IQAS Vol. 56 / 2025 1, pp. 101–116

Book Reviews

Phoebe Zoe Maria U. Sanchez / Regletto Aldrich D. Imbong / Matthew Ming Tak Chew / Caroline M. Schöpf (eds), *The Palgrave Handbook on Decoloniality in Asia*. Xxxvii, 639 pages, 6 illustrations, €192.59. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024. ISBN 978-9-8196-2336-5 (eBook)

The Palgrave Handbook on Decoloniality in Asia affords and engages the readers with critical analyses of the complex ideologies, systems and structures that facilitate – or hinder – the development and democratic processes in the region. It lucidly uncovers and maps the patterns of continuity and change, capitulation and resistance, and oppression and liberation that are revealed in the various interanimating domains of knowledge production, economy, policy praxis, gender relations, well-being, spirituality, language, arts, media and sports. For full disclosure, this book review reflects my positionality as an interdisciplinary development scholar from the Global South whose area of research is social justice communication and whose frame of analysis is guided by the critical tradition.

As a counter-treatise, the handbook exposes and interrogates the pervading vestiges of colonial and neocolonial influences in the Global South in both material and non-material embodiments. Each chapter serves as a compelling exposition of decolonial discourse that represents the standpoints of the authors as engaged scholars and reflective practitioners who come from the diverse fields of sociology, political economy, philosophy, political science, development studies, history, psychology, communication, humanities, gender studies, criminology, conflict studies, environmental studies and theology.

In setting the context, Geoffrey Pleyers categorically points out that coloniality "has reproduced and adapted itself […] with specific patterns in each country" (p. 13). This suggests that while there are observable standard features, coloniality assumes different forms depending mainly on the social situatedness of the territory that it takes hold of. Along this line, the place-based exposition of Tran Thi Hong and Nguyen Huu Minh (for Vietnam), Antonio D. Salazar, Jr. and Noe John Joseph E. Sacramento (for Thailand), and Pablo Sapag and Armando Recio (for Palestine) provide very rich geo-economic, socio-historical and politico-cultural contexts of (neo)colonialism's toxic legacies and the peoples' diverse expressions of defiance. Relatedly, Phoebe Zoe Maria U. Sanchez foregrounds the "universes of anti-colonial conversations", highlighting the multiplicities and complexities of people's resistance (p. 22). In her treatise, Sanchez particularises and analyses these collective and varying responses, spanning

"nativism and/or popular uprisings, cultural reform movements, Marxist class struggles, and revolutionary nationalism" (p. 29).

In critically making sense of the matrix of disruptive social systems throughout history, Christoph Sorg in his paper underscores the entanglements of colonialism and racism, defining colonialism as "institutionalized dispossession between different political territories" and racism as "dispossession within their territories based on race, citizenship, ethnicity and religion" (p. 47). Sorg further argues that if colonialism is a precondition for capitalism and if the colonial legacy brought forth modern racism, then it can be argued that racism and capitalism are systemic twins. A corollary to this critical examination of the nexus of vicious social and economic systems is how the national democratic movement in the Philippines, for instance, validly describes feudalism as the economic base of imperialism. Then and now, this unholy alliance of local semi-feudal lords and foreign elites maintains their strategic economic and political control over vast territories through intermediary arrangements that involve land monopolies, tenancy agreements, import-export businesses and policy capture mechanisms.

At the praxeological level, decolonising public policies is critical in dismantling colonial and imperialist control over "client states", especially in the key areas of trade, financial and security relations. The same also goes for the decolonisation of public policy studies in the epistemic sense. As a contribution to critical policy studies, Salazar and Sacramento's critique of public policy studies in Thailand is a welcome effort toward decolonising this subfield of enquiry in public administration by interrogating the neocolonial and conservative attributes of the dominant policy discourses. Through this critical meta-policy analysis, policy scholars and activists in other development contexts will be able to not just problematise the policies in question but also reveal and challenge the policies behind the policies, thereby exposing their neocolonial, elitist, positivist and urban-oriented underpinnings.

As a recurring development debate in rural political economy, the phenomenon of forced migration needs to be unpacked as an offshoot of elite-instigated extractivist and exclusivist economic policies that displace Indigenous peoples from their ancestral lands and poor peasants from their farmlands. When predicated in this socio-historical background, it then becomes evident how (neo) colonial politics and class inequality create a compounding effect, further marginalising the subaltern migrants. In the context of broader global climate injustice and in view of anti-immigrant sentiment as a manifestation of a "lack of awareness of global inequalities", Caroline M. Schöpf presents the compelling case of environmental racism involving the enormous natural and climate indebtedness of the Global North to the Global South (p. 126). In interrogating this ecological and climate apartheid, she argues that the long history of contempt of the former towards the latter must be decisively rebutted and rectified, especially in the context of unfairly deriding migrants from the Global South

in official documents and/or mainstream media as "border jumpers", "unskilled laborers" and "undocumented immigrants", and other forms of ad hominem attacks.

Interrelatedly and seamlessly, the handbook explores the various embodiments of (neo)colonialism, ranging from economic to epistemic and from agriculture-based to data-driven. For his part, Firoze Alam substantially expounds on how precision agriculture together with agricultural data extraction are methodically instrumentalised by the Global North to "build their data empire to dominate global agriculture" (p. 237). Through extractive biopiracy, resource appropriation and data mining, the so-called "one-third world" (i.e., Global North) gains a strategic foothold and totalising control over the rest of the supposed "two-third world" (i.e., Global South) in virtually every aspect of existence.

Sensibly, socio-historical analysis cuts across the majority, if not all, of the handbook chapters. The strong historical materialist perspective is also consistently foregrounded. By mainstreaming the "historical-political-economic context", Patrick Torres, for instance, is able to coherently establish the inherent connection of the colonial process of state formation with the unholy alliance between the colonial and national elites and the concomitant local feudal patron–client relations, shedding light on the asymmetrical macro–micro power constellations between and among nations and nationalities.

As a field of enquiry and tool of analysis, history itself must also be consciously decolonised. Inspired by the progressive attributes of Latin American social thought, Luis Martínez Andrade proposes a "contrary reading of history" to challenge the colonial paradigms and privilege the "liberation struggles of its victims" (p. 352). In invoking the transformative and liberating potential of religion, he seeks to draw critical insights from Latin American Liberation Theology to challenge the prevailing "ideology of development", "dynamics of modernity" and "idolatry of the market", stressing the crucial role of progressive faith-based formations in envisioning and actualising an alternative development paradigm, policy and practice. Concomitantly, from the critical lens of decolonial spirituality, Karl Gaspar provides an incisive exposition of how religion has been employed in dialectically opposed standpoints, i.e., as a colonial instrument to "demonize the people's Indigenous belief system" and as a counterculture to "conscientize and organize" as well as "expand the resistance movement" (pp. 365, 375). The same can also be argued about the duality of language use.

From the perspective of critical linguistics, it is commendable how Sanchez invokes the power of local terminologies and etymologies in showing how concepts can counter the established politico-economic order, such as the case of the Filipino words "laya" (free) and "layas" (runaway), with both terms connoting the idea of liberating/escaping from patently deplorable conditions

and arrangements (p. 23). This points to the powerful, creative and transformative potential of discourse, especially in interrogating decoloniality in the realm of language and communication, which I believe the other authors could have also employed in relation to their respective substantive areas and cultural contexts. As a compelling ideological and discursive tool, the media is strategically utilised by the power wielders to perpetuate (neo)colonial narratives and mental models as well as to invalidate and divert legitimate grievances that originate in the Global South. Within the context of the Palestinian liberation movement, for instance, Sapag and Recio (p. 162) problematise how the Western/Western-influenced media militates against the movement for sovereignty and self-determination by "concealing that in essence this is a material dispute, a struggle for the land" and not a "religious conflict" (p. 162), underscoring the continued influence of Samuel Huntington's construct of the "clash of civilizations" and the imperative to expose and challenge this central thesis.

Emphasising the same transgressive potential of art, Nomar Bayog Miano contends that the "history of art is a story of colonial expansion, but it is also a story of anti-colonial resistance" (p. 409), accentuating the need to re-examine and decolonise all art forms and expressions. In his research, Matthew Ming Tak Chew also advocates for the imperative to decolonise knowledge creation at the cultural front. He laments how the "lowbrow" local culture in Hong Kong is being marginalised and rendered invisible in terms of "aesthetic quality and socio-political impact" (p. 423), revealing the oft-ignored cultural hierarchy within the Global East as well as the Global South. This cultural stratification needs to be understood as an offshoot of power imbalances brought about by past conquests and forced assimilations. This lamentable and hidden case of internal colonialism must also be foregrounded and problematised in the other dimensions of coloniality and exclusion.

Regrettably, sports as a social practice also tends to be marginalised in national affairs. As asserted by Satwinder Rehal, another layer of discrimination (i.e., double discrimination) is evident in how Indigenous games are sideswiped and relegated to the back burner of "mainstream mega events" (p. 439). Within this context, the Olympic Games need to be unmasked as a colonial instrument that propagate "Western-led sports" to the denigration and invisibilisation of their Indigenous counterparts.

As persuasively argued by Sanchez, the process of decolonisation is incomplete without a gendered analysis and a concomitant attempt to reject a patriarchal outlook (p. 285). Relatedly, Glovedi Joy Bigornia's intersectional application of decolonial feminist epistemologies in dignifying and privileging Indigenous women and Indigenous communal practices contributes to the recentring of situated knowledges that have long been muted and subdued by "colonial and patriarchal ideologies" (p. 271). In the context of the Palestinian quest for liberation, Regine Ylaya situates this legitimate struggle by adding the complex layer

of the disproportionate and intergenerational impacts of colonialism and apartheid on women and children and by foregrounding the role of Palestinian mothers in engendering the "values of resistance, dignity, and solidarity in their children, nurturing future generation of activists" (p. 315). This implies that gender must not be merely an afterthought (i.e., tangential or tokenistic) in critical sensemaking.

Through the ardent and exigent act of frame bridging, Bandana Purkayastha draws on co-orienting decolonial strands to challenge the prevailing knowledge structures and hierarchies by "weaving local to transnational knowledge production processes, in different patterns, at different historical moments" (p. 267). If the Global South is to (re)assert its collective value and strength, it must undertake a thoroughgoing frame bridging across alternative perspectives and horizontal networking among progressive social movements. As with praxes, this underscores that decoloniality must be rendered in the plural form considering its multiple expressions and materialisations (i.e., decolonialities). Such synergies coherently align with Bhumika Muchala's dual delinking, which seeks to achieve both structural and epistemic freedoms, and Delfo Canceran's double movement, which strives to factor not only the historical truths but also the ensuing realities into the process of critical meaning-making and action-taking. In conceiving the people's liberatory struggles and in line with Canceran's double movement, decoloniality must therefore be understood to be co-constitutive of democratisation. But even so, democratisation itself needs to be decolonised (decolonising democracy), considering what Sanchez piercingly argues at the outset as "West-centric institutions of democracy" (p. 22). Correspondingly, this underscores the constant need to re-assess whether the movement is decolonising enough or if it is truly decolonising from below. Thus, the acts of decolonising decolonisation and democratising decolonisation enable the strengthening and broadening of the change movements where critical self-reflectivity, dialogue and praxis are integral processes.

While the handbook has laudably fulfilled its ultimate goal of raising the level of critical discourse and debate, I strongly recommend that subsequent editions foreground the elite conspiracies – both global and local – across different industries and institutions. Doing so would further expose the various forms of unholy alliance that inflict devastating consequences on economies, ecologies and communities (e.g., the energy-industrial, technology-industrial, finance-industrial, real estate–industrial, medical-industrial, pharmaceutical-industrial, food-industrial, housing-industrial and prison-industrial complexes, among others). For a more expansive as well as nuanced focus, it is also worth considering that the following themes and subthemes be included in future volumes: decolonising libraries, decolonising archiving, decolonising cartography, decolonising IQ tests, decolonising textbooks, decolonising licensure examinations and decolonising censuses, among others. In more concrete terms, de-

coloniality should therefore be effectuated not just in the broader political economy of North–South relations but also grounded in the politics of everyday life within the context of the multitudinous and dialectical realities in the Global South.

In summary, the handbook possesses a strong cross-disciplinary, transboundary and multidimensional take on decoloniality by offering its readers an incisive epistemological, contextual, sectoral, intersectional and value-based enquiry into the precarious lives in the margin. Resolutely and encouragingly, the authors also provide the readers with a sense of hope, frame of mind and course of action that will help define the paths towards collectively determined and socially desirable futures.

John N. Ponsaran

Hassan Abbas, *The Return of the Taliban: Afghanistan after the Americans Left*. Updated Edition. 251 pages, 2 maps, $26.00. New Haven / London: Yale University Press, 2024. ISBN 978-0-30027-1195 (eBook)

Hassan Abbas's *The Return of the Taliban: Afghanistan after the Americans Left* is a lucid and accessible scholarly work on Afghanistan's recent political trajectory and the Taliban's dramatic resurgence after the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces in 2021. A long-time scholar of South and Central Asia, Abbas writes in a thematically expansive fashion, weaving together multiple threads with an eye for compelling detail and an evident familiarity with Afghanistan and the region. The book offers more than a chronological recounting of the Taliban's return to power; it attempts to probe the inner texture of a movement caught between its historical roots and the exigencies of the present.

The book consists of six substantial chapters, excluding the introduction and conclusion. The chapters, in sequence, include an examination of the Taliban's resurgence, their governance model and challenges, internal power dynamics, ideological foundations, relationships with allies and opposition, including other militant groups, and their evolving engagement with the international community.

The volume exemplifies a genre that readers of Afghanistan scholarship will find familiar: the ambitious, "tell-all" account, sweeping in scope, descriptively rich and intermittently prescriptive. Abbas presents his narrative with journalistic flair, favouring accessible prose over academic density, which makes the book inviting to students and general readers alike. Yet, this readability comes at the cost of theoretical depth. The text often skirts questions of power, resistance and postcolonial state formation – areas crucial to understanding the deeper