Studies utilizing the perspectives of postcolonial theory have become established and increasingly widespread in the last few decades. This series embraces and broadly employs the postcolonial approach. As a site of struggle, education has constituted a key vehicle for the “colonization of the mind.” The “post” in postcolonialism is both temporal, in the sense of emphasizing the processes of decolonization, and analytical in the sense of probing and contesting the aftermath of colonialism and the imperialism which succeeded it, utilizing materialist and discourse analysis. Postcolonial theory is particularly apt for exploring the implications of educational colonialism, decolonization, experimentation, revisioning, contradiction, and ambiguity not only for the former colonies, but also for the former colonial powers. This series views education as an important vehicle for both the inculcation and unlearning of colonial ideologies. It complements the diversity that exists in postcolonial studies of political economy, literature, sociology, and the interdisciplinary domain of cultural studies. Education is here being viewed in its broadest contexts, and is not confined to institutionalized learning. The aim of this series is to identify and help establish new areas of educational inquiry in postcolonial studies.

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Lorenzo Milani’s Culture of Peace

Essays on Religion, Education, and Democratic Life

Edited by

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To Bruce Kent, Giovanni Franzoni, and Dionysius Mintoff. Three wise men engaged in the struggle for peace in the former centre, current outskirts, and perennial periphery of the empire.
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Last year (2013) marked the ninetieth anniversary of the birth of Don Lorenzo Milani, a Roman Catholic priest and conscientious objector who dedicated his life to the education of poor children in Italy. He is best known for his direction of the School of Barbiana and his *Lettera a una Professoressa* (Letter to a Teacher). Yet despite his vital educational project, few educators outside of Italy or the European South are aware of his tireless efforts to critique war and the impact of militarization on the education of students in his country. With this in mind, *Lorenzo Milani’s Culture of Peace* focuses on the inspiration of this leading European critical pedagogue to a postcolonial pedagogy of peace. Toward this end, this book includes a broad range of his writings, hitherto not translated (into English) such as *Esperienze Pastorali* and the letters to the Military Chaplains and Judges, *L’ubbidienza non è più una virtù* produced in English translation by James T. Burtchaell with the title of *A Just War No Longer Exists: The Trials and Tribulations of Don Lorenzo Milani*.

True to Milani’s *Lettera ai cappellani militari* (Letter to the Military Chaplains), which offers an ethical defense of the right to be a conscientious objection, the urgency of Milani’s message is resurrected in the spirit of the text. It is urgent for various reasons, not least of which is the hegemonic politics of militarisation, witnessed constantly over the last century. Furthermore, despite the fall of the Berlin Wall and the process of formal decolonization of nations, which occurred after the Second World War until the late 1970s (with the independence of Portuguese colonies in Africa and elsewhere), growing disparities in standard of living between West and East and North and South persist, with little signs of abating. Yet, colonialism has not gone away, having morphed into more subtle and covert political forms.

Milani, together with his students at Barbiana, called into question the issue of a “Just War,” which they argued no longer exists. In so doing, he provided a critical process of reading and teaching history against the grain, challenging officially santized versions of public wartime discourses. He also examined the nineteenth-century movement for Italian unification, the Risorgimento—referred to by certain commentators of Gramscian
inspiration as a case of a failed revolution—the wars which characterized it, and the duplicitous politics that ensued.

Milani accomplished the same feat with his interrogation of imperialist wars in Africa during the second wave of European imperialism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the concurrent pedagogy of duplicity and dishonesty at the core of the pro-war school curriculum at the time, which coincided with Milani’s own period of schooling. He recalls the way students were socialized and conditioned to blindly rejoice for the Empire in its wars of colonial expansion in Africa, without being told that it was Ethiopia who held the moral high ground. This was so, given that Ethiopians had done nothing to provoke the Italians, who employed outlawed poisonous gas on their crusade of conquest.

The Letter produced by Milani and his students is also instructive in considering the ways history can be taught from an anti-imperial stance,—a pedagogical approach that is most relevant today, an age where the “War on Terror” persists and blood is often traded for oil. In this regard, the letter connects with some of the writings that emerge from Critical Pedagogy around these themes. Henry Giroux’s antimilitaristic arguments, for instance, in *Hearts of Darkness* and *Against the New Authoritarianism: Politics after Abu Ghraib*, easily comes to mind.

What emerges in this book then is the important contribution that a critical pedagogy, based on a powerful reading of history, can make to the lives of students. In this instance, it equips them with the knowledge and confidence to say “No” to a politics of militarization and the spread of imperial interests and the loss of innocent human lives, as witnessed in Iraq, among other places, in the last decade. Moreover, it is worth noting that at the time when Milani wrote the Letter, many within the Catholic tradition considered absolute obedience to the authority of the Church a fundamental virtue.

This discourse also extended itself to issues concerning citizenship and the State; citizens were to regard obedience as a political and social virtue in the interests of the Homeland. Obedience also became a virtue in both Fascist and post-Fascist Italy, especially, in the latter case, in the armed forces. Milani, in direct contrast, argued that “obedience is no longer a virtue,” the very message that appears as the book title of the volume in Italian, which first included the letter to the military chaplains and judges. As might be expected, Milani was vilified for his stance, but vindicated posthumously. This change of heart is apparent in more recent years, when youth have been accorded the right to engage in community work anywhere in the world, many in the South, in lieu of military conscription. And although mandatory conscription was recently removed, young Italian men and women still have the right to obtain state funding to carry out work in Italy and various other parts of the world.

In 2010, for example, a meeting was held with popular educators in a shanty town on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro, which involved a number of Italian youth who benefited from this provision and their involvement
with emancipatory Freirean work in the South. This seems to point to a significant change in policy with respect to the former military expectation, that Milani and his students inveighed against, when writing in defense of conscientious objection. One might argue that, in contexts such as these, there is the potential for shifts from a onetime imperial military policy to a postcolonial one—one that tackles the negative aftermath of colonialism particularly in the global South. However, this seldom happens without much labor and struggle, given the common glorification of military culture in capitalist societies.

Carmel Borg and Michael Grech have carefully pulled together an edited volume that provides a worthy and varied examination of many of the same issues linked to war and peace once raised by Milani. The contributions to this collection are truly written in the spirit of Milani’s work as an organic intellectual, although authors do not all necessarily speak directly to his contribution. As such, these essays encompass a variety of perspectives from Christian to non-Christian, which critically engage a variety of areas and touch upon a number of academic disciplines, including history, political theory, philosophy, theology, and sociology. At the heart of this compilation is found a deep attention to the conditions of subaltern classes and an understanding that education must function as a decolonizing project, where students and their communities learn to critically question, challenge, and transform their everyday lives, as they together work to reshape the contours of civil society.
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