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Between citizen paralysis and praxis: Toward a critical pedagogy for confronting global violence

Dr. Adam Davidson-Harden

SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellow,

Faculty of Education,

Queen's University,

511 Union St., Kingston, Ontario K7M 5R7

613 533 6000 ext. 75394

a.davidsonharden@queensu.ca

Abstract:

This paper argues that to be effective methods of confronting global violence, contemporary critical pedagogies for citizenship must take into account the theoretical distance between citizen 'paralysis and praxis'. This distance, the author posits, comprises the path between individual reactions of helplessness and powerlessness to disturbing global and local issues, and experiential or praxis-based educational opportunities that can help citizens transcend such feelings toward confronting and changing a violent world. To explore these themes, an interdisciplinary approach is taken that fuses insights from the psychology of stress and coping with a framework of peace education, and education for citizenship conceived as praxis responding to disturbing trends of global violence, drawing on the traditions of positive peace and a complex conception of violence rooted in Johan Galtung's work. A core argument is offered in the form of a provocation to educators dealing with citizenship, peace or global issues to be attentive to inviting participants to consider paths for their own forms of 'peace praxis' that comprise the best hope for transcending individual reactions of helplessness in the face of global violence.

A society which is mobile, which is full of channels for the distribution of a change occurring anywhere, must see to it that its members are educated to personal initiative and adaptability. Otherwise, they will be overwhelmed by the changes in which they are caught and whose significance or connections they do not perceive. The result will be a confusion in which a few will appropriate to themselves the results of the blind and externally directed activities of others. (Dewey, 1916)

[People] are disturbed not by things but by the view they take of things. (Epictetus, Enchiridion)

Introduction

The emancipatory ideal of a full, rich human life nurtured by a wide range of individual

freedoms is a key thread that weaves through the quilt of enlightenment thought, interpreted and extended today further by thinkers and educators inspired by critical theory and pedagogy. The story of this quilt in Western societies is one of discovery of new ways of thinking, re-discovery of old ways, and the continued development of philosophies of education and democracy which challenge entrenched, ossified and authoritarian forms that restrict the scope of individual freedom and one's capability to participate in the 'rule of the people' that democracy promises. In Dewey, a champion was found for the conception of education as fundamentally integrated and synonymous with, not only all individual and collective life experience, but with the very fate of the democratic ideal and democratic political life specifically. Persistently aware of



the tenuous nature of this ideal and its hold on contemporary societies, Dewey vociferously criticized more elitist and aristocratic conceptions of (less substantially democratic) politics¹, while consistently arguing for the potential for a holistically-conceived education to contribute a solid foundation for a democratic society based on broad individual freedoms and equality of educational opportunity. Education, he hoped, was the principal vehicle whereby the egalitarian impulse democracy represents could help break down barriers between people which exist in the form of discrimination based on race, class, and gender, sexual orientation, ability, or age.

Freire (1970; 1973) foremost among later critical pedagogues extended the link between democracy, education and experience further, by suggesting and operationalizing the idea that education conceived as *praxis* (thought-action-reflection) is a liberating force that can enable the 'objectified', disenfranchised and illiterate person to become 'conscientized': thus becoming a 'subject' and therefore a conscious shaper of their own political and social worlds. In this sense, becoming able to both 'read the word and the world' holds up the transformative possibility of taking initiative and responsibility for shaping economic, political and social worlds that move away from violence. With Freire the global ramifications of education as experience, and as critical praxis (thought/action/reflection) come into full relief. The scope of violence and attendant de-humanization (in his terms) characterizing the world as we find it today, along with its severe inequalities and disproportionate suffering along polarized lines of class, race and gender remains a palpable challenge to the notion that human civilization may indeed be described as 'civilized' or 'human', if we accept the idealistic and egalitarian values with which these terms are historically imbued. A history of colonial oppression and attendant systemic

racism pointedly resonates in these terms as well, as though betraying the contradiction of their idealism with enduring violent realities. The eurocentrism of the Western philosophy that undergirds the same revolutionary Enlightenment ideals that promise change, freedom and democracy are a similar reminder of the historicity of these ideals, embedded as they are in Western thought. At the same time, Marx and later critical theorists have shown us how the modern age has witnessed the usurpation of the 'rational' impetus of Enlightenment ideals by the economic forces that have propelled industrial capitalism, along with its attendant problems and prospects in the form of growing and magnified global inequalities, entrenched poverty², and now, imminent ecological disaster³. Contemporary economics, dominated as it is in the policy arena by neoliberalism, continues to 'externalize' the myriad negative social and ecological consequences of unrestrained capitalist development, into the new century. Indeed, the concept of freedom itself remains a centerpiece in the ongoing neoliberal attempt to redefine all areas of the social according to the image of the market, through the logics of 'free trade'⁴, 'economic freedom', and the general conflation of capitalism with democracy. Meanwhile, during the ascendance of neoliberalism as a dominant economic and social policy paradigm, problems of within and between-country inequality have worsened (Milanovic, 2005; UNU-WIDER, 2006⁵) (as have a host of other destructive ecological and social impacts)⁶.

The challenge of these global problems, and the task of nurturing individual citizens along their own path of confronting and reacting to them, is of crucial significance, and a matter which this paper seeks to explore. I will argue that to be effective methods of confronting such problems, contemporary critical pedagogies for citizenship must take into account the theoretical



distance between citizen 'paralysis and praxis'. This distance, I will posit, can be understood by discerning the difference between a pattern of individual reactions of feeling helpless and overwhelmed in the face of disturbing global and local issues on the one hand, and experiential or praxis-based educational opportunities on the other that can help citizens transcend such feelings toward confronting and changing a violent world. To help me explore these ideas, I will first set the context for the arguments to be offered in contemporary peace studies. Next, the psychology of individual stress and coping will be explored as a way to understand the challenge to educators to consider how to enhance critical pedagogies for citizenship and peace through attentiveness to how individuals respond to disturbing patterns of global violence.

Global violence and the dilemma it presents for critical pedagogy and citizenship

In contemporary critical peace studies, the conception of violence has evolved to include forms of violence beyond direct individual/group physical or emotional harm (2004; 1969; Galtung et al., 2002). Galtung's 'triangular' conception includes direct, structural and cultural violence to capture complexities in the 'subjects and objects', or causes and effects, of what I sum up here as 'global violence'. Such violence can be measured in terms of human deprivation and death, or ecological degradation. In Galtung's terms, direct violence corresponds to the most common conception of violence we tend to employ on an everyday basis: physical, emotional or psychological violence perpetrated by an individual or group on another individual or group. Structural violence, Galtung's first great innovation (1969), broadens an understanding of violence away from the obvious, direct sort to patterns of the degradation of human and other life that may have roots or fuel in policy and

social institutions (here we can think of deaths from malnutrition, or illiteracy, or a host of other potential examples, open to interpretation). Finally, cultural violence (Galtung, 1990) is comprised of any cultural form (text, media, talk, iconography, art) that represents any kind of direct or structural violence as inevitable, normal, or legitimate. When one broadens the scope to humanity's relationship to Gaia⁷ and other life forms on this planet, the extent of discernible 'global violence' is tremendous and palpable – from extinctions of species due to human-induced climate change, to persistent global hunger and deaths from malnutrition and preventable disease, lack of access to freshwater, education, and health care, the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Whether globally or locally, the reality of a 'violent world' in many senses is now, more than ever, instantaneously available to a global 'cognoscenti' with access to that great glut of information which is the internet. Further, despite the vigorous debate that surrounds such matters, critical theory and perspectives again are helpful in making us aware that much of the global violence evident in the world today has structural roots in policy and practice that helps to sustain and exacerbate it. Neoliberalism, as the world's still-dominant and pre-eminent economic ideology, promotes raw economic growth and a perversely stunted conception of related economic 'freedom' as an end above all others, rationalizing, for example, international debt regimes that continue to reinforce and exacerbate poverty in the world's most indebted and vulnerable countries (Bond, 2004; Soederberg, 2004; Chossudovsky, 2003; Davidson-Harden, 2007)⁸. International trade regimes pushed by powerful corporate lobbies and pliant governments further promote and legislate the primacy of profit over people and planet, as witnessed in the World Trade Organization's agenda of 'trade liberalization' and commodification of all reaches of life, including

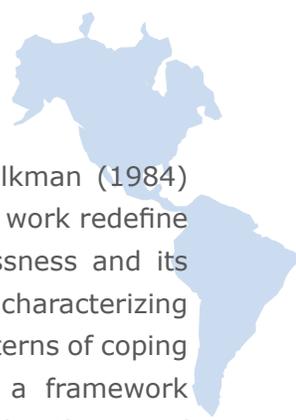


life itself (Shiva, 2005). Warmongering in the pursuit of profit continues apace, as the scramble for dwindling and increasingly precious fossil fuel resources powerfully undergirds geopolitics and conflict in oil-rich areas such as the Middle East and Central Asia, with the Iraq wars and the current conflict in Afghanistan highlighting these trends well. Transnational corporations plunder the most vulnerable countries' valuable resources with virtually complete impunity, with egregious examples evident in the extractive industries, while corporations, governments and multilateral trade and financial institutions and bodies resist calls for more regulation that adheres to ecological or human rights standards (Bond, 2006; Rights and Accountability in Development, 2004; Renner, 2002).

Thankfully, given the overwhelming examples of global violence that prevail in the world as we find it today, all is not 'bad news'. Led in most cases by civil society activists, and citizen-driven social and peace movements (the latter captured well in the appropriately termed 'global justice movement'⁹), the violent impact of continuing neoliberalism and militarism is perhaps more visible and exposed than ever before, given the capacity of information technologies to help spread words and images. In the academic sphere, a wide variety of work based in critical theory and pedagogy and inspired by a variety of currents of thought – integrating a concern with interrogating militarism and the global capitalist economy, with poverty and ecological justice – continues to interrogate the full panoply of global violence and its structural roots (McLaren, 2005; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005; Giroux, 2004). Transnational corporations and their global and local roles have been a recurring object for critical inquiry and analysis, both in their position as central economic protagonists in a profoundly unequal world, as well as for their push to

commodify and re-figure further areas of society and nature as subject to rules of a globalized market, characterized by unequal actors, misery for the many, and power for the few. Notably the drive to sustain middle and upper-class lives in consumer societies in the north, based as these are on an abundance of both cheap and expensive consumer commodities designed to make life more comfortable (for those who can afford them), as well as uninterrupted and artificially cheap, abundant supplies of energy, has facilitated the explosive rise of corporate actors, as well as attendant neoliberal economic agendas trumpeted by the modern states that act to 'underwrite' global capitalist expansion and its actors, often through military force. One may think of global oil corporations (whether own by American or Chinese capitalists) and their role in supporting richer northern citizens' lifestyles in this way, along with global conditions hastening potentially irreversible global climate change (Monbiot, 2007).

However, the public work of global justice movements in confronting global violence is not always obvious to the individual who encounters knowledge of such violence, or the connections between issues that help us understand instances of global violence may not be clear (mediated as they are, for many, by the vicissitudes and biases of the corporate media in de-contextualized 'bites'). Indeed, with the issues so hotly debated and the facts at times so purposefully distorted by those that wish to discredit global justice movements and their criticism, I was not surprised in the slightest to find a bias in one official Ontario 'civics' textbook for a required high school course that portrays WTO protesters as predominantly violent and without merit (Davidson-Harden, 2003). Even if one has the privilege of learning about global violence from the safe vantage point of a university



classroom¹⁰, one may easily feel helpless and overwhelmed in the face of knowledge or even partial awareness of the scope of global violence today. With all of the wonderful clarion calls for revamped conceptions of citizen responsibility in the face of such violence – whether social or ecological¹¹ – it is possible that the promise of such calls to new forms of citizen agency, as well as the many insights of critical theory, pedagogy and analysis, may fall short when it comes to the possibility that in spite of it all, you or I may feel individually helpless and overwhelmed at the potential tasks before us.

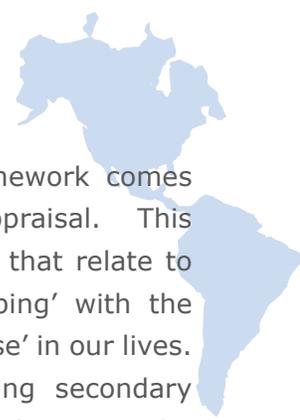
The ‘changes in which we are caught’, to echo Dewey’s words quoted at the outset of this article, I submit, are reflected in the persistent reproduction and extension of global violence visible today and across time, impacting both relationships between humans and between us and Gaia (Lovelock, 2000) as well as different species on this planet. Not only our potential ignorance, but even our awareness – however incomplete or complete it may be – of different forms of global and local violence, can act as a significant frustrator of our capacity to react, adapt and constructively deal with, or ameliorate global violence. Individually, personally, if we react to global violence through – quite natural and expected – feelings of helplessness and powerlessness, then even the most resourceful among us are prone to inaction, not for lack of awareness, perhaps, but for lack of hope and confidence, and belief that we can, indeed make a difference.

The psychology of stress and coping: How do citizens ‘cope’ with global violence?

To help explicate this point of view, I enlist the work of psychologists who have explored how individuals react, or cope, with

forms of stress. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) are two psychologists who in their work redefine what it means to look at helplessness and its effect on mental health. In characterizing reactions to forms of stress as patterns of coping behavior, these researchers use a framework that looks at how individuals deal with sets of events encountered in the course of everyday life, and their responses to them, as a way of analyzing responses to stressful events. This section will not pretend to offer a comprehensive introduction to their contributions, something best obtained through their work itself. Instead, it will introduce key conceptions in their approach toward linking it with the matter of global violence and individual responses to it, as well as discuss implications for education, citizenship and democracy in this regard.

The authors offer several layers to understanding how we appraise stressful events, though they are not described in order of importance or sequence and are seen by Lazarus and Folkman as interweaving and co-dependent, even potentially simultaneous steps individuals take in responding to stress. ‘Primary appraisal’ is a tool to describe an initial reaction to events along different lines. The operative question at hand with respect to primary appraisal would be something like “what is at stake here?” Appraising events as we encounter them, in Lazarus’ and Folkman’s terms, we categorize events and outcomes (whether explicitly or tacitly) as relating to our personal well-being in three different ways. An event can be perceived as irrelevant, meaning that it is judged to be of no impact on our well-being whatsoever. Or it can be judged as ‘benign-positive’, that is to say, as having an effect of either preserving or enhancing our well-being. Finally, through primary appraisal an event or outcome could be judged as stressful. Within this third category of stressful appraisals, the



authors suggest that there are three potential sub-categories of reaction involving distinct emotional repercussions. The first of these is 'harm/loss', implying that damage or constriction of our well-being has occurred. The second stressful reaction is to perceive a stressful event or outcome as a threat, whereby we anticipate that some harm or loss will befall us in the future or as a result of the event.

Within these first two sub-categories, the authors further suggest that where individuals attach strong commitments – represented in beliefs, values or goals – relative to our appraisal of harm/loss or threat in the case of a particular stressful event, the perception of harm/loss or threat will be all the more acute. This comprises an interesting point to return to: essentially, Lazarus and Folkman argue, the more we care about a specific outcome/event/source of stress, the more vulnerable we may be to any appraisal of threat associated with it. A third sub-category is reserved for the possibility that we may perceive the event or outcome as a challenge, which implies that we believe there is some potential for gain and either a preservation or enhancement of well-being that can result from the situation. Within the third mechanism of primary appraisal, that of the perception of stress, the first two sub-categories of reactions involve negative emotions, whereas the final sub-category of perceiving a challenge involves positive emotions. In the language of Lazarus' and Folkman's analysis, the difference between perceiving stressful events as either threats or challenges is critical, because it can lead us to respond in either 'maladaptive' ways – leading to a vicious cycle of negative emotions and further appraisals of harm/loss or threat, or in 'adaptive' ways of functioning, whereby we choose – again explicitly or tacitly – to 'meet' a challenge and be the better for it.

Next in the authors' framework comes the notion of the secondary appraisal. This layer of reaction involves factors that relate to each individual's method of 'coping' with the stress that we perceive or 'appraise' in our lives. The operative question underlying secondary appraisal might be "what, if anything, can be done about it?" Within a framework of 'coping strategies', it is suggested, there are two principal sets of expectations that every individual brings to an appraisal or means of responding to forms of stress. The 'outcome expectancy' represents our expectation that whatever option we take in response to the perceived stress will be effective in addressing that stress at no cost to our personal well-being. Second, the 'efficacy expectation' represents the level of belief we have in our ability to carry out such an option, and is a conception related to earlier psychological work, in particular that of Bandura (1982). The context for secondary appraisals subsequently fits into the larger interplay between what psychologists understand as 'person' and 'situation' factors, where the former represent the commitments (e.g., to objectives, persons, or ideals) and beliefs (which may be culturally shared, or involve religious or political dimensions, for example) we bring to the task of appraisal of stressful events and outcomes. 'Situation factors' represent how we perceive the events at hand in terms of their novelty to us, our perception of their predictability or unpredictability, their temporal character (in terms of imminence, variable duration, and uncertainty concerning timing), or their ambiguity (concerning our lack of clarity over the perceived cause of stress, or lack of clarity concerning stressful information or events). Ambiguity itself can be conceived or perceived as a source of threat. These two poles reflect the larger concern of psychological inquiry to balance analytical perspectives that focus on the relationship of the person to their environment.



In Lazarus' and Folkman's terms, the individual interplay between person and situation factors represents a "specific transaction" informing stress (1984, p. 83). The notion of personal control, partially reframed by the authors in terms of appraisal, re-enters their model here in many ways, not least through the role of individual perceptions or "belief in one's ability to control an event" that may be perceived as stressful (1984, p. 77). Where stressful outcomes or events are seen to be outside one's control or influence, one will tend to essentially avoid sources of stress through multiple ways, whereas if we perceive ourselves as capable of influencing such outcomes or events, we will tend to gravitate toward engagement or positive forms of coping.

To further emphasize the fluid nature of interpenetrating categories of appraisals of harm/loss, threat or challenge, the conception of 'reappraisal' is offered, which represents the fact that individuals may 'appraise' a potential source of stress multiple times, even in ways that are contradictory. The choice of the individual in making many distinct appraisals lends strength to the conceptual model, as it draws attention to the fact that individuals have critical agency and autonomy in forming and re-forming their attitude to events in their life, mirroring the quote from Epictetus that began this article. We are not beholden to deterministic, automatic responses or traits ingrained on our consciousness as though carved in stone, rather, we constantly choose how to perceive the world around us, and these myriad choices impact our attitudes, our propensity for coping positively with stress, and even our overall health. Reappraisals, Lazarus and Folkman suggest, may also be effected 'defensively' in the case of reactions that lead to more negative forms of coping with stress, a point I return to below.

Lazarus and Folkman also suggest that due to existing individual patterns of appraisal as well as commitments or beliefs, it is possible to interpret for each individual a level of 'psychological vulnerability' to both perceptions of harm/loss and threat as well as negative or destructive ways of dealing with stress, analogous to how a previous pattern of physical injury or physical stress leads to a physical vulnerability. In addition, an understanding of the level of individual responses to forms of stress can be gained, the authors suggest, through looking at patterns individuals establish for confronting and dealing with various forms of stress they encounter in positive or healthy ways.

It is this last point explored by Lazarus and Folkman that pertains most directly to the task at hand here in connecting with how individuals react and respond to perceptions of global violence and potential feelings of helplessness in light of this violence. Through the framework of coping with stress, the authors outline categories to describe the principal means by which we tend to cope with stresses in our lives that we perceive as threats or challenges. These means are centered around two poles of coping strategies, those of 'emotion-focused coping', and 'problem-focused coping', also referred to as negative and positive coping strategies. The first category is meant to reflect means of coping by which we attempt to distance ourselves from the perceived stress by negating it through forms of avoidance, such as minimization, distancing, selective attention, or distraction. It also represents a type of coping used when sources of threat or challenge are seen to be less controllable or susceptible to our influence. The latter category in contrast refers to behavioral and cognitive strategies we employ to work toward 'solving' the perceived stress, and represents coping strategies that reflect our belief that we can influence or exert some control in



relation to the source of threat or challenge. By working toward changing our behavior to deal with a problem, for instance, through taking active steps to confront challenges or threats in our daily life in different ways, or through transforming our way of thinking about a problem (i.e., through cognitive strategies), we work toward a more constructive way of dealing with these perceived problems in our lives. The notion of levels and perceptions of personal control or influence remains a consistent thread between the psychological literature on helplessness and that on coping and stress.

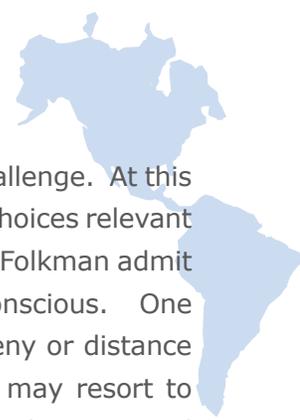
Lazarus and Folkman stress¹² that coping is defined in their model not as an ingrained and constant 'trait' to be ascribed to individuals but rather as a process undertaken by individuals in response to various forms of stress: "The dynamics and change that characterize coping as a process are not random; they are a function of continuous appraisals and reappraisals of the shifting person-environment relationship" (1984, p. 142). To return to the influence of our perceptions of control over sources of stress, the authors note that forms of emotion-focused coping tend to act as ways for individuals to regulate "emotional responses to the [perceived] problem" ('nothing can be done'), whereas forms of problem-focused coping lend themselves to devising and enacting plans to manage or alter "the problem causing distress" (where we perceive conditions as amenable to change and ourselves as capable of effecting change) (1984, p. 150).

They also suggest that there are important potential sources of constraints on individual 'coping resources' that also may influence our capacity to choose either positive or negative coping strategies. Personal health and energy, positive beliefs, problem-solving skills, social skills, social support and material resources are all factors that provide a groundwork for us to

be able to choose and sustain positive coping strategies. Among these, the authors identify social support as one of the most critical and a key to positive coping, although the authors acknowledge that the mere presence of a social network of support will not guarantee positive coping choices and strategies.

With the brief introduction to Lazarus' and Folkman's work accomplished, it's possible to make some links between their framework and the matter of how we may respond to or 'appraise' global violence. I've already suggested that it seems a natural response to appraise global violence in our world as something overwhelming, out of our reach, and beyond our influence. This type of observation harks back to the idea of locus of control offered first by Rotter (1966). The tendency to think of yourself as unable to impact global violence would lend itself to a belief that such violence is beyond our control, the 'external locus of control', whereas a contrasting belief in one's ability to impact global violence reflects a more 'internal locus of control'. Lazarus and Folkman, however, go beyond Rotter in the sense of their idea of stress and coping as relating to a process rather than a trait. That is, by focusing on individual processes of appraisal in various contexts and situations, Lazarus and Folkman do not seek to say anything definitive about entrenched individual traits or ingrained psychological profiles per se through their theory, but rather they call attention to individualized appraisal processes that are always in flux and open to reinterpretation, reappraisal, and choice.

We can consider the pedagogical and experiential dilemma of learning about global hunger as one way of probing different potential responses to global violence. Whether we come across global hunger, for example, through a video/sound bite in a 30 second commercial fundraising to combat hunger in a poor country,



or in a university classroom dedicated to exploring critical issues of global significance, what matters in the end is our appraisal of this particular form of violence. Do we see it as beyond our reach? Are we overwhelmed by it? Do we feel helpless in the face of it? My sense is that we feel all of these things, even most of the time, in such a context. The experience, the personal world from which I write is one of relatively great privilege on a global scale. With my material needs attended to, my educational opportunities and desires sated, and nurtured by an upbringing of plenty and love, free of suffering or hardship, I live in a society whose consumer market is structured around my tastes and whims. Countless devices of convenience make everyday life easier, there are endless forms of entertainment available for those who can pay for them (from television to theatre and music, art, reading) and at every turn I am reminded that I am a potential customer of whatever pleasing goods are just around the corner. Into the middle of my place, my life in this narcissistic culture, drops a decontextualized awareness or glimpse of global violence. What is global hunger and starvation to me, living in a world, a society predicated on comfort and plenty for those who can afford it? How we appraise the information offered to us – including in the context of either short-lived fits and starts or through in-depth exposure (e.g., television commercials vs. university courses) – will shape the type of coping strategy we use to deal with it as a source of stress, whether perceived as a potential harm, loss, or challenge. I've suggested that the culture I am immersed in is really essentially built upon avoidance and comfort (for those who can afford it). I find myself continually enticed, persuaded and pushed to think of my own comfort above all other concerns. Yet the reality of global hunger, perceived and understood even if incompletely and insufficiently, may still bother me, if I care. If it does, if I conceive of global hunger as a source of stress, as it were, I can appraise it as a source

of harm, loss, or threat, or as a challenge. At this point we are faced with a series of choices relevant to our appraisals, and Lazarus and Folkman admit these can even be partially unconscious. One series of choices would have us deny or distance ourselves from the problem. We may resort to an easy path of comfort and avoidance – and subsequently resort to some of the many various options for negative (emotion-focused) coping available to us. For example, we can indulge in wishful thinking ("our governments will surely fix this problem, I don't need to worry about it"). With respect to the tactic of distancing, anyone can admit that it is relatively easy to distance the problem of starvation and undernourishment in the global south. One might say that itinerant television commercials even reinforce the easiness or applicability of this reaction. The tactic of 'selective attention' is an interesting one to raise at this point. I would submit that there is likely a fine line between choosing a tactic like selective attention (as a negative coping strategy) and the appraisal of a violent trend like global hunger as a challenge, where the latter category implies a choice on our part to believe we can have an impact through our own behaviour by confronting whatever violence we identify in the world around us (leading to positive coping strategies, or confronting the problem). Dwelling on global hunger as an example a bit more helps explain this suspicion on my part (although by now you can offer up your own examples rooted in a wider variety of topics related to global violence: militarism/wars, poverty, ecological degradation, etc.).

Consider the 30 second commercial highlighting starvation or undernourishment in, for example, a sub-Saharan African country¹³. The roots of hunger lie in both international trade patterns, the behavior of large economically advantaged producers in the north, those who profit from these schemes, and the persistent



constraints that these interrelated factors pose for the development of food self-sufficiency in hunger-challenged countries¹⁴. If I watch this commercial, am moved, and pick up the phone to make a donation to an organization that pledges to be involved in relieving hunger through aid, how am I impacting the problem? For if my \$50, or even \$50 000 donation goes toward alleviating the symptoms of a specific group of people who suffer directly from hunger as structural violence, what is done (or is not done) about the deeper, 'structural' causes and patterns causing the violence of hunger? In a cruel twist of irony, many have argued that food aid actually sustains hunger through being too limited for broad application, and for its effect of undercutting local food economies in the most needy countries. In addition, a 2007 report from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) found that as much as 1/3 of global food aid budgets in richer countries are lost to shipping and processing¹⁵. Often food aid in richer countries is tied to national regulations stipulating that a defined percentage of such aid must be purchased in the rich country itself, reinforcing the same dynamics of food dumping and price deflation that continue to undercut local food economies in the global south. In this way, picking up the phone and donating, and thus alleviating our conscience and sating our desire to pay global hunger *some* attention straddles the line between selective distancing (negative coping) and some form of engagement (positive coping). The difference between the two is founded in ambiguity around the factors that influence global hunger, and so our access to information to make an informed choice about how to 'cope' with such an issue critically shapes our choice of coping strategies. We might *feel* like we are engaging in the problem, that we can do something about it, but in fact by simply picking up the phone and making a donation we are arguably doing more to alleviate our own consciences, to comfort ourselves, than

we are to actually confront the complex problem that is global hunger. Lessening our ambiguity concerning the problem of hunger, educating ourselves and finding out more, is a crucial step in making the difference between negative and positive coping.

Ambiguity hurts, in a way. The very staggering complexity and scope of a problem like global hunger poses a formidable source of ambiguity in and of itself to all of us. It is far easier, and far more comforting, to simply trust in whomever is at the other end of that phone line to take our money and go and 'fix the problem' – out of sight, out of mind. Ambiguity is stressful, itself a potential source of harm, loss or threat. Faced with this, we may choose an easy path to cope with it, through a beguiling and simplistic path of action, in this case one I describe as a tactic of selective attention (the donation above). Confronted with ambiguity in our lack of knowledge and understanding of global hunger, we can choose in this sense not to distance ourselves from what we perceive or avoid it completely, but to 'make the problem go away' in our minds through an easy outlet. When the ambiguity of our lack of understanding of the issue is not confronted, or when we perceive it as too harmful or difficult to deal with, we can 'make it go away' by deferring to a simpler explanation that requires no effort from us to understand (bowing to the commercial). I describe this as beguiling, however, because given the complexity of the issue of global hunger, we are deluding ourselves to think that global hunger will be alleviated or solved through donations of food aid, to take but one example.

This is not to say that financial resources of various kinds – support for a broad scale of civil society organization (CSO)¹⁶ work focused on relief being one – are much needed to confront the structural violence of hunger (and countless



other problems) in the global south. But there is no easy solution. Indeed, given the entrenched position of some of the protagonists of global hunger (transnational agriculture corporations, the WTO, government policy regimes), the task of confronting this particular form of global violence is a monumental one rooted in policy change and pressure. Moving to food economies in the global south that are founded on self-sufficiency in food production first is no small task, but not an impossible one either. Such a change could be thought of in terms of changing individual minds and building momentum to change policy. Paths toward engagement in this direction might be pursued through electoral (party) politics, education, or different forms of nonviolent activism. I smile as I write this in realizing that the task of contributing to such momentum – of engaging in this direction to confront the structural violence of hunger – can be seen as overwhelming in and of itself, once again. We are continually confronted by a range in our choice of coping strategies and appraisals of the stresses of global violence that we meet with in our lives.

A former student of mine – someone with a long history of social activism and engagement – put the matter in interesting terms. She suggested that ‘in the absence of a clear path’ to follow to engage and confront violence, we will tend to feel more helpless in the face of it. This kind of eloquent observation evokes the idea of ambiguity well. I might add to this in saying that even where we may perceive a clear path, without confronting our ambiguity around the source of global violence, we risk minimizing the problem, thinking wishfully that it is not pervasive or deserving of concerted attention. If we want the ambiguity, or the source of global violence to ‘go away’ for us – if it is deemed too stressful by us to deal with (i.e., if we see it through the lenses of harm, loss or threat), then we will make it do

so. In fact this is all too easy to accomplish. And all the more important to avoid, considering the scope of violence in our world and the necessity for engagement to confront it.

Taking up the challenge: Critical pedagogies of praxis as tools for ‘re-humanization’ and effective global social and ecological citizenship

In the face of repugnant relations of violence, all of us choose – in various ways or even in combination, depending on the circumstances or issue at hand – methods of avoidance or engagement. In an attempt to better understand the nature of this type of choice in specific contexts, different researchers have explored the idea in questionnaire-based research looking at, for instance, how university students or pre-university young people report they react to concerns I would typify as relations of violence, although little research has used such a framework explicitly (one example will be discussed in a moment). Research done in Australia (Frydenberg & Rowley, 1998) with university students used Lazarus’ and Folkman’s idea of emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies to analyze how participants reported that they coped with a range of issues – from those pertaining to poverty, to the environment and human rights, for example – in terms of ‘personal’ and ‘global’ levels. In all cases where participants in the study indicated they used coping strategies, the researchers found that these were applied to personal concerns as opposed to global concerns. In other words, where problems were perceived to have a direct impact on the individual self, they were deemed to be more ‘controllable’ or susceptible to influence by individuals, consistent with Lazarus’ and Folkman’s framework. Additionally, and of interest here, the study reported a trend in the use of a negative or ‘emotion-focused’ coping strategy of ‘wishful thinking’ when it came to global



issues. In the U.K., another more recent study (Ellis, 2004) that looked at respondents' views of their responsibility for ensuring human rights for others found that though a majority of participants favored the idea of human rights, they expressed a sense of helplessness when it came to doing anything about it. In addition, other participants reported deflecting responsibility for human rights away from themselves and particularly onto government or intergovernmental bodies ("shouldn't the UN do that?").

Susan Opatow, a professor of peace and conflict studies at the University of Massachusetts, attempts to explain the lack of will or motivation, or commitment to act to remediate relations of violence through the notion of 'moral exclusion' (Opatow, 2001; Opatow et al., 2005). Premising her point of view on the basis of the existence of structural violence based on Galtung's work, Opatow argues that the reason for a lack of motivation and commitment to act to confront structural violence lies primarily in the fact that we as individuals, at various levels, 'exclude' others who suffer from relations of violence from our own 'moral communities', and deem them consequently unfit for the same standards we uphold for ourselves. In these terms, moral exclusion entails a narrow 'scope for justice' as a sense of justice is not extended to those who are outside of our moral communities. For this author, what is called for is a fundamentally educational project of 'moral inclusion' that emphasizes exposure to relations of violence in our world:

Peace education should be designed to recognize, challenge, and change the thinking that has supported oppressive societal structures and, as we argue, moral exclusion. It should reveal

conditions that trigger violence, ideological rivalries, and national policies that maintain arms races, military systems, and inequitable economic priorities. (Opatow et al., 2005, p. 305)

I am in agreement with these principles, and have attempted to adopt them in my own teaching¹⁷. I strive to make the educational spaces I'm a part of 'morally inclusive' when it comes to exploring relations of violence in our world. I even attempt to expand the envelope further to include 'ecologically inclusive' thinking, incorporating a consideration of ecology, the limits to growth and negative environmental impacts into my own approach to peace studies and relations of violence. However, as we have explored here, despite the arguments and reasons put forward for the idea of moral exclusion, and despite best efforts to invite others to consider the world from a 'morally inclusive' standpoint, we are still left with the nagging question "but what can I do"? We may not feel like we can do much, or anything at all, to remediate problems that we perceive as beyond our reach or capabilities. We may also tell ourselves that the problem we perceive is beyond our responsibility, whether we feel helpless or not in the face of it. Additionally, there is an important, yet subtle distinction to be made in the case of helplessness when perceiving or learning about relations of violence. Whereas a 'moral exclusion' perspective lends to the notion that there is substantial intent involved in 'explaining away' relations of violence as they are perceived, a perspective taking helplessness into account acknowledges that in the absence of any sense that we can *do* anything about such problems, we are left with the sole recourse of avoidance and comfort. As alluded to earlier, in the case of the culture and society that I live in, there are literally a myriad of sources of



comfort that exist to help 'make the problem go away'. One might say that the entire first-world way of life, energy-intensive, overconsumptive and wasteful, is fundamentally premised on comfort mechanisms. Ironically, convenient roads of avoidance, through comfort, lead back to a context of violence, especially in a context where the objects of our consumption, from the food we find on our supermarket shelves to the products in our superstores, more often than not are traceable to relations of violence when scrutinized for such linkages.

Simply knowing about relations of violence can be a painful act, and the tendency to helplessness and even avoidance can be said to be natural and eminently understandable. Similarly, when faced with the choice to 'care' about what we perceive in this sense, we are faced with additional pain. Both are stressful processes. Coming to terms with the idea that one cares about a situation involving relations of violence entails coping with these 'pressure-points' and making the equally difficult decision to deal with the problem. 'Positive coping', in Lazarus' and Folkman's terms, requires courage, determination, persistence and strength of will. Understood in different terms, the choice to care and to act through engagement in this sense represents a commitment to forms of what Gandhi called *tapasya*, or self-sacrifice. Citizen agency is not easy; too often a term like 'citizen engagement' or 'citizen agency' is repeated as banal and analytical, when the visceral experience of involving oneself emotionally and psychologically in confronting global violence involves real leaps of courage and hope. Giving time and energy toward engagement requires us to 'step outside the box' of our everyday lives. This type of task demands something that relates to the love that Freire describes in his critical pedagogy (Freire, 1993, pp. 70-71), as

a necessary tool to be undertake critical work to confront violence in our worlds. This type of commitment also presents the best prospects for personal and social transformation as we confront violence. If we 'know' and 'care' about relations of violence in our world and make the difficult choice to cope in a positive way, doing so can embody a new form of being we live out in response to the violence we encounter. Taking the challenge to act at this point comprises a powerful form of engagement in the face of our own feelings of helplessness.

Education, I believe, can act as a critical sort of 'immunization' from helplessness in the face of global violence along the lines that Seligman and related psychologists hoped behavioral interventions could immunize individuals from forms of depression and anxiety (Seligman, 1992). If this sounds too absolute or ambitious, then to borrow the terms of Lazarus and Folkman, I believe in the potential of education to embody crucial positive coping strategies in the face of oftentimes-painful learning about violence in our world, as well as to encourage the growth of psychological 'resilience' in our reactions to various relations of violence. Specifically, learning consciously based in experience or praxis, after Dewey and Freire, holds the best chance of strengthening the individual citizen against the descent into spiralling feelings of helplessness when confronted by violence in our world. Educational thinkers and researchers embracing critical pedagogy use the term 'pedagogy of praxis' to reflect a participatory, experiential approach to education, synonymous with both Dewey's conception of education-as-experience and Freire's notions of 'conscientization' and praxis (as thought/action/reflection) (Schugurensky, 2000; Gadotti & Milton, 1996). Schugurensky (2000) argues that the experience of participatory



democracy comprises an optimal setting for the learning of democracy, demonstrated through an analysis of the comprehensive implementation of participatory budgeting processes in Porto Alegre, Brazil (the city that engendered the first World Social Fora). To complement Freire's conception that as individuals are 'objectified' by oppressive social relations they are also 'de-humanized', I offer that critical pedagogies of praxis to confront global violence offer an educational project of 're-humanization'.

Regardless of the pedagogical setting – formal or informal – there are a myriad of potential possibilities to integrate experiential opportunities into pedagogical spaces related to confronting forms of global and local violence. I will leave you to ponder your own paths in this regard, and those you may help set for others, if you are an educator. In my own teaching, an optional 'peace praxis' component in certain undergraduate university

courses I've offered has helped lead to some powerfully transformative experiences for some of my students¹⁸. Critical pedagogies of praxis have the potential to assist in the nurturing of citizens prepared to face head-on and transform relations of violence that persist today, and even those with deep structural roots and powerful supporters. As educators concerned with nurturing and deepening democracy and peace often in contexts where these lack substance, we ignore the understandable reality of individual reactions of helplessness to global and local violence at our peril. In order to effectively foster and nurture social and ecological citizenship, exhortations and critiques must be the beginning of wisdom, and not the end of it. Action cannot be construed as an end to enlightenment's means. Rather, the two are in symbiosis toward the goal of transforming global violence toward peace, while citizens' perceptions of themselves and their worlds make the difference between

Endnotes

¹ Such as those reflected in the thought of Walter Lippmann or Alexander Hamilton.

² It is sobering to remember that the world stands poised to fail in the achievement of even the relatively modest development goals set out in the 'Millennium Development Goals' (UN, 2005).

³ See Monbiot (2007) and Flannery (2006) for one introduction to immanent and imminent global ecological catastrophe.

⁴ McMurtry (1999, pp. 43-44) provides a capable critique of the neoliberal perversion of the original meaning of classical economists such as Adam Smith, whose vision of 'free trade' did not incorporate predominant and transnational corporate actors not beholden to any democratic oversight.

⁵ This study, done by the World Institute for Development Economics Research (WIDER, affiliated with the United Nations University) confirmed – used comprehensive household survey methods, and found that 2% of the world's wealthy own more than half of all global household wealth, and that the richest 1% on their own hold 40% of global assets, while the poorer half of the global adult population owns not even 1% of



household wealth. This picture of a massive global gap between rich and poor is complemented by a broader perspective that takes into account the lack of progress in ameliorating inequality since the 1970s. Developing countries have 80 percent of the world's people but share in only a fifth of global GDP. Meanwhile, global GDP has increased in the past 30 years from \$3 trillion to \$30 trillion. The richest 20 percent of the world's people control 82 percent of world export trade and 68 percent of world foreign direct investment, while the bottom poorest 20 percent share barely more than 1 percent of these categories. Continuing a two century trend, the same 20 percent of the world's richest people in OECD countries in 1997 had 74 times the income of the poorest 20 percent, up from a 30: 1 ration in 1960. Astonishingly, the world's richest 200 people's net worth increased to \$1 trillion from \$440 billion between 1994 and 1998, and the assets of the world's three richest people totalled to an excess of the GNP of the world's 43 poorest or 'least-developed' countries combined. This information is adapted from the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Report (1999, pp. 25-37).

⁶ Proponents of neoliberalism trumpet the necessity for economic growth as a kind of social and political panacea, that will cure all ills. Recent transformations of this discourse have begun to incorporate the notion of 'pro-poor' or 'sustainable' economic growth as a footnote, but in this author's view the core prescription of aggregate economic growth above any other concern holds as a fundamental tenet of neoliberal social and economic policy and practice, which remains hegemonic today.

⁷ Gaia is James Lovelock's conception of the planet we live on as one great, self-regulating being which is as much alive as any of the constituent species and ecosystems that comprise her (Lovelock, 2000).

⁸ Despite a rhetorical change in tone from the Bretton Woods Institutions, for example, they still most enthusiastically promote and require implementation of core neoliberal macroeconomic recipes that were at the heart of pre-'poverty reduction' structural adjustment days (McKinley, 2004; World Development Movement, 2005; Wood, 2004).

⁹Of course this is a widely debated and used term. I understand global justice movements as comprising citizen-driven social and peace movements that are linked by common concerns of opposing the violence engendered by capitalism (and sometimes capitalism itself), militarism, different forms of interpersonal and systemic oppression based on identity and social class, and ecological destruction, while promoting alternative visions and politics based on principles of positive peace, nonviolence, diversity, democracy, pluralism and cultural self-determination.

¹⁰ I am conscious of the fact that I write this article from the standpoint of privilege in several ways. I am myself the beneficiary of a life of relative privilege and affluence. I hope that this article can have an audience in both privileged and under-privileged audiences, voices and pedagogical spaces. That said, in the spirit of 'full disclosure' I write and theorize from my own experience (pedagogy in a public university in Ontario, Canada), which is necessarily distinct from other contexts in the participants' backgrounds, including our relative privilege and affluence as a group or global demographic, if you will.

¹¹ See Lister (1997a, 1997b), Pettus (1997), and Knijn (2006) for innovative and passionate feminist calls for such re-framing of citizenship; Sears (1996a, 1996b) for formative Canadian perspectives on how to better



understand the role of education for citizenship toward such a task; Arneil (2005) for a contemporary view of the dilemmas of limited social citizenship as a 'shared fate'; and Latta & Garside (2005) as well as Dobson (2003) for perspectives on the necessity for articulating and enacting an ecological citizenship.

¹² -pun intended.

¹³ According to statistics from the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2006), sub-Saharan Africa as a region accounts for fully 1/4 of all the world's chronically hungry people, with 1/3 of the region's citizens hungry - the highest such proportion by region in the world.

¹⁴ While countries of the global south have been coerced through debt conditionality to structure their economies to be dependent on exports of key commodities (including crops such as coffee and cocoa in Africa), food self-sufficiency and local food security have languished, at the expense of local farmers and citizens reliant on agriculture to survive, while transnational corporations have reaped by far the lion's share of the economic benefits of neoliberalized trade in agricultural commodities. Meanwhile, under-nourishment and starvation takes the lives of 18 500 children under the age of 5 per day in sub-Saharan Africa alone, and 6 million children the same age die yearly across the world (Madeley, 2004). For another recent book offering powerful and critical analysis of the political economy of global hunger as structural violence, see Patel (2008).

¹⁵ See <http://www.globalpolicy.org/socecon/hunger/relief/index.htm> for a variety of articles reviewing these controversies and others. See also specifically Mittal (2005).

¹⁶ I prefer the term CSO to 'non-governmental organization' (NGO). CSOs represent a vast cross-section of society; the reader should not presume that I am giving blanket endorsement to all CSOs. Since the work of organizations in this field is diverse and represents many different actors and interests, it remains up to the individual to research particular CSOs and make their own judgments. Corporations of various kinds, for example, have been known to set up 'shell' organizations to promote essentially violent causes, from denial of climate change to promotion of Big Tobacco and biotechnology. CSOs have also been shown at times to fuel conflict either directly or indirectly in developing countries; for one source of research and links on this topic visit <http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/services/cds/themes/aid.html>.

The question of CSOs in general is far broader than I can treat here. For one book that broaches this topic in a thoughtful way, see Swift (1999).

¹⁷ At the time of writing I am into my third year of offering critical courses relating to peace and conflict in a Global Studies department.

¹⁸ I can't treat this experience in proper depth here; I will leave that task for a subsequent article. Suffice it to say that several students' peace praxis projects were the inspiration for an as-yet unpublished manuscript on this topic. As a start, consider Kai Brand-Jacobsen's work (2004) as one springboard that I have myself used to prompt participants in pedagogical spaces to consider their own forms of 'peace praxis'.



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