Love and Revolution

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Abstract  
Critical sociologists have long recognized the intersections between love and revolution. For the most part, however, our understanding of love and its relevance for revolution remains vague. My article seeks to remedy this limitation. It starts by sketching the social and personal contexts of alienation, indicating that in today’s capitalist world genuine love is revolutionary in itself. It then specifies what love means, what types of love exist, and what revolutionary love implies in theory and practice. The next section introduces the political cultures of loving revolution concept and applies it to the Indian independence movement led by Gandhi. The conclusion discusses how potential revolutionaries might benefit from my interpretation of love and revolution.

Keywords  
agape, alienation, love, political cultures of loving revolution, revolution

One must have a large dose of humanity, a large dose of a sense of justice and truth, to avoid falling into extremes, into cold intellectualism, into isolation from the masses. Every day we must struggle so that this love of living humanity is transformed into concrete facts, into acts that will serve as an example. (Che Guevara)

I, the man of color, want only this: That the tool never possess the man. That the enslavement of man by man cease forever. That is, of one by another. That it be possible for me to discover and to love man, wherever he may be. (Franz Fanon)

I accept the interpretation of Ahimsa namely that it is not merely a negative state of harmlessness but it is a positive state of love, of doing good even to the evil-doer. But it does not mean helping the evil-doer to continue the wrong or tolerating it by passive acquiescence. On the contrary, love, the active state of Ahimsa, requires you to resist the wrong-doer by dissociating yourself from him even though it may offend him or injure him physically. (Mohandas Gandhi)
Of course, you may say, this is not practical; life is a matter of getting even, of hitting back, of dog eat dog. Maybe in some distant Utopia, you say, that idea will work, but not in the hard cold world in which we live. My only answer is that mankind has followed the so-called practical way for a long time now, and it has led inexorably to deeper confusion and chaos... For the salvation of our nation and the salvation of mankind, we must follow another way. This does not mean that we abandon our militant efforts. With every ounce of our energy we must continue to rid our nation of the incubus of racial injustice. But we need not in the process relinquish our privilege and obligation to love. (Martin Luther King, Jr)

Introduction

It seems like every quarter, after talking about social injustice for a few weeks, the collective mood of my sociology class suddenly changes. Initially, students and I feel empowered by the new insights we gain about our social worlds, but soon a sense of despair sets in about our inability to overcome oppression. Students who recognize the need for radical transformation would like to build a new society, but at the same time they feel that acting on these beliefs in reality would be foolish. As educator, I find it extremely important – and extremely difficult – to swim against the tide of hopelessness and I have learned that many colleagues experience similar challenges and frustrations.

The most fruitful discussions about what to do in the face of global inequalities and violence have centered on two elusive ideas: love and revolution. The eyes of students as well as fellow teachers light up when we talk about Martin Luther King’s beloved community or Mohandas Gandhi’s leadership of the Indian independence movement. But frequently our encounters end before we develop a deeper understanding of what love and revolution mean, and how to apply these concepts in an era defined by war, profit-seeking, and alienation. This article begins to articulate a deeper sense of the relevance of love and revolution in our everyday lives, communities, and world system.

The psychological and social forces working against love and revolution are arguably even stronger today than in the past. The first section therefore discusses contemporary forms of alienation, particularly its social roots and specific manifestations. Its purpose is to highlight that the social contexts in today’s capitalist world generally impede love and revolution. Both small-scale and large-scale settings in contemporary societies favor competition over association, personal ambition over social justice. Thus, we need to develop a dialectical approach to how the contemporary social structures obstructing radical transformation at the same time also constrain our ability to form authentic human relationships, and to how these structural limitations at the same time also contain opportunities for new forms of love and revolution (Ollman, 2003). To enable such a dialectical approach, however, we must re-conceptualize love and revolution. The second section turns to the work of Fromm, King, and Schmitt for guidance. These dissident thinkers show that genuine love has revolutionary implications, not only for our personal relationships, but also for the large-scale transformations that social scientists typically associate...
with revolutions. The following section argues that the political culture of opposition concept, introduced by John Foran and Jean-Pierre Reed, contributes to dialectical analysis of love and revolution, particularly in the case of Gandhian love and the Indian independence movement. And finally, to encourage further dialogue among critical scholars and activists, I propose ways that potential revolutionaries can benefit from my arguments and case study.

The Contexts of Alienation in Capitalist Societies

Using contemporary writings to explore connections between love and revolution is problematic. Most publications about love adopt the superficial language of popular psychology and ignore fundamental social change, while academics specializing in revolutions tend to focus on structural conditions rather than stories about people’s emotions and lived experiences (Scheff, 2006: 112–13). One reason for these limitations is that both types of literature usually fail to examine how alienation in today’s capitalist societies constrains the possibility of love and revolution, in our personal lives and social worlds. A better grasp of alienation allows us to see that love and revolution are dialectically connected, and that we must struggle for transformation on both fronts, at the same time, rather than wait for even more catastrophic structural crises.¹

Alienation is a complex concept with a long history, diverse origins, and multiple dimensions (Fromm, 1961; Meszaros, 2000; Pappenheim, 1959). Instead of covering the same ground as other writings on this topic, I will merely touch on the social roots and individual challenges with direct relevance for studying love and revolution. But first let me clarify what alienation means by distinguishing it from two closely-related concepts: oppression and exploitation. In concrete terms, oppression refers to the political, economic, social, and cultural means that privileged people and groups use to dominate others without such means, while exploitation refers to the widening gap between rich and poor caused by disparities in income and wealth. Alienation, in contrast, expresses how these forms of social injustice undermine our personalities as well as our abilities to live meaningful and productive lives. It points to how we – in a world driven by corporate profits, political domination, and militarism – construct internal and external barriers that prevent us from asserting ourselves, collaborating with others, and facing difficult challenges with courage and hope. It also makes us submissive, hedonistic, materialistic, and fearful of strange people and places (Schmitt, 2003: 92–3). And most importantly, even if we (like the sociology students I mentioned in the Introduction) learn to recognize alienation in ourselves and in our societies, it can still keep us from taking active responsibility for reinventing ourselves and our societies (Moore, 1978). Transforming alienation into love, in other words, requires cooperative and oppositional effort, not just individual awareness and positive emotions.

Despite changes in the way global capitalism operates, the social roots of alienation that Marx observed in his era have not lost any of their significance. First of all, the process of commodification continues unabated in the 21st century, affecting human life
throughout the world in unprecedented ways. Increasingly, the job market decides what kind of work we do, while we use the product of our labor (our wages) to consume commodities rather than make our lives more meaningful or cooperate with others. In consumer society, we feel constant pressure to buy new goods and services, both externally (due to omnipresent advertising and peer pressure, for instance) and internally. We suffer from what Marx (in Tucker, 1978: 319) calls ‘commodity fetishism’: we always need new things to be satisfied and are unhappy if we do not have what everyone else seems to have. The work we do and the ways we consume not only produce more environmental waste and exploitation, but also shape who we are and how we relate to other people. Because we rely on money and commodities for our sense of well-being, we grow disconnected from the material world (e.g. from the land we live on), lose the capacity to lead thoughtful lives, fail to learn how to solve our own problems, and become more passive in our personal relationships. We start thinking of ourselves and other people as commodities, and interact on the basis of superficial appearances instead of enduring human qualities (Schmitt, 2003: 93–6). When we do so, as Herbert Marcuse (1964) and other critical social theorists observe, our ability to reason becomes another means for perpetuating existing society rather than a means for moral critique or invention of alternatives (Bronner and Kellner, 1989: 9–11).

The second social root of alienation is competition, the central value in capitalist societies. In our economic system, workers produce profits for corporations in exchange for wages. We do not primarily seek to develop our own abilities or take pride in what we produce; we mostly want to earn as much money and consume as many commodities as possible. While we receive wages for our labor, however, we give up much of our control over working conditions to employers, who use their power to force workers to compete with each other over who gets hired, how much we get paid, how many hours we work, what we do (at work as well as at home), who makes the best impression, and who gets promoted. This kind of competition is destructive: it encourages people to eliminate competitors – whether co-workers or other corporations – for the sole purpose of maximizing the corporation’s earnings. It infects personal relationships, not only in the business world but also in our social lives. To see how we are doing, therefore, we tend to focus more on how we compare with others – in terms of our possessions, appearance, or popularity – than on whether we are improving our creative abilities, moral imagination, or human bonds (Lederach, 2005; Schmitt, 2003: 96–105).

Alienation in capitalist societies is also a product of deep-seated isolation. Liberal thinkers suggest that loneliness is the price to pay for freedom. They argue that personal autonomy is only possible without the intrusion of other people, groups, or (government) institutions. This negative view of liberty, however, ignores that group membership does not necessarily force us to be passive and dependent, but may also encourage us to be active and creative by participating in collective decision-making and shaping our social worlds. Based on the liberal idea of freedom, people in today’s capitalist societies emphasize our self-interest and only join groups if doing so increases our own (or our corporation’s) wealth and power. We are less likely to contribute to community efforts and organizations that serve common purposes, and less eager to engage in
interactions and dialogues with people who have different backgrounds, perspectives, and qualities. By allowing market forces to separate us from each other, we are destroying the public spaces where people can meet to gain recognition for their unique ideas and activities, where people learn to respect and value each others’ differences (Harvey, 2000; Schmitt, 2003: 101–3).

The final social root of alienation with direct relevance for my investigation of love and revolution is conformity. In capitalist societies where prices guide how we value things and spend our time, we easily assume that people who ignore the economic laws of supply and demand are irrational, at best. As a result, we buy the same cheap products, adopt the same ruthless selling techniques, and go to the same tourist destinations as everyone else. Corporations take advantage of our desire to get the best deal by manipulating our choices with various forms of advertising, which further invade our public spaces with commercial messages. Thus, we allow power elites and ruling institutions to shape our worldviews, social sites, and actions through what Althusser (in Lemert, 2004: 317–21) refers to as the ‘ideological state apparatus’. We ‘freely’ accept our own subjection to the hegemonic capitalist system by defining ourselves primarily as consumers rather than workers or critical citizens (Resnick and Wolff, 1987: 81–106; Gramsci, 1971). As with the other sources of alienation, conformity not only pushes us to increase our levels of consumption, but also limits the time and energy we devote to reflecting on how we live our lives, construct our identities, relate to other people, and respond to our natural surroundings (Schmitt, 2003: 106–8).

While alienation is deeply embedded in capitalist social structures, people respond to concrete situations in unique ways. Moreover, how people face the specific challenges in their social worlds – which, of course, vary greatly in terms of oppression and exploitation – either perpetuates or modifies existing patterns of alienation. Evading the ambiguities of human existence through naive optimism or persistent fatalism merely reproduces the status quo. Engaging in the perpetual struggle to make sense of ourselves and our circumstances, however, allows us to modify our ways of life – although some people obviously have more resources and opportunities to do so than others. Individuals make four interrelated types of decisions with particular influence on personal and structural alienation.

In the first place, we all make important choices about the work we do. As Marx emphasizes, we reinforce alienation by equating labor with earning money. By focusing primarily on our wages, we give employers significant control over the daily activities that shape our identities, relationships, and surroundings. We gain power over our lives (and fight alienation within and around us) by doing work that we care about, work that enables us to develop our abilities, and work that contributes positively to our communities – even if the pay is relatively low. At the same time, we decide how to manage the multiple selves that we construct to respond to daily situations and encounters. We give in to alienation when we allow outside forces, strangers, or institutions to determine how we create and assemble our different selves. We make our lives more authentic and coherent when we consciously take responsibility for how we think, feel, and act in various social contexts (Domenici and Littlejohn, 2006: 4–9). In addition, we have some control over how and to what extent we try to give meaning to our existence. Our lives become
passive and futile when we let random and inexplicable events define us; they make more sense when we develop life projects that guide how we deal with bad habits from the past, respond to personal and social problems in the present, and forge practical ‘freedom dreams’ for the future (Kelley, 2002). With such life projects, we can compose and share coherent stories about ourselves and our social worlds, despite the unintelligible events that occur. And finally, the choices we make concerning our occupations, identities, and purpose in life influence our level of self-confidence in facing internal as well as external challenges. Without learning how to relate constructively to ourselves and to others, we lack the personal capacities and nurturing relationships required for effective action in our communities. The superficial feeling of empowerment promoted in most self-help books merely perpetuates alienation by denying structural constraints and ignoring the need for revolutionary transformation in the face of contemporary global capitalism (Appelbaum and Robinson, 2005; Schmitt, 2003: 52–68).

Each of these choices, which we make under varying circumstances, shapes our ability to build loving human relationships in the face of alienation. But what does love actually mean? And what distinguishes loving from non-loving human relationships?

**Expanding the Meaning of Love in Theory and Practice**

In a world where oppression and alienation are rampant, sustaining genuinely loving relationships beyond a small (and shrinking) inner circle of family and intimate friends is nearly impossible and, therefore, revolutionary in itself. When we hear the word love, we usually think of feelings that are pure, personal, exclusive, unconditional, and everlasting. This conventional view of love as a mysterious emotion that only lovers themselves can understand ignores the social disposition, communication, and interaction that allow love to emerge, grow, and survive. By assuming that true love is between two individuals who are insulated from the rest of the world, we deny the possibility of love as a force for social inclusion, transformation, and justice (Scheff, 2006: 111–24; hooks, 2000).

**Defining Love**

The definition of love in *Webster’s College Dictionary* emphasizes passionate affection, sexual infatuation, feelings of attachment, and concern for other people; a strong predilection for certain activities and objects; and intimate ties with God. While this definition refers to powerful emotions associated with love, it says little about what qualities enable loving relationships between real people – between ‘self’ (or ‘selves’) and ‘other’ (or ‘others’). For a deeper understanding of love, I argue that we need to focus more directly on human relationships between (or within) individuals and groups. Thus, in my view, when we describe strong feelings toward activities and objects, we are actually using love metaphorically (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 139–55). Our enthusiasm for playing baseball or antique furniture, for example, is like love (not love itself). To clarify my
sociological definition, which can only provide a glimpse of what love means to human beings, let me first highlight interpersonal and social bonds that do not qualify as loving. See Table 1 for the different types of human relationships and their social implications.

Particularly in Western societies, we tend to accept the liberal conception of individuals as isolated and self-sufficient, implying relationships of self against other(s) or self without other(s). In other words, we either see ourselves as competing with each other for survival and happiness, or we consider our own achievements and failures as disconnected from the achievements and failures of people beyond our inner circle of family and friends. Sometimes, however, we acknowledge the need to help people in need, especially after natural disasters or when national survival is at stake. Even then, though, we generally perceive our relationships as self for other(s) or self with other(s). Thus, we offer charity to innocent victims or coordinate joint efforts with strangers without gaining concrete knowledge about their social contexts and without looking at situations from their perspective. I suggest that none of these relationships – self against other(s), self without other(s), self for other(s), and self with other(s) – is loving. Although working ‘for’ or ‘with’ other human beings is more likely to develop into love than working ‘against’ or ‘without’ them, participants in charitable and coordinated activities may remain quite separate from each other.

Genuine love, in contrast, involves connections among social individuals who work together toward a common purpose while validating each person’s uniqueness (Gould, 1978). Unlike coordination, which in this case implies self with other(s) ties among separate individuals or groups with common instrumental interests, genuine love implies self (or selves) with self (or selves) ties among individuals or groups who share interests as well as values, strategies as well as identities, in their collective efforts (see Table 1). In other words, loving relationships are what Richard Schmitt (1995: 58) refers to as:

**joint acts**, which are not ‘yours and mine’ but ours because there is only one act, which you and I perform together when we decide on some course of action … For shorter or longer periods, two or more persons constitute an agent insofar as they have a shared understanding with respect to some more or less specific matter. Each, of course, remains a distinct person. Each is different and has his or her separate identity. They come together as a plural subject with respect to very specific acts, agreements, projects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of human relationship</th>
<th>Social implication</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self against other(s)</td>
<td>Competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self without other(s)</td>
<td>Isolation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self for other(s)</td>
<td>Charity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self with other(s)</td>
<td>Coordination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self (selves) with self (selves)</td>
<td>Love</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 1  Human relationships between self and other(s)
Educators, for example, promote (and rely on) genuine love when they engage in dialogue and collaboration with students, and treat them as equally significant co-investigators in projects aimed at understanding and changing oppressive conditions in their social worlds. While the particulars of such joint acts vary according to historical and cultural context, I argue that all authentic love involves some kind of self with self relationship.

It is important to emphasize, however, that genuine love is never all-encompassing or complete. Human beings are always ‘in-the-making’, which means that they have to constantly struggle to make themselves and their relationships more loving, without ever achieving perfection. Nevertheless, I propose that some human beings and relationships have more ‘loving moments’ than others; that some have more fully integrated the ‘art of loving’ into their habits than others; and that some communicative practices and interactions are more loving than others. Instead of classifying particular social ties as either loving or not loving, therefore, we need to specify what makes them more or less loving.

We also need to investigate which social settings and structural conditions encourage us to learn the art of loving, and which do not. Although contemporary circumstances generally impede genuine love, human beings remain capable of discovering and creating new ‘spaces of hope’, whether on a small-scale (such as within schools) or on a larger scale (such as within transnational networks among activists). As David Harvey (2000: 231) points out, we are all capable of opening up new spaces – new physical, social, and imaginary structures – for shaping and preserving our ways of life. Here we can work out alternative visions and social worlds, without losing sight of our material and ecological surroundings. And here we can experiment with strategies for ‘collaboration, cooperation, and mutual aid (the production of social organization, institutional arrangements, and consensual political-discursive forms, all of which rest upon capacities to communicate and translate)’ (Harvey, 2000: 209). Even these spaces of hope, though, are never finished and can always become more (or less) loving than they are now. Our challenge as critical sociologists and activists is to understand why and how genuine love thrives more in some social contexts than in others, and to use our knowledge to support struggles for social justice.

**Types of Love**

Defining genuine love as based on self with self relationships has implications for the four major types of love: self-love, eros, philia, and agape. Self-love is not the same as selfishness, but highlights that we cannot freely give love to others (including those we dislike or oppose) if we do not have a loving relationship with ourselves. If children do not learn to love themselves due to physical abuse, for instance, they are likely to act destructively toward themselves and others as adults. Developing self-love is difficult for all of us, whatever our circumstances. It requires critically confronting who we are, especially if doing so is uncomfortable, humbling, or discouraged by other people and social institutions (hooks, 2000). Eros refers to the romantic passion and intense sexual desire that our popular culture idealizes. Yet it is also the most exclusive, fleeting, and deceptive form of
love. Thus, we usually seek union with only one romantic partner at a time, but such a bond can only survive if we learn (through endless trial and error) to interact on the basis of less intensive, but more enduring and meaningful dispositions. Otherwise, eros can easily become a way to escape loneliness or dominate other people, neither of which allow for committed and respectful relationships (Fromm, 1956: 44–8). Philia points to human relationships based on mutual fondness and affection, such as those among intimate friends, family members, neighbors, or people belonging to the same group (King, 1957: 3). Some kinds of philia involve mutual advantage (as with business partners who like each other for economic reasons), while others involve mutual pleasure (as with musicians who appreciate the aesthetic quality of each others’ songs). But the best forms of philia involve mutual admiration for what is good – rather than merely useful or enjoyable – in other people. Such friendships benefit the lives and happiness of all participants and produce actions that are ethical in themselves. At the same time, though, the feelings of philia we have for people we like (who, more often than not, are ‘people like us’) often come with feelings of antipathy or even hatred for people we dislike (who are frequently ‘people unlike us’).

The fourth kind of love, agape, is the most important for studying revolutionary movements. It refers to the love of all human beings and forms of life, without distinguishing between worthy and unworthy people, friends and enemies, neighbors and strangers, likeable and unlikeable creatures. It is inclusive love between fellow human beings, based on the experience of solidarity with other people and species, no matter how much we disapprove of their ideas or practices. King (1957: 3–6) provides important reasons for why participants in revolutionary struggles need to love their enemies:

I think the first reason that we should love our enemies ... is this: that hate for hate only intensifies the existence of hate and evil in the universe ... There’s another reason why you should love your enemies, and that is because hate distorts the personality of the hater ... For the person who hates, the beautiful becomes ugly and the ugly becomes beautiful. For the person who hates, the good becomes bad and the bad becomes good. For the person who hates, the true becomes false and the false becomes true ... Now [the] final reason ... is this: that love has within it a redemptive power ... History unfortunately leaves some people oppressed and some people oppressors. And there are three ways that individuals who are oppressed can deal with their oppression. One of them is to rise up against their oppressors with physical violence and corroding hatred ... Another way is to acquiesce and to give in, to resign yourself to oppression. But there is another way. And that is to organize mass non-violent resistance based on the principle of love ... We must discover ... the redemptive power of love. And when we discover that we will be able to make of this old world a new world. We will be able to make men better. Love is the only way.

This kind of love is particularly strong when it emanates from someone else’s need – from the oppressed person’s need for resources and recognition, the sinner’s need for redemption, the tyrant’s need for integrity, or the animal’s need for preservation, for example. By responding to the needs of fellow living beings without seeking immediate
rewards or denying their uniqueness, we help eradicate oppression and alienation, and contribute to a more just and peaceful world that benefits all of us in the long run. Doing so, we also facilitate the other types of love: agape not only promotes self-love, but also nurtures romantic or erotic relationships with our partners and prevents philia bonds from becoming exclusive or destructive. As King so eloquently argues, agape is central in creating and developing the ‘new persons’ and ‘new societies’ that make other worlds possible. In a world shaped by global capitalism rather than global peace and justice, practicing agape in our personal and social lives is transformative in itself, which is why I call it revolutionary love.

Revolutionary Love in Theory and Practice

Today’s unfavorable structural conditions severely limit our opportunities for acting on the basis of inclusive and transformative revolutionary love. As Fromm (1956: 7) makes clear:

The principle underlying capitalistic society and the principle of love are incompatible … Important and radical changes in our social structure are necessary, if love is to become a social and not a highly individualistic, marginal phenomenon … Society must be organized in such a way that man’s social, loving nature is not separated from his [sic] social existence, but becomes one with it.

Yet, as mentioned earlier, we are capable of creating small yet meaningful ‘spaces of hope’, where we (in cooperation with fellow human beings) can learn how to develop the kinds of disposition, consciousness, community, organization, and political culture required for revolutionary love (Harvey, 2000). As teachers, parents, citizens, or activists, for example, we can continue the struggle to make our personal relationships and sites of social interaction as loving as possible. We can reserve time and energy for meaningful dialogues about our social worlds with students, children, neighbors, and opponents. And we can learn to become more giving, caring, responsible, respectful, and knowledgeable in our collaboration with others.

Revolutionary love requires consistent effort by everyone involved, and it does not become meaningful until we leave our comfort zone and exert ourselves for other people. Through such effort, we develop an orientation toward fellow human beings and our social worlds that is based on giving rather than just receiving. Giving is a productive act that enhances the joy, insight, and ability of the giver as well as the receiver. Contrary to common misconceptions, it does not refer to self-deprivation, sacrifice, or ‘giving up’ something (Fromm, 1956: 18–9). By giving something of ourselves – our understanding, knowledge, possession, experiences, humor, sadness, and so forth – without focusing on what we receive in return, we enrich the other person. And by increasing the other person’s sense of vitality, we allow her or him to become a giver as well, thereby expanding the power of both. In other words, love in the form of giving not only benefits each
person involved, but also expands freedom (as well as reduces oppression and alienation) in the social contexts we share.

Besides giving, revolutionary love also requires voluntary acts of care, responsibility, respect, and knowledge. Care refers to the emotional and practical concern of one human for other humans – such as a parent’s concern for his or her children – and for natural life. Such concern is active and involves work, because as Fromm (1956: 23) puts it: ‘One loves that for which one labors, and one labors for that which one loves.’ Responsibility implies a person’s ability and willingness to respond to the psychological as well as physical needs of other persons. To be a loving father, for example, I must feel responsible for the well-being of my three sons – not just because it is my duty, but because it improves their quality of life, and thereby my own. Respect means reaching out and relating to other people, while encouraging them to develop for their own sake and in their own ways. Respect requires subjective autonomy and freedom among everyone involved, and precludes oppression and alienation of others as well as ourselves. Thus, no matter how friendly or polite their interactions, slaveholders can never truly love and respect their slaves. And finally, care, responsibility, and respect are impossible without seeking deeper knowledge of ourselves and others. This means that I should not merely observe and react to the overt manifestations, statements, and emotions of my wife (or myself), but should also try to discover and respond to their underlying sources. At the same time, though, we must accept that we can never fully grasp reality through thoughts or words. I can only struggle to learn as much as possible about myself, my wife, fellow human beings, and our world through acts of love and collaboration with other people (Fromm, 1956: 22–7).

To expand our social capacity for revolutionary love, we must change our practical ways of life, both in private and public spheres. First of all, we need to develop discipline in our reflections and actions concerning loving relationships. In contemporary capitalist societies, we are usually only disciplined at work; we tend to spend our free time engaging in activities – like shopping, partying, watching television, or hanging out – that require almost no self-discipline. We also need to develop our capacity for concentration by slowing down our activities and giving our senses the time and space to build meaningful ties with fellow human beings in our social worlds. Next, we have to develop patience so that we are able to build loving relationships with ourselves, with our family members and close friends, and especially with neighbors and ‘people unlike us’. This implies rejecting our current obsession with immediate results and personal gratification. And finally, learning the art of loving is a slow and painful process that can only progress if we make it our primary concern. We must develop courage and commitment in all facets of our personal and social lives, so that we can respond lovingly to inevitable feelings of hatred, anger, fear, and despair, and form alliances with different oppressed social groups in joint struggles for social justice. Like other forms of love, revolutionary love requires constant effort, particularly when we are embedded in structures of alienation. To transform our personal and social lives, we must learn the dispositions of the art of loving and apply them to discover, create, and expand revolutionary spaces of hope.
Despite the personal and structural pressures working against us, we are all capable of implementing revolutionary love’s various dispositions, types, and practices in our everyday lives and collective actions – at least to some extent. At the same time, though, love can only replace alienation as the dominant characteristic of our contemporary world if we contribute to revolutions that expand the scope and quality of social contexts for being-in-relation, communication, and collaboration across differences. In turn, such social and political revolutions can only succeed in the long run if we learn to think, feel, and act on the basis of love toward people near and far, like and unlike us. Thus, contrary to popular opinion among rulers as well as rebels, love and revolution are two sides of the same coin, not opposing forces.

Revolutionary Love and Political Cultures of Loving Revolution

While scholars increasingly recognize the importance of emotions in revolutions, the theoretical and practical meaning of love remains understudied (Scheff, 2006: 111–24). Even those who accept the transformative potential of love have yet to specify its dynamics or its contribution to building radical alliances (Bystydzienski and Schacht, 2001; Emirbayer and Goldberg, 2005; Goodwin et al., 2001; Reed, 2004). Among the key contributors to this field, Foran (2005: 274) is the most explicit about the connections between love and revolution:

Love is arguably the emotion that most strongly underlies the vital force that impels many ordinary people into extraordinary acts, across time and place. Expressing hope and optimism, it provides a constructive counterpoint to those other powerful animating emotions, hatred and anger. Love of life, love of people, love of justice all play a role across revolutionary political cultures. This is something that the revolutionaries of the future will need to learn to nurture and build upon.

But while Foran’s statement is useful as starting point, it glosses over several key issues. First of all, what exactly does Foran mean with love? And secondly, how exactly does love contribute to revolutionary political cultures?

This section addresses these important questions by exploring how my conceptualization of love applies to what Reed and Foran (2002) call political cultures of opposition, and to what I will call political cultures of loving revolution. It lays the groundwork for more extensive analysis in a preliminary case study of the Indian independence movement led by Gandhi. Although this liberation struggle precipitated the violence of Partition, it clearly involved the fundamental transformation of power relations in political institutions, social structures, economic systems, cultural ways of life, and popular consciousness that scholars define as revolutions (Foran, 2003). It also represents the 20th century’s most ambitious national attempt at implementing the principles and practices of love in people’s everyday life and social structures. Activists and intellectuals
seeking a *global* revolution ‘against neoliberalism and for humanity’ in the 21st century have much to learn from the achievements and failures of India’s experiments with loving revolution (Ponce de León, 2001: 101–6).

By introducing the *political cultures of opposition* concept, Reed and Foran (2002: 335–41) seek to synthesize areas of study that most revolution scholars prefer to keep separate. On the one hand, they accept the importance of organizational resources and institutional structures, but link them to explicit ideologies as well as less coherent cultural idioms. On the other hand, they connect these three elements – organizations, ideologies, and cultural idioms – to the emotions of people’s everyday lives and concrete experiences. They suggest that *before* the emergence of large-scale revolutions, individuals and groups who want to transform existing power structures may draw on common traditions of struggle, shared feelings of injustice and stories of oppression, specific programs for resistance, and available mobilizing networks, and bring these elements together to form various political cultures of opposition. *After* the beginning of revolutions, these diverse political cultures of opposition – involving people from a range of different races, classes, genders, and other social categories – become the foundation for joint struggles in specific fields of contention.8 Reed and Foran imply that whether revolutions succeed or fail largely depends on the capacity of oppositional political cultures to create ‘unity-amid-diversity’ among its participants, and to challenge authorities and spark radical change according to their visions of social justice.

More specifically, Reed and Foran (2002: 340) and Foran (2005: 21) argue that political cultures of opposition draw on and in turn shape:

1) *emotions* and the lived experiences of individuals or communities,
2) explicit worldviews and *ideologies*,
3) traditional and folkloric *cultural idioms*, and
4) social networks, institutional structures, and *organizations*.

Linkages between emotions and cultural idioms, and between ideologies and organizations, are more direct and visible than those between emotions and ideologies, and between organizational structures and cultural idioms. Each element’s connection to the political culture of opposition, moreover, is immediate, explicit, and potentially reciprocal.9 I would add, moreover, that the evolving relationships between elements – not the nature of each element in itself – and the ever-changing social contexts of these relationships enable the formation of political cultures of opposition and loving revolution. How individual or collective actors actually construct such relationships and respond to their social contexts is unpredictable and partly depends on their creativity and effort.

Reed and Foran’s conceptualization of political cultures of opposition contributes to my project in several ways. It allows me to focus on connections between cultural and political resistance, between struggles in everyday life and fields of contention, rather than seeing these as separate forms of action in separate arenas of social life. It enables me to move beyond other common binaries in the social sciences, such as those between
reason and emotion, subject and object, agency and structure, strategy and identity, and public and private. It appreciates the need for unity among revolutionary people and collectivities without denying the significance and value of their differences in terms of class, race, gender, sexuality, and other social categories (Bystydzienski and Schacht, 2001; Collins, 2000). And it provides a clear and realistic picture of what opponents of global capitalism – both in the past and today – need to do to challenge the structures of alienation (within themselves and their communities) perpetuating oppression and exploitation. But it does not specify the relevance of revolution’s most vital force: love. I propose extending Reed and Foran’s concept by incorporating agape (revolutionary love) as a key component of political cultures of loving revolution.

This revolutionary form of love obviously applies to the emotion element of Reed and Foran’s theoretical framework. I want to emphasize, however, that agape does not encourage us to deny or repress other emotional responses to alienation like fear, shame, anger, hatred, or despair (Scheff, 2006). In fact, it encourages us to confront oppressive circumstances and painful experiences directly, as long as we translate potentially destructive emotions into constructive dispositions and behavior. I agree with Deborah Gould (2006), for example, that recent feelings of despair among ACT UP activists, who have lost many of their friends to AIDS without seeing significant political progress, are not necessarily counterproductive or demobilizing. To turn despair into collective insurgency, however, requires a strong sense of agape, which depends on the (re)creation of political cultures of loving opposition or revolution. Rather than viewing love as a way to avoid or overcome despair, therefore, I see it as a way to respond to despair (or other ‘negative’ emotions) with honesty and direct action.

But what makes agape especially significant for revolutions is that it also applies to the other elements of the political cultures of loving revolution concept. In the case of the Indian independence movement, for example, Gandhian ideologies relied on loving dialogue among activists and with outsiders, Gandhian cultural idioms resulted from loving reinvention of Hindu and other traditions, while Gandhian organizations depended on loving collaboration within and across social groups. Together, these four dimensions of the Gandhian political culture formed what is perhaps the only loving revolution in history – that is, if we accept Jeffrey Paige’s (in Foran, 2003: 26) definition of revolution as:

[A] rapid and fundamental transformation in the categories of social life and consciousness, the metaphysical assumptions on which these categories are based, and the power relations in which they are expressed as a result of widespread popular acceptance of a utopian alternative to the current order.

Like other modern revolutions, the Indian independence movement certainly suffered from internal flaws and produced tragic outcomes. Yet, during its heyday, the ‘Gandhian utopia’ (Fox, 1989) that guided the Indian independence movement undoubtedly transformed social consciousness, social categories, and power relations among people in India. Each of the ways that agape shaped the Gandhian political culture of loving
revolution – through its impact on human disposition, dialogue, reinvention, and collaboration – deserves much more extensive attention than I can provide here. For now, I just want to introduce Gandhi's notion of revolutionary love and sketch a few historical illustrations of how it influenced India's loving revolution.

Gandhian Revolutionary Love

Gandhi developed his views on love in response to the structures of oppression, exploitation, and especially alienation that evolved in India during the British Empire's rule. The two key ideas underlying Gandhian revolutionary love are *satya*, the Hindu term for truth, and *ahimsa*, referring to 'action based on the refusal to do harm' or non-violence (Bondurant, 1971: 23). In his writings, Gandhi (in Bondurant 1971: 16) argues that our search for truth is only meaningful when we avoid violence in word, deed, and spirit, because humans are unable to grasp all dimensions of the absolute Truth and are 'therefore not competent to punish'. Accepting that our glimpses of truth are relative makes us humble and self-reflective – rather than self-righteous or dogmatic – about our thoughts and behavior. Instead of immediately rejecting or attacking someone who disagrees with us, Gandhi urges us to listen carefully to that person, identify the valid aspects of her or his arguments, and rethink (and if necessary revise) our own position accordingly. At the same time, though, he resists the notion that seeking truthful ends with non-violent means is submissive or a 'weapon of the weak'. Based on our current understanding of what is right (which may derive from religious or secular moral values), we must confront oppressive structures and try to persuade opponents through symbolic as well as organized collective action. In other words, Gandhi's work stresses that means and ends are inseparable: means are 'the end in process and the ideal in the making' (Shridharani, 1939: 316). While we can never be certain about the whole truth or ultimate ends, we can make sure that the actual means we use to contribute to social justice are as moral, non-violent, and loving as possible.

Gandhian revolutionary love relates to each of the five elements of Fromm's theory. First of all, it is *giving* in the sense that, for Gandhi, moral action requires commitment to the service of fellow humans, particularly those who are different, oppressed, and particularly alienated in our society. By offering something of ourselves without expecting anything in return, we not only enable other people to help themselves, but we also develop our own capacity to build what King (1967) called 'beloved communities'. Secondly, it encourages *care* of others by improving their quality of life through physical labor in their social worlds. From Gandhi's perspective, actively engaging in grassroots efforts to address the most basic needs of people living in poverty – such as food, housing, clothing, sanitation, literacy, and health care – is no less important than collective struggles in the public arena. Thirdly, Gandhi's concept of revolutionary love depends on a sense of *responsibility* in our interactions with others, supporters and opponents alike. Participants in Gandhian political campaigns, for instance, always have to communicate...
openly and behave honorably in their relationships with fellow activists as well as government authorities (no matter how much we dislike their ideas and practices). Fourthly, it is founded on respect for everyone involved – for ourselves, friends and family, fellow activists, bystanders, and unjust rulers. Like Jesus and King, Gandhi shows that loving enemies means recognizing their basic humanity – without ignoring their unacceptable role in maintaining oppressive and alienating structures – and focusing our energy on building peaceful and equitable communities rather than expressing our hatred in destructive ways. And finally, Gandhian revolutionary love implies an endless search for knowledge about ourselves, our allies, our critics, and our social worlds. Among other things, it entails carefully investigating the details and different perspectives of a situation before initiating non-violent direct action for political liberation.

Gandhian revolutionary love also serves as a moral and strategic compass for concrete individual and collective actions. As in Fromm’s set of practices, discipline plays a crucial role in Gandhi’s repertoire for political struggle, also known as ‘satyagraha’ or soul force. Satyagraha, which literally means ‘firmly striving for truth’, stipulates that protest leaders and activists must follow four steps before engaging in non-violent direct action against oppression. First, they should try to resolve the grievance through negotiation or arbitration. Then, they must critically examine their own motivations and prepare for organized collective action. Next, they need to inform the public through education campaigns, mass meetings, and demonstrations. And finally, they should issue an ultimatum to opposing authorities, offering them one last chance to address their grievances and avoid contentious interaction (Bondurant, 1971: 40; Shridharani, 1939: 5–42). If government officials fail to respond, Gandhian activists have to be ready to apply the protest methods of satyagraha – which includes boycotts, strikes, non-cooperation, and civil disobedience against immoral laws – with the long-term purpose of creating alternative social structures and political institutions based on peace and social justice. To maintain individual and collective discipline, Gandhian activists also develop their capacity for concentration, patience, and concern. Thus, during the Indian independence movement, they concentrated on particularly oppressive manifestations of social injustice such as the Salt Laws, emphasized that fighting British rule and other kinds of tyranny would require patient struggle, and focused their concern on the endless process of developing agape love. But how did Gandhian revolutionary love guide the four components of the political culture of loving revolution during actual historical events?

**Emotions: Loving Disposition**

At the beginning of the Indian independence movement, Gandhian revolutionary love was primarily a private emotion, shaping the ideas and practices of relatively few individuals. When Indians heard about the Amritsar massacre on 13 April 1919, for example, most of them responded with righteous anger and freely expressed their hatred toward British General Dyer, who had ordered his soldiers to open fire on a crowd of peaceful demonstrators. Their rage intensified when a British committee failed to punish
Dyer and local authorities for criminal misconduct, especially when an Indian committee published a report with abundant and dramatic evidence of what had actually happened (Draper, 1985: 201–2; Fein, 1977). These strong feelings about the brutality of British rule served as ‘revolutionary accelerators’ (Reed, 2004) by expanding the range of people involved in the Indian independence movement. But at this particular historical moment, the limited number of satyagraha practitioners were unable to persuade large segments of the population to combine their sense of indignation about the brutality of the Amritsar massacre with constructive action on the basis of Gandhian love of humanity. Consequently, Gandhi could not prevent internal violence during the Rowlatt Bill event or mob attacks on a police station in Chauri Chaura, which occurred in 1922 and led to 22 deaths (Amin, 1995).

For the next seven years, Gandhi concentrated on turning his concept of revolutionary love into a collective emotion (Emirbayer and Goldberg, 2005), encouraging people throughout Indian society to develop their sense of agape and promoting the creation of the Gandhian political culture of loving revolution for particular strategic purposes. By articulating the Constructive Program, for instance, he stimulated Indian activists to focus more on the quality of life at the grassroots level and coalition-building among diverse social groups. These painstaking efforts toward improving the social contexts for revolutionary love paid off during the famous Salt March campaign of 1930 and 1931, which involved nationwide civil disobedience and ended the British monopoly on salt without causing bloodshed.

**Cultural Idioms: Loving Reinvention**

To stimulate collective agape, Gandhi popularized and reinvented four cultural idioms that resonated among the majority of Indians. The first term, *swadeshi*, referred to a traditional way of life based on economic self-reliance, local production, and fulfillment of basic human needs. Contrary to Western industrialization and modernization, founded on selfish interests and economic inequality, swadeshi suggested that India should rely on rural villages to provide moral purpose, self-discipline, and resources for survival (Fox, 1989: 54–9; Terchek, 1998: 112–14).

The second term, *sarvodaya*, emphasized commitment to serving the oppressed and expanding public welfare. The Constructive Program served as a practical guide for promoting Hindu-Muslim unity, basic education and health care, efforts to end untouchability and poverty, and women’s rights. Gandhi was committed to grassroots community-building as well as public contention, and made clear that national liberation required the inclusion and autonomy of everyone (Fox, 1989: 42–4; Nojeim, 2004: 110–19).

The third term, *aparigraha*, stressed that limitless material desire eventually produces immoral behavior, violence, and hatred. Gandhi urged fellow citizens to lead a simple life based on autonomy, self-control, discipline, and hard work as preparation for the mental, physical, and emotional challenges of the Indian independence movement (Fox, 1989: 44–5; Terchek, 1998: 40–2).
And finally, the symbol that synthesized these traditional ideas was *khadi* or hand-spinning. Gandhi felt that promoting this production process would allow the poor Indian masses to regain their sense of pride, take control of their material welfare, and help build a new society based on peace and justice for all (Terchek, 1998: 120–23). The spinning wheel later appeared on nationalist flags, while white homespun clothing (including the ‘Gandhi cap’) became the uniform of upper-caste as well as untouchable activists (Hardiman, 2003: 78–9; Tarlo, 1996). Thus, each of these cultural idioms contributed to the Gandhian political culture of loving revolution by radicalizing the Indian population and involving the widest range of social groups possible.

**Ideologies: Loving Dialogue**

Drawing on satyagraha, ahimsa, and cultural idioms, Gandhi formulated influential ideologies for thinking about Indian independence. He clarified the content of his philosophy through innumerable letters and articles, and as editor of the journal *Young India* engaged in ongoing dialogue with his readers about how his concepts applied to contemporary events (Gandhi, 1999). For example, he redefined the meaning of *swaraj*, the traditional term for national liberation, by arguing that it involved much more than taking over the political structures of the British Raj (Gandhi, 1909; Hardiman, 2003). India would not be free until its people and communities rejected Western civilization – especially its ideas about industrialism, nationalism, and modernity – and learned to build a new society by reinventing Indian traditions to challenge domination, inequality, and fatalism. As Terchek (1998: 68) explains:

He wants activity extended to service to the community, both to strengthen what is worthwhile as well as challenge what is dangerous. Tradition points the way, according to Gandhi, because it reminds human beings that their humanity is not found in mastering their biological nature but in transcending it and reaching out to others, particularly the most vulnerable members of society.

In other words, Gandhi’s interpretation of swaraj urged Indians to regain control of themselves and develop agape. At the same time, he argued that the motivation for doing so should not be personal ambition, but loving dialogue and relationships with other people, other communities, other parts of the world, and other living creatures.

Unlike most revolutionary thinkers of his time, Gandhi opposed Western nationalism. Instead of seeking territorial sovereignty and self-determination, he called for internal inclusion and external cooperation (Hardiman, 2003: 12–38). To avoid replacing a foreign tyranny with a domestic one, Gandhi focused on the ability of oppressed Indians to rule and provide for themselves. And to break the world system’s cycle of violence, he promoted dialogue and coalition-building among people from different countries and cultures. For Gandhi, therefore, the Indian independence movement was part of a worldwide
struggle to expand unity-amid-diversity among all individuals, communities, cultures, and societies working for peace and social justice (Hardiman, 2003) – that is, across race, class, gender, and nationality. Although each oppressed group had to lead and organize its own fight, he encouraged the relocation of satyagraha outside of India by traveling abroad and sharing his insights with foreign visitors (Chabot, 2003).

Organizations: Loving Collaboration

And finally, Gandhian revolutionary love also infused the Indian independence movement's organizations. Gandhi founded several 'ashrams' – small, self-sufficient, and inclusive communities – and drafted the Constructive Program to prepare Indians for the spiritual values and collaborative habits required to practice satyagraha. Organizing grassroots work was crucial, because it allowed the Indian population to build alternative social structures and ways of life before the end of British rule, and to experiment with loving practices before engaging in non-violent direct action campaigns (Bondurant, 1971:180–81; Gandhi, 1945).

Ashrams were in effect the revolutionary spaces of hope of the Indian independence movement. As Lloyd Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph (2006: 159) write:

Ashrams provided training for resisters and workshops for fashioning strategies and tactics of resistance. Volunteers observed routines and practiced discipline. They maintained the common enterprise by performing at assigned times common and individual labour on the farm or in the workshops. They were schooled to participate in risky political actions. They expected to be called upon to go on marches, attend meetings, and engage in civil disobedience by breaking unjust laws. Such acts would result in jail sentences which they anticipated and for which they were prepared ... The habituation and discipline were critical ... The capacity to be non-violent, particularly the 'new courage' to accept violence without retaliation had to be learned and cultivated.

Besides highlighting the significance of ashrams and relying on ashram residents to lead satyagraha campaigns, Gandhi also used the Constructive Program to convince Indian National Congress leaders to serve the entire Indian population (Terchek, 1998:164). His agenda for grassroots efforts responded to the particular social conditions of India at the time and included the following points: communal unity (especially between Hindus and Muslims), removal of untouchability, prohibition of alcohol and drugs (as distractions from the revolutionary struggle), khadi, other rural forms of economic production, village sanitation, basic education, adult education, women's rights, health and hygiene, an indigenous national language, and economic equality. For Gandhi, constructive work was supposed to precede, accompany, and follow satyagraha campaigns. It prepared revolutionaries for the dangers of activism, was a major non-violent direct action strategy in itself, and allowed Indian people to build the parallel
institutions that would serve as foundation for the new (post-colonial) society (Bondurant, 1971: 180–84).

Perhaps the most dramatic example of loving collaboration across differences was with the Pathans, an Islamic group in North West India (now in Pakistan) known for its military skills and culture of violence. Given their religious background and history of warfare, it seemed unlikely that the Pathans would want to join a movement guided by non-violent principles and strategies. But at the end of the 1920s, when cooperation between Hindu organizations and other Islamic groups was beginning to fall apart, Pathan leader Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan founded a political party on the basis of Gandhian love. During the civil disobedience campaigns of 1930–31, Khan and his followers earned a reputation as deeply committed satyagrahis – more committed than many Hindu members of the Indian National Congress, who adopted satyagraha as a political method, but not as a way of life (Banerjee, 2000). As Bondurant (1971: 144) observes:

The achievement of the [Pathans] was nothing less than the reversal of attitude and habit of a people steeped in the tradition of factious violence. For competition in force, they substituted cooperation in constructive action. The [Pathans] achieved a discipline for hot-tempered discontents and directed it into channels which proved effective not only in social organization but in political action. The instrument for this achievement was a Pathan version of satyagraha.

Thus, Gandhian revolutionary love encouraged collaboration among vastly different people, organizations, and cultures. Although Gandhi’s efforts to build cross-cutting alliances often failed – especially those with the Muslim League led by Jinnah and the untouchables led by Ambedkar – they also enabled the inclusion of Pathan activists and practices into the Gandhian political culture of loving revolution (Hardiman, 2003: 129–36).

The Gandhian Political Culture of Loving Revolution and Fields of Contention

Political cultures of loving revolution are too dialectical, complex, and fluid to accurately describe with a few impressionistic glimpses. Rigorous sociological analysis would require a more detailed case study of the elements, internal dynamics, and diversity of the Gandhian political culture of loving revolution, and a clearer picture of how they responded to ever-changing fields of contention. To explain why, after violent behavior by activists, Gandhi canceled satyagraha campaigns in the early 1920s, but not during the Quit India campaign in the 1940s, for example, I would need to specify shifts in the forms and contexts of interaction among revolutionary actors, government authorities, social elites, bystanders, and mass media (McAdam and Tarrow, 2000: 149). These are the kinds of issues I intend to highlight in future work. For now, though, I hope that my arguments for conceiving of love and revolution as two sides of the same coin are persuasive.
The Potential Future of Revolutionary Love and Loving Revolutions

Even if my previous discussion of love and revolution makes sense, however, one critical question remains unaddressed: what do contemporary revolutionaries need to learn about love in order to transform personal lives and globalize liberation? Instead of ending my article with a traditional conclusion, let me offer several preliminary responses and invite fellow scholars and especially global justice movement activists to join me in dialogue on this urgent question.

My first proposition is that revolutionary love is much more than internal, personal, romantic, and sexual feelings – no matter how intense such feelings may be. This popular conception ignores that meaningful and enduring love requires active, labor-intensive relationships with ourselves, other people (both friend and foe), and our social worlds. Radical activists need to keep in mind that loving ideas are motivated by giving, care, responsibility, respect, and knowledge, while loving practices result from discipline, concentration, patience, and concern. Creating revolutionary love and loving revolutions involves long and painstaking struggles against alienation – both within and between individuals – not merely the sudden, seismic shifts of social structures that most scholarly definitions of revolutions highlight (Foran, 2003).

My second proposition is that revolutionary love not only applies to private relationships or psychotherapy, but also to social movements and revolutions in public fields of contention. On the one hand, critical social theorists usually focus on love’s significance for our emotional health and interpersonal relationships in societies dominated by capitalism, sexism, racism, and class elitism (Fromm, 1956; hooks, 2000; Scheff, 2006). On the other hand, the academic literature on revolutions either avoids using normative concepts like love or fails to specify its practical meaning (Foran, 2005; Goldstone, 1991; Skocpol, 1979; Tilly, 1978). The Indian independence movement is an important historical example of the diverse ways that love can shape revolutionary political cultures – an example that clearly deserves more rigorous attention from critical social theorists in general and revolution scholars in particular. (Other examples, such as the liberation theology movements in Latin America during the 1970s and the current Zapatista movement in Mexico have received much more attention.) Although contemporary and future revolutionaries cannot simply imitate Gandhian revolutionary love, they can reinvent it and incorporate their own forms of revolutionary love into political cultures embedded in their own social contexts and fields of contention (Chabot, 2003; Scalmer, 2002).

My third proposition is that, in the end, revolutionary love and violence are incompatible. This is a problematic issue for both scholars and activists, because nearly all past revolutions were violent struggles. The quotes at the beginning of my article indicate that revolutionary heroes have long appreciated the relevance of love. It is important to recognize, however, that the interpretation of Guevara or Fanon is not the same as that of King or Gandhi. Whereas the revolutionary love of the former extended primarily to the oppressed, the revolutionary love of the latter also included opponents. Like Barbara Deming (1971), I suggest that King’s agape and Gandhi’s ahimsa imply more radical and extensive transformation of self, relationships with others (as selves in their own right),
communities, and humanity than the interpretation of revolutionaries promoting (or at least justifying) violence – not less, as most academics and activists presume. In my view, radical struggles in the age of neoliberal globalization will only be meaningful if we learn to apply the art of loving in response to alienation in all human relationships and areas of social life: in the private sphere as well as in political, economic, social, and cultural arenas. If participants in emerging and future revolutions do not learn to translate anger and despair into love, or domination into peaceful dialogue, we will eventually fall into the same trap as all past revolutions (including the Indian independence movement) and merely replace one tyranny with another.

To avoid repeating historical mistakes, my fourth proposition stresses that we need to rethink our approach to power. Scholars as well as activists often equate power with the ability to dominate. Most social scientists agree with Max Weber (1946: 180) that power is ‘the chance of a man or of a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action’. And Saul Alinsky, the famous American labor organizer and author of Rules for Radicals (1971), argues that the task of union leaders is to help community members win their battles with local government. Both of these approaches assume that, in a given social context, some persons and groups have or gain power over others (Kreisberg, 1992: 53). My concept of revolutionary love urges radicals to promote another kind of power, power with, which emerges when individuals and groups engage in mutual dialogue and collaborative action to improve the lives of oppressed people as well as everyone else living in particular communities. Power with, in other words, evolves when we learn to relate and work together with other people (including strangers and opponents) to satisfy our needs and live up to our values without imposing our will on each other (Collins, 2000; hooks, 2000; Kreisberg, 1992: 85–6; Noddings, 1984; Welch, 1985). It implies that, if we wish to contribute to a loving revolution, we need to focus on the long-term process of transforming power in our institutions and everyday lives, not primarily on taking power and overthrowing the current government in the short run (Foran, 2005). We need ideas and practices that help us destroy old structures of oppression and at the same time also build new persons, communities, and governments.

My final proposition is that we have much to learn from Gandhi and King, but need to put more emphasis on building global struggles for peace and social justice, without undermining local and national efforts. In my view, George Lakey (1987; and in Solnit, 2004) offers the most practical strategy for achieving such a loving revolution on a worldwide scale (see also, Aronowitz and Gautney, 2003; Epstein, 1991). Without going into detail here, his framework of five interrelated stages – cultural preparation, organization-building, confrontation, political and economic non-cooperation, and parallel institutions – is a good starting point for potential revolutionaries who seek concrete ways to promote active forms of agape. It indicates, for example, that American sociology teachers like me must try to create classrooms that encourage power with, especially if this means facing opposition from students and colleagues (Kreisberg, 1992). Although such small efforts are insufficient in themselves, global revolutions cannot succeed without individuals embodying the changes they seek. Lakey’s strategy also suggests that contemporary Global
Justice Movements in the North and South will not achieve unity-amid-diversity unless participants from wealthy as well as poor countries experiment with and commit to loving practices. They need to learn from past spaces of hope (such as Gandhian ashrams and the Constructive Program) and apply their insights to envision and create new spaces of hope for shaping their local, national, as well as global contexts. Without such spaces of hope within and across borders, we cannot sustain revolutionary love as a key source for world-wide loving revolutions against neoliberal capitalism.

However we define love and revolution, though, we must remember that no one can provide us with all the answers. Radical intellectuals and activists like Che, Fanon, Gandhi, and King challenge us to reflect on our human condition and contribute actively to global social justice. But, in the end, we have to invent our own visions and strategies for building new persons, new communities, new societies, and new world systems, without denying our material realities or pretending we no longer need to confront alienation.

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Notes

1 In other words, personal change does not precede social change, or vice versa. Instead of focusing on whether emotions of love or shifts in structural conditions make loving relationships possible, I suggest that both are necessary and, to some extent, imply each other. Loving emotions do not emerge ‘out of nowhere’, while social structures always involve human action.

2 Webster’s College Dictionary equates love with: ‘1. A profoundly tender, passionate affection for another person, esp. when based on sexual attraction. 2. A feeling of warm personal attachment or deep affection. 3. A person toward whom love is felt. 4. A love affair. 5. Sexual activity. 6. ... a personification of sexual affection ... 7. Affectionate concern for the well-being of others; love of one’s neighbor. 8. A strong predilection, enthusiasm, or liking: a love of books. 9. The object of such liking or enthusiasm ... 10. The benevolent affection of God for His creatures, or the reverent affection due from them to God …’


4 Harvey (2000: 200) uses the metaphor of architect to depict the figure who constructs spaces of hope, emphasizing that we are all capable of being ‘architects of our own fates and fortunes’. On the same page, he also quotes from Marx’s Capital: ‘But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour process we get a result that existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement. He not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works, but he also realizes a purpose’.
5. Thus, loving emotions and practices do not precede loving spaces and structural conditions, or vice versa. Genuine love implies both loving dispositions and loving contexts, which are inextricably linked.

6. Contrary to Fromm, Marcuse claims that a liberated eros would release instinctual energies motivating people to seek not only sexual gratification, but also fertile outlets for artistic creativity, inclusive human relations, and social revolution (Kellner, 1984: 161–2; Marcuse, 1955: 44, 139). In my view, though, Marcuse focuses too much on biological ‘energies’ and individual pleasure, and not enough on the qualities of communication and interaction that allow for personal as well as social liberation (Alford, 1987; Kellner, 1984: 195–6; Pippin et al., 1986).

7. Elsewhere, King (1958: 105–6) writes: ‘Agape is not a weak, passive love. It is love in action. Agape is love seeking to preserve and create community. It is insistence on community even when one seeks to break it. Agape is a willingness to sacrifice in the interest of mutuality. Agape is a willingness to go to any length to restore community ... He who works against community is working against the whole of creation. Therefore, if I respond to hate with a reciprocal hate I do nothing but intensify the cleavage in broken community. I can only close the gap in broken community by meeting hate with love ... In the final analysis, agape means a recognition of the fact that all life is interrelated. All humanity is involved in a single process ... If you harm me, you harm yourself’.

8. McAdam and Tarrow (2000: 149) define a field of contention as: ‘a socially constructed set of adversarial relationships that is embedded in a legal/institutional system that effectively constrains the strategic options available to all contenders ... Among the actors who can comprise a field of contention are various state officials, challenging groups, non-state elites, bystander publics, and representatives of the news media’.

9. See Figure 1 in Reed and Foran (2002: 340) for a schematic view of political cultures of opposition.

References


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