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# PREFIGURING ALTERNATIVE WORLDS: ORGANIC CRITICAL LITERACIES AND SOCIO-CULTURAL REVOLUTIONS

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ABSTRACT. This paper offers a vision of critical literacies that speak to education, revolution and the institutional arrangements of capitalism. We provide a path forward for educating within/against neoliberalism and for understanding the imperative to prefigure spaces and a language of possibility. Our aim is to situate the need for critical spaces in revolutionary struggles, and to delineate a theoretical framing of organic critical literacies while grounding them in generative exemplars. Drawing upon the concept of *prefigurative politics*, we demonstrate how mediation and place-based praxis must be at the core of critical literacies that challenge capitalism and its institutional arrangements, and that are generative of *socio-cultural revolutions*.

Keywords: organic critical literacies; prefigurative politics; liberatory education

In this paper we reflect upon the inter-relation between education and revolution, grounding our discussion in concrete critical literacy projects seeded over the years. In order to enrich the broader discussion, we situate the question of education and revolution in dialogue with concrete historical struggles, projects, and practices. We speak from a contradictory location, as critical scholars and teacher educators who are working within institutions of higher learning while tied to literacy projects that challenge and resist the present historical moment of neoliberal privatization and colonial subjugation. Thus, we unpack the inter-relation between education and revolution, what this has meant historically as social movements have materialized throughout Latin America, and then proceed to an analysis of the centrality of critical literacies in liberation struggles. We analyze two exemplars or 'case studies' from our own work, detailing how these prefigurative political spaces generate a new language of possibility, beyond the enclosure of the present moment. We argue that these micro-political projects of today are living lessons for the cultural and social revolutions of tomorrow. A lesson is that the revolutionary transformation of capitalist societies, while traditionally conceived as a battle of ideology and class interests that leads to radically new economic structures (socialism), involves multiple fronts and a radically new unfinished society. A second lesson: Without careful attention to aspects of rehumanizing education, revolutionary struggle has a tendency to instrumentalize students and people under the guise of means-ends politics, potentially undermining the world it seeks to create. A fundamental question for us as cultural workers and teacher educators working within capitalist-colonialist institutional arrangements is how we can seed education projects from below, at the grassroots level, that bring to life spaces of hope, love, and what we term *socio-cultural revolutions,* marked not only by radical economic changes but also by ecological and re-humanizing values that lead to the production of new social subjects, communities and our relation to the earth-world. Of significance is how these place-based struggles for liberation translate or get reinvented as anticipatory or prefigurative political spaces (Holloway, 2010). That is, how can we link place-based struggles and humanizing micropractices developed there with broader social movements? And what mediating role can critical literacies play in the formation of prefigurative spaces and liberation?

## The Struggle for Liberatory Education:[1] Interlocking Geo-Politics and Histories

> 'We certainly do not wish socialism in America to be imitation and a copy. It must be a heroic creation. We must give life, with our own reality and in our own language to an Indo-American socialism.' – Mariátegui (1928)

Understood within the ensemble of social relations (economic, political, legal, ideological, and institutional) that make it possible, education has been conceptualized in structuralist terms as an ideological state apparatus intimately tied to the reproduction of the social relations of capitalist production (Athusser, 1971; Hill, 2001). In our view, education is more than an expression or function of economic institutions: education emerges through struggle and contestation (Apple, 1995; 2006), in which vying group interests, values, and ideologies come to shape its content, form, and purpose. Understanding education relationally means situating it historically and geopolitically alongside the advent and development of liberal-democracies, which in today's global economic order need to be understood as capitalist-colonialist liberal-democracies (see Goldberg, 2002). From this perspective, education in the U.S. and Latin America has functioned as a contested medium and reproductive force for global capital *and* coloniality/Eurocentrism. By 'coloniality/Eurocentrism' we mean more than a discursive process or the erasure of non-Western knowledge systems; rather, the concept signals the geo-politics of erasure and 'othering' to a material, economic, and cultural logic that operates on the epistemological and ontological levels (see Dussel, 2001; Mignolo, 2002).

Against this backdrop of global capital *and* coloniality/Eurocentrism, struggles for liberatory forms of education have emerged. In social movements throughout Latin America, education has been a central component of social revolutions. By central vehicle we mean that liberatory education has become a deliberate, albeit contested, space for radical social transformation. As Samoff (1991) observes, ‘Socialists have regarded education – both the learning generated by participation in struggle and the more organized instructional efforts inside and outside the schools – as critical, and perhaps the principal, dynamic in reconstructing society’ (2). Our conception of *socio-cultural revolution* entails radical structural-economic change that is accompanied by a cultural revolution at the grassroots level, among the people in everyday social interactions – a revolution in which a liberatory education is a constitutive component. The struggle for liberatory education is, as Paulo Freire (2005a; 2005b) has aptly identified, an evolving transformation from education as massification to a project of liberation in the microspaces of the everyday practice that constitutes life. This dynamic view of education and social transformation allows us to see that ‘liberation’ is not a final destination we ‘arrive at’ when the revolution is ‘here’ but that it is an ongoing process of self and social transformation imbued with our own historical unfinishedness.

Arguing from a position afforded by an intersectional lens, education is a constant struggle, an expression of different classed, racialized, gendered, and sexed interests in the broader society that are best analyzed from a compound standpoint (de Lissovoy, 2008) or what Grosfoguel (2011) terms a *decolonial political-economy*. These interlocking and entangled geo-politics and histories of race and class, while conjunctural, have been challenged by multiple fronts and strategies, with socialism understood as only one of many struggles in the peripheries (Grosfoguel, 2008; Motta, 2013). It is in this vein that a critical Latin American intellectual standpoint has emerged, challenging (and enriching) Western knowledge systems and frameworks that have been reinscribed in social movements. As Mignolo (2002) poignantly observes:

> ‘The Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism was accepted in former colonies as “our own” critique of Eurocentrism; socialist alternatives to liberalism in Europe were taken, in the colonies, as a path of liberation without making the distinction between emancipation in Europe and liberation in the colonial world’ (64).

While Indigenous movements against globalization in Latin America have often reduced to manifestations of class struggle by the radical Left or, in some cases, rendered incomprehensible as ‘real’ movements against global capital (see Hall & Fenellon, 2004; Hall & Fenellon, 2008), they offer an opportunity for us to understand diverse pathways for the building of movements and historical change. We argue, for example, that what has emerged in Bolivia, after decades of Aymara peoples mobilizing against global capital through the creation of the mass-based political party *Movimiemto al Socialismo* (MAS) is an amalgam of Indigenous and socialist strategies – whose endpoint is not socialism. The taking of state power within a given nation-state, such as that by the MAS movement in Bolivia, is a strategy to transform hegemony. Re-framing it as a largely Aymara-Indigenous struggle challenges traditional, linear, Eurocentric notions of socialist development (see Dunbar-Ortiz, 2009; Riddell, 2008). Some scholars have noted a distinct kind of socialism integrating Indigenous values and knowledge systems that are prioritizing ecological issues (Löwy, 2014; Riddell, 2008) and decolonial and Indigenous education (Lopes-Cardozo, 2011; Lopes-Cardozo & Strauss, 2013). These linear, Eurocentric critiques of Indigenous-socialist movements do not cohere with Marx's later writings, in particular – among other unpublished manuscripts – his ethnological notebooks, which point to alternative forms of development, where nations do not follow a single evolutionary path (see Kohan, 2007; Riddell, 2008). In his analysis of the Russian communes, for example, Marx provides insights on multiple pathways to communism, noting that the historical specificity of the Russian commune need not follow from 'communal to private property.' On the contrary, he finds 'The crisis will come to an end with the elimination of capitalist production and the return of modern society to a higher form of the most archaic type – collective production and appropriation' (Marx, 1881). Marx sees a parallel in the enclosure of the Russian commune with 'primitive societies' or Indigenous groups: 'In any event the research has advanced far enough to establish that…the vitality of primitive communities was incomparably greater than that of Semitic, Greek, Roman, etc. societies, and, a fortiori, that of modern capitalist societies' (Marx, 1924).[2] We conclude this section by reiterating the idea that race and class interlock in the geopolitical landscape of spaces such as Latin America, and that social movements can and do take multiple pathways. Thus, there isn't one linear path toward liberation that nations follow: Different and distinct social movements and socialisms have taken root as a result.

## Critical Literacies in Latin American Social Movements

> 'Literacy is an apprenticeship in life because in the process people learn their intrinsic value as human beings, as makers of history, as actors of important social roles, as individuals with rights to demand and duties to fulfill.' – *Frente Sandinista* (November 1979)

Liberatory education is in constant motion; what social revolutions in Latin America have taught us is that literacies are an important space of struggle. Precisely because functional literacies had been historically denied to peasants, workers, women, Indigenous peoples, and other subaltern groups, socialist revolutions have focused intently on literacy campaigns. The struggles for basic literacies in Cuba (see Carnoy & Samoff, 2014; Kempf, 2014) and Nicaragua (see Muhr, 2013) have been amply discussed and their positive impact on the general society documented. We concur that these literacy campaigns are liberatory in the sense that they functioned to empower the marginalized masses with the basic tools denied as part of the colonial social order and because of their anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist framings. The questions we raise pertain to seeing liberation as an on-going struggle that occurs at all levels, including the struggle for critical literacies. Some scholars have been critical of the functional, reproductive role that literacy campaigns have played in social revolutions. Kempf (2014) argues that in the context of the Cuban revolution, what is a current struggle is how literacy and education can address the enclosure of nationalist discourses and anti-imperialist framings that may negate reflexivity and internal critiques of the new society Cubans have created and may lead to orthodoxy. Kempf (2014) maintains that 'a more important consideration is the degree to which the politics of a given education system recognize, support and improve the lived reality (historically, currently, and going forward) of the communities it serves' (12). Contradictions in social movements are not resolved with the advent of political revolutions that lead to economic restructuring, nor are the everyday practices and beliefs that instantiated, sustained, and reproduced the old social order. It remains to be seen what contemporary education reforms and radical transformations in Latin America will reveal. The current struggle for a decolonial education in Bolivia is a case in point. The struggle to decolonize education includes a radical shift and centering of Indigenous knowledges that is currently being contested and challenged by teachers themselves (see Lopes Cardozo, 2013). We also see these tensions emerge in the struggle for education projects within Landless Workers' Movement (MST) of Brazil, where activist goals curtail organic process when landless peasants are not consulted or made integral to literacy and education projects (see Tarlau, 2015). We turn now to the concept of prefiguration as a way of addressing the need for organic work in the development of education projects that, while critical of oppressive systems, respect the hopes, dreams, and cultural knowledge of students.

## Prefigurative Spaces: Planting Seeds of Possibility

> 'The ways in which political action is performed and everyday life in social movements is lived are highly significant not just because they shape how effective struggles for social change can be, but also because they help explain the formation and composition of movements, groupings, and structures of solidarity themselves' (Yates, 2015: 19).

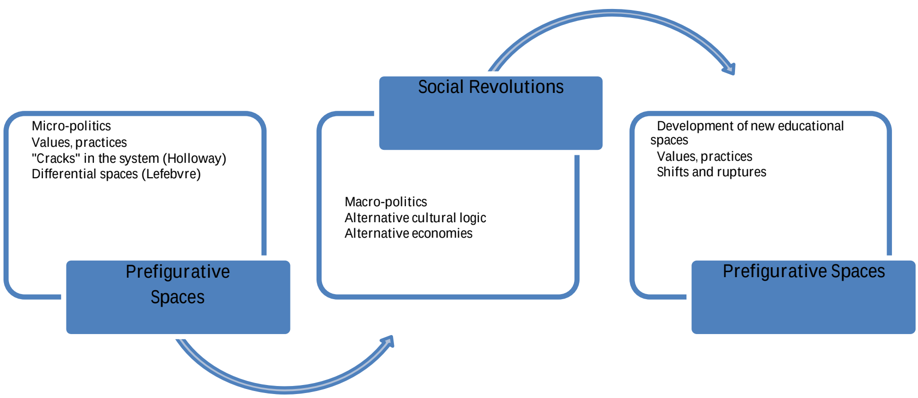
Critical scholars (Apple, 1995; De Lissovoy, Means, & Saltman, 2016; Giroux, 2001) have argued, education at all levels is both a site of social reproduction and a site of cultural production: 'Schools are sites of cultural struggle within civil society as well as sites for the making of critical consciousness' (De Lissoy, Means, & Saltman, 2016: 9). As cultural workers, we see the need to articulate and engage in serious reflection on the im/possibilities of liberatory education within today's neoliberal assault on public education. We turn here to the growing work on prefigurative politics as a way for pushing beyond the present moment and rethinking the question of the inter-relation between education and social revolutions. We move by unpacking the concept of prefiguration, drawing out its relevance to the formation of a new language of critique and possibility (Giroux, 1988).

Prefiguration is defined as 'a radical strategy of social transformation that emphasizes building alternative political, economic and cultural infrastructures while working to dismantle existing oppressive contexts' (Luchies, 2014: 112). The following are two fundamental qualities of prefigurative politics: an anti-oppressive stance that challenges multiple forms of oppression leading to 'problem-solve movements' latent white supremacy, dis/ablism, class-ism, sexism, homo- and transphobia' (Luchies, 2014: 112); and the enacting the social values of social movements in the present (Esteva, 2015; West, 2013). While prefigurative politics have been associated with Anarchist and Open Marxist movements, its ideas have been voiced by Latin American decolonial scholars working to decolonize the epistemological frameworks used to address oppression. Enrique Dussel (2013) comments:

> 'To liberate is not only to break the chains (the negative moment) but also "to develop" human life (liberate in the sense of providing the subject with a positive possibility) by demanding that the institutions and the system open new horizons of transcendence beyond those of mere reproduction, as repetition, of "the same" – and, simultaneously, beyond the oppression and exclusion of the victims. Or it can be, more directly, the effective construction of a possible utopia, the structures or institutions of a system where it is possible for the victims to live' (422).

Dussel's (2013) philosophy of liberation points to the ethical possibilities and movements in countering capitalist values via everyday encounters with the other. The following figure (Figure 1) illustrates the dialectical relation between pre-figurative spaces and social movements.

**Figure 1** Dialectic of Prefigurative Spaces and Social Revolutions



While the literature (Pepper, 2010; Siltanen, Klodawsky, & Andrew, 2015; Vodovnik & Crubacic, 2015) tends to define prefigurative spaces as place-based struggles in the 'here and now', leaving undefined how place-based efforts might congeal or coalesce into macro-political movements, there is no discussion of the ways in which prefigurative politics and spaces are developing, not even in the context of social revolutions such as those in Latin America. To what extent do socialist revolutions in Cuba, Venezuela, and Bolivia create spaces of hope and possibility from below, spaces that lead to developmentally new values and practices, say of solidarity and egalitarianism, or spaces for the development of humanizing education? Seeing prefiguration from a socio-historical lens enables us to ask fundamental questions about socio-cultural revolutions: What kinds of values and practices do revolutions reinscribe via their parties and leaders?

Dhaliwal's (2012) distinction between 'closed prefigurations' and 'open prefigurations' is useful in analyzing the potential for rupture and social movement building. Closed prefigurations are characterized as an 'insular enclave,' whereas open prefigurations are potentially counter hegemonic on many levels, challenging capital relations and the state. While the emphasis on de-centralization of power away from the state and capital and toward grassroots communities is an important part of prefigurative politics, caution must be taken to not completely negate strategies of state power. The case of MAS in Bolivia is, we argue, primarily an Indigenous struggle manifest currently as a socialist strategy. Because struggles are messy, often spontaneous and violent, a prefigurative politics grounded in the values and vision of an alternative world-based horizontal social relations, consensus building, and power as distributed and relational – must be grounded in actual historical struggles. Prefiguration will look different based on the communities that take it up, via the spaces that make it possible, and its manifest external and internal contradictions.

## The Enclosure of Prefigurative Spaces

While 'prefiguration' has been taken-up by anarchist scholars and activists as a non-hierarchical stasis of becoming and realization of an egalitarian society in the present, a developmental approach enables us to see how prefigurative spaces are dialectically tied to social movements and how these spaces are open and social, imbued with values and practices from the 'outside.' It is thus that caution needs to be taken with respect to conceptualizing prefigurative spaces as non-contradictory. Grounded in sociocultural understanding, we are inclined to conceptualize all spaces of struggle and possibility as contradictory and in motion. Scholars of socialist revolutions and the development of a post revolutionary education system (Carnoy & Samoff, 2014; Griffiths & Millei, 2013a; Griffiths & Millei, 2013b; Samoff, 1991) have documented the ways in which the values and practices of capitalist and colonialist forms of education are not 'shed' overnight, but rather require a deliberate cultural transformation.

> The guiding values, institutional forms, pedagogical strategies, and patterns of schooling inherited by the new leadership have proved durable…though a core element of socialist political education, democratic participation rarely characterizes education practice. Notwithstanding their commitment to social transformation, the new leaders often accepted not only the form and function of the inherited education system but also much of the ideology that rationalized it. Their faith in education – to develop, to construct a desired future, to create new people – reinforced their inclination to focus their critiques on issues of access and participation rather than on content and organization (Samoff, 1991: 8–9).

The idea here is that social revolutions pre-figure the world they seek to create via the values they enact through revolutionary struggles. Political revolutions guided by military fronts or social revolutions that, under the banner of nationalism extol the opposition or divergent thinking, are not instrumental spaces shed once we ‘arrive’ at liberation: binary discourses and practices get reinscribed as the ‘new’ society begins to form. A major caveat of the idea of prefiguration is that pre-figurative spaces are always contradictory spaces, cracks in the system, populated by ‘specific social, economic, cultural and political relations that one cannot simply escape’ (Böhm, Dinerstein, & Spicer, 2010: 27–28). Dinerstein (2012) asserts, ‘There cannot be closure, perfection or uncertainty. We are contradictory beings, and our resistances are so too’ and she adds that ‘cracks can be (and they are) integrated into the capitalist cohesion at any time’ (531). Yet, one vital lesson for cultural workers and movement organizers is that prefiguration is not just about participants imagining and enacting a future society in the present, that we need to see this unfolding as developmental and historical: ‘imagination, experimentation and trying to proliferate and perpetuate struggle are only *part of* prefiguring politically’ (Yates, 2015: 18). We conclude this section with the idea that pre-figuration is not a closed system that breaks away from the old; rather it carries with it latent values, beliefs, and practices (as demonstrated in Figure 1 above). In our micro-political struggle for new social relations and critical literacies, we need to be attune to the contradictory nature of the new world we seek to create.

## The Erasure (and Necessity) of Critical Literacies in Neoliberal Times

> ‘By examining the specifics of [schooling and literacy as] interacting sets of transformations [within globalization], we are much more able to think through the issues associated with a politics of *interruption*. That is, we can begin to point to ways in which the politics of globalization might be altered at both the macro and micro levels’ (Apple, 2010: 26).

A political-economy analysis (Marx, 1976) of education (Allman, 2007; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005) enables us to understand how *structural* conditions and institutional arrangements within capitalist societies shape and enclose education. More recent analyses have conceptualized the maintenance of structural relations via knowledge and information systems. In particular, these have conceptualized how education functions discursively to constitute new subjectivities that encircle education within a neoliberal logic (De Lissovoy, 2012; Doherty, 2014). This body of work allows us to name the centrality – but not totality – of capitalism within Western democracies. We build here from contemporary social movements (socialist, ecological, Indigenous) that pose serious challenges to capitalism, yet proceed with caution, recognizing the limits of place-based movement building. A fundamental tenet of Marx's approach to history is to see historical events and processes as dialectical, in the sense that they are ever changing, developing out of a nexus of political-economic structurations, with capitalism as perhaps the most significant force today, and working class struggle leading historical change at a deep, fundamental level. We believe that political-economy is that much more relevant today – yet it needs to adapt to differential pathways toward national liberation occurring throughout the world, such as in the Middle East, Latin America, and here in the United States. These differential Indigenous and endogenous movements are not accounted for by binary distinctions between 'old' and 'new' social movements (see Holst, 2011).

## Our Vision of Critical Literacies for Social Movements

> 'Perhaps the key philosophical and political issue in this millennium is this relationship between cultural systems of representation – traditional print texts, writing, mass media, journalism, advertisements, web pages, texts, instant messages digital communications – and social and economic reality' (Luke, 2013: 137).

Like Freire, Dussel (2013) argues that critical reflection is intimately tied to the liberation (and re-emergence) of what he terms the sociohistorical subject: 'In order to become a subject, it is necessary to take a self-conscious critique of the system that causes victimization…The sociohistorical subject becomes a liberating subjectivity only when it is elevated to a critical-explicative consciousness of the cause of its negativity' (387). So, what do we mean by critical literacy in reclaiming our 'sociohistorical' subjectivities? To begin, from our perspective there is no one, single approach to critical literacy; we think it is more appropriate to think of critical *literacies*. We understand critical literacies as practices focused on exploring the ways language and literacy are enmeshed within power relationships and inequalities (Morgan, 2002; Janks, 2009), and that understanding and challenging the ways inequalities are produced, at least partly through language and linguistic positionings, can happen in a myriad of ways. Indeed, from our understanding it is essential to recognize that these critical, position-taking practices often exist and develop beyond or without formal learning spaces; people often employ their literacies for organic, critical ends (Campano et al., 2013). Within formal education contexts, a central concern of critical literacies praxis is supporting others in navigating multiple social fields and associated literacies, particularly in spaces where reductive notions of which practices or people can count as literate prevail (Pandya & Ávila, 2013). Working to render overt the contingent nature of current framings of social relations, critical literacies point us towards other possibilities of relationships and orderings through language.

Broadly speaking, our conception of the praxis of critical literacies as a prefigurative political space includes the 'use of the technologies of print and other media of communication to analyze, critique and transform the norms, rule systems, and practices governing the social fields of everyday life' (Luke, 2012: 2). A key element of the work of critical literacies that is often overlooked, and that we wish to stress here: analyzing and critiquing texts as a means of potentially reshaping our social worlds and material relationships does not mean relegating inquiry, critique, or analysis to purely textual or intertextual forms. Rather, 'models of critical literacy in and of themselves require a commitment to the existence and accessibility of "truth", "facts" and "realities" outside the texts in question and, potentially, as having an existence independent of their immediate discursive construction' (Luke, 2013: 146). There is a need to 'turn to explore other texts and the facts, the material and social realities they purport to represent' (146). From our conception of the praxis of critical literacies as a prefigurative political space, then, we must work to ground critical literacies in explorations of lived realities and biosocial worlds. It is not enough to mount a critique of, say, capitalism, without documenting the associated practices and widespread harmful effects of current social arrangements.

For this reason, we offer exemplars of critical literacies projects that connect discourse analytic work with other modalities. It is because we want to preclude the instrumentalization of our students, the adolescent scholars we have taught and learned with, that we endeavor to name and describe potentially revolutionary spaces that have been collectively created within formal educational contexts. As former literacy teaching/learning practitioners at the secondary level, we write with our 'practitioner identit[ies] inseparable from [our] scholarly one[s]' (Campano et al., 2013: 104) in the micropractices and spaces of everyday life that are constitutive of the larger social formation.

## Prefigurative Spaces: Working with Urban Raza Youth

Grounded in Freirean and decolonizing pedagogies (Iseke-Barnes, 2008; Nakata et al., 2012; Tejeda Espinoza & Gutierrez, 2003; Zavala, 2014), Zavala (author) has been a part of the development of alternative liberatory education projects working with *Raza*[3] migrant farmworker (2002–2005, 2015) and im/migrant (2007–2014) high school youth. An example of critical literacies praxis serving as a prefigurative political space is the six-week summer Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) program in Santa Ana, California. Taught as part of a major university's community partnership, the summer program brought together several courses – on the History of Santa Ana, Writing & Research, Statistics for

Community Change, and Environmental Science. The summer program is part of a three year education pipeline project whose goals are to increase the college enrollment of low-income students in Santa Ana and to nurture civic engagement practices. Working strategically within a highly institutionalized and federally funded space, the program was re-designed in 2013, marked by two important shifts: the move from college access to critical consciousness; and, the move from academic research to action-research. This re-orientation was manifest in the infusion of a place-based Ethnic Studies approach to the History of Santa Ana course and the implementation of YPAR as a primary vehicle for the Writing & Research seminar. It is important to note that Santa Ana has been historically a racialized and classed urban 'ghetto' in Orange County, experiencing extreme poverty amidst one of the wealthiest counties in the nation. Santa Ana is primarily composed of Raza im/migrant families, many of them laboring in the service and few remaining industries in the county and neighboring cities. For instance, Santa Ana has one of the largest migrant farmworker populations, families which live in the city yet commute as many as 100 miles to find work in the fields of Riverside and Imperial Valley, neighboring counties in Southern California.

Unified by the central theme, *Poverty in Santa Ana*, a theme arrived at by students in previous years, the curriculum and pedagogical praxis of the Writing & Research seminar moved in two ways. First, the course engaged students with a critical re-reading, using Freirean generative themes (Freire, 2005a) derived from the poverty in their lives. This entailed a deliberate attempt to begin with students' sociocultural reality and cultural capital and other strategies that allowed students' to view their families as resourceful rather than ontological 'others.' As a way of critically understanding poverty, particular texts were selected that would provide students with a historical and sociological understanding of the causes and effects of poverty. Among the texts were Eduardo Galeano's *Open Veins of Latin America*, Rudolfo Acuña's *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, and selections from Karl Marx on the development of capitalist societies. The pedagogical and literacy work entailed in connecting students' lives with historical processes requires laborious close-text analysis (Vossoughi, 2014) while enabling them to see their lives as encircled within a capitalist-colonialist reality included the use of popular 'texts' and film to draw out experiences and ideas related to these.

The second move was to orient writing and reading – conceptualized within the program as multiple literacies for critical consciousness – toward an action-oriented strategy: Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Morrell, 2008). The students used the tools of social analysis and research, such as interviewing and demographic analysis, in the development of their action-research projects. This process was a dialectical journey that allowed everyone, including the instructor, to co-create knowledge and deep understanding of the causes and impact of poverty in Santa Ana. This process led to further questions and the eventual refinement of research projects that allowed students to explore concrete manifestations of capitalism and its relation to poverty wages, homelessness, violence, mental health, immigration, and schooling (all themes taken-up by student research groups). Working in groups, students used qualitative research strategies in the investigation of their topics, with one group applying statistical analysis. Students developed brief reports and presented research findings to each other, at the university, and to community members – particularly their families.

Students' projects became fertile ground in the creation of spaces of healing (Villanueva, 2013). Many students voiced having changed their understanding of poverty, which they viewed as unchangeable and of their own doing – which indexed a cultural deficit and colonial frame that intersects with capitalist ideologies of meritocracy. But many became 'patiently impatient' (Freire, 2000), with their projects extending into the community. For instance, one group of students focused on capitalism and schooling and is currently undertaking a local campaign in their district, with the support of their parents, to address issues of inequality and under-funding. In communication with these students and through deliberate mentorship that involves monthly meetings and travel to national research conferences, the students are moving in organic ways to organize other high school students around the intrusion of charter management organizations, which are looking at Santa Ana Unified's Fundamental Schools. The projects and pedagogical spaces, in particular the classroom and social relations amongst peers and educators, were developed with an eye toward building community, re-claiming students' sociocultural knowledges and human dignity in light of years and generations of historical trauma. This approach is manifest in Xicano-Indigenous epistemological frameworks (Arce & Fernandez, 2014; Villanueva, 2013) that deliberately de-colonize learning by creating healing spaces.

Recognizing the limitations in undertaking YPAR within institutional settings, the question of how critical literacies mediate prefigurative spaces becomes an important one for cultural workers and educators who are seeking social change at micro- and macro- levels and are attuned to political work that doesn't instrumentalize students and learning. The pre-figurative 'moment' viewed dialectically, materializes where pedagogies of healing are made possible; it materializes in spaces where students and teachers engage in authentic learning, cognitive work, and social action, where students take up projects in organic ways, reclaiming their dignities and rights to learning and literacies (Espinoza & Vossoughi, 2014). Given our analysis of neoliberalism as sets of discourses and practices perpetuating and intensifying capitalist development alongside the capitalist-colonialist state, and given the cultural-historical trajectories of *Raza* youth and families, these spaces help us see the historical impetus to reclaim ways of knowing and literacies. They also represent a direct challenge to capitalist ideas and values by making capitalism and poverty the object of reflection and analysis. These critical literacies as prefigurative spaces lead to germinating seeds of change in micro-political acts of consciousness (dignified learning) and participation (action-research in the classroom, community, and beyond). These are spaces where the emphasis is on creating possible worlds in the present (prefiguration) by nurturing new sets of values (of solidarity, community, democracy) and practices through which students become owners of the means of knowledge production. Further investigation is needed in understanding how these pre-figurative 'moments' lead to further contradictions of consciousness in the homes, the community of Santa Ana, and how these in turn may lead to the transformation of emergent social movements.

**Prefigurative Spaces at Frantz Fanon Academy**

> 'It's not that language and the world are separate, but that analyzing a literary representation of a real-world issue is not the same thing as facing that issue and having to do something about it in a particular context. Analysis and action are not necessarily separable, but they may obey different temporalities' (Johnson, 1994: 80).

A second example of teaching and learning praxis that creates a prefigurative political space is the *Literature, Language and Social Spaces* project in the Frantz Fanon Academy[4] (FFA). FFA, an under-resourced 'second-chance' alternative public high school located in a South Bronx neighborhood in New York City, serves African American and Caribbean Latina/o adolescent scholars[5] ages 16–21. Noah Asher Golden (author), who at the time of the project a literacy educator at the school, sought to honor student concerns regarding linguistic practice and power. Resisting the oft-repeated mantra from educators that 'academic' literacies lead to positions of power in society, the adolescent scholars engaged in counter-storytelling (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) to challenge reductive and simplistic framings of formal education and the American Dream of social mobility through merit and effort. Though not termed as such, these young scholars were challenging language ideologies and ethnoracialized positionings (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Skutnabb-Kangas & McCarty, 2008) they experienced in and out of the spaces of formal education.

To invite this resistance into the space of the classroom, and to engender fertile ground for already-present critical literacies to further develop, the initial resistance became the subject of an entire course: *Literature, Language, and Social Spaces.* Through a Youth Participatory Action Research approach, the adolescent scholars were invited to participate in and shape three activities,[6] each serving as fertile territory for prefigurative spaces and politics to grow. First, the adolescent scholars were invited to analyze the social worlds present in the (1990[1934]) short story 'Father and Son' by Langston Hughes. Set in the early twentieth century in the American South, this work of short fiction centers around the return of Bert, the biracial son of a Colonel Norwood, a White plantation owner, and his mistress Cora, a Black cook at the plantation. Bert returns from what was then known as a 'Negro college' refusing to walk through the back door to his own home, demanding the status of an educated son of a powerful man. Using both the lexicon of Bourdieusian sociology (e.g., institutional capital as a form of cultural capital, social capital, economic capital) and their own specialized vocabularies, the adolescent scholars delved into the literary text to name the ideologies, social structures, and embodied capitals that positioned and constrained Bert. Despite his powerful academic competencies, embodied cultural capital (aligned to dominant White normative ways of being-in-the-world), and degree, Bert was positioned as a second-class citizen at best. The adolescent scholars debated the ways in which Bert might resist these positionings and structures, yet concluded that the systems present in the social world of the text offered little recourse for individual striving or desire for recognition of merit.[7]

The adolescent scholars then compared Bert's social worlds to our own social worlds. To move beyond debating the extent to which our society had 'progressed' on issues of race, power, and ethnoracialized positionings, the second project was ethnographic in intent: the adolescent scholars chose a social space they were familiar with for participant observation, and they took copious field notes. Through exploratory writing, analysis, and discussion of these field notes, the scholars sought to understand dominant language ideologies as well as which literacies were valued and associated with power in their chosen social space. Under the umbrella of Youth Participatory Action Research, we collectively answered the question of whether or not academic literacies made people powerful, and, if so, for whom and in what social spaces. Through analysis of language-in-use in an after-school program, a neighborhood block, a commercial shopping zone, a basketball court, a police precinct, and other social spaces (fields or markets in the Bourdieusian lexicon), the adolescent scholars engaged elements of social science research to challenge normative assumptions about meritocracy, ethnoracial positionings, identity, power, and the promise of academic literacies.

Following the ethnographic work, the third and final project in the *Literature, Language, and Social Spaces* course was to read and debate selections from Chinua Achebe's 'English and the African Writer,' Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's 'On Writing in Gikuyu,' and James Baldwin's 'If Black English Isn't a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is?' In and through exegesis of these texts, the adolescent scholars engaged postcolonial and critical theories regarding language, identity, and power. Each of these authors explores the challenges and possibilities of creative and political expression in linguistic forms that are either tied to group-based histories and identities or the language of oppression. Through these textual explorations, the adolescent scholars began to connect their critical questionings and resistance to mantras about the power of academic literacies with complex histories of global oppression and identity.

Why might these three activities, and the continuum they form, be considered a site for prefigurative politics? These projects opened up the space of the secondary-level classroom to trace the linkages between micro-level resistance to empty rhetoric (about academic excellence, social mobility, and power) and both historical and current colonialism and institutionalized racism. By making language ideologies and language-in-use objects of study, and through collaborative action research, adolescent scholars developed a new language of possibility to challenge the present moment through an exploration of the traces of oppression. While the adolescent youth already employed critical literacies that were further developed through these formal education-based YPAR projects, there were signs that some of the scholars were rationalizing their own oppression, suggesting that people's stations in society are derivative of their merit.[8] Indeed, it is well documented that minoritized people are often encouraged to take up discourses of self-blame (e.g., Fine & Ruglis, 2009; MacLeod, 2010). Through this intellectual labor, the adolescent scholars are opening possibilities for further resistance, exploring the ways that oppressed people must often engaged in complex relationships with the very languages and linguistic forms with which they have to resist and organize further resistance. This is a necessary step in a revolutionary education: naming the world does not transcend or overcome damaging social structures, but it does engender the possibility of sustained activism and resistance by organic intellectuals (Gramsci, 2009).

## Education & Revolution: Enduring Questions

> 'However limited in any particular historical, spatial and political conjunction within Capital, resistant and counter-hegemonic acts are possible and necessary, as is socialist utopianism – the analysis of the present and the vision and planning for an egalitarian democratic socialist future' (Hill, 2005: 211).

> 'The teacher as committed intellectual recognizes that the Freirean notion of praxis and the capacity to engage in critical self-consciousness are not enough to transform both the repressive and integrative functions of the hegemonic orders. Nevertheless, they are necessary to finding ways to actively intervene in the world order in ways that have the potential to transform the world' (Fischman & Haas, 2009: 572).

While the case studies discussed above highlight the mediation of prefigurative spaces, inserting critical literacies at the heart of place-based struggles, we recognize the delimitation of strategy and goals for countering the economic and cultural logic of capitalism. Yet, we envision space in an open knowledge economy (Peters, 2013) that 'offers a way of reclaiming knowledge as a global public good' within an emerging "global knowledge commons' (239). It was and is key that this work was done through a participatory framework and ethos. This is not to say that power inequities and inequalities were somehow transcended through this approach to intellectual labor, but that they were recognized, named, and the subject of our collective work. Indeed, this work was done with the acknowledgement that our intellectual space was a 'contact zone' (Torre & Fine, et al., 2008), recognizing grossly asymmetrical relations of power. Engaging participatory work is not so much a means of erasing power inequalities, but rather naming and attempting to work through them.

We share these projects with a humility born of the knowledge that these exemplars are not flawless revolutionary catalysts, nor do they speak to what are always-contextualized local struggles. Indeed, these 'case studies' are revolutionary in ways that obey a different temporality (Johnson, 1994), one that sets the groundwork for political action through naming, engagement and awareness of the ways that historical and current oppressions live in people's bodies, languages, and practices. These projects resist the instrumentalizing of the adolescent scholars we have worked with by respecting their agency and lived realities, and by making intellectual space responsive to voiced and pressing concerns. Again, this renaming of our social world is a necessary first step to challenging that world and engaging in revolutionary struggle(s) (Morgan, 2002). As Frederic Jameson (2005) has noted, one must imagine other possibilities before one can struggle with others to realize them.

It is essential to not overstate the revolutionary nature of these 'case studies': they are simply attempts to name the world differently (Apple, 1996). It is all too easy for these and similar intellectual labor projects to serve as forms of passive revolution (Gramsci, 1988; Mouffe, 1979) or interest convergence (Bell, 1979), redirecting or subduing the activism we hope our intellectual labor will engender. For this reason, reflection and reflexivity are integral to engaging this work with adolescent scholars. We end, tentatively, with a series of questions for scholars of social movements, movement activists, and cultural workers invested in engendering critical literacies throughout their pedagogical work.

• How might we further change and prefigure the world that is to come within capitalist and colonialist systems without instrumentalizing people and learning?
• How might we ground critical literacy projects with concrete, empirical explorations, linking them to place-based struggles and social movements?
• What are the affordances and limitations in conceptualizing pedagogies, literacies, and social movements as multiple and intersecting?
• What lessons can we learn from endogenous, grassroots struggles for social justice that already prefigure alternative, possible worlds to global capital in the present?

## NOTES

1. We use the term 'liberatory' tentatively, as history is littered with examples of self-proclaimed movements and struggles for liberation that impose their own hegemonies in and through local spaces and institutions. The term can also imply the possibility of stepping outside of discursive positionings, a reading that diminishes the power of current social arrangements. Recognizing the limitations of these readings, we use 'liberatory' education to refer to educative processes that are grounded in people's humanity and the potential for self- and collective-determination. Here, we use it in the sense of an organic on-going process, where knowledge is co-constructed by and with students, yet is oriented toward liberation from structural forms of oppression, manifest presently in the United

States as social justice teaching, Ethnic Studies, anti-racist pedagogy, decolonizing pedagogy, feminist and queer teaching, etc.

2. We are cognizant of the problems with Marx's use of the term 'primitive' in his ethnological notebooks, a term that may reinscribe a Eurocentric, linear narrative of the development of societies. For a poignant discussion on Marx's conceptualization of non-Western and non-Capitalist societies, see Saludijan et al. (2013).

3. I use the term '*Raza*' as a socio-cultural-political identity that is inclusive of working class, Indigenous, *mestizo* and Afro-peoples from Latin America. The term '*Raza*' is synomymous with 'the people' and is similar to notions of the 'subaltern.'

4. The name of the institution is a pseudonym.

5. The learners are termed 'adolescent scholars' to affirm their lived realities and literacies, and to recognize them as organic intellectuals. For more on the orientation that grounds this work, see Golden & Womack (2016).

6. For more on the pedagogical aspects of these projects, and exemplars of student writing on these issues, see Golden (2016).

7. Following this initial project, the adolescent scholars were invited to rewrite the ending of 'Father and Son.' Bert experiences extreme hostility and violence due to his demand for equitable and just interactions, and he does not survive. To engage the radical imaginary, the adolescent scholars were invited to conceive how they would have wanted the short story to end, and they explored a variety of approaches to the struggle for safety, equity, and justice for Bert and other people of color in the American South during this period.

8. For critique of the ways merit and life station are assumed to be tied with deficiencies or choices, see Kirkland, Robinson, Jackson, & Smitherman (2004).

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