

**Spyros Themelis, Stephen Cowden and Inny Accioly - Book Symposium on Curry Malott and Derek Ford (2015) *Marx, Capital and Education: Towards a Critical Pedagogy of Becoming*. New York: Peter Lang**

**Review 1**

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***The emergence of radical alternatives: broadening the horizons of possibility through critical pedagogy of becoming***

What was there before neoliberalism? What will be there after its end? If you answered 'capitalism' to both questions, then this book is not for you. However, if you only answered 'capitalism' to the first question, then you would have a lot to gain from reading it. In the following lines, I will offer an appraisal of the book by locating it in the contemporary intellectual production. As such, I will explore a number of key issues that run across the book and merit some consideration.

The foremost of these themes is the idea of communism. The authors invoke this idea not only as a way out of the cul-de-sac of the current phase of capitalism, more widely known as neoliberalism or neoliberal capitalism, but as a permanent way into a better future. In their own words, '*Rather than shying away from the term "communism" and taking cover in democracy, we confront head-on the ideological distortions that have permeated U.S. society and other capitalist democracies.*' (p. 4). The authors are fully aware that this choice is bound to inflict some reactions and they rightly do so. Cowden's review is a case in point, as it raises some concerns about the use of the concept of communism, which, for him, can be seen as an ailment of the imagination of the Left rather than an exegetical imperative. I feel that there are a number of issues with both positions. On one hand, Cowden erroneously attributes the origins of Malott and Ford's use of the term communism to the texts of Badiou and Zizek. While it is true that both those thinkers were among the first ones to re-insert communism into common parlance, at least among the Left, but also more broadly, that still does not suffice to associate Malott and Ford's use of communism with that of Badiou (2010) and Zizek (2010). In fact, I would argue that Malott and Ford's use of the concept is much more nuanced and developed than that of Badiou and Zizek. For them (Malott and Ford) communism is not another means of punishing those responsible for the decay of capitalism nor is it a romantic re-articulation of that good old idea: they are not trying to sell old wine into new bottles. Rather, they are seeking to articulate a re-worked philosophy of freedom and creation, a pedagogy of becoming as they call it. If read in this vein, then the book gains added heuristic value, though it has not to be approached as an exegetical device, that is to

say a book that can help us understand all that is wrong with capitalism. In fact, their account is void of any apologia and plenary with a zeal-like desire to press upon the reader the beauty of an alternative world that has yet to become. Accioly aptly calls this a 'terrifying beauty'. However, she does not advance further and lets her reader decide for herself whether the terrifying lies with the becoming or with its beauty. Perhaps the authors will take to this metaphor positively as it captures the spirit of the dialectic they engage with throughout their book. And dialectic is, apart from mediation, also contradiction. Although the authors acknowledge this, they seem to emphasise more its mediative character. And this is where their invocation of communism becomes laden with possibility. Malott and Ford are concerned with the foundations of communism as a property of humanity-not as it is, but as it can become. This is of some importance or one might lose sight of the oeuvre the authors make to their reader. When Malott and Ford throw the gauntlet, it is not because they have an aesthetic commitment to communism as the ephemerally appropriate or intellectually pleasing. Rather they do so because they see something that has been, is not and could become (again or anew). In a nutshell, they see in communism a bridge between the past and the future, which is necessarily mediated by the present. For them, as for Marx (1939/1973) who they duly quote, communism is '*the absolute movement of becoming*' (p. 488). And this movement '*dialectically links the subjective and the objective, and it is in this way that [the authors] focus on education as a process of becoming. In other words, the critical pedagogy that [they] develop [in this book] recognizes both that subjectivity takes shape within—and as a result of—the totality of capital and that it is, in the last instance, subjects that push against and, hopefully, beyond that totality.*'

On the other hand, Malott and Ford might have made a leap too far in one of their core arguments in support of their version of transformation (i.e. towards communism). For the 'objective' reality that the subjects-under-capitalism (might) seek to change, does not take place independently from their own subjective understandings of it. In other words, while '*pushing against and, hopefully, beyond that totality*' (p. 4) of capitalism, subjects might have (falsely or prematurely) come to realise that they have 'achieved communism', or they might have done so momentarily. I would expect the authors to counter this criticism by saying that this is not in line with their idea of communism unless by the latter we only mean the replacement of capitalism with a different system. Nevertheless, there is still an issue that needs to be resolved: even if/when communism emerges, the subjectivity of all those living in the present might not instantly change to reflect the communist reality. The authors might object also to this criticism by arguing that the pedagogy of becoming is tasked with the transformation of subjectivities too, but how do we know when this has happened/is achieved? How do we know when subjects have transformed their subjectivity in the moment, which is to say, as they are becoming?

This raises a related issue that Cowden discusses, namely that of the formation of the language of becoming. Where does this language come (or have to come) from? For Cowden the answer is unequivocal '*the language which will give us the alternative to the barbarism of financial markets has to come out of genuine popular struggles, and in the case of universities, from those struggles currently taking place in universities against fees,*

*outsourcing and casualisation. It is from these real struggles, rather than assertions of the need to 'become communist' that this new language will come*'. While Cowden is correct in asserting that the primacy of the alternatives lies (among other things) in utilising alternative methodologies and epistemologies of and in the transformation— that is to say, the language of transformation has to reflect the language of the struggle rather than an ad hoc invocation of the idea of communism – I feel that he is partly right. While this is genuinely the case, I think that Malott and Ford do not speak from the pulpit nor do they maintain critical distance from the struggles in the name of some ill-conceived epistemic authority or primacy of the intellectual. In fact, their account is informed by contemporary struggles, some of which they are immersed in. Now I cannot fully know whether the authors have travelled more times the distance from academia to the street than the other way around nor how fully enmeshed they are in the struggles they write about, but it is clear, and they do not shy away from it, that they do not see themselves as 'objective' theoreticians writing about struggling subjects independently from their own involvement in these struggles. Following Malott and Ford, the idea of communism has to remain high on the intellectual agenda of our times. Equally, though, Cowden has got it right when he warns against an invocation of any idea, communism or otherwise, that is not rooted in contemporary struggles. Yet, I would argue, this is a point of convergence rather than disagreement between the two sides.

There are two more themes that are worth discussing here: the role of critical pedagogy and the conception of transformation Malott and Ford have in mind. The two themes are intertwined therefore I will discuss them concurrently.

Malott and Ford have built their case methodically; therefore it is worthwhile following their steps. First, they take distance from the concept of neoliberalism as they find its heuristic and analytical value limited. What is more, they expose the limitations of neoliberalism from the standpoint of the particular type of transformation they are interested in (i.e. communist transformation). This is a crucial point in understanding the book for it allows its authors to discuss the idea of communism in a holistic way. That is to say, Malott and Ford do not compartmentalise and deconstruct capitalism in order to re-construct it later into a more coherent, kinder and more humane whole. Instead, they are keen on doing away with capitalism once and for all. By rejecting the concept of neoliberalism, which is the current configuration of capitalism, they pave the way for a wider conception of the political economy that is usually envisaged by capitalism's critics. For they do not have to justify why they leave outside their work important considerations, such as democracy, social justice, rights and so on. For them nothing can be fully accomplished under capitalism because capitalism is the system of denial, or to follow Hegel's terminology that the authors themselves use, capitalism is a negation:

Our critical pedagogy is only interested in combating neoliberalism because neoliberalism is the current configuration of capitalism and the capital relation today. We are not interested in fighting neoliberal privatizations in the name of a kinder, gentler capitalism (which is always only kinder and gentler for some, of course). Or, more strategically speaking, we are interested in fighting neoliberalism insofar as that fight allows us to lay bare the fundamental logic of capital upon which it rests. (p. 88).

But what is framework that allows the authors both to advance a critique of the current configuration of capitalism and at the same time to propound communism as *the* alternative? The answer is the concept of *global class war*, which is a reworking of Marcy's (1979) idea. This choice allows Malott and Ford to focus their analysis on the capitalist system in total rather than on neoliberalism, which is of historically limited duration (and, as a result, importance). In other words, they provoke us to think outside the 'neoliberal-all' way of thinking by exploring the merits of communism. According to the authors, any other solution to the current and future woes of humanity will not be responded to in a lasting, fulfilling and just way. However, this is the master framework. In moving towards it we need, they suggest, another way of doing things, another way of being: this is the meaning they give to the "critical pedagogy of becoming" or "Marxist pedagogy of becoming". The reader might notice that throughout the book the authors do not call this approach a 'method' because that would curtail its transformative potential and confine its all-encompassing character to a mere revolutionary fetish. For them, critical pedagogy is more than a method and nothing less than another way of being in the world:

Critical pedagogy is an intervention in the present order of things, a force of contestation that not only insists that there are alternatives to present social formations but, more importantly, also develops a vision of what those alternatives might look like, or at least some elements of what they entail. And, as we will continue to stress, the process of becoming other cannot but begin with the present. (p. 39).

Accioly in her review takes this point further and shows the role critical pedagogy can play in empowering and transforming teachers and other public service employees in Brazil, which currently is one of the most important places in the world when it comes to seeking alternatives to neoliberalism. For neoliberalism might have a short history but capitalism doesn't. And this history we find ingrained in the super-exploitation of the Brazilian people, as Accioly reminds us. The alternatives presently sought in Brazil might not point to a revolutionary role of the working class, as some accounts would have it, but they certainly underline the class characteristics of the struggles being waged there and the historically rooted and globally important features of the fight against capitalism. For as long as this is the case, Malott and Ford can find recourse to their framework of *global class war*. Yet, a caveat is necessary; the emphasis here should not be on the term 'global', but on the phrase 'class war'. Not that we cannot find any global dimensions to the struggles of the Brazilian people – by contrast, given the global character of neoliberal capitalism, this is not tenuous a proposition at all. However, while accepting that Brazil is inescapably implicated within the global division of labour, the point is to approach Brazil as a system, as a whole, where the full force of capitalism is exercised in the totality of the Brazilian space: its people, land, history, ideology, language and so on. In other words, Brazil has to be approached as a system that is exploited in its entirety. In that sense, the exploitation of the Brazilian people is *global* because it has all-encompassing characteristics. Following capitalism in its development through history allows for the trajectory of exploitation to be mapped across the years. As Accioly makes clear, exploitation now follows the workers wherever they choose to be: in their schools, hospitals, museums and so on. For nothing escapes capitalism and no one is outside of it: capitalism is a totalising and universalising system (McLaren, 2005; McLaren

and Rikowski, 2001). Anywhere where there is capitalism, there is class war. And this war, Malott and Ford argue, is global, that is to say it is spread everywhere in a single place, across the world and it affects everyone. But how are we to fight such a war? In other words, where does hope lie in *Marx, Capital, and Education*? The answer rests in the critical pedagogy of becoming, which, according to the authors,

Can offer a powerful tool in helping students and teachers situate their own experiences in this larger social, historical context, fostering self-empowerment and collective critical agency. In other words, in order to negate ourselves as alienated labour, we need to be able to see ourselves as such, see ourselves as the negation of ourselves as such, and, finally, engage in the negation ourselves. For Marx ... this is the historical process of becoming, which, in line with Paulo Freire, should be conceived of as a never-ending process, one that is rigorously lived, both individually and collectively. (p. 13).

Without trying to be the midwife of consensus here, I can see another point of convergence between, on one hand, Malott and Ford, and Accioly and Cowden, on the other. For they all seem to agree that the process of seeking transformation is never-ending and it has to be lived collectively as well as individually. In defining the '*contemporary moment as one that is dominated by counterrevolution*' (p. 39), that is to say as a movement that seeks to oppress the majority of people and negate them as human beings and curtail their potential in fighting back, Malott and Ford aim to join forces with various movements across the globe that are actively seeking to reverse this process and counter pose humanising alternatives. Cowden offers a glimpse of similar struggles in the UK, while Accioly provides insights from Brazil.

No book alone will ever suffice to push a door open into an alternative, however the latter might be defined and conceptualised. Yet, few authors can achieve in a single book to spell out an alternative and lay out its premises as lucidly and forcefully as Malott and Ford do. *Marx, Capital, and Education* is for those who are ready to think outside of the box and those willing to have their political, educational, pedagogical and sociological imaginations dangerously stretched and their horizons' of possibility broadened. This is not another book about alternatives to a better future, but rather, a key one in trying to make these alternatives possible.

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## Review 2

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### *'Critical Pedagogy, Marxism and Equality'*

For most people in the English-speaking world, the encounter with the body of work known as Critical Pedagogy comes through the book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, written by the now somewhat legendary Brazilian educationist Paulo Freire (1921-1997). In the introduction to the English version of the book Richard Shaull summed up the radical thrust of Freire's arguments in the idea that education 'can never be neutral'; it either acts to socialize the learner into 'the logic of the present system' or it becomes the 'practice of freedom; the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world' (Freire 1996:16). This is expressed in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* through the critique of the 'banking method' of education, whereby passive students were simply the recipients of the material deposited by their all-knowing teachers. The 'critical' element within Critical Pedagogy was thus not just about content, but essentially concerned with the methods by which education was undertaken, and Freire signally rejected the idea that his pedagogy simply involved replacing a conservative content with a radical one. His concern was with a transformed form and content within pedagogy – and it is in this light that we can understand his argument that it was by overcoming their 'internal oppressor' that learners developed the capacity to question and practically challenge social inequalities. Freire's ideas have been popularised and developed by a range of contemporary critical radical educational critics like Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, Antonia Darder, bell hooks and Michael Apple, to name simply a few of those who have drawn on his legacy. Yet despite its huge influence and status as the bible of Critical Pedagogy, it could be said that *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is more revered than understood, and this is not altogether surprising when one looks at it in more detail. A key problem is that Freire's negative critique is much more extensively elaborated than the alternatives he actually developed and worked with; indeed it is curious that Freire doesn't refer directly to the specific illiteracy educational work he undertook in Brazil. Did this work involve a curriculum? Did it involve assessment, and if so of what sort? Similarly for all the importance of Freire's attack on 'banking education', his discussion of how the unequal power relations between students and their teachers could be challenged remains somewhat elliptical. Might an implication of his work be a class taught on the principle that every view discussed is equally valid? While this might be good for building participation, doesn't this leave us with a completely relativistic account of knowledge? This points us to another tension in Freire's work concerning the project of Critical Pedagogy; was it primarily a teaching strategy based on the idea of 'dialogue', or rather a strategy for revolutionary social

transformation? These ambiguities in Freire's legacy have remained and continue to generate what are often very different approaches from people who claim to be practicing Critical Pedagogy.

This question of whether Critical Pedagogy is first and foremost a teaching method or rather a version of Marxist revolutionary politics frames the approach of the book 'Marx, Capital and Education: Toward A Critical Pedagogy of Becoming' by Curry Stephenson Malott and Derek Ford. As the title suggests they are very strongly of the latter camp and indeed their book opens by addressing their frustration with the vagueness of the description of education as a 'transformative process'. As the authors argue 'Education can change people and societies, but *how* and – just as importantly- *toward what ends?* (2015:1). In line with many contemporary critics of neoliberal capitalism, they argue that what was once a leftist and progressive language of social change and transformation has been appropriated by neoliberal ideologists, who are seeking to justify a form of capitalism which requires constant and disruptive change (a view expressed particularly by Boltanski and Chiapello [2005]). The result is that much of Critical Pedagogy's rhetoric has simply lost any critical edge. Malott and Ford's response to this is that Critical Pedagogy must be reformulated around an essentially Marxist critique of capitalism. Much of the book is made up of an explication of Marx's work but they begin by drawing on the recent invocation of 'Communism' as the starting point of a new anti-capitalist pedagogy. The term 'Communism' here represents not a return to the old world of Communist Parties, or 'actually existing Communism' as it was in the Soviet Union or China, but comes via the work a body of theory initiated by the Marxist intellectuals Slavoj Zizek and Alain Badiou (see Badiou 2010) which argues that by limiting itself to the defence of 'democracy', the Left is demonstrating not just cowardice, but its inability to break with the parameters of bourgeois thought. This work frontally attacks the neoliberal 'end of history' zeitgeist and repudiates the idea that, in Badiou's words, 'to want something more is to want something worse' (Badiou 2010:1). Malott and Ford's engagement with this work comes from US social theorist Jodi Dean and they quote the assertion from her 2012 book 'The Communist Horizon' that 'with Communism as our horizon, the field of possibilities for revolutionary theory and practice starts to change shape. Barriers to action fall away...Anything is possible' (Malott and Ford: 1). Developing from this starting point the book then goes on to offer a re-examination of selections from Marx's work; the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, excerpts from Volumes 1, 2, and 3 of *Capital* and the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, an understanding of which is central to the process of 'becoming communist'. Included alongside are other chapters concerned with the commodification of educational institutions and the destruction of the public ethos of education, which offers a similar analysis to the work of Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren. The central and distinctive argument of the book is that in order to move beyond Critical Pedagogy's rhetorical appropriation by neoliberal ideology and the predominance of the idea that there is 'no alternative' to capitalism other than something worse, it is essential to situate Critical Pedagogy on a thoroughly Marxist and 'Communist' theoretical footing.

While the book offers a useful account of how the texts of Marx it discusses can be linked to a critique of the commodification of education, I think there is a problem in the claim that it



is only through Marx that a genuine Critical Pedagogy can be re-founded. One of the things I least liked about the old world of Communism was an approach to Marx's writings where one was required to believe that his work gave us the basis of understanding every facet of social life. Marx himself characterised his project, certainly from the time he and Engels wrote the Communist Manifesto in 1848 onwards, as 'the Critique of Political Economy'. While the question of pedagogy is not entirely unconnected with this, it is important to be clear that Marx himself was not particularly concerned with educational questions. While his work is a crucial starting point for understanding the way educational processes are being marketed at the moment (and see the work of Andrew McGettigan [2013] as one of the best examples of this), that isn't the same as a theorisation of Critical Pedagogy as a specifically educational initiative. In similar terms, I remain unconvinced of the value of this invocation of 'Communism' by thinkers like Dean, Zizek and Badiou. For all the problems of 'old communism', it represented a real movement of massive historical significance and genuine transformative power in the lives of millions of people. The neoliberal narrative that there is 'no alternative' to capitalism derives its power in no small way from the actual destruction not just of the 'old communism', but also of the 'state socialism' of public welfare and social democracy. I can't help but think that this re-invocation of 'Communism' simply reflects frustration by Left intellectuals regarding the lack of mass opposition to neoliberalism and the sheer difficulty in re-establishing collective and democratic alternatives. This frustration is entirely understandable and I share in it myself, but it seems to me that the language that will give us the alternative to the barbarism of financial markets has to come out of genuine popular struggles, and in the case of universities, from those struggles currently taking place in universities against fees, outsourcing and casualisation. It is from these real struggles, rather than assertions of the need to 'become communist' that this new language will come

I noted earlier that Critical Pedagogy as a project was concerned not just with content but also essentially with the method of pedagogy. Given that one of neoliberalism's most significant successes has been in individualising our subjectivities, it seems to me that Critical Pedagogy's role in allowing learners to find their own voices and to see the relationship between these and the possibility of articulating collective demands is more important than ever. But I can't help but feel that it is this dimension of Critical Pedagogy as a process which receives scant attention in this book. When the authors refer to Critical Pedagogy, they seem to define this as the adoption of a Marxist approach to contemporary global politics. For instance in Chapter 2 they write:

Critical Pedagogy has to have an adequate understanding of the global relationship of class and national forces as an on-going historical development central to the spirit and intent internal to capitalist logic, and this understanding has to be primary. If one examines the current neo-liberalisation of US public schools outside of this context, then one will only have a partial and therefore inadequate understanding of the dynamics at work...and the potential for connecting domestic struggles to the global class war (2015:60).

The point is not whether this is true or untrue, but from the perspective of Critical Pedagogy, the key issue for me would be the means by which these understandings and connections

could be made by learners or activists in particular contexts. Earlier in my discussion I noted a concern in Freire's work between the tension of his conception of Critical Pedagogy as egalitarian education, and critical pedagogy as a politics of revolutionary transformation. While Malott and Ford are rightly concerned to critique a version of Critical Pedagogy whose vaguely utopian language has entirely diminished that collective dimension, what I don't see enough of in this book is a sense of the emancipatory nature of Critical Pedagogy *as process*.

This relates to my final point about the relationship between Critical Pedagogy and Marxism. Now while Marxism plays an important part within the tradition of Critical Pedagogy, it is important to note that this has never been an exclusively or even primarily a Marxist tradition. Some of the most important ideas within this body of work are not necessarily Marxist, and what I have in mind here primarily is the Radical Enlightenment tradition of 'Equality'. This work emerges through figures such as Thomas Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, and the working class tradition of auto-didacticism. One of the most fascinating contemporary explorations of the latter is Jacques Ranciere's discussion of the eighteenth century educator Jacotot in his book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1991). The central issue explored in this book concerns the development of a form of Pedagogy based on the belief in 'the equality of intelligence' (Ranciere, 1991:38). It's this same conceptualisation that has formed the basis of movements such as the Workers' Educational Association, and in a recent discussion of his involvement with this, Jim Crowther characterises this as based in the idea of a 'fundamental essential equality of being' (Crowther, in Cowden & Singh, 2013). If we were talking about a genealogy of Critical Pedagogy, I would argue we need to see this as a tradition which is significantly fed by Marxism, but that this is one of many streams within it. Rather than seeing this as a problem to be overcome, I would argue that these different elements of the radical Critical Pedagogy tradition need to be understood as existing in a creative and dialogic tension, and this is something that enriches that tradition.

In conclusion, Malott and Ford have offered a valuable discussion of the Marxist dimension of Critical Pedagogy. While this is very useful, the problem emerges where they want to identify the problems within Critical Pedagogy as a consequence of its insufficiently Marxist basis. I think this analysis fails to address the real problems faced by students, teachers and researchers who are at the sharp end of neoliberal educational policies, and is reductive when it comes to understanding the breadth of the tradition we are standing on. While Marxism plays an important role in that body of work, we also need to value its non-Marxist elements, particularly the tradition of 'radical equality', which is an important but not specifically Marxist pedagogy. In terms of the present, I feel that one of the most crucial strengths of Critical Pedagogy is its capacity to allow learners to find their own voices in the face of the real and epistemic violence through which we are isolated and 'individualised'. Indeed the challenge of the present moment strikes me as about creating spaces – in staff and student unions, in activist groupings and in everyday teaching situations - where those possibilities can be nurtured and expanded.

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### Review 3

#### Inny Accioly

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#### The terrifying beauty of becoming

This is not a conventional book review. My goal is not to evaluate the scholarly merit of the book, which is undeniable. Rather, I intend to show the importance of reading and thinking about critical pedagogy through the perspective presented in this book. I, and the authors of this book, believe that education can change people and societies. However, it is important to question toward what end should be this transformation and how it would take place.

As a Brazilian educator and activist, I've been watching the multiple interpretations of the work of Paulo Freire which have spread through Brazil and across the world. The co-optation of the critical discourse by the currents of neoliberalism, which sometimes appears under the nomenclature of *neo-developmentalism*, has contributed to the transformation of important popular demands into educational slogans (Scheffler, 1960) that aim to achieve popular support, hide social conflicts, or even, help implement authoritarian decisions. *Dialogue* and *participation* are some of the slogans that are recurring in current Brazilian education policies (Stahelin, Accioly, Sanchez, 2015). By contrast, the aim of participatory democracy that was enshrined in the Brazilian Federal Constitution of 1988, after twenty years of civil-military dictatorship, has been manipulated by the Workers Party (PT) to legitimise adverse interests to popular demands. A case in point is the National Plan for Education (2014 – 2024), which is the Act that lays out the aims and strategies of the Brazilian education for the next ten years, and clearly expresses this contradiction. The 'democratic participation' in education - where it actually occurs - is restricted in a way that does not cause impediments to public-private partnerships inside schools or standardized test (Colemarx, 2014). According to the Plan, the school councils, which can be understood as tools to achieve shared management of schools by giving responsibility to teachers, students and parents to take the important decisions, have now their importance restricted to a depoliticized form of assessment, management and control of school ratings.

In the introduction of *Marx, Capital and Education: Towards a Critical Pedagogy of Becoming* the authors anticipate that "The reader will therefore not find any vague talk in this book about inclusion, making society more just, expanding or reclaiming the public sphere', or 'restraining dominant power. In fact, one will not even read of democracy (p.3)." This is a very important discussion, because it brings out the limits of capitalism and the need of thinking about revolution. According to the experience in Brazil, "participate" is not the solution to the necessary transformation of society.

The authors rely on the work of Marx to formulate a *critical pedagogy of becoming*. This is a courageous attitude because despite the undeniable failures of capitalism, intellectuals who stand by communism and the writings of Marx suffer persecution from both the Right and the Left. As a contribution to build a revolutionary critical pedagogy, this book is based on a systematic and educational reading of a variety of Marx's works: the Paris manuscripts, the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, the three volumes of Capital, and the Critique of the Gotham Programme.

Malott and Ford (2015) write:

The Marxist dialectic allows us to understand that the potential to be free—to reunite thinking and doing—already exists within the alienated waged worker, from the privileged engineers and managers to the more oppressed manual labourers. Those of us who rely on a wage to survive are therefore contradictory—we embody our own potential negation as dehumanized existence because our vital powers, our humanness, are externally commanded and controlled (p.24).

In order to negate ourselves as alienated labour, we need to be able to see ourselves as such, see ourselves as the negation of ourselves as such, and, finally, engage in the negation ourselves. For Marx, this is the historical process of becoming, which, in line with Paulo Freire, should be conceived of as a never-ending process.

The historical situation that faces the working class of the "peripheral" regions of capitalism (Fernandes, 1975) points to the "practical necessity" (Sánchez-Vázquez, 2011) of imagining and developing ways to transform reality. The transition from theory to practice or from "radical critique to radical praxis" (ibid.) is conditioned by the historical situation. In other words, this process will suffer the limiting impacts of the lack of free time, the lack of material and organizational resources, the trap of ideological battle and also the positive impacts generated by the advancement of collective political consciousness. The radical critique involves deep understanding of the social and historical bases under which human beings relate to each other. It implies deep analysis and critique of the foundations, dimensions, implications and consequences of the capitalist mode of production, which is understood by some Marxist strands as a "contradictory totality":

In stark contrast to mainstream, domesticated currents that put critical pedagogy forward as a method of teaching and learning, we insist that critical pedagogy is part of a movement toward the radical transformation of the totality of social relations, which entails the abolition of capitalism and private-property-based social relations. This means—and this point is absolutely crucial—that our critical pedagogy is interested in combating neoliberalism only because neoliberalism is the current configuration of capitalism and the capital relation today (Malott, Ford, 2015, p.88).

The authors make an important critique of some critical pedagogy currents that are limited to fighting against neoliberalism and its expressions. It is important to consider that if the enemy is neoliberalism - in the case of Brazil the enemy is the imperialistic face of neoliberalism that could overwhelm its national interests - the solution would be greater activity of the state

in the social sphere. In this way, the Brazilian sociologist Florestan Fernandes (1975) explained that imperialism is not a phenomenon that occurs by impositions from the outside. The local bourgeoisie are busily engaged in imperialism inside and outside Brazil. For this purpose, they take control of the state apparatus so that it serves their interests.

In Brazil, since 2003 when the Workers' Party was elected to the federal government, the neoliberal "formula" assumed *neo-developmental* features. This was met with broad popular support due to the "social" characteristics of attendant policies. On the one hand, the government of the Workers' Party invested in income distribution programs. On the other hand, the Workers' Party also attacked labour rights by investing in national conglomerates that became strong enough to establish themselves as global players<sup>[1]</sup> that acted imperialistically.

It appears that the banner of critical pedagogy is being flown as a catchall category for conceptual and theoretical endeavours that actually diverge epistemologically and ideologically from each other in important ways. The variations are based on different interpretations of Freirean political and pedagogical principles vis-à-vis Marxist conflict paradigms and post-foundational critical theories. This discussion is presented by Stahelin, Accioly, and Sanchez (2015) in a paper that point to the divergence in the field of critical environmental education in Brazil.

Contemporary critical pedagogy, without Marx, suffers from exactly this short-sightedness. Because mainstream critical pedagogy and some of its post-structural variants begin by rejecting Marx, critical pedagogy tends to be based on simplistic understandings of social class that stress the consequences of capitalism, such as poverty, inequality—and, in education, educational inequality—without grasping the internal logic and driving force of capitalism (ibid., p.65).

The understanding of internal logic and driving force of capitalism is crucial especially in the so-called third world because of the necessity of making the transition from theory to practice to transform reality. From the analysis of the relationship between value and labour, Marx was able to elucidate the fundamental contradiction of the capitalist mode of production. He helps us to understand that the commodity prices point to some evidence of deep economic processes. When we focus the analysis not on the commodities already produced but on the production process, we face the labourer and the time spent at labour. Capitalist exploitation is operated in the division between *socially necessary labour* and *surplus labour-hours*. This is a split within the working time spent during the production process. The *socially necessary labour* is the labour-time necessary for the reproduction of the labourer. It is the part of the working day that would be used to produce the indispensable products for their own subsistence. The other part of the working day is called *surplus labour-hours* and generates no value to the labourer.

Socially necessary labour is the result of historical and moral elements (i.e., class struggle). The struggle over the working day is a struggle over the values produced and to whom, or more accurately, which class, these values will accrue (p.70).

In the third world - specifically in Latin America (Marini, 1973) - the mechanism used to ensure the internal dynamics of accumulation of capital by financial-industrial bourgeoisie was the increasing of surplus through the *super-exploitation* of labour (Marini, 1973).

The *super-exploitation* appears in a concrete way in the Brazilian National Sample Survey of Households of 2011. The minimum wage fixed for 2011 was R\$ 545.00. However, the required minimum wage which was calculated by the Department of Economic Statistics and Studies to cover the costs of housing, food, education, health, leisure, clothing, transportation and social security should be R\$ 2,329.00. Luce (2013) points out that more than half of Brazilian workers received wages between 4.27 and 1.42 times below the required minimum wage. This picture of the *super-exploitation* gets worse when we observe that in 2000s in Brazil 95% of the employed workforce received wages that were 1.5 times below the minimum wage (Pochmann, 2012). According to Osório (2014), the *super-exploitation* generates productive processes that ignore the needs of the majority of the working class because they direct the national products mainly to foreign markets.

The Brazilian development project is based on low-tech industries that produce goods to foreign markets. This development project impacts education policies in multiple ways. For example, the low-tech industries require less qualified workforce to perform basic jobs as they use a lot of machinery in the production. Because they are activities that use intensive natural resources and extensive land demand, they generate large social and environmental impacts and they are challenged by a growing number of popular movements.

This points to another paradox: as the machine makes redundant the skilled worker and thus eliminates the need for formal education, the emergence of the unskilled worker increases immiseration and thus working-class resistance, which in turn increases the need for the ideological management most efficiently and consistently offered by formal education. This paradox helps us understand education policy in the contemporary context that seems to sacrifice intelligence for obedience (Malott, Ford, 2015, p.102).

In Brazil, educational policies take the function of social control that Malott and Ford describe in their book. In addition, the coercive power of the state is largely used to suppress demonstrations. The years 2013 and 2014 were marked by massive protests and strikes of public school teachers, professionals working in public museums and cultural centres, subway workers, bus drivers, street-sweepers and many other professionals. What all these mobilisations had in common was the fight for better working conditions and complaints about workers' exploitation. Specifically the strike of public school teachers and professionals working in public museums and cultural centres exposed the new forms of privatization in education and culture. In Rio de Janeiro, teachers who were on strike were

prosecuted by the state and had their wages reduced. These teachers were forced to stop the strike, although the government did not negotiate with them and dismissed their demands.

In the context of dissatisfaction and repression, the National Education Meeting (ENE) was held in August of 2014 that brought together more than two thousand teachers, students, trade unionists, and participants in social movements from different parts of Brazil (also attended by representations from Mexico, the Palestinian Territories and France). It was an independent event committed to the principle that education should be public, free, secular, of high quality, socially relevant at all levels and universally accessible. It also highlighted the importance of unify and internationalization of the struggles to stop the commodification in education and all spheres of social life. This type of meeting is important because it is an opportunity to build knowledge about the international dynamics of capitalism.

Critical pedagogy has to have an adequate understanding of the global relationship of class and national forces as an ongoing historical development central to the spirit and intent internal to capitalist logic, and this understanding has to be primary. If one examines the current neo-liberalization of U.S. public schools outside of this context, then one will only have a partial and therefore inadequate understanding of the dynamics at work, the futures and lives at stake, and the potential for connecting domestic social struggles to the international global class war (ibid. p.60).

Malott and Ford (2015) emphasize Marx's argument that the state should fund education but retain no control over its purposes or curriculum. Rather, the state is who needs to be educated by the people (proletarians). This, the authors argue, is the basis for the *pedagogy of becoming* because under capitalism the state apparatus is in the hands of the capitalists and it expresses their interests (Gramsci, 2011).

A Marxist pedagogy of becoming resists capital's insistence that the capitalist has a right to exist; he does not. His existence, the existence of capital personified in a real human being, together in a class of capitalists, causes the economic bondage and growing suffering of labour. Now, the capitalists may or may not (depending on the severity of their crimes and the set of laws that we developed and deploy to judge them) have a right to be alive as human beings, but they categorically do not have a right to be capitalist human beings. In other words, labour does not belong to capital, and **the capitalist does not have a human right to exploit and degrade humanity** (Malott, Ford, 2015, p.147, my emphasis).

Malott and Ford's book is important because it shows us possible paths in moving from radical critique to radical praxis. The authors do not present easy solutions and ready-made formulas for transformation. Rather, they argue that one of the beautiful—if terrifying—attributes of 'becoming' is that it cannot be predicted (p.154). Certainly the seed of transformation is already among the global working class who struggle daily against all kinds of dispossession. Thus,



A critical pedagogy of becoming, based on a class analysis, is oriented toward working-class and other oppressed students, not students in general. Or perhaps we could say that critical pedagogy should work to transform the lives of all students, just in different ways: it should work to liberate oppressed students and repress students from the oppressing class (so that, in accordance with Freire, they can be humanized) (p.90).

When we (the proletarian teachers) understand that our students belong to a class we have the opportunity to unite ourselves to unveil the oppression and contradictions that dehumanize us. More than this, we can build paths for a profound transformation towards a society where there are no more classes or oppressions. In this way, the authors dedicate this book to all of the proletarian teachers, students, and fighters in the global class war.

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## Notes

[i]Some samples of Brazilian global players are the mining Vale which operates in more than twenty six countries, the contractor Odebrecht which operates in twenty one countries and Petrobras which operates in eighteen countries. These corporations receive financial auspices of the National Bank for Economic and Social Development (BNDES).

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