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WRESTLING WITH THE *RIGHT SIDE OF HISTORY*: ON DISCOURSE, PEDAGOGY, TIME, AND THE ETHICS OF CRITICAL SCHOLARSHIP

ABSTRACT

This reflexive piece offers a critical reflection on my scholarly trajectory by mapping the theoretical and political commitments that have shaped my academic work over time. Drawing from lived experiences of dislocation, and political urgency, I trace how my scholarship has developed across three interrelated thematic domains: (1) the discursive construction and normalization of far-right authoritarianism, (2) the ideological functions of education as a contested site within capitalist structures, and (3) the centrality of historical thinking as a methodological, epistemological, and political imperative. Grounded in Critical Theory —particularly the Frankfurt School— and articulated through Critical Discourse Studies and Critical Pedagogy, I examine how my work has aimed to expose and disrupt the logics of neoliberalism, authoritarianism, and epistemic violence. Across these domains, I argue that critique is not a methodological add-on but a historically and politically situated praxis. This paper is both an intellectual memoir and a synthesis of scholarly contributions, foregrounding the imperative to historicize, politicize, and radicalize intellectual labor in the service of social transformation.

Keywords: *reflexivity, CDS, critical applied linguistics, critical theory, critical pedagogy, historical thinking*

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ΑΝΑΜΕΤΡΗΣΗ ΜΕ ΤΗ ΣΩΣΤΗ ΠΛΕΥΡΑ ΤΗΣ ΙΣΤΟΡΙΑΣ: ΛΟΓΟΣ, ΠΑΙΔΑΓΩΓΙΚΗ, ΧΡΟΝΟΣ ΚΑΙ Η ΗΘΙΚΗ ΤΗΣ ΚΡΙΤΙΚΗΣ ΑΚΑΔΗΜΑΪΚΗΣ ΕΡΕΥΝΑΣ

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Το παρόν κείμενο αποτελεί μια κριτική αναστοχαστική αποτίμηση της ακαδημαϊκής μου διαδρομής, χαρτογραφώντας τις θεωρητικές και πολιτικές δεσμεύσεις που έχουν διαμορφώσει το έργο μου στο πέρασμα του χρόνου. Αντλώντας από βιωμένες εμπειρίες, ιχνηλατώ την εξέλιξη της επιστημονικής μου σκέψης μέσα από τρεις αλληλένδετους θεματικούς άξονες: (1) την κατασκευή σε επίπεδο Λόγου και κανονικοποίηση του ακροδεξιού αυταρχικού λόγου, (2) τις ιδεολογικές λειτουργίες της εκπαίδευσης ως πεδίου σύγκρουσης εντός καπιταλιστικών δομών, και (3) τη σημασία της ιστορικής σκέψης ως μεθοδολογικής, επιστημολογικής και πολιτικής αναγκαιότητας. Στους τρεις αυτούς τους θεματικούς άξονες, υποστηρίζεται ότι η κριτική δεν αποτελεί απλώς μια μεθοδολογική επιλογή αλλά μια ιστορικά και πολιτικά τοποθετημένη πράξη. Το άρθρο αυτό αναδεικνύει την ανάγκη ιστορικοποίησης, πολιτικοποίησης και ριζοσπαστικοποίησης της διανοητικής εργασίας στην υπηρεσία του κοινωνικού μετασχηματισμού.

Λέξεις κλειδιά: *αναστοχαστικότητα, κριτικές σπουδές λόγου, κριτική εφαρμοσμένη γλωσσολογία, κριτική θεωρία, κριτική παιδαγωγική, ιστορικότητα*

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> *Every intellectual in emigration is, without exception, mutilated, and does well to acknowledge it to himself, if he wishes to avoid being cruelly apprised of it behind the tightly-closed doors of his self-esteem. […] He is always astray. […] His language has been expropriated, and the historical dimension that nourished his knowledge, sapped. […] The share of the social product that falls to aliens is insufficient, and forces them into a hopeless second struggle within the general competition*
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> Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*

I think of my journey toward criticality as a deeply embodied process, shaped by dislocation, political urgency, and an ethic of discomfort. Theodor Adorno's assertion that every intellectual in exile is "mutilated" (Adorno, 2005) resonates with the dislocation I have often felt. I was born in Athens, Greece, at the dusk of a seven-year junta, immersed in its lingering narratives and traumas. Family stories wove together memories of the German fascist occupation, the civil war, torture and exile, and our childhood songs often included revolutionary anthems like that of the National Liberation Front. My family's political commitments were always transparent and unapologetic. My parents —leftist public educators who rose from the working class thanks to higher education— carried their struggles, contradictions, and a non-negotiable ideological clarity that laid the foundation for both my academic and personal trajectory.

Moving to the United States in the 1990s to pursue graduate school beyond a geographical relocation was also an existential rupture. It was the first time I experienced myself as the "Other''. I entered a highly individualistic context and culture where the commodification of everything was a way of life and the neoliberalization of higher education had already been successfully implemented, serving as a model to the rest of the world. The United States was a conflicting space as it offered both the material possibilities of academic development and a fertile ground for my radical criticality to flourish as well as the spiritual dissonance of an epistemological exile. While exile is a "mutilation'', it is also a vantage point —a place from which the world can be seen more clearly from some distance. I am writing from this voluntary "exile'' with varying degrees of closeness to values, beliefs, epistemologies, understandings and alliances. Delving in this reflective piece, I feel that my personal and intellectual trajectory is more akin to an *assemblage*, rather than a linear course: heterogeneous, dynamic and always in process (Deleuze & Guattari,

1980). In what follows, I am casting light on the most salient pieces of this assemblage.

I read Edwards Said's *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994) in my first year of doctoral studies. This was the first time that, as an emergent researcher and a junior scholar, I thought of myself as an academic with particular responsibilities. Said helped me develop a powerful vision of the public intellectual as a pedagogical and political agent deeply embedded in historical consciousness and social responsibility. It became clear to me then that intellectuals in the academic context are not neutral knowledge producers but situated actors with an ethical imperative to expose structures of power, confront injustice, and engage in the transformation of society. I came to understand the "public intellectual" as one who speaks truth to power, historicizes dominant narratives, and resists the commodification and professionalization of intellectual labor. Said, a Palestinian-American intellectual at Columbia, rejected the model of the intellectual as a disembodied, apolitical "expert" and instead insisted on an "amateur" ethos —one defined by moral courage, public engagement, and a commitment to justice. Further drawing on Gramsci's concept of the organic intellectual, I always saw intellectual labor as inseparable from the social fabric and political struggles of our time. Edward Said's work was fundamental in my developing criticality as I understood it both as part of my historical vocation and of my position in the division of labor. In my published work on this topic (Gounari, 2005, 2008), I insisted that intellectuals, particularly within higher education, must reclaim the university as a contested public sphere—a space for civic participation, critical dialogue, and democratic struggle. The pedagogical task then becomes to make the political central, to connect private troubles to public issues, and to cultivate students as historical agents capable of naming and transforming their conditions. Along these lines, I further attempted to foreground the urgency of re-historicizing contemporary realities and recovering "dangerous memories" as forms of critique and resistance. Very early in my scholarly trajectory I was convinced that intellectuals must disrupt dominant ideologies —especially the depoliticizing logics of neoliberalism— by challenging dominant narratives, by producing alternative discourses and vocabularies, engaging in public witnessing, and by sustaining collective imaginaries of justice and liberation. This should not be understood as merely a rhetorical or academic exercise but as deeply embodied and contextually grounded political responsibility.

The positionality I developed through my lived experiences and theoretical influences —never fully being "at home" geographically,

culturally and intellectually— has become central to my scholarship. The only place I have always felt more 'at home' was my left, humanistic ideology —a kind of humanist radicalism that "goes to the roots and thus to the causes", seeking to liberate people from the chains of illusions (Fromm, 1973, p. 485) and my unapologetic politics. They have both grounded me and guided me, particularly as a resident in a country possessed by violent capitalism.

In a sense, my idea of criticality resonates more with the idea of "dwelling in the unfamiliar", a practice of unsettling taken-for-granted notions and ideas and a refusal of intellectual capitulation. My experience has been one of perpetual negotiation and conflict. This has driven my refusal to reduce *critique* to a "lens", a methodological approach or a citation practice. Critique is embodied action, political engagement, ethical responsibility and a way of thinking about, and being in the world —restlessly, uncomfortably, and with a commitment to transformation. Critique is also a process of relentless self-accountability and reflexivity— personal, relational, methodological and contextual.

Living through four years of the first Trump administration and witnessing the rise of Trumpism, as an embodiment of far-right populism, pushed me to start thinking about the reasons behind the revival of authoritarian, neo-Nazi, and fascist ideologies across the world and the connection to the United States. At the same time, I had witnessed the rise, legitimation, and criminal activity of the Greek neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn in my home country, Greece, along other far-right movements in Europe. These two moments "read" against a broader landscape of authoritarian politics, have deeply troubled me, and kept me up at night —I had lived them both in my skin. As a critical linguist and educator, I sought to find answers in the fields I know better: critical applied linguistics and critical education. Always thinking dialectically, I knew I had to do this in the context of thinking historically. In this piece, I will be focusing on these three themes.

The first theme of my research presented here interrogates the discursive constitution of far-right politics and ideologies, examining how authoritarian populism is linguistically produced, circulated, and normalized across various sociopolitical arenas. Social media, in particular, functions as a key site for the amplification of these discourses, enabling their rapid diffusion, affective resonance, and algorithmic reinforcement. I am especially interested in how these platforms operate as incubators of authoritarian language practices that both reflect, refract, and sustain the

broader political logics of far-right movements. I am particularly interested to explore how these authoritarian discourses circulate, flourish and thrive in liberal "democracies."

Second, education —both as a site of labor and as the object of my study— figures centrally in my research as a core institution within the capitalist nexus. This is not because "schools change society," but because they shape, inform, and mobilize subjectivities and collective identities. At the same time, the interrelated processes, practices, and ideologies that circulate in schools and in society are always mediated, embodied, and enacted through language and discourse. I critically analyze these discourses through a historical-discursive lens, which serves as a foundational methodological tool in my work.

Third, in terms of epistemology, I strive to ground my work historically and understand the paradigm of knowledge and research, as well as recent shifts that include both new critical lenses, as well as distortions. In my work, I am trying to use lenses that move away from a narrow, reductionistic framework. I am striving to build my analyses around historical and larger structural, sociopolitical considerations. Historical thinking and historicity figure prominently in my work because I am convinced that to think critically means to think historically.

1. EMBODYING THE CRITICAL IMPETUS: THEORETICAL COMMITMENTS, SCHOLARLY CONTRIBUTIONS

My work is grounded in the intersection of sociolinguistics, critical discourse studies, critical pedagogy and the sociology of education. As a critical linguist, I examine how social issues and institutions are discursively constructed —how ideologies, knowledges, and assumptions take shape through language. I am particularly interested in how the discursive practices of late capitalism produce and sustain hegemonic meanings, how far-right ideologies are normalized into hegemonic narratives, and where and how authoritarian politics gain discursive traction. This work is simultaneously a scholarly and pedagogical endeavor. My undergraduate education and training in theoretical linguistics at the National University of Athens in the 90s, while giving me a solid basis in the historical roots of the field, rooted in structuralism and prescriptivism, left little room for understanding language as a social practice. I was trained in a largely positivistic model of understanding and conducting research, and my exposure to the social aspects of language when I came to the United States was transformative.

1.1. The Discursive

My main theoretical home, since I was a doctoral student and up to this day, has been Critical Theory. I have been drawing on the work of the Institute of Social Research (*Institut für Sozialforschung)* also known as the Frankfurt School. Critical Theory, as a social theory oriented toward critiquing and changing society as a whole "has as its object human beings as producers of their own historical form of life" (Horkheimer, 1993, p. 21). In contrast, traditional theory is oriented only to understanding or explaining it. Critical Theory must meet three criteria: "it must be explanatory, practical, and normative, all at the same time". That is, it must present and explain the problems and ills of current social reality, identify the actors to change it, and "provide both clear norms for criticism and achievable practical goals for social transformation" (Bohman, 2019, para. 3). I have often felt that dwelling in Critical Theory early on has kept my criticality in check all these years, while also enabling me to acknowledge the limitations of this theoretical tradition.

In my work on discourse, I have been particularly influenced by Herbert Marcuse's landmark book *One-Dimensional Man* (1964). I keep returning to this work to build, modify and evolve my theoretical framework. I find that Marcuse's work related to discourse offers theoretical, conceptual, and analytical tools particularly relevant and I read it from a linguistic/discursive perspective, to structure a frame of reference where authoritarian discourse, as one-dimensional discourse, can be analyzed and understood as it manifests in different realms of human life.

In the context of Critical Theory, ideology is not merely false consciousness (as false beliefs about the world), but a deliberately structured, socially and historically embedded mode of representation that supports the reproduction of domination. Rooted in the Marxist tradition, it explains how individuals come to accept, naturalize, or even legitimize conditions that run counter to their interests. Ideology operates by obfuscating structural inequalities, reifying contingent social arrangements, and shutting down political imagination.

Beyond false consciousness or propaganda, ideology is materially anchored in practices, institutions, and affective dispositions. Critical theorists in the Frankfurt School, conceptualize ideology along epistemic, functional, and genetic lines: it produces distorted knowledge, stabilizes hegemonic social relations, and emerges from the specific sociohistorical conditions of its time. Adorno and Marcuse radicalized this account,

arguing that ideology penetrates the very formation of subjectivity, shaping impulses, desires, and the conditions of possibility for critique. The task of ideology critique, then, is both diagnostic and transformative: it must render visible the veiled operations of power while remaining attuned to the experiential and affective dimensions of ideological formation.

This notion also resonates with another key theoretical influence in my work: Antonio Gramsci's concepts of *hegemony* and *common sense*. Gramsci argued that in modern societies, power is no longer exercised primarily through overt force or material coercion, but through more covert and ''normalized'' means—hegemony. Power becomes embedded in what is perceived as natural, taken-for-granted ''common sense'': "The conception of the world which is uncritically absorbed by the various social and cultural environments in which the moral individuality of the average man is developed" (Gramsci, 2007, p. 343). It is a view that shifts across historical, social, and cultural contexts. Its defining characteristic is that it remains "fragmentary, incoherent, and inconsequential", reflecting the lived contradictions of the social groups who produce and inhabit it. The language of common sense is stripped of abstraction or alternative frameworks that could challenge the dominant order. Each society produces its own regime of truth, along with discursive formations that circulate as legitimate knowledge in particular historical and spatial contexts. These discourses come to function as normative frameworks for evaluating truth and falsehood because they are sedimented into consciousness as "natural." One reason they appear so self-evident is that they have been *dehistoricized* —presented as timeless rather than as historically contingent (Gounari, 2006).

Critical Discourse Studies

The epistemological and methodological affinities between Critical Discourse Studies —particularly the Discourse-Historical Approach— and Critical Theory reveal a deeply generative convergence. The influence of the Frankfurt School on the critical program of what started as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is uncontested and widely acknowledged in the literature (Anthonissen, 2001; Chouliaraki, 2008; Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Collin, 2011, 2015, 2018; Forchtner & Tominc, 2012; McKenna, 2004; Wodak & Meyer 2009). This holds particularly true for the discourse-historical approach pioneered by Ruth Wodak and the Vienna School of CDA that explicitly "adheres to the socio-philosophical orientation of critical theory" (cited in Forchtner, 2011, p. 3) differing from

other approaches to CDA (Fairclough & Wodak,1997; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, 2009; Wodak, 1996, 2001; Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

Overall, the literature in CDS that acknowledges a theoretical debt to Critical Theory, has relied mostly on Horkheimer and Adorno, in particular *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, 2009; Fairclough & Wodak,1997) or *The Authoritarian Personality* (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Wodak, 2015; Forchtner, 2018). For instance, Wodak's *Politics of Fear* (2015) draws on Adorno's *Authoritarian Personality* to articulate an analysis of right-wing populist politics (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001).

While Herbert Marcuse is the only scholar from the first generation of the Frankfurt School who explicitly discusses the workings of language in advanced industrialized societies, raises linguistic questions and even presents his concept of "one dimensional discourse", with a few exceptions, (van Leeuven, 2018; McKeena, 2004; Carvalho, 2008) his work does not seem to have found its way into CDS. The heavy focus on the role of culture in the reproduction of the capitalist order, the critical scrutiny of all social forms and norms, the rejection of positivism and the bridging of the social with the individual, and the role of historicization in understanding and analyzing social phenomena; borne out of Marcuse's work, are recurring themes in CDS literature. It follows, then, that Marcuse's work can serve as an appropriate, useful and rich theoretical home for Critical Discourse Studies and this is where my theoretical contribution to CDS comes.

The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) established by Ruth Wodak (2001) combines "linguistic analysis with historical and sociological approaches" (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016, p. 31), analyzes and integrates the historical context in the interpretation of discourses and texts and it has been used in a wealth of studies on far-right discourses (Boukala, 2021; Wodak & Krzyżanowski, 2017; Wodak, 2001; Wodak et al., 2013), discourses of national identity and anti-Semitism (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Wodak, 2001; Wodak & Pelinka, 2002a, 2002b; Wodak et al., 2009), and racist discourses (Krzyżanowski & Wodak, 2009; Richardson, 2004; Wodak & van Dijk, 2000).

The hybridity, genre-, discourse- and style-mixing found in authoritarian, far-right discourses lend themselves to a nuanced analysis following the parameters of the DHA. Finally, and more importantly, the Discourse-Historic Approach has a strong grounding in Critical Theory. Having identified a social and political problem that has a linguistic dimension (in my case, far-right populist authoritarianism and neo-fascism), DHA looks at the problem historically, building knowledge and background;

it, then, brings together the discursive data to be analyzed drawing from diverse sources; the data is analyzed based on discourse topics identified by exploring discursive strategies; finally the data and analysis articulate a critique that reveals both the discursive and sociopolitical layers of the discourse at hand, and a possibility, that is, ways moving forward that create a better understanding of the problem and prompt action upon this understanding to address the problem. Both, Critical Theory and the Discourse Historical Approach put at their core the historical dimension and look at discourses synchronically and diachronically, as products of a discursive genealogy. Clearly, the goals of the CDS program align with the core of Critical Theory.

We know that texts have social effects and, as elements of social events, they also have causal effects (Fairclough, 2003). Even though exploring this kind of causality may be a far-reaching and intricate endeavor, it is useful and interesting to examine how discourses may 'do' things. Fairclough cautions for clarity in establishing causality between texts and social practices noting that "we cannot […] claim that particular features of texts automatically bring about particular changes in people's knowledge or behavior or particular social or political effects" (p. 9). He stresses that,

> we may textually construe (represent, imagine, etc.) the social world in particular ways, but whether our representations or construals have the effect of changing its construction depends upon various contextual factors – including the way social reality already is, who is construing it, and so forth (p. 9).

In recent work (Gounari, 2018, 2020, 2021a, 2021b) I have tried to explore this correlation between discourses and events, culminating in my 2021 monograph (Gounari, 2021a). The January 6th 2020 U.S. Capitol insurrection crystallized for me a connection often impossible to make between discourses, social practices realized and materialized in actual social events. Prompted by the plethora of news stories and preliminary reports on the insurrection, I delved into social media corpora only to confirm the central role they have been playing in the rise of Trumpism, as well as in the revival of far-right extremism and white supremacism. I, further, discussed social media and (social)mediatization as an extension of mediatization and I presented the ways in which this framework is most appropriate for social media as a site of authoritarian discourses. I illustrated this by exploring social media discourse on Twitter and on three different conservative far-right friendly and neo-Nazi platforms:

Iron March, Parler, and Telegraph. In social media, the private and the social have been merging; the digital environment seems to have intensified existing social problems, contributing to more misinformation, superstition, and perpetuation of fake stories and news. This intensification often comes through the proliferation of authoritarian discourses that in turn, bring more violence, aggression, and authoritarianism, making up a new dark age: a digital new dark age.

Drawing again on Marcuse's work I built a theoretical framework to understand right-wing authoritarian discourses in general, and particularly their contemporary iteration in social media. Marcuse's work related to discourse offers theoretical, conceptual, and analytical tools that can support and enrich inquiry into far-right authoritarian discourses, as they manifest in social media. In order to do this, I read Marcuse's theoretical work from a linguistic/discursive perspective, to structure a frame of reference where authoritarian discourse, as one-dimensional discourse, can be analyzed and understood as it manifests in different realms of human life. In this framework, I identify six features of authoritarian discourse: 1) *dehistoricization*, 2) *instrumentalism/operationalism*, 3) *digital aggressiveness*, 4) *discourse as commodity*, 5) *self as a brand*, and the 6) *discourse of amusement* (Gounari, 2021a).

1.2. The Pedagogical

I can no longer clearly recall whether it was Critical Pedagogy that led me to Critical Theory and subsequently to Critical Discourse Studies, or whether it was Critical Theory that first opened the path toward both pedagogy and discourse. From the vantage point of who I am today, these intellectual trajectories appear as inseparably linked —dialectically articulated and mutually constitutive. I was "socialized" academically in the first wave of critical pedagogy in North America. While I had the opportunity to deeply engage with the core work in the field and receive mentorship by some of the leading scholars, I also felt, at times, that this work was presented as a new orthodoxy. I have since been interested in critically questioning the orthodoxies within critical pedagogy and seeking to redefine critical pedagogy's radical meaning for the current sociohistorical context. As critical pedagogy has witnessed a renewed interest, it has in some instances turned into the antithesis of what it professes: a product, a fancy label for any kind of progressive politics or rebellion, a pedagogy of intellectual stardom. However, in my research it has become clear that any pedagogy

that wants to be critical needs to be rooted in humility and to have a clearly articulated political project that moves away from a discourse of reformism and progressivism. I have always tried to root my analyses historically, while at the same time, attempting to move away from orthodoxies, theoretical rigidity and dogmatic perspectives.

At the heart of my work lies a commitment to liberatory education as a rigorous, situated praxis that is accountable to history, discourse, and struggle. I insist on the necessity of a pedagogy that is not only critical in content but also critical of itself: a pedagogy that resists becoming the antithesis of its own aspirations. As I have written elsewhere, "any pedagogy that wants to be critical needs to be rooted in humility and to have a clearly articulated political project that moves away from a discourse of reformism and progressivism". My engagement with critical pedagogy is rooted in a commitment to interrogating and transforming the socio-political structures that shape education. Central to this endeavor is the recognition that language and discourse are not neutral vehicles of information but are imbued with power relations and ideological underpinnings. Here critical means first and foremost to challenge the neutrality of education, the notion that education is apolitical. Schools are not neutral spaces; they are arenas where social values, norms, and power relations are reproduced, contested and embodied. I spoke elsewhere about the struggle over meaning in education (Gounari et al., 2022). The question is not whether education is political, but whose politics it serves. One way to challenge this neutrality is to identify, challenge and deconstruct the discourses that constitute it.

Education is a battlefield, a contested terrain where different forces are seeking to establish hegemony over its vision, content, role, and goals. The neoliberal, neoconservative, capitalist restructuring of the last 40 years has prompted important shifts, as part of a broader assault on the public good. The neoliberal attack on public education has thrived in the now-unbroken alignment of capital's needs with educational goals, the implementation of protracted austerity, the use of schools as a mechanism for social control, the intensification of their sorting function, and their commercialization and privatization coupled with centralization of power. High-stakes, standardized testing and tracking for students, punitive evaluation for teachers, expansion of student choice with vouchers and charter schools, pressuring schools into accepting funding from large foundations in exchange for "reforms" (Russom, 2012) are only some of the items on the neoliberal educational agenda. In this agenda, education is instrumentalized

and operationalized in order to serve a capitalist system that depends on the production and exploitation of disposable, obeying bodies and minds, disposable labor, disposable knowledge and ideas, and disposable politics. Educational policies and practices are often justified through discourses that appeal to "common sense", masking the ideological forces at play. These discourses naturalize particular worldviews, making them appear as the only logical or acceptable options. By critically analyzing these narratives, we can uncover the assumptions they carry and challenge the status quo they uphold. If critical pedagogy is to be a project of resistance, then discourse must be treated not as a neutral vessel but as a terrain of ideological struggle. My work in critical discourse analysis has allowed me to unpack how educational policies encode, enforce, and naturalize dominant ideologies in relevant pieces such as *Critical Pedagogy and Beyond* (Gounari et al., 2022); *Teaching in Authoritarian Times* (Gounari, 2020a); *Education in the Trump Era* (Gounari, 2019), *Liberatory and Critical Education in Greece: Historical Trajectories and Perspectives* (Grollios & Gounari, 2016).

1.3. The Historical

History has always had a polarizing effect in the mainstream imaginary. The reason might be that the values, beliefs, ideologies, and practices, as well as the desires and fears of large groups of people depend on and are shaped through their relationship to the past, through their gaze upon it. In this relationship, humans are registered as either subjects or objects in the stories told. History is our relationship to ourselves, our families, our communities, our societies, and the world. As Brazilian educator Paulo Freire has noted "there is no historical reality which is not human. There is no history without humankind, and no history for human beings; there is only history of humanity" (Freire, 2017, p. 169).

History is often written in the present to legitimize or normalize particular versions of events; This happens also through semiotic choices. Particular histories become dangerous and threatening because they have bearings on the present —our present existence, understandings, meaning-making, and our present individual and collective identities, affects, and imaginaries (Gounari, 2021). Therefore, "investigating discourse about the past opens up a space to explore the dynamic nature of meaning-making practices" (Achugar, 2017, p. 298) in the context of the discursive construction of collective remembering (Nghia-Nguyen & Gounari, forthcoming).

This is a proposal to put history and thinking historically at the core of our research and pedagogies in articulating a radical agenda. In my work, I have used this framework to explore for example, the backlash against Critical Race Theory, anti-wokeness, book bans, and other instances of far-right, conservative attacks on public education in an attempt to map the shifting terrain. I looked at official legislation and public discourse in an attempt to challenge historical revisionism and the demise of historical thinking by authoritarian far-right capitalism is an important pedagogical and political project and the basis for liberatory praxis.

Dehistoricization takes place discursively through recontextualization (Bernstein, 1990; Wodak, 2000; Wodak & Fairclough 2010). History is a retrospectively-composed and meaning-endowed narrative that is always construction and fictionalization. Historical phenomena as the result of social processes are borne out of contradiction, conflict, and the struggle over meaning. In this struggle, some events "will become carriers of consensual values and ideals" and will "therefore have value as objects in collective memory" (Heer et al., 2008, p. 1). The process of retrospective attribution of meaning, includes conflict, since decisions are being made on inclusions and exclusions and the production of their ensuing discourses. History —written, oral, aural, or visual, official, or unofficial, distant or recent, is always a "text" of some sort (Gounari, 2021a; Nghia-Nguyen & Gounari, forthcoming). But there is a lot more to its textual nature. Historical narratives are constantly made and remade, thought and rethought, discursively, in a process of "multidirectional remembering'' (Milani & Richardson, 2022; Rothberg, 2010) that highlights the interplay and cross-referencing between memories and histories, while insisting on an exploration of underlying power dynamics and a recognition of our own positional entanglements in these histories. Along these lines with Minh Nghia Nguyen we have explored history and collective remembering in a Critical Multimodal Discourse Analysis (CMDA) of collective remembering of the American War in Vietnam through photography (Nghia-Nguyen & Gounari, forthcoming). In it, we discuss necropolitical discourse drawing on Achille Mbembe's work (2003) on necropolitics as the power to decide over life and death. We claim that the Discourse of Necropolitics is the "symbolic, multimodally discursive normalization and legitimation of necropolitical power. It is the visual, discursive, spatial, gestural, aural, and other semiotic modes' interplay between life and death. Sovereignty is further articulated through the discursive power to semiotically represent and legitimize life and death. Cultural artifacts,

such as the selected photographs in this project, are important semiotic resources for the sense-making of the war and its commemorations" (Nghia-Nguyen & Gounari, forthcoming).

2. INTELLECTUAL REFLEXIVITY AND SCHOLARLY DISSENT: DOING THE CRITICAL AND BEING CRITICAL

Doing the critical and being critical is a dialectical process—one that becomes most fragile the moment we start feeling comfortable, "at home". Criticality speaks to our unfinishedness as human beings (Freire, 2017) and supports our vocation as historical beings in a constant process of becoming. It is often lived in our contradictions, in our internal struggles, as we attempt to discern where justice lies and how to stay aligned with the right side of history.

A few years back, while writing the introduction as an invited editor for a special issue on critical language education, I posed a question that still lingers: "How do we educate and raise educators' and students' critical consciousness, so that they will always find themselves on the right side of history?" (Gounari, 2020b, p. 3). A senior editor —a respected, progressive, and generous colleague— offered the following editorial comment: "There is not always a right and a wrong 'side of history,' and it is not in our power to ensure that our students 'always find themselves on the right side.' Tone this down?". Her comment unsettled me. But it was a generative discomfort as it became a reflexive moment. What did I mean by the right side of history? Had I, without realizing it, fallen into a reductive binary myself?

My answer then —and now— is this: the right side of history is a profoundly humane space. It is where suffering, exploitation, inequality, genocide, and dispossession have no place. It is where all people have access to both material and symbolic resources. A space of possibility and radical relationality, where every person can fully realize their intellectual, emotional, artistic, social, and professional potential. Where we meet each other not as fixed entities, but as historical, unfinished, and complex beings. There is no single course to this space —no universal trajectory. The journey must begin by acknowledging the different geographical, cultural, emotional, and epistemological departure points we each bring. One step is to learn to walk in other people's shoes; another, more difficult one, is to walk in those shoes backwards —historically— and forward, with hope. This is the work of historical thinking that brings about critical consciousness.

My journey in being and doing the critical has been layered with my own conflicts, contradictions, and transformative insights. Early in my scholarly life, I struggled to understand how power could be exercised outside the apparatus of the state. Michel Foucault's work opened up new ways of thinking about the workings of power, its capillaries, its circulation. Yet at times, I found myself so deep in the analysis of language, discourse, and representation that I feared losing sight of real, material conditions — poverty, suffering, exploitation. It was Pierre Bourdieu who reminded me to ask the hard questions: If this is what the discourse is doing, what are its material effects? What is the cost —in suffering, violence, addiction, exclusion?

Many of my research inquiries have emerged from social problems that are discursively mediated. And while my scholarship draws from lived experience and the particular, I have always resisted the idea of staying confined within my own context. The same way we caution against collapsing the universal into the personal, we must also be wary of reducing the political to the parochial. My intellectual labor has been to ask how the particular can speak to the universal, how our situatedness can be a site of connection-how, to use C.Wright Mills' phrase, do we connect private troubles with public issues and vice versa. I have had to learn to stretch beyond my own corner of the world —to understand how our struggles are interlinked, and how solidarity requires us to read the world not only through our own stories but through the lens of the global and the historical.

The last decade I have found myself thinking strongly about the decolonial turn and its implications for Critical Discourse Studies. Raised and educated within the paradigms of Western epistemology, I had internalized, even if unwillingly, many of its norms. For so long, I was socialized through and immersed in theory produced by European white (mostly) men —rich, rigorous, fascinating but presented as a universal normative paradigm. What was missing: scholarship from the Global South, indigenous epistemologies, pluriversal ways of knowing. The work of scholars like Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Walter Mignolo, Anibal Quijano, and within CDS, Viviane de Melo Resende, Mariana Achugar and others have opened up new decolonial imaginaries in scholarship and within discourse studies. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith and others have shown, Western epistemologies continue to define what counts as valid knowledge in schools, in research, and in public discourse. This epistemic violence, often invisible to those benefiting from it, works to erase, marginalize, and

contain other ways of knowing and being. I have been trying to unlearn and re-learn —to think from the margins, to make space for epistemic disobedience, and to listen to and draw upon knowledges that do not speak in the dominant register.

For me, criticality is inseparable from historical consciousness. As I've stressed earlier, to think critically is to think historically. And to think historically is not to dwell in the past but to understand the present as a product of historical struggle. History, after all, is now. So, to think historically means to think about the present in ways that are emancipatory, agential, and liberating (Gounari, 2025).

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