

○ **R. APPLEBY, *ELT, GENDER AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT. MYTHS OF PROGRESS IN A NEOCOLONIAL WORLD***
 (BRISTOL: MULTILINGUAL MATTERS, 2010, PP. XV, 243)

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This book offers a fascinating account of a domain which has received little attention in applied linguistics and English language teaching. Its main focus is the English language program which was part of Australia's aid effort in East Timor following the violence and societal breakdown which took place when the East Timorese sought to establish independence from Indonesian control in 1999. The book draws on interviews with female English language teachers, poststructuralist critiques of the space/time binary and critical approaches to development to scrutinize ELT in the aid context. In company with other critiques of the global role of English (for example, Canagarajah, 1999; Pennycook, 1994), the book questions current approaches to English language education in development contexts and asks who is really benefited by development aid.

The theoretical background is provided in Part 1, including, in Chapter 1, concepts of development and ELT; in Chapter 2, the analytical framework of space and time; and in Chapter 3, the geopolitical and historical background to the development aid offered by Australia to East Timor. Part 2 of the book deals with the empirical material, weaving critical approaches to development and space-time into the teachers' narratives: Chapter 4 discusses teachers' experiences of living in a development community; Chapter 5 deals with their accounts of classroom practice; and Chapter 6 focuses on the ways in which the teachers negotiated gender in the aid context. In the concluding Chapter 7, a clear and concise summary of the content of the book is offered, along with some suggestions as to how a rethinking of the temporal/spatial interplay can open up ELT practices in new ways.

The book draws attention to the binary divide constructed by discourses of international development, a divide which sees developed nations defined in terms of advanced economic/political/technical status and developing nations defined in terms of deficiency. This divide justifies interventions made in terms of offers of expertise which perpetuate colonial hierarchies and their attendant legacies of social and economic inequality, and bring about a disconnect of knowledge and practice from lived experience. Related to this, is the

impact of modernist notions of space and time. Time, as the privileged signifier and aligned with change, movement, progress and reason (Massey, 1993), is set in opposition to space, which is understood as transparent and therefore knowable, and as providing an empty and therefore passive background against which change can take place.

Appleby's discussion of space and time allows insights into the ways in which the specificities of space, place and context are often ignored in ELT. As she comments, notions of time and space underpin our perceptions and constructions of both professional and personal life. In the language classroom, time is central to "curriculum planning, the sequencing of lesson activities, the importance of efficiency, and the proper development of language acquisition; [it shapes] our beliefs about progressive improvements in teaching methods, and our ideas about the contribution English language can make to economic, scientific and technological development" (pp.15-16). Similarly, a spatial regulation can be seen in the separation of students into discrete classes based on proficiency levels and in the physical arrangements of classrooms which support the authority of the teacher. The processes of abstraction which occur in the classification of objects and people into taxonomies and hierarchies (grading and streaming) produce a static and systematic order from the apparent chaos of nature. In this process, there is often an inappropriate imposition of a Western consumer-based English, as here, a troubled space in which the teaching took place in "bombed-out buildings" (p.162), "lessons are interrupted by a background cacophony of rooster calls, sirens, helicopters, troop carriers" (p. 161) and teachers hear students' stories of having "people chopped to death in front of them. Some of them had to hide in the mountains for two years, with nothing, no shoes on their feet and no food, begging for food from farmers" (p. 199). As Appleby's discussion of her teachers' narratives shows, modernist notions of space and time impact on the policies and practices of ELT in the development context to counter the inclusion of local contexts and, in doing so, reproduce inequality.

The theoretical discussion in Part 1 of the book is informative and takes the reader to the heart of current poststructural thinking on space and time and to critical analyses of development aid. Nevertheless such theory is not everyone's cup of tea and Appleby recommends that, for those who prefer empirical accounts, Part 2 may be more user-friendly. Certainly the teachers' narratives offer thought-provoking insight into what really happens on the ground; they give access to a perspective rarely seen in the literature. We see not only the difference female gender makes, as the teachers find themselves caught in an anomalous space between the masculinised development community and the male East Timorese; we see also the ways in which, in this context, as one of Appleby's informants states, the well-worn and supposedly universal teaching practices "crashed and burned" (p.162); and we see

a disruption to the “stories of success” of development aid. At times the teachers’ comments cut to the chase as in the description of the UN happy hour as “an evening of pissed, patronizing idiots and glamour secretaries slumming it from Geneva” (p. 106).

We see also in these chapters the way the teachers successfully manage the complexities of this contact zone with its hierarchies of gender, ethnicity and economic status both within the community of aid workers, and between the aid workers and the local community. Thus, the book works towards a discussion of what it would mean to move to a “more flexible social and pedagogical engagement with temporality and spatiality” (p.209). For Appleby (and for a growing number of others in ELT and education more generally, see for example, Albrecht-Crane & Slack, 2007; Ellwood, 2006), this entails taking “the disorientation of uncertainty, ambivalence and ‘not knowing’ as a point of departure” (p. 209). To this end, Appleby includes discussion of some of the less habitual teaching practices in which teachers engaged, which involved, for example, leaving the classroom to investigate UN and NGO locations and enquire about the reconstruction effort (p. 205). While such practices demanded a letting go by the teachers of their need to be in control, requiring of them to be “a bit less frightened of the unknown, a bit less frightened of the unexpected” (p. 172), it importantly enabled a strong engagement of both teacher and students with the local context and an authentic response to the students’ need to be in control of their lives, both within and outside the classroom.

Appleby questions the myth of ELT as an apolitical and beneficial activity. The dominance of the view that ELT materials and techniques are universally relevant has already been seen to contribute to the failures of language programs. Basic tenets such as the monolingualism which underpins most teaching materials, and the way claims that ELT methods are ‘learner-centred’ mask the actual authority of the teacher must also be queried. Other factors seen to contribute to the failures of ELT in aid contexts are the unrealistic expectations of what can be achieved in the short time frame and the focus on measurable outcomes and accountability. The idea that teachers can be ‘change-agents’ is also questioned, in light of the fact that the structure of ELT in aid contexts is clearly directed towards a Western model of change which seems often incapable of taking local interests into account.

Along with its insights into ELT and gender, the book contains enlightening accounts of the contradictory realities of life in the aid zone: income disparities, profiteering, the transported Western consumerist lifestyle, the masculinised nature and poor coordination which marked the aid effort, and, overall, a failure to understand the locale and its people (p.84).

The overall impact of the book is that of a much-needed resource to provoke deeper thought about the three issues – ELT, gender and development aid – which it addresses. This is a book that informs deeply about the aid context in general, about the need for locally

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responsive ELT practices, and about gender in the aid context. However it does more than that. In offering ways to rethink the interplay between space and time, Appleby effectively contributes to long-running debates about context in English language teaching. Additionally, through the insights it offers on the experiences of women teachers in ELT aid contexts, both as teachers and as women, the book also has the potential to ‘teach’ those of us who may never have considered the political aspects of ELT, gender and aid. It is a book which should be read by all who are responsible for ELT aid programs, by those who teach on aid programs, by anyone interested in issues of language planning and above all, by anyone interested in asking “what would a decolonized, dewhitened, postcolonial English language teaching actually look like?” (p. 217).

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