



Bringing the Body Back to Life through Radical Geography of Hunger: The Haymarket Affair and its Aftermath

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In several locations throughout the city of Chicago every week, people collectively gather to share free food that would have otherwise spoiled and been needlessly wasted with those who do not have access to enough food to sustain their daily lives. They do so without making hungry people ravaged by the destructive work of neoliberal capitalism jump through hoops and feel like second-class citizens. These groups share food while handing out pamphlets with titles like “Don't Just March - Organize Nonviolent Civil Resistance”, “Anti-McDonalds Day”, and “End Torture by the United States”. They often share food under banners that have slogans like, “This is Solidarity, Not Charity” printed on them in bold letters. They do not share food in an effort to reform the defunct state apparatus that allows so many across Chicago, the US and the world to go hungry, but rather, to contribute to revolutionary changes through which a new egalitarian society can emerge in which basic human rights, like food, are met unconditionally. They share food because as Peter Kropotkin (1995) pointed out over a century ago in *The Conquest of Bread*, there is immense revolutionary potential that lurks

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within, and throughout, human hunger. And, at the most fundamental human level, this revolutionary potential can emerge through feeding hungry people and helping them feed themselves. All of this sharing of food occurs under the name of *Food Not Bombs* (FNB).

FNB's logic and tactics are quite different from those of other radical movements in Chicago's history who have shared similar goals linked to anti-hunger/anti-poverty politics. That said, FNB's broad political approach owes a considerable debt to key historical struggles in Chicago, especially the legacy of the Haymarket anarchists and the efforts of the Black Panther Party (BPP)². At the heart of the Haymarket anarchists' and the BPP's efforts, lies the dialectical history of how bodies contribute to producing urban space, and how urban space contributes to producing urban bodies. These revolutionary efforts all recognized that hunger, like many other dimensions of material inequality, is part of a larger process of uneven development and must be met with a forceful grassroots response. These movements, while illustrating the importance of the material politics at the center of anti-hunger politics, also demonstrate how important the discursive politics are at the core of socially producing those hungry bodies.

The body, I argue, has always been at the core of Marxist attempts to theorize uneven development under capitalism (see Harvey 1998). The importance of this material/corporal grounding is at the heart of what Marx and Engels (1998: 37) meant when they suggested: "Men [sic] must be in a position to live in order to be able to 'make history'... The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself." My claim aside, there is still much more effort necessary to better demonstrate how the physical torment of human bodies existing amidst extreme material inequality under capitalism are shaped through the discursive power relations that define social bodies in particular ways. Connecting the material and discursive politics of human survival is in-line with Harvey's (2000:130) suggestion that: "The body (like the person and the self) is an internal relation and therefore open and porous to the world. The study of the body has to be grounded in the understanding of real spatio-temporal relations between material practices, representations, imaginations, institutions, social relations, and the prevailing structures of political economy. The body then can then be viewed as a nexus through which the possibilities for emancipatory politics can be approached." Contrary to implications within both

² While I am focusing on a particular kind of radical anti-hunger politics in this paper, other legacies of anti-hunger politics should be acknowledged, including; (1) community-based public health approaches that have focused on enabling community-based strategies to address food insecurity; (2) grassroots sustainable agriculture activism that has expressed concern about food safety, the disappearance of productive land, growing distances between producer and consumer, environmental degradation and corporate concentration of agri-business; and more recently, (3) anti-globalization activists who have protested the commodification of food.

vulgar Marxist and post-Marxist critiques of Marx's work, which too often focus too narrowly on his latter writings at the expense of his earlier work, Marx was deeply aware and concerned about individual's role within capitalism and how their bodies' myriad differences contributed to the larger unfolding of human history (see Marx 1964, 1976; Harvey 1998, 2000).

Related to this point, the intellectual history of geography shows that we too often take human survival for granted; we continue to do so today. In a recent issue of *Antipode* (2006), I made the argument that radical scholarship needs to take a couple steps back to ground itself more deliberately in questions related to the material foundations of human bodies and survival. While anti-essentialist discourse within contemporary geographic scholarship has provided important insights into the complexity of social life by disempowering long existing binary power relations, in so doing, it has also simultaneously shaken some of the fundamental theoretical practicalities of sociobiological life. One of the most important points I tried to make was that we cannot assume bodily survival is at the core of our arguments because it is so blatant and so necessary. The result of the blatancy of survival is that often times arguments for radical plurality get caught up in too often taking survival for granted (see Amin and Thrift 2005). If this was not the case, we would hear much more about the approximately eight-hundred and fifty million people without enough food to meet their daily needs across the planet, or the eighteen-thousand who will die *today* due to hunger or malnutrition related illnesses. However, I also argued that in grounding our theoretical/political efforts in the material foundations of bodily survival, we must simultaneously strive to better understand *how/why* bodies too often do not meet their material needs (hunger, homelessness, etc) as a result of the social production of their bodies. This has everything to do with explicit engagements with how race, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability and other bodily characteristics are discursively used to produce uneven social power relations under capitalism. The Haymarket anarchists, the BPP and FNB all illustrate how the body, as the root of a radical intellectual project, is simultaneously materially and discursively produced. And while I utilize dialectics via a Marxist framework, historical blind spots toward race and gender necessitate a better incorporation of feminist identity politics and critical race theories for thinking about the utopian politics of feeding hungry bodies, given the material and discursive realities those bodies are produced through and constructed within.

The need to focus on the material survival of human bodies rings out in *The Conquest of Bread* when Kropotkin (1995: 55) illustrates what is politically at stake with such a focus: "That we are utopian is well known. So utopian are we that we go to length of believing that the revolution can and ought to assure shelter, food and clothes to all—an idea extremely displeasing to middle-class, citizens, whatever their party colour, for they are quite alive to the fact that it is not easy to keep the upper hand of a people whose hunger is satisfied." Kropotkin goes on to

show why *we* have not focused on these issues, instead taking them for granted when he suggests (1995: 63), “The man [*sic*] who is full-fed does not understand this [the revolutionary importance of hunger], but the people do understand, and have always understood it; and even the child of luxury, if he is thrown on the street and comes into contact with the masses, even he will learn to understand.” However, Kropotkin at no point in the *Conquest of Bread* engages with the discursive nature of who went hungry or the social production of their bodies. I suspect his failure to do so ultimately sullied his utopian political vision.

I want to spend this rest of this short essay looking at these connections through the context of some of those individuals linked to the Haymarket affair and the BPP in Chicago, in an effort to better understand what contemporary anarchist/radical social movement groups like FNB might do to increase their revolutionary potential.

Haymarket Anarchists and the Material/Discursive Politics of Hunger

The lives and deaths of the Haymarket anarchists can help us begin to situate the complex dialectical ways in which human bodies become embedded within the whirlwind of interdependent and interrelated political, economic, cultural and ecological processes that produce urban space. At the same time, these events can help us understand how radical bodies produce urban space through their political, economic, cultural and ecological struggles for survival. The lives and deaths of the Haymarket anarchists provide important insight into the ontological and epistemological ways in which we engage in emancipatory political struggle. While “labor” is often talked about in an effort to demonstrate human agency and utopian emancipatory possibility amidst other structural process that shape urban space, when it is treated in monolithic ways, it too often serves to reinforce the kinds of essentialist thinking that creates disempowering hierarchies. The efforts of the Haymarket anarchists provide a historical example of the legacy of how struggles for labor rights, while very important at the structural level of collective solidarity, is at a more fundamental level about meeting the material and discursive political needs of the body.

I want to focus first on the comments of two of the most well known of the Haymarket anarchists, August Spies and Albert Parsons. Spies and Parsons show how the material production of human life was at the core of the Haymarket riots, and how the common-place remembrances of Haymarket as primarily about labor rights serves to eclipse the complexity of the events that occurred. These issues were of course about the exploitation of labor, but were more fundamentally about human bodies who require food first and foremost, and who had to try to use their labor power to earn wages to buy food. The point here is to calibrate our political focus on the most fundamental issues of survival, and build upward. To demonstrate this emphasis, during the week of October 7th, 1886 Spies (1886) said to his accusers prior to being found guilty and executed by the state:

“You don't believe in magical arts, as your grandfathers did, who burned witches at the stake, but you do believe in conspiracies... You want to "stamp out the conspirators"-the "agitators?" Ah, stamp out every factory lord who has grown wealthy upon the unpaid labor of his employees. Stamp out every machine that is revolutionizing industry and agriculture, that intensifies the production, ruins the producer, while the creator of all these things stands amidst them, tantalized with hunger! They murder, as we have said, little children and women by hard labor, while they let strong men go hungry for lack of work.”

From Spies, we begin to get a sense of how it was the geography of material inequality that led to the organizing of Chicago laborers. We get a clear view about how early class relations in Chicago, the riot and the bomb had its roots in the radical geography of hunger. Spies' testimony is bolstered by further testimony the same week by Albert Parsons (1886), when he said in the court trial for his life, “Is it not a fact that the present social system places all power in the hands of the capitalist class? They can, and do refuse to make any concessions. The tyranny and the despotism of the wage system of labor consists in the fact that the wage laborer is compelled, under penalty of hunger and death by starvation, to obey and accept terms laid down to him by his employer.”

While all of the Haymarket martyrs were white men, the legacy of the Chicago Haymarket affair is also about radical women if we take a longer and more critical view of the history. Lucy Parsons, Albert Parson's wife, provides an important biographical element connecting radical anti-hunger politics in Chicago, to anarchist, as well as feminist and racial struggles, in important ways. And while many historians have not paid as much attention to Lucy Parsons as they should have, the fact that she was mixed race, with African-American and Native American heritage, and was often times referred to as Black, demonstrates other levels of social complexity and political positionality via discursive political struggles.

After her husband's execution, Lucy Parsons continued struggling for the issues they worked on together for another fifty-five years. She published pamphlets, books, and newspapers, as well as led many demonstrations and lectured widely. Throughout her life, she continued to focus on the most vulnerable people who were devastated by the disparaging pressure of US capitalism; the poor, the unemployed, the foreign born. As poverty and hunger ravaged the US between 1913-1915, hunger demonstrations began to occur, especially in East and West coast US cities. After lending her energies toward a series of successful organizing efforts in San Francisco around poverty, unemployment and hunger, Lucy Parsons went to Chicago to work with IWW members. By January, 1915, there had been widespread factory closings and

reduced production within those factories that remained open throughout the Chicago area, and elsewhere because of disruptions to European markets. At the same time, bread prices continued to raise while grain speculators sent wheat overseas which led to less access to basic food staples by those hardest-hit by the economic crisis. In an effort to characterize/humanize these local/global processes, and their impact on urban bodies and urban space, on January 18 the *Chicago Tribune* ran a cartoon with a distraught mother surrounded by her hungry children. Knitted into a large shawl the mother held, was “Give us this day our daily bread”. At her feet rest a newspaper with the headline reading “Vast Wheat Shipments to Europe Imperil American Food Supply.” (see Ashbaugh 1976: 239)

As she had done so many times before, Lucy Parsons and twenty-one other Chicago anarchists took to the streets demanding bread for the hungry; demanding food for the fictionalized mother and her children that in reality represented 1,000s within the area. While hunger demonstrations had already erupted in Chicago earlier that year, Parsons, in coordination with the *Westside Anarchists*, planned a major demonstration for the same week the cartoon had been published to continue to build public grassroots momentum. Posted above the speakers platform for the demonstration hung several signs that said, “HUNGER”, “We Want Work, Not Charity”, “Why Starve in the Midst of Plenty”, and “Hunger Knows No Law”. After several speakers railed against the inhumanity of allowing so many to go hungry, protesters collectively marched throughout the streets of Chicago. Early in their march, the protesters were met by Chicago police swinging bully clubs and detectives wearing brass knuckles. And while the papers did not report it, the next day eye accounts testified that the police fired their guns on the crowd. About the speeches delivered at the demonstration that day that mobilized the masses, one spectator later said, “The most radical speaker was Lucy Parsons. Mrs. Parsons was, as a rule, both frightening and beautiful in her intense earnestness.” (Ashbaugh 1976: 239).

While the material inequalities Parson’s and the other anarchists struggled to ameliorate are of primary concern to this historical moment, so too is the degree to which the mother and children were symbolically used to represent those who most often struggle against the conditions of poverty and how uneven development so often derails social reproduction. Parsons’ ability to rouse the masses and encourage them to stand up for their rights not only brought to light her magnetism however, but her ability/presence also opened her, and all other radical women, up for attack in the wake of the Haymarket affair in the form of a fictionalized accounting of the events written by an anonymous author called *Red Ruin*. *Red Ruin*, as propaganda, is useful for demonstrating the interdependencies of material and discursive politics because it testifies to the degree to which Parsons’ femininity, in all its social production, was so powerful for contributing different perspectives, approaches and tactics as a set of internal relations that produced radical anti-hunger politics.

The author of *Red Ruin* argued that radical women were a major threat to society in two ways. First, the author suggested that radical women supported male revolutionaries with their earnings so men had more leisure to engage in violence. The second, more “sinister” threat provided by radical women according to *Red Ruin* was that women would ultimately tire of their roles as “supporters” and would not only rouse men to greater violence, but engage in violence themselves. According to the author, because of these reasons, radical women would be much more dangerous than radical men. The author wrote “Charlotte killed her Marat. Lucy Parsons married hers. And now that justice has wiped him out, she wants to get a whack at justice with a can of nitroglycerine and a detonating fuse.” (see Marsh 1981:108) Most interestingly, I read these attacks on radical women more than anything as a testament to their dynamic ability to carry out the difficult work of social reproduction. The author of *Red Ruin*, in trying to demonize radical women, elevates their contribution to power relation formation as it relates to both material and discursive anti-hunger politics in a way that Lucy Parsons herself would have likely not been able to do alone. The alternative take to the attacks on radical women in *Red Ruin* is that they are simply misogyny cloaked in political rhetoric.

Parsons was committed to an anti-capitalist politics first and foremost, but she most often focused on how capitalism destroyed human bodies through producing poverty, material inequality and hunger. Her unique positionality as a leading radical labor organizer and advocate for the poor, in addition to being a mixed-race or Black woman, provides a useful perspective through which to consider the radical anti-hunger politics discussed by Kropotkin, especially since it was in-part the discursive production of her femininity and race that made her so uniquely powerful. Parsons publicly argued that all social ills stemmed from economic oppression. In a relative way she further argued that racial oppression was first based in slavery as the dominant mode of production that led the US economic growth, and the wage system, or wage slavery that followed as more advanced forms of industrial capitalism took hold. In a similarly relative way, she argued that women were oppressed because they were economically dependent on men. While she recognized that racism and patriarchy were used to divide the working class by producing stocks of cheap surplus labor, at the same time she thought that the eradication of capitalism would automatically lead to racial and gender equality. While her political understanding of capitalism, racism and patriarchy was far too narrow, and also like Kropotkin, lacking the inclusion of the discursive politics around the politics of the body, her own influence, in part as a result of the discursive context of her own body, helps to demonstrate the need for broader conceptualization of radical politics.

If we draw on EP Thompson’s (1971) discussion about the “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century” we can get from the material foundations of life, to what Thompson suggested was the moral, or

cultural, underpinnings that help people understand, and often times politically respond to their own material inequality. Toward this same point, Charles Tilly (1975: 389) has suggested that early European food riots "occurred not so much where men [*sic*] were hungry as where they believed that others were unjustly depriving them of food to which they had a moral and political right." Echoing this notion in their seminal work, *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail*, Piven and Cloward (1979: 12) suggested "[f]or a protest movement to arise out of these traumas of daily life, people have to perceive the deprivation and disorganization they experience as both wrong, and subject to redress." These social movement notions can be used to begin bridging the gap between the material body that starves from a lack of food and the discursive power relations that play out through the body as a result of its gender, color, ability, and political injustices thrust upon human bodies because of the social production of these corporal characteristics. Through Spies, Parsons, Thompson and Tilly, Piven and Cloward we see the radical geography of hunger and limitations of human life as the root of social power that often times forces people to stay in line with the dominant political economic processes of any period. But also, we see these material foundations are the root of power to make people stand up for their rights, to organize, to work to change the destructive systems within which they live.

The Black Panther Party's Radical Anti-Hunger Politics

Given the levels of despotism and injustice that lie at the heart of the Haymarket incident, it should not be surprising that when Huey P. Newton, co-founder of the BPP started writing his doctoral dissertation about the BPP at the University of California, Santa Cruz in the late 1970s, that he stated with the "History of Repression in America" generally, and with the Haymarket incident specifically. In his opening pages (1996: 15), Newton reviewed much of basic history of the Haymarket affair and the degree to which the history of the US must be seen as filled with oppression and domination by the state and the power elite that so often control the state. Just as Lucy Parsons' anti-capitalist efforts were deeply embedded both within the material politics of inequality, poverty and especially hunger, so too were the radical politics of the BPP fundamentally about the ability of humans to exist under capitalism³.

If the insight drawn from Lucy Parsons' "do as I say" juxtaposed with her "do as I do/do as I am" politics offers insight into radical anti-hunger politics, the BPPs efforts in Chicago also offer useful insight into what Kropotkin's utopian

³ In other projects, I have been working to link the grassroots efforts of the BPP and their Free Breakfast for Children Program to these bigger ideas that can help us better understand how, as Harvey suggests, "the body can then be viewed as a nexus through which the possibilities for emancipatory politics can be approached."

politics lacked. I want to move three miles to the west of the site of the Haymarket riots, to Monroe Street at Oakley Blvd very briefly to the case of another important Chicago martyr whose life and death offers insight into the potential of radical anti-hunger politics. Efforts, to impede the success of the BPP's *Free Breakfast for Children Program*, which I argue elsewhere was one of the most important moments in US anti-hunger political history, took a dramatic turn on December 4th, 1969 when Fred Hampton was assassinated by the Chicago Police in coordination with the FBI while sleeping with his pregnant girlfriend. The BPP's free breakfast program should be explicitly read as a grassroots direct action campaign to respond to the contradictions inflicted upon raced and gendered human bodies under capitalism. Despite its connections to other anarchist traditions, the BPP self identified as a Marxist-Leninist political group. Fred Hampton was one of the main organizers within the Chicago Chapter of the BPP and nationally, somebody largely associated with the success of the *Free Breakfast for Children Program*.

To this end, a recent interview I conducted with Elaine Brown, a former Chairman of the BPP, and highest ranking women in the Party is very useful. When I asked her about Fred Hampton's life and death, about the wider efforts and struggles the BPP faced in feeding hungry children who suffered as a result of the uneven development of capitalism, and why they did what they did, she told me: "Because, we are so used to the capitalist construct, it doesn't occur to us that we have a human right to eat; because if you don't eat you will die, it's not complicated. So, if there is a price tag to eating, then there is a price on your head, because the minute you don't have enough money to eat, you're slated for death. The question is, do I as a human being in this society, or in this life, have a right to eat." In many ways, this notion relates to the kinds of moral economic and political responses Thompson, Tilly and Piven and Cloward were talking and we see these same internal relations play out within the Haymarket affair. Brown's discussion of anti-hunger politics also directly relates to Kropotkin's discussion about how people who are full-fed do not understand the revolutionary importance of hunger, and why our own political theorizing has drifted so far away from questions of material inequality.

The case of the BPP is especially useful for understanding the links between material and discursive politics because in this historical moment we are explicitly talking about bodies that have been racialized, in much more explicitly and deliberate ways than was Lucy Parson, through a complicated set of social processes; social processes that have occurred in US inner-city ghettos in dramatic and debilitating ways. The context of the BPP can serve to further complicate the question of bodies within particular historical-geographical materialist contexts, as does the success of their response to the contradictions of US capitalism. But, Elaine Brown went farther toward complicating these questions about bodies and the possibilities for emancipatory utopian politics when she said:

“The breakfast program represented the beginning of breakdown within the party ranks of the roles between men and women. You can believe me, there was resistance to this shit. Remember, revolutionaries are men they don’t cook breakfast...I would say that you could almost tag the discussion within the Party of gender to the breakfast program because food, cooking, kitchen come on, that’s all women, so for men, here you came in, you wanted to fire your gun and kill some pigs, kill some white people, whatever your thought was, and you ended up with a spoon in your hand and apron on, and serving some kids in the community.

You could have a thousand dialogues on gender issues and you would have never gotten that result faster than you did by saying look, if you love these children, if you love your people, you better get your ass up and start working in that breakfast program.”

Here, in Brown’s words, we can get start to get a better glimpse into why so many utopian political moments in the past have failed: they have tended to either focus on the material/structural politics at the heart of oppression, or more recently, exclusively on the discursive politics of repression, but rarely both.

Conclusions

At a time when many contemporary geographers engaging with social theory are striving to find new and innovative ways to understand the production urban space and urban bodies, I would suggest that the path lay not, at least initially, in inventing new metaphors. Instead the promise of emancipatory politics is more likely to be found first and foremost in taking a couple steps back, back to grounding the necessary factors of human existence, food, water, shelter, etc, in urban social space and from there understanding what *ought* to be done. Hunger, belief and political action are historically much more ingrained within the urban imaginary as a result of the visceral connections between ideology and emancipatory resistance to hegemony, especially hegemonic efforts that impede human survival. To believe that we have a right to eat when the otherwise powerful and capitalist elite waste so much requires endorsement by radical intellectuals and increased efforts on the part of those radical intellectuals to politically engage the social institutions that frame the status quo and produce hunger. We must take to the streets and not only talk about feeding the hungry, but indeed help feed the hungry ourselves; but feed the hungry in solidarity against those systemic contradictions that produce an uneven food system not under the banner of charity. We must do so not as civil servants or neoliberal subjects, but as revolutionaries that demand either an egalitarian system of government, or no central government at all. Thus, we must not simply play along with the reforming rhetoric of foodstamps, soup kitchens and breakfast for children programming (though all of these are crucial for an enormous segment of the US population), but

rather with bread and carrots in our clenched fists demand that people not be made to jump through the disciplining hoops of neoliberal and neoconservative capitalists alike, but that when they struggle for food, that they be fed. In so doing we might engage in a really radical geography that is capable of understanding what it will take to secure the most fundamental material necessities of life and political mobilization against those that would deny the fundamental material necessities of life.

FNB is one of the fastest growing radical social movement organizations in the world, with hundreds of autonomous chapters sharing food throughout North, Central and South America, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Australia. FNB has its immediate roots in the 1980s anti-nuclear movement, when Keith McHenry and C.T. Butler started the first FNB chapter in Boston. However, as a group that locates its grounding principles and tactics within long-running anarchistic traditions, its roots run much deeper. In addition to being one of the most vibrant anarchist groups in the US, FNB also represents the most contemporary face of radical anti-hunger politics that is centuries old in the city of Chicago and the US more broadly. Their anti-hunger politics though are only one dimension of a holistic political agenda that is committed to the philosophy of non-violence and believes that we must all work to eradicate racism, sexism, the class system, and authoritarianism if we are to remove aggression, violence and destruction from our everyday lives. They, as realized in their movement, seem to understand, at least partially, the need to focus on both the material and discursive nature of radical anti-hunger politics.

When I consider the Haymarket riots, while I am as curious as anybody as to who threw the bomb, perhaps with some twisted sense of class solidarity, I push myself to go deeper than thinking about the riot as primarily about class relations. Rather, I see that class relations were, and are, grounded in the everyday life of living human bodies, just as Black Power was grounded in the racial and gendered dynamics the Panthers. Fred Hampton's signature declaration, "You can kill a revolutionary, but you can't kill a revolution" is an idea steeped in the drama and trauma of oppression, exploitation, exclusion, hegemony, radical social change, and emancipatory politics of all kinds. But, it is also explicitly grounded in the material foundations of life, of shelter, of clothing, of access to health care and of hunger the hunger of so many.

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