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Book Review: Transitional Justice and Education: Learning Peace by Clara Ramírez-Barat and Roger Duthie

Author(s): Tina Robiolle

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BOOK REVIEW

TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE AND EDUCATION: LEARNING PEACE
EDITED BY CLARA RAMÍREZ-BARAT AND ROGER DUTHIE
SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH COUNCIL, 2016. 424 PAGES
\$30.00 (PAPER)
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Despite increased attention given to the idea that education has often been used as a tool to spread misinformation and spark division, education usually is not considered an element of transitional justice (i.e., prosecutions, truth commissions, reparations, and other economic and institutional reforms). In *Transitional Justice and Education: Learning Peace*, editors Clara Ramírez-Barat and Roger Duthie fill a major gap in the literature on education in emergencies, and on reconstruction after periods of conflict and authoritarianism, by exploring what it means to address transitional justice and legacies of the past from an education perspective and how this relates to a broader peacebuilding agenda.

This book is the result of a collaborative research project between the International Center for Transitional Justice and UNICEF that took place from 2013 to 2015. The project aimed to articulate the links between transitional justice and education in peacebuilding, and to develop a better understanding of the role education can play in postconflict situations as part of a broad response to the legacies of human rights abuses. Through 17 commissioned papers representing a variety of experiences and places, the project explored two main questions:

1. How can transitional justice shape the reform of education systems and facilitate the reintegration of children and youth into those systems as a means of contributing to building peace?
2. How can education expand its outreach agenda to engage the younger generation and help transform a culture of impunity into one of human rights and democracy? (p. 12)

When approaching these questions, the contributors looked for ways transitional justice and education can reinforce each other in peacebuilding contexts and explored the tensions, challenges, and obstacles that can result from any attempt to coordinate education initiatives with transitional justice processes and goals. These efforts make each chapter particularly engaging for an audience of practitioners.

This edited volume, which is organized into four complementary sections, offers a selection from the 17 commissioned papers. The first section explores the implications of taking a transitional justice approach to postconflict education reconstruction and offers useful pedagogic guidelines for teachers and practitioners working in such contexts. The second section considers education as a form of reparation for victims of human rights abuses and their descendants, and assesses the extent to which such measures can help reintegrate children affected by conflict into the school system and into society more broadly. The third section reflects on transitional justice outreach programs that use education as a means to engage children and youth with issues of memory, history, and justice. The last section of the book presents civil society activities aimed at addressing past injustices in various informal education settings and explains how such programs might serve as catalysts for similar efforts in formal education systems. Importantly, several authors throughout the book insist on the importance of training educators in how to address the past.

This volume makes a valuable contribution to the fields of education in emergencies and transitional justice for scholars and practitioners alike. The contributing authors provide examples from a large variety of countries, settings, and stages of fragility. They present and analyze both successful and failed attempts to use a transitional justice framework to shape the reform of the education sector. The case studies in the former Yugoslavia (Jelacic, chapter 8) and in Lebanon (Maalouf and Yakinthou, chapter 13) are particularly compelling, as they shed light on the timing and sequencing of such efforts. Especially notable throughout the book is the inclusion of instances where the non-formal education sector complemented the formal sector in the transitional justice process. In contexts where state fragility greatly challenges the efficiency of the education ministry and of the formal education sector in general, NGOs can play an instrumental role that should not be overlooked. Overall, the contributors raise essential questions for the field and offer an analysis that provides key lessons and stimulating suggestions for future research.

Despite its length, this book is a relatively fast read, thanks to its enticing content and its clear and accessible language. However, there are two elements I wish the authors had included more of. First, the ideological challenges these efforts are likely to trigger seem to have been neglected. Scholars such as Paulo Freire (1985) consider education in general to be a political act. Revising history books in postconflict settings is a serious challenge in itself, so one can imagine the pushback that any attempt to coordinate education initiatives and transitional justice processes is likely to receive. It would have been interesting to learn whether this has been an issue in these cases and whether and how and to what extent this challenge has been managed. Second, while readers can find a thorough analysis and guidance points for relevant actors in the online report Ramírez-Barat and Duthie published in 2015, a concluding chapter that synthesized and analyzed the lessons learned through these various experiences would have significantly enhanced this book. This would have created an opportunity to reflect on the transferability of the findings and the extent to which these lessons may be generalized. Nevertheless, this edited volume is a major step toward the inclusion of education in any transitional justice framework. I hope it will be an incentive for a greater number of scholars and practitioners to embrace this important topic.

TINA ROBIOLLE

The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University

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