

### Paper III

#### Revolution: Never Obsolete. Today, *the* Agenda

"The philosophers have interpreted the world in various ways, the point however, is to change it."

- Karl Marx, Theses on Feuerbach

When Marx wrote those words, Europe was caught in a maelstrom - the very material fabric of life was undergoing fundamental, transformative change. All that was seemingly solid, was melting into air. Entire landscapes were being obliterated, cities were being built at a frenetic pace, enormous wealth was being created, material goods were being churned out. And concomitantly, great misery abounded - children were funneling through mines that often collapsed upon them, women were working hours on end in sweltering factories, men were performing tasks that would leave them blind, maimed, dead. Even as citadels were rising, the ground around them was seeping into despair. Things are not much different in parts of China today. But that falls short. For, in fact, one can today take a thirty minute drive out to the inner city spaces of Detroit and face similar despair. True, one can make a thirty hour plane journey to Karachi, and see it in even more vivid form in the slums of Liyari. In the colonies (or, ex-colonies), capitalism is always a little more naked. But in either spatiality, despair it is. And it is growing at a faster rate than in Marx's Europe. Given this tangible "really real," the question arises, how could one even question the need for revolution? Marx wrote his words as a

call for action, as a reminder of what was the need of that spatio-temporality. And here we are, faced with an even more encompassing, far reaching, pernicious reality, questioning whether there is need for revolution in our spatio-temporalities? It reminds one of Antoinette's infamous suggestion of cake.

To be sure, what "revolution," is will vary in the various spatio-temporalities we are situated in. For example, in Pakistan, achieving land reform would be a revolution because it would be a fundamentally transformative event - land reform would alter Pakistan's class structure, its power hierarchies, the composition and logics of its institutions, the mechanisms and processes of domination and control that pervade, and the discourse on subjectivities that exists - because it would entail the collapse of the existing categories of life and being. It is important to note how this would happen - the actual land reforms, in and of themselves, are only one piece, perhaps the last piece of the act that would bring these changes. *It is the process of getting to the point where land reforms can be implemented that in fact, is where the revolution lies.* For, in order to get to the point where land reforms can be implemented, amongst other things, mobilization would have to occur that would bring peasants and the urban poor together, contestation would have to focus not across identitive cleavages that work to fracture the under-classes, but on the feudal elite and their nexus of power and influence in the military, in bureaucracy, in industry. In other words, it is in this mobilization that the

existing categories of life and being that serve to divide and fracture, will be contested and erased. Only then would a movement come about that could challenge the feudal elite sufficiently to achieve land reforms, and in that final formal act, do away with them all together.

This is why Castaneda falls woefully short. The goal of achieving a social democratic society in Pakistan, with the first step of introducing land reforms in Pakistan, is in its very essence, in no way, a "lesser evil," but a utopian ideal. Utopian, because the process of achieving land reforms requires the nitty-gritty of long, hard struggle, of contesting the existing categories of life and being, of mobilizing the populace to such a degree and magnitude through this contestation that they pose a threat to the existing social order, and this will inevitably mean experiencing the bullets of death squads, facing the rolling tanks, living through abject turmoil. In short, it is utopian because achieving that social democratic society appears highly unlikely. And then to think of a world composed only of social democratic states modeled on Sweden, as a "lesser evil," to the current neo-liberal global system that functions, perpetuates itself, precisely through uneven geographic development, without the nitty-gritty of struggle, sees us jump from utopia into flights of fantasy.

And this is where Harvey is instructive, in positing "dialectical utopianism" he reminds us that the utopian ideal is today essential. But the achievement of it should come from

focusing on the particular (say, land reform in Pakistan) with an eye on the universal. First, because even as hierarchies are nested in a specific spatio-temporal reality, they are after all, *hierarchies*, and they extend far beyond the borders of nation states into the configurations of power that dominate the global system. And threats and challenges at the base of the hierarchy reverberate through to its top, eliciting a counter-response down the line. Which is to say that if a movement arose in Pakistan that posed a real challenge to the existing feudal order, it would simultaneously pose a challenge to the networks of power globally (e.g. in the U.S., and Europe), and so this movement would have to deal with not just a counter-response from Pakistan's feudal elite, but elites everywhere. Therefore, to ignore the universal would be to at the outset, undermine the chances of success of the movement.

But there is a second reason why an eye must be kept on the universal. And this is where we can answer the question posed by Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein, "1968: A Rehearsal of What?" As Paige points out, the movements of 1968 opened the door to realizations that suffering maybe situated, but it is not unrelated, that for example, it does not stop at those abstract, mandated boundaries of nation-states. That suffering can be shared. That the particulars we experience, whether good or bad, are linked to the particular someone, faraway, spatially and temporally, experiences or has experienced. It is indeed a pity therefore, that the movements did not go through that door.

Instead, the movements stayed within the realm of discourse, and fixated themselves on discoursing about subjectivities, ignoring the structures that produce those subjectivities, the "really real" tangibles that create those fractures. Mere sloganeering, being counter-culture, became seen as enough. But as Eric Hobsbawm neatly puts it, "Shocking the bourgeoisie is, alas, easier than overthrowing him."

On the other hand, a dialectical utopianism that keeps its eye on the universal will note how the universal creates the particular, and will call attention to that. A dialectical utopianism will walk through the door opened by the movements of 1968. It will produce better architects of us all, because it will allow us to use the resources of the universal not as an alternative to the particular, but in conjunction with it. It will allow us to use, and make better use, of all the resources now available to us. And in doing so, it will allow the particular to surmount the counter-response that will come down the nested hierarchy.

So, we have a choice. We can sit back and wonder whether revolution is possible today. If we do so, we might as well let the processes of neo-liberal capitalism run amok. Eventually, they will produce the kinds of mind numbing, devastating disparities that will see reality either made up of suicide bombers and the collateral damage of bunker-busting bombs, or more optimistically, they could possibly finally produce that rupture through violent class struggle that the historical

materialists have always talked about. On the other hand, we could choose to embrace the praxis inherent in our species being, and realize that revolution is not just on the agenda today, it is *the* agenda. And we can act in our various situated particulars, and work together universally, to change the world.

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