

Lineages of Freedom. John Holloway, 2012.

Lineages of freedom. I love the title of the colloquium, with its suggestion of a discontinuous continuity between past and present. It makes me think of Bob Marley: These songs of freedom, redemption songs, redemption songs.

That's what it's all about, isn't it? Redemption. It's the word that keeps on coming back to me in South Africa. I know that there are people in the room who were imprisoned and tortured in the struggle for a better world. I am sure that many of you will have known people who gave their lives in that struggle. And there must be a sense that this is not what you fought for, that this is not what you dreamed of. There have been great changes, of course, fundamental changes, but I cannot believe that in the world you dreamt of, there would be so much poverty beside so much wealth. I cannot believe that your ambition for South Africa was that it would win first prize as being the most unequal society in the world. I cannot believe that Marikana was part of your dreams. There have been fundamental changes, but the pain of capital is still there, the pain of a form of social organisation that quite literally tears up the earth and destroys the humans, animals and plants that live on it.

Songs of freedom, redemption songs. Redemption, because it is not enough to remember, we must redeem that memory. We do no honour to the dead by building them monuments. We honour them by picking up the dreams that they left lying on the ground and making them ours. It is just not good enough to proclaim a brave new world in which the young will rule, uncluttered by the struggles of the past. It is not good enough because there is something unfinished on the table. The dead, our dead, must be buried with dignity. Their struggles must be redeemed. It is not the dead past that must bury its dead in this case because the past is so frighteningly alive. Formally, apartheid is gone, but you just need to go out the door and walk down the street and then up the hill to see how alive it is, not an apartheid dictated by law, but an apartheid dictated by money, an apartheid not just of colour, but very palpably of class. The pain of money is still there, the pain of capital.

Redemption songs, but how do we sing those redemption songs? How do we redeem the struggles of the past? Certainly not by being realistic, by tweaking policies here and there or voting for DA instead of the ANC, because realism inevitably pulls us in to the labyrinths of the real world we are fighting against. We redeem the struggles of the past not by making them more moderate but by pushing them farther, by turning them not just against the government, but against the state as a form of organisation, not just against the multinational corporations but against capital as a social relation, as a way of doing things. We sing redemption songs by walking in the wrong direction, wherever and however we can.

That is surely what we are doing today: walking in the wrong direction. In the face of a massive tide that would wash the whole of higher education into the search for more efficient ways of serving the rule of money, we are saying that No, that is not what education is about. Education is about retracing the lineages of freedom, redeeming the struggles of the past. A hopeless task, of course, were it not for the fact that we are not alone. There is a surge of discontent throughout the world, a surge of ¡Ya basta!, Enough! Sekwanele!, a surge of We cannot go on the way we are going, an African spring that is a world spring, of which we today are part.

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