

Critical Pedagogy in the Age of Authoritarianism: Challenges and Possibilities

Pedagogía Crítica en la Era del Autoritarismo: Desafíos y Posibilidades

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Abstract: The discourse of authoritarianism and the echoes of a fascist past resurface. In this context, higher education, beyond favoring practices of freedom, has become an instrumentalized institution in order to reproduce and legitimize dynamics of domination. This article questions this reactionary form of educational and pedagogical action, particularly in its neoliberal version. At the same time, it explores how education can provide the theoretical and practical foundations to rethink its own purpose, together with the very nature of politics. In this sense, this article proposes that education and politics are completely inseparable dimensions.

Keywords: critical pedagogy, authoritarianism, fascist policies, public intellectuals, willful ignorance, political pedagogy.

Resumen: El discurso del autoritarismo y los ecos de un pasado fascista vuelven a resurgir. En este contexto, la educación superior, más allá de favorecer prácticas de libertad, se ha transformado en una institución instrumentalizada en pos de reproducir y legitimar dinámicas de dominación. Este artículo cuestiona esta forma reaccionaria de la acción educativa y pedagógica, particularmente en su versión neoliberal. A la vez, explora cómo la educación puede proveer de los fundamentos teóricos y prácticos para repensar su propio propósito, junto a la naturaleza misma de la política. En este sentido, se plantea que la educación y la política son dimensiones completamente inseparables.

Palabras claves: pedagogía crítica, autoritarismo, políticas fascistas, intelectuales públicos, ignorancia voluntariosa, pedagogía política.

Received: October 12, 2019 Accepted: December 2, 2019

The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.
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Introduction

Albert Camus states in his novel *1947 The Plague* that the plague bacillus “never dies or disappears for good; that it can lie dormant for years”¹ before it rises up again. Camus’s warning about the plague has its relevance today in both the re-emergence of right-wing populist movements and an emerging fascist politics now spreading across the globe. Camus’s cautionary admonition was followed by his recognition that there was something far worse than the plague, which was an embrace of a cynical and depoliticizing despair. According to Camus, “The habit of despair is worse than despair itself”². In this case, despair is a foundation for turning outrage into either a paralyzing cynicism or for mobilizing those desires and modes of agency fashioned in the language of hatred, xenophobia, and nativism. Within the last few years, “the plague” and the crippling discourse of despair have fueled the emerging discourses of a resurgent, if updated, form of authoritarianism. One consequence is that the echoes of a fascist past, with its cruel policies of austerity and exclusion, have moved from the margins to the center of politics across the globe, all the while met too often by too many with a silence that suggests a dangerous indifference. The plague of authoritarianism, in different terms, is becoming the new normal and constitutes a crisis of both consciousness and politics. In this instance, it ceases to be a temporary, if passing condition and morphs into a permanent state of affairs, embedded into the very systems and structures of society, not as an obscenity, but as a matter of common sense.

For Camus, the phrase ‘the habit of despair is worse than despair itself’ captures succinctly a serious theoretical challenge in contemporary forms of critical pedagogy. It makes more complex the difficulties of analyzing one of our classic concerns: ‘consciousness’. However, the theme, although classic, has not been stable. Ideas and discourses of ‘consciousness’, institutions and practices now cross international boundaries fueled by new digital technologies and modes of communication suggesting that the crisis of politics cannot be removed or separated from the crisis of education, culture, and consciousness.

The paper argues that we need to reassert the importance of education as central to politics by writing about notions of place, space and international power, and discourses of visibility (about what is ‘questioned’ before it is ‘seen’). Indeed, critical pedagogy begins to give politics of consciousness a sharper delineation and serves to expand the range of critical concepts which are available to us for analytical and theoretical work. This is of major importance to education. Consciousness and other concepts - ‘unit ideas’, to borrow a phrase from Robert Nisbet - are crucial to critical pedagogy³. These unit ideas, such as context, culture, agency, education itself, praxis and the problems of praxis and notions of power have been of major intellectual concern to critical pedagogues. In particular, consciousness has been historically crucial to a definition of critical pedagogy, most evident in the work of Paulo Freire, John Dewey, Stanley Aronowitz, and other theorists. It still is. However, ‘consciousness’ is also part of a broader motif within education: recognizing and studying the significance of ‘educated hope’. Thus, to retain the tradition of ‘critical pedagogy’ as a social movement, as a set of possibilities for praxis, without the left-over vocabularies of neoliberalism and fascist politics.

¹ Camus Albert, *The Plague*, New York, Vintage, 1991, 308

² *Ibid*

³ Nisbet Robert Alexander, *The Sociological Tradition*, New York, New Jersey, Transaction Publishers, 1966

The new political formation: Neoliberal fascism

Much of the globe is in a state of crisis that touches every aspect of public life, extending from a crisis of economics produced by massive inequality to a crisis of ideas, agency, memory, education and politics itself. We are in a new historical period, one in which everything is transformed and corrupted by the neoliberal tools of financialization, deregulation, and austerity. Within this new nexus of power, anti-democratic principles have become normalized, weakening society's democratic defenses, especially its educational institutions. Exploitation is now matched by a politics of terminal exclusion. In too many parts of the globe, people disappear, civic culture withers, and state violence turns lethal as is evident in the emerging tide of hate aimed at those populations considered other by virtue of their race, ethnicity, color, or religion. In the face of a growing authoritarianism, too many people look away and become complicitous with this new form tyranny, which we call neoliberal fascism, without addressing the distinctive form of violence that characterizes this new political formation.

Neoliberal fascism has become a powerful engine of violence and cruelty both in the United States and in an increasing number of other countries. Combining the savage consequences of economic inequality and a politics of survival with the dictates of ultra-nationalism and white supremacy, neoliberal fascism represents a distinctive and dangerous plunge into an upgraded form of fascist politics. In the European Union right now, over 120 million Europeans are threatened from poverty and social exclusion⁴, while inequalities in wealth and power have taken on such momentum and autonomy that they tend to become a central force for a savage culture of misery, suffering, and social death. According to Zygmunt Baumann, "Nowadays, inequality continues to increase by its own logic and momentum. It needs no more help or kick from outside no outside stimuli, pressures or blows. Social inequality seems ever closer to becoming the first perpetuum mobile, which after innumerable failed attempts humans have finally managed to invent and set in motion."⁵ Educators need to develop a discourse and social movements that resist such violence, safeguards public goods, revives historical memory as a form of moral witnessing, produces public spheres for critically interrogating the unsettling and unspeakable—a critical engagement with a culture of real, visceral and symbolic violence. In this instance, education becomes central to politics and takes on an ethical necessity and impassioned sense of collective struggle.

All over the world, the forces of neoliberalism and the mobilizing passions of fascism have merged dismantling the historically guaranteed social provisions provided by the welfare state, defining profit making and market freedoms as the essence of democracy, while diminishing civil liberties as part of the alleged "war" against terrorism and those populations considered a threat to the forces often of white nationalism. The savagery of the market has provided the preconditions for white supremacy, ultra-nationalism, and a culture of cruelty to gain ascendancy and in some countries, such as the United States and Poland to become normalized⁶. Secure in its dystopian vision, neoliberalism eliminates issues of contingency, struggle, and social agency by celebrating the inevitability of economic laws in which the ethical ideal of intervening in the world gives way to the idea that we "have no choice but to adapt both

⁴ European Commission, *Poverty and social exclusion*, European Commission, 2019, [Accessed on 15th July 2019]. Available from: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=751>

⁵ Shapira Anita, *On Eve of Israeli Visit, Renowned Academic Zygmunt Bauman Laments Protracted Occupation, Israel, Haaretz*, February 16, 2013, [Accessed on 15th July 2019]. Available from: <https://www.haaretz.com/.premium-israel-derelict-in-duty-to-warn-the-world-1.5229873>

⁶ Helm Toby, *Rise of Donald Trump is 'obscuring lessons of the second world war', says Sadiq Khan*, UK, The Observer, August 31, 2019. [Accessed on 15th September 2019]. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/aug/31/trump-johnson-forgotten-lessons-war-sadiq-khan-white-nationalism-rightwing>

our hopes and our abilities to the new global market.”⁷. Coupled with the power of new digital technologies along with a culture of surveillance and fear, market freedoms seem securely grounded in a defense of national security and a defense of property.

Educators and other cultural workers need a new political and pedagogical language for addressing the changing contexts and issues facing a world in which capital draws upon an unprecedented convergence of resources—financial, cultural, political, economic, scientific, military, and technological—to exercise powerful and diverse forms of hegemony. If educators are to counter global capitalism’s increased power to both depoliticize and disempower, it is crucial to develop educational approaches that reject a collapse of the distinction between market liberties and civil liberties, a market economy and a market society.

This suggest developing forms of critical pedagogy capable of appropriating from a variety of radical theories—feminism, postmodernism, critical theory, post-structuralism, neo-Marxism, etc. – those progressive elements that might be useful in both challenging neoliberalism on many fronts while resurrecting a militant democratic socialism that provides the basis for imagining a life beyond the “dream world” of capitalism. More specifically, this suggests, on the one hand, resurrecting the living, though blemished traditions, of Enlightenment thought that affirmed issues of freedom, equality, liberty, self-determination, and civic agency. On the other hand, critical theory’s engagement with Enlightenment thought must be expanded through those democratic discourses that problematize modernity’s universal project of citizenship, its narrow understanding of domination, its obsession with order, and its refusal to expand both the meaning of the political and the sites in which political struggles and possibilities might occur.

Critical pedagogy: Remaking education central to politics

In our new digital age, something sinister and horrifying is happening to liberal democracies all over the globe. Democratic institutions such as the independent media, schools, the legal system, unions, and higher education are under siege. The promise of democracy is receding as present-day fascists work to subvert language, values, courage, vision and a critical consciousness. Education has increasingly become a tool of domination as the entrepreneurs of hate deploy right-wing pedagogical apparatuses to attack workers, Black youth, refugees, immigrants and others they consider disposable. In the midst of a moment when an older social order is crumbling and a new one is struggling to define itself, there emerges a time of confusion, danger, and moments of great restlessness. We are once again at a historical juncture in which the structures of liberation and authoritarianism are vying over the future.

We have arrived at such a moment in which two worlds are pitted against each other and a history of the present is poised at a point when “possibilities are either realized or rejected but never disappear completely.”⁸. Two worlds are colliding: First, as a number of scholars have observed, there is the harsh and crumbling world of neoliberal globalization and its mobilizing passions that fuel different strands of fascism across the globe, including the United States. Power is now enamored with amassing

⁷ Aronowitz Stanley, *Introduction*, in Freire Paulo, *Pedagogy of Freedom*, Lanham, Rowman and Littlefield, 1998, 7

⁸ Thompson Peter, *The Frankfurt School, Part 5: Walter Benjamin, Fascism and the Future*, UK, The Guardian, April 21, 2013. [Accessed on 15th July 2019]. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2013/apr/22/frankfurt-school-walter-benjamin-fascism-future>

profits and capital and is increasingly addicted to a politics of white nationalism and racial cleansing⁹¹⁰¹¹. Second, there is the world of counter movements, which is growing especially among young people, with their search for a new politics that can rethink, reclaim and invent a new understanding of democratic socialism, untainted by capitalism

It is hard to imagine a more urgent moment for making education central to politics. If we are going to develop a politics capable of awakening our critical, imaginative, and historical sensibilities, it is crucial for educators and others to develop a language of critique and possibility. Such a language is necessary to enable the conditions to forge a collective international resistance among educators, youth, artists, and other cultural workers in defense of public goods. Such a movement is important to resist and overcome the tyrannical fascist nightmares that have descended upon the United States, Brazil and a number of other countries in Europe plagued by the rise of neo-Nazi parties. In an age of social isolation, information overflow, a culture of immediacy, consumer glut, and spectacularized violence, it is all the more crucial to take seriously the notion that a democracy cannot exist or be defended without informed and critically engaged citizens.

The pedagogical lesson here is that fascism begins with hateful words, the demonization of others considered disposable, and moves to an attack on ideas, the burning of books, the disappearance of intellectuals, and the emergence of the carceral state and the horrors of detention jails and camps. As a form of cultural politics, critical pedagogy provides the promise of a protected space within which to think against the grain of received opinion, a space to question and challenge, to imagine the world from different standpoints and perspectives, to reflect upon ourselves in relation to others and, in so doing to understand what it means to “assume a sense of political and social responsibility.”¹²

Education both in its symbolic and institutional forms has a central role to play in fighting the resurgence of fascist cultures, mythic historical narratives, and the emerging ideologies of white supremacy and white nationalism. Moreover, at a time when fascists across the globe are disseminating toxic racist and ultra-nationalist images of the past, it is essential to reclaim critical pedagogy as a form of historical consciousness and moral witnessing. This is especially true at a time when historical and social amnesia have become a national pastime, particularly in the United States, matched only by the masculinization of the public sphere and the increasing normalization of a fascist politics that thrives on ignorance, fear, hatred, social cleansing, the suppression of dissent, and white supremacy. Education as a form of cultural work extends far beyond the classroom and its pedagogical influence, while often imperceptible, is crucial to challenging and resisting the rise of fascist pedagogical formations and their rehabilitation of fascist principles and ideas¹³.

Cultural politics in the last 20 years has turned toxic as ruling elites increasingly gain control of commanding cultural apparatuses turning them into pedagogical disimagination machines that serve the forces of ethical tranquilization by producing and legitimating endless degrading and humiliating images of the poor, immigrants, Muslims, and others considered excess, wasted lives doomed to terminal exclusion. The capitalist dream machine is back with huge profits for the ultra-rich, hedge fund managers,

⁹ Harvey David, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. New York, Oxford University Press, 2005

¹⁰ Hall Stuart, *The Neoliberal Revolution*, in Rutherford J and Davison Sally, (eds), *The Neoliberal Crisis*. London, Lawrence Wishart. [Accessed on 15th July 2019], Available from:

http://wh.agh.edu.pl/other/materialy/678_2015_04_21_22_04_51_The_Neoliberal_Crisis_Book.pdf

¹¹ Giroux Henry A, *American Nightmare: Facing the Challenge of Fascism*, San Francisco, City Lights, 2018

¹² Nixon Jon, *Hannah Arendt: Thinking versus Evil*, Times Higher Education, February 26, 2015. [Accessed on 15th July 2019]. Available from: <https://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/features/hannah-arendt-thinking-versus-evil/2018664.article?page=0%2C0>

¹³ Mayer Jane, *The making of the Fox News White House*, The New Yorker, March 4, 2019, [Accessed on 15th July 2019]. Available from: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/03/11/the-making-of-the-fox-news-white-house>

and major players in the financial service industries. In these new landscapes of wealth, fraud, and social atomization, a brutal and fanatical capitalism promotes a winner-take-all ethos, a culture of cruelty and white nationalism, aggressively undermining the welfare state while pushing millions into hardship and misfortune. The geographies of moral and political decadence have become the organizing standard of the dream worlds of consumption, privatization, surveillance, and deregulation. Within this increasingly fascist landscape, public spheres are replaced by zones of social abandonment and thrive on the energies of the walking dead and avatars of cruelty and misery.

Education within the last three decades has diminished rapidly in its capacities to educate young people and others to be critical and socially engaged agents. Under neoliberal regimes now flirting with white supremacy, the apostles of authoritarianism have deemed the utopian possibilities formerly associated with public education as too dangerous to go unchecked. Increasingly public schools — which could have such a radical potential to promote social equality and support democracy — are falling subject to the toxic forces of privatization and mindless standardized curricula, while teachers are subjected to intolerable labor conditions. Higher education now mimics a business culture run by a managerial army of bureaucrats, drunk on market values, who resemble the high priests of a deadening instrumental rationality. Moreover, as Mark Crawford observes “Driving our universities to act like businesses doesn’t just cannibalise the joy of learning and the social utility of research and teaching; it also makes us ill.”¹⁴ Crawford wrote this while a postgraduate student union officer at UCL. He also noted the regressive culture of neoliberalism and its corporate market driven values does not simply undermine the mental health of faculty and students, it also constitutes something of a crisis among higher education staff and has been described as ‘an epidemic’ in the UK¹⁵. Under such circumstances, it is not hard to conclude that the commanding visions of democracy are in exile at all levels of education.

The struggle, however, is far from over. The good news is that there is an increasing wave of strikes by teachers, public servants, and workers both in the United States and abroad who are resisting the cruel machinery of exploitation, racism, austerity, and disposability unleashed by neoliberalism in the past forty years. There may be a lesson to be learned from The Foundation Pit’s Andrei Platonov’s who states that at [a]t the time of the Revolution, dogs howled day and night all over Russia¹⁶. Looking at the big picture, a series of strikes and demonstrations in many countries across the world, including the Yellow Vests in France, seem to show that – despite the lack of organization and clear orientation – Europeans have begun to question the one-way course of austerity imposed by the ruling classes and financial elite.

For example, we can point to the increasing turmoil in Budapest under the authoritarian government of Viktor Orbán. Many demonstrations took place against the ‘slave law’, which allows employers to claim up to 400 hours of overtime per year¹⁷. We, then, go to Vienna and the large demonstration that took place on December 2018 on the occasion of the first anniversary of the assumption of power by the conservative, far-right government formed on 18th December 2017¹⁸. It is

¹⁴ Shackle Samira, *The way universities are run is making us ill: inside the student mental health crisis*, The Guardian, UK, Sept 27, 2019, [Accessed on 27th September 2019]. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/sep/27/anxiety-mental-breakdowns-depression-uk-students>

¹⁵ Weale Sally, *Higher education staff suffer 'epidemic' of poor mental health*, The Guardian, May 23, 2019, [Accessed on 12th August 2019]. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/may/23/higher-education-staff-suffer-epidemic-of-poor-mental-health>

¹⁶ Platonov Andrei, *The Foundation Pit*, New York, New York Review Books Classics, 1987

¹⁷ Graham-Harrison Ema, *Thousands in Budapest march against 'slave law' forcing overtime on workers*, The Guardian, January 5, 2019, [Accessed on 12th August 2019]. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/05/thousands-in-budapest-march-against-slave-law-forcing-overtime-on-workers>

¹⁸ The Local, *Thousands protest against far-right party in Austria's government*, The Local, December 16, 2018, [Accessed on 12th August 2019]. Available from: <https://www.thelocal.at/20181216/thousands-protest-austrias-far-right-coalition-in-vienna>

the same government that has gone ahead with the promotion of anti-labour policies supporting the 12-hour working day that allegedly gives “companies more flexibility” as the Austrian government has argued¹⁹. What should also be noted are the major student demonstrations in 30 cities in Italy²⁰, as well as a rash of acts of resistance by students in Albania²¹. The latter began in December 2018 and continued until recently demonstrating a general dissatisfaction with the government of Edi Rama. Similarly, Belgrade and other Serbian cities are moving against a growing fascist politics. In this case, thousands of Serbs gathered for twelve weeks not only to protest the resignation of President, Aleksandar Vučić²². Similarly, people were in the streets in Montenegro asking for the resignations of the President, Milo Đukanović, and the Advocate General²³. This is what some people call the heart of the ‘Balkan Spring’ slightly, forgetting – or pretending that they have forgotten – the outcomes of the Ukrainian and Arab spring. Also in Lithuania, we saw the biggest strike of teachers in the country²⁴. Of course, it is worthwhile to move a little further away from Europe and take a look at India, where the largest general strike in history has taken place with 200 million workers²⁵, but also the US Bureau of Labour Statistics published a survey on the 15th February 2019, which shows that labour movements in the US in 2018 have peaked since 1986²⁶.

All of the above speaks to an optimism that suggests that power is never simply about domination. Moreover, we are not arguing for a naive optimism, but for a militant optimism that stems from an understanding of and resistance to the very contradictions of the capitalist system itself. Of course, strategic necessity of such demonstrations is crucial to recognize. At the same time, there is a pedagogical challenge to make power visible, which in this case makes clear that governments cannot hide the self-evident that all these people who are coming out on the streets seem to be asking to live – not by charity or bonuses but by their own means and potential in the social structure. As Miguel de Cervantes (1851) rightly points out ‘never stand begging for that which you have the power to earn’²⁷. Central to such a political and pedagogical challenge is the necessity to imagine a politics in which hope is central to agency and critical agency cannot exist without a hope that enables one to think otherwise in order to act otherwise.

On the politics of educated hope

¹⁹ Deutsche Welle, *Austria: Thousands protest against plans for 12-hour workday*, Deutsche Welle June 30, 2018, Available from: <https://www.dw.com/en/austria-thousands-protest-against-plans-for-12-hour-workday/a-44475182> [Accessed on 12th August 2019]

²⁰ Peoples Dispatch, *Thousands of students march in Italy for increased educational spending*, Peoples Dispatch, October 16, 2018, [Accessed on 15th October 2019]. Available from at: <https://peoplesdispatch.org/2018/10/16/thousands-of-students-march-in-italy-for-increased-educational-spending/>

²¹ Cherry Libby, *Emboldened Albanian students eye wider change*, Balkan Insight, September 24, 2019. [Accessed on 15th October 2019]. Available from: <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/09/24/emboldened-albanian-students-eye-wider-change/>

²² Deutsche Welle, *Why are Serbs protesting against Aleksandar Vucic?*, Deutsche Welle, April 13, 2019, [Accessed on 12th August 2019]. Available from: <https://www.dw.com/en/why-are-serbs-protesting-against-aleksandar-vucic/a-48306953>

²³ Tomovic Dusica, *Montenegro protesters demand President's resignation*, Balkan Insight, February 23, 2019, Accessed on 12th August 2019]. Available from: <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/02/23/montenegro-protesters-demand-presidents-resignation/>

²⁴ Delfi, *What protests shook Lithuania in 2018?*, Delfi, December 28, 2018, [Accessed on 12th August 2019]. Available from: <https://en.delfi.lt/archive/what-protests-shook-lithuania-in-2018.d?id=79974565>

²⁵ Grevatt Martha, *All-India General Strike is largest in world history*, Mundo Obrero, January 14, 2019, [Accessed on 12th August 2019]. Available from: <https://www.workers.org/2019/01/14/all-india-general-strike-is-largest-in-world-history/>

²⁶ Abrams Abigail, *The number of U.S. workers involved in a strike in 2018 was the highest since 1986*, Time, February 8, 2019, [Accessed on 12th August 2019]. Available from: <https://time.com/5525512/american-workers-strikes-bureau-labor-statistics/>

²⁷ De Cervantes Miguel, *The History of Don Quixote de la Mancha*, Charleston, South Carolina, BiblioBazaar, 2008

Critical thought and the imaginings of a better world present a direct threat to neoliberal rationality in which the future must always replicate the present in an endless circle in which capital and the identities that it legitimates merge with each other into what might be called a dead zone of the imagination and pedagogies of repression. This dystopian impulse thrives on producing myriad forms of inequality and violence—encompassing both the symbolic and the structural—as part of a broader attempt to define education in purely instrumental, privatized, and anti-intellectual terms. What is clear is that neoliberal modes of education attempt to mold students in the market driven mantras of self-interest, harsh competition, unchecked individualism, and the ethos of consumerism. Young people are now told to invest in their careers, pack their resumes, and achieve success at any cost. It is precisely this replacement of educated hope with an aggressive dystopian neoliberal project and cultural politics that now characterizes the current assault on public and higher education in various parts of the globe. Under neoliberalism, the mantra of privatization, deregulation, and the destruction of the public good is matched by a toxic merging of inequality, greed, and an obsession with profit.

It is crucial for educators to remember that language is not simply an instrument of fear, violence, and intimidation, it is also a vehicle for critique, civic courage, resistance, and engaged and informed agency. We live at a time when the language of democracy has been pillaged, stripped of its promises and hopes. If fascism is to be defeated, there is a need to make education an organizing principle of politics and, in part, this can be done with a language that exposes and unravels falsehoods, systems of oppression, and corrupt relations of power while making clear that an alternative future is possible. Hannah Arendt was right in arguing that language is crucial in highlighting the often hidden “crystallized elements” that make fascism likely²⁸. Language can be a powerful tool in the search for truth and the condemnation of falsehoods and injustices.

This is even more reason for educators to make the political more pedagogical and the pedagogical more political in order to recognize that pedagogy is always a struggle over agency, identities, desire, and values while also acknowledging that it has a crucial role to play in addressing important social issues and defending public and higher education as democratic public spheres. Making the political more pedagogical in this instance suggests producing modes of knowledge and social practices that not only affirm oppositional cultural work and pedagogical practices but also offer opportunities to mobilize instances of collective outrage coupled with direct mass action, against a ruthless casino capitalism and an emerging fascist politics. Such mobilization must oppose the glaring material inequities and the growing cynical belief that democracy and capitalism are synonymous. At the very least, critical pedagogy proposes that education is a form of political intervention in the world and that it is capable of creating the possibilities for individual and social transformation.

Given the current crisis of politics, agency, history, and memory educators need a new political and pedagogical language for addressing the changing contexts and issues facing a world in which capital draws upon an unprecedented convergence of resources—financial, cultural, political, economic, scientific, military, and technological—to exercise powerful and diverse forms of direct and indirect control. If educators and others are to counter global capitalism’s increased ability to separate the traditional sphere of politics from the now transnational reach of power, it is crucial to develop educational approaches that reject a collapse of the distinction between market liberties, civil liberties, a market economy and a market society, and capitalism and democracy. Resistance does not begin with reforming capitalism but abolishing it. Neoliberal capitalism creates the foundation for what I have called neoliberal fascism and echoes Max Horkheimer’s dictum of 1939 that “Whoever is not prepared to talk about capitalism should

²⁸ Arendt Hannah, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, New York, Harcourt Trade Publishers, 2001.

also remain silent about fascism.”²⁹

In this instance, critical pedagogy becomes a political and moral practice in the fight to revive civic literacy, civic culture, and a notion of shared citizenship. Politics loses its emancipatory possibilities if it cannot provide the educational conditions for enabling students and others to think against the grain and realize themselves as informed, critical, and engaged citizens. There is no radical politics without a pedagogy capable of awakening consciousness, challenging common sense, and creating modes of analysis in which people discover a moment of recognition that enables them to rethink the conditions that shape their lives. This is the moment of hope in which as Ruth Levitas points out the sense of “something missing can be read in every trace of how it might be otherwise, how the ever-present sense of lack might be [tempered].”³⁰

As a matter of political and social responsibility, educators should do more than create the conditions for critical thinking and nourishing a sense of hope for their students. They also need to responsibly assume the role of civic educators within broader social contexts and be willing to share their ideas with other educators and the wider public by making use of new media technologies and traditional modes of communicating. Communicating to a variety of public audiences suggests using opportunities for writing, public talks, and media interviews offered by the radio, Internet, alternative magazines, and teaching young people and adults in alternative schools to name only a few. Capitalizing on their role as public intellectuals, educators can address the challenge of combining scholarship and commitment by using a vocabulary that is neither dull nor obtuse, while seeking to speak to a broader audience. More importantly, as teachers organize to assert the importance of their role and that of education in a democracy, they can forge new alliances and connections to develop social movements that include and expand beyond working with unions and traditional political formations.

A disconcerting number of academics and teachers in the current moment continue to join forces with right-wing pundits to argue that classrooms should be free of politics. Their falsely shared conclusion is that schools should be neutral spaces in which matters of power, values and social justice should not be addressed and should not enter the classroom. The usual scornful accusation in this case is that teachers who believe in critical pedagogy indoctrinate their students. In this supposed ideologically pure and politically neutral world, pedagogy is reduced to a banal transmission of facts in which nothing controversial can be stated, and teachers are forbidden to utter one word related to any of the major problems facing the larger society. Or, teaching is reduced to an imagination killing exercise of teaching to the test—which is code for a pedagogy of oppression.

Of course, this view of teaching being neutral or free of politics is as much a flight from reality as it is an instance of irresponsible pedagogy. In contrast, one useful approach to embracing the classroom as a political site, while rejecting any form of indoctrination, is for educators to think through the distinction between a *politicizing pedagogy* and a *political pedagogy*. A *politicizing pedagogy*, insists wrongly, that students should think exactly as we do as educators while a *political pedagogy* teaches students through informed dialogue and critical engagement about the importance of power, social responsibility, and taking a stand (without standing still). Political pedagogy, unlike a dogmatic or indoctrinating pedagogy, embodies the principles of critical pedagogy by rigorously engaging the full range of the best of historical knowledge and ideas within a framework that enables students to move from a moral purpose to purposeful action in pursuit of thinking through the demands of a strong democracy.

²⁹ Griffin Roger, *Staging the Nation's Rebirth: The Politics and Aesthetics of Performance in the Context of Fascist Studies*, in Berghaus Günter, (ed), *Fascism and Theater: Comparative Studies on the Aesthetics and politics of Performance in Europe, 1925-1945*, Providence: Gergahn Books, 1996 [Accessed on 10th July 2019]. Available from at:

<https://www.libraryofsocialscience.com/ideologies/resources/griffin-staging-the-nations/>

³⁰ Levitas Ruth, *Introduction: The Elusive Idea of Utopia*, History of the Human Sciences, 2003, volume 16 n° 1

What is important about critical pedagogy is its emphasis on how responsibility is understood as both an ethical issue and a strategic act. Responsibility is not only a crucial element regarding what issues teachers address in a classroom; but is also embodied in their relationships to their colleagues, students, parents, and the wider society. Responsibility as a crucial part of any pedagogical practice suggests providing the connective tissue that enables students to raise issues about the consequences of their actions in the world and their behaviors toward others, and to analyze the relationship between knowledge and power and the social costs it often enacts. Critical pedagogy in this instance recognizes that human beings are unfinished and that education is part of the permanent process of being curious, learning to reflect on the conditions that shape their lives.

Education operates as a crucial site of power in the modern world. If teachers are truly concerned about safeguarding education, they will have to take seriously how pedagogy functions on local and global levels. Critical pedagogy has an important role to play in both understanding and challenging how power, knowledge, and values are deployed, affirmed, and resisted within and outside of traditional discourses and cultural spheres. In a local context, critical pedagogy becomes an important theoretical tool for understanding the institutional conditions that place constraints on the production of knowledge, learning, academic labor, social relations, and democracy itself. Critical pedagogy also provides a discourse for engaging and challenging the construction of social hierarchies, identities, and ideologies as they traverse local and national borders. In addition, pedagogy as a form of production and critique offers a discourse of possibility—a way of providing students with the opportunity to link understanding to commitment, and social transformation to seeking the greatest possible justice.

This suggests that one of the most serious challenges facing teachers, artists, journalists, writers, and other cultural workers is the task of developing a discourse of both critique and possibility. This means developing discourses and pedagogical practices that connect a critical reading the word with reading the world, and doing so in ways that enhance the creative capacities of young people and provide the conditions for them to become critical agents. In taking up this project, educators and others should attempt to create the conditions that give students the opportunity to become critical and engaged citizens who have the knowledge and courage to struggle in order to make desolation and cynicism unconvincing and hope practical. Hope in this instance is educational, removed from the fantasy of an idealism that is unaware of the constraints facing the dream of a radical democratic society. Educated hope is not a call to overlook the difficult conditions that shape both schools and the larger social order nor is it a blueprint removed from specific contexts and struggles. On the contrary, it is the precondition for providing those languages and values that point the way to imagining a future that does not replicate the nightmares of the present.

Educated hope provides the basis for dignifying the labor of teachers; it offers up critical knowledge linked to democratic social change, affirms shared responsibilities, and encourages teachers and students to recognize ambivalence and uncertainty as fundamental dimensions of learning. Such hope offers the possibility of thinking beyond the given. As difficult as this task may seem to educators, if not to a larger public, it is a struggle worth waging.

In an age of poisonous capitalism and an emerging fascist politics, educators, students, and other concerned citizens face the challenge of providing a language that embraces a militant utopianism while constantly being attentive to those forces that seek to turn such hope into a new slogan or to punish and dismiss those who dare to look beyond the horizon of the given. Fascism breeds cynicism and is the enemy of a militant and social hope. Hope must be tempered by the complex reality of the times and viewed as a project and condition for providing a sense of collective agency, opposition, political imagination, and engaged participation. Without hope, even in the direst times, there is no possibility for resistance, dissent, and struggle. Agency is the condition of struggle, and hope is the condition of agency.

Hope expands the space of the possible and becomes a way of recognizing and naming the incomplete nature of the present.

Hope is the affective and intellectual precondition for individual and social struggle. Hope, not despair, is the precondition that encourages critique on the part of intellectuals in and outside of the academy who use the resources of theory to address pressing social problems. Hope is also at the root of the civic courage that translates critique into political practice. Hope as the desire for a future that offers more than the present becomes most acute when one's life can no longer be taken for granted. Only by holding on to both critique and hope in such contexts will resistance make concrete the possibility for transforming politics into an ethical space and a public act. And a better future than the one we now expect to unfold will require nothing less than confronting the flow of everyday experience and the weight of social suffering with the force of individual and collective resistance and the unending project of democratic social transformation. At the same time, in order for resistance to take on the challenges posed by the rise of a fascist politics, it will have to develop an awakening of desire. This form of educated desire is rooted in the dream of a collective consciousness and imagination fueled by the struggle for new forms of community that affirm the value of the social, economic equality, the social contract, and democratic values and social relations.

The question that arises is: will the financial elites continue to have power by producing financial policies that merge the massive suffering of millions with a legitimating ideology that places the blame for such suffering on those populations considered disposable. Resistance is meaningless unless it is rooted in both an understanding of the conditions that produce a fascist politics and other brands of authoritarianism, and a willingness to remove the tools of power and institutions that drive capitalist societies. What are these tools? The new communication technologies do not belong to them. The commanding industries should not belong to them. Because banks without bankers can exist, bankers without banks cannot exist. Industries without industries, manufacturers without industries cannot exist. Ship owners without ships cannot exist, but ships without ship owners can exist.

Some say: 'Yes, but we are small and helpless'. The story of the circus elephant is relevant here because it speaks to how the crucial lesson that oppression is learned. Circus elephants are chained by a small chain fastened to a metal collar around the elephant's foot and is attached to a wooden peg nailed into the ground which is obvious that, if they make a move, they will break it. What has happened? The way to chain an elephant is to start when it is a baby. The baby elephant will struggle, but eventually it will realize that it cannot break it. The baby elephant learns not to struggle – it accepts that the limit imposed by the rope or chain is permanent, and there is no use struggling against it. Sure, the elephant grows up, and becomes the most powerful land mammal on the face of the earth. But the chains in its mind remain, and so the chains on its leg are never broken. This is also the case with people. When they realize their power, when they realize that the tyrants are cruel because they are bent on themselves – when people lift up, the chains will disappear. In this instance, two lessons stand out. First, pedagogy is always a struggle over meanings, modes of identification, desires, and agency. Pedagogy is a place where individuals can realize themselves as engaged critical citizens. Secondly, as Vaclav Havel once stated politics follows culture in that the educative force of the culture provides the tools for the possibility of people connecting everyday struggles to wider social considerations and also recognizing that domination does not only exist in economic and financial structures but are also intellectual and pedagogical and lie in the realm of persuasion, rhetoric, social relations, beliefs, and the changing of consciousness.

Conclusion: critical pedagogy as a social movement

It is crucial for us to stress that the current fight against a nascent fascism across the globe is not only a struggle over economic structures or the commanding heights of corporate power. It is also a struggle over visions, ideas, consciousness, and the power to shift the culture itself. It is also as Arendt points out a struggle against “a widespread fear of judging.”³¹ Without the ability to judge, it becomes impossible to recover words that have meaning, imagine alternative worlds and a future that does not mimic the dark times in which we live, and create a language that changes how we think about ourselves and our relationship to others. Any struggle for a radical democratic socialist order will not take place if “the lessons from our dark past [cannot] be learned and transformed into constructive resolutions” and solutions for struggling for and creating a post-capitalist society.³²

In the end, there is no democracy without informed citizens and no justice without a language critical of injustice. Democracy begins to fail and political life becomes impoverished in the absence of those vital public spheres such as public and higher education in which civic values, public scholarship, and social engagement allow for a more imaginative grasp of a future that takes seriously the demands of justice, equity, and civic courage. Democracy should be a way of thinking about education, one that thrives on connecting pedagogy to the practice of freedom, learning to ethics, and agency to the imperatives of social responsibility and the public good³³. In the age of nascent fascism, it is not enough to connect education with the defense of reason, informed judgment, and critical agency; it must also be aligned with the power and potential of collective resistance. Moreover, it is crucial that centrists, liberals, and radicals not make common cause with the right over the idea that classrooms should be “free of politics.” We may live in dark times, but the future is still open. The time has come to develop a political language and pedagogical tools in which civic values, social responsibility, and the institutions that support them become central to invigorating and fortifying a new era of civic imagination, a renewed sense of social agency, collective struggle, and an impassioned sense of civic courage and political will.

The great Frederick Douglass's words are more important now in the age of authoritarian nightmares than ever before. It is time to shut down the machineries of social and political deaths with mass movements that build on demonstrations like we have seen with the massive protests by young people across the world against global climate devastation. As Douglass so courageously and brilliantly put it nine years before the civil war in his speech, “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July”:

It is not the light that is needed, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder. We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake. The feeling of the nation must be quickened; the conscience of the nation must be roused; the propriety of the nation must be startled; the hypocrisy of the nation must be exposed; and its crimes against God and man must be proclaimed and denounced³⁴.

Without hope, there is no possibility for resistance, dissent, and struggle. Agency is the condition of struggle, and hope is the condition of agency. Hope expands the space of the possible and becomes a way of recognizing and naming the incomplete nature of the present.

³¹ Arendt Hannah, *Personal Responsibility under Dictatorship*, in Kohn, J. (ed), *Responsibility and Judgement*. NY: Schocken Books, 2013, [Accessed on 10th July 2019]. Available from: <https://grattoncourses.files.wordpress.com/2016/08/responsibility-under-a-dictatorship-arendt.pdf>

³² Bertoldi Nicola, *Are we living through a new Weimar era?: Constructive resolutions for our future*, OpenDemocracy, January 3, 2018, [Accessed on 10th July 2019]. Available from: <https://us1.campaign-archive.com/?e=d77f123300&u=9c663f765f28cdb71116aa9ac&id=367a142d39>

³³ Giroux Henry A, *The Terror of the Unforeseen*, Los Angeles, Los Angeles Review of Books, 2019

³⁴ Douglas Frederick, *What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?*, 1852, [Accessed on 12th August 2019]. Available from: <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/what-to-the-slave-is-the-fourth-of-july/>

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