
Hegemonic and Marginalised Educational Utopias in the Contemporary Western World

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ABSTRACT This article discusses whether utopian thinking in education has really disappeared, as is often argued. The argument is here made that while overtly utopian thinking has lost its legitimacy among social sciences and education theorists and practitioners, the influence of various utopian discourses on educational policies and practices remains strong. The first part of this article contextualises the present state of utopian thinking by overviewing its historical development. The second part discusses this in the context of education. The third part raises the issue of hegemonic utopias that present as 'realist' discourses about the future. The fourth section brings into discussion marginalised utopias, and asks the question if there are any spaces left for utopias that most deeply challenge patriarchal and Western assumptions about what constitutes knowledge, history, future and ideal education. The article concludes by arguing that all 'regimes of educational truths' whether labelled 'realistic' or 'utopian' draw their inspiration from a particular image of the future, an image that always includes at least some elements of the utopian.

The Death of Utopia?

Historical overviews of utopian thinking have a predictable storyline, argues influential utopian historian Krishan Kumar (1987, p. vii):

One is bounced through the ancients – the biblical prophets, Plato and the Greeks; hurried throughout the Middle Ages, with a glance at Augustine; served up More, Campanella and Bacon as a substantial dish; then finished off with the nineteenth-century socialists: often with a coda which proclaims or laments the death of utopia in our own century.

Arguments that aim to explain this death of utopia in the twentieth-century Western world usually run along two main lines. The first set of arguments focuses on countless failed utopian social experiments. Most significantly, the collapse of socialist/communist utopian dreams, the pursuit of which led to totalitarian Stalinism, Maoism and so on, apparently hammered the final nail into the coffin of utopia. According to these arguments, awareness of the emergence of such 'totalitarian nightmares' was compounded by the effects on the Western psyche of two world wars in Europe, thus contributing to the general disillusionment with the utopian as well as to the emergence of anti-utopian sentiment.

The second set of arguments, paradoxically, focuses on utopian successes. Due to advances in technology and in general knowledge, almost 'any form of the concrete world, of human life, any transformation of the technical and natural environment is a possibility' (Marcuse, 1970, p. 62). What numerous utopians dreamed in the past – societies where abundance is the norm, for example – has materialised in the so-called 'post-scarcity society' (at least in Western nations belonging to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development). It could then be argued that some societies finally live in 'utopia now':

The greatest irony of the concept of Utopia is that people are still searching for it when, at the dawn of the 21st century, most citizens of the world's industrial democracies are already living in one [utopia]. If we could communicate with even the wealthiest people who lived much before 1900, and told them we live in a time when even ordinary people have clean clothes and houses, nutritious food and potable water, the freedom to quit any job we dislike, the ability to hear symphonic music and watch dramas without leaving home, and vehicles to transport us anywhere in the world in a matter of hours, who can doubt that they would cry out, 'you live in paradise!?' (Anonymous, 2000, p. 12)

So on the one hand, utopia is seen to have disappeared because it has failed miserably to bring positive social change. On the other hand, utopia is seen to have failed because it is no longer needed.

In the context of mainstream politics, interestingly enough, utopia has been 'killed off' by both left and right, by radicals and conservatives alike, though for different reasons. For conservatives, the utopian demand for radical transformation, rather than slow and more manageable piecemeal reform, is fundamentally flawed. They have generally argued that:

grand designs for social reconstruction are nearly always disasters. While contemporary social institutions may be far from perfect, they are generally serviceable. At least, it is argued, they provide the minimal conditions for social order and stable interactions. These institutions have evolved through a process of slow, incremental modification as people adapt social rules and practices to changing circumstances. The process is driven by trial and error much more than by conscious design, and by and

large those institutions which have endured have done so because they have enduring virtues. This does not preclude institutional change, even deliberate institutional change, but it means that such change should be piecemeal, not wholesale ruptures with existing arrangements. (Wright, 1999, para. 4)

An article published in *Time* a couple of years ago (Hughes, 2000, pp. 84-85) is typical of such negative attitudes towards utopia. Hughes argues that utopia is necessarily about failure because its subjects are 'the fallacies and delusions of human hope' (p. 84). He also argues that 'utopia means conformity, a surrender of the individual will to the collective or the divine' (p. 84) and, as such, utopia is basically for 'authoritarians and weaklings' (p. 84). In the article, both Nazism and communism are connected to nineteenth-century utopian experiments and while some might think 'that to be deprived of a life in Utopia may be a loss, a sad failure of human potential' this can be the case only until they 'consider how unspeakably awful the alternative would be' (p. 85).

But even those interested in radical social transformations have attacked utopia. Karl Marx himself used it as a weapon 'in the fight between Marxism and non-Marxian socialism' (Buber, quoted in Ozmon, 1969, p. v). That Marx's thought had all the elements of the utopian (including its dystopian downfall) is now rarely contested. But Marx:

used this concept to differentiate between his scientific socialism and what he felt were the dreamy abstractions of others. The opposing faction was thus labeled by Marx as 'utopian'. To a large extent, Buber adds, this fight between the Marxists and the non-Marxists has conditioned our understanding of the world today. (Ozmon, 1969, p. v)

The battle between the 'scientific' and 'realistic' approaches, and the 'utopian' significantly influenced political debates of the twentieth century. Somewhere in that process, utopian was simultaneously equated with 'unrealistic, naive and unfeasible'. Being labelled 'utopian' would consequently de-legitimise a political project, by default.

The latest attack on utopianism has come out of postmodernism. Most postmodernists, 'in the tradition of Foucault ... generally refuse to offer a vision of the future' argues Fendler (1999, p. 185). Unlike modernists, they believe that offering *a vision* 'such as providing a solution, ideal or utopian hope ... would set limits on possibilities for the future' (p. 185). In addition, they believe that offering a vision of the future means 'to assume a position of political authority (intellectual as center)', a position that is generally declined on 'ethical grounds' (p. 185). The allocation of utopia to the dustbins of history has apparently been completed.

But is utopia really dead? And, more importantly, do we still need it?

Survival of Utopia

The answers to these questions depend partly on the way utopia is defined and understood. As John Carey (1999, p. xi) argued, 'utopia' is variously understood to mean both 'nowhere' or 'no-place' as well as a 'good place' or a 'perfect place'. Understood in the latest sense as 'a place, state or condition *ideally perfect* in respect of politics, laws, customs, and conditions' (*The Oxford English Dictionary*, 1989, p. 371, emphasis added) that can actually be achieved, utopia is pretty much outdated. There are very few places left (for example in some religious futures visions) where such overt utopianism can be found. Although the idea of a *perfect* society in the future still inspires some, such ideas have, in general (and rightfully), lost legitimacy. 'Classical' utopian thinking and its preoccupation with uniformity, order and singularity of truth has by now been abandoned. Equally problematic and similarly abandoned is the ideal of the creation of 'perfect societies' – inhabited by 'perfect', 'rational', 'selfless' humans – that exclude 'real people' (Carey, 1999) and include only the right, ideal, utopian types. This is because such utopianism is clearly not only unrealistic (as it aims to achieve elusive perfection), it can also be dangerous. It is such an interpretation of utopia that, as argued by Hudson (2000, p. 4), has the capacity (by opting for 'maximal value orientation') to encourage human beings to 'give vent to totalist adolescent psychological states' and provide 'an illusory basis for human action'. Furthermore, such a utopia is:

a form of subjectivism which ignores the fact that we cannot reshape the world in our own image. It is irrational in its refusal to acknowledge objective reality, immature in its inability to realise the limited nature of the possible, and irresponsible in its failure to understand the role of fallibility in the realisation of the good. (Hudson, 2000, p. 4)

Most critics of utopianism assume only this definition of utopia. But utopia has also matured and been transformed, surviving in many other forms, even those that aim to oppose it. John Carey (1999, p. xi) argues that 'strictly speaking, imaginary good places and imaginary bad places are all utopias, or nowheres'. That is, understood as 'nowhere' or 'no-place' utopia incorporates both imaginary 'good places' (eutopias) as well as imaginary 'bad places' (dystopias) (p. xi) – and both of these forms still significantly inform views of the future as well as actions taken in the present. In addition, although aiming to end utopia, postmodernism has produced yet another utopian form, that of a multiplicity of heterotopias. Lastly, many narratives about the future that aim to represent 'realistic' approaches (as in technological, scientific determinism) also incorporate utopia – that is, what is desired and hoped for. Such approaches are disguised as *crypto* utopias; nonetheless, they also incorporate 'prescriptive and improved imagined states of both collective and/or individual being' (Milojevic, 2002, p. 45). As such, they too incorporate the true meaning of utopia.

Dystopia

The current prevalence of dystopia is hard to dispute. The twentieth-century Western world has witnessed the emergence of a distinctive dystopian genre and the prevalence of dystopian images in the media. Both in fiction and especially in the news, images of 'natural disasters, accidents, crime, war, disease, social injustice ... convey a picture of a world where nothing works – in short, dystopia now' (Jennings, 1996, p. 212). The prevalence of such dystopian thinking has had a profound negative impact on both the general population as well as on young people, as Hutchinson (1996), Slaughter (1998) and Hicks & Holden (1995) argue. The main problem with the prevalence of the dystopian genre is its capacity to legitimise fears while deligitimising hope. As argued by Boulding (1995, p. 100), people want to be 'realistic' but they take it as 'axiomatic that fears are realistic and hopes unrealistic'.

Another influential utopian theorist, Ernst Bloch, also saw problems with the prevalence of the dystopian. Bloch (1986, p. 3) argued that the future dimension always contains both dystopia and utopia, that is, both what is feared or what is hoped for. But he also felt that it is hope that is 'superior to fear', because it is:

neither passive like the latter, not locked into nothingness. The emotion of hope goes out of itself, makes people broad instead of confining them, cannot know nearly enough of what it is that makes them inwardly aimed, of what may be allied to them outwardly. The work of this emotion requires people who throw themselves actively into what is becoming, to which they themselves belong (Bloch, 1986, pp. 3-4).

But while this may be so, our societies do need dystopian thinking, providing such thinking represents insights arising from healthy scepticism. In this respect, Jennings (1996, p. 211) argues that dystopian thinking takes two basic forms or functions. It can be expressed as a description of 'a place or condition in which everything is as bad as possible', or, it can take the form of anti-utopias. Jennings further argues that in the former, dystopias have the important function of emphasising 'the serious problems that may result from deliberate policies, indecision and indifference, or simply bad luck in humanity's attempts to manage its affairs' (p. 211). However, as anti-utopias, dystopias are 'satirical or prophetic warnings against the proposed "improvement" of society by some political faction, class interest, technology, or other artifact' (p. 211). In this latter sense dystopias can thus 'poison our outlook on the present, or even prompt us to give up trying to do better' (p. 211).

So, rather than debating the merits of utopia vs. dystopia, it may be more important to take a *critical view* of both dystopian (based on fear) and utopian (based on hope) visions. This would help us to balance the need to 'prepare for the worst with a desire to achieve the best' (Jennings, 1996, p. 212). But, as explained by Boulding earlier, this critical view of dystopian thinking is still missing. Dystopias have come to represent the normative discourse about the

future; this may be especially due to the influence the mainstream science-fiction movie genre (in large part communicating dystopian images of the future) exerted onto Western consciousness during the twentieth century. The main function this has had is in seeing our present as not so bad after all, effectively diminishing desire for radical social change.

Eutopia and Heterotopia

The critical evaluation of utopia, on the other hand, has resulted in the emergence of two new concepts – eutopias (decisively good not perfect places) and heterotopias (as places of otherness). The shift from understanding utopias as ‘perfect societies’ to utopias that are marked by self-doubt and questioning is implicit in the increased use of the term eutopia. This term implies that while it is not possible to create perfect societies, we could still hope to create better ones, improvements on the past and the present. The role of eutopias is invaluable. They are spaces for speculation, social dreaming, subversion and critique, the intellectual expansion of possible futures, and expression of a desire for different (and better) ways of being.

Heterotopia is equally important. Partially developed by Michel Foucault in his article ‘Of Other Spaces’ (1986), heterotopia was initially to mean ‘real places’ that exist in every culture and every civilisation. For Foucault (1986, p. 27), heterotopia is ‘a space of illusion ... a space that is other’. It is also a counter-site, or ‘a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted’ (p. 22). Literally translated as other or different place, this term has more recently come to denote imaginary places of otherness, multiplicity and diversity. While Foucault’s conceptualisation of heterotopias is ‘frustratingly incomplete, inconsistent, incoherent’ (Edward Soja, 1996, p. 162), their importance lies in Foucault’s insistence on the *plurality* of spaces of otherness. Foucault’s heterotopias are ‘narrowly focused on peculiar microgeographies, nearsighted and near-sited, deviant and deviously apolitical’ (Soja, 1996, p. 162), but the concept has since evolved to reconceptualise utopia by including flexibility, questioning, and work in progress. Although initially used to counter-pose utopia, the concept of heterotopia has since become one of many evolved forms of utopia. Such a conceptualisation is extremely important in every pluralistic society – and every society is always in essence pluralistic – because it can open up the possibility of developing alternative discourse. Critically viewing utopia has thus resulted in a new understanding of utopia as ‘self, limiting, partial and plural’ (Alexander, 2001, p. 579), and as such represents an attempt to include diversity and chaos in utopianism.

On the question of whether we still need utopia, it is clear that while abandonment of utopia as a blueprint for the ideal, perfect and uniform society is a good idea, there is still the need for dystopias of critique, heterotopias of diversity and eutopias of improvement. This need is particularly felt by various

marginalised social groups. As Fred Polak argued 30 years ago (1973, p. 172), although utopian visions are usually created by the intellectual elite, 'the utopia is really on the side of Don Quixote and not Don Carlos'. Almost 70 years ago, Mannheim (1936) made a similar argument about who, in fact, gains from labelling utopia as unrealistic, naive and impossible. According to him (1936, pp. 176-177), it is the representatives of a given order who will 'label as utopian all conceptions of existence which *from their point of view* can in principle never be realized'. So even if many of the earlier utopian ideals are realised, in the context of a highly hierarchical world, there will always be a social group in need of utopia – as an expression of the hope that the future can, indeed, be different.

The Politics of Utopia: labelled and overt vs. crypto-utopias

Hope for a different future lingers in most historical and contemporary narratives on social and educational change. And at any given time in history, there are numerous, often competing, utopian and dystopian visions that are constantly being negotiated, locally and globally. In that process, not all social groups have the opportunity to exercise equal power and contribute towards the 'universalisation' of utopian ideals. Thus, certain utopian visions are always privileged, defining what becomes the dominant image of the future. In our present historical moment, it is predominantly cyber-utopia and the utopia of free and open markets that have become the privileged utopian discourse. Of course, discourses on a 'post-industrial', 'information' society and on a 'globalised', 'pan-capitalist' world are rarely termed as 'utopian'. Rather, they are seen to form 'rationalistic' and 'realistic' futures where discussion about the desired is apparently taken out of the equation. As such they represent what could be termed *crypto-utopia*, or utopia that is hidden, disguised, veiled, concealed, covert. While they purport to communicate the 'truth about the future', such 'realistic' futures in fact also subtly promote implicit assumptions about the nature of future society (high tech, globalised) and impose these views on other futures discourses. All other discourses about the future are made to adjust to and negotiate with these, arguably, most-likely futures. On the other hand, marginalised alternatives remain virtually unknown and are rarely debated. Examples include the 'popularity' of Elise Boulding's vision of a gentle/androgynous society, Riane Eisler's partnership society/gylany or Sri Aurobondo's 'the coming of the Spiritual Age' as compared to the ideas of 'post-industrial' and 'information' society.

To conclude, despite all the attempts to 'kill it off', utopia has survived well into the twenty-first century. It has matured, transformed and taken on a multiplicity of forms, including those that apparently negate it. But although utopian thinking (either explicit or implicit) is almost always there whenever 'future' is brought into the discussion, this is not always recognised. Not all utopias are born equal. Some succeed in convincing people about their inevitability, masking themselves as destined, unavoidable and 'realistic'

futures. In order to constitute the main 'truth' about the future, these hegemonic narratives depend heavily on prediction and determinism. Predictions about the future usually take the form of trend identification and analysis that is, in turn, often based on technological and economic determinism. At other times, determinism is backed by a belief in the ubiquitous character of historical and social structures that leave little space for human agency. What distinguishes hegemonic utopian and futures narratives from other, counter or alternative ones, is their capacity to convince others of the inevitability of a particular future. Hegemonic futures thus eliminate alternatives not by making them 'illegal, immoral or unpopular', but by making them 'invisible and therefore irrelevant' (Postman, 1993, p. 48). The desire to abandon utopianism is thus political rather than a decision taken 'with one's feet firmly on the ground'.

Utopian Thinking in Education

Futures and utopian thinking in education has, in general, paralleled the developments described above. Overt utopianism in education has not completely disappeared, but it has been marginalised and is no longer a 'legitimate' discourse. Since educational discourse in the present historical moment is 'organized around a totalising principle in a paradigm that is called "analytic", "rationalist", or "scientific"' (Fendler, 1999, p. 170), utopianism is, in general, considered 'passé'. As argued by Armstrong (1996):

Hardly anyone talks about educational utopias anymore. We seem to be too caught up with test scores, basic skills, teacher burnout, school violence, and so-called excellence to be concerned with visions of what our schools really could be at their best. The early 1970s gave rise to exciting books like George Leonard's *Education and Ecstasy* and John Mann's *Learning to Be*, which painted fantasy pictures of futuristic schools that educated the total spectrum of human capability. In Leonard's book, children used computer-assisted technology to interact with humanity's rich collection of symbol systems. Mann's book described a utopian school where children attended 'empathy classes' and simulated trips to Mars. Just 20 years later, some of these fantasies seem laughably outdated, whereas others are just now being realized. In their time, however, these books revealed a freshness of vision and an unabashed impulse to explore the heights of possibility in education. We just don't seem to do much exploring in this hardheaded era. (Armstrong, 1996, para. 1)

Numerous other authors (e.g. Giroux, 2003; Luke, 2002; McLaren, 1998) attest to the similar lack of space for utopian imagining and the construction of normative large-scale ethical and political narratives. The results of such separation between educational goals and strategies and e/utopian futures imaging have been well documented. For example, as argued by Allan Luke (2002, p. 50), neo-liberal educational governance and the new globalised

political economy of education have colluded with leftist scepticism toward grand narratives:

Taken together, these two ostensibly opposite forces can set the practical and administrative conditions for a fragmentation of the educational work of teaching and learning. This fragmentation is achieved both through the narrow instrumental technicism of a test or package-driven classroom, and through an overly developed epistemological sensitivity to the local, the 'cultural' and the diasporic that eschews grand constructions of discipline, field and discourse and thereby effectively narrows the curriculum to parochial concerns.

Similar arguments are developed by McLaren (1998, pp. 439 & 435):

The Leftist agenda now rests almost entirely on an understanding of asymmetrical gender and ethnic relations ... The educational Left is finding itself without a revolutionary agenda for challenging inside and outside the classrooms of the nation the effects and consequences of the new capitalism ...

In the face of the 'the current lack of Utopian and the postmodern assault on the unified subject of the Enlightenment tradition' (McLaren, 1998, p. 444), what has resulted is a 'political paralysis', at least at the left end of the political spectrum. Modernity, stemming from the Enlightenment tradition, has not been 'destroyed by alternative visions, but by the collapse of all visions; everything goes, but nothing much counts' (Giddens, 1992, p. 21). To fill in that vacuum a 'new alliance' and a 'new power block' have formed (Apple, 2000, p. 226) – in the USA in particular and in developed Western countries in general. This new power block:

combines multiple fractions of capital that are committed to neoliberal marketized solutions to educational problems, neoconservative intellectuals who want a 'return' to higher standards and a 'common culture', authoritarian, populist, religious fundamentalists who are deeply worried about secularity and the preservation of their own traditions, and particular fractions of the professionally oriented new middle class who are committed to the ideology and techniques of accountability, measurement, and 'management'. (Apple, 2000, p. 226)

Most importantly, this new block has utilised a particular image of the romantic past to fill the vacuum created by disintegration of the old and lack of articulation of the new futures narratives. As argued by Apple (Apple, 2000, p. 226, emphasis added):

Its overall aims are in providing the educational conditions believed necessary both for increasing international competitiveness, profit, and discipline and for returning us to a romanticized past of the 'ideal' home, family, and school.

But would neo-liberal discourses be so influential if they had not incorporated, and indeed appropriated, elements of the desired and the hoped for? The next part of this article discusses utilisation of particular futures imaging developed by this new alliance. The argument will be made that the success of neo-liberal politics was partially due to their ability to capture the public imagination, to offer a blueprint, a prescriptive and improved imagined state of individual and/or collective being. This vision had to be disguised, however, because overt utopianism, as discussed previously, was already undermined.

Perhaps it is not coincidental that a lack of new utopias coming from the left of the political spectrum influenced strengthening of utopias coming from the right. Until very recently, both left and right relied on 'modernist notions of progress to justify their theoretical, empirical, and political strategies' (Popkewitz, 1998, p. xiii). Popkewitz (p. xiv) argues that this has been done without reflective examination and with 'almost missionary zeal' in order to obtain the 'salvation' of the masses through education.

The idea that education, and other social institutions, can be transformed rationally and in ways that 'enhance human wellbeing and happiness has a long and controversial history' (Wright, 1999, para. 3). In one of the rare books that explicitly focus on the connection between utopias and education, *Utopias and Education* (1969), Howard Ozmon has argued that utopian thought played an important part in influencing educational thought in the West. He points at ways in which utopian thought has influenced education in the past and has also asserted that utopians have, by and large, placed a high priority upon education. In addition, 'most utopian writers not only have a high regard for education but are educationists themselves' (p. x). That education has always been a utopian measure par excellence (Hertzler, 1965), Ozmon (1969, p. ix) explains by stating that:

[As utopians believed] ... that the great social problems of a society cannot be solved without changing the entire structure of the society within which these problems reside ... they saw a twofold necessity for education, first, for the purpose of educating man [sic] to the need for great and important changes, and secondly, they saw education as a vehicle for enabling man to adjust to these changes.

Can Western education thus be separated from the tradition that created it in the first place? And, as there is hardly a geographical or psychic space left that is not being imprinted with both Western modernist views of progress and development as well as with Western educational models, where can spaces of 'otherness' and new imaginary 'nowheres' be found?

Utopia is Dead, Long Live Utopia: globalisation and new ICTs

Quite often, globalisation is represented not so much as a historical tendency or a complex process, but as an outcome: a 'new order'. (Dicken et al, 1997, p. 158)

At precisely the same moment that the planet is being constructed within the powerful, pervasive all consuming logic of the market, there is a second order language, a fairy tale ... that suggests in Utopian terms new possibilities, in particular those presented by the new alchemies of 'the Net'. (Tracey, 1997, p. 50)

Utopian and dystopian narratives dominate the discourse on globalisation and on new information and communication technologies (ICTs) to such an extent that a great number of authors warn about avoiding such utopian/dystopian themes. For example, Cunningham et al (1998, p. 4) argue that while there is no shortage of scholarly, journalistic, governmental or institution-specific materials on the intersection of globalisation, information technologies and education, there is, they continue, an 'acute shortage of disinterested, thorough and realistic analyses'. To turn this around, scholarship on globalisation and new ICTs is thus passionate, partial and unrealistic (utopian?). Authors such as Kellner (2000a), Snyder (1997), Kenway (1996), Burbules & Callister (2000) and Kapitzke (1999) also warn about not falling into the modes of technophilia/technophobia. Univocally, these authors argue that utopian/dystopian themes should therefore 'best be avoided' mostly because they constitute 'binarist approaches' and as such tend to 'overlook the complexities and the contradictions of sociotechnical activity and educational change' (Kapitzke, 1999, p. 3).

Rather than dismissing utopian thinking, this article chooses to engage with it. There are several reasons for this. To start with, unless there is a dialogue between various utopian, eutopian, dystopian and other futures imaging, dominant social groups and ideologies will continue to define what is seen as utopian (implying impossible and naive) and what is to be seen as 'the truth about the future'. This is problematic because it facilitates the colonisation of the future by particular visions and images. Such colonised futures claim both universality as well as far-sightedness. The problem with this claim is that alleged universality is usually claimed predominantly on the basis of one's own particular experiences and world-views. In addition, 'a "far sighted" perspective' is developed 'solely on the basis of one's myopia' (Luke & Luke, 2000, p. 278). Thus by focusing on utopian, eutopian and dystopian elements in *all* futures visions, whether hegemonic or marginal, claims about particular futures 'out there' are weakened.

Globotopia

The vision of a globalised world is essentially a vision of a utopian society, or at least a eutopian one. As Peter Martin passionately argues, globalisation is 'the best thing that has happened in the lifetime of the post-war generation', including for those residing in non-Western countries (Martin, 2000, pp. 12-13). This is because:

It [globalisation] will lead to an irreversible shift of power away from the developed countries to the rest of the world ... [It] ... is simply untrue, both in relative and in absolute terms, ... that there are many more losers than winners from globalisation. ... It is sometimes said that free trade must cede precedence to more elevated values. Surely there is no more elevated values than delivering billions of people from poverty, creating opportunities for choice and personal development, and reinforcing democracy all round the world? The liberal market economy is by its very nature global. It is the summit of human endeavor. (Martin, 2000, pp. 12-13, emphasis added)

Here, Martin not only advocates globalisation but also promotes a particular desired vision for the future, that of a neo-liberal global democracy. This is a vision of global pan-capitalism also known by terms such as 'post-scarcity society', 'post-industrial society' or 'global age'. While not everyone is as enthusiastic as Martin, most writers on globalisation do mention at least some positive aspects which often include: a shift towards the understanding of human differences within a unified view of humanity; increased ecological consciousness; higher cultural interchange; more consumer and employment choices; and the opening up of possibilities in travel, communication, and business (Kofman & Youngs, 1996; Lechner & Boli, 2000). The vision of globalised societies also promises material benefits, instant satisfaction of material needs, advancement towards international democracy globally, and the movement away from the tyranny of the local community (Nandy, 1987) – an authentic eutopia.

This is also true for education. At its most visionary, the ideal of globalised education is to bring 'a dynamic synergy of teachers, computer mediated instructional devices, students collaborating' globally (Mason, 1998).[1] Its purpose is to transform the industrial model of schooling into an agile and flexible system. It is a vision of a particular interpretation of 'student-centred' education – students seen as consumers/customers – their needs paramount and their views almost always 'right'. In this vision, knowledge is exchanged on the basis of the usefulness it has to the consumer. This development is positive because it is:

effectively empowering the learner and forcing the providers of education to concern themselves with students' needs, rather than with the transmission of a pre-established canon of knowledge. (Mason, 1998, p. 7)

Another promise of globalised education lies in the extension of transnational and transcultural dialogues and learning, in deepening what is thought, in the general expansion of knowledge. The re-locations created by globalisation are apparently to influence the creation of a new system of knowledge, education and learning that will include many components that do not currently exist. This new system of knowledge, education and learning could, and according to Cogburn (2002) *should*, include the following key components: a focus on abstract concepts; a holistic, as opposed to linear, approach; enhancement of

the student's ability to manipulate symbols and to acquire and utilise knowledge; production of an increased quantity of scientifically and technically trained persons; blurring of the distinction between mental and physical labour; encouragement of students to work in teams; and use of virtual teams around the world.

Courses demanded by the global consumer will thus become flexible, adaptable, portable and interactive, and all this could promise great benefits for the student body. Globalisation is, therefore, marked by the disruption of modernist educational practices that in many ways constitute particular spaces of enclosure (Lankshear et al, 1996). Furthermore, it is argued that globalisation can indeed open up spaces for critical-emancipatory education (Edwards & Usher, 2000, p. 154) and the possibility of creatively re-imagining educational practices. Globalisation thus represents a sign of hope, of the transformative future that can be.

Cybertopia

Utopian promise is even more prominent when it comes to the potential of new ICTs. If post-information society utopia could be described in only two words these would be 'Libertarian Utopia' (Kinney, in Sardar, 1996, p. 9). Because there is not yet real censorship in cyberspace, totalitarian societies stand less chance of controlling information. New ICTs can thus lead towards global cyber democracy – the Internet decentralises and therefore democratises. As there is also no obvious framework of constraint, the individual is free to become the 'author of meaning' (Kenway, 1996, p. 222). The anonymity of the Internet allows for 'fluid identity games' (p. 223), it gives the freedom to create new virtual identities and communities – to invent reality. In addition to its libertarian aspect, the digital age is also 'harmonizing' (Negroponte, 1995, p. 229). Digital technology thus has the potential to be 'a natural force drawing people into greater world harmony' (p. 230). It provides a means for addressing hunger and illness among the world's poor. Furthermore, by improving conditions for the world's poor, the issue of the gap between rich and poor will become less relevant. New ICTs allow for ever-increasing access to tools of ever-increasing productivity. Latecomers are not disadvantaged; on the contrary, those who adopt technology later will benefit by acquiring advanced technology created by entrepreneurs, avoiding the mistakes of the trailblazers (Gates, 1995).

The choices with new ICTs are virtually limitless, whether in buying products, being entertained, improving health or acquiring education. Information will apparently be easily accessed and will create numerous benefits for the person who seeks it. To summarise, in cybertopia's most utopian vision, new ICTs will help resolve the environmental crisis, liberate us from the limits of time, geography, class, disability, race and gender, create world harmony and free us from repetitive boring tasks giving more time for leisure.

Similar gains – liberation from the limits of time, geography, class, race and gender – are promised in education, along with improvements in access to and quality of education, individual-centred education, pedagogical abundance, and general improvements in teaching and learning.

Because the Internet removes almost all time and space constraints, its potential is in allowing ‘individuals to take courses at their own pace, and to choose from all possible courses in the world those which best meet their learning needs’ (Skolnik, 2000, p. 57). With constraints of space and time removed the benefits are obvious:

If Little Eva cannot sleep, she can learn algebra instead. At her homelearning station, she will tune in to a series of interesting problems that are presented in an interactive medium, much like video games. First the learning program will identify her level of competence and then move her to the appropriate level of challenge; algebra, she will discover, is presented as a series of brain-teasers, puzzles that she wants to solve.

Young John may decide that he wants to learn the history of modern Japan, which he can do by dialing up the greatest authorities and teachers on the subject, who will not only use dazzling graphs and illustrations, but will narrate a historical video that excites his curiosity and imagination. When he decides that he wants to learn Japanese, he may enter into a program of virtual reality, learning the language in conversation with Japanese speakers. (Ravitch, 1993, p. 40)

Other benefits that result from removing geographical boundaries include improved access to top-quality education:

For every student who gets into a Harvard or a Princeton or a Berkley there are probably a hundred who could handle the work. Why should they be denied the opportunity? (Forbes.com, 2000)

The new technological era in education promotes greater equity of access for those previously excluded. This argument is implicit in the previous quote and more explicit in the following:

Using the new technologies, all children will have access to exactly the same electronic-teaching programs, learning at their own speed and in settings of their own choosing, at home or at school, in a community learning center or at a friend’s home. Regardless of her race or her parent’s income, little Mary will have the same opportunity to learn any subject, and to learn it from the same master teachers as children in the richest neighborhood. (Ravitch, 1993, p. 40)

While educational institutions will initially resist these trends towards democratisation, they will eventually ‘give in’:

Students will be able to shop around, taking a course from any institution that offers a good one. Degree-granting institutions will have to accommodate this. They will resist at first, but eventually society will

realize that anyone is entitled to the best courses, and barriers will fall. Quality education will be available to all. Students will learn what they want to learn rather than what some faculty committee decided was the best political compromise. Education will be measured by what you know rather than by whose name appears on your diploma. (Forbes.com , 2000)

The democratisation of education will occur because new ICTs are making education less costly, more accessible and flexible.

The list of potential benefits and improvements in education does not stop here; it has been suggested that we are at the beginnings of a learning revolution with children themselves becoming agents for change at school (Papert, 1996). Or that the advances in knowledge are such that the information age could more appropriately be termed the Innovation Age (Pitch, 1996), revolutionising everything. Old dreams and utopias can now finally be fulfilled:

The promise of the Information Age is the unleashing of unprecedented productive capacity by the power of the mind. I think, therefore I produce. In so doing, we will have the leisure to experiment with spirituality, and the opportunity of reconciliation with nature, without sacrificing the material well-being of our children. The dream of the Enlightenment, that reason and science would solve the problems of human kind, is within reach. (Castells, 1998, p. 359)

Narratives on globalisation and new ICTs clearly bring in numerous utopian and eutopian visions. What makes them distinct from marginalised utopias is that they also have a dystopian version (Milojevic, 2002). This is not the case with most (marginalised) alternatives, but only with imagined futures that are considered sufficiently a threat to one's own vision to deserve the critique. Paradoxically, it is by that very critique, by that very act of 'negative or reactive project' (Grosz, 1990, p. 59), that 'the truth' of what is critiqued gets reaffirmed. That is, what is contested is whether a particular vision is 'good' and 'desirable' (and asserted that it is not!) and not that this vision is the future.

So why is it these two visions of the future that became hegemonic? What makes them attractive, appealing and 'realistic'? How did they succeed in capturing public imagination? And why is it that statements such as 'Globalisation and new technologies *are* dominant forces of the future' (Kellner, 2000b, p. 316) remain accepted both by the mainstream public as well as by the more critical academia as 'the truth' about the future?

Sorry, but Only the Patriarchal West Counts: the story of marginalised utopias

But, firstly, utopia is *not* universal. It appears only in societies with the classical and Christian heritage, that is, only in the West. Other societies, have in relative abundance, paradises, *primitivist* myths of a Golden Age of

justice and equality, Cokaygne– type fantasies, even messianic beliefs; they do not have utopia. (Kumar, 1987, p. 19, emphasis added)

As argued earlier, several authors, particularly those informed by neo-Marxism and/or critical-education theory (e.g. Giroux, 2003; Blackmore, 2000; Kenway et al, 1993; Apple, 2001; McLaren, 1998; Spring, 1998; Mason, 1998), suggest that the push towards current hegemonic visions is dominated by the neo-liberal agenda. This domination has been successful partly because a particular ‘power block’ (Apple, 2001) succeeded in changing the discourse about the future (for example, how globalisation is defined and perceived).

It is important to note here that, as Foucault argued, various social groups can use the same discourses for diverse strategies. For example, the globalisation discourse can be used to justify both ‘new Right ideologies of market liberalism and social conservatism’ (Blackmore, 2000, p. 135), or demands for a more inclusive and multicultural world. This discourse can inform both those who demand the return to ‘good old-fashioned’ values in education, or those who demand that the curriculum should be radically transformed and more inclusive. So if the globalisation discourse can be used to promote various policies and interventions in the present, why has it recently been mostly linked to demands to commercialise and corporatise education? When calls for educational reform are made by politicians and senior educational administrators, why is globalisation ‘not normally linked to’ multiculturalism (Davies & Guppy, 1997, p. 440) or ecological issues, or issues of global social sustainability? Or indeed, given all the talk about the ‘global knowledge economy’ or global ‘learning society’, why is globalisation not normally linked to demands for *increased* funds for education? Why is it that, even within the language of the corporate world, education is ‘still more often described as a cost [rather] than as an investment’ (Levin, 1998, p. 131). Who decides that economic policy imperatives and the ideologies of the market are to take precedence over social, cultural and environmental issues?

One possible explanation is that as globalisation is mostly defined and understood in economic terms, it is the economic dimension that starts to dominate all other areas, such as health, education, etc., as well. Other explanations focus on the critical social and educational thinkers who have, meanwhile, apparently been too busy critiquing and deconstructing and even outrightly refusing to offer futures visions. As explained earlier, this refusal came from the conviction that any futures visioning is in itself seen as prescriptive, and as such is part of a meta-narrative formation (seen to be problematic and dangerous). Interestingly enough, what has resulted from these two simultaneous processes is not a rejection of desired futures and old meta-narratives on progress and development; rather, we have seen the emergence of a new meta-narrative – globalisation – as ‘the mother of all meta-narratives’ (Luke & Luke, 2000, p. 278). It seems that the decision by the left to abandon meta-narratives has turned out to be rather costly.

But there is yet another possible explanation of why globalisation is defined in terms of ‘free’ and ‘open market’ and, coupled with new ICTs,

championed 'as the solution' for the future, even part of our 'salvation'. Current crypto-utopias, that is, hegemonic futures visions of a globalised and technologised world and education have also emerged because they 'make the most sense' – are easily recognisable and intelligible – within mainstream views of time, history and the future. The hegemonic future convinces of its inevitability because it 'fits' within the already existing 'imaginaire'. For example, the 'new' 'techno-literate' citizen of the twenty-first century has a long history. This techno-literate subject has been imagined, discussed and portrayed in detail for many decades, if not the whole century. Villemard's (1910) school of the future, for example, has teachers directly wiring students to a 'book feeding machine'. It is precisely such imaging that creates the demands to 'put a computer in every classroom' (1980s) and 'have every classroom wired' (1990s) (Luke, 2001, p. 426), that is, for future literacies to be defined within technological terms.

Neither has the current 'globalisation hypothesis' emerged from an epistemologically and politically neutral place. Rather, it has a history and geography (Edwards & Usher, 2000, p. 15). Geographically, the globalisation hypothesis originated in Western societies, historically coinciding with the coming of the Christian millennium. At that particular moment in history the rhetoric of globalisation served extremely important political purposes. It has helped name more concretely the vaguely described 'New World Order'. It has also helped replace more problematic terms such as 'monopoly capital' or 'world capitalism', conveniently neutralising anti-capitalist rhetoric. The globalised future has therefore not come to represent the victory of 'the right' in the historical ideological battle with the 'left'. More conveniently, it has come to represent a whole new system with a whole new set of rules that can potentially benefit all humanity. While, arguably, this may be the case, this globalised future can clearly be identified as a new phase within Western and patriarchal understanding of time and social change. As Cvetkovich & Kellner (1997, pp. 13-14) write:

In many mainstream social theories, the discourse of the global is bound up with ideological discourses of modernization and modernity, and from Saint-Simon and Marx through Habermas and Parsons, globalisation and modernization are interpreted in terms of progress, novelty and innovation, and a generally beneficial negation of the old, the traditional, and the obsolete. In this discourse of modernization, the global is presented as a progressive modernizing force; the local stands for backwardness, superstition, underdevelopment, and the oppressiveness of tradition.

Colonisation of the Future

This latest explanation fits well with arguments about Western and patriarchal colonisation of the future (Sardar, 1999; Daly, 1978). Confined to the private

sphere, women's contributions to the future were primarily limited to the personal domain (Boulding, 1983; Milojevic, 1998). Although now presenting a large corpus of writing, futures visions coming from women's and feminist movements continue to remain marginalised. As for the 'non-West', it was assumed, and still is, that non-Western societies could not develop images of advanced futures societies because they themselves were 'pre-industrial' and 'premodern'. The colonisation of knowledge by the dominant (patriarchal, Western) perspective has thus led to a view of the future defined mostly by three pillars: 1. the capacity of technology to solve all problems; 2. linear progress as the underlying mythology; and 3. the accumulation and expansion of material goods as the main goal of civilisation (Milojevic, 2002). This has resulted in looking at the future as 'a single, dominant but myopic projection' (Sardar, 1999, p. 1):

The future is little more than the transformation of society by new Western technologies. We are bombarded by this message constantly from a host of different directions. The advertisements on television and radio, in newspapers and magazines, for new models of computers, cars, mobile phones, digital and satellite consumer goods – all ask us to reflect on how new technologies will transform not just our social and cultural environments but the very idea of what it is to be human.

Emergent hegemonic futures remain so because they fit into the world-view that legitimates. This world-view also has an inevitability to it, the trajectory of the future is predicated on past and present trends and developments. It also presents what reality is, and is going to be. But the discourse about 'globalised and cyber education' is only partly about 'the push' toward the future. That is, rather than being only an attempt to 'objectively' and 'impartially' describe the way things are/going to be, these discourses are also about what is desired, or hoped for, or alternatively, about what is feared. They are also discussions about future directions. Most significantly their description of inevitable futures is itself embedded in politics.

Alternatives

What makes hegemonic futures particularly successful is that they manage to convince not about the dangers (about the dystopian) but about the impossibility and irrelevance of other futures visions. For example, contrast the discourse on the inevitability of globalised and technologised education with the five utopian discourses that follow.

The first one is the feminist: in the new emerging knowledge society it is important to acknowledge the insights of feminist pedagogy that insists that all human experiences are gendered. The key is to develop a gender-sensitive education versus a gender-free one (Houston, 1994, p. 122). Educational administrators are thus required to accrue the skills urgently needed in our

gender-aware schools and universities. Furthermore, it is important for the education system to incorporate themes of nurturing and caring and emphasise 'connection over separation, understanding and acceptance over assessment, and collaboration over debate' (Iskin, in Buch & Pollack, 1983, p. 183).

The second is the indigenous: indigenous knowledge needs to be 'recognized and valued at the level of the school curriculum', and it should 'be incorporated into the teaching/learning process' (George, 1999, p. 90). Appropriate education within the knowledge society is to ensure that 'Aboriginal perspectives are included across the curriculum' and that 'community members are playing an important role in the education of not only Aboriginal students, but all students' (Davison, 1999, p. 22). This is because of the importance of Aboriginal knowledge to 'the future survival of our world' (Battiste, 2000, p. 194).

The third is spiritual: education in an emerging knowledge society should essentially be 'as much about spirituality as it is about mathematics' (Krishnamurti, 1974, p. 177). Every school is thus to be transformed into a *gurukula*[2] and every teacher into a *rishi* or sage, 'who will lead the children along material, moral, ethical and spiritual paths, until they become ideal citizens' (Sai Baba, 1988, pp. 49-50). 'Thousands of kindergartens and primary schools must be started with this new system of education, to create a spiritual urge amongst children throughout the entire world' (Sarkar, 1998, p. 182).

The fourth is peace education discourse: the coming of a new partnership (Eisler, 1997, 2000) and gentle societies (Boulding, 1977, 1990) requires education organised around principles of equality, social justice and inclusion. Extensive (rather than tokenistic and strategic) multiculturalism is thus to be promoted. As future societies become increasingly organised according to the peace paradigm, peace education is to become incorporated in all schools and at all grade levels. Teaching and learning will then accept and honour both human unity, interdependence and interconnectedness as well as our diversity. With the decline in dominator (Eisler, 1987) elements in our global society, in place of various nationalistic holidays and violent histories, most schools will consequently introduce celebrations and curriculum innovations in order to mark peace promoting holidays, such as Harmony Day (21 March) and International Day of Peace (21 September).

And, the fifth, ecological/Gaian: the paradigm shift currently under way will eventually ensure that nature is no longer seen to be subservient to human needs and economic growth. In this context, teaching and learning will not only be about and through, but also for, the environment (Fien, 1992). This change is reflected in the education that promotes high regard for nature, respect for natural and social limits to growth, empathy with other species, other people and future generations, the all-encompassing web-of-life. Most

importantly, our planetary education will thus be conducted in the environment in which social and educational ‘outcomes’ are to be valued in terms of social, economic, ecological and spiritual awareness and advancement.

In our current political climate, can these visions and claims legitimately be made? If not, why not? Why are these visions seen as a (faint) possibility, an option, rather than ‘a force’ that is to be governed, or adjusted to? Have globalisation and new ICTs really managed to bring that great a change in education? If not, why is it that they remain the accepted knowledge about the future? If the great transformation has begun, is that despite or because of our efforts to ‘adjust’ to these – at one stage – futures visions?

If the (patriarchal) West can currently be defined as fundamentally about materialism, external change, linear time, evolution, rationalism, a techno-scientific approach to knowledge, anthropocentrism, competition, division between mind/body, human/nature and so on, are there spaces for alternatives that challenge some or most of the above? Or are these alternatives also always going to be incorporated into the broader civilisational project? How are the alternatives that aim to break from the hegemonic present and future marginalised, in theory and in our day-to-day lives? Most importantly, is there any hope left for them? And if we are to change the current neo-liberal dominance, which alternative discourses are then most likely to be accepted by educational administrators, teachers and parents alike?

Resistance and Alternative Futures

Thirty years ago Toffler (1974, p. 19) argued that ‘all education springs from some image of the future’. This could be paraphrased to assert that all education springs from some utopian image(s). Utopian elements remain present in discussions on where education should be going. They are implicit in both actions in the present (as these are informed by particular desired futures) as well as in the theoretical debates. As the issue of educational futures is important in areas of policy formation (Peters & Humes, 2003), curriculum (Gough, 2002), educational trends (e.g. Hostrop, 1973; Withrow et al, 1999) and critical futures and educational studies (e.g. Beare & Slaughter, 1993; Hicks, 2002; Page, 2000; Hutchinson, 1996) so is the critical evaluation of various utopian futures imaging. As discussed earlier, these utopian futures images could remain hidden, disguised or are transparent, overt. Due to a general de-legitimisation of the ‘utopian’ there is a pressure to stay away from overtly utopian discourses. Nevertheless, utopian elements remain implicit in all philosophical positions, world-views and strategic demands for social change. Even postmodernists, who decline to develop *a vision* about the future, have indeed developed (though implicit) a vision of what, from their point of view, constitutes the desired. As argued by Siebers (1994) and Doll (1995), postmodern vision is mostly characterised by a focus on heterogeneity, multiplicity, difference and equality (not of sameness, but of differences).

Postmodern utopian vision, further argues Doll (1995, p. 96), takes on a new frame which can be called 'post-liberal' as it refers to its 'move beyond individualism' and focuses on the 'ecological, communal, [and] dialogical'. For Siebers (1994, pp. 2-3) postmodernism too is in essence a utopian philosophy:

What postmodernism wants is what has been lacking, which is to say that postmodernism is a utopian philosophy. ... Postmodernists, then, are utopian not because they do not know what they want. They are utopian because they know that they want something else. They want to desire differently.

Western education has been built on the successes as well as on the failures of utopian imagining and intervention. If it is to benefit more than just the (global) elite, educators will first need to recognise that:

Every imagined future has its past, just as every historical moment has its own vision of the future. (Thacker, 2001, para. 7)

As well as that:

Those who control the past, control the future; Those who control the future, control the present; Those who control the present, control the past. (Orwell, 1949)

While the last paragraph might be particularly depressive for educators that dream about an educational eutopia that will exist within and help create inclusive, multicultural, gender-balanced, holistic, ecologically and socially sustainable future societies, the situation might not be that bleak after all. While particular discourses about the future in general and the educational future in particular do become hegemonic – constituting 'regimes of educational truths' about the future that are considered inevitable and uncontested – resistance to those is also possible. As suggested by Foucault, the process of normalisation is never complete (McPhail, 1997, para. 65). As knowledge is 'never fully co-opted' there will 'always be subjugated forms of (power/)knowledge that can be used to resist prevailing and hegemonic forms of (power/)knowledge' (para. 31).

In this resistance three things are crucial. First is the realisation that what is considered utopian and what are considered real futures probabilities or possibilities are, in fact, political constructions. Second, it is thus important to see that 'taken for granted' futures visions are also utopian. Even the 'realistic' discourse of the 'imminent future' is constituted by desire and imagination, about what is hoped for. And third, it is important to bring in and discuss the alternatives to the hegemonic futures. By exploring alternative visions of what our societies and education can become, we can show that possible alternatives can exist and that 'these alternatives can be as "real" as our reality' (Halbert, 1994, p. 29).

It is in this last capacity that utopian images of the future still have the potential to become 'an agent of social change' (Boulding, 1995, p. 95), a place

to begin 'practical journeys of hope' (Hutchinson, 1996, p. 210). It is here that utopia will never cease to inspire.

Notes

- [1] Note the difference between the 'global' and 'globalised' education. Global issues and concerns in the area of education have a long history. These global issues and concerns have predominantly functioned as topics or themes in specific learning areas, such as history and geography, or in more recent curriculum areas such as development, industrialisation, peace studies and environment (Gough, 2000, p. 80). Over the last 25 years, global education predominantly meant dealing with issues such as environment, development and human rights, peace and conflict, race, gender, health and education, and was in some ways connected to issues of social justice. Recently, however, 'global education' has come to mean something else. The discourse has been changed, even 'hijacked', and is increasingly used to denote the need for competition and market-based strategies in education. 'Globalised education' has thus mostly come to mean vocational education necessary for preparation for a competitive market force. But 'globalised education' has also kept some of the old utopian ideals of a 'truly global' education.
- [2] The forest schools of the past in which sages taught spiritual practices along with other subjects.

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