



QUESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE ON THE BASIS OF TODAY'S LESSONS: A CONVERSATION WITH DIPESH CHAKRABARTY¹

María Marta Yedaide²
José Tranier³

Abstract

In this particular COVID time, even in the face of early hopelessness, we set out to think together about our expectations for the world and the kind of life we want to lead in it. Summoned in what José (Pepe) Tranier has coined the "Network of Peripheral Educators", and provided the circumstances were favorable in evading geographical distance, a group of academics from three Argentine State Universities decided to start a few conversations with some of the great names in our libraries⁴. We hoped these important people would help us review the contemporary political, social, academic, pedagogical, and cultural settings. Inspired by the possibilities that became available in these troubled times, we aimed high and wrote to people we deeply admire. Such is the background of our encounter with Dipesh Chakrabarty, this amazing Bengali historian who has made huge contributions to Postcolonial theories and Subaltern Studies. Even if his lucidity could have been anticipated by his credentials, the warm, kind tone of our early correspondence was unexpected, and enhanced the interest in the forthcoming discussions. We hereby share a conversation we immensely enjoyed: it is worth reading on account of the social and political importance of the contents discussed, the stature of the interviewee and the force of the pedagogies of the affections implied.

Keywords: COVID, Inequality, Education, Questions

Recibido: 30/10/2020
Evaluado: 08/11/2020
Aprobado: 01/12/2020

PEPE: Thank you so much dear Dr. Chakrabarty for accepting our invitation for this interview which is gonna be shared with all our students from our national universities in Argentina. Please let me tell you that most part of what we've learned about Postcolonial Studies comes from you.

DISPESH: Thank you. I'm very honored.

PEPE: Please let me introduce you to María Marta Yedaide, who is the head of the Department of Education at the National University of Mar del Plata. Hi María Marta, thanks for joining us.

MARIA: Thank you for the introduction. Pepe is a friend from the university of Rosario, in Argentina. He used to be my professor, so it is fair to say I've learned from you both.

DIPESH: So, do you teach education?



MARIA: Yes, both of us. He teaches education in Rosario and I do so in Mar del Plata, which is a town 400 kilometers away from Buenos Aires, to the South. We have a new course of studies on Educational Sciences. In fact, the program has reopened, since it had been closed at the time of our last dictatorship. So, we are restarting the course of studies and we're making alliances with people in the rest of the country and abroad. We have already made an alliance with you, although probably you didn't know about it yet!

DIPESH: Now I do! Tell me a little bit about the kind of students you have in your classes, their background. Tell me a little bit about them.

MARIA: In the case of my students (because I cannot say both institutions are alike in this) most of the graduated students that attend the state university in Mar del Plata are my age. They look very much like me: they have kids, they work a lot as teachers at school and they want to change something through education. We are a little bit naïve, perhaps, since we hope something can change if we learn to do it better. Maybe not better, but together.

DIPESH: Even when you don't succeed, you can produce an experience that changes people for life.

MARIA: I think so.

DIPESH: Like when I think about India and think of Gandhi, and I think Gandhi was often not successful in actual terms, but he changed a lot of people, a whole generation. He changed values and that's very important.

PEPE: He has touched everybody around the world as well.

MARIA: Well, my students are humbler in their reach but as enthusiastic in their goals and their tenets. And then, our postgraduate students are people that are also committed to changing the world politically, and we are set to becoming greater aware of the colonial marks in us. In that, you have been greatly inspiring.

DIPESH: Thank you. I'm very very deeply honored.

MARIA: Before we go on, I must read something about you in general and then I will make a very simple question before you all the other questions. In case there are people that know little about you, which I believe would be a very rare situation, I want to say that you were born not very long ago in India.

DIPESH: Long ago! I'm 71.

MARIA: Well, but you don't look 71!

DIPESH: I don't feel like 71 but my biological age is 71.

MARIA: Well, you look great.

DIPESH: Thank you.

MARIA: I also want to say that you have made astonishing contributions to Postcolonial Theories and Subaltern Studies. You've been distinguished many times, and you are currently a professor in History at the University of Chicago. I was surprised when I learned that you have been a physics professor, that your first major...



DIPESH: I was not a professor, but I studied physics for my BSc and for my undergraduate degree.

MARIA: Right, yeah, that surprised me. Well, the first thing that I want to ask you, before Pepe can then ask the questions that we've sent...

DIPESH: I am so happy to hear you both...

MARIA: I want to know how you feel. This is a very particular time, we were discussing with Pepe how we feel right now...

DIPESH: Do you want to know how I feel? Well, I feel many things at many levels. At a personal level I feel very angry with governments that did not take all warnings of a pandemic seriously. India did not, the U.S did not. Trump was joking, saying this is a Chinese virus, this is for Europeans. But actually there were many warnings from WHO (World Health Organization) and from other agencies, because when the last coronavirus epidemic happened there was a man, a German man called Klaus Schwab, who was the head of that epidemic management and we could not have a different coronavirus. And then they were saying that we were lucky that the first coronavirus was one where you first began to show symptoms when you became sick. And they actually said: if we get a virus where you don't show any symptoms but you're sick, we will be in trouble. So, there were all kinds of discussions about a global strategy for managing epidemics, because epidemics are becoming more frequent because of what humans are doing, right? But we needed a global approach, whereas what exists in the world among powerful nations are national approaches. China wants to manage itself, you know, the U.S wants to manage itself... So, I feel angry that there were warnings, and they didn't take them seriously. So, at a personal level I feel angry, and intellectually I feel that it shows, first of all, how much our social lives have become dependent on capitalism. So now when the coronavirus is there and people say "don't get together, don't socialize except electronically", you know, it means that you can reconstitute your social life only if somebody else makes money out of it, you know? Like we use zoom, and zoom is owned by some Chinese company. It's registered in the U.S but it's a China owned company. We're using skype, I don't know who owns skype. So what I'm saying is that now that our social life is so dependent on capitalism in the marketplace, we will be able to defeat the virus medically only if somebody makes a vaccine and makes profit out of it, right? And what it means is that if there is a vaccine, some countries will have it and some countries won't. Countries that are powerful will be able to pay for the vaccine and will get it first. So, every crisis we have brings out the inequality in the world.

MARIA: Sí, estoy totalmente de acuerdo.

DIPESH: So, if you ask me how I feel, I mean personally, I feel angry with some governments. There's also a lot of silly things that people do, so people are also responsible for what happens. But intellectually, I think there is a conflict between what Foucault used to call biopolitics (that is how we manage human life and other lives in order for humans to live well) and biological life. See, this virus was part of biological life, not part of our social life, not part of biopolitics. Now it's coming to our lives, we don't know how to deal with it. When we find a vaccine, we will make it part of biopolitics. So, we'll have to manage the other form of life to live, but deep down all of these pandemics happen these days, the last 20 years they say 75% of the infectious



diseases have come from wild animals and that's because of what capitalism does to wild animals, you know, we make deforestation, we build roads in jungles, we make jungles into farmland, right? And we build human houses into where wild animals live. Normally wild animals don't come to humans, we are forcing them to come closer and then some virus in them jumps onto us. So I think about all of these things.

MARIA: All right. Each thing you have said could trigger a whole new conversation, but I will respect the schedule and Pepe, and let him ask you the next question.

PEPE: Our first question (in fact the second one, since you have already given us a kind of answer) can be split or it can help us to think more issues regarding this coronavirus. Do you think that this Covid 19, being understood as a surprising and disruptive situation around the world, allows us to focus more sharply on those political, and also historical, things that have been left behind in the waiting room of history? Could the postcolonial approaches paradoxically obtain some more audibility or better reception? Could this be our historical opportunity for trying to think this critically as well?

DIPESH: It is surely a moment for thinking critically, you see. There are two aspects to it. Now, to the degree, to the extent that you or Maria are part of an economy that is globally connected—even if your well being depends on Argentinian exports, let's say, and if these exports are being affected by the shutdown of global commerce—to that degree you will be suffering. Poor people will be suffering first but, if the suffering goes on, we'll all suffer. So, at the moment I still get my salary from the university, but the university is not getting as much money, like we have a hospital where they're not making as much money. So, if this goes on for four or five years, then I will also suffer. There's no way I will not suffer. At the moment I have a buffer. So, depending on one's class position you have a buffer for a while; from that point of view, because we have created this globally connected economy, its interruption immediately means suffering. But at the same time, it is time to think about whether so much human travel is good for the world, for what we do, whether it leaves us all vulnerable. Think of the third world people like myself. So often I say that the more privileged people, middle class people, become global sitting at home. So Americans don't leave America to become global, Europeans don't have to leave Europe to become global. It's people like me who have to leave India or some other third world country to become global, and then our globalization depends on being able to travel back, emotionally, being able to having Skype or Whatsapp or other so that you participate in the emotional structure of your kinship, friendship, all those things. And this has shown how vulnerable these lives are. You know, my son lives in Australia. I can't see him. I have relatives, my sister is in Calcutta. If Covid happens to her and if she happens to die, I will not be able to go. I mean, that's the situation. So I think it's a time to reflect deeply on what the structure of our lives are. As I was saying, in many ways global capitalism has colonized social life. To give you an explanation, when I was growing up there were two capitalisms. India was not so much a part of it because India was trying to be self-sufficient economically, capitalist but not part of global capitalism, and our main form of entertainment was getting together with friends, sometimes in their houses, not even in restaurants, going for a walk in the park. None of these cost money. So in a way, if I wanted to be social, nobody made money out of it. But increasingly, now if I want to go to Calcutta, if I want to have a cup of coffee, I have to go to a hotel because it's so noisy, there are so many people, the cities have become so big that to have a peaceful cup of coffee you have to go to a five-star hotel and pay a lot more in order to actually talk to your friend quietly,



right? Or your friend will say let's go there... So in some ways, as we have formed a global middle class, we consume things. Consumption becomes part of society, deeply. So even the kind of social lives that we used to have, which did not cost any money, have become more and more unavailable. And due to the crisis today, even many of those forms of social life are unavailable. Me and my friends can't go out to a restaurant to eat now because all the restaurants are shut. So, now the only kind of social life we have in America is people getting together like this and we say "Let's have a Zoom cocktail", which means you sit there and you drink your drink and I sit here and drink my drink, right? And the usual instinct to give a hug, hold somebody, shake hands... What I'm saying is that we got into this crisis because for 150 years, or for 70 years, or the last 40 years we built an economy in the name of globalization where we handed over more and more aspects of our lives to the market, to capitalism; and I think this is a moment to think about it and to see what one can achieve. So, your question took me back to the 70s when I was a student and Latin America was producing dependency theory, which was very popular worldwide, and the dependency theory argued that if you look at the history of Brazil and other places for industrialization, every time there was a war (WWI, WWII) which interrupted the global economy, third world countries were able to industrialize because they got some independence of the global economy for a few years. So, your question is like now that global capitalism has been interrupted, is it an opportunity for us to do something? So really one has to see in one's own surrounding which forms of social life one can carry on with. But given the pandemic, one condition would be to manage the pandemic intelligently and you need cooperation of authorities. So, if today I had to think about what can I recover of my social life, it has to include a strategy for managing the pandemic. I do not mean by medicine, but I mean socially. Depending on how serious it is. I can give you examples of Australia because I know: my son lives there, and I have friends in New Zealand because I lived in Australia for a long time. So, I know that in New Zealand and in Canberra, basically they did lock down. They made sure that nobody was ill anymore and then allowed people to come together, initially on the bases of bubbles—like you got together with people you knew and trusted—. Because unfortunately the pandemic has happened, and I don't know the situation in Argentina, how bad it is. I should have looked it up in the world list. I know that the U.S, Brazil and India are the top three. You're probably way down, which is good. Are you way down? That's good. So, you probably don't have to worry about it so much, but to the degree that it's there, you have to worry about it. It can kill people, damage people, do all such things. But I'm saying, keeping it in mind, it's time to think about A) "Do we want to be so dependent? Do we want to have capitalism colonize our social life so much?" B) what we can retrieve, and C) I think globally we all have to say to our leaders that humans have to make sure that we don't destroy biodiversity around the world if we want to survive, because what is happening with global capitalism is that it's destroying biodiversity. The crisis of wildlife and these so-called zoonotic diseases (diseases that come from animals to humans) are part of the destruction of biodiversity by global capitalism, and we need restraints by national governments, by international agreements. So that's a long answer to your short question.

MARIA: It's a perfect answer. I need to say that Argentina is not uniform. Around Buenos Aires it's quite complicated but we live in places that are highly populated, Rosario and Mar del Plata, but we are handling it a little bit better

DIPESH: This is good.



MARIA: Yes, the question is it's become obvious here in Argentina, in Pepe's environment and in mine, inequality has shown its clearest... it has become obscene. We are seeing the obscenity of inequality, and when we say inequality, we read a colonial mark. Because that inequality is not independent from our colonial common legacy. So, what we were wondering with Pepe is whether the obscenity of this can be a sign of hope. Can we rely on this? Because we see a lot of people acknowledging that this is a very unfair world and that this is going to doom, that we are doomed if we continue this way. Do you think there are signs, there are reasons for hope? Do you think this might be the moment to make the changes that we need, the things that have been waiting in the waiting room of history, as Pepe says. Do you think it's a good time? Is it the right time for that? To reconquer part of what had been taken away from us?

DIPESH: Yes, I have to say that the most obscene form of inequality we have seen in America is with the murder of these black people by the police and the racism. I mean here inequality often takes the form of racism in the U.S. In India with this Covid crisis the main form of inequality we saw was that it revealed that most of the workers in our cities in India are migrant workers. They don't come with their families, they're not paid wages that can support families, so they come on their own, they live in slums five or six men in one room, and the moment the government declared a lockdown with four hours notice, their landlords threw them out of the houses because they couldn't pay rent anymore. They were not able to go back, then they began to (from all different parts of India) walk hundreds and thousands of miles to get to their home. The provincial government said you can't come back, you're danger. It was dreadful. Many of them in Delhi, in the capital, for instance, have gone leaving their kids so the kids have become orphans. In India, 90% of the labor force is in the informal sector and it suddenly became very clear that this very glitzy middle-class India, which is part of globalization, basically sits on the labor of these migrant workers. When I did labor history as a Marxist, we knew they were migrants, but our Marxism was about "Are they class conscious? Is the class struggle going on?" We never thought of migrancy, you know? What it means to be a migrant, to be a single man of a reproductive age, to live in bad conditions in a city along with other other men, sometimes women too. So, it actually made every Indian realize that most of these workers are migrants, sometimes migrants from Bangladesh illegally. It made you realize that while globally the privileged people travel by plane, the underprivileged are always migrants because they don't have safe lives, secure lives. So, the question is whether you can locally create bubble economies that actually support these lives. So, the question to ask would be, and this answer would be different from one place to another, but you would have to ask: What are the forms of life that have become most precarious by the form of capitalism that you have where you are? So, in India I can say that the most precarious form of lives are these migrant workers, because when the shutdown came, they were just thrown out and nobody cared until there was a lot of political noise and governments had to care a little bit. So, you have to always think... as many people have said, think from the position of the most disadvantaged. So always think, who is the most disadvantaged person in my situation and what can I do to improve their situation, and that might involve creating smaller economies. It's very hard to change the mind of the middle classes that have tasted the affluence of the global economy. It's very hard. I was talking to a bunch of students in India this morning; they're not my students, so they wanted to talk like this. So, I was saying that the middle class today in India, they build luxury flats apartments and one thing that is happening in India which has



probably happened elsewhere before, our kitchens are all becoming Western. If you buy a new flat, then your kitchen would look like my kitchen in Chicago, there'll be no difference. Indian kitchens used to vary from one place to another traditionally, so a kitchen in the north of the country would look different from a kitchen in the rest of the country. But now the kitchens are becoming homogenized for the middle classes and everybody has a marble or granite bench top, which is easy to clean, your chop vegetables on it. And I was telling them the other side of it is that mountains in India, hills, are being destroyed illegally to supply the marbles. So, you buy a nice apartment, you're very happy that you have a beautiful kitchen, but that beautiful kitchen means some mountain somewhere has been destroyed to supply the marble. Now, I say this, but this doesn't mean that the next time they build a kitchen they will not have marble. They will probably have marble, because a consuming class is driven by its own ambitions. But that's why I think, where you can make an immediate change, a small change but significant change, is always in the lives of the people who are most disadvantaged. Because any improvement you bring in their condition will be immediately appreciated. And whether one can do that, whether Covid allows you an opportunity to do that, I think yes! Because if the disadvantage has come out of Covid, if you see, for instance, that when capitalists were thriving, you got casual jobs, you made some money and now there's no building construction going on, there's no money. So, you're almost dying, you're starving. So, if you can work with them to imagine other kinds of community, other kinds of living which allows them to survive, I think that would be wonderful change. In a sense, yes. I mean, I don't know if it answers the waiting room of history question, because the waiting room of history question was where the elites of the colonized people wanted to catch up. So, the colonizer told you "you are in the waiting room" and you accepted that you were in the waiting room and then you said: "now we want to catch up". And that global structure is not going to go down very soon, as in five years. It's there, it's a powerful structure. And if you look at what China is doing, what the U.S is doing, they still think nationally. I mean, China still thinks of becoming a superpower as a nation. Even yesterday the Chinese ambassador to the U.S was saying: "We have a right to prosperity, we have a right to become a superpower". So, they're thinking like Americans used to, like the Soviets used to and that thinking is part of the reality of the world. And that's thinking from the waiting room. Now it's our turn to become powerful, so the Chinese are thinking out of the waiting room. Indian middle class thinks: "It's now our turn to consume, you have been consuming for so long. You've been polluting the air for so long, it's our turn to pollute". That's the waiting room thinking. But you have to get out of the waiting room and say "what can I do now and in what sense does this interruption of capitalism leave us with people who are very disadvantaged by this interruption and who therefore need change?" Because the alternative for them is to starve and die, and whether you can connect. So if I were in your place, I'm just imagining, I'd probably have little projects in the classroom to find out about these people, to talk to them and kind of see what opportunities are there, what kind of alternate microeconomies one can create to help these people, to work with them and to imagine alternative forms of community, of economy, of society.

MARIA: I don't know the situation in Rosario but here in Mar del Plata, where I live, people have already started. There has been much social movement and much has been done and advanced on those lines that you were describing. Recently I've been sort of thinking that it's time to go for the upper class and the middle class, especially from



education. I believe that there is a change that must be at least tried. The way in which they figure out the world... they need to take responsibility for what they do. It is not just about helping the ones that are disadvantaged. Because the upper classes are disadvantaged in terms of sensitivity, they are disadvantaged in terms of humanity.

DIPESH: I totally agree with you because we are only producing human beings who are callous, you know, but who are destroying the world for others. So that's why the other thing I always feel as a teacher is that in what I do...I mean since I'm not a policy person, I often look that we have a school of policy studies, economics and I think they assume that we have agreed on values, that there's no values to be debated. So they assume that capitalism is good, and then they advise to create policy within that understanding that capitalism is good. But I think that in the classroom, when we are teaching students, we can open up the value questions. I mean it is capitalism that destroys biodiversity. If capitalism destroys biodiversity, is that a good capitalism? So sometimes what I do, now that I work on climate change and things, I explain to them that there are so many things we depend on, that capitalism can destroy but not create, and one of them I tell them about is the air we breathe. So, the air we breathe has 21% Oxygen, which means that if it had more Oxygen everything would burn, the forests would all burn up. If it had less oxygen, we would choke to death, and so the oxygen is maintained in the air at a level where trees can survive, animals can survive, humans can survive, other creatures can survive. And who does it? Trees do it, plants do it, little planktons in the sea do it. They keep supplying fresh oxygen with Oxygen that gets mixed up with other gases. And how long has this been going on for? 400 million years. So, I tell them that we are beneficiaries of this atmosphere, which geologists call the modern atmosphere of the planet, which has existed for 400 years since forests evolved and animals evolved. 400 million years. I said we are beneficiaries. We have lungs because we are creatures that depend on this Oxygen. We have to process this air, that's why we have lungs. The coronavirus can get us because we have lungs, right? So, I try to make them understand that we are beneficiaries of the way that this planet has made itself, bringing its geology and biology together. And if we produce global warming, if the temperature of the seas goes up by six degrees celsius, the planktons will die and we will shut off a part of the machine that produces Oxygen, and that will kill us. Now if you have capitalism that is so mindlessly driven... because what we call capitalism it's a hydra headed monster. People drive technology not thinking about what else technology can do. If they think technology can replace people they think "Good, as long as there's profit, they'll make it". The mining companies think "If there's something to be mined in the forest, we will go in and mine it". The poor guy in Africa who sometimes eats bushmeat. So there's a story in Cameroon, in Africa. There are tribal people who sometimes eat gorilla or chimpanzee meat but normally they go in circles out of their villages, a small distance. But then the government decided to build a road to the forest. The tribal people followed the forest road, went deeper into the forest and then killed some more gorillas that actually had some virus that came out of it, you know, they suffered. But what I'm saying is that teachers are producing tomorrow's leaders, nationally and internationally. I think in the classroom we have to ask questions of tomorrow, not questions of today. I mean, you ask questions of today when you want to produce managers. If you want to produce bureaucrats who will manage the system, people who will manage the corporations... Universities have departments that do this. Economics do it, policy people do it, law does it sometimes. But if you also want to produce people who ask questions of tomorrow, then I think in our kind of subjects we teach tomorrow. We



don't teach today. We teach today in order to show what kind of tomorrow we need, because the tomorrow that today's capitalism is producing is unlivable. And honestly, some of the rich people don't say it but I think they're racist enough not to mind the world in which the poor die off. Because they know that most of the poor people will be of another color, from another country, etc. That's why I think that with many of your students, I totally agree with you, we have to open up this question of what we should value. And one of the things I now teach and tell people is to value biodiversity, to treat it as a nonrenewable resource in the same way that we say fossil fuel is nonrenewable. Because if you lose biodiversity, it takes millions of years for it to recover. So, I teach humanities' students about species extinction, about what is happening to other forms of life and how human beings need to think about other forms of life.

I think the biodiversity question has to be made everybody's question. Whatever subjects you teach, this has to come and we have to tell people. You're sending out teachers to schools and teachers should become aware of the destructiveness of this. The woman who declared the pandemic, the head of the U.N environment whose name is Anderson, immediately came out and said "Look, we are getting diseases from animals because we are destroying wildlife habitat".

I've been working on climate change so, I expected droughts, I expected wildfires, I expected cyclones, I expected avalanches, I expected landslides. I did not expect this. I knew that microbes, viruses and bacteria and other microbes by number and weight are the majority form of life. We are a minority form of life that is now dominating the order of life. And we do that without realizing that we need the other forms of life in order to be humans, to remain humans, to survive. We become mindless and we are actually destroying ourselves. So, I often say that this capitalism itself is anti-life. As you know, in the more advanced countries, human reproductive rate goes down and becomes almost negative, which is why they need immigration from countries where there are more people. So that's why people like me get jobs, because they don't reproduce enough. But if every country followed that logic, humanity would be extinct. So, I thought that from many aspects I think that this global capitalism in its current shape is completely anti-life, anti-evolution and it has to be regulated. So, something I sometimes say is "Look, the debate between capitalism and the soviet form of socialism is dead", because we know that the soviet form of socialism was totalitarian. Stalin was horrible, in some ways even more horrible I would say than Hitler because Hitler killed 6 million Jews. Stalin killed 40 million people in different ways. So that is gone but that doesn't mean that debating capitalism has ended. We still need to debate capitalism.

That has not ended. Therefore, to bring all this, to make your students aware that we cannot simply value the market without valuing other forms of life, and how we bring them together. So, it might mean that we have capitalism but not multinationals. It might mean that we have economies which are more kind of related at work, not integrated. That local communities have their own kinds of market and they have certain exchange relationships with the next door. Maybe that's the kind of economy we need eventually, but to get there there's obviously no one clear path. But we have to make people aware that all the environmental crises we are facing are mostly the result of the kind of capitalism that we have developed, and inequality is an integral part of it.

PEPE: It's really interesting listening to you.



DIPESH: In that sense it's an opportunity for teachers because you can actually bring it home. So, if you actually google pandemics and viruses and these things, you'll find a lot of information about why this happens. So, I've been reading biologists lately to understand what are the social reasons for the pandemic, and it becomes clear that we have, in many ways, sometimes forced wildlife to come close to us and sometimes the demand for wildlife meat has also gone up. So, in China, for instance, when the last Coronavirus happened, the SARS epidemic happened, which didn't become a pandemic because people showed symptoms the moment they were sick, so we knew if somebody was sick. This one spreads, this current coronavirus spreads because you don't know if somebody is sick, they don't know if they are sick. So that's why they say "don't meet with people", because you don't know who is sick and who is not. There's a particular kind of animal called civet cats that people began to eat and that's how they got the virus, but the cats were already infected by other animals. So, one thing that happened in China was that because many people have come into money, because of Chinese prosperity, the demand for exotic meat has also gone up—whatever they consider exotic—. That's why there's all these Chinese markets where exotic meat is sold. But we now travel, so the Chinese got the disease. The Italians were there because they have factories in China. So, they went to manage their factories, then they picked up the virus, they brought it to Europe and the virus travelled. Viruses can travel because we live in crowded cities, we are very mobile, very large in numbers. This is what makes humans vulnerable. So eventually you want to get to an economy which probably doesn't depend on these kinds of cities we have. I mean even in Buenos Aires. When I was there 10 years ago or something... I forget the name, there was a Spanish word for young people who'd come at night to collect garbage.

MARIA: *Cartoneros*.

DIPESH: *Cartoneros!* yeah, and they traded in garbage. You could see that there's a certain kind of poverty that was part of the economy, you know? And it reminded me of some Indian scenes or sometimes scenes here. So, the environmental crisis is an opportunity to raise this question in the classroom. The reason why it's very useful, not just tactically but also in principle, is that because the facts of the environmental crisis are so clear that you don't have to be a Marxist to show them. If you make a Marxist critic of capitalism somebody will say "Oh, they're Marxists. That's their ideology". But to actually show why climate change is happening, why the pandemic is happening, the role of deforestation, the role of mining companies, you don't have to be a Marxist. These are the facts. Otherwise, people wouldn't say it, biologists would not be saying it. This is why it's happening. So that's an advantage coming from the environmental crisis including the pandemic to the economic question. Because if you only begin with Marx's critique of capitalism, apart from the theoretical problems, people will immediately say they're biased. They don't like capitalism but the point is it is killing us. You don't have to be a Marxist to see that this kind of capitalism is actually killing us. Normally, I would have expected to live... I have a lot of problems. I have a heart problem, bypass surgery, I'm diabetic (most Indians are diabetic), I have high blood pressure. But normally, even under this kind of capitalism I knew, I would have expected to live into my early 80s. Now I don't know if I'll live beyond the Coronavirus because I'm vulnerable, my life is more precarious. And I'm not underprivileged, I'm privileged. But I'm saying that I feel vulnerable. So, I realized that this capitalism is making even the privileged vulnerable. Therefore, you don't have to be a Marxist to



document that and that's why I'm going back to your question Jose. It's a great opportunity, intellectually because you can bring this...

PEPE: Thank you so much. We thought about the questions and we already think in the same way, that capitalism is anti-life.

DIPESH: It's antipolitical and anti-life.

PEPE: I'm thinking about the role of the National University as a public thing and also public schools. So, I think, in order to try to think of another chance on the question of life, to inhabit life, we have to knock down the waiting room of history in our classes, in our curricula.

DIPESH: So we should not accept the logic of waiting, we should not say to ourselves "we will be tomorrow's United States".

PEPE: Exactly.

DIPESH: People say the 19th century was the British Empire. Then the Germans tried to be the superpower and they did it wrong, they became Nazis, they destroyed themselves. Then there was the Cold War. The Soviets and the U.S were trying to be superpowers and the Chinese said "okay that was then, now we are going to be the superpower". That's just history as repetition of yesterday. So, first the British, then the Soviet Union. I think we need to break out of the waiting room. But to destroy the waiting room, the way to do is to show that the waiting room does not work. So, there's a French social scientist called Pierre Charbonneau. He has recently written a book in French on abundance and liberty. He shows that when Europeans colonized other places, it arose a difference between the land you lived in and the land you lived from. So even today, the Americans in the U.S, we consume products of the world: things from Argentina, things from Brazil, things from Mexico. Even though I live in America, I don't live on the land of the United States. I live on many other lands. Many other people are producing things that I can consume. So the water of your country, the soil of your country is coming to serve me. When you wear cheap clothes made in Bangladesh, you're actually consuming Bangladeshi water. And that's why they say that if everybody has to live in this kind of way, then there won't be enough land. Because already you need so much land to support the wealthy countries. So if others become wealthy, there won't be enough land. So, the waiting room is a hoax. You will wait forever, some people will wait forever.

PEPE: Yes, it is very unfair.

DIPESH: The waiting room is an ideology which only the successful middle class people think "oh it's good because now it's our turn". But it's not like we're on an escalator where everybody will go up.

But these are propositions you can argue factually in the classroom. Pierre Charbonnet is not a Marxist, he's a lefty but not a Marxist. But these are the facts of history and I think this is something we can do to prove that capitalism is anti-life and it's anti-political and that we need a form of politics that respects biodiversity. The friendliness to life has to be part of politics. Politics should not be simply about my interests and your interests. So, in that sense I often say that politics cannot afford to be purely anthropocentric. We only focus on human beings. Politics needs to be also about non-humans. So, once you bring these things, then you begin to see that today's world



does not meet our needs. Today's world is based on structures that were theorized between the 17th and the mid 20th century. To give you one another example... so you know, when there was a hole in the ozone layer in the early 80s. There was something called Montreal Protocol that the U.N set up which was about how to fix the ozone layer. But when the United Nations was set up after the war, the assumption was that the U.N would address all the global problems. So, the idea was that the globe was made up of nation states and whatever problems had to be solved between nation states or among them, the U.N. was the forum. But the assumption was that human beings had an indefinite amount of time at their disposal to address global problems. So, if you ask somebody "when would Palestinians and Israelis live in peace?" the answer would be "we don't know but we will try". One day they will live in peace. When will India and Pakistan stop fighting? One day they'll stop fighting. We have to keep trying. That is indefinite time. But when the climate change problem happened, scientists did not give us indefinite time. They said "you have to do this by such and such date if you want to avoid a dangerous climate". But what happened? We gave the responsibility to dealing with something that was a planetary problem (not a global problem) to a global organization called the United Nations where the whole politics was for nation states to bargain for more time. They will go and bargain so that there's no peace tomorrow, and they can take a little more territory in the meanwhile. So, do you see what is happening today? We have planetary problems, but we don't have institutions to deal with them. We still have institutions that were made for a global world. So that's what I mean that our political institutions were based on yesterday's vision. They were not based on the vision that we might have climate change, that we might have these kinds of pandemics. So, the global institutions are not always capable of dealing with these kinds of planetary problems, because the timetable required to deal with planetary problems is not often this indefinite time. We have heard this expression that says that if the average temperature of the surface goes up by 2°C, there will be a dangerous climate change. But actually, scientists actually said 1.5. The figure 2°C was the result of governments trying to bargain more time... for development, they said we have to pull out poor people out of poverty, etc. So they were bargaining with scientists to get more time for non-action. So, two degrees was to say "okay, we don't have to act now".

MARIA: It sounds quite childish and even irresponsible. I think we are acting irresponsibly.

DISPESH: It's not responsible, true. But what I'm saying is that when you're teaching young people, they can realize that the institutions we have have visions of yesterday. How humans saw the future in 1950 led them to create institutions for the future. But the future has turned out to be different from the way they foresaw. So, we need other kinds of institutions and a plan on how we get there. These are larger questions to think about: how to create these bodies even when there is the UN, there are nation states, they are not gonna go away. How to create opportunities... Can we give WHO more power, for instance, to enforce things against the wishes of national states, can we agree on that? We need to think about those things. Can we create an authority and give it more power to preserve biodiversity? So that it has the power to say to certain mining companies "you cannot mine there, you can't do it, don't do that". But the problem is, of course, you will have to go through nation states to get a good agreement, and nation states will bargain to dilute the strength of that argument agreement. That's the reality of the world. But at least if people have different values, if the mindsets change, then maybe your students of tomorrow, particularly those who aspire to be



managers—because middle class people want to be managers, they want to be a cog in a machine and to keep the machine going, but then there are some people who want to change the machine—. So, you try with your students and maybe 10% will be those changed people. But the classroom is always a utopian space. The classroom is always a place for imagining, because it's abstracted from all the interests in the world and it's very important not to sound like an ideologue. This is not ideology, you have to go through facts, not sound like you are saying this because you're a leftie, but you're saying this because these are the facts.

PEPE: Here in Argentina public education is really important, it's a conquest.

DIPESH Everywhere. Everywhere because it's neglected and less resourced. So that's why you really have to be more imaginative and more creative on how you do it.

PEPE: The other day we were discussing with María Marta, for example, as we were listening to you that there is no journal of education called histories of education, in the plural.

DIPESH: What happened with the ideas of Paulo Freire and the "*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*", all those ideas of the 70s. What happened to those ideas?

MARIA: They are very much alive and there are two very strong pedagogical currents or approaches which are decolonial, which is not strictly postcolonial but...

DIPESH: There's a big debate between decolonial and postcolonial going on.

MARIA: I am not too fond of that debate. I think it's a wonderful twist on the postcolonial, a sort of tailoring the postcolonial to the very specific settings of our country. But we feed all the time of both postcolonial literature, of course. And then there is queer pedagogies, which have to do with this value for the diverse, which I believe might be helping a little bit in the side of the biodiversity, thinking in terms of people.

DIPESH: Absolutely, and taking the word queer in its broader sense. Sometimes I think of it as minority thinking. So to realize that humans are a minority form of life, think just as you would not like a minority to take over your country and dominate the majority. But as humans we are a minority form of life, which has taken over, dominating the whole order of life. Well, the microbes are a majority form of life.

MARIA: Yes. Well, we are moving along those lines; we are making change, but change has not actually affected life. I mean, we feel we are on the right track, some of us, but it's a very difficult thing.

DIPESH: It's very difficult and, as I said, it'll always be uneven. Different scales will take different times and that's why I asked if locally you can connect your students to local people who are really disadvantaged by what's going on. Because there, even a small move is a big move. For people who are really badly off, a small change is a big change. Whereas more powerful people, we'll only go for very small changes which are definitely not big changes.

MARIA: But maybe, hopefully, right now they are also vulnerable, and they are experiencing vulnerability and maybe that is a crack into the whole thing and we can feed on that. Maybe, I don't know, I'm being hopeful, maybe a little bit naive.



DIPESH: They say that in America, in the elections, the old people, my generation will hate Trump because he has made them more vulnerable, even the privileged people, have become vulnerable because Trump didn't care about the pandemic. Because it's a geriatric nation, and I think geriatrics won't like it. So yes, more people will be willing to listen to you.

PEPE: And our public schools also, Maria Marta, because, for a lot of children, the only safe place in their life is our public schools, because of what teachers do everyday.

DIPESH: I think it's very important. I was also thinking, Maria, as you were speaking, that the lives of more privileged people become contradictory because they're also invested in the system. For instance, I don't like the system, but my pension funds are in the system. So, when I think of my pension and old age I think "oh I don't want them to do bad!". So, if you are more or less privileged, then you're part of the system, even if you're mentally critical of it. So, your lives are more contradictory and so is the room for movement, you have one step forward one step backwards kind of movement. But through all that the world changes, it doesn't remain the same.

MARIA: Hopefully!

PEPE: It has been a real pleasure. We will share this with our students and colleagues.

DIPESH: I'm very pleased to meet you and I'm very honored that you wanted to talk to me. I wish you both safe and healthy lives, and purposeful lives.

PEPE: I would like to greet you with *apane logon ke lie shaanti*. That is "peace for your people" in Hindi. Right?

DIPESH: Right! I speak Bengali but appreciate the gesture! Thank you. Very nice to meet you and I hope one day I'll meet you in person.

PEPE: You are invited anytime!

Notas

¹ La entrevista completa, que realizamos el 20 de julio de 2020, se encuentra disponible en video en <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPss7NsDM7A&feature=youtu.be>. La transcripción y traducción de la misma ha estado a cargo de Alfonsina Giménez, con la colaboración de Agustina Casero. Cuerpo de Traductores, Secretaría General, Universidad Nacional de Rosario, Argentina.

² Profesora Regular, investigadora y actual Directora del Departamento de Ciencias de la Educación de la Facultad de Humanidades, Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata. Directora del Grupo de investigación en Escenarios y Subjetividades Educativas del Centro de Investigaciones Multidisciplinarias en Educación y de la Revista de Educación de la Facultad de Humanidades (UNMDP). myedaide@gmail.com

³ Doctor en Ciencias de la Educación (UNR). Docente e Investigador Universitario interesado en "Historiar" el "Presente". Docente en Escuelas Públicas y "Pensador" colectivo de la Educación. Profesor Titular Regular de Pedagogía en la Universidad Nacional de Rosario, (UNR). Email: jtranier@gmail.com

⁴ Nos referimos a la Universidad Nacional de Rosario, la Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata y la Universidad Nacional de La Pampa. Desde estas coordenadas territoriales trabajamos desde hace ya muchos años, y con el impulso del Director del CIMED de la UNMDP, Dr. Luis Porta, en complicidades académicas maravillosas. Estas incluyen, además, colegas, instituciones y colectivos que, entramadxs en nuestras propias voces y experiencias, participan y colaboran con las conversaciones que animamos.