

**A Book Review Symposium: Lilia D. Monzó (2019) *A Revolutionary Subject: Pedagogy of Women of Color and Indigeneity*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing. ISBN: 978-1-4331-5919-0**

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### **Marx, Indigenous Women, and Women of Color**

At a time when Indigenous women and Women of Color are rising up, theorizing and organizing against exploitative conditions, *A Revolutionary Subject: Pedagogy of Women of Color and Indigeneity* by Lilia D. Monzó (2019) offers relevant and critical insights for addressing racialized and gendered oppression. In this work, Monzó explores the revolutionary role of women of color and indigenous women in their struggle against racism, colonialism, sexism, and capitalism using a Marxist-humanist approach. Marxist-humanism, as developed by Dunayevskaya (1958), is a philosophy that engages with the totality of Marx's work, posits that alienation is at the center

of dehumanizing structures humans face under capital and embraces Marx's philosophy of liberation.

By engaging with Marx in this way and by examining Marx's writings on non-western societies and on gender relations Monzó argues that Marxism is a philosophy of liberation that is inherently anti-sexist and anti-racist (Anderson, 2016; Brown, 2013). Marxist-humanists have always taken a long dialectical view of history, paying attention to the struggles of the day and identifying the revolutionary subjects of the time. Drawing from theory emerging from the scholarship and lived experiences of Indigenous women and Women of Color, Monzó follows in this tradition making a strong case for this hyper-dehumanized group being "revolutionary Reason and force" necessary for liberatory movement (Dunayevskaya, 1982). This particular task is important to address class-reductionist thinking that insists that other antagonisms like sexism and racism should take a backseat to class issues and to building an international worker coalition. Here Monzó posits that Indigenous women and Women of Color experience double oppression, both as hyper exploited workers and as racialized gendered minorities. Her book is particularly astute at revealing the limitations of dogmatic Marxist thinking and makes a case for how and why we need to have a greater vision and a more inclusive picture of what it means to be a worker.

Most importantly by engaging the totality of Marx's work Monzó reveals that Marxism can be a philosophy of revolution, one that is concerned with a new humanism, not of the limiting European, western or masculine variety but one that "develops our species being through new values and social relations that are built on equality and cooperation rather than competition and individualism.....with an economic system that is actually democratically

controlled by the people, wherein every person is inherently valued and perceived as interdependent with all other life forms” (p.240).

### **Indigenous Women and Women of Color Ways of Knowing**

Who among the radical left has not wondered how revolutionaries come to be? Throughout the book, Monzó makes it clear that we need to not only theorize about the material lives of women but that we also need to engage with their personal histories. Whereas we expect scholars to give us conceptual, quantitative and anecdotal evidence to support their assertions, we rarely see stories embedded into texts such as this. Instead, Monzó takes her own advice of taking revolutionary courageous actions by sharing her personal history. In the chapter, *In search of freedom; My road to Marx*, Monzó unabashedly thrusts the reader into her lifeworld, retelling her experiences with issues of race, class, gender, sharing her private shame and triumphs while relaying her encounters with theory that ultimately led her to a Marxist-humanist orientation.

In other chapters, Monzó uses a similar treatment when addressing the radical women of color she examines throughout history as well as in her encounters with participants she interviewed. The histories shared in these chapters reveal pain, trauma, exploitation, abuse and alienated life under capitalism, they also reveal the resiliency, capacities, and resolve of Indigenous women and Women of Color. The counter-narratives presented in these chapters actively dispel sexist ideas that suggest that women were/are passive actors in revolutionary movements over history. Instead, Monzó makes a case for women being a “revolutionary spark and motor” that propel/led many social movements across the world (p.138).

The personal accounts, the revolutionary history of women presented here along with the stories of her interviewees for Monzó demonstrate an idea that is

throughout the book – that women of color are and continue to be agentic subjects in their quest for their liberation and that “revolutionaries are not born but are made” (p. 147). Weaving theory, personal narrative and historical exposition throughout this book Monzó disrupts a common-sense western masculine logic and style that we often encounter in academic texts such as these. Here it is clear that her vision goes beyond the acknowledgment of forgotten histories, but to the liberation of Women of Color and Indigenous women’s ways of knowing; a knowing that syncretically links the relationship between the personal and the political as well as the individual and the collective.

### **Fostering Solidarity Among Indigenous Women and Women of Color**

In the section *Gendered and racialized capital: Tensions and alliances*, Monzó highlights historic struggles between and among Indigenous women and Women of Color in the United States. As with all other sections of the book, she employs a Marxist-humanist lens to explain capitalism’s function in producing what she describes as “patriarchal racisms” (p.206)- the different manifestations of patriarchy that disproportionately impact the lives of women of color. She is clear in distinguishing how these different ‘racisms’ inform each other and ultimately create dehumanizing systems for all Indigenous women and Women of Color. Monzó describes how labor produces value and how women of color have historically been racialized and conscripted for different forms of treatment in the service of capital.

Using Marxist and feminist thought as an explanatory heuristic and not as a call to ignore real theoretical and practical challenges Monzó explores issues like the model minority myth often ascribed to Asian Americans, Indigenous conceptions of what non-indigenous groups are considered to be settlers, and tensions among immigrant groups of women based on competition within the

capitalist order among others. To address these historic challenges, Monzó encourages alliance-building among women of color that do not adopt the logic of capital. Here again, she combats class-reductionist thinking that suggests women should fall in line and ignore these challenges for a greater class war. She also confronts bourgeois feminisms that are limited to individualism and an each-woman-for-herself approach. Informed by the work of Indigenous women, Monzó offers several suggestions towards alliance-building among women of color but reminds us that this project must be anti-capitalist and writes, “self-determination, freedom from property and domination and the recognition of mutual responsibility to the human beings and to the Earth will not happen as long as capitalism is allowed to structure our lives” (p.232).

### **From critical pedagogy to revolutionary critical pedagogy and dreaming**

Towards the end of the book, Monzó beautifully lays out what she describes as a *Pedagogy of Dreaming*, the principled hope and courage Women of Color and Indigenous women can draw on to propel their work. This is a significant chapter that makes connections between Women of Color’s past histories, present oppressions, and future transformative possibilities. She urges the reader to not focus only on large structural issues but to also deal critically with the psycho-affective dimensions of oppression. Monzó does so by revitalizing the entirety of Freire’s revolutionary critical pedagogy including his commitment to the concepts of love and hope. She moves us beyond neoliberal conceptions of Freire’s work including those that would reduce critical pedagogy to methods, techniques or programs and to an anti-capitalist, humanist framework steeped in love and care. Indeed, in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire asserts, "Because love is an act of courage, not of fear, love is a commitment to others. No matter where the oppressed are found, the act of love is a commitment to their cause-- the cause of liberation “(1968). As such *Pedagogy of Dreaming* recognizes that

joy, love, dreaming and imagination are not only aspirational but principled political stances necessary to take in our collective struggles.

## Conclusion

*A Revolutionary Subject: Pedagogy of Women of Color and Indigeneity* is an insightful and critical book that dialectically explores the theoretical and lived experiences of Indigenous women and Women of Color. Monzó's commitment to women of color as human subjects with agency and revolutionary capacity to create the worlds they want to live in, is hopeful and unrelenting. Her perspicacious Marxist-humanist and feminist analysis can also be applied to newer movements, such as the anti-colonial feminist uprisings in the Middle East, the Latinx feminist actions against sexual assault, and the flowering queer liberation we are witnessing in Africa. This book is a must-read for theorists, organizers, educators, and activists interested in exploring pedagogy that impels us towards new, humanizing social relations.

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The new book, *A Revolutionary Subject: Pedagogy of Women of Color and Indigeneity*, by Lilia D. Monzó (2019a), presents a much needed and prescient look at the significant role of women, especially Women of Color and Indigenous Women, in revolutionary struggles, and it demonstrates how women's liberation and anti-racist agendas are central to Marxist-Humanism. Monzó employs Marxist-Humanisms' body of thought and political action to envision and advocate for a socialist alternative. In doing so, she connects her political and theoretical arguments to expose the imperial violence against women, but more specifically against Women of Color, Indigenous Women, and the non-Western world to advance Western development. Monzó writes that women's active participation in revolutionary movements have been historically erased, their leadership capacity often ignored, and their specific insights as historically oppressed beings dismissed. This is especially true with Women of Color and Indigenous Women. She adds that this is expressly true in political circles of the radical left where the presence and voices of Women of Color and Indigenous Women are often missing or minimized, even though at the grassroots level it is women who are often in the daily trenches organizing, marching, and providing needed services (Monzó, 2019b). She writes that we need to encourage Women of Color and Indigenous Women to see Marxist-Humanist organizations as social spaces where liberation – the liberation of Women of Color and Indigenous Women, along with that of all others, in both philosophy and in our everyday practice – is a central goal. The task now, according to Monzó, is for Women of Color and Indigenous Women to claim their position and reassert their voices and contributions to revolutionary history.

Responding, this book provides a roadmap to confront the current decolonial approaches to capitalists' imperialism, neoliberalism, racism, and more specifically to the hyper-exploitation of Women of Color and Indigenous Women. Historically, feminists have taken umbrage with classical Marxism arguing that it has significant unresolved tensions with little said about women's oppression. According to Cyril Smith (1996), Marx's social theory has often been considered 'sex-blind' in the sense that it operates analytically on the basis of the relations between social classes, rather than the relations between men and women. Elevating Classical Marxism to Marxist-Humanism, Raya Dunayevskaya (2000) talked about the narrow ways in which Marx's work has been reduced to an economic critique of capitalism rather than a philosophy of revolution with theoretical and practical paths to the idea of a "new humanism" – conceived as a new non-alienated human being, whose values and ways of being in the world would arise out of the more humane social conditions that Marx advocated (p.176)

Monzó squarely argues that a Marxist-Humanist perspective is more in line with understanding and confronting the current racialized and gendered oppressions and realities. This, she says, is in opposition to the gender-blindness of Classical Marxism. She notes that Eurocentric Western interpretations of Classical Marxism has relegated Indigenous communities and People of Color to the margins of humanity. Monzó strongly believes that the liberation of Women of Color and Indigenous Women can only be achieved through a socialism based on a Marxist-Humanism that champions the struggles of all the oppressed and marginalized. Hence, Monzó's book and politics draws on Marxist-Humanist's theoretical framework to demonstrate how it can help us to better understand and utilize revolutionary pedagogy to liberate and transform the lives of all women, in particular Women of Color and Indigenous Women.

To accomplish this, Monzó astutely complicates critical race scholarship, Marxists critiques, and the normative iterations of Women of Color and Indigenous Women feminism. Her theoretical insights and methodologies of feminism and Marxism are fully engaged with theorizing Indigeneity and settler-colonial paradigms. As a Latina woman, she is clearly in tuned with the plight of Women of Color and Indigenous Women at our current historical conjunctures, as well as the problematic structural dis-junctures, and the existing power asymmetries. Specifically, Monzó posits that social theories must be re-thought and re-developed anew in light of the ideas and perspectives being generated by Chicax and Latinx women, Indigenous peoples, and the Black Freedom Movement. For Monzó, revolutionary struggles in the Marxist-Humanist tradition must demonstrate that women's liberation and anti-racist agendas are central to class struggles.

### **Systems of Oppression**

Paulo Freire (1985) eloquently spoke of a 'Culture of Silence' where the oppressed become so powerless and silenced that they do not even talk about or name their oppression. According to Iris Marion Young (1988), the very concept of 'oppression' cannot be strictly defined or corralled within one clear boundary with no attribute or set of attributes that all oppressed people have in common (p. 278). Young (1988) posits that there are indeed five "faces" or types of oppression: violence, exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, and cultural imperialism. These concept of 'interlocking systems of oppression' were defined in a social movement of Black Feminist by the Combahee River Collective (CRC) as the structural anchor to describe simultaneous oppressions and as the target for integrated political struggle (CRC 1977/1981/1983, p. 210). This led to the feminists' notion of intersectionality coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) as a way to demarginalize the intersections of race and gender. Crenshaw argued that Women of Color are discriminated against in

ways that often do not fit neatly within the legal categories of either “racism” *or* “sexism”—but as a combination of both racism *and* sexism. As the feminist theory of Intersectionality has evolved, it is now informed by the idea that gender intersects with other aspects of a person’s identity, such as class, race or sex, nationality, as well as, the unequal transnationalized terrains of gender, citizenship, disability and sexuality and the renewed horizons of exclusion and hatred and/or legal violence (Blackwell, Briggs & Chiu, 2015, p. 1).

These types of oppressions and the violence against women have been exacerbated and further exposed with the onset of globalization’s neoliberal predatory social and financial tools (Macrine, 2016). In response, this book provides a space to analyze the oppressions of the Triangulation of Neoliberalism, Authoritarianism and Nationalism (Edling & Macrine, Forthcoming) resulting in the far-right assaults on Women in general and more specifically, Women of Color and Indigenous Women. These are the predatory engines that drive Monzó’s book which advocates Marxist-Humanism and feminist politics to challenge racists and gender inequality.

Monzó skillfully illustrates the ways in which entwining systems of oppression have shaped and negatively impacted the lives of Women of Color, Indigenous women and children, and explicates emancipatory socialist movements and actions in response at the local, national and transnational levels (Edling & Macrine, Forthcoming; Mohanty, 2013). She points to how Feminist approaches to Marxist-Humanism provide frameworks for understanding and responding to racial and gender injustices (Macrine, 2016; Parekh & Wilcox, 2018). The book’s chapters explicate the intersections and coalitions of capitalist’s projects and argues that various neoliberal projects are directly connected to the exclusionary nationalism, conservatism, patriarchy, sexism and racism of the emerging right-wing populist parties (Keskinen 2012; Macrine, 2016).

In light of the intersecting systems of the oppression of Women of Color and Indigenous Women, Monzó's advocates for hope, action, and love. She concludes the book with a chapter on Paulo Freire's (1994) notions of dreaming. She writes that Freire's philosophy was imbued with love and humanity, noting that Marx also embraced similar ontological understandings. She describes that 'dreaming' is especially important for Women of Color and Indigenous Women epistemologically. She writes this is because "we cannot know a past or a present without [understanding] oppression—in every context of our lives we are oppressed and exploited. Only through dreaming can we recognize the possibility of our freedom and envision a future where we are treated as fully human. (p.254)." Monzó inspired by Paulo and Nita Freire calls on Women of Color and Indigenous Women to continue "'walking with grace'—engaging a pedagogy of dreaming that nourishes our spiritual vocation to walk courageously into the future with a profound political commitment to human freedom (p. 246)." Adding that the, "greatest humanistic and historical task of the oppressed [is] to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well" (Freire, 1970, p.181).

## **Conclusion**

This book, guided by Marxist-Humanism, presents a clarion-call for revolutionary political actions, as well as, a politics of human resistance that cannot and must not shrink from the powers that be. In the end, this book examines the competing conceptions of the relevance of Marxist-Humanism for Women of Color and Indigenous Women as they have been affected by the changes and challenges of race, class and gender issues. The book is both an informative and enlightened treatment of socialist thought, critical pedagogy, and Marxist theory. Like many great books, it seemed to say what one had always wanted to say but lacked the words. As a result, this book gives us the

language to formulate those challenges and responses with clarity. Books should be judged in terms of their circumstantiality and their implications in the social and political imperatives of the world in which they are produced. Clearly, this book rises to this challenge.

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Lilia Monzó has written an important book, arguing Indigenous, working class, and feminist scholarship and implications for material praxis, have never been more pressing concerns given the current world political climate. Foundational to critical analysis and leading to and for revolutionary critical pedagogy, her framework exemplifies the true spirit of intersectional Marxist analysis as she encourages readers who would reconsider the status quo, to dream a world beyond a political and propaganda machine that ensures arguments against tyranny are a foregone conclusion. Furthermore, her book is an excellent companion for those reading history, the work of GWF Hegel and of Karl Marx, materialism, feminism, critical race theory, critical pedagogy, revolutionary thought and cosmological Indigenous framings of public life, her unique but grounded analysis deftly underscores the need for a personal commitment toward critical reflexivity, authentic consciousness and social transformation.

Unlike some other critical scholars, Monzó vehemently suggests that class should not be sidelined from woman's liberation efforts. Like Tronti (1966/2019), she argues her readers must consider the connection between capitalist social relations of production, the attacks on social movements by politicians and pundits, and the state arm of control when re-theorizing Marxian thought. Her implication being that if we are ever to move beyond simplistic

methods of analysis to the language of praxis, we must also understand a new revolutionary vocabulary that informs workplace, youth, and community struggle (Magill & Rodriguez, 2019). Monzó examines her own revolutionary spirit, to establish a Marxist-humanist, Feminist, raced, Indigenous, among other readings, of the social hierarchy extant to massification of lived experience. These are the forms of oppression meant to exploit those who unwittingly support the messianic nature of transnational global politics in how they establish the dialectical realities for so called disposable populations (Giroux, 2010; Rodriguez & Magill, 2017A & 2017B). She further asks us to reject the beneficence of the White liberal capitalist class whose social movements or oppositional tendencies are often complicit in dehumanization via their acceptance and/or negligence of one or more axes of oppression and their acceptance of existing social relations of production. In these cases, we lose our ability to choose a self that is a critical revolutionary subject if we do not consider that freedom and class struggle go hand in hand. Instead freedom and class struggle can emerge from solidarity and living a revolutionary human and critical ethos (Rodriguez & Magill, 2017C).

In and for educational research, some of the scholarship Monzó explores such as Federicci (2004), Mies (2014) and Dunayevskaya (1964) are particularly interesting for audiences that are interested in intersecurities or who have only explored their ideas or relationships between materialism, class hierarchy, and struggle superficially. She places Federicci's (2004) historical materialist analysis in conversation with Mies' materialism ultimately infusing these ideas with the revolutionary spirit and action of Raya Dunayevskaya (1964). These analyses serve to reveal the mechanisms of women's subjectification, which as she notes is necessary for expansion and maintenance of capitalism. Monzó considers how the role of the political dialectic helps describe and push her reader toward a more complete revolutionary critical pedagogy by bridging her

own and other important feminist work in conversation within Marxian analyses. From these foundations, Monzó discusses the “impetus for revolutionary action” that might emerge from the exploitation and oppression of Indigenous women. The revolutionary and transformational spirit of women of color has unquestionably been one of the most tragically unexplored historical narratives of the current social period. This is critiqued at length in the book.

Much like Marxist feminist historian Sylvia Federicci (2004) and Materialist feminist Maria Mies (2004) (both of whom she cites at length), Lilia Monzó reveals how the oppressive manipulation of patriarchal ideology has caused society to privilege certain bodies, particular forms of work, and promote social relations of production as she grounds this analysis in the manifestations of power and production in various contexts, state control, access to healthcare and justice under the law. These authors are juxtaposed in conversation with the struggle for Black liberation in the United States within which women of color were the source of revolutionary praxis. Furthermore, she explores ideology, epistemology and ontology as understood by Iroquois people, since they included full female participation in tribal affairs, like Black liberation, toward a more communal society. These examples show differences in hegemonic and Indigenous perceptions of value; the Iroquois engaged public life freely, aware of the implications of social relations on community development. Like women’s work, Black Liberation, and other subjugated narratives, Indigenous knowledge was silenced in order to exclude thinking related to more communal ideas about social organization. Monzó’s centering of these ideas are in this way a revolutionary act speaking back to the ways that hegemony works to create ideologically informed tastes, norms, and perspectives.

Placing Marx (2010) directly in conversation with Feminist research Monzó follows the above chapter by asking us to reconsider some of the

misconceptions against a potentially important relationship between the ways woman's labor is understood in relation to the capitalist project. The implication being that "woman's work" is foundational for making possible other forms of so called "productive labor" and the value propositions associated with these relations to bring praxis into being. She argues from Marx's suggestion that labor is authentic human capacity and therefore the alienation of women is particularly pernicious, the nature of the work itself does not challenge alienation- it instead ensures further domination.

Like other decolonizing and feminist methodologies, Monzó places these framings in conversation with her own autobiographical sketch, where she describes how she came to understand the revolutionary dialectic. Her exposition includes ways we might understand the potential of her working-class Latinx immigrant background to speak a more revolutionary ethos. Particularly interesting, though not surprising, were the ways that capitalist and communist myths were created and internalized, yet did not occur as they were presented. In US materialist realities poor and working-class families must accept social conditions as inherent generational inequality not as means to push liminal experience toward becoming, the possibility of stratification and excess then seem stark contradictions to ideas that anyone can make it in the world (Rodriguez & Magill, 2017B). US interventions in Central and South America, in the Mid-East and Africa are justified in the war against communism, but combating, rather than fueling capitalist exploitation, is the clear moment of becoming Monzó describes. The vanguardian promises of socialism, taking from the rich to give to the many, are similarly shrouded in totalitarianism, there is nothing democratic about wage slavery in China, Russia or Venezuela.

What most resonates throughout the book is Lilia Monzó's sharing every instance of personal transformation, what it is to be woman, privileged and

engaging in class struggle while envisioning what authentic woman agency might be, what women's dispositions and work ought look-like. The revolutionary woman of color, la Adelita, this is Monzó as she enacts her identity fusing conversation with class markers that compel us to not simply consider but to act, this is the value frame of reference for analysis, intersectional oppression exists unchallenged that is, so long as we silence our own voices as class hierarchy agonists and not as party to a true revolutionary possibility enacting the language of praxis.

What is revolutionary woman? To use current language, what are the pronouns carving their meaning into the historical record? In contemporary society that ranges from examination of the French, Russian, Cuban, Rojava, and Zapatista Revolutions to revolutionaries of the Black Panther Party, Black Lives Matter, and other intersectional movements, revolutionary women of color examine the nature of their reality and then seek to change it, they include Gloria Anzaldúa, Assata Shakur, Celia Sanchez, Ding Ling, Cherry Moraga, and bell hooks. The above precisely lead to her analysis of stories of struggle. In the book Monzó interviews local activists and provides a parallel analysis of the above-mentioned revolutionary subject- class-consciousness united in the struggle for liberation.

The above conversations transition to the potential revolutionary power illustrated by Chicana/Boricua/Latina women as revolutionary subjects in the chapter authored with Anaida Colón-Muñiz, Marisol Ramirez, Cheyenne Reynoso, and Martha Sanchez. In this chapter Monzó discusses the revolutionary potential as each identity consciousness toward revolutionary action. In doing so, she demonstrates solidarity consciousness and a critical research methodology needed for social action. These remarkable stories feature transformational revolutionary action in areas of social support, economic and

racial justice, bilingual and immigrant children's literacy, and Native/Indigenous and women's organization. From the stories of oppression, spring discussions of conscious agency, tools necessary for enacting freedom, and the courage and resiliency each author possesses. The narratives teach us the possibility for solidarity across identity and class difference (Magill & Rodriguez, 2015). It also demonstrates the importance of critical mentorship and representation as Freire and Horton (1990) among others argue, we make the road by walking.

What becomes clear then, are the ways that White male responses to oppression, like other knowledge, become cannon when responding to challenges aimed at hegemony, ideas that might be folded into social and historical narratives. Monzó describes how Manu Karuka (2017), Iyko Day (2015), and others including Evelyn Nakano Glenn's (2015) unitary theory of racialized and colonial oppressions in the context of North American settler colonialism can result in divisions and alliances forming among racialized women- especially along class lines. In her analyses Monzó also ties anti-black scholarship and border theories together to make sense of the histories of radicalized and gendered capital that reveal many of the ways White supremacist ideologies are articulated in society, a dialectical approach in which she and her comrades might inspire perpetual praxis.

Lastly, Monzó discusses the key points of solidarity in conversation with other critical pedagogues. She places her analysis in conversation with Grande (2015) who describes the "relations of mutuality" with McLaren (1998), who reconfigured "revolutionary critical pedagogy" and the "liberation" described by Freire (1985). Ultimately, she offers readers a framework for understanding that she calls "pedagogy of dreaming" as a way for us to move beyond Western rationality and center our "human capacity for love, hope and courage," toward

a more communal and transformational humanity. In her words, she imagines a world where Hegel's (1977) negation and negation of the negation will bring about a new world in which women of color will have brought,

ways of knowing and engaging in the world, theories about what it will take to free the world of oppression, impetus, strength, courage, perseverance, and love. It is my dream that all of us, Indigenous women and Women of Color, may harness these gifts in this world so that we may walk with grace into the next.

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