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## Comments

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# On Dialectics and Human Decency: Education in the dock

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## Abstract

*Set against the backdrop of the contemporary crisis of capitalism and world-historical events, this article examines the advance of globalized imperialism from the perspective of a Marxist-humanist approach to pedagogy known as ‘revolutionary critical pedagogy’ enriched by liberation theology. It is written as an epistolic manifesto to the transnational capitalist class, demanding that those who willingly serve its interests reconsider their allegiance and calling for a planetary revolution in the way that we both think about capitalism and how education and religion serves to reproduce it at the peril of both students and humanity as a whole.*

Keywords: revolutionary critical pedagogy, globalized imperialism, neoliberal capitalism, market fundamentalism

As critical educators we take pride in our search for meaning, and our metamorphosis of consciousness has taken us along many different paths, to different places, if not in a quest for truth, then at least to purchase a crisper and more perspicuous reality from which to begin a radical reconstruction of society through educational, political and spiritual transformation. What forces are at work to disable our quest are neither apparent nor easily discerned and critical educators have managed to appropriate many different languages with which to navigate the terrain of current educational reform. This article adopts the language of Marxist humanism, revolutionary critical pedagogy and Christian socialism.

What this article recriminates in official education is not only its puerile understanding of the meaning and purpose of public knowledge but its hypocrisy in advocating critical

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This essay is a modified version of a recent article called ‘Education Agonistes’ that was published in *Policy Futures in Education* (McLaren, 2014a). It is also a reworking of a longer article, based on ‘Education Agonistes’ called ‘Comrade Jesus: an epistolic manifesto’ to be published in *Knowledge Cultures* (McLaren, 2014b). I have borrowed some sections of my own work from the following sources: ‘Forward’ in *Inclusive Practices and Social Justice Leadership for Special Populations in Urban Settings: A Moral Imperative* (McLaren, in press); and a promotional blurb for the book, *The Mis-measure of Education* by Jim Horn and Denise Wilburn (2013).

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thinking—as in the case of the recent educational panacea known as ‘common core’—but at the same time publically suturing the goals of education to the imperatives of the capitalist marketplace. The idea of the new global citizen—cobbed together from a production line of critically-minded consumers who have been educated make good purchasing choices—is a squalid concept lost in the quagmire of bad infinity, and will only advance the notion that growth through the expansion of neoliberal capitalism automatically means progress. Critical pedagogy offers an alternative vision and set of goals for the education of humanity. Critical pedagogy is the lucubration of a whole philosophy of praxis that predates Marx and can be found in Biblical texts. If we wish to break from alienated labor then we must break completely with the logic of capitalist accumulation and profit, and this is something to which Marx and Jesus would agree.

It is no exaggeration to say that public education is under threat of extinction. The uneven but inexorable progress of neoliberal economic policies clearly provided the incubus for transferring the magisterium of education in its entirety to the business community. The world-producing power of the corporate media has not only helped to create a privatized, discount store version of democracy that is allied with the arrogance and greed of the ruling class, but it has turned the public against itself in its support of privatizing schools. The chiasm of gloom surrounding public schooling that has been fostered by the corporate attack on teachers, teachers unions and those who see the privatization of education as a consolatory fantasy designed to line the pockets of corporate investors by selling hope to aggrieved communities, is not likely to abate anytime soon.

Erudite expositors on why the ‘what’, ‘how’ and ‘why’ of effective teaching understand that it cannot be adequately demonstrated by sets of algorithms spawned in the ideological laboratories of scientific management at the behest of billionaire investors in instrumentalist approaches to test-based accountability. At a time in which exercises in ‘test prep’ have now supplanted the Pledge of Allegiance as the most generic form of patriotism in our nation’s schools, critical pedagogy serves as a sword of Damocles, hanging over the head of the nation’s educational tribunals and their adsentatores, ingratiators and sycophants in the business community.

In an age of ‘advocacy philanthropy’, where the business elite and other financial opportunists sit comfortably at the helm of educational policy-making, where advocates for programs supported by funds from the student loan business to increase access to college for students who must borrow heavily to attend are not judged to be enemies of democracy but rather held up as examples of good citizenship, and where the overall agenda of educational reform is to establish alternatives to public education at public expense, we shudder at just how retrograde public education has become in their hands.

All of us indignantly reject social inequality as a major impediment to our goals of reforming the state through education, but many of us have chosen to follow a path that takes the struggle against inequality further than simply denouncing the peremptory mandates of austerity capitalism. My own goal has to use education to create critically-minded citizens willing and able to consider alternatives to capitalist value production. One of the major obstacles has been imputing to socialism false maxims that we socialists ‘hate America’ and attributing to us irreformably demonic characteristics—contemporary spin-offs that we are ‘reds’ hiding under America’s ‘beds’. One of the key problems here, of course, is the confusion of capitalism with market anarchy and socialism with

planned production by a centralized state. The bulk of social wealth is consumed not by people but by capital itself. The answer is not to be found in exchange relations in the market but rather the domination of dead over living labor. The inability of capitalism to reproduce its only value-creating substance—labor power—means that capitalism can be defeated. We need a philosophically grounded alternative to capitalism (Hudis, 2012).

The inexorable reprobation to which socialists have been subjected and their execration by the public-at-large has less to do with a willful ignorance than with a learned ignorance created through the decades by the corporate media, an ignorance that Chomsky famously coined as ‘manufacturing consent’. This has led over time to an instinctive repugnance toward socialism and a knee-jerk anti-Marxism. The culpable absence of the public in looking beyond capitalism can be ascribed to many factors, but in particular to a motivated amnesia about the history of class struggle in the United States, to an unscrupulous crusade against welfare and social programs carried out by both Republicans and Democrats, and to a celebratory adherence to official doctrinal propaganda that claims that capitalism might be flawed but it is the only viable alternative for economic prosperity and democracy. The idea of a socialist alternative to capitalism is not an idea that needs to be immediately amenable to scientific investigation. Suffice that for the purposes of this article, we view it as moral exhortation—a categorical imperative, if you will—that some other sustainable form of organization has to be adopted in order for the planet to survive and human and non-human life along with it.

Clearly, this is a pivotal moment for humanity, when the meanings, values and norms of everyday life are arching towards oblivion, following in the debris-strewn wake of Benjamin’s Angel of History; when human beings are being distributed unevenly across the planet as little more than property relations, as ‘surplus populations’; when a culture of slave labor is increasingly defining the workaday world of American cities; when capital’s structurally instantiated ability to supervise our labor, control our investments and purchase our labor power has reached new levels of opprobrium; when those who are habitually relegated to subordinate positions within capital’s structured hierarchies live in constant fear of joblessness and hunger; and when the masses of humanity are in peril of being crushed by the hobnailed boots of Stormtrooper Capitalism. The winds of critical consciousness, enervated by outrage at the profligate use of lies and deceptions by the capitalist class—a class that gorgonizes the public through a winner-takes-all market fundamentalism and corporate-driven media spectacles—are stirring up the toxic debris from our austerity-gripped and broken humanity. Wearing the nationalist armor of settler-colonial societies, capitalism subordinates human beings to things, splitting human beings off from themselves, slicing them into pieces of the American Dream with the nonchalant dexterity of the Iron Chef wielding an eight-inch Honbazuka-processed knife.

Greg Palast (2013) has exposed what he calls the ‘End Game Memo’ which signaled part of the plan created by the top US Treasury officials to conspire ‘with a small cabal of banker big-shots to rip apart financial regulation across the planet’. In the late 1990s, the US Treasury Secretary, Robert Rubin, and Deputy Treasury Secretary, Larry Summers, were frenetically pushing to deregulate banks, and they joined forces with some of the most powerful Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) on the planet to make sure that this was accomplished. The ‘end game’ was tricky and seemed indomitable because it required the repeal of the Glass–Steagall Act to dismantle the barrier between

commercial banks and investment banks. Palast describes it as ‘replacing bank vaults with roulette wheels’. The banks wanted to venture into the high-risk game of ‘derivatives trading’ which allowed banks to carry trillions of dollars of pseudo-securities on their books as ‘assets’. But the transformation of US banks into ‘derivatives casinos’ would be hampered if money fled US shores to nations with safer banking laws.

So this small cabal of banksters decided—and were successful—at eliminating controls on banks in every nation on the planet—in a single cunning stroke by using the Financial Services Agreement (FSA). The FSA was an addendum to the international trade agreements policed by the World Trade Organization that was utilized by the banksters to force countries to deal with trade in ‘toxic’ assets such as financial derivatives. Every nation was thus pushed to open their markets to Citibank, JP Morgan and their derivatives ‘products’. All 156 nations in the World Trade Organization were pressured to remove their own Glass–Steagall divisions between commercial savings banks and the investment banks that gamble with derivatives. All nations were bribed or forced in other ways to comply and only Brazil refused to play the game. Of course, as Palast notes, the game destroyed countries like Greece, Ecuador and Argentina, just to name a few, and contributed catastrophically to the global financial crisis of 2008.

Amidst the turmoil and conflagration of the current historical moment, capitalism keeps a steady hand with the flippant arrogance of the most famous smirking apologist of US imperialism, William F. Buckley, his Yale-educated tongue wagging jauntily from the pillow-feathered cloud of his heavenly perch as he adroitly deploys his clipboard-prop gently upon his succulent lap, otherwise reserved for his King Charles spaniels. There seems to be nothing standing in the way of capitalism’s continuation, save a few irritants in the alternative media that are flippantly swatted away from time to time, like flies on the arse of a barnyard goat. Today’s unrelenting urgency of redeeming life from the belligerent forces of social reproduction—the internally differentiated expanding whole of value production, inside of which is coiled an incubus—marks a watershed in the history of this planet.

The paradigmatic innovation of anti-colonial analysis in North America has been significantly impacted by what has been taking place since capital began responding to the crisis of the 1970s of Fordist–Keynesian capitalism—which William Robinson (1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2011a, 2011b) has characterized as capital’s ferocious quest to break free of nation-state constraints to accumulation and twentieth-century regulated capital (labor relations based on some [at least a few] reciprocal commitments and rights)—a move which has seen the development of a new transnational model of accumulation in which transnational fractions of capital have become dominant. New mechanisms of accumulation, as Robinson notes, include a cheapening of labor and the growth of flexible, deregulated and de-unionized labor, where women always experience super-exploitation in relation to men; the dramatic expansion of capital itself; the creation of a global and regulatory structure to facilitate the emerging global circuits of accumulation; and, finally, neo-liberal structural adjustment programs which seek to create the conditions for unfettered operations of emerging transnational capital across borders and between countries.

In my work with teachers, education scholars, political activists and revolutionaries worldwide, I have repeatedly visited mean and lonely streets that span numerous counties, countries and continents. Whether I have been visiting the Roma district of Budapest, the

barrios on the outskirts of Medellin, the cartel-controlled neighborhoods of Morelia or Juarez, the favelas of Rio or Sao Paulo, the crowded alleys of Delhi, the alleyways of Harbin (near the Siberian border), or the streets of South Central Los Angeles, I have encountered pain and despair among the many as a result of the exploitation by the few. Whether I have been speaking to hitchhikers caught in a snowstorm, Vietnam vets in overflowing homeless shelters, elderly workers in emergency warming centers whose food stamps had just been cut by Republican legislation, jobless men and women resting on pillows of sewer steam wafting through the cast iron grates of litter-strewn streets, a group of teenagers hanging out in strip malls festooned with faded pockmarked signs offering discount malt liquor, or day laborers crowded around hole-in-the-walls offering cheap pizza, I hear the same voices of desperation and resignation. Even in such concrete situations that reek of economic catastrophism, I would like to stress the importance of philosophy. That is, class struggle as cultivating a philosophy of praxis.

Class struggle appears not to be a popular topic in universities today, at least not throughout the United States. A fresh new breed of postmodern rebels festooned with brand-name-theory knock-offs and thrift-shop identity politics now exercise their fashionable apostasy in the new techno-mediated social factories known as universities. They are very much present in our graduate education programs through their postmodern theorizing of identity, which hinges on the linkage of identity-formation and the creation of a discount store version of democracy as a mixture of meritocracy and the American Dream. Rather than challenging the marriage of the university and the capitalist class or fighting for the emancipation of the oppressed worldwide through pedagogies of liberation that have a transnational reach, class antagonisms are universally normalized through the pettifoggery, the sophistry, the pseudo-profundities, the convulsions and casuistries of political disengagement and the vertigo-inducing terminology that has distinguished these disquieting hellions of the lecture hall over the past few decades—not to mention their dismissal of class struggle in favor of questions of ethnicity, race, gender and sexuality. This domestication of the economic and divine activation of the cultural has led to the exfoliation of some of the most verdant contributions of socialist pedagogy during these decades. From this vantage point, postmodernism appears to be an ideology of the prosperous, ‘which itself is a product of the type of capitalism that arose in the imperialist core of contemporary capitalism during the “Golden Age of Capitalism” between 1945 and 1973’ (Ahmad, 2011, p. 16). If, during these years of prosperity, creating a democracy embracive of economic equality in the United States was about as realistic as Astroland’s Burger Man seizing the controls on the rocket ship that sat atop Gregory and Paul’s Hamburgers on Coney Island, and orbiting it around the Statue of Liberty, then economic equality through education today is about as realistic as the National Rifle Association calling for a ban on assault weapons, or McDonalds eliminating the Big Mac. Much of the self-styled brigandage exercised by these postmodern outlaws involves turning away from the cultural and claiming to be materialists. But this so-called productive materialism grounded in immanence equates the material with the ‘thing-ness’ of signs, symbols, discourses, values—part of the cultural ‘real’—rather than with how the mode of production of material life and social being determines consciousness. Teresa Ebert (2009) sees this move as a return to 18th century matterism that stipulates experience as the limit of what can be known.

Regrettably, in this milieu Marx's ideas become increasingly domesticated, and not all the blame lies with the postmodern hispters of the seminar rooms. Marx's ideas have been increasingly ripped out of their revolutionary soil by decades of toxic bombardment by the corporate media and repotted in glasshouse megastores where, under hydrofarm compact fluorescent fixtures, they can be deracinated, debarked and made safe for university seminars and condominium living alike, and made palatable for highly committed twentysomethings who like to whistle to ballpark tunes in their faux-Victorian bathtubs.

Erstwhile radicals once sympathetic to Marx but who became disillusioned and disgusted by revelations about the Gulag, and traumatized by the failure of 'really existing socialism' worried that they would be condemned as dusty dilettantes still clinging to the paltry spirit of socialism (or worse, traduced as Stalinists). They decided instead to ride the new wave of postmodern social theory that embraced a linguistic turn and managed in turn to find comfortable abodes in literature and cultural studies departments. Positioning themselves thus enabled them both to smite the gross profligacy of the capitalist class and its command structure comprised of greedy corporatists and bankers with self-aggrandizing tirades and at the same time put paid to their academic critics by adopting a more digestible 'deconstruction'. This was a deft academic move that allowed them to assume a political agenda through a stringent labyrinth of explanations yet without dragging research and scholarship away from the compromise of incremental reformism. Here, the institutional framework informed by neoliberal assumptions is already prejudged as the only rational framework for a society bent on justice, and unwittingly supported by a postmodern embrace of playfulness and the undecidability of the sign.

Reveling in the sagacity of cultural criticism and eager to keep their gladiatorial attitude in tact without suffering an unsettling cost for their radicalism, these prodigies of cosmopolitan learning embraced an unutterably reactionary 'anti-foundationalism' that condemns all 'master narratives' of progress. Marx would occasionally find a polemical way into some of the debates but was mostly banished from serious consideration. And while the work of Marx is a bit more fashionable these days, with the current crisis of neoliberal capitalism, the postmodernists have to a large extent fallen into tacit agreement with their modernist adversaries and pushed themselves into self-limiting alliances with liberals. By leaving the challenge to capitalism untouched their politics eventually and unwittingly colludes with those whom they despise.

In the arena of educational reform, these defanged revolutionaries abraided the cause of their more militant colleagues often with self-serving maunderings and sententious commentary about educational reform that are mere coinages of the general currency used in mainstream educational debates, never challenging the primacy of capital. Here we need to recall the storied comment by Benjamin (1936) that those who call for a purely cultural or spiritual revolution without changing asymmetrical relations of power and privilege linked to class antagonisms can only be served by the logic of fascism and authoritarian political movements.

And then there are the Marxists who attempt to descry the positivity ensepulchered within the negativity of Hegel's absolutes but who are shunned for their embrace of a dialectics of transcendence (transcendence could lead to the Gulag again, it is much safer to remain in a politics of immanence). The Marxist-humanist position that emphasizes transcendence, the position to which I ascribe, holds that we are the flesh-and-blood idea of

capital, waxed fat from our complicity in advancing class society and in doing so enabling millions to be exiled into Marx's reserve army of workers (the unemployed). Thus we need to break out of the social universe of value production by creating a democratic alternative.

My agnostic relationship to liberal modernity with its emphasis on the apolitical drama of personal development while crucifying class struggle on the altar of culture such that the politics of 'representation' is substituted for a politics of 'revolution', does not mean that I rely on some ghostly psychopomp for advice; rather, I ascribe to the concept of praxis (an ordered chaos or irrational regularity) without retreating into the hinterlands of metaphysics and in doing so express critical pedagogy in germinal form as a philosophy of praxis, steering a path between the Scylla of an intractable rationalism and the Charybdis of metaphysical ravings.

The annihilation of humanity that capitalism prosecutes with such an illustrious savagery is not some ramped-up bit of catastrophism, but the foundation of civilization's unfinished obelisk, against which we can only smash our heads in horror and disbelief. The chilling realization is that eco-apocalypse is not just some fodder for science fiction movie fans who revel in dystopian plots, but the future anterior of world history that is upon us. Under the guise of responsible job-producing growth ('jobs for the jobless'), we have an infestation of eco-fascisms, whose distracting sheen belies the horrors lurking underneath the surface. Preoccupied with the beautiful translucent hues of a soap bubble catching the noonday sun as it floats aimlessly down a seaside boardwalk, courtesy of a bulbous-nosed local clown, we fail to notice the fish floating upside down amidst the rank and stink of the nearby ocean sewage. As our biosphere goes, so goes the public sphere, including public schooling, with its mania for high-stakes testing, accountability, total quality management and a blind passion for privatization (which usually begins with private-public partnerships), effectively dismantling a public education system that it took 200 years to build.

Capitalism is more than the sheet anchor of institutionalized avarice and greed, more than excrement splattered on the coat-tails of perfumed bankers and well-heeled speculators—it is a 'world-eater' with an insatiable appetite. Capital has strapped us to the slaughter bench of history, from which we must pry ourselves free to continue our work of class and cultural struggle, creating working-class solidarity, an integral value system and internal class logic capable of countering the hegemony of the bourgeoisie, while at the same time increasing class consensus and popular support. Inherent in capitalist societies marked by perpetual class warfare and the capitalist mode of production is structural violence of a scale so staggering that it can only be conceived as structural genocide. Garry Leech (2012) has argued convincingly and with a savage aplomb that capitalist-induced violence is structural in nature and, indeed, constitutes genocide.

The hyperbolic rhetoric of the fascist imaginary spawned by the recent 2008 recession is likely to be especially acute in the churches and communities affiliated with conservative groups who want a return to the economic practices that were responsible for the very crisis they are now railing against, but who are now, of course, blaming it on bank bailouts, immigration and the deficit. Fascist ideology is not something that burrows its way deep inside the structural unconscious of the United States from the outside, past the gatekeepers of our everyday psyche; it is a constitutive outgrowth of the logic of capital in crisis that can be symptomatically read through a neoliberal individualism enabled by a

normative, value-free absolutism and a neofeudal/authoritarian pattern of social interaction. The United States has managed to conjure for itself—mainly through its military might and the broad spectacle of human slaughter made possible by powerful media apparatuses whose stock-in-trade includes portraying the United States as a democracy under siege by evil forces that are ‘jealous’ of its freedoms—a way to justify and sanctify their frustrations and hatreds, and reconstitute American exceptionalism amidst the rampant violence, prolonged social instability, drug abuse and breakdown of the US family. Of course, all of this works in concert with the thunderous call of Christian evangelicals to repent and heed God’s prophets, and to welcome the fact that the United States has been anointed as the apotheosis of divine violence. Plain-spoken declarations abound, dripping with apocalyptic grandiosity, for dismantling the barriers of church and state, and creating a global Christian empire. This should not sound unusual for a country in which rule by violence was the inaugurating law, and which has, through the century, marked its citizenry indelibly in their interactions with others.

In the midst of the current epochal crisis, the US Department of Education and its spokespersons in the corporate media are diverting us away from the central issues of the crisis of capitalism and the ecological crisis by turning our attention to the failure of public schools (McLaren, 2006, 2012). They propose, as a solution, to smash public schools and the commons by unleashing the hurricane of privatization (the term hurricane is metaphorically appropriate here in a double sense, since New Orleans went from a public school system to a charter school city after Hurricane Katrina [see *Democracy Now*, 2007]), causing unionized teachers to drop from 4700 to 500. Of course, this is not symptomatic only of the United States. We are facing the imperatives of the transnational capitalist class and so the challenge to public education is occurring on a transnational scale.

Yet violence is not simply linked to financial indexes, as frightening as those have been of late. Violence is more than a series of contingencies unleashed by the labor/capital antagonism that drives the engines of capitalism. It is more than a series of historical accidents transformed into a necessity. In fact, it is the very founding act of US civilization. While violence can be traced to worldwide social polarization linked to the phenomenon of capitalist over-accumulation and attempts by the transnational capitalist class to sustain profit-making by means of militarized accumulation, financial speculation and the plundering of public finance (Robinson, 2008), it can also be traced historically to epistemologies of violence and linked to the genocides brought about by the invasion and colonization of the Americas (Grosfoguel, 2013). Here, violence can be viewed as foundational to the Cartesian logic of Western epistemology, as the universal truth upon which all our understandings of the world must rely. Such violence can be seen across a host of institutional structures, including education, and in particular through ‘banking’ approaches to teaching that preclude dialogue and thus privilege Western epistemology, omitting and systematically erasing other worldviews. Indeed, Paulo Freire would maintain that dialogue necessarily brings forth the epistemologies grounded in particular social positions. Not surprisingly, the historical conditions that have brought us to a place of Western domination are linked to ‘undialogic’ social relations (Grosfoguel, 2013).

Ramón Grosfoguel, Enrique Dussel, Anibal Quijano and other decolonial thinkers have argued convincingly that the *ego cogito* (‘I think, therefore I am’) which underwrites

Descartes's concept of modernity replaced the prior Christian dominant perspective with a secular, but God-like, unsituated and monolithic politics of knowledge, attributed mainly to white European men. The presumed separation and superiorization of mind over body of the *ego cogito* establishes a knowledge system dissociated from the body's positioning in time and space, and achieves a certitude of knowledge—as if inhabiting a solipsistic universe—by means of an internal monologue, isolated from social relations with other human beings (Grosfoguel, 2013). This *ego cogito* did not suddenly drop from the sky; it arose out of the historical and epistemic conditions of possibility developed through the *ego conquiro* ('I conquer, therefore I am'), and the link between the two is the *ego extermino* ('I exterminate you, therefore I am').

Grosfoguel and Dussel maintain that the *ego conquiro* is the foundation of the 'Imperial Being', which began with European colonial expansion in 1492, when white men began to think of themselves as the center of the world because they had conquered the world. The *ego extermino* is the logic of genocide/epistemicide that mediates the 'I conquer' with the epistemic racism/sexism of the 'I think' as the new foundation of knowledge in the modern/colonial world. More specifically, the *ego extermino* can be situated in the four genocides/epistemicides of the sixteenth century, which were carried out

- 1) against Muslims and Jews in the conquest of Al-Andalus in the name of 'purity of blood';
- 2) against indigenous peoples first in the Americas and then in Asia;
- 3) against African people with the captive trade and their enslavement in the Americas;
- 4) against women who practiced and transmitted Indo-European knowledge in Europe burned alive accused of being witches. (Grosfoguel, 2013, p. 77)

According to Grosfoguel (2013), these four genocides are interlinked and 'constitutive of the modern/colonial world's epistemic structures' and Western male epistemic privilege, and we can certainly see these genocides reflected in the founding of the United States, in particular the massacre of indigenous peoples, the transatlantic slave trade and the Salem witch trials.

This genocidal history has been repressed in the structural unconscious of the nation (the term 'structural unconscious' is taken from Lichtman, 1982). The assertion here is that the contradiction between the claims of ideology and the actual structure of social power, and the need to defend oneself against socially constructed antagonisms, is the primary challenge that faces the ego. The function of the structural unconscious is therefore to reconcile reality and ideology at the level of the nation state, and this requires conceptual structures to help citizens adjust to its genocidal history (McLaren, 1999; Monzó & McLaren, 2014). These structures comprise the foundations for coping strategies and are provided by the myths of democracy, rugged individualism and White supremacy that lie at the heart of US capitalist society. Racialized violence is the domestic expression of the American structural unconscious, whose function is to provide psychic power to the myth of America's providential history—that as a country it has been ordained by providence to democratize and civilize the heathen world. The structural unconscious is the lifeblood of the national religion of genocide (Monzó & McLaren, 2014). It continues to legitimize genocide, ecocide and epistemicide (the obliteration of indigenous ecosystems of the mind).

Today, we see this totalizing effect on America's structural unconscious as we live out our lives through the whims of the market, seeking happiness in an ever increasing consumption of things we feel we need and justifying our superficial existence as the 'successful' outcome of our 'hard work'. We have stopped questioning, and perhaps even caring as a society, why some people are more deserving than others of the basic necessities of life—food, health and dignity—and simply accepted the myth that some people do not work hard enough to get ahead, and that individual social ascendance based on presumed merits and motivation is just and right—that our existence alone is not sufficient to deserve basic human needs and that these must be 'earned'. Likewise, we have stopped questioning who benefits from the chaos that exists in particular communities, and have accepted that the natural world has been antiseptically cleaved and cordoned off into binary oppositions—wealthy/poor, white/of color—and that it is the providential role of the United States to 'democratize' by means of our mighty arsenal of weapons those populations who threaten our economic interests and geopolitical advantage. We operate, of course, by the divine mandate that mere mortals must simply accept—that accepting our role as the global policeman is 'God's will' and is as 'good' for us as it is for the rest of the world.

I wish to make a few comments about critical pedagogy as a lodestone through which we can consider how to organize the social division of labor and the realm of necessity, so as to enable humans to satisfy their social and individual needs. This is a daunting challenge, given that public education today is all but dead yet refuses to acknowledge its own demise, and its once proud luminaries fail to see how capitalism is one of the key factors that bears much of the responsibility. The terms of the debate over what to do with education's rotting carcass are selectively adduced by blue-chip brokers in the flora-stuffed, starched-linen breakfast rooms of expensive hotels to remind the public in opulently elusive ways that the importance of education today revolves around increasing the range of educational choices available to communities by privatizing education. Consequently, the debate today—which could only be described as death-haunted and excremental—has an uncompromisingly narrow and understocked conceptual vocabulary, consisting of pithy yet comparatively slippery terms such as 'free choice', 'common core', 'competency-based education' and 'accountability', all bound up in a supererogatory embrace of democracy. Competencies, which clearly define what students will accomplish to demonstrate learning for a workforce-related need, are an improvement in some ways—i.e. students can better pace themselves—but ultimately these competencies must be rendered measurable. All of these terms, of course, are endlessly retranscribable depending on what educational crisis happens to be the public's flavor of the month.

The emergence of Massive Open Online Courses, adaptive learning environments, peer-to-peer learning platforms, third-party service providers, and new online learning technology, and increased emphasis on learning outcomes and assessment, obscures the question of why we are educating students in the first place. Standardized testing occupies a world where the humanity of students is enslaved to a particular analytic structure, combining instrumental reason, positivism and one-dimensional objectivity. Its heteronomous dogma is all about increasing control of our external and internal nature, creating a reified consciousness in which the wounds of our youth are hidden behind the armor of instrumentality. Reason has become irrational as the animate is confused

with the inanimate; students are turned into objects where the imprint of unbeing is left upon being.

Higher education pundits are propitious for saying that university education creates democratic citizens who are ready to take the hefty helm of government and steer it to glory. Yet the hysterical nucleus of capitalism—in which systems of higher education are inextricably embedded—is one in which the labor of the working class is alienated and in which the surplus value created by workers in the normal functioning of the economic process is appropriated by the capitalist. The workers are paid wages that are less than the price of the force of labor expended in their work. This value beyond the price of labor is surplus labor and is made possible only because the workers themselves do not possess the means of production. All the good works made possible by higher education are calamitously wasted in the pursuit of profit. While cautiously adjusting its role to the fluctuating needs of capital, and vigorously safeguarding its connections to corporate power, higher education has become unknowingly imprinted with an astonishing variety of reactionary social practices as it unsuccessfully tries to hide that it is in cahoots with the repressive state apparatuses and the military-industrial complex, and works to create the hive known as the national security state. Impecunious students are taught to be dedicated to the hive (as indentured servants as a result of soaring tuition fees), which is conditioned by the pathogenic pressures of profit-making. Within the hive, the capitalist unconscious turns murderously upon what is left of the Enlightenment as the irresolutely corporate conditions under which knowledge is produced reduce the products of the intellect to inert commodities. Higher education offers mainly on-the-cheap analyses of how capitalism impacts the production of knowledge and fails, in the main, to survey ways of creating an alternative social universe unburdened by value formation, and, in the end, offers us little more than a vision of a discount-store democracy. In making capitalism aprioristic to civilized societies, corporate education has replaced stakeholders with shareholders and has become the unthinkable extremity towards which education is propelled under the auspices of the cash nexus—propelled by a hunger for profit as unfillable as a black hole that would extinguish use value if allowed to run its course.

Under earlier dispensations, education had many names—it was paidea, it was critical citizenship, it was counter-hegemonic, it was transformational, it was a lot of things. Over time, its descriptions changed as its objects changed, and now it is distinguished by a special nomenclature most often drawn from the world of management and business. While critical educators have striven to formulate their work clearly, and have defended their arguments with formidable weapons of dialectical reasoning, there is a new call by some Marxists and eco-pedagogues to expand the struggle as anti-capitalist agitation. This is to be welcomed, of course, but education as a revolutionary process will likely not seem time-honored enough for most readers to take seriously, with the exception perhaps of the work of Paulo Freire, whose storied corpus of texts exerts a continuous subterranean pressure on the critical tradition, and amply and brilliantly demonstrates its best features.

And what of Obama? Do his policies demonstrate the best features of liberal democracy and so many of us had hoped? Clearly and without question, Obama has hurt education reform immeasurably. Obama has really carried over the George Bush Jr initiatives and rebranded them with some cosmetic touches. You are not a good

educational leader when your Race to the Top initiatives tie federal funds for states and localities to their use of assessments of national ‘college and career readiness’ standards; when you set yourself on a mission to privatize or quasi-privatize public schools through an expansion of charter schools; when you evaluate teachers by linking an individual teacher’s salary and employment status to student test scores; or when you pink slip teachers and principals in schools that have been designated as failing schools; and especially when your entire philosophy of education is driven by the logic of assessment and competition that includes merit pay for teachers, etc. To use federal leverage to get your initiatives in place, to sow distrust of public schools and to give preferential treatment to charter schools (that do not do as well as public schools overall even though they can cherry-pick their students and can refuse to admit students with learning disabilities), to create such a mess that teacher drop-out rates are at an all time high—the voluntary drop out rate for teachers is higher than the failure rate of students as nationally, 16% leave after the first year and approximately 45% leave within five years—is to give educational reform another kick in the teeth. Whether it is a Democrat or Republican in the White House does not seem to matter—the Democratic will wear hobnailed boots to kick out your teeth, the Republicans will use army surplus store boots from the invasion of Iraq to do the job.

What punishment is due to war criminals such as Obama? Dipping his Aesopian tongue in kerosene and igniting it with a smoldering lump of coal from the fire around which Afghan tribal leaders sit to mourn the death of family members, whose families have lost relatives in Obama’s drone attacks? Will there ever be any justice in this regard for two US presidents who, after September 11, 2001 (9/11), launched two wars that have killed more than a million people and contributed to ongoing instability and violence that continue to this day? If we can put aside for a moment the sentimental inducements that accompany discussions of 9/11 in the public square, there is another 9/11 that we need to take into consideration: September 11, 1973, when Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger helped to orchestrate a coup of Salvador Allende’s government in Chile. Mark Weisbrot quotes Richard Nixon on why he wanted the Allende socialist government to be overthrown:

President Richard Nixon was clear, at least in private conversations, about why he wanted the coup that destroyed one [of] the hemisphere’s longest-running democracies, from his point of view: ‘The main concern in Chile is that [President Salvador Allende] can consolidate himself, and the picture projected to the world will be his success . . . . If we let the potential leaders in South America think they can move like Chile and have it both ways, we will be in trouble’. (Weisbrot, 2013)

Nixon and Kissinger led the way in Chile for a rule of terror by coup leader Augusto Pinochet, to whom they gave the green light to assassinate Allende and strategic assistance from the US military:

The U.S. government was one of the main organisers and perpetrators of the September 11, 1973 military coup in Chile, and these perpetrators also changed the world—of course much for the worse. The coup snuffed out

an experiment in Latin American social democracy, established a military dictatorship that killed, tortured, and disappeared tens of thousands of people, and for a quarter-century mostly prevented Latin Americans from improving their living standards and leadership through the ballot box. (Weisbrot, 2013)

The rule of terror in Chile, courtesy of the US government, is nothing new. The Vietnam War is closer to home for most Americans. Listening to the transcripts of White House tape recordings between President Nixon and his advisors on April 25, 1972, and May, 1972 leads us to believe that the outcome could have been much worse for the North Vietnamese:

*President Nixon:* How many did we kill in Laos?

*National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger:* In the Laotian thing, we killed about ten, fifteen [thousand] ...

*Nixon:* See, the attack in the North [Vietnam] that we have in mind ... power plants, whatever's left—POL [petroleum], the docks ... And, I still think we ought to take the dikes out now. Will that drown people?

*Kissinger:* About two hundred thousand people.

*Nixon:* No, no, no ... I'd rather use the nuclear bomb. Have you got that, Henry?

*Kissinger:* That, I think, would just be too much.

*Nixon:* The nuclear bomb, does that bother you? ... I just want you to think big, Henry, for Christsakes. (Blum, 2014)

May 2, 1972:

*Nixon:* America is not defeated. We must not lose in Vietnam. ... The surgical operation theory is all right, but I want that place bombed to *smithereens*. If we draw the sword, we're gonna bomb those bastards all over the place. Let it fly, *let it fly*. (Blum, 2014)

I have advocated for a critical patriotism (McLaren, 2013) in my work in critical pedagogy, a pedagogy that would identify and condemn crimes against humanity perpetrated by the United States, as a way of avoiding future tragedies. As a way of countering the attitude of government advisors such as Michael Ledeen, former Defense Department consultant and holder of the Freedom Chair at the American Enterprise Institute, who opines sardonically: 'Every ten years or so, the United States needs to pick up some small crappy little country and throw it against the wall, just to show the world we mean business' (Blum, 2014). In high school history classes, we do not hear much about the US atrocities during the Philippine–American War (1899–1902), the coup in Chile or about Pinochet's feared Caribellos; or the assassinations of Catholic priests organizing cooperatives in the Guatemalan towns of Quetzaltenango, Huehuetenango, San Marcos and Sololá; or the failed coup against the Venezuelan government of Hugo Chávez in 2002; or the role of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in destabilizing Latin American and Middle Eastern regimes throughout the centuries; or the history of the United States as the supreme master of focused and unidirectional aggression, whose intransigent martial will has made it the most feared country in history. Nor do we learn about the Zapatista uprising which occurred as a result of government oppression in the towns of the Selva, Altos, Norte and Costa regions of Chiapas, and took place in San Cristóbal de las

Casas, Las Margaritas, Altamirano, Oxchuc, Huixtán, Chanal and Ocosingo, and involved Tzotzils, Tzeltals, Tojolabals, Chols, Mams and Zoques.

What is of most concern in teacher education programs is not the impact that neoliberal capitalism has had on the way the United States deals with questions of public and foreign policy, and the implications of this for developing a critical approach to citizenship. What occupies the curricula in teacher education is the question of race and gender and sexual identity formations. And while, in itself, this is an important emphasis, identity formation is rarely problematized against the backdrop of social class and poverty, and the history of US imperialism. I do not want to downplay the importance of the struggles over race or gender or sexuality, and the history of the civil rights struggle. But I believe that it is necessary to see such antagonisms both in relationship to a geopolitics of knowledge and in terms of the ways in which capitalism has reconstituted itself over the years.

We do more than embrace the Geist of solidarity; we work towards its world-historical attainment in the pursuit of truth. A commitment to truth is never unproductive because no transformative act can be accomplished without commitment. No true act of commitment is an exit from the truth, but tramps down a path along which truth is won (Fischman & McLaren, 2005). I do not want to use my political imagination to create something new out of the debris of the old, because that leads us to adapt our revolutionary work to that which already exists. My concern is to struggle to change the conditions of what already exists and to liberate agency for its own conditions of possibility in order to create what was thought to be impossible.

### **A New Epistemological Alternative**

To look mainly to the European social tradition for guidance in the belief that the struggle for a socialist alternative to capitalism is the monopoly of the West would be to succumb to the most crude provinciality and a truncated ethnocentrism. Thomas Fatheuer (2011) has examined recent innovative aspects in the constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia. In Ecuador, for instance, the right to a ‘good life’—*buen vivir*—becomes a central objective, a bread-and-butter concern that cannot be relinquished. One of the subsections of the constitution deals with the rights to nutrition, health, education and water, for example. The concept of the good life here is more than economic, social and cultural rights. It is a basic principle that ‘forms the foundation of a new development model (*régimen de desarrollo*)’ (Fatheuer, 2011, p. 16). Article 275 states: ‘*Buen Vivir* requires that individuals, communities, peoples and nations are in actual possession of their rights and exercise their responsibilities in the context of interculturalism, respect for diversity and of harmonious coexistence with nature’ (cited in Fatheuer, 2011, p. 16). Fatheuer distinguishes the concept of *buen vivir* from the Western idea of prosperity as follows:

*Buen Vivir* is not geared toward ‘having more’ and does not see accumulation and growth, but rather a state of equilibrium as its goal. Its reference to the indigenous world view is also central: its starting point is not progress or growth as a linear model of thinking, but the attainment and reproduction of the equilibrium state of *Sumak Kausay*. (Fatheuer, 2011, p. 16)

Both Bolivia and Ecuador have utilized their constitutions to re-establish their states in a postcolonial context and are committed to the concept of plurinationalism and the preservation of nature. Here, the state promotes the ethical and moral principles of pluralistic society:

*amaqhilla, ama llulla, ama suwa* (do not be lazy, do not lie, do not steal), *suma qamaña* (*vive bien*), *ñandereko* (*vida armoniosa*—harmonious life), *teko kavi* (*vida buena*), *ivi maraei* (*tierra sin mal*—Earth without evil, also translated as ‘intact environment’), and *qhapaj ñan* (*Camino o vida noble*—the path of wisdom). (Fatheuer, 2011, pp. 17–18)

The concept of *Pachamama* (‘Mother Earth’) and the rights of nature play a special role, designed to put human beings and nature on a foundation of originality, mutuality and dialogue, and the Defensoría de la Madre Tierra statute is designed to ‘monitor the validity, promotion, dissemination and implementation of the rights of *Madre Tierra*’, and forbid the marketing of Mother Earth (Fatheuer, 2011, p. 18). Here it is stipulated that the earth has a right to regenerate itself. It is important to point out that *buen vivir* is not a return to ancestral, traditional thinking, but is a type of *ch’ixi*, or a concept where something can exist and not exist at the same time—in other words, a third state where modernity is not conceived as homogeneous, but as *ciudadanía*, or ‘difference’; a biocentric world view that permits the simultaneous existence of contradictory states without the need for resolution towards a given pole, and that conceives of life in a way which is not informed by the opposition of nature and humans (Fatheuer, 2011). New indigenous discourses in Bolivia and those articulated by the Confederation of Indigenous Discourses of Ecuador advocate for an integral philosophy and a new plurinational, communitarian, collective, egalitarian, multilingual, intercultural and bio-socialist vision of sustainable development. They fight against a capitalism that militates against harmony inside and between society and nature (Altmann, 2013). Interculturality is seen as a relational and a structural transformation and an instrument of decolonization. It is something that must be created and it refers not only to groups but also structures based on respect, cultural heterogeneity, participative self-representation, communitarian forms of authority, mutual legitimacy, equity, symmetry and equality, and is applicable to monoethnic and multiethnic territories. Here, interculturality in combination with plurinationality is linked to a postcolonial refoundation of the modern state (Altmann, 2012).

John P. Clark (2013), in his magnificent work *The Impossible Community*, has offered an array of possible approaches to take from the perspective of communitarian anarchism. These include a revised version of the libertarian municipalism of the late Murray Bookchin, the Gandhian Sarvodaya movement in India, and the related movement in Sri Lanka called Sarvodaya Shramadana—the Gandhian approach to self-rule and voluntary redistribution of land as collective property to be managed by means of the *gram sabha* (‘village assembly’) and the *panchayat* (‘village committee’). Sarvodaya Shramadana offers four basic virtues: *upekkha* (‘mental balance’), *metta* (‘goodwill towards all beings’), *karma* (‘compassion for all beings who suffer’) and *mundita* (‘sympathetic joy for all those liberated from suffering’). Clark’s (2013) work focuses on the tragedies and contradictions of development and his discussion of India is particularly insightful (see especially pp. 217–245 and the eloquently informative review of Clark’s book by Sethness, 2013). More

familiar to teachers are perhaps the examples of the Zapatistas and the Landless Peasants' Movement in Brazil. Clark mentions, as well, the indigenous Adivasi struggles and those by Dalits, fighting the paramilitaries of the transnational mining communities in India.

Instead of reducing citizens and non-citizens alike to their racialized and gendered labor productivity, as is the case with the neoliberal state apparatus, we wish to introduce the term *buen vivir* as an opposing logic to the way we approach our formation as citizen-subjects. We would advise the guardians of the neoliberal state—especially those who are now in the 'business' of education—to look towards *Las Américas* for new conceptions of democratic life that could serve as a means of breaking free from the disabling logic of neoliberalism that now engulfs the planet—a new epistemology of living that has so far not been a casualty of the epistemicide of the conquistadores past and present. We still adhere to the proposition that the human mind lives in a largely self-created world of illusion and error, a defective system of false reality from whence we can be rescued only by the development of a critical self-reflexive subjectivity and protagonistic agency. But we would add that such self-creation occurs under conditions not of our own making. Many of those conditions have been created by social relations of production and the way in which neoliberal capitalism has produced nature–human relations as a total world ecology linked to a racialized social division of labor and hyper-nationalism. Critical consciousness here becomes the inverse equivalent of the ignorance of our false consciousness under capitalist social relations of exploitation and alienation. Hence, we seek a social universe outside of the commodification of human labor, a universe deepened by direct and participatory democracy and a quest for *buen vivir*. Clearly, while we need a new epistemology of *buen vivir* and of Sarvodaya Shramadana to help stave off the epistemicide of indigenous knowledges by means of violent Eurocentric practices, we also need a class struggle of transnational reach.

If the new generation is to help throw off the chains forged by the centuries-old dogma of the capitalist class, then we cannot leave this challenge only to our youth. We need to offer them hope, but hope at the expense of truth can turn optimism into feelings of omnipotence and can lead to a fatal outbreak of hubris. We need to conjugate our hope with seeking new pathways to justice, despite the grim reality that the odds are not in our favor, and perhaps never will be.

Critical revolutionary pedagogy is non-sectarian and emphasizes ecumenical approaches, attempting to incorporate a Marxist humanist critique of alienation under capitalism into the doxa of critical pedagogy—a move that recognizes consciousness and external reality as constitutively entangled, and asserts that there must be an ethical dimension which gives priority to the oppressed, thereby rejecting many of the 'diamat' tendencies that held sway in the former Soviet Union and Eastern bloc countries. Such tendencies maintained that they could uncover a transparent reflection of reality and that a focus on human consciousness, self-management and agency within popularly based social movements was unscientific, and that the central focus should be on social relations of production. By contrast, human agency and human needs are not conceptualized by Marxist humanists as secondary or epiphenomenal to objective social forces. Consequently, reform and revolution are not mutually antagonistic relationships, but must be understood in a dialectical relationship to each other. Dialectics does not juxtapose reform and revolution, but mediates them as a 'both–and' relationship rather than an 'either–or' relationship. The same is true with ecology and the grounding antagonism

between capital and labor, such that class struggle is at one and the same time an ecological struggle, taking to heart the Earth First slogan that there can be ‘no jobs on a dead planet’.

Even the illustrious Marcuse in his *Great Refusal* (his analysis of the predatory capitalist system and neoconservatism or what he referred to as ‘counterrevolution’) displaces the dialectical quality of classical Hegelian and Marxist philosophy, betraying an incapacity to overcome contradiction in his lurching towards a metaphysical or antinominal (neo-Kantian) posture in which he vacillates between two poles of a contradiction, poles of which he regards as antiseptically independent rather than interpenetrating; at times he seemed tragically resigned to the perennial permanence of contradiction and paradox (Reitz, 2000). Here we can benefit from Marx’s focus on Hegel’s concept of self-movement through second negativity, which leads him to posit a vision of a new society that involves the transcendence of value production as determined by socially necessary labor time. Unlike the popular misconception about Marx’s critique of Hegel—that Hegel’s idealism was opposed to Marx’s materialism—Marx did not criticize Hegel for his failure to deal with material reality. When Marx noted that Hegel knows only abstractly spiritual labor, he was referring to the structure of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* and philosophy as a whole, which was based on a dialectic of self-consciousness, in which thought returns to itself by knowing itself (Hudis, 2012). Marx’s concept of transcendence, on the contrary, was grounded in human sensuousness, in the self-transcendence of the totality of human powers. Dialectics deals with the transformative contradictions that power the material historicity of capitalist life.

Hegel presented the entire movement of history in terms of the unfolding of the disembodied idea; in other words, he presented human actuality as a product of thought instead of presenting thought as the product of human actuality. Marx, therefore, inverts the relations of Hegel’s subject and predicate. Marx criticized Hegel for failing to distinguish between labor as a trans-historical, creative expression of humanity’s ‘species being’ and labor as the reduction of such activity to value production. We need to understand the dialectic, the description of the means by which reality unfolds, the nature of self-activity, self-development and self-transcendence, and the way that human activity subjectively and temporally mediates the objective world.

The presence of the idea—as negation—in human consciousness has the power to alter the natural world. Marx was not interested in the returning of thought to itself in Hegel’s philosophy, but the return of humanity to itself by overcoming the alienation of the objective world brought about by capitalist social relations. In other words, the human being is the agent of the Idea; the Idea is not its own agent. The human being is the medium of the Idea’s self-movement. Self-movement is made possible through the act of negation by negating the barriers to self-development. But negation, as Peter Hudis (2012, pp. 72–73) tells us, is always dependent on the object of its critique. Whatever you negate still bears the stamp of what has been negated—that is, it still bears the imprint of the object of negation. We have seen, for instance, in the past, that oppressive forms which one has attempted to negate still impact the ideas we have of liberation. That is why Hegel argued that we need a self-referential negation—a negation of the negation. By means of a negation of the negation, negation establishes a relation with itself, freeing itself from the external object it is attempting to negate. Because it exists without a relationship to another outside of itself, it is considered to be absolute—it is freed from dependency on

the other. It negates its dependency through a self-referential act of negation. For example, the abolition of private property and its replacement with collective property does not ensure liberation; it is only an abstract negation which must be negated in order to reach liberation. It is still infected with its opposite, which focuses exclusively on property. It simply replaces private property with collective property and is still impacted by the idea of ownership or having (Hudis, 2012, pp. 71–73). Hudis writes:

[Marx] appropriates the concept of the ‘negation of the negation’ to explain the path to a new society. Communism, the abolition of private property, is the negation of capitalism. But this negation, Marx tells us, is dependent on the object of its critique insofar as it replaces private property with collective property. Communism is not free from the alienated notion that ownership or having is the most important part of being human; it simply affirms it on a different level. Of course, Marx thinks that it is necessary to negate private property. But this negation, he insists, must itself be negated. Only then can the truly positive—a totally new society—emerge. As Dunayevskaya writes in *P&R* [Philosophy and Revolution], ‘The overcoming of this “transcendence,” called absolute negativity by Hegel, is what Marx considered the only way to create a truly human world, “positive Humanism, beginning from itself”’. (Hudis, 2005)

However, in order to abolish capital, the negation of private property must itself be negated, which would be the achievement of a positivity—a positive humanism—beginning with itself. While it is necessary to negate private property, that negation must itself be negated. If you stop before this second negation then you are presupposing that having is more important than being (Hudis, 2012). Saying ‘no’ to capital, for instance, constitutes a first negation. When the subject becomes self-conscious regarding this negation—that is, when the subject understanding the meaning of this negation recognizes the positive content of this negation—then she has arrived at the negation of the negation. In other words, when a subject comes to recognize that she is the source of the negative, this becomes a second negation, a reaching of class consciousness. When a subject recognizes the positivity of the act of negation itself as negativity, then she knows herself as a source of the movement of the real. This occurs when human beings, as agents of self-determination, hear themselves speak, and are able both to denounce oppression and the evils of the world and to announce, in Freire’s terms, a liberating alternative. I fully agree with Reitz (2000, p. 263) that critical knowledge ‘is knowledge that enables the social negation of the social negation of human life’s core activities, the most central of which are neither being-toward-death [as Heidegger would maintain], nor subservience [as Kant would argue], but creative labor’. When subjects create critical knowledge, they then are able to appropriate freedom itself for the sake of the liberation of humanity (Pomeroy, 2004).

Life does not unfold as some old sheet strewn across a brass bed in the dusky attic of history; our destinies as children, parents, and teachers do not flow unilaterally toward a single vertigo-inducing epiphany, some pyrotechnic explosion of iridescent and refulgent splendor where we lay becalmed, rocking on a silent sea of pure bliss, or where we are held speechless in some wind-washed grove of cedars, happily in the thrall of an unbridled, unsullied and undiluted love of incandescent intensity. Our lives are not overseen by a

handsome God who blithely sits atop a terra cotta pedestal and with guileless simplicity, quiet paternalism and unsmiling earnestness rules over his eager and fumbling brood, ever so often rumpling the curly heads of the rosy-cheeked cherubim and engaging the saints in blissful conversation about quantum theory. Were there such a God, wrapped in the mantle of an otherworldly Platonism and possessing neither moral obliquity nor guilt, who brings forth the world through supernatural volition alone, the world would be nothing but an echo of the divine mind. Hunger could be ended by merely thinking of a full belly and sickness eliminated by a picture of perfect health.

Most of us, however, sling ourselves nervously back and forth across the great Manichean divide of the drab of everyday existence, where, in our elemental contact with the world, our human desires, for better or for worse, tug at us like some glow-in-the-dark hustler in a carnival midway. We go hungry, we suffer, and we live in torment and witness most of the world's population crumpled up in pain. We do not have to witness a final miracle of eschatological significance to reclaim the world. What we do have to accomplish at this very moment is organizing our world to meet the basic needs of humanity.

### **Comrade Jesus: Christian Communism Reborn?**

But the same message of meeting the needs of humanity was prevalent in the Bible, and occupied the message of Jesus. I do not suddenly mention this out of some otherworldly penchant, but for a concern for the here and the now. The majority of American citizens are Christians of some denomination or other and it is important to point out as an incontrovertible fact that the message of Jesus in the Gospels is focused on the liberation of the poor from captivity and oppression, thus in Luke 4:18–19: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.' Jesus was very much opposed to oppression and bondage and it was no secret that he excluded the wealthy from the kingdom of God, noted in this very clear passage from Matthew 19:16–24 (this authentic logion of Jesus is also described in Mark 10:17–25 and Luke 18:18–25):

And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why do you ask me about what is good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honor thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go

through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

Many of us—either openly or secretly—harbor a religious faith that often remains hidden between the lines of our manifestos and treatises. I have often maintained the position that the official church of Jesus has been implicated in the indefensible falsification of the gospel in order to protect the hierarchies of the church. But here I wish to amplify this idea by briefly summarizing the important work of Jose Porfirio Miranda. Miranda's work skillfully corroborates his own analysis of the Bible with those of ecclesiastically sanctioned studies by recognized and prominent Catholic exegetes. According to Miranda (1977, p. 203), Christian faith is supposed to 'transform humankind and the world'. Miranda (1980, 2004) claims the persecution of Christians for the first three centuries constrained Christians to present a version of Christianity that would no longer provoke repression. After the fourth century, the church acquired a dominant status in class society, and this was what then motivated the continuing falsification of the gospel.

The official teachings of the church falsify the gospel, since it is clear from reading the texts of the Bible that Jesus maintains an intransigent condemnation of the rich. Even liberation theology gets this wrong when it asserts that there should be a 'preferential option for the poor'—it is not an option, but, as Miranda notes, it is an obligation. We cannot shirk from this obligation without imputation of culpability and still remain Christians. There is no abstention from this struggle. The condition of the poor obliges a restitution since such a struggle is injustice writ large (Miranda, 1974). Jesus died for participating in political transgression aimed at liberating Judea from the Romans. According to Miranda, Jesus clearly was a communist, and this can convincingly be seen throughout the New Testament but particularly in passages such as John 12:6, 13:29 and Luke 8:1–3. Jesus went so far as to make the renunciation of property a condition for entering the kingdom of God. When Luke says, 'Happy the poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God' (Luke 6:20) and adds, 'Woe to you the rich, because you have received your comfort' (Luke 6:24), Luke is repeating Mark 10:25 when Jesus warns that the rich cannot enter the kingdom. The Bible makes clear through Jesus' own sayings that the kingdom is not the state of being after death; rather, the kingdom is now, here on earth. Essentially Jesus is saying that 'in the kingdom there cannot be social differences—that the kingdom, whether or not it pleases the conservatives, is a classless society' (Miranda, 2004, p. 20). Consider what Luke says in Acts:

All the believers together had everything in common; they sold their possessions and their goods, and distributed among all in accordance with each one's need.  
[Acts 2:44–45]

The hear of the multitude of believers was one and their soul was one, and not a single one said anything of what he had was his, but all things were in common . . . . There was no poor person among them, since whoever possessed fields or houses sold them, bore the proceeds of the sale and placed them at the feet of the apostles; and a distribution was made to each in accordance with his need. [Acts 4:32, 34–35]

Jesus did not say that the poor will always be with us, he said that the poor are with us all the time. Miranda (2004, pp. 58–60) cites numerous translation sources attesting that this statement should be translated as ‘The poor you have with you at all moments [or continuously]. And you can do them good when you wish; on the other hand, you do not have me at all moments’ [Mark 14:7]. According to Miranda (2004, p. 65), Jesus did not say ‘my kingdom is not of this world’ he said ‘my kingdom does not come forth from this world’ or ‘my kingdom is not from this world’ since we can retain the original meaning only if we consider the preposition ‘ek’ in the original Greek as meaning ‘from’, signifying place of origin or provenance. But did not Jesus advocate paying taxes? Rendering unto Cesar what is due Cesar? Jesus’ remark about giving Cesar what is due Cesar is decidedly ironic, and not a capitulation to Roman authority (Miranda, 2004, pp. 61–65). Consider the following quotation cited by Miranda (2004, p. 53) concerning economic transactions found in the Bible:

For the sake of profit, many have sinned; the one who tries to grow rich, turns away his gaze. Stuck tight between two stones, between sale and purchase, sin is wedged. [Ecclus 27:1–2]

Miranda (2004, p. 54) notes that Biblical scripture condemns the term ‘interest’ (the Hebrew word is ‘neshet’) numerous times: Exodus 22:24; Leviticus 25:36, 37; Deuteronomy 23:19 (three times); Ezekiel 18:8, 13, 17, 22:12; Palms, 15:5; Proverbs 28:8. And numerous times profit-making through commerce, loans at interest, and productive activity itself (the process of production) is condemned (production likely here referring to agriculture). Does not James condemn the acquisition of wealth by agricultural entrepreneurs (see James 5:1–6)? And does he not, in fact, attack all the rich (James 1:10–11)? In James 2:6 does he not say: ‘Is it not the rich who oppress you and who hail you before the tribunals?’ Does he not also say: ‘See, what you have whittled away from the pay of the workers who reap your fields cries out, and the anguish of the harvesters has come to the ears of the Lord of Armies’ (James 5:4)? Does it now surprise us that Jesus would call money, ‘money of iniquity’ (Luke 16:9, 11)? On this issue Miranda (2004, p. 55) writes:

What this verse is doing is explaining the origin of wealth. Its intention is not to refer to *some* particularly perverse rich people who have committed knaveries which other rich people do not commit. The letter’s attack is against *all* the rich.

This is the biblical reprobation of differentiating wealth as Luke vituperates those who have defrauded workers and impugns all the rich. According to Miranda (2004, p. 53), profit ‘is considered to be the source of (differentiating) wealth’. Miranda continues:

For James, differentiating wealth can be acquired only by means of expropriation of the produce of the workers’ labor. Therefore, following Jesus Christ and the Old Testament, James condemns differentiating wealth without vacillation or compromise. Profit made in the very process of production is thus specifically imprecated. (Miranda, 2004, p. 55)

Miranda (2004, p. 73) explains further what this implies: ‘Where there is no differentiating wealth, where economic activity is directly for the purpose of the satisfaction of needs and

not for trade or the operations of buying and selling for profit, government becomes unnecessary'. The Bible attacks not only acquired wealth but the means by which such wealth is accumulated, which is the taking of profit or what could be considered a form of systemic or legalized exploitation. Even the prophets such as Micha and Amos understood that 'no differentiating wealth can be acquired without spoliation and fraud' (Miranda, 2004, p. 40). Miranda notes: 'If we want to know "Why communism?" the response is unequivocal: because any other system consists in the exploitation of some persons over others' (2004, p. 55). Miranda sees Jesus as the true God grounded in himself, meaning grounded in the establishment of justice and life now, at this very moment, since 'the hour is coming and it is now'. Miranda is uncompromising when he notes:

A god who intervenes in history to elicit religious adoration of himself and not to undo the hell of cruelty and death that human history has become is an immoral god in the deepest sense of the word. A god who is reconciled or merely indifferent to the pain of human beings is a merciless god, a monster, not the ethical God whom the Bible knows. We would be morally obliged to rebel against such a god, even if our defeat were inevitable. Equally immoral is the god for whom the end of injustice and innocent suffering is a secondary or subordinate imperative. (Miranda, 1977, p. 187)

The key point in Miranda's theological argument is that the eschaton has already arrived, the eschaton of justice and life for all, in the example of Jesus Christ. If Christians do not believe that the eschaton has already come, then they relegate Jesus to a nontemporal and eternal or Platonic realm—but the historical moment of salvation is not repeatable since Jesus is the definitive 'now' of history. If this were not the case, 'then the imperative of love of neighbor becomes an intro-self concept. It does not speak as a real otherness, because anodyne time, even if it is present, truly has no reason to command me more than any other time' (Miranda, 1977, p. 192). Christians can not postpone the commandment to love their neighbor in the fathomless future, because this would make of God an unassimilable otherness, a perpetual language game in which postmodernists would love to participate without a commitment to any political imperative. And thus we could never be contemporaneous with God. Eternal life is not life after death but the defeat of death, that is, the defeat of suffering and injustice in the here and now. Of course, what should be condemned are the totalitarian police states that *claimed* to be communist (such as the Soviet Union) but which were, in the final instance, formations of state capitalism (see Dunayevskaya, 1992). William Herzog's various attempts at developing an historical-critical approach to investigate adequately the historical Jesus began with examining the eschatological-existential and theological-ethical meanings of the parables of Jesus. Herzog considered these approaches insufficient and it finally led him to reject such approaches in favor of a Freirean 'problem-posing' approach that involved a dialectical understanding of the parables of Jesus, i.e., reading them as microscenes within the macrosenario in which they were told. Finally, Herzog (1994) attempted to understand these parables in relation to the social and economic world of agrarian societies and the political world of aristocratic empires. The major findings of Herzog's experiment revealed that the parables of Jesus were created to problematize systems of oppression and that the center of Jesus's spirituality was the call to social justice.

Jesus was likely no quietist who publicly repudiated his Messianic role, avoided political involvement and rejected the idea of leading a nationalist movement against the Romans. What is clear is that he was executed for sedition at the hands of the Romans and if he were not a Zealot, then is likely he was sympathetic to many of their principles (Brandon, 1967). For those Christians—especially the prosperity evangelicals who are so popular in the United States—who promote capitalism and equate faith with wealth, it would serve them well to reconsider their interpretation of the gospels and to consider the fact that communist predated Karl Marx through the teaching of the Bible (Miranda, 1974, 2004).

No matter how strained we may become in fathoming the calamity of capitalist globalization and its attending antagonisms, we cannot banish the harrowing realities of our times or thrust them out of mind by taking refuge in our books, our theories, our seminar rooms, or in the salons of our organizing committees. We have, after all, a new era to proclaim. Here educators committed to social transformation through incremental means can take heed from the words of Miranda:

The true revolutionary abjures reformist palliatives, because these divert the efforts of the people most capable of fomenting rebellion against the bourgeois system into rejuvenating and refurbishing it; such palliatives thus constitute the system's best defense. By the same token, the revolutionary must find any change in the socioeconomic system to be a priori inadequate, if that change does not involve a radical revolution in people's attitudes towards each other. If exchange-value (that 'imaginary entity') and the desire for personal gain continue to exist, they will inevitably create other oppressive and exploitative economic systems. (Miranda, 1977, pp. 21–22)

The revolution is now, it is the dialectic regained and it is the people unchained.

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