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Damiano Matasci. *Internationaliser l'éducation: la France, l'UNESCO et la fin des empires coloniaux en Afrique (1945–1961)*. Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2023. ISBN: 978-2757438145.

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Introduction by Angela Villani, University of Messina, Italy

Damiano Matasci is well-known for his works on the history of education, especially in imperial and inter-imperial contexts, as well as for his studies on the role of International Organizations (IOs) in the field of education in developing countries[1]. His latest book, *Internationaliser l'éducation: La France, l'UNESCO et la fin des empires coloniaux en Afrique (1945–1961)*, transports us to French colonial Africa after the Second World War in the midst of the crisis of empires, as the emerging United Nations turned its attention toward the social and economic development of less-developed countries. The volume explores the 1940s to the early 1960s, a period that marks the transition from imperial domination to the decolonization of the continent. Untangling a very extensive range of primary sources from national and IO archives, archives of philanthropic institutions and other non-governmental ones, Matasci succeeds in analyzing this evolution, using the paradigm of fundamental education as a common point of reference for both French colonial authorities and for the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Matasci's book deals with a holistic concept, which had already been shaped during the interwar period by multiple actors. As a wide body of literature[2]—and one that the author commands thoroughly—has shown on this subject, League of Nation bodies and agencies, missionaries, philanthropic foundations and imperial authorities had all agreed during this time that poverty and ignorance could be tackled through interventions in different fields. They were all involved in the pursuit of raising the standard of living in poor countries. This involved not only education but also health, nutrition, housing, and rural welfare. The nexus between education and economic-social development was also at the basis of the early studies of development economics, and was especially fostered after the Second World War. The main idea was that effective knowledge transfer was decisive in raising the standard of living and crucial to economic development.

Matasci recalls these legacies and shows how from 1946, UNESCO shaped its activity and programs around the concept of fundamental education as a tool to overcome educational poverty and a contribution to socio-economic development, involving groups of experts, from Western academics, colonial administrations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and foundations. In the same period, the French empire tried to launch the idea of "enlightened colonialism" (45) in the field of education, with the

[1] Damiano Matasci, Raphaëlle Ruppen Coutaz, eds., *Educational Internationalism in the Cold War: Plural Visions, Global Experiences* (Routledge, 2024); Matasci, Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo, Hugo Gonçalves Dores, eds., *Education and Development in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa: Policies, Paradigms, and Entanglements, 1890s–1980s.* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020); Matasci, Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo, Hugo Gonçalves Dores, eds., *Repenser la « mission civilisatrice »: L'éducation dans le monde colonial et postcolonial au xxe siècle.* (PUR, 2020); Matasci, Marie-Luce Desgrandchamps, eds., "De la 'mission civilisatrice' à l'aide internationale dans les pays du Sud: acteurs, pratiques et reconfigurations au XXe siècle," *Histoire@Politique* 41 (mai-août 2020); https://journals.openedition.org/histoirepolitique/284.

[2] A traditional strand of literature, with particular reference to the League of Nations' contribution, includes Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford University Press, 2015); Patricia Clavin, *Securing the World Economy. The Reinvention of the League of Nations.* (Oxford University Press, 2016); Iris Borowy, *Coming to Terms with World Health: The League of Nations Health Organization* (Peter Lang, 2006); Sandrine Kott and Joelle Droux, eds., *Globalizing Social Rights: The International Labour Organization and Beyond* (Palgrave, 2013).

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aim to endorse a positive image of its presence and influence in Africa. Yet, in practice, it planned to modernize the educational policies already promoted on the continent since the 1930s.

Besides the limitations of early action, UNESCO faced strong resistance from the colonial authorities in addition to poor human and financial resources. The institution of the Commission for Technical Cooperation in Africa South of the Sahara (CTCA), the inter-colonial organization that was responsible for technical cooperation among the French, British, Belgian, and Portuguese empires in Africa, is the main testimony of this attempt to overcome the cumbersome presence of United Nations (UN) agencies in Africa. As Matasci writes, CTCA was set up in 1950 to legitimize the colonial experience, thus giving a response to the demands of African elites but also maintaining a presence in an area which colonial powers depended on for significant influence also in the post-colonial perspective.

Thus, competing visions between the UN system and imperial powers existed and the latter avoided any attempts to internationalize questions concerning their territories especially at the UN. From the early 1950s on, the UN indeed gave the floor to Asian, African, and Arab countries, which were often joined by Latin American countries, to bring the issue of the emancipation of colonial territories back to the forefront, invoking a series of Charter articles in support of the UN's right to deal with the issue and tying it to the more general issue of collective security[3]. In this framework, France, like the other colonial powers, needed to exclude any anticolonial questions from the debate at the UN and to prevent the proposals of the UN agencies from appearing as alternatives to the imperial ones. For France, it was a question of survival of the empire and of preserving its international image. There were some clear examples of these: French representatives definitively opposed the request for a compulsory report on non-self-governing territories by the colonial countries, who had been refusing to recognize the legitimacy of the Committee on non-self-governing territories since the beginning; likewise, they strongly rejected to inserting the question of Algeria's independence in the agenda of the General Assembly from when the question arose until full independence of the North-African territory in 1962[4].

Although Matasci highlights this competing vision of both French authorities and UNESCO in the first half of the 1950s, noting that what was at stake was the "monopoly" on knowledge in Africa, (112), there was not, in reality, any clear-cut separation between them. The focal points of the book are the circulation of experts

[3] Some of the more recent volumes on these issues include Nicole Eggers, Jessica Lynne Pearson, Aurora Almada e Santos, eds., *The United Nations and Decolonization*. (Routledge, 2020); Eva-Maria Muschik, *Building States: The United Nations, Development, and Decolonization, 1945–1965*. (Columbia University Press, 2022); J. Lüdert, M. Ketzmerick, J. Heise, eds., *The United Nations Trusteeship System: Legacies, Continuities, and Change*. (Routledge, 2022); A. Dirk Moses, Marco Duranti, Roland Burke, eds., *Decolonization, Self-Determination, and the Rise of Global Human Rights Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2020).

[4] Jessica Lynne Pearson, "Defending the Empire at the United Nations: The Politics of International Colonial Oversight
in the Era of Decolonisation," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 45:3 (2017), 525-549. Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (Oxford University Press, 2002); David Stenner, *Globalizing Morocco: Transnational Activism and the Postcolonial State* (Stanford University Press, 2019).

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and the cross-fertilization of approaches between UNESCO, the UN system as a whole, and empires. In Matasci's view, this dynamic did more to unite than to divide the approach of the French empire from that of the UN and its agencies. France and UNESCO had the same objective of raising educational standards in Africa for social and economic development, but they differed in their purpose. For the French authorities, fundamental education was a tool to defend and legitimize the civilizing mission of its colonial policies. For UNESCO, it was a way to implement the fundamental right to education established by the Universal Declaration of 1948, thus improving economic and social conditions of less developed countries.

UNESCO and CTCA widely converged in their aims in the late 1950s, as the decolonization process began. The modernizing approach of French empires was weakened by lower national investments in education and growing opposition from African elites to the colonial project of fundamental education. From then onwards, France gradually reduced its defensive approach toward UNESCO and considered joining up with the agency alongside Britain. At first, its aim was to exercise control and to contain anti-colonial opposition, as well as to use the agency as a tool to maintain influence and presence in Africa. As Matasci writes, "development aid represents an extension in other forms of the colonial policies conducted during the 1950s" and in this respect, bilateral programs of technical assistance in the educational sector and cultural diplomacy represented a privileged channel for France (224).

In turn, UNESCO gained more space and legitimacy to act in Africa, as the conference of Addis Ababa, which was convened in 1961 by the UN agency and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) with the participation of 32 African countries, showed. As Matasci highlights, it discussed and elaborated a 20-year plan for the provision of education linked to the economic and social modernization process of African countries, which relaunched UNESCO's presence on the continent. Between 1962 and 1964, African states became the main recipients of the agency's technical assistance, though France remained the leading global donor in Africa, together with other IOs like the European Economic Community (EEC) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD).

Thus, *Internationaliser l'éducation* tells a story about the convergences and divergences, sometimes the ambivalence and overlapping, between two different internationalisms, which Matasci tackles with great skill and care. Linking his narrative to the literature which emerged with the transnational and global turns, he emphasizes the role of empires as networks through which so-called epistemic communities grew and transited to the post-colonial phase, along with their capital of knowledge and practices.[5] The book especially succeeds in spotlighting the space that education acquired in the planning on the part of all the stakeholders for economic and social development towards the newly independent countries in Africa from the 1960s onwards.

Finally, Matasci does not leave out the role of African representatives. In the last section of the book, he underlines the new protagonism of African elites, thus responding to the call of international

[5] See, for example: Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo and José Pedro Monteiro, eds., *Internationalism, Imperialism, and the Formation of Contemporary World* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2018); Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, *Empires and the Reach of Global* (Harvard University Press, 2014).

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historiography on development to give space and voice to the local actors, especially from the Global South[6]. The author provides some important and innovative insights in this regard. He refers to the capability of African leaders to create a role for themselves in the process of internationalizing educational models and practices, thus contributing to filling a gap in studies on the African experience.[7] Moreover, he shows a link between the local and global dimension of development, something that enhances a methodology that is increasingly called for by historians of development. [8] Finally, he enhances the contribution that UNESCO gave to raising these "African voices," which were to influence the organization's agenda according to their demands for increasing international assistance in education that was more respectful for each country's cultural peculiarities.

The four reviewers are unanimous in praising the volume for the breadth of the archival sources and the author's skill in using them. Moreover, they all appreciate the ability to address certain questions, including methodological ones, and agree on the excellent contribution this book makes to several strands of research, which successfully interact with each other. It addresses the history of education in colonial and post-colonial contexts, which is an outstanding starting point for the elaboration of a global history of education. It also addresses the history of empires, especially regarding the last phase of the empires in Africa, the history of development, and the history of IOs.

Harry Gamble[9], who is a specialist on colonial history, decolonization, and postcolonial relations, with a focus on French empire, considers the new contribution that Matasci devoted to UNESCO's presence in colonial Africa excellent. Few studies deal with the paradigm of fundamental education and its impact on both the imperial experience and the process of decolonization. He underlines the core point of the book, which is the confrontation between UN internationalism in the field of education, based on the fundamental right to education stated by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, and French "imperial internationalism" (22).

[6] Alanna O'Malley, and Vineet Thakur. "Introduction: Shaping A Global Horizon. New Histories of the Global South and the UN," *Humanity* 13:1 (2022), 55-65; Eric Helleiner, *Forgotten Foundations of Bretton Woods: International Development and the Making of the Postwar Order* (Cornell University Press, 2014).

[7] Other analyses are already present on Latin America and Asia. See, for example, some of the essays in P. Duedahl, ed., *A History of UNESCO. Global Actions and Impacts* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); C. F. Verna, "Haiti, the Rockefeller Foundation, and UNESCO's Pilot Project in Fundamental Education, 1948–1953." *Diplomatic History* 40:2 a(2015), 269–295; Y. Chen, "Experimenting with a global panacea: UNESCO's Fundamental Education programme in China, 1945–1950," *International Review of Education* 68 (2022), 345–368.

[8] Stephen J. Macekura, Erez Manela, eds., *The Development Century: A Global History.* (Cambridge University Press, 2018); Corinna R. Unger, *International Development: A Post-war History.* (Bloomsbury, 2019.) Joseph Hodge, "Writing the History of Development, part 2: Longer, Deeper, Wider," *Humanity* 7:1 (Spring 2016), 125-174.

[9] Harry Gamble, "Navigating the Fourth Republic West African University Students between Metropolitan France and Dakar," *French Politics, Culture & Society*, 39:3 (2021), 73-99. Harry Gamble, *Contesting French West Africa. Battles over Schools and the Colonial Order, 1900–1950* (University Press of Nebraska, 2017); Harry Gamble, "La crise de l'enseignement en Afrique occidentale française (1944–1950)," *Histoire de l'éducation* 128:4 (2010), 129-162.

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The attempt of the UN, and especially of UNESCO, to find a role in promoting international cooperation and in raising standard of living for colonial peoples was seen by France and other colonial powers as an interference in the legitimation and influence of their own empires. This was similar to the experience of other UN agencies, like the World Health Organization (WHO), in African colonial territories. Gamble underlines this, asking about the differences or similarities between the presence of WHO and of UNESCO when comparing their activities in French colonial Africa. Being aware of the precarious condition of their local educational systems and fearing for the growth of anticolonial feelings and movements across their empire, French authorities pursued a modernization plan to again legitimize France's imperial role in improving educational conditions. This plan was enacted through the establishment of new institutions of intercolonial cooperation (like the CTCA) in the early 1950s. Gamble considers this kind of experience to be "intentionally designed to serve as something of a screen, protecting European colonial empires from unwelcomed international involvements." As this action was framed in the institutional evolution of the French Fourth Republic, Gamble wonders if a link between that context and the idea of reshaping relations between the colonizing country and its colonies could be found. However, as Gamble underlines, UNESCO did not have a role as "major provider of education in Africa" but was "more like a clearing house, which would conduct experiments, bring together experts, provide training and technical support, and contribute to educational agendas and best practices."

While UNESCO was not a major stakeholder in education in Africa in the 1950s, it gradually became a point of reference for French authorities at the end of that decade. They started to collaborate with the UN agency to influence the fundamental education program and to control activities on the ground. Albert Charton, for instance, was a French colonial officer and a member of the French National Committee for UNESCO, the connection body between the French government and the UN Agency. In this perspective, Gamble rightly asks if new evidence could be found on the role that French government institutions, including the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Overseas France, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, played and to what extent their views about legitimacy and jurisdiction of education in Africa differed from UNESCO's approach.

According to Gamble, Matasci describes the "complex circulations and cross-fertilizations" between imperial structures and officers and UN agencies very well. From the end of the 1950s on, French officers attempted to shape fundamental education within UNESCO as something linked and similar to their own traditions and priorities. This trend emerged with decolonization, when new countries gained access to the UN, which they in turn began to see as a forum within which they could have a voice in order to influence the political agenda especially on decolonization and development.

As a specialist in history of empires and decolonization and on the role of international organizations, especially in Africa, Jessica Lynne Pearson[10] presents Matasci's "compelling" and "excellent" book as

[10] Nicole Eggers, Aurora Almada and Santos, and Jessica Lynne Pearson, eds., *The United Nations and Decolonization* (Routledge, 2020); Pearson, "French Decolonization in Global Perspective," *French Politics, Culture, and Society* 38:2 (2020), 1-8; Pearson, *The Colonial Politics of Global Health: France and the United Nations in Postwar Africa* (Harvard University Press, 2018).

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"essential reading for scholars of empire, internationalism, development, and education alike," as it "traces the history of competing visions of development in postwar Africa though the lens of education de base." Pearson especially underlines that fundamental education was a "capacious concept" aiming to raise the standard of living by providing knowledge. It was a concept developed in the interwar period, which "became a key battleground between French officials and international experts in the 1950s" as France first perceived UN action as a threat to its presence and legitimation as empire. France tried to face the double challenges of anticolonialism as well as of the interference of international institutions. One of the means France used to counterbalance these pressures was the inter-imperial experience (CTCA). Colonial authorities tried to show that international agency activity was neither proper nor needed to address the question of the overseas territories, pointing out their colonial experience as the best body of knowledge to use in this operation.

Pearson underlines two main points of the book. First, it allows readers to place the history of UNESCO "within the broader constellation of UN agencies." In this framework, Pearson, sharing Gamble's reflections, also underlines the many similarities with other UN Agencies, WHO in particular, in this competing vision and action with the colonial powers. She asks Matasci to deepen his analysis here, explaining which differences could be found between education plans and other domains of development in French Africa.

Second, Pearson notes that Matasci avoids presenting UNESCO as a self-enforcing monolith. Instead, he enhances the role of the men and women who developed ideas, strategies, and programs within the agency, and their connection with academics, colonial officials, and Global South networks. This approach is considered a point of reference for historians of internationalism who "seek to unpack and understand how the work of these institutions shaped the lived experiences of subjects and citizens on the ground." This point is particularly relevant if we consider the role that African leaders were to assume as national delegates of newly independent states within UNESCO and, more broadly, within the UN system. In this perspective, echoing Gamble's final reflection, Pearson wonders what influence they had in shaping UNESCO's agenda, and what impact their involvement had on the future of the UN and its leadership.

Finally, Pearson raises the question of "physical proximity" between UNESCO and French institutions, both based in Paris, asking if this proximity could have influenced, conditioned, or facilitated exchanges of viewpoints or ideas, thus arguably making UNESCO "a more 'French' institution than other UN agencies."

Pierre Guidi,[ii] an expert in the history of education in colonial and post-colonial Africa, considers the book to be "very rich," and "a reference in the field of the global history of education." Guidi finds the author's choice of focusing on fundamental education interesting as a common ground for analyzing both French colonial policies and UNESCO programs. He appreciates the methodology, since fundamental education

[ii] Pierre Guidi, Jean-Luc Martineau, and Florence Wenzek eds., "L'école en mutation: Politiques et dynamiques scolaires en Afrique (années 1940–1980)," *Cahiers Afrique* 33 (2024). Pierre Guidi, Ellen Vea Rosnes, and Jean-Luc Martineau, eds., *History through Narratives of Education in Africa: Social Histories in Times of Colonization and Post-Independence, 1920s–1970s.* (Brill, 2024); Pierre Guidi, *Éduquer la nation en Éthiopie: École, État et identités dans le Wolaita, 1941–1991* (Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2020).

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was a strategy shaped within international institutions and empires but aimed at local communities—thus, allowing the author to analyze the dynamics from global to local and back. Moreover, with his book, Guidi notes that Matasci contributes to filling a gap in the historiography as he places "Africa in the history of educational globalization."

Like the other reviewers, Guidi also considers the book as a contribution to the history of development "as a colonial category," using sources and analyzing the actors who produced them. These were experts from academia, from the colonial administration, and from those who belonged to the educated colonized elites: a true epistemic community formed by these people who wanted to spread a certain model of educational knowledge to the colonies or former colonies.

That said, two elements of discussion emerge from Guidi's review. First, all the actors involved at UNESCO, CTCA, and the French colonial administration, though competing with each other, appear to have agreed on the content and goals of education in developing countries. Guidi points out how "beliefs" or rather "colonial stereotypes" seemed to prevail with both French colonial authorities and UN experts throughout the book. Guidi especially underlines that the activities of these actors are imbued with concepts and ideas that "recycled the worst clichés of colonial racism." This is demonstrated by ties between the education policies that France and other colonial powers implemented in the 1930s, on the one hand, and the concept of fundamental education itself, which arose during the interwar period, on the other. Matasci highlights this in particular (45-58). Even experts recruited by UNESCO subscribed to this notion and used both a racist and paternalistic lexicon. On this note, Guidi refers to the contradiction between the transnational dimension of this community of experts, resulting from the supposed contribution of different ideas and approaches on education, and the supposed homogeneity of this group, which belonged to the same networks, trained according to the same imperial culture, and shared the same values. Guidi links the second question he posed to Matasci to this latter point.

Fundamental education was a means to transform individuals and societies, but it implied a sort of universal model, with the same standards and objectives—in other words, the Western ones—for education all over the world. This was the same model that UNESCO sponsored to achieve development in economic and social fields, and to overcome poverty across its domains of operation. In this perspective, Guidi recalls the theory of "educationalization," underlining that the "emancipatory ideal claimed for education was thereby transformed into dependence" and warned against this model as a tool to "infantilize" societies. This point would require a deeper reflection on the relation between pedagogy and colonial ideology, considering that literature on the history of education in Africa has already shown to what extent "colonial ideology has permeated educational discourse and practice." As for UNESCO, according to Guidi, it might be interesting to understand how colonial clichés were revised, revitalized or transformed by this agency, especially in the transition "from colonial development to the theory of human capital that appeared in UNESCO's speeches in the 1960s."

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Meanwhile, Elisa Prosperetti,[12] a specialist in history of education, development and decolonization in West Africa, praises Matasci's work as it develops "a thoughtful and lucid text to narrate a complex story." In her view, one of the "most compelling aspects" of Matasci's book refers to the nexus between education and development, a nexus that French colonial authorities considered to be a tool "to rehabilitate empire." Thus, education emerges as a key field of modernization programs within the Empire and as a way to present the empire's successes to colonial subjects at a time when conflicts in Algeria and Indochina were actually undermining them. Another strong point which Prosperetti highlights deals with the connections and interactions between the French colonial milieu and UNESCO. There is substantial literature, she shows, which argues that empire "was no closed off container," but represented a space for the circulation of ideas, knowledge, power and expertise. Matasci's book, she contends, is indeed a well-described history of these connections and interactions.

Prosperetti starts from a critical view of colonial ideology that characterized experts working in the field of education in Africa, emphasizing the paternalism that illustrated the approach and ideas of many experts in colonial administration. Moreover, she identifies the concept of fundamental education as an offshoot of such paternalism and an expression of colonialist culture. In so doing, Prosperetti questions the difference between official UNESCO experts and colonial experts, who basically shared the same value and came from the same colonial background.

Another point that Prosperetti raises, joining the previous reviewers in their comments, deals with the role of African actors in bringing about the end of various empires. While Matasci refers to African nationalists, who considered fundamental education as a colonial approach in a different guise and as another way to hinder African emancipation, Prosperetti invites the author to go into depth on this aspect, especially explaining to what extent this criticism conditioned the outcomes of the fundamental education program. At the root of the failure of this program, in her view, there is the ideological component of the program itself, so much so that, starting in 1956, France confirmed education at the center of its cooperation projects in Africa. Another limit of this fundamental education paradigm concerns the assumption that it did not see Africans as citizens of the French Union, rather as subordinates. In this perspective, the French and UNESCO visions appeared similar, according to Prosperetti, as they were "swimming in the same colonial ideology."

Finally, in investigating the dynamics of French competition with UNESCO in Africa, she wonders if a deeper consideration of the Cold War context could reveal the military and financial interests of France in Africa, thus giving a wider and more comprehensive understanding of this complex frame.

The stimulating and insightful comments of the reviewers give Matasci the opportunity to go into depth on some key points of the book. In his reply, he indeed recognizes the two main aspects raised by the reviewers:

[12] Elisa Prosperetti and Claire Nicolas, eds., "Reconsidering Ghana's Long 1970s (1966–1979)" *Ghana Studies*, 27 (2024); Prosperetti, "Writing International Histories from Ordinary Places: Postcolonial Classrooms, Teachers, and Foreign Policy in Ghana, 1957–1983," *Journal of Contemporary History* 58:3 (2023), 509-530; Elisa Prosperetti, "'Between Education and Catastrophe': Côte d'Ivoire's Programme d'Education Télévisuelle and the Urgency of Development (1968–1983)," *The Journal of African History*, *60*:1 (2019), 3-23.

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the concept of fundamental education, which represents the core arguments around which the whole book revolves, and the actual role of African actors, the voices from the continent that experienced the model of education that both UNESCO and colonial authorities developed. All of Matasci's replies contribute to further bringing out the innovative and topical qualities of his research that proves to be a successful attempt to globalize the history of education and late-colonial experience in Africa, as well as the history of development.

Contributors:

Damiano Matasci is a Senior Research Associate at the University of Geneva, Switzerland. His work explores the history of Europe and colonial Africa from a global perspective, with a focus on education, childhood, and science. He is the author of *Internationaliser l'éducation : La France, l'UNESCO et la fin des empires coloniaux en Afrique (1945–1961)* (Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2023*) and L'école républicaine et l'étranger : Une histoire internationale des réformes scolaires en France, 1870–1914* (ENS Éditions, 2015). Damiano is also the co-editor-in-chief of the journal *Histoire de l'éducation* and a member of the editorial boards of the *International Review of Sociology* and *Historical Studies in Education*.

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Elisa Prosperetti is an Assistant Professor of History at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, in Singapore. She specializes in the connected histories of education, development and decolonization in West Africa. Her research has appeared in several publications, including the *Journal of Contemporary History*, the *Journal of African History*, *History in Africa*, and *Ghana Studies*. Her first book will be published by Cambridge University Press in 2025 under the title *An Anticolonial Development: Public Schooling, Emancipation, and its Limits in 20th Century West Africa*.

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Review by Harry Gamble, The College of Wooster

For colonial powers struggling to adapt to the many changes that followed World War II, the founding of the United Nations (UN) presented an uncertain mix of real and perceived challenges. In his excellent new book, Damiano Matasci explores the UN's increasing interventions in the field of education and the responses they elicited from colonial powers that were determined to protect their African territories against developing forms of internationalism. While homing in on French responses, Matasci also works to keep other colonial powers, and especially Great Britain, partially within his analytical frame.

The extent of French apprehensions about postwar educational internationalism might seem surprising. After all, the UN and its specialized agencies tended to venture rather cautiously into colonial arenas. Moreover, during the postwar period, the funding and institutional footprint of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) remained distinctly limited, and the agency's priorities came into focus only incrementally. In short, this arm of the UN hardly seemed poised to directly challenge the colonial powers in the field of education, and in fact its representatives often went out of their way to avoid confrontations. However, as Matasci compellingly shows, many of the contests that developed during the first postwar decade centered on questions of legitimacy, and on this plane the colonial powers found themselves increasingly on the defensive, whereas the ascendant UN and UNESCO were both pressing forward with new mandates.

Although primarily devoted to the realm of education, Matasci's study also contributes more broadly to historical work on the emergent field of international development, which became the site of new forms of cooperation as well as growing rivalries.[1] Keenly aware that interwar "civilizing missions" were ill-prepared to confront the mounting scrutiny and shifting expectations of the postwar period, French and British authorities sought to quickly assemble and publicize more ambitious modernizing projects for their African territories. Sweeping educational reforms and commitments soon became major components of postwar plans to promote the welfare and development of African populations. But while colonial authorities clearly felt that they were best positioned to define and pursue these priorities, the UN and its specialized agencies were also seeking to carve out new roles. Skillfully exploiting a broad range of correspondence and documentation that is housed in archives in France, Senegal, Switzerland, and the United States, Matasci closely examines UNESCO's struggles to open up new spaces for international collaboration and intervention on a continent that remained very much in the grip of colonial powers.

UNESCO's 1945 constitution proclaimed the importance of "full and equal opportunities for education for all."[2] Similar principles were expressed with greater precision in other parts of the developing UN system, and particularly in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted in 1948. This

[1] See Sara Lorenzini, *Global Development: A Cold War History* (Princeton University Press, 2019); Corinna R. Unger, *International Development: A Postwar History* (Bloomsbury, 2018); and Stephen J. Macekura and Erez Manela, eds., *The Development Century: A Global History* (Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[2] "Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization," UNESCO, accessed 26 August 2023, https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/constitution.

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foundational document stated that "everyone has the right to education," that primary education should be free and compulsory, and that "technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit."[3] However theoretical these propositions remained, colonial powers had good reason to be concerned given the state of the educational systems they oversaw in Africa.

In the Federation of French West Africa (*Afrique occidentale française*, or AOF), less than five percent of school-age children were enrolled in official educational institutions during the immediate postwar years. Confined to Senegal's old coastal towns, the Four Communes, until the end of the war, secondary education was only beginning to be set up in other locations in AOF, and the federation remained bereft of any institution that was devoted to post-secondary education. Educational underdevelopment in French Equatorial Africa remained even more pronounced. Although authorities were working to remake and expand the school systems of French Africa, these reforms proceeded rather gradually across the postwar period.

In Africa, the UN's mandate was strongest when it came to the "trust territories," administered by various colonial powers on behalf of the international community. Colonial authorities jockeyed to ensure that UN oversight over these territories, however partial it remained, would not serve as the thin edge of a wedge that might open up the rest of the continent to broader international involvements. This was certainly the agenda that French officials pursued as they sought to manage and limit UN oversight over the trust territories of French Togo and Cameroon. Exploring these early tensions, Matasci highlights a proposal put forward by the UN's Trusteeship Council that called for the founding of a university to serve all the African trust territories. If this proposition set off alarm bells in colonial circles, it was not only because it implied that the strategic field of higher education could—and even should—be developed with the assistance of international bodies. Equally worrisome to French and British officials was the UN's suggestion that boundaries between colonial empires did not need to be mapped onto the emerging field of higher education. Determined to beat back these challenges, both of these colonial powers accelerated their own plans to develop post-secondary education within the structures of their African empires. In this particular case, French and British authorities prevailed, and the UN's proposal was shelved.

As Matasci's study shows in rich new detail, however, France and the other colonial powers eventually found UNESCO to be a broader, longer-running challenge to their authority in the field of education. This UN agency was not designed to serve as a major provider of education in Africa that would directly administer schools that might rival those of the colonial powers. On the contrary, UNESCO officials understood their young organization to be more like a clearing house, which would conduct experiments, bring together experts, provide training and technical support, and contribute to educational agendas and best practices. Nonetheless, UNESCO's activities generated deep suspicion among French and British

[3] United Nations, "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," accessed 26 August 2023, https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights.

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officials, who were determined to defend the records and bona fides of colonial administrations in the area of African education.

In an effort to forestall forms of internationalism that might challenge their African empires, the European powers began to establish their own forms of intercolonial cooperation, or "imperial internationalism" (22). Although these efforts were initially bilateral in nature, drawing together French and British officials, they subsequently broadened out to include representatives from Belgium and Portugal, and even the Union of South Africa and Southern Rhodesia. Exchanges soon became more formalized, with the creation of the Commission for Technical Cooperation in Africa South of the Sahara (CTCA) in 1950. As we learn, this new commission was presented by its founders as nothing less than an "African United Nations" (107).

Whereas other historical studies have tended to devote rather scant attention to this intercolonial body, Matasci takes it quite seriously, as a nexus that can reveal much about colonial responses to postwar internationalism and the developing UN system.[4] In many ways, the CTCA was deliberately designed to mirror the UN's specialized agencies. However, unlike the latter, this commission boasted deep connections to imperial structures, personnel, and expertise. As French and British officials stated repeatedly off the record, and as UN officials came to clearly understand, the CTCA was intentionally designed to serve as something of a screen, protecting European colonial empires from unwelcome international involvements.

Here, the arguments put forward by Matasci run parallel to those made by Jessica Pearson in her important book, *The Colonial Politics of Global Health: France and the United Nations in Postwar Africa*.[5] Although her study focuses on a different sector, Pearson has also highlighted the determination of French authorities to keep the UN, and, in this case, the newly founded World Health Organization, at bay, by creating and promoting public health entities, research programs, and expertise that were rooted in imperial structures and partnerships. Although Matasci briefly references Pearson's scholarship, further guidance and fuller comparisons would have been appreciated. Did efforts to limit the reach and credibility of the WHO in French Africa fully align with concomitant attempts to check the advances of UNESCO, or were there also some key differences? By reaching across these and other policy areas, scholars could bring historical understandings into even sharper focus.

Internationaliser l'éducation makes some of its most important and original contributions in its chapters on the fundamental education (*éducation de base*) paradigm and program, which was developed under the aegis of UNESCO during the late 1940s before being rolled out more fully during the 1950s. As Matasci correctly notes, these initiatives have been the subject of relatively few studies, unlike formal colonial school systems, which have continued to draw more sustained scholarly attention.[6] Officials at UNESCO presented this

[4] See, for example, Florian Wagner, *Colonial Internationalism and the Governmentality of Empire, 1893–1982* (Cambridge University Press, 2022). For a study that does explore the CTCA, see Jessica Lynne Pearson, *The Colonial Politics of Global Health: France and the United Nations in Postwar Africa* (Harvard University Press, 2018).

[5] Pearson, *The Colonial Politics of Global Health*.

[6] On fundamental education, see Phillip W. Jones, *International Policies for Third World Education: UNESCO, Literacy and Development* (Routledge, 1988). On colonial school systems, particularly in French Africa, see: Harry Gamble,

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new program or constellation of programs as a way to quickly accelerate education and progress across various parts of the "developing world," and particularly in remote regions that seemed to "lag far behind."

Fundamental education involved not only literacy campaigns, but also targeted training in a series of practical areas, such as farming, nutrition, hygiene, housing, and disease prevention. Unlike systems of formal schooling, with their more complex architectures and more sustained investments, *l'éducation de base* was designed to be dynamic and nimble so that it could be rapidly deployed in settings that usually lay beyond the reach of official school systems. These interventions were meant to be quite concentrated in time, lasting for a period of weeks or months—just long enough to provide an injection of modernization that might put these outlying communities more firmly on the "road to development." If UNESCO officials could present these educational interventions as innovative and progressive, it was partly because they frequently involved the use of new teaching technologies, such as portable projectors and screens, and audio recordings.

Given the limited reach of the school systems they administered, colonial authorities had difficulty deflecting UNESCO's growing interest in promoting fundamental education in Africa. French and British officials ultimately found it more strategic to enter into selective collaborations with UNESCO, in an effort to influence understandings of *l'éducation de base*, while also asserting control over the on-the-ground implementation of these programs. Matasci shows how a number of French colonial officials became prominent participants in international discussions and planning surrounding fundamental education. Most of these officials had been deeply involved with the "native schools" that had marked the interwar period.

This was certainly true of Albert Charton, who had headed up the education department in French West Africa between 1929 and 1937, before going on to hold an equivalent position in French Indochina. Despite his close association with interwar schools that provided truncated forms of education specifically designed for colonial "subjects," Charton remained an influential figure during the immediate postwar period, presiding over the education and youth department at the Ministry of Overseas France while also serving as a key member of the French National Commission for UNESCO. Through his examination of the roles played by Charton and an array of other officials, Matasci draws new attention to complex circulations and cross-fertilizations, showing how officials with very different backgrounds and positionalities vied to influence the development of fundamental education. *Internationaliser l'éducation* succeeds in deftly navigating and clearly illuminating these complex interstices between reformist imperial circles and the still-developing structures and agendas of postwar internationalism.

As Matasci shows, an assortment of French actors worked to bend fundamental education toward their nation's traditions and priorities, in the hope of creating something akin to a "French doctrine." In a bid to

Contesting French West Africa: Battles over Schools and the Colonial Order, 1900–1950 (University of Nebraska Press, 2017); Carole Reynaud-Paligot, *L'école aux colonies: entre mission civilisatrice et racialisation, 1816–1940* (Champ Vallon, 2020); and Gilles Boyer, Pascal Clerc, and Michelle Zancarini-Fournel, eds., *L'école aux colonies, les colonies à l'école* (ENS Éditions, 2013).

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"nationalize" this international program, and to obviate the need for direct UNESCO involvement in French Africa, authorities put together new administrative units charged with overseeing the on-the-ground development of fundamental education. Whereas French officials consistently opposed direct UNESCO operations in French Africa, their British counterparts eventually proved somewhat more open to such interventions in the territories they controlled. By contrast, Belgian authorities remained even more wary than the French when it came to UNESCO's activities in Africa, while Portuguese officials chose to avoid entanglements with this UN agency altogether.[7]

The chronological period covered by *Internationaliser l'éducation* closely corresponds to the life of France's Fourth Republic, which brought far-reaching reforms to French Africa. Many of these reforms were designed to provide new protections against expanding forms of postwar internationalism. This was certainly the case with the French Union, the new framework meant to encompass metropolitan France and most of the nation's overseas possessions. Much the same might be said of the overseas citizenship that was officially extended to the inhabitants of France's overseas territories as of 1946, along with new opportunities for political participation, however restricted these remained.[8] By developing integrationist structures and projects, authorities hoped to define routes forward that might shield Overseas France from international pressures and intrusions.

Given these priorities, Matasci might have done more to connect his history of fundamental education to this broader reformist context. One never fully learns, for example, how the *éducation de base* paradigm and project intersected with African citizenship and the expanding practice of politics. One senses important tensions. For while the architects of fundamental education sometimes asserted that their goal was to help rural Africans claim their rightful place as citizens, the cursory and resolutely "practical" nature of these educational campaigns hardly seemed to blaze a path toward educational advancement, equality, and democratic inclusion. Indeed, certain aspects of the fundamental education model seemed to resurrect discredited interwar approaches to the education of "subject" populations. Even the language used by promoters of fundamental education often recycled colonialist tropes about rural Africa that connected back to the interwar period and beyond. As late as 1954, the Ministry of Overseas France could still write, in a report on fundamental education: "[I]t's a kind of education that is meant for the primitive man, isolated and abandoned, as the African peasant has long been, in order to help create what has been inscribed in our constitutional texts since 1946: 'a citizen of the French Union'" (165). Presented in these terms,

[7] See Philip J. Havik and José Pedro Monteiro, "Portugal, the World Health Organisation and the Regional Office for Africa: From Founding Member to Outcast (1948–1966)," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 49:4 (2021): 712-741; and Raquel Valente Dos Santos, "Portugal in UNESCO: From Leaving in 1972 to Returning as a Member in 1974," *Portuguese Journal of Social Science* 20:1-2 (2021): 87-105.

[8] See Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945–1960* (Princeton University Press, 2014); Tony Chafer, *The End of Empire in French West Africa: France's Successful Decolonization?* (Berg, 2002); Nicolas Bancel, *Décolonisations? Élites, jeunesse et pouvoir en Afrique occidentale française (1945–1960)* (Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2022); Liz Fink, "Institutional *Terra Non Firma*: Representative Democracy and the Chieftaincy in French West Africa," in Ed Naylor, ed., *France's Modernising Mission: Citizenship, Welfare and the Ends of Empire* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 31-57; and Harry Gamble, "Navigating the Fourth Republic: West African University Students between Metropolitan France and Dakar," *French Politics, Culture & Society* 39:3 (2021): 73-99.

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fundamental education seemed to reflect broader French hesitations about the extent—or even the reality—of African citizenship.[9]

In a similar vein, it would have been interesting to know more about how fundamental education comported or conflicted with the changing field of education in postwar French Africa. As part of a broader program of postwar modernization and integration, reformers worked to align the school systems of French Africa with metropolitan educational structures and practices. If these changes were a direct response to African demands for equal educational rights and opportunities, they were also meant to deflect international pressures and involvements by demonstrating that France was pushing forward with far-reaching educational reforms. As part of these shifts, the French Education Ministry took on expanding roles in "Overseas France." As it extended its spheres of activity, this metropolitan ministry challenged the authority of colonial administrations that had formerly managed "native schools."[10]

Reading *Internationaliser l'éducation*, it is not always clear how the development of fundamental education intersected with this changing educational landscape. How, for example, did "Franco-French" rivalries between the Education Ministry and the Ministry of Overseas France influence approaches to *l'éducation de base*? All of this seems important, since Matasci is so clearly interested in questions of legitimacy and jurisdiction in the field of education. Moreover, looking beyond fundamental education, one wonders whether officials at the French Education Ministry always viewed UNESCO and the UN through the same lenses as their colleagues at the Ministry of Overseas France, or at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Whereas Matasci's account tends to underscore shared or overlapping perspectives, further research might reveal particular moments when French approaches were at odds with each other.

Many Africans picked up on the tensions that clung to fundamental education programs. Since his narrative is more focused on contests between French officials and UNESCO representatives, Matasci does not dwell deeply on African responses. However, in revealing passages, we do encounter African critiques, which grew in intensity during the second half of the 1950s as decolonization was becoming a concrete reality. As Africans asserted their broadened political rights and growing influence over territorial administrations and proto-governments, support for fundamental education programs quickly withered away. African critics drew attention to the paternalist visions that often hovered around fundamental education programs, and to the starkly limited nature of this kind of education. To many, *l'éducation de base* appeared more like a cut-rate expedient than as a means to truly empower rural populations and citizens. Moreover, whereas fundamental education interventions targeted particular rural communities, they often seemed quite disconnected from the broader national projects that were now taking shape.

As Matasci convincingly argues, the colonial powers did succeed, at least for a time, in impeding the internationalization of education that UNESCO had come to represent. Throughout their rather short life,

[9] For a recent study of these hesitations, see Emily Marker, *Black France, White Europe: Youth, Race, and Belonging in the Postwar Era* (Cornell University Press, 2022).

[10] On postwar education reforms and surrounding struggles over the future of AOF, see Gamble, *Contesting French West Africa*, chapters 7-8.

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fundamental education programs remained far more concentrated in Latin America and Asia than in sub-Saharan Africa. And to the extent that such programs did get underway in French Africa, they remained firmly under the control of colonial administrations. But as Matasci makes clear in the last chapter of his book, times were quickly changing.

Even as they watched fundamental education initiatives quickly lose steam and relevance, UNESCO officials discovered that, in other respects, the emerging "Africa of nations" was shaping up to be a more welcoming place for their activities. As a succession of newly independent African countries joined the UN and UNESCO, educational exchanges and partnerships seemed poised for rapid expansion. In one of the culminating sections of his book, Matasci's describes the novelty and significance of the major education conference that UNESCO helped to organize in Addis Ababa, in 1961. Such a gathering would have been a political and material impossibility just a few years earlier, when most of the continent was still enclosed in European empires. In the changed circumstances of 1961, this conference drew representatives from thirty-nine governments, most of them African. Beckoning toward new forms of inter-African exchange and cooperation, and toward updated relationships with UNESCO and other international entities, this conference produced and ratified a comprehensive educational plan that set forth ambitious targets for national school systems.[11]

However, it would be misleading to conclude, too simply, that the era of educational internationalization had finally arrived in Africa. Although post-independence Africa did prove more receptive to international initiatives, including those emanating from UNESCO, legacies of imperialism and particular modes of decolonization continued to shape and constrain educational exchanges and collaborations. During the early 1960s, French and African authorities negotiated and signed far-reaching cooperation agreements covering a range of important sectors, including education. In many cases, these arrangements proved to be quite exclusive. As bilateral cooperation agreements were implemented across "francophone Africa," UNESCO and other international bodies could still find their access to be limited. All of this points not only to the limits of educational internationalization, but also to competing versions of this process. Many French authorities remained deeply committed to fashioning forms of internationalization that reinforced special relationships between francophone African states and the former colonial power—relationships that had surprising staying power.

[11] See "Final Report: Conference of African States on the Development of Education in Africa, Addis Ababa, 15-25 May 1961," United Nations Economic Commission for Africa Knowledge Repository, accessed 10 September 2023, https://repository.uneca.org/handle/10855/34775.

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Review by Pierre Guidi, Université Paris Cité, Institute for Research on Development, Centre Population et Développement (Ceped)

After publishing extensively on the inter-imperial circulation of colonial actors, ideas, and educational practices,[1] Damiano Matasci has now published *Internationaliser l'éducation. La France, l'UNESCO et la fin des empires coloniaux en Afrique (1945–1961)* in 2023. In his most recent publication, he explores a trans-imperial history of education by looking at the design and implementation of *éducation de base* (fundamental education) in colonized and, to a lesser extent, non-colonized Third World countries after the Second World War. Fundamental education, a holistic concept that was developed within the newly-created UNESCO, was supposed to solve all the "problems" of the colonized populations. It arose in a context marked by the "crisis of empires" and the introduction of so-called "developmentalist" colonialism, which aimed to re-legitimize colonization. Through cascading effects, fundamental education was intended to bring with it a series of intellectual and material advances in health, hygiene, food, agriculture, crafts, work habits, and so on. Taking the French empire as a case study and comparing its relations of exchange and competition both with other empires and with UNESCO, Damiano Matasci shows that fundamental education was first used by French colonial circles as a means of re-legitimizing its "civilizing mission" on the international stage.

The book shows how "in the age of the 'crisis of empires,' international organisations, and UNESCO in particular, [were] seen as arenas in which to showcase the successes of the colonial project" (155). In this way, fundamental education crystallized rivalries over the monopoly of educational knowledge, as each of the empires sought to establish their "national" labels on the new international development market. After the Second World War, with the establishment of UN organizations that intervened in development, colonial powers were no longer in exclusively bilateral relationships with their colonies. The knowledge and skills that were necessary to implement efficient development policies became an object of competition between imperial powers and new UN organizations, and between the imperial powers themselves. In this context where colonialism became increasingly discredited, expertise in development was a way for each imperial power to legitimize its own colonial enterprise, as well as to keep its place in the world order. UNESCO's desire to intervene directly in colonized countries was often perceived by the colonial empires as an intrusion into their own preserve.

Matasci's choice to focus on fundamental education as the subject of investigation and on empire, the French one in particular, as the scope of his investigation, is interesting for two reasons. One is methodological and the other is historiographical. First, as a concept that was forged in an international institution and was aimed at remote villages, fundamental education itself allows us to vary the scales of analysis, from the global to the local and vice versa. Second, as Matasci points out in his conclusion, his

[1] Damiano Mastasci, "Decolonizing Education: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Challenges," *African Studies Review* 65:3 (2022): 761-770; Damiano Matasci, Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo, and Hugo Gonçalves Dores, eds., E*ducation and Development in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa: Policies, Paradigms, and Entanglements, 1890s–1980s* (Palgrave McMillan, 2020); Damiano Matasci, Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo, and Hugo Gonçalves Dores, dir., *Repenser la « mission civilisatrice ». L'éducation dans le monde colonial et postcolonial au 20e siècle* (Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2020).

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work makes it possible to place Africa in the history of educational globalization. This particular concept refers to the world-wide spread of the form of compulsory schooling that developed in the West in the nineteenth century. This form of education was tied strongly to concepts of industrialization and of the nation-state, where schools as institutions became pivotal bearers of the ideology of progress. After the Second World War, it spread to many newly independent states. Indeed, the author demonstrates remarkably well how the African continent, considered by the designers of fundamental education to be the poorest, "underdeveloped," a victim of disease, "inert" and "isolated from the rest of the world," has been at the heart of the concept of "education for development," which has since become the dogma of global education policies. This book enriches the documentation on the history of development as a colonial category, by taking a closer look at the sources and the actors who produced them.[2] Readers will find themselves at the heart of the exchanges generated by the conception of fundamental education through the letters, minutes of meetings, and field reports that are quoted at length. We see how the actors, who were drawn from colonial administrations, the European and American academic worlds, and the school-educated colonized elite, formed themselves into an "epistemic community," a group of experts who claimed a monopoly on the educational knowledge to be dispensed among the colonized, the formerly colonized, and other Third World populations.

It is first with regard to these actors that I would like to open a dialogue with Damiano Matasci. Although they were sometimes in tension over colonial preserves, UNESCO, inter-imperial institutions such as the *Commission de Coopération Technique en Afrique* (CCTA), and colonial administrations all agreed on the content and objectives of education. While research has shown that epistemic communities are based on shared scientific knowledge as well as on beliefs,[3] it is the role of beliefs, or rather on colonial stereotypes, that seems to dominate here. This is why it would certainly have been useful to examine in greater depth the conceptual framework within which the designers of fundamental education thought and acted. Since the nineteenth century, missionaries and colonial administrators constructed the colonized as the inferior "other," whose "backward" characteristics were used justify domination in the name of progress.

In October 1947, UNESCO identified 425 experts from 46 countries who would cover non-industrialized countries to be targeted by fundamental education. The objective was for fundamental education to become "a platform facilitating the circulation and cross-fertilization of ideas and knowledge specifically designed to meet the needs of the countries of the South" (38-39). Yet Matasci's work demonstrates strikingly that, by way of "knowledge," these experts repeated a handful of general ideas that recycled the worst clichés of colonial racism. The first chapter provides a remarkable analysis of how the French,

[2] Corrie Decker and Elisabeth McMahon, *The Idea of Development in Africa: A History* (Cambridge University Press, 2021); Joseph M. Hodge, Gerald Hödl, and Martina Kopf, eds., *Developing Africa: Concepts and Practices in Twentieth-Century Colonialism* (Manchester University Press, 2014); Thomas Martin and Andrew Thompson, "Empire and Globalization: From 'High Imperialism' to Decolonization," *The International History Review* 36:1 (2014): 142-170; Philip W. Jones, *International Policies for Third-World Education: UNESCO, Literacy, and Development* (New York: Routledge, 1988).

[3] Morgan Meyer, Susan Molyneux-Hodgson, "'Communautés épistémiques': une notion utile pour théoriser les collectifs en sciences?" *Terrains & travaux* 18:1 (2011): 141-154; Peter M. Haas, "Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination," *International Organization* 46:1, 1992: 1-35.

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Belgian, and British colonial educational experiments of the 1930s gave rise to fundamental education. Most of the actors involved were colonial bureaucrats, who drew on their past experiences in the colonies. One well-known example is the French colonial pedagogue Albert Charton, who was very active in West Africa and Indochina between the two world wars.

The chapter also shows how, to a lesser extent, international aid from the League of Nations became a reservoir of ideas. Yet, while according to most so-called "experts" the time seemed to have come for "enlightened colonisation," the vocabulary they used, and therefore the conceptual framework within which they thought about Africa, underwent no changes that might have indicated a shift in an "enlightened" direction. The book is replete with quotations from UNESCO "experts" who opined that "the poor are a danger to human progress and international understanding," or "these populations are rather miserable and not very evolved," "inert," "indolent," "backward," etc. (40-41; 177). This is why, for these "experts," fundamental education had to focus first and foremost on "spiritual development," poverty being explained above all by ignorance (41). Elsewhere, a French UNESCO technician is quoted as criticizing the "*évolués Africans*" who assisted him in his work. According to this technician, they were endowed with an "extreme susceptibility due to an inferiority complex exacerbated by a rather disconcerting pride" (179). The circulatory regime[4] studied in this book appears to have been international in that it was run by people from a variety of countries. At the same time, it was based on a closed circle of individuals who were endowed with the same imperial culture, and who agreed on the essential point: colonial condescension. Here, the author could have relied on the rich literature on the relationship between colonial stereotypes and practices, as was introduced, for instance, by Frederick Cooper, in order to analyze the colonial ideological drivers of UNESCO expertise on Africa.[5]

It seems to me that the contradiction between the claim to universality by a resolutely transnational community of experts, which claimed to enrich itself through the cross-fertilization of knowledge, but which appears to have been closed and sociologically very homogeneous, could have been further analyzed. Would a more in-depth sociology of this group of actors and their modes of sociability have made it possible to address this tension? For instance, it seems that even if they were originally colonial pedagogues, European and American scholars, or members of the school-educated colonized elite, they shared the same imperial culture and common international networks. It appears also that the fields of colonial administration and British or French universities were porous, with actors circulating in both, as the example of Margaret Read, the famous British social anthropologist with a long career as an advisor to the Colonial Office on educational matters, testifies. In the same vein, it would have been enriching to analyze in greater depth how the same clichés were revived, renewed, and even reinforced by new concepts that

[4] "Circulatory regime" is a concept used by researchers who seek to identify orders governing the flow of ideas, goods, and people in the field of transnational relations. It is particularly used in the history and sociology of knowledge. See Sandrine Kott, "International Organizations–A Field of Research for a Global History," *Zeithistorische Forschungen*, 8:3 (2011): 446-450.

[5] See Frederick Cooper, "Modernizing Bureaucrats, Backwards Africans, and the Development Concept," in Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard, eds., *International Development and the Social Sciences: Essays on the History and Politics of Knowledge* (University of California Press, 1997): 64-92.

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gave the appearance of novelty, from colonial development to the theory of human capital that appeared in UNESCO speeches in the 1960s.

The next point I would like to discuss concerns two implications of the holistic conception of education in the specific case of education for development. On several occasions, the author explains how fundamental education was part of the debate on living standards and how it led to the economic and social development of the colonies. It was seen as the foundation and driving force of interdependent effects that linked education, the end of disease and poverty, the transformation of mentalities, economic development, and social progress. From its creators' perspective, fundamental education was intended to do nothing less than transform individuals and societies as a whole, and thereby solve all the "problems" of "underdeveloped" countries. In this way, Matasci brings to light the first steps in a line of thought that, since the 1960s, has taken on traction. According to this line of thinking, the whole of humanity must necessarily, for its well-being, be educated at school, according to the same standards, for the same objectives.[6]

Historians of education who are concerned with theorization, such as Marc Depaepe and Paul Smeyers, have developed the concept of :educationalization" to "identify the overall orientation or trend toward thinking about education as the focal point for addressing or solving larger human problems."[7] These same researchers have shown that this approach has involved a process that infantilizes societies. The educator—in this case the UNESCO technician—held the authority and decided what was "good." The emancipatory ideal claimed for education was thereby transformed into dependence. Applied to the colonized, who had already been infantilized by the colonial ideology that placed them in the infancy of humanity, the project of fundamental education can then be seen to have been a double mass infantilization, colonial and pedagogical. One wonders whether Matasci thinks that the concept of "educationalisation," which would have made it possible to cross-reference the theoretical elaborations of the history of education with those of the history of colonization and development, might have been relevant in strengthening his analysis. Indeed, most of the works on the history of education in Africa inform how colonial ideology has permeated educational discourse and practice.[8] On the other hand, the way pedagogical thinking shaped the colonial ideology, relationships with the colonized, as well as with the populations of the Third World beyond the school environment, has not been yet been considered, at least to my knowledge.

The purpose of these questions is to open up a discussion with the author and in no way to point out gaps in a work that is already very rich. Indeed, there is no doubt that this work will be a reference in the field of the global history of education, as it documents the first steps of what became the world educational order in a remarkable way.[9] Damiano Matasci succeeded in doing so by situating his analysis at the heart of the

[6] For a critique of the hegemony of a single school form, see Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (Harper & Row, 1971).
[7] Marc Depaepe and Paul Smeyers, "Educationalization as an Ongoing Modernization Process," *Educational Theory* 58:4 (2008): 379-389.
[8] Peter Kallaway and Rebecca Swartz, *Empire and Education in Africa: The Shaping of a Comparative Perspective* (Peter Lang, 2016).
[9] Stephen Carney and Eleftherios Klerides, "Introduction: Governance and the Evolving Global Education Order," *European Education* 52:2 (2020): 81-86; Marcelo Caruso, "World Systems, World Society, World Polity: Theoretical

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circulatory regime of actors, ideas, and educational practices in formerly colonized regions that became the global South. Finally, while work on the coloniality of knowledge is often done at the conceptual level and offers little empirical data, this book is more than welcome in the field of studies on colonization and on its avatar, development.

Insights for a Global History of Education," *History of Education* 37:6 (2008): 825-840; Christian Laval and Louis Weber, eds., *Le nouvel ordre éducatif mondial* (Nouveaux regards et Syllepse, 2002).

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Review by Jessica Lynne Pearson, Macalester College

In his compelling new monograph, *Internationaliser l'éducation: La France, l'UNESCO et la fin des empires coloniaux en Afrique (1945–1961)*, Damiano Matasci traces the history of competing visions of development in postwar Africa through the lens of *éducation de base*—"fundamental education" in English. A capacious concept, fundamental education aimed to lift up entire communities by providing knowledge and skills for people of all ages. It encompassed a wide gamut of social and economic domains, from literacy, hygiene, and basic household skills to the modernization of agriculture and the management of local resources. Fundamental education, Matasci shows, had a multi-pronged genealogy, with origins in interwar philanthropy, colonial development, and projects and research sponsored by the League of Nations. Despite—or, indeed, because of—its dual colonial-international roots, this field became a key battleground between French officials and international experts in the 1950s, when many champions of France's overseas empire saw UN development programs as a threat to French sovereignty.

Internationaliser l'éducation joins a growing body of scholarly literature that takes seriously the international and transnational dimensions of both postwar colonial reform and decolonization.[1] Focusing on France's two sub-Saharan federations, French West Africa (AOF) and French Equatorial Africa (AEF), Matasci weaves a complex history that draws on archives from three continents and from a broad range of institutions and organizations, including but not limited to American philanthropic organizations, the Commission for Technical Cooperation in Africa South of the Sahara (CCTA), French and British government ministries and colonial administrations, the UN, and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

The book follows a chronological arc. It begins in the early postwar years as bureaucrats and politicians from France and the empire were hammering out the contours of the reimagined "French Union" and as various UN agencies were plotting their own projects in the Global South. Matasci then situates the reader in a moment of mounting imperial crisis in the early 1950s during which French officials worked to salvage their reformed empire by combating anticolonialism from within and international interference from without. As a means of defending themselves from the latter, European administrations in Africa came together in novel ways, forging new venues for cooperation amongst colonial powers. While inter-imperial cooperation was certainly not unprecedented, it experienced something of a heyday in the 1950s, as colonial governments sought to demonstrate that the involvement of the institutions like the World Health

[1] To name only a few of the most recent: Aurora Almada e Santos, Nicole Eggers, and Jessica Lynne Pearson, eds., *The United Nations and Decolonization* (Routledge, 2020); Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo and José Pedro Monteiro, eds., *Internationalism, Imperialism and the Formation of the Contemporary World: The Pasts of the Present* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Megan Brown, *The Seventh Member State: Algeria, France, and the European Community* (Harvard University Press, 2022); Mary Ann Heiss, *Fulfilling the Sacred Trust: The UN Campaign for International Accountability for Dependent Territories in the Era of Decolonization* (Cornell University Press, 2021); Jennifer Johnson, *The Battle for Algeria: Sovereignty, Health Care, and Humanitarianism* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); Alanna O'Malley, *The Diplomacy of Decolonisation: America, Britain and the United Nations during the Congo Crisis (1960–1964)* (Manchester University Press, 2018); and Eva-Maria Muschik, *Building States: The United Nations, Development, and Decolonization, 1945–1965* (Columbia University Press, 2022).

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Organization (WHO), the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), and UNESCO was neither necessary nor appropriate in their overseas territories. No UN agency, they claimed, could match the deep on-the-ground experience that European experts had gleaned during decades of colonial occupation.[2] Intercolonial technical cooperation, many hoped, would operate as a kind of protective barrier between Europe's African colonies and any unwanted interference from the UN or its specialized agencies. The result of these machinations, Matasci shows, was a very circumscribed engagement between UNESCO and Africa in the years that preceded decolonization.[3] During this period, the scope of the organization's education-related activities on the African continent paled, quite significantly, in comparison to its extensive work in Asia and Latin America. Efforts to forge open channels of communication and cooperation between UNESCO and the CCTA encountered seemingly innumerable obstacles. When UNESCO delegates were invited—or, rather, reluctantly permitted—to attend intercolonial education conferences sponsored by the CCTA, they sensed a palpable hostility to their presence.

Against this backdrop, Matasci delves into a series of fundamental education pilot projects that took place in French sub-Saharan Africa from 1952 to 1956, "in the shadow of the international," as chapter 4 is also called. While longer-term schemes to increase access to both primary and secondary education in the empire were already in the works, these kinds of colonial development projects were slow to deliver the outcomes necessary to defend the French Union in a moment of swiftly intensifying imperial crisis. Fundamental education, by contrast, could deliver the rapid results needed to legitimize ongoing French rule for an increasingly skeptical international audience, or so colonial officials believed. UNESCO shaped the orientation of these programs in powerful ways, including by providing professional development for many of the individuals who were tasked with overseeing them. The French government, though, rejected any formal affiliation between UNESCO and its fundamental education schemes. By rebranding this international initiative as a quintessentially French project, French administrators hoped to seal off any back doors left open to meddling international experts and to affirm, once and for all, the national origins of postwar modernization programs in the empire.

Despite the generally positive reception by many of the rural communities that hosted them, these pilot projects confronted countless difficulties, from budgetary shortcomings to under-trained staff. Shifting administrative parameters in the context of the 1956 *loi cadre* exacerbated financial difficulties within individual territories. Also, the rising tide of anticolonialism meant that these programs were increasingly associated with a racist and exploitative colonial regime, thereby reducing much-needed buy-in from local communities. By the end of the 1950s both the French administration and UNESCO had abandoned fundamental education altogether, the former in favor of adult education courses focused on literacy and the latter in favor of "*la notion plus 'onusienne' de la 'développement communautaire'*" (198). In the book's final

[2] On earlier efforts to forge intercolonial cooperation in the fields of science and medicine, see Deborah J. Neill, *Networks in Tropical Medicine: Internationalism, Colonialism, and the Rise of a Medical Specialty, 1890–1930* (Stanford University Press, 2012).

[3] My own work traces a similar history in the context of the World Health Organization's engagement with French-occupied Africa. See Pearson, *The Colonial Politics of Global Health: France and the United Nations in Postwar Africa* (Harvard University Press, 2018).

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chapter, Matasci brings the story full circle to the early postcolonial moment, tracing both the possibilities that Africans imagined decolonization could bring to the field of education and vice versa, but also the still-quite-powerful ties that continued to bind Africa and Europe well into the post-independence era.

The greatest strength of Matasci's book, in my view, is his commitment to telling the story of the actual individuals who both comprised and engaged with UNESCO. Given the nature of the archives they leave behind, international organizations often appear in historical scholarship as self-propelled machines rather than as the complex patchworks of human experience that they are. Matasci cleanly avoids this trap, working diligently to humanize the history of the United Nations in each and every chapter. To name only one example: in the first chapter we meet not only Julian Huxley, the first director-general of UNESCO, but, indeed, all of the contributors to UNESCO's foundational publication on fundamental education: *Fundamental Education: Common Ground for all Peoples* (1947). Matasci not only provides a list of all thirty-three participants and their nationality, but also situates them within their respective scholarly, colonial, and Global South networks. This kind of thoughtful engagement with the lived experience of UNESCO's work is a common thread that knits the book's chapters together.

Having myself written a parallel history of competing colonial and international visions of public health in postwar French Africa,[4] I was keen to discover in Matasci's monograph how the history of UNESCO and education both overlapped with and diverged from the sagas I had uncovered in the archives of the WHO, the French colonial health service, and the *Centre International de l'Enfance* (International Children's Centre). While most of my questions were amply satisfied, especially with regard to the uncanny similarities between the two histories, I was left with a few straggling questions about possible differences. Broadly put, what set education apart from other realms of postwar development in France's African empire? And how might the history of UNESCO's involvement in Africa differ from that of other UN agencies?

Something else that struck me about Matasci's book is the notable role that a number of key African actors played in UNESCO's early postwar work. Amadou Mahtar M'Bow, who would later become the director-general of UNESCO, played a central part in the on-the-ground implementation of fundamental education pilot programs in Senegal and Mauritania. We meet future Senegalese president Léopold Sédar Senghor, too, at various points in this history, including in his role as member of the French National Commission for UNESCO. In my own research on the WHO's Regional Office for Africa, I found, much to my chagrin, far fewer African voices and perspectives represented as delegates sat down in the 1950s to map out the sanitary future of the continent.[5] While Matasci discusses this briefly in the conclusion, I would be eager to hear more about how individuals like M'Bow and Senghor might have set UNESCO on a different trajectory in terms of its engagement with African visions of development (244). I am also curious about the implications of this early African involvement in UNESCO for the future of the organization and its leadership. It is worth remarking, for example, that whereas M'Bow assumed the directorship of UNESCO

[4] Pearson, *The Colonial Politics of Global Health*.

[5] The one exception was Dr. Joseph Togba, the Liberian delegate to the WHO Africa Regional Committee. Unlike M'Bow and Senghor, however, Togba hailed from an independent African nation.

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in 1974, the position of director-general of the WHO would not be held by an African until Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus took office in 2017, more than forty years later. In what ways might the history that Matasci recounts here have laid the foundation for this divergence?

Second, I would be curious to learn more about the role of place in the story—particularly the geographic context of UNESCO itself. Both UNESCO and the WHO sit, administratively, under the UN's international umbrella. But, like all international institutions, they are physically headquartered within the borders of an individual nation. The WHO is based in Switzerland, whereas UNESCO's seat is co-located in France's capital near a number of relevant French ministries: Education, Foreign Affairs, and Overseas France. Did this physical proximity facilitate exchanges of ideas, viewpoints, or influence between French officials and UNESCO? Are there any ways in which UNESCO's physical presence in Paris might make it a more "French" institution than other UN agencies?[6]

I offer these questions not as critiques, but as a means to both continue the engaging conversation that Matasci launches with this excellent monograph and to help us situate the history of UNESCO within the broader constellation of UN agencies, each with their own respective past.

Overall, *Internationaliser l'éducation* is a highly commendable work of history. Matasci's book will no doubt become essential reading for scholars of empire, internationalism, development, and education alike. His clear and engaging prose was a joy to read and his deep engagement with the implementation of UNESCO projects on the African continent will serve as a model for other scholars of postwar internationalism who seek to unpack and understand how the work of these institutions shaped the lived experiences of subjects and citizens on the ground.

[6] These questions are inspired by conversations with Dexter Fergie, who is writing a compelling dissertation that revolves, in large part, around the UN's physical location in the City of New York. See Northwestern University, Department of History, "Dexter Fergie," https://history.northwestern.edu/people/graduate-students/dexter-fergie.html, accessed 4 September 2023.

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Review by Elisa Prosperetti, National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

Empires used to be in control of the narrative. Several decades of historical writing have slowly done away with that assumption, at least in the case of European colonialism in Africa. From Sara Berry's "hegemony on a shoestring," to Frederick Cooper's rejoinder to subaltern studies that colonial governments' power was "more arterial than capillary," and, finally, through to the post-Cold War embrace of African "agency" as a guiding concept for Africanist historical analysis, it has become hard to remember how formidable empires once seemed.[1] To hear historians tell it, empires were in a constant state of confusion, scrambling from one crisis to the next. This ongoing and long-term historical revisionism—which emerged from historians' access to documents that are soaked with imperial anxiety—is welcome. However, like any analytical choice, it comes at a cost. The unintentional price we pay for seeing empires as faltering entities that were internally beset by crises and power struggles is the playing down of the power that they did wield, the less rigorous interrogation of that power, and the minimizing of the work of the anticolonial activists who led improbable struggles against the systems that had structured their lives. In Damiano Matasci's new book, *Internationaliser l'éducation*, we see both the merits and the drawbacks of this revisionist take on empire.

Unquestionably, Matasci has pulled off a laudable archival feat. He delivers a portrait of late French colonial rule that was in the throes of its own denial and was bent on seeing UNESCO as its existential enemy rather understanding the deep-seated changes afoot in African society. He does this by weaving together an impressive array of sources, from French, UN, Senegalese and American archives. He is also in command of varied historiographies, including global history, the history of international organizations, French colonial history, and development histories, which he expertly puts into conversation with one another. This wide-ranging source base, both primary and secondary, offers him a broad vista on which to reconstruct the uncertainty of late-colonial rule. Here, empire was no closed-off container, but one through which breezes flowed—like the ones from Geneva and New York—with more or less force. Empires were not siloed, Matasci convincingly demonstrates, but embedded in complex circulations of knowledge, power, and expertise.

One of the most compelling aspects of Matasci's analysis is his effortless triangulation between a larger global context and French imperial timelines. We see how the 1948 signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which enshrined education as a human right, preceded US President Harry Truman's "Four Points" speech by just two months. The latter has often been credited with launching the age of development.[2] These two events in fact frame one of the major contributions of the book, which is to show

[1] Sara Berry, "Hegemony on a Shoestring: Indirect Rule and Access to Agricultural Land," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 62:3 (1992): 327-355, DOI: 10.2307/1159747; Frederick Cooper, "Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History," *The American Historical Review* 99:5 (1994): 1533, DOI: 10.1086/ahr/99.5.1516; Keletso E. Atkins, *The Moon Is Dead! Give Us Our Money!: The Cultural Origins of an African Work Ethic, Natal, South Africa, 1843–1900* (Heinemann, 1993); Carol Summers, *Colonial Lessons: Africans' Education in Southern Rhodesia, 1918–1940* (Heinemann, 2002).

[2] Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton University Press, 1995), 3-4.

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how deeply education and development practice were intertwined in the efforts to rehabilitate empire. Education had a special role as a key index of colonialism's "modernizing mission." Following on from the Brazzaville Declaration's commitment to mass education in France's African colonies in 1944, and the establishment of the French Union in 1946, Matasci convincingly argues that education played a central role in the French "colonial new deal" (15). Education was also highly measurable. Steadily rising numbers of schools and enrolled students helped the French present themselves as benevolent at a time when crises in Indochina and Algeria were attracting stubbornly bad press. The French saw education and development in Africa as the most effective means by which to clean up empire's public relations problem.

If, however, the importance of education for the rehabilitation of French empire is examined in detail, the book does not explore what such education might have meant to African actors, or what role they played in forcing the hands of the French. In fact, the question of whether African agency mattered in the crumbling of colonial rule is posed only by its absence. Thus, rather than a history of colonialism, the book is best understood as a history of late colonial expertise, a category that in the 1940s and 1950s deliberately excluded Africans. As such, for this reviewer, the author could have more explicitly interrogated the ideology of these experts, and of colonial rule more broadly. Matasci does acknowledge that the fundamental education projects (*éducation de base*), as envisioned by colonial experts like John Bowers, were "tainted" by a "certain paternalism" and that their "particularly paternalist image" contributed to their being abandoned as a development strategy in the later 1950s (40; 193). However, this paternalism, which is really another way of saying the ideology of colonial rule, was not a superficial attribute of fundamental education. It was, rather, the constitutive principle of what passed for expertise in the colonial setting. For, while many actors in the book appear in their roles working for UNESCO, almost all had earlier careers in the colonial service. The way that their colonial worldview acted on the formation of their supposed expertise seems to me to go a long way to explaining why *éducation de base* failed so thoroughly, but that is not made explicit in the text. In passing, Matasci evokes the critique of African nationalists and intellectuals, who saw fundamental education as another way for France to pump the breaks on African progress (193-194).[3] He does not, however, grapple with the implications of these critiques, which seemingly doomed the entire enterprise from the start.

Fundamental education's *political* failing was a result of its *ideological* constraints, which assumed that African people who demanded equality were a "de-tribalized" minority. Fundamental education wished itself to be, as James Ferguson pointed out in his memorable analysis of development policies, an "anti-politics machine."[4] Surrounded by post-war anticolonial movements, the "experts" refused to grapple with the changing political and social context in Africa. Ultimately, the French colonial delusion was always that Europeans could control the "pace" of African development by "dosing" education correctly.[5]

[3] As an example of the importance of anticolonial critique of French education policy in Africa, see Bernard Dadié, "Misère de l'enseignement en A.O.F.," *Présence Africaine* 11 (December 1956–January 1957): 57-70.
[4] James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: "Development," Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Cambridge University Press, 1990).
[5] Tony Chafer, "Conflicting Modernities: Battles Over France's Policy of Adapted Education in French West Africa," in Ed Naylor, ed., *France's Modernising Mission: Citizenship, Welfare and the Ends of Empire* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 3-30.

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Fundamental education, which was so resolutely blind to the future that Africans envisioned for themselves, was perhaps the apotheosis of this delusion. It was only following the 1956 *Loi-cadre*, when the French finally accepted African demands rather than trying to impose their own ideas of what Africans should want, that France was able to craft a hegemonic role for itself in African education. By making "education the priority area" of its *coopération* apparatus, France successfully secured a postcolonial hold on its former colonies.[6]

A discussion of ideology brings us back to the actors who shaped and were shaped by it. It is stunning to see the afterlife of interwar educationists like Thomas Jesse Jones of the American Phelps-Stokes Fund, who was famous for his reports on "adapted" education for Africans in the early 1920s, and Albert Charton, the education inspector in French West Africa in the 1930s, who was well-known for championing "rural schools." We learn just how little expertise had changed in the intervening years, although now some of these experts had traded their colonial outfits for a UNESCO suit and tie. Matasci's narrative is at its best when weaving together their stories, interactions, and conclusions. As I read, I wondered how their career evolutions fit in with J.M. Hodge's thesis about the "triumph of the expert" in interwar East Africa.[7] Broadly, Hodge argues that development began when colonials required the instruments of science, rather than the instinct of personal experience, to couch their knowledge.

While the expert educationists in the book thought of themselves as scientifically rigorous, they were in fact anything but. The fatal flaw of their expertise was to persist in seeing Africans not as *citizens* of the French Union, with the rights and responsibilities that this entailed, but as *subalterns* of the French Empire. Without that insight, no expert could offer a workable plan. Further, since the perspectives of French and UNESCO experts were so similar, swimming in the same colonial ideology, it is not evident why the French were so distrustful of UNESCO. The subtext seems to have been an almost petulant refusal by the French colonial establishment to relinquish authority over 'its' Africans. Perhaps a more explicit discussion of the geopolitical stakes of the Cold War, or the financial and military interests of France in Africa, would have better accounted for the reasons why anti-UNESCO sentiment ran so high in the *coulisses* of French diplomacy.[8]

Historians make choices about the stories they tell. Matasci has written a thoughtful and lucid text to narrate a complex story that has, until now, not been fully told. France comes across as desperately trying to maintain control over education in its former colonies and territories in Africa as its empire was crumbling elsewhere. Despite their terrible ideas, their failed "colonial club," and their ideological blinkeredness, by the end of the 1950s, French diplomats succeeded in securing Francophone Africa as their postcolonial *pré carré*, building the most significant technical assistance apparatus of all of the European powers. Matasci shows that this was by no means a predetermined outcome, but rather an improbable result that was largely

[6] Samy Mesli, "French *Coopération* in the Field of Education (1960–1980): A Story of Disillusionment," in Tony Chafer and Alexander Keese, eds., *Francophone Africa at Fifty* (Manchester University Press, 2015), 121.
[7] Joseph Morgan Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert: Agrarian Doctrines of Development and the Legacies of British Colonialism* (Ohio University Press, 2007), 12.
[8] Jean-Pierre Bat, *Le Syndrome Foccart: La politique française en Afrique, de 1959 à nos jours* (Folio, 2012); Fanny Pigeaud and Ndongo Samba Sylla, *L'arme invisible de la Françafrique. Une histoire du franc CFA* (Éditions La Découverte, 2018).

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conditioned by France's fear of UNESCO's encroachment. France had lost control of the narrative; only in the final hour did it get it back.

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Response by Damiano Matasci, University of Geneva

I wish to thank Harry Gamble, Pierre Guidi, Jessica Lynne Pearson, Elisa Prosperetti, and Angela Villani for their very careful reading of *Internationaliser l'éducation*, as well as for their many remarks and comments. It is a pleasure, and a real honor, for me to engage in this discussion with eminent colleagues who have made major contributions in the fields of study covered by my book. In my response, I will first recall the initial goals of my research. I will then discuss the main points raised by the reviewers, trying to answer most of their questions, before concluding with a few, more general considerations.

The main aim of my book is to examine the different, contrasting visions of education, development, and international cooperation that emerged following the Second World War. To this end, I chose to focus on the case of France and its colonies in sub-Saharan Africa, which I tried to place in a global context characterized by the growing involvement of the United Nations' specialized agencies in the countries of the "Global South." From the outset, my investigation was guided by a twofold concern: on the one hand, I wanted to shed light on the circulation of knowledge and individuals between national, imperial, international, and inter-imperial spheres. More precisely, my ambition was to show that empires are not hermetic world-systems, but formations that are built (and unmade) through a complex system of connectivity, rivalry, and cooperation.[1] On the other hand, my objective was to show how the debates that took place within colonial and UN arenas, particularly the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), steered educational policies on the ground, including at a local level. This explains my decision to look at the experiments in fundamental education (*éducation de base*) carried out in several territories under French control in the early 1950s: they reflect the tensions experienced during the period of so-called "development colonialism" ("*colonialisme de développement*"[2]) and reveal the role that education played—or was supposed to play—in the new "modernizing mission" of French colonialism.[3] Furthermore, fundamental education was also seen as a way to re-legitimize colonialism on the national and international stage, which makes it possible to highlight the transnational dynamics that accompanied colonial reform and decolonization.[4] Therefore, *Internationaliser l'éducation* is not only a history of education, development, and—as noted by Prosperetti—late-colonial expertise, it is also a history of diplomacy and international relations, which helps "globalize" historical narratives of contemporary France and Europe.[5]

[1] For a conceptual discussion, see Daniel Hedinger and Nadin Heé, "Transimperial History: Connectivity, Cooperation and Competition," *Journal of Modern European History* 16:4 (2018): 429-452, DOI: https://doi.org/10.17104/1611-8944-2018-4-429.

[2] Frederick Cooper, "La modernisation du colonialisme et les limites de l'empire," trad. Pierre Savy, *Labyrinthe* 35 :2 (2010): 77, DOI: https://doi.org/10.4000/labyrinthe.4085.

[3] On the notion of a "modernising mission", see Ed Naylor, ed., *France's Modernising Mission: Citizenship, Welfare and the Ends of Empire* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2018).

[4] For a recent analysis of the transnational and global dimensions of the decolonisation process, see Martin Thomas, *The End of Empires and a World Remade: A Global History of Decolonization* (Princeton University Press, 2024).

[5] For a discussion on the writing of European history after the "global turn", see David Motadel, "Globalizing Europe," *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 76:4 (2021): 645-667, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/ahsse.2022.2; For the

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The reviewers make some critical comments and raise a series of very relevant questions. Some of them are quite wide and cross-cutting, while others are more specific and precise in nature. A first set of comments relate to one of the key concepts in the book: fundamental education. One of my goals was to show by means of a socio-historical approach that paid attention to individual actors how a small group of experts with similar sociological profiles elaborated a new educational paradigm, which served as a flagship in UNESCO's initial campaigns in the 1940s and 1950s. As Guidi and Prosperetti argue in their reviews, colonial experts, such as the Frenchman Albert Charton, occupied a special, dominant place in this respect. They were in positions of power, shared an "imperial culture," and spread an educational vision marked by "paternalism," "condescension," and a colonial "worldview." In their discourses, territories under European rule, and the countries of the South more generally, were often portrayed as "backward," "static" regions.[6] According to the reviewers, this would explain why fundamental education was doomed to fail, or at least to arouse the hostility of Africans: in the French case, experiments in this field were based on "ideological constraints" that prevented them from taking into account the social and cultural aspirations of local populations and their desire to be considered full citizens.

I entirely agree with this interpretation. The analysis of the political framework in which experts operated is very important and, as reviewers have noted, could have been taken further in my book in order to show even more clearly the ways in which colonial stereotypes influenced global debates on education and development. However, we must not forget that the conceptual contributions to fundamental education were very varied. The "colonial matrix," while dominant, was not the only reference point that guided the work of UNESCO. Experts from the "Global South" also played a not insignificant role in the debates, bringing alternative views, experiences, and knowledge to those offered by colonial officials. Chinese educators, for instance, made major contributions to debates on "mass education" and were very active within UNESCO.[7] Furthermore, in the same period, a whole series of experiments were conducted in non-colonial contexts. A *Centro Regional de Educación Fundamental para la América Latina* was also set up in Pátzcuaro, Mexico, in 1951, and an *Arab States Fundamental Education Centre* was established shortly afterwards in Sirs el-Layan, Egypt.[8] Thus, fundamental education was mobilized by "southern" actors and could accompany ideas and projects that were very different from those conceived and implemented by French or British colonial experts. A historical assessment of the ideological underpinnings of this paradigm (and its legacies), as well as Guidi's call for a deeper sociological analysis of the "epistemic community" that contributed to its definition, should therefore take into account these dimensions.

French case, see Quentin Deluermoz (eds.), *D'ici et d'ailleurs : Histoires globales de la France contemporaine* (La Découverte, 2021).

[6] UNESCO, *Fundamental Education: Common Ground for All Peoples* (The Macmillan Company, 1947), 129.

[7] Yarong Chen, "Experimenting with a Global Panacea: UNESCO's Fundamental Education Programme in China, 1945–1950," *International Review of Education* 68:3 (2022): 345-368, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-022-09959-5. For the interwar period, see Kaiyi Li, *Transnational Education between The League of Nations and China: The Interwar Period* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

[8] On CREFAL and its activities, see Stefanie Kesteloot, *Fundamental Education for a Better Life: Towards a First Mediation of Human Rights in Practice through UNESCO's First Regional Fundamental Education Center – CREFAL – in Mexico* (PhD diss., University of Luxembourg, 2024).

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The reason why I wish to underscore the multifaceted and flexible nature of fundamental education is that it helps us to better understand another essential element in my book, namely, French mistrust not only of UNESCO but also of UN organizations as a whole. This attitude was especially evident between the late 1940s and early 1950s. Relations then evolved very quickly but differently, depending on the organization, with the World Health Organization (WHO) managing to have a more incisive presence on the continent than UNESCO. Indeed, the latter was involved in an area—education—that was much more political and controversial than health. It is important here to underline the ambiguity of these relations. In the case of fundamental education, for instance, UNESCO's conceptions were not that different from those developed by French colonial experts, as reviewers have noted. At the same time, a strong rivalry emerged due to the political implications of this educational commitment. Indeed, for the French, the main goal was to project the image of an "enlightened colonialism" and to avoid "imperialism being put on trial."[9] The launch of fundamental education projects in the early 1950s, as well as the types of inter-imperial cooperation that became established at this time, particularly via the Commission for Technical Cooperation in Africa South of the Sahara (CTCA), should therefore be seen as an attempt by colonial powers to align themselves with the developmentalist agenda promoted by the United Nations and the new international language centered on human rights and development.

These rivalries did not prevent the circulation of ideas, information, and individuals between imperial and international bodies. In the French case, as Pearson points out, connections were helped by a certain physical proximity. The fact that UNESCO had its headquarters in Paris facilitated exchanges and meetings. For instance, international officials had a seat in French institutions that were dedicated to fundamental education. Conversely, UNESCO officials organized courtesy visits to enable working with members of the colonial administration or CTCA officials. These were mostly the result of personal initiatives, however, and did not necessarily reflect the official position of the institutions to which individuals belonged.

In order to grasp all these nuances and to avoid the trap of Manichean views that would overemphasize oppositions, it is essential to work on first-hand archive sources. These make it possible to show, as Pearson notes in her review, that the institutions examined in my book are "complex patchworks of human experience." This is the case for UNESCO, but also, as Gamble rightly points out, for the French government apparatus, which was far from being a homogenous entity. For instance, in the mid-1950s, controversies emerged between officials of the Education Ministry and those of the Ministry of Overseas France on the subject of who should have control over education overseas. Similarly, relations with UNESCO were dependent on the positions of the involved actors. The most rigid opinions were found in colonial-administration and Foreign Affairs circles. They were much more flexible and open to collaboration when it came to National Education officials. All these ambiguities reflect tensions and contradictions caused by the acceleration of the decolonization process within places of power.

[9] This was also the case of the British colonial administration. See Naïma Maggetti, "La Grande-Bretagne à l'ONU dans les années 1940 et 1950: sa défense d'un colonialisme « libéral et éclairé »," *Relations internationales* 177:1 (2019): 31-44, DOI: https://doi.org/10.3917/ri.177.0031.

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This being said, a particularly important criticism concerns the role of Africans. My book tells a complex story from an imperial and international perspective. I fully stand by this approach. However, as noticed by Prosperetti and Gamble, it comes with the disadvantage of minimizing the role played by anticolonial activists and their fight against the type of education that the colonizers provided. This problem relates to my initial choice to focus on institutional bodies (including UNESCO and colonial administrations) from which Africans, with a few exceptions, were excluded. On this point, my analysis could undoubtedly have been improved in two ways.

The first one is by looking more closely at the ways in which African actors became involved in fundamental education experiments carried out in French colonial territories. Many of them worked as doctors, teachers, and agricultural supervisors (*moniteurs d'agriculture*); in some cases, they were also in charge of the direct supervision and implementation of these projects. The book explicitly addresses this issue but should have explored this specific feature further, especially since fundamental education seems to have been a fairly unique case in the landscape of developmentalist projects conducted in Africa in the same period. As Pearson reminds us in her brilliant book, African voices and perspectives were almost completely absent from the WHO's Regional Office for Africa.[10] In my most recent research, I have therefore tried to examine in greater detail the profiles and careers of African experts, the best known of whom is undoubtedly Amadou Mahtar M'Bow, who was appointed Director-General of UNESCO in 1974.[11] This provides a better understanding of their views on education, even though it is still difficult to gauge to what extent this involvement led to a specifically African, "endogenous" conception of development in the medium and long term.[12]

Second, the place of Africans could have been better highlighted by giving more importance to the post-war educational context and landscape, which have recently been the subject of new research.[13] As Gamble rightly notes, the creation of the French Union and access to citizenship in 1946 aroused great expectations among Africans. It is no accident that "assimilationist" school reforms were introduced then.[14] While in official discourses the underlying idea of fundamental education was indeed to create a "French Union citizen," in reality it was, however, an education "*au rabais*" that was being offered. Such hesitations and contradictions in the educational policies pursued by the French authorities were numerous and should be examined more closely in future research.

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[10] On these issues, see Jessica Lynne Pearson, *The Colonial Politics of Global Health: France and the United Nations in Postwar Africa* (Harvard University Press, 2018).

[11] See Damiano Matasci, "La modernité au village : Une expérience de développement social au Sénégal, 1953–1954," *Études internationales* 54:1 (2023): 51-73, DOI: https://doi.org/10.7202/1110733ar.

[12] African views and experiences of development have been recently examined by Corrie Decker and Elisabeth McMahon, *The Idea of Development in Africa: A History* (Cambridge University Press, 2021).

[13] Emily Marker, *Black France, White Europe: Youth, Race, and Belonging in the Postwar Era* (: Cornell University Press, 2022).

[14] Harry Gamble, "La crise de l'enseignement en Afrique occidentale française (1944–1950)," *Histoire de l'éducation* 128 (2010): 129-162, DOI: https://doi.org/10.4000/histoire-education.2278. See also Harry Gamble, *Contesting French West Africa: Battles over Schools and the Colonial Order, 1900–1950* (University of Nebraska Press, 2017).

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Similarly, the positions and responses of anti-colonialist movements, trade unions, and African intellectuals, who had long been calling for a "Europhone" education, also deserve special attention.[15] As mentioned above, this blind spot is linked to my decision to primarily focus on issues related to fundamental education, which were discussed in colonial and international circles, while African expectations and demands were mostly directed towards access to "official" school institutions and expressed in other forms and spaces. A similar observation applies to the post-independence period. My book analyses the ways in which France and UNESCO rethought education at a time when the colonial relationship was being reconfigured through the establishment of the modern development-aid system, based on multilateral and bilateral agreements. However, some questions remain unanswered: How did newly independent African countries become involved in international organizations? How did they define their own educational agendas? Was there a break with the vision of development conceptualized in Western scholarly circles? The UNESCO archives provide a glimpse into the ways in which African actors used international bodies to buttress their political and cultural emancipation projects, as demonstrated by the conference held in Addis Ababa in 1961. Even so, additional research is needed to better understand the expectations and aspirations of the African continent and its representatives. This, I believe, would provide a means to break out of the "colonial matrix" and offer an African-centered history of education.[16]

I would like to conclude this dialogue by returning to an "*ouverture*" suggested by Guidi, who asks whether it is worth using the concept of "educationalization" put forward by Marc Depaepe and Paul Smeyers. This conceptualization is certainly useful in describing the worldview and actions of many actors at the center of my book, whether Western or African. They all shared the conviction that education was a means to achieve socio-economic development and, in the case of colonized populations, to build a better future. In the colonial world this process clearly implied an infantilization of local populations, whose legacies are also visible in national and international aid policies after independence. However, it remains difficult to assess precisely how pedagogical thinking influenced colonial ideology or even to gauge the "coloniality" of fundamental education. In the 1960s and 1970s, for example, the concept of *éducation de base* was reactivated to support emancipatory political projects, as in Benin, Cameroon and Burkina Faso.[17] Despite the complexity and diversity of historical contexts, education, whether "fundamental" or not, was nevertheless

[15] On these issues, see Céline Labrune-Badiane and Étienne Smith, *Les Hussards noirs de la colonie : Instituteurs africains et "petites patries" en AOF (1912–1960)* (Karthala, 2018). See also Elisa Prosperetti's forthcoming book, tentatively entitled *An Anticolonial Development: Public Schooling, Emancipation and its Limits in 20th Century West Africa*.

[16] See Desmond Ikenna Odugu, "Education in Africa: A Critical Historiographic Review," *History of Education*, 52:2-3 (2023): 220-245, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/0046760X.2023.2182914. New research on the history of education in Africa has been published recently: see Pierre Guidi, Jean-Luc Martineau, and Florence Wenzek (eds.), "L'école en mutation. Politiques et dynamiques scolaires en Afrique (années 1940–1980)," *Cahiers Afriques* 33 (2024); Ellen Vea Rosnes, Pierre Guidi, and Jean-Luc Martineau, eds., *History through Narratives of Education in Africa* : *Social Histories in Times of Colonization and Post Independence (1920s–1970s)* (Leiden: Brill, 2024). I have also discussed recent scholarship in a review essay: see Damiano Matasci, "Decolonizing Education: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Challenges," *Africa Studies Review* 65:3 (2022): 761-770, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2022.71.

[17] Marjorie Mbilinyi, "L'éducation de base: instrument de libération ou d'exploitation?," *Perspectives* 7:4 (1977): 527-543.

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seen by all the actors involved as a tool for "addressing or solving larger human problems,"[18] in this case "underdevelopment" and its many repercussions. This belief, I argue, had long historical roots: it was increasingly formalized between the 1930s and 1950s, thanks also to the conceptual work done around fundamental education. It reached its peak as early as the 1960s, particularly with the rise of the "human capital" theory and it has continued to guide the actions of many (inter)governmental and non-governmental actors to this day, as evidenced by the United Nations' Sustainable Development Agenda. By focusing on a pivotal moment in this process—decolonization—my book shows how this debate about education and living standards contributed to the emergence of shifting and contrasting visions of modernity that shaped North-South relations in the long term.

[18] Marc Depaepe and Paul Smeyers, "Educationalization as an Ongoing Modernization Process," *Educational Theory*, 4:58 (2008): 379, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.2008.00295.x.

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