

Book review

The State, civil society and the citizen: Exploring relationships in the field of adult education in Europe

By Michal Bron Jr., Paula Guimarães and Rui Viera de Castro (Eds.) (Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 2009) 229 pp., 42.50 €, ISBN 978-3-631-58593-1

In the edited collection - *The State, Civil Society and the Citizen Exploring relationships in the Field of Adult Education in Europe*- 18 researchers and adult educators across Europe explore some of the contemporary issues pertaining to the field of adult education.

The texts originate from papers presented at a conference organized by the Active Democratic Citizenship and Adult Learning research network part of the European society for research on the education of adults (ESREA) in Braga, Portugal, 2007. The edited collection, which hereby forms a part in the more extensive series of books on lifelong learning and adult learning previously published by ESREA, is edited by Michal Bron Jr., Paula Guimarães and Rui Viera de Castro. Most of the contributors come from Portugal (9) and Sweden (4). Even though the geographic variation perhaps could have been wider, the themes and issues dealt with are not limited.

The book is divided into three sections. After a clarifying introductory text written by the editors, the first part of the book is named *The State, civil society and the citizen Towards a cosmopolitan adult education?*. All of the contributors in this part of the book argues for a new “cosmopolitical education” to arise, albeit they work from different theoretical perspectives. This is arguably the most abstract part of the book and the part that I have chosen to concentrate on in this review.

The second part of the book *Adult educational policies. Shifts in discourses in international and national contexts* turn our attention to the policies and texts produced for, or at least in relation to, adult educational practices. This part consists of three critical policy analyses of national and international documents and some case studies from courses and other educational activities in Portugal and Sweden. The last section *Citizenships in transition: Changes in roles, times and spaces* includes two participatory research initiatives, one from Seville (Spain) and one from northern Portugal. The section also has a chapter on the long lasting effects among adult education professionals when the unification process in Germany began in 1989. The focal point in the last part then is on changes and transitions that occur in the field of adult education, either contextual, systemic, temporal or whatever.

The editors open the book by stating that this edited collection appears in the “time of transition” that seems to be monitored by globalization-processes and “a growing importance of supra-national and international organizations”. As a consequence of that (and reason *for* that) we get a rather tilted role for the nation-states, whom no longer prove sufficient or any safe harbor (if they ever were). The organizations of civil society are also challenged by these transitions, it seems. So the field of adult education stand before “new possibilities, and new problems” according to the editors. At the same time as globalization give rise to serious problems it also opens up conditions for new

educational practices, loyalties and perspectives. This introductory text also functions as an important backdrop to the first three chapters on cosmopolitanism. The question soon arises: "is globalization just what we needed for creating a new cosmopolitical pedagogy"?

Chalos V. Estêvão, in his chapter *Cosmopolitanism and the adult education in the era of globalization* argues that there are two sides of contemporary cosmopolitanism. One, which he sees as "the neo-liberal version", which doesn't bother with issues like income redistribution, inequality and social justice. Leave everything to the market and we will be fine and well. As Estêvão points out, and already Marx noted, capital has indeed had this "cosmopolitan" drive for quite a while. It is expansive by nature. In opposition to the mercantilised cosmopolitan world view Estêvão positions the "cosmopolitical democracy". Following close behind the globalization process are, according to Estêvão, the political and cultural tendencies towards "cosmocitizenship". And the political aims here are universal: [as] "the current trend of cosmopolitan democracy seeks to extend democratic ideals to all states." (p. 47). Politics is seen to evolve towards "a community without frontiers" where the loyalties no longer lie within any territorial frame but at multiple levels and with "complex" layers. Estêvão concludes that it is high time to create a *cosmopolitical education* that corresponds to these tendencies and "takes a global perspective of the future humanity, since all individuals have an equal moral value and must be part of our community of dialogue and attention" (p. 53).

The next chapter by Manuel Barosa goes very well with the chapter by Estêvão, as he too argues for a "post-national" or "multilevel citizenship". They both seem to be in quest for some sort of un-attached and de-nationalized notion of citizenship. Barbosa even writes that: "National citizenship is an unjustifiable privilege in the age of frantic globalization and great migration. In fact, it is citizenship that works, as an exclusion mechanism that opposes the logical extension of rights, particularly to emigrants" (p. 61). Even the first chapter of the book *Civil society and the State: Some implications for adult education* which I read with great pleasure, written by Jim Crowther and Ian Martin, ends up singing almost the exact same cosmopolitical song in the end. The task of building a "new cosmopolitan pedagogy" they contend to be "the real challenge" for an adult educational movement today (p. 42). Their definition of cosmopolitanism as the "sensibility predicted on a willingness to step outside oneself in order to engage the other in a substantive and meaningful way" (After Bronner, 2004 in Crowther and Martin) is however so close to good old fashioned solidarity, they leave me thinking that the words of 1970's maybe weren't so awful after all.

So, what is the problem with all of this? Is not "cosmopolitical education" precisely what we need in this era of globalization? And is not a "community without frontiers" the most viable dream that we can come up with in these days of ever more increasing racism, organised right wing populism in our parliaments, and utterly inhumane border controls? Well, the first problem I have with these admittedly very visionary and seductive cosmopolitan ideas are that they seem a bit too unrealistic. It is, to start with, unlikely that any community will appear which constitutes itself without any outside reference. Other planets simply don't seem to do the trick, UN will not be a vital organization for long the NGO's are not by definition (more) democratic and so on. What is left in this "post-national" universe?

Taking emigration as a starting point it puzzles me a bit that if there were anything that rightfully should deserve to be called "cosmopolitical" would it not be the activities of migrants or say the double consciousness streaming from the mass-scale diasporas hitherto undertaken in history? This is however not the kind of phenomena that the

theorists of cosmopolitanism seem to be referring to. In Estêvão's conclusion, for instance, it is rather as if someone else is invited into "our community of dialogue and attention" where we are embracing "the global perspective of the future humanity" in which we hopefully/gracefully can include others. And when we take our "democratic ideals" and seek to establish them around the globe, what room is there really for variations and elaborations outside the realms of what "we" (now as Europeans) have hitherto recognized as "democratic" or the right ways to govern a country? Can it even be so distressing that behind these cosmopolitan dreams is lurking something of an old colonial desire to establish a worldwide empire? Are we merely poring old imperial wine into new cosmopolitical bottles?

The remaining two parts of the book are not as consistent thematically as the first part. In the last section of the book it occurs to me that "the-text-that-did-not-fit-anywhere" came. Even though the last piece of paper by Rob Evans on the transition and system change among university professionals in East Germany after the fall of the wall is inspiring in itself, it doesn't feel as if it is a suitable ending. The interlude (Chapters 5-9) holds together reasonable though, since methodologically there is a concentration on policy analysis. Here I especially enjoyed Judith Walkers chapter on *The need and competent citizen in OECD educational policy documents*. There is, in Sweden at least, a lot of talk about neo-liberal policymaking and the damage OECD does within the realm of education. More seldom you see someone carefully doing empirical investigations on these matters. How do these policies end up being so influential? And what do they really say? Walkers' text is a cautious and critical reading of four OECD texts produced between 2001 and 2005 on lifelong learning and adult education. The citizen that emerges when looking more closely at these documents are, according to Walker, both connected to protestant Christianity in certain respects (e.g. the Calvinistic ethos) and the more recent ideology of "inclusive liberalism". The OECD seems very keen on providing explanations for non-participation, educational failure and inequalities in personal characteristics and distinct individual behavior. At the same time the most central theme in the OECD discourse are the "tactics of activation" and an apparent will to include all (on this point Walker analysis somewhat coincide with Andreas Fejes in the chapter before her). A lot of energy should consequently be spent in order for "the dedicated and committed institutions" to reach the dangerous uneducated people. Walker shows, without taking any overtones though, that this talk of inclusion is really an integral part of the "political rationale of neo-liberalism" (p. 108). While looking even closer at what the OECD are saying shows that they are prioritizing the material effects of inclusion, such as rendering greater productivity or to cut public spending.

All in all, the edited collection *The State, Civil Society and the Citizen: Exploring relationships in the Field of Adult Education in Europe* might not be solid as a rock. As is probably well known from other edited collections based on conferences ending up in your bookshelf, it is hard to create consistency in quality and a firm thematic structure from the material at hand. One of the most crucial reasons why it is nevertheless enjoyable to read and important to print this kind of book is that it help us to see international differences both in how the conditions for adult education are shaped and how we as researchers do things differently depending on where we are situated.

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