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Waging the class struggle in theory and practice[1]: An Interview with Peter McLaren

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INTRODUCTION

The following Peace, Land, and Bread exclusive interview with revolutionary educator and organizer Peter McLaren was conducted by Derek Ford, his comrade and former student, over e-mail in late 2022-early 2023, after McLaren read Ford's latest book and wrote a review of it for Monthly Review. We felt it was an important opportunity to expose a new generation and cohort of communists to McLaren's life and work. In it, they cover a wide range of intellectual and political topics and events, showcasing the brilliant way McLaren's praxis plays out.

Peter McLaren is a renowned theorist, educator, and organizer, who is one of the main Marxist educational theorists in the world today, as is evidenced by the interview below. McLaren serves as a Distinguished Professor in Critical Studies in the Attallah College of Educational Studies, Chapman University, where he is Co-Director of the Paulo Freire Democratic Project and International Ambassador for Global Ethics and Social Justice. In 2005, a group of scholars and activists in Northern Mexico established La Fundacion McLaren de Pedagogía Critica to develop a knowledge of McLaren's work throughout Mexico and to promote projects in critical pedagogy and popular education. On September 15, 2006 the Catedra Peter McLaren was inaugurated at the Bolivarian University of Venezuela.

[1] FORD, Derek R. **Waging the Class Struggle in Theory and Practice:** An Interview with Peter McLaren. Peacelandbread.org, 2023. Disponível em: https://www.peacelandbread.org/post/waging-the-class-struggle. Acesso em: 13 ago. 2024. Material gentilmente cedido por Peter McLaren para publicação nesta edição da Revista Eletrônica Kuab.

McLaren served as a member of Derek Ford's dissertation committee in 2015 and has, since then, supported his work and the work of a new generation of revolutionary educators.

Derek Ford: Peter, thank you so much for taking the time out of your hectic schedule to speak with us about your research and activism. As you know, political education is one of the central tasks of our moment, and one reason we wanted to do this interview is because of your broad and deep experiences thinking and practicing political education. But as a way to get into your background, trajectory, and the particulars of your praxis, we wanted to begin with a recent article you published with Petar Jandrić on the role of the public intellectual today.

You begin by asserting that a simple truth of critical pedagogy is that it's not confined to classrooms or schools but infused throughout daily life. Now, correct me if I'm wrong, but it seems like this has been a consistent principle throughout the different phases of your work, and as Marxist organizers, we agree this is a foundational fact of critical pedagogy. Why is it still important to begin by explicitly stating this premise and is it more important now than at other points in the history of critical pedagogy?

Peter McLaren: Thanks Derek for your invitation to speak with you. Your question to begin our conversation is important and gets to the heart of the dilemma facing education today. I believe that as educators we cannot emphasize enough the signal importance of our day-to-day political engagement with others, in the social contexts of our lifeworlds as teachers and researchers and activists. The answer to this means going far beyond what progressives have been advocating, because we are living today at a critical inflection point in history, with a singular species of bone-marrow-deep instantiations of fascism swaddled in neo-Nazi, neo-Confederate, anti-immigration, neo-feudal, and misogynistic garb, and primed by today's 'respectable' sociopathic edgelords, intellectual Dark Web appliers and techno-fascists. The rabbit hole of QAnon has the power of a black hole, sucking otherwise rational people into a world where

our next-door neighbors are believed to be child eating reptiles under the stewardship of the Democratic Party and its Satanic Overlord, Joe Biden.

Fascism, as Ernst Bloch taught us, is a swindle of fulfillment. It is designed to revitalize pasts that have remained barren and unfulfilled when faced with a present where hope is in decline. We have created a true American Volksgemeinschaft—where existential truths are non-negotiable and where young people feel justifiably free to persecute friends or classmates harboring censorious and illiberal ideas—who are not following the well-understood rituals of behavior according to the MAGAverse. The MAGA social milieu is one where holding an opinion has the equivalent power of mustering an argument, enough to morally justify the political violence we have seen in places like Charlottesville or at the Capitol Building.

We have a right-wing Supreme Court dominated by judicial textualists who are prone to reading the law without attempting to account for historical and cultural contexts and the intentionality of the legislators. We have evangelical fundamentalists who have anointed President Trump as "The Chosen One" and this same former president who proclaims himself "King of Israel" and the "Second Coming of God" which ensures that there will be Trump cults marinated in a fetid stew of QAnon beliefs that will flourish well into the future. And we have the media platforms such as Gab where microblogging and social networking work as instruments of harassment and torture that can be instantly inflicted at perceived enemies.

But the urgent question that plagues all education—the question of capitalism—is still not raised. Recall that during the Red Scare in 1952, in a 6-3 decision, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a New York state law known as the Feinberg Law that prohibited communists from teaching in public schools. Anyone who called for the overthrow of the government was banned from the teaching profession. Subversive propaganda was outlawed. We are back in those days of the "Red Scare" today, but this time it is backed by a mediaverse that is powerful enough to add layers of ideological mystification to our already overburdened structural unconscious—to create fascists who are techno-savvy, who are militarized, whose capacity for empathy and affirming the principles of

social justice has become an environmental dead pool, unable to spawn the possibility of new life.

We don't have many weapons at our disposal to challenge these current threats to our world, but we do have our own involvement in critical pedagogy and our work as public intellectuals and activists. Critical pedagogy, as you know Derek, emerged in the late 1970s as a vibrant and contestatory reform movement that with an insolent lucidity situated itself outside of the flower powered human potential movement of the 1960s associated with 'free schools' whose teaching philosophy and curricula relied on the mainly European wisdom tradition generated by the humanistic psychology of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers focused on efforts to improve students' 'self-concept' or 'self-image.' Later some of its tendrils drifted to people like Timothy Leary and the "tune in, turn on, and drop out" culture (of which I was a part in the late sixties).

Critical pedagogy immediately attracted the ire of the Republican Party (some members in those days did possess some intellectual heft, as repulsive as they might have been) since it was an approach to educational reform whose proponents dared mention the names Karl Marx, Antonio Gramsci and Paulo Freire prominently in their essays, and who promoted their work under the banner of 'resistance theory.' In a larger sense, critical pedagogy was an attempt to reveal the moral and practical consequences of political neutrality and also the impact social relations of production and cultural formations have on the organization and well-being of human life. In these current times attacks by Republicans performing their blustering efforts at exorcizing 'woke culture' with a drunken ambition that would make Elmer Gantry seem somnambulant, shots of cheap bourbon masquerading as holy water and tongues of flame leaping from their blabbering mouths like big tent snake handlers in oversized linen suits, they have typically branded educational theory that has emerged on the left as an infernal species of devil-inspired 'socialism' or 'communism.' And, predictably, given the prominence of the Black Lives Matter movement, they have singled out Critical Race Theory as their convenient bête noire.

With no apologies to those who persist in their ignorant attacks on Critical Race Theory, with those who gawp at Karl Marx as if he were some kind of exotic

creature, we need to be clear that the industrialization of America was indeed built on slavery and the extermination of indigenous peoples. How can we say that capitalism has succeeded when such a large proportion of the wealth in the United States is concentrated in the hands of such a few? Those of us on the left understand that in the minds of those critics who damn Critical Race Theory, Critical Pedagogy and the work of Paulo Freire as Marxist or Communist, this is just a clownish attempt at throwing red meat to Trump's base. If they are serious about using those terms, even as props in their cheap tricks and political acrobatics, they might be interested in discovering that they need go no further than the Bible in their search for the birth of communism, specifically the New Testament. But that would just create a further divide.

That we don't teach Marx in our schools is one of the great scandals of education in the U.S. For many college students in the United States, reading Marx would be considered a fundamental breach of patriotism, something that would undoubtedly spark the ire of tried-and-true Americans, and cause a firestorm of protests from the parents and relatives of these students. Let's contrast this with the way some Europeans engage with Marx. In 1989, Karl Marx topped a BBC News Online poll to find the greatest thinker of the millennium. Albert Einstein ranked second. The top 10 included philosophers Immanuel Kant and Rene Descartes as well as twentieth century scientist Stephen Hawking. Just saying.

Critical pedagogy and its international exponents have helped to shape how education is understood conceptually, and most importantly dialectically, and what counts as knowledge and agency in the information era. Critical pedagogues have undertaken more theoretically aware critical action in defense of public schools, accruing theory and action as well as providing a language for creating historical memory and a critical vernacular with which to both understand and judge the world in its struggle for possible futures. Such a description might sound to some like lofty claims dropped out of history on a playing field designed for ideologues to engage each other performatively but not substantively, but there is merit to them, and they help define how critical educators came to formulate the idea of pedagogy and how their work compliments the major

contributions of critical theory and the advances made during the Civil Rights Movement and how revolutionary struggles worldwide are conceptualized today as a multi-level process—tasks that define wholly our present activity as agents of change. The contributions of critical pedagogy are distinct from those of their more mainstream contemporaries in terms of the scope of their interests, their appeals to authority, and the shape of their canonical works, whether they are convoluted or finely honed, chocked-full of positivity or overburdened by cynicism. It is more accurate to talk about critical pedagogies (in the plural) than a singular critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy has grown exponentially rather than linearly, and certainly Marxist and anarchist variants have played a part of its evolutionary trajectory and have helped determine its large-scale development.

Participating in the struggle for socialism, which is a challenge that primarily drives my own contribution to critical pedagogy, takes various organizational forms such as trade unions, associations, councils, and cooperatives. But it also can take place in the most informal of settings, such as conversations in local pubs or on the shop floor in factories, or in campus classrooms. It can take place at concerts and at poetry readings, seminars and salons, and in Greenwich Village coffee shops or those nestled away in the local strip malls that dot the urban landscape all across the country.

I've always found poetry and spoken word gatherings helpful in generating political dialogue. Growing up in my native Toronto, I was particularly drawn to American Beat Poets such as Gregory Corso, Allen Ginsberg and Lawrence Ferlinghetti. I viewed them as home-grown philosophers who pointed their listeners to certain life experiences. I was drawn to Corso not because he survived being born to a sixteen-year-old mother who abandoned him to Catholic Church Charities. Not because his father finally took him in so he could dodge the World War 2 draft (he was drafted anyway), leaving Corso on the streets, not because he slept in subways and on rooftops, or because he stole a toaster at 13 and was sent to The Tombs (the Manhattan Detention Complex), where he was traumatized by his fellow inmate psychotic murderers—an event which led to his transfer to the psychiatric ward of Bellevue Hospital, and finally at age 17

to Clinton Prison where he spent time under the protection of the mafia in "Lucky" Luciano's former cell. Not because he was a laborer, a sailor or a newspaper reporter. But because he loved the saints, was not afraid to hide his disgust at contemporary society, and used whimsical jazz rhythms to tell his story. After reading the Beats, I began to pay more attention to the experiences of people on the streets.

DF: Thanks for your answer, and I am glad that you ended by making explicit how your participating in the struggle for socialism drives your work on critical pedagogy. Indeed, what has inspired me so much about your work, and what for me makes it distinctive in our field and an important model for intellectual production today, is how deeply and extensively integrated it is with the actual people's and workers' movements of our day. In particular, I'm thinking of the work you did with the revolutionary government of Venezuela on critical pedagogy and revolutionary education in 2006, during an early stage of the Bolivarian Revolution. How did that collaboration come about? What did you learn from the comrades in Venezuela, and what were they interested in learning from you?

PM: The invitation to Venezuela followed a natural progression in tandem with my work. My collaboration with different groups and individuals outside of the U.S. began with an invitation by Paulo Freire to speak at a conference in Cuba where he was giving a series of talks. The vast majority of my work up until that time was restricted to my native Canada and the U.S. So began my first trip to Cuba where I was surprised to find other academics from Brazil and from Mexico who were familiar with my work. I was surprised because I hadn't published much at the time and was just beginning my academic work. While at the conference I was even more surprised to receive invitations to speak in Mexico and Brazil and that marked a period of my life where I was speaking and traveling in Brazil very frequently. That lasted for a decade or more and was followed by further visits to Cuba, and trips to Venezuela, Colombia and Argentina where I was able to meet new comrades and to learn about the formative struggles wherever I happened to be visiting. In all, I was invited to approximately 30 different countries,

sometimes as a conference speaker and other times to meet activists and visit various communities and groups. My visits to Mexico have continued right up until the present, although for health reasons I am no longer able to travel.

Very often groups that would bring me in to talk about critical pedagogy expected me to have the answers to whatever problems they were facing but in more instances than not, I was there as a learner. I tried to make it clear that I was there to dialogue and share our various struggles in the very different contexts in which we were working and to provide contacts from our experiences that could prove to be helpful to various groups and organizations with whom we had become familiar. I'm not a very good organizer and I regret not being able to develop a more structured network that would have connected all of us. I have learned much from my comrades in the Paulo Freire Democratic Project at Chapman University about organizing. My most recent effort was to create the foundations for a critical pedagogy institute in China. So far we have managed four international conferences but it is unclear if there will be more. Most of the time that I was traveling I was also teaching a full load at the university, chairing dissertations, serving on university committees and publishing. It took its toll physically.

The task I was given in Venezuela was to engage educational researchers and teachers with my own work in critical pedagogy, specifically focusing on Freire's work, and to serve in an advisory role. It included targeted lectures in various universities, marching in the streets with the Chavistas and confronting the anti-Chavez groups, visits to sites where many social programs developed under President Chavez around health, food and literacy were being carried out, such as missions Ribas, Robinson, Barrio Adentro, Mercal, and Zamora. President Chavez was very clear during a conversation we had in Miraflores Palace that any critical pedagogy to emerge out of Venezuela would be Venezolano. This was consistent with what Paulo had always emphasized in our conversations—that his work was not to be imported across geographical boundaries and simply plugged into whatever situations that needed to be addressed (a one-size-fits-all-pedagogy) but rather reinvented in the contextually specific spaces of revolutionary struggles.

DF: This seems like an incredible task, both in terms of the impact as well as the responsibility that comes with it. What was it like, working with the Chavistas?

PM: Working with the Chavistas was a powerful, politically life altering experience. One of the advisors to Chavez in education, Luis Bonilla, had invited me to give talks in support of the Bolivarian revolution throughout various cities and towns across the country. That's how it started. I joined up with a group of revolutionaries and we worked together. Sometimes we traveled in a National Guard airplane with two teenage pilots who kept AK-47s on the cockpit floor.

Later on, I was invited to attend two television programs hosted by President Chavez, Alo Presidente!, and was joined by the great poet Ernesto Cardenal who had been reprimanded by Pope John Paul II years earlier for getting involved in Nicaraguan politics (Ernesto was a Catholic priest at the time). One highlight from my visit to neighboring Colombia was being whisked away by a group of high school teachers from Medellin who tracked me down at a sociology conference where I was a featured speaker. They took me to their school and quickly arranged for me to speak to the faculty who, years before, had witnessed tanks, armored personnel carriers, Black Hawk helicopters and thousands of troops invade their community, looking to capture or kill clandestine members of the FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) who were known to be hiding in the neighborhood.

Faculty were a bit nervous during my speech because the school was under surveillance by the paramilitary, whom in many ways were more deadly and vicious than the military. Luis Bonilla had been following my work over the years and the invitation to Venezuela came right out of the blue, since I was unaware of Luis and his work in Venezuela at the time. Now, we have become good friends and I am amazed at the work he has been doing internationally.

DF: It's at this point that I think some broader intellectual and biographical context is relevant because the status of your theoretical development was one

of the conjunctural factors involved in this collaboration. What was your theory—or broader theoretical approach to—revolutionary critical pedagogy that facilitated the collaboration?

PM: I suppose one answer to your question could be that I was one of a handful of self-described Marxists in the field at the time (I didn't use the phrase neo-Marxist which was in vogue at the time) and I had been publishing since 1980, and some of my works were getting translated into Spanish and Portuguese. And I was accepting invitations outside of the U.S. in places where teachers were interested to see what educators from the U.S. had to offer. Instituto McLaren, which was initiated by a comrade in Mexico, was largely populated by communist and socialist professors, and often groups would contact me through the institute. I previously identified my work as critical postmodernism, and every so often I come across a journal article that still describes me as such.

I had begun to rethink the lack of Marxist analysis in my work during a trip to East Germany, where I met British comrades Mike Cole and Dave Hill. Mike challenged me to start re-reading Marx and applying it to the critical pedagogy that was developing. Dave introduced me to the important work of another comrade, Glenn Rikowski. It was a few years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and universities were replacing East German professors with those from West Germany. I learned much from my comrades in England during subsequent years, and some of my associates in the U.S. were horrified that I had gone down a political rabbit hole when they started seeing references to Marx in my work. In 2005 or 2006, thirty professors at UCLA were identified by a right-wing group that called themselves The Bruin Alumni Association and that were funded by Republican operatives. I was at the top of the list of that mind-twisting cabal of leftist professors that became known as the "Dirty Thirty." We responded to the name by calling ourselves In Good Company.

Students were offered 100 dollars to secretly audiotape my lectures and 50 dollars for notes from my lectures. This went for the entire group. It became a national story that was framed as a return to the days of Joe McCarthy. There were student spies that tried their best to make up stories about us—after all, 100

dollars is no small change. We are certainly back in the days where critics use the label 'communist' for just about anything they don't like about liberal cultural values. It is an effective ploy by Republicans because it conjures images of gulags, political assassinations, atheism, forced starvation, and Manchurian candidates. It also brings to mind the fear of lock-step thinking when in reality uniformity is more a feature of capitalism. In many ways we are living in a reactionary society today that is far worse than the 1950s, since social media has made weaponized frictionless forms of digitalized hate.

I am a Catholic convert, and I write about liberation theology from time to time. One of the best Marxist theorists that I have encountered is José Porfirio Miranda, who has written numerous books, among them Marx and the Bible, Communism in the Bible, and Marx Against the Marxists. This would often confuse my critics. It still does. But this is a topic for another time.

DF: This is very helpful context, and it's important for the historical record. It makes me think about the key role that the historical moment plays in the research and work that we do. For example, it was a much different intellectual environment in the United States when I started graduate school in 2012 and when we met in 2014 than it was in the 1990s and 2000s. In particular, the Occupy Wall Street movement, immigrant rights struggles, anti-imperialist movement against the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, as well as the pink tide in Latin America—among other factors—made the debates between postmodernism or identity politics and other liberal political theories and marxism or socialism seem quite esoteric and almost irrelevant. it was clear to everyone that capitalism and imperialism were not separate from but the motors of—or at least "intricately tied up with"—oppression based on nationality and identity. But having read those debates for my graduate work, it was clear they played a defining moment in an intellectual class struggle in education. What was that period like for you personally in relation to those debates?

PM: Those debates did at times seem overly esoteric and sometimes even irrelevant. The worst of them were saturated with philippics and casuistry,

helped fashion a toxic tribalism and encouraged affiliations based more on affective investment than rational argumentation. Looking back, however, they helped to prepare me for my journey into historical materialism and working in revolutionary settings.

I immigrated to the U.S. in 1985 and took up a position at Miami University of Ohio at the invitation of Henry Giroux, with whom I had the privilege of working for 8 years creating the first cultural studies center housed in a school of education. I was hired as an ethnographer and many of the debates that required my attention had to do with doing anthropological fieldwork where I would attempt to assess impact postmodernism had on the collection, interpretation and evaluation of data. Joe Kincheloe and I managed to do some work in this area together and the field of education lost one of its brightest thinkers when he passed at a relatively young age.

At the time I was interested in semiotics as well as general semantics and pragmatics but was starting to become more interested in the work of the Frankfurt School. Of course I was also interested in theology, which became more intense when I started to visit Latin American countries, meeting the children of los desaparecidos in Argentina and the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and learning about how liberation theologians risked their lives speaking out against the torture and murder of campesinos and the feared government sanctioned death squads.

In fact some of these priests were assassinated, the most famous case being the 1989 murder of six Jesuit intellectuals on a university campus in El Salvador by a Salvadoran military death squad. In November 1989, six Jesuit priests, a cook and her 16-year-old daughter had been murdered by the elite Atlacatl army battalion using M-16s and AK-47s. Between 1980 and 1989, the U.S. Congress had given more than $4 billion in assistance to the government of El Salvador and the U.S. military had also trained hundreds of Salvadoran officers and soldiers under the condition that the country's armed forces were no longer committing human rights abuses and had reformed themselves.

While the idea of deaths squads may be horrifying to the average American, we need to remember, as Annie Jacobsen has written, that the CIA

carries out assassinations at the behest of the U.S. president. A presidential finding, also called a Memorandum of Notification, gives the president the authority to put people on a kill list which is then transferred to the CIA who passes the names of those to be assassinated to its paramilitary operatives because the CIA works under a code called Title 50, which permits these extra-judicial murders. The United States has operatives in 134 countries who operate under Title 50, because the rules of engagement of the U.S. military is different. The Department of Defense operates under Title 10 which does not permit killing citizens of countries with whom we are not at war.

Under Henry Giroux's influence, I became drawn to cultural studies. Henry and his friend Donaldo Macedo also introduced me to Paulo Freire. Macedo, an expert in applied linguistics, was one of Freire's close comrades. I was fortunate to be working at Miami of Ohio during this time. I can't think of a more important public intellectual writing today in the area of youth culture and contemporary politics than Henry. It is not surprising that he has a vast readership worldwide. Henry and I invited prominent scholars to speak at the Center such as Stuart Hall and Henry was in close contact with Larry Grossberg, who played a formidable role in establishing cultural studies as an academic field in the U.S. During this period, there were many demarcation lines drawn between orthodox Marxists and leftist researchers who were affiliated with the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University.

For years I worked at the intersection of these two tendencies while at the same time trying to keep up with what was happening in the world of ethnography. I became more interested in critiques of political economy as time went on. With respect to Gramsci, for instance, who was coming into prominence at the time among cultural studies researchers, there seemed to be a tendency to focus more on issues of persuasion and consent to the detriment of value production and class struggle. Class struggle was often thought to be restricted to tarrying with a crude economism, and dismissed as a species of Marxist economic determinism. Hegemony was often discussed in ways that antiseptically cleaved this relationship from value production, and was perceived

by Marxists as a way to distract us from the inner functions of capitalism. This certainly was the case with some of the research.

I was also exploring how resistance could be transformed into agency. But an agency directed at the overthrow of the capitalist system of value directly responsible for the exploitation of the proletariat. I was also interested in the state of ongoing praxis that was required for organic and committed intellectuals to live as revolutionaries. This led me to an engagement with the concept of hegemony and its essential caducity as this related to understanding and explaining state power and forms of political legitimacy and the reality of production underwriting all social relationships. After all, it seemed obvious to me that hegemonic relationships that reproduced relations of domination, oppression and exploitation cannot escape revolutionary confrontation.

As I expressed in publications with Gustavo Fischman and others, to grasp the complex relationship between ideology and hegemony, both constructs need to be seen as parallax relations, that is, from the perspective of the social agent at the present moment, with the understanding that this site of enunciation is in itself dialectically conditioned by this interplay. Some Marxists were convinced that some of the blame for the retreat from class and class struggle on the part of many neo-Gramscians had to lie with the cultural studies exponents of Gramsci (1971), including Hall himself, and the way that Gramsci's notion of hegemony had been retranslated. Fabiana Woodfin made the case that the appropriation of Gramsci has often served the ironic purpose of arguing against Marx.

There was at the time a dispute within British cultural studies over how to best re-engage with the Marxist tradition. There was at the time debates fomenting around the structuralism-culturalism dispute. Raymond Williams famously put forward Marx's proposition that social being determines consciousness as a replacement for the mechanical base-determines-superstructure model of E.P. Thompson. This, in fact, had set the stage for the introduction of Gramsci into the project of British cultural studies. But Woodfin pointed out that this "break into Marxism" that set the stage for Gramsci was short

lived and, thanks to the work of Stuart Hall, Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, and others, culminated in its opposite: a break out of Marxism.

Woodfin argued that by completely rejecting caricatures of the base-superstructure model, Hall positioned his project against Marxism rather than as an argument for the continuing relevance of a Marxism that exists beyond deterministic and economistic models. In what should have been a renewal of Marx's "being versus consciousness" dialectic, Hall rewrote the culturalist-structuralist dispute as the defining break away from Marxism. That said, we can't ignore the important contributions these theorists have made.

There were also debates over the Zapatista idea of changing the world without taking power put forward by the Zapatistas. I was utilizing Teresa Ebert's distinction between critical postmodernism and ludic (bourgeoise postmodernist) postmodernism, which I found very helpful and her emphasis on the importance of analyzing the historicity of identities, particularly of gender, sexuality and race and the relationship that they had to the labor process. Ludic postmodernism was a term she used to identify those who privileged desire over material relations of exploitation and whose work was founded upon poststructuralist assumptions of difference, representation, and linguistic play. Textuality, desire and voluntarism had replaced revolutionary transformation. Then, of course, there were the debates over multiculturalism, Eurocentrism, post-colonialism and decolonization to which I responded by writing a book called Revolutionary Multiculturalism which focuses on the politics of white privilege and the construction/invention of the white race and the importance of narrative in the formation of political agency. These are debates are still alive today but the ones receiving public attention are those related to race.

Of course there are also debates about whether the U.S. has crossed the line into bona fide fascism, debates over nationalism versus socialist internationalism, the denationalization of capitalism, techno-fascism, decolonization, Eurocentrism, repatriation, disalienation, the coloniality of power, indigeneity and settler colonialism and the list gets longer each day, as should be the case. As interesting as these theoretical debates are, nothing really prepares

you for the geopolitical nuances in crossing borders from one country to another. Those have to be learned in situ.

I was in Ankara around the time of the Gezi Park protests in Istanbul, and in Athens during the anti-austerity protests in Greece. Those protests led to debates over the self-organization of the masses. Lots of demonstrators were tear gassed and clubbed and I was no exception. Fortunately in my case, a waiter at a local restaurant in Ankara found me on the street and hid me in a closet near the kitchen until the riot troops had left. During those moments you don't necessarily think about how your personal situation fits into the long menu of theoretical constructs you have been discussing in your journal articles and whether or not you are privileging class over, say, religious nationalism.

I came away from the debates over the relevance of Marxism to education and cultural studies with the conviction that in order to have a critical pedagogy of any kind, we first need to develop a philosophy of praxis, which requires that we recognize that all philosophy is determined by its dialectical relationship to praxis. The relationship between philosophy and praxis is imminently ethical in that it is manifested in a preferential option for the poor (reaffirmed in liberation theology) and its thematic priority is given to the oppressed. The oppressed, the toilers of the world, those who live in aggrieved communities have the first option to present their counter-stories and testimonies of resistance. A philosophy of praxis is also imminently pedagogical in that it recognizes that the languages and discourses of the oppressed have been domesticated, if not destroyed, by the pedagogical practices of the state (in its role as a client to the owning class) and, as I have mentioned numerous times in my work, that new languages of resistance are often coded in the interstices of popular struggles. A philosophy of praxis is also imminently transformative in that it adopts a class position in solidarity with the oppressed.

Furthermore, it remains united in popular, ideological, racial, gender and cultural struggles. So we join up with struggles of all kinds—decolonial struggles, indigenous struggles, anti-imperialist struggles, feminist struggles in the creation of a counterpublic sphere, a democratic and liberatory social commons that recognizes the dangers inherent in an unsustainable world capitalism. These

struggles are characterized by the socialist principle of internationalist solidarity against anti-imperialism.

The issues that began in the late 1980s and 1990s were primarily over intersectionality and which categories get privileged over others and in which contexts or circumstances that occurs. I agree, Derek, that understanding intersectionality in exploring the connections between race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability and citizenship is important, and that is an emphasis that has remained consistent over the last few decades in the field of critical education.

But in response to the focus on 'identity politics,' I appreciate the position taken by Angela Davis, who prefers to focus on collective struggles rather than individual identities. She focuses more on "a politics of identity" than on "identity politics." Her notion of identity comes "not from what a person happens to be, but from that person's willingness to engage in radical struggles to create a better world. And so I would say that tension between identity and politics or one might describe it as the politics of identity or the identification of political struggles as central in our quest to change the world." This position seems to be to be more cohabitable with Marxist revolutionary struggle.

I was roundly criticized in my early work for not dealing with certain issues beyond race, class, gender and sexuality. For instance, I wasn't discussing obesity, or disability, or drug addiction, or depression, and that was a problem for some people and it was also a way to attack Marxists for being economic determinists obsessed by class over anything else. Of course, now it is much clearer how social relations of production necessarily impact the key political struggles of our day, which doesn't mean that because I am a Marxist that I automatically privilege class over race, over gender, over sexuality, or over other identifications. Later on, these debates became more sophisticated. I've always appreciated Joel Kovel's take on this issue of intersectionality and there is one quotation of his that I like to share with my students which can be found in his book, The Enemy of Nature where he talks about class being:

[B]oth logically and historically distinct from other forms of exclusion (hence we should not talk of 'classism' to go along with 'sexism' and 'racism,' and 'species-ism'). This is, first of all, because class is an essentially man-made

category, without root in even a mystified biology. We cannot imagine a human world without gender-distinction — although we can imagine a world without domination by gender. But a world without class is eminently imaginable — indeed, such was the human world for the great majority of our species' time on earth, during all of which considerable fuss was made over gender.

Historically, the difference arises because 'class' signifies one side of a larger figure that includes a state apparatus whose conquests and regulations create races and shape gender relations. Thus there will be no true resolution of racism so long as class society stands, inasmuch as a racially oppressed society implies the activities of a class-defending state. Nor can gender inequality be enacted away so long as class society, with its state, demands the super-exploitation of woman's labor. Class society continually generates gender, racial, ethnic oppressions and the like, which take on a life of their own, as well as profoundly affecting the concrete relations of class itself. It follows that class politics must be fought out in terms of all the active forms of social splitting. It is the management of these divisions that keeps state society functional.

Thus though each person in a class society is reduced from what s/he can become, the varied reductions can be combined into the great stratified regimes of history—this one becoming a fierce warrior, that one a routine-loving clerk, another a submissive seamstress, and so on, until we reach today's personifications of capital and captains of industry. Yet no matter how functional a class society, the profundity of its ecological violence ensures a basic antagonism which drives history onward. History is the history of class society — because no matter how modified, so powerful a schism is bound to work itself through to the surface, provoke resistance ('class struggle'), and lead to the succession of powers.

Of course Kovel has much more to say on this issue but I think that this quotation pretty much gets to the root of why we should not confuse class with classism. Today in the U.S. we join other countries in facing the specter of fascism, more than at any other time in our history. As my friend Bill Robinson notes, 20th century fascism involved the fusion of national capital with reactionary and repressive political power. But 21st century fascism involves the fusion of

transnational capital with reactionary political power. Today we are facing a recomposition of the political forces within capitalist globalization. In order to unload the trillions of dollars it has accumulated, the transnational capitalist class has turned to militarized accumulation—that is, to endless cycles of war, to "accumulation by repression" (private prisons and immigrant detention centers, border walls, homeland security technologies, etc.), the structural necessity of endless surplus value and profit, and the construction of surveillance state. And of course the war on Ukraine has divided much of the left here in the U.S. And there is a need, as my friend Joel Kovel emphasized, to transform socialism into ecological socialism, a socialism for our ecologically-fraught times where economic conditions that affect everyone are systematically linked to the crisis of transnational capitalism with its ecosystemic breakdowns, its endless cycles of war and its commodification of living labor which has produced millions of ecological refugees.

Overproduction and overconsumption are functionally tied to ecocide, genocide, and epistemicide (the destruction of cosmovisions of indigenous peoples). This forces us to scrub the dross from our vision of the future of humanity, as Kovel would put it. One of the problems of the progressive left is that they try to create conditions of equality without fundamentally challenging the logic of capitalism and the ways in which our economy is organized.

Whether we are fighting for neoliberal strategies or economic nationalism, we are finding ourselves trapped. Capitalism's basic workplace structure—employers versus employees—is left unmolested in both its state and private forms—Raya Dunayevskaya exposed this in her pathfinding essay on state capitalism. Clearly we need to abolish capitalism’s specific form of abstract or alienated labor or else face the prospect of continuing along the path of state-capitalism which can only perpetuate the injustices that we are facing today. What we are fighting for as critical educators is a world where exchange value and universalized commodity production come to an end and the means of production relies upon the self-organization of the masses and the self-deliberative acts of the producers. Time will be organized in a completely different fashion. We will welcome a planned distribution of labor time by producers who

have shirked off their chains and are no longer crushed under the weight of socially necessary labor time. Forms of labor that are not productive of surplus value will be created. In this, we seek the end of capitalism's all-pervasive violence.

We are seeing more and more inequalities within and among nations and I am in agreement with Richard Wolff when he calls for an internationalist socialism to guarantee food, clothing and housing across the lifetime of all peoples, and a democratization of political and economic life in ways that move us closer to a genuine socialism. My political affiliation over the years has been with the International Marxist Humanist Organization. But I have a wide range of interests that go beyond materialist politics. I mentioned my interest in theology and apologetics but I also try to follow, in an amateurish way I suspect, current debates in cosmology and evolutionary biology as we are all perforce linked to forces of determination of which some are material and others non-material. Well, I consider myself more of an artisan than an expert.

DF: It's clear how your thinking really continues to develop as movements advance and circumstances change, and as you push yourself into new and different territories. Your ability to make clear political pronouncements and to state clear political affiliations but without becoming sectarian and while not collapsing all pedagogy into politics is something that's sorely missing from academia today. So, finally, what has it been like working as an academic but participating in revolutionary and other liberation movements and struggles? What have you learned from them; in other words, what advice would you give the latest and upcoming generations of revolutionary thinkers and organizers?

PM: None of us are experts when it comes to the inexpressible unknown and unfamiliar, even when the unknown becomes known and the unfamiliar becomes familiar—because we are outside of our safety zone and the cultural markers that we take for granted lack a coherence and correspondence with what is familiar to us. We are in a world where a smile can be mistaken for a frown, and a grimace for an affirmation. We are thrust into the position that some of our

students feel when they take our classes—and so reflecting upon this can be a good exercise. In this way, fieldwork becomes a way of surrendering oneself to the existential moment. We pursue our tasks with feelings of anxiety and apprehension, imbibing the ether of unfamiliarity.

How shall we perform our identity when we don't know the language by which subtle cues and inferences are communicated? How will we be able to convey the sincerity of our convictions? After a while we feel relaxed and confident enough to stop second-guessing everything. We feel exhilarated by the love and kindness shown to us, we feel threatened in perilous moments of danger, we feel intoxicated with joy in the most unforeseen moments, we feel immense gratitude at being forgiven for behavior we did not know was considered embarrassing, and we are constantly surprised at the capacity of others to tolerate us when we make the same mistakes over and over again. Our relationships with those humbled by poverty and deprivation often shame us into recognizing the most superficial aspects of our own 'it's all about me' culture. We feel guilty when we find ourselves delighting in sharing our own stories when we should be listening to others.

From a more academic reading, I have found that theory emerges from practice and not the other way around. In other words, theory grows out of practical struggles, some of which were successes and some of which failed to meet the assigned objectives. For instance, I remember a group of Chavista students from an impoverished sector of Caracas, wanting to start a pirate radio station. After setting this in motion they would meet our group and discuss the obstacles they were facing and then ask us if any of our work could help them find more success in reaching their objectives. What I learned is that critical consciousness is not a precondition of revolutionary struggle (you need to read so many books, take so many courses, etc., before you are 'critical' enough to begin a project) but the result of immersing oneself in the struggle. Reflection comes after such immersion, and yes, that's when previous readings and conversations can be helpful in becoming more critically-minded activists.

A momentous moment in my life occurred around 2005 when I met Sergio Quiroz Miranda, a man 5 or 6 years older than me but someone whom I regarded

as a father figure in many ways. He introduced me to local organizers and everyday workers throughout Mexico who were interested in collective struggle. Sergio co-founded the Partido de los Comunistas Mexicanos in 1997, was a university professor, and invited me to Mexico to give talks when he lived in Mexicali and afterwards when he was teaching in Tijuana and then when he moved to Ensenada. He asked if he could name an educational institution he was thinking of creating, Instituto McLaren. I was flattered but wasn't sure it was the best option as a name. He was insistent, and had discussed the issue with his comrades, who had read much of my work that was available in Spanish. And shortly afterwards, the institute came into being—it is still located in Ensenada but has students from all over Latin America, but mostly from numerous states throughout Mexico. Much later I was granted honorary membership in the Partido de los Comunistas Mexicanos.

Until his death several years ago, Sergio was in charge of Instituto McLaren and would invite me to lecture (my Spanish is terrible and he always provided me with a translator) when I wasn't teaching in Los Angeles. His death has shaken me considerably. The faculty at Instituto McLaren consisted of members of the Partido de los Comunistas Mexicanos and visiting scholars. The Instituto offers a doctorate in education and is becoming well known throughout Mexico as an alternative to what universities have to offer. Sergio would accompany me on speaking engagements throughout Mexico—and as a result of his kind mentorship and friendship, I've visited dozens of cities and states throughout that amazing country.

Sergio and I spent time in the Copper Canyon region of Chihuahua, Mexico with the Rarámuri, also known (incorrectly) as the Tarahumara. In Chihuahua City, I worked with a group of teachers, one of whom had just arrived at my lecture from Parral. She had brought her children with her and all her belongings were tightly packed into her car. Her son had been threatened by Los Zetas, one of the most vicious cartels in the country. She was also threatened and ordered to routinely turn over her teachers' salary to the cartel each month. She had left her house and the rest of her belongings because she knew her life

and that of her children were in serious danger. She attended all the lectures and some of the students tried to help her get relocated in Chihuahua City.

One of the most memorable visits was to the Purépecha city of Cherán in the northwestern region of Michoacán, where the indigenous population were making plans for an armed defense of the city from drug cartels who were moving onto Purépecha lands and removing large swaths of the forests in order to sell the lumber. Sergio would also invite me to speak at his annual Volver a Marx (Return to Marx) conferences.

The last one that I attended was in Mexico City and featured Marta Harnecker, a Chilean intellectual who founded the research institute Memoria Popular Latinoameria (MELPA) in Cuba and who was an advisor to Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez. She was married to my friend, the Canadian Marxist Economist, Michael Lebowitz. From there I would visit Colombia and meet with members of the teachers' unions and visit schools in communities that had been attacked by the Colombian military and paramilitary. The schools I visited often had portraits of teachers painted on walls dedicated to those members of the school community who had been assassinated by the paramilitary.

I recall speaking to one union head who told me that every previous president of the union had been assassinated, and he expected that he would share the same fate. I met numerous female revolutionaries and was amazed how the revolutionary struggle can transform motherhood (I think of the important role of Zapatista women that I met in Chiapas, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo who were invited guests to one of my talks in Buenos Aires, and women working in newly established communities of Brazil as part of the Landless Workers' Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra, or MST), one of the largest movements in Latin America. Imagine the creativity needed to plan the takeover of a tract of unused land to support a small village—where was the school going to be located? Where would the supplies be stored? How would the foodstuffs be available? How would the children be cared for during this transition?

I was fortunate to be able to spend a few days with members of the Abahlali baseMjondolo movement ("the residents of the shacks") which is a

socialist shackdwellers' movement in South Africa that organizes land occupations, considered to be the world's largest urban social movements. I learned a great deal about the importance of decommodifying the land. I gave lectures at the Winter School for the South African Communist Party and learned first-hand about the struggles both during and right after the end of apartheid. The first time I openly wept during a public presentation was when I spoke in Argentina with the group known as HIJOS (an acronym for Sons and Daughters for Identity and Justice against Oblivion and Silence) made up mainly of sons and daughters of those 'disappeared' during the 'dirty war', and hearing stories about how members of the fascist militia would threaten HIJOS members, sometimes in the identical locations where their parents were seized decades earlier, never to be found again.

In Cuba I had a meeting with Che Guevara's daughter, Aleida Guevara, who had read my book on her father and was kind enough to show me some of his personal possessions. I could go on and on about my experiences in Latin America and how they gave my critiques of U.S. geopolitics a much sharper edge. Trips to Turkey, Israel, Palestine, Pakistan, Malaysia and many other countries gave me opportunities to speak in person to people who had been tortured and who spent years as political prisoners. One of the most powerful experiences I had was during a trip to Poland where I visited Auschwitz concentration camp and was able to witness the site of one of the greatest horrors in human history, and since that time I have become a serious student of World War II which has alerted me the dangers of fascism that exist to this day. I take to heart the phrase, 'Never Again'! I have been devoting considerable time to writing about the dangers of fascism in the U.S. and the rise of anti-Semitism.

I would advise the young revolutionaries and organizers of today to appreciate our kinship with all living beings, to engage in dialogue with multigenerational others who have endured unimaginable hardships in their struggle for freedom, those who have been disinherited, those who have survived systematic cruelty and degradation and yet emerged with a faith that the world can be transformed into a better and more peaceable place. I would encourage them to embrace those who wish to rise up against injustice, but in doing so have

refused to auction off their souls. Who have taken into custody those actions that impede rather than facilitate dialogue, who are careful not to trespass on the instinctive goodness of others. In other words, I would encourage them to try to be resolute in their struggle for a better world, a world where scatterings of joy can be found amidst the rubble of hardships. It is important to respect the diverse communities of resistance that have been afforded us today, and the counterforce of togetherness and human sociability that has nurtured them, which enables all of us to appreciate the vast possibilities inherent in such a union and the potential for goodness that such revolutionary love entails.

DF: Wow, that last sentence to me really encapsulates the essence—if there is one—of your praxis over these last few decades. Whatever debates you've been inaugurating or participating in, whatever lines you've drawn, whatever movements you've supported or questioned, whatever scholarship you've critiqued or supported (or more often than not, both), seem to be guided by that revolutionary love: the quest for the unforeseen capacities we as humans have, and the need to unleash these.

I really want to thank you for your time speaking with me and sharing this history and knowledge with all of us. As revolutionary organizers in the U.S. begin taking up intellectual space, which is fantastic, it can be quite daunting to enter into these fields with their sometimes discipline-specific but always very expansive and sprawling details and lines of inquiry and demarcation. I think what you've just laid out will be specifically helpful in this regard!