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BOOKS ACROSS BORDERS: UNESCO AND THE POLITICS OF POSTWAR CULTURAL RECONSTRUCTION, 1945-1951

Miriam Intrator. Palgrave Macmillan, Springer, Cham, Switzerland, 2019, 280 pages.

International education, global literacy, and adult education campaigns developed in the immediate years following the Second World War in the context of hundreds of thousands of war-time dislocated books and destroyed libraries on the one hand, and rising ideological competition between capitalist and socialist blocs on the other. In this context, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Libraries Section embarked on numerous projects, which revealed the challenges, limitations, and possibilities of transnational knowledge production and mobilization that can arise during global political and social tensions. The story of some of these projects—and their goals, successes, and failures—is told to us across eight chapters written by Miriam Intrator, a special collections librarian at Ohio University.

Books Across Borders is the result of Intrator's extensive archival research into the achievements and failures of UNESCO's library section over its first six years. Through meticulous examination of more than thirty archives and libraries across eight countries, the book provides a historical examination of cultural diplomacy, educational reform, and transnational book circulation during the beginning of the Cold War. While there have been a few recent studies that have attempted to discuss the general history of UNESCO, this book is unique in its focus on the key role of its Libraries agency during the organization's foundational period. In today's world of rising antagonism between states, when daily we wake up to misinformation campaigns and state-sponsored psychological wars, those of us interested in adult education and fostering progressive change through knowledge will not only be inspired by the rich history of UNESCO's Libraries Section, but also will be prompted to reflect and learn from its shortcomings.

The book begins with the "millions of displaced books" during the war (p.7), and the Nazi regime's destruction of books and libraries. Intrator contextualizes the rise of UNESCO in this period of global "book starvation" (p.9). In the aftermath of the Second World War, UNESCO was a centralizing force in the global cultural reconstruction efforts to counter the Nazi's "abuse and misuse of books and libraries" (p.2). In this historical context, like UNESCO itself, the Libraries Section developed as a coordinating agency, not an operating one. UNESCO's Libraries Section's policies and initiatives were to mediate the global free flow of information and publication, and to help facilitate global cooperation in the field of culture and education. The book has eight chapters. After this introduction, Chapter 2 traces

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the origins of UNESCO's Libraries Section to the late 19th century and the pivot to culture in the international movement. This chapter then moves on to discuss the rise of UNESCO based on the building blocks of the short-lived League of Nations' International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, advocating for the essential role of culture, education, and information in establishing a "tolerant and peaceful" future (p.69). Chapters 3 and 4 discuss the Libraries Section's policies, programs, and achievements in helping countries respond to the wartime destruction of books. Chapter 3 explores how UNESCO ensured the existence of flexible and multiple ways for all countries to access the publications and information their users wanted. Chapter 4 shows how UNESCO made books globally accessible and affordable, diversifying the number of languages translated, promoting mass production of cheap titles, and facilitating regional and cross-border distribution.

UNESCO's operations met the resistance of some member states which presented particular challenges. Chapters 5 and 6 discuss a few cases of operational failures and disagreements. Chapter 5 details why and how UNESCO attempted to play a role in the case of dislocated and confiscated books while also discussing the setbacks and resistances that such moves generated, especially from the United States, arguably UNESCO's most influential member state and largest funder. Chapter 6 focuses especially on the case of confiscated Jewish books. Chapter 7 turns to the role of UNESCO in promoting cultural rights. This chapter discusses the two cases of France and Poland to show how UNESCO maneuvered to find common ground within highly contested understandings of cultural rights. The final chapter, Chapter 8, reflects on the previous chapter's discussion of UNESCO's postwar reconstruction activities to help postulate possible solutions for contemporary global cultural and educational challenges.

Books Across Borders critically discusses the Nazi fascist regime and its role in book dislocation; however, it fails to analyze UNESCO's Libraries Section's global activities in the context of the competing and evolving ideologies of the Cold War and the U.S.-Soviet rivalry in the production, translation, and international circulation of books. In the absence of such a contextualization, the geo-politics of the Cold War and its consequences for global book and libraries are not investigated. Therefore, UNESCO's role in mediating state operations within these geo-politics is not elaborated. As the focus of Intrator's study is mainly on the history of books in early post World War Europe, it would have been helpful, for instance, if she had discussed U.S. anti-Communist knowledge mobilization efforts during the cultural reconstruction of Europe, such as the Congress for Cultural Freedom (Saunders, 2000). The Franklin Book Programs (FBP) was another major book program with international outreach and objectives established in the U.S. during later years of Cold War (Benjamin, 1984), and which evolved into an international educational development program publishing university textbooks, schoolbooks, and supplementary readings in the Middle East and Latin America (Laugesen, 2012). The FBP developed close relations with the national representatives in UNESCO and participated in many UNESCO conferences (see, Smith, 1977). It was curious, then, that such organisations, especially the Congress for Cultural Freedom, did not appear in Intrator's research.

There are other oversights in the book. For example, the author points out that the Soviet Union did not join UNESCO until 1954 (Intrator, 2019, p. 30), but does not historicize the reasons behind the Soviet Union's refusal to join earlier. Moreover, early on the author's historical narrative of UNESCO emphasizes the leadership role of individuals, an emphasis which is clear from the biographical notes and many references made to several individuals.

Such an emphasis on individuals, their personal histories and possible humanistic anti-fascist approach, risks downplaying the role individuals played as their respective states' representatives in the international agency. In a few instances, such as in discussing the nationalist approach France made toward hosting UNESCO's headquarters in Paris, the author brings up the important observation that within UNESCO there was an inherent tension between this agency's universalist mission and its individual nation state members (p.33). However, the author does not expand on this inherent tension as an analytical concept in her historicization of UNESCO and its role in transnational cultural and educational operations.

To conclude, *Books Across Borders* is a timely contribution to the understudied history of knowledge production, transnational book production, translation and circulation within the post-World War rise of global literacy and adult and international education. The book further shows the complexities of policy making in international institutions related to international education and cultural cooperation. Through extensive archival investigation, the author has historicized the policies, roles, vision, and limitations of UNESCO's Libraries Section, with a specific focus on the two European countries of France and Poland, between 1945-1951. Still, more studies are required to extend our understanding of the role of UNESCO in a non-European context, as well as in the aftermath of the 1950s to the end of the Cold War. The relationship between international organizations such as UNESCO, non-for-profit organizations such as the FBP, and corporate foundations such as Ford and Rockefeller—which all had the same transnational role in book production, library development, and training projects during the Cold War—is also a crucial subject for investigation.

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