

Book Review of *The Ages of Globalization: Geography, Technology, and Institutions*¹

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Introduction

Economist Jeffrey D. Sachs in *The Ages of Globalization: Geography, Technology, and Institutions* (2020) challenges conventional narratives of development, presenting a historically informed account that interrogates the interactions between geography, technology, and institutions. Unlike traditional approaches that often privilege Western perspectives (Held et al., 1999; Steger, 2013; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010), Sachs (2020) draws diverse lessons from seven eras of human history. This approach invites critical examination of how globalization has shaped and continues to shape education.

Objectives

This review engages with Sachs' (2020) work through the lenses of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Tewell, 2015) and decolonial critiques (Mignolo, 2009; Tamale, 2020), examining how his historical appraisal of globalization can inform more equitable and contextually responsive approaches to comparative education. By challenging the universal narratives frequently embedded in globalization discourse (Connell, 2007), this analysis highlights the potential for reimagining educational practices that recognize diverse knowledge systems and ways of understanding the world. Scholars have advocated for increased cultural and contextual sensitivity in educational research to enhance its contributions to theory, policy, and practice (Crossley & Watson, 2003). This review contributes to comparative education by demonstrating how historical frameworks can guide cross-cultural educational approaches. In doing so, it builds on Arnone's (2007) dialectical analysis of global and local forces shaping education systems and Spring's (2008) examination of the globalization of education.

Outline of the Book

Sachs (2020) divides human history into seven ages of globalization characterized by interactions between geography (physical constraints and opportunities), technology (tools and innovations), and institutions (social organizations and governance structures). This tripartite framework offers a valuable vantage point for comparative education, as one can examine how different educational systems are shaped by these factors and how educational collaborations can address pressing global issues.

¹ Sachs, J. D. (2020). *The ages of globalization: Geography, technology, and institutions*. Columbia University Press.

Departures from Traditional Frameworks in Comparative Education

Sachs' (2020) historical approach offers a distinct departure from world culture theory and dependency theory in comparative education. World culture theory explains the cultural impacts of global convergence through a neo-institutionalist lens, emphasizing the rationalization of change driven by isomorphism (Silova & Brehm, 2020). The book's framework embraces complexity by examining the interplay of geography, technology, and institutions across seven historical ages, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of how local contexts influence and adapt to global forces. Similarly, Sachs (2020) diverges from dependency theory, which focuses on exploitative relationships between wealthy core nations and impoverished periphery nations, often portraying periphery nations as victims with limited agency (Ghosh, 2019). While dependency theory emphasizes economic exploitation, Sachs (2020) highlights the challenges and opportunities globalization presents for different regions. By acknowledging local agency and adaptability, Sachs (2020) avoids framing periphery nations solely as passive recipients of external forces, offering a more optimistic view of how diverse societies have shaped—and been shaped by—globalization over time.

Chronological Sequence of Globalization

Sachs (2020) outlines seven distinct stages of globalization: the Paleolithic Age (marked by human migration across continents), Neolithic Age (agricultural revolution), Equestrian Age (horse domestication enabling mobility), Classical Age (emergence of major civilizations), Ocean Age (maritime exploration), Industrial Age (mechanization), and Digital Age (information technology revolution), each defined by significant technological and institutional changes that have shaped human societies over time. This historical analysis is essential for understanding the implications of globalization on education, particularly as Sachs (2020) demonstrates how knowledge transmission systems evolved (for example, from oral traditions in the Paleolithic Age to formal educational institutions in the Classical Age). His framework highlights the need for contemporary educational systems to adapt to the challenges and opportunities of an interconnected world, fostering innovation in teaching and learning practices.

Critical Pedagogy: Foundations for Analyzing Globalization in Education

Paulo Freire's (1970) concept of conscientization provides a powerful lens for examining Sachs' work on globalization. Freire's (1970) critique of the 'banking' model of education and his advocacy for 'problem-posing education' question how knowledge about globalization is internalized. By applying Freire's ideas to Sachs' historical analysis, we can uncover hidden power dynamics behind the universality of globalization processes. Sachs' (2020) work might be used to foster critical awareness and empower students to engage more actively with global issues.

Eamon Tewell's (2015) work on critical information literacy offers a complementary framework for analyzing Sachs' presentation of globalization. Tewell's emphasis on questioning widely held assumptions about information and its political nature is

particularly relevant when examining historical narratives of global development. By applying Tewell's insights, we can scrutinize how Sachs (2020) contextualizes information about globalization within broader social and political structures.

Decolonial Critiques: Deconstructing Colonial Knowledge Production

Walter Mignolo's (2009) concept of global coloniality provides a useful framework for analyzing Sachs' (2020) historical narrative of globalization. Mignolo's emphasis on the 'decolonial option' and the call to delinking from empire-centric historical narratives challenges us to interrogate global development. By applying Mignolo's insights, we can examine how the book challenges colonial power structures in its depiction of economic and knowledge systems across different times.

Sylvia Tamale's (2020) call for combining decolonial approaches with Afro-feminist analysis offers a complementary perspective for evaluating Sachs' work. Tamale's emphasis on understanding how colonization, globalization, and neoliberalism have operated as mechanisms of othering and exploitation provides a lens through which to examine Sachs' (2020) portrayal of African and other non-Western contexts. This perspective enables us to consider how the book might be reinterpreted to encourage critical dialogue and foster a more inclusive understanding of globalization.

Contextual Variations in Globalization's Impact

One of the central themes in Sachs' work is the recognition that globalization is not a uniform process; rather, it manifests differently across various contexts, as illustrated in chapter 6 by his discussion of how the Ocean Age brought prosperity to European imperial powers while simultaneously resulting in colonization and exploitation for many societies in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. This insight aligns with critical pedagogy's emphasis on contextual awareness and the importance of local knowledge in educational practices (Giroux, 2011), as education should be rooted in the lived experiences of learners rather than imposing standardized approaches across different contexts. By acknowledging that educational approaches must be tailored to fit the unique cultural and social dynamics of different communities, Sachs (2020) offers a foundation for more participatory and inclusive educational practices.

Decolonizing Globalization Narratives in Education

In chapter 3, Sachs highlights the Equestrian Age's impact on nomadic societies, demonstrating how technological advancements in horse domestication led to increased mobility and cultural exchange, as well as the displacement of Indigenous populations. This example illustrates how Sachs' work resonates with decolonial thought by challenging the simplistic narratives of progress that may overlook non-Western perspectives (Robinson, 2002). By advocating for a broader understanding of globalization that includes diverse voices and experiences, Sachs opens up possibilities for rethinking how education can engage with global issues in ways that are equitable and just. In this context, partnerships emerge as vital mechanisms for fostering

collaboration and knowledge exchange. Sachs' insights encourage educational leaders to consider how collaborations could be structured to empower marginalized communities and promote social justice within the framework of globalization.

Critical Pedagogy and the Role of Education

From his historical analysis of knowledge transmission across different ages, the book suggests that education must play a foundational role in equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate complex global issues, particularly in the Digital Age. This aligns with the principles of critical pedagogy, which advocate for education that empowers students to critically engage with their social realities and become active participants in shaping their communities (Parjanadze, 2009).

The book highlights the responsibility that educational institutions have in fostering a sense of global citizenship among students. By integrating themes of sustainability, social justice, and cultural awareness into curricula, educators can help students understand their roles within a global context. Sachs' emphasis on the interconnectedness of global challenges serves as a call for educational practices that promote critical thinking and collaborative problem-solving.

While Sachs does not critique educational models, his analysis of how institutional structures throughout history have perpetuated power imbalances suggests implications for traditional education systems that reinforce hierarchies and inequalities, lending support for educational approaches that challenge such norms and encouraging students to question dominant narratives. This perspective is relevant in the context of educational partnerships, which can serve as platforms for innovative pedagogical practices that prioritize equity and inclusivity. Sachs' work thus provides a compelling rationale for reimagining educational collaborations as spaces for transformative learning that address academic goals and contribute to broader societal change.

Implications for Educational Practice

The Ages of Globalization can inform educational practices in several key ways. In curriculum design, the seven-age model provides a structure for developing interdisciplinary curricula that connect local historical patterns to global issues. For instance, educators could create units that trace the evolution of local trade practices from early history to their place in modern global supply chains, highlighting continuities and changes. This approach grounds learning in local realities while fostering an understanding of global interconnectedness. Sachs' emphasis on how geographical and cultural contexts shaped societal development throughout the seven ages of globalization aligns with and enhances critical pedagogy principles, advocating for educational approaches that are responsive to the unique cultural and social dynamics of communities while situating them within a global context.

Sachs' emphasis on the interplay between geography, technology, and institutions encourages innovative teaching methods. Utilizing geographic information system (GIS) technology to analyze how local geographical features have influenced historical development and continue to shape current international diplomatic and trade relations, educators can incorporate similar tools to enhance students' understanding of global interconnections elaborated upon in the book. Building on this interdisciplinary approach, educators could design project-based learning experiences that require students to analyze global issues through multiple lenses, such as examining how climate change impacts ecosystems, economies, and policy negotiations, thereby cultivating systems thinking skills essential for addressing contemporary challenges.

Although Sachs does not explicitly discuss educational practices or partnerships, his analysis of how institutions evolve and collaborate to address complex challenges underscores the potential importance of school-university partnerships in advancing Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). By bringing together researchers, students, educators, and community members, these collaborations can serve as effective mechanisms for integrating global perspectives into local educational contexts. For example, universities could collaborate with local schools to develop project-based learning experiences that require students to analyze local issues within Sachs' global historical framework, such as examining how their community's dominant industries fit into broader patterns of global resource distribution and consumption.

The implications of Sachs' historical analysis for educational equity highlight the importance of fostering balanced power dynamics within school-university collaborations, particularly in comparative education contexts where institutions from different regions and with varying resource levels interact. By prioritizing inclusivity and social justice in their initiatives, these partnerships can help address systemic inequalities that often persist in educational settings. This requires a commitment to ongoing dialogue and collaboration among all partners to ensure that diverse perspectives are represented and valued in decision-making processes. These applications of Sachs' work demonstrate how it can inform the content and methods of education, moving beyond broad generalizations to specific, actionable approaches that are locally grounded and globally relevant.

Limitations

While Sachs acknowledges diverse global perspectives, there could be a more in-depth exploration of non-Western epistemologies and their contributions to global development. An example of this is the concept of Ubuntu, an African philosophy that emphasizes interconnectedness and collective well-being, which could offer valuable insights into alternative models of globalization and education (Terblanche & Waghid, 2023). Ubuntu's principles align with Sachs' emphasis on interconnected systems and the need for collective action to address global challenges, informing more holistic approaches to sustainable development. Incorporating Ubuntu and other philosophies,

the book could benefit from a more diverse understanding of global interdependencies and the role of education in fostering an equitable and just future for humanity.

Conclusion

The Ages of Globalization compels educators and policymakers to fundamentally reassess their approaches to teaching and learning by considering how the historical interplay of geography, technology, and institutions continues to shape educational possibilities and constraints in different global contexts. As we confront unprecedented challenges such as climate change, migration, and conflict, Sachs' insights underscore the important role education must play in fostering a more equitable and resilient society. This book serves not only to catalog the trajectory of global development but also provides a robust toolkit for those dedicated to cultivating impactful educational collaborations that can effectively address the complex challenges of our time.

Sachs' work invites comparative education researchers to reimagine education as a powerful catalyst for equity and sustainability by analyzing how different educational systems worldwide can address shared challenges while respecting diverse cultural contexts. It challenges us to envision educational systems that respond to current crises and anticipate those that may arise in the future. In this context, the book provokes comparative education scholars to consider: How can we encourage innovative cross-cultural educational collaborations that embrace diverse epistemological perspectives to empower future generations to contribute to sustainable solutions for a more just and resilient world?

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