

BOOK REVIEW

Lilia. D Monzó *A Revolutionary Subject: Pedagogy of Women of Color and Indigeneity*, Peter Lang Group AG, New York, Bern, Berlin, Brussels, Oxford, Wien, 2019, 290 pp. ISBN 978-1-433-13406-7 (pbk)

Victoria Showumni
University College London

The cover draws the reader into the theme of the book, promoting activism. The beautiful art on the book cover is a graphic by artist-activist Melanie Cervantes titled 'Dreams are Stronger than Fear'. Cervantes is co-founder of the Just seeds project and uses the phrase in her artwork with Jesus Barraza, of Dignidad Rebelde. The author Lilia D. Monzó is known for her use of Marxist-Humanist and decolonial approaches to address and challenge capitalism, imperialism, racism, and the hyper-exploitation of women of colour. Her work envisions a socialist alternative that centres on humanism and liberation.

The book emphasizes the significant contributions of women, particularly women of colour, in revolutionary movements. It argues that women's liberation and anti-racist agendas are central to Marxist-Humanism. Monzó highlights how the voices and leadership of women of colour and indigenous women have often been marginalized, despite their crucial roles in grassroots organizing and activism. Monzó draws on Marxist-Humanism to highlight the human potential and creativity stifled by capitalism. She emphasizes the importance of recognizing the interconnectedness of human beings and the dehumanizing effects of capitalist structures.

Her decolonial approach critiques colonial legacies and their ongoing impact on marginalized communities, particularly women of colour. This perspective seeks to dismantle colonial representations and develop a praxis of liberation. Monzó's work addresses the intersection of race,

gender, and class, arguing that these forms of oppression are interconnected and must be confronted together. She critiques class-reductionist thinking and advocates for a more inclusive vision of Marxism. She envisions a socialist society that prioritizes equality, cooperation, and the well-being of all individuals. This alternative seeks to overcome the alienation and exploitation inherent in capitalist systems.

The key objectives of the book can be summarised as follows:

1. **Reclaiming History:** The book aims to reclaim the history of women of colour and indigenous women in revolutionary struggles, showcasing their leadership and insights.
2. **Marxist-Humanism:** It advocates for Marxist-Humanism as a philosophy for the oppressed, emphasizing the need to recognize and honour the experiences of women of colour and indigenous women.
3. **Addressing Class Reductionism:** Monzó addresses the limitations of class-reductionist thinking, arguing that racism and sexism are equally terrorizing structures that need to be confronted alongside class issues.
4. **Inclusive Vision:** The book calls for a more inclusive vision of Marxism, one that embraces the totality of Marx's work and promotes a new humanism built on equality and cooperation.

The title is a little less obvious and does not allow you to make any assumptions about the core focus of the book. The book was published in 2019 at a time of significant change in the global North, after Donald Trump won the presidential election in 2016. Fundamental tenets such as the 'right to be heard' with respect and behaviours which encouraged participants in debates to disagree well were eroded. The ability to discuss and debate with people who hold very different views is not without its challenges; but having the tools, techniques and platforms to do so is a vital part of enabling communities to co-exist. The acquisition of historical knowledge also supports constructive debate.

Monzó's book puts the voices and experiences of women of colour at the centre of the discourse. Her innovative approach to a 'pedagogy of dreaming' is presented as offering a potential catalyst for the creation of a new society. She foregrounds the capacity of dreaming to help us gain insights and make history to counter capitalist pretence.

This elucidates a reinterpretation of Marxist notions in relation to colonialism, gender, and exploitation, highlighting the female

perspective. Marxist dialectics are deployed in fresh ways, challenging reductionist readings and foregrounding a view of the class struggle that embraces anti-racism, anti-sexism, and opposition to all forms of oppression.

Additionally, this book offers insights into the women's movement over time, particularly the way in which middle class women interpret how the women's movement was seen through the lens of feminism. The book sheds light on what it is like to be considered to be hyper-exploited and simultaneously courageous through examples taken from lived experiences through a Marxist lens. This brings together capitalism, classism, and injustice and creates a compelling rationale for taking a stand against all forms of oppression.

It is important to deconstruct prevalent thinking in relation to Marx and Marxists. They are accused of class reductionism, that is relegating other problematic antagonisms to a secondary, less important category. Marxism asserts that the conflict between social classes—namely, the bourgeoisie (capitalists) and the proletariat (workers)—is the fundamental force shaping economic relationships within a capitalist system. This class struggle, it is believed, will inevitably lead to a communist revolution. Marx's thought was indeed ground-breaking, and it stimulated argument across every major language, including multiple disciplines: philosophy, history, politics and economics. Marx helped to shape the discipline of sociology. In *Das Kapital*, Volume 1, Marx argues that there was a need to analyse the profound structural processes through which the capitalist mode of production reproduces itself. Such a controversial topic disenchanted many followers during the 1980's and 1990's as orientations changed and disaffection ensued. This resulted in a weakening commitment to revolution and emancipation.

Feminists abandoned Marxism and reject Marxist political economy because they perceived that it was so reductionist that it prevented the creation of an adequate framework for a comprehensive theory the oppression of women. Others argued that this kind of reductionism had 'no place in the complex and rich ideas of Marx, or in the most Marxist tradition' (Pollard 2022). White women were not the only group that struggled to embrace Marxism. The Marxist interpretation of the Black experience in America failed to account for the noneconomic aspects of racism and the presence of racism within the working class. With the development of capitalism after the second world war, Marxism was

unable to incorporate the economics of uselessness whereby large numbers of Black people were permanently unemployed. Many Black people across the globe have become highly critical of capitalism, whilst, like feminists, also rejecting Marxism. The reason is that Marx's class analysis, which blames capitalists for racism, does not provide answers to account for racism within the white working class (Willhelm, 1980).

Building on these insights, we appreciate how Monzó moves beyond concepts of the bourgeois and the proletariat to more profoundly revolutionary praxis, including the voices of all oppressed women. She does not restrict herself to the voices of women who remain complicit with the privilege inherent in whiteness. Monzó dares to imagine that it is imperative to listen to the voices of women of colour. She examines the notion of a Freirean dialogue (Freire 1970), an epistemological encounter, whereby interlocutors listen to each other with profound attention and engagement. This is the democratic right of all human beings. She challenges all men and women who see themselves as change agents to pick up the mantle and understand that for the real distribution of power, privilege must be conquered. Monzó draws on Marxist, humanist, and feminist theory as well as the theology of liberation, to develop a new type of pedagogy of the oppressed for the twenty first century. She connects the need to uproot capitalism with the eradication of racism, sexism and heterosexism. Her arguments are based on the writings, life experiences and struggles of women colour and indigenous women from across the globe.

The book is compelling as it reconceptualises Marxist theory, embedding personal life stories that leave the reader humbled. Monzó challenges a one-sided regime of truth, entangled in unjust power relations and legitimized by dominant social systems. She recognises that women of colour around the world continue to suffer the devastating impact of racialized capitalism, despite historical efforts to promote equality.

Women of Color and Indigeneity: A Revolutionary Subject is comparable to several other influential works in the genre. These include *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* by Gloria E. Anzaldúa, as well as *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* by Audre Lorde, and *The Combahee River Collective Statement* by The Combahee River Collective.

Researchers who focus on intersectionality would likely be interested in *Women of Color and Indigeneity: A Revolutionary Subject* by Lilia D.

Monzó, particularly Feminist scholars, Marxist-Humanist theorists, decolonial scholars, and social justice educators.

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