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# Discursive Contestations and Pluriversal Futures: A Decolonial Analysis of Educational Policies in the United Arab Emirates

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**Abstract:** Most research on global transformations in education has focused on the actions of political and economic elites. As a result, attempts to contest and subvert globally circulated policies at subnational levels have received less attention. To address this gap, this study focuses on discursive contestations around educational reforms in the United Arab Emirates. Drawing on the theoretical framework of decoloniality (Mignolo, 2011), I explore how Western interventions into educational policies are justified by dominant discourses and challenged by their opponents through public media in the United Arab Emirates. Even though alternative discourses provide constructions of education useful for charting the trajectories of pluriversal futures, the struggle between different voices resolves in favor of global "best" practices. This happens not because they are more rational or universal, but because the voices of dissent are disconnected and fragmented. The significance of this paper lies in employing decolonial lens in the analysis of globally circulated policies and in attending to the voices that become marginalized in the implementation of global reforms.
**Keywords**: Global policies; educational policy transfer; United Arab Emirates; decolonial perspectives

**Las disputas discursivas y unos futuros pluriversales: Un análisis decolonial de las políticas educativas en los Emiratos Árabes Unidos**
**Resumen:** La mayoría de las investigaciones sobre las transformaciones globales en la educación se han centrado en las acciones de las élites políticas y económicas. Como resultado, los intentos de impugnar y subvertir las políticas de circulación mundial a nivel subnacional han recibido menos atención. Para abordar esta brecha, este estudio se centra en las disputas discursivas en torno a las reformas educativas en los Emiratos Árabes Unidos. Partiendo del marco teórico de la descolonialidad (Mignolo, 2011), exploro cómo las intervenciones occidentales en las políticas educativas están justificadas por los discursos dominantes y desafiadas por sus oponentes a través de los medios públicos en los Emiratos Árabes Unidos. A pesar de que los discursos alternativos proporcionan construcciones de educación útiles para trazar las trayectorias de futuros pluriversales, la lucha entre diferentes voces se resuelve a favor de las "mejores" prácticas globales. Esto no sucede porque sean más racionales o universales, sino porque las voces de la disidencia están desconectadas y fragmentadas. La importancia de este documento radica en emplear lentes decoloniales en el análisis de las políticas de circulación global y en atender a las voces que se marginaban en la implementación de las reformas globales.
**Palabras-clave:** políticas globales; transferencia de política educativa; Emiratos Árabes Unidos; perspectivas decoloniales

**Disputas discursivas e futuros pluriversais: Uma análise descolonial das políticas educacionais nos Emirados Árabes Unidos**
**Resumo:** A maioria das pesquisas sobre transformações globais na educação se concentrou nas ações das elites políticas e econômicas. Como resultado, as tentativas de desafiar e subverter as políticas globais de circulação no nível subnacional receberam menos atenção. Para resolver esta lacuna, este estudo enfoca as disputas discursivas que envolvem reformas educacionais nos Emirados Árabes Unidos. A partir do quadro teórico da descolonialidade (Mignolo, 2011), exploro como as intervenções ocidentais nas políticas educacionais são justificadas pelos discursos dominantes e desafiadas pelos seus adversários através da mídia pública nos Emirados Árabes Unidos. Embora os discursos alternativos forneçam construções educacionais úteis para traçar as trajetórias dos futuros pluriversais, a luta entre diferentes vozes é resolvida em favor das "melhores" práticas globais. Isso não acontece porque eles são mais racionais ou universais, mas porque as vozes da dissidência são desconectadas e fragmentadas. A importância deste documento reside no uso de lentes decoloniais na análise das políticas de circulação global e no atendimento de vozes que foram marginalizadas na implementação de reformas globais.
**Palavras-chave:** políticas globais; transferência de política educacional; Emirados Árabes Unidos; perspectivas descoloniais

# Discursive Contestations and Pluriversal Futures: A Decolonial Analysis of Educational Policies in the United Arab Emirates

Returning from her teaching practicum at a local school, my student Mariam, an Emirati pre-service teacher and a mother of three, with tears in her eyes described her experience: "Everything is in English. Teachers don't know what they are doing. There is no curriculum or textbooks. Students do not understand what is happening. There is no learning in that school. Miss, they are *killing* our

children, generations of our children." Like Mariam, many of my former student-teachers were distressed about English as the medium of instruction in public schools for Arabic-speaking children; many found the outcomes-based curriculum guides imported from other countries a challenge. At the same time, the government of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) reported that "UAE public school reform [was] a big success" (Al Najami, 2008). The discrepancies between these appraisals raise questions not only about UAE reforms but also about struggles engendered by globally circulated policies around the world.

Recent scholarship on global education policy has examined multiple dimensions of globalization in education (Mundy, Green, Lingard, & Verger, 2016). This line of research has focused on how entrepreneurs engage in trading policies around the world (Ball, 2012, 2016), how private sector actors promote reform packages to carve out niches in national education markets (Au & Ferrare, 2015; Steiner-Khamsi, 2016), and how international organizations – such as the OECD or the World Bank – use global policies as tools of global education governance (Klees, Samoff, & Stromquist, 2012; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). The introduction of global policies into national spaces is often followed by changes that are only symbolic, reflecting how national elites engage with the "global speak" of transnational policy trade (Steiner-Khamsi, 2010, 2016). When global policies reach the level of practice, they can be reinterpreted, resisted, or infused with new meanings (Anderson-Levitt, 2003; Vavrus & Bartlett, 2009). The growing attention to the global policies and scripts, however, runs the risk of reifying the very standardization or elimination of difference that these policies create. In this context, as Carney, Rappleye, and Silova (2012) argue, it is important to document coercion, contestation, and conflict surrounding globally circulated policies and to attend to the matters of agency and power involved in their introduction.

The matters of coercion, power, and agency are particularly important in light of the connections between global policy trade and the emergence of neocolonial imperialism as "a form of structural domination in which a country with more global power uses political and economic interventions in other countries to influence policy and exercise control over markets" (Chen, 2010, p. 18). The locus of domination may have shifted from state actors to private sector entities in the Global North (Ball, 2012), but control through dependencies and resource extraction has remained. Educational consultancies and edu-businesses create these dependencies by first telling national policy-makers or local educators what "new" education should look like and then selling to them the services that will allegedly accomplish the necessary change (Steiner-Khamsi, 2016). As national actors begin the acquisition of services, they become enmeshed in relationships of protracted dependence on foreign experts to provide them with the policy blueprints, curriculum shells, or teacher training models regardless of their potential fit for the socio-historic and cultural conditions of their educational practices. A side effect of these dependencies is the elimination of alternative educational paradigms and philosophies that become discarded as unfit for the modern age (Spring, 2015a, 2015b). When education professionals even in such relatively independent contexts as the Russian Federation perceive the elimination of national alternatives as a form of colonization (Aydarova, 2015), it behooves international researchers to attend to the ways in which global policy trade has begun to operate as a neocolonial regime (Spring, 2015a, 2015b).

These transformations place an additional burden on international education policy research. Scholars now have to not only document the spread of global policies but also chart possible trajectories for decolonization and deimperalization of education (Chen, 2010). This paper engages with this challenge by examining discursive contestations around educational reform in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) through the lens of a decolonial framework (Chen, 2010; Mignolo, 2011). While higher education transformations in the UAE have received some attention in scholarly literature (see Burden-Leahy, 2009; Donn & Manthri, 2010), educational policies targeting K-12

sector have been examined less (for exceptions see Abi-Mershed, 2010; Ridge, 2012). Yet the UAE as one of the oil-rich Gulf stages presents an interesting case to consider how neocolonialism shapes K-12 policies and how it becomes contested by the public. With seemingly no external pressures applied, the nation imports policy discourses as well as educational models on a large scale. These imports, however, ignite conflicts and contestations. By analyzing these contestations, I show how political elites align with agendas of colonization by pursuing educational forms that can allegedly lead the country to the universally desired knowledge-based economy. In response, their opponents construct arguments in favor of decolonizing Emirati education to pursue alternative futures. This analysis sheds light on the agency exercised by those who oppose the reforms, reveals the unequal power entailed in the debates, and documents the tactical maneuvering that emerges as a result of these contestations. The significance of this paper lies in considering how the struggle against global designs can be used to decolonize global education policies and to pursue pluriversal futures.

## Research Context: The United Arab Emirates

Nested in concentric circles of several contextual layers – the Middle East, the Arab World, and Gulf Cooperation Council – the UAE is a well-off yet developing nation. It does not depend on international loans to carry out its educational reforms, yet it adopts many of the global policies (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Before a federation of seven emirates was formed in 1971, the UAE had been a loose conglomerate of settled and nomadic tribes under the British protectorate. In 1973, the discovery of oil brought wealth and increased foreign involvement – by the beginning of the 1980s, Emiratis comprised only 20% of the country's population (Davidson, 2005). The UAE relied on the expertise of other Arab countries to develop the national educational system (Heard-Bey, 1982; M. Lootah, 2011). Over time student enrollments grew (Peck, 1986), but the quality of education in public schools remained a matter of concern (Al Banna, 1997; Gardner, 1995). In 2000, in an attempt to improve education, the UAE Ministry of Education issued *Education Vision 2020* that argued for Emiratization of education, improving teachers' qualifications, and increasing students' access to technology (M. Lootah, 2011).

In mid-2000's, the UAE authorities issued a series of policy reports that prioritized economic development agendas (e.g. *Abu Dhabi Economic Vision 2030*; *Abu Dhabi Policy Agenda 2007-2008*, etc.) and a major educational policy shift began to occur. The emirates of Abu Dhabi and Dubai created their own agencies to monitor and supervise schools in addition to the already existing Ministry of Education and Youth – Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) in 2005 and Dubai Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) in 2006. These agencies began to rely almost exclusively on expatriate experts predominantly from English-speaking countries. In 2007, the Emirate of Dubai joined TIMMS and students' subpar performance confirmed concerns that the quality of K-12 education was low. At about the same time, a McKinsey Company report (Barber, Mourshed, & Whelan, 2007) stated that the UAE educational system needed reforms to make it output-oriented and efficient.

A staggering number of educational reforms (Kirk, 2013) followed this policy shift. These reforms reduced government's role in education, increased the involvement of the private sector, and decentralized the educational system (The Executive Council, 2008). Both Dubai and Abu Dhabi introduced new school models: "Schools of the Future" (*Madares Al Ghad*) and "New School Model" respectively. New models introduced outcomes-based curricula, English as the language of instruction, and a system of continuous assessments, among other measures. Many of these reforms reflected foreign models introduced by foreign consultants, without much consideration for the exigencies of the local context (Aydarova, 2013). Teachers in schools felt largely unprepared for the

changes and bewildered by the new expectations (AlAlili, 2014). Some attempted to resist the reforms, while others simply quit (Ibrahim, Al-Kaabi, & El-Zaatari, 2013). While previous analyses of these reforms focused on their successes or failures, I propose to expand the scope of inquiry to examine how those reforms were debated in the society at large through the lens of decolonial theory (Chen, 2010; Mignolo, 2011).

# Theoretical Framework

In a recent attempt to re-envision the field of international education research, Welch (2013) argued that "postcolonialism is, in many respects, a more solid starting point for comparative methodology [as it is] based on a refusal of paternalism and an adoption of the values of mutuality and reciprocity" (p. 46). Yet, scholars from the Global South aver that postcolonialism as a form of critique of imperial center is not enough. Instead, they propose to pursue decolonization, deimperialization, and dewesternization, in order "to build a world in which many worlds will coexist" (Mignolo, 2011, p. 54). This pursuit serves as the foundation of decolonial theory.[1] Viewed from this theoretical standpoint, global neoliberalism has become one of the defining features of modernity project, with its rhetoric serving as "a rhetoric of salvation (by conversion yesterday, by development today), but in order to implement what the rhetoric preaches, it is necessary to marginalize or destroy whatever gets in the way of modernity" (Mignolo, 2011, pp. xxiv-xxv). Salvation by development prioritizes economic goals over all others and provides technical solutions for social problems. This "linear global thinking" (Mignolo, 2011, p. 91) is built on problematic assumptions of universal knowledge able to direct any society or nation on a linear trajectory towards a more developed state, orienting it towards a singular version of the future – be it knowledge-based economy or a society driven by ever-increasing consumption (Mignolo, 2011).

An important element in the process of decolonization is the liberation of the mind (wa Thiong'o, 1995) that fosters decolonial thinking (Mignolo, 2011). Decolonial thinking is an epistemology that calls for "an active intervention against the triumphalist sentiment of the imperialist desire" (Chen, 2010, p. 112) to control through knowledge production or to govern through policy circulation. This intervention requires both reassessment of what constitutes a legitimate claim to knowledge or a valued form of being (Mignolo, 2011) and a deconstruction of "the colonial cultural imaginary" (Chen, 2010, p. 112), in which colonized subjects are continually defined against an image of the colonizer. Decolonial thinking requires that we accept the "interconnections between geo-history and epistemology" and assume "the legitimacy of 'I am where I think.'" The promise that decolonial thinking holds for international education research is that it "confronts the imperial privileges of imperial/global linear thinking" and provides resources for "building decolonial futures" (Mignolo, 2011, p. 90).

One of the tasks of decolonial theory is to "reconstruct and rearticulate new imaginations and discover a more democratic future direction" (Chen, 2010, p. 112) towards pluriversality rather than standardization and uniformity. Rethinking education – its purposes, its processes, and its activities – is central in this struggle towards pluriversal, rather than universal, futures. Instead of assuming that forms of teaching and learning prevalent in the Global North are equally suitable for other contexts, decolonial thinking urges us to attend more closely to the existing educational forms in the Global South and examine their potential for preserving diversity of worldviews and

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[1] Decoloniality is specifically Mignolo's (2011) term. Because Mignolo and Chen strive towards similar goals and find their own work complementary to each other, I apply Mignolo's term to both of their theories to underscore important conceptual bridges between decoloniality and deimperialization in Chen's (2010) work.

experiences. To achieve that, it is important "to generate knowledge to build communities in which life (in general, not only human life) has priority over economic gains, economic growth, and economic development, to cultivate knowledge that will subject economic growth to human needs, rather than submit human needs to economic growth and development" (Mignolo, 2011, p. 115).

The cultivation of this knowledge requires that we as researchers do not dismiss as irrelevant the alternative constructions of modernity, education, or desired futures in the national and subnational spaces of our research. Rather we have to attend to a variety of voices and engage in what Chen calls "critical syncretism" – or the process of "actively interiorize[ing] elements of others into the subjectivity of the self so as to move beyond the boundaries and divisive positions historically constructed by colonial power relations" (Chen, 2010, p. 98). From this perspective, my own positionality as a researcher requires interrogation because the words subaltern speak can be easily ignored, misappropriated, or misinterpreted (Spivak, 2012). As a woman who was brought up in post-socialist Ukraine and educated in the US, my ties to the UAE as a former teacher educator working for an institution built on imported educational models reveal my complicity in the very neocolonization that I attempt to critique. Yet the struggles I observed – one of which is presented in the opening of this paper – transformed my perceptions of the world and my place in it. As Chen (2010, p. 23) observes "the decolonization work performed by the colonized will not be complete without the colonizer's deimperialization, and vice versa." It is from this position I engaged in this analysis – the position of emphatic ethical "responsibility as pre-originary right" (Spivak, 2012, p. 347) necessary for mutual deimperialization and decolonization.

## Methodology

In this study, I use the methods of critical policy analysis (Bacchi, 2000; Taylor, 1997) in conjunction with critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003, 2013) to examine discursive contestations over educational reform in the UAE context. Critical policy analysis approaches educational policy as discourse that "may have the effect of redistributing 'voice' [s]o that it does not matter what some people say or think, only certain voices can be heard as meaningful or authoritative" (Ball, 1993, p. 15). Despite the presence of an authoritative or dominant discourse, "subjects are positioned in relation to multiple and contradictory discourses, opening up a space for change" (Bacchi, 2000, p. 54). Thus, this paper attends to "dominant" discourses (Ball, 1993, p. 15) in the UAE educational reforms and examines how alternative discourses were deployed in a struggle over meaning, power, and desired futures (Taylor, 1997). This focus on the struggle between multiple voices affords a glimpse into the challenges to the dominant position (Bacchi, 2000) and a possibility of change towards pluriversal futures (Mignolo, 2011).

Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (CDA) provides useful tools for critical policy analysis in the context of globalization (Rizvi & Lingard, p. 2010). Focusing on discourse as semiosis dialectically related to other social elements, CDA provides tools for analyzing the nature of relationships between three levels of social reality – social structures, practices, and events (Fairclough, 2003). In this framing, discourses are "semiotic ways of construing aspects of the world (physical, social or mental), which can be generally identified with different positions or perspectives of different groups of social actors" (Fairclough, 2013, p. 180). This allows a discourse analyst to establish links between social structures and discursive constructions, thus mapping the dialogic engagement of dominant discourses and their alternatives. Furthermore, CDA's distinctions among various genres – or "semiotic ways of acting and interacting" (Fairclough, 2013, p. 179) – shows how different social activities are associated with different textual representations. Thus, tracing how policy representations fracture across policy texts, media publications, online commentaries,

conference reports, and websites reveals the multiple meanings and various struggles associated with education reforms. Finally, CDA provides a model for analyzing the argumentation underlying the relationships between problems and solutions in policy-making and in policy debates. In this model, analysis of argumentation provides insight into participants' political imaginaries and aspirations for social control or social change (Fairclough, 2013).

In order to access discursive contestations over educational reforms and the UAE's potential futures, I analyzed a variety of texts that captured different voices in the UAE society. The textual corpus analyzed in this study consisted primarily of newspaper articles on educational reforms published in three leading newspapers in the United Arab Emirates between May 2001 and May 2011. I chose to focus on newspaper articles for several reasons. First, political elites use newspapers to project the narratives that advance their agendas, which affords access to dominant discourses circulated in the society. At the same time, opinion sections, letters to the editors, or online comments on newspaper articles afford opportunities for alternative discourses to enter the social sphere thus capturing social multivocality and struggle over meanings. To ensure greater multiplicity of perspectives, I collected articles from three main newspapers circulated in the UAE that represented different ends of the political continuum and were directed at overlapping but also different audiences. The first newspaper, *Khaleej Times* (*KT*), has the same content in its English and Arabic editions, boasts "the highest distribution among the English language newspapers in the Gulf," and claims a "multinational readership of 450,000." The *Gulf News* (*GN*) is circulated among the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (such as the UAE, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, etc.) but is published only in English. It includes both publications describing leaders' positions and more critical accounts that come from readers' letters or essays submitted by journalists from outside a more conservative Arabian peninsula. Finally, founded in 2008, *The National* (*TN*) argues that it tells "the story of the Middle East as seen through the region's eyes." It incorporates both writing that supports the official position and a more critical commentary on the events in the region. Both the *Gulf News* and *The National* allow readers to post comments. In my search, I focused specifically on publications that described, analyzed, and critiqued educational reforms in the United Arab Emirates. Eliminated from this search were articles that described educational reforms in other contexts or focused on the transformations in other domains of the UAE's social sphere.

In addition to the articles, I collected readers' comments on them (if available), policy texts, international reports, related website texts, and other publications associated with reform processes in the UAE. Overall, more than 30 articles were selected from each newspaper, with the total count of texts in the database exceeding 100. I proceeded through the analysis in two stages. The first round of open-ended coding focused on identifying broad themes that revealed a struggle between different discourses and prompted me to look for a theoretical framework that could shed light on these struggles. The second round drew more on the theoretical framework of decoloniality and employed CDA. Having noticed the struggle that the text captured, I first identified which texts represented the dominant position and which texts challenged it. Then, I focused on the argumentation structures that these two groups followed: how they described "possible and desirable alternative futures" (Goal premise; Fairclough, 2013, p. 183), how they problematized the quality of UAE education (Circumstantial premise), what courses of action they advocated (Claim), and what values they prioritized (Value premise). This mapping of different groups' argumentation structures allowed me to identify knots of contestations – or areas on which different groups presented opposing perspectives, such as goals of educational reform, direction for action, subjects of reform, and language of reform. In what follows, I present the findings of this study based on the knots of contestations that capture the struggles of educational reforms and open possibilities for pluriversal futures.

## Discursive Contestations

### Goals of Educational Reform

**Dominant discourses: Economic and political priorities.** As was noted earlier, the major policy shift in the UAE occurred in the middle of the 2000s. The shift was reflected in the number of publications on the topic of education reform that appeared in the UAE press: between 2001 and 2006, only five articles across the *Gulf News* and *Khaleej Times* dealt with that topic, whereas in 2008 alone eleven articles addressed it. Important is not only the increased attention to the reform efforts, but also the language used to mark the departure from "traditional" forms of education. The Ministry of Education's announcements called for a "radical education overhaul" (*TN*, Lewis, 2008c) and a complete revamping of the school education (*GN*, Majaida, 2010). Similarly important are the spaces with which calls for reform became associated in the press. The UAE government leaders, ministers, heads of councils and occasional high-profile foreign guests to the country called for urgent reforms of the educational system. These calls were voiced across international or national educational conferences, such as the World Economic Forum Summit (*KT*, "Call for urgent action," 2010) or the meetings of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) education ministers (*TN*, Lewis, 2008). The calls targeted not only the education system of the UAE, but also the educational systems of the Middle East, Arab World, and the GCC.

In the leaders' dominant discourse, the driving forces behind the urgency of the educational reform were primarily economic, motivated by the tenets of the human capital theory and the global economic competition. Through the change in the educational system, the national leaders aspired to develop "a sophisticated and entrepreneurial workforce" that will build "a sustainable knowledge based economy" by 2021 (The Executive Council, 2007, p. 28) and compete on the global stage. The creation of knowledge economy was described as the globally recognized path for development and because of the UAE's attempts to move away from its over-reliance on oil (The Government of Abu Dhabi, 2008). Individuals as diverse as a former CEO of IBM (*KT*, WAM, 2010) or the UAE's Minister of Education (*KT*, Ahmad, 2010) discussed the steps the country needed to undertake to revamp its education and to establish a knowledge economy.

The press reported, however, not only how national or international leaders described the need to develop knowledge economy, but also what reports issued by international organizations, such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) or the World Bank, had to say about the ways of accomplishing that goal. For example, the *Arab Human Development Report* (UNDP, 2003) was dedicated solely to the development of knowledge societies in the Arab World. While its first recommendation dealt with guaranteeing freedom of speech and opinion through good governance, the second recommendation addressed the need to provide access to quality education to all citizens. The *Arab Knowledge Report* (UNDP, 2009), published in cooperation with Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Foundation of Dubai, identified ways to address the knowledge gap between the Arab states and the rest of the world. It built on the previous reports both by highlighting the impact of the lack of freedom on the knowledge capital of Arab nations and by repeatedly emphasizing the role of schools and universities in building Arab nations' knowledge capital. Both reports were discussed in newspapers as lending support to the national leaders' vision for education reform as a path towards knowledge economy (*GN*, "Gulf News says", 2003; *KT*, "Arab states," 2009).

In addition to the economic factors, dominant discourses claimed that education had to be reformed to maintain the political stability in the region. Before the events of the Arab Spring in the winter and spring of 2011, Sheikh Mohammed al Maktoum – the ruler of Dubai and the prime-minster of the UAE – published the article "*Education vs. Extremism*" in the *Wall Street Journal* in 2009

(Al Maktoum, 2009). The same article was reprinted in the *Khaleej Times* under the title "UAE dedicated to a new education paradigm" (*KT*, WAM, 2009). In it, he called the nations of the Arab World to reform education to prevent political unrest. He suggested that a demographic explosion, or "youth bulge", (based on different estimates 25 to 40% of the Arab population are under 25), could lead to a lack of stability in the region, if all the young people were unemployed. Sheikh Mohammed positioned the UAE as a unique leader that can set an example for other Arab nations to follow. In his address, he combined the concepts of modern competitiveness in the global economy and the ancient glories of the Arab past, when the Arab world led the way in science, medicine, and math. According to Sheikh Mohammed, through the educational reform the Arab nations could maintain their political stability and regain the glories of the Islamic Golden Age:

> Our ancestors had their own form of globalization. Through free trade and scientific inquiry, they brought great wealth and enlightenment to Arab societies. We want to rekindle that spirit of daring in the Arab world. There aren't any other viable options, because we are in danger of being left behind in a relentlessly competitive world. Investing in education means investing in the permanent peace and security that our people deserve. (Al Maktoum, 2009)

To summarize, drawing on the "global-speak" (Steiner-Khamsi, 2010) political elites advocated for education reforms from either the economic or the political perspectives in order to create a better workforce – either more qualified because it is well trained or more socially stable because it is employed. This focus on economic priorities reflects "the global linear thinking" (Mignolo, 2011, p. 78) that colonizes imagination and assumes that only one universal path towards development is possible – the path of modernization towards knowledge-based economy.

    **Alternative discourses: Civic priorities and structural inequalities.** In contrast to the powerful speakers of the dominant discourses, alternative discourses in the UAE debate came from educators, researchers, journalists, and parents who questioned the official ideology and sought alternatives for it. Yet, as they contended with the dominant discourses, they did not bring a pre-determined agenda. Rather, their agendas evolved as a response to the imposition of the dominant ideology. By not occupying the positions of power and authority, they were left to their own devices in finding public spaces to raise their concerns. For them, national and regional conferences, editorials, or online forums became the main channels of discursive engagement with the dominant discourses.

    One of the key aspects questioned by the alternative discourse was the goal of education and reforms. For instance, during an educational conference on the UAE education, presenters shared that the "national education system [should] create 'good citizens and not just good workers'" (*GN*, Salama, 2010). This critique underscored that the government's focus on competitiveness and economy deterred attention from preparing students to be UAE citizens.

    The struggle over the notion of what constitutes a citizen ensued. Political elites responded that they espoused the goal of developing "productive citizens" (*GN*, "Prioritising Education Must Be an Arab Ideal," 2010). This response appropriated the critique and reintroduced the notion of citizen into the vision of desired futures, but only after inflecting it with the economic value. While alternative discourses prioritized citizenship as a form of commitment to a nation-state, dominant discourses focused on citizenship as usefulness for the economy.

    International reports also did not escape scrutiny and contestation. Dr. N. Janardhan – a political analyst based in the United Arab Emirates – published an article situating the calls of *Arab Human Development Reports* in the complex network of neocolonial relationships between the West and the Arab World. "The central message of both reports was for Arabs to fashion their own

future rather than allow the West to dictate the changes," he noted (*KT*, Janardhan, 2005). His analysis, however, suggested that even the release of reports was mired in politics with the US dictating that the contents be revised because the authors "linked lack of development to US policies in the region." In other words, alternative discourses emphasized critical dimensions of the reports, moving from the narrow focus on education as a path knowledge economy presented by political elites. Instead, they presented a broader contextualization of education within neocolonial relations with the West that may impede development.

Responding to the *Arab Knowledge Report* (UNDP, 2009), Ramzy Baroud, a Palestinian American journalist, shed light on how by focusing on education dominant discourse avoided addressing larger systemic issues:

> Generalised problems can only obtain generalized, thus superficial solutions. Therefore, it has been summarily decided that the problem lies in lack of education, not the inequitable and unrepresentative political systems. Education became the buzz word, as if education is a detached value. (*KT*, Baroud, 2009)

In his critique, Baroud questioned the applicability of the "global-speak" for local contexts by raising objections to "generalized problems and solutions." Importing the definition of a problem from elsewhere, according to Baroud, does not allow the problem-solvers to identify the context-specific needs and results in superficial solutions. Scoffing at the claim that education is the problem behind all social ills in the Arab countries, Baroud questioned the political regimes that control their citizenry without giving them voice. This questioning draws the newspaper readers' attention back to the prior UNDP (2003) report where freedom of speech was given top priority, not educational reform. He also referred to the political elites' treatment of education as a commodity, a product, "a detached value." Implied in this quotation is a criticism of national leaders and politicians who view education as a panacea for social ills without looking for ways to address the problems their societies are facing, be it poor economies failing to employ all their citizens, or large disparities between the rich and the poor. In a similarly scathing critique of the UAE's reforms, Maryam Ismail (2010) – a journalist for *The National* – noted that "money won't fix schools when there are endemic social and structural problems that aren't addressed."

## Reform Actions

**Dominant discourses: Introduction of global models.** Drawing on globally circulated discourses of education for knowledge economy, ministers of education and heads of education councils repeatedly stated that "sweeping reforms of public education" (*TN*, Lewis, 2008a) were necessary to create a new system that would emphasize "creative thinking," "critical thinking," "problem-solving" and "innovation." Similar to other contexts around the globe, the "traditional" education system based on "rote learning," "memorization," and "overreliance on textbooks" (*TN*, Lewis, 2008a) was portrayed as an outdated model that should be discarded. "Traditional" forms of teaching where the teacher is an "expert" were dismissed as inappropriate; "modern" forms of teaching in which students are "active" and "at the center of the learning process" were described as indispensable for the development of the national economy (*TN*, Lewis, 2008c). The contrasts between the "traditional" and the "modern" occurred in the context of repeated references to the "best international" or "best global" practices, "international standards and benchmarks," and "word-class education" both in policy documents (Abu Dhabi Executive Council, 2007; ADEC, 2012) and in the press. The references to undefined but desirable "modern international best practices" and to educational achievements of "'advanced' countries" (*TN*, Lewis, 2008e) reflected

what Chen (2010) referred to as "colonial cultural imaginaries," which positioned practices associated predominantly with the West as superior to their local alternatives.

The perceived superiority of approaches used elsewhere became translated into an intense level of policy activity, during which authorities brought in "experts from the outside" to provide assistance in reform efforts (*TN*, Lewis, 2008d). Among those experts were not only individual scholars and researchers who were hired by ADEC, KHDA, and the Ministry on short but also long-term contracts, but also private consulting firms McKinsey and Booz Allen Hamilton. These different experts identified what aspects needed to be reformed, participated in creating strategic plans for accomplishing those changes, and opened the gateway for multiple models to be imported into the UAE. For example, Dr. Lynne Pierson – one of Abu Dhabi Education Council directors – explained the introduction of a wide variety of international models in different Emirati schools: "We don't believe in bringing (just) one model, it (may have) worked well in that country but not necessarily in Abu Dhabi" (*KT*, WAM, 2010). Another Emirati official similarly explained that because it was not clear which models would survive in the UAE context, it was necessary to bring in as many of them as possible. This proliferation of models was often achieved by inviting a variety of private sector actors to run schools, hire teachers, and design curriculum. Among those actors were Nord Anglia, GEMS Education, and CfBT (British Education Development Trust).

Amidst this model proliferation, the emphasis was placed on introducing standards for educational outcomes, standardized assessments to measure those outcomes, and school inspections to monitor the quality of educational provision. What came to matter was the neoliberal focus on performance, such as knowledge gains demonstrated on standardized assessments or higher scores on school inspections that could only be observed as an external activity rather than an internal transformation. Reports of students' underachievement on national tests or of schools failing to meet the quality benchmarks began to spread across the newspapers in 2009 and in 2010. The process of colonization that was started by the abstract comparisons between "modern" and "traditional" approaches reached schools, teachers, and children through punitive measures of school shaming and school closures.

**Alternative discourses: Critiques of foreign models.** Alternative discourses incorporated elements of the dominant discourses by affirming that changes were necessary; yet, they problematized the means of accomplishing the changes and questioned the expediency of educational imports. In October of 2010, the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research organized a conference on the UAE educational policies. Speaking at that conference, Dr. Warnica, a professor of education at the American University of Ras Al Khaimah, stressed "that transplanting wholesale Western education models to the UAE does not work and a top-down control has ruled out innovation by students and teachers" (*GN*, Hilotin, 2010). According to Dr. Warnica, the UAE educational reforms resulted in outcomes exactly opposite those for which they were intended: instead of raising the students' level of innovation and creativity, they undermined them. Critiquing the role of "external experts," Dr. Warnica noted: "For foreign advisers [sic] to succeed in bringing up reforms, they must do them *with* local educators and schools and *not to* them" (emphasis added, *GN*, Salama, 2010). This critique underscored the neocolonial nature of relationships between "external experts" and local actors characterized by imbalances of power and control.

Another academic criticized educational imports for the price tag attached to them and their failure to develop students' Emirati national identity at the same conference. Dr. Mariam Lootah stated that imports were costly; the expenses they required should instead be used to develop local educational expertise (*GN*, Matthew, 2010). The development of local capacity shifted focus from bringing external measures to creating internal drivers. For Dr. Lootah, this shift was necessary because foreign models and curricula, as well as the proliferation of foreign experts that

accompanied them, undermined Emirati students' national identity. Bringing back the educational goal of creating citizens, Dr. Lootah's speech entered into a discursive contestation with the dominant discourses: "the main factors in education policy have to be local, and the UAE needs to focus on internal drivers to build good citizens" (*GN*, Matthew, 2010). Dr. Lootah's argument for a more focused attention to the local space, its resources and its demands, echoed Mignolo's (2011, p. 99) description of decolonial thinking that rejects universal designs produced elsewhere in order to engage the epistemology "I am where I do and think."

Other critiques of imported models underscored their incongruence with the country's dominant religion. Some argued that Islam as the cornerstone of the society's culture was lost in the nation's pursuit of competitiveness and knowledge economy. Therefore, in response to the imports of Western models of education, calls were made to return to the Islamic methods of inquiry, learning, and being.

> "The massive destruction suffered by the world is originally based on ideas of scientists who produced instruments of destruction because they looked at the idea of achievement alone without researching its effects and consequences. Education should be based on Islamic cultural thought, which includes the foundations of the integrated view of the universe and sciences," Dr Hessa said. […] "Most of our so called specialists in education, involve individuals who lack understanding and awareness of the Islamic intellectual achievements that can be applied in education. Many of the recent calls for education reform in the UAE claim that they aim to spread the spirit of tolerance among students. In fact, this results in intolerance and extremism." (*GN*, El Shammaa, 2010)

Dr. Hessa Abdullah Lootah – a professor at the UAE University – critiqued the Western knowledge and expertise as a destructive force and questioned the focus on achievement as a measure of educational success. Speaking at the same conference, she argued that the only alternative to the possibility of destruction is bringing Islam back into the center of education to help students develop tolerance and spiritual balance. Failure to do so would result in extremism. Unlike Sheikh Mohammed's call to reform education to prevent extremism discussed in the previous section, this quote shows that extremism does not come simply as a result of a lack of education; it comes as an outcome of education that is incongruent with local epistemologies and ontologies.

Beyond critiques of imported models, alternative discourses contained calls to bring Islam back into education by creating alternative models of instruction. For example, one of the articles published in *Khaleej Times* described a new learning center that offered a "blend of Quranic teachings with scientific knowledge" and "provide[d] students with a new way of life" (*KT*, Shabandri, 2011) in order to restore the balance of life and produce "moderate thinkers and scholars." The purpose of this center was not simply to provide students with the knowledge of Islam, but rather to help them reach "personal fulfilment" and to "enrich [their] soul." The emphasis was placed not on the external measures of performance, but on the internal balance to accomplish a different way of living. The center's model challenged the dominant discourses on the goals of education as a form of competition and suggested that instead the focus should be on balance and moderation. The reinterpretation of Islam's role in education as a force that can restore spirituality currently eradicated by the Western emphasis on performance provided an alternative pathway for educational development and offered a glimpse into a possibility of pluriversal futures advocated by decolonial thinkers.

## Language of Reform

**Dominant discourses: English as the language of instruction.** According to the UAE political elites, the primary goal of education is to create knowledge economy and ensure global competitiveness. Arguing that English is "the language of global economy" (*KT*, WAM, 2010), the Minister of Education suggested that improving Emirati students' English fluency should become an "imperative strategic goal" (*GN*, Landais, 2010). In the UAE, English was the language of instruction at tertiary institutions since mid-1990s. Students whose K-12 education was in Arabic were often required to attend pre-university programs to improve their English proficiency and to strengthen their academic skills for tertiary education. Since 2003, Emirati leaders described those foundation programs as a drain on the educational system: based on one estimate, remedial programs took up 30% of the higher education budget (*KT*, Janardhan, 2009). The Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research blamed the large expenses of these foundation programs on the inefficient K-12 educational system and the traditional instruction in Arabic. As one article described it, "The monolingual approach has proven to be damaging, with more that 95% of students enrolling for remedial foundation programmes" (*TN*, Ahmad, 2011).

To cut state expenses on remedial programs, reforms of the 2000s introduced English as the language of instruction throughout the entire K-12 system. In Abu Dhabi's "New School Model," English was used for teaching English Language Arts, Math, and Science, whereas Arabic was used in Arabic classes, Islamic Studies, and Civic Education classes (ADEC, 2012). Dubai's Schools of the Future similarly prioritized using English as the language of instruction. This move was seen as necessary for the implementation of foreign curricula imported from English-speaking countries. When confronted about the imposition of English, educational officials argued that new types of schools were "not all about English" (*GN*, Matthew, 2010), but rather about English being the channel through which Emirati children could receive quality instruction.

**Alternative discourses: Arabic over English.** English as the medium of instruction in K-12 schools unleashed contestations about its impact on students' academic achievement and national identity. Scholars published op-ed articles arguing that English as the language of instruction hampered students' learning because they were not proficient in it:

> In the UAE, […],after about 50 special Madares Al Ghad or Schools of the Future were started more than two years ago, with maths [sic] and science being taught in English, a recent survey revealed that 73 per cent of pupils in these schools deemed the new curriculum "difficult and incomprehensible." (*KT*, Janardhan, 2009)

Concerns about language, learning, and identity issues gained such a momentum in the society that the UAE government commissioned a study reported in *the National.* Allegedly, the study found that 80% of the parents did not think that English as the language of instruction undermined students' national identity or culture (*TN*, Ahmad, 2011). The article did not discuss how the study was conducted or where it was published. One of the readers sent in a letter to the editor commenting on the article. The reader's concern was the cognitive development of children who were taught concepts in math and science through the medium of English that they did not understand. In this reader's opinion, changing the language of instruction to the language that students did not know was counter-productive because of the learning impediment that language barriers created. Another reader emphasized the link between language and identity in an online comment on the article, later expanded and reprinted as a letter to the editor:

> I disagree about what this article is trying to convince us: that teaching our
> children in English will not affect their identity. Language is the corner stone [sic]
> in one's identity. There are many developed countries other than the English-
> speaking nations that study in their original language. (TN, S. Lootah, 2011)

The final comment connected to the critiques raised by numerous opponents of English as the language of instruction due to the threat it posed to students' identities and to "the survival of the UAE as an Arab and Gulf nation" (*GN*, Matthew, 2010). With English described as "integral to success in fields from engineering to business" (*TN*, National Editorial, 2011), dominant discourses positioned English as the language of modernity, development, and opportunity and relegated Arabic to the position of heritage and tradition. Arguing that it was inappropriate to treat Arabic "just [as] the language of heritage and culture" (*GN*, Salama, 2010), educators, scholars, and parents attempted to disrupt the unequal status allocation between languages and cultures. Together, these critiques contested the use of English as the means of "spiritual subjugation" (wa Thiong'o, 1995, p. 287) and colonization of students' minds that this hierarchical positioning of languages in the school curriculum could produce.

### Subjects of Reform

**Dominant discourses: International teachers.** The pursuit of new teaching methods, the introduction of imported curricula, and English as the language of instruction placed new demands on the teaching force. Reports produced by external agencies along with national evaluations had previously revealed that teachers in the UAE lacked necessary qualifications (Gardner, 1995). Ambitious reform plans required a rapid transformation of the teaching profession and the UAE authorities decided to accomplish it by hiring teachers from other countries:

> In efforts to drive improvement in English language teaching and introduce
> modern pedagogic methods in the Abu Dhabi's public school system, ADEC has
> hired internationally licensed teachers. (*GN*, El Shammaa, 2010)

Through this action, educational authorities positioned foreign teachers as the subjects of reform able to revamp teaching methods in schools and to accomplish the "imperative strategic goal" of improving students' knowledge of English. Most of the teachers were brought in from English-speaking countries such as "the US, UK, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa and Ireland" (*KT*, WAM, 2010). One of the distinguishing features of sought-after teachers was not only their qualifications, but also their status as "native English speakers" (*TN*, Ahmad, 2011).

The process of hiring and bringing in international teachers was so intensive that they soon were outnumbering Emirati teachers:

> Figures issued by KHDA for 2009/2010 showed that 1,787 of the 3,154 teachers
> working in the state system were Emirati… In Abu Dhabi, 4,319 of the 10,854
> teachers employed by ADEC are Emirati nationals. Little wonder if some local
> teachers feel eclipsed by their international counterparts. (*TN*, Collins, 2011)

Despite large numbers of international teachers being hired every year, political elites rarely openly discussed the role of international teachers in educational reforms, apart from brief comments about their "work alongside local educators" (*TN*, Ahmad, 2011). Official discourses avoided divulging reliance on foreign expertise in the classroom itself, even though English-language advertisements for teaching positions in the UAE schools continually peppered the Internet.

**Alternative discourses: The plight of Emirati teachers.** Contesting dominant discourses, scholars and researchers argued that foreign teachers represented a threat to the national identity and a financial drain on the educational system. They were perceived as a threat because they could not contribute to the development of the students' national identity and because they were not committed to local communities. They were seen as a financial drain because the high salaries offered to the expatriate teachers could have been used to strengthen the local teaching force, improve schools, or develop new teaching materials. Alternative discourses underscored "the negative impact of 'continuous intervention by foreigners, changing policies, and that too much time and money is given to foreign experts and not enough time given to local priorities'" (*GN*, Matthew, 2010).

Viewing national identity development and the creation of good citizens as the core goals of education, alternative discourses captured arguments that Emirati teachers were an indispensable component of the teaching and learning processes. But in the context of reforms, Emirati teachers became marginalized by the power of foreign educational experts in charge of revamping the educational system and by the prestige of English-speaking international teachers.

> Many nationals are finding that teaching methods they have relied upon for years
> have suddenly fallen from favour [sic]. Held up to international scrutiny, they
> have been found wanting in the face of contemporary theory that promotes
> student participation and active learning. (TN, Collins, 2011)

This quote demonstrates how dominant discourses contributed to the hierarchical positioning of teachers, with international teachers being described as those who have the necessary skills and competencies to transform the UAE schools and Emirati teachers as those who had no such expertise. This hierarchical positioning reveals most starkly the colonization process entailed in the reform efforts: the ways in which "international scrutiny" finds local educators "wanting" pointed to the colonial cultural imaginary (Chen, 2010), which positioned colonized subjects as backward and underdeveloped in comparison to the colonizer. Noting that international teachers "have to learn as much as they give" and that "they don't have all the answers," David Allison from the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (*TN*, Collins, 2011) pointed to the tensions created by the unidirectional flow of knowledge that this hierarchical positioning created.

As a result of these status disparities, many Emirati teachers quit teaching or chose jobs in other sectors: between 2009 and 2011, the number of Emirati teachers in Dubai schools dropped by 500 out of a total of 1787 (*TN*, Collins, 2011). Members of the public contended that more Emirati teachers should be recruited into schools and that their expertise should be valued. For example, a faculty member from Zayed University – Lowola al Marzouqui – argued that Emirati teachers have an important role to play:

> Parents read about all these expatriate teachers and assume that they are the only
> qualified teachers. That assumption is wrong. Emirati teachers are not promoted
> in the right way. There are Emirati teachers who are qualified as contributing to a
> good school system, and to be an Emirati in a classroom is to be a role model
> and to be proud of your children and culture. (*TN*, Collins, 2011)

Echoing the sentiment above, one of *The National* journalists argued the Ministry of Education should "look for some help right here at home rather than from superheroes from abroad" (*TN*, Ismail, 2011). Numerous advocates contended that education should be improved through Emiratization of teaching (*GN*, Salama, 2010) rather than its further colonization.

## Discussion

The discursive contestations around educational reforms in the United Arab Emirates reveal that global discourses and educational transfers create subnational contestations and ideological struggles about the goals, priorities, and meanings of education. The case of the UAE shows that as the global impact ushered in by the authorities' desire to create a knowledge economy increases in its intensity, so does the local resistance to it. But this resistance is not limited to the re-interpretation of the global practices (Anderson-Levitt, 2003). Rather, it leads to the re-interpretation of the local self and its symbolic orientation in the world. In the case of the UAE, the imposition of global practices in the national space has been a powerful catalyst for bringing to the surface the struggles of national fears and cultural threats. Similar to what is happening in other international contexts, the UAE's political elites pursued the path of becoming more global and accepted the vision of a universal future. They did so by promoting the ideologies of competitiveness and prioritizing economic goals, even though most of the UAE citizens rely heavily on state subsidies (Kanna, 2011). As the dominant discourses sought to colonize the future and in turn promoted reform measures of neocolonial domination, alternative discourses attempted to de-colonize the present to create pluriversal futures. Individual academics, journalists, and parents expressed criticisms of official discourses and shared concerns about the effects of new policies on the Emirate society and its future. Their priorities did not lie in the economic performance, but in the national identity, spiritual stability, balance, and moderation. The threat of cultural loss or linguistic contamination mattered to them much more than the distant goal of knowledge economy. Voices of alternative discourses stated that it would be better to preserve what made the UAE citizens different than make them global at the expense of losing themselves. Yet those voices had no pre-determined coherent agenda or an action plan: their worldviews and conceptions of teaching and learning emerged in the process of contending and struggling with the official dogma.

Of the priorities emphasized by the alternative discourses, national identity was most often appealed to. Yet, in the context of the UAE – a relatively young state, in which tribal allegiances are stronger than allegiances to the unified state and in which the federation was created through consent purchased through petro-dollars (Kanna, 2011) – these references were both ironic and strategic. The rhetoric of the need to preserve national identity resonated with the ruling families' concerns over protecting their positions of power: in a divided country where no unifying identity binds citizens together, the elites' hold on power and control could dwindle. This rhetoric ultimately achieved a degree of success because political elites appropriated the notion of education for national identity and incorporated it as a key principle for subsequent educational policies. For example, the revised version of the "New School Model" introduced in the fall of 2010, sought to "develop [students'] Arabic and English language abilities, critical thinking skills, and cultural and *national identity* through the consistent use of rigorous learning outcomes and pedagogy" (emphasis added, ADEC, 2012, p. 4). Similarly, authorities eventually conceded to those who argued for a prominent role for Emirati teachers and the Arabic language and introduced a bilingual model that required the presence of two teachers (one Western and one Emirati) in each classroom. Even if these appropriations, revisions, and concessions stayed at the discursive level, they revealed that the struggle with dominant discourses had its positive effects.

The contestations and mutual appropriations, however, are not easily noticeable to the naked eye of an observer. They remain hidden because different discourses target different audiences and spread their messages to different contextual levels. The UAE leaders addressed their calls for change to wider audiences, projecting their discourses beyond the borders of the UAE, to the GCC, the Arab World, the Middle East, and even the US. Adding these external referents added weight to

their arguments positioning them as globally minded players whose logic is representative of greater spaces than the national arena. The speakers of the alternative discourses, on the other hand, focused their arguments on the UAE, keeping policy-makers as their main addressees. Relatively few references were made to the world beyond the borders of the UAE, weakening the position of this discourse as it appeared myopic in comparison to the "global speak" employed by the elites. The opposition's disjointed voices, struggles, and resistance were concealed by the predominance of the dominant discourse, its wider sphere of influence, and the power fused to it. It is through the unequal distribution of power and uneven spread of these different discourses that educational colonization through globally circulated reforms could be accomplished. Alternative designs advocated for by those who contend with political elites fade in the struggle and rarely emerge in international discussions, even though they can have much to offer not only to the UAE but to other nations around it.

# Conclusion

Educational transfers and imports have long been the focus of international education policy research; yet, relatively few studies have focused on how local responses to global policies can be used to flip the script in order to imagine, create, and sustain alternative constructions of teaching and learning. Thus, this paper does not only present an analysis of the UAE case, but also extends an invitation to re-consider taken-for-granted assumptions about education and imagine alternatives to the global neoliberal order. This requires an active engagement with alternative discourses across national borders in order to build pluriversal futures that will sustain diversity, preserve dignity, and edify humanity for the years to come.

Yet engagement with alternative discourses presents a number of challenges as their disjointed and fragmented nature creates obstacles for researchers. Attempts to locate and trace the influences of alternative discourses across international contexts often run into problems with their limited scope of circulation, obscurity of spaces where they might appear, fear of potential repercussions for dissenters, as well as linguistic challenges of accessing their content. Those challenges require new methodological approaches and a more fluid conception of what constitutes data.

Despite these challenges, however, attention to alternative discourses through the lens of decolonial framework creates space for a new form of international policy analysis. As Takayama, Sriprakash, and Connell (2017, p. S18) argued, postcolonial and decolonial theories show "how the 'Rest' can be conceptualized as a source of radical difference and a basis for confronting the active legacy of colonialism that constraints our imagination about pedagogy, policy, and research." Thus, attention to alternative discourses affords international scholars the opportunity to attend to the voices of decolonization and dissent in subnational spaces and to amplify those voices across international borders.

Instead of focusing on how these voices fall short of Western or global conceptions of education, future research could pursue the decolonial ethics of responsible engagement with the Other and examine how local alternatives can be used to dismantle global norms (Aydarova, 2015). This type of ethical engagement with the narratives that contest dominant discourses and provide insights into forms of education eradicated by the spread of global neoliberal policies can create more opportunities for reimagining alternatives for pluriversal futures (Mignolo, 2011). Future research should explore what role alternative discourses circulated in subnational spaces can play in the process of decolonization in the Global South as well as how their circulation at the global level can be deployed towards deimperialization of the Global North.

# Acknowledgements

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