

Chapman University Chapman University Digital Commons

Education Faculty Articles and Research

College of Educational Studies

11-2016

Revolution and Education


Lilia D. Monzó

Chapman University, monzo@chapman.edu

Peter McLaren

Chapman University, mclaren@chapman.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/education_articles

 Part of the [Criminology Commons](#), [Curriculum and Social Inquiry Commons](#), [Demography, Population, and Ecology Commons](#), [Disability and Equity in Education Commons](#), [Inequality and Stratification Commons](#), [Other Education Commons](#), [Other Sociology Commons](#), [Place and Environment Commons](#), [Politics and Social Change Commons](#), [Race and Ethnicity Commons](#), and the [Social and Philosophical Foundations of Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Monzo, L. D., & McLaren, P. (2016). Revolution and education. *Knowledge Cultures*, 4(6), 20-24.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Educational Studies at Chapman University Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Education Faculty Articles and Research by an authorized administrator of Chapman University Digital Commons. For more information, please contact laughtin@chapman.edu.

Revolution and Education

Comments

This article was originally published in *Knowledge Cultures*, volume 4, issue 6, in 2016.

Copyright

Addleton Academic Publishers

Revolution and Education

Lilia D. Monzo and Peter McLaren

Knowledge Cultures. 4.6 (Nov. 2016): p20.

Copyright: 2016 Addleton Academic Publishers

Full Text:

A crucial task in this age of unmitigated greed, violence, and terror is the need to envision something better, to dream of that which, although seemingly impossible, will allow us to take action in favor of reinstating our stolen humanity, snatched from our history by the monstrous tentacles of a White supremacist and patriarchal capitalism. This past year we had the opportunity to visit Auschwitz in Poland and The Museum of Anti-Japanese Aggression in Changchun, China. We cannot capture with words the true horror that these museums evidence, a horror brutally inflicted upon our brothers and sisters. Yet a critical reminder of our genocidal history is necessary as a sobering and reflexive praxis to recognize and learn from our past mistakes.

Unfortunately, these are only two examples of a much longer list of atrocities that came before and after--the colonization of 'The New World,' American slavery, the witch hunts, Hiroshima, the recent war on Iraq and impending global environmental catastrophe represent just a handful of massacres orchestrated and perpetrated by the Western world against the rest of humanity and all life forms. For 500 years the capitalist mode of production, has gnawed at our moral fiber and left it to bleed and fester, slowly eroding our ability to recognize, care, and fight against injustice.

Denied the right to recognize patterns of violence and their relationship to class and specifically to the capitalist mode of production through an institutionalized historical amnesia, we live our lives as mere passengers on a train that stops at death's door. In the self-proclaimed greatest super power, the United States, the mythical alliance to democracy serves to obfuscate its systematic plundering of life and earth in service to the transnational capitalist class. We have been brainwashed through state and corporate-sponsored lies, myth, and a national zealotry to forget and continue to repeat the atrocities of our past. We have been plucked out of history by design and have developed a narcissism that ensures our primary concern is to ourselves and a willingness always to blame the Other and accept world suffering, so long as it 'protects our way of life.'

We have become a people of today--without roots and without a future beyond ourselves. While we may watch reports with some semblance of empathy, we quickly dull these feelings through a shopping mall politics that restores our apathy and inertia. Of course we too understand this tilt-a-whirl tendency to protect ourselves from feeling too much. It has been ingrained in humanity everyday in a process of production that enslaves and alienates us from ourselves and each other, turning us into mere capital (Rikowski, 2001).

The postmodern preoccupation with deconstructing the multiplicity of singularities dislodged from any totality has been instrumentally aligned (perhaps unwittingly) to an anti-Marxist philosophy of inaction. That is, today's social relations, abstracted from the broader and complex process of history and the mode of production, renders social change only ever partial and/or

short-lived and therefore stuck in the world of today, without any semblance of the relationship it has to the future of our survival.

This ever present sense of inevitability and acquiescence to the current world of economic exploitation, violence, and hate has been made possible by a carefully orchestrated ideological, economic, and/or military attack on any state or movement that aligned itself with socialism or communism. It is tragically the case today that in the United States 'freedom' under capitalism refers to the right for each individual and corporation to compete for the greatest possible profits and to amass unimaginable wealth, irrespective of the consequences to other life forms. This inalienable 'right' to private property and unchecked individual economic growth is made acceptable to even those who are unlikely to ever benefit from it under the mythical narrative of 'equal opportunity,' which allows the capitalist class to claim the riches they 'deserve' for their presumed 'hard work and ingenuity.'

The mythology of America as 'home of the free' has been masterfully crafted by attempting to erase or at least discredit one of the greatest thinkers of the 19th century, whose revolutionary goal was to emancipate all of humanity and develop respect and social responsibility toward nature and all life forms. Indeed once considered a must-read among intellectuals, the work of Karl Marx is increasingly ignored or marginalized as an historical philosophical relic among college graduates in the United States and other 'industrialized' nations. Marx's critique of capitalism and his ideas on socialism and communism have influenced the World's most important people's revolutions, including the Paris Commune, the Russian Revolution, the Chinese Revolution, and the Cuban Revolution. However, all of these revolutions have either willfully diverged from or failed to surmount obstacles to Marx's conceptualization of a classless society built on democratic principles, freedom, equality, social responsibility, and social justice. Marx's philosophy was designed to break through the false binaries that constitute capitalist social relations and to lead us to a new socialist consciousness and a new society. The Russian Revolution under Stalin took a totalitarian turn that destroyed and limited possibilities for establishing the collectivist society that Marx envisioned. However, this betrayal of Marx's philosophy of revolution and the human rights violations that have been attributed to these self-proclaimed 'communist' regimes have served as mighty propaganda stoking fear among the masses, especially in the United States, a country that houses the greatest economic and racial disparities across the so-called developed world, thus necessitating an unprecedented ideological hazing in order to contain any threat to the established White supremacist, capitalist order (McLaren, 2015).

The fall of the Soviet Union became the evidence that conservatives were looking for to completely destroy any possible viability that a socialist or communist state might hold and to establish capitalism as inevitable, the 'only' enduring social order and the 'best' possibility for democracy to flourish. Indeed, any alternatives were presented as eventually doomed to fail and to become corrupt in the process. Jodi Dean argues that this view of 'failed' communisms and 'failed' social movements, when considered in the context of the history of class struggle, can be conceived of as miss-starts and early attempts in a larger historical process of revolution from which we can learn and improve upon in light of Marx's revolutionary humanism.

Let's for a moment attend to 21st century capitalism. According to William Robinson (2014), approximately one third of humanity is locked out of productive participation in the capitalist economy. Can we not see the dramatic shift in the U.S. since the end of WWII from concern with social welfare to a preoccupation with social control? Is there not a pronounced fear among the ruling elite that outraged workers will rise up and protest living in what is fast becoming planet slum? Robinson notes that the role of the state in creating social cohesion through the accumulation of capital is fracturing as a result of the crisis of capitalist overaccumulation. Consequently, the state is fast losing its 'legitimatizing' function, and must therefore cause citizens to affectively invest in a logic of displacement, a preening American exceptionalism, exclusion, criminalization and hate. It must demonize its surplus population through a logic of fascism and through practices of mass incarceration and the school-to-prison pipeline--all overlain with fantasies of a paradise of consumption.

This omnipresent and growing fascism, distinct in contour but obscure in substance, has become an impassable reality of our age: a politics of the diminishment of our humanity. We cannot ignore it without engendering its spread. Imperialist geopolitical maneuvering in the Middle East; heightening conditions for war abroad with an inestimable cost to human lives; repression of ethno-religious minorities at home; misogyny, a hypernationalism and immigrant bashing and Islamophobic appeals by the President-elect, Donald Trump, and the absurd accusation that Syrian refugees coming into the US are ISIS supporters that recall the slanderous days of the pre-World War 2 era, when Jewish refugees were turned away from the shores of the U.S. amid carefully planted suspicions of Nazi agents among them. The hypocrisy of this narrative is astounding, when we can certainly agree that geostrategic and international economic considerations coupled with the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq helped to cultivate the ground for groups such as ISIS. Just as astounding is the terror that for centuries has besieged the Black communities of the U.S. who live everyday under the threat of racism-related killings, police profiling, and hyper-incarceration as evidenced nationally and internationally in the string of publicized senseless killings of black unarmed young men, which has increasingly gained greater media attention.

Finally, after the decades of backlash and complacency that followed the gains of the Civil Rights era and the 60s, we are seeing evidence that our young people are taking back the reigns of history, standing up, and demonstrating in the streets and college campuses for what they believe in and in some cases they are winning. Inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement, today thousands of "water protectors" have joined the Sioux Nation of Standing Rock to act in prayer and service to stop the construction of the Dakota Access pipeline, a multi billion dollar oil pipeline that would tragically affect Native American communities and land. But this is more than one cause, it is a movement to acknowledge and respect Native American sovereignty and human rights. Indeed many see this as a movement that connects multiple groups and interests, including anti-capitalists, feminists, environmental rights activists, and people of color. We believe, indeed we pray, that the world is ready to once again engage Marx's ideas and to consider that indeed, our only alternative if we wish to survive as a species on this Earth, is an alternative to capitalism's value production.

Toward that effort, it is critical to remember that Marx himself proclaimed that he was not a Marxist, rejecting the 'crude economism' that the Marxists of the time were attributing to him and

to which we can explain some of the pitfalls that have befallen the so called communisms that shifted gears and turned against the people. Indeed, much of what Marx wrote has often been taken out of context and distorted. This special theme issue on Revolution and Education is a step in the process of introducing or re-introducing Marx to those who have long believed in the widely announced 'death of Marx' as well as to explore some of the most fundamental ideas underlying his philosophy of revolution, in light of new interpretations based on his actual writings that are now more readily available than at any other time. Exposing the false associations and misrepresentations of Marx's works is critical at this time.

The proof of our agency lies in history as does the proof of our future. A revolutionary critical pedagogy (Allman, 1999; McLaren, 2015) can develop the conditions of possibility in which we discover our history and develop a philosophy of praxis that can allow us to see what Jodi Dean (2012) has called 'the communist horizon. '

LILIA D. MONZO

monzo@chapman.edu

Chapman University

PETER MCLAREN

peter.mclaren1@gmail.com

Chapman University

REFERENCES

Allman, P. (1999). *Revolutionary social transformation*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.

Dean, J. (2012). *The communist horizon*. New York: Verso.

McLaren, P. (2015). *Pedagogy of insurrection: From resurrection to revolution*. New York: Peter Lang.

Rikowski, G. (2001). Fuel for the living fire: Labour-power! In A. C. Dinerstein & M. Neary (Eds.), *The labour debate: An investigation into the theory and reality of capitalist work* (pp. 179-202). Brookfield, VT: Ashgate.

Robinson, W. (2014). *Global capitalism and the crisis of humanity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Monzo, Lilia D.^McLaren, Peter