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Damiano Matasci, *Internationaliser l'éducation. La France, l'Unesco et la fin des empires coloniaux en Afrique (1945-1961)*, Lille, Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2023, 290 p.

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"Mobilité, rapidité, efficacité." (p. 164) Three adjectives utterly discordant with the inimitable trio of liberty, equality and fraternity. But herein lay their virtue. This triumvirate of technocratic descriptors distilled the supposed merits of *l'éducation de base* (fundamental education), an initiative conceptualized during late colonial rule that sought to head off the troublesome claims-making potential of France's famous ideals. Colonial officials eagerly endorsed *l'éducation de base*, hoping that the program's insistence on mobility, speed and efficacy would outflank African pressure on France to deliver on the original Republican three.

In his new book, *Internationaliser l'éducation*, Damiano Matasci analyses the history of *éducation de base*, a short-lived technocratic solution to the "crises of empire" afflicting the French Union in the late 1940s and 1950s. He explores the wider challenges facing French colonial experts in this period, as they struggled to maintain a discursive grip on the fraught question of African colonial education in the shadow of Unesco. In the process, he shows that the "great uncertainty" (p. 200) of the period under examination contributed to the blossoming of development expertise. On the eve of African independence in the 1960s, technical assistance emerged as the resounding answer to critiques of colonially produced inequalities.

Following a concise and compelling introduction, Chapter 1 opens with a vista on the confusion that dominates the second half of the 1940s. Unesco, emboldened by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights' codification of education as a universal right in 1948, began to consider what a global agenda to fight educational inequalities might mean. It settled on inviting a slew of colonial and missionary experts to define the concept of *éducation de base* as a catalyst for "holistic" development. But the ensuing pilot programs carried out in Haiti, China, and Nyasaland produced mixed to disastrous results, confirming for Unesco that its role in the global South was best confined to that of clearing house and consultancy rather than operations manager. However, Unesco's relative retreat was suddenly complicated by U.S. President Harry Truman's speech announcing the "Point Four" program and the resultant United Nations Expanded Program of Technical Assistance in 1949. Chapter 2 concentrates on the reaction of the French colonial and diplomatic establishment, now under threat from an international emphasis on development. They worried that the UN system would offer colonial critics a new megaphone with which to undermine the empire. In response to this "wind from New York and Geneva," the

French adopted a two-pronged public relations strategy: to valorize their success in African education and to turn to inter-colonial cooperation to deflect international (read: Unesco) cooperation. Chapters 2 and 3 detail that inter-colonial cooperation, represented by the *Commission de coopération technique en Afrique au Sud du Sahara* (CCTA), co-founded in 1950 by Britain, France, Portugal, Belgium, South Africa and Rhodesia. But the CCTA was out of step with its times. When the organization presented itself as a "United Nations of Africa" (p. 107) or an "African Unesco" (p. 138), it adopted the sheen of the rights-based order of the international community all while seeking to protect colonial rule from the implications of such rights talk. Its membership laid this hypocrisy bare. How could the CCTA claim the mantle of an "African Unesco", if it had two apartheid states in its ranks?

Beset by its own internal tensions, the CCTA struggled to find purchase in a rapidly evolving political context. Moreover the French, caught up in the Indochina and Algerian conflicts, were desperate to rehabilitate the image of their empire on the international scene. Enter, again, *éducation de base*. Chapter 4 shows how the French colonial establishment tried to "nationalize" (p. 156) *éducation de base* as a "French" concept.[1] In conscious rivalry with Unesco's global literacy program, France's "shock action" (p. 164) with *éducation de base* would demonstrate the metropole's renewed commitment to rapid African development. Needless to say, *éducation de base*, which Africans critiqued as reactionary, did not deliver on its promises of rapid community development. Rather, as we see in Chapter 5, by the end of the 1950s, the French colonial establishment has taken a page out of Unesco's book, and reinvented itself as the provider par excellence of technical assistance for Francophone Africa. A reinvention which occurs, importantly, before formal independence (the French Overseas Ministry is rebaptized the Ministry of Cooperation in 1959). By positioning itself in this way, France successfully retained its hold on African educational policy in its former colonies while also collaborating with Unesco's African agenda, the ambitious "Addis Ababa Plan" of 1961, to massively increase educational enrollments across the continent. The author closes by raising the question of neocolonialism, an issue which is not substantially addressed, but whose prehistory the book has sketched out in detail.

Matasci tells us that the overarching goals of his book are two (p. 239). First, to restitute Africa to debates on the globalization of education in the twentieth century and, second, to show how actors and expertise circulate within, among, between, and across empires and international organizations in the period under question. The second objective, it seems to me, conditions the first. Those designated as experts come from a variety of milieux, which Matasci groups into four broad categories—colonial officialdom, missionary circles, Anglo-Saxon academics and actors from the global South, such as the Haitian Emmanuel Gabriel in the 1940s or, later, Amadou Mahtar M'Bow (future Director General of Unesco). One is struck by the longevity of the career of some of these players (perhaps none more so than Thomas Jesse Jones, the villain of the early 1920s Phelps-Stokes Commissions who shows up on Unesco's payroll in 1947). Retracing meticulously, as Matasci does, the circulations of such characters across a variety of institutions and roles gives us a sense not only of the ways knowledge moves, but how closed—ideologically—the space in which it circulated was.

Here the question of the consequences of the intense rivalry between the French colonial and diplomatic establishment, on one hand, and Unesco, on the other, is not always clear. Did the different affiliations of these supposed experts truly affect how they viewed the problems that they were being hired to solve? Compare Unesco's search for, in the words of Julian Huxley, a "representative tribal African community" to pilot its fundamental education program in 1947 (p. 62) with the French choice, five years later, of M'Boumba, a village in Senegal that matched the "theoretically required conditions" (p. 173) to test out its *éducation de base* program. Both seem to read "Africa" through the same ideological matrix, rendering the overlap in Unesco and France's educational efforts less surprising ("frappant", p. 87) than the author might have us believe. Which brings me back to the first objective of the book, that of centering Africa in the history of the globalization of education. To the degree that Africa is

[1] A small quibble: here, Matasci is describing precisely what Abou Bamba refers to as the "politics of dubbing", wherein the French re-brand external development expertise into a French conceptual framework. Engagement with Bamba's analysis would have bolstered Matasci's own conclusions. See Bamba Abou B. (2016), *African Miracle, African Mirage: Transnational Politics and the Paradox of Modernization in Ivory Coast*, Athens, Ohio University Press.

centered here, it is a certain vision of Africa, colonial in origin and inflected by technocracy, that is centered. It is the "Africa" seen by the so-called experts—an "Africa", certainly, but one of many.

Yet Matasci, by his own account, is not writing an Africanist history. The great merit of this work is its insistence that we write history as the actors in question lived it. *We* know that empires were about to disappear but—to paraphrase E.P. Thompson—*they* did not.[2] Matasci's analysis illuminates the confusion of late colonial rule from an unusual angle, that of the struggle to retain expertise over African issues in a changing development landscape. By varying analytical levels, from the international, to the imperial, to the pilot project, Matasci successfully explains how education, a core issue of colonial governance, became globalized through the interface between colonies, metropoles, the United Nations system and its universalist foundations.

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[2] Thompson, writing about peasant resistance to industrialization, was famously "seeking to rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper…from the enormous condescension of posterity…Their hostility to the new industrialism may have been backward-looking…But they lived through these times of acute social disturbance, and we did not." (Thompson E.P. (1991 [1963]), *The Making of the English Working Class*, 4th ed., London, Penguin Books, p. 12).