

IGNORED HISTORIES: THE POLITICS OF HISTORY
EDUCATION AND INDIGENOUS-SETTLER RELATIONS
IN AUSTRALIA AND KANAKY/NEW CALEDONIA

By Angélique Stastny

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Ignored Histories is a thought-provoking book that takes the reader on an informative and didactic journey into the colonialist mechanisms of producing history. The author, Angélique Stastny, is a French researcher associated with the University of Melbourne, where she completed a Ph.D. in 2018 in Political Science. This book is the result of her doctoral research.

The book compares colonial legacies and power relations imbued in education systems in Australia and New Caledonia, particularly regarding the teaching of history. The comparison between these countries could seem peculiar when considering the difference in size of land and population, or the type of colonisation: the first having been colonised by the British and the second by the French. The author argues that, on top of similar histories as penal colonies and similar treatment of Indigenous peoples, settler colonial power rests on 'settler regimes of ignorance' (7) that sustain the political *status quo* in both Australia and New Caledonia. Stastny coined this expression to highlight ignorance as inherent to settler colonial power and makes it the book's main thesis. She argues that many settlers in both colonies do not care, or refuse to know about specific aspects of their history, which is constituted as a régime and thus becomes a tool for political domination. She sees this ignorance as an obstacle to change, thus to decolonisation, but also as the capacity for change in teachers' practices through their acknowledgement of personal ignorance.

Stastny does not shy away from positioning her book as a tool 'to contest and destabilise settler colonialism, to provoke change, and – ultimately – to decolonise Indigenous-settler relations' (4). Furthermore, she explains from the

start her decision to use Indigenous terminologies whenever possible, hence the use of the term Kanaky alongside New Caledonia throughout the book.

Stastny carries out a comparative analysis of the ways that Indigenous-settler history is taught in public schools in Australia and New Caledonia, through study of curricula, history textbooks and interviews with teachers. These are the three parts that constitute the book, which is also divided into chapters. The first chapter sets the historical context, the societal debates on decolonisation, and the parameters of her research. In Part One, dedicated to policy and directives, Chapters Two and Three focus on curriculum development and teacher training. Part Two is a thorough evaluation of history textbooks, from production to content. Stastny then analyses the teaching of Indigenous-settler history and looks at its limitation as well as its potential.

Through careful analysis of Indigenous-settler history, always viewed in parallel within both contexts of Australia and New Caledonia, Stastny explains the education mechanisms and strategies that maintain domination and thus limit Indigenous points of view and epistemologies in history curricula. She concludes that the path to decolonising knowledge and the curriculum is through creating exchanges with other epistemologies, in particular Indigenous worldviews.

Apart from a couple of historical inaccuracies regarding New Caledonia, and bearing in mind her resolute political stand, Stastny's analysis is built on sound research, evidenced in part by her long and varied reference list. However, data she gathered from interviews with teachers is, from her own accord, uneven: only 14 Australian teachers (including three Aboriginal teachers) compared to 19 New Caledonian history teachers, teacher educators and retired teachers (of whom five were Kanak). Similarly, the distribution of interviewees is unequal, with only three states represented in Australia (Victoria, New South Wales and the Northern Territory) and five customary areas in New Caledonia (out of eight).

This book is, as the author puts it, 'the first scholarly work to engage in a long-term, systematic analysis of the historical knowledge disseminated in school textbooks in Australia and Kanaky/New Caledonia' (44–45). It provides a unique contribution to understanding the education mechanisms established by the settler colonial powers, how they maintain a domination of colonial histories, and how they affect Indigenous-settler power relations in Australia and New Caledonia. It contributes to comparative and international education

discussions in the region, and would interest scholars as well as laypeople with an interest in colonialism and decolonisation in the Pacific.