



1 *Foreword*

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3 **A Time for Hope in Dark Times**

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5 **Abstract:** N/A

6 **Keywords:** dark times, fascism, education, hope, optimism, resistance, agency, pedagogy, fascist
7 politics.

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10 The dark times that haunt the current age are epitomized by the barbarians who echo the
11 politics of a fascist past and have come to rule the United States, Hungary, Turkey, Poland,
12 Brazil, the Philippines, and elsewhere. The designers of a new breed of fascism increasingly
13 dominate major political formations and other commanding political and economic
14 institutions across the globe. Their nightmarish reign of misery, violence, and disposability
15 is legitimated, in part, in their control of a diverse number of cultural apparatuses that produce
16 a vast machinery of manufactured consent. This reactionary educational formation includes
17 the mainstream broadcast media, digital platforms, the Internet and print culture, all of which
18 participate in an ongoing spectacle of violence, the aestheticization of politics, the
19 legitimation of opinions over facts, and an embrace of a culture of ignorance. Under the reign
20 of this normalized architecture of neoliberal ideology, critical education is now regarded with
21 disdain, words are reduced to data, and science is confused with pseudo-science.

22 The promise of a robust democracy is receding as present-day fascists work to subvert
23 language, values, courage, vision and a critical consciousness. We live at a time when the
24 language of democracy has been pillaged, stripped of its promises and hopes. If fascism is to
25 be defeated, there is a need to make education an organizing principle of politics and, in part,
26 this can be done with a language that exposes and unravels falsehoods, systems of oppression,
27 and corrupt relations of power while making clear that an alternative future is possible.
28 Hannah Arendt was right in arguing that language is crucial in highlighting the often hidden
29 “crystalized elements” that make fascism likely.¹ Language can be a powerful tool in the
30 search for truth and the condemnation of falsehoods and injustices. Moreover, it is through
31 language that the history of fascism can be remembered and the lessons of the conditions that
32 created the plague of genocide can provide the recognition that fascism does not reside solely
33 in the past and that its traces are always dormant, even in the strongest democracies.

34 Under such circumstances, resurrecting the social imagination in order to affirm a
35 politics of hope becomes a central political and moral practice in the fight to revive civic
36 literacy, civic culture, and a notion of shared citizenship. Politics loses its emancipatory
37 possibilities if it cannot provide the conditions for enabling students and others to think
38 against the grain and realize themselves as informed, critical, and engaged citizens. There is
39 no radical politics without a pedagogy capable of awakening consciousness, challenging
40 common sense, and creating modes of analysis in which people discover a moment of
41 recognition that enables them to rethink the conditions that shape their lives.

42 This suggests that one of the most serious challenges facing teachers, artists, journalists,
43 writers, and other cultural workers is the task of developing a discourse of both critique and
44 possibility. This means developing discourses and pedagogical practices that connect a
45 critical reading the word with reading the world, and doing so in ways that enhance the
46 creative capacities of young people and provide the conditions for them to become critical
47 agents. In taking up this project, educators and others should attempt to create the conditions
48 that give students the opportunity to become critical and engaged citizens who have the

¹ Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Trade Publishers, New Edition, 2001).

49 knowledge and courage to struggle in order to make desolation and cynicism unconvincing
50 and hope practical.

51 Hope in this instance is educational, removed from the fantasy of an idealism that is
52 unaware of the constraints facing the dream of a radical democratic society. This is a notion
53 of hope that is attentive to addressing the difficult conditions that shape the larger social order
54 and rejects theoretical analyses that function as a predetermined blueprint removed from
55 specific contexts and struggles. On the contrary, it is the precondition for providing those
56 languages and values that point the way to imagining a future that does not replicate the
57 nightmares of the present.

58

59 **I.**

60 We live in dangerous times. Consequently, there is an urgent need for more individuals,
61 institutions and social movements to come together in the belief that the current regimes of
62 tyranny can be resisted, that alternative futures are possible and that acting on these beliefs
63 through collective resistance will make radical change happen. Put differently, it is crucial in
64 a time of tyranny to embrace a politics of hope not out of desperation, but to recognize its
65 importance as a foundation for being able to think otherwise in order to act otherwise.

66

67 **II.**

68 In an age of rising right-wing populist movements and authoritarian governments, it is more
69 and more difficult to think beyond an era of foreclosed hope, or to take up the notion that
70 there is a different future beyond the dark times marked by the current resurgence of a global
71 fascist politics. For us, one of the great dangers and challenges of the contemporary moment
72 is that the power of hope becomes illusory and privatized, suggesting that the space of the
73 possible is not larger than the one in which people now find themselves. Under such
74 circumstances, it becomes difficult for individuals to translate private troubles into public
75 issues and systemic considerations. Our optimism is based on the belief that the dream of a
76 just and equitable society must challenge neoliberalism's ability to use corporate controlled
77 cultural apparatuses and state violence as weapons to impose what the novelist Toni Morrison
78 states is "a coma on the population" producing misery and traumas so deep and cruel that
79 they kill the moral imagination and "purge democracy of all of its ideals."²

80 Our optimism is also based on the perception that there is a growing resistance around
81 the world, especially among young people, that they live in an age in which the problems that
82 extend from the threat of an ecological disaster and nuclear war and to the ongoing assault
83 on any viable notion of democracy by a savage neoliberalism are too urgent to ignore. Such
84 dissatisfaction is growing globally as for instance indicated by a recent poll conducted by the
85 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer that indicates 56% of people in 28 countries believe "that

² Toni Morrison, "Pearl," *The Source of Self-Regard*, [Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 2019], pp. vi.

86 capitalism as it exist today does more harm than good in the world.”³ The critical awareness
87 of such problems is central to numerous youth movements that realize that their future has
88 been cancelled and that they have been written out of the script of democracy.

89 Central to our optimism about the next decade is the recognition that hope cannot take
90 place without a struggle. We believe that such struggles are the outgrowth of radical social
91 visions, expanding critical consciousness, and social movements that draw on the rich
92 histories and legacies of resistance movements fighting for equality, democracy, social
93 justice, and human rights. Evidence of such struggles can be found in the growing resistance
94 to global neoliberalism in Chile, France, Peru, and Ecuador, among other countries.

95 Another reason for our sense of hope is based on a developing consciousness among a
96 majority of people in the United States who support a range of progressive values that extend
97 from Medicare for All, a Green New Deal, student loan forgiveness, free tuition, abortion
98 rights, human immigration policies, legislation that sustains the environment, a living
99 minimum wage, and taxing the ultra-rich and big corporations. An embrace of similar
100 essential democratic values are sparking revolts in a range of other countries.

101 We believe that the threat to the planet and humankind is so urgent that there is no space
102 in between from which to choose. The machinery of death unleashed by the avatars of
103 neoliberal greed, disposability, and exploitation wears its horrors like a badge of honor all
104 the while producing death-dealing global networks of finance and social irresponsibility. Yet,
105 power is not only about domination but also about resistance, which is now worldwide,
106 mobilized by millions, and the call here is not just to win justice through phony elections but
107 to shut down the militarized institutions, cultures, and ideologies of racism, exploitation, and
108 human suffering through direct action. We are optimistic when thousands take to the streets,
109 and the punishing state loses the only weapon it has left, sheer repression.

110 Our optimism stems from the belief that without hope there is no possibility for
111 producing radical democratic mass movements that can both hold power accountable and
112 implement transformative structural changes. We believe that agency is the condition of
113 struggle, and hope is the condition of agency. Hope expands the space of the possible and
114 becomes a way of recognizing and naming the incomplete nature of the present. *It also*
115 *recognizes in the words of the novelist, Lukas Barfuss, that “cynicism and resignation are*
116 *simply other words for cowardice” and that the possibility of a more just and humane world*
117 *rests on the assumption that no society is ever just enough.*⁴ Our optimism stems from a
118 militant optimism which suggests a deep understanding of history, the importance of
119 individual and collective agency, civic courage, and a sense of educated hope that believes
120 that resistance is no longer an option but a necessity.

³ **Error! Main Document Only.**2020 Edelman Trust Barometer (January 19, 2020). Online: <https://www.edelman.com/trustbarometer>.

⁴ Lukas Bärfuss, Tess Lewis, “It’s Between Us: Lukas Bärfuss’s Georg Büchner Prize Acceptance Speech,” *LARB*, [January 22, 2020]. Online: <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/its-between-us-lukas-barfuss-georg-buchner-prize-acceptance-speech/>.

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