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Guevara, Ernesto 'Che' (1928–1967)



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Synonyms

[Biography](#); [Che Guevara](#); [Cuban revolution](#); [Focoism](#); [Guerilla warfare](#); [Marxism](#)

Definition

This essay explores the life and work of Argentine Marxist revolutionary, physician, author, guerrilla leader, military theorist, and diplomat, Ernesto 'Che' Guevara (1928–1967).

We all appreciate heroes whose actions and historical stature help enable us to recognise our potential as human beings and who give us the impetus to be better than we are – more courageous, more selfless, more committed to making the world a better place. This is especially true today when our world is on the verge of planetary catastrophe at the hands of a transnational capitalist class and its corporate clientele and a US-led imperialist order seemingly willing to forsake millions of lives in favour of protecting its corporate interests through a shameful complicity with

the brutality and aggressiveness required as the 'leader' of the 'free world' (Robinson 2008). Today, as we witness the world's only superpower using its divinely ordained pre-emptive power to 'democratise' rogue countries through the savagery of war, symbolically delousing its new immigrant populations from the south by highlighting their supposed cultural inferiority, and deploying surveillance and cyber capabilities to steal industry secrets and sabotage financial systems in order to advantage its domestic industry and spy on its own citizens and those from countries around the world, we can safely say that while democracy clearly has no historical present in the US, it could possibly have a future should a socialist alternative to capitalism be one day realised. Yet, this seems unlikely in today's historical juncture, in a world harrowed by war, famine, racism, and ecological destruction.

Any vestiges of social responsibility are trampled into dust by a world corporate media system that deploys its own 'heroes' – i.e., Bill Gates, Warren Buffet, Mark Zuckerberg, the Walton family – to ensure that the capitalist marketplace is venerated as the motor force of democracy. Humanity appears weak and puny in the face of the entrenched dominance of the capitalist mode of production and its billionaire heroes, and alerts us to the seemingly insuperable task of emerging victorious against any and all forces aligned with the interests of capital accumulation. As Peter McLaren (2010) notes:

In a world torn between the oppressed on the one side, and those who esuriently exploit them, on the other, there seems little hope today of a grand alternative for the wretched of the earth. They seem forever caught between the jaws of those scrupulously respectable people who offer them the slavery of wage labour and a lifetime of alienation in exchange for their labour power, and those who loathsomely criminalize their very existence, or feel justified to leave them to suffer whatever cruel fate the market has in store for them. (102–103)

The unmitigated lie that we are destined to be passive participants in history and unable to act in a world of necessity becomes evident when we come to know and recognise the valiant self-fashioning of those who – despite being locked within the prison house of capitalism with its dislocation and disaggregation of person identity – create spaces of protagonistic agency that enable them to act with integrity, valour, and commitment toward a ‘collective struggle’ (Darder 2011). What we need is to learn of and from the heroes who stand among real men and women and who have made profound contributions in our lifetime precisely because of their humanity – because somehow conditions in and around their lives forced them to demand of themselves more than most of us dare to do. The real heroes of our world are those whose disquieting commitment to resisting the brutalisation of everyday life convinces us that we too can be revolutionaries – that in the substantive and aggregative nexus of our historical experiences, we all have the capacity for courage, for honouring others, and for revolutionary love.

Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara was a man from whose storied legacy we can glimpse the possibilities of an authentic humanity, recognising at the same time that he was also one of the most important socialist revolutionaries of the twentieth century and beyond. His accomplishments as an intellectual and a military commander continue to be felt in the hearts of those who knew him and among new generations who continue to discover him anew (Löwy 2007). His gift to his own generation and future generations was his refusal to give succour to despair, his diligent focus on the world-historical antagonisms of his day, the clarity he achieved in redressing social injustices of

his time and his pedagogy of revolution that was based on a critical engagement of Marxist-Leninist theory and the philosophy of praxis he developed from the basis of such an engagement (Harris 1998). Through the words with which he agitated, incited, and persuaded men and women to fight for a socialist alternative, we witness the honesty, self-reflection, and integrity that he argued were necessary characteristics of the ‘new [wo] man’ and socialist revolutionary (Löwy 2007). His Guevarian pedagogy and socialist imaginary were not the product of some privileged access to his own internal reflection but came through a commitment to truth, a struggle for solidarity, a belief in the political efficacy of guerrilla warfare, and a search for a coherence between theory and practice, a coherence that has informed various revolutions since and provides great insights into how we, as critical educators, can begin to attain proletarian hegemony through a pedagogy of love, revolution, and social justice.

A Legacy of and for Revolution

Che is revered as an epic symbol of revolutionary heroism among disenfranchised communities across the globe and especially in his native América Latina. His extraordinary willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice of his life to liberate humanity, his unwavering commitment to his Guevarian (Marxist) pedagogy, and his courageous and unflinching affront to capitalism and US imperialism support the image of a knight from Arthurian legend, a secular Christ, or an avenging angel wielding a fiery sword promulgated and instructed by divine ordinance to slay the hydra-headed beast of US imperialism. For many of us on the left, he inspires and energises us to continue to fight for what we know is right and just, and instils a sense of solidarity and love that reminds us of our purpose.

Hundreds of books and articles have been written about Che, the man who, alongside Fidel Castro, spearheaded a socialist revolution that brought down the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista in Cuba in 1959 and played a key role in various aspects of Cuba’s transformation into

communism. In 1965, he moved on to develop and support other socialist revolutions in Congo-Kinshasa and in Bolivia, where he was eventually captured and assassinated by the Bolivian army with CIA assistance. He was and continues to be a controversial figure, idolised by poor, indigenous, and otherwise brutalised communities worldwide and intensely hated not only by the transnational functionaries of the capitalist superstructure and the restrictive circle of the ruling class but also by those of the working class whose enduring embourgeoisement positions Che as a determinate threat to their upward mobility (McLaren 2000).

A man who grew up in the so called middle class with privilege and opportunity and became a physician, Che renounced what could have been a lucrative medical profession to bring an end to the unnecessary suffering of people caused by what he recognised not only as the unconscionable and gluttonous greed of the capitalist class but more importantly as the very system of capitalism itself in which it was impossible to function humanely since it was powered by overaccumulation and the expropriation of surplus value from the poor in order to serve the interests of the rich. Those who have deeply studied his life, including his writings, whether divinising him as a revolutionary hierophant or misguided romantic adventurer, consistently point to a man who held a deep love for humanity and an abiding belief that human beings could and would change through the development of a socialist-humanist consciousness in both immanent and productive ways. He grasped keenly the full extent to which capital expands and encroaches upon every aspect of social life, including our social and political values and the ways in which we engage with each other and our world. He denounced capitalism and imperialism on the basis of the devastation and unfreedom it creates for the masses of exploited peoples and the inhumanity that it engenders in individuals and society. He argued that capitalism necessarily spawns inequality and creates human beings who are motivated by a stygian individualism that results in the negation of the essential qualities of humanity – love of and for our fellow human beings, responsibility for the wellbeing of

all, honesty, creativity, voluntary labour, solidarity and a sense of community (Löwy 2007).

The obsessive focus on the self that characterises much of how we engage in the world, including our explanations for success and failure, is part and parcel of the totalising effect of capitalism that breeds a deep-seated survival of the fittest attitude that normalises poverty and other forms of human suffering. This individualism runs throughout all institutions under capitalism, including education, where the opportunity to learn is determined through competition for grades and scores as if these were not related to a host of other social factors and in particular poverty and the availability of material resources. It is considered a superior human quality to strive to be the best of the best and to leave others trailing behind. Given this capture of education by individualism, it is not surprising that people learn early on to see themselves not as part of a social group working collaboratively to achieve goals with the benefit of mutual support but in an antagonistic relationship to each other. Capitalism pits human beings against each other such that 'man' becomes 'man's' worst enemy. A central aspect of Che's revolutionary goals was the transformation of (wo)man into human beings who, through the alchemy of critical consciousness, could transmute historical experiences of exploitation into a praxis of liberation by embodying the values of revolutionary socialism – values that could only be fully achieved outside of capital's value form. In other words, the problem was not only to rid the world of capitalists, but capital as a social relation. McLaren (2010) writes:

The fact that all Washington administrations are populated by a particularly venal cabal of career opportunists, theocratic sociopaths, anti-Enlightenment activists, pathological liars and vulpine opponents of democracy should in no way confound us into thinking that the problem of capitalism is rooted in acts of political malfeasance by clever but corrupted politicians. Such acts may be torturously accommodating to capital, and lead to impoverishment, bloodshed, repression, misery, and eventually to genocide and even to the obliteration of entire nations, but they are not the source of the problem. The problem itself can be traced to Marx's world-historical discovery: the alienated character of the very act of labouring and the

exploitation that is a fundamental part of selling one's labour-power for a wage. (105)

Historical conditions set the stage for what came to be for Che a life of tremendous self discipline, theoretical clarity, and revolutionary vision invoked through a profound love for humanity and a conviction that a society that callously exploited, bestowed cruelty, and created or accepted barbaric living conditions for any of its citizens needed to be radically transformed. Che suffered throughout his life from terrifying asthma attacks that may have sensitised him to people's suffering. Indeed, he worked in his youth with leper communities and was deeply affected by the way in which they were treated with disdain. He was an avid reader of the classics and many revolutionary texts from his early youth onwards. He was raised in a politicised household with parents who actively took part in dissident political activity. At the age of 23, he embarked on a journey with a close friend that took him through South America, where he witnessed for himself the abject poverty, hunger, disease, drug addiction, and indignities impoverished peasants and workers experienced at the hands of those who seemed unable or unwilling to see or feel their suffering. His journaling throughout this time suggests that these experiences were deeply troubling to him and offered the opportunity for reflection that spawned both the desire and commitment to do something meaningful in his life. As Guevara (2004) wrote in his now famed *Motorcycle Diaries*:

The person who wrote these notes passed away the moment his feet touched Argentine soil again. The person who reorganizes and polishes them, me, is no longer, at least I am not the person I once was. All this wandering around 'our America with a capital A' has changed me more than I thought. (25–26)

The concerns and questions evidenced in these diaries ultimately developed into a revolutionary consciousness that involved a deep capacity for honest self-reflection and a Guevarian pedagogy that brought triumph to the Cuban Revolution and a strong belief that the only way to defeat US imperialism was with a united América Latina. This latter antiimperialist and, particularly, anti-US position was solidified as he evidenced the

overthrow of Guatemala's President Jacobo Arbenz with the assistance of the CIA in service to the interests of the United Fruit Company. It is believed that his vision of a united América Latina, was beginning to see fruition as he moved to support Bolivia's revolution and planned to follow thereafter with insurgencies into his native Argentina. Alas, as the US recognised that his enormous courage, his charm and gift of persuasion, and his brilliant socialist pedagogy were a daunting if not indomitable force to be reckoned with, the CIA hunted him down and put an end to his socialist internationalist agenda. He was captured in Bolivia in 1967 and summarily executed on the orders of the CIA (McLaren 2000).

A key moment in revolutionary history was the fateful meeting of Che Guevara and Fidel Castro in Mexico City when Fidel and his men were exiled from Cuba after serving 2 years in prison as a result of being captured during their first attack against the dictatorship of Batista in 1951 (Fidel's 26 July Movement in Cuba had only a narrow base composed largely of middle-class intellectuals). After training in Mexico City, Che, Fidel, and other Cuban exiles boarded the *Granma* that took them to Cuba and so began the Cuban Revolution that toppled the Batista Government with a final victorious battle led by Che and peasant guerrilla forces at Santa Clara in 1959. This historic achievement and the years that followed serve as testament to Che's extraordinary bravery and commitment, and to the significance of a Guevarian pedagogy – a testament that lives on today despite an overwhelming campaign to domesticate Che into yet another superhuman hero of the market in an attempt to mystify his extraordinary but very real and human revolutionary accomplishments.

The commodification of Che's name and face – which are now plastered on coffee mugs and T-shirts and sold to consumers across the world, but especially in the US – is a strategic attempt to diminish Che's image as a revolutionary and attenuate the potential of his dialectical thinking in helping today's youth achieve critical consciousness. The iconisation of Che extracts his humanity and with it the socialist ideals that he embodied and that gave millions the hope for

a socialist alternative. It serves to turn Che against himself as he becomes the commodified form that he rejected and against which he courageously fought. We recognise the marketisation of our heroes as strategies of hegemonic control but also note the contested spaces within which Che is made and iconised. As McLaren (2000) states elsewhere:

Even though there appears to be more of a willingness by rank-and-file North American commentators to de-reify Che as saint or sinner and to place him somewhere in between, we must remember that every encounter with that irrepressible force known as Che occurs in an occupied space. It is a space of reception dense with public signs and personal memories, a space de-limited by the discourses and 'ways of telling' that are most available to society, most overdetermined within society, and carrying the most currency within today's economy of ideas – especially in the public media. (7)

Yet people are not always duped by the anaesthetising impact of shopping mall politics. Che stands, among other human heroes in history, to remind us that even within the totalising system of capital that aims to eclipse the virtues inherent in our existence, there are essential aspects to our humanity that remain, perhaps buried deep within the interstices of our self-and-social transformation, that can be nurtured, recovered, and brought forward to create new revolutionary heroes among us and in future generations until we can finally find ourselves in the moment of true victory, when humanity is vindicated from the treacherous workings of capital and its attendant antagonisms and we can move into the light of our secular salvation.

Indeed the extraordinary – some would say miraculous – reappearance of Che's body on 28 June 1997, near the airstrip where it had been discarded thirty years earlier, seems a prophetic reminder and admonition to the world that a martyr was made of Che to liberate humanity, such that we may find the fortitude to rise toward this most fearsome of goals, lest his execution be in vain (McLaren 2010).

A Guevarian Pedagogy

Che was a man devoted to the revolution, fully willing to make the ultimate sacrifice in order to free humanity from its enslavement to the chillingly individualistic and devouring monsters of capital. His readings of Marx, Lenin, and other revolutionary theorists began early in his youth but later became sources of study – to be analysed, critiqued, and built upon. A brilliant Marxist, Che believed wholeheartedly that revolution was the ultimate course in which the world was headed, that capitalism would suffocate humanity until the threat became too much to be endured at which time the people would rise up against it. However, he did not believe in uncritical idolatry or teleological accounts of historical victory over capitalism but rather argued that a revolutionary philosophy of praxis must be adapted to specific socio-historical contexts (McLaren 2000). As such, he recognised and denounced the enormous and growing power of US imperialism and its inextricable link to capital interests.

Che, however, was also a brilliant guerrilla warfare strategist who was not content to merely wait for conditions to be ripe for revolution. He argued that conditions for revolution could and should be accelerated to liberate the millions of people that at the time faced poverty and other inhumanities. His Guevarian pedagogy involved the idea that revolution required a short period of preparation, to ensure sufficient support among the people, and then a hard strike against those who would support the state apparatus, specifically against the state military.

Although he believed that armed struggle was and should always be a last resort, he was convinced that a socialist revolution was synonymous with armed conflict, and that it must be thus since the capitalist class and the imperialist powers would never give up their presumed right to exploit under a mantra of false ideologies that serve their interests. According to Löwy (2007, p. 79), 'the principle of the inevitability of armed struggle was [for Che] derived precisely from the sociology of the revolution: because the revolution is socialist it can be victorious only through revolutionary war' (79).

For Che, a socialist revolution could only survive under conditions of profound love – a love that was deeper than the romantic version used to commodify feelings and to turn people into possessions under capitalism. In Che's now famous words:

Let me say, with the risk of appearing ridiculous, that the true revolutionary is guided by strong feelings of love. It is impossible to think of an authentic revolutionary without this quality. This is perhaps one of the greatest dramas of a leader; he must combine an impassioned spirit with a cold mind and make painful decisions without flinching one muscle. Our vanguard revolutionaries must idealize their love for the people, for the most sacred of causes, and make it one and indivisible. They cannot descend, with small doses of daily affection, to the places where ordinary men put their love into practice. (Anderson 1997, pp. 636–637)

Che was a man of love and his love for humanity reached the ultimate crescendo as he transcended the presumed natural state of self-preservation engendered through capitalism and embraced a socialist consciousness that included a vision for something far greater than one individual's needs – the struggle for humanity's liberation. Thus, within this socialist framing, we can recognise his now famous words uttered proudly and unflinchingly moments before his execution to reflect this revolutionary vision: 'Shoot, coward, you are only going to kill a man' (cited in Kunzle 1997).

And although these courageous words impel an image of an heroic being beyond what any mere mortal can presume to emulate, we learn that this was not an instinct held deep within him but something that was fostered during his youth when he was said to be a risk-taker – something that allowed him to push himself to the limits of what a young man could endure as he played rugby despite his life-threatening asthmatic condition. We see his vigilance of character enacted through self-reflection as he wrote during a battle in Cuba's Altos de Merino:

Upon arriving I found that the guards were already advancing. A little combat broke out in which we retreated very quickly. The position was bad and they were encircling us, but we put up little resistance. Personally, I noted something that I had never felt before: the need to live. That had better be

corrected in the next opportunity. (cited in Anderson 1997, p. 327)

With this profound love and respect for humanity, Che was clear that a true revolutionary must necessarily harbour a deep hatred toward any who would destroy the opportunity to liberate humanity.

Hatred is an element of struggle; relentless hatred of the enemy that impels us over and beyond the natural limitations of man and transforms us into effective, violent, selective, and cold killing machines. Our soldiers must be thus; a people without hatred cannot vanquish a brutal enemy. (Guevara 1999)

And yet he showed profound empathy for his captured enemies and afforded them the dignity he perceived the right of every human being. Rooted firmly within the Latin American humanist tradition, for Che, the 'standard of dignity' to which all revolutionaries should adhere is reflected in the words of José Martí: 'A real man should feel on his own cheek the blow inflicted on any other man's' (cited in Löwy 2007, p. 24).

Those who wish to discredit his name and destroy his legacy of bravery that was built upon his love take a righteous moralising position that his statements and actions regarding armed struggle reflect a dark and murderous side. These capitalist moralists who direct massacres without bloodying their own hands suggest that love and hate as claimed by Che are contradictory. Löwy (2007) argues otherwise:

To hold life in profound respect and to be ready to take up arms and, if need be, to kill, is contradictory only in the eyes of Christian or pacifist humanism. For revolutionary humanism, for Che, the people's war is the necessary answer, the only possible answer, of the exploited and oppressed to the crimes and the institutionalized violence of the oppressors ... (24)

Zizek (2008) talks about the ultimate cause of violence as the fear of the neighbour. But he also describes what he calls 'divine violence'. He sees divine violence as an infusion of justice beyond the law. It is extra-moral but not immoral. It is not a divine licence to kill. It is divine only in a subjective sense, in the eye of the beholder, or in the mind of the person enacting such violence. It is Walter Benjamin's Angel of History looking

forward as he/she moves backwards, slaying the masters of progress, restoring the balance to the history of the world. It is a violence that refuses a deeper meaning; it is the logic of rage, a refusal to normalise crimes against humanity, either by reconciliation or revenge; it is, in other words, a refusal to compromise with injustice. Žižek describes divine violence as pure power over all of life for the sake of the living, it is a type of sign that the world is unjust. It is not the return of the repressed, or the underside of the authoritarian legal order. Nor is it the intervention of some omnipotent God. Rather, it is the sign of the impotency of God. There is no objective criterion with which to judge divine violence. Žižek claims that Che's comments are united in Che's motto: *Hay que endurecerse sin perder jamas la ternura*. (One must endure [become hard, toughen oneself] without losing tenderness).

The legal monopoly of violence in capitalist society is embodied in the institutions of the state, or political society, and clearly the social forces that constitute state formations are not static but historically contingent. While it is clear that the state is both an instrument of coercion as well as the production of consent, it is a matter of debate whether contemporary developments in civil society can result in an augmentation of state violence. Suffice it to say that, given his analyses of state formations, international relations and the political economy of his day, Che was committed to the inevitability of armed conflict in the struggle for socialism.

Che argued that fundamental to revolution was the making of the 'new (wo)man'. Not only was the development of characteristics and values among the people that would support the revolution essential to its success but it was also at the heart of the goals of a socialist revolution. Liberating humanity was not merely about redistribution of resources but about changing the ways in which human beings related to each other and to their world. This required a pedagogy of revolution – the critical understanding of what the revolution was ultimately about, beyond the initial desire for bringing justice and greater resources to the suffering masses.

Che was known to always carry books with him and to spend time reading them to the men who fought alongside him, often in addition to providing literacy instruction since many of the men who fought the Cuban Revolution were poor peasants who had never had the opportunity for schooling. In Che's words we hear a vision that can readily map into the ideas set forth a decade later by Paulo Freire (1970) in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and which spawned the Critical Pedagogy movement. Specifically, Che recognised that a revolutionary praxis would bring a socialist consciousness and would engender the unequivocal demand for justice and restore the necessary sense of agency to lead their struggle.

The first step to educate the people is to introduce them to the revolution. Never pretend you can help them conquer their rights by education alone, while they must endure a despotic government. First and foremost, teach them to conquer their rights and, as they gain representation in the government, they will learn whatever they are taught and much more: with no great effort they shall soon become the teachers, towering above the rest. (cited in Löwy 2007)

Through his words, we recognise, as McLaren (2000) notes, that he was not only 'a teacher of the revolution but a revolutionary teacher' who saw the emancipatory nature of teaching and rejected traditional teaching pedagogy that is characterised by oppressive teacher/student relations in which the teacher holds all the knowledge and doles it out at will while simultaneously discrediting the knowledge of the oppressed. We can see how this traditional teaching approach sustains the status quo as the oppressed are led to feel grateful for the opportunity to learn without the opportunity to question and transform the existing social relations that oppressed them in the first place. Che's revolutionary pedagogy was an affirmation to the ontologies and epistemologies of the workers and peasants to which only the oppressed are privy by virtue of their social and historical positioning. As Che indicated, in the tradition of Marx before him and Freire after him, a revolution must be a people's revolution, even though it may be initiated by a vanguard which fights not for them but whose actions ultimately should reflect the people's decisions.

The new (wo)man would be a product of a new society within which education would play a vital role. Socialism, Che believed, would engender individuals that were responsive to the needs of the whole group and who held a deep commitment to the development of humanity and the revolutionary cause. Socialism requires a different set of values, the value for social justice, for communal efforts, for sacrifice, for equally supporting others, for labour as a creative endeavour, and shared responsibility for those tasks that a society deems necessary but that no one really wants to do, a responsibility that helps individuals develop in community (Martí 1999).

His actions and personal testimonies about him reveal a man who did not stand above the rest but lived to the best of his ability through the values that he professed. He was said to hold enormously high expectations of others and to be even more demanding of himself. He lived, to the best of his ability, his Guevarian politics but he was quick to point out his own deficits as a socialist revolutionary, recognising the imprint of capital's seemingly intransigent stranglehold on every aspect of our lives. In Cuba, where an 82-foot statue of Che stands, marking his mausoleum in Santa Clara (often called 'the City of Che'), children are encouraged to be like *el Che* – to develop the characteristics that he espoused and exemplified as a revolutionary (Martí 1999).

Che in the Context of World Capitalism

Our current transnational capitalist world has reached a level of destruction unprecedented in the history of humanity. Famine, war, racism, sexism, hatred are all implicated to various degrees in the incessant necessity for capital accumulation underwritten by an imperialist creed that legitimises US exceptionalism and the quest for power beyond what the imagination can condone. William Robinson (2008) makes a clarion call for action as he relates the disastrous fate capital has procured:

The system of global capitalism that now engulfs the entire planet is in crisis. There is consensus among scientists that we are on the precipice of

ecological holocaust, including the mass extinction of species; the impending collapse of agriculture in major producing areas; the meltdown of polar ice caps; the phenomena of global warming, and the contamination of the oceans, food stock, water supply, and air. Social inequalities have spiraled out of control, and the gap between the global rich and the global poor has never been as acute as it is in the early twenty-first century. Driven by the imperatives of over accumulation and transnational global control, global elites have increasingly turned to authoritarianism, militarisation, and war to sustain the system. Many political economists concur that a global economic collapse is possible, even probable. (vii–viii)

Indeed this is Marx's prophetic critique of capital restated in the context of today's crisis of capitalism; yet it is still uncertain if capitalism will bring about its own demise as a result of workers rising up in response to their destitute conditions.

The ideological marriage of democracy to capitalism that sustains the image of the US as a benevolent protector of the 'developing world' serves to conceal its treacherous dealings against any socialist alternative, even when this is the popular will of the people, in service to transnational capital. Evidence of US-sponsored massacres can be found across the globe, but particularly in América Latina, which has served for centuries as a killing field for US profit and power. Indeed, the massacres of greed and hatred can be traced to the infamously historic year of 1492, when a colonial power matrix was instituted that placed wealth and power in the hands of white, able-bodied, Christian men through a murderous war waged materially and ideologically against indigenous communities. According to decolonial theorists Ramon Grosfoguel, Enrique Dussel, Anibal Quijano, and others, the continual violence enacted upon the peoples of the global South is a founding aspect of Cartesian Western epistemology, instituted as the universal truth on the basis of the *ego cogito* (I think, therefore I am) that rises out of the historic and epistemic conditions of possibility developed through the *ego conquiro* (I conquer, therefore I am) and the link between the two is the *ego exterminis* (I exterminate you, therefore I am) (Grosfoguel 2013). The genocide perpetuated by Western

imperialists on the indigenous populations of the New World and African slave populations of the Middle Passage was followed by epistemicide – the demonisation and disappearance of indigenous knowledges that accompanied the expansion of the US settler-colonial state. Today we search for the wisdom of the autochthonous societies of our lost ancestors – the Arawaks, the Caribes, the Chibchas of the Antillean coastline, the Tapuyas, the Arucanos, the Incas, the Patagones, and countless other tribes massacred, tortured and enslaved by the European invaders.

Che was far ahead of his time in his understandings of the social conditions in América Latina. His conviction that only a united Latin America could emerge victorious against US imperialism seems prophetic in our age of financialisation, monetarism, hedge-fund hucksterism and fictitious capital. From his socio-historical and political location in the global South, Che's epistemology challenged and extended Marxist thought. For Che, imperialism was not an extension of capitalism as Marx would have it but intricately imbricated in its conditions of possibility. As Robinson (2008) explains, colonisation was the first of multiple stages in the development of capitalism that has continually expanded in subsequent waves to reach today's totalising formation. Che's revolutionary ontology was forged out of the converging and worsening crises of capitalism, society, and civilisation, the dictatorship of ownership, first-hand experience of the colonality of power (*patron de poder colonial*), the brute force US capitalists were able to wield through the military-industrial complex, and the privileged geopolitical positioning of the US and its proximity to Latin America that had correspondingly undermined the dignity and livelihood of countless populations throughout Las Américas. As he witnessed Cuba's professional class flee the country in droves after the victory of the revolution, he came to recognise that the bourgeoisie would rather sell their soul to the highest bidder, side with the imperialist ambitions of the US, and take refuge in the certainties of the past than give up their perceived right to lands in favour of agrarian reform.

Yet, at the time, the guerrilla warfare deployed by Fidel and Che and the promise of a future free from the jackboots of imperialism helped secure a socialist alternative for Cuba, and thus it was believed that the same victory could be realised by other national liberation movements. In today's transnational capitalism, the accumulation of wealth by the largest transnational corporations is based on the hyper-exploitation of the peoples of the 'developing' world, particularly exacerbated through the North American Free Trade Agreement. The concentration of the transnational capitalist class's wealth and power enables it to wield tremendous influence in national and international policy. Not surprisingly, it is fiercely opposed to large-scale socialist developments (such as Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution) that may upset the 'democratic' stability of the nations that procure their profits. A massive military industrial complex and a narco-terror war that has militarised the US-Mexican border serves to bolster US surveillance and intimidation of all Latin America in the service of transnational corporate interests (Monzó et al. 2014).

Yet even under this hyper-capitalist world order, Che's heroic legacy continues to inspire and hold promise for the marginalised communities of América Latina and to spur and inform new socialist movements. Revolutionary struggles that have come to bear Che's foundational signature include the Cuban Revolution, the Sandinista Revolution, the Zapatistas indigenous movement in Chiapas, Mexico, which is explicitly inspired by Che's teachings, and the Bolivarian Revolution led by Hugo Chavez that began in 2007. However, these are small-scale movements in comparison to the large-scale socialist alternative that Che envisioned.

A Guevarian-Informed Critical Pedagogy

Although Che recognised, as Marx did, the totalising and self-reproducing aspects of capital, and although his vision of socialism transcended nationalised boundaries of identity (although not gender ones), he did not come to see the extent to which capitalism would persevere nor the

magnitude of destruction and human suffering it would engender. Today's globalised world and the unyielding and supreme power of the US make localised guerrilla warfare politically unserviceable. While we support social movements in which the oppressed masses extol their collective power to fight for justice, emancipation, and freedom from oppression and exploitation in Latin America and across the world, we believe that a different type of war must be simultaneously waged within the imperialist powers themselves; an ideological war or, in Gramscian terms, a 'war of position'. This is a concerted epistemological challenge to US cultural hegemony, the ideological underpinnings that hold the capitalist system together. According to Gramsci, a war of position is a necessary precursor to a 'war of manoeuvre' in which social movements collectively attempt through a united front to topple the state apparatus. Che recognised this ideological war must be waged through education and the creation of the revolutionary consciousness in the new (wo) man. There is no blueprint available today for the road to socialism, only those with the courage to remake history using the insights gleaned from a very unreliable attempts to control the social production of labour power by the workers. As McLaren (2010) remarks:

The stages of liberation that were to follow lock-step from the contradiction between the forces and the relations of production – the accumulation of evolution powered by a law of dialectical development that would inevitably lead from the economic contradictions of capitalism to the establishment of a classless society under 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' – did not follow in the wake of the quixotic predictions of the dogmatists (a condition into which a great many fundamentalist Marxisms fall), ensuring the final victory of socialism over the cut-throat capitalists, the end of alienated labour and the flourishing of human culture. What young radicals such as Che had discovered in the interim was that it was not history that should drive the revolution but the other way around – the peasants and the workers should direct their own fate, making economic decisions and deciding which share of production is to be assigned to accumulation and which share to consumption But today, nearly forty years after Che's death, when the contradictions at the heart of the market economy are more exacerbated than they were in Che's day (even in the industrialized capitalism of Marx's day!), there

are no completed socialist revolutions to serve as a living model for the world, only those that have been ceaselessly and violently interrupted, or those that, following in the intrepid footsteps of Simon Bolivar, are being tested in the barrios of Caracas or los alto-planos of Venezuela. (103)

A revolutionary critical pedagogy is a philosophy of praxis that interrogates the ideological conditions and contradictions that sustain societal structures as if such were natural or the best possible democratic options available. A host of institutionalised structures are in place in the US that serve to keep the masses of workers anaesthetised to the suffering of others and duped into believing that our capitalist system is the best of all possible worlds, including the corporate media and our increasingly privatised school system. Normalised ideologies about human 'nature', including individualism and competition are so culturally embedded in the way society functions that people find it difficult to conceive within the lineaments of their technocratic rationality that individuals could thrive within a set of values that emphasise overcoming necessity for every person through collectivist cooperation. Closely associated with individualism are ideologies that serve to create and sustain discourses necessary for identity construction, such as those associated with race, class, gender, and sexuality. However, as important as identity construction has become in today's culture of racism, homophobia, patriarchy and ableism, the formation of these identities is often used by the transnational capitalist class to divide workers against each other by administering a specific image of what it means to be 'American', and in doing so masking the role of capital as an 'equal opportunity' exploiter and effectively circumventing class struggle and the construction of protagonistic political agency.

A Guevarian informed revolutionary critical pedagogy re-inserts the values of freedom from necessity, provides spaces for self-and-social critique, encourages self-reflection and sacrifice for the good of humanity, promotes anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-homophobic curricula and pedagogical practices, and encourages an informed public to learn from and with those whose epistemologies are rooted in the histories and struggles

of the global South. Within a Guevarian informed revolutionary pedagogy, education is not only freely available to all but carries with it a responsibility for each person to meet the needs of society's most aggrieved populations. Within such a framing, teachers are viewed as committed intellectuals who create the conditions of possibility for the development of a socialist consciousness so that they may actualise their own power and recognise this as an inherent human capacity, leading to a renewed sense of agency and the will to act toward the creation of a new sociality.

For the youth of our nations, Che offers an alternative to the individualistic and greed-based consumer logic to which they are socialised, and offers opportunities for students to create a protagonistic political agency. The feeling that we are powerless to change the world's suffering is not an accident – it is a strategic aspect of class relations. Hope is the first step that must be taken to enable us to act towards something bigger and better than the world we have constructed. In Joel Kovel's (1997) words:

Therefore capital must go if we are to survive as a civilization and, indeed, a species; and all partial measures and reforms should be taken in the spirit of bringing about capital's downfall. Nothing could seem more daunting than this, indeed in the current balance of forces, it seems inconceivable. Therefore the first job must be to conceive it as a possibility, and not to succumb passively to the given situation. Capital expresses no law of nature; it has been the result of choice, and there is no essential reason to assume it cannot be un-chosen. Conceiving things this way is scarcely sufficient. But it is necessary, in both a moral and a practical sense. (14)

Far from being an ambivalent space that defies categorisation, love is a foundational element in a Guevarian informed revolutionary pedagogy. The media exalts a capitalist-based love in which people become the possession of others in the name of love. A revolutionary love is one that does not encounter state boundaries or colour lines and one that encourages freedom of spirit and

a commitment to the well-being of others. It is a feeling that honours the dignity of human beings above all else. It is a love willing to sacrifice for humanity and its freedoms. It is a love that will spawn new revolutionary heroes in our lifetime and generations to come until we finally achieve the most fearsome of victories – a socialist alternative in which all of humanity can live and love freely.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Castro, Fidel \(1926–2016\)](#)
- ▶ [Cuba: A Historical Context to Anti-Imperialism, Nineteenth Century to the Present](#)

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