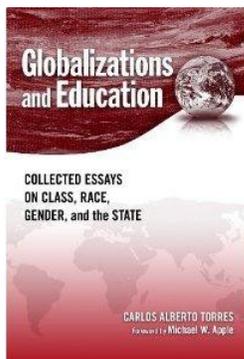


## Professional Book Review

Torres, A. C. (2009). *Globalizations and Education: Collected Essays on Class, Race, Gender, and the State*. New York: Teachers College Press. 240 pp., ISBN: 978-0807749371 (pbk). \$32.95.

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Carlos Alberto Torres collects three decades of research that in his own words tries “to reconcile the scholarship of discovery with the scholarship of integration and the scholarship of intervention...” (p. 1) and organizes it into a selection of six chapters preceded by an introduction that is aptly subtitled “A Life Journey in the Political Sociology of Education” (p. 1). Torres derives a political sociology of education that centers on the dynamics of “education, power and the state” (p. 3) by drawing upon a review of his own educational research on social and cultural reproduction. Torres synthesizes his past collected works and builds scaffolding upon this foundation so that we can imagine new theoretical and empirical directions for advancing research in the sociology of education.

Skillfully weaving critical theory and a political sociology of education using Gramsci, Habermas, and Freire, Torres presents a collection of essays that imagine a global discourse which moves a revolutionary movement from merely a theoretical-technical stance to that of a praxial-social stance. He challenges people, including academicians, theoreticians, and politicians, to attend to the practice of making everyday concretely possible for every person economically, intellectually, and socially. Torres both posits and exemplifies this challenge in his conceptualization of the new direction that a political sociology of education will have to undertake. As he struggles for a resolution through this work, it is admirable that Torres as a theoretician himself is unafraid to attempt his own movement toward praxis, even if it exposes his own predilection to theory. Torres reminds us that the individual matters, that a person’s lived conditions matter, and that the personal has to be possible so that we are not compromised by having “only one standard for social change: major social transformation” (p. 61).

Using the context of Latin America, Torres demonstrates the incompleteness of social and cultural reproduction theory in education. He argues that by focusing only on structural connections between schooling and society as a whole, or only on categories such as race, class, and gender independent of each other, reproduction theory ignores the intersecting and inter-related nature of educational systems. He identifies that the means and the

production of knowledge are more accurately and empirically described by the intra and inter-segmentation that occurs in public schools today, rather than only by reproduction theory. Furthermore, Torres finds that educational policies and practices are influenced by the tensions between the bureaucratic enforcement of normative ideology and the struggle for social change against it because these intersect “in different ways, at different times, and for different purposes” (p. 5) – a finding that neither the neo-liberal nor the neo-conservative critiques of education address in toto.

His analysis of the Latin American context extends to the role of the state in knowledge production and its exertion of normative ideological power to control the production of knowledge. Torres forcefully points out that the state, attracted by the promise (or the threat) of economic development and influenced by a post-industrial globalized marketplace, schizophrenically divides teachers into both normative agents and employee labor as well as students who are laborers-in-the-making for the state. The apparatus of the state in transmitting cultural norms is thus reflectively caught between the political exigency of the necessity of a normatively educated body public and the global demand for cheap skilled labor that coerces educational investment only on the basis of supply-and-demand economics.

Torres concludes his analysis of Latin America with the sobering clarity that such cultural schizophrenia in establishing a normative democratic state will only intensify inequality and difference in social, political, economic, and educational contexts, rather than result in a more unified whole. Perhaps more significant is his observation that such a state will continue to struggle with normativity and difference, thereby increasing the costs of democratic consensus, something that will only feed the politics of neo-liberal market economies by insisting that the production of knowledge has to be utilitarian in order to justify the costs, and not praxial, with and for emancipation.

The book discusses at the macro level whether citizenship must be recognized as perhaps the flux element within the inflammatory reality of a multicultural, capitalist, democratic, and canonic terrain of identity differences that permeate globalization. The discussion on what Torres calls “democratic multicultural citizenship” is both imaginative and incisive (p. 112). This discussion is particularly relevant for educators, in that Torres captures the essence of the democratic dilemma as it operates within a capitalist framework. There is a forceful and nuanced critique flowing within the author’s analysis that invites critical multicultural educators to respond with the construction of an epistemological process that in Freirean terms “conscientizes” the promise of “humanization” which has the possibility of transcending the current narrow scope of citizenship that exists on the basis of identity, whether it be in one’s group, category, region, or nation-state. After all, oppression as a condition requires a plural, collective context with an asymmetrical mix of power and difference to be present. Is the reality of oppression not best described by the persons experiencing it and can we not stand with them simply bearing witness?

Is there any need for an “Olympic Games” of oppression as we currently organize and play it in groups?

Torres has effectively “problematized” an intersecting and complex set of systemic variables that reiterate his insistence toward a “Political Sociology of Education.” He invokes both Hegel and Freire in his conclusive chapters as the basis for how the project of education is nothing less than a revolutionary struggle for transformation that refuses to be imprisoned by prevalent neo-colonial formations of global capitalism and urges us to conceive “education as an act of reason (theoretical and practical) but a *political* act of reason” (p. 149). His inter-dialectical approach to Hegel and Freire sets the stage for dialogical continua that imagine a “project of revolutionary utopia” (p. 150).

In the aggregate, Torres presents a work that demands conscious attention, calling for educators around the world to jointly inquire into what he refers to as a “liberal utopia” (p. 173), wherein we assume, with Freire, “that we cannot change society by changing the school” (p. 173). He develops a complex analysis and raises incisive questions about the politicizing of education that will simultaneously unlink the status quo of education (as fundamentally a capitalist undertaking that permits only a controlled opposition within the existing and systemic apparatus of schooling) and transform it into an organic social movement that shares its struggle with the working class. In so doing, Torres issues a powerful argument that emphasizes “the need to redefine education from the perspective of the subordinate classes” (p. 173). His arguments should sear our consciousness and move us to become political actors who are willing to displace the complacency of our bounded social imaginaries. Are we willing to, as Freire (1986) notes, “give much more emphasis to the comprehension of a rigorous method of knowing...” (p. 164) and “ask ourselves, to know in favor of what and, therefore, against what to know; in whose favor to know” (p.164)? In the end, if we are to reinvent ourselves as educators active in change agency, we, as Torres concludes, “can stay with Freire or against Freire, but not without Freire” (p. 175).