

## Book Review

Carmel Borg & Michael Grech (Eds.) (2014),  
*Lorenzo Milani's Culture of Peace:  
Essays on Religion, Education, and Democratic Life*  
New York: Palgrave Macmillan,  
ISBN: 978-1-137-38210-8, pp. 253

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*Lorenzo Milani's Culture of Peace* foregrounds multiple ways of how this leading European critical pedagogue can inspire a postcolonial pedagogy of peace. With his *Lettera ai cappellani militari (Letter to the Military Chaplains)*, in particular its ethical defence of the right to conscientious objection, as the main source of inspiration, the essays featured in this book offer ideas and insights into how the field of peace culture can respond to multiple and diverse realities, particularly those facing marginalized communities.

Hailing from different disciplines, the authors of this impressive collection of essays pay tribute to a number of moral and ethical insights pursued by Milani. Such insights, on which Milani built his pedagogical action, include: the issue of "Just War", which he argued no longer exists; the importance of learning peace by doing peace; his militancy for justice; and the refusal to accept uncritically the core reasons for violence.

The book provides an overview of key tenets of peace culture and ideas central to critical peace education. The volume is inspirational to aspiring and practicing peace educators, particularly those seeking to

interrupt inequalities and those working towards lasting and comprehensive peace and social justice.

The discourse of the military chaplains, to which Don Milani was reacting in his letter, was not the only strand concerning war that existed within the Catholic tradition. The first part of the volume - 'Peace and religion: Then and Now' - focuses on other figures who adopted discourses favourable to peace.

The first essay entitled 'The Catholic, Italian, and Tuscan Ecclesiastical Contexts of Don Milani's Letter to the Military Chaplains', gives a very clear picture of the European and Italian cultural and political context in which Milani grew and formed his beliefs, opinions, and character. The work and testimony of figures like Mazzolari, La Pira, Balducci, among others, is well acknowledged in the chapter. It revolves particularly around Don Milani's approach to social justice and peace, and explains how the priest was put on trial in 1965 for advocating conscientious objection. The authors, Carmel Borg & Michael Grech, situate their vision of education in a broader quest for social and moral change. Milani's anti-war pedagogy is the basis of their theoretical framework that is rooted in the critical pedagogic tradition which sees education's primary purpose as nurturing democratic values, civic involvement, and a commitment to a more just and compassionate culture.

Entitled 'Peace and the Religion in a Changing World: From Consensus to Difference', the second chapter within the foregoing section explores the evolution of the religious meaning and praxis of peace in the Christian West. Darren J. Dias traces the historical development of the notion of peace as a rich concept that includes justice, the common good, personal and communal wholeness, reconciliation, unity and the protection of the weak. Taking into consideration the contemporary Catholic approaches to interreligious dialogue, a need nurtured by Don Milani at his school in Barbiana, Dias proposes "a heuristic for a transformative dialogical process towards the establishment of a religious community-in-difference that celebrates the difference that constitutes religious diversity" (pp. 29-30). Far from being impediments to forming community, difference is a critical category, the condition of possibility for interdependence and mutuality among religions.

At the same time that Don Lorenzo Milani was most active, the Roman Catholic Church was undergoing its most significant transformation in four hundred years, aimed at presenting, in a more authentic way, the spirit of Christ's teachings. In the third essay entitled 'Vatican II's Teaching on Peace and War: A Contribution to Conciliar Hermeneutics', Michael Attridge analyses the impact of Vatican II, focusing on three issues: "what is peace?"; "is war ever justifiable?"; and "what does the Council teach about non-violence and conscientious objection?" What emerges from the essay is an ethical responsibility: the Church is not only a mystery abstracted from the world, it is also a historical reality; a gathering of God's faithful who are called to work for justice to transform the world. Wherever they recognize situations of injustice, poverty, inequality, - individually or communally - they must find ways to correct these conditions.

The Church the military chaplains presented was not a sign of a possible peaceful future for humanity. Brian Wicker, the author of the fourth chapter entitled 'The Church as a Sacrament of the Future', explores a different possibility. Referring to the Roman Catholic Church, he stresses that the Church teaches that communities, like individuals, must cope with their mutual differences by practising the virtues, especially those of justice and peace, for the good of all. He points out the contradiction in the way in which the Church's organization functions. Reconfirming the principles of *Gaudium et Spes*, the Author insists that warfare is unthinkable and that it is possible, and necessary, for the globalised world, to organise itself to foster justice and peace, and reject violence. Being the body of Christ and sharing in His divinity, the Church is the sacrament of what is possible, a promise of something which could be put into practice if only the will and the virtues for it were mustered; the sacrament of human diversity, rooted in justice, peace and charity.

The second part of the volume focuses on peace, memory and education. The running argument of the section is that now, more than ever, in a time of unprecedented social and economic crisis, it is morally imperative for educators to assume responsibility for helping to bring about a culture of peace and non-violence throughout the world as a whole.

The first chapter entitled 'The History of World Peace in 100 Objects: Visualizing Peace in a Peace Museum' suggests that if military museums are prominent national institutions in many countries, and

that history textbooks are often dominated by narratives of war, the themes of peace, nonviolence, and antiwar are conspicuous by their absence. Making them more tangible and more visible could constitute an essential part of the development of a culture of peace and peace education. As the ideal for human brotherhood has been expressed in all possible art forms, Peter Van Den Dungen imagines a museum where peace and peacemakers are celebrated. He selects nine artifacts that could inspire and encourage visitors to believe in peace: William Penn, the Belt of Wampum, the Quaker Peace Testimony, Ludwig van Beethoven's Ode to Joy, Victor Ugo's oratory "The United States of Europe", the novel "Lay Down Your Arms" by Bertha von Suttner, Alfred Nobel's Testament, Albert Einstein's 2% speech, the CND/Peace Symbol, and the Blue Helmets (United Nations Peacekeeping Forces).

In the essay 'Responding to the Call of Peace: In Memory of a Future That Might Have Been', Clive Zammit investigates the possible sources for the origin of the link between history and war, drawing on Roland Barthes' analysis of myth to examine its implication for the field of ethics and responsibility. While acknowledging the written history of Western civilization is replete with evidence that war is a constant reality, the author contends that there is still no evidence to suggest that the inevitability of war is an objective fact imposed by the logical structure of reality. It is a product of the work of myth that feeds on the equivalence between history and war, compromising the emergence of the free standing human agent and our sense of response-ability. Don Milani's response to the call of war transcends the instinctual reaction imposed on us by history, opening the door for the long forgotten possibility of peace.

Zammit's analysis is rather in line with the third chapter of this section, 'Peace Education in a Culture of War'. The author, Antonia Darder, shows how violence in all its forms limits human emancipation. She underlines that over a hundred overt military campaigns of varying degrees have been undertaken in the name of peace, freedom, and security at home, by the US government. Students are initiated into a culture of permanent war at school; similarly, other institutions of civil society serve as pedagogical venues that normalize and fabricate consent around the necessity of conflicts. The development of critical peace pedagogy, dialectically engaged with wealth and humanity, is the key for dismantling the existing paradigm of war, where violence is considered the solution, and for ushering in a genuine culture of peace

where policies and practices, aligned with social justice, human rights, and economic democracy, can flourish in our schools, in our communities, and around the world.

In the chapter 'On Education, Negotiation and Peace', Marianna Papastephanou criticizes the fact that many political theorists, peace educators and negotiators, imagine the solution of local, or world problems, as consensus-reaching decisions through negotiation processes that focus on a pragmatic give and take, on cultivating pacification rather than peace, with no attention to the issue of justice. Rather than an agreement perspective, that represents a cognitive or purely communicative challenge, the author promotes a vision of true peace that goes beyond pacifying language and superficial conceptions of cross-cultural dialogue. Instead of envisaging a world as an ordered and harmonized whole of opposing-though-co-ordinated parties, still divided into rich and poor, she suggests to adopt Milani and Torres' embodying genuine cosmopolitanism as the attitude of serious engagement with the others, a vision against any division of the world, the true lesson of peace education.

Isabelle Calleja Ragonesi, the author of the essay 'From Conflict to Conflict Resolution: Teaching the History of Cyprus in the Buffer Zone', uses the case of an Island to illustrate the importance of peace studies and the doctrine of idealism to affect conflict resolution. It focuses on the recent changes in educational trends particularly in the "buffer zone", the zone that was established as a result of the civil war and became impassable with the division of Cyprus, representing a real obstacle to reconciliation. Since 2004, this zone is slowly being rehabilitated and a number of Peace Education programmes have been designed, utilizing the principles of inclusiveness, and confidence-building measures, unlocking a common process of participation and opportunities for intercommunal dialogue aimed at creating a future scenario where the island can make the transition to real peace, that is, learning to understand, accept, and live with diversity.

'Beyond Reality Dissonance: Improving Sustainability of Peace Education Effects' is the title of a chapter written by Yigal Rosen. He underlines that in a region of intractable conflict (such as Israel, Northern Ireland, Balkans), where the media, educational system, and other societal institutions express a culture of conflict, the effect of peace education programmes are short-lived and, therefore, methods to sustain the effects over time are needed. Analyzing the dissonance

between the ideal views and practices promoted by typical programmes of peace education and the sociopolitical environment that surrounds participants, the author criticizes the fact that many peace initiatives do not incorporate features to combat this dissonance. The practices of changing the negative image of the other side, of reducing fear of members of other collective, or of influencing openness to social contact with the other, can represent possible ways to achieve the goals of peace.

'Because I Care: From an Encounter to a Political Option' is the last essay of the second section. Francois Mifsud stresses that the encounter with "the other" (those who differ from an individual or group, referring to culture, religion, nationality, political ideology, or language) creates a dilemma of how the self will respond to the "other". To transform this encounter into a political option and action for the other, one needs an ethical ideal that can be identified with the notion of interest. The author critically analyses Chantal Mouffe's political theory, focusing on the relation between "diversity" and "the political". Then, he considers the positivistic approach to "the other" as an intentional alienation of "the other". The School of Barbiana, with its maxim "I Care", evidences an awareness of "the other" that induces the we/self to be surprised by "the other"; a dialogical and relational space that ethic as interest can generate.

During this past century there has been growth in social concern about horrific forms of violence, intended mainly to destroy the other, like genocide, ethnic hatred, racism, homophobia, sexual abuse and domestic violence, and a corresponding growth in the field of peace education where educators use their professional skills to advise citizens about paths to peace.

The third part of the volume, focusing on peace, democracy, sexuality, gender, and aesthetics, starts with a chapter entitled 'Peace Education and Critical Democracy: Some Challenges in Neoliberal Times'. The chapter is written from the perspective of critical democracy and aims at identifying and unpacking challenges that education faces in our liberal context. John P. Portelli criticizes the belief that democratic education involves only procedural matters and that means no real role for the teacher. These misinterpretations consider that, since democracy is open to multiple and differing views, and it involves dialogue, the role of the teacher is simply reduced to that of a neutral facilitator, without offering different perspectives to students, or

welcoming critiques and disagreements on his own reasoning. The author disapproves the fact that a common curriculum, a common mode set of standards, and a common mode of assessment and evaluation is adopted to treat individuals in the same manner. Equality and equity are not identical at all.

The issue of democracy, considered by Don Milani as one of the great inventions of humankind, has been further pursued in the chapter 'Does Democracy Promote Peace? A Rancière Reading of Politics and Democracy'. Duncan P. Mercieca criticizes the idea that democratic politics and practices lead to peace and that having a democratic and limitless world will reduce and eliminate war, violence and their threat at both international and local level. Considering Jacques Rancière's idea of equality as a starting point, rather than a goal that most democratic societies strive to achieve, he sustains that peace and democracy must not be delivered by institutions to people; they must in some way be presupposed. According to the lines Rancière suggests, he illustrates how the concept of equality may be concretely reread and he analyses how, in terms of equal access to educational set-up, equality may be cherished, but not respected in a supposedly democratic society.

In the essay "Peace and Sexuality - Two Reflections", Mario Gerada, Clayton Mercieca and Diane Xuereb, representatives of a Maltese association of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Christians, tell how they have to carry a heavier burden because of their different sexual orientation. When one dares to act differently from what the norm presumes, s/he become the outcast, the target and scapegoat of society. As a Catholic group they have to confront their sexuality, identity and gender in the light of society's prejudices, hostility and negativity. If we consider reconciliation between peace and sexuality as a journey for all, peace for the LGBT community seems a far away promised land, long for desired. Sexuality can stir many internal conflicts that shatter one's peace. In this way peace becomes a distant notion, a gift that needs much nurturing and address.

Mark Debono is the author of the chapter "On Art and Politics: Exploring the Philosophical Implications on the Creative Order of Art on the Organization of Social Relations". He analyses two paintings: Guernica, by Pablo Picasso, and Judith beheading Holiernes by Jamie Miller (where Holiernes' head is replaced with that of former president George W. Bush), questioning the effect of authoritarian

politics on peoples' freedom. In a century of supposed progress and rational planning, according to Milani's letter, conflicts could be avoided letting soldiers to follow their own conscience rather than blind obedience to orders. The essay suggests that art, in its seeking of alternative routes of how to connect its various elements, can turn out to be an enterprise of imagination, which promotes an expression of real freedom. It serves as a reflection on a past event, that invites us to ponder on how easy it is for politics to turn authoritarian and generate abuse.

'Can We Learn from Comparing Violent Conflicts and Reconciliation Process? For a Sociology of Conflict and Reconciliation Going beyond Sociology' is the chapter written by Nicos Trimikliniotis where he provides a framework for a sociology of ethnic conflict and reconciliation in deeply divided societies that have suffered from ethnic-related violence. The first part of the piece constitutes a reflection on the notion of conflict and violence and on the Conflict Resolution (CR) approach. The second part presents the basic frame of a sociology of conflict and resolution that is located within the rich debates caused by the study of nations and nationalism, ethnicity, race and racism, and war; that is interdisciplinary, comparative and capable of bridging the gap between specializations through which violence and conflict have so far been separately studied. Peace and the resolutions of conflicts require adequate theoretical tools fostering the sort of citizens who are able to act ethically and to envisage realistic targets that allow peace to be achieved.

In 'The Modern Muslim Woman in the Arab Peoples' Revolution of Freedom and Dignity', Nathalie Grima criticizes the generalized projection of Muslim women as passive agents. Deconstructing these misleading perceptions, she sustains the idea of a modern woman that can also be a practising Muslim. The second part of the article looks at the revolutionary events that took place in Tunisia and Egypt, where the women played a very active role in the face of injustice, sharing a strong sense of being part of a collectivity united by the common cry for democracy, freedom of speech, economic stability, and for developments in the educational and health system. Exploring the role of women in the struggle for peace, the author underlines how Arab and Muslim women combine emancipation and religious fervor, debunking the widely held assumption that Islam and progress are incompatible with each other.

In general, this book demonstrates that, as the culture of war has pervaded our ways of being in myriad ways, an education for a culture of peace needs to be introduced into every aspect of our lives and into the process of learning, to respond to various forms of conflict and violence and to create new forms of educational praxis in social contexts across the globe. As Maria Montessori said: "Peace is a goal that can be attained only through common accord, and the means to achieve this unity for peace are twofold: first, an immediate effort to resolve conflicts without recourse to violence, to prevent war – and second, a long term effort to establish a lasting peace among men. Preventing conflicts is the work of politics; establishing peace is the work of education". (Montessori 1972 [1949], 30)

Lorenzo Milani's *Culture of Peace* underlines how the priest's work is crucial in helping students develop the ability to think critically, and for fostering people to act with moral courage for social change, two essential outcomes of peace culture. The considerations proposed by the authors make this book an invaluable resource for individuals and groups interested in beginning, or developing inter-religious dialogues and in fostering the culture of peace, democracy, equity and social justice.

## Reference

Montessori, M. (1949). *Education and peace*. (H.R. Lane, Trans.). Chicago, IL: Henry Regerny.

