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Book review

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ON EDUCATION FOR SERVICE WORKS OF THE GLOBAL CAPITALIST SYSTEM*



Antonić, Slobodan. 2024. *Colonial (Anti) Education: Serbian Education under the Yoke of Atlanticism*. Belgrade: Catena Mundi, 127 pp.

This book by Slobodan AntoniĆ, a distinguished Professor at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, is very interesting, inspiring, and intriguing. In it, Professor AntoniĆ, as in many of his previous books, analyzes current social phenomena in Serbian society and debates with their protagonists, pointing to fundamental national and civilizational values. In this context, he very seriously and critically analyzes the education reform at all levels in the Republic of Serbia that was carried out after October 5, 2000, which he describes as a “training system” for the planetary capital needs of global and profit multiplication (AntoniĆ 2024, 5). At the same time, professor AntoniĆ takes a stand against the creators of these reforms, their executors, and propagandists. His views are based on the analysis of numerous phenomena, processes, and examples from everyday practice in the education system, but, on the other hand, also on serious arguments that are grounded in the literature of a humanistic

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educational orientation. That is why his ideas are original and innovative, and it seems quite logical that professor Slobodan Antonić's book *Colonial (Anti)Education, Serbian Education under the Yoke of Atlanticism* received the *National Award for Creativity* for 2024 from the national branch of the World Intellectual Property Organization (Zavod za intelektualnu svojinu Republike Srbije 2024).

This book by Professor Antonić, in addition to the introduction and conclusions, is composed of six chapters, which are titled: 1) Education Reform in Serbia and Transnational Structures; 2) Academic Capitalists and Anti-Education; 3) The Comprador Elite Takes Over Serbian Education; 4) What Covid-19 Has Shown About "Nationalism" in Serbian Schools; 5) Civic Education as Autocolonial Morality; and 6) Gender Ideology in Primary and Higher Education.

In the introductory part of the book, Professor Antonić points out that the education reform after October 5, 2000, is possible to present as "a transition from a system that produces a responsible national elite, as well as a modernizing qualified middle class, to a system of training and socialization of the *auxiliary population* – which plans to perform only routine, semi-skilled and service jobs for the center of the

world capitalist system." (Antonić 2024, 5). For the bearers of this educational reform, he designates the "colonial political class" that has selfless help from the "comprador intelligentsia." This transformation of education is expressed through the commercialization of education, the decline in the quality of education at all levels, the introduction of dual education, the reform of higher education through the Bologna Process, and the increasing suppression of material related to cultural and national identity from teaching, especially in primary education. These views of Professor Antonić run through the entire text of this book and are confirmed after an analysis of educational reforms at all levels of the education system.

In the first chapter, Professor Antonić devotes the greatest attention to considering the relationship between educational reforms in Serbia and transnational structures, pointing out that these reforms, as in other transition countries, are being implemented as a function of globalization processes and that they cannot be understood without these processes. In this context, he points out that the process of educational reforms in Serbia "reduces itself to the transition from a *qualitatively elitist* to a *class-elitist* model of education." (Antonić 2024, 13).

This refers to the lowering of the general level of knowledge acquired in public schools and the taking over of the education of children from the upper classes by transnational structures. Children from the upper classes are sent to study mainly in private schools and universities belonging to the centers of world capitalism, while children from the lower classes remain in devastated domestic public schools and universities. Reforms have been carried out in primary and secondary education that are “in line” with the strategic goals of the European Union and the challenges imposed by globalization. This reform did not begin with an autonomous analysis of the situation and needs but instead based on the demands of transnational structures. Through this reform, as Professor Antonić points out, they came to express, in particular, the pressure of the World Bank to reduce the number of classes in primary and secondary schools and include national content in educational programs. Higher education reforms that encourage globalization are based on the Bologna Process, which has further undermined strong and independent national education systems.

In the further course of his considerations, through the second chapter, Professor Antonić elaborates on the liberalization of

education, which in Serbia has been reduced to the commercialization of education. In addition, he points out that the Humboldtian concept of the university has been replaced by a concept according to which students do not receive grades from professors based on knowledge but based on the enrollment fee they have paid to the owner of the university. To illustrate these claims, Professor Antonić points to a multitude of phenomena and examples in Serbia. In the third chapter, Professor Antonić continues his analysis regarding the commercialization of education, as well as the mandate of the comprador elite in that process. At the same time, he points out very argumentatively how the trend of degradation of academic evaluations and certificates is increasingly spreading to state universities which have succumbed to the impact of market competition, particularly evident through pressures to increase exam pass rates. In addition, he points to corruption in the education system and its actors, which he illustrates with examples of controversial doctorates that have succeeded in public and have been the subject of numerous controversies. Then, in these considerations, Professor Antonić devotes great attention to dual education in Serbia, which he sees as a need to produce cheap

labor for foreign companies. Also, primary education was devastated through reform processes, which was most reflected in eliminating national curriculum content necessary in the educational process. In this and the overall reform of Serbian education after the October 5 changes, professor Antonić sees a significant role for the dominant comprador elite in Serbian society.

In the fourth part, Professor Antonić discusses the accusations made by the primary representative of the *Other Serbia* that education in Serbia is allegedly burdened by “Serbian nationalism.” Such accusations were raised during the *COVID-19* pandemic when lectures were held online and broadcast on television, with parents and the wider public having the opportunity to see the content of most of those lectures. Professor Antonić, through his analysis, proves that such accusations are not true and points out that in some cases the public protested due to inaccurate or inadequate interpretation of facts relating to key questions of the history and identity of the Serbian people, which he supports with strong arguments and concrete examples.

One of the very important topics in Serbian education is civic education textbooks for primary schools, to which Professor Antonić devotes attention in the fifth chapter

of this book.. He points out that these textbooks express a *hidden curriculum* in which two critical goals are recognized. The first is an attempt to alienate or denationalize children; and the second, “to create a gap between students and their parents.” (Antonić 2024, 6). Both of these forces are leading to the dehumanization of education. In the last, sixth, chapter Professor Antonić points out to the penetration of gender ideology into Serbian education. He does this through the analysis of “two specific cases.” The first relates to the curriculum in the biology textbook for primary school, and the second to a document called the *National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2030* (SRRP 2021). In this strategy, projects related to the implementation of gender equality in university education deserve special attention. In the conclusions of this book, Professor Antonić warns that there’s a pronounced tendency to reduce the quality of education in Serbia at all levels, from elementary school to university. Then, this tendency is directly related to the effort to socially produce generations with limited education, unprepared for critical thinking, who will be easily manipulated not only in the political sphere, but primarily in the domain of economics, from relations in production to consumption patterns (103).

The book *Colonial (Anti) Education: Serbian Schooling under the Yoke of Atlanticism* by Professor Slobodan Antonić does not leave the reader indifferent, regardless of whether they agree with his views or not, but simply forces him to think more deeply. That is why this book is so valuable, and like few others, it leaves a strong impression on the reader's understanding and comprehension of current issues in Serbian education after reading. Such books and scientific papers are essential for our academic, professional, and social public to become informed and encouraged to view and resolve many education-related issues more creatively and critically. Based on the aforementioned observations, it can be concluded that this book by Professor Antonić can be inspiring for many readers involved in education, whether they are people who study education or those who create educational policy and determine curriculum content, as well as for those who work in the education system.

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