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Away with All Teachers: the cultural politics of home schooling

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ABSTRACT In the United States and a number of nations, one of the most powerful dynamics of educational 'reform' involves the movement toward *home schooling*. The national media have spoken glowingly about it and the number of children being schooled at home is growing rapidly. In large part, this is stimulated by the circulation of anti-statist discourses and by the continuation and expansion of claims about school failure. In these accounts, the sources of educational problems are multiple: teacher education institutions produce teachers who are unprepared academically and unskilled in teaching the 'basics'; state funded (public, in the US sense of the word) schools have been taken over by 'progressive' models of teaching that are unworkable; these same schools do not teach 'traditional' cultural and religious knowledge, beliefs, and values; and public schools do not listen to conservative parents and are much too bureaucratic. Supporters of home schooling are usually religious fundamentalists who have increasing power in the USA and elsewhere. They have formed a national coalition and have joined in a tense rightist hegemonic alliance with neo-liberals and neo-conservatives, an alliance that seeks to reconstruct our common-sense about education and about all things social. The article shows how the movement toward home schooling has become more extensive and more dangerous than has usually been thought. In the process, home schooling is situated within the larger conservative and authoritarian populist ideological, religious, and social movements that provide much of its impetus. Connections are suggested with other protectionist impulses and connections are made to the history of and concerns about the growth of activist government. Finally, the article points to how it may actually hurt many other students who are not home schooled.

Introduction

If one of the marks of the growing acceptance of ideological changes is their positive presentation in the popular media, then home schooling has clearly found a place in our consciousness. It has been discussed in the national

press, on television and radio, and in widely circulated magazines. Its usual presentation is that of a savior, a truly compelling alternative to a public school system that is presented as a failure. While the presentation of public schools as simply failures is deeply problematic [1], it is the largely unqualified support of home schooling that concerns me here. I am considerably less sanguine.

Data on home schooling are not always accurate and are often difficult to compile. However, a sense of the extent of home schooling can be found in the fact that the National Home Education Research Institute has estimated that as of the 1997–98 school year, there were 1.5 million children being home schooled in the United States. The Institute also has suggested that there has been a growth of 15% annually in these numbers since 1990. While these data are produced by an organization that is one of the strongest supporters of home schooling, even given the possible inflation of these figures it is clear that this is a considerable number of students.[2]

In a relatively short article, I cannot deal at length with all of the many issues that could be raised about the home schooling movement. I want to ask a number of critical questions about the dangers associated with it. While it is quite probable that some specific children and families will gain from home schooling, my concerns are larger. They are connected to the more extensive restructuring of this society that I believe is quite dangerous and to the manner in which our very sense of public responsibility is withering in ways that will lead to even further social inequalities. In order to illuminate these dangers, I shall have to do a number of things: situate home schooling within the larger movement that provides much of its impetus; suggest its connections with other protectionist impulses; connect it to the history of and concerns about the growth of activist government; and, finally, point to how it may actually hurt many other students who are not home schooled.

At the very outset of this article, let me state as clearly as I can that any parents who care so much about the educational experiences of their children that they actively seek to be deeply involved are to be applauded, not chastised or simply dismissed. Let me also say that it is important not to stereotype individuals who reject public schooling [3] as unthinking promoters of ideological forms that are so deeply threatening that they are – automatically – to be seen as beyond the pale of legitimate concerns. Indeed, as I have demonstrated in *Cultural Politics and Education* (Apple, 1996), there are complicated reasons behind the growth of anti-school sentiments. As I showed there, there are elements of 'good' sense as well as bad 'sense' in such beliefs. All too many school systems *are* overly bureaucratic, are apt not to listen carefully to parents' or community concerns, or act in overly defensive ways when questions are asked about what and whose knowledge is considered 'official'. In some ways, these kinds of criticisms are similar across the political spectrum, with both left and right often making similar claims about the politics of recognition (see Fraser, 1997). Indeed, these very kinds of criticisms have led many progressive and activist educators to build more

community-based and responsive models of curriculum and teaching in public schools (Apple & Beane, 1995, 1999).

This said, however, it is still important to realize that while the intentions of critics such as home schoolers may be meritorious, the effects of their actions may be less so.

While there are many home schoolers who have not made their decision based on religious convictions, a large proportion have (see Detwiler, 1999; Ray, 1999). In this essay, I shall focus largely on this group, in part because it constitutes some of the most committed parents and in part because ideologically it raises a number of important issues.

Many home schoolers are guided by what they believe are biblical understandings of the family, gender relationships, legitimate knowledge, the importance of 'tradition', the role of government, and the economy (Kintz, 1997; Detwiler, 1999).[4] They constitute part of what I have called the 'conservative restoration' in which a tense alliance has been built among various segments of 'the public' in favor of particular policies in education and the larger social world. Let me place this in its larger context.

Education and Conservative Modernization

Long lasting educational transformations often come not from the work of educators and researchers, but from larger social movements which tend to push our major political, economic, and cultural institutions in specific directions. Thus, it would be impossible to fully understand educational reforms over the past decades without situating them within, say, the long struggles by multiple communities of color and women for both cultural recognition and economic redistribution (see, e.g., Fraser, 1997). Even such taken for granted things as state textbook adoption policies – among the most powerful mechanisms in the processes of defining 'official knowledge' – are the results of widespread populist and anti-northern movements and especially the class and race struggles over culture and power that organized and re-organized the polity in the United States a century ago (Apple, 2000).

It should, then, come as no surprise that education is again witnessing the continued emergence and growing influence of powerful social movements. Some of these may lead to increased democratization and greater equality, while others are based on a fundamental shift in the very meanings of democracy and equality and are more than a little retrogressive socially and culturally. Unfortunately, it is the latter that have emerged as the most powerful.

The rightward turn has been the result of years of well-funded and creative ideological efforts by the right to form a broad-based coalition. This new alliance, what is technically called a 'new hegemonic bloc,' has been so successful in part because it has been able to make major inroads in the battle over common sense.[5] That is, it has creatively stitched together different social tendencies and commitments and has organized them under its own

general leadership in issues dealing with welfare, culture, the economy, and as many of you know from personal experience, education. Its aim in educational and social policy might best be described as 'conservative modernization' (Dale, 1989). In the process, democracy has been reduced to consumption practices. Citizenship has been reduced to possessive individualism. And a politics based on resentment and a fear of the 'Other' has been pressed forward.

There are a number of major elements within this new alliance (see Apple, 1996, for more detailed discussion). The first, *neo-liberals*, represent dominant economic and political elites who are intent on 'modernizing' the economy and the institutions connected to it. They are certain that markets and consumer choice will solve all of 'our' social problems, since private is necessarily good and public is necessarily bad – hence, their strong support of vouchers and privatized choice plans. While there is clear empirical evidence about the very real inequalities that are created by such educational policies (Whitty et al, 1998; Lauder & Hughes, 1999), this group is usually in leadership of the alliance. If we think of this new bloc as an ideological umbrella, neo-liberals are holding the umbrella's handle.

The second group, *neo-conservatives*, are economic and cultural conservatives who want a return to 'high standards,' discipline, 'real' knowledge, and what is in essence a form of Social Darwinist competition. They are fueled by a nostalgic and quite romanticized vision of the past. It is often based on a fundamental misrecognition of the fact that what they might call the classics and 'real' knowledge gained that status as the result of intense past conflicts and often were themselves seen as equally dangerous culturally and just as morally destabilizing as any of the new elements of the curriculum and culture they now castigate (Levine, 1996).

The third element is made up of largely White working class and middle class groups who mistrust the state and are concerned with security, the family, gender and age relations within the home, sexuality, and traditional and fundamentalist religious values and knowledge. They form an increasingly active segment of *authoritarian populists* who are powerful in education and in other areas of politics and social and cultural policy. They provide much of the support from below for neo-liberal and neo-conservative positions, since they see themselves as disenfranchised by the 'secular humanism' that supposedly now pervades public schooling. They are also often among those larger numbers of people whose very economic livelihoods are most at stake in the economic restructuring and capital flight that we are now experiencing.

Many home schoolers combine beliefs from all three of these tendencies; but it is the last one which seems to drive a large portion of the movement (Kintz, 1997; Detwiler, 1999).

Satan's Threat

For many on the right, one of the key enemies is public education. Secular education is turning our children into 'aliens' and, by teaching them to question our ideas, is turning them against us. What are often accurate concerns about public schooling that I noted earlier – its overly bureaucratic nature, its lack of curriculum coherence, its disconnection from the lives, hopes, and cultures of many of its communities, and more – are here often connected to more deep-seated and intimate worries. These worries echo Elaine Pagels's argument that Christianity has historically defined its most fearful satanic threats not from distant enemies, but in relation to very intimate ones (Pagels, 1995). 'The most dangerous characteristic of the satanic enemy is that though he will look just like us, he will nevertheless have changed completely' (quoted in Kintz, 1997, p. 73).

Some of the roots of this can be found much earlier in the conservative activist Beverly LaHaye's call for the founding of an organization to counter the rising tide of feminism. In support of Concerned Women of America, she spoke of her concern for family, nation, and religion:

> *I sincerely believe that God is calling the Christian women of America to draw together in a spirit of unity and purpose to protect the rights of the family. I believe that it is time for us to set aside our doctrinal differences to work for a spiritually renewed America. Who but a woman is as deeply concerned about her children and her home? Who but a woman has the time, the intuition, and the drive to restore our nation? … They may call themselves feminists or humanists. The label makes little difference, because many of them are seeking the destruction of morality and human freedom. (quoted in Kintz, 1997, p. 80)*

It is clear from the above quote what is seen as the satanic threat and what is at stake here. These fears about the nation, home, family, children's 'innocence', religious values, and traditional views of gender relations are sutured together into a more general fear of the destruction of a moral compass and personal freedom. 'Our' world is disintegrating around us. Its causes are not the economically destructive policies of the globalizing economy (Greider, 1997), not the decisions of an economic elite, and not the ways in which, say, our kind of economy turns *all* things – including cherished traditions (and even our children) [6] into commodities for sale. Rather the causes are transferred onto those institutions and people which are themselves being constantly buffeted by the same forces – public sector institutions, schooling, poor people of color, other women who have struggled for centuries to build a society that is more responsive to the hopes and dreams of many people who have been denied participation in the public sphere, and so on.[7]

As I noted at the beginning of this article, however, it is important not to stereotype individuals involved in this movement. For example, a number of men and women who are activists in rightist movements believe that some

elements of feminism did improve the conditions of women overall. By focusing on equal pay for equal work and opening up jobs opportunities that had been traditionally denied to women who had to work for pay, women activists had benefitted many people. However, for authoritarian populists, feminism and secular institutions in general still tend to break with God's law. They are much too individualistic and misinterpret the divine relationship between families and God. In so doing, many aspects of civil rights legislation, of the public schools' curricula, and so many other parts of secular society are simply wrong. Thus, for example, if one views the Constitution of the United States literally as divinely inspired, then it is not public institutions but the traditional family – as God's chosen unit – that is the core social unit that must be protected by the Constitution (Kintz, 1997, p. 97). In a time of seeming cultural disintegration, when traditions are under threat and when the idealized family faces ever more externally produced dangers, protecting our families and our children are key elements in returning to God's grace.[8]

Even without these religious elements, a defensive posture is clear in much of the movement. In many ways, the movement toward home schooling mirrors the growth of privatized consciousness in other areas of society. It is an extension of the 'suburbanization' of everyday life that is so evident all around us. In essence, it is the equivalent of gated communities and of the privatization of neighborhoods, recreation, parks, and so many other things. It provides a 'security zone' both physically and ideologically. Linda Kintz describes it this way:

> *As citizens worried about crime, taxes, poor municipal services, and poor schools abandon cities, the increasing popularity of gated communities, … fortress communities, reflects people's desire to retreat …They want to spend more of their tax dollars on themselves instead of others … Further, they take comfort in the social homogeneity of such communities, knowing that their neighbors act and think much as they do. (Kintz, 1997, p. 107)*

This 'cocooning' is not just about seeking an escape from the problems of the 'city' (a metaphor for danger and heterogeneity). It is a rejection of the entire *idea* of the city. Cultural and intellectual diversity, complexity, ambiguity, uncertainly, and proximity to 'the Other,' all these are to be shunned (Kintz, 1997, p. 107). In place of the 'city' is the engineered pastoral, the neat and well-planned universe where things (and people) are in their 'rightful place' and reality is safe and predictable.

Yet in so many ways such a movement mirrors something else. It is a microcosm of the increasing segmentation of American society in general. As we move to a society segregated by residence, race, economic opportunity, and income, 'purity' is increasingly more apt to be found in the fact that upper classes send their children to elite private schools; where neighborliness is determined by property values; where evangelical Christians, ultra-

orthodox Jews, and others only interact with each other and their children are schooled in private religious schools or schooled at home (Kintz, 1997, p. 108). A world free of conflict, uncertainty, the voice and culture of the Other – in a word I used before, cocooning – is the ideal.[9]

Home schooling, thus, has many similarities with the Internet. It enables the creation of 'virtual communities' which are perfect for those with specialized interests. It gives individuals a new ability to 'personalize' information, to choose what they want to know or what they find personally interesting. However, as many commentators are beginning to recognize, unless we are extremely cautious, 'customizing our lives' could radically undermine the strength of local communities, many of which are already woefully weak. As Andrew Shapiro puts it:

> *Shared experience is an indisputably essential ingredient [in the formation of local communities]; without it there can be no chance for mutual understanding, empathy and social cohesion. And this is precisely what personalization threatens to delete. A lack of common information would deprive individuals of a starting point for democratic dialogue. (Shapiro, 1999, p. 12)*

Even with the evident shortcomings of many public schools, at the very least they provide 'a kind of social glue, a common cultural reference point in our polyglot, increasingly multicultural society' (Shapiro, 1999, p. 12). Yet, whether called personalizing or cocooning, it is exactly this common reference point that is rejected by many within the home schooling movement's pursuit of 'freedom' and 'choice'.

This particular construction of the meaning of freedom is of considerable moment, since there is a curious contradiction within such conservatism's obsession with freedom. In many ways this emphasis on freedom is, paradoxically, based on a *fear* of freedom (Kintz, 1997, p. 168). It is valued, but also loathed as a site of danger, of 'a world out of control'. Many home schoolers reject public schooling out of concern for equal time for their beliefs. They want 'equality'. Yet it is a specific vision of equality, because coupled with their fear of things out of control is a powerful anxiety that the nation's usual understanding of equality will produce uniformity (Kintz, 1997, p. 186). But this feared uniformity is not seen as the same as the religious and cultural homogeneity sponsored by the conservative project. It is a very different type of uniformity – one in which the fear that 'we are all the same' actually speaks to a loss of religious particularity. Thus, again there is another paradox at the heart of this movement: we want everyone to be like 'us' (this is a 'Christian nation'; governments must bow before 'a higher authority') (Smith, 1998); but we want the right to be different – a difference based on being God's elect group. Uniformity weakens our specialness. This tension between knowing one is a member of God's elect people and thus by definition different and also so certain that one is correct that the world needs to be changed to fit one's image is one of the central paradoxes behind

authoritarian populist impulses. For some home schoolers, the paradox is solved by withdrawal of one's children from the public sphere in order to maintain their difference. And for still others, this allows them to prepare themselves and their children with an armor of Christian beliefs that will enable them to go forth into the world later on to bring God's word to the those who are not among the elect. Once again, let us declare our particularity, our difference, in order to better prepare ourselves to bring the unanointed world to our set of uniform beliefs.

Attacking the State

At the base of this fear both of the loss of specialness and of becoming uniform in the 'wrong way' is a sense that the state is intervening in our daily lives in quite powerful ways, ways that are causing even more losses. It is not possible to understand the growth of home schooling unless we connect it to the history of the attack on the public sphere in general and on the government (the state) in particular. In order to better comprehend the anti-statist impulses that lie behind a good deal of the home schooling movement, I need to place these impulses in a longer historical and social context. Some history and theory is necessary here.

One of the keys to this is the development of what Clarke & Newman have called the 'managerial state' (Clarke & Newman, 1997). This was an active state that combined bureaucratic administration and professionalism. The organization of the state centered around the application of specific rules of coordination. Routinization and predictability are among the hallmarks of such a state. This was to be coupled with a second desirable trait, that of social, political, and personal neutrality, rather than nepotism and favoritism. This bureaucratic routinization and predictability would be balanced by an emphasis on professional discretion. Here, bureaucratically regulated professionals such as teachers and administrators would still have an element of irreducible autonomy based on their training and qualifications. Their skills and judgement were to be trusted, if they acted fairly and impartially. Yet fairness and impartiality were not enough; the professional also personalized the managerial state. Professionals such as teachers made the state 'approachable' by not only signifying neutrality but by acting in non-anonymous ways to foster the 'public good' and to 'help' individuals and families (Clarke & Newman, 1997, pp. 5–7).

Of course, such bureaucratic and professional norms were there not only to benefit 'clients.' They acted to protect the state, by providing it with legitimacy. (The state is impartial, fair, and acts in the interests of everyone.) They also served to insulate professional judgements from critical scrutiny. (As holders of expert knowledge, we – teachers, social workers, state employees – are the ones who are to be trusted since we know best.)

Thus, from the end of World War II until approximately the mid-1970s, there was a 'settlement,' a compromise, in which an activist welfare

state was seen as legitimate. It was sustained by a triple legitimacy. There was (largely) bi-partisan support for the state to provide and manage a larger part of social life, a fact that often put it above a good deal of party politics. Bureaucratic administration promised to act impartially for the benefit of everyone. And professionals employed by the state, such as teachers and other educators, were there to apply expert knowledge to serve the public (Clarke & Newman, 1997, p. 8). This compromise was widely accepted and provided public schools and other public institutions with a strong measure of support since by and large the vast majority of people continued to believe that schools and other state agencies did in fact act professionally and impartially in the public good.

This compromise came under severe attack, as the fiscal crisis deepened and as competition over scarce economic, political, and cultural resources grew more heated in the 1970s and beyond. The political forces of conservative movements used this crisis, often in quite cynical and manipulative – and well-funded – ways. The state was criticized for denying the opportunity for consumers to exercise choice. The welfare state was seen as gouging the citizen (as a taxpayer) to pay for public handouts for those who ignored personal responsibility for their actions. These 'scroungers' from the underclass were seen as sexually promiscuous, immoral, and lazy as opposed to the 'rest of us' who were hard-working, industrious, and moral. They supposedly are a drain on all of us economically and state sponsored support of them leads to the collapse of the family and traditional morality (Apple, 2000). These arguments may not have been totally accurate (see, for example, Fine & Weis, 1998), but they were effective.

This suturing together of neo-liberal and neo-conservative attacks led to a particular set of critiques against the state. For many people, the state was no longer the legitimate and neutral upholder of the public good. Instead the welfare state was an active agent of national decline, as well as an economic drain on the country's (and the family's) resources. In the words of Clarke & Newman:

> *Bureaucrats were identified as actively hostile to the public – hiding behind the impersonality of regulations and 'red tape' to deny choice, building bureaucratic empires at the expense of providing service, and insulated from the 'real world' pressures of competition by their monopolistic position. Professionals were arraigned as motivated by self-interest, exercising power over would-be customers, denying choice through the dubious claim that 'professionals know best.' Worse still, … liberalism … was viewed as undermining personal responsibility and family authority and as prone to trendy excesses such as egalitarianism, anti-discrimination policies, moral relativism or child-centeredness. (Clarke & Newman 1997, p. 15)*

These moral, political, and economic concerns were easily transferred to public schooling, since for many people the school was and is the public

institution closest to them in their daily life. Hence, public schooling and the teaching and curricula found within it became central targets of attack. Curricula and teachers were not impartial, but elitist. School systems were imposing the Other's morality on 'us'. And 'real Americans' who were patriotic, religious, and moral – as opposed to everyone else – were suffering and were the new oppressed (Delfattore, 1992). While this position fits into a long history of the paranoid style of American cultural politics and it was often based on quite inaccurate stereotypes, it does point to a profound sense of alienation that many people feel.

Much of this anti-statism of course was fueled by the constant attention given in the media and in public pronouncements to 'incompetent' teachers who are over-paid and have short working days and long vacations.[10] We should not minimize the effects of the conservative attacks on schools for their supposed inefficiency, wasting of financial resources, and lack of connection to the economy. After years of well-orchestrated attacks, it would be extremely odd if one did not find that the effects on popular consciousness were real. The fact that a number of these criticisms may be *partly* accurate should not be dismissed. There undoubtedly is a small group of teachers who treat teaching as simply a job that gives them many holidays and free time in the summer. Administrative costs and bureaucratic requirements in schools have risen. Parents and local communities do have a justifiable right to worry about whether their daughters and sons will have decent jobs when they leave school, especially in a time when our supposedly booming economy has left millions of people behind and many of the jobs being created are anything but fulfilling and secure (Apple, 1996). (The fact that the school has very little to do with this is important.)

Yet, it is not only worries about teachers that fuel this movement. As I point out in my forthcoming book, *Educating the 'Right' Way* (Apple, in press), public schools themselves are seen as extremely dangerous places. These schools were institutions that threatened one's very soul. Temptations and Godlessness were everywhere within them. God's truths were expunged from the curriculum and God's voice could no longer be heard. Prayers were now illegal and all of the activities that bound my life to scriptural realities were seen as deviant.

Even with the negative powerful emotions that such senses of loss and disconnection create, an additional element has entered into the emotional economy being created here with a crushing force. For an increasingly large number of parents, public schools are now seen as threatening in an even more powerful way. They are dangerous bodily; that is, they are seen as filled with physical dangers to the very life of one's children. The spate of shootings in schools in the United States has had a major impact on the feelings of insecurity that parents have about their children. Stories of violence-ridden schools, one's that were worrisome but were seen as largely an 'urban problem' involving the poor and children of color, were already creating an anti-public school sentiment among many conservative parents. The horrors

of seeing students shoot other students, and now not in those supposedly troubled urban schools but in the suburban areas that had grown after people fled the city, exacerbated the situation. If even the schools of affluent suburbia were sites of danger, then the *only* remaining safe haven was the fortress home.[11]

Fears, no matter how powerful they are or whether they are justified or not, are not enough, however. That a person will act on her or his fears is made more or less probable by the availability of resources to support taking action. It is an almost taken for granted point, but important nonetheless, that the growth of home schooling has been stimulated by the wider accessibility to tools that make it easier for parents to engage in it. Among the most important is the Internet (see Bromley & Apple, 1998). There are scores of websites available that give advice, that provide technical and emotional support, that tell the stories of successful home schoolers, and that are more than willing to sell material at a profit. The fact that, like the conservative evangelical movement in general (Smith, 1998), a larger portion of home schoolers than before seem to have the economic resources to afford computers means that economic capital can be mobilized in anti-school strategies in more flexible and dynamic ways than in earlier periods of the home schooling movement.

Since home schooling is often done using the web, it is useful to see what some of the sites say. The Teaching Home, based in Portland, Oregon, is one of the central resources for conservative Christians who wish to home school.[12] On its website, after the following general statement on the question 'Why do families home school?' a number of answers are given:

> *Many Christian parents are committed to educating their children at home because of their conviction that this is God's will for their family. They are concerned for the spiritual training and character development as well as the social and academic welfare of their children.*

Among the advantages listed are:

> *Parents can present all academic subjects from a biblical perspective and include spiritual training.*
>
> *'The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding' (Proverbs, 9:10 NAS).*
>
> *Home schooling makes quality time available to train and influence children in all areas in an integrated way.*
>
> *Each child receives individual attention and has his unique needs met.*
>
> *Parents can control destructive influences such as various temptations, false teachings (including secular humanism and occult influences of the New Age movement), negative peer pressure, and unsafe environments.*

Children gain respect for their parents as teachers.

The family experiences unity, closeness, and mutual enjoyment of one another as they spend more time working together.

Children develop confidence and independent thinking away from the peer pressure to conform and in the security of their own home.

Children have time to explore new interests and to think.

Communication between different age groups is enhanced.

Tutorial-style education helps each child achieve his full educational potential.

Flexible scheduling can accommodate parents' work and vacation times and allow time for many activities.

This list is broader than might be allowed in some of the stereotypes of what home schooling advocates – particularly religiously conservative ones – are like. There is a focus on wanting their children to explore, to achieve their full academic potential, to have 'his' needs met. Yet, in this diverse list of advantages, certain themes come to the fore. At the top is biblical authority, with knowledge and understanding connected with 'fear of the LORD'. 'Real' knowledge is grounded in what the Holy One has ordained. The role of the parent is largely one of 'training', of influencing one's children in all areas so that they are safe from the outside influences of a secular society. God/home/family is pure; the rest of the world – secular humanism, peers, popular culture – are forms of pollution, temptations, dangers. That the male pronoun is used throughout is indicative of God's wish for the man of the house to be God's chosen leader (Kintz, 1997).

Yet, saying these things must not be used as an excuse to deny the elements of concern that parents such as these express. They are *deeply* worried about the lives and futures of their children, children they are fully willing to sacrifice an immense amount for. They do want there to be a caring environment for their children, one in which all family members respect and care for each other. There are powerful positive moments in these statements. In a time when many groups of varying religious and political sentiments express the concern that children are ignored in this society, that they are simply seen as present and future consumers by people who only care whether a profit is made off of them, that our major institutions are less responsive than they should be, and that there are elements of popular culture that are negative as well as positive – all of these sentiments are central to the concerns of home schoolers as well.

Given what I have just said, we do need to recognize that there are elements of good sense in the critique of the state made by both the left and the right, such as the home schoolers I have discussed above. The

government has assumed all too often that the only true holders of expertise in education, social welfare, etc. are those in positions of formal authority. This has led to a situation of over-bureaucratization. It has also led to the state being partly 'colonized' by a particular fraction of the new middle class that seeks to ensure its own mobility and its own positions by employing the state for its own purposes (Bourdieu, 1996). Some schools have become sites of danger given the levels of alienation and meaningless – and the dominance of violence as an 'imaginary solution' in the 'popular' media. However, there is a world of difference between, say, acknowledging that there are some historical tendencies within the state to become overly bureaucratic and to not listen carefully enough to the expressed needs of the people it is supposed to serve and a blanket rejection of public control and public institutions such as schools. This has not only led to cocooning, but it threatens the gains made by large groups of disadvantaged people for whom the possible destruction of public schooling is nothing short of a disaster. The final section of my analysis turns to a discussion of this.

Public and Private

We need to think *relationally* when we ask who will be the major beneficiaries of the attack on the state and the movement toward home schooling. What if gains that are made by one group of people come at the expense of other, even more culturally and economically oppressed groups? As we shall see, this is not an inconsequential worry in this instance.

A distinction that is helpful here is that between a politics of redistribution and a politics of recognition. In the first (redistribution), the concern is for socioeconomic injustice. Here, the political-economic system of a society creates conditions that lead to exploitation (having the fruits of your labor appropriated for the benefit of others), and/or economic marginalization (having one's paid work confined to poorly paid and undesirable jobs or having no real access to the routes to serious and better paying jobs), and/or deprivation (being constantly denied the material that would lead to an adequate standard of living). All of these socioeconomic injustices lead to arguments about whether this is a just or fair society and whether identifiable groups of people actually have equality of resources (Fraser, 1997, p. 13).

The second dynamic (recognition) is often related to redistribution in the real world, but it has its own specific history and differential power relations as well. It is related to the politics of culture and symbols. In this case, injustice is rooted in a society's social patterns of representation and interpretation. Examples of this include cultural domination (being constantly subjected to patterns of interpretation or cultural representation that are alien to one's own or even hostile to it), nonrecognition (basically being rendered invisible in the dominant cultural forms in the society), and disrespect (having oneself routinely stereotyped or maligned in public

representations in the media, schools, government policies, or in everyday conduct (Fraser, 1997, p. 14). These kinds of issues surrounding the politics of recognition are central to the identities and sense of injustice of many home schoolers. Indeed, they provide the organizing framework for their critique of public schooling and their demand that they be allowed to teach their children outside of such state control.

While both forms of injustice are important, it is absolutely crucial that we recognize that an adequate response to one must not lead to the exacerbation of the other. That is, responding to the claims of injustice in recognition by one group (say religious conservatives) must not make the conditions that lead to exploitation, economic marginalization, and deprivation more likely to occur for other groups. Unfortunately, this may be the case for some of the latent effects of home schooling.

Because of this, it is vitally important not to separate out the possible effects of home schooling from what we are beginning to know about the possible consequences of neo-liberal policies in general in education. As Whitty et al have shown in their review of the international research on voucher and choice plans, one of the latent effects of such policies has been the reproduction of traditional hierarchies of class and race. That is, the programs clearly have differential benefits in which those who already possess economic and cultural capital reap significantly more benefits than those who do not. This is patterned in very much the same ways as the stratification of economic, political, and cultural power produces inequalities in nearly every socioeconomic sphere (Whitty et al, 1998). One of the hidden consequences that is emerging from the expanding conservative critique of public institutions, including schools, is a growing anti-tax movement in which those who have chosen to place their children in privatized, marketized, and home schools do not want to pay taxes to support the schooling of 'the Other' (Apple, 1996).

The wider results of this are becoming clear – a declining tax base for schooling, social services, health care, housing, and anything 'public' for those populations (usually in the most economically depressed urban and rural areas) who suffer the most from the economic dislocations and inequalities that so deeply characterize this nation. Thus, a politics of recognition – I want to guarantee 'choice' for my children based on my identity and special needs – has begun to have extremely negative effects on the politics of redistribution. It is absolutely crucial that we recognize this. If it is the case that the emergence of educational markets has consistently benefitted the most advantaged parents and students and has consistently disadvantaged both economically poor parents and students and parents and students of color (Whitty et al, 1998; Lauder & Hughes, 1999), then we need to critically examine the latent effects of the growth of home schooling in the same light. Will it be the case that social justice loses in this equation just as it did and does in many of the other highly publicized programs of 'choice'?

We now have emerging evidence to this effect, evidence that points to the fact that social justice often does lose with the expansion of home schooling in some states. A case in point is the way in which the ongoing debate over the use of public money for religious purposes in education is often subverted through manipulation of loop-holes that are only available to particular groups. Religiously motivated home schoolers are currently engaged in exploiting public funding in ways that are not only hidden, but in ways that raise serious questions about the drain on economic resources during a time of severe budget crises in all too many school districts.

Let me say more about this, since it provides an important instance of my argument that gains in recognition for some groups (say, home schoolers) can have decidedly negative effects in other spheres such as the politics of redistribution. In California, for example, charter schools have been used as a mechanism to gain public money for home schoolers. Charter school legislation in California has been employed in very 'interesting' ways to accomplish this. In one recent study, for example, 50% of charter schools were serving home schoolers. 'Independent study' charter schools (a creative pseudonym for computer-linked home schooling) have been used by both school districts and parents to gain money that otherwise might not have been available. While this does demonstrate the ability of school districts to strategically use charter school legislation to get money that might have been lost when parents withdraw their children to home school them, it also signifies something else. In this and other cases, the money given to parents for enrolling in such independent study charter schools was used by the parents to purchase religious material produced and sold by Bob Jones University, one of the most conservative religious schools in the entire nation (Wells, 1999).

Thus, public money not legally available for overtly sectarian material is used to purchase religious curricula under the auspices of charter school legislation. Yet unlike all curricula used in public schools which *must* be publicly accountable in terms of its content and costs, the material purchased for home schooling has no public accountability whatsoever. While this does give greater choice to home schoolers and does enable them to act on a politics of recognition, it not only takes money away from other students who do not have the economic resources to afford computers in the home, but it denies them a say in what the community's children will learn about the themselves and their cultures, histories, values, and so on. Given the fact that a number of textbooks used in fundamentalist religious schools expressly state such things as Islam is a false religion and embody similar claims that many citizens would find deeply offensive [13], it does raise serious questions about whether it is appropriate for public money to be used to teach such content without any public accountability.

Thus, two things are going on here. Money is being drained from already hard-pressed school districts to support home schooling. Just as importantly, curricular materials that support the identities of religiously

motivated groups are being paid for by the public *without* any accountability, even though these materials may act in such a way as to deny the claims for recognition of one of the fastest growing religions in the nation, Islam. This raises more general and quite serious issues about how the claims for recognition by religious conservatives can be financially supported when they may at times actually support discriminatory teaching.

I do not wish to be totally negative here. After all, this is a complicated issue in which there may be justifiable worries among home schoolers that their culture and values are not being listened to. But it must be openly discussed, not lost in the simple statement that we should support a politics of recognition of religiously motivated home schoolers because their culture seems to them to be not sufficiently recognized in public institutions. At the very least, the possible dangers to the public good need to be recognized.

Conclusion

I have used this essay to raise a number of critical questions about the economic, social, and ideological tendencies that often stand behind significant parts of the home schooling movement. In the process, I have situated it within larger social movements that I and many others believe can have quite negative effects on our sense of community, on the health of the public sphere, and on our commitment to building a society that is less economically and racially stratified. I have suggested that issues need to be raised about the effects of its commitment to 'cocooning', its attack on the state, and its growing use of public funding with no public accountability. Yet, I have also argued that there are clear elements of good sense in its criticisms of the bureaucratic nature of all too many of our institutions, in its worries about the managerial state, and in its devotion to being active in the education of its children.

In my mind, the task is to disentangle the elements of good sense evident in these concerns from the selfish and anti-public agenda that has been pushing concerned parents and community members into the arms of the conservative restoration. The task of public schools is to listen much more carefully to the complaints of parents such as these and to rebuild our institutions in much more responsive ways. As I have argued in much greater detail elsewhere, all too often public schools push concerned parents who are not originally part of conservative cultural and political movements into the arms of such alliances by their defensiveness and lack of responsiveness and by their silencing of democratic discussion and criticism (Apple, 1996). Of course, sometimes these criticisms are unjustified or are politically motivated by undemocratic agendas (Apple, 1999). However, this must not serve as an excuse for a failure to open the doors of our schools to the intense public debate that makes public education a living and vital part of our democracy.

We have models for doing exactly that, as the democratic schools movement demonstrates (Apple & Beane, 1995, 1999). While I do not want

to be overly romantic here, there *are* models of curricula and teaching that are related to community sentiment, that are committed to social justice and fairness, and that are based in schools where both teachers and students want to be. If schools do not do this, there may be all too many parents who are pushed in the direction of anti-school sentiment. This would be a tragedy both for the public school system and for our already withered sense of community that is increasingly under threat. Even though state-supported schools have often served as arenas through which powerful social divisions are partly reproduced, at least in the United States such schools have also served as powerful sites for the mobilization of collective action and for the preservation of the very possibility of democratic struggle (Hogan, 1983; Reese, 1986). As one of the few remaining institutions that *is* still public, struggles over it are crucial. This is obviously a tightrope we need to negotiate. How do we uphold the vision of a truly public institution at the same time as we rigorously criticize its functioning? In the United States, this is one of the tasks that the critical educators involved in *Democratic Schools* and the National Coalition of Education Activists have set for themselves (Apple & Beane, 1995, 1999).[14] They have recognized that schools have contradictory impulses and pressures upon them, especially in a time of conservative modernization. It is not romantic to actively work on and through those contradictions so that the collective memory of earlier and partly successful struggles is not lost. Nor is it romantic to engage in what I have called elsewhere 'non-reformist reforms,' reforms whose aim is to expand the space of counter-hegemonic action in public institutions (Apple, 1995). Yet, in order to do this, it is necessary to defend the public nature of such public spaces.

Raymond Williams may have expressed it best when – positioning himself as an optimist without any illusions – he reminded us of the importance of the *mutual* determination of the meanings and values that should guide our social life. In expressing his commitment toward 'the long revolution', his words are worth remembering. 'We must speak for hope, as long as it doesn't mean suppressing the nature of the danger' (Williams, 1989, p. 322). There are identifiable dangers to identifiable groups of people in public schooling as we know it. But the privatizing alternatives may be much worse.

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Notes

[1] It is important that we remember that public schools were and are a victory. They constituted a gain for the majority of people who were denied access to advancement and to valued cultural capital in a stratified society. This is not to claim that the public school did not and does not have differential effects. Indeed, I have devoted many books to uncovering the connections between formal education and the recreation of inequalities (see, for example, Apple, 1990, 1995). Rather, it is to say that public schooling is a site of conflict, but one that also has been a site of major victories by popular groups (Reese, 1986). Indeed, conservatives would not be so angry at schools if public schools has not had a number of progressive tendencies cemented in them.

[2] For further information on the National Home Education Research Institute and on its data on home schooling, see the following website: <http://www.nheri.org>

[3] In the United States, the term 'public' schooling refers only to those schools that are organized, funded, and controlled by the state. All other schools are considered 'private' or 'religious'.

[4] In part, the attractiveness of home schooling among religiously motivated parents is also due to a structural difference between schools in the United States and those in many other nations. Historically, although at times mythical, the separation between state-supported schooling and an officially defined state religion has been a distinctive feature of education here. Thus, the absence of religious instruction in schools has been a source of tension among many groups and has generated even more anti-school sentiment (see Nord ,1995). I have discussed some of the history of the growth of conservative evangelical movements and their relationships with anti-school sentiment in Apple (in press).

[5] I have demonstrated the success of this movement both historically and empirically elsewhere. See Apple (2000) and Apple (1996). For a history of the tensions surrounding the forces of conservative modernization specifically in the United States, see Foner (1998).

[6] I am thinking here of Channel One, the for-profit commercial television show that is in an increasingly large percentage of our middle and secondary schools. In this 'reform,' students are sold as a captive audience to corporations intent on marketing their products to our children in schools. See Apple (2000) and Molnar (1996).

[7] Of course, the very distinction between 'public' and 'private' spheres has strong connections to the history of patriarchal assumptions. See Fraser (1989).

[8] This is a *particular* construction of the family. As Coontz (1992) has shown in her history of the family in the United States, it has had a very varied form, with the nuclear family that is so important to conservative formulations merely being one of many.

[9] Of course, it is important to realize that there may be good reasons for some groups to engage in cocooning. Take the example of indigenous or colonized groups. Given the destruction of cultures (and bodies) of oppressed peoples, it is clear that for many of them a form of cocooning is one of the only ways in which cultures and languages can be preserved. Since dominant groups already have cultural and economic power, the relative lack of such power by oppressed peoples creates protective needs. Thus, in cases such as this, cocooning may have a more positive valance.

[10] Anti-teacher discourse has a long history, especially in the United States. It was often employed to legitimate centralized and standardized curricula and centralizing decision-making about textbooks within the state. See, for example, my discussion of the growth of state textbook adoption policies in Apple (2000).

[11] There have a number of highly publicized shootings in schools in the past few years in the United States. The most well known occurred in Columbine High School in a relatively affluent community in Colorado in which two alienated students killed a teacher and 12 other students and also planted pipe bombs throughout the building. This followed upon other shootings in suburban schools. In a recent instance in a suburban but much less affluent community in Michigan, a six-year-old boy killed a six-year-old girl classmate after an altercation on the playground. The threat of violence is now seen as a very real possibility in schools throughout the United States.

[12] This and other similar material can be found at the following website address for The Teaching Home. See <http://www.teachinghome.com/qa/why/htm>.

[13] See Moshe Re'em (1998) for an interesting analysis of some of this content.

[14] One of the best places to turn for an understanding of the more progressive movements surrounding education and social justice in public schools in the United States is the fast-growing newspaper *Rethinking Schools*. It represents one of the most articulate outlets for critical discussions of educational policy and practice in the country and brings together multiple activist voices: teachers, community activists, parents, academics, students, and others. It can be contacted at *Rethinking Schools*, 1001 E. Keefe Avenue, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53212, USA or via its website at www.rethinkingschools.org

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