

Critical pedagogy and democracy: cultivating the democratic ethos

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Abstract

Neoliberalism has forged new modes of subjectivity and citizenship through a social mandate to provide for one's survival solely through individual "choice." As a consequence, we have oppression, manipulation, exploitation and human misery. In this paper I support that Critical Pedagogy can contribute to the creation of a human agent who is autonomous, more humane, author of his/her decisions, dignified, with social solidarity, responsibility, and a sense of freedom that negates every dehumanizing practice through the cultivation of a democratic ethos. In essence, the democratic ethos is the starting point of a reflective praxis. This democratic ethos evolves into conscientization, which in turn becomes "responsibilization", culminating in solidarity, love, dignity, hope and mutual support through praxis, inevitably reinforcing the same democratic ethos. This means that critical pedagogy promotes a teaching culture that will foster the development of a young generation, which will inevitably negate the capitalist system.

Introduction

Neoliberalism has transformed our lives since society is transformed in the image of the market and the state itself is now "marketized." Citizens are regarded as consumers. It follows that neoliberals privilege the market mechanisms, as the most "efficient" and "rational" tool to construct human agency, by promoting individualism, and by assuming social and political determination. As Polanyi (1957, p.14-15) has persuasively shown, the establishment of the market economy implied sweeping aside traditional cultures and values and replacing the values of solidarity, altruism, sharing and cooperation (which usually marked community life) with the values of individualism and competition as the dominant values. New modes of subjectivity and citizenship are forged through a social mandate to provide for one's survival solely through individual "choice," leading to, according to Habermas (1986), an "instrumentalism of existence". As a result, people are brought together in competition rather than in cooperation in finding a living. The prevailing motto derived from neoliberal global capitalism is consume, compete, and win at any cost.

All the major communication institutions of a modern society—including the media and education, facilitate the replacement of democratic values by market values. As Beder (2008) writes, "the market values of competition, salesmanship and deception have replaced the democratic ideals of truth and justice," and

The conflict between democratic values and corporate values is even more evident at a personal level, given that in the new global culture—where people are rewarded for their greed—increasingly there is little room for the expression of higher human values and qualities such as generosity, compassion, selflessness, willingness to seek out and expose the truth, courage to fight for justice.

As Tom Stoppard¹ illustrates, society within a capitalist context tends to corrupt the best instincts of people. Instead the lower instincts prevail, leading to a subhumanity of the mankind.

In this paper I elaborate on ideas of democracy and critical pedagogy. In the first part of the paper I support the idea of autonomous society and stress the need of participation of citizens as distinguished in the Greek *polis*. In the second part I suggest that a democratic ethos is a useful starting point of elaboration of critical pedagogy. This can facilitate conscientization, which can lead to feeling as an organic part of society-responsible- of the injustices of this society, a ‘responsibilization’ as an evolving procedure that will lead to praxis.

Very useful for this analysis is Castoriadis’s conception of heteronomous and autonomous societies. Since the establishment of the market economy about 200 years ago, the world has been transformed from autonomous communities into heteronomous world markets, that is, from self-determining societies to societies where all the decisions that refer to it are taken from centers outside of it. As a consequence, we have oppression, manipulation, exploitation and human misery. According to Castoriadis (2003), there cannot be an autonomous individual without an autonomous society:

..in the contemporary West, the free, sovereign, autarchic, substantial “individual” is hardly anything more, in the great majority of cases, than a marionette spasmodically performing the gestures the social-historical field imposes upon it: that is to say, making money, consuming, and “enjoying” (if that happens to occur). Supposedly “free” to give to his life the meaning [*sens*] he “wants,” in the overwhelming majority of cases this individual gives to his life only that “meaning: that has currency, that is to say, the non-sense of indefinite increases in the level of consumption. (p. 80)

This individual’s “autonomy” is in reality heteronomy again, since s/he succumbs to a generalized conformism. In other words, there can be no individual “autonomy”

¹ (Interview in Eleftherotipia newspaper, Oct. 26, 2008)

without collective autonomy, and no individual “creation of meaning” outside of the framework of a collective creation of significations.

The growing realization of global contradictions rises up local initiatives setting out the process of change. An inclusive democracy would result from dialectic between institutional and human change. According to Fotopoulos (2008b), under these circumstances the problem for emancipatory politics today is how all the social groups which potentially form the basis of a new liberatory subject would be united by a common worldview, a common paradigm, which sees the ultimate cause of the present multidimensional crisis in the existing structures that secure the concentration of power at all levels, as well as the corresponding value systems.

Largely relying on Karl Polanyi, Fotopoulos stresses that the reintegration of society with the economy is a necessity if an autonomous society is to be built. Any talk about democracy, which does not also refer to the question of economic power, is “hollow.” According to Fotopoulos (2008 b), “To talk about the equal sharing of political power, without conditioning it on the equal sharing of economic power, is at best meaningless and at worse deceptive” (p. 206). And as he supports, “in the last instance, it is *paideia* that may effectively condition democratic practice.” (Fotopoulos, 2008, p. 196).

A new inclusive education will intend to shape new citizens in a democratic society. As Zinn and Macedo support (2011), a miseducation has been always a device for conformity. “Those who are the victims of the educational system are considered to be disposable bodies, which were never supposed to be educated in the first place.” This has to be stopped. There are no simple solutions. Hence it becomes crucial for educators at all levels of schooling to provide alternative democratic conceptions of the meaning and purpose of both politics and education.

Polis versus individualism as social re-location.

The dominant social paradigm promoted by mass media and other cultural institutions expresses only the values and beliefs of the ruling elites, which have a vested interest in the reproduction of the existing institutions of capitalism that secures also the reproduction of their own political, economic and social power. As Cliff DuRand (1997, p.1-3) asserts, the core of the historical idea of democracy is “the possibility of collective decision-making

about collective action for a common good." He says this is the opposite of the concept found in popular consciousness today which defines democracy as the freedom of individuals to decide on their own on actions to pursue their own purposes.

Unlike what took place in the classical polis, the individual and the state are polarized entities, in conflict, and adversaries rather than partners in a common pursuit. As John Anton (1995:p.17) describes, "hidden forces of oppression continue to show up just as unexpected acts of violence against the tyranny of the state become unavoidable. The polis is absent from the operation of the state. The state is not a polis, cannot be. At best, it is a benevolent despot, and has found a place in all of us, who in vain believe ourselves to be citizens. If we are citizens, we relate to the state in radically different ways from what the citizens of the polis thought their function to be". Ancient Greeks sought justice to secure eudaimonia, whereas nowadays, in neoliberal global capitalism there is strife for "justice" to deliver rights to satisfy the cravings of the individualized will. In this on-going struggle for freedom of this will, the pursuit of power has become the centrepiece of political conduct. This individualized will according to the Greeks was a peculiar and unfathomable entity, if any entity at all. According to Aristotle (Politics, H3, 1325B14-32), the greed that goes with human needs and desires motivates the citizen to interpret justice and equality according to their own good and not the common good. He believes that justice and friendship are elements of a political community, where friendship is to be seen as a community for the sake of self-interest and the participation in common values. Aristotle did not believe this to be an easy task and "differences that arise to contentions that fuel strife concerning the individual and common good lead to revolutions, which bring about political changes".

The real issue in contingencies, as Aristotle would say, is the formulation of the principle of the Architechtonic: how to conceive of the art and science of politics as the overarching source of value and conduct, for without it human dignity is compromised and peace becomes short-lived. According to Aristotle (Pol.1278b 29 1253a 7-8), man is by nature a political animal in that he is by nature inclined to associate; he is a being that partakes of language and has a sense of what is right or wrong, of what is beneficial or harmful. He believes that the city-state (polis) as a community came about on accounts of the needs of life, but exists for the sake of good life, on the basis of "homonoia" (political friendship), which is linked to a cooperative endeavour to bring to fruition the associative conditions, the "common good", within which endecheia may be fulfilled (p. 92). According to Konstantinos Kalimtzis (1995, p95), "if we interpret Aristotle's comments on the defining

characteristics of homonoia, from the standpoint of the relationship of homonoia to human fulfilment, we find a number of objective conditions must be met for political friendship to be actual:

- As polis friendship, it must sustain the common good and produce reciprocated benefits in all things that contribute to shared polis life.
- At the same time homonoia can never become a collective “oneness”; it must preserve and enrich the autonomy of the individual, for friendship is only possible among citizens who are free and equal and empowered to act for the good of another;
- It must promote stable values according to which each citizen becomes truly worthy of mutual regard and cooperative affection.”

This means that in order to become humanized again, what is needed is a renegotiation of human values. According to Castoriadis, “the existing state of affairs is self-destructive politically. It produces a growing glacier of privatization and apathy; it dislocates the social imaginary significations that hold institutions together. An apathetic and cynical society cannot maintain for long even the few institutions existing today. And a society of social institutions based upon the relentless pursuit of individual self-interest is sheer nonsense”. Instead, Castoriadis claims (2003, p.48), “one who wants to institute a people has to change the mores of the people.” Through individualism and competition people in a society are marginalized, disempowered and manipulated. Instead, communitarian values, solidarity and responsibility, for individual and community autonomy, need to be fostered.

Solidarity can become an enriching experience. It makes sense when its definition takes into account the needs of *all* the exploited and oppressed. It must be based not only on unity in struggle but also on learning from other people about the forms of oppression and exploitation that they face. One need to take action whether it is to support Third World’s struggles, refugees resisting deportation, anti-poverty actions, assertions of women’s rights, struggles for the needs of the disabled, or a strike. Capitalism has destroyed previous forms of community and solidarity. Castoriadis (2003, p.78) says on this: “The only value in liberal-capitalist societies is money, media notoriety, or power in the most vulgar, most derisory sense of the term. Here, community is destroyed. Solidarity is reduced to a few administrative measures.” A politics of solidarity is not simply a politics of defense against attack; it also needs to be developed more offensively as a politics of social transformation. The struggle against oppression is not simply a fight for representation. It also needs to get to the social roots of the forms of oppression people face and the transformation of social relations

producing oppression. This is what an anti-racist, feminist, class politics needs to be all about. This approach is about developing a broader sense of class struggle and anti-capitalism that is centrally defined by struggles against oppression. Facing capitalism and exploitation requires an approach to solidarity that views it as taking up and learning from all our struggles.

Personal freedom in society is inextricably and dialectically linked with personal responsibility. The existence of either is dependent on the existence of the other. However, responsibility needs to be seen in a context of community feeling, since it is essential not only for the defense against neoliberal global capitalism, but mainly for humanization, according to Paulo Freire. Feeling responsible for social exclusions is an inextricable feature of human dignity. "Responsibilization" in this form becomes an essential component of social prosperity and it is a prerequisite for unity and mutual support. Neoliberalism promotes a kind of individualized responsibility, which is not ours to take²: we (not multinational corporations that overuse resources) are held responsible for global warming, we (not the system with its segregating politics) are responsible for our social exclusion, we are responsible if our politicians fail or are corrupted (as if we have a say to what "representative" politicians do once elected or even who gets into politics -these decisions are made for us by default). A new "responsibilization" should be built on hope, on the faith that something can be done and on the determination that we are not passive receptors of the will of others but agents of our destiny in the recreation of our common future. In essence, this means feeling responsible for the present state of society. As Henry Giroux (2004, p.124) maintains, "politics demands more than understanding, it demands that understanding be coupled with responsibility to others".

Political disobedience, dissident and resistance seem to be a way out of this havoc. It is the only way to protect democracy from extinction. Resistance must be more than a protest against elite policies or disruption of the institutions through which they rule. It can only affect their actions marginally, perhaps restricting their choices in time and place, but cannot alter their course. Popular forces may succeed in driving elites to seek more secure locations in which to meet (G8 and G20) and 15 million people may protest worldwide against their

² Barack Obama said that: "Solving this crisis will require more than resources - it will require all of us to step back and take responsibility". "Government must take responsibility for setting rules of the road that are fair and fairly enforced. Banks and lenders must be held accountable for ending the practices that got us into this crisis in the first place. And each of us as individuals must take responsibility for their own actions. That means all of us must learn to live within our means again." In this way he equates the victims and the victimizers, through a generalized responsibility.

wars, but the ruling elite still has the power to make decisions and impose them. According to Takis Fotopoulos (2008b), “The inevitable conclusion is that only the struggle for the building of a massive movement aiming at the creation of a new institutional framework of equal distribution of power, and the parallel development of the corresponding culture and social paradigm, might have any chance to lead to the emergence of a new world society, which would reintegrate the economy and polity as well as Nature with society, and transcend the present huge and continually deteriorating multi-dimensional crisis.”

The fact is that there is a growing discontent amongst peoples. The global economic crisis has made things obvious: either the banks will take over society or society will survive by taking back its power. In a real economy of 57 trillion dollars the financial system that the ruling elite has fostered is more than 1000 trillion dollars. About 950 trillion dollars is nothing more than thin air... but on the excuse of debt made in order to serve this thin air states are attacking their nations serving the ruling elite and not the people who they presumably represent. Even in USA, there is a percentage of about 50% who can now see that there are class divisions to their dismay. This discontent needs to be transformed into widespread mobilization for social change. The strengthening of the struggle against neoliberalism requires unity of mass struggles and recognition that the ruling elite's interests patronize politics. Attempts to organize popular dissatisfaction and despair in an effective manner have not produced satisfactory results. Although there is clearly a highly organized and extremely effective trans-national capitalist class, the global organization of the 'popular', as opposed to the 'capitalist' classes, has been far less effective. Therefore there is ample ground for the ruling elite to play the game, the only rules being determined by profit, which translates into the 'computation of lives'. Under such a set of morals, you can, for example, justify the dumping of nuclear wastes on Indian reservations in the U.S., (what's the use of a few million lives, when balanced with such huge profits?) You can also justify the elimination of millions of peasants and indigenous communities in Mexico, so that land which was once cultivated collectively, can now pass to the hands of multi-national companies which will use it to cultivate crops for exportation, a much more profitable activity.

Neoliberalism is a predatory system. The neoliberal bias in favor of financial interests has had devastating effects on growth, employment and the environment. It is not only humankind, who is in danger; nature and the environment are also threatened. The basic concept of Bacon that man can conquer nature in order for development to be achieved

(Adorno and Horkheimer, 1996) was detrimental to the environment. Neoliberalism promotes a “blind” development, as rapid as possible, whatever the cost may be. Over the past decades, the planet has been suffocating in a “non-sustainable” development, because neoliberal capitalists’ greed for short-term profit making led to consuming resources and wasting common goods which are in danger of extinction. The conception of “sustainable” development is a farce, because what causes environmental problems is the neoliberal conception of “development.”³ Sustainable development was a “sugaring the pill” practice, an excuse for keeping on doing the same things under different names. It is striking that those who harm the environment present themselves as its saviors. For example, World Council for Corporate Governance, pretending to protect the environment, consists of those who pollute and exploit it, mainly firms like 3M, Monsanto, Unilever, Novartis, Nestle, Coca Cola, Total, Fina etc. Capitalism is in fact profitably wasting the capital that Nature has been producing for three billion years, a waste that is accelerating each day. To say that the environment must be saved is to say nothing less than that society has to change its frantic consumer race. As Castoriadis maintains, this potentially constitutes the fiercest political, psychological, anthropological and philosophical quest of humanity today. And it takes the whole of society to overcome it.

Education under the Neoliberal Regime

Under neoliberalism education faces a dual trauma. On the one hand, there is a continuation and intensification of teaching as indoctrination, in order for future citizens to have no critical conscious and to passively accept the neoliberal dogma. The teaching of indifferent, useless and out-of-context knowledge has been used as a means to this end. On the other hand, education in neoliberalism has been given over to marketization, with devastating consequences.

As Castoriadis (1998, p.19) describes, the student is considered a passive vessel to which the teacher pours in a certain amount of knowledge. The student is considered a simple executor in a process whose aim is the student him/herself as a fixed product of a certain type and quality of education. In all this procedure s/he has no initiative—s/he just has to learn what

³ From 2002 Latouche promotes a discourse for the need of de-development, which signals the need to escape from the imperialism of economy, and the colonization of our imaginary of the economy. (Latouche Serge (2008). *The challenge of de-development*. Polis. In Greek)

s/he is told and that is that. This training or miseducation will continue to exist if teachers, as John Dewey (1954) had already described, continue to teach (and preach) certain collections of fixed, immutable subject matter that they were taught which they in turn transmit to students under them. The educational regime thus consists of authorities at the upper end handing down to the receivers at the lower end what they must accept. This is not education but indoctrination, propaganda. It is a type of “education” fit for the foundations of a totalitarian society and, for the same reasons, fit to subvert, pervert and destroy the foundations of a democratic society.

Paulo Freire (1970) described this as the “banking concept,” and according to that, “it is the people themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system. For, if disassociated from inquiry, from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human” (p. 53). Freire (1970) insightfully describes that “implicit in the banking concept is the assumption of a dichotomy between human beings and the world: a person is merely *in* the world, not *with* the world or with others; the individual is a spectator, not re-creator” (p. 56).

Castoriadis (1988) remarks that:

If someone really thinks about it, away from his superstitions, school is a monstrous institution. The child goes into an artificial world for X hours, immobilized on a desk, amongst four walls, forced to learn things which are, for the most part, strange, useless, and indifferent. S/he is forced to be passive against someone who stuffs him/her with knowledge. S/he suffers a complete separation of his/her physical and mental development, a fragmentation in which the curriculum inserts some ridiculous beautifying aspects, like 1 hour of gymnastics or 1 hour of art, etc. The result is that when s/he leaves school s/he is a disabled person, who shouldn't—if the educational system had had its way—have either body or mind. If s/he has still a body or mind it is because of his/her resistance to the system. (own translation) (p.35)

The values of education have been eroded during the last 30 years. Under this neoliberal dominance, schooling takes the form of miseducation, an *apaideia*; it becomes a domain for the promotion of ignorance. The student in this school has to be filled with useless knowledge and must be mentally and psychologically amputated. S/he must be rendered unable for critical analysis and for linking knowledge with his/her own reality, personal or political. In a world of blurred and shifting boundaries under the neoliberal regime, the purpose of education has certainly shifted from that of a public good to a commodity, while meanings of

education have become reconstituted, as have the roles of educators and students. As Castoriadis (2003) explains and is worth quoting at length:

Not so very long ago, school was, for parents, a venerated place, for children an almost complete universe, for teachers more or less a vocation. At present, it is for teachers and pupils an instrumental form of forced labor, a site for present or future bread-winning (or an incomprehensible and rejected form of coercion), and, for parents, a source of anxiety: “Will my child get into the right schools [*l'enfant, sera-t-il ou non admis à la filière menant au Bac C*]” . . . It is only apparently a paradox. Economic value, having become the only value, educational overconsumption and anxiety on the part of the parents of all social categories concerning the scholarly success of their children is uniquely related to the piece of paper their children will or will not obtain. This factor has become ever weightier these past few years. For, with the rise in unemployment, this piece of paper no longer automatically opens up the possibility of a job; the anxiety is redoubled, for now the child must obtain a good piece of paper. School is the place where one obtains (or does not obtain) this piece of paper; it is simply instrumental—it no longer is the place that is supposed to make the child a human being. Thirty years ago, in Greece, the traditional expression was: “I am sending you to school so that you may become a human being—*anthropos*.” (p. 34)

On the other hand, educational institutions have become a principal target of marketization agendas that have sought to discursively reconstitute and redefine the nature of education by transforming it from a collective public good into an individualistic commodity that can be bought and sold in the marketplace. Education, as an ideological state apparatus, insidiously works to ensure the perpetuation of the dominant ideology by immersing students in ideologically determined practices like measuring student learning and the quality of teaching by percentage improvement of test scores and standardized tests. Then funding of education is based on this measurement. This fact ignores a basic thesis of sociology of education: that the social background of students reflects competence. As Macedo so repetitively argues, when a student goes hungry to school, it is impossible to learn. So instead of working on the source of their underperformance, schools under the neoliberal regime are to be punished. One thing is sure: This will contribute even more to increasing inequalities of education, leading the poor to become poorer and more ignorant and the rich richer. Markets have gradually taken over education as a commodity. Many governments, under pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank to cut government funding, have imposed fees for public schooling—a de facto privatization. In the U.S., neoliberalism has taken a variety of forms in education; perhaps the most important of these

being the running of formally public school systems by private, for-profit companies. In order for schools to be taken over by the market, standardized testing has been used:

While ensuring accountability through standardized testing may seem somewhat paradoxical—since education is meant to extend far beyond standardized test scores and graduation rates—this craze with standardized testing not only promotes teaching to the test, but has also become a vehicle to restrict educational opportunities from those who need those opportunities the most. (Makris, 2009, p. 2).

Contrary to these recent changes, societies have long designed school systems to meet a broad set of social needs—including the creation of social equality, social cohesion, common values and language. When schooling is privatized and education becomes a commodity, these broader social needs take second place before the need of the private- school operators to make a profit and the decisions of individuals who are buying an education to meet their particular needs. As education becomes a commodity, the nature of this “product” gets transformed. As Kincheloe (2007) writes, “In this milieu, students are transformed from citizens into consumers, capable of being bought and sold.” Democratic control over what goes on in the schools is harshly curtailed, if not eliminated entirely.

Schools increasingly resemble prisons, and policing is the only pedagogy the system is able to apply. Since there is no more intention of creating jobs, security, or a viable future of any kind, as Giroux (2004) supports, the system insidiously promotes the limitation of personal creativity and freedom, while it attempts to create a culture of fear to ensure that the Youth will not resist the dominant ideology in its various manifestations. The system’s ultimate goal is to subordinate the Youth, which, left to their own devices, will perform actions, the implications of which the system definitely wants to avoid. In other words, they want to kill the soul of the Youth before it becomes expressive or offensive. At the same time, since the Youth is no longer a social “investment” and it has lost its established cultural position, schooling is restricted to utilizing mainly policing facilities, which is hard for society to swallow. Giroux (2004) notes this: “As despairing as these conditions appear at the present moment, they increasingly have become a basis for a surge of political resistance on the part of many Youth, intellectuals, labor unions, educators and social movements” (p. 103).

Marcuse (1989), a major figure in the Frankfurt school, so insightfully points out, “No qualitative social change, no socialism, is possible without the emergence of a new rationality

and sensibility in the individuals themselves: no radical social change without a radical change of the individual agents of change." As for the radicalization of individual agents, education is a site for struggle. According to Freire (2004), "If education alone cannot transform society, without it society cannot change either" (p. 47). The final crucial issue refers to what Castoriadis called "the riddle of politics," i.e., how within a heteronomous society and a heteronomous education we may create autonomous institutions and the infrastructure of *paideia*.

This is where critical pedagogy seems to be a necessary component of awareness, resistance, and social struggle. Critical pedagogy is about how to be in the world with the world, and as Macedo (2007) so correctly remarks, it is a "never-ending process that involves struggle and pain, but also hope and joy maintained by a humanizing pedagogy". Critical pedagogy, according to Giroux (1994), signals how questions of audience, voice, power, and evaluation actively work to construct particular relations between teachers and students, institutions and society, and classrooms and communities. Pedagogy in the critical sense illuminates the relationship between knowledge, authority, and power (Giroux, 1994, p. 30). It is at this place where critical pedagogy becomes an important vehicle for social resistance and social transformation.

Critical Pedagogy as Democratic Practice

Since education is the ideological apparatus of the state, according to Althusser (1994), the aim of education is explicit: It is the construction of the desired citizen. Under neoliberalism, this person has become a passive citizen who accepts the neoliberal agenda. It is for teachers to change that. Critical pedagogy as a social theory necessitates that the teacher has taken a stand and has recognized his/her ideological basis. It means that whatever and however they teach, they connect knowledge to the social and political agenda and install democratic values to their students in an effort to make them agents of social change.

According to Castoriadis (2003), the goal of emancipation is individual and social autonomy. In order to achieve an autonomous society, an autonomous activity of collectivities is required. At the individual level, a democratic ethos needs to be cultivated. Commenting on the crisis of democracy, Castoriadis (2003) says:

Democracy is possible only where there is a democratic *ethos*: responsibility, shame, frankness (*parrhssia*), checking up on one another, and an acute awareness of the fact that the public stakes are also personal stakes for each one of us. And without such an *ethos*, there can no longer be a “Republic of Letters,” but only pseudotruths *administered* by the State, by the clergy (whether monotheistic or not), or by the media. (p. 6)

What is needed then is a critical pedagogy in the classroom cultivating the democratic ethos of the student and creating the conditions for a citizen, through conscientization, to struggle for a just world. In such an emancipating pedagogy, egocentrism, narcissist certainties, and the constant accumulation of experiences are put into question. Instead, communitarian values are to be developed. According to Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* (1.2.1094b7-10), a life guided by moral virtue is a political life. He maintains that the good person and the good citizen are one, at least in the ideal state. To be a good person is simply to use one’s faculties well, and political activity constitutes a way in which one can exercise one’s faculties well. Hence, to perform one’s tasks as a citizen is to exercise one’s faculties for the sake of the community that one shares in (Harper, 1995, p. 81). Aristotle claims that the good of the community is nobler and more divine than the good of any individual; to secure and preserve the former is greater and more complete than the latter. Since the good person is someone who leads a good life, and since one who works with other citizens improves his own life too, the good person should be a good citizen. On the other hand, not only is the good citizen a good person, but it is through acts incumbent upon citizens that they can realize their human potential. In an ideal state, personal and civic interest, private and public interest converge. In other words, the individual cannot be happy alone, but only within a community, and the community cannot prosper without its citizens’ contribution.

Educating the active, critical citizen to participate in the *polis* is considered by critical pedagogy as an essential means for the emancipation of society. In Castoriadis’s words:

Only the education (*paideia*) of the citizens as citizens can give valuable, substantive content to the “public space.” This *paideia* is not primarily a matter of books and academic credits. First and foremost, it involves becoming conscious that the *polis* is also oneself and that its fate also depends upon one’s mind, behaviour, and decisions; in other words, it is participation in political life. (quoted by Fotopoulos 2008).

According to Freire (2004), “Dealing with the city—the *polis*—is not simply a technical matter; it is above all a political one” (p. 17). The *polis* is an area for political action. Also, as

an expression of individual autonomy, it secures more than human survival. Politics makes possible man's development as a creature capable of genuine autonomy, freedom, and excellence, according to ancient Greek practice. Education as a means of cultivating the democratic ethos for a genuine democracy to be realized needs to open up pedagogical spaces, where interaction between the educators and the students promotes this self-realization and self-institution of society.

Critical pedagogy contributes to a democratic ethos for the benefit of both the individual and the collective. Critical pedagogy is about acquiring both knowledge and the ability to maximize individual *and* social autonomy, as a means of individual *and* social liberation. This democratic ethos is cultivated in a sense of freedom. Freedom cannot be taken for granted; it is something that needs to be taught. Aristotle claims that freedom is not a means; it is a coordinated end. According to Freire (2004):

Freedom is not a gift given, but is rather earned by those who enrich themselves through the struggle for it. That is true to the extent that there can be no life without at least a minimal presence of freedom. Even though life in itself implies freedom, it does not mean in any way that we can give it gratuitously. (p. 120)

Giroux (2004) argues, "Democracy necessitates forms of education that provide a new ethic of freedom and a reassertion of collective identity as central preoccupations of a vibrant democratic culture and society" (p. 53). This necessitates commitment to the democratic project with passion. Democracy is impossible without a democratic passion, a passion for the freedom of each and of all, a passion for common affairs, which become, as a matter of fact, the personal affairs of each individual. Freedom facilitates the understanding of human conditionality and the potential of humankind to shake off any kind of oppression and exploitation. Freedom, personal initiatives, and resistance to any form of compliance and to any form of power should be an integral part of the educational process.

However, using Reason to teach freedom is a paradox, as "Reason itself presupposes freedom—autonomy. Reason is not a mechanical device or a system of ready-made truths; it is the movement of a thought that doesn't recognize any authority other than its own activity" (Castoriadis, 2003, p. 292). The sense of freedom necessitates Reason because excessive freedom can lead to selfishness, hedonism, and egoism, that is, people who love and strive for their own freedom but ignore the freedom of others. This neoliberal egoistic notion of

freedom that equates freedom with personal interests has been successfully cultivated by capitalism through competition and individualism.

In a state of freedom, autonomy is cultivated. Autonomy according to Castoriadis is not hedonic fulfilment of desires: doing whatever one wants, whenever one wants. The word is a combination of Greek words *auto* (self) and *nomos* (law). So there is a law, but the question is who lays down the law (2003, p.158). Critical pedagogy aids the subject in becoming as autonomous as possible in a collective autonomy. As Freire (2004) commented, “It is necessary for the child to learn that his/her own autonomy can only attain legitimacy if it respects the autonomy of others” (p. 38).

Freedom and autonomy have to be based on the cultivation of *nous* and embedded in a communitarian context—to use Castoriadis’s (2003) words, “in a collective identity—of a whole with which one might, in key respects, identify, in which one participates and about which one might bear some concern, and for whose fate one feels oneself responsible” (p. 98).

According to Castoriadis (1988), for the self-institution of society, *nous* as critical thinking and praxis as critical outcome, are required. This distinction resembles Freire’s concept of conscientization. As Freire (1970) stressed, conscientization focuses on achieving an in-depth understanding of the world, allowing for the perception and exposure of social and political contradictions. This conscientization, as *nous*, is an inner-self-procedure and cannot be indoctrinated. Conscientization leads to praxis, taking action against the oppressive elements in one’s life that are illuminated by that understanding. So we see that both Castoriadis and Freire supported similarly: conscientization as *nous*, has to do with the realization of suppressive circumstances and leads to praxis, which has to do with forms of resistance.

This freedom and autonomy (through the creation of a democratic ethos) is essential for conscientization as *nous*. Conscientization within a democratic ethos is about an agent who wants to belong to a community based on equality (regardless of race, age, sex, culture, class, disability, sex orientation), feeling responsibility for the injustices of this world. This responsibility feeling is not a state; it is a procedure. This “responsibilization” grows with conscientization and makes us feel that we are an organic part of what is going on around us, that we are equally liable for the injustices being done in this world as they evolve, unless we

speak up and strive for their elimination. It is clear that “responsibilization” based on autonomy does not mean imposing one’s value system upon others, but implementing dialogue and maintaining empathy, an attitude of openness in order to understand others, while always respecting them. It dictates justice as each individual contributes to the community, according to each one’s capabilities and needs. Personal freedom in society is inextricably and dialectically linked with personal responsibility. The existence of either is dependent on the existence of the other. However, responsibility needs to be seen in a context of community feeling, since it is essential not only for the defence against neoliberal global capitalism, but mainly for humanization, according to Freire (2004). He says, “If I lack responsibility, I cannot speak of ethics or of hope” (Freire, 2004, p. 99). Feeling responsible for social exclusions is an inextricable feature of human dignity. “Responsibilization” in this form becomes an essential component of social prosperity, and it is a prerequisite for unity and mutual support. Responsibility, though, is not to be founded on guilt. Guilt immobilizes the individual, neutralizes every tendency for freedom, and overshadows and numbs human feelings.

Conscientization as praxis means acting with solidarity, where the collectivity by no means consists of homogenized and identical masses. Capitalism has destroyed previous forms of community and solidarity. Castoriadis (2003) says this: “The only value in liberal-capitalist societies is money, media notoriety, or power in the most vulgar, most derisory sense of the term. Here, community is destroyed. Solidarity is reduced to a few administrative measures” (p. 78).

Responsibilization, as a procedure of conscientization, concludes to solidarity, to a communal feeling, connecting to society and working towards a common goal, which is defined by society and not the markets. This is where responsibilization connects conscientization as *nous* with praxis. Conscientization leads to praxis as a revolutionary action. When Castoriadis was asked if he was a revolutionary, he replied, “Revolution does not mean torrents of blood, the taking of the Winter Palace, and so on. Revolution means a radical transformation of society’s institutions. In this sense, I certainly am a revolutionary(1988).” This is where critical pedagogy comes along as an essential emancipatory device for social self-institution (auto-thesmis, to use Castoriadis’s term). Challenging neoliberal hegemony as a form of domination is crucial to reclaiming an alternative notion of the political and rearticulating the relationship between political agency and substantive democracy (Giroux, 2004, p. 53).

Epilogue

Paulo Freire (1970) started his magnum opus, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, by commenting that, “While the problem of humanization has always, from an axiological point of view, been humankind’s central problem, it now takes on the character of an inescapable concern.”

Since then, things have turned from bad to worse, and neoliberalism is the driving force behind that. Neoliberalism has been wreaking havoc in education. For one, it has promoted a pathological sense of a citizen as a consumer rather than as historical agent. Neoliberalism has made the true face of global capitalism so obvious and so ugly. Teachers are now confronted with an inevitable choice: Which stand do they take? Are they with the victimizers or the victims? Do they choose to support the vulnerable, the excluded, and those who suffer, or do they insist in performing an act, which is not apolitical but has deep social consequences and deepens social injustices? As Darder and Mirón (2006) suggest:

There is no question that we are living in a time when we must stretch the boundaries of critical educational principles to infuse social and institutional contexts with its revolutionary potential. It is a moment when our *emancipatory theories must be put into action*, in our efforts to counter the hegemonic fear-mongering configurations of a national rhetoric that would render teachers, students, parents, and communities voiceless and devoid of social agency. Hence, critical pedagogical ideas and practices in the interest of democratic schooling must be central to our efforts to confront the powerlessness and uncertainty that is so much the reality in many public schools today. (p. 7)

Critical pedagogy comes to bring hope to these New Dark Ages (Nikolakaki, 2011), since it is revolutionary and reintroduces the potential for struggles to promote social justice. So, as despairing as the conditions created by neoliberalism can be, they are also a basis for hope. And hope is needed in education, especially for the teachers. Hope is based on a human-centric worldview. It behooves us to imagine that humanity deserves better than this; that humanity can make it work right. As Castoriadis said (1988), societies are self-instituted. The difficult thing is for this idea to be conscientized. Besides, along with dark ages comes renaissance, hope for a better condition for humanity.

We can always learn from everyday lives in schools, in society, and in nature and improve our practice. Overall, building and defending a truly democratic and critical education is a collective project. We have much to learn from each other.

Freire (2001) said, “The educator with a democratic vision or posture cannot avoid insisting on the critical capacity, curiosity and autonomy of the learner in his teaching praxis” (p. 33). First of all we have to look closer at the pedagogy inscribed in the classroom for the cultivation of a democratic ethos within each individual student. We must think of ways to pedagogically contribute to the creation of a human being who is autonomous, more humane, author of his/her decisions, dignified, with social solidarity, responsibility, and a sense of freedom that negates every dehumanizing practice. This means that critical pedagogy promotes a teaching culture that will foster the development of a young generation with a democratic ethos, which will inevitably negate the capitalist system. To nourish and practice a democratic ethos is to deal primarily with the inner self, in the belief that the social expression of this self as praxis will follow accordingly. An essential step to take toward building a democratic ethos is to instigate in students a desire for freedom and a rejection of oppression as values. We must also link, rigorously and with perseverance, our labor within schools, universities, and communities to actual conditions and events, with the clear purpose and intent of transforming these conditions collectively in very concrete and meaningful ways. A critical pedagogy in the classroom also necessitates that practice employed confirm an agenda, according to which people and nature coexist harmonically.

In this context critical pedagogy in the New Dark Ages must promote the sense of freedom, an inner sense that radicalizes and revolutionizes interpersonal and group relations, an inner revolution, which will express itself outwardly and will transform the existing structures, relations, and modes of communication. In essence, the democratic ethos is the starting point of a reflective praxis. This democratic ethos evolves into conscientization, which in turn becomes responsabilization with hope, culminating in solidarity, love, dignity, and mutual support through praxis, inevitably reinforcing the same democratic ethos. It is for critical pedagogy to assist students in developing the capabilities to further their involvement in the communitarian process, in a search for a more just world.

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