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**SCHOOLING
IN THE CARIBBEAN
AND LATIN AMERICA**

**REPRODUCTION,
RESISTANCE,
REVOLUTION**

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INTRODUCTION

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"What is the relationship between schools and society?" The discussion that ensues from this question too often takes the form of a vicious circle: Do we need better schools for a better society? Or do we need a better society for better schools? Liberal education theories in the United States—the geographical position from which we write—maintain that to improve society we must first improve schools. Better schooling will increase social mobility, incomes, and equality. This approach reflects US education reformer Horace Mann's balance wheel of society: school as the Great Equalizer. By contrast, French philosopher Louis Althusser, US economists Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, as well as some within the US radical left maintain that to better our schools, we must first better society. From this view, schools currently reproduce the racist, heteropatriarchal, classist societies of which they are part. Any attempt to address social injustice only through schooling will at best ameliorate injustice just enough so that unjust social structures perpetuate themselves by staving off revolutionary change. These familiar questions remain: Do schools actively *produce* society or do they merely *reproduce* it? Are schools institutions of change or sites of passivity?

We at LAPES ask if these enduring questions may risk oversimplification at the expense of assessing the more intricate dynamics of learning through specific place-based struggles. In our March 2018 symposium, "Schooling in Latin America: Reproduction, Resistance, Revolution," we sought to dramatically expand the terrain of inquiry: Is school the foremost modern educational institution in the Caribbean and Latin America? Is schooling different from education? What is school from a Caribbean and Latin American perspective? What has it been? How have Caribbean and Latin American schools reproduced their societies' ideologies or social relations, and how do they continue to do so? How have Caribbean and Latin American schools been sites of resistance against the reproduction of social injustices? What role have schools in the Caribbean and Latin America played during revolutionary moments when new ideologies, social relations, and apparatuses replace older ones? How have they served as counter-revolutionary

apparatuses? How have conceptions and practices of schooling in the United States influenced Caribbean and Latin American schooling, and vice versa?¹

Across two days, we learned about a broad spectrum of examples that complicated our understanding of how *social movements in society* relate to schooling. The four contributions to *LÁPIZ N°5*, first presented at the 2018 symposium, elaborate how Caribbean and Latin American movements practice deschooling, transform schools to practice dual power co-governance against existing state powers, and create alternative sites of learning through care and mutual aid, while avoiding essentialized or romanticized notions of pre-colonial indigenous learning histories. Our hope is that reading across these varied case studies can help ferment and foment a more vibrant ecosystem of pedagogically focused struggles for liberation in the Caribbean and Latin America. Furthermore, we offer that those based in the United States can evolve our inquiring paths in closer relationship with these hard-won epiphanies in our own hemisphere.

In "Existence (De)schooled," Catherine Walsh attends to the disciplining of subjectivities in formal educational spaces in service of the co-imbricated projects of modernization, progress, and global capitalism. Although she focuses on this problem in the context of Latin America's "left" governments of the Pink Tide, her conclusions also resonate beyond the continent. Walsh begins by asking readers to remember the massacre and disappearance of educators from the Ayotzinapa Rural Teacher-Training School of Iguala, Mexico in September 2014, a meditation that foregrounds how revolutionary thought has been made to —literally— disappear. Walsh considers

1→ We distinguish the Caribbean and Latin America to explicitly open up a critical discussion on the continentality of Latin Americanist discourses. Even though the only Caribbean example covered in this issue (Puerto Rico) is linguistic kin to Spanish-speaking Latin America, we wish to dedicate more attention to the Caribbean's distinct geographic and inter-cultural histories, pedagogies, and struggles. The Caribbean is a complex region entangled with Spanish, Portuguese, French, British, and Dutch colonial legacies, and thus our engagement with Puerto Rico is only an initial opening towards future conversations between Latin American and Caribbean pedagogies. The archipelagic nature of the Caribbean should not be subsumed by Latin America's continentality. We welcome readers' feedback to deepen these discussions and to strengthen our collective critical engagements by attending to the specificities of these varying contexts.

her's and others' *gritos* or "existence-based cries... against the lived realities of violence in its multiple forms and exacerbated proportions" in contexts that are claimed by both the "Right" and "self-identified Left."² In doing so, Walsh reminds readers of the very real-life stakes of these discussions; these are no mere theoretical ruminations.

Walsh's piece traverses geopolitical contexts to think through struggles within the matrix of modernity/coloniality, schooling and civilization. For example, she analyzes the use of reactionary "gender ideology" discourses by religious and political leaders across the political spectrum to disrupt feminist organizing for gender and sexual diversity across the continent. Walsh also considers the ways in which communities and collectives in *Abya Yala* (Latin America) engage in practices of deschooling, cultivating *existence otherwise* against the entangled matrices of the coloniality of power. Walsh is interested in educational spaces that have been created beyond the formal educational system as well as "pedagogies and praxis of existence otherwise present and emergent in the system's margins and cracks."³ Ultimately, Walsh complicates the left/right divide, and demonstrates the significance of deschooling in whatever tight spaces of possibility we might create.

Rebecca Tarlau challenges us to think of schools as more than just sites of ideological reproduction. The Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais sem Terra) (MST) proves that, despite their reliance on the liberal capitalist state, schools can, if designated as sites of ideological struggle, be places for fostering alternative visions of non-capitalist societies. In "Prefigurative Politics with, in, and against the State," Tarlau describes how the MST creates new schools, and transforms existing ones from within by cultivating what she calls "contentious co-governance" with local and federal authorities and institutions in Brazil.⁴

Tarlau holds up the MST as an example of how social movements express the dialectical unity between prefigurative and state struggles. According to Tarlau, the MST disproves the leftist dichotomy between

2 → Catherine Walsh, "Existence (De)Schooled," 24.

3 → Walsh, "Existence (De)Schooled," 21.

4 → Rebecca Tarlau, "Prefigurative Politics with, in, and against the State: The Brazilian Landless Workers Movement and Latin American Philosophies of Education," 53.

autonomous organizing and social movements that work within state institutions to transform them. In Tarlau's view, the MST's political education activities both inside and outside of schools demonstrate that it is possible to unify prefigurative and institutional strategies that seek to liberate us from capitalist exploitation. Tarlau maintains that "the dichotomy between prefigurative and institutional politics does not map on to most social movement organizing in Latin America, where there is a tradition of integrating autonomist practices with institutional transformation."⁵

To drive her point home, she "draws on the case of the MST's educational struggle to explore the relationship between prefigurative politics and occupying state power in the particular realm of public education."⁶ Reading this piece, we learn how the MST's political struggle illustrates that achieving state transformation "is more likely if the means involves strategically occupying public schools. In other words, not only can social movements build counter-institutions and prefigure democratic practices within their own ranks, they can also begin to prefigure socialist ideals in the very capitalist, bourgeois institutions that they are simultaneously fighting against."⁷ Engaging with Tarlau's contribution to *LÁPIZ N°5*, the reader must seriously ponder the extent to which "contentious co-governance," as both a pedagogical tool and political strategy, might be adopted within movements and classrooms that advance anticapitalist struggles.

Ana Cecilia Diego places the previous works by Walsh and Tarlau in a deep historical perspective by reviewing Aztec teaching-and-learning practices. She is careful to remind the reader that these practices do not always stand in easy analogic relationships to the conceptions of "schooling" and "education" in the colonial era, let alone our own neocolonial era. In "Intercultural Interpretations," Cecilia Diego draws from multiple sources—but especially the superb scholarship of Miguel León-Portilla and Alfredo López Austin—to interpret the Mendocino and Florentine Codices, as well as the chronicles of Motolinia, Sahagún, Durán, Mendieta, Torquemada, and Ixtlixochitl. In particular, she

5 → Tarlau, "Prefigurative Politics," 64.

6 → Tarlau, "Prefigurative Politics," 64.

7 → Tarlau, "Prefigurative Politics," 65.

focuses on two Aztec institutions of teaching-and-learning, the *calmecac* and the *telpochcalli*, in order to illustrate Julieta Paredes's assertion that "conquest is not a European privilege."⁸ As Cecilia Diego notes, the Aztec empire was "built upon the conquest of the Valley of Mexico."⁹ As such, any understanding of these Nahuatl people's institutions and practices of teaching-and-learning must place the reality of empire and conquest squarely in view, just as critical education theory seeks to illuminate the relations among empire, schooling, capital, and education.

Cecilia Diego walks a tightrope throughout her article. She balances, on the one hand, a sensitivity to the epistemic injustices perpetuated by scholars who "impose intercultural interpretations of a European episteme on the Mexican prehispanic reality at the time of the conquest" with, on the other hand, the conviction that comparing our teaching-and-learning practices to those of the Aztecs is not only intelligible but will reveal something valuable and useful for us in the present day.¹⁰ At the risk of committing an interpretive fallacy, Cecilia Diego's discussion shows us just how difficult it is to read opportunities for resistance and revolution in imperial practices and institutions of teaching-and-learning. Along the way, she opens the door to a provocative question: Given that two of the five Aztec words for "teacher" (*teixtlamachtiani* and *netlacaneco*) carry connotations of making others wise and "humanizing" our love, to what extent did the wisdom and love taught in the *calmecac* and the *telpochcalli* result in resistance against imperial conquest rather than its mere reproduction?

The final work in this number reproduces a dialogue between a Puerto Rican and a Diasporican—Kique Cubero García and Ariana González Stokas—on how the history and practices of Centros de Apoyo Mutuo (Mutual Aid Centers) reveal the role of decolonial learning through place-based direct solidarity initiatives on the island. One part "serve the people" programs, like those sponsored by the Black Panther and Young Lords Parties in the late 1960s and 70s, and one part

8 → Cecilia Diego, "Intercultural Interpretations: Pondering the Aztec Houses of the Gods," 84; see also Julieta Paredes, "Feminismo comunitario de Abya Yala," *LÁPIZ N 3*, 35.

9 → Diego, "Intercultural Interpretations," 84.

10 → Diego, "Intercultural Interpretations," 86.

autogestión (self-management), like the factory recuperations after Argentina's 2001 crisis, these projects are also a contemporary innovation born out of the University of Puerto Rico student strikes and recovery efforts after Hurricanes Maria and Irma, under the enduring context of vicious United States neocolonialism. The CAMs offer a distinct organizing model that redefines political participation not as a commitment to a pre-packaged ideology, but as meeting people's immediate needs while transforming their relationships to care, labor, the land, and each other.

This conversation offers lessons on anticolonial community autonomy in dialogue with other anti-state movements in the Caribbean and Latin America, such as the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico and the MST across Brazil. Cubero García affirms, "The aim of the CAMs is not to negotiate a political space with the state. We are interested in working with people, with the political subjects, the people who will make a revolution... You have to allow for people to create themselves in order to build a new society, not the other way."¹¹ Drawing on the work of Édouard Glissant, Eve Tuck, and K. Wayne Yang, González Stokas cautions that this work is context-specific and thus not tidily replicable: "our interest in possibilities of the [CAMs] in Puerto Rico as sites of an emergent decolonial pedagogy of relation is not in order to create a metaphor to be extracted and applied to other places."¹² Nevertheless, in a context where imposed debt, hurricanes, earthquakes, and government corruption has activated Puerto Ricans to reinvent their futures, the LÁPIZ Editorial Collective urges readers to learn from this island that is transforming itself into a veritable freedom school for our time.

The global health crisis of 2020 and social uprisings in the United States have cast in stark relief the ugly truths of our deeply unequal and iniquitous (settler) colonial societies: their anti-Black racism, misogyny, homophobia, xenophobia, and classism. But in order to build on this moment within the long arch of revolutionary struggles, we must be able to sustain it, to make the crisis a pedagogical experience, to grow a forest from this crack in the asphalt. Students who have been

11 → Kique Cubero García and Ariana González Stokas, "Centros de Apoyo Mutuales: An Emergent Decolonial Pedagogy of Relation?" 105.

12 → Cubero and González, "Centros de Apoyo Mutuales," 10.

forced out of school or asked to study remotely might learn that schooling is a disciplinary apparatus that obscures the always autodidactic act of learning; or they may rediscover that the value of the school is less schooling than the educational community it gathers together. Individuals who have lost their livelihoods may discover in mutual aid the physical and spiritual sustenance to carry on in spite of the mandate to sell one's labor or one's product and the broken contract of "just" compensation. Denizens and workers who are once again called to sacrifice for the continued enrichment of their masters may occupy the institutions of their subjugation—the churches, the courthouses, the police stations, the schools—in order to reclaim their right to co-governance. These institutions for the (re)production of society may then be made to prefigure new ones. In different ways, the contributions to *LÁPIZ N°5* exhort us to find within ourselves our innate capacity for collective autonomous (re)production. From behind the back of capitalist (neo)colonial modernity, we will stalk it to its untimely end. We enjoin readers to engage their imaginations in how we might take up these questions and these pressing tasks. ■

EXISTENCE (DE)SCHOOLED¹

Catherine Walsh

Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar

1 → This text was originally presented as a keynote talk at the 2018 LAPES Symposium in Philadelphia. In its revised version here, the text maintains its stance of political-epistemic militancy and decolonial proposition, a stance which, as the reader may note, often goes against—or at least ruptures and fissures—the academic precepts of objectivity, neutrality, and distance.

Not just education but also social reality have come to be schooled... Not just education but also society as a whole need to be deschooled.

—Ivan Illich²

OPENING REMARKS

The above words of the insubordinate priest and anarchist thinker Ivan Illich, written almost 50 years ago, could not be more true today. In his now classic book *Deschooling Society*, Illich argued for the need to take radical action against the modern capitalist “schooling” of our hearts, bodies, minds, and values, and for the liberation of “other” ways of learning and living. The problem, for him, was with the accelerated global degradation and modernized misery of society, existence, and life. And it was with the direct relation of this degradation and misery with the nature of modern social institutions and their practice of life-long institutionalization.

“Health, knowledge, dignity, independence, and creative labor are all defined as little more than the performance of institutions that claim to serve these purposes,” Illich said.³ From this perspective, advances and improvements are dependent on the greater allocation of resources, on more and better services, more and better institutions, more and better administration, governments, policies, and laws, and more and better institutionalization.

Up against this reality, Illich’s hypothesis and argument were that society can and must deschool itself. For him, the path of change was not in institutional or educational reform. And it was not in institutionalized or educational alternatives. Rather, it was in the simultaneous effort of dismantling these institutions as a practice of freedom, and of building a radically distinct societal project. As he concluded, “deschooling will inevitably blur the distinctions between economy, education, and politics, on which the stability of the present-day world order is

2 → Iván Illich, *La sociedad desescolarizada* (Queretaro, Mexico: El Rebozo, 2013 [1971]): 17. My translation.

3 → Illich, *La sociedad desescolarizada*, 16.

founded.”⁴ Illich’s arguments were, without a doubt, grounded in the critical debates of his time in which the relation of politics, education, and economy was particularly central. Such relation was, of course, also present in the work of the Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire. In the 1980s, I had the privilege to spend several years working alongside Paulo. Together we facilitated university seminars and popular education community-based workshops in Western Massachusetts.⁵ Together and with other colleagues, we formed the first network of critical pedagogy in the US. I never met Ivan but, through Paulo, I came to know him, his thought and praxis. In fact, the dialogue and friendship between Paulo and Ivan began in the 60s in Brazil. However, it was in the 70s that Illich began to reflect on their difference:

I went from the criticism of the school to the criticism of what education does to a society, that is, to promote the idea that people need to receive help to prepare themselves to exist or live... Therefore, in spite of its good and solid tradition, I had to move away from the approach of concientization and adult education whose main spokesperson was Paulo during the 60s and early 70s, not only in Latin America but throughout the world.⁶

While the differences between Illich and Freire have been the subject of analyses and reflections, this is not the interest here.⁷ My interest instead is with the ways that existence is schooled in these present times in Latin America, my place of life and work for the last 25 years.

4 → Illich, *La sociedad desescolarizada*, 139.

5 → See my reference to this relation in Catherine Walsh, “(Decolonial) Notes to Paulo Freire Walking and Asking,” in *Educational Alternatives in Latin America: New Modes of Counter Hegemonic Learning*, ed. Robert Aman and Timothy Ireland (London: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2019), 207-230.

6 → Illich, “Goodman y Freire: encuentros y desencuentros. De las conversaciones entre Iván Illich y David Cayley,” excerpts taken from David Cayley, *Ivan Illich in conversation* (Toronto: Anansi, 1992).

7 → In addition to the Illich and Cayley conversation, see Gustavo Esteva, Madhu Prakash, and Dana Stuchul, “From a Pedagogy for Liberation to Liberation from Pedagogy,” in *Rethinking Freire: Globalization and the Environmental Crisis*, ed. C.A. Bowers and Frederique Apffel Marglin (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005).

Here the historical continuities and the new strategies and practices of “schooling” constitutive of a continually evolving matrix of colonial power are central. But my concern is also with the ways that individuals, collectives, and communities are struggling to deschool; that is, to enact, construct, and create existence deschooled, which, of course, is *existence otherwise*.

I recall Paulo’s words in the book published after his death: *Pedagogy of Indignation*. There he spoke of anger, outrage and indignation, his own and that of the dehumanized, colonized and oppressed. His argument was that these are not just reactions and responses to injustice; more critically, they are also starting points and tools of rebellion, resistance, and political pedagogical action.

It is necessary to view the *resistance* that keeps us alive, the *understanding* of future as *problem*, and the inclination toward *being* more as expressions of human nature in process of being. They are the fundamentals of our *rebellion* and not of our *resignation* before destructive injury to being. Not through resignation, but only through *rebellion* against injustice, can we affirm ourselves.⁸

For Paulo, this affirmation was about existence: “existence is life that knows itself as such... Making the world ethical is a necessary consequence of producing human existence, or of extending life into existence.”⁹ In a world and region facing the collapse of the universalized Western model of civilization and existence, its patriarchal-capitalist-modern/colonial system,¹⁰ and its social institutions, including, and most especially, education and schools, existence is necessarily marked by—and signified and grounded in—struggle. Enrique Dussel

8 → Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Indignation* (Boulder: Paradigm, 2004), 61.

9 → Freire, *Pedagogy of Indignation*, 98.

10 → I use hyphens instead of commas here in order to evidence the intersectional relation of patriarchy and capitalism, and with the system or matrix of modernity/coloniality.

refers to this struggle, in conversation with Freire, as actions that are conscious, ethical, transformative, and always becoming.¹¹

These are the actions and struggles that are waged from below, from the margins and cracks of the system; they are the struggles of those for whom existence has been dominated, subjugated, repressed, negated, and denied. As I have argued elsewhere, they are about existence and “re-existence,” that is, about the pedagogical and praxistal processes and practices, most especially of those historically excluded, racialized, stigmatized, and silenced, to construct and re-construct life in conditions of dignity.¹² As such, both existence and re-existence are marked by lived and situated contexts of concern that, as Lewis Gordon argues, have to do with “philosophical questions premised upon concerns of freedom, anguish, responsibility, embodied agency, sociality, and liberation.”¹³

Of course, the questions, meanings, and concerns of existence do not stop here. They also, and in a very different way, underscore the civilizing model of existence imposed by the West; a model, vision, and project that, for the last 527 years, has maintained the dominant geopolitical, raced, gendered, and territorialized order. Here the actions, apparatus, and devices of discipline and control, and of institutionalized schooling, have always had an essential function and role within the colonial matrix of power.¹⁴

This article takes as its base the persistence of and the ongoing struggles against this matrix, also referred to as the coloniality of power. The focus is two-pronged. First, it examines how existence—its idea, prospect, practice, and project—, is a component part of the complex present-day intertwinings of schooling, modernization, coloniality, and

11 → Enrique Dussel, *16 Tesis de Economía Política: Interpretación filosófica* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 2014).

12 → Adolfo Albán, “Interculturalidad sin decolonialidad? Colonialidades circulantes y prácticas de re-existencia,” in *Diversidad, interculturalidad y construcción de ciudad*, ed. Wilmer Villa and Arturo Grueso (Bogotá: Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, 2008), 64-96.

13 → Lewis Gordon, *Existencia Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought* (NY: Routledge, 2000), 10.

14 → For a detailed discussion of the colonial matrix of power see Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, and Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

civilization in Latin American countries of both the Right and self-professed Left. Here I consider the current ties between formal education, modernization, progress, and capital, explore the geopolitics of knowledge and language, and examine the ways that religious conservatism has taken a front seat in educational and existence-based policy and politics, most especially with regards to “gender ideology.” Second, the text brings into debate questions, pedagogies, and praxis of existence deschooled; that is, strategies, actions, reflections, and concerns that give credence, possibility, and force to re-existence, dignity, and learnings, unlearnings and relearnings for life, against capitalism-coloniality’s scheme of destruction, pillage, dispossession, and death.

EXISTENCE SCHOOLED GRITOS / EXISTENCE-BASED CRIES

On September 26, 2014, municipal police along with other forces of Mexico’s narcostate brutally attacked three buses of students from the Ayotzinapa Rural Teacher-Training School in the south Western Mexico town of Iguala. Three students were killed, eight were wounded, and forty three made to disappear. In commemoration (against oblivion) of the first year anniversary of the Ayotzinapa massacre and disappearance, José Elizondo and Karla Aviles wrote the following words:

When thinking to question, to claim, to build, becomes a threat to the *guardians of silence*. When the bullets go through the insurgents’ throats by right. At this moment, “I think, therefore they disappear me.” At that moment the jailers of thought shoot with live ammunition. And the words become the last breath of those who only know how to cry FREEDOM. Because no longer “I think therefore I am.” Because reason does not find reasons to so much madness. Because I no longer “think therefore I exist.” Because thinking has become a revolutionary act. Because thinking has become a threat to the monitors

of the single thought. And for that, they disappear me. And because of that, they disappear us.¹⁵

“I think, therefore they disappear me” is a collectively anonymous phrase that first appeared as graffiti in protest marches in the days following the attack, later circulating in the social media, and on walls throughout Mexico, including in Mexico City’s Condesa Park where the British trip hop band “Massive Attack” projected it on screen at their huge concert the week following the occurrence. At my university in Quito, Ecuador, we also put this phrase on the walls in a “happening” of protest, memory, and support for the forty three disappeared, for those killed, and for those who managed to survive.

The phrase certainly does not need interpretation. However, its lived significance was made clear in the account of Omar García, one of the survivors, who by telephone recounted in detail to those of us gathered at the Quito event, the story of horror that began on the night of September 26 and continued on into the early hours of the following day. As García made clear, it was not a random attack. It was a conscious assault on the school of rebellion, resistance, and critical thought that has been and is the Ayotzinapa school of rural teacher education.

Ayotzinapa was founded in 1926 by the teacher Raúl Isidro Burgos as part of a state project for massive public rural education, a project that quickly became a tool for social transformation. In Mexico, probably more than anywhere else in Latin America, rural teacher schools have been—and continue to be—a place for thinking, rethinking, and giving action from below to education and existence understood as necessarily intertwined. From its outset, Ayotzinapa was a seedbed for revolutionary thought, social consciousness, and community-based struggle in this peasant region, one of the poorest in the south Western state of Guerrero. Genaro Vázquez and Lucio Cabañas, among other well-known revolutionary teachers and guerilla fighters, studied at Ayotzinapa.

In recent times, Ayotzinapa students have played crucial roles in the struggles against neoliberal education reform, educational

¹⁵ → José Elizondo and Karla Avila, “Pienso, luego me desaparecen,” El Fardadio, September 26, 2015, <http://www.elfardadio.com/2015/09/26/pienso-luego-me-desaparecen/>.

commodification, and the alarming levels of institutional violence and repression in Guerrero. Moreover, in their teacher's college and well beyond, most especially in communities and community-based schools, these militants walk an education that challenges the system and its dominant institutional aims and frames. Education here is about existence and re-existence; it is about sowing dignity and life in these times of violence, war, and death. And this is precisely the reason for the disappearance, elimination, and extermination.

While many throughout the region dared to cry out in response, public educational institutions in Mexico, including and most especially universities, were complicit in their policies and practices of silence and of silencing. In fact, I experienced this myself several weeks after the incident. In an event organized by a large "autonomous" university in which I had been invited to speak, no mention was made of Ayotzinapa. When I publicly expressed my indignation at the silence, I was told by authorities not to speak out, to remain silent. As I came to learn later, my defiance of the discipline and silencing, my refusal to be hushed, had its consequences. This was the "coming out" of my own *gritos*, cries accumulated over many years including, as I will later evidence, in Ecuador during the 10-year reign of the so-called progressive government of Rafael Correa.¹⁶

Today and throughout Latin America, the *gritos* and existence-based cries of many are increasingly sonorous. They are cries against the lived realities of violence in its multiple forms and exacerbated proportions in countries governed by the Right but also the self-identified Left: feminicides and violence against women, sexual abuse and rape of children including in schools, and massive displacements, disposessions, and deterritorializations caused by extractivism (mining, oil, agroindustry), projects of megatourism, narco-industries, interests, and wars, and the capitalist death project which is this and more all combined.¹⁷ Capitalism rules, and survival often takes precedence

16 → See Catherine Walsh, "Interculturalidad, transmodernidad y (des)humanidad(es). Una carta a Enrique Dussel desde Abya Yala/América del Sur", in *Del monólogo europeo al diálogo inter-filosófico. Ensayos sobre Enrique Dussel y la filosofía de la liberación*, eds. José Gandarilla and Mabel Moraña (México City: UNAM, 2018).

17 → While this death project is present throughout the region, its manifestations in Colombia are particularly alarming. Colombia is number one in the world for internal displacements.

over school. Where formal education is possible, pacification, civilization, and modernization are both the tools and discourses of discipline and control of peoples, knowledges, and of life itself. Recalled is Illich's argument that "not just education but also social reality has come to be schooled."

"SCHOOLINGS"

Existence—its idea, prospect, practice, and project—frames much of the critical debate and situated embodied struggle in "Latin America," or what many of us prefer to name *AbyaYala*. It is at the center of state politics, economic interests and designs, and ideological-religious exigencies, on the one hand and, on the other, of grassroots and social movement battles for life against destruction, pillage, and death. The schooling of existence in this sense, and as I will argue here, is a manifestation and component part of a complex and continually evolving matrix of power. Its operation takes on multiple faces and crosses distinct spheres.

Privatization is one sphere. In Brazil, Colombia, and Chile, for example, privatization is exogenous in that it links schools and education with transnational and corporate interests, political-ideological postulates, and the dictates of the market. In these countries as well as in Argentina, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico and Peru, for example, "endogenous privatization" is also on the rise, advanced through standardized-universalized instruments and practices of teacher, students, school, and university evaluation.¹⁸ Throughout the region, modernizing educational reforms apply market measures and assure state authority through standardization, quality control and the control over

Since the signing of the so-called peace accords in 2016, 620 Indigenous, Black, and peasant community-based leaders have been killed. (<https://www.telesurtv.net/news/colombia-lideres-sociales-asesinados-extermio-marcha-20190726-0006.html>). For an excellent analysis in Spanish, see "Territorio Nasa Sa'th Tama Kiwe frente al narcotráfico. Es el Estado: 'Acá resistimos entre todxs!'" <http://pueblosencamino.org/?p=7599>; "Terror corporativo está matando en toda Colombia," <http://pueblosencamino.org/?p=7542>.

18 → See, for example, Campaña Latinoamericana por el Derecho a la Educación, *Mapeo sobre tendencias de privatización de educación en América Latina y el Caribe* (Sao Paulo: CLADE, 2014).

knowledge, social, cultural, and linguistic difference, as well as over politics and ideology in the classroom.

Certainly, the politics advanced in Brazil first by the coup-government of Temer and now by Bolsonaro are a case in point. Among other measures of discipline, control, and re-schooling, the government has endeavored to defame and eliminate the legacy and contribution of Paulo Freire. This has included, among other actions, the alteration in June 2016 of Paulo's biography in Wikipedia, an alteration that named him "assassin of knowledge," that is, the source of Brazil's backward education, and the origin of Marxist indoctrination in schools. *Brasil Wikiedits*, a group that monitors modifications in Wikipedia pages, identified SERPRO (the technical informational network of the Brazilian federal government) as the responsible source. While SERPRO denied direct involvement, it accepted that the alteration came from its network. In 2017, the government launched another attempt in the Senate to rescind Paulo's recognition as "patron of education" (*patrono da educação*), awarded by the national government in 2011. The attempt here was also to prohibit his texts and teachings in universities and schools. Of course, all this is a constitutive part of the evangelical majority extreme Right's movement and project *Escola sem partido* (Schooling without political party, that is without the Worker's Party) that aims to eliminate "ideological indoctrination" in universities and schools.¹⁹

In Brazil but also all over the region, the dismantling of public and community-based schooling, the disarticulation of community-based social networks and the elimination of all that challenges global capitalism's project (including schools, educational programs, teachers, students and critical thought and knowledge) are in full force.

The situation of higher education is not dissimilar. Today, and as I have argued elsewhere, the universality implied in "uni-versity" is increasingly more potent; thus my reference to UNI-versity with the prefix UNI each time in larger letters.²⁰ As the Colombian scholar Renán Vega maintains, we are up against the "University of Ignorance," driven

19 → See Walsh, "(Decolonial) Notes."

20 → See Catherine Walsh, "(Des)Humanidad(es)," *Alter/nativas. Revista de Estudios Culturales Latinoamericanos*, 3, (2014). <http://alternativas.osu.edu/es/issues/autumn-2014.html>

by academic capitalism, and the marketing of higher education.²¹ Such is the experience throughout the region: educational autonomy is dismantled while state, national, and trans-national state discipline, vigilance, and control wrest and replace all semblance of socially relevant education. Critical thought is deemed both dangerous and non-useful, while intellectual production is measured not by content or contribution but by the number of articles in indexed journals (preferably in English and published in the Global North). Whether these articles are read or what they are about matter little; the interest is in one's "stats" in the universal and universalized sphere of the "scientific" market. Meanwhile, among both faculty and students' intellectual somnambulism, silence, apathy, and indifference are rampant. All this is part of the growing inhumanity and dehumanization of the Humanities (what I have called the "Dehumanities") that extend throughout the human and social sciences including the field and practice of Education.²² Certainly the reader can begin to get the idea of what I mean when I say that both education and existence are increasingly "schooled."

The trends and effects of the growing universalization of cognitive and academic capitalism are increasingly well documented, including from the perspective of the new and evolving frameworks and strategies of the modern/colonial matrix of power.²³ However, less discussed and known are the new and emergent modes of discipline, disciplining, and schooling in the so-called progressive countries of the region, where modernization, civilization, and capital take on new and unexpected faces and forms.

In Ecuador and Bolivia, for instance, the eradication of poverty is the named central objective. The statistics, in fact, are impressive. In Bolivia, poverty went from a reported 60% in 2005 to 39% in 2015,²⁴ and according to official data in Ecuador, close to 1.5 million people came out of poverty in the 10 years of Rafael Correa's "Citizen's

21 → Renán Vega Cantor, *La Universidad de la Ignorancia. Capitalismo académico y mercantilización de la educación superior* (Bogotá: Ocean Sur, 2015).

22 → Walsh, "(Des)Humanidad(es)."

23 → See Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality*.

24 → "INE: La pobreza en Bolivia se ha reducido," *Instituto Nacional de Estadística: Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia*, July 10, 2019, <https://www.ine.gob.bo/index.php/ine-la-pobreza-en-bolivia-se-ha-reducido/>.

Revolution” (2007-2017).²⁵ Of course, we can ask: What is understood by poverty? Who creates, constructs, and maintains this definition? Under what pretense and vision of peoples, progress, civilization, and existence are poverty-related policies and politics enacted? What are the practices employed, and how do they work to variously “school” (i.e. discipline, modernize, civilize) existence and people?

In a recent book that dismantles the discourse of poverty eradication in Ecuador, Miriam Lang engages a similar question, arguing that the politics of poverty reduction can be understood as a cultural construction intimately tied to the paradigm of Western civilization and its apparatus of “development.”²⁶ “Progressivism” has extended this paradigm in particularly nefarious ways, making the extractive industry the motor for poverty elimination:

In the context of neodevelopmental extractivism, environment justice and the transformation of predatory societal relationships with nature are sacrificed in the name of social justice and poverty eradication, exemplified in the recurrent phrase of president Rafael Correa used to justify the expansion of the oil frontier and the introduction of mega-mining in Ecuador: “Misery cannot be part of our identity, and we cannot be beggars seated on top of a sack of gold.”²⁷

Ecuador during the 10-year reign of president Rafael Correa and his “Citizen’s Revolution” is particularly illustrative. “The challenge for our ancestral peoples and for the entire country is to change in order to overcome poverty,” Correa said.²⁸ Here poverty eradication

25 → “Gobierno Nacional expone cifras de la pobreza en Ecuador,” *El Universo*, January 27, 2017, <https://www.eluniverso.com/noticias/2017/01/27/nota/6017392/regimen-expone-cifras-pobreza>.

26 → Miriam Lang, *¿Erradicar la pobreza o empobrecer las alternativas?* (Quito: Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar and Ediciones Abya-Yala, 2017). Also see Catherine Walsh, “Development as *Buen Vivir*: Institutional Arrangements and (De)colonial Entanglements,” *Development* 53, No. 1 (2010).

27 → Lang, *Erradicar*, 17. My translation.

28 → Rafael Correa, “El capital domina el mundo: Discurso de posesión presidencial,” Quito, May 24, 2013. My translation.

consistently references Indigenous peoples, while the cause of the poverty is blamed on Indigenous leaders. As Correa argued:

Indigenous leaders are the ones responsible for *atrasa pueblos* (backward villages and peoples)... they are the ones who keep us in the past... along with the infantile ecologists who put words in the mouths of the Indigenous, discourses that the principal problem is water, plurinationality or interculturality. No, let’s not fool ourselves! The principal Indigenous problem is poverty. To be Indigenous in this country almost always means to be poor and this signifies centenarian processes of exclusion.²⁹

The response of an Amazonian indigenous leader makes clear the battle over project and meaning: “We are not poor... I always say that those who live in cities are poor, because they do not have territory and because they breathe contaminated air.”³⁰

In government discourse and politics, social justice and poverty eradication reference another project and term: “interculturality.” In Ecuador (and in contrast to most other countries of the region), the significance and meaning of interculturality first took form in the 80s and 90s with the political project of the Indigenous movement. The National Confederation of Indigenous Peoples and Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) named interculturality as a political, ideological, epistemic, and existence-based concept, process, practice, and project aimed at the radical transformation of social relations, institutions, and structures.³¹ I have referred to this as “critical interculturality,” distinguishing it from the “functional interculturality” which has become part of the policy and politics of government and state. The latter now enables a

29 → María Paula Granda, *El macho sabio. Racismo y sexismo en el discurso del Rafael Correa*. (Quito: Ediciones de la tierra, 2017).

30 → Lang, *Erradicar*, 64.

31 → For CONAIE this included the transformation of education and state. See Catherine Walsh, “(Post)Coloniality in Ecuador: The Indigenous Movement’s Practices and Politics of (Re)signification and Decolonization,” in *Coloniality at Large: The Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, ed. Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel, Carlos A. Jáuregui (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

kind of naturalized association and articulation: interculturality-poverty-inequality; here the eradication of poverty means modernization, specifically the modernization of Indigenous and Black peoples, communities, territories, and traditions.

There are many examples of the operation of this functional interculturality. Here I will consider three especially illustrative of “existence schooled.” The first has to do with the government’s “transversalization of interculturality” with respect to knowledge and education. Here I reference two interrelated ventures. One is the National Secretariat of Higher Education’s project: “the dialogue of knowledges.”

The dialogue of knowledges is a process of permanent interaction... Its objective is to strengthen the revitalization and protection of traditional knowledges, while at the same time promoting their incorporation in scientific work, technological development, and social innovation from a multi- inter- and transdisciplinary focus, this in order to generate dialectical processes between academia and communities, in the framework of the Plurinational State and in correspondence with the principles of justice, interculturality, *sumak kawsay*, and the decolonization of knowledge.³²

In practice, however, dialogue and decolonization were never present. In the years preceding and following the announcement of the Dialogue of Knowledges Project, universities were forced to take on a more universal form. The 2010 Law of Higher Education, established regulations and evaluation measures aimed to improve universities and their scientific-academic endeavors. A model was forged that discredits national education, reifies the universalized model and knowledge of the Global North, and concretizes the university’s practical, productive, and utilitarian function *vis à vis* the government’s modernizing, neodevelopmentalist political project. Arturo Villavicencio, former head of the country’s Higher Education Council of Evaluation and

32 → Catherine Walsh, “¿Interculturalidad? Fantasmas, fantasías y funcionalismos,” in Ecuador. *Desafíos para el presente y futuro*, ed. Fernando Balseca and Cesar Montúfar (Quito: Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar y Ediciones de la Tierra, 2015), 271. My translation.

Accreditation, described the law and the related state project as reflective of a kind of “academic capitalism” that negates the university as a space of analysis, critique, and public discussion and debate, and a kind of “academic colonialism” that disavows the experience and history of the Ecuadorian university, including as a space of autonomy and struggle.³³ Here the “UNI” of “university” and of “universal” knowledge (read: Western, Eurocentric) are exalted. The “hard” sciences are supported over the humanities and social sciences, including through a massive government-funded scholarship program, the largest in Latin America and the third largest in the world after Germany and Denmark. Scholarships as high as \$250,000 supported (until 2017) graduate-level study in those foreign institutions listed in the Academic Ranking of World Universities, in which Latin American institutions are few. In 2013, a maximum of 10% of the scholarships was destined to the humanities and social sciences; by 2014 these fields of knowledge were all together eliminated. Relatedly, the government established in 2011 the Prometeo Project with the goal of incorporating 5,000 foreign professors and researchers principally from the Global North into the nation’s system of higher education by 2017.

A subprogram here was Prometeo Wise Elders, which sought to incorporate older international experts as a mechanism of social inversion in order to generate knowledges that could foment economic development, competitiveness, and strategic national production. The National Secretariat of Higher Education’s description is telling:

From the reference in Greek mythology that inspires the name of this project, in this case, knowledge is positioned as the object to be recovered because it is the most powerful and direct mechanism to achieve *el buen vivir* or “*Sumak Kawsay*” (i.e. well being, life in plenitude), that is the national aspiration consecrated in the foundational norm of the Ecuadorian state and executed in the public and private everydayness of this country. The Project Prometeo Wise Elders is one of the most lucid and visionary programs. In short, it is

33 → Arturo Villavicencio, *¿Hacia dónde va el proyecto universitario de la Revolución Ciudadana?* (Quito: 13 Ediciones, 2013), 8-9. My translation.

necessary to postulate academic and inverse scientific mobility, that is, one that receives talents instead of exporting them, as has been the case in Ecuador.³⁴

Similarly, efforts were made to hire professors from the Global North, temporarily and in all universities through the related project *Ateneo*, and more permanently and contractually in the state's four new "emblematic" universities conceived and planned to meet the state's economic productive matrix. In this frame and through the International Plan for the Capturing and Selecting of Educators (a name quite telling in and of itself), an ad was placed in Spain's principal newspaper *El País* in 2013 announcing 500 jobs for the soon to open National University of Education. Included in the announcement was the projection of the opening of another 5,000 positions for primary and secondary teachers of Spanish origin over the next several years. According to the Ministry of Education, Spain was the first country to receive this offer both for the high level of Spaniards, and the "affinities of language and history between the two countries."³⁵ The pretension it seems was to bring people that know to teach those who do not precisely because they are from the Global South. More than 500 years after their first "arrival," the Spaniards are now invited and well paid. Of course, we can ask: What does this suggest about new configurations of the coloniality of knowledge in a government self-defined as progressive and of the Left?

In its 2008 Constitution, Ecuador took an unprecedented step in as far as Political Charters go, by recognizing knowledges, sciences, and technologies in the plural. Here ancestral knowledges are named as also technological and scientific, and required material in universities and schools. Yet despite this constitutional recognition and the Dialogue of knowledges' pretension of decolonization, another new configuration of coloniality has taken form, this one tied to the idea,

34 → Juan Morales Ordoñez, "El Proyecto Prometeo Viejos Sabios o la movilidad inversa en Ecuador," *Portal Enlaces Instituto Internacional para la Educación Superior en América Latina y el Caribe-IESALC*, May 2, 2013. My translation.

35 → Juan Carlos Bow, "Ecuador ofrece salario, comida y vivienda a profesores españoles," *El País*, July 22, 2013, http://sociedad.elpais.com/sociedad/2013/07/22/actualidad/1374496004_364310.html.

logic, and law of the "social economy of knowledges" which in 2016 became law. Amongst other aspects, this legislation gives attention to ancestral knowledges, considered as fundamental, useful, and appropriate elements to generate value, and patrimonial property of the state. Effectively, the state became the protectorate and owner of millennial knowledge. Also opened by the law (and advanced in the discourse of Correa), is the possibility for ancestral Indigenous and Black communities to sell their knowledge as a monetary good as a way out of poverty and into modernity, development, capitalism, and civilization. This is what I have referred to in Spanish as the new TLC (the initials in Spanish for Free Trade Agreements): now the *Tratado de Libre Conocimiento* (the Agreement of Free Knowledge), that is, the right of Indigenous and Afro-descendant individuals to participate in the market of millennial and sacred knowledges, and the right to receive a good economic compensation.³⁶

The second venture of transversal interculturality is the re-naming of the national education system as intercultural education. Here integration is the announced intention. Concretely, this has meant the elimination of culturally and linguistically differentiated educational programs and experiences, considered by the government as counter-productive to the modernization of the nation and the modernization (read: universalization and Westernization) of sciences and knowledges. "Utility" is the new orienting axis; efficiency, standardization, and quantitative evaluation are postured as the new universals that will bring modernization, and the discipline and disciplining that modernization and universalization require.³⁷ The closing in November 2013 by the Correa government of the Intercultural University Amawtay Wasi – an educational project of the National Confederation of Indigenous Peoples and Nationalities of Ecuador conceived as a "Pluriversity" and recognized by the state system of higher education since 2002– is a clear example. In an evaluation based on national standards established by the Council of Higher Education Evaluation, Assurance, and

36 → Walsh, "¿Interculturalidad?"

37 → Arturo Villavicencio, "Hasta dónde va el proyecto universitario de la Revolución Ciudadana," in *El correísmo al desnudo*, ed. Juan Cuvi, Decio Machado, Atawallpa Oviedo and Natalia Sierra (Quito: Montecristi Vive, 2013), 216-32.

Accreditation (and developed in consultation with higher education evaluation companies in the U.S.), Amawtay Wasi was found to “lack academic quality” and, as such, was permanently shut down. Of course, the determination of “quality” here presupposes a set of beliefs about “scientific” knowledge, disciplinary organization, language, teaching approaches, infrastructure, and about the institution of higher education itself. What knowledge, whose knowledge, taught by whom and to whom, how and where, and with what vision, perspective, and practice of social reality, life, living, and existence?

Intercultural “integration” works in theory and practice to elevate the system over students and communities; to individualize, deculturize, and dispossess them of the languages, knowledges, and existence-based practices that, for the system, are indicative of under development and backwardness. The goal and practice is to disengage and break vital communitarian and collective ties. In this new scene, interculturality is emptied of its radical transformative meaning constructed “from below,” becoming a top-down functional tool of a state that does not negate diversity but uses it to advance state interests and the state project in the name of “equality.” Is it not clear what I mean by *existence schooled*?

The motor towards “integration” has been “educational “fusion””; that is the accelerated elimination of Indigenous bilingual education, and the massive closing of community-based schools, places not only of formal education but also of community organization. Between 2013 and 2014, more than 10,000 community-based, bilingual, and/or alternative schools were closed, many in operation for decades, some, such as *Inka Samana* in the Kichwa community of Saraguro, recognized nationally and internationally for their innovative curriculum and pedagogy.³⁸

The “fusion” here is, in essence, inclusion within a mainstream model of education in new large, modern “Millennial Schools,” sometimes with a thousand or more students. A standardized curriculum is taught in Spanish, with English and sometimes even Chinese added; all semblance of instruction in students’ native languages is gone. As of 2019,

38 → Rosa María Torres, “Adiós a la educación comunitaria y alternativa,” *Línea de fuego*, November 14, 2013, <http://lalineadefuego.info/2013/11/14/adios-a-la-educacion-comunitaria-y-alternativa-por-rosa-maria-torres/>.

104 Millennial Educational Units or Schools are in operation, primarily in zones with large Indigenous, Black, and peasant populations.

While the present government has called for the conversion of many of these Units into technical schools,³⁹ this has not yet occurred.

For Sisa Pacari, Kichwa indigenous educator and former head of the National Teachers Union, “The centralist State massifies education and develops cultural ethnocide... assimilating Indigenous cultural practices to the state sphere, folklorizing the sociopolitical proposal of Indigenous peoples and nations. We do not want the massification of education in one colonial system.”⁴⁰ The concerns here are multiple. Among others they include the elimination of the semi-autonomous system of bilingual intercultural education (a right won by Indigenous organizations in 1988 after decades of struggle); the destruction of collective, communal, and communitarian life-visions and practice; the dismantling of the social, cultural, and political bases of community organization; and the establishment of filters of control, vigilance, pacification, and extermination.

The fact that many of these schools are strategically concentrated in geographical zones that have historically maintained strong bases of resistance and social, political and cultural mobilization, and that are close to areas of present or potential extractivism is not fortuitous. It is also not fortuitous the addition, in many of the schools in remote and strategic areas, of a boarding school model, replicating and reproducing in many ways the missionary experiences of the past. Made evident here is *existence disciplined, regulated, ordered, and controlled, and also in route of extermination*.

Interestingly, with the new Millennial Schools, attendance has dropped. In many cases, this has to do with the long distances that students must travel on foot, by river, or with makeshift transportation to

39 → Due to the ongoing critique of these schools by various social sectors and their inoperability as “white elephants” of sorts, the present government called this year for the conversion of many into technical schools; however, this still has not occurred. See “Las Unidades Educativas del Milenio se convertirán en colegios técnicos,” *El Telégrafo*, April 3, 2019, <https://www.eltelegrafo.com.ec/noticias/sociedad/6/unidadeseducativasdelmilenio-colegiostecnicos-estudiantes>.

40 → Sisa Pacari Bacacela, “Etnocidio cultural desde el Estado,” *Diario El Universo*, January 2014. My translation.

get to the schools. In other cases, the drop-in attendance reflects family and community decisions to once again place education in the communities' hands; that is, to reject, resist, and rebel against the state's model and practice of "existence schooled." As the self-named "de-professionalized" educator-intellectual Gustavo Esteva argues with respect to Mexico:

The people in the villages know very well that school prevents their children from learning what they need to know to continue living in their communities, contributing to the common well-being and that of their soils, their places... In many communities in Oaxaca and Chiapas, Mexico, parents no longer delegate their children's learning to school.⁴¹

The third venture and example, related to the one above, is the construction in the Amazon of "Millennial Cities" adjacent to strategic oil reserves. These new "Cities" of cement block houses (one connected to the other), with indoor plumbing, paved roads, on a completely deforested terrain accessible only by river, and with a wall to keep the jungle out, impose a new modality of existence-based organization modernization, urbanization, pacification, and "schooled" extermination. In the government's words, the "Cities" offer to the Indigenous peoples historically excluded and forgotten, the possessions of the "good life": development, technology, and access to high quality public services, including education, housing, and a dignified way of life. Moreover, and as the state oil company Petroamazonas states, "the millennial communities have functional housing, Millennial Schools, a market, coliseum, cemetery, and all the facilities of a modern city."⁴² Of course, the question that follows is: What more could the poor Indigenous people want?

With their clean, white, ordered construction, and with the Millennial School in the middle, the cities portend to leave all that is "savage"

41 → Gustavo Esteva, "Reclaiming Our Freedom to Learn," *Yes Magazine*, November 7, 2007, <http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/liberate-your-space/reclaiming-our-freedom-to-learn>.

42 → Cited in Lang, *Erradicar*, 92.

behind, including knowledges, customs and traditions, plants and animals, small plots of gardening and farming, ancestors, spirits, life-philosophy, and cosmological relationality and vision. Recalled are the missions of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, well known throughout Latin America for its ties in the 1950s and 60s with Nelson Rockefeller and the CIA.⁴³ There the school was at the center of a reorganization aimed to advance processes of sociopolitical, educational, religious, and existential control, pacification and civilization. The territorial strategy then and now is clear: concentrate disperse populations in controlled riverside settlements from where civilizational disciplining, control, and schooling can be easily executed and taken to fruition.⁴⁴

Forest peoples who for generations have lived free, in clans and not communities, in ample and open spaces, and always in relation to and in harmony with the cosmos and nature and all of its beings, are forced to relocate, abandon their spaces and rhythms of life, their means and modes of production and reproduction. "Here they prohibit us from everything," a Millennial City resident said.⁴⁵

As if that were not enough, the Indigenous inhabitants are required to participate in courses on urbanization. A critical clergyman and longtime resident of the Amazon describes this "schooling":

All of the residents have to participate in various courses or workshops where they are trained to be citizens and live in these cities; how to manage and separate trash, how to pull out the weeds from in-between the cement and stone walls and pavement, how to be authentic pioneers of the Citizen's Revolution. The courses and workshops are obligatory, and at the end they receive a certificate that makes them qualified

43 → See Gerard Colby and Charlotte Dennett, *Thy Will Be Done. The Conquest of the Amazon: Nelson Rockefeller and Evangelism in the Age of Oil* (NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995).

44 → Manuel Bayón, "La urbanización de la Amazonía como estrategia continua de la acumulación por despojo capitalista-extractiva," December 12, 2013, <http://www.laciudadviva.org/blogs/?p=20229>. My translation.

45 → Cited in Lang, *Erradicar*. 98. My translation.

to live in the Millennial City. Without the certificate, they are excluded.⁴⁶

Of course, the project here is not simply one of urbanization and modernization. By effectively emptying strategic zones of the Amazonian forest and redistributing the population, the “Cities” give open access to the exploration and exploitation of nature and its resources. “It is a type of development and urbanization of the Amazon that complements the accumulation of transnational capital through territorial dispossession and the pillage of the common property of Indigenous peoples.”⁴⁷ So are the existence-based projects of Correa’s Citizens’ Revolution and their strategies, mechanisms, and politics of functional intercultural “schooling.” Interestingly enough, these “Cities” today are for the most part abandoned. Their populations have “escaped” back to the forest, leaving behind the now deteriorating housing and grounds of the “Millennial Cities,” and the Westernizing modernity of the millennial schools. Deschooling is, *without a doubt, part of the way back to existence.*

SCHOOLING WITHOUT GENDER

In addition to the disciplining of modernization, civilization, and capital described above there is another focal point of “existence schooled” present and growing in Latin America today, that is the attack on the so-called “gender ideology.”

Latin America is the region with the highest level of femicide and violence against women in the world. The statistics are terrifying: a woman is killed because she is a woman every four days in Peru, every three days in Bolivia, every 50 hours in Ecuador, every 31 hours in Argentina; 54 women per month in Honduras, 4 per day in Colombia, more than 2,000 per year in Mexico and 5,500 per year in Brazil (15 per day, of which 60% are Afro-descendant women, with Brazil having the fifth highest rate of femicide in the world).⁴⁸ Those were the reported

⁴⁶ → Cited in Lang, *Erradicar*, 98. My translation.

⁴⁷ → Bayón, “La urbanización de la Amazonía.” Also see Walsh, “¿Interculturalidad?”

⁴⁸ → Colectivo Geografía Crítica, “Manifiesto geográfico contra la violencia hacia las mujeres,”

figures in 2017; the reality is much worse today.

At the same time that violence against women and against gender diversities is on the rise, so too are efforts to prohibit the discussion of gender and sexual diversity in education at all levels. “Gender ideology” is the new term used by evangelicals, conservatives, governments (of the Right and Left), and the Catholic Church, to label feminisms and the promotion of gender and sexual diversity.

In an opinion piece in the *New York Times* focused on the new marriage between evangelicals and conservatives in Latin America, Javier Corrales explains in clear terms the perverse logic at work:

When experts argue that sexual diversity is real and gender identity is a construct, Evangelical and Catholic clergies respond that this is just ideology, not science. Evangelicals are keen on stressing the word “ideology” because this gives them the right, they argue, to protect themselves, and especially their children, from exposure to these ideas. Ideology of gender allows them to call for the protection of children as cover for homophobia. The political beauty of “ideology of gender” is that it has given clergymen a way to recast their religious stand in secular terms: as parents’ rights. In Latin America, the new Christian slogan is, “Don’t mess with my kids.” It is one of the results of this Evangelical-Catholic collaboration.⁴⁹

Laws now prohibit the discussion of gender issues and sexuality in education systems in eight Brazilian states with national legislation gaining ground. In November 2017, Judith Butler was viciously attacked in Brazil by a group who identified as anti-gender.⁵⁰ National anti-gender

August, 8, 2017, <https://geografiacriticaecuador.org/2017/08/08/manifiesto-geografico-contra-violencia-hacia-las-mujeres/>; “Latinoamérica tiene mayores tasas del femicidio en el mundo,” *El Tiempo*, November 26, 2016, <http://www.eltiempo.com/mundo/latinoamerica/cifras-de-femicidio-en-america-latina-46362>.

⁴⁹ → Javier Corrales, “A Perfect Marriage. Evangelicals and Conservatives in Latin America,” *The New York Times*, January 19, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/17/opinion/evangelicals-politics-latin-america.html>.

⁵⁰ → Sonia Correa, “Gender Ideology: Tracking its origins and meanings in

laws now exist in Panama, Paraguay, and Peru, with active campaigns in Ecuador, Colombia, Chile, Argentina, Mexico, Costa Rica, and the Dominican Republic, to mention only some countries.⁵¹ In 2013, Rafael Correa gave credence to the campaigns, dedicating one of his weekly Saturday's TV broadcasts to "gender ideology" as a tool that destroys the family. The critical journalist Sandra Correa documents the continental character of the campaign:

In early 2017, anti-gender campaigns flared in the context of the Mexico District Constitutional Reform and right after an anti-gender bus began circulating across the country. Two months later the same bus was traveling in Chile, right before the final voting of the law reform that left behind the total prohibition of pregnancy termination promulgated by the Pinochet regime in the 1980s. Coinciding with Judith Butler's visit to Brazil, a campaign against 'gender ideology' in public education curricula erupted in Uruguay, a country known for its deeply grounded secular culture. And, in Ecuador, a law provision aimed at curtailing gender based violence was viciously attacked by anti-gender conservative religious groups. As the media coverage of the attack against Butler began waning, the Bolivian Constitutional Court struck down the recently approved gender identity law arguing that the dignity of the person is rooted in the natural sexual binary of the human.⁵²

current gender politics," *Engenderings*, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2017. <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/gender/2017/12/11/gender-ideology-tracking-its-origins-and-meanings-in-current-gender-politics/>

51 → Eva Brunner and Ricardo Grande, "Los enemigos de género en América Latina," *Esglobal* (November 7, 2017) <https://www.esglobal.org/los-enemigos-del-genero-america-latina/> (last consulted September 27, 2019). As the attack on "gender ideology" in education grows, so do the cases of violence against children. In 2017, the same year that Peru passed its law against gender ideology in schools, there were 25,000 reported cases of sexual abuse against children. See Patricia del Rio, "Nada más queda," *El Comercio* (Lima), February 8, 2018, <https://elcomercio.pe/opinion/rincon-del-autor/violacion-ninos-menor-edad-violadores-miedo-queda-patricia-rio-noticia-495575>.

52 → Correa, "Gender Ideology."

In Colombia, the anti-gender campaigns have linked "gender ideology" with the peace accords between the government and the FARC; the argument is that these accords give emphasis to feminist rights and the rights of the LGBT community and, therefore, should not be supported.

These campaigns and laws are also part and parcel of new alliances between evangelicals, the conservative arm of the Catholic Church, and rightist political parties. The almost successful candidacy of Fabricio Alvarado in Costa Rica in 2018, the 2017 reelection of Sebastian Piñeira in Chile (who had four evangelical pastors as his campaign advisors), the presidential campaign of Duque in Colombia in which he promised to defend and promote Judeo-Christian thought, the strong evangelical support for López Obrador in Mexico, and of course in Brazil the coup-government of Michel Temer in Brazil (with a Congress composed of 90 evangelical members), followed by Bolsonaro now in power, are concrete examples. Latin America is certainly not alone. Let us not forget the evangelical-Christian alliances present in Trump's campaign, and now in the US government itself represented by vice-president Mike Pence.⁵³

What existence and what kind of existence are being schooled?

EXISTENCE DESCHOOLED

TOWARDS EDUCATIONS OTHERWISE

Education and schooling are not the same, explained Janja, a Black Brazilian feminist, university educator, and capoeira master. "Schooling is taking over education. Schooling is destroying our ancestral essence, our being, our knowledges. It is schooling, not education, which we need to end; it is schooling that we, as Black peoples, need to take distance from."⁵⁴ Moreover, she added, "there are spaces of education that defy schooling, and some of these spaces are in the buildings that we call schools." An example she shared is a school in the south of

53 → Corrales, "A Perfect Marriage."

54 → Words spoken by Janja at the opening panel of the IV Latin American Colloquia on Coloniality/Decoloniality of Power, Knowledge, Being, Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, March 9, 2018, and in personal conversation. My translation.

Bahia that organizes the entire curriculum around the postulate of learning in and through Angolan capoeira, an African cultural and religious matrix and philosophy of existence. Janja's words and example give lived and situated context and resonance to what I refer to here as "existence deschooled."

However, for Janja, for the Afro-Brazilian activist and community educators with whom I conversed with in 2018 in Bahia, as well as for many others, including myself, the project is not simply to *deschool*. More broadly, it is towards the building, weaving, and articulating of *educations otherwise*,⁵⁵ that is, of experiences of learning, unlearning, and relearning that affirm rather than negate, that enable modes of thinking-feeling-being-living that schooling (as system-institution and/or systemic institution) works to decimate, civilize, and conquer, and that proffer re-existence, this understood as the construction and reconstruction of life in conditions of dignity.⁵⁶

These experiences—situated and lived—are increasingly present in Latin America/AbyaYala today. Some are conceived and constructed as autonomous, outside the confines of formal education, and without the state. The most well-known example is that of the Zapatistas.⁵⁷ Other experiences work from the cracks or fissures of the system.⁵⁸

Here the fissuring or crack making is a constitutive part of the deschooling and of the pedagogies and praxis of an education—or educations—otherwise, what I understand as decolonial pedagogies and praxis.

55 →By "otherwise" I mean those other ways of being, thinking, knowing, sensing, feeling, doing and living in relation that challenge the hegemony and universality of capitalism, Euro-centered modernity and the Western civilizing logic, including its anthropocentrism and binary-based foundation. The "otherwise" here, and most especially in the Andes, denotes and constructs a lived pedagogy and praxis that is not human-centered or humanistic, but instead grounded in the interrelation of all of nature of which humans are only a part. As I have come to recognize and comprehend it, the otherwise is that which exists in the borders, edges, fissures and cracks of the modern/colonial order; it is that which continues to be (re)molded, (re)constituted, and (re)shaped both against and despite coloniality.

56 →Albán, "Interculturalidad sin decolonialidad."

57 →See for example in English, Angélica Rico, "Educate in Resistance: The Autonomous Zapatista schools," *Roar Magazine*, January 2, 2014, <https://roarmag.org/essays/zapatista-autonomous-education-chiapas/>.

58 →See, for example, Catherine Walsh, "Decolonial Pedagogies Walking and Asking. Notes to Paulo Freire from Abya Yala," *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 34, no. 2 (December 2014).

DECOLONIAL PEDAGOGIES AND PRAXIS RISING

I left the field and discipline of Education more than two decades ago. The principal reason was the increasing weight in universities of both the North and South of "existence schooled." As I have described elsewhere, I also put to one-side Paulo Freire's texts sensing then that his class-based and male-oriented perspective afforded little for understanding the existence-based struggles of Indigenous and African descended peoples, and most especially of women.⁵⁹

However, as my attention and energy have moved toward the "decolonial how and hows," pedagogy and praxis have, for me, taken on newfound significance. Here I find resonance with Paulo's idea of pedagogy as indispensable methodology in and for social, political, ontological, and epistemic struggles of liberation and with his comprehension of these struggles as pedagogical enclaves for learning, unlearning, and relearning, and for reflection and action. I find resonance as well with the pedagogies of indignation that he described in one of his last texts, in his calling forth of rebellion as self-affirmation, and his cry for and from the resistance that keeps us alive. Yet again, Paulo was, and is, not enough. I continue to explore in depth the pedagogical contributions of Frantz Fanon, extended in the work of Nelson Maldonado-Torres and most especially Sylvia Wynter. And I continue to read and re-read Jacqui Alexander's potent text *Pedagogies of Crossing*.

However, it is most especially in the pedagogical thought and practice of community-based intellectuals, activists, collectives and others outside the academic canon, that I encounter the seeds and possibilities of existence deschooled, educations otherwise, and the "hows" of decolonial praxis.⁶⁰

The examples are many and growing. In Mexico, the Illich-inspired experiences of the Universidades de la Tierra (mentioned above), especially in Oaxaca and San Cristobal, come to mind. Here autonomy

59 →See, for example, Catherine Walsh, "Decolonial Pedagogies Walking and Asking. Notes to Paulo Freire from Abya Yala," *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 34, no. 2 (December 2014).

60 →See the two volumes of Catherine Walsh, ed., *Pedagogías decoloniales. Prácticas insurgentes de resistir, (re)existir y (re)vivir*, (Quito: Ediciones Abya-Yala, 2013 and 2017).

and freedom reign. Professors, students, curriculum, textbooks, and degrees are deemed unnecessary for learning. As Gustavo Esteva of Unitierra Oaxaca explains, by “deschooling our lives...in this real world, where the school still dominates minds, hearts and institutions,” and by building conditions of apprenticeship, of decent living, social fabric, and of the regeneration of community, we are shaping and enabling an “internal and social structure that is a fundamental condition for real freedom... and for learning. What we are doing is highly subversive,” Esteva says. “In a sense, we are subverting all the institutions of the modern, economic society. In packaging our activities as one of the most respected sacred cows of modernity education we protect our freedom from the attacks of the system.”⁶¹

Similarly, the Escuelita Zapatista (the Zapatista “Little School”) organized in 2013 and 2014 by the EZLN in collaboration with Unitierra Chiapas opened an “other” ethical, epistemic, political, and educational space, an “other” decolonizing praxis, and an “other” social condition of knowledge that turned capitalism/modernity/coloniality on its head. La Escuelita invited people of all ages to learn to unlearn in order to re-learn, from the collective lived practice, experience, thought, and knowledge of Zapatista communities and from these communities’ ongoing struggle for autonomy and liberation. I have shared in several published texts some of my experience as a first-grade student in the Escuelita.⁶²

In villages and barrios throughout Latin America/Abya Yala, communities (especially Indigenous and African-descended communities) are increasingly reclaiming the freedom to learn, regenerating traditional and ancestral forms of learning outside and in the margins and fissures or cracks of state-controlled education and schooling. I am thinking of the recently formed *Escuela de Pensamiento Crítico Juan García Salazar* (Juan García Salazar School of Critical Thought) in Esmeraldas, Ecuador, focused on African descended collective memory and ancestral thought, and of the schools of Black oral tradition formed by Juan García before his recent passing.⁶³ Here the lived

61 → Esteva, “Reclaiming our Freedom to Learn.”

62 → Walsh, “(Decolonial) Notes to Paulo Freire.”

63 → Juan García Salazar and Catherine Walsh, *Pensar sembrando/Sembra pensando con el Abuelo Zenón* (Quito: Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar-Cátedra de Estudios

concept-praxis of existence weaves modes, knowledges, and philosophies of life and living of collective well-being that rupture capitalist and anthropocentric frames and turn modernity/coloniality on its head.

I am also thinking of the regeneration of practices and processes in Bahia, Brazil focused on *quilombola* (maroon) pedagogies and on the connected histories and existence-life-based philosophies of Angola and Afro-Brazil. Here the efforts of Mille Fernandes from the Valencia campus of UNEB (the State University of Bahia) particularly stand out. Through her work with teachers, students, and *quilombola* communities, Mille is assembling a praxis in and out of school that defies the dictates of schooling and state.

In a very different context, the community of Saraguro in Ecuador responded to Rafael Correa’s closing of its community school Inka Samana by opening Yachay Kawsay, a deschooled school outside the frame, dictates, and control of state. Similarly, the Intercultural University Amawtay Wasi, also closed by Correa’s government, continued, until recently, to exist as a “Pluriversity” without the state.⁶⁴

The examples of decolonial pedagogies and praxis are many and diverse. Some, like those described in my edited two-volume collection *Pedagogías decoloniales* (2013 and 2017), aim to construct conditions and possibilities for survival (against capitalism-coloniality’s scheme of destruction, pillage, deterritorialization, and death) while at the same time giving credence, possibility, and force to re-existence, dignity, and learnings, unlearnings and relearnings for life.

I am thinking here not only of that which occurs outside the system, but also the pedagogies and praxis of existence otherwise present and emergent in the system’s margins and cracks. Fissuring and crack-making is, in fact, a component part of my educational-life project, including in the international doctoral program that I began in in Quito in 2002.⁶⁵ It is what has kept me, up until now, working within the

Afro-Andinos and Ediciones Abya-Yala, 2017).

64 → In 2018-2019, Ecuador’s government began a process of negotiation with some sectors of the Indigenous movement to re-open Amawtay Wasi as a public state university. Despite the controversies surrounding these negotiations and the plan, now in operation, to effectively discipline and “school” Amawtay Wasi within the same frame of functional interculturality that I criticized earlier in this text, protest and debate have been virtually nil.

65 → See Catherine Walsh, “The Politics of Naming: (Inter)cultural Studies in De-Colonial Code,”

educational institution, opening and expanding the cracks, and planting and cultivating seeds of deschooling, of educations and existence otherwise, and of decolonial praxis.

While there is much more to say, I will close here with the cracks and with the seeds of hope, both of which point to the possibilities and urgencies of action in these times of increasing despair in Latin America, North America, and the globe. This action returns me to Illich; to paraphrase him: *not just education but also existence needs to be deschooled*.

So I end with the open question: What does all this suggest for you the reader, for those who define themselves as educators, and for what we understand as schools? ■

Cultural Studies 25, no. 4-5 (2011).

**PREFIGURATIVE POLITICS WITH,
IN, AND AGAINST THE STATE:
THE BRAZILIAN LANDLESS
WORKERS MOVEMENT AND LATIN
AMERICAN PHILOSOPHIES OF
EDUCATION**

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INTRODUCTION

RETHINKING THE MST'S EDUCATIONAL APPROACH

In 2009, Sara Lima, the Executive Secretary of the State Department of Education in Pernambuco, a state in the northeastern part of Brazil, knew that in a few hours the daily routine of this educational bureaucracy would be turned upside down with the arrival of hundreds of activists from the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (Movimento Sem Terra, or MST). Lima knew this would happen because several MST leaders had called her earlier that day to inform her that they were coming. Lima had worked closely with dozens of these activists over the past year, constructing a proposal for an educational program—known as Knowledges of the Land (*Saberes da Terra*)—that would allow adults in rural communities to finish fifth through eighth grade through accelerated night courses. The program would include the pedagogical practices that MST activists developed to support their political vision, including collective learning, small-farming, agroecological production, and an interdisciplinary curriculum.¹

The Department of Education of Pernambuco was supposed to begin financing this program, however everything was on hold due to legal questions. Activists from the MST decided to occupy the Secretary of Education to push forward the process, and they had informed Lima—despite being a top-level appointee of a right-leaning government²—because she had been working closely with the movement. Lima represents what Jonathan Fox refers to as an entrepreneurial reformist,³ a state actor with the “willingness and the capacity to initiate and pursue their own interests amid contending social forces.”⁴

1 → Curriculum included topics such as “Sustainable Development and Solidarity,” “Citizenship, Social Organization, and Public Policies,” “Economic Solidarity,” MEC, “Projeto Político-Pedagógico: Programa Nacional de Educação de Jovens Integrada Com Qualificação Social e Profissional Para Agricultores (as) Familiares.” (Brasília: Ministério da Educação, 2008).

2 → The administration of Jarbas Vasconcelos, Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB).

3 → More recently Fox has also referred to the importance of interlocutors, or “facilitators of two-way communication” between mobilized groups and state reformists. Jonathan Fox, “Social Accountability: What Does the Evidence Really Say?,” *World Development* 72 (2015): 346-61.

4 → Jonathan Fox, *The Politics of Food in Mexico: State Power and Social Mobilization* (Ithaca,

Shortly before noon, hundreds of MST activists arrived, setting up tents and equipment to camp out for the next few days. According to Lima, the other bureaucrats in the Secretary of Education were appalled, exclaiming, “Everything Sara does for the social movements, and look at what they are doing to her now!”⁵ But Lima was not angry. She talked to the lawyers who had been stalling the program, telling them there was nothing she could do to appease the activists. By the end of the day, the program was approved. Lima remembered this series of events fondly: “My colleagues thought the social movement was being ungrateful, but the MST’s mobilization helped me, we needed the extra pressure to push the program through.” Later that year, dozens of MST activists were hired as the coordinators of this state-funded education program.⁶

POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL MOVEMENT-STATE RELATIONS

In this article I reflect on the relationship between social movements and the state, from the perspective of a political sociologist who has done long-term research with one Brazilian social movement, the MST. In other words, I am not only trying to understand the MST itself but moreover the broader lessons that the experiences of this movement can teach us about social change. My methodological approach is political ethnography, which, as Javier Auyero and Lauren Joseph write, “look(s) microscopically at the foundations of political institutions and their attendant sets of practices... [and] explain[s] why political actors behave the way they do to identify the causes, processes, and outcomes that are part and parcel of political life.”⁷ I explore both the MST’s contentious politics, including land occupations and protests, and the movement’s everyday politics, which take place in offices,

NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 16.

5 → Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the author’s.

6 → This vignette and quote are from an interview with Sara Lima on April 5, 2011.

7 → Javier Auyero and Lauren Joseph, “Introduction: Politics under the Ethnographic Microscope,” in *New Perspectives on Political Ethnography*, ed. Lauren Joseph, Mathew Mahler, and Javier Auyero (New York, NY: Springer Press, 2007), 1.

state-civil society advisory boards, and in teacher meetings. The goal of political ethnography is to empirically investigate how “political hegemony is constructed, challenged, and reconstructed.”⁸

As this introductory vignette illustrates, the process of social movements implementing their goals within the bureaucratic state-apparatus does not simply involve activists making demands on the state and state actors conceding to those demands. In the MST’s case, we observe a social movement that, 1) illegally occupies land; 2) pressures the capitalist state to grant occupying families use rights to this land and to public services; and, most striking, 3) negotiates the right to govern education with the aim of teaching children how to critique, subvert, and practice alternatives to capitalism.

The MST has succeeded, over the past three and a half decades, in pressuring the federal and state governments in Brazil to redistribute land to between 150,000 and 350,000 families.⁹ In addition to land, the movement has pressured municipal and state governments to build over two thousand public schools in these new communities, with over eight thousand teachers attending to 250,000 students.¹⁰ The movement has also pressured the government to fund dozens of adult literacy, infant education, and bachelor degree courses specifically for students in areas of agrarian reform, through partnerships with over 80 public universities.

However, access is only one part of this educational struggle; the movement is also attempting to *participate in the co-governance* of these programs and promote Freirean-based pedagogical, curricular, and organizational practices in these schools.¹¹ These programs encourage

youth to stay in the countryside, engage in collective agricultural production, and critique capitalism. These goals are an explicit attempt to *prefigure* in the current public-school system more collective forms of social and economic relations that can help to construct a socialist society sometime in the future.

The major argument that I make in this paper is that social movements’ strategic engagement with the many state institutions that shape our lives—what I refer to as *contentious co-governance*¹² —is critical to their ability to achieve their economic and political goals. Indeed, I argue that the contentious co-governance of public education is a central component not only of the MST’s political strategy, but moreover, their movement pedagogy. In the first part of the article I reflect on my participation in the Latin American Philosophies of Education Society (LAPES) Symposium in 2018, and how the symposium pushed me to think more about the philosophy of prefigurative politics, radical organizing inside and outside of the state, and social reproduction. The next part of the article reconstructs the lineage of prefigurative politics, with a focus on how it transformed from a theory of state engagement to a theory justifying the rejection of state engagement. Then, I offer several vignettes from my fieldwork to reflect on the consequences and possibilities of prefiguring alternative social and political goals within state institutions. In the final section of the article I assess the gendered nature of the MST’s educational struggle and how this has led to the transformation of the movement’s membership and demands. In the conclusion, I summarize these arguments and briefly comment on their relevance for the current Brazilian context.

8 → Auyero and Joseph, 4-6.

9 → Miguel Carter, ed., *Challenging Social Inequality: The Landless Rural Workers Movement and Agrarian Reform in Brazil* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015); Angus Wright and Wendy Wolford, *To Inherit the Earth: The Landless Movement and the Struggle for a New Brazil* (Oakland, CA: Food First Books, 2003).

10 → Miguel Carter and Horacio Martins de Carvalho, “The Struggle on the Land: Source of Growth, Innovation, and Constant Challenge for the MST,” in *Challenging Social Inequality: The Landless Rural Workers Movement and Agrarian Reform in Brazil* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 229-73

11 → The MST’s educational approach is based on both Freirean ideas and several Soviet pedagogues writing in the early 1920s, including Anton Makarenko and Moisey Pistrak. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum International Publishing,

2000); Rebecca Tarlau, “Soviets in the Countryside: The MST’s Remaking of Socialist Educational Pedagogies in Brazil,” in *Logics of Socialist Education: Engaging with Crisis, Insecurity and Uncertainty*, ed. Thomas Griffiths and Zsuzsa Millei (Dordrecht: Springer, 2012); Rebecca Tarlau, “How Do New Critical Pedagogies Develop? Educational Innovation, Social Change, and Landless Workers in Brazil,” *Teachers College Record* 117, no. 11 (2015); Anton Semenovich Makarenko, *The Road to Life: An Epic of Education*, trans. Ivy Litvinov and Tatiana Litvinov (Honolulu, HA: University Press of the Pacific, 2001); Moisey M. Pistrak, *Fundamentos Da Escola Do Trabalho* (São Paulo: Expressão Popular, 2000).

12 → Rebecca Tarlau, *Occupying Schools, Occupying Land: How the Landless Workers Movement Transformed Brazilian Education* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2019).

LATIN AMERICAN PHILOSOPHIES OF EDUCATION AND THE MST'S EDUCATIONAL APPROACH

In March 2018, I had the opportunity to present my research on the MST as a keynote speaker at the Latin American Philosophies of Education Society (LAPES) Symposium. It was an honor to be invited to the event, which had the overarching theme “Schooling in Latin America: Reproduction, Resistance, Revolution.” The LAPES organizers framed the symposium around a series of questions about the role and function of schooling in Latin America. For example, “What roles do schools play during revolutionary moments where new ideologies, social relations and apparatuses replace older ones? How have they served as counter-revolutionary apparatuses?” These provocative questions are central to my own research, which explores how social movements use public schools to increase their capacities for radical social change.

I believe that the existence of LAPES is itself an important political intervention, an attempt to decenter the incessant knowledge production about education in the global north, and re-center the vibrant educational histories, pedagogical innovations, and stories of learning and resistance of the Latin American region. With that purpose in mind, I began my talk acknowledging that I myself am not Latin American, and I did not want to speak for or on behalf of Latin American social movements. I especially did not want to speak on behalf of the MST, a movement of thousands of organic intellectuals¹³ and researchers more than capable of presenting about their own struggles.¹⁴

13 → Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci used the term organic intellectual to distinguish between people who are considered an intellectual for their profession, such as academic researchers, and the many working-class people who are intellectuals in their day to day life because they shape the visions and views of the people around them. Gramsci writes “Every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields.” Antonio Gramsci, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935*, ed. David Forgacs (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 301.

14 → Some of the publications by MST activists about education include: Rosali Salete Caldart, *Pedagogia Do Movimento Sem Terra* (São Paulo: Expressão Popular, 2004); Edgar Jorge Kolling, Ir Nery, and Monica Castagna Molina, eds., *Por Uma Educação Básica*

Rather than speaking about or for Latin America, I shared with LAPES participants some of the lessons I learned from my decade of research with the MST and on the Brazilian state, about the role of schooling in reproduction, resistance, and yes, sometimes revolution. In my book *Occupying Schools, Occupying Land: How the Landless Workers Movement Transformed Brazilian Education*,¹⁵ I address a question central to the symposium: To what extent can social movements, which frequently develop non-formal educational programs to support their struggles, also engage in the contentious co-governance of the public educational sphere and use institutions of schooling to increase their internal capacity and long-term revolutionary goals?

In my talk I suggested that public schools are simultaneously what Louis Althusser¹⁶ referred to as the most important Ideological State Apparatus of the contemporary capitalist era, and also, one of the most important spheres of resistance. Schools are both spaces where youth learn the ideology of the bourgeoisie and the technologies of self-discipline, and locations where activists can promote critical thinking and self-governance. I made this provocative argument based on more than a decade of research with the MST on what German student activist Rudi Dutschke, drawing on Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, termed the “long march through the institutions.”¹⁷ In this case, the long march through the institutions refers to MST activists’ occupation and transformation of the Brazilian public school system, from infant education to secondary and tertiary schooling.

Do Campo (Brasília: Fundação Universidade de Brasília, 1999); Alessandro Mariano and J.F. Knopf, “A Autogestão Nas Escolas Itinerantes Nas Escolas Itinerantes Do MST Paraná” (V Seminário Nacional Interdisciplinar de Experiências Educativas, UNIOESTE, Francisco Beltrão, 2015); Erivan Hilário, “A Organização Do Trabalho Pedagógico Da Escola Catalunha No Contexto Do MST” (Graduate Thesis, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, 2011); Rosali Salete Caldart et al., eds., *Caminhos Para Transformação Da Escola: Reflexões Desde Práticas Da Licenciatura Em Educação Do Campo* (São Paulo: Expressão Popular, 2010).

15 → Tarlau, *Occupying Schools, Occupying Land*.

16 → Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus,” in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 121-76.

17 → Rudi Dutschke, “On Anti-Authoritarianism,” in *The New Left Reader*, ed. Carl Oglesby (New York: Grove Press, 1969), 249.

My talk provoked some thoughtful responses, which I will address in this article. The first response related to an analogy that we had already been playing with the entire weekend, initially motivated by the keynote address of Dr. Catherine Walsh, a senior professor and director of the doctoral program in Latin American Cultural Studies at the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar in Ecuador. For decades, Walsh has written about decolonial pedagogies as well as critical interculturality, critical pedagogy, race and gender, knowledge, and decolonial thought.¹⁸ In her powerful talk to the LAPES symposium participants, she convincingly argued that there was a need for “de-schooling” in Latin America, to confront the deep interconnections between formal education, modernization, progress, and capital accumulation. She highlighted the pedagogies and praxis of existence that emerge in the system’s “margins and cracks” that are part of decolonial projects against “capitalism-coloniality’s scheme of destruction, dispossession, and death.”¹⁹ The LAPES symposium participants returned to this analogy of the “cracks” again and again, asking if the cracks would ever be large enough for all of the pedagogical needs of poor communities; if the cracks could expand enough to destabilize and collapse larger structures; and if the cracks were indeed autonomous and independent of their corrupting surroundings.

This analogy of organizing within society’s “cracks” is, of course, in tension with my position that the MST’s long march through the institutions is an important strategy for *prefiguring* within the current state system the social and economic relations that can help build a future socialist society. Most often, “prefigurative politics” is understood as “a means of building the new society within the shell of the old,”²⁰ or in other words, within society’s cracks. My talk led to renewed discussion

18 → For example: Catherine E. Walsh, *Interculturalidad, Estado, Sociedad: Luchas (de) Coloniales de Nuestra Época* (Quito, Ecuador: Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, 2009); Catherine E. Walsh, *La Interculturalidad En Educación* (Lima, Peru: Ministerio de Educación. Dirección Nacional de Educación Bilingüe Intercultural, 2005); Catherine E. Walsh, “Shifting the Geopolitics of Critical Knowledge: Decolonial Thought and Cultural Studies ‘Others’ in the Andes,” *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2-3 (2007): 224-39.

19 → See, Catherine Walsh, “Existence (De)Schooled,” *LÁPIZ* 5 (2020): 22.

20 → Wini Breines, *Community and Organization in the New Left, 1962-1968: The Great Refusal* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 52.

of the benefits and drawbacks of “state/no state” or in Walsh’s framing “schooling/deschooling” in social change.

Dr. Michelle Glowa, Assistant Professor in Anthropology and Social Change at the California Institute of Integral Studies, was the moderator and discussant of my keynote presentation. In her comments, Glowa drew on Ana Cecilia Dinerstein’s theorizing of prefigurative politics in *The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America: The Art of Organizing Hope*,²¹ to suggest that rather than “State/no state” the more interesting question is “how does the capitalist state cope with the radical change brought by autonomous organizing.”²² Glowa quoted another LAPES participant, Dr. Ariana González Stokas, who asked us: “What are the methods of producing the seeds we need? And how do communities identify sources of seed making?” In this analogy, the prefigurative alternatives in the cracks of capitalist society are also seeds, that can help grow more possibilities in the future. Following González Stokas’ lead, Glowa asked: “How does the MST’s educational work in schools or elsewhere produce seeds that may be organizational tools in the process of building towards the *not yet*?”

Glowa also focused her comments on the role of gender in social reproduction and resistance. Glowa pushed me to engage with the work of social reproduction theorist Tithi Bhattacharya in thinking about prefigurative politics, and in particular, the West Virginia teacher strikes that took place in February 2018. Drawing on Bhattacharya,²³ she commented that teachers’ role in both social reproduction through child care and the paid workforce opened up opportunities to use and build upon social and community networks during the strike. For example, teachers were seen packing lunches and serving hot meals to children during the strike, “showing the teacher as an educator through pedagogy that goes beyond the classroom to relationships of social reproduction.”²⁴ In this example, teachers engaged in public forms of

21 → Ana Cecilia Dinerstein, *The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America: The Art of Organizing Hope* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

22 → Glowa citing Dinerstein, 22.

23 → Tithi Bhattacharya, “Bread and Roses in West Virginia,” *Verso Blog* (blog), March 6, 2018, <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3669-bread-and-roses-in-west-virginia>.

24 → Quoted from discussant comments.

social reproduction that elicited support from communities and state officials alike. This led Glowa to ask about the practices that MST activists embrace to prefigure other relations of care and transform how state officials may respond to their work

Inspired by all these questions and conversations, I decided to explore in more detail the history of the concept of prefigurative politics. In the next section I share my reflections on the lineage of prefigurative politics, and in subsequent sections I illustrate how a more nuanced analysis of the purpose of prefigurative politics is critical for understanding the MST's political and educational strategy.

LINEAGES OF PREFIGURATIVE POLITICS²⁵

The idea of prefigurative politics was never intended to discourage social movement activists and party cadre from engaging the state. The origins of the concept of “prefigurative politics” is most often traced to Carl Boggs, and either of his two 1977 articles “Revolutionary process, political strategy, and the dilemma of power” or “Marxism, prefigurative communism, and the problem of workers' control.”²⁶ The concept of prefigurative politics, however, became even more widely popularized by Wini Breines in the two editions of her book *Community and Organization in the New Left: 1962-1968*.²⁷ Many people referencing Boggs' definition of prefigurative politics, as the “embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of the movement, of those forms of social relations, decision making, culture and human experience that are the ultimate goal,”²⁸ do so by citing Breines' 1989 book. Nonetheless, the

25 → Following the LAPES 2018 Symposium, I began exploring the origins of the concept of prefigurative politics, and how scholars and activists have utilized this concept to argue for and against the strategic engagement of state institutions for radical social transformation. I am indebted to my Graduate Assistant Hye-Su Kuk, who did the bulk of the work collecting references and summarizing articles that are part of the lineage of this concept. We are currently writing an article together that goes into a longer analysis of this literature.

26 → Carl Boggs, “Revolutionary Process, Political Strategy, and the Dilemma of Power,” *Theory and Society* 4, no. 3 (1977): 359-93; Carl Boggs, “Marxism, Prefigurative Communism, and the Problem of Workers' Control,” *Radical America* 11-12, no. 6-1 (1977): 99-122.

27 → Breines, *Community and Organization in the New Left*, 1962-1968.

28 → Boggs, “Marxism, Prefigurative Communism, and the Problem of Workers' Control,” 100.

big argument I hope to illustrate in this literature review is that a close reading of Boggs' original articles shows that his intention was never to promote prefigurative politics as an anti-statist project, but rather, insist on the dialectal unity between prefigurative and state struggles.

It was actually Boggs' 1974 article “Gramsci's Theory of the Factory Councils” published in the *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* that first uses the term “prefigurative.”²⁹ In this article Boggs describes what he refers to as a “structural dualism” in Antonio Gramsci's writings, which “combines factory councils and soviets as organs of popular socialist democracy with the revolutionary party as a mechanism of coordination and leadership.”³⁰ Boggs claims that in his early *Ordine Nuovo* writings from 1918-1920, Gramsci emphasized the creation of factory councils (what Boggs refers to as prefigurative bodies), over the contestation of bourgeois institutions, such as parliament, state bureaucracy, parties, and trade unions. For example, Gramsci claimed that trade unions had become a central element of bourgeois hegemony that could never foster the “abilities of proletarians which make them capable and worthy of governing society.”³¹ In contrast, the factory councils were the “embryonic Structure of a new socialist order” in which “the form and content of socialist society would be prefigured in the ongoing struggle of workers to transform all aspects of their everyday life.”³² Gramsci argued that the “socialist state cannot emerge within the institutions of the capitalist state, but is a fundamentally new creation in relation to them”³³ According to Boggs, during this period Gramsci saw factory councils as an advance over centralized and vanguardist socialist parties, in so much as they could: 1) counter the tendencies towards bureaucratization; 2) preserve the autonomy and identity of the revolutionary movement; and, 3) “prefigure in their own development the future socialist state.”³⁴

29 → Carl Boggs, “Gramsci's Theory of the Factory Councils: Nucleus of the Socialist State,” *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 19 (1974): 171-87.

30 → Boggs, 171.

31 → Gramsci quoted in Boggs, 174-75.

32 → Boggs, 176.

33 → Gramsci quoted in Boggs, 177.

34 → Boggs, 179.

Up until this point, Boggs seems to be drawing on Gramsci to make an argument in favor of anarchist, autonomous, anti-statist forms of political organizing. Indeed, many scholars and intellectuals, in Latin America and beyond, take the Turin factory councils as a historical example of the importance of autonomous organizing efforts. However, in the next part of this article Boggs argues that Gramsci's emphasis on factory councils slowly shifted to an equally if not more important emphasis on politics, or occupying spheres of bourgeoisie political power. Boggs writes that, "Lacking its own political force in the way of a party or a peoples' militia, the council movement was easily encircled and finally crushed. Gramsci concluded that in its syndicalist enthusiasm, *Ordine Nuovo* was too confined to the factories."³⁵ These events, along with the rise of Fascism, led Gramsci to focus on the war of position within bourgeois institutions.

Boggs claims that Gramsci was the first to develop a concept of prefigurative struggle, or prefigurative Marxism (although Gramsci does not use this terminology), through his theory of the factory councils. The memory of the factory councils inspired similar organizing efforts among anti-authoritarian activists in the Soviet Union, the council movement in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and in Italy (1943-1947), and within the U.S. New Left in the 1960s.³⁶ Nonetheless, Boggs argues that Gramsci's "overriding concern was to synthesize the two levels rather than to contrast them—to bring together the organizational and spontaneous, the political and economic, the party and councils... Gramsci thought it possible to ground a vastly different kind of party—an authentic mass party—in the reality of the councils."³⁷ In summary, Boggs introduces the idea of prefigurative politics in the 1970s, not to promote it over other forms of struggle, but rather, to call for the unity of prefigurative and institutional strategy.

In the contemporary literature on prefigurative politics, these origins of the concept have largely been lost. In *Community and Organization in the New Left*, Breines draws on Boggs' concept of prefigurative politics to defend the New Left from critiques of being nihilist or irresponsible.

35 → Boggs, 182.

36 → Boggs, 183.

37 → Boggs, 184.

She writes:

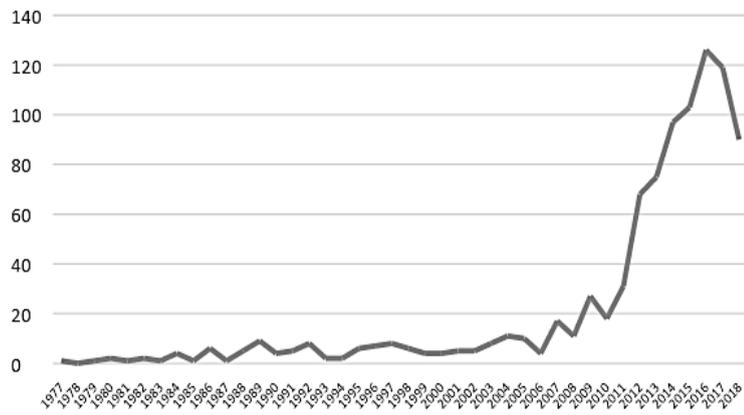
While those commentators see pathology, however, I see the healthy and vital heart of the new left, its *prefigurative politics*. The term prefigurative politics is used to designate an essentially antiorganizational politics characteristic of the movement, as well as parts of new left leadership, and may be recognized in counter institutions, demonstrations and the attempt to embody personal and anti-hierarchical values in politics.³⁸

Thus, Breines draws on the concept of prefigurative politics to highlight the new forms of anti-hierarchical organizing among the New Left, and to defend those organizing efforts. She also embraces the counterinstitutions of the left, which she argues were institutions created outside of the established order with radical egalitarian principles.

These first discussions of prefigurative politics took place in the 1970s and 1980s, after the rise of the New Left in the United States. However, it was not until the mid-2000s that citations of prefigurative politics took off in the English-language academic literature, reaching its peak in 2016 (IMAGE 1). This trend is related to the rise of the anti/alter globalization movements of the early 2000s, the U.S. Occupy movement, Spanish *Indignados*, the Arab Spring, and the other so-called horizontal movements of the 21st century. The bulk of this literature is a defense of prefigurative politics, understood as anarchist, autonomist, and/or anti-statist politics, over other forms of institutional or statist struggles. David Graeber epitomizes this position, arguing for more "direct action, with its rejection of a politics which appeals to governments to modify their behavior, in favor of physical intervention against state power in a form that itself prefigures an alternative."³⁹

38 → Breines, *Community and Organization in the New Left*, 1962-1968, 6.

39 → David Graeber, "The New Anarchists," *New Left Review* 13, no. 6 (2002): 62.



[IMAGE 1] Numbers of Google Scholar Citations of "Prefigurative Politics"⁴⁰

Conversely, this literature also includes scholars and activists who reject prefigurative politics, claiming that it is the antithesis of strategic politics. In this latter line of argument, Jonathan Smucker writes that "I am neither against manifesting our vision and values in our internal organizing processes, nor against staging actions that put these visions and values on public display; my critique rather, is of the notion that such practices can somehow substitute for strategic engagement at the level of political power."⁴¹ As both Graeber and Smucker exemplify, there is a tendency to talk about prefigurative politics and strategic state engagement as separate or opposed forms of activism and contestation. This dichotomous thinking is unfortunate, because it does not allow for the dialectical unity between prefigurative and state struggles that Boggs initially promoted.

More recently, Ana Cecilia Dinerstein has applied the concept of prefigurative politics to Latin American social movements in her book *The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America: The Art of Organizing Hope*. Dinerstein explores autonomous practices among a diversity of social movements in Latin America, declaring that these struggles for

⁴⁰ → This table was created by a graduate student assistant at Penn State, Hye-Su Kuk.

⁴¹ → Jonathan Matthew Smucker, *Hegemony How-To: A Roadmap for Radicals* (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2017), 122.

"self-determination, self-organization, self-representation, self-management, and indigenous autonomy—are not new."⁴² She also argues that autonomous organizing is essentially "a tool for prefiguring alternatives with political imagination,"⁴³ defining prefiguration as the process of learning hope. With the rise of the "pink tide" in Latin America in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the debate about autonomy intensified. Dinerstein argues that the Latin America pink tide left deep "divisions between those who support the governments and those who feel betrayed."⁴⁴ The support for autonomous organizing, outside of and against the state, reemerged with a new force.

Dinerstein, however, rejects this prefigurative retreat. She writes, "I contend that the characterization of prefiguration as 'the enactment of an ideal society' is too narrow and does not inform the complexity of the politics of autonomy in Latin America. It reduces prefiguration to a self-contained organizational process, and does not tackle the issue of form, embeddedness and struggles that underpin prefiguration."⁴⁵ In other words, Dinerstein critiques the detachment of prefiguration from other forms of political struggle. Instead, she argues that prefigurative politics include four simultaneous processes, the negation of the current system, the creation of alternative social, political and economic relations, and the "struggle with, against, and beyond the state, the law and capital, the production of excess."⁴⁶ This latter process refers to the creation of modes existence that cannot be captured within the boundaries of capitalism (e.g., land rights can be offered within a capitalist framework, while food sovereignty is inherently an anti-capitalist demand, or excess). Dinerstein theorizes the state as a mediation in the process of prefiguration. In other words, "Autonomy is not 'against' the state or 'outside' the state but internal to the social relation of capital."⁴⁷ Thus, prefiguration never exists in a separate life-world from the state, capital, and the law; rather, the capitalist state manages

⁴² → Dinerstein, *The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America: The Art of Organizing Hope*, 1.

⁴³ → Dinerstein, 2.

⁴⁴ → Dinerstein, 8.

⁴⁵ → Dinerstein, 17.

⁴⁶ → Dinerstein, 188.

⁴⁷ → Dinerstein, 19.

autonomous organizing through these mediations, for example, allowing the Piqueteros in Argentina to administer government employment programs, or legalizing public settlements and land-use rights for landless squatters.

Thus, drawing on the particularities of Latin America, Dinerstein re-frames the debate around prefigurative politics away from the question of “state/no-state” to the empirical examination of how capitalist states transform in response to autonomous organizing. This is a huge advance from previous debates, as it rejects the debilitating question of whether social movement engagement with the state simply leads to demobilization and decline. Rather, Dinerstein illustrates that there is no form of prefigurative politics that is not mediated by the state, capital, and law. This moves us beyond Boggs’ original formulation, illustrating *not* that prefigurative and state struggles are both important, but rather, that the former is analogous with the latter.

I agree that the dichotomy between prefigurative and institutional politics does not map on to most social movement organizing in Latin America, where there is a tradition of integrating autonomist practices with institutional transformation. In the rest of this article, I draw on the case of the MST’s educational struggle to explore the relationship between prefigurative politics and occupying state power in the particular realm of public education. I contend that not only are prefigurative and institutional politics compatible in one overall strategy, as Boggs suggests, but moreover, some of the most effective means to prefigure radical egalitarian ideals. In many ways, this argument aligns with Dinerstein’s focus on the interconnections between prefigurative politics and state mediation. Indeed, Dinerstein draws on the MST’s agrarian reform struggle to illustrate her points about the politics of autonomy.

However, while drawing on Dinerstein, I also want to suggest a corrective to her presumed relationship between autonomous organizing efforts and state transformation. She writes, “Autonomy, I propose, is not the organizational tool to transform the state but rather the transformation of the latter is a consequence of the movements’ autonomous search for what is not yet.”⁴⁸ I am critical of this position, as it still

48 → Dinerstein, 25.

suggests that movements should not be focused on transforming state institutions, but rather, developing autonomous practices that will lead to state transformation. Based on my research with the MST, I argue that activism within the many state institutions that are a daily part of people’s lives is *critical* for sustaining social change efforts. At its heart, this is an argument about the importance of both the means and the ends: although state transformation might be the overall goal, the MST’s political struggle illustrates that achieving that end is more likely if the means involves strategically occupying public schools. In other words, not only can social movements build counterinstitutions and prefigure democratic practices within their own ranks, they can also begin to prefigure socialist ideals in the very capitalist, bourgeois institutions that they are simultaneously fighting against. The following vignettes will hopefully illustrate this point.

THE MST’S PUBLIC EDUCATIONAL STRUGGLE AS PREFIGURATIVE POLITICS

“THE ITINERANT SCHOOLS WOULD GO ALONG WITH THE MARCH”

On November 19, 1995, the center-right governor of Rio Grande do Sul began funding the construction and administration of public schools located in MST occupied encampments. In these “Itinerant Schools” a process of *contentious co-governance*⁴⁹ developed in which the government continued to provide the financial resources, bureaucratic apparatus, and basic curriculum for the schools, while MST leaders built the schools, chose the teachers, organized teacher trainings, changed the schools’ organizational structure, and even had influence over much of the curriculum. The movement also gained permission to have these schools “move” with the movements of the camp; or in other words, relocate after evictions or when new land occupations occurred. During one MST mobilization, encamped families occupied several government offices in Porto Alegre for seven months. The Itinerant

49 → Tarlau, *Occupying Schools, Occupying Land*.

Schools functioned during this entire period on the lawn outside of these offices—while still being funded by the state government. One MST leader recalled, “This was an exciting period for the Itinerant Schools. If there was a march the Itinerant Schools would go along with the march; they would measure the kilometers the children were walking; they would analyze the different types of vegetation they saw.”⁵⁰ Access to Itinerant Schools within MST occupied camps quickly became one of the movement’s primary strategies for keeping families living in the camps and mobilizing them into action.

...

In this account of the Itinerant Schools, the MST pressures the state government to construct public schools in MST encampments. However, once built, the MST led a process of contentious co-governance of these schools, becoming part of the state through appointed positions and informally taking on government tasks. The goal of these public schools was to prefigure the MST’s agrarian vision—developing communities with the capacity for self-governance and economic sovereignty—on a small scale within the local school system. This institutional arrangement lasted for a decade. Then, in 2007, a new right-wing governor, Yeda Crusius, shut down the Itinerant Schools. Nonetheless, the prefigurative process embodied in the Itinerant Schools had an important long-term impact, with MST leaders in other states visiting these schools and then developing similar prefigurative educational experiments, which often surpassed the original schools in size and capacity.

This exchange itself was an important pedagogical moment, as activists learned about the history of the Itinerant Schools, how the movement negotiated their legal status with the state government, and the challenges that the teachers and students faced. This helped build the knowledge and confidence of these activists to build similar educational experiments in their own states. This is reminiscent of Boggs’ description of the factory councils in Italy, which were able to “raise new issues and instill a new vision in the minds of thousands of workers... The legacy of the factory occupations and the councils became a feature of proletarian culture in Northern Italy, to emerge later in [other]

⁵⁰ → Interview, October 2010.

forms.”⁵¹ In other words, prefigurative struggles, even if only momentary, can help expand people’s imaginary of the politically possible, or as Dinerstein writes, the not yet. In the case of the MST, the radical prefiguration of an alternative social world took place within the state public school system.

“WE ARE ALWAYS IN ‘RE-START’”

When the first MST land occupation occurred in 1995 in Santa Maria da Boa Vista, the semi-arid (*sertão*) region of Pernambuco, young 18-year old Teresneide Varjão began visiting the camp and “fell in love with the community.” Varjão began to teach the children on the camp to read, as her eighth-grade education made her one of the most educated camp residents. In 1998, observing her potential, the state MST leadership decided to invest in her capacity for teaching. They sent Varjão to the first MST-sponsored high school program in the Northeast, funded through the federal government in coordination with the University of Paraíba. Erivan Hilário was only fourteen years old when his family joined an MST land occupation in Santa Maria in 1996. In the camp, Hilário organized educational activities for the smaller children. The MST leadership saw his initiative, and asked him to attend the high school with Varjão.

For both of these local leaders, access to this MST-sponsored high school program was an important opportunity since there were no high schools in their rural region. Through this three-year program, Varjão and Hilário learned about the MST’s educational approach. Hilário described the high school, “as a dream... it started my activism, I learned to love teaching, I learned that I wanted to be a teacher, but not just any type of teacher.”⁵² The high school was organized through the pedagogy of alternation (*pedagogia da alternância*), which allowed Varjão and Hilário to spend several months a year in Paraíba studying, and the rest of the time in Santa Maria completing community research projects.

⁵¹ → Boggs, “Gramsci’s Theory of the Factory Councils: Nucleus of the Socialist State,” 183.

⁵² → Interview, October 2011.

The community project that Hilário and Varjão were assigned to was the task of organizing an MST education sector in the region.

The principle challenge for Varjão and Hilário was convincing teachers to support the movement's educational proposal. Varjão and Hilário had to engage in a long-term process of persuading dozens of teachers in their schools—almost all of whom were from the city—to become allies of the movement. The MST leaders traveled to the schools every day, talking to teachers and offering their assistance. Varjão recalled, "It was crazy, we would leave on Monday, come back late Sunday, wash our clothes, go off again." Over time, they began to win over these teachers by being a constant presence in these schools. One teacher explained, "My vision was similar to everyone. I was scared and thought that this was an invasion... In 1997 I went to an MST teacher training in Caruaru; I began to understand the movement in another way, my vision expanded... I am connected to the MST and always participating."⁵³

However, despite local MST leaders' initial success garnering the consent of these teachers for their educational project, they faced another big issue: the constant turnover of teachers due to local political disputes. As Varjão described, "Every time a mayor changes all of the teachers change, and everyone in the opposition party was sent to our schools." Varjão and Hilário learned to avoid party politics and support *all* of the teachers assigned to their settlement schools. Varjão recalled: "The difficult issue is that we were always re-initiating our work, we would joke every time the teachers changed, 'we are in re-re-re, we are always in re-start'."⁵⁴

...

Over the past fifteen years the MST has been able to maintain an active presence in the public schools in Santa Maria over multiple mayoral administrations through long-term, continual, effective leadership in local communities. As Varjão describes, this is not a task that is ever "complete." Rather, MST leaders have to constantly *earn* teacher, parent, student, and community allegiance. As Wendy Wolford argues, social movements are "competing discourses negotiating for the rights

53 → Interview, May 2011.

54 → Interview, April 2011.

and ability to define who will represent the poor and how."⁵⁵ Part of the MST's ability to win over the right to represent these communities has been their active involvement in the local schools, an institution that the community values. The MST's involvement might be as simple as helping the teachers set up their classrooms in the morning, or planning parent-teacher meetings in the afternoon. The movement also organizes teacher trainings that teach educators about the core philosophical components of the movement's educational vision, including the relationship between theory and practice, the methodological connection between learning and training, knowledge and learning based in people's realities and experiences, learning that is socially useful, education for work and through work, and the organic connection between educational and political and economic processes.⁵⁶ Teachers and parents become active members of the MST, not due to the agrarian reform struggle, but because they are inspired by this educational vision.

When I was in Santa Maria in 2011, both Varjão and Hilário were involved in other statewide and national MST tasks. Now, different MST leaders were the "organic intellectuals" in these agrarian reform settlements, convincing these communities of the value of participating in the governance of an alternative school system. Several of these new organic intellectuals were the teachers themselves, who had moved from simply supporting the MST's proposal to becoming active leaders in the MST's education collective. In other words, through activists' educational struggle in the public school realm, the "movement" grew beyond the original activists to include the teachers and sometimes principals of these rural schools.

"WHY SHOULDN'T I SUPPORT A MEETING OF MST YOUTH?"

It was July 9, 2011, and I was heading to interview Mayor Eduardo Cultinho of the municipality of Água Preta, in the sugar cane region of Pernambuco. Cultinho came from an elite family that had been in power

55 → Wendy Wolford, *This Land Is Ours Now: Social Mobilization and the Meanings of Land in Brazil* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 10.

56 → MST, "Princípios Da Educação No MST" (Movimento Sem Terra, 1996).

in the region for decades with different political affiliations. After miles of driving on almost impassable muddy roads, we pulled up to his plantation where a group of people was waiting. I was escorted to Cultinho's office and he asked me to have a seat while he "attended to the people outside." The first woman came in and told a story about someone sick in her family, asking if Cultinho could help. Cultinho gave her 50 *reais* [in 2011, \$25 USD], saying to the woman, "It is only a little, but it is from the heart, so you can buy some groceries." The next two men also told stories of hardships, and Cultinho asked his assistant to give each of the men 30 reais. Cultinho turned to me, "I know that it should not happen this way, but I have to help people when I can."⁵⁷

After the visitors left, Cultinho and I jumped into a two-hour interview about municipal politics, the regional economy, and the MST. Cultinho explained, "My relationship with the MST began a year after my election... I supported MST marches, meetings of *sem terrinha* (little landless children)." Cultinho seemed open to the MST's presence in his municipality. However, when I asked him why he funded a movement that critiques large land estates, he replied: "I am the mayor, I try to attend to everyone's demands... I have always had a good dialogue with the MST. Why shouldn't I support a meeting of MST youth? *I attend to the needs of the Evangelical church, the soccer team, a guy who wants to go to the beach. Why not fund a plenary of MST youth?* [emphasis added]" For Cultinho, the church, a soccer team, a beach vacation, and the MST were all citizens at his door that morning asking for money.

...

For the past three and a half decades, all over Brazil, municipal, state, and federal government officials have devolved educational responsibilities to local MST leaders to develop curriculum, train teachers, design new educational practices, and facilitate community involvement in schools. In many locations like Água Preta, conservative mayors allow this to happen because the benefits of conceding educational co-governance to MST activists seem to outweigh the potential conflicts that might arise if this help is rejected. As another local mayor in Pernambuco explained, "After I took power, the MST became part of

57 → Fieldnotes, July 9, 2011

the administration—they helped to run the government. They began to make a lot of suggestions about education, and we invited them to participate... It was very practical. The MST education collective had already been working in the municipality for a long time."

For these mayors, the MST's participation in the public schools both avoids conflicts and, in many cases, helps the schools function more efficiently. The pedagogies that the MST implements, which prefigure collective work practices, participatory governance, and political struggle, do not seem to be immediately threatening to local politicians in terms of their hold on office. The mayors are playing the short-term game, hoping their concessions to the movement will subdue any immediate protest; the activists are playing the long-term game, planting the seeds in the public school system that they hope will grow their movement, and its power to confront the mayors' political power sometime in the future.

"THE PURPOSE OF THIS OCCUPATION WAS PEDAGOGICAL"

On Wednesday, September 22, 2015, I joined twelve hundred teachers at the Second National Meeting of Educators in Areas of Agrarian Reform (II ENERA) marching through the streets of Brasília and making several stops. First, we stopped in front of the Ministry of Education and the teachers spray painted on the side of the building: "Education is not a commodity," "Closing a school is a crime," and "37,000 rural schools closed." Then, we marched to the Ministry of Justice, and the teachers denounced the killing of indigenous people in Mato Grosso do Sul. Afterwards, we marched towards the Ministries on the other side of the road. As half of the group passed by the Ministry of Agriculture, where Kátia Abreu the infamous supporter of agribusiness was Minister, the middle of the march suddenly started running towards the building, breaking through the glass doors and occupying the lobby. Police began throwing tear gas grenades and using pepper spray to push back the crowd. In the building, twenty female teachers dressed in skeleton masks took off their shirts and breastfed skeleton dolls, a symbol of the effects of pesticides on infant health. After no more than ten minutes in the lobby, several MST leaders shouted for

the teachers to leave and the crowd exited the building. No one was arrested.

Twenty minutes later, sitting on the grass with some of these teachers, I asked what they thought of the protest. Clara Ribeiro, from the northeastern city of Água Preta, said that this was her first MST activity. She said she had never experienced anything like that before and she thought it was inspiring. Another teacher from Água Preta, Isabela Costa, was more familiar with the MST because she lived in a settlement. Costa said, “honestly, I was so scared when everyone started running to the doors and the police came!” She did not like the feeling of fear, but she enjoyed the rest of the march; she also wanted to keep participating in the movement. I also chatted with the head of the MST education sector in Pernambuco, Rubneuzza Leandro, asking her why the teachers had only occupied the building for ten minutes. Leandro said, “The point was not to occupy the building permanently, and have everyone get arrested. The purpose of this occupation was pedagogical, it taught the teachers that the conflict we talk about is not just theoretical, it has a material reality when you go to the street.”

...

During the II ENERA, the MST brought together teachers from around Brazil to experience, if only for a week, what it means to be part of a world with socialist values, theories, politics, culture, and confrontation. The goal of this meeting was partially to make demands on the state, but more importantly, the meeting was “pedagogical,” teaching the teachers about the movement’s alternative educational project—in theory and practice. The II ENERA is a single manifestation of the MST’s national attempt to influence teachers, communities, students, and government officials across the country. Local MST leaders recruit teachers that they think might be sympathetic to their struggle, and they invite them to movement-led teacher trainings where they learn about the theoretical foundations of the MST’s educational proposal and experience it first-hand, prefiguring the educational values they hope to implement in their own public school system. However, the teachers are not only there to learn; they also become active promoters of this approach through contentious action. Every year dozens of

statewide and regional teacher meetings take place, in addition to similar events with other foci, such as meetings about agroecology, housing, health, gender, youth, media, and law. In all of these meetings, these thematic issues are discussed in relationship to the MST’s larger agrarian reform struggle.

PREFIGURATION AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

In the proceeding vignettes, MST activists work both within and against the complex and contradictory Brazilian state to prefigure their social values. In this case, the transformation of public education is not simply a consequence of autonomous organizing efforts, but rather, a means to achieve that primary goal. By promoting alternative practices in hundreds of state institutions, the MST is able to integrate more activists into the movement, increase political and technical knowledge, and allow a wider subsection of civil society (e.g., teachers and students from non-MST communities) to practice, or prefigure, an alternative social world. I argue that these prefigurative educational practices *within state institutions* are an example of what Dinerstein would call organizing hope, or the “collective pursuit towards the realization of what does not yet exist for each of the movements in question and the concrete anticipation of such unrealized reality in the present.”⁵⁸ Although in many cases politicians concede educational governance to the MST as a “mediation” of their protest, the MST’s co-governance of these schools still sow the “seeds” that may very well be, in Glowa’s words, “the organizational tools for the process of building towards the not yet.”

The fact that this struggle takes place in the public school system is significant. As Tithi Bhattacharya suggests,⁵⁹ educational struggles are gendered in particular ways that shift their meaning for understanding the process of social change and social reproduction.⁶⁰ First of all, the

58 → Dinerstein, *The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America: The Art of Organizing Hope*, 25.

59 → Bhattacharya, “Bread and Roses in West Virginia”; Tithi Bhattacharya, “Women Are Leading the Wave of Strikes in America. Here’s Why,” *The Guardian*, April 10, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/apr/10/women-teachers-strikes-america>.

60 → I once again want to thank Michelle Glowa for the suggestion to read Bhattacharya and

majority of the activists as well as the teachers and parents involved in the MST's educational struggle are women. This is unsurprising, as Bhattacharya writes, "Teaching is seen as 'care work,' traditionally understood as 'women's work'."⁶¹ Indeed, the MST's focus on education initially began with a concern about care, or "what to do with all of the children" running around the occupied camps without supervision or childcare. As national MST leader Edgar Kolling explains, "When we occupied land and created large camps there was a lot of pressure to have schools. The moms and teachers pressured the MST to be concerned with formal education."⁶² Kolling's specific reference to "moms" indicates how the concern with children was often considered a "woman's concern" within the occupied camps. Thus, even though the MST was fighting for the transformation of economic relations of production, the gendered nature of productive and reproductive work continued. Since the first land occupation in the early 1980s, the mothers in the camps, often with the support of other women who had teaching degrees, organized educational activities for the camp's children.⁶³ Eventually, these women also pressured the MST's national leadership to make education an official concern of the movement, not simply an informal function, leading to the founding of a formal MST education sector in 1987.

Importantly, although not intentionally, the gendered nature of the MST's educational struggle led to the radical transformation of the movement itself. For the past three and a half decades, the MST education sector has been a point of entry (*porta da entrada*, as it is frequently called within the movement) for women to begin their activism, and then take on other, more prestigious leadership roles within the movement. In other words, many of the MST female leaders gained confidence in their organizing capacity by establishing childcare in their camps, helping out in the diverse tasks needed in the schools, pursuing teaching degrees, and negotiating with and protesting against

apply her theories of Social Reproduction to the MST's educational struggles.

61 → Bhattacharya, "Bread and Roses in West Virginia."

62 → Interview, January 2011.

63 → Tarlau, "How Do New Critical Pedagogies Develop? Educational Innovation, Social Change, and Landless Workers in Brazil."

local educational officials. After these initial experiences, these women took on national leadership roles in other movement spheres such as agricultural production, finance, political formation, grassroots organizing, and international relations. Eventually, the women who became national leaders pushed the movement to implement a quota system in the mid-2000s to guarantee equal gender representation in all of the movement's decision-making bodies.⁶⁴

These dynamics illustrate how formalizing struggles around care work can help to transform the internal composition of grassroots movements. Similarly, sexuality is intertwined in complex ways with the gendered nature of productive and reproductive work. In the MST, the majority of LGBT activists also began their activism through regional education collectives. The LGBT activists I spoke with expressed their preference for the more welcoming atmosphere in the education sector, versus the agricultural production sectors and other spheres of the movement dominated by male activists that were often homophobic. In 2015, LGBT activists began organizing around specific issues that LGBT landless people face in camps and settlements. Almost all of the national leaders of these LGBT organizing efforts were long-time participants in the education sector. In 2017, this LGBT collective was given a seat on the MST's national coordination body. Thus, the movement's educational organizing not only transformed the composition of the movement but also helped articulate struggles along different lines of oppression in the Brazilian countryside.

A second reason that the MST's educational activism is distinct from other forms of organizing is its location within a sphere of social reproduction. As Bhattacharya writes, "If workers' labor produces all the wealth in society, who then produces the worker?" Bhattacharya reminds us of the pitfalls of binding class struggle to the point of production alone, "without considering the myriad social relations expanding between workplaces, homes, schools, hospitals—a wider social whole, sustained and coproduced by human labor in contradictory yet constitutive ways."⁶⁵

64 → João Alexandre Peschanski, "A Evolução Organizacional do MST" (Masters Thesis, Universidade de São Paulo, 2007).

65 → Tithi Bhattacharya, "Introduction: Mapping Social Reproduction Theory," in *Social*

The MST activists had to address the issue of social reproduction from the very beginning of their movement, as local state officials set up schools in their communities that taught their children that rural areas were backwards and that success required moving to the city for a good job and better life. The MST realized that in order to promote their economic vision over multiple generations, they had to intervene in this sphere of social reproduction and “produce a worker” for a different type of agrarian society. Although the movement does not articulate its educational struggle as a “social reproduction” struggle, it is here that social reproduction theory is extremely useful.⁶⁶ As Bhattacharya articulates, social reproduction theory “reveals the essence-category of capitalism, its animating force, to be human labor and not commodities.”⁶⁷ Thus, by occupying the school system the movement was planting the seeds for a different type of society, producing human laborers trained in practices of self-governance, collective work tasks, agroecological farming, and an ideological critique of capitalism.

The MST’s formal educational programs have helped to build the internal capacity of the movement in three important ways. First, as I already mentioned, by occupying the public-school system the MST has integrated more women, LGBT activists, and youth into their movement. Second, the public education system is a means to obtain the many technical skills that movements need for self-governance and autonomy. The MST has promoted high school and university degree programs in cooperative management, public health, social work, law, veterinary studies, agronomy, and many other areas. Instead of relying on outside experts, the movement has produced its own organic intellectuals who have the technical skills to integrate into concrete professional tasks. As national MST activist Maria de Jesus exclaimed, “Now

Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression, ed. Tithi Bhattacharya (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 3.

66 → The MST draws on critical theorists such as Mariano F. Enguita and Gaudêncio Frigotto to theorize schools as instruments of social reproduction, however, the movement does not traditionally use feminist theories of social reproduction. Mariano F. Enguita, *A Face Oculta Da Escola: Educação e Trabalho No Capitalismo* (Porto Alegre, RS: Artes Médicas, 1989); Gaudêncio Frigotto, “Teoria e Práxis e o Antagonismo Entre a Formação Politécnica e as Relações Sociais Capitalistas,” *Trabalho, Educação e Saúde* 7 (2009): 67-72.

67 → Bhattacharya, “Introduction: Mapping Social Reproduction Theory,” 19.

we have pedagogues, agronomists, lawyers, journalists, all of these professions in the countryside that are important for the working class.”⁶⁸ Although it is also possible to gain these technical skills outside of the formal school realm, by earning degrees recognized by the state movement activists have been able to go on to occupy other institutional spheres.

Finally, while I contend that it is possible to prefigure alternative social visions in all state spheres, the public education system is a particularly powerful institution to make this intervention. Youth, teachers, local state officials, and parents spend hours and hours a week studying and working within the public-school system. As Bhattacharya writes in reference to the 2018 teacher strikes in the United States:

The West Virginia strikers might see their political identity in a de-gendered way, i.e. as workers alone, but they were, in their lived experience, mothers, church members, community leaders, and breadwinners. Domestic labour and wage labour were always layered and conjoined. This was expressed in how quickly wider layers of the community were immediately pulled into the strike and reflected the disproportionate ways in which women, rather than men, create social and community networks.⁶⁹

MST activists, by providing daily support for educational provision, are not just landless farmers promoting a particular economic vision. They become mothers, community leaders, teachers, caretakers, mentors, and friends to an entire community. By providing immediately useful support in the sphere of social reproduction—radicalizing childcare now for a future “not yet”—the movement has developed a wide network of allies that go far beyond the boundaries of their own movement. This consent the movement has garnered in the civil society realm will be increasingly important, especially given the conservative

68 → Interview, September 2011.

69 → Bhattacharya, “Bread and Roses in West Virginia,” 6.

resurgence in Brazil and the rest of Latin America taking place since 2013, which I will address briefly in the conclusion.

CONCLUSIONS

Our ideas and philosophical understandings of the world are directly shaped by the people around us. This article and my thinking about prefigurative politics and the gendered nature of the MST's educational struggle have been shaped by the Latin American Philosophy of Education Society, and I hope these ideas will continue to evolve through further dialogue with this group of scholars and activists. In this conclusion, I summarize the major points I have tried to make in this article, and I end with a brief reflection on the current Brazilian context.

The major goal of this article has been to reject the dichotomy that is often constructed between "prefigurative politics" and "state struggles." In the United States, the bifurcation between these forms of struggle emerged in wake of the New Left in the 1960s, and intensified with the rise of the alter/anti-globalization movement and the Occupy Wall Street Movement from the 1990s through the 2010s. In Brazil, the "state/no state" debate is most recently a product of the disappointment social movement leaders and political activists have felt with the rise and fall of the "pink tide" over the course of the twenty-first century, and the failure of leftist and left-of-center presidents to fulfill their radical promise.

In order to move beyond this polarized debate, I first traced the history of the concept of prefigurative politics, suggesting that in its original formulation the goal was to merge the prefigurative and the political. In other words, socialist prefigurative politics was necessary, but so was the political struggle that could help ensure the continued existence of these small-scale experiments.⁷⁰

Second, I suggested that the polarization between prefiguration and institutionalization does not map on to the experiences of Latin American social movements. I analyzed the contributions of Dinerstein's

70 → Boggs, "Gramsci's Theory of the Factory Councils: Nucleus of the Socialist State"; Boggs, "Revolutionary Process, Political Strategy, and the Dilemma of Power"; Boggs, "Marxism, Prefigurative Communism, and the Problem of Workers' Control."

The Politics of Autonomy in Latin America, and her point that prefiguration will always be mediated through the state, capital, and law. Therefore, autonomous practices are never fully outside of state power. I suggested that Dinerstein's idea of excess, or how movements can promote an alternative social world that cannot be captured within a capitalist logic, is a useful framework for analyzing prefigurative politics.

Third, and notwithstanding Dinerstein's important contributions, I have also argued that there is a difference between the transformation of the state as a means or end of organizing. In both Dinerstein's argument about the politics of autonomy and my own argument about the long march through the institutions, the prefiguration of alternative social relations directly leads to state transformation. However, Dinerstein's emphasis is still on prefiguration outside of bourgeois state institutions, although she acknowledges that there is nothing outside of state mediation. I argue, drawing on the MST, that the prefiguration of alternative social visions within bourgeois state institutions is also important, because these are the institutions that interface with the majority of people in their everyday lives. I also suggest that the *ends* of transforming the state is much more likely if social movements employ multiple *means*, both building counterinstitutions and occupying bourgeois state institutions, as Boggs originally suggested in 1974.

Finally, drawing on Bhattacharya, I have reflected on how the MST's prefigurative politics in the public educational realm is gendered, having always been a sphere of women's work within the movement. This both reproduced the gendered division of work that is dominant in the broader capitalist society, while also radically transforming the movement itself. By formalizing the movement's concern with public education and childcare, the MST integrated women into the movement. Consequently, these female educational activists became leaders in the MST's many decision-making bodies. The MST's occupation of the public-school realm also allowed for women to advance their formal education and obtain technical degrees that have allowed them to occupy other institutional spheres. Finally, by becoming leaders in their communities fighting for quality educational access in the Brazilian countryside, MST activists have won over entire communities that now

support their broader struggle, even if they *do not yet* identify as socialists.

Given the current Brazilian political context, the fruits of this thirty-five-year long march through the institutions is more important than ever. In October 2018, the fascist, virulently homophobic, misogynist, racist politician, Jair Bolsonaro, won the presidential elections. Part of his campaign promise was to rid Brazil of the “red outlaws,” referring primarily to the MST and the homeless movement. Bolsonaro promised to arm landlords with guns and respond to land occupations with military intervention. In the policy realm, the majority of the movement’s gains at the federal level had already been reversed by the previous administration, with important public policies like the National Program for Education in Areas of Agrarian Reform (PRONERA) completely gutted.

Yet, there are reasons for cautious optimism. First, since Bolsonaro has taken office in January 2019, he has not yet employed this strategy of using the military or federal police to violently repress the movement. Of course, Bolsonaro’s hateful rhetoric has emboldened others to take violent action, most recently in July 2019 a man drove a truck into an MST occupation, killing a 72-year-old landless farmer, but this is not the same as state-sanctioned violence. Second, the definitive end of political diplomacy in Brazil has distinct advantages, with the potential of generating a surge in MST-led occupations and protests. With the Workers’ Party out of power, the MST no longer has to engage in a delicate political dance with the federal government; it can mobilize against the new administration and openly contest its legitimacy. Agrarian reform youth is a third reason for optimism. Today’s MST is a movement of young people who grew up in settlements and camps, obtained education through the movement’s formal educational programs, and participated in MST activities and events. Bolsonaro does not have the power to reverse those experiences, and even a couple thousand second-generation leaders who stay in the countryside could prove critical to the long-term relevance of the movement. In other words, the seeds have already been planted and harvested, and will not be disappearing in the near future.

Fourth and finally, the MST is now engaging in this contentious political struggle with more material, ideological, and socio-political resources than ever before. The federal government will have difficulties dismantling the already viable cooperatives, schools, and university programs which are now part and parcel of the fabric of local economies and institutions. Furthermore, although Bolsonaro won the general election in 2018, he lost to his political opponent Fernando Haddad in eleven states, all concentrated in the poor Brazilian North and Northeast. In this region many left-leaning governors won the election. Ironically, after Bolsonaro came to power these local governments were *more* willing than ever before to work with the MST as a form of resistance against Bolsonaro.

In conclusion, the MST’s prefigurative struggle has always moved forward under contradictory and conflictive relations with the Brazilian state. Over the next years we are going to see the true strength and limits of the MST’s long march through the institutions, or what I have referred to as activists’ attempt to prefigure, within our many state institutions, the *not yet*.⁷¹ ■

71 → For a longer explanation of these arguments about the MST’s struggle under conservative resurgence, see the epilogue of my book (Tarlau 2019).

**INTERCULTURAL
INTERPRETATIONS**

**PONDERING THE AZTEC
HOUSES OF THE GODS**

Cecilia Diego

Esto no es una escuela

“Conquest is not a European privilege”¹ and the institutionalization of teaching-and-learning (what we would be tempted to call schooling) might not only be a Modern European instrument of domination. This opening phrase is in no way apologetic of European imperialism. It was uttered by an Indigenous woman and cited by me (a Latin American woman) both of whom intend to communicate just the opposite. By quoting this particular sentence of Julieta Paredes’ speech, I do not wish to apologize nor create a rationale for the terrible actions taken on behalf of the conquering European nations; very much on the contrary. I wish to illuminate the fact that the idea of the Indian as the “good savage” is also an imposition of the modern world. We need to realize the construct of the Indigenous Ethos was not their own, but one that was created during the collision of Europe with America. In order to save Indigenous people from a crueler fate, missionaries concocted an amicable image of the newly discovered people, an image that reduced them to little more than children, lagging behind the productive and religious enlightenment cherished by the Europeans.

European modernity rejoiced in “finding” these people whose connection to nature and whose pureness they could contrast with their nascent modernization. Such themes can be read in the works of Montaigne and Rousseau. This “otherness” to which they contrasted themselves was no more than their projection of what they wanted the Indigenous people to be, stripping them of qualities that the powerful possess: the tendency to desire empires, conquer others and dominate over them. However, if we take just one minute to familiarize ourselves with the true history of pre-Hispanic Indigenous civilizations, that is what we find, especially when we inquire about the Aztecs or Mexicas. Their empire was built upon the conquest of the Valley of Mexico, and the expansionism of their empire by means of violent warfare and human sacrifice. This is exactly the argument I will be making throughout this paper, by focusing on another tool for conquest: the Aztec system of childrearing.

I propose that an iteration of organized, institutionalized, and compulsory teaching-and-learning was utilized as an instrument of domination

and conquest was used in Mesoamerica before the arrival of the Spaniards. As I see it, the Aztecs used such institutionalization for the economical-political-religious domination of the people who inhabited the Valley of Mexico before their arrival, as well as for the loyal submission of their own people. Systems of teaching-and-learning have been often—but not always—used by empires throughout the ages as one of their preferred mechanisms of control. The following argument is relevant to our study because of its paradigmatic obscurity in the history and philosophy of education. It is also an important conversation to have because it sheds light on the impossibility of ever fully understanding the otherness of the Mesoamerican peoples before and at the time of the conquest. What we know of these cultures has been delivered to us through the mediation of Catholic friars whose interpretations of that perplexing reality are marred by religious and cultural bias. It is impossible to ever truly know what life was like before Europe met America: their ontology, their epistemology, their *techné*, have all been lost and the glimpses we have are mere interpretations at best, of what people 500 years ago saw.

Two things which are analogous are not identical. At the very least, this presents a pressing problem for anthropologists and historians. Cultures use words in their natural language to describe their realities, but when another agent wishes to describe said culture’s reality it resorts to using its own words, and sometimes the best word to describe another’s reality is merely an analogy. In using a word which is analogous but not identical, the meaning of one people’s culture becomes contaminated and twisted. To understand this better, I recommend looking at the Sapir-Whorf theory which states that each language has its own vision of the world.² Different languages entail different visions of the world, and these visions are incommensurable with each other. Hence, utilizing words from the Spanish language to describe the institutions, traditions, and beliefs of the Mesoamerican peoples is at best an *interpretation* which stems from the Spaniard world view, obfuscating forever the true meaning of things within the non-European cultural system before the conquest.

1 → Julieta Paredes, “Feminismo Comunitario de Abya Yala,” *LÁPIZ* 3 (2018): 35.

2 → Umberto Eco, *Decir casi lo mismo* (Mexico: Lumen, 2008), 48.

When it comes to analyzing cultural realities other than our own we cannot simply have an inclusive definition which encompasses all practices that have to do with the formation of personhood. We would be inadvertently imposing our own views and interpretations onto others' practices. The term "education," as we will see later on in the essay, is not just a "catch-all" umbrella term—it is very specific to our particular modern reality of teaching-and-learning. In what follows, I paint a picture of the Nahua institutions called *calmecac* and *tepochcalli*. This description will hopefully demonstrate that these institutions were not related to the budding European systems of compulsory schooling. However unique this system might have been, we will never fully understand its novelty because the knowledge we have of it comes by way of the Spanish friars' interpretations of what they saw, and what they saw was easily construed by them to be educative.

Throughout this document, I am careful not to purposefully impose intercultural interpretations of a European episteme upon the Mexican prehispanic reality at the time of the conquest. It would be very easy to call the teaching-and-learning structures "schooling" or formal education. In fact, that is exactly what one finds is the official version offered by the Mexican government. The Secretariat of Public Education issues free textbooks to all students throughout the country. The sixth grade textbook published in 2018 reads: "La educación era obligatoria y existían dos escuelas, una para los nobles (*calmecac*) y otra para los demás jóvenes (*tepochcalli*)."³ With this short sentence, the government (oblivious to the underlying linguistic/epistemic/political problems inherent in this statement) communicates the existence of a formal educational system in our territory's past.

If we look to the most renowned Mexican historians and anthropologists, we find hesitancy in using Spanish-language wording to describe the Aztec teaching-learning processes and institutions. León-Portilla, a contemporary philosopher and historian, famous for his knowledge of Nahua history and culture, takes on the subject directly in at least three of

3 → "Education was mandatory and there were two schools: one for the nobles (*calmecac*) and another for the rest of the youths (*tepochcalli*)." Carlos Alberto Reyes Tosqui, et al., *Historia Sexto Grado*, (México: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2018).

his books.⁴ In these texts he warns of the dangers of not having a clear indication that the Nahua utilized the concept of "education" to designate the formation of their people. León-Portilla points to the myriad texts that describe this learning-teaching iteration, and cautiously proceeds to use the term education. So he writes: "En el caso de la cultura náhuatl prehispánica, sabemos que existieron en ella diversos tipos de escuelas o centros de educación"⁵ and dedicates an entire chapter to the topic of "Los ideales de la educación" (Ideals of Education) in his book *Toltecáyotl. Aspectos de la cultura náhuatl* (Toltecáyotl: Aspects of the Nahuatl Culture) and another entire chapter titled "La educación prehispánica" (Prehispanic Education) in a later book titled *Aztecas-Mexicas. Desarrollo de una civilización originaria* (Aztecs-Mexicas: Development of an Indigenous Civilization).⁶

Alfredo López Austin, a notable Mexica scholar, created the first and only anthology which contains the texts that offer insight into "pre-hispanic education." In his *La educación de los antiguos Nahuas 1 y 2* (Education of the Ancient Nahuas, Vols. 1 and 2), López Austin collects only what he calls "primary sources," by which he means those texts written immediately following the Spanish conquest of Tenochtitlan in 1521.⁷ In his rendering of the Aztec reality, the Aztecs had a formal educational system and schools which he dubs *templos-escuela* (temple-schools). This hyphenated word works better to capture the religious element of their formation process. Of these templos-escuelas he writes: "el templo-escuela era el lugar por excelencia donde niños y jóvenes eran inducidos a adquirir el conocimiento que les permitía desempeñar en su presente y en un futuro adulto los papeles sociales que les atribuían los grupos dirigentes."⁸

4 → Miguel León-Portilla, *Toltecáyotl* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2014); *Aztecas-Mexicas. Desarrollo de una civilización originaria* (Madrid: Algaba Ediciones, 2005); *La filosofía náhuatl estudiada en sus fuentes* (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 2017).

5 → "In the case of the prehispanic Nahuatl culture, we know there existed many kinds of schools and education centers." León-Portilla, *Toltecáyotl*, 190.

6 → León-Portilla, "La educación prehispánica," in *Aztecas-Mexicas. Desarrollo de una civilización originaria*, (Madrid: Algaba Ediciones, 2005), 211-223.

7 → For a complete relation of these texts, see López Austin, *La educación de los antiguos Nahuas*, 2 vols. (México: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2002).

8 → "The temple-school was the principal place where boys and youths were induced into

Throughout this paper I will provide some cautious justifications for why we might use the modern day terms for “school” and “education.” Although critiques of these translations should be held in mind, this document is, in fact, partly an exploration of the possibility that there is no appropriate terminology—and never may be. Our paradigmatic distance from the Mesoamerican world is such that words can only describe their realities from our current point of view. With the prior information in mind, the following is a detailed description of those Aztec cultural realities which have been called (or interpreted to be) formal education and schooling. The descriptions come from what we can learn by reading the Mendocino and Florentine Codices, and the Chronicles of Motolinia, Sahagún, Durán, Mendieta, Torquemada and Ixtlixochitl, as well as by analyzing the modern day interpretations of education in the Nahuatl world offered by León-Portilla and López-Austin.

HOUSES OF THE GODS: WHERE THE NAHUA YOUTH WERE REARED

Calmecac and *telpochcalli* are the titles given to the two most cited institutions of formal child-rearing and service in Prehispanic Mexico. In our own modern terms, we have interpreted these institutions to be their “schools,” although in Sahagún’s texts he never refers to them as such, and instead uses the term “house” when talking about these buildings.⁹

These institutions were not only a staple of Aztec culture, but in different iterations were manifestations of the larger Nahuatl “educational” tradition that had already existed in the Valley of Mexico and its surroundings hundreds of years before the Aztecs conquered the area. It was, however, Emperor Moctezuma the I (also known as Moctezuma Ilhuicamina) who in the 1400s officially instituted compulsory and universal attendance as part of his plan to consolidate the Aztec Empire and expand his dominion over neighboring territories and

acquiring the knowledge that would allow them to carry out, in the present and in their future adult lives, the social rules assigned to them by the leadership.” López Austin, *Educación Antiguos Nahuas* 1, 26.

9 → See Alfredo López Austin, *Educación Mexica. Antología de textos Sahaguntinos* (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1985).

peoples.¹⁰ Fray Diego Duran describes the establishment of schools for all communities in the Tenochtitlan vicinity in his text which can be found in López Austin’s anthology.¹¹ Similarly, Torquemada wrote: “all parents in general were careful to send their children to these schools... and they were obligated to.”¹² Offering their child to the gods was not only a tradition amongst the Nahuatl people but a mandate from their ruler beginning in the late period of Aztec history. Parents were careful to send them because they were forced to. This highlights how the power dynamic between the people and the ruler were used to the advantage of the empire.

The *calmecac* was dedicated to Quetzalcoatl (Feathered-serpent god). It was usually reserved for the children of the elite class (pipiltin), although parents from all social classes were free to choose which institution to offer their child into, hence creating the opportunity for class mobility. Attendees lived there. These places of learning and service were housed in buildings erected next to the most important temples in their cities. It is estimated there were around eight or ten of them in Tenochtitlan.¹³

The *calmecac* was known for its strict rules, rigorous discipline, and elevated academic standards. Life within this institution was one of constant sacrifice and labor. Their upbringing and lessons were carried out through their everyday tasks and chores as evidenced in the following text by Fray Diego de Duran:

[They] swept and cleaned the house at four in the morning... The older boys would go find spines of maguey... They carried wood from the mountains on their backs, which was to be burned in the house each night... They ceased work early, and later went directly to the monastery to serve their gods and do penitence, but first to bathe.... The food that they made they

10 → See López Austin, *Educación Antiguos Nahuas I*, 25.

11 → López Austin, *Educación Antiguos Nahuas I*, 58.

12 → Torquemada, *Monarquía indiana*, 2 vols., (México: Salvador Chávez Hayhoe, 1943), 187.

13 → See Ana María Valle Vázquez, “Nezahualcōyotl. Pensamiento, poesía y educación en México prehispánico,” in *Filosofía de la Educación en México*, Cecilia Diego (ed.), (LAPES: México, 2015), 17-19.

cooked in the house. At sundown they started to prepare the things that were necessary (for activities at night)... At midnight all of them got up to pray, and those who did not wake were punished...¹⁴

Life for the Nahuatl children and adolescents was entrenched in violence, hardship and fear. The level of discipline and physical strength needed to carry out their work was met with a sense of duty and honor, as well as a good dose of punishment. The endurance necessary to fulfill their time at the *calmecac* was seen as a huge success.

In his *Toltecáyotl*, León-Portilla refers to the *calmecac* as centers of higher education because the Nahuatl's most elevated knowledge was taught there. Rhetoric (how to speak well in a poetic manner), military and ecclesiastical arts, astrology, and astronomy were among the subjects taught.

"They taught the children to speak well and how to greet and bow.... They taught them all the verses of songs to sing, which were called divine songs... And they taught them astrology of the Indies and the interpretations of dreams and the counting of the years..."¹⁵

They were also taught how to read the sacred codices, how to sing the sacred/religious songs, and how to interpret the calendar. Most importantly, through their discipline in everyday life and academic-intellectual studies, they learned self-control. It was at the *calmecac* that the ruling class would acquire the needed knowledge to rule. Hence the importance of becoming models of morality and knowers of the sacred arts, as well as of military strategy. The high level of performance needed to fulfill the academic requirements and high moral standards of the *calmecac* meant high social praise for those who were able to finish their studies. There was a level of social mobility-stability involved in the completion of the *calmecac*. As a *pipiltin* it was important for

14 → *Códice Florentino*, in León-Portilla, *La filosofía Nahuatl*, 226.

15 → *Códice Florentino*, 226.

maintaining elite status, and for those from a lower class, making it through the *calmecac* implied moving up in society.

The *telpochcalli* or house of young people was dedicated to *Tezcatlipoca*, and was the "school" for the *macehualtin*, or common folk. These institutions were found in the villages, not in the big cities. The Nahuatl had a particular geo-political division which functioned like modern day rural neighborhoods and were called *calpulli* (row of houses), and each had its own *telpochcalli*. The buildings for the *telpochcalli* were said to have had different chambers: some for the boys and some for girls. Although students also slept there, rules of housing were more relaxed than in the *calmecac* and children often wandered back home for lunch.

Though presumably less rigorous than the *calmecac*, sacrifice and discipline were also central. Penitence in both schools was severe. It is described in detail in Fray Diego Duran's writing and entailed the use of maguey spines to continuously prick oneself until blood was drawn.¹⁶ At the *telpochcalli*, attendees were purposefully malnourished, slept on uncomfortable surfaces, and were subjected to a life of austerity. Fasting was an important practice. Malnourishment was a result of being fed very little so students would become used to austerity and would survive extended periods of war, famine, or drought. At night, they would stay up, forsaking sleep as penitence or offering to the gods. Punishment and reprimand were central to this hierarchical methodology. Keeping busy, and always having something to do was an important part of their moral formation: idleness was punished and greatly frowned upon.

Special attention was placed on each child's particular abilities, and teachers would steer them towards the activities they seemed most apt to develop.¹⁷ Subject matter, according to León-Portilla, had to do with mastering the art of war.¹⁸ In comparison to the *calmecac*, where teaching was centered on mastering the intellectual strategies of warfare, the *telpochcalli* developed students' ability to fight in war: they became adept at archery, spear throwing, and sword mastery. The

16 → López Austin, *Educación Antiguos Nahuas I*, 78.

17 → In López Austin, *Educación Antiguos Nahuas I*, 74.

18 → León-Portilla, *Toltecáyotl*, 190.

ideals of military and religious values were not merely transmitted, but embodied in physical education. Being fit was most necessary for military training soldiers but also as part of religious practices, as students were taught how to sing and dance their sacred rituals. Among the disciplines taught was also art: painting, sculpting, modeling, etc. Moral conduct and good habits were of the utmost importance. Chastity was a value enforced by fear of death.

At both the *calmecac* and *telpochcalli*, different didactic materials were used depending on the type of content to be learned. When practicing the art of war and hunting, students used weapons like blowguns, clubs, darts, bows and arrows, shields and swords and other instruments like nets and rocks. For intellectual work, teachers and students made use of pictographs and codices as tools for learning astrology or history. However, what is most peculiar to the Nahua teaching “didactic” was their use of pictographs as a mnemonic device to learn songs and poetry.¹⁹ In contrast with the Greek poets that had no writing system for composing and reciting their poetry, the *cuicapicque*, or “song smiths,” could rely on the pictograph in their books. This can be found in the following poem by a Nahua poet:

In noncuica amoxtlapal,
Ya noconyazozoutinemi,
Nixochialotzin,
Nontlatetotica
In tlacuilolcalitic ca.²⁰

—

(I sing the paintings in the book,
As I unfold it,
I am like a colorful parrot,

19 → See Ana María Valle Vázquez, “Nezahualcōyotl. Pensamiento, poesía y educación en México prehispánico,” in *Filosofía de la Educación en México*, Cecilia Diego (ed.), (LAPES: Mexico, 2015).

20 → *Cantares mexicanos*, fol. 51v, in Miguel León-Portilla, *Quince poetas del mundo náhuatl* (México:Diana, 2006), 14.

I speak of many things
Within the house of the paintings.)

López Austin points out that while these two “schools” were the most commonly mentioned in the Nahua primary sources, there were others dedicated to other gods. Another institution mentioned in Fray Diego Duran’s text was named *cuicacalli* and was dedicated to the teaching-and-learning of singing, dancing, and playing instruments. It was the teachers who instead lived in the *cuicacalli*, and the students—both male and female—would attend daily. In contrast to the *calmecac*, where music played a central role in religious ritual, at the *cuicacalli*, young people were taught profane songs which recounted historical accomplishments of the people’s history.²¹

IN IXTLI IN YOLOTL

It is possible to interpret these primary sources as suggesting that “formal education” played a preponderant role in everyday Aztec life and culture. There was a profound anthropological ideal that motivated these people towards teaching-and-learning. In Nahua the ideal is phrased: *in ixtli in yolotl* (your face, your heart). This phrase denotes an indigenous ontology, a way of being and a way of wanting to be in the world. It also gives identity. A model Nahua would possess a wise face and a strong (courageous) heart: the Nahua people upheld extremely high moral standards. Hence, “education” (both in the *calmecac* and *telpochcalli*, but also in the household) was always aimed at the formation of the wise and courageous man. This ideal is expressed in the following poem:

El hombre maduro:
Un corazón firme como la piedra,
Corazón fuerte;
Un rostro sabio,
Dueño de un rostro, dueño de un corazón,

21 → López Austin, *Educación Antiguos Nahuas* I, 84-92..

comprehensivo.²²

(The mature man:

A heart as firm as a rock,

Strong heart;

A wise face,

Owner of his face, owner of his heart,

Understanding.)

In addition to *in ixtli in yolotl* as the anthropological ideal held by the Aztecs, this rhetoric also sheds light on their particular approach to knowledge. Yolanda Chávez Leyva offers a breakdown of the inherent epistemology in this ancestral phrase. She writes that, depending on the context, *ixtli* can be used to mean face or eyes.²³ The *ixtli* was tied to perception, to gaining knowledge. The *ixtli* is the part of a human being with which he/she feels: “it is the perception of the world through the senses.”²⁴ The *yolotl*, or heart, was believed to contain our knowledge, the heart was believed to house memory. Working together, the *ixtli* and the *yolotl* would “create insight.”²⁵ This particular phrasing alludes to an ontology as well as an epistemology, and since it was central to adults’ teaching efforts, it illuminates their moral ethos.

In *ixtli in yolotl* is also a necessary concept for understanding the role of the “teacher” in Nahuatl society. As Valle Vázquez writes: “The words *teixcuitiani* and *teixtlamachtiani*, which can be translated as teacher, literally mean ‘the one who makes the others take a face/a perception’ and ‘the one who gives wisdom, a face/a perception, to the others.’”²⁶ To teach would be the action of giving wisdom to others’ faces. In Nahuatl the word for this type of teaching is *ixtlamachlizti*.

Miguel León Portilla, in his *Toltecáyotl*, offers an even more

22 → *Códice florentino*, vol. II, b. X, fol.7v.

23 → Yolanda Chávez Leyva, “In ixtli in yóllotl/ a face and a heart: Listening to the Ancestors,” *Studies in American Indian Literatures Series 2*, Vol. 15, No. 3/4 (Fall 2003/Winter 2004): 102.

24 → Valle Vázquez, “Nezahualcoyotl,” 20e.

25 → Chávez Leyva, “In ixtli in yóllotl,” 102.

26 → Valle Vázquez, “Nezahualcoyotl,” 21e.

exhaustive analysis of five different terms for “teacher” in the Nahuatl language; each one describes a particular attribute and action of the teacher. The first three words listed here are related to *ixtli* (the face/ the eyes/perception), while the fourth and fifth words are related to the *yolotl* (heart). *Teixcuitiani* alludes to the teacher as “he who makes others take a face,” *teixtlamachtiani* refers to “those who make others’ faces wise,” and *tetezcahuiani* denotes “he who holds a mirror in front of others.” On the other hand, *netlacaneco* (*itech*), which could be translated as “thanks to him (*itech*), people humanize their love;” and finally, *tlayolpachivitia*, the Nahuatl word for he who hardens hearts.²⁷

The fourth concept, *netlacaneco* (*itech*), is the most enigmatic to me so far. In *La filosofía náhuatl estudiada en sus fuentes*, León-Portilla remarks that it points to a certain ideal of what was understood to be “human” as a moral quality. He also hints at the possibility that this ‘humanization of love’ is one of the basic concepts in their understanding of “education.”²⁸ In that same text, León-Portilla develops a chapter where he takes this up in detail. Although he clearly points out our Nahuatl ancestors *did not* develop a science of education (to develop a science of anything is a modern endeavour), they cared deeply about “forging others’ faces,” and “humanizing peoples’ love.”²⁹ Such cultural preoccupation with a particular type of ideal formation can possibly be construed today as “education.”

TLACAHUAPAHUALIZTLI

León-Portilla underscores there was no science of education, however, in a prior chapter of *La Filosofía Nahuatl estudiada en sus fuentes* he also highlights the Nahuatl had a rich conception of the “art of child-rearing (*crianza*) or educating men” (*tlacuahuapahualiztli*).³⁰ The difference is subtle but telling of our contemporary knowledge on the subject. While León-Portilla clearly affirms the Nahuatl had no science of education because there was no “science” as such before the modern

27 → León-Portilla, *La filosofía náhuatl*, 115.

28 → *Ibid.*

29 → León-Portilla, *La filosofía náhuatl*, 269.

30 → León-Portilla, *La filosofía náhuatl*, 271.

era, he is also cognizant of the fact that they had a robust corpus of knowledge and know-how on the formation of men towards their ideal in *ixtli* in *yollotl*, and this, he points out, is signified in the Nahuatl word *tlacahuapahualitzli* [*tlaca*=man; *huapahualitzli*=child-rearing (*crianza*) or education]

Before I continue with the analysis of *tlacahuapahualitzli*, I have to address the usage of the word “education.” When one reads the original 16th century texts from the Spanish friars Bernardino de Sahagún, Gerónimo de Mendieta, and Fray Diego Durán, the word “education” is not mentioned even once. (If you read the modern interpretations of these texts, then it is certainly present.) This is because the use of the word was first introduced into Spanish after the second half of the 1500s.³¹ The word that was utilized to identify the concepts of learning-and-teaching toward a commonly held ideal was *crianza*, which loosely translates to child-rearing. When the word *educación* was introduced into the Spanish language, it was used indistinctly with *crianza*. Eventually though, child-rearing and education became two very different concepts, with the concept of education becoming the broader and richer of the two, particularly in our current understanding of it as an institution likened to maybe only healthcare.

León-Portilla tells us *tlacahuapahualitzli* refers to the education or child-rearing of man. However, as I have written, the word and modern concept of education would not have been used by the friars when translating or describing the reality of pre-conquest *tlacahuapahualitzli* because on the one hand it was not in usage, but most importantly, because it has come to mean something broader, which was not what they were seeing or describing. I therefore believe it more adequate to use the concept of *crianza*; and *tlacahuapahualitzli* would hence be the art of childrearing, not the art of education or the science of it.

I make this distinction because it is essential to our overall understanding of education, and whether or not the pre-Columbian practice was indeed education. The Nahuatl, as expressed in multiple accounts,

31 → See Lisardo Doval Salgado, “Acercamiento etimológico al término “Educación,” *Revista Española de Pedagogía*, vol.37, no. 146 (1979); M.S. Prakash and Gustavo Esteva, *Escaping Education* (New York: Counterpoints:2008); Gustavo Esteva, *Desafíos de la interculturalidad* (Oaxaca: Proyecto Andino de Tecnologías Campesinas, 2017).

had a collection of practices geared towards the young which had the objective of *in ixtli in yolotl*. The Aztec empire in particular had a *compulsory* and *universal system* that we need not call schooling or education, yet was clearly a mechanism of power. The Aztec empire utilized the *calmecac* and *tepochcalli* to bring up their young strictly in accordance with their beliefs and values, but also to instill unwavering reverence to their leaders, to train their soldiers, to adore their gods and offer penitence, and as free labor, promoting above all things the importance of keeping oneself from being idle. Furthermore, as Fray Diego Duran writes, the establishment of universal-compulsory attendance was a political act by Moctezuma Ilhuicamina who implemented this reform at a crucial time in the expansion of the Aztec Empire as a measure to secure its continuity.³² This is an example of how institutionalized learning has been utilized as a mechanism for the submission of the young by the established and growing powers of imperial endeavours. At this point it is worth keeping Paredes's words in mind: “Conquest is not a European privilege.”

It is by studying Fray Diego Duran's text that López Austin writes about the *calmecac* and *tepochcalli*:

[T]odas estas casas eran lugares donde los jóvenes, al cumplir sus funciones sacerdotales, adquirirían los conocimientos y la disciplina necesarios para desempeñar específicas funciones en la edad adulta.

(All these houses were places where, upon completing their priestly functions, youths would acquire the knowledges and discipline necessary for carrying out specific functions in adult life).³³

López Austin does not call Aztec learning institutions schools, but rather temple-schools. This brings to our attention another important aspect of these spaces: they were not instituted as places of learning,

32 → Fray Diego Durán, “Los jóvenes dedicados a los templos,” in López Austin, *La educación de los antiguos nahuas* I, 57-92.

33 → Ibid.

but of worship, and it was through their permanence there that learning took place. Let us also keep in mind that the Nahuas and first friars who wrote about these institutions called them neither schools nor temples but houses—houses where the gods dwell. Was learning in these houses epiphenomenal? Are we simply impaired to ever comprehend the reality of these Nahua spaces because of our limited modern lens?

**CONCLUSION:
MAKING PEACE WITH NEVER FULLY
UNDERSTANDING OTHERS' ALTERITY**

An expected ending would be for me to conclude whether or not the reality of teaching-and-learning in the Aztec Empire was schooling and/or education. As I hope to have demonstrated, this is more than a mere problem of semantics, and it is also much more than a mere translation problem. We are faced with an intercultural dilemma and hence, it might be more useful to ask: What good would come of using a particular modern European qualifier on a pre-Colonial reality rather than affirming its use? In what way and to whom is it useful if we reduce one people's reality to our own? Unfortunately, when two worldviews are brought together, the best we can hope for is an intercultural interpretation. We must make our peace with never fully understanding others' alterity.

With this said, I ponder whether their particular institutions—whatever we call them—were conducive to the submission of their population for the consolidation of the empire. These institutions, which promoted all their youth to serve their gods, were places of worship and learning, but mostly of labor. This labor was not remunerated. The reward was, in a sense, the social position maintained or gained by virtue of having gone through the institution. Once the Aztec nomadic tribe was able to establish a stronghold on the land in the Valley of Mexico, they quickly moved to establish a compulsory system which obligated all children to be promised to a god at birth and then sent to serve him. It is the particular way in which the adults decided to utilize the young people's time and efforts that truly defines it as a power dynamic. The

ultimate objective of these institutions then was not childrearing or learning but the inclusion of the young into a society of service: service to the gods and service to their emperors. The hierarchical structure of the "houses of the gods" sheds light on Mesoamerican power structures which were much more complex than we have been led to believe by the myth of the "good savage." ■

CENTROS DE APOYO MUTUO: AN EMERGENT DECOLONIAL PEDAGOGY OF RELATION?

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Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a program of complete disorder. But it cannot come as a result of magical practices, nor of a natural shock, nor of a friendly understanding. Decolonization, as we know, is a historical process: that is to say it cannot be understood, it cannot become intelligible nor clear to itself except in the exact measure that we can discern the movements which give it historical form and content.
—Franz Fanon¹

We frame this work as a series of questions, an emergence into the possibility of the work of Centros de Apoyo Mutuo (CAMs) as revealing a decolonial pedagogy of relation.

As Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang remind us, decolonization—particularly its role in education broadly conceived—cannot become a metaphor for other efforts.² It must maintain a conceptual integrity of the moves, methods, and imaginaries that “brings about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life. It is not a metaphor for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools.”³ In this spirit, our interest in possibilities of the Centros de Apoyo Mutuo (CAMs) in Puerto Rico as sites of an emergent decolonial pedagogy of relation is not in order to create a metaphor to be extracted and applied to other places. It is through place- and land-based work by Boricuas, on the island and in the diaspora, that this question of the practices necessary to support the various stages of decolonization will be answered.

- 1 → Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox, (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 2.
2 → Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1-40.
3 → Tuck and Yang, “Decolonization,” 1.

What follows is a transcript of a presentation and conversation that took place at the Latin American Philosophy of Education Society (LAPES) conference in Philadelphia in 2018 between myself and Kique Cubero García, a member of the organization Centro de Desarrollo Politico, Educativo y Cultural (Center for Political, Educational and Cultural Development) (CDPEC) and one of a group of organizers of the CAM in Caguas, Puerto Rico. The CDPEC is an organization supporting the development of these mutual support systems. In an effort not to speak for those working in the CAMs, I will relate to Kique’s words through questions he asked me at the conference, briefly link the work of the CAMs to Edouard Glissant’s concept of opacity,⁴ and explore how the CAMs may present us with an emergent decolonial pedagogy of relation important for Boricuas engaged in learning to decolonize.
—Ariana González Stokas

KIQUE CUBERO GARCÍA: The development of the CAMs after Hurricanes Maria and Irma were not a relief effort but putting into practice what CDPEC had been working for. We had begun to practice the ideals of mutual support and to use space and place to make visible possible worlds through the Comedores Sociales, a project which set out to: 1) feed hungry students and 2) visualize hunger in the University of Puerto Rico. The Comedores began around 2012 during one of the university strikes in response to U.S.-imposed austerity measures which were upheld by then Governor Luis Fortuño. What the hurricane allowed was an opportunity to seize the moment to continue the work of practicing and making visible places where new modes of relating might arise. In the process of working toward the realization of these ideas, there were tensions in the movement. In the beginning there was a tendency to recruit people to ideologies. A few people realized that the recruitment of people to work—and for activists to listen rather than to recruit others to ideologies—was needed in the foreground. From this tension the Comedores Sociales were born. The main feature of the Comedores is a three-way contribution system of sustainability where people receive a plate of food in exchange for: 1) volunteer work hours; 2) supplies or

- 4 → Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

food; 3) a monetary donation. It is important to stress that this model of contribution was created from the participation of people in the Comedores. It is a system not only of bringing support, but also of integrating new people to a political practice rather than an ideology. Work and money and materials are all resources of equal value in the Comedores Sociales, and this practice and this philosophy were brought to the CAMs. The CAMs were created not to recruit people to CDPEC, not to be the vanguard, but to inspire others to invent places where mutual support might be realized. CDPEC offered a place and information and ways of understanding how to organize vulnerable people. Now there are ten CAMs.

ARIANA GONZÁLEZ STOKAS: Kique stressed the centrality of men “shutting up” and listening, especially to women in the Caguas CAM and Comedores Sociales. The function is to make places available where the processes of learning what people already know can be shared and seen as sources of strength in the struggle against U.S. oppression. Sharing how to handle the truth and the cause. Managing together gender violence through a transformative justice approach. Kique describes that the Caguas CAM and Comedores were influenced by the “serve the people” practices of the Young Lords and the Black Panther Party. These practices sought to reimagine the use of spaces, such as churches, hospitals and storefronts, through occupying them and instituting services that met the needs of Black and Puerto Rican communities while simultaneously practicing a form of spatial politics. The CAM in Caguas, like many of the CAMs across the island, take ownership of abandoned public buildings and repurpose them for direct support that serves the people with health care, food security, arts and cultural programming, and healing. The Caguas CAM has retained squatter rights to an abandoned social security building since late 2017. The connection between the spatial political practices by the Young Lords, the Black Panther Party, and the CAMs reveal a genealogy of design practices in the service of transforming spaces for modes of living and interacting that allow for *autogestión*, or the exercise of a self-determined existence.

KIKE: The CAMs practice a new politics--listening. It is not new because it hasn't been practiced; it is new because of the political context and the way that Puerto Rico has historically functioned through U.S. colonialism. The aim of the CAMs is not to negotiate a political space with the state. We are interested in working with people, with the political subjects, the people who will make a revolution. In attempts to take the power of the state, many have forgotten about people. *Desde abajo* (from below). You have to allow for people to create themselves in order to build a new society, not the other way. So we focus on transforming our relations as human beings. We decided to work with the knowledge people have to self-organize. We work with the survival abilities of the people who have been living the challenge. We seek attentiveness in our activism to the way that people have been self-organizing, not bringing in a theory to implant.

QUESTION 1

KIKE: WHAT DO YOU THINK THE CAMS ARE DOING?

ARIANA: While decolonized modes of relation and the practice of *autogestión*—understood here as the practice of self-determination—are instructive and a possible process for those not only in Puerto Rico or Puerto Ricans to engage in, this is a project decidedly focused on how Boricuas, *de allá y de acá* [there and here], can learn new modes of interaction, new ways of relating to the self to one another, to our history and to the land beyond the behaviors inscribed by colonialism. It is a project to wander into the modes of healing essential to a rematriation of indigenous land, life, imaginaries and self, beyond the confines of the U.S. colonial systems—both in the continental U.S. and on the island—that have perpetrated epistemic, physical, psychological and environmental violence. The aim here is not to “grasp” what the CAMs are engaged in, but rather aim toward the kind of relation that Glissant directs us toward in his book *Poetics of Relation*. How we approach the other is not to try and become them or enclose them--demand transparency and veracity or to appropriate their ways of life--but rather to, as Glissant suggests, “be able to conceive of the opacity of the other

for me, without reproach for my opacity for her. To feel in solidarity with her or to build with her or to like what she does, it is not necessary for me to grasp her. It is not necessary to try to become the other (to be image).⁵ I am learning from what the CAMs are doing. For me, the CAMs are clearing a space for a manner of thinking and relation that emerges, even if just as a glimpse, when self-managed existence is struggled for in daily mundane activity. Painting a mural, cooking a meal, standing in line for food, holding an acupuncture clinic, creating an intergenerational summer camp. The work, as I come to it, places healing and being together, invention and rematriation of property, land, history and food at the center of what it means to provide “support.” This support is not a formula of dependency and extraction, but rather a source of invention, healing, and planting seeds to reveal the possibility of self-managed existence. The work of the CAMs articulates modes of self-determination integral to realizing a decolonial project. The CAMs highlight that listening to and making place with those who have been pushed to the margins is an off-ramp from continuing to re-produce imperialism, environmental racism, anti-blackness, misogyny, transphobia, non-consensual social and political relations, and violence.

QUESTION 2

KIKE: WHY DO YOU SEE THE CAMS AS POTENTIALLY “DECOLONIAL” AND DECOLONIZING?

ARIANA: The work of the CAMs has the potential to be decolonizing work particularly because of the role of taking back—taking over—land and place, as well as the participatory focus. It is through the participation of people in the community where the CAM is located that makes for its existence. So participation permits existence. The place is co-created through the participation of many different people within the community. I will say that this is an important point to pay attention to in the evolution of the CAMs. What they will become—if they are to continue

5 → Glissant, *Poetics*, 193.

emerging in the direction of being places for the practice and education of decolonization—depends on the continued participation and attentiveness to the local and the participatory in order to become places instructive in decolonial practices. The needs of the most marginalized must always be put first in the work. The commitment to clearing space for the practice of *autogestión* encourages moves to change how we relate and step beyond the bounds of legal permissions and policies, which is something that the identity formation of Boricuas has been tethered to. We are waiting to be allowed to exist or we are hoping not to disappear. The CAMs are beginning to, I believe, illuminate the kinds of de-linking moves Boricuas need to see.⁶ They delink, by collectivization, the occupation of space, the separation from the state and from the need to ask permission for being, the historicizing through encouraging intergenerational transmission of knowledge—for identity, for everyday modes of managing life. They potentially show those of us in the diaspora how collective determinations arise from below and from within our own communities. It clears a space to practice *autogestión* and see what arises, such as a Comedores Sociales, a summer camp, a community healing clinic, from its practice.

QUESTION 3

KIKE: WHAT KIND OF “PEDAGOGY” DO YOU SEE OCCURRING?

ARIANA: The CAMs seem to be moving, as Fanon identifies in the quote I shared at the beginning, to assist in the discernment of the historical form and content of the colonization/decolonization project in Puerto Rico and in the United States. Since many of the CAMs talk about being influenced by the work of the Young Lords, we can see a historical resonance across diasporic locations with place-making, using place to visualize possible worlds as central.

6 → Editors' Note: For more on de-linking, the reader is encouraged to consult Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

We are in a creolized moment of the confluence of the colonial empire with natural disasters, meaning what happened before is happening again--disguised in a slightly different form. The hurricanes of the early colony, San Ciraco (1899) and San Ciprian (1932) are an early warning system for post-María. After both of these hurricanes, the United States (in partnership with the sugar cane industry and others) engineered massive land grabs leaving many Puerto Ricans, including my grandparents, landless. These “historical presents” are instructive in the significance of what has been described as place-based approaches: of attending to the locale--its historical layers and how this attentive responsiveness to the present, the flow of history within it, fosters what is needed and identifies and takes care of the sources of nourishment essential to enabling further growth and resilience in our communities. The centrality of healing a relationship to land, to collective ownership and care, cannot be underestimated as part of this pedagogy. In Borinquen and in the diaspora we have a great deal to learn from First Nations Communities across Turtle Island and Abya Yala. The CAMs are struggling toward articulating new modes of existence that are not dependent upon extraction from the island, from the land, but rather co-existence. These are some of the ways the CAMS are revealing an emergent decolonial pedagogy.

QUESTION 4

KIQUE: WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN
FOR THE DIASPORICANS?

ARIANA: As a diasporican, or more specifically a Nuyorican, after the hurricanes I had to come to a reconciliation with myself. Although I was raised both *allá y acá*, on the island and in New York, I am not of *La Isla* in the same way that those who live the daily reality of the colony are. So what was I to do? How might we support our people? Our families? These were the questions so many of us were asking. We supported, we fundraised, we sent goods. People chartered planes, we created brigades. We practiced a kind of mutual aid. I looked for the political

militancy. We collectively saw how strange it is to be Boricua and live within the United States. Then many, I think, began to sense that it was decolonization practices that they were searching for, although many do not necessarily have clarity on how to describe what such a practice in everyday life looks like.

The daily reality of life in the colony must be acknowledged as distinctly different than those of us in the Diaspora. However, we must also begin to attend to the similarities, such as the rates of incarceration, pay, or educational attainment that correlate with how Black of a Boricua you are. In my family alone, the darker you are, the poorer you are, and the more likely you are to have ended up in prison at one point in life. The generational poverty and environmental racism of the South Bronx, the stronghold of many descendants of the early waves of Boricua forced migrations, holds an echo of the twenty-three superfund sites on the island. Mine, and other Diasporicans, is a daily life where social death is a reality, where invisibility is regularized, where there has been little acceptance here or there. To be part of the diaspora of Puerto Rico is to be in the dark belly of the colonizing beast on the brink of epistemic extinction because you are often alone, dispossessed from the land that serves as remembrance. How to decolonize from within the empire, as a dispossessed Boricua on occupied indigenous lands, holds its own special contradictions. The invention of possible worlds through the occupation of space and place holds promise as a method for learning decolonization in the everyday. We must examine deeply what we carry when we move back and forth from the island into the empire. ■

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