

## Book Review

# South-South Educational Migration, Humanitarianism and Development: Views from the Caribbean, North Africa and the Middle East

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**South-South Educational Migration, Humanitarianism and Development: Views from the Caribbean, North Africa and the Middle East**, by Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, London, Routledge, 2015, x + 157 pp., Hardback, \$ 145.00. ISBN 978-0-415-81478-2

Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh's extraordinarily thoughtful book joins the small but increasingly relevant body of critical international education and education policy literature that visibilises projects by 'the South' that pursue educational justice outside (and against) the dominant ideology of privatisation, marketisation and elitism. As 'intersecting case studies' (142) of 'South-South humanitarianism' (18), the book presents the Cuban and the Libyan 'transnational education programmes' that have provided free-of-charge primary, secondary and tertiary education to Sahrawi and Palestinian refugees within and beyond the Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA) region. In Fiddian-Qasmiyeh's conceptualisation, two sovereign, non-aligned states located in the 'independent margin' – Cuba and Libya – have acted as education providers for geopolitically marginalised populations in the 'dependent margin' (1). Thus concerned with decolonisation and individual and collective self-determination, this interdisciplinary analysis pinpoints the benefits of these programmes and, more importantly, ambivalences and contradictions involved in education policy-making regarding unintended outcomes with respect to perpetuating (rather than eliminating) dependencies and vulnerabilities (conflict-induced displacement, dispossession, marginalisation).

Methodologically, the study is grounded in an innovative, extensive multi-sited ethnography conducted since 2001 in Algeria, Cuba, Lebanon, Libya and Syria. By using critical discourse analytical techniques in dialogue with social theory, a relational analysis of the transnational refugee-student mobilities integrates with a comparative approach to the Cuban and Libyan South-South education policies and the experiences of Sahrawi and Palestinian students during and after returning to their home refugee camps. Following a short introduction, Chapter 2 draws from post-structuralist theory in its exploration of South-South cooperation as an 'anti-colonial paradigm' (4), conceptual challenges to 'Northern-dominated humanitarianism' (12), and the concepts of 'solidarity' and 'self-sufficiency' in relation to development (23) (discussions that are resumed throughout the book). Chapter 3 explores the Cuban

scholarship programme by reference to the political-ideological connections between Cuba and Arab socialist states and liberation movements since the 1950s. On the basis of educational experiences of Muslim MENA students in Cuba the concept of the 'central margin' is introduced, as a 'space [that] not only challenges existing centre/margin dichotomies (US/Cuba, for instance), but officially refuses to reproduce a similar dichotomous and unequal system within itself' (51). Chapter 4, based on accounts of Sahrawi Cuban graduates in their home-camps in Algeria, concludes that rather than achieving self-sufficiency, the Cuban programme ultimately accentuated the camps' Northern aid dependency due to (especially male) graduates' labour migration to Spain. This unintended outcome was produced by the Spanish language proficiency acquired in Cuba in combination with the recognition of Cuban medical degrees in Spain. Subsequently, Chapter 5 compares the Sahrawi views from both Cuba and the refugee camps with perspectives from Cuban-educated Palestinians in their home-camps in Lebanon, to reveal a further paradoxical outcome of the Cuban transnational education policy: that Palestinian graduates in Lebanon actively distance themselves from their Cuban past due to (fear of) discrimination in the labour market. Chapter 6 explores the changing Libyan Pan-Arabist education provision over time (up to the NATO military intervention in 2011) and, by drawing from Derrida's notion of 'hostipitality', once more argues that different forms of discrimination were reproduced, in this case in Libya against especially Palestinian refugees. The concluding Chapter 7 explores whether the South-South educational migration system can provide 'alternative modes of responding to refugees' (141).

Neither idealisation nor demonisation, this conscientiously written analysis is outstanding in disaggregating the 'trans-regional, intergenerational and multi-directional' (6) complexities of these education programmes. Such analytical sophistication, i.e. exploring in multifarious directions, (inevitably) deprives the book of a strong line of argument which perhaps would have increased its accessibility for readers unfamiliar with the MENA context. Equally, some readers, like myself, may wish for greater analytical weight on the reproduction of the global, structural dependencies to balance out the great detail dedicated to individual experiences (the latter, however, being one of the assets of this book). Of minor relevance here, though noteworthy, is the unfortunate misspelling of 'Bolivian' instead of 'Bolivarian' (with respect to Venezuela or the Bolivarian Revolution) on one or two occasions (e.g., 16) which, however – speaking from my own experience – I would attribute to an over-autonomous copy editor rather than the author herself.

This book, then, is an extremely valuable contribution to the study of the interdisciplinary refugee-education-migration nexus, and of the MENA region and South-South cooperation generally. For the critical education policy community it underscores that alternatives to the global neoliberal eduscape and Northern-led neo-colonialist 'refugee education' and 'peace education' do exist, despite their marginalisation in today's mainstreamed academia: South-South humanitarianism concerned with "saving a way of life" over "saving a life" per se' (22).

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