BOOK REVIEWS

Pan-African Education: A Must for the African Union

JOHN K. MARAH
Routledge: New York, 2018, 292 pages.

In his book *Pan-African Education: A Must for the African Union,* John K. Marah insists that African education should focus exclusively on the needs of African people, and that it should lead to the realization of African unity that propels that continent forward economically and politically. Marah insists that a true pan-African education has yet to be realized because African leaders have been focused on the establishment of national universities. The "entrenchment of small African communities" (p. 1) has led Africans to believe that there is no interconnectedness between the economic, political, and social needs of *all* African communities. His main argument asserts that African unity must begin with education. Furthermore, African institutions should exclusively focus on the needs of Africa and its people, rather than aiming to meet the learning needs of the West. Embodying the visions and principles espoused by Marcus Garvey and Kwame Nkrumah, Marah declares that African unification will allow Africa to take the helm in its own development.

Marah argues that previous assessments of African education and African unification are not separate entities, but that both the historical contextualization as well as the current needs of Africans must be prioritized to benefit Africans and the diaspora. He acknowledges and affirms the foundations of African education, beginning with traditional African systems that were established before the presence of Arabs and European colonizers, disavowing existing scholarship that portrays traditional African education as insufficient. This book is a synthesis of academic journal articles and historical writings that depict the evolution of African education, colonization and occupation, and the author's conceptualizations of pan-Africanism. Marah wanted to provide an African-centric overview of education for emerging African leaders and changemakers. The primary audience is Africans and African descendants who aim to dismantle a westernized approach to African education and unification.

Marah's book begins with a historical overview and spans the entirety of African education from its foundations, beginning with chapter 2,

which recognizes the contributions of African tribalism and its challenges. Chapter 3 examines the historical evolution of education in Africa, beginning with ancient Egypt and spanning the influence of Islamic education to colonial education in African. Chapter 4 then looks at the movement of African nationalists and their influence on African education in the wake of colonial educational systems. In chapter 5, Marah provides an historicized assessment of educational adaptation, which he defines as a type of education thrust upon Africans and African descendants (in America) that maintained inferior status, "the type of education that would not uproot them for their social, cultural, and economic confines" (p. 60). Marah transitions in chapter 6 to a comparison of American and African educational philosophies, aiming to show similarities in their desires for a national identity, comparing America in the 1800s to Africa at present. Chapter 7 covers the remnants and ever presence of colonial education and how it runs counter to the needs of pan-Africanism. In chapter 8, the author presents pan-African education as applicable to all issues on the continent, in order to create and foster a unified citizenship among Africans.

Marah presents a less than positive view of any non-Black African influence on the continent; he is highly critical of the roles of Christianity and Islam, and attributes much of the loss of traditional African practices and learning to the influence of these external forces. He calls for African unification; however, he is largely critical of the presence and influence that Islam has had on the continent, at times contradicting his call for unification. He simultaneously praises the influence that African Muslims had on education through the establishment of Islamic universities, while admonishing the presence of Arabs in North Africa.

Much of his criticism emerges from the presence of Arabs in Africa and their religion. He frequently negates African ownership of Islam and conflates the religion with racism and the Arab involvement in the enslavement of Africans. From a modern standpoint, Marah remains dismissive of North Africans, many of whom identify as Arab, thus excluding them from his view on pan-Africanism. He substantiates his position by highlighting Arab hostility toward Africans (and or Black people), noting that Arab mistreatment of Africans "cannot be sustained in Nkrumah's and Garvey's pan-Africanism" (p. 7). In his calls for African unification Marah would benefit from differentiating whether he envisions African unity for *all* the continent or only sub-Saharan Africa. Marah seems unable to disassociate Islam's being a religion of Arabs from its being a religion for all humanity.

Marah presents another contradiction, which emerges in chapter 6, "American and Africa: A Comparative Study in Educational Philosophy." In the comparison between American and Africa, the author acknowledges that these societies are completely different in almost every way but uses American educational philosophies from the 1700s and 1800s that emerged from the vestiges of colonialism to demonstrate what Africans must do to create a nationalism like that of America's. While there is merit in this comparison, it confuses the author's previous positions on European and Western colonialism as anathema to pan-Africanism. Selecting America in the 1800s as a comparison point contradicts previous positions that Marah holds. He praises American nationalism and the creation of identity through schooling, yet the period he references was one where African descendants were subjugated and denied their rights to freedom. Even into the present, this American nationalism through education fails to fully acknowledge even the contributions of African Americans to education. This comparison is antithetical to his main argument and the purpose of the book.

In the final chapter, Marah advocates for the creation of a central and unified university—a brick and mortar location that would belong to all African people. He further urges that the teachings within this centralized university would elevate African knowledge and teaching in a way that would be support the economic, political, and social needs of the African people. These universities should serve as a central frame of reference (p. 167) as opposed to the knowledge and teachings that were once imposed by the Western world through colonization. For Marah, there should be African knowledge, education, teaching, and solutions for African issues.

Marah's advocacy for a pan-African education is admirable and timely; there is a pressing need for African-led solutions to African problems. He identifies the effects and lasting impact that European colonialism has had on the continent and cautions Africans against flocking to western countries to find salvation and resolutions. Yet for all of Marah's campaigning for African unity, he is noticeably separatist as it pertains to non-sub-Saharan Africans. Marah provides recommendations for reaching African unity, but he also contextualizes how a pan-African education can and should be implemented. *Pan-African Education* is written from a historical perspective and would benefit researchers and students of history who want to understand the evolution of pan-Africanism from its inception under Marcus Garvey to its evolution under Kwame Nkrumah and its connection to education.

For readers hoping to glean greater insight into Muslim education in Africa, *Pan-African Education* provides minimal information. Marah's mention of Islam and Muslim education is frequently referenced with negative connotations and proclaimed as anti–pan-African. For Marah, Islam is a transplanted religion, which has since been Africanized, but would still require amendments to meet the goals of pan-Africanism. Marah does not acknowledge what appears to be his personal disdain toward the presence of Islam in Africa, making arguments that a pan-African education would eradicate what he believes to be antithetical and undue influence on African norms.

While Marah contributes to the scholarly research surrounding pan-African education, largely from a historical perspective, he remains highly critical of anything he considers foreign or un-African, and that includes religion. Additionally, Marah's position on African unity is in constant contradiction, as it only refers to the unity of sub-Saharan Africans. To effectively advocate for pan-African unity not predicated on the dismissal of the beliefs of a large portion of the population or the exclusion of an entire geographical region of the continent, Marah's *Pan-African Education* should be consumed with discernment. Readers should understand that Marah's call for African unity is subjective at best.

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DOI: 10.2979/jems.4.1.09