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ARTICLE

A Review of Peter McLaren and Nathalia Jaramillo's *Pedagogy and Praxis in the Age of Empire: Toward a new Humanism*

(AW Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers, 2007. 206 pages. ISBN: 978-90-77874-84-4)

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As we lurch from crisis to crisis, beamed directly into our brains by satellite TV, we have to think on our feet. On the move. We enter histories through the rubble of war. Ruined cities, parched fields, shrinking forests, and dying rivers are our archives. Craters left by daisy cutters, our libraries. (Roy, 2003)

It's interesting...to see again how systematic or formal education, in spite of its importance, cannot really be the lever for the transformation of society... The problems of school are deeply rooted in the global conditions of society, perhaps the problems of discipline and alienation above all... I was thinking for example, of how a teacher working several years in the classroom, trying to become a very concrete example to the students of a radical democratic teacher, after five years can fall into some despair, or can fall into some cynicism... Precisely because education is *not* the lever for the transformation of society, we are in danger of despair and cynicism if we limit our struggle to the classroom. (Freire in Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 129).

Peter McLaren and Nathalia Jaramillo's *Pedagogy and Praxis in the Age of Empire (PPAE)* best collects their founding theoretical work on the post-9/11, emergent international anti-capitalist/imperialist movement that reflects an active example of revolutionary critical pedagogy. Those familiar with McLaren's recent material on the subject in books such as *Teaching Against Global Capitalism and the New Imperialism* (with Ramin Farahmandpur, 2004) *Capitalists & Conquerors* (2005), *Red Seminars* (with Compeñeras y Compeñeros, 2005), and *Rage & Hope: Interviews with Peter McLaren on War, Imperialism and Critical Pedagogy* (2006), will find in this latest text a further volley of unflinching and searing essays that seek to unapologetically smash like a hammer into the hateful workings of power syndicates such as the Bush cabal, unprovoked American militarism, corporate media, privatized schooling and transnational capitalist class ventures.

PPAE should serve to call further professional attention to Jaramillo herself, who is undoubtedly one of revolutionary critical pedagogy's most exciting young scholar-activists, and whose contribution to the movement is here apparent both in her first-hand praxiological work alongside McLaren throughout Latin America (and elsewhere), as well as in her trenchant analyses of the intersections of class, race, gender and culture evident in the book. For instance, in the book's third chapter (pp. 91-120), "Critical Pedagogy, Latino/a Education, and the Politics of Class Struggle," one perceives Jaramillo's guiding insights into how a Marxist Humanist framework might effectively develop political and educational solutions in a time when the Latina/o population moves headlong towards becoming a primary, if not majority, demographic in the United States over the coming decades.

PPAE is a book of pedagogical theory (and in the spirit of revolutionary critical pedagogy, performative acts of polemic should be included within the field of theory proper), but as McLaren and Jaramillo put it, this book's work is not intended "as grist for advancing our careers in the academy but as a way of participating in a wider political project in which we attempt (to echo Henry Giroux) to make the pedagogical more politically informed and the political more pedagogically critical" (p. 6). Thus, McLaren and Jaramillo's collaborations, though often conceptually and linguistically dense, are not to be mistaken as yet another speculative exercise in pedagogical pontification about the problems

of schools or how to reconstruct them so as to emancipate their democratic potentials. This is not a Cartesian mediation on social reconstructionism, but an organic attempt to articulate a burgeoning worldwide standpoint theory born of class warfare and other forms of transnational oppression that produce the dehumanization of global society.

Supporting this claim are a variety of personal photos included as textual bookends (which chronicle the authors' journeys and meetings with key figures/groups over the last five years in places such as the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America) that are emblematic of how McLaren and Jaramillo have begun to construct a critical revolutionary pedagogy that both walks its talk and makes its road by walking it. Indeed, the images in *PPAE* undoubtedly gesture stylistically to those taken of Che Guevara during his travels – portraits produced to express the themes of unity, companionship and the vital embodiment of collective struggle, what Ché and Freire each meant in their respective ideas of a materialized “revolutionary love” (McLaren, 2000). It should be observed that *PPAE*'s emblematic cover art, produced by Erin Currier in a mural of stirring revolutionary portraits of everyday warrior women of color (which serve as necessary expansions of the legacies that otherwise tend to brandish names such as Zapata and Villa), which similarly helps to evoke the potential beauty and dignity of the historical struggle from below as refleshed socialist passions in the face of the transnational imperialist enterprise.

It is crucial, then, to recognize the extent to which *PPAE* attempts to both theorize and enact a critical revolutionary pedagogy that, as Gregory Martin (2005) describes, is

a radical shift of social priorities . . . that seeks to enrich the knowledge base of grassroots political movements through the development of social relations [labour practices] that encourage critical analysis, genuine dialogue and problem solving based upon people's everyday knowledge of capitalism.

When most progressive academics are still engaged in coffee talk over how to better involve the local community in campus life, McLaren and Jaramillo appear to have leapt over imperialist barricades in order to speak with and forge a wider resistance to present-day colonialist domination agendas. In short, with *PPAE* they provide a living example of how a forged solidarity between critical educators, political activists in social movements, informed workers of the world, and others involved in the growing struggle against imperial capitalism can be the fertile ground in which critical revolutionary pedagogy can become rooted and begin to sprout.

By articulating a global working-class standpoint, McLaren and Jaramillo are essentially tracing the objective structures of global capitalism that have come to organize geo-political versions of the modern state as well as the social conditions of local communities across the planet. Further, by aligning their perspectives on the margins of global imperialism, their theoretical work provides an anthropological grounding that allows the authors to gain a variety of outsider-within-critical-ideational status on the contradictions of global capitalism that are at work within the U.S. presently. *PPAE* thusly spends a good amount of energy calling out and identifying these dehumanizing aspects of the U.S. corporate-state-military-academic complex, which include, according to McLaren and Jaramillo, the institution of a state of permanent war (p. 35), a rightist fomenting of anti-immigration and other xenophobic attitudes throughout society (p. 99), the rise of anti-bilingual/multicultural efforts in educational policy such as NCLB (p. 76), the corporate media and culture industry's complicity in the erosion of an educated civil society (p. 49), the blatant classism and racism underlying the Bush administration's response to hurricane Katrina (p. 8), and the ecological genocide that is a direct result of predatory capitalist expansion at all costs (p. 17).

In opposition, *PPAE* hopes to bear witness to the birth and maturation of a movement within the field

of education that viscerally realizes

the need for a new critical humanist pedagogy, an approach to reading the word and the world that puts the struggle against capitalism (and the imperialism inherent in it) at the center of the pedagogical project, a project that is powered by the oxygen of socialism's universal quest for human freedom and social justice. (p. 20)

Again, McLaren and Jaramillo's mapping of the domestic contradictions of global capitalism evident here in the U.S. is importantly not limited by a parochial view of the matter. Rather, the spirit of the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela, the work of critical educators in Oaxaca, Mexico, and the historical legacy of an ongoing attempt for an emancipated Cuba animate the collective thrust of the book's thesis. For McLaren and Jaramillo, such sites are not isolated instances of a controlled alternative to the capitalist form of life. They clearly delineate a burgeoning constellation of socialist resistance that is the movement-generated possibility of another world beyond the paltry business-class-as-usual-driven political openings for change in the social and educational structure of the United States.

Drawing from the energy of the international workers movements, McLaren and Jaramillo want also to re-organize a worldwide front of critical, popular educators who will comprise an "educational left" (pp. 34-64) that works in concert with extra-institutional revolutionary forces. One task this educational left has is to provide a map of the neoliberal educational landscape that highlights how the stranglehold of a corporate media oligarchy continues to distribute public knowledge through strong ideological filters, how standardized educational curricula have ossified into the normative goal of education, and how the systematic segregation of people of color in schools all challenge both leftist educators and society generally with complicated and urgent problems. Therefore, McLaren and Jaramillo ask: "How can critical educators reinvigorate the civil societarian left precisely at a time when we are creating a world where elites are less accountable to civil society than ever before?" (p. 52). According to the authors, the answer to this question lies largely in the potential for generating concrete revolutionary critical pedagogy, which means going beyond progressive, constructivist, curricular methods towards developing socialist sensibilities throughout the institution of public schooling by conscientizing "teachers, students, families and other cultural workers" (p. 63).

Now, without seeking to contradict the spirit of McLaren and Jaramillo's project, it cannot hurt to raise some questions about the tactics of revolutionary critical pedagogy as regards to its implementation in school systems. Particularly, we might reflect seriously about critical pedagogy's ongoing historical attempt to transform schools (e.g., as sites functioning as Ideological State Apparatuses) into democratic spaces, especially to the degree that this has been done through volunteeristic appeals made by the professoriate to teachers, with the expectation that schoolteachers can learn to act against their own immediate individual self-interests in the name of the future realization of the greater good. While schoolteachers certainly should not be dissuaded from engaging with forms of public-oriented intellectualism or ethically driven civic-mindedness, it may be asking more of them than they can bear if revolutionary critical pedagogy courts the idea that they should become subversive agents who can work to monkey-wrench school ideology from within. In George S. Counts's version of this form of program (and this is going back now some three quarters of a century!), he at least expected teachers to be widely organized and empowered to dare a new social order and teach openly against class/state interests.

Today, rather, one can no doubt find radical teachers here and there in many school systems (and, to be fair, much of this is doubtless a result of the work of critical pedagogy over the last few decades), but often these teachers are institutionally limited in their power such that they cannot realize the organization of trans-local threats of a kind that would demand their suspension and/or removal by

panoptic superiors further up the economic food chain. Indeed, just as McLaren and Jaramillo apparently seek to support the emergence of a revolutionary state of governance (p. 49) but do not believe that this can be accomplished through either mere shifts in party power or, perhaps, even the reformation of *any extant state* (at the end of their book they soberly admit that there are no guarantees as to the meaning of Hugo Chavez's tenure, though they do have real hope for the Bolivarian revolution), it seems questionable then that they suggest in *PPAE* that schools as an institution of social reproduction might be qualitatively changed by a platform of praxis that seeks to substitute teachers-as-servants-for-the-status-quo with radical-educators-as-cultural-workers-and-anti-class-agonists (e.g., pp. 34, 85, 106).

Moreover, whereas McLaren and Jaramillo correctly look to the direct and participatory democracy of social movements as organizational forms that can alter social possibilities and more equitably distribute state power (p. 114), perhaps the correlate to this thinking *vis-à-vis* schools would be to more widely promote versions of nonformal popular education. In other words, could it be that revolutionary critical pedagogy needs less Freire and more Ivan Illich? As I have written elsewhere, revolutionary critical pedagogy would be strengthened through a deeper engagement with Illich and the anarchist tradition in pedagogy generally (see Kahn, forthcoming; Kahn & Kellner, 2007). In this respect, does not the increasing popularity of the home schooling movement – even if this popularity is now in part fueled by interests of rightist reactionaries who seek sectarian religious curricula for their children – also offer potentials for radical “learning webs” (Illich, 1970) that would be near impossible in more formal schooling circuits? This said, it is not clear that the choice to be made is one of to school or not to school, but rather of whether a critical dialectical approach to the problem of democratic education focuses merely on schools or is capable of strategically thinking beyond them.

To the degree that schools do remain sites of contestation and power struggle, it will increasingly be necessary for revolutionary critical pedagogy to begin to mount its cultural work outside the discipline of education proper and to move its focus past school teachers to those who are also directly involved in regulating school institutions like principals, superintendents and other community leaders. There is the need for texts and training in revolutionary critical pedagogy, as well as titled professorships, to increasingly find integration in academic departments of educational leadership and organizational change, in addition to those designed to certify teachers for secondary and elementary schools. Indeed, to the degree that Freire remains iconic for critical pedagogy, there is in Freire himself an example of a radical educator who also took up questions of administrative leadership when he served as Sao Paulo's Secretary of Education in 1989 during the tenure of the Socialist mayor Luisa Erundina (Freire, 1993). While having radical educational leaders will, of course, itself not be enough to produce long-standing change in the American school system, at least it would allow existing and future critical community educators to have administrative counterparts so that the teachers such as Bill Nevins (p. 33) are not left open to easy rightist attacks, poor evaluative reviews, and demands for their leave-of-absence or untenured removal. Of course, it is not clear that McLaren and Jaramillo would disagree with this.

To recap, then, McLaren and Jaramillo's latest collaboration has undoubtedly added volume to the developing Marxist framework for understanding the struggle over contemporary education through its careful attendance to the ways in which the politics of schools can link up with and be informed by international anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist political movements. *PPAE* provides a fertile bevy of conceptual analysis that will allow others to delve deeper into the recesses of predatory global capitalism and its militarization of the planet, thereby helping to suture together networks of oppression that have become the reified sociopolitical artifacts of the contemporary divide-and-conquer moment. More than a mere theoretical contribution, though, critical theorists of education, critical educators, and a radicalized citizenry concerned with the direction and shape of education in the U.S. generally are reminded in *PPAE* that the world is larger than that which is daily fed to us by

American politicians and news anchors.

McLaren and Jaramillo hope to teach us that we still have much to learn about our social and political futures, which remain open, and hence any and all efforts to build unity for a materialized opposition to the broader structures that presently attempt to determine the particular conditions of our lives is something that represents a vital sense of hope (p. 115). *PPAE* documents some of McLaren and Jaramillo's hopeful efforts, and thereby provides a pedagogical statement of needed theoretical interventions into the ongoing problem of how to realize inclusively democratic forms of school and society, as well as an enactment, or performance, meant to demonstrate and create concrete possibilities for educational freedom in a time when many believe such political possibilities are in short supply.

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