■ Paolo Vittoria and Dave Hill

FOREWORD. CRITICAL EDUCATION IN TIMES OF RIGHT-WING POPULISM AND PROPAGANDA

Propaganda, management, manipulation –
All arms of manipulation cannot be
instruments of Humanization.
(Freire, 2005 p. 68)

THE ICCE CONFERENCE AND ITS IDEOLOGICAL, EDUCATIONAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXTS

We are very glad to present this special edition of *Educazione Aperta* resulting from the Ninth Annual Conference of the International Conference on Critical Education (ICCE) held in Naples in July 2019. The struggle on behalf of the oppressed is an ongoing global struggle- with particular local characteristics and manifestations. The global and local context of struggle are the eruption of cruel, xenophobic, right-wing authoritarian populism and populist leaders.

Ideological and actual material disputes and struggles are evidenced, for example, in the rejection, as opposed to the reception, of immigrants. Intolerance, indeed, often, hatred, is the basis of this kind of right-wing xenophobic populism. Recent events and political trends in many countries give witness to a strong wind that is contrary to the politics of resistance and humanization: it is the wind of the criminalization of solidarity, of the exaltation of the individual, of the values of competition. These- at the social and (in)human level- are the effects of neoliberal

economic policy, the transfer of wealth and income from the poor to the rich, the impoverishment and immiseration of hundreds of millions who have seen cuts in their wage and their social wage (benefits, public services) - in particular since 2008 but over the longer period since Reaganism/ Thatcherism of the 1970s and 1980s and the first test-bed of neoliberalism, the Chile of the murderous Pinochet regime.

This wind of intolerance and immiseration must lead the field of education to reaffirm and reorganize our international solidarity and redefine strategies, thoughts, methods of those of us committed to economic and social justice.

Struggles for social justice are, therefore, dramatically placed at the margins of what we can call "mass thought" or "dominant thought", the current neoliberal ideological hegemony. The Conference was a cultural, educational and political organization of movements, associations, people who are fighting for justice, equality, solidarity, dialogue and action/ activism at local and international level. As it says on the Conference Website, https://9icce2019.wordpress.com, the 9th International Conference on Critical Education (ICCE): Resistance and Praxis against Populism, Sexism and Racism, held from 3 to 6 of July 2019 in Naples, Italy at the Università degli studi di Napoli Federico II, the Sala dei Baroni (*Hall of the Barons*) in Castel Nuovo, and Accademia di Belle Arti (*Academy of Fine Arts*), provided a vibrant and egalitarian platform, encouraging scholars, educators, activists, students, and those interested in contesting the current neo-liberal/ neo-conservative/ nationalist hegemony, to come together and engage in a free, democratic and productive dialogue.

The Conference was started in 2010 by Kostas Skordoulis of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece, and Dave Hill, of Anglia Ruskin University and Middlesex University, UK, and also of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece. Both are Marxist and Critical Educators, and both trade union and activists, and, following their initial, Bethnal Green meeting in the East End of London in 2009, had decided to organize such an annual conference- open to critical educators and critical pedagogues of various varieties, schools and tendencies, on a non-sectarian and collegiate, comradely basis. ICCE is very much an international conference, regularly attracting 200-300

participants, including around 60 regular participants. Some sessions have been attended by many hundreds. The previous eight conferences were held at Universities in London, Athens, Thessaloniki, Ankara and Wroclaw (Poland). The conference is non-sectarian, embracing Marxist, Communist, Socialist, left social democrat, Freirean, emancipatory educators and activists from a variety of traditions. The conference aims to be a space for reflection and common planning for these communities. We learn from each other. And stimulate each other. And provide a safe space for those of us anti-hegemonic intellectuals and activists to give and take from each other intellectual, political and emotional support and solidarity.

THIS PUBLICATION

We present here a special edition about the IX Conference in Naples organized in three parts: "Freire, Boal and critical education", "Marxism, critical education and crisis of democracy", and "Critical education, inclusivity and struggle for social justice".

The first part is about the history, the thought, the social commitment of Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal. It comes from as *veias abertas da America Latina*, the open veins of Latin America: from historical wounds, fractures, and feelings of solidarity with the marginalized, the mistreated, the forgotten, the oppressed. Latin America becomes a metaphor of an existential, political, human, psychological, pedagogical condition of oppression: that of a historically colonized culture that invades the oppressed in all his/ her being. Freire and Boal are part of an anti-colonial culture, in favor of resistance of oppressed peoples, and cultural minorities. One major strand of Critical Education comes from this tradition of resistance. Freire and Boal were organizers of human hope that, if not historically rooted, if not politically organized, can easily become disillusionment. In this ontological vocation of historical organization of human hope, in this existential tension, we take the side the political, social and artistic aspects of revolutionary action of Freire and Boal. It is the poetics of life, the poetics of those who dedicate their lives to art, to education: Boal in the theatre, Freire in education (Vittoria, 2016, 2019). They are both part of the historical circumstances

in which social movements were organized in the fields of literacy, education, popular theatre and land reform for social transformation. These movements were brutally crushed by the 1964 coup that forced Freire and Boal into exile at different times. Via different paths Freire and Boal spread their thoughts in other countries of world, and then returned to Brazil at the beginning of the eighties, during the period of re-democratization. They joined as political activists, returning from exile, in active participation in the reconstruction of democracy in Brazil- a democracy, unfortunately seriously threatened by the recent political events, the electoral triumph of Bolsonaro, and his neo-fascistic threats and actions.

Freire and Boal have in common an immense trust in the emancipatory and maieutic power of the human relationship through education, art, theatre and literacy. A trust that we are all potentially artists and we are all educators/educates. The breaking of the relational barriers, the construction of a dialectical, open and reciprocal relationships for critical consciousness.

The spectator, in the theatre of Boal, takes part in the action, discusses it with the actors and other spectators: as Boal said, he becomes a spect-actor. In the pedagogy of Freire, the educator learns from educated, teaching and learning. The essays show as reinvent Boal and Freire, to build a more open, therefore dialogic, critical relationship.

In our times this form of siege and persecution reproduces itself in forms of false democracy. Political figures like Bolsonaro in Brazil have often expressed hatred and disappointment against the experiences of solidarity, defense of the Earth, critical consciousness.

The second part treats the crisis of democracy is truly the crisis of capitalism and to understand this is important read and/or to re-read Marx, resignify the role of critical intellectual, the Marxist intellectual, the activist intellectual.

What Marxism does is to expose the class nature of society and of `official' education, the ways in which `official' education- in its organisation, its formal curriculum, its hidden curriculum and its pedagogies- serve to reproduce the current class structure of society, with its economic relations of production and its social relations of production. This is so overall, despite the efforts of resistant and counter-hegemonic education

workers. Capitalist economy and society is based on the expropriation, the extraction, the *exploitation* of the surplus value, the profit, produced by the labour power of workers- the working class- by capitalists - large shareholders, multi billionaires and millionaires, and by their chief organizers such as CEOs. While both the capitalist class and the working class develop historically and recompose- the re-composition of the labour market- the fundamental principle of capitalism, for Marxists, is this economic exploitation of the working class- those of us who sell our labour power to capital or to the institutions in society that support and sustain capitalism (such as health and education apparatuses).

For Marxists, capitalism is not just immoral and a case of `oppression'. It is that capitalism is exploitative. It is based on economic exploitation. However, most Marxists and socialists (the terms are slightly different and used differently in different historical and geographical situations) point to the need for `agency' for action, for the need for Marxist militants and activists to work to develop class consciousness, to use Marx and Engels' phrase (Marx and Engels, 1848) the development of the working class as a (conscious) `class for itself', instead of a `class in itself' with economically similar positions in relationship to the ownership of the means of production and similar social relations of production, but with no sense of class unity or class struggle (Marx, 1847). Freire used the term, `conscientization' (Freire, 1972). Marxists believe in `agentist' activism, in the need to develop strong political organizations to fight for major social and economic, revolutionary, change. For Marxists today, socialism and Marxism are not `inevitable', they have to be fought for. Marxists believe that the point is not simply to describe the world but to change it. In Marx's words, `The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it' (Marx, 1845, cited in Hill, 2019).

Of course, as with Freirean educators and critical pedagogues, there are different types of socialist, Marxist theorisations, analyses, programs, pedagogies. `Resistance Marxists', many of whom are represented in this publication, (and in Rasinki, Hill and Skordoulis, 2018, reporting on a previous ICCE Conference) synthesizing `Reproduction Marxism' with `Resistance Marxism', agentism within the ideological and repressive state apparatuses such as formal, `official' education. Hundreds of

thousands, perhaps millions, of teachers, educators, within official education institutions such as schools and universities, `unofficial' schools and colleges/ universities, and in trade unions, political parties, social movements and community, friendship and family groups, have been carrying out forms of critical education, emancipatory education, socialist education, communist education across the globe and across the ages. This publication, and the ICCE conferences, academic journals such as the *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies* (www.jceps.com), and *Educazione Aperta*, attempt to spread and to share and learn from, and act upon different approaches to critical education.

So, all this makes us understand that it is not possible to think of social inclusion only as a didactic and pedagogical technique, but that it must start from a political and economic analysis of social structures.

The third part treats about how it is unthinkable to believe that social and economic inclusion is independent of a critical reflection on the system of globalization, precariousness of work, and the growing individualism and hyper-individualism that creates fear and discouragement and pauperization. Right-wing Populism blows exactly on the wind of fear. It creates a climate of war against the poor, and war *between* the poor, war stoked and stimulated by those in power, a war premised and propagated on grounds of `race', religion, sexuality, type of employment (private or public or unemployment) and relative degrees of wealth and poverty. The attempted (but always contested) hegemony of the authoritarian populist Right is partly based on the power of the algorithm, on the control of data on the web, on the speculative use of fake-news. It also develops into the use of brute force, of the burning down of immigrant or Roma camps, the turning away of boats of refugees, the murder of anti-fascist and anti-racist militants. It is not enough for those of us engaged in countering this neoliberal populist hegemony to say "inclusion", therefore, nor enough to engage ourselves in defensive and offensive anti-fascist, anti- racist, organization and involvement in movements and actions against right-wing authoritarianism. It is also that we actively develop and spread critical thought, critical awareness, critical interrogation, critical consciousness on the reasons for exclusion, marginalization, oppression, exploitation. The third part of this publication is dedicated to this kind of critical reflection.

This astoundingly broad yet focused publication draws on critical intellectuals and activists from a variety of critical education traditions (some Freirean, some from different approaches of Marxism, though other tendencies and traditions are represented here). Through the richness of the theorization and praxis represented in this publication and through our activism as critical activist intellectuals in other arenas- we express our commitment, our reaffirmation of the need for the resistance, for solidarity, dialogue, critical consciousness and creativity and activism in such difficult times in which populism, propaganda, manipulation are strategies of the current hegemony. We have often heard and sung *Bella Ciao* during the conference in many languages. The Italian partisan resistance song resounded in an idea of education that is clearly anti-fascist.

So, keep in touch! Don't miss the next ICCE conference, the X International Conference for Critical Education, in Thessaloniki, 25-28 June, 2020! The website is www.eled.auth.gr/icce2020/

December, 2019

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