

Power, Politics, and Higher Education in Southern Africa: International Regimes, Local Governments, and Educational Autonomy by José Cossa. Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2008. 226 pp. ISBN 9781604975154.

Politics, Power, and Higher Education in Southern Africa (Cossa) is a well-written, thought-provoking, and timely contribution to international higher education studies.ⁱ Author José Cossa explores “how Global International Regimes (GIRs) and Regional International Regimes (RIRs) perceive power dynamics during international negotiations that influence the autonomy of local governments to regulate higher education in Southern Africa” (p. 153). Along with deconstructing these power dynamics with a useful blend of conceptual models and articulating some regional and sub-regional implications, including effects on national autonomy, Cossa provides a cogent analysis of a particular nexus of politics and education playing out in an age of globalization.ⁱⁱ

Cossa sheds light on the multiple implications and dynamics of “power exchanges,” including notions of government autonomy vis-à-vis negotiations, and the tendency for regional and sub-regional surrogates to follow policy prescriptions. In terms of policy formulation and implementation, the implication is that education policy and practice directives result from complex and often contested regime interactions, mitigated by the concordant display, interchange, and modulations of power. In broad terms, specific types of development result from the power that parties do or do not possess.

Cossa’s work offers a fresh blend and exposition of theory and method. It employs a “qualified” theoretical framework using system transfer and international regime theories that analyze aggregations and flows of power, along with a mixed-method approach that includes both quantitative and qualitative dimensions.ⁱⁱⁱ His framework is explicitly critical: “While I preach that teaching critical thinking is controversial practice because one who is taught how to critically think ceases to think critically, I would argue that this stage is critical in a project because it provides a framework through which to look at the concepts at hand, thus avoiding obvious conceptual issues that would emerge otherwise” (p. 16).

Cossa’s theoretical conception of power adheres largely to that of Foucault, in that it acknowledges power’s multiple, often contested links, and thus its multivalent influence on knowledge and discourse, theory and practice. This poststructural configuration positions power relative to the one subjected to power. In his study of Mozambique, he unpacks and analyzes, through a temporal continuum of power dynamics, the power relationships that historically buffeted a specific African rendition of colonizer and colonized. As presently played out vis-à-vis negotiations between GIRs and RIRs, system transfer theory articulates “how power dynamics between regimes manifest within and at perhaps the core of such transfer” (p. 23), leading to Cossa’s argument that previous forms of rule and being tend to linger across time amid evolving (or static) power dynamics.

So, in terms of the monopolistic and reproductive nature of colonial systems of mass education, which embody the philosophy and theory of the colonizer, “the inherent perceptions of the relationship between education and development within a given transferred system continue to exert influence in the country even after the administration that introduced it had ceased to rule” (p. 36). The case of Mozambique highlights the temporal synergy and system transfer of colonial forms; for Cossa, Mozambique is a

colonial proxy in which the Salazar administration used the colony as a means to enrich Portugal. Considering this interaction in terms of the colonizer/colonized binary, Cossa performs a colonial inversion of Hegel's dialectic, molded in this instance by the aegis of power across time: "What is intriguing is the fact that although Southern African countries have recently become independent and know what it is to be under subjugation, they are willing to give up power for the sake of belonging in some...global arrangement where they do not participate equally" (p. 133).

Cossa's methodology merges quantitative and qualitative forms that capture the broad spectrum of power dynamics of negotiations, and the subsequent interplay of forces. The four models include the RIF (Regimes as Intermediate Factors), NSPD (Necessary and Sufficient conditions, plus Properties and Dimensions), FET (Filter Effect Theory), and SHRP (Schematic Representation of Hermeneutical Power). In terms of specialist appeal, FET well reveals the subtleties of power dynamics and provides a foundation to analyze and explain assorted educational phenomena. The hermeneutic insight of SHRP and the conceptual/positional clarity of FET convey the intricacies of power exchanges; for example, the textual-hermeneutic analysis unpacks the more subtle visual and textual modalities that might escape casual analysis, where regimes as interlocutors between a system's power structure and negotiations (and decision making in the system) maintain a range of associations and connections in subtle and very often covert ways.

The book has two problematic aspects, though given the theoretical and practical utility of the text these are not to be unduly construed as "trouble spots." The first may result from the particular stylistic proclivities of this reviewer, though a fellow reader also noted potential issues beyond those related to the form and flow of diction. It relates to the models and related vernacular dispersed throughout the text, the consideration not being one of validity, but rather one of packaging. The difficulty is the likely potential for overwhelming a specialist or even non-specialist reader (as it nearly did for this reviewer), particularly the case with the NSPD model, which approaches near alchemical proportions in several sections of the book.

Second, Cossa notes how the interview process was impacted by a lack of subjects from international organizations, due to subjects being unable or unwilling to participate. We might posit how a subject's ability to decline an invitation speaks volumes about certain power dynamics (e.g., who has it)! Also not to be discounted is the possibility that the global financial malaise already being felt in 2006 (when the study was undertaken) made interviewing, on what could amount to discussions on the serviceability of a failing neoliberal capitalism, a potentially unpalatable prospect for certain individuals.^{iv} Nevertheless, survey "brick walls" are a possibility in any research project, certainly with "elite interviewing" (p. 100), but the small sample here is a shortcoming. Considering the specific international and global dimensions of the study (with the analysis of GIRs and RIRs), future work should strive to cull a larger and more representative sample.

The globalization of capital has augured massive financial upheavals in global markets, promoting ruptures in the very practice if not the ideology of finance capitalism. With the links between the underlying interest-based capital apparatus, and the inequitable and unsustainable development it has long inspired now more openly exposed and challenged, it is potentially an opportune moment. Cossa notes how "the formidable

power appropriated by external forces and global regimes” (p. xvi) continues to reproduce and manifest in old and new forms, and perhaps his key contribution here is to stimulate critical analysis not only of the power dynamics which mitigates the policy and practice of higher education in Africa, but also the efficacy of its marketization linked to a monetarist profit and loss calculus. Cognizant of both the folly of inaction and tendencies to overt and covert regurgitations of colonial forms—“For things to remain the same, everything must *change*”^v—Cossa prescribes a blend of suspicion (a Nietzschean hermeneutics of suspicion?) and hope to challenge more parochial presumptions, e.g., the universal applicability of capitalist democracy,^{vi} as local governments emerge as active contributors to policy and not merely passive beneficiaries.

Endnotes

ⁱ Considering autonomy of African nations in light of the vestiges of “structural vulnerability” from earlier colonial policy and practice, Cossa sees the interstices of the local and global convergence—here apropos education policy negotiations—as where Africa can begin to recapture and reconstitute power.

ⁱⁱ Dolby and Rahman (2008) argue that globalization has thrust International Studies into the center of educational research, and the impacts of globalizations from above and below are now increasingly seen to influence theoretical and practical frameworks of education *tout court*.

ⁱⁱⁱ Cossa synthesizes a range of authors, and not simply (or strictly) Eurocentric or even African ones. This means that on the one hand, he abstains from providing the proverbial laundry list of canonical authors who endlessly promulgate what Edward Said once called the “presumed universal applicability” of Western ideas on development and being, from Rousseau and Marx to the more recent Leo Strauss. On the other hand, the use of pan-African and renaissance writers like Mbeki and Wa Thiong’o highlight African renditions of postcolonial and subaltern decentering, which as ostensible exponents of “southern theory,” are perspectives that frequently elude awareness and deserve consideration in the west.

^{iv} Cossa mentions Friedrich von Hayek (1994), which is poignant, considering the latter’s massive though somewhat unnoticed ideological influence on Reagan and Thatcher monetary policy in the 1980s; thus Cossa offers useful historical context for the present maelstrom embroiling “free markets.”

^v In the context of globalization, and the plethora of its definitions and essences, Cossa avoids rendering globalization in reductive or monolithic terms. In other words, globalization in Africa is not provincially dismissed as the continuation of colonial imperatives by other means, a passive neocolonial hinterlands receiving unhooked Keynesianism and neocon *force majeure* via GIRs/RIRs; nor either is it a dystopic postmodern landscape where transfixed consumer-workers numbingly eat, drink, and sleep according to the *techniques* of techno-industrialism.

^{vi} *The Leopard (Il Gattopardo)* is an award-winning 1963 film by Italian director Luchino Visconti, based on Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa’s novel of the same name.

References

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Reviewer

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