

# MATRIZES

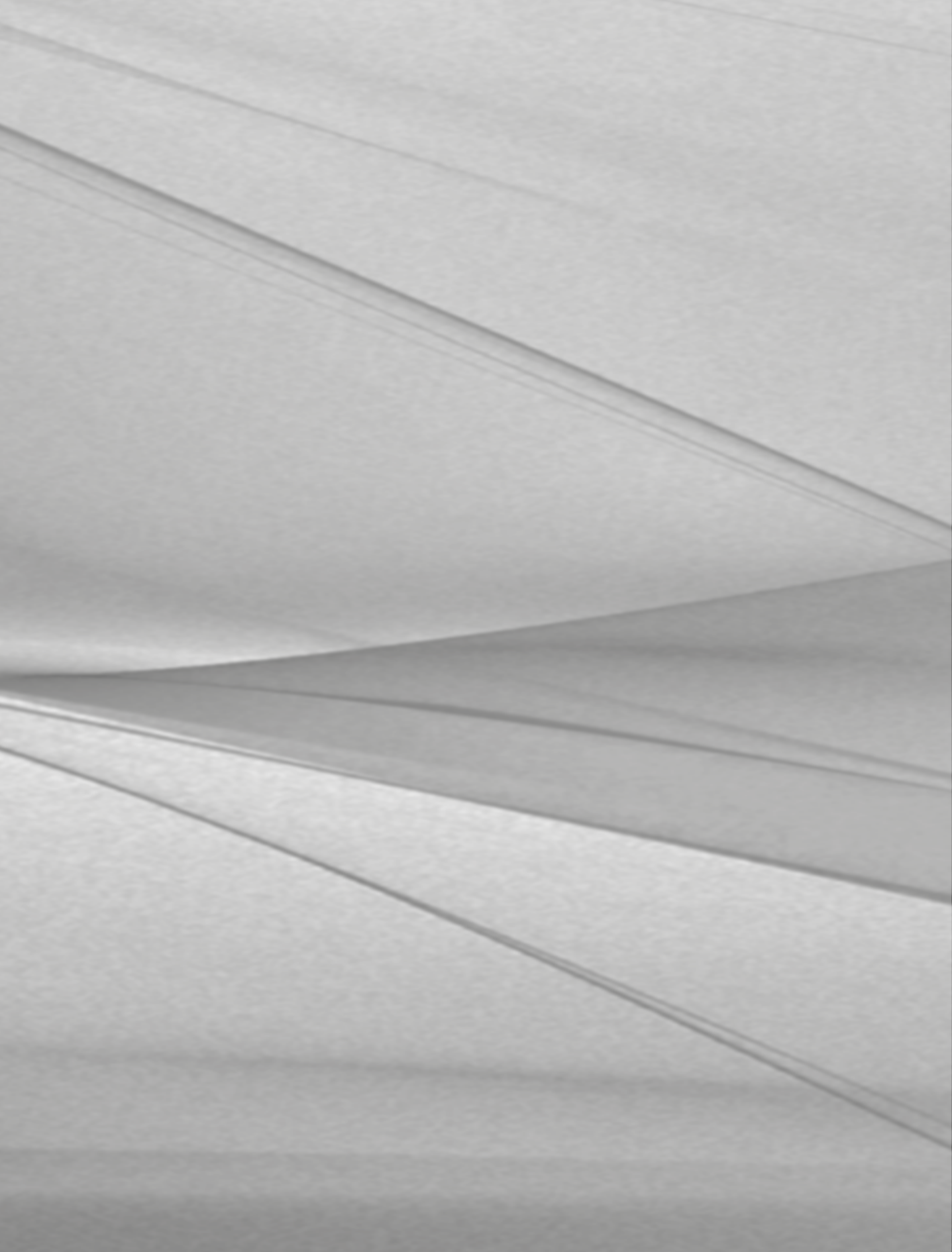
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## PAULO FREIRE 100 YEARS

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# INTRODUCTION





# Revisiting Paulo Freire: An Introduction

## *Reverendo Paulo Freire: Uma Introdução*

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### INTRODUCTION

THE JOURNAL **MATRIZES** hereby launches this special issue dedicated to the centenary of the birth of Paulo Freire (1921-1997). The following set of texts, bringing together articles and testimonials from authors from various countries, attests to the strength and relevance of the theoretical-practical contribution of this citizen of the world born in Pernambuco, in North-eastern Brazil. These analyses intend to explore the contributions of Freire's thought to the fields of communication, education and to civil society development, taking into consideration the local realities from which they emerged.

Only one of Freire's (1969/1983) books directly and more broadly addresses the scope of communication; it is *Extension or Communication?* published in 1969, originally in Spanish, during Freire's exile in Chile. This book became an important reference for the studies and practices of participatory communication worldwide and was decisive for the review of diffusion models (Peruzzo, 2020b), which took communication as a tool to guide the reproduction of models considered modern and developed, without paying attention to local experiences and knowledge.

Approached more broadly, the transversality of communication in Freire's pedagogical perspective can be discussed from at least three perspectives. The first combines language, education and communication. The second links education and communication with popular mobilization and, more openly, with processes of political engagement. The third stems from Freire's own critical positioning in relation to the media. These three inflections will be discussed

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in more detail throughout the material compiled in this edition of **MATRIZes**. However, this introduction will firstly seek to identify key features and determine moments that accompany the articles and position Paulo Freire as one of the most important thinkers of the 20th century.

### ENGAGED EDUCATOR

A thinker of education for liberation, Paulo Freire has his work translated into more than twenty languages, including Urdu and Arabic, leaving a deep mark on literacy projects whose examples can be found both in Angicos (Pernambuco) or Natal (Rio Grande do Norte), in Brazil, and in Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde and Angola, in Africa.

Freire also got involved in the organization of both national and international projects and even in public administration, seen for example in his collaborations with the Institute for the Development of Agriculture (INDAP), in Chile; the World Council of Churches (WCC), in Geneva; the Cultural Action Institute (IDAC), founded in 1971 in Switzerland, together with Elza Freire, Miguel and Rosiska Darcy de Oliveira, Claudius Ceccon and others; and with the Department of Education of the city of São Paulo (1989-1991). In the latter, Freire took on the task of managing a complex system that had been scrapped in the previous administration, by Mayor Jânio da Silva Quadros. It was then a question of recovering, from the administrative, pedagogical point of view, and valuing the staff, a formal education network comprising of 629 schools, 720,000 students, and 39,614 teachers. In 1989, the city had 9.6 million inhabitants, of which 1.2 million people were illiterates over 14 years of age.

This rich theoretical-practical trajectory is part of the engaged profile, marked by the will to transform the world, that characterized the life and work of Paulo Freire. As Pierre Furter (1967) summarized, in the tab of the presentation of the book *Education: The Practice of Freedom*:

An education as a practice of freedom can only be fully realized in a society where the economic, social and political conditions for an existence in freedom exist. Consequently, and because there can be no *pedagogical* renewal without a renewal of global society, Paulo Freire's pedagogical requirements *also* led him to take a political position.

His identification with the oppressed is well known and led him to be persecuted by the military dictatorship instituted in Brazil in 1964,



resulting in almost 15 years of exile in numerous countries. In recent years, especially with the advent of Jair Bolsonaro's government and its attack on democratic institutions, culture, the arts and education, we have experienced a paradox: while Freire's name is increasingly remembered, with his work recognized and applied in various parts of the world, in Brazil, it became the object of systematic attacks. Paradoxically, he is accused of defending a school dedicated to the formation of citizenship, of a critical spirit, a line of thinking which evidently is in direct collision with extreme right-wing regimes that are satisfied with *banking education*, linear transmission and monological models of learning.

### THREE DIMENSIONS OF FREIRE'S THINKING

The Freirean project can be appreciated in the light of three large integrated dimensions: political-ideological, methodological, humanist. These dimensions are found in his writings and in the actions that he implemented, stretching from the Basic Education Movement (for the Portuguese acronym MEB) to his engagement in the anti-colonial struggles in Africa.

#### Political-ideological challenge

The Freirean worldview is articulated on two fronts: the widespread progressive Catholicism of the Second Vatican Council, along with the names of Theillard de Chardin, Emmanuel Mounier, Jacques Maritain, Alceu Amoroso Lima, and the Marxism, whose lineage draws from thinkers as Lukacs and Lucien Goldman. In this set of influences, the presence of the Instituto Superior de Estudos Brasileiros (ISEB) – 1955/1964 –, especially through the philosopher Álvaro Vieira Pinto, informs the texts of Paulo Freire.

Such a theoretical-practical orientation, with a left-leaning ideological inspiration, can be identified from the first writings, in the late 1950s, to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1968/2000) and subsequent works. What appears in this trajectory of writing is Freire's engagement with the project of national development. In the case of Brazil that entailed bringing the popular element to the main scene of a country that asserted itself between Juscelinist developmentalism<sup>1</sup> and the struggles for basic reforms that were promoted during João Goulart's<sup>2</sup> short term as president. The intellectual, political, and artistic wealth in the late 1950s, until the military dictatorship took power in 1964, constituted the background from which the Freirean ideas flourished. In that effervescent scenario, promoting literacy implied promoting two movements: access to the

<sup>1</sup> In reference to Juscelino Kubitschek, Brazilian president from 1956 to 1961.

<sup>2</sup> Brazilian president from 1961 to 1964, destituted by a military coup d'état.



written word, the verbal code and all the consequences thereof, and the right of the citizen to actively participate in the life of the country: voting, access to power of the word, recognition of place in speech.

In a different form, informed by national contexts, similar challenges reappear in Chile, where greater popular participation was promised with the advent of the Eduardo Frei Montalva government (1964-1970). In this period, while exiled in Santiago, Paulo Freire participates in the implementation of programs of education with peasant populations, at the Institute for the Development of Agriculture (for the acronym in Spanish INDAP). This is a decisive experience informing Freire's writing of the book *Extension or Communication?* (Freire, 1969/1983). Similar challenges emerge in the complex literacy programmes Freire engaged in within African countries, programmes that emerged from the Portuguese colonial yoke and that were marked by a great linguistic plurality, in many cases of oral tradition.

Overall, Freire's work is embedded fundamentally in a political perspective of social transformation. Education and literacy are part of this effort; communication is its ontology. Ideologically, it adheres to the popular-progressive field, within which the images and representations capable of opposing and transcending the ideals of the oppressors emerge.

### A question of method

It is within this political option that the so-called Paulo Freire method can be understood. This form of adult literacy methods refers to the Angicos' experience<sup>3</sup>, the basic elements being: a forty-hour format; the choice of generative words; the inclusion of encoding and decoding mechanisms; the organization of culture circles; the domain of the word and its implications in power games and the importance of dialogue, among others. What is intended, in the end, are the formative processes of consciousness, in which subjects recognize their place in the world and participate in it in pursuit of transformations that lead to a more just and egalitarian society<sup>4</sup>.

As several scholars point out, the methodological issue in Paulo Freire is not the plastered formatting of determinations, scripts and prescriptions to solve a problem, but rather a collective construction guaranteed by procedures that ensure the achievement of a certain purpose. Hence, the method in question does not imply an eclectic gathering aimed only at a pedagogical technical effectiveness but rather at the elaboration of commitments with the learning subjects, the ultimate purpose being reaching a liberating consciousness. Or, in the terms of Ernani Maria Fiori (1968/2005, p. 10):

<sup>3</sup> Angicos is the village where Paulo Freire developed and implemented his literacy method in the early 1960s.

<sup>4</sup> These aspects of Freire's work deeply inspired an epistemological current in the field of communication, called *popular communication* in Latin America (Peruzzo, 2020; Suzina, 2021), and with equivalents based on the same principles as *citizen communication* (Rodríguez, 2001), *radical communication* (Downing et al., 2001), and *communication for social change* (Gumucio-Dagron & Tufte, 2006; Tufte 2017).



By objectifying their world, the student finds themselves in it with others and in others, companions of their small “circle of culture”. They all meet and reencounter in the same common world and, from the coincidence of the intentions that make it objective, the communication emerges, the dialogue that criticizes and promotes the participants in the circle emerges. . . . In the circle of culture, strictly speaking, one does not teach, one learns in “reciprocity of consciences”; there is no teacher, there is a coordinator whose function is to provide the information requested by the respective participants as well as favourable conditions for the group’s dynamics, reducing to a minimum their direct intervention in the course of the dialogue.

Thus, if the so-called Paulo Freire method is based on a systematization of procedures, it is situated at the heart of a worldview of horizontal relationships that articulate bonds and exchanges between educators-learners. After all: “Here, no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught. People teach each other, mediated by the world” (Freire, 1968/2000, p. 80).

### **Humanist inflection**

Little or nothing would make sense in the construction of national projects or in the implementation of educational methods, if an attitude of respect for human beings was separated from these methods, including an attitude of overcoming alienating impositions, the right to freedom and decent living conditions. In Paulo Freire’s theoretical-practical project, adherence to emancipatory humanism is reiterated, in which subjects are no longer exploited in their work relationships, integrating themselves into affective circuits that allow the recognition of the other, the exercise of otherness and the liberation of the word of the subaltern.

It is understandable to read the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1968/2000) in the light of a political-educational action devoted to radical humanism, which emphasizes intersubjective relationships and dialogue as necessary elements for the construction of transformative sociabilities. Throughout Freire’s books, new terms, with a great affective charge, are created, as if there were a linguistic effort to affirm the sense of humanity that must preside over the bonds between the subjects and guarantee the processes of communicability: beauty, re-admiration, lovingness, incompleteness/incompletion (of people), re-admiring, existing, hoping, etc.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, the links between education/training/democracy relate, in the final analysis, to the concern with dignity in the lives of men and women: “The total disregard for the integral formation of the human being,

<sup>5</sup> For further knowledge about the universe of Freirean vocabulary in its neological profusion, in the formal Portuguese language, see the work of Simões (2013).



its reduction to pure training, strengthens the authoritarian way of top-down speech that lacks, for this very reason, the intention of its democratization in *speaking with*” (Freire, 1996/2006, p. 116). Or: “It is the directivity of education, this vocation that it has, as a specifically human action, of addressing itself to dreams, ideals, utopias and goals, which I have been calling the politics of education” (Freire, 1996/2006, p. 110). And even the reflections aimed at dealing with the humanist vector that needs to accompany the work with the peasants involved in the agrarian reform, and exposed in one of the chapters of the book *Extension or Communication?*:

Humanism, seeing men in the world, in time, “immersed” in reality, is only true as long as it takes place in the transforming action of the structures in which they find themselves “reified”, or almost “reified”. Humanism which, rejecting both despair and naive optimism, is therefore hopefully critical. And his critical hope rests on an equally critical belief: the belief that men can do and remake things; can transform the world. Belief in that, doing and redoing things and transforming the world, men can overcome the situation in which they are being an almost non-being and become a being in search of being more. In this scientific humanism (which does not lack loving) the communicative action of the agronomist-educator must be supported. (Freire, 1969/1983, p. 50)

Following these key features in Freirean thinking, we will in the next section focus on the three perspectives that we consider essential to understand the influence of Paulo Freire’s work on communication research and practice: communication and education; communication and civil society development; critical approaches to communication and the media.

### COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION

There is no intelligibility that is not communication and intercommunication and that is not based on dialogicity.

–Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Autonomy*

Communication is one of the fundamental human rights. Such an assertion, in its formulations and developments, is found throughout Paulo Freire’s work. From *Extension or Communication?* (Freire, 1969/1983) to the *Pedagogy of Autonomy* (Freire, 1996/2006), the understanding that we are permeated by



“a world of communication” (Freire, 1969/1983, p. 44) persists. It is certainly not about thinking about the communicational flow within the limits of technologies or the media but referring it to the concrete life of the subjects in which self-recognition and co-participation are instituted. Hence, every effort aimed at ensuring education, developing literacy programs, fostering the growth of critical awareness, seeking the emancipation of men and women, gains power when translated into a comprehensive matter provided by the dialogue between subjects. Or even: “The intelligible is only communicated insofar as it is communicable” (Freire, 1969/1983, p. 46). Such a simple-looking formulation carries with it, at the same time, a political perspective, and the understanding that the act of communicating goes beyond simple announcement, as it mobilizes within it the exchange of experiences, a communicating reciprocity, in short, the construction of knowledge:

Knowing, in the human dimension, which interests us here, whatever the level at which it takes place, is not the act through which a subject, transformed into an object, receives, docilely and passively, the contents that another gives or imposes on him. Knowledge, on the contrary, requires a curious presence of the subject in the face of the world. It requires their transforming action on reality. It demands a constant search. It implies invention and reinvention. It demands the critical reflection of each one on the very act of knowing, through which it recognizes itself as knowing and, by recognizing itself in this way, it perceives the “how” of its knowledge and the conditioning to which its act is submitted. (Freire, 1969/1983, p. 16)

Communication arises, therefore, as a process based on inter-individual, inter-subjective displacements, of the subject’s social involvement in the world, giving meaning to human life. In a word: “Consciences are not communicative because they communicate with each other; but they communicate with each other because they are communicative” (Fiori, 1968/2005, p. 15). Away from intercommunication, verbs like educate, alphabetize, emancipate, liberate, lose their strong meanings, remaining as transmissive resources of announcements.

This Freirean perspective works as a fertilizing element of a lineage of studies that are developed around communicative-educational interfaces, or educommunication, according to a terminology that is gaining strength among media and communication researchers and practitioners. This is not the place for a discussion centred on the scope, procedures or action strategies involved in the communicative-educational interfaces. It would

be relevant, rather, to examine aspects around the introduction of means of communication in the school, and in particular examining these aspects through a critical reading of them, and also reviewing the epistemological dimensions of this process. The current health crisis resulting from Covid 19 and the expanded use of technologies as a classroom strategy, in remote or hybrid modalities of education, would contain, in itself, a theme to be explored in the educommunicative scope and to which Freirean thinking makes an important contribution.

It is necessary to emphasize that Freire's understanding of communication as a humanizing process takes this analysis directly to the scope of formal education (among others) as an interactive space that requires the full exercise of dialogue and, accordingly, to the ability to place subjects in circuits of mutual recognition, of exercising otherness. Thus, the displacement of speech, the tensioning of values, the admission of the speech of others as capable of structuring the debate, occurs at the same time as the communicative process is instituted, thus enabling the circulation of knowledge.

It means that education as a practice of freedom (a circumstance in which the act of knowing is not limited to the known object, in view of creating communicative circuits recognizing experiences between knowing subjects) goes beyond being just an ideological motive, a slogan or a publicity motto, to constitute a democratizing structure driven by respect for formal and evaluative procedures that feed dialogue. It should be remembered that according to Freire (1968/2000), the fundamental constitutive element of dialogue is the word marked by two sides drawn to each other, those of reflection and action: "There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis.<sup>1</sup> Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world" (p. 87). The empty word is, in this way, alongside the announcements, moving away from the theoretical-practical movement, ultimately denying communication itself.

In other words, the dialogic educator develops the awareness that the communicable constitutes the space that allows the possibility of encounters "between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world" (Freire, 1968/2000, p. 88). Dialogue becomes a requirement for the integral formation of subjects. With this, we discard the pretextual pronouncements that aim to elaborate shared meanings and we adhere to the effective exchange of arguments, the circulation of ideas, the democratic recognition that it is possible to overcome the asymmetrical power game embodied in the discourses of dominant groups. In summary: communication occurs, effectively, when the exchange of meanings, intersubjective bonds, and awareness of the common take place.



In view of this conceptual, practical and normative horizon, it is imperative to add that Freire's thinking has not neglected or treated the presence of communicational devices as irrelevant. We must consider the terms being some that work on several fronts and that preceded the digital expansion of the internet. Hence, Freire did consider the role of computers and their functionalities. As an anecdote, during the administration of Paulo Freire as secretary of municipal education in São Paulo in the early 1990s, he purchased one of the first batches of computers to be installed in public schools in the city. According to him:

Deifying or demonizing technology or science is a highly negative and dangerous way of thinking wrong. . . .

That's why I've always been at peace to deal with it. I have no doubts about the enormous potential for stimuli and challenges to curiosity that technology puts at the service of children and adolescents from the so-called favoured classes. (Freire, 2006, p. 33, 86)

Freire (1996/2006) even explicitly recommends to progressive educators that: "not only can we not ignore television, but we must use it, above all, to discuss it" (p. 139). Despite talking about the hegemonic vehicle in the media scene at the time, it must be recognized that these opinions emerged within the scope of Paulo Freire's concerns to undertake a formal educational treatment of the communicational messages socially arranged by television.

It is worth stating: the entry of the media in school, either as equipment in support of educational actions, or as the production of messages that must be analysed from a critical and reflective perspective (in feedback movements in the encoding-decoding continuum), requires a classroom environment that is aligned with the purposes of teaching as a practice of freedom. This Freirean approach is at the centre stage of how educommunication works. It is necessary to allude that the theme of media literacy, today quite present in debates about the necessary communication-education links, appears, in its own way, in Paulo Freire's intellectual project, above all in his last writings, with greater evidence in the *Pedagogy of Autonomy* (Freire, 1996/2006). It is worth remembering, however, that if literacies express a necessary condition for the exercise of education in a broader sense, they may not be enough. After all, as defended over the years by Freire, it is necessary to unravel the culture of silence in which large sectors of the population are submerged, and to allow the voice of the silenced (often by the media themselves, by the dominant discourse and their interests to preserve privileges, or, in our days,



by the internet echo chambers) to erupt as an active element in the various communication modalities – whether technologically mediated or face to face. Thus, becoming media literate is a path that does not end with the identification of language structures and codifying arrangements, but expands to the recognition of the signifiers involved therein.

This perspective makes room for communication to be rethought in an ontological dimension, or epistemological, as Paulo Freire would prefer. This is something essential in human relationships, without which it is not possible to talk about education, nor to seek the autonomy of subjects. This is what is explained in *Extension or Communication?* (Freire, 1969/1983) and unfolds in the whole of Freire's work: the agronomist willing to pass on his technical knowledge to rural workers, disregarding the reality in which they live; the teachers viewing in the student body only the sounding boards of truths formulated by the teaching; the party leaderships that formulate slogans without listening to the militancy. Such examples make explicit, in a recurring line of meaning, the fact of denying the subject and his autonomy, which implies, in the end, breaking the communication process.

### **A COMMUNICATION INSPIRED BY FREIRE IN SOCIAL CHANGE PROCESSES**

There really is no isolated thought inasmuch as there is no isolated man.

Every act of thinking requires a subject who thinks, a thought object, which mediates the first subject of the second and the communication between them, which takes place through linguistic signs.

The human world is thus a world of communication.

–Paulo Freire, *Extension or Communication?*

The association between education, popular mobilization and political participation processes opens up another perspective, which unfolds in the multitude and diversity of dialogues and constructions that Freire's work has with social movements and civil society organizations around the world. In this perspective, the communicative principle of Freire's understanding of education expands to all processes in which the learning of a new place in the world is proposed, and even a new configuration of the world.



For Freire, the word is the generating element of subjectivity and agency. A person ceases to be an object and becomes a subject of history as he becomes capable of naming himself and the world around him. This generative process oriented towards intervening in the world and generating social change became foundational for what has become a significant strand within communication research and practice – that of communication for social change and many associated strands known under a broad array of names and approaches, from alternative communication in the 1980s to popular and community communication of the most recent years.

Key scholars in the field of communication became inspired by Freire's action-oriented communicative practices, from Juan Díaz Bordenave, Luis Ramiro Beltrán and Cicilia Peruzzo in Latin America to Frank Gerace, Robert Chambers and many others. A common denominator was Freire's principles and his method, insisting on not only naming the world but intervening in it. Juan Díaz Bordenave drew on Freire in developing his participatory communication approach to rural communication, Frank Gerace writing the first book on Horizontal Communication in 1973, and in more broad terms, several generations of communication practitioners and civil society organisations in Latin America have drawn on the Paulo Freire method in their work with non-formal education, mobilization and media production, demanding human rights and equality.

A pioneering experience was seen in the development of Christian Basic Communities in Brazil and other Latin American countries in the 1970s and 1980s, an experience of drawing on Freire's notions of dialogic communication in enhancing subjectivity and agency and in resisting the increasingly non-dialogic configuration of any public space at that time. The authoritarianism that the military dictatorships imposed constituted the context to which the Christian Basic Communities responded, inspired also by the Theology of Liberation. It planted the seeds of a new generation of community-based organisations, non-governmental organisations and social movements. A new civil society grew from this, some of which, over the years, influenced government structures, for example when Luiza Erundina won the mayor's election in Sao Paulo, Brazil in 1988 and in 1989 invited Paulo Freire to become the municipal secretary of education and at the same time invited numerous activists from the surround social movements to join the municipal administration.

Beyond Latin America, Freire's ideas travelled, both via his own global work, not least in newly independent African states. However, while a lot of that work by Freire himself was organized around collaborating with African governments,



a growing numbers of civil society organizations took on his ideas, for example when the REFLECT method (Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques) was developed in the early 1990s by Robert Chambers and University of Sussex in the UK and became a preferred method to work with in NGOs in many sub-Saharan African countries.

What travelled internationally was the communicative ethos of Freire's work with a focus on emancipation, the autonomy of subjects, and based on a relationship of equality in every form of dialogue and exchange of knowledge.

### **FREIRE AND THE CRITICISM OF THE MEDIA**

It is clear that Freire's adherence to the use of media platforms does not reflect an innocence vis-a-vis the role and place of the mass media – to keep to the rhetoric of the time – in social life and, particularly, in the world of schools. On the contrary, what is revealed is a kind of pragmatic recognition of a reality permeated by messages circulated by vehicles such as television, radio, newspaper etc., and which forcibly presented themselves (and continue to do so) in classrooms, in private environments for teachers and students, and amongst groups of friends within the school communities.

How to face the extraordinary power of the media, the language of television, its “syntax” that reduces the past and the present to the same level and suggests that what doesn't exist is already done . . . The world gets shorter, time is diluted: yesterday turns now; tomorrow is already done. All very fast. Debating what is said and what is shown and how it is shown on television seems to me something more and more important. (Freire, 1996/2006, p. 141)

From these and other passages in his work, it can be understood that Freire is not a critic of media development, but, again, an engaged educator against the massive, deterministic and oppressive uses of any and all communication platforms. In one interview, Paulo Freire insists on the lack of “a political decision that puts the media *also* at the service of the popular classes” (Fadul, 1987, p. 90). In this conversation, he opposes uses of the media that seek the co-option of audiences, in a similar criticism to the one he makes of banking education. In other words, there is a declared condemnation of vertical information transmission schemes that are far from dialogic procedures and autonomy of thought.

In this interview, when Anamaria Fadul (1987) provokes Freire to talk about the gap between the development of the education system and the communication

system in Brazil, he reveals two complementary concerns. The first is related to the presence of a predatory and elitist communication system, in which the popular classes only appear as “an object of strangeness” (p. 90); and the second is associated with the need of forging an educational dynamic capable of producing critical citizens of the first. In general terms, Freire’s vision of the communication system contemplated broad and unrestricted access to the media, within a perspective of equality; the reform of these vehicles to make them useful to the population; and education and recognition of the critical capacity of audiences in their relationship with media products.

I am not afraid to appear naive in insisting that it is not even possible to think about television without bearing in mind the question of critical conscience. Thinking about television or the media in general poses the problem of communication, a process impossible to be neutral . . . Hence the accurate role played by ideology in communication, hiding truths, but also the very ideologization in the communicative process. (Freire, 1996/2006, p. 141)

Such ideas helped to delineate a gap that social movements tried to fill with different strategies. Among the exponents of this approach are works such as *Para leer al Pato Donald*, an essay by Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart, from 1971, and extensive training programs in Critical Reading of Communication (LCC), such as those carried out by the Brazilian Christian Association of Social Communication (União Cristã Brasileira de Comunicação Social – UCBC), between the 1970s and 1990s. Dorfman and Mattelart’s book is considered one of the pioneering works of cultural studies in Latin America. Dorfman and Mattelart’s Marxist critique of capitalist propaganda and cultural imperialism openly dialogues with Freire’s perspective, according to which “the oppressed has another reading of the messages conveyed. There is no adhesion without resistance” (Fadul, 1987, p. 92). Thus, despite acknowledging the effort of co-opting the popular classes, there was confidence in their critical and reactive capacity to appropriate media messages.

In this wake, programs such as those organized by UCBC have spread across Latin America. Among its objectives were demystifying the communication system, alerting to political-economic collisions within it, and offering tools to expand the critical capacity of citizens in relation to media consumption. There was also an interest in promoting the autonomous production of communication, starting from the communities and organizations at the bases.

LCC courses started to have a conference profile, with subsequent debates on the communication system, the cultural industry, the contradictions in the



performance of the mass media, the excesses committed by these vehicles as informers of public opinion, etc. To these themes was added a study of Christian communication and of the worship or liturgy practiced by Christian communities. The objective was to denounce the manipulation exercised by the mass media and warn about those responsible for the control and diversion of information: the sociopolitical-economic-cultural system in force in Brazil and, in general, in the world. The courses sought to point out clues for action, mainly orienting towards the exercise of alternative and popular communication. (União Cristã Brasileira de Comunicação Social, 1985, p. 6)

Finally, aware of the unequal power of the mass media, Freire also did not refrain from a commitment to being present in these spaces. In another excerpt of his interview given to Anamaria Fadul (1987), he talks about the need to occupy them, in a horizon shared with many social movements historically.

On the other hand, I want to make it clear that if it is not possible to put TV at the service of the working class, it is up to us with much more difficulty than in the case of education, to invade the TV space. When TVs invite me to participate in programs, I never refuse, as long as it's live, because this is a political task, to use time in a space that is not mine. (p. 92)

In this step, it is worth remembering that the contemporary dissemination of fake news, malicious information, denial, and intolerance, partly distributed by (in)social networks, but with overwhelming access by school segments, can be fought in the context of formal education with a Freirean program to elevate the ability to discern, the intercommunication that raises critical judgment, the emancipatory inflection of teachers and students. In other words, it is necessary to place communication at the centre of the communicative act, something that institutes communicability – through signs, complex languages, non-bureaucratized words that only distribute announcements – “that is done and lived while it is spoken of it with the power of witness” (Freire, 1996/2006, p. 37).

These efforts of placing communication centrally in a liberating process constitute a struggle also very much fought beyond the formal educational sector, in the dialogic spaces created by civil society in NGOs, in CBOs and in the multitude of social movements characterizing our time. These institutions, organisations and movements are all claiming to be present in dialogues defining our future, and in doing so, are paying their strongest tribute to Paulo Freire.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The articles and testimonies gathered in this special issue of our journal, through different ways and multiple considerations, situate Freire's path in its theoretical-practical range, emphasizing, above all, the themes of communication and its interfaces. In order to organize the articles, at least approximately, we have grouped them into four major thematic axes, capable of interconnections, when referred to Paulo Freire's work: communication beyond the announcements; communicate and educate; communication and cultural developments; communication: political frameworks and social changes.

**MATRIZES** thanks the national and international authors who agreed to participate in this tribute to Paulo Freire.

We hope you enjoy the reading. **M**

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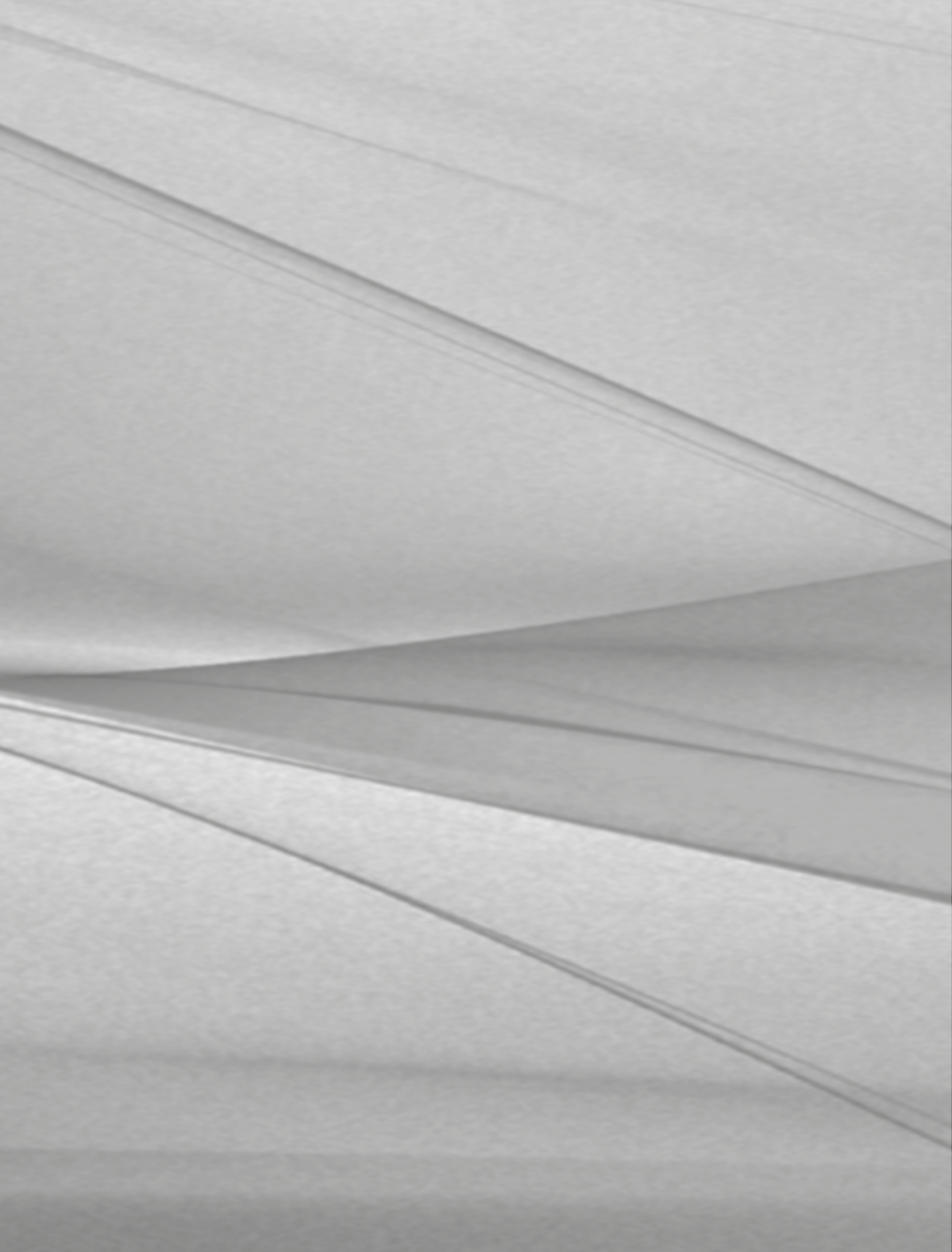
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**COMMUNICATION BEYOND  
THE ANNOUNCEMENTS**







# Liberating Communication in the 21st Century

## *Comunicação Libertadora no Século XXI*

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### ABSTRACT

Does Paulo Freire have any contribution to the field of communication studies today? We offer an exhaustive reading of Freire's work, from his view of human nature, which includes communication as an existential and ontological reality, to communication in its relational and political dimensions. We also survey Freire's manifestations on communication after the publication of his foundational texts; an analysis of the critical position of communication scholars in Brazil and abroad; and, finally, an evaluation of Freire's contribution from the perspective of his *praxis of freedom* extended to communication research in the 21st century.

**Keywords:** Paulo Freire, liberating communication, praxis of freedom

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### RESUMO

Paulo Freire tem alguma contribuição a oferecer ao campo de estudos da comunicação nos nossos dias? Neste artigo, fazemos uma exaustiva leitura da obra de Freire, desde a sua visão da natureza humana, que inclui a comunicação como realidade existencial e ontológica, passando pela comunicação nas suas dimensões relacional e política. Fazemos também um levantamento das manifestações de Freire sobre comunicação após a publicação dos textos fundadores; da posição crítica de estudiosos da comunicação no Brasil e no exterior e, finalmente, oferecemos uma avaliação da contribuição de Freire na perspectiva de sua *prática da liberdade* alongada para a pesquisa da comunicação no século XXI.

**Palavras-chave:** Paulo Freire, comunicação libertadora, práxis da liberdade



I dream of a society reinventing itself from the bottom up, in which the popular masses actually have the right to have a voice and not just the duty to listen.

–Paulo Freire, *Essa Escola Chamada Vida (A School Called Life)*.

### INTRODUCTION

**P**AULO FREIRE'S NUCLEUS of thought was formed during his practice as an educator in Brazil in the late 1950s, early 1960s and in Chilean exile, until the end of the decade. During this period, it was believed that the collective process of *conscientization* promoted through *education as a praxis of freedom*, would lead to the political and economic emancipation of populations historically subjected to injustice and inequality in Latin America. This utopia was shared by an important portion of Christians – Catholics and Protestants, including Freire – stimulated by the *aggiornamento* proposed by Pope John XXIII, by the new directives emanating from the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and by the nascent Liberation Theology (Löwy, 2016). Even after the 1964 civil-military coup in Brazil, and in the midst of the fierce ideological dispute promoted by the Cold War, many still bet on the viability of a project of democratic socialism for the region. It did not happen.

Twice imprisoned by the dictatorship, Freire was exiled for over 15 years in Bolivia, Chile, the United States and Switzerland. Working in the World Council of Churches, he had, from 1970 onwards, the opportunity to collaborate with African nations that had recently emerged from bloody processes of national liberation, returning to Brazil only after the Amnesty Law, in 1980.

At the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century, the historical circumstances are totally different. Freire did not live through the troubled times of post-truth, virtual social networks and the uncontrolled dissemination of fake news (disinformation). When he died in 1997, the leading role of media oligopolies and their ability to define and influence the scenario of political disputes was unquestioned. Many believed, however, that the digital revolution and the internet would be unavoidable factors for popular participation and the strengthening of democracy. It did not happen.

In the new times, those who the Franco-Italian political scientist Giuliano da Empoli (2019) called “chaos engineers” fuel the formation of virtual bubbles that do not communicate with each other. Issues of common interest are evaded from public debate, breaking a basic condition of the democratic process. Among other different causes, one of the results of this whole process is the coming to power of extreme right-wing authoritarian leaders who threaten the

very survival of liberal democracy. Not only in Brazil, but in several countries around the world (Lima, 2021a).

Given the new historical circumstances, is the discussion of the concept of communication, first articulated by Freire more than 50 years ago, justified today? What did his later praxis and reflection add? How has Freire's communicational thought been evaluated by Brazilian researchers? And, after all, does Freire have any contribution to offer to the field of communication today?<sup>1</sup>

To try to answer these questions, it will be necessary to go back to his initial formulation of the concept. In Freire, the concepts of *communication*, *education* and *culture* are closely associated. He himself, in a letter addressed to the editor of *Paz e Terra*, Moacyr Felix, in the fall of 1970, stated:

It seems to me interesting to point out . . . that reading *Extensão ou Comunicação?* [Extension or Communication?] implies reading *Educação como Prática da Liberdade* [Education for Critical Consciousness], *Pedagogia do Oprimido* [Pedagogy of the Oppressed], a few articles published by ICIRA with the title *Sobre la Acción Cultural*, as well as essays such as *Cultural Action for Freedom* and *The Cultural Action Process – An Introduction to its Understanding*, which resulted from seminars I coordinated last year in Cambridge, Massachusetts. (Freire, 1969/1971a, pp. 9-10)

The initial formulation of the concept of *communication* in Freire must be understood, therefore, in the perspective of the other texts indicated by him and in the context of the execution of an agrarian reform program in Chile, in the mid-1960s. The isolated analysis of the concept is not only insufficient, as it will always be incomplete and partial. Since then, Freire's liberating communication/education implied overcoming the *culture of silence* in which the oppressed were immersed.

## FUNDAMENTALS OF THE FREIREIAN CONCEPT OF COMMUNICATION

The only opportunity in which Freire conceptually discussed communication was in an essay written for the Instituto de Capacitación e Investigación en Reforma Agraria (ICIRA), in Chile, in 1968. The text intended to criticize the extension activities of agronomists and serve as a basis for discussion in an interdisciplinary group composed of experts linked to the agrarian reform program<sup>2</sup>. With the suggestive title of *Extensão ou Comunicação?* (Freire, 1969/1971a), it constitutes a radical criticism of the American *diffusionist* tradition which, at the time, had great penetration in Latin America, submitted to the general rubric of *communication and development*.

<sup>1</sup>I have tried to answer these questions in different papers over time. So, repetition of arguments and duplication of texts are unavoidable. Check, among others, Lima (2015b, 2021b).

<sup>2</sup>The team of experts was made up of officials from the Agrarian Reform Corporation (Cora), the Animal Production Development Institute (Indap), the Agriculture and Livestock Service (SAG) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).



Opposing communication to *transmission*, Freire (1969/1971a) argues that communication is *the co-participation of Subjects in the act of knowing* and that *extension* implies transmission, transfer, invasion and non-communication. Freire therefore distances himself from the false neutrality that is normally attributed to the word transmission in diffusionism and in other models of communication study, originating in the behaviorist tradition. He says:

The term extension is significantly related to transmission, delivery, donation, messianism, mechanism, cultural invasion, manipulation, etc. And all these terms involve actions that, by transforming man<sup>3</sup> in almost a “thing”, deny him as a being of transformation of the world. They [also] deny the formation and constitution of authentic knowledge. They deny true action and reflection to those who are the objects of such actions. (p. 22)

#### The view of human nature

What bases the Freireian concept of communication is his view of the human being as a *Subject in relation to the world*, which implies, in turn, a specific conception of the *relationships between men*.

Freire (1976) emphasizes the fact that “all educational practice implies a theoretical position on the part of the educator. This position, in turn, demands – at times more, at others less explicitly – an interpretation of man and the world” (p. 42). What is valid for educational practice applies equally to communicational practice. For this reason, Freire always reiterates a distinction between *men* and *animals* in their relationship with the world that implies a particular type of relationship between men.

Assuming that men differ from animals because they are able to create and innovate their world, Freire (1970b) says:

The main difference between the animal, whose activity goes no further than mere production, and man, who creates the domain of culture and history through his action on the world, is that the latter only is a being of praxis. He is a being who creates and knows it as changer and creator. That man, in his permanent relationship with reality, produces not only material goods, sensible things, and objects but also social institutions, ideologies, art, religions, science, and technology. (pp. 167-168)

Freire therefore uses the relationship between man and nature – what he calls praxis – to explain the type of creation that is unique to human beings, using the word *contacts* to identify the relationship between animals and the

<sup>3</sup> At the time of this text and others cited here, Freire still used the word *man*, later replaced by *human being*. We kept the terminology of the original. In his self-criticism in *Pedagogia da Esperança* (Pedagogy of Hope), he states: “From that date until today (between the late 1970s and early 1971), I always refer to women and men or human beings. . . . Changing the language is part of the process of changing the world. The relationship between language-thought-world is a dialectical, procedural, contradictory relationship. It is clear that the overcoming of the sexist discourse, like the overcoming of any authoritarian discourse, requires or bring us the need, concomitantly with the new, democratic, anti-discriminatory discourse, to engage in practices that are democratic as well” (Freire, 1992, p. 68).

world. Thus, the categories that identify each of these types of links with the world are defined: (1) men-world relations: critical stance, plurality, consequence and transcendence; (2) animal-world contacts: absence of a critical stance, singularity, inconsequence and immanence (Freire, 1970c, p. 1/5).

A beautiful summary of this distinction is presented in the first pages of *Educação como Prática da Liberdade*:

Men relate to their world in a critical way. Their capture of objective data from their reality (such as the ties that bind one piece of data to another, or one fact to another) is naturally critical, and therefore reflexive and non reflexive, as it would be in the sphere of contacts. And in the act of critical perception, men discover their own temporality. . . . Transcending one-dimensionality, they go back to yesterday, recognize today and arrive at tomorrow. . . . Man . . . exists in time. He is inside. He is outside. Inherits. Incorporates Modifies. Because he is not tied to a reduced time, to a permanent today; he crushes it, emerges from it. Bathes in it. He temporalizes himself. However, insofar as he emerges from time, freeing himself from his one-dimensionality, discerning it, his relations with the world are impregnated with a consequent meaning. Man's normal position in the world, since he is not only in it but with it, is not limited to mere passivity. Not being limited to the natural (biological) sphere, as he also participates in the creative dimension, man is able to interfere with reality to change it. Inheriting the acquired experience, creating and recreating, integrating to the conditions of his context, responding to its challenges, aiming at himself, discerning, transcending, man launches himself into a domain that is exclusive to him – that of History and that of Culture. (Freire, 1967/1971b, pp. 39-41)

Thus, in Freire's view, while animals are contact beings that adapt to the world and are *in it*, men are relationship beings that interact with the world in *praxis* and are *with it*. In another text, he completes the previous view, noting:

Men and animals are both unfinished beings, in relation to, or in contact with, an equally 'unfinished' reality. But men are beings conscious of themselves and the world, while animals are beings unconscious of themselves and the world. Consciousness is an exclusively human characteristic, so that men are 'unfinished' in a way fundamentally different than animals. . . . While men, even though conditioned by the categories of time and space, live between determinism and liberty, animals are absolutely determined by their species and their own 'support'. Men are not merely unfinished beings; men recognize themselves as incomplete





beings, while animals are not capable of asking themselves about themselves. (Freire, 1970c, p. 2/1)

The basic consequence of Freire's comparison, and one that he uses most often, is that men are not *objects* but, on the contrary, *Creative Subjects*. They can be treated as objects by oppressive social systems, that is, they can be dehumanized, but this does not change their *ontological vocation*, which is to be a Subject, aware of himself, who interacts with the world and with other men<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>4</sup>The best synthesis of Freire's conception of men and animals in their relationship to nature and the world is in the ten *existential situations*, illustrated by Francisco Brennand, originally discussed in *culture circles*. Check "Apêndice" in Freire (1967/1971b). In Lima (1981/2015b, pp. 114-130), I discuss these existential situations as an anthropological concept of culture.

### Communication as an existential and ontological reality

In his view of man and the world, Freire joins the philosophical tradition that, according to Friedman (1975), recognizes "dialogue, communication, and the I-Thou relationship not as a dimension of the self but as the existential and ontological reality in which the self comes into being and through which it fulfills and authenticates itself (p. xxvii).

Freire was strongly influenced by existentialist philosophy, both through the work of the Instituto Superior de Estudos Brasileiros (Iseb)<sup>5</sup> and for his involvement with progressive Christianity in the 1950s and early 1960s<sup>6</sup>. It is this influence that makes communication a central category in his educational theory<sup>7</sup>, in his epistemology and in the political implications of his thought.

Freire (1969/1971a) argues that "the social and human world would not exist as such if it were not a world capable of communicability" and goes on to state that "the human world is, in this way, a world of communication" (pp. 65-66). He also says that "existing is individual, but it only takes place in relation to other existences. In communication with them" (Freire, 1967/1971b, p. 41). But he goes further by underlining: "Only in communication does human life make sense" (Freire, 1968/1977, p. 73). "Men as beings cannot be out of communication, as they are communication. To obstruct communication is to transform them into almost a 'thing'" (Freire, 1968/1977, p. 149).

More than 25 years later, reflecting on dialogicity, in his *À Sombra desta Mangueira* (Under the Shadow of this Mango-Tree), Freire (1995/2013) reiterates and summarizes:

Dialogicity is a requirement of human nature, on the one hand; on the other, a claim for the democratic option of the educator. Ultimately, there is no communication without dialogicity and communication is at the very center of the vital phenomenon. It is in this sense that communication is, at one time, life, at another, factor of more life. (p. 130)

<sup>5</sup>Iseb (1955-1964), linked to the Ministry of Education and Culture, but with administrative, research and teaching autonomy, had as its main objective the discussion of a public policy for national development. Extinct after the 1964 military coup, it had several of its members exiled from Brazil.

<sup>6</sup>For a detailed discussion of these influences, see Lima (1981/2015b, Chap. 1).

<sup>7</sup>In his early writings, Freire called his method *dialogic* and used the definition of dialogue found in Karl Jaspers (1953).

Considering man as a creative Subject in relation to the world, and being essentially communicative in relation to other men, Freire establishes the immediate philosophical basis of his concept of communication, which necessarily includes two dimensions, the relational and the political one.

### **Communication as a social and political relationship**

In his reflection on *the act of knowing*, Freire (1969/1971a) draws on the work of the Spanish-Mexican philosopher Eduardo Nicol (1907-1990), who builds his argument in the context of the discussion on the nature of scientific knowledge and truth (Nicol, 1965, pp. 42-93). For him, in addition to the three relationships encompassed by knowledge – *gnoseological*, *logical* and *historical* – there is a fourth, also fundamental and indispensable, without which no act of knowledge would be possible: the *dialogic* relationship.

Nicol (1965) interchanges the word *conocimiento* (knowledge) with the word *pensamiento* (thought). In both cases, however, he refers to the fact that knowledge is a dynamic process and the four relationships are dialectically interrelated. It claims, therefore, that, just as there is no isolated human being, there is also no isolated thought.

### ***The relational dimension***

Based on Nicol (1965), Freire (1969/1971a) argues about the nature of knowledge (and communication) as follows:

The thinking Subject cannot think alone. He cannot think about objects without the co-participation of another Subject. There is not an “I think”, but a “we think”. It is the “we think” that establishes the “I think” and not the opposite. This co-participation of the Subjects in the act of thinking takes place in communication. . . . Communication implies a reciprocity that cannot be broken. Therefore, it is not possible to understand thought without referring to its dual function: cognitive and communicative. . . . What characterizes communication as this communicating by communicating is that it is dialogue, just as dialogue is communicative. Education is communication, it is dialogue, inasmuch as it is not transference of knowledge, but an encounter of interlocutors who seek the meanings of meanings. (pp. 66-69)

In another passage, he is even more incisive. He excludes the possibility of communication (and knowledge) when the practice is transmissive. He says that “without the communicative relationship between cognoscent Subjects,



around the cognizable object, the cognoscitive act would disappear” (Freire, 1969/1971a, p. 65). So:

The object . . . as content of communication cannot be communicated from one subject to another. If the object of thought were a pure communication, it would not be a significant meaning mediating the subjects. If subject “A” cannot have the term of his thought in the object, since this is the mediation between him and subject “B”, in communication, he cannot transform subject “B” into a depository incidence of the content of the object he thinks about. If this were so – and when it is – there would not be and there is no communication. (Freire, 1969/1971a, pp. 66-67)

By emphasizing that communication means the co-participation of Subjects in the act of thinking, that the object of knowledge cannot be the exclusive term of thought, but, in fact, it is its mediator, and that knowledge is built through the relationships between beings and the world, Freire is defining communication as the social situation in which people create knowledge *together*, transforming and humanizing the world. Communication is an interaction between Subjects, equal and creative. And this interaction must necessarily be founded on *dialogue*.

Although the concepts of communication and dialogue are used interchangeably, for Freire, “only dialogue actually communicates” (Freire, 1967/1971b, p. 107). He insists on this point, stating:

To be dialogic is not to invade, not to manipulate, not to sloganize. To be dialogic is to commit to the constant transformation of reality. This is why, since dialogue is the content of the way of being unique to human existence, it is excluded from any relationship in which some men are transformed into “beings for the other” by men who are false “beings for themselves”. Because a dialogue cannot take place in an antagonistic relationship. Dialogue is the loving encounter of men who, mediated by the world, “pronounce” it, that is, transform it and, by transforming it, humanize it for the humanization of all. (Freire, 1969/1971a, p. 43)

Freire (1970c) considers it crucial, therefore, that the philosophical principle of dialogue, at the level of the act of knowing, is carried out on the social plane. He insists that “The real act of knowing is always an act of engagement” (p. 1/4) and suggests that communication/dialogue not only presupposes co-participation and reciprocity, but above all, it constitutes a significant process that is shared by Subjects, equal to each other, in a relationship of equality as well. Communication must be lived by human beings

as a human vocation. In other words, communication must be experienced in its political dimension.

### ***The political dimension***

The political dimension of communication appears in a more articulated way in the *Pedagogia do Oprimido* (Freire, 1968/1977), in the context of the discussion on dialogicity and cultural action. Communication is defined as an *encounter between men, mediated by the word, in order to name the world*. Using the biblical myth of Genesis, Freire explains his religious roots and introduces the idea of *saying the true word* or *giving a name to the world* as a specific political dimension of the dialogue.

When analyzing the dialogue as a human phenomenon, the word emerges as the *essence of the dialogue itself*, however, according to Freire (1968/1977), it is something more than an instrument that makes it possible. Seeking its constitutive elements, he finds two dimensions – reflection and action – “in such a profound interaction that if one is sacrificed, even in part, the other immediately suffers” (p. 91). The consequences are, then, *verbalism* – the sacrifice of action, or *activism* – the sacrifice of reflection. Freire then states that “there is no true word that is not at the same time praxis. Thus, to say the true word is to transform the world” (p. 91).

Freire (1968/1977) also uses the notion of *speaking the true word* in relation to the socio-historical process in which thought and language are generated. For him, *thought and language, insofar as they constitute a totality, always refer to the reality of the thinking subject. Authentic thought-language is generated in the dialectical relationship between the subject and his concrete historical and cultural reality*. Thus, in the case of *culturally dependent* or *alienated* societies, thought-language itself is alienated because it is *dissociated from the action implied by authentic thought*. This only generates false words, not true words. Freire (1970a) goes on to argue that the fundamental theme of the “Third World”<sup>8</sup> consists exactly in the “the conquest of its right to a voice, of the right to pronounce its word”, adding that the man who “has a voice” is “one who is the subject of his choices, of one who freely projects his own destiny” (pp. 1-4).

Next, Freire (1970a) is even more explicit about the meaning he attributes to the idea of naming the world and, republicanly, speaks of using the word as a “primary human right”:

Speaking the word is not a true act if it is not at the same time associated with the right of self-expression and world-expression, of creating and re-creating,

<sup>8</sup>The expression Third World emerged during the meeting of Asian and African countries emancipated from European colonization, at the Bandung Conference, held in Indonesia in 1955. Throughout the Cold War, it began to identify countries that were neither aligned with the United States nor with the Soviet Union. Later the expression was replaced by *underdeveloped* or *developing* or *emerging countries*. For Freire (1976), however, “the concept of Third World is ideological and political rather than geographical. . . . The Third World is the world of silence, oppression, dependence, exploitation, violence exerted by the ruling classes on the oppressed classes” (p. 127).



of deciding and choosing and ultimately participating in society's historical process. (p. 12)

For Freire (1968/1977), the political dimension of communication/dialogue – the transformation of the world by naming it, pronouncing it – is inherent to human nature itself. In light of this reality, he argues:

Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men and women transform the world. To exist, humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it. Once *named*, the world in its turn reappears to the *namers* as a problem and requires of them a new *naming*. (p. 92)

In short: by stating that communication means co-participation of the Subjects in the act of thinking; that knowledge is built through the relationships between human beings and the world; that the object of knowledge cannot be the exclusive term of thought, but, in fact, is its mediator; that communication is an interaction between Subjects, equal and creative, necessarily founded on dialogue; that the word constitutes the essence of dialogue and the true word is praxis committed to justice and social transformation; Freire defines communication as the social situation in which people create knowledge *together*, transforming and humanizing the world. That is to say, *true communication will always be liberating communication*.

In the successful synthesis by Ana Maria Araújo Freire (2015):

Starting . . . from the semantic analysis of words, dialoguing with them, [Paulo] understood, contrary to History, that extension implying transmission, transference, invasion and manipulation was not only different, but antagonistic to communication. This is the co-participation of subjects around the object they seek to know, when they seek to humanize themselves. Extension is within the authoritarian standards of the verticality of the command, while communication is characterized by the horizontality of the epistemological loving dialogue. One orders from the top down, nullifying the ability to think and decide who is obligated to simply obey. The other calls for dialogue and understanding of the equity relationship between those involved in the issue, allowing for thinking, deciding and learning. One rips humanity away from the other, thus making it impossible for them to become transforming subjects in the unethically ugly and unjust world. The other gives rise to inventiveness, recreation, humanization. One depoliticizes. The other politicizes. One works for incommunicability,



muteness, oppression and domination. The other reinforces the social relationship of equal opportunities and rights, not forgetting the duties. One oppresses. The other frees. (p. 13)

### FREIRE'S OTHER WRITINGS

After *Extensão ou Comunicação?* (1969/1971a), *Pedagogia do Oprimido* (1968/1977) and other texts from the same period, Freire no longer conceptually dealt with the theme of communication. Still in the *Pedagogia do Oprimido*, when discussing “the conquest” as one of the characteristics of the theory of antidialogic action, Freire (1968/1977) says that the “approach” with the people to keep them alienated. “This approximation, however, does not involve being with the people, or require true communication. It is accomplished by the oppressors depositing myths indispensable to the preservation of the status quo”. He considers that the mass “communications” media are the channels of well-organized propaganda that bring to the popular masses the myths necessary for their conquest, “as if such alienation constituted real communication!” (pp. 163-164).

I register three other emblematic occasions in which Freire makes reference to technologically mediated forms of communication, particularly television, two of them answering questions put to him.

The first is in the second volume of the book in dialogue with Sérgio Guimarães, *Sobre a Educação* (About Education) (Freire, & Guimarães, 1984):

SÉRGIO: . . . We see that, in your various books, you haven't properly discussed [media] issues. Why?

FREIRE: Precisely because I have never felt competent, other than from a global appreciation point of view. If you ask me: “Paulo, what do you think about television?”, I answer: for me, television cannot be understood in itself. It is not a purely technical instrument, its use is political. And I am also able to make some proposals regarding the use of television. But even when I have not been dealing with these so-called means of communication in my previous works, even though I do not speak directly about them, *I consider them, for example, within the general horizon of the theory of knowledge that I have been developing in my work on education* [emphasis added]. I do not deal with them directly, in the sense that they are not the subject of a scientifically valid, technical study. . . . I don't feel like an expert on this topic. I approach it in general terms. (p. 40)



The second passage is from a long interview that Freire gives to Sonia Breccia, on the program *Hoy por Hoy*, on Channel 5, the Uruguayan state TV, in June 1989. I made an edited selection of some representative excerpts from her transcription that appears in *Pedagogia do Compromisso* (Pedagogy of Commitment) (Freire, 2008):

INTERVIEWER: How is TV used in your country and how do you think it could be used? Do you like TV? Does TV have a role (in the process) of change or not?

FREIRE: I try to be a man and an educator of my time. I cannot understand how an educator of this time can deny TV, deny video, deny computing, deny radio. . . . I would love to work on TV, I would probably have to learn a lot because I don't know anything about it. . . . I believe this world of illusion is fascinating, but if there is a world of illusion that is profoundly real, this is it. . . . Through the imagination, you touch the real. There is a huge relationship between the imaginary and the real, the concrete. However, for this work on TV, it is necessary to know that there is no such thing as neutral TV. A means of communication like this cannot but be eminently political and ideological. . . . Probably, if I worked in Montevideo permanently, there wouldn't be four programs like this. Not because of you, but because of the political-ideological forces that are behind the TV, behind the camera.

INTERVIEWER: Do you trust that much in the importance of the medium, in people's intelligence and in their ability to transmit to know that . . . , over private interests. . . , there is an interviewee and a popular intelligence that can surpass (these interests)?

FREIRE: I believe there is, I bet on it, as an educator and as a politician. . . . And my dream is that one day TV will treat people with decency. You know that I'm deeply annoyed by the people who do it in a "scientific" neutral way, who work in the organization of the news. Sometimes it seems like they don't know what they're doing. They gather a lot of news from around the world and "pulverize" it. . . . This is the ideological and political wisdom of the ruling class and this happens all over the world, not just in Brazil.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think TV is all-powerful, in such a way that it makes men less free and "sells" us the candidate or formula they want?

FREIRE: No, it's not like that. I believe it is an undeniable power, indisputable, but not as potent as once thought. . . . TV is an extraordinary means of communication, but it is necessary that we teach, that we learn to see it critically. . . . The key is to fight for this environment to be more ethical, to be more at the service of the exploited, the dominated and for that we have to change society itself, and by changing society the ethical and political issue that is proposed is not to perpetuate in this means of communication the taste for preservation, for the status quo. In other words, in a different society, putting this medium at the service of making it different: more alive and more creative. (pp. 127-139)

And the third appears in one of Freire's last writings, *Pedagogia da Autonomia* (Pedagogy of Autonomy) (1997), when he deals with the need to "unhide hidden truths" in the media:

Thinking about television or the media in general poses the problem of [mass] communication, a process impossible to be neutral. In fact, all [mass] communication is communication of something, done in a certain way in favor or in defense, subtle or explicit, of some ideal against something and someone, not always clearly referred to. Hence the keen role played by ideology in [mass] communication, hiding truths, but also the very ideologization of the communicative process. It would be holy naivety to expect that a television station belonging to the ruling power group, in reporting a metalworkers' strike, would say that its comment is based on employer interests. On the contrary, its discourse strives to convince that its analysis of the strike takes into account the interests of the nation. We cannot put ourselves in front of a television set "surrendered" or "available" to whatever may come. . . . A critical and alert posture at the necessary moments cannot be lacking. . . . To face the ideological ruse that involves the message [of the ruling power] in the media . . . our mind or our curiosity would have to function epistemologically all the time. And that's not easy. (pp. 157-158)

In summary: what is observed in the above quotes is that Freire recognizes the immense power of the mass media for the creation of the collective imagination; its power to spread the myths that keep the masses alienated; the impossibility of their being neutral; the immense political and ideological power, particularly of television. On the other hand, he does not lose faith in the capacity of educated women and men to deal critically with the means. Most importantly, Freire refers the reader to his previous reflections on the theory of knowledge and to the need to think *epistemologically*, that is, to consider



the dialogic matrix as a normative reference for the communication process, be it technologically mediated or not.

### WHAT DO BRAZILIAN SCHOLARS THINK?

In the essay “Research in Communication in Latin America”, when identifying what she calls “founding fathers”, Christa Berger (2001) mentions a survey carried out among 50 researchers in the region, in 1992. The study identifies Paulo Freire as one of the top five theoretical influences of this field of study. Freire is remembered for his essay *Extensão ou Comunicação?* (1969/1971a), in which “the main criticism of the mass media is contained: of being mere transmission instruments, of treating recipients as passive receivers and of making dialogic relationships impossible” (Berger, 2001, p. 256). Likewise, widely recognized authors with vast production in the field, such as the Belgian Armand Mattelart – with historical experience in Chile in the 1960s and 1970s – and the Spanish/Colombian Jesús Martín-Barbero, recognize Freire’s contribution in the construction of their theoretical perspectives.

Denise Cogo (1999), on the other hand, describes the active presence of Freire’s ideas in three areas: the studies and practice of rural communication; alternative and/or popular communication and cultural studies, in the research aspects on the active receiver and critical reading of the media.

Regarding alternative and/or popular and community communication, it is worth mentioning the recent research by Círculo Peruzzo (2017) who, after following the practice of different community organizations and popular movements in three Brazilian states – Paraíba, Paraná and São Paulo –, states:

Paulo Freire . . . contributed a lot in the formulation of concepts and practices of popular, alternative and community – or horizontal, participatory – communication in Latin America. Many Latin American authors who deal with this communication, as well as communication for development and social change and the relationship between Education and Communication, are based on Paulo Freire’s conceptions or, at least, started from his ideas. Social practices, in turn, echo in different regions and experiences, the principles of dialogue, popular protagonism, horizontal participation, criticality and emancipatory education, especially when it comes to non-formal and informal education. . . . The concepts of popular and community communication and their derived denominations bring at their core some of the principles of Paulo Freire’s liberating education, which can be seen in scholars of this communicational field, such as Mário Kaplún, Luis Ramiro Beltrán, Daniel Prieto Castillo, Juan Diaz Bordenave,

Alfonso Gumucio Dagron, Rosa Maria Alfaro, Regina Festa, the author herself and many others. It is also common for leaders and militants to carry out these propositions, putting these principles into practice. (pp. 8-9)

On the other hand, considering that Freire was the precursor of the more or less explicit critical dialogue with the nascent North American and English traditions of cultural studies, personified at the time in James W. Carey (1934-2006) and Raymond Williams (1921-1988)<sup>9</sup>; Cogo's (1999) considerations about its founding importance for this tradition in Latin America deserve to be noted. She states:

<sup>9</sup>For a discussion of these issues, check Lima (1981/2015b), especially chapter IV.

Paulo Freire's work helps to consolidate the bases for understanding the interrelationships between communication, education and culture, whose consequences are later reflected in the development of a field called cultural studies and communication. Heir of English cultural studies, this trend finds its specificity in the Latin American context from the late 1980s onwards through researchers such as the Colombian Jesús Martín-Barbero and the Mexicans [*sic*] Nestor García Canclini and Guillermo Orozco Gómez, whose reflections point to the construction of a common trajectory: the comprehension of communication within the framework of the process of cultures in which the comprehension of the communicative phenomenon is not limited to concepts and criteria such as channels, means, codes, messages, information. The understanding of communication is reoriented towards a revaluation of the cultural universe and the daily lives of subjects as mediators of the meanings produced in the field of reception of messages disseminated by the mass media. (p. 31)

Another author who highlights the potential of Freire's work for communication studies is Eduardo Meditsch (2008). In a thought-provoking article published in 2008, he draws attention to Freire's commitment to practice:

Paulo Freire's thought was not limited by this or that theoretical school on which he eventually relied: his first commitment was to real life, to the human reality he sought to understand in order to transform or, in a word, to practice. (Meditsch, 2008, p. 3)

Both Cogo (1999) and Meditsch (2008), however, recall not only the reductionist readings and the imprisonment "in the game of concepts practiced in the academic environment", but also "the weak appropriation" of Freire's work in the studies of Communication. Meditsch (2008), in a caustic diagnosis of the



field of study in our country, states that it was exactly the fundamental primacy of *practice* that caused Freire's distancing:

The "practical" ones never realized the potential of Freire's theory to improve their practices, and the vast majority didn't even know about his ideas, except through book flaps. In turn, the "theoretical" ones who read beyond book flaps never felt committed to applying Freire's ideas in media practices, not only because they solemnly ignored these practices, but also because they felt a deep contempt for them. For them, the practice that Marx and Freire spoke about was just another concept to enrich their theoretical baggage, or it was so idealized a practice that it refused to admit as legitimate the reality with which "the practical" ones related. In this way, Freire's ideas, when taken into account in our area, were confined to the "ballet of concepts" of communicology and "domesticated" by the academic logic that their author has always condemned. Its application in the development of communication practices was aborted in our field. (p. 8)

Over and above Meditsch's (2008) observations, there are also authors who consider Freire's thought a disservice to the field of communication studies, especially to the theoretical search for a specific object of study of communication itself<sup>10</sup>. One of these authors discards the eventual contribution of the "pedagogue" Freire and criticizes, from an allegedly "scientific" position, his inclusion among the four "founding fathers" of a "Latin American school of communication", whose existence he does not recognize. He states:

Theory was, and to a great extent remains, the great weakness of Latin American production – hence the paradox of classifying it as a school. A proof of this is that authors from other disciplines are often appointed as the founding fathers or as the great theorists in our field. Paulo Freire, for example, widely recognized as a pedagogue, ends up becoming one of the four main Latin American communication theorists, although the real contribution of this author is quite debatable: his humanist and philosophical vision of communication is better expressed in a theology who takes divine love as the foundation and ultimate criterion for communication. Of course, this can only happen with the entry into the scene of a communication concept with a stratospheric scope and hardly conducive to scientific discussion. (Martino, 2007, pp. 107-108).

The aforementioned observations by Berger (2001), Cogo (1999), Peruzzo (2017) and Meditsch (2008), in addition to others by important authors cited by them, answer affirmatively to the question whether Freire, after all, would have any contribution to offer to the field of communication today.

<sup>10</sup>Contrary to the defense of an innocent *epistemological purity* for the field of communication studies, Stuart Hall (1989) argued, in his "Ideology and Communication Theory", about the inevitability of the theoretical articulation of communication happening in the regional field "of the social structures and practices" (cf. Lima, 2015a, pp. 103-133).



We have not examined all the authors who refer to Freire here, but those who argue otherwise are rare.

## FREIRE'S CONTRIBUTIONS

Complementarily, it is also possible to suggest at least four specific areas of communication studies for which Freire would certainly have something relevant to say.

### **Communication as dialogue**

Freire is the main contemporary representative of the theoretical tradition of *communication as dialogue*. This is what is argued by Clifford Christians (1988, 1991), one of the most important researchers of this tradition in the United States. Freire adds to this tradition the political dimension, absent from the reflections of its main exponents (cf. Lima & Christians, 1979a<sup>11</sup>).

Back in 2001, I wrote:

if until recently this model seemed inadequate for any type of application in the context of the so-called “mass communication”, unidirectional and centralized, today the new media reopens the possibilities of a dialogic process mediated by technology. . . . The normative model constructed by Freire becomes current and becomes an ideal for the full realization of human communication on all its levels. (Lima, 2001/2012, p. 53)

The tradition of communication as dialogue gains renewed importance given the possibility of permanent and online interaction in the very act of communication. Freire ethically and normatively theorized about interactive communication before the digital revolution, that is, before the internet and its social networks. As Freire himself did, we must refer to his reflections on the theory of knowledge, the basic reference for the concept of communication as dialogue. There we will find a revitalized, creative and challenging ethical and normative reference of immense value for thinking about new communication technologies and the public policies necessary and adequate to their complex democratic regulation.

### **Communication and freedom (liberation)**

The implicit conception of freedom in the dialogic definition of communication developed by Freire is constitutive of an active citizenship that

<sup>11</sup>Portuguese language version published in Lima and Christians (1979b).



equates self-government with political participation, contrary to the negative freedom of classical liberalism. Freedom does not precede politics but builds on it. Education (communication) must be a practice of freedom. Having a voice and expressing it publicly, on equal terms with any other citizen, is a necessary condition for the democratic process. The subject-citizen constitutes the main axis of democratic public life.

In a seminar on literacy and citizenship, held in Maceió, Sergipe, in November 1990, Freire (2001) stated:

Being a citizen involves popular participation, through the voice. By voice I do not mean opening one's mouth and speaking, reciting. The voice is a right to ask, criticize, suggest. That's what having a voice is. Having a voice is being a critical presence in history. Having a voice is being present, not being a presence. (pp. 130-131)

This *republican* aspect of Freire's thought did not go unnoticed by the renowned press historian, Michael Schudson. In his famous *Descobrimos a Notícia: Uma História Social dos Jornais nos Estados Unidos* (Discovering the News: A Social History of Newspapers in the United States), when discussing current explanations about the *revolution* that took place in American journalism from the 1830s onwards, Schudson (2010) resorts to Freire to contest "the literacy argument" (pp. 48-52)<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>12</sup>I thank Professor Murilo C. Ramos (FAC-UnB) for drawing my attention to Schudson's quotation of Freire.

Despite admitting, of course, that without literacy, large-circulation newspapers would be unfeasible, he questions whether increasing literacy would itself be a stimulus for newspaper circulation and says that there are good reasons to doubt this. Schudson (2010) quotes Freire's passage about the "the right of self-expression and world-expression" (Freire, 1970a, p. 12) and continues to argue that

what would explain an increase in literacy in a literate society would be an extension of political and economic rights or, more broadly, an extension, to a greater number of individuals, of the awareness that they are actors in history. (Schudson, 2010, p. 50)

Then, he adds the importance of "the whole range of social changes, many of them political, that enable people to emerge from what Freire calls the 'culture of silence'" (Schudson, 2010, p. 52) and then conclude that "literacy is a necessary but insufficient condition for the growth of newspaper circulation" (Schudson, 2010, p. 52).

**Communication and human rights**

Freire's ideas constitute the theoretical basis for the affirmation of *communication as a fundamental human right*.

The right to communication permeates the three dimensions of liberal citizenship defined by T. H. Marshall, in his classic *Cidadania, Classe Social e Status* (Citizenship and Social Class) (1949/1967), each one founded on a distinct principle and institutional basis. In fact, contrary to liberal logic, the right to communication is, at the same time, a *civil* right – individual freedom of expression; in *political* law – through the right to information; and in *social* law – through the right to a public policy that guarantees citizen access to different forms of technologically mediated communication.

The need for the development and affirmation of a right to communication was identified more than 50 years ago by the Frenchman Jean D'Arcy, when he was director of audiovisual and radio services at the United Nations Department of Public Information in 1969. At that time, he stated:

The time will come when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights will have to embrace a broader right than the human right to information, first established 21 years ago in Article 19. It is *man's right to communicate* (as cited in Fisher, 1984, p. 26).

Eleven years later, the famous MacBride Report, published by Unesco (1980/1983), pioneered recognition of the right to communication. The Report says:

Communication, nowadays, is a matter of human rights. But it is increasingly interpreted as the *right to communicate*, going beyond the *right to receive communication or to be given information*. Communication is thus seen as a two-way process, in which the partners – individual and collective – carry on a democratic and balanced dialogue. The idea of dialogue, in contrast to monologue, is at the heart of much contemporary thinking, which is leading towards a process of developing a new area of social rights. The right to communicate (45) is an extension of the continuing advance towards liberty and democracy. (pp. 287-291)

Both D'Arcy's proposal and the MacBride Report, in fact, assumed and enshrined the dialogic perspective of communication that had already been developed by Freire, from a conceptual point of view, in *Extensão ou Comunicação?* (1969/1971a). Communication as a characteristic of human nature, the co-participation of equal subjects who interact dialogically around the object they want to know and, at the same time, transform the world in the context of liberating cultural action.



Since the late 1960s, as mentioned above, Freire claimed that speaking the word, having a voice, expressing oneself constituted a “primary human right”. It is worth repeating:

*Speaking the word* really means: a human act implying reflection and action. As such it is a *primordial human right* [emphasis added] and not the privilege of a few. Speaking the word is not a true act if it is not at the same time associated with the right of self-expression and world-expression, of creating and re-creating, of deciding and choosing and ultimately participating in society’s historical process. (Freire, 1970a, p. 12)

Communication is necessarily dialogic, *two-way*, sheltering, at the same time, the rights to inform and be informed and the right to access the technological means necessary for full freedom of expression<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>13</sup>The Freirean perspective is described and elaborated by Pedrinho Guareschi (2013).

### **Communication and culture of silence<sup>14</sup>**

There is an enormous analytical potential in concepts elaborated by Freire that have not yet been fully explored. An eloquent example is the concept of the culture of silence – the culture that hosts those who have no voice – and its corollary, the *policies of silencing*.

The relationship between communication and culture takes place in Freire in a very simple way: there is no possibility of communication in the *culture of silence*. The silence of oppression predominates in it. Cultural action, that is, the conscious process of struggle for human liberation, assumed by women and men who are subjects of their own History, is the space for dialogic communication, generator of new knowledge and social transformation.

<sup>14</sup>To any interested parties, I would like to suggest the reading of Lima (2021b).

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Starting from the concrete challenge that emerges from his practice with peasants in the process of agrarian reform in Chile, in the 1960s, Freire makes a rigorous critique of rural extension, which was based on the theory of diffusion of innovations. He then develops the theoretical and practical alternative of humanizing and liberating dialogic communication. It is located on the opposite pole of communication as transmission and is based on the belief of the human being as a creative and transforming subject in the world, and on a gnoseological theory in which, without dialogue (communication) between equals, knowledge is not produced. Communication becomes, by definition, necessarily political and liberating.

Although there are occasional criticisms of his thinking, Freire has influenced and continues to influence important communication researchers in Brazil and abroad, including formulators, in multilateral organizations, of the perspective of communication as a fundamental human right.

The proposal of a Freireian liberating communication, extending an entire thought and praxis focused on the practice of freedom, continues to offer a creative and challenging perspective for the field of communication studies, especially as a normative and ethical reference in the historical circumstances of this third decade of the 21st century, dominated by virtual interactivity, made possible by the digital revolution and the internet. ■

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# Las Voces que Somos, an Indigenous Dialogic Media Utterance for Liberation

## *Las Voces que Somos, um Enunciado da Mídia Dialógica Indígena para a Libertação*

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### ABSTRACT

In this article I review Paulo Freire's theories of anti-dialogic action and of dialogic cultural action, as well as Bakhtin's notion of dialogue and utterances. Drawing from these, I focus on a communication project of Indigenous media and communication practitioners from the state of Oaxaca, Mexico, and on one of its media products which I consider a media utterance. I argue that the core themes of the communication project and a radio series that addresses them reflect the dialogue between Indigenous communication practitioners and the ongoing reality they face that menaces their territories and ways of life. Dialogue is a key component of a communicative process that shapes our understanding of the world-system and makes differences and inequalities evident.

**Keywords:** Paulo Freire, Mikhail Bakhtin, dialogue, media utterances, Indigenous communication

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### RESUMO

Neste artigo, reviso as teorias de Paulo Freire da ação antidialógica e da ação cultural dialógica, bem como a noção de diálogo e enunciados de Bakhtin. Com base nisso, enfoco um projeto de comunicação de mídia indígena e comunicadores do estado de Oaxaca, México, e em um de seus produtos midiáticos que considero um enunciado de mídia. Defendo que os temas centrais do projeto de comunicação e uma série de rádio que os abordam, refletem o diálogo entre os comunicadores indígenas e a realidade atual que enfrentam que ameaça seus territórios e modos de vida. O diálogo é um componente fundamental de um processo comunicativo que molda nossa compreensão do sistema-mundo e torna as diferenças e desigualdades evidentes.

**Palavras-chave:** Paulo Freire, Mikhail Bakhtin, diálogo, enunciações da mídia, comunicação indígena



## **VIOLENCE AGAINST INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN MEXICO**

**I**NDIGENOUS PEOPLES HAVE constantly lived in situations of violence in Mexico. From the racism instilled in everyday forms of life (Castellanos & Guerrero et al., 2007), often disguised as cordial racism (Gómez Izquierdo & Sánchez, 2012), to the violence exercised by the authorities through public policies and assimilationist programmes that seek to annihilate Indigenous cultures under the pretext of development (Castells i Talens, 2011; Korsbaek & Sámano-Rentería, 2007). Indigenous women and men in Mexico live immersed in structural violence (Galtung, 1996) expressed by social exclusion, exploitation, as well as the denial of their culture and identity.

Through the exercise of violence and fear, various megaprojects of extractive nature have advanced in Indigenous territories. Extractive companies exercise violence both through the nature of their ventures and through the mechanisms they use to guarantee access to territories, which involve repression, coercion, and even criminal violence (Durán Matute & Moreno, 2021). Indigenous communities have resisted various attempts to include them in the dominant models of social, political, and economic organization. Although they have many differences that make them unique, they share a number of elements that allow them to identify with each other. One of these is the constant aggression and plundering of their lands and territories. The process of capitalist totalization (Tischler, 2013) has used cultural, territorial, linguistic, and other forms of colonization to expand and guarantee its survival. We are currently experiencing an escalation in the aggression against these peoples due to the proliferation of extractive projects and dispossession (Harvey, 2005) derived from neoliberal policies that have resulted in the excessive and uncritical increase of concessions to transnational companies for mining, wind energy, hydroelectric, large-scale agriculture, tourism development, etc.

This expansion attacks the Indigenous communities' ways of life, which have generated diverse mechanisms of resistance that obey the sociohistorical, political, and economic contexts of the moment. "The way in which indigenous people represent nature, their relationship with it and its conservation, is a key element in their struggle for self-determination" (Magallanes-Blanco, 2016, p. 135). The plundering of territory is also plundering of cultures, of ways of life, of languages, and of cosmogonies, in such a way that the Indigenous Peoples' struggle for the defence of land and territory is a struggle for life.

### **The Oaxacan Context**

The state of Oaxaca is located in southeast Mexico. It is divided into eight regions with 570 municipalities in 30 districts. In 2020, Oaxaca's territory was

inhabited by 4,132,148 people (Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía e Informática, 2020). Oaxaca has historically been one of the poorest states in the country. Overall, by 2018, 66.4% of the population lived in poverty, and 13.2% of the population aged 15 and over, according to the Inter-Census Survey 2015, was illiterate. Oaxaca is the entity with the greatest ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and natural diversity in Mexico, which is expressed in the presence of the Indigenous peoples Amuzgo, Cuicateco, Chatino, Chinanteco, Chocholteco, Chontal, Huave, Ixcateco, Mazateco, Mixe, Mixteco, Náhuatl, Triqui, Zapoteco, and Zoque, recognized since 1990 in article 16 of the local Constitution (Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía e Informática, 2020).

By 2020, 43% of the total population of the state was Indigenous, i.e., 1,780,303 (929,478 women); and 194,474 were considered Afro-descendant. In total, 31.2% of the population in Oaxaca speaks an Indigenous language, 89% also speak Spanish, and 11% do not speak Spanish (Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía e Informática, 2020).

According to Servicios para una Educación Alternativa A.C., “in Oaxaca there are areas or regions dominated by families who believe are the owners of people’s lives, where impunity and exceptions to the law prevail” (EDUCA, 2021, p. 2). In the territory of Oaxaca, the Interoceanic Corridor megaproject is planned as part of the National Development Plan 2019-2024:

The Interoceanic Corridor would cover 79 municipalities in the states of Oaxaca and Veracruz, or 98 including Tabasco and Chiapas. It includes the rehabilitation of the railway to transport goods and connect the two oceans [Atlantic and Pacific], but also the construction of highways to guarantee communication, ten industrial parks; an oil pipeline to connect with the Dos Bocas refinery and a gas pipeline to supply the region with natural gas coming from the United States. It also includes the expansion of the ports of Coatzacoalcos and Salina Cruz, and the construction of an oil-commercial port also in Salina Cruz. This corridor could also involve new energy and mining projects. (Durán Matute & Moreno, 2021, p. 28)

Although the government’s discourse on the project focuses on economic activation, in reality it would devastate the region, an area rich in natural assets that will become the property of large companies. Durán Matute and Moreno (2021) explain it as follows:

If carried out, they would alter the physical geography, cause changes in ocean currents, increase population density, affect the fisheries on which people live, further menace their lands, rivers and seas, generate social conflicts, cause water



shortages and land dispossession, make life even more precarious, and increase violence, insecurity and drug trafficking. Thus, the arrival of megaprojects in Mexico conceals a war of extermination disguised as “development”, “employment” and “welfare”. No consideration is given to the effects they will have on the Indigenous Peoples, the region and the planet. (p. 29)

In the Isthmus region where the Interoceanic Corridor is planned, three Indigenous community radio stations are part of the project Transformative Communication for the Care of Life and Territory from Mexico to Central America implemented by Ojo de Agua Comunicación.

### **TRANSFORMATIVE COMMUNICATION FOR THE CARE OF LIFE AND TERRITORY**

Ojo de Agua Comunicación (Comunicación Indígena S.C.) is a non-profit organization of communicators born in Oaxaca, Mexico in 1998, dedicated to promoting Indigenous and community communication, producing cultural and educational radio, and video programmes, as well as collaborating with other collectives and organizations in Indigenous and community communication processes and media in Mexico and other regions of Latin America (Magallanes-Blanco & Monteforte, 2019).

The objectives of Ojo de Agua Comunicación are: 1) strengthening capacities that enable the appropriation of tools and the creation of communication spaces, mainly for Indigenous peoples; 2) contributing to the understanding and respect of cultural diversity, streamlining information, communication and expression within Indigenous communities and towards the rest of society; 3) facilitating meetings, exchange, and feedback between Indigenous communicators in Oaxaca, as well as with other regions and countries; and 4) supporting other civil society organizations in strengthening their own communication strategies (Magallanes-Blanco & Monteforte, 2019).

Ojo de Agua’s work is strongly rooted in the needs and challenges of community and Indigenous communication in Mexico today; in understanding, living, and exercising communication as a right, and using it as a tool for community, social, and political advocacy. “Given the climate of generalised violence and territorial depredation, and the scarcity of existing counter-hegemonic media and communication tools with a gender focus” (Ojo de Agua Comunicación, 2020, p. 1), Ojo de Agua Comunicación decided to carry out the project Transformative Communication for the Care of Life and Territory from Mexico to Central America.

With funding from Kultura Comunicación y Desarrollo (KCD), Ojo de Agua implemented the project between 2018 and 2020 with three main lines of action: 1) strengthening the capacities of Indigenous communicators from nine community radio stations in four regions of the state of Oaxaca by means of training through diploma courses, workshops, and meetings; 2) community organisation for the care of life and territory through community radios, with the affirmation of cultural identity and the contribution of the new generations. This was done through the production and broadcasting of radio content anchored in cultural identity and related to the care of life and territory with a gender perspective, and also through community events to make social issues visible and foster community links; 3) the articulation of a community media in Mexico and Central America for political advocacy, the visibility of rights violations, and sustainable alternatives. This was done through meetings, seminars, festivals, and exhibitions that allowed the sharing of products, experiences, knowledges, and forms of struggle and resistance.

The project had three thematic axes: gender perspective, care for life and territory, and a culture of peace.

### **Gender perspective**

In 2015, Ojo de Agua Comunicación decided to mainstream a gender perspective in the organisation and in the project it was implementing with various community radio stations in various regions of the state of Oaxaca. By 2017, they incorporated gender as a transversal axis both within the organisation and in the work developed with the community radio stations. “For those who are part of the collective, working from a gender perspective implies assuming a political stance, an ethical commitment to not allow injustices and violations of women’s rights, and to contribute to closing the gender inequality gap” (Zurita Cruz, n.d., p. 4).

Ojo de Agua seeks to provide information for the prevention not only of aggression but also of alcoholism, as well as physical and gender violence. To this end, they are certain of the benefits of using radio formats to inform, raise awareness, and potentially prevent gender-based violence. They say “our work is to talk about gender in an intelligent form that provides a way out. We want to talk about gender in order to change violence” (Magallanes-Blanco & Di Lauro Bentivogli, 2021, p. 11). They believe that this approach to gender allows for a broad view that includes the perspectives of women and men, as well as adolescents and children, in order to build dialogues in and from



the community, and give rise to contents focused on prevention. They are also aware that it is necessary to make alliances at the community level or with authorities so that if a woman wants to make a complaint based on a radio soap opera or socio-drama, she knows who to turn to.

### **Care for life and territory**

Ojo de Agua's commitment in relation to the care of life and territory is to inform in an assertive way, including in its messages elements that people can relate to and that are useful to them. The defence of territory is closely related to health, education, and food. The defence is against megaprojects, so it is important to make clear what they are, what model of life they respond to, who benefits from the development model they propose, and how it harms communities and peoples. The threats posed by megaprojects are common to all territories, so it is necessary for them to unite as communities and emphasise values such as reciprocity and collective celebrations (or *Guelaguetza*) in the radio productions so that the people recognise themselves in the stories, and ideally, awaken or maintain the desire to sow the land.

They believe that it is necessary for the communities to discuss the conditions in which they live and the decisions regarding the cultivation of the land. Ojo de Agua feels that it can contribute by providing information and encouraging reflections because, although there is a defence by the population of the territories and ways of life, there are also abuses of resources and power, and large extractive projects installed or being installed in community environments such as mining, hydroelectric, monoculture, tourism, and development projects.

Ojo de Agua developed a communicative and formative agenda that seeks to inform in a clear and accessible way who benefits from megaprojects. This agenda has the role of counter-information in a society permeated by a dominant Western system that is rooted in what they call "the braid of power". This is made up of capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy, three connected forms of domination that demonstrate that the exploitation of land, racism, and poverty go hand in hand. Ojo de Agua's role is to expose this web of power and respond to it through its communicative work. They know that it is necessary to think of a multi-component strategy that encompasses emergencies, urgent and felt needs in the day-to-day life of the communities, as well as long-term elements that place the human above economic interests, and the relationship between living beings in conditions of equity, contemplating intergenerational dialogues that allow for long-term thinking from specific contexts that give rise to enjoyment and pleasure.

**Building a culture of peace**

This thematic axis is the most recent in Ojo de Agua's work agenda. The construction of a culture of peace, or the theme of the culture of peace, emerged from the lived experiences in the territories where the radio stations are located. In these communities, people constantly commented on the situation they lived (and continue to live) in relation to drug trafficking, abuse by authorities, the theft of young women, and lynching. Ojo de Agua had to take into account this context of multiple violence as an important part of its work with the radio stations and advocacy in the communities.

Ojo de Agua recognises that sometimes the threats and problems are not external, but internal to the communities, the radio stations, or the collectives. Hence, it has approached the issue of conflict resolution so radio broadcasters can work without being so exposed or vulnerable, and learn how to handle complex issues in a harmonious way. They recognise that conflict is a constant element of everyday life, that it is not fixed, and that thinking in static terms is not the best way forward. In addition, they agree that it is not possible to talk about peace at a time when the context is full of conflict and violence. However, they consider that community radio stations anchor their work in community values, which is why they build a culture of peace, and that is why Ojo de Agua can provide them with tools for this construction, and for community defence, strengthening the communal fabric.

The three thematic axes of the communication project are anchored in issues that reflect the coloniality of power (Quijano, 1998) which Indigenous peoples face in their everyday lives. Gender-based violence, violence against the territories and traditional ways of life, and violence perpetrated by organized crime and individuals with opposite interests are deeply rooted in the modern, colonial, capitalist, and patriarchal world system (Sousa Santos, 2018). They are updated forms of conquest and continue to promote division amongst Indigenous individuals and peoples. The defence of life and territory is a defence of culture and cosmovisions, of ways of knowing and of beliefs which have been erased, undermined, or misrepresented by mainstream media and diverse institutions (educational, political, and religious). The oppressors have many strategies and discourses to manipulate Indigenous peoples and to divide them and make them believe that their ways of life are inferior or the reasons why development cannot be reached by the larger national society. Cultural Invasion is pervasive in all areas of life and is deeply connected with the core themes of the project developed by Ojo de Agua Comunicación: gender, defence of life and territory, and peace-building.





By the same token, the diverse activities and media productions connected to the communication project promote the collaboration of indigenous individuals and communities in making their realities visible by discussing, problematizing, and enunciating them. The collaborative nature of the projects brings people together in their recognition of the world-system and how it operates to transform it. This transformation is sought through diverse organized activities such as music festivals, gastronomic fairs, and radio productions, which are all cultural actions. Hence, they illustrate the relation between the elements of Freire's theory of anti-dialogic action and dialogic cultural action. They seek a transformation inside the communities that can expand beyond their boundaries to confront the dominant world-system.

### PAULO FREIRE ON DIALOGUE

Our human existence is deeply related to our use of words. Words give meaning to the world we inhabit and connect us with it. For Freire (2008), "there is no true word that is not an unbreakable union between action and reflection and, therefore, that is not praxis. Hence, to speak the true word is to transform the world" (p. 105).

To transform the world, we must pronounce it, that is to say, we must be able to describe, problematize, reshape, and imagine it according to our needs, desires, and realities. The pronunciation of the world is not the privilege of a few, although there is a small group of people who, throughout history, have defined what the world looks like, how it is organised, and who should have access to what (resources, rights, benefits, and privileges) (Sousa Santos, 2018).

We live in a modern, capitalist, colonial, patriarchal world-system (Quijano, 1998; Sousa Santos, 2018; Walsh, 2013) in which Indigenous peoples, amongst other groups, have been dehumanized and segregated because of their allegedly inferior condition. This inferiority was forced upon them by the colonizers. Based on the notion of *race*, the colonizers imposed a system of dominance and repression, setting the basis for what Quijano (1998) named the coloniality of power.

Coloniality of power is the ongoing pattern of domination based on the notion of race, supported by institutions and mechanisms of dominance to preserve social classification. Thus, those who were classified as inferior are dispossessed of their identities, practices, cultures, beliefs, and ways to relate with the world and to name it. There is a coloniality of being (Maldonado Torres, 2007) as the individuals interiorize the marginalized category in which they have been placed. This way, the lives of individuals are devalued along with their culture and knowledges.

Those who are colonized are impeded to objectify images, symbols, and subjective visual and plastic experiences (Quijano, 1998). They must surrender their pronunciation of the world to that of the colonizers (Freire, 2008). They are incapable of representing the world as their own, in their own terms, considering it being susceptible of being changed by their own means and according to their goals (Nakata, 2014; Smith, 2012; Sousa Santos, 2018). Therefore, self-representation is a fundamental part of the political and cultural agenda in the struggles of Indigenous Peoples.

For Linda T. Smith (2012), the issue of representation is part of the agenda of research and production of Indigenous knowledge. The main vehicle for Indigenous Peoples' self-representation is communication, materialised in various processes, media, and messages which include Indigenous peoples' true thinking. For Freire (2008), true thinking is "a thinking that perceives reality as a process, that grasps it in constant becoming and not as something static" (p. 112). Critical thinking is a key element of communication. For Freire, "obstructing communication is tantamount to transforming people into objects" (p. 166), which is the task of the oppressors. When communication is not possible people are alienated and reduced to mere things. Dialogue, then, is a praxis that connects people amongst each other, and in and with the world. It humanises individuals and makes an authentic revolution possible to transform reality. Such transformation can only be made by those whose lives have been oppressed and are seeking emancipation.

Freire developed a theory of anti-dialogic action to explain the mechanisms of oppression. He also developed a theory of dialogic cultural action to describe the mechanisms that make emancipation possible.

### **Theory of anti-dialogic action**

Freire's theory of anti-dialogical action is based on four characteristics: conquest, division, manipulation, and cultural invasion. They are interrelated and work to continue the anti-dialogic relation of individuals and groups with each other and with the world.

Conquest is the way to keep individuals alienated. In conquest, authentic communication cannot occur. Instead, there are communiqués that produce and circulate myths that are "indispensable for the maintenance of the status quo. The myth, for example, that the oppressive order is an order of freedom. That everyone is free to work wherever they want" (Freire, 2008, p. 182). In Mexico, these myths have prevailed throughout time in presenting Indigenous peoples as backward, inferior, and barbaric. They are criminalised for defending



their territories, and caricaturised and reduced as folkloric elements for touristic purposes. By the same token, the myth of development as a keystone for the growth and wealth of a nation (rather than only of a few) is the basis of the process of capitalist totalization. Violent conquest still occurs to this day in many Indigenous territories. It is materialized in the Mexican state, extractive corporations, and the mainstream media and continues to further extend the divide between those who count and those who don't.

Another dimension of the oppressive action contained in the theory of anti-dialogic action is to divide and subdue the popular masses through division. Those in power have the need to keep the oppressed divided for the continuity of their power. The oppressors "cannot afford to accept the unification of the popular masses, which would undoubtedly pose a serious threat to their hegemony" (Freire, 2008, p. 184). Therefore, it is imperative that the oppressed do not perceive the rules of the world-system. There are several methods and procedures to create and deepen divisions, from state bureaucracy to forms of cultural action, to manipulate people. The Interoceanic Corridor project has been sold as the means to activate the economy in the region. The project has divided many people in the Isthmus area as some see it as a source of jobs and means to get a basic health and education infrastructure for the communities. On the other hand, there are those who oppose the project as they see it as a menace to the territories, the environment, and Indigenous cultures. Social and mainstream media have played an important role in creating a unified official discourse about the project which contributes to the manipulation of information.

Manipulation is another element of the anti-dialogic action. It is done through a series of myths and discourses. For Freire (2008), one myth was of particular importance: "the model that the bourgeoisie makes of itself and presents to the popular masses as it is possible to ascent, establishing the conviction of a supposed social mobility. Mobility is only possible to the extent that the masses accept the precepts imposed by the bourgeoisie" (p. 192). Manipulation serves to impede the oppressed recognizing the organization of the world-system. It distracts them by creating illusions of social mobility or of development. According to Freire, "if the masses associate with their emergence, or their presence in the historical process, a critical thinking about it or about their reality, their threat becomes concrete in revolution" (p. 194).

The oppressed need to unveil this manipulation to comprehend the logic of social classification and the functioning of the world-system. They need to be able to pronounce the world as they live, experience, see, and imagine it. Manipulation prevents them from looking at it with their own eyes. This is

what the communication project implemented by Ojo de Agua Comunicación aims at doing. On the one hand, it makes gender inequalities visible inside the communities. It seeks to raise awareness on the different forms of gender-based violence and prevent them. It also focuses on discussing the nature of extractive projects being implemented in Indigenous territories and their relations with the larger set of power relations at regional, national, and international levels that include issues related to organised crime, drug, and human trafficking, forced migration, amongst other themes.

According to Freire (2008), another form of manipulation takes place in pacts between the oppressors and the oppressed. Those pacts might be presented as resulting from dialogues between differences parties. Yet, they are anti-dialogic and often result from the submission of one party to another in exchange for benefits or privileges for a few. These pacts reinforce the status quo and the functioning of the world-system. In different Indigenous regions, local authorities have colluded with mining companies, state governments, and even with drug cartels, allowing them to enter the territories without the knowledge or consent of the population.

The final element of the anti-dialogic action is cultural invasion. “Cultural invasion consists in the penetration of the invaders into the cultural context of the invaded, imposing on them their vision of the world, to the very extent that they curb their creativity, inhibiting its expansion” (Freire, 2008, p. 198). Cultural invasion is always violent. It is deeply connected with the coloniality of knowledge (Mignolo, 2007), the coloniality of being (Maldonado Torres, 2007), and the coloniality of representations (Salazar, 2009; Schiwy, 2009), as those oppressed are convinced of their inferiority by looking at the world through the eyes of the oppressors, they introject the patterns of domination and even reproduce them.

The values of the invaders become the standard for the invaded. The more the invasion is accentuated, alienating the being from the culture of the invaded, the greater the desire of the invaded to resemble the invaders: to walk like the invaders, dress in their way, speak in their way. (Freire, 2008, p. 200)

Community Indigenous media have a major role to play in counteracting cultural invasion as they have strong roots within the communities, safeguard and promote Indigenous culture and languages, and act in favour of the interests of the communities. They are key spaces for the circulation of information regarding the world-system and its many menaces and are essential in the shaping and naming of the world in Indigenous terms.



### **Theory of dialogic cultural action**

Opposed to the theory of anti-dialogic action, Freire discussed the theory of dialogic cultural action. This is also constituted of four elements: collaboration, union, organization, and cultural synthesis.

“In the dialogic theory of action, the subjects meet, for the transformation of the world, in collaboration” (Freire, 2008, p. 218). Collaboration occurs at the level of the being. It is not a sum of individualities, but a dialectic relation in which two “yous” become two selves. Indigenous communities have a communal basis that enables collaboration in the Freirean sense (Martinez Luna, 2013). The dialogical action occurs only between subjects, in full humanity, with differences, yet not inequalities. To fully achieve dialogic action inside the communities, gender equality is of the utmost importance. Indigenous women need to be recognised fully for all they do and bring into communal life. They need to be able to exercise their rights. By the same token, internal conflicts need to be sorted out either inside the radio stations or the communities. Peace-building relies on collaboration between beings and it can only be realised in communication.

Collaboration requires subjects to turn to the reality on which they depend to problematize, to pronounce, and transform it while being transformed by it. Ojo de Agua Comunicación has fostered the production of different radio productions, as well as songs and film festivals, seminars, workshops, and meetings as part of the project Transformative Communication for the Care of Life and Territory. These have all been spaces for Indigenous voices, knowledges, and ideas to be pronounced, heard, and circulated. They are enunciations of the world-system from the realities of Indigenous peoples. They analyse, criticize, and connect diverse forms of domination that demonstrate that the exploitation of territories, cultures, individuals, and the environment are part of what they call the braid of power, from which they seek liberation.

According to Freire (2008), liberation can be achieved with the union of the oppressed among and with themselves. To achieve union, the oppressed learn the mechanisms and ideologies of their adherence to the reality that has colonised them and gives them a false understanding of themselves. Dialogic action in unity provides the recognition of how the world-system operates and how they have adhered to it to transform an unjust reality.

In seeking unity, the oppressed must be organised as liberation is a common effort. Freire (2008) considered testimonials constitutive elements of revolutionary action. Testimonies provide critical knowledge of the historical moments in which the dialogic action takes place. They allow individuals to share and build a unified world view, a perception of the contradictions of society,

and the possibilities of change. Testimonies are the vehicles for the organisation of the oppressed. Whereas in the anti-dialogic theory manipulation is used for domination, in the theory of dialogic action, for the organization of the masses and, with them, the need for liberation.

According to Freire (2008), “all cultural action is always a synthesised and deliberate form of action that has an impact on the social structure, in the sense of maintaining it as it is, of verifying small changes in it or transforming it” (p. 235). Hence, cultural action serves either the domination or the liberation of beings. When put to the service of liberation, cultural action seeks to supersede the antagonistic contradictions of the world system and overcome the manipulation and the surrender of the (colonized) self to the (colonizer) other.

The pronunciation of the world, the praxis of dialogue, allows individuals to identify what Freire (2008) called “generating themes”, that is to say, the themes that are meaningful to the people according to their circumstances and in their own terms. The project Transformative Communication for the Care of Life and Territory has three core themes that function as generating themes. They were defined between Ojo de Agua and Indigenous broadcasters from the nine community radios. Gender, defence of life and territory, and peace-building are at the core of everyday life in Indigenous communities, not only in Oaxaca, but throughout the world. For Freire (2008), through the knowledge emanated from conversations around the generating themes, from the praxis of the true word, it is possible to get organised and to begin the process of cultural action, which he calls cultural synthesis.

I consider different media productions and communicative activities derived from the project Transformative Communication for the Care of Life and Territory as examples of Freire’s theory of dialogic cultural action. The media and communication products are dialogic discourses that reflect the praxis of enunciating the world. To discuss some examples, I refer to Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism as it provides the basis for the understanding of media discourses as substantive elements of dialogue.

### **BAKHTIN’S THEORY OF DIALOGISM**

According to Bakhtin (1986), dialogue brings about opinions leading to understanding, and creating the possibility of change. Bakhtin’s dialogism pays special attention to the multiplicity of meanings resulting from human perception, because meaning is what makes an event relevant, that is to say, the shared construction of an event between different individuals at a certain time and space that would be a way to enunciate the world from situated perspectives in equal





terms despite their differences. Indigenous peoples in different regions of the state of Oaxaca (and of the world) share a construction of their realities facing the menaces of the model of development of the modern capitalist, colonial, and patriarchal world-system. They have been denied by the oppressors the right to enunciate the world according to their perspective. However, they are using diverse media and communication technologies to give shared meanings to the events taking place in their territories.

According to Bakhtin (1986), dialogue allows us to make sense of the place we live in, and of the way we relate to this place. This is close to Freire's idea of the praxis of dialogue which includes action and reflection. The way the dialogic interaction takes place is through the exchange of discourses, including discursive events. For Bakhtin, language, as a code that allows its users to share meanings, is the basic element of discourse. Ken Hirschkop and David Sheperd (1989) state that there are a variety of styles in the articulation of language that have various discursive meanings dependent upon the contexts in which they are used. The internal differentiation and stratification that is characteristic of any language is what Bakhtin defined as heteroglossia (as cited in Holquist 1981). Heteroglossia reveals specific points of view about the world that are manifested through utterances.

### **Media utterances**

An utterance can be a single word, a novel, or a video production. It is the product of the interaction between the specificities of language and its context (Todorov, 1984). According to Todorov (1984), an utterance embodies the understanding and positioning of interlocutors in a given context. This positioning makes possible for interlocutors and the discourse, combined, to create a unique thing.

I consider utterances the media productions created by Indigenous and community media makers as part of the project Transformative Communication for the Care of Life and Territory. I understand them as social phenomena anchored in the three core themes that allow for the enunciation of the world from the perspectives and positions of Indigenous Peoples. Utterances cannot be separated from particular interlocutors and from specific social situations (Todorov, 1984). "No utterance in general can be attributed to the speaker exclusively; it is the *product of the interaction of the interlocutors*, and, broadly speaking, the product of the whole complex *social situation* in which it has occurred" (Voloshinov, 1927, as cited in Todorov, 1984, p. 30). I consider media products such as radio shows or podcasts utterances, units of speech

communication and of dialogue. Media-utterances share a language, a code that gives them meaning. Media-utterances cannot be attributed only to media-makers and communicators since they are “the product of the whole complex situation in which [they] occur” (Todorov, 1984, p. 30). Media-utterances are the result of the interaction between interlocutors and the social events during which the utterances are constructed, emitted, received, and understood. Therefore, media utterances I discuss incorporate the word of media makers as well as that of the communities, the different radio stations, regions of Oaxaca, and even from Indigenous communities in other Latin American countries.

Community Indigenous media producers give meaning to the world according to one time/place and context and share their experience and knowledge about it through their media productions. They orient their different media-utterances towards one referential object, the model of development based on accumulation by dispossession that is materialized in several projects of extractive nature. In focusing on this referential object, they also deal with complex and relevant issues such as violence, gender inequality, politics, distribution of power and wealth, flow of capital, global solidarity, democracy, freedom, human rights, and Indigenous rights. The different media-utterances intersect and engage in dialogues amongst themselves. These dialogues seek to undermine the official discourse provided by mainstream media networks, official governments, and corporative sources.

### **LAS VOCES QUE SOMOS, A DIALOGIC MEDIA UTTERANCE**

*Las Voces que Somos* is a live radio series broadcasted online and in diverse community radios in Oaxaca and other territories. The series was produced as part of the community cinema and radio festival entitled *El Lugar que Habitamos* (The Place we Inhabit), a yearly activity organized by Ojo de Agua Comunicación as part of the project Transformative Communication for the Care of Life and Territory. The radio series consists of live radio shows with the participation of different male and female Indigenous broadcasters from different radio stations in Mexico and other parts of Latin America. Each show is devoted to one main theme related the everyday life and pressing needs of Indigenous Peoples. In 2019, the radio series was described as follows:

from different corners of Latin America, the voices of the earth are expressed, proud and dignified, to denounce, to learn, to reflect, to propose and demand respect for life and the territories. A commitment that exhibits two antagonistic ways of seeing and being in this world: the unsustainable capitalist model based



on extractivism and dispossession, versus the vision of *Buen Vivir*, the harmonious coexistence with Mother Nature that preserves life in all its manifestations in the Place We Inhabit. (Ojo de Agua Comunicación, n.d., para. 1)

The series included Indigenous community broadcasters from Mexico, Brazil, and Colombia. There were three shows entitled: Strong Women, Violent Worlds; Weavings of Life, Fighting Against Megaprojects; and We Are Life, We Are Hearts that Transform. In each show there were sound bites produced by different Indigenous and community media from Oaxaca in Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, and Bolivia.

The radio series is a media utterance because it embodies the positioning and understanding of interlocutors about the generating themes they chose to discuss at a given time and space. *Las Voces que Somos* is the product of the interaction between interlocutors and the social context from which they speak. In sharing the language of radio, there is an underlying shared meaning between media and communication practitioners about the orality of radio and the codes to produce radio shows. This common code allows individuals from different Indigenous nations and different countries to build one mediated message. The radio series incorporates the voices of the people doing the live show as much as those from different radio stations and media collectives via the sound bites included in each show.

Sound bites include small dramatizations, on site journalist reports, informative sound bites, songs, or episodes from other radio series. For each show of the series, the themes vary. Some are related to women's rights, violence against women, masculinities, migration, and sexual exploitation. Others deal with Indigenous cosmovisions, the relation with nature and the territories, and the value of water as a source of life. They also refer to megaprojects of extractive nature such as the Interoceanic Corridor in the Isthmus region, highways on the Bolivian Amazon, or to the capitalist, racist, and patriarchal world-system.

*Las Voces que Somos*, as a media utterance, gives meaning to the world Indigenous peoples inhabit. It incorporates the reflection of different individuals and communities, and it is a mediated product that calls for actions to transform the world. It brings about opinions that lead to understanding and open the possibility of change of ideas, preconceived notions about Indigenous Peoples, development, and the manipulative official discourse.

The radio shows, live conversations, and sound bites used in each broadcast describe and problematize the world from Indigenous perspectives. They discuss and analyse aggression against women, capitalism, racism, megaprojects, development, water, life, history, drugs, alcohol, and communal life, amongst

other themes. They also imagine the world as it could or should be. For example, with Indigenous men helping in domestic chores, or governments complying with international agreements and providing good quality public services to Indigenous communities. Also, extractive megaprojects being stopped or people living in a harmonious relation with nature and amongst themselves. The radio shows contain a multiplicity of meanings for each phenomenon or theme they address. These meanings on different issues addressed in the radio series make them relevant.

The media utterance is constructed between different Indigenous individuals and community media, as well as territories situated in a certain time and space. It enunciates the world from situated perspectives that, although unique in their specificities, are commonly shared amongst many Indigenous communities in Latin America that are oppressed and whose territories are in danger of being plundered. The media utterance allows Indigenous Peoples to make sense of the place they live in and of how they relate to it, but it also allows audiences to relate to those places and stories from their own situated realities despite the heteroglot nature of the radio series.

Heteroglossia is acknowledged in the radio series from the title *Las Voces que Somos* (The Voices We Are). It refers to an array of voices, languages, and speech types that carry within them cultures, histories, traditions, and cosmovisions. The series is a media utterance made in collaboration amongst Indigenous broadcasters from different media and different Indigenous Peoples. It is a conversation between individuals in full humanity, with differences, yet not inequalities. Hence, there is a dialogue between their world views that includes the sound bites that complement the human-to-human conversation. The media utterance includes sounds from the territories, local music, and different languages, and bring to the show the presence of women, men, the youth, and children, as well as that of territories and cultural practices.

The radio series is a vehicle for self-representation. It contains traditional knowledges and a contemporary perspective of world issues demonstrating that Indigenous cultures and knowledges are not stagnant. It is an exercise of Indigenous rights via media, making communication possible and displaying Indigenous Peoples' full humanity against the oppressors. It is a way to seek emancipation.

The union of different Indigenous Peoples, voices, cultures, music, traditions, and knowledges in one radio series brings Peoples, individuals, and territories together amongst themselves. The media utterances embody the dialogic action, which, according to Freire, provides recognition of how the world-system operates and how to transform it. The radio shows and sound bites state



the profound comprehension Indigenous peoples have about how the world-system operates and how it keeps oppressing and marginalizing them. They discuss the intersection of capitalism, patriarchy, and racism in different areas of everyday life such as family roles in the care of children and of housework, expressing emotions, struggles of Indigenous and Afro-Latin American women, sexual exploitations, forced migration, the benefits of infrastructure and development projects to a few and not to the communities, and the lack of government assurances, to mention a few.

The radio series is both a media utterance that includes the heteroglossia of diverse Indigenous individuals, communities, and territories and the materialization of one form of organisation of media and communication practitioners. As a media utterance, it relies heavily on testimonies which Freire (2008) considered sources of critical knowledge of the historical moments in which dialogic action occurs. The live shows and the sound bites included in them are testimonies of these times, and the ways to face their menaces and reap their opportunities. The media utterance shares a unified world view from different Indigenous peoples bringing forward several contradictions of society and opening possibilities for change.

The media utterance *Las Voces que Somos* is a concrete contribution to an Indigenous cultural action put to the service of liberation. It is a discourse that counteracts the manipulation of the oppressors, and the monolithic official discourses about Indigenous cultures and development. It is also an example of Indigenous self-representation that presents individuals in their full humanity as well as cultures, knowledges, and cosmovisions in equal terms as those from the Western, colonial, dominating world-system. ■

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# Paulo Freire: Comprehensive Citizenship

## *Paulo Freire: A Cidadania Compreensiva*

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### ABSTRACT

This text presents the proposal of comprehensive epistemology as a legacy of the teachings of the educator Paulo Freire, whose centenary is celebrated in 2021. The proposal is centered on citizenship as a possibility to be achieved and exercised in daily life, starting not only with awareness, but sensibilization. The sensitive as a driving force capable of producing the definitive link between diversities and the harmonious coexistence between differences, with a view to building the Freirean utopian horizon. Considering the failure of the framework of rational orders and paradigms, the sensorium is elected as an instance capable of producing new forms of citizenship and the sensitive as a generating force.

**Keywords:** Citizenship, epistemology, comprehensive

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### RESUMO

O texto apresenta o conceito de epistemologia compreensiva como um legado dos ensinamentos do educador Paulo Freire, cujo centenário se comemora em 2021. A proposta está centrada na cidadania como possibilidade a ser alcançada e exercida no cotidiano, a partir não apenas da ideia de conscientização, mas principalmente de sensibilização. O sensível como força motriz capaz de produzir a definitiva vinculação entre as diversidades e a convivialidade harmônica entre as diferenças, vislumbrando-se a construção do horizonte utópico freiriano. Diante da constatação de falência do arcabouço das ordens e paradigmas racionais, elege-se o *sensorium* como instância capaz de produzir novas formas de cidadania e do sensível como força geradora.

**Palavras-chave:** Cidadania, epistemologia, compreensão



### TEACHERS AS CULTURAL WORKERS

**P**UBLISHED TWO YEARS after working as the Municipal Secretariat of Education for mayor Luiza Erundina, during which he helped to implement fundamental changes in the city of Sao Paulo's educational system, Paulo Freire, 72 years old at the time, published *Teachers as Cultural Workers* (1997). It serves as a basis for considering themes such as the effort and engagement inherent to the bonding and communal proposals for fully exercising citizenship. Beginning with the introduction, Freire (1997) looks to establish the important distinction between teacher and coddling parent, not in order to oppose one to the other, as he himself clarifies, but to avoid conceptually binding the two, which would thereby reduce the professor to the role of an aunt (p. 9). This perspective pinpoints the tendency to flee from the recognition of the real and, in an act of apparently affective juvenile escapism, to demean, deface, and disrespect one of the most important and most necessary enterprises in underdeveloped countries such as Brazil: education and those who dedicate themselves to it.

As Freire (1997) argues, "seeing a teacher as a coddling aunt marks just another chapter in the fight against diminishing the value of the profession, evidenced by the three-decades-old habit of transforming the teacher into a substitute for a relative" (p. 10). In trying to deconstruct the apparently affective construction which is epitomized in the act of identifying the teacher as an aunt, Freire emphasizes the fact that there are no children who choose not to go to schools. In fact, they "are prohibited by the system to either enter school, or to remain in school" (p. 10). It is the fulfillment of an ideology, a deliberate policy of social exclusion.

This book is already an important reference, in that it addresses the idea of *critical citizenship*, and given it uses the sensible as a strategy for overcoming, it must be included when considering the pressing issue of consciousness. Sensible awareness and consciousness are steps toward constructing citizenship.

This article will trace the path towards constructing a perspective of citizenship which is committed to the ideas of territory, or community-based citizenship, in that it is connected to common responsibilities and a common ideal. Education, school, and political literacy are fundamental, as opposed to the pure citizenship of rights, which is ever more concerned with the individual – and ever less concerned with the collective. Liberal citizenship centered on the individual, marked by the exclusive preoccupation with rights, is a fragile concept.

Another of his texts from the 1970s is also relevant to this discussion. *Extension or Communication* (Freire, 1997) was written after the author's experience as an adviser to Chile's do Instituto de Desarrollo Agropecuario (Institute of

Agricultural Development), part of the Ministry of Education, during his exile from 1964 to 1969. As the title implies, the text criticizes the concept of extension by comparing it to communication. However, the fundamental fact is that Paulo Freire explores his unique conception of the nature of knowledge in this book.

The text is a reference and is the only place in which he systematically defines his thinking on the act of knowing, thereby formulating his epistemological basis. He begins with the understanding that, for better or worse, words create a reality. He therefore vigorously defends communication for its dialogical character, while refusing the idea of extension, which is marked by directed practice without considering the historical context of communities, especially in rural areas. With this distinction, he implies that *communication* is a foundational, inescapable, anthropological experience of the human condition. Communication therefore implies the acts of sharing or *mediating*, indispensable to the common, the approximate resolution of pertinent differences in symbolic forms.

This focus on two specific moments of Paulo Freire's thought recovers and emphasizes the markedly sensible aspect of his theory of knowledge. He definitively and consciously considers the sensible in his educational methodology, with his method of teaching literacy by using generative words, defending and valuing the teacher-student relationship in their dialogical epistemology.

He affirms that knowledge "requires a curious presence of the subject before the world" (Freire, 1977, p. 27). This vision, this respect for knowledge is fundamental for research and investigation, in that it transforms the subject into an actor. As Freire himself stated, "knowing is not an act through which a subject transformed into an object, docile and passive, receives the content. Knowing is a task for subjects, not objects" (Freire, 1977, p. 27). In establishing the intrinsic connection between knowledge and feeling, emotion, as he emphasizes in other works – even referencing French theoretician Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (2020) –, Freire confers an affective spectrum to knowledge, which consequently ties into our proposal for a comprehensive epistemology.

### **COMPREHENSIVE EPISTEMOLOGY: BETWEEN CONSCIOUSNESS AND SENSIBLE AWARENESS**

On the one hand, Freire's proposal can be synthesized without resorting to reductionism, using his own words, as "trying to overcome preeminently sensible knowledge by a knowledge which, beginning with the sensible, achieves the reason of reality" (Freire, 1977, p. 33). Freire believes that consciousness can lead to breaking the chains of domination, in that this consciousness allows for a critical reading of the world and reality in which we live.



On the other hand, his initial question is essential: to whom is this knowledge destined? Who is served by scientific progress? This is a fundamental point, in that it regards the production of knowledge and stimulates further investigation. The reduction of the myriad forms of reflection related to scientism, and especially to positivism, have shown no capacity to take account of the historical reality of societies. Recently, the discussion has been aimed toward questioning the collective, egalitarian existence of all individuals, or rather, of a knowledge which accepts, comprehends, and investigates global reality as quotidian reality.

The proposal goes beyond mere rationalism, in that it contemplates the fullness and radical nature of sharing, or rather, the construction of a comprehensive epistemology. The comprehensive approach allows for circumventing that which Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2007a) calls the “monoculture of knowledge and rigor”, or rather, “the idea that the only rigorous knowledge is that of scientific knowledge, therefore, that other forms of knowledge are neither as valid nor as rigorous as scientific knowledge” (p. 29).

Sousa Santos (2007b) strove to revitalize critical theory, warning of the incontestable fact that the great social science theories were all produced in three or four countries from the Northern Hemisphere. He therefore argues that, for those who live in the South, “the theories are out of place and cannot be adjusted to these realities” (p. 19).

Octavio Ianni (1988) notes that the analysis of social problems which arose and developed in modernity is originally European, but that Latin America, Africa and Asia continue to reproduce the ideas and theories of European and American sociologists, focusing their work around the same themes and explanations. He admits, however, that among contributions which appear anachronic, exotic, or eclectic, “there are original creations, innovations, new themes and different explanations: they surprise and challenge through their originality, strength, and inventiveness” (p. 16).

Ianni (1988) believes that Latin America is, in a certain sense, a creation of the Modern World, and just like parts of Asia and Africa, represents the unfolding of social forces which drive modern society. They developed *pari passu* with ongoing transformations in Europe and the United States, which is why they often align unequally with that which appears to be the civilizing force of capital, navigating diverse phenomena such as “colonialism, imperialism, nationalism, cosmopolitanism, and internationalism, which can be seen as the products and conditions of the broader Europeanization of the world” (p. 16).

It has already been calmly assumed that there is no one universal logic for all time and every place – although this is the assumption of the legacy of Western modernity: Cartesian thought. Descartes based his reasoning on a

form of rationality which, given its Eurocentric origin, excludes knowledge of other cultures and places from *science*, banishing them to marginality or even denying their existence. The European colonialism of the *Great Discoveries* continued as the colonialism of knowledge. The knowledge of Latin America's indigenous peoples and of the *uncultured masses* in general is still considered *popular wisdom*, lacking in scientific basis.

However, given the failure of the great models and the incapacity of scientific models to respond ubiquitously to all questions, this traditional and popular knowledge is ever more present and increasingly studied by the authorized sciences. In many cases, it ends up being reincorporated in global society as *true* knowledge.

One can even state that, in recent years, this kind of *alternative* knowledge has turned into a lucrative business through regulations on international proprietary rights. The private appropriation of ancient communal or local knowledge, transformed into massively commercialized, global products with exorbitant price labels, especially regarding seeds and medication, is just one example. Businesses expropriate collective knowledge through patents, privatizing traditional knowledge which is produced and consumed communally.

The relationship and the dispute between this kind of science and its applications has become increasingly decisive, normally revolving around technology, where there is a separation between the authorship or propriety of knowledge and the consumer, who only has to receive and use it.

Moreover, there has been a tendency to repeat themes and methodologies from a Eurocentric perspective. The issue becomes even more complicated when questions arise regarding the fragility of these countries' democracies, such as those about the enormous social inequality, largely responsible for the exclusion of indigenous knowledge – permanently shunned from the authorized *loci* of speech. The supposition of a *unitary knowledge* represses an important part of reality, in that it excludes or disqualifies all thought produced through traditional social practices and popular knowledge. Its effects on education are damaging, because monoculturalism, which privileges a hegemonic language, impedes the pluralism of languages which come from different social strata and other, emigratory regions of the globe.

The distance of the “monoculture of knowledge and rigor”, as understood by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2007a), aims toward a comprehensive epistemology of the human sciences, focusing on the *social act* – rather than society as collective category, as preferred by sociological epistemology –, not an exclusively individual act, but a *communal act*, filled with affective characteristics. It is the *communal act* that makes the practical knowledge of the institution



transindividual, and can define this knowledge as a way of thinking and doing which is independent from the individual. It is an act which strongly invokes the *emotional* or the *sensible*, or what was still called the *world of spirit* in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, decisive for comprehending intersubjective relationships.

It is the constitutive acts of the *commons*, or even of the *com*, the with, of coexistence, of living together, and of bonding. The acts of perceiving, feeling, thinking, knowing, engaging, and doing imply bringing oneself to the meeting with the *common*, which is the unifying center of an institution or a social group. Acting *with* also implies an obligation to another, as inscribed in the *munus* (origin of the word, *communitas*).

It is a propitious moment for evoking this proposal as a driving force towards the definitive reversion of excessive individualism as well as the social inequalities and the disparity between intellectual production in the Global North and South. As Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2007b) said, “these days, it is not so much about surviving as it is about knowing to live. This requires another form of knowledge, a comprehensive, intimate knowledge that does not separate us, but rather personally unites us with that which we study” (p. 54).

The bases for a comprehensive epistemology come from a perspective which recognizes the historical and territorial reality, and which is capable of making an analysis devoid of pre-judgments and pre-concepts, in which acceptance is the trick to uniting different forms of knowledge and thus conferring academic legitimacy. The researcher must begin to investigate, in order to avoid repeating the history of Paulo Freire’s (1977) *Extension or Communication?*, which narrated the countless clashes between farmers, *cultured culture*, and the peasants, the *uncultured culture*, witnessed during his exile in Chile.

As Freire himself argued, no one authentically reads or studies without assuming the critical form of being or of being the subject of curiosity, the subject of literature, of the process of knowing in that which is found. To read is to attempt to comprehend that which is read; this, among other fundamental points, marks the importance of correctly teaching reading and writing. Teaching to read is engaging in a creative experience bound in *comprehension* and communication. And the experience of comprehension will be much deeper when we are capable of associating, never dichotomizing, the emerging concepts of the school experience with those which result from day-to-day life.

Reading words, just as in the search for comprehending the text and, therefore, the objects referred to therein, now reminds us of the earlier reading of the world. It is fundamental to clarify that a reading of the world through sensorial experience is not sufficient. On the other hand, it cannot be written off as *inferior* to a reading

made from the perspective of the abstract world of conflicts which range from the generalized to the tangible. (Freire, 1997, pp. 20-21)

The main idea is that, theoretically, one can construct objects which can behold the territory that holds them, whose construction must be made dialogically. One must *comprehend*, not merely hold information or understand, but comprehend the reality of the other and intervene, fully carrying out the proposition that overcoming can only be constructed together. Freire gives value to the *emotional field* – or what 19<sup>th</sup> century German socio-philosophy termed *Weltgeist* –, considering it decisive for comprehending intersubjective relationships. It therefore reaches the set of requirements which phenomenology instituted as conditions of *comprehensibility*. It has become increasingly evident that the collective construction of science is necessary for acting in a generative manner over the territory – a way in which every action potentially stimulates others – with dignity and mutual respect.

### REVISITING CITIZENSHIP AS STRENGTH

Constructing minimal parameters for exercising citizenship requires an education committed to the territory, including a critical reading of reality, historical knowledge, and incentives for creativity and inventiveness. Citizenship is focused on the basic notion of rights, whether civil, political, or social, understood civil rights as the individual freedoms of expression, faith, and property. Political rights are related to the people's participation in political power or elections, and social rights include the basic rights to economic well-being and security, as well as social inheritance.

Commitment to a territory, its people and its culture, must be included when constructing a quotidian concern with the collective. The relationship between rights and duties is symbiotic to the point that the individual perceives themselves as a fundamental part of the group to which they belong. Now that individualistic acts, restricted to ever more confined spaces, are increasingly emphasized, what kind of teaching could demonstrate the urgency of overcoming mere connectivity and achieving sensible, dialogical connections? The intrinsic relationship between rights and duties, which we call citizenship and which is a fundamental piece of living in groups, should be taught and, therefore, learned. A species of Freire's pedagogy for citizenship which can achieve the desired level of consciousness will certainly be founded in sensible awareness.

T. H. Marshall's (1967) classic study used England's historical and cultural trajectory to suggest that different rights arose in different periods: civil rights





in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, political rights in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and social rights in the 20<sup>th</sup>. The modern idea of citizenship arose in a historical context marked by transformations in traditional power, and in the change from medieval society to the modern era, with the gradual substitution of servile labor by free labor.

Habermas (1998) argues that the urban bourgeoisie was responsible for transforming subjects into citizens. That was when citizenship began to be understood as a social statute, enriched by rights and under the aegis of social contracts. The idea of the social contract itself is fundamental to the implementation of modern citizenship, given that the rights of man were an invention stemming from social and political relationships. The rights of man and citizens are a historical creation, a social and political construction, which came about through structural changes and almost always resulted in social conflict.

The concept of citizenship naturally gives rise to the interaction and interdependence between civil, political, and social rights. However, creating rights allows for a partial vision of the social structure, and does not guarantee the effective presence of citizens. Given that the idea of citizenship is basically the bundling of rights, when we consider societies like Brazil's, with an excessive concentration of wealth and enormous social inequalities, social inclusion becomes urgent, if not fundamental. Citizenship in Brazil demonstrates the urgency of State action, with its *duty* to guarantee a dignified existence to all individuals.

This urgency for survival, for guaranteeing minimal levels of existence, implies a specific understanding of citizenship, one that differs from the structure of social contracts and legal precepts regarding collective rights.

José Murilo de Carvalho (2004) argues that, in analyzing the construction of citizenship in Brazil, the functional separation of rights led to difficulties in exercising and experiencing citizenship in the country. José Murilo believes that our citizenship was founded on a parochial culture with medieval tendencies; that political rights in Brazil came first and were gradually separated from civil and social rights.

He even coined the term “negative citizenship”, referring to actions and movements which historically included attempts to refuse the State's presence, including the movement against civil registries such as marriage registries, in 1874, the movement against the military draft, one against the system of weights and balances in 1871, and various others. He believes that, on the one hand, these were attempts to refute dictatorial actions by the State, especially regarding civil citizenship. On the other, however, that same State was always sought out and utilized in the name of private interests.

Paulo Freire (1970), however, teaches through his work, and particularly through a piece he published in a German magazine while working with the

World Council of Churches in its Department of Education in Geneva, that it is indeed possible to teach citizenship. He teaches about a sense of political literacy: “Consciousness is not based *here* and a world is not based *there*. Consciousness makes this distinction impossible, as it is based on a correlation between the conscious and the world” (p. 59). He argues that consciousness implies critical reflection of the world, and this intimate, profound reflection was the target of his method. It would come about through the pedagogical process.

Even though we ideally adhere to the Greek notion of citizenship and mimic the citizenship we witness every day, it is important to note that, beyond the mere fulfillment of duties, citizenship can provide access to the *good life*, that in which all are capable of deliberating the merits of moral excellence, of participating politically, and of sharing common goods and deciding how they ought to be used. This perspective of the *good life* gives rise to categories that are frequently more highly valued than the common life by certain ethical conceptions: theoretical contemplation and participation by citizens in the political sphere. This stage is considered to proceed the satisfaction of minimal survival needs. This structure was proposed by the communitarians, Michael Walzer (1998) and Charles Taylor (1993). After researching the rule of law’s place and role in societies, they consider that it ought also to be responsible for promoting the *good life*.

The Greek *Polis*, from which the original conception of citizenship arose, no longer exists. Some authors suppose the current existence of a *polis* using a media-based model, so that we could be thought of as citizens of a *mediapolis*, as suggested by Roger Silverstone (2007). Our perspective is that exercising citizenship is of interest to a city’s residents in that it regulates the harmonic possibility of living together.

In this new age marked by the order of the present absentee, devoid of the physical body yet with digitalized contracts and contact – in which we are urban no matter where we are, thanks to the ubiquity of the virtual – new forms of citizenship are being managed. These new formats can become the preparation for exercising a kind of commonality capable of bringing us together as subjects, in which the common is valued and cared for more so than the individual. Subjects can also be connected through a basic set of civil duties necessary for a dialogical connection. Freire’s work illuminates the path, the ever-riskier challenge of further distancing ourselves from the barbarity of these last few years, especially in regards to the normalization of immense inequality gaps.


This article seeks to emphasize the need to construct a perspective of citizenship which values collective, communal duties, in which respect for a territory, its history and cultural diversity is valued through an appreciation for the sensible in the name of comprehension and critical



consciousness. Strategies for creating sensible awareness are necessary for a radical, communal belonging in national society.

This polis, which is no longer structured through walls and rules as was the Greek model, should gain new definitions and possess codes which structure it with a new kind of urbanism. Mobilizations and new forms of social being increasingly evoke citizen participation. These new forms of social action and being began to arise in the beginning of the new millennium, as evidenced by global demonstrations in the middle of the first decade. They have led to political systems which are taking significant steps backwards, especially in regard to human rights.

However, beginning in the second decade of the new millennium and founded on technological advancements, ideas began to form regarding the consciousness of collective life and the necessity for organic, integrative solutions, in which dignity and respect are inscribed on communal education and geared towards overcoming. Once more, we turn to Paulo Freire (1997) for the final argument:

Democracy is not received as a present. Democracy is fought for. You don't break the bonds which prohibit us with good behavior and patience, but rather with the People mobilizing, organizing, consciously critical. With the popular majority not only feeling that they have been exploited since Brazil was invented, but also uniting in feeling the knowledge that they are being exploited, the knowledge that gives them the "raison d'être" of the phenomenon which reaches the level of the sensible in them. In speaking of the sensibility of the phenomenon and of critically apprehending the phenomenon, I am in no way suggesting a rupture between sensibility, emotion, and cognitive activity. I have already said that I know with my whole body: feelings, emotions, critical mind. We make it clear that a people mobilizing, a people organizing, a people knowing in critical terms, a people deepening and solidifying democracy against any authoritarian streak is a people forging the discipline which democracy requires to work. In Brazil, nearly always, we oscillate between the absence of discipline for denying freedom and the absence of the discipline for denying authority. (p. 78) 

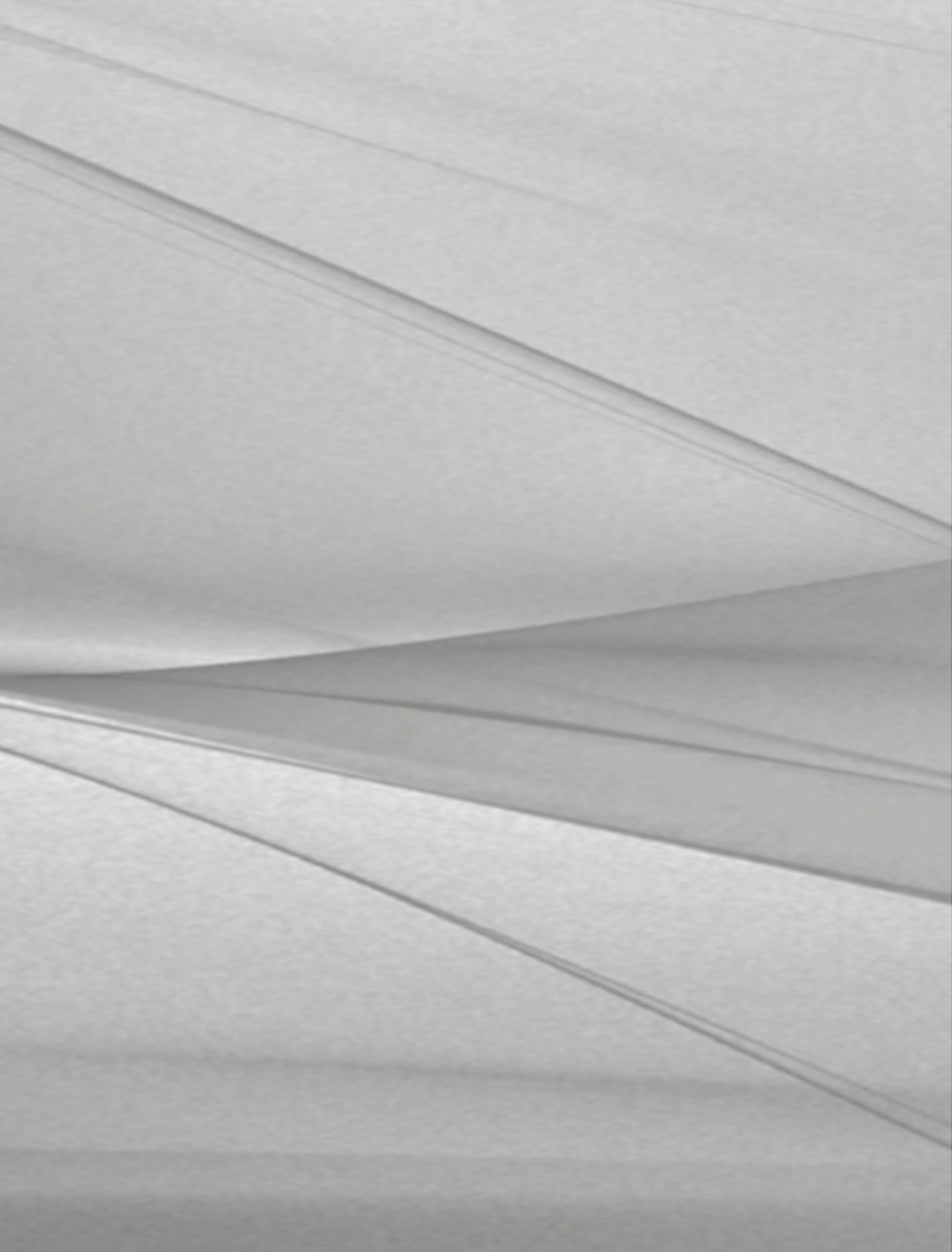
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# Conocer es Actuar: Desde la Epistemología Genética al Legado de Paulo Freire<sup>a</sup>

## *Knowing Is Acting: Between Genetic Epistemology and Paulo Freire's Legacy*

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### RESUMEN

¿Qué significa convertirse en *sujetos de conocimiento*? Los actores sociales que pueden enfrentar sus problemas mediante la construcción de su propio conocimiento, ¿realmente se empoderan? La teoría y los hallazgos otorgados desde la Epistemología Genética nos brindan una poderosa herramienta teórica y metodológica para comprender las experiencias de *concientización* como procesos de empoderamiento y permiten leer el método de Freire a la luz de una teoría de los procesos de construcción del conocimiento. Al estudiar y practicar la Comunicación para el Desarrollo, afirmo que la Información, la Comunicación y el Conocimiento deben ser considerados como un proceso crucial triple, no separable, que incluye simultáneamente transformaciones biológicas, conductuales y sociales, especialmente aquellas que han sido creadas colectivamente.

**Palabras clave:** Epistemología genética, pedagogía del oprimido, conocimiento

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### ABSTRACT

What does it mean to become *subjects of knowledge*? Do the social actors who confront problems through knowledge construction really become empowered? The theory and findings of Genetic Epistemology provide a powerful theoretical and methodological tool for understanding experiences of *conscientization* as processes of empowering, allowing to read the Freirean method for literacy under the light of a theory of the processes of knowledge construction. In studying and practicing Communication for Development, I claim that Information, Communication and Knowledge constitute a crucial threefold, non-separable process that includes biological, behavioural, and social transformations, especially those that have been collectively created.

**Keywords:** Genetic epistemology, pedagogy of the oppressed, knowledge



## INTRODUCCIÓN

ESTE TEXTO DESEA abrir un diálogo conceptual posible y necesario entre la obra de Paulo Freire y algunos de los fundamentos de la Epistemología Genética (EG) que Jean Piaget y sus colaboradores crean para estudiar científicamente los procesos de construcción del conocimiento en la especie humana. Ambas perspectivas se complementan y potencian mutuamente dentro del espacio controversial de la *comunicación para el cambio social* (Badenes, 2020; Downing, 2021; Gumucio & Tufte, 2008; Tufte, 2017). Para aminorar el efecto de visibilización reducida e instrumentalizada que de ella prevalece en las ciencias y en particular en los estudiosos de la comunicación dedicaré un poco más de espacio a exponer la obra de Piaget y García.

Al final del trabajo presentaré brevemente un área de exploración en la investigación y desarrollo de cibercultur@ -KC@- (González, 2019). En ella convergen la EG, centrada en el estudio de los mecanismos constructivos del conocimiento considerado como acción sobre el mundo (García, 2000; Piaget & García, 1982) con la investigación/acción orientada al mejoramiento de las condiciones de vida de las personas a través de la intervención colectiva sobre el entramado de relaciones entre la información, la comunicación y el conocimiento para conocer/actuar sobre problemas aberrantes.

## TRENES PARALELOS: DOS PERSPECTIVAS, DOS AUTORES, DOS PROPÓSITOS

Freire y Piaget son dos de los autores más recurridos y citados en los ámbitos de la pedagogía, la educación, la psicología, la enseñanza y hasta de los movimientos sociales (Caldart, 2004). En mi propia formación en comunicación desde el inicio de los cursos nos encontramos leyendo a ambos autores (González, 2018, p. 282). La lectura de Freire (1973) me conmovió emocionalmente; mientras que la de Piaget (1973), aunque me parecía fascinante, no logré entenderla sino muchos años después gracias al trabajo conjunto con Rolando García.

Entender, siempre depende de la estructura del que entiende, no solo del contenido a entender.

### **Freire: Alfabetizar para la libertad**

Freire deja muy claro que su pedagogía del oprimido no es solamente un método de aprendizaje instrumental de las letras, sino una forma de *praxis* social cuyo fin inmediato es la habilitación de la capacidad para leer y escribir

*más allá* de las letras y los textos, es decir, una práctica para *leer y escribir* (acción transformadora) sobre ese mundo social (Freire, 1973, 1993).

El objetivo no es solo *alfabetizar*, sino *concientizar* sobre las condiciones de la vida de las personas a partir de la reflexión, el diálogo y la acción. Es una forma de intervención dialógica, consciente y deliberada dentro de la organización desigual de la sociedad. Esta desigualdad se ha *hecho cuerpo* en millones de oprimidos que permanecen sumidos en un ambiente de ignorancia, autodesprecio fatalista e incapacidad de organización colectiva para cambiar las relaciones que hacen que el mundo de los analfabetos, de los desposeídos, de los empobrecidos económica y culturalmente, sea vivido y concebido de esa forma y no de otra. Freire persigue la transformación de esa situación y de la miserable condición de millones que se vive y sobrelleva en cada poblado, en cada *favela*, en cada agroindustria, en cada fábrica, en las calles bajo los puentes, y en los campos de cultivo establecidas en el curso de la historia.

Es la pobreza la que está detrás de lo inaccesible de la lectoescritura – y no al revés, como suele pensarse (Dale & Hyslop-Margison, 2010) – es decir, no *son* pobres porque sean analfabetos, sino al revés. El método de Freire desarrolla la apropiación de ese poderoso *artefacto cultural* (Vygotski & Luria, 2007) que les permitiría modificar a los educandos/educadores su reflexión y su acción, no solo como individuos sino también como colectivo.

Un rasgo importante del horizonte utópico de la propuesta de Freire está en el hecho de que al liberarse como *oprimidos* también se libera al *opresor*:

La violencia de los opresores, deshumanizándolos también, no instaura otra vocación, aquella de ser menos. Como distorsión del ser más, el ser menos conduce a los oprimidos, tarde o temprano, a luchar contra quien los minimizó. Lucha que solo tiene sentido cuando los oprimidos, en la búsqueda por la recuperación de su humanidad, que deviene una forma de crearla, no se sienten idealistamente opresores de los opresores, ni se transforman, de hecho, en opresores de los opresores, sino en restauradores de la humanidad de ambos. Ahí radica la gran tarea humanista e histórica de los oprimidos: liberarse a sí mismos y liberar a los opresores. (Freire, 1968/2005, p. 41)

No es con una relación de odio y destrucción que se confronta y rompe la opresión. Es con la construcción de *la importancia del otro*, del *prójimo como yo mismo* que se reconstruye virtuosamente una visión crítica del ominoso mundo de la explotación, de la violencia, del abuso y la injusticia, que nada tienen de *naturales*.

Esas condiciones fueron creadas en la historia y por ello son cambiables.



La propuesta pedagógica y política de Freire está fundada en la ética (Dussel, 1998), en los valores humanos (Paoli, 2014) en la escucha y en la transformación de los que se involucran en esa lucha, concebida y deseada como una praxis plenamente liberadora.

De manera práctica, con el tiempo la pedagogía del *oprimido* se transmuta también en una pedagogía de la *esperanza*, es decir, en la prefiguración de *otro mundo* y *otras relaciones posibles* como principio que orienta las acciones cotidianas, a pesar de que las relaciones sociales injustas sigan succionando la energía social hacia esa zona oscura, densa, pesada y profundamente injusta que es la explotación económica, las diversas formas de dominación política y subalternidad cultural.

Ser *pobre* es ser un sujeto social des-energizado social, no por *naturaleza*, sino por la *naturaleza* de las relaciones sociales y de una historia que escapan a su conciencia. Esas relaciones de explotación, de violencia, de despojo y extracción de energía social que someten y rebajan a quienes Freire llama *oprimidos*, también rebajan y deshumanizan desde luego al explotador y se inculcan, se aprenden (y se pueden combatir) en forma de valores desde pequeños (Paoli, 2014, p. 12). Resulta también muy entendible la relación tan estrecha que se ha dado entre la pedagogía de Freire y la Teología de la Liberación: “El cuidado solamente surge cuando la existencia de alguien tiene importancia para mí” (Boff, 2014, p. 103). O como nos refería una lideresa del Nordeste de Brasil: “Si los demás están bien, yo estoy mejor” (Krohling-Peruzzo & González, 2018, pp. 205-235). El amor al prójimo, entendido de esta forma, libera. Eso se propone y justifica el trabajo de Freire.

Por estas y otras razones, además de establecer un método para la alfabetización de adultos, la obra de Freire constituye toda una *filosofía moral*, una reelaboración en código amoroso y precisamente por ello, plenamente político de las relaciones con la vida, con los otros y con el mundo. De ahí la importancia de comprenderla también como una *pedagogía de la autonomía* (Freire, 1996/2010) que requiere de la formación de un tipo particular de docentes que deben prepararse para establecer ese proceso en todas las actividades y ejercicio de su profesión.

Freire realizó muchas experiencias concretas de alfabetización en América Latina y otras partes del mundo. Su legado sigue presente no solo como método práctico para aprender a leer y escribir, sino como guía en la organización social.

Pasemos ahora revista con mayor detalle a algunas características de la Epistemología Genética.

### **Piaget: Conocer el proceso de conocer**

Desde mediados del siglo pasado Piaget, biólogo de formación, psicólogo “por necesidad” y epistemólogo por vocación, con un equipo multidisciplinario

que reúne en el Centre International D'Épistémologie Génétique en la Université de Genève, inicia la fundamentación conceptual y contrastación empírica de una nueva ciencia: la *Epistemología Genética*. El adjetivo *genética* lo coloca Piaget para diferenciarla de la epistemología desarrollada como rama de la filosofía especulativa que exploraba desde la antigüedad las preguntas sobre *qué es y de dónde viene* el conocimiento.

La piagetiana, a diferencia de la epistemología filosófica, asume la tarea de contrastar con pruebas empíricas sus conceptualizaciones sobre el proceso de conocimiento. Piaget rechaza las preguntas sobre el origen o la esencia de este y construye a lo largo de varias décadas una disciplina para estudiar otras preguntas científicamente más productivas: ¿cómo se pasa de una estructura de conocimiento menos diferenciante a otra más diferenciante?

Su epistemología es *genética*, no por su relación con los genes. El adjetivo lo usa Piaget para destacar que lo que interesa conocer en detalle es lo que una estructura de conocimiento/acción anterior le *hereda* a otra en el tiempo y cómo se efectúa esa transformación.

Piaget se concentró en el desarrollo y fundamentación conceptual de una disciplina experimental que tuviera un dominio, un objeto y un método propios, al mismo tiempo que elaboraba una teoría lógicamente coherente y empíricamente contrastable de los procesos de conocimiento.

El proyecto de alfabetización que creó y estableció Freire inicialmente en el Nordeste de Brasil, tuvo desde el principio un horizonte de acción transformadora de las inhumanas condiciones de vida de la población más pobre, de los *oprimidos*. Freire parte de un claro compromiso político y práctico, un horizonte de crítica y transformación posible de las condiciones de miseria que han generado la deshumanización y el analfabetismo de millones.

En apariencia, no tiene nada que ver con Piaget, nacido y educado en la sociedad suiza de habla francesa, que se propone llenar un vacío en el horizonte de las ciencias al crear una teoría científica de los procesos del conocimiento. A Piaget no se le conocieron filias ni fobias *políticas* que impulsaran su trabajo. Pero controversialmente, para conseguir su objetivo tuvo que contraponerse a dos fuertes tradiciones filosóficas que se habían ocupado mucho antes que él de las cuestiones del conocimiento: el innatismo y el empirismo (García, 2000, pp. 45-47).

Al primero se opone por defender que el conocimiento *surge* o *aparece* de forma innata en las personas; es decir, porque esa tradición considera que el conocimiento ya está incluido dentro de nuestra naturaleza independientemente de la experiencia de lo real.

La EG, por contraste, muestra que todo conocimiento es el *producto de una acción constructiva* e implica por ello un sujeto *activo*. Nuestra especie solo



puede *conocer* cuando *actúa* sobre las cosas y situaciones del mundo. Sin acción sobre el mundo real, que existe afuera de nosotros, no hay conocimiento posible. Nada innato hay en las interacciones que generan conocimiento.

Al segundo y más robusto adversario que constituyen todas las formas del empirismo, en especial el empirismo lógico o neo-positivismo del Círculo de Viena – lo impugna porque supone que “la realidad” la conocemos *a través de los sentidos*.

Piaget refuta todos los tipos de empirismo porque muestra *empíricamente* que las características y propiedades de los objetos que podemos registrar (con los sentidos), *dependen* de los esquemas de relaciones establecidas por el sujeto en su devenir. Al mismo tiempo muestra que por hacer estudios *empíricos* no quiere decir que sea *empirista*. Lo fundamental es entender y explicar los procesos de estructuración de esos esquemas de relaciones.

La ciencia que hace Piaget es *contraintuitiva*: no se concibe fácilmente el hecho de que solo podamos *ver* empíricamente, lo que delimitan nuestros esquemas.

En otras palabras, las propiedades que registramos con los sentidos *dependen* de las relaciones y no al contrario. Con ello adquiere pleno sentido la famosa frase de Bachelard (1981): “el vector de conocimiento va de lo pensado a lo real y no al revés” (p. 11).

Estas posturas filosóficas (innatismos y empirismos) sobre el conocimiento y la ciencia, que han sido las más influyentes en la historia del pensamiento occidental, son controvertidas y rechazadas por Piaget. La primera por prescindir de la experiencia y la segunda por sobredimensionarla. Nuestro autor muestra empíricamente que las explicaciones y fundamentaciones que había elaborado el *empirismo lógico* sobre el conocimiento llegaron a ser (y siguen siendo) muy influyentes y lógicamente impecables, pero con la particularidad de ser científicamente *falsas*.

El conocimiento *se construye*, no *entra* del exterior a partir de experiencias sensoriales seguidas de generalizaciones empíricas, sino mediante reelaboraciones sucesivas ocasionadas por crisis permanentes de los esquemas de acción enfrentados a condiciones para las que no están adaptados y por eso mismo requieren de un sujeto activo que *construye* su conocimiento en interacción con sus objetos a través de una gama de procesos asimilación y acomodación que hacia la adolescencia desembocan en el desarrollo de la capacidad de abstracción reflexiva. Con ella se hace posible la anticipación, las deducciones y el diseño de la planeación lógica. Esta disciplina nos explica científicamente cómo se *construye*, literalmente, la posibilidad de “no solo buscar lo que es bueno, sino (que) también se puede buscar el bien, no solo el éxito, sino la comprensión o la verdad” (Becker, 2017, p. 17). Esta capacidad del desarrollo de los humanos constituye un salto cualitativo

en el diseño de mundos posibles, de la reelaboración narrativa de la propia memoria y en la definición crítica del presente, como veremos en la parte final. La EG, al explicar los procesos que reorganizan la acción de conocimiento, vuelve inteligible, da un soporte riguroso y desmitificador al proceso de lo que Freire llama *concientización*. Esta conclusión está detrás del adjetivo *constructivista* que también suele darse a la epistemología piagetiana.

Asimismo, la EG muestra de forma impecable que esa interacción no se puede comprender sin una *concepción dialéctica* de todo el proceso constructivo, pues éste siempre se genera a través de equilibraciones y reequilibraciones sucesivas de esquemas de conocimiento en crisis.

El concepto de “estructura” en la EG no es un sustantivo, sino debe tomarse como un *verbo*. No hay estructura sin historia, como no hay historia sin estructura, respondería Piaget a quienes le criticaban como *estructuralista*.

Solo podemos *conocer* mediante nuestra interacción con los objetos, nos convertimos en plenamente humanos, es decir, en seres sociales, cuando en el curso del tiempo desarrollamos esa capacidad superior de *abstracción reflexiva* sobre nuestras propias coordinaciones, que no pertenecen al *objeto*, no vienen de *afuera*, ni se pueden observar de forma directa.

Es esta una concepción científica revolucionaria e inédita en el entendimiento científico de los procesos de conocimiento que puede tener repercusiones importantes y fundamentadas sobre los modos de enseñanza/aprendizaje y práctica de las ciencias. Asimismo, también puede servir de soporte teórico y práctico en los procesos de alfabetización, a veces extraviados en tratar con las carencias de los sujetos alfabetizables, que podrían orientarse en “ayudar al adulto a comprender el modo de funcionamiento de la escritura a partir de lo que él ya ha construido, a partir de su saber efectivo y no de su ignorancia” (Ferreiro, 2007, p. 206).

El programa de trabajo de Piaget dedicó décadas a estudiar los *estadios iniciales* de la construcción del conocimiento. Esto implicó el diseño de protocolos detallados para investigar con menores desde recién nacidos –con sus propios hijos– hasta adolescentes capaces de generar abstracciones complejas, porque mediante sus acciones de conocimiento han sido construidas al paso de muchas disequilibraciones y reequilibraciones. Cuando los niños, más o menos a partir de los 13 o 14 años construyen este tipo de abstracciones, su sistema cognoscitivo está desarrollado, listo y habilitado para la vida social adulta. Asimismo, las inferencias y teorizaciones diversas que Piaget realizaba sobre los procesos de conocimiento le llevaron a la invención de la *psicología genética*, diseñada para estudiar la psicogénesis de los conceptos y realizar contrastaciones empíricas de las conceptualizaciones de su epistemología.





La obra científica de Piaget, tanto por la utilización del método histórico-crítico, como por su concepción dinámica de los procesos de construcción de los conocimientos, lo coloca, como también podríamos ubicar el trabajo de Freire, dentro de la tradición de la dialéctica de Hegel, Marx y Lenin.

Piaget, como el mismo Karl Marx, tampoco era *marxista*, pero su concepción y uso de la dialéctica está en el fondo de la parte más creativa e importante de su toda su teoría (García, 2008, p. 202). Sin embargo, esta epistemología científica (constructivista/dialéctica/genética) que fue desde el principio el objetivo de todo su trabajo, parece haber quedado sepultada mediante un mecanismo selectivo que le etiquetó como *psicólogo infantil*, *pedagogo*, *educador activo*, una reducción que conduce a ignorar las aportaciones fundamentales de su teoría muchas veces mutilada en la identificación y superación de las *etapas de desarrollo*.

Becker (2017) nos proporciona algunas razones de esto:

Nuestro sistema escolar está organizado por franjas de edad. Esto facilita la gestión de la escuela. Sucede que ese principio administrativo, el agrupamiento de los alumnos por edad, fue transformado en principio pedagógico. . . . la teoría de Piaget, cuando entró en la escuela, fue interpretada como una teoría de las etapas (*stage*), en lugar de ser vista como estados (*stade*) o estadios, metáfora preferida por mucho. Con esto, todo el proceso de equilibración o de abstracción reflexiva fue reducido a un proceso de maduración. En una palabra, anuló su novedad. Aquello que debería ser entendido como un período de desarrollo, determinado por una estructura de conjunto construida activamente por el sujeto, que perdura durante cierto tiempo – un estado, por lo tanto – fue interpretado como resultante de un proceso de maduración, es decir, predeterminado en el genoma. (pp. 22-23)

La visibilidad y el estudio de Piaget como creador de una disciplina científica que estudia los procesos de construcción de conocimiento se desdibujó completamente por debajo de su visibilización como psicólogo. Por supuesto que uno de los campos en los que puede influir esta nueva teoría del conocimiento como acción es en la educación y la pedagogía, la psicología infantil del desarrollo y otras ramas de aplicación que poco a poco fueron derivando de los trabajos de Ginebra<sup>1</sup>. En su consolidación institucional, la reflexión teórica sobre los experimentos y la activación procedimental de ese objetivo a lo largo de los años, Piaget atrajo a una larga lista de destacados colegas: Ilya Prigogine (químico), Benoit Mandelbrot (matemático), Lucien Goldman (sociólogo), Bárber Inhelder (psicóloga), Pierre Greco (lingüista), Léo Apostel (filósofo) y Rolando García (físico de la atmósfera y empirista lógico) así como otros que colaboraron con él en el desarrollo de su epistemología.

<sup>1</sup> Uno de ellos, por ejemplo, es la *Inteligencia Artificial* desarrollada por el matemático Seymour Papert cuando después de diez años de colaborar con Piaget, fue reclutado en el MIT en Estados Unidos, donde creó el lenguaje de programación *Logo* y promovió el *construccionismo* en continuidad con su práctica en Ginebra

## EL BINOMIO VIRTUOSO PIAGET–GARCÍA

Como sucede en una buena cantidad de ocasiones en la historia de la ciencia, el encuentro de Piaget con Rolando García es tan fortuito como afortunado para ambos (González, 2018).

Las relaciones entre el influyente Círculo de Viena y el grupo de Ginebra, por efecto del propio desarrollo de la EG, construido contra los supuestos del Empirismo Lógico, no eran las mejores.

Para esta nueva ciencia, todo empirismo configura un formidable obstáculo epistemológico.

Cuando hablamos del *empirismo*, esa perspectiva que en el fondo sostiene que el conocimiento *depende* de lo que nuestros sentidos reporten, estamos apuntando no solo un posicionamiento filosófico que Piaget demostró como *empíricamente* falso, sino que señalamos la existencia actual de toda una estructura social de relaciones de poder (por la fuerza de los sistemas de evaluación, contratación y permanencia en las instituciones especializadas, en las facultades y escuelas) y de valoración aceptados o impuestos, que definen en la práctica lo que es y no es la *ciencia*, lo *científico*, sus prácticas especializadas.

Como si no existiera una disciplina científica sobre los procesos de conocimiento, los autores empiristas en todas sus formas y manifestaciones siguen siendo utilizados en los cursos de formación de los científicos y la mayoría de los no científicos en el mundo *occidental*.

Me refiero a que, como corriente filosófica sobre el conocimiento, continúa orientando las evaluaciones, la estructura y los contenidos de la producción de textos, las revistas, las editoriales, las asociaciones, los temarios de las asignaturas, las prácticas periodísticas y pedagógicas sobre el sentido y la enseñanza básica del discurso científico, la historia de los científicos y sus descubrimientos y por supuesto, la sacralización de un único y verdadero Método Científico (salido de una etapa de la historia de la física) que se convirtió en un canon. Cualquier disciplina que no se rija por ese método, se considera como mera especulación, creencia y subjetividad y, a lo sumo, una forma más de “pseudo-ciencia” (Bunge, 1983, p. 54).

La Epistemología Genética nos muestra que no existe un único e infalible *método científico*, sino diferentes formas de cientificidad (González & Krohling-Peruzzo, 2019, p. 71) y que la ciencia es *una forma* de conocimiento más, pero no es ni la única ni a veces tampoco resulta ser la más útil. Nos muestra también que en la metodología de investigación antes que dedicarse a perseguir y comprobar hipótesis, debemos estar preparados para *esperar lo inesperado*.

Diversas prenociones y vicios sobre la ciencia y el conocimiento científico se siguen enseñando, son incorporados y defendidos de manera rígida y acrítica por profesores y estudiantes de todas las disciplinas, *como si no existiera* desde



hace años una sólida teoría científica de los procesos de conocimiento. Podemos ilustrar esta paradójica situación de ignorancia selectiva con tres ejemplos.

En la *filosofía*, seguir enseñando la lógica silogística como si no hubiera existido Bertrand Russel y su metalenguaje formal, que nos hace ver que toda la lógica aristotélica opera con una sola relación (incluido/no incluido), a todas luces insuficiente frente a la ciencia moderna.

En la *química*, seguir entendiendo el por qué se queman las cosas con fuego, recurriendo a la teoría del *flogisto* de Stahl, como si no hubiera existido Lavoisier y su construcción del oxígeno como comburente.

En la *comunicación*, seguir enseñando la teoría hipodérmica, como si no hubieran existido Katz y Lazarsfeld y su teoría de la influencia personal y la comunicación en dos pasos, en fin, en la *economía*, como si no hubiera existido Marx y su teoría de la plusvalía como falsación de la teoría de la ganancia de la economía clásica.

Una vez impuesto y aceptado el canon empirista, también se sacraliza el *cuantitativismo* (si el estudio no tiene cantidades expresables en *matemáticas*, puede ser cualquier cosa, pero no es *científico*). El movimiento contrario, que es igualmente empirista, pero de polaridad diversa, abona la disputa en favor de lo que he llamado en otros textos el *melatismo* (a mí me *late* que eso se comporta así y no necesito números para comprenderlo) porque – sostienen – que la acción humana es como la historia, irrepetible y no puede ser *explicada* ni cuantificada, sino solamente *interpretada*, comprendida. La EG nos enseña que comprensión y explicación, son dos momentos complementarios, y no polos opuestos, en toda investigación.

Todavía muchas instituciones universitarias están internamente escindidas entre las ciencias y las humanidades, entre las ciencias naturales y las sociales, entre explicar y comprender, entre la verdad científica y las opiniones sobre la realidad.

Nos parece un error la separación entre la formación filosófica y la formación en cualquiera de las disciplinas científicas. Al proceso de especialización de los dominios de cada una de ellas, del lado de los *cuantis* o de los *qualis*, se van adicionando fobias y filias diferentes, sistemas de clasificación, de identificación y descalificación que en forma de prejuicios acompañan y sazonan la convivencia controversial por necesidad de las diferentes disciplinas.

El resultado es que frente a problemas críticos que no pueden ser abarcados solamente desde una disciplina ni por un conjunto de ellas, parece imposible que puedan entenderse entre sí. Cada una hace su parte, pero no se cultiva la capacidad para organizarse frente a graves problemas que solo el conocimiento interdisciplinario puede enfrentar. El reciente y doloroso ejemplo de la pandemia de Covid-19 en el mundo tomo por sorpresa las verdades aisladas de cada

disciplina. La contundente pertinencia del *conocimiento transversal* que no se agota en disciplinas, la fundamenta la EG a través de la teoría de los sistemas complejos de Rolando García (2006). García es invitado al seminario semanal y a los experimentos clínicos de Piaget que opera una demolición inclemente del empirismo lógico de Rolando García (formado con Rudolf Carnap y Hans Reichenbach) frente a las experiencias psicogenéticas que García no puede explicar desde una posición empirista. García se *convierte* así, estudiando a fondo la EG, en un constructivista *tan crítico* que poco después le señala a Piaget algunas de las zonas *no constructivistas* de su edificio teórico. A partir de ahí y hasta su muerte en 1980, Piaget trabajaría muy estrechamente con García.

De forma destacada escriben juntos *Psicogénesis e Historia de la Ciencia* donde sostienen que los mecanismos constructivos del conocimiento tienen una continuidad funcional en el tiempo y son los mismos que operan tanto en el desarrollo psicogenético de los niños como en la historia de la creación de los conceptos de cada ciencia. En la misma obra, García introduce el concepto de *marco epistémico* (Piaget & García, 1982, p. 228) con el que muestra que los problemas y las preguntas que condicionan el desarrollo de la ciencia surgen de una toma de posición ideológica, en el mejor de los casos política, frente a los problemas. No existe la ausencia de valores en la ciencia. Un marco epistémico *condiciona* el tipo de preguntas que se pueden hacer en un tiempo determinado, pero no *determina* el contenido de la ciencia.

Se abre así otra forma de entender la *objetividad* pura y prístina que pregona la ciencia empirista. Este concepto ayuda a comprender el motor de las llamadas revoluciones científicas, que no dependen de un aparato o dispositivo tecnológico (el telescopio, el microscopio electrónico, etc.), sino del *tipo de preguntas* que orientan la investigación. En contra de lo que suele pensarse, la cientificidad de una investigación no depende ni de las técnicas ni de los métodos, sino de las preguntas con las que investigamos (González & Krohling-Peruzzo, 2019, p. 529).

La obra de Rolando García (2000) *El Conocimiento en Construcción. De las Formulaciones de Jean Piaget a la Teoría de los Sistemas Complejos*, consolida la maduración de la Epistemología Genética, además de otras de sus aportaciones señaladas, al plantear el entendimiento del conocimiento como un sistema complejo.

En fin, García llegó a Ginebra y se encontró con Piaget siendo ya un reconocido físico de la atmósfera, un empirista lógico de primera calidad, un gestor universitario que siempre buscó promover la ciencia comprometida con las condiciones de su natal Argentina y de América Latina. Regresa de Europa como un epistemólogo agudo y crítico que colabora y potencia con Piaget la consolidación de esta nueva disciplina. Rolando García pasó los últimos



años de su vida productiva trabajando en México y ahí publica su teoría de sistemas complejos como concreción de una teoría general de los procesos de conocimiento (García, 2006).

### **¿FREIRE CON PIAGET, PIAGET CON FREIRE?**

Los nombres y las luces de Piaget y de Freire dentro del mundo académico son enormes. Tanto de uno como de otro se pueden encontrar centenas de versiones, unas más fundamentadas que otras, sobre sus aportaciones a los procesos de conocimiento (Piaget), y a los procesos de alfabetización que desembocan en la concientización de los oprimidos sobre su propia condición, su pasado y su futuro posibles (Freire). También, como todo en la ciencia, sus ideas y obras sufren lecturas anquilosadas, destotalizantes y reduccionistas.

Los avances de la Epistemología Genética son ampliamente compatibles con las formulaciones conceptuales y la práctica que desarrolla Freire en su trabajo como practicante y a la vez formulador conceptual de los procesos de alfabetización. Incluso, me parece que ayudan a comprender mejor y más críticamente muchas de las decisiones y estrategias que desarrolla Freire en su práctica pedagógica y algunas otras que no llegó a desarrollar y que siguen en desarrollo en varios países del mundo. Paulo Freire ha sido conocido principalmente como pedagogo activista que lucha por la justicia y la democracia. Cicilia Krohling-Peruzzo junto con otros autores, incluso lo ubica en los orígenes del desarrollo de la técnica de investigación/acción (González & Krohling-Peruzzo, 2019, p. 475). Jean Piaget fue un científico de tiempo completo, conocido como un pedagogo y psicólogo de niños, que construye una teoría revolucionaria muy potente, pero desapercibida o mal leída, sobre los procesos de construcción de conocimiento. Creemos que pueden dialogar con provecho ambas perspectivas. Freire conocía el trabajo de las primeras formulaciones de Piaget, pero nunca se dedicó a trabajar a fondo esa veta, ni a desarrollar una perspectiva científica propia. No era su campo. Las condiciones sociohistóricas en las que vivió marcaron los límites de lo posible y de lo probable en su trabajo. Con Piaget sucede lo mismo. Probablemente conocía algo de la obra de Freire, pero su pasión por crear una teoría robusta que terminara con las mistificaciones empiristas e innatistas sobre el conocimiento no le dejó mucho tiempo para otras cosas. Para nosotros, el trabajo seminal de Paulo Freire está plenamente soportado por una teoría científica del conocimiento como acción que fundamenta los principios básicos de la operación exitosa de su pedagogía. Ambas perspectivas se encuentran en la investigación y desarrollo de cibercultur@.

**CIBERCULTUR@ EN EL CAMINO DE ALGUNOS SENDEROS QUE SE BIFURCAN**

Los mecanismos constructivos para conocer/actuando sobre el mundo nunca detienen su movimiento dialéctico. En otras palabras, nuestra especie nunca deja de conocer.

La disciplina de Piaget y García no llega a estudiar el desarrollo cognoscitivo de adultos comunes y corrientes que ya construyen abstracciones reflexivas e inferencias complejas para actuar en su mundo. Difícilmente se lo plantean porque no lo necesitan, ni llegarán a volverse profesionales de la creación de conocimientos sobre un dominio. En condiciones normales, la enorme mayoría de la población adulta no se interesa ni se relaciona con la ciencia.

Tampoco la ciencia se interesa mucho en ellas ni en ellos. Menos aún los analfabetos. Eso me parece un hueco claro en el desarrollo de la teoría. Piaget se concentró especialmente en los niños, porque en esas edades la fuerza de la creación, estructuración y desestructuración de los conocimientos es enorme y nos deja estudiar esos mecanismos comunes a todas y todos, de una forma más clara. En el mundo social adulto, una vez que se configuran las estructuras cognitivas y directivas más complejas, el potencial creativo parece descender. Hay al parecer menos *construcción* de conocimiento que *desarrollo* del mismo y Piaget no estuvo en posibilidad de dedicarle tiempo y recursos a esa veta. Conocer, es aprender a *diferenciar* aquello que nuestra estructura no era antes capaz de diferenciar, y al mismo tiempo es aprender a *integrar* esas nuevas diferencias construidas dentro de estructuras más complejas que *habilitan para actuar* de otra forma en nuestra realidad. Si no podemos *diferenciar e integrar* mejor, tampoco podremos *actuar* más inteligentemente para modificar las condiciones que no queremos.

En México y América Latina (y en todas las sociedades que han sido *globalizadas* desde afuera y a la fuerza, así llamadas *periféricas* o más recientemente como *sur global*) existen millones de hombres y mujeres históricamente empobrecidos y miserabilizados, no solo en la producción económica, sino también en sus ecologías simbólicas. A fuerza de siglos han desarrollado una *autopercepción heterodeterminada* (González, 2019, p. 99), definida desde afuera por otros que Freire llama *opresores*. El entramado de relaciones simbólicas en que se tejen este tipo de percepciones es uno de los nodos interconectados de la relación hegemonía-subalternidad. Esos adultos, a pesar de tener todo el potencial reflexivo ya construido bio-psico-socialmente para accionar sobre el mundo, todavía no alcanzan a *diferenciar e integrar* los componentes, las relaciones y las transformaciones de su *ser social* en devenir, en movimiento, en proceso. Muchos tampoco se han logrado apropiarse del poderoso *artefacto cultural* que constituye la tecnología de la lectoescritura.



Del mismo modo que con Piaget y García, con la obra de Freire también se han hecho simplificaciones y reduccionismos variados:

¿Me estoy oponiendo a Paulo Freire porque no aprecio las bondades de la palabra generadora?: “El Freire que ha circulado de boca en boca y de cita en cita por el mundo es un Freire simplificado, formulizado, unilateralizado, estereotipado a partir de un conjunto de nociones fijas – educación bancaria, alfabetización, educación de adultos, concientización, diálogo, palabra generadora – y virtualmente suspendido en los años 60-70, junto con sus dos primeros libros” [citando a Rosa María Torres]. Las mejores experiencias que conozco de alfabetización de adultos a través de textos han sido realizadas por grupos brasileños, que vienen de una práctica anterior anclada en las teorías de Paulo Freire. (Ferreiro, 2007, p. 321)

Otros más, a pesar de ya haber sido *alfabetizados*, no parecen aprovechar esa capacidad para *leer y escribir* su palabra, su voz, su versión y su visión en la modificación de las relaciones sociales que los ha colocado en donde están. Esta condición es completamente funcional al injusto orden de las cosas, pero en congruencia con todo el desarrollo de las ideas de la EG, estamos seguros de que podría cambiarse. Si preguntáramos a Rolando García ¿eso es posible?, diría: “Eso *no* es posible. Hay que construir lo posible” y este me parece el lugar de la comunicación para el cambio social.

Si usamos las ideas de Freire (1968/2005), para describir lo que él llama “niveles de conciencia” de los oprimidos, la pregunta epistemológica sería, ¿cómo se pasa de un nivel de conciencia a otro? ¿Qué es lo que cambia, qué se modifica, qué se conserva intacto y qué es lo nuevo que aparece? Una conciencia que opera en modo *intransitivo* (poco diferenciante de su ser social), es “impermeable a desafíos situados fuera de la órbita vegetativa” (p. 60). Persiste plena de supersticiones y naturalizaciones de los procesos sociales, resulta inhábil para organizarse con otros para mejorar sus condiciones, opera centrada sobre sí misma y sumergida en una cultura del silencio, y termina siendo depresiva y con dificultades para identificar y comunicar sus emociones<sup>2</sup>. El método de Freire potenciado a la luz de la EG podría ayudar a modificar colectivamente una condición cultural y social en la que los explotados, los oprimidos no se dan cuenta de que *no se dan cuenta*. Pero pueden darse cuenta.

El cambio de ahí hacia una conciencia *transitiva* implica que ya se tiene construida alguna capacidad para ir y actuar *más allá de lo inmediato* y por tanto capaz de generar organización para orientarse hacia cambios sociales y políticos colectivos favorables. De esa segunda forma de conciencia, pasar a una conciencia *transitiva y crítica* quiere decir volverse capaz de integrar

<sup>2</sup>La epigenética de la cultura sostiene que las condiciones de pobreza, violencia y estrés permanente se heredan, no de forma genética, sino a través de la transformación de la estructura de las mitocondrias en procesos de metilación agudos (Jablonka, 2016). Una importante vía para explorar la reproducción de algunas de las condiciones más agudas de la pobreza y una poderosa perspectiva a explorar en el terreno del análisis social.

diferencias antes desapercibidas que habilitan para construir interpretaciones más profundas, más densas sobre los problemas que les aquejan y de los que logra generar una representación diferenciada de sus causas concretas.

Lo que Freire describe de forma filosófica y metafórica, a partir de su reflexión sobre las experiencias de concientización con centenas de hombres y mujeres oprimidos de diversas partes del mundo merece un trabajo riguroso de sistematización y un proceso de homologación conceptual con la ciencia de Piaget y García que no podemos asumir ahora.

Al organizarse para construir *el conocimiento de su ser social*, se inician procesos de *empoderamiento* de los sujetos. Especialmente aquellos que han sido *diseñados* y tratados como meros objetos de estudio y no como sujetos activos del conocimiento. Esa es una de las consecuencias más importantes del legado de Paulo Freire, no sólo en Brasil, sino en el mundo.

Pero ¿qué significa convertirse en *sujetos de conocimiento*? Los actores sociales que pueden enfrentar sus problemas por medio de la construcción de sus propios conocimientos, ¿realmente se empoderan? La teoría y los hallazgos de la Epistemología Genética nos ofrecen una poderosa herramienta científica, conceptual y metodológica para analizar experiencias de *concientización* como procesos de empoderamiento.

Observar, registrar, identificar, analizar y dialogar colectivamente sobre la especificidad de su inserción en el mundo de la producción de valor (como *explotados*), de la organización social (como *dominados*), de las representaciones, tradiciones y símbolos (como *subalternos*) es una tarea cotidiana que permite reorganizar y rediseñar nuestras *ecologías simbólicas* (González, 2019). El método de Freire para la alfabetización de adultos sigue vivo, no se cristalizó y ahora puede ser fundamentado y criticado bajo la luz de una interpretación científica (es decir, histórica, dialéctica, abierta y documentada) de los procesos de construcción del conocimiento. Toda teoría científica prueba su potencia cuanto más genera preguntas que la fuerzan a avanzar y explorar zonas que no había cubierto antes o que solo diferenció parcialmente. El trabajo de desarrollo de ciberkultur@, se ocupa de investigar y promover el crecimiento de las capacidades para *conocer* el mundo, *actuando*, no solo sobre la situación específica que causa lo que la gente vive e identifica como un *problema*, sino sobre la forma simbólica y práctica de acercarse a ello y de hacer posible la capacidad de transformar sus *ecologías simbólicas*.

Con la noción de “ecologías simbólicas” designamos el conjunto total de relaciones de sentido que en una sociedad se construyen en la historia con un entorno físico, biológico, psicológico, social y cultural a través de la actividad cognitiva y sus dimensiones más complejas, como la mente, el discurso y la actividad modeladora





y adaptativa de las identidades y alteridades de los diferentes y variados colectivos sociales. (González, 2019, p. 209)

La información, la comunicación y el conocimiento son tres componentes claves para el desarrollo, la deriva y el entendimiento de tales ecologías simbólicas. Estos tres componentes están tejidos entre sí por relaciones de *interdefinibilidad*, de tal manera que la especificidad de las propiedades y características de cada una *depende* de su relación con las otras dos. No se pueden estudiar por separado. Al estudiar y practicar la *comunicación para el cambio social*, el estatuto conceptual de la Información, la Comunicación y el Conocimiento deben tomarse como un conjunto de fuerzas y estructuras en movimiento de un complejo proceso que incluye transformaciones biológicas, conductuales y sociales. Estas transformaciones mejoran la capacidad individual y grupal para diferenciar e integrar (es decir, conocer) en la acción sus experiencias del mundo, y al hacerlo, potencian la capacidad de las personas y colectivos para actuar, confrontar y superar sus condiciones y contradicciones sociales.

Cuando un grupo determinado de personas que sufre y padece problemas críticos en su vida cotidiana (hambre, huracanes, maremotos, violencia familiar, inseguridad social, precariedad y explotación laboral, depresión, malnutrición, pandemias, discriminación, etc.) comienza a *cultivar* y construir su propio conocimiento, se *concientiza*. Ese grupo activa un *proceso de empoderamiento* que recupera históricamente su capacidad para *hacer y modificar* las condiciones de su vida, tanto en lo material, como en lo social y en lo simbólico. De eso se trata desarrollar *cibercultur@*.

Cuando se inicia el proceso de reconstrucción y apropiación de sus sistemas de *información*, sus sistemas de *coordinación y comunicación* junto con sus sistemas de *conocimiento*, activado por un trabajo de elaboración y reelaboración dialógica sobre sus *concepciones* y sus procesos, se hace posible recuperar o conquistar la capacidad para narrarse a sí mismos y dirigir su acción colectiva hacia la resolución de sus problemas críticos.

Esa capacidad para auto-narrarse puede ser recuperada, *habilitada* y se objetiva en tres dimensiones estratégicas. A saber, en el aumento de la capacidad del grupo para elaborar un discurso coherente y propio sobre su pasado; en el mejoramiento de su pericia y oportunidad para generar definiciones propias, sensibles y bien documentadas de su situación presente; y particularmente en la voluntad para abrir el futuro hacia diversos mundos posibles<sup>3</sup>.

La lucha por desocupar sus territorios simbólicos que han sido y permanecen ocupados pasa necesariamente por el rediseño de esta relación tridimensional con: (1) la *información*, entendida no como *las noticias*, sino como la capacidad de

<sup>3</sup> Ver el trabajo de Antonio Paoli y la pedagogía del mutuo aprecio con estudiantes de primaria en México (Paoli, 2014).

establecer relaciones entre cosas, eventos, y personas organizadas con signos y textos cada vez más complejos que se vuelven significativas, donde antes no podían hacerlo; (2) con la *comunicación*, entendida, no como enviar mensajes y recibirlos, sino como la capacidad de coordinar acciones con otros, es decir, de autoorganizarse, y (3) con el *conocimiento*, ese proceso de asimilar y acomodar el mundo que nos transforma al mismo tiempo que lo transformamos cuando aumentamos la capacidad de diferenciar e integrar, como el producto de abstracciones reflexivas que habilitan a los individuos y al colectivo con mayores grados de autodeterminación e inteligencia.

La Epistemología Genética, ha desarrollado una teoría científica rigurosa y pertinente para comprender estos procesos. La pedagogía de Freire trabaja precisamente con quienes que no estuvieron incluidos en la historia de consolidación de esta disciplina. Ambas están en plena evolución.

La investigación y desarrollo de ciberkultur@, es decir, de la capacidad de autodeterminación que se puede cultivar y desarrollar con los procesos de conocimiento, potenciada por la organización e inteligencia colectiva, es el reto que desde hace un par de décadas comenzamos a enfrentar, tratando de ver un poco más lejos, montados en los hombros de gigantes. Sabemos muy bien que lo que deseamos, no es posible. Tendremos que construir lo posible.■

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# Extension or incommunication? For a New Meeting with Freire in Communications

## *Extensão ou Incomunicação? Para um Reencontro com Freire na Comunicação*

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### ABSTRACT

This article starts from recognizing Paulo Freire as a fundamental author for the theoretical understanding of communication in the Latin American context. It also notes its underuse in teaching and research in this area of knowledge in Brazil. An explanation for this paradox is the unlikely compatibility between Freire's praxiological method and the dominant applicationist perspective in university teaching and research. As an alternative, it discusses the possibility of a Freirean conception of extension, proposed as a thesis in his time at the University of Recife, rejected as an antithesis in his work in Chile and reaffirmed as a synthesis by the Brazilian National Forum of Extension of Public Universities in the present.

**Keywords:** Paulo Freire, praxiology, university extension, communications

### RESUMO

Este artigo parte do reconhecimento de Paulo Freire como autor fundamental para a compreensão teórica da comunicação no contexto latino-americano. Por outro lado, constata sua subutilização no ensino e na pesquisa dessa área de conhecimento no Brasil. Busca uma explicação para isso na improvável compatibilidade entre o método praxiológico de Freire e a perspectiva aplicacionista dominante no ensino e na pesquisa universitárias. Como alternativa, discute a possibilidade de uma concepção freiriana de extensão, proposta como tese em sua passagem pela Universidade de Recife, rejeitada como antítese em seu trabalho no Chile e reafirmada como síntese pelo Fórum Nacional de Pró-Reitores de Extensão de Universidades Públicas no presente.

**Palavras-chave:** Paulo Freire, praxiologia, extensão universitária, comunicação



## INTRODUCTION

**I**N THE ACCLAIMED BIO-BIBLIOGRAPHY of Paulo Freire organized by Moacir Gadotti, the Ecuadorian educator Carlos Crespo Burgos (1996) proposes that Paulo Freire's pedagogical thought contributed decisively to the formulation of a horizontal and democratic communication model:

Although the only opportunity Freire explicitly referred to communication was in his book *Extension and Communication [sic]*, in which he radically criticized the "extensionist" model, his proposals formulated from education had, especially in Latin America, a significant impact on communication theory in general. (p. 620)

It was precisely by criticizing extension as a mere unilateral diffusion of innovations, hegemonic in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s, that Paulo Freire formulated the concept of communication that would become an essential reference for the area in Latin America. Throughout this paper, we will discuss why, despite this contribution and the international prestige earned, Freire's ideas have met and continue to meet obstacles to their adoption in Brazilian education and research in communication. Finally, then, we discuss how, paradoxically, it is in extension – an activity that Freire apparently rejected in his important work of 1969 – that there is a greater possibility of overcoming the lack of communication between his ideas and the academic practices in the area.

## PAULO FREIRE AND THE COMMUNICATION AREA

In a panel during the XX Congress of the Sociedade Brasileira de Estudos Interdisciplinares da Comunicação (Brazilian Society for Interdisciplinary Communication Studies – Intercom) held in Santos in 1997, Colombian professor Jesús Martín-Barbero pointed out Paulo Freire (alongside anthropologist Renato Ortiz) as the most important Brazilian author for the development of Latin American thought in the area. Denise Cogo's survey (1999), carried out soon after, confirms this influence in several lines of studies and research in the communication area in the continent. Besides the rural communication area, his thought defined the investigation on popular and alternative communication and influenced the main authors in the communication and cultural studies area, both in the studies of reception and education for communication.

Venício Lima, an author who studied the concepts of communication and culture proposed by Paulo Freire in a thesis published as a book in Brazil in 1981, republished the work 30 years later, on the occasion of the 90th anniversary of

the educator's birth, drawing attention to the power of his thought in the new digital context:

The tradition of communication as dialogue acquires renewed importance and increases the possibility of permanent, online interaction in the act of communication itself. Freire theorized on interactive communication before the digital revolution, before the Internet, and its social media. As Freire himself did, we should refer to his reflections on the theory of knowledge, the basis of the concept of communication as dialogue. There we find a revitalized, creative, and challenging normative reference that will be of immense value in thinking of new communication technologies and also in thinking about their regulation. (Lima, 2011, p. 22)

In a more recent study, published in 2017, Cicilia Peruzzo notes Freire's continuing influence, although she points out that it manifests itself more intensely in the social practices of communication and non-formal education:

Although he worked essentially in the education area, his ideas contributed a lot to formulating concepts and practices of popular, alternative, and community communication – or horizontal, participative communication – in Latin America. Many Latin American authors who deal with this communication and communication for development and social change and the relationship between Education and Communication are based on Paulo Freire's conceptions or, at least, derived from his ideas. Meanwhile, the social practices in different regions and experiences echo the principles of dialogue, of popular protagonism, of horizontal participation, of criticality, and of emancipating education, especially when it comes to non-formal and informal education. (Peruzzo, 2017, pp. 8-9)

Despite this receptiveness in social practices, Freire's ideas have met obstacles to become inserted in the same way in formal academic life. Meditsch (2016) credits this underutilization to the dichotomy between theory and practice observed in university teaching in the area. Also, in research, the underutilization of Freire's work in the communication area in Brazil, compared to other areas of knowledge, is evident in the observation of the research groups registered at CNPq. The CNPq Directory of Research Groups lists 54 groups from the search for "Paulo Freire". Seventy percent of them (38) are in the Education area. Language and Literature, Ecology, Business Administration, Sociology, and Psychology have two groups each. History, Physics, Social Work, Physiotherapy, Geography, and Computer Science are the areas that have a group citing Paulo Freire as a keyword. Communication does not register any research group. The keyword



search in the Directory of Research Groups identifies the groups where the word appears in the group's name, its research lines, or its keywords. Although Paulo Freire is still being studied by some authors and applied in specific areas, such as popular and community communication and educommunication, he is not valued in Communication research in the same way he is in other areas of knowledge. This is demonstrated by the absence of his name among the keywords of the registered research groups<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Query carried out on  
June 3, 2021.

According to a Freirean perspective, we could attribute this absence to more general ideological issues that were already criticized by Freire himself (1980), such as the difficult-to-overcome conditioning of Brazilian academic thought to culturally hegemonic countries:

Authentic thought language is engendered in a dialectical relationship between the subject and its concrete cultural and historical reality. In the alienated cultural processes that characterize dependent societies or object societies, the same thought language is alienated. As a result, during the most intense periods of alienation, these societies have no authentic thought of their own. As we experience it, the reality does not correspond to the objectively experienced reality but to the reality in which the alienated man imagines he finds himself. This thought is not a valid instrument, neither in objective reality, to which the alienated is not connected as a thinking subject, nor in imagined and expected reality. Dissociated from the action that supposes authentic thought, this way of thinking is lost in false and ineffective words. (p. 87)

However, the underutilization can also be explained by the difficulty of making the dominant model of formal teaching and academic production adopted at the university compatible with a method different from its own.

### **DIALECTICAL AND PRAXEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY**

In his book in dialog with Freire, published in 1985, Frei Betto makes this distinction regarding teaching methods, referring to popular education:

The traditional methodology is deductive and is based on learning concepts and notions within the teacher-student relationship. Paulo refers to this as “banking” because it reproduces the domination system prevalent in capitalist social relations. The teacher holds the knowledge monopoly, and the student pays and sacrifices himself or herself to obtain a portion of that knowledge. This relationship reinforces the intellectual authority of the teacher, as it further

reduces the student to his or her own ignorance. The starting and reference point is the teacher, or rather, the teacher's discourse. This discourse has the property of abstracting the real into concepts, to the point of accentuating more the importance of apprehending concepts than the importance of transforming the real. The real is something to be known, explained, analyzed, and not something to be transformed. (Freire & Betto, 1985, p. 76)

Then, Frei Betto proposes the alternative that underlies Freirean pedagogy:

In dialectical methodology, the starting point is not the educator's knowledge, but the students' social practice. . . . Here, the concept appears as a tool that helps to deepen the knowledge of the real, and not to make of it a mere abstraction. . . . Therefore, the dialectic methodology is inductive, and in it, the process of theorizing the real goes from the personal to the collective, from the biographical to the historical, from the local to the national, from the specific to the general, from the conjunctural to the universal, from the partial to the structural, from the concrete to the abstract. Theorization must return to the practice of the popular group in a new light. Light adds nothing to the real, but it allows us to see it better, understand it, and capture it scientifically. Finally, theory becomes a guideline for action that transforms the real . . . In methodology, it is essential to know which path the educational process takes theory-practice-theory or practice-theory-practice. (Freire & Betto, 1985, pp. 76-78)

In turn, the Canadian Maurice Tardif (2000), an educational researcher, observes how this method inversion has manifested itself in the university professional training. It adopts an applying perspective of knowledge that would be opposed to an "epistemology of practice":

We call the epistemology of professional practice the study of the set of knowledge actually used by professionals in their daily workspace to perform all their tasks. We attach a broad meaning here to the notion of "knowing", which encompasses knowledge, skills, abilities (or aptitudes), and attitudes, that is, what has often been called knowing, know-how, and know-being. . . . The purpose of an epistemology of professional practice is to reveal this knowledge, to understand how it is concretely integrated into the tasks of professionals and how they incorporate, produce, use, apply, and transform it given the limits and resources inherent to their work activities. It also aims to understand the nature of this knowledge, as well as the role it plays in both the work process . . . and the professional identity. (pp. 10-11)





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In the exact text, the Canadian author notes that the dominant model of university training would be based on a different epistemological perspective:

The programs . . . are globally idealized according to an appliance model for knowledge: students spend several years attending classes that are course-based and made up of propositional knowledge. Afterward, or during these classes, they will take an internship to “apply” this knowledge. Finally, when the training is over, they start working on their own, learning their craft in practice, and finding, most of the time, that this propositional knowledge does not apply well in everyday action. (Tardif, 2000, p. 18)

For Tardif (2000), this model crystallizes in the institutionalization of a labor division in and from the university:

This appliance model is not only ideological and epistemological. It is also a standardized model throughout the university practice and career system. For instance, research, training, and practice constitute three separate poles in this model. Researchers produce knowledge that is then transmitted during training and finally applied in practice. The production of knowledge, the training related to this knowledge, and the mobilization of knowledge in action become, from that moment on, completely different problems and issues for different groups of agents. . . . In turn, each of these groups of agents is subjected to professional demands and trajectories according to the types of careers at stake. (p. 18)

Tardif’s text (2000), produced in and for the education area, deals with teacher training but reports a dichotomy between *knowing about* and *knowing how to do*, which is also present in the communication area. Paulo Freire developed his teaching-learning method and all his philosophical conception of education because he diagnosed this dichotomy and intended to face it in his area, pedagogy. In his conception, the theoretical understanding of reality is only a moment in the larger cycle that leads to its permanent transformation by the human being who understands it. In a text published during his period of exile in Geneva, Freire summarizes this understanding:

Separated from practice, theory becomes mere verbalism. Separated from theory, practice is nothing more than blind activism. That is why there is no authentic praxis outside the dialectical unity action-reflection, practice-theory. Likewise, the theoretical context does not exist outside the dialectical union with the concrete context. In this concrete context, where the facts necessarily happen, we find

ourselves involved by the real, but without critically understanding why the facts are what they are. In the theoretical context, keeping the concrete within our grasp, we seek the rationale for the facts. In this concrete context, we are subjects and objects in a dialectical relationship with reality. In the theoretical context, we assume the role of subjects who are aware of the subject-object relationship that takes place in the concrete context and then faces reality again as subjects. This establishes the unity, not the separation, between practice and theory, action and reflection. (as cited in Torres, 1979, p. 68)

In the same sense, the Chilean philosopher Antonio Faundez emphasized this inversion of the method in a book also dialogued with Paulo Freire, published in 1985, when they discussed the production of science. According to the author, this exact inversion is verified in research:

In summary, Paulo, true science is that which, starting from the concrete and mediated by the concept, returns to the concrete. Furthermore, this is a permanent cycle. However, as intellectuals understand it today and as it is taught in universities, science consists of starting from the concept, returning to the concrete, and then returning to the concept. Although also permanent, it is another cycle; we cannot simply say that when science is concerned only with the concept, it does not have the intentionality of the concrete. The concrete also constitutes its problem, but it is the concrete that appears as a mediator for the concept. Then, we have the inversion of the knowledge process to return to the concept; in this process, the concrete appears as a bridge element between the concepts. In this regard, you are right in saying that we should not stay in the concept. Erroneously we regard the concept's life as the reality, instead of the concrete's life, which, for us, is the true reality and includes the concept. In other words, it is a revolution because it is a new conception of science as a mediator for the understanding and transformation of reality. (Freire & Faundez, 1985, pp. 64-65)

For the German Heinz-Peter Gerhardt (1996), who deeply studied his life and work, "Freire proposes a *praxeological* approach to education, towards critically reflective action and critical reflection based on practice" (p. 169). This perspective would have led him to a rejection of university academicism while always generating, as well, criticism of his ideas from academia (pp. 153-154).

This misunderstanding is partly due to the influences that helped build Freire's thoughts, which are not currently the most usual in the university. In a 1963 text, for instance, Freire's religiosity is explicit as one of the primary sources and inspirations of his praxeological perspective (p. 5), which he would



recognize throughout his life, even after accepting the Marxist influence, as he did in the dialogued book with the US activist Miles Horton:

When I first met with peasants, men and women workers in the slums of Recife, to teach them and learn from them, I have to confess that I did so impelled by my Christian faith. . . . I have to say that I went there, the first time as if I had been sent. . . . I went there because I believed in what I heard and what I had studied. I could not standstill. I thought I had to do something, and what happened is that the more I went to the slum areas, the more I talked to the people, the more I learned from them. I was convinced that the people were sending me to Marx. Then I started reading Marx and reading about Marx, and the more I did so, the more I became convinced that we had to change the structures of reality and commit ourselves totally to a global process of transformation. However, what is interesting in my case – which is not the case for all people with a similar background as mine – my “meetings” with Marx never suggested that I stop having meetings with Christ. . . . I have always lovingly talked about both of them. You see, I feel comfortable in this position. (Freire & Horton, 2003, pp. 227-228)

However, between Christ and Marx, Paulo Freire went through many other influences. For the US professor Ann Berthoff (1990), who prefaces Freire’s dialogued book with Donaldo Macedo, Freire’s practice is entirely pragmatic:

Paulo Freire is one of the true heirs of William James and C. S. Pierce. He tells us: *the way your theory works and what it does change will tell you better what your theory is*. He wants us to consider the value of an idea by asking how much it matters. He wants us to think about the dialectics of ends and means, about the mysteries of despair and hope. Moreover, he encourages us not to put off change until a propitious moment; not to be wasteful in getting people to be ready to change, ready to learn . . . I believe Paulo is telling us, “There is no way to transformation; transformation is the way”. This is not mystification, and it is not a paradox of spirit that we must solve: it is a dialectic that we must enforce. (pp. xxvi-xxvii)

Although he recognizes the importance of this influence in his education, Freire (2000) will later distinguish between a pragmatism that he learned from John Dewey’s (1965) New School, based on the dissemination of his work in Brazil by Anísio Teixeira and which he considers progressive, and another “pragmatism”, put in quotes, typical of neoliberalism, which leads to fatalism and accommodation, with which he does not identify (pp. 123-124). In addition to US pragmatism, Freire was influenced by the concept of praxis that he found in

his reading of Gramsci, Marx, and their interpreters, and that would later help to ground his pedagogical proposal, itself explained as a “theory of knowledge put into practice”. Freire’s theory of knowledge will be drawn from philosophers such as Karel Kosík, Adolfo Sánchez-Vásquez, and Álvaro Vieira Pinto, as well as from works by Marx himself. On several occasions, Freire refers to the *Theses on Feuerbach*, highlighting that the German thinker wrote in only two and a half pages one of the most important works of Western philosophy.

In a conversation with Carlos Alberto Torres reproduced in the book *A Educação na Cidade*, Paulo Freire (1991) summarizes his praxeological perspective:

I emphasize the need for us, within the theoretical context, to distance ourselves from the concrete, in the sense of perceiving how, in the practice exercised in it, is embedded its theory, which sometimes we do not suspect or hardly know. . . . The central issue for us, educators, in the chapter of our permanent training, is how, from the *theoretical context*, taking distance from our *practice*, we extricate our knowledge of it. In other words, it is how from the *theoretical context*, we “take distance” from our practice and become epistemologically curious to grasp it in its rationale. By unveiling what we do in this or that way, in the light of knowledge that science and philosophy offer today, we correct and improve ourselves. That is what I call thinking the practice, and it is by thinking the practice that I learn to think and practice better. (pp. 103-105)

However, since the *concrete context* of practice is always historical and situated, the methodologies tried out by Freire cannot simply be transposed to other realities. Freire himself insists on this issue when reviewing his experience with Miles Horton:

For example, your experience and also mine in the sixties in Brazil did not occur in a vacuum. They took place in a historical space, in a context with special historical, political, social, and cultural elements. It is possible that we would not get the same results now. However, it does not mean it is not possible to achieve similar results in some areas of the country at certain times. . . . This is precisely why knowledge is always undergoing transformation. That is, the act of knowing has historicity, so today’s knowledge about something is not necessarily the same tomorrow. Knowledge transforms as reality also moves and transforms. So, the theory also does the same. It is not something stable, immobilized. (Freire & Horton, 2003, pp. 108-114)

In another of his dialogued books, with the US professor Ira Shor, in 1986, Freire moves forward in this observation in a propositional sense: “It is for no other



reason that I always say that the only way anyone can apply, in his or her context, some of the propositions I have made is exactly to remake myself, that is, not to follow me. To follow me, the key is not to follow me” (Freire & Shor, 1986, p. 41).

### **FREIRE AND THE REINVENTION OF EXTENSION**

Freire’s method and philosophy have their origins in the early 1960s in the experience of the Popular Culture Movement, introduced during the administration of Miguel Arraes in the Recife City Hall, of which he was one of the coordinators, and matured in the Cultural Extension Service (SEC) of the Universidade de Recife (nowadays Universidade Federal de Pernambuco). He was its director and was discovered by the then Minister of Education, Darcy Ribeiro, who supported him with funds and the projection of his work beyond Pernambuco (Freire, 1963, p. 19). The celebrated experiment that proved the effectiveness of his literacy method in 40 hours of classes given to peasants in Angicos, Rio Grande do Norte, was carried out as a SEC extension project (Pelandr , 2002, p. 53).

Professor Jarbas Maciel (1963) witnessed this experience at the time while making clear the critical perspective with which extension was dealt with in the institution:

*Cultural extension*, for us who are part of Prof. Paulo Freire’s work team and who are immersed in an intense activity of democratization of culture among the people, means something more than what is generally attributed to it in the university centers of Europe and the USA. The *extension* is a dimension of the Brazilian Pre-Revolution since it also – and not only man, in Gabriel Marcel’s fortunate expression – is *situated* and *dated*. Certainly, it is no longer possible to understand, in Brazil today, a university turned in on itself and to the past, unconcerned about the crucial problems that afflict the people it is supposed to serve. . . . Its motivation has its roots in the great contradiction of the Brazilian University that, among other things, clashes 1% of our population against the remaining 99%, in the most complete spiritual blindness and brutalized in the abandonment of a form of social and economic enslavement. . . . Therefore, to be truly functional, the *extension* must be aimed at these 99% – the immense majority of the Brazilian people – towards simply paying off a heavy debt that is not only accidental and not recent, because it is a historical debt. When we undertake cultural extension in these terms, we are fighting even against the errors and vices of our colonial past. (pp. 25-26)

In this spirit, the Cultural Extension Service planned publications, lectures, and created the University Radio (today called Paulo Freire Radio), considering the Adult Literacy Method as only one of the stages of what would be a Paulo Freire

System of Education that “is already being formulated and, some of them, experimentally applied, leading to an authentic and coherent Popular University” (Maciel, 1963, p. 26). The SEC project came to a halt with the 1964 coup d’état, when the Cultural Extension Service of the Universidade de Recife was invaded, and all its assets were destroyed. However, it left behind Paulo Freire’s first theoretical formulation on extension, a thesis that would later be denied by its antithesis in the educator’s Chilean experience, eternalized in the book *Extensão ou Comunicação?* (1969), which would mark the pedagogue’s main incursion into our area. José Eustáquio Romão (2018) contextualizes this turn:

Always concerned with the etymology of words and the historical trajectory of the original meanings, which are being transformed and gaining other meanings – are being “re-signified”, to use a trendy neologism –, Paulo Freire takes the word “extension” (from the Latin *extendere*: ex = outside + tendere = stretch) and lists some of its meanings, highlighting the one in the sentence: “Pedro is an agronomist and works in *extension*”. We can see from the example that Freire is conditioned, as was common in the 1960s, by “Rural Extension”. It is worth remembering that he wrote the text in Chile, when he was working at the *Instituto de Capacitación e Investigación en Reforma Agraria* (ICIRA), directed by Jacques Chonchol, who, by the way, wrote the work’s preface and who would be, some years later, Salvador Allende’s minister. At that time, the University “Extension” was strongly linked to rural assistance, in the sense of taking knowledge and techniques produced inside the University to the rural environment, to expand the production of the economy’s primary sector. Toward demonstrating that words intrinsically carry contextually and ideologically marked meanings, Paulo Freire uses the concepts of “linguistic field” by Jost Trier (1894-1970) and “associative fields” by Charles Bally (1865-1947) (27) to vehemently resist the term “extension”. (p. 189)

In this exposition, Freire (1969) describes extension in its most unidirectional sense, proposing rejection of the term and the practice:

Extension... Transmission

Extension... Active subject (the one who extends)

Extension... Content (which is chosen by the extender)

Extension... Recipient (of contents)

Extension... Delivery (of something that is taken by a subject who is “behind the wall” to those who are “beyond the wall”, “outside the wall”. That is why we talk about extramural activities)

Extension... Messianism (on the part of the one who extends)



## Extension or incommunication?

Extension... Superiority (of the deliverer's content)

Extension... Inferiority (of those who receive)

Extension... Mechanism (in the action of the one who extends)

Extension... Cultural invasion (through the content taken) reflects the worldview of those who take it, which overlaps with those who passively receive it. (p. 22)

As an alternative to extension, Freire (1969) proposes that “true communication does not seem to be in the exclusive transfer or transmission of knowledge from one subject to another, but in their co-participation in the act of understanding the signification of meaning” (p. 70).

Curiously, starting from this antithesis, Freire does not deal specifically with the university extension issue in his later works and the many interviews he answered recounting his life experience, he was not asked about the contradiction between the thesis of the Cultural Extension Service of the Universidade de Recife and the antithesis stated in *Extensão ou Comunicação?* (1969). The dialectical synthesis that will overcome it, at least in theory, will appear in the reinvention of extension from creating the Fórum Nacional de Pró-Reitores de Extensão das Universidades Públicas Brasileiras (National Forum of Pro-Rectors of Extension of Brazilian Public Universities). According to Antunes et. al. (2018),

The creation of the *National Forum of Pro-Rectors of Extension of Brazilian Public Universities* – today “Fórum de Pró-reitores de Extensão das Instituições Públicas de Educação Superior Brasileiras” [Forum of Pro-Rectors of Extension of Brazilian Public Higher Education Institutions] – the FORPROEX, in November 1987, was decisive for the advance that followed. For FORPROEX, University Extension was understood as an educational, cultural, and scientific process that inseparably articulates Teaching and Research and makes possible the transforming relationship between University and Society. For FORPROEX, University Extension is “a two-way street” between University and society. Academic knowledge and popular knowledge met once again. Then, came the 1988 Constitution, which consecrated the principle of “inseparability between teaching, research, and extension” (Article 207) and the 1996 LDB (National Educational Bases and Guidelines Law – Law no. 9.394/96), which established University Extension as one of the University's purposes (Article 43). The transformation of University Extension into an instrument of social change and the university itself has been underway along with the conquest of other rights and the defense of democracy. (p. 210)

Although the synthesis has been achieved in theory, in practice, the thesis and antithesis remain in force, still according to the authors:

In practice, *two strands* of University Extension have confronted each other: one that is more assistentialist and the other that is not, or, as they say, an extensionist practice and a non-extensionist one. The first one understands University Extension as the vertical transmission of knowledge, an assistance service, ignoring culture and popular knowledge. Essentially, this conception holds that “those who have, extend to those who have not”. Thus, this assistentialist view brings a unilateral direction. It is a kind of one-way street: it only goes from the university to society. The other way around is not considered. It is interpreted as non-existent. . . . The second strand understands extension as a communication of knowledge. It is a non-assistentialist, non-extensionist view of University Extension. Paulo Freire’s proposal to replace the extension concept with the communication concept is along these lines. It is based on a theory of knowledge, answering the question: how we learn and produce knowledge. A theory of knowledge based on an anthropology that considers every human being as an unfinished, incomplete, and inconclusive being who does not know everything but also does not ignore everything. In these last decades, FORPROEX has acted strongly to overcome the extension’s more assistencial profile. (p. 211)

Moreover, “dialogic interaction” is the first guideline proposed for extension actions, followed by “interdisciplinarity and inter professionalism”, “inseparability of teaching-research-extension”, “impact on student education”, and “impact and social formation”, according to the National University Extension Policy defined by the Fórum de Pró-reitores de Extensão das Instituições Públicas de Educação Superior Brasileiras (2013):

The *Dialogical Interaction* guideline directs the development of relationships between universities and social sectors marked by dialogue and exchange of knowledge, thus overcoming the discourse of academic hegemony and replacing it with the idea of an alliance with social movements, sectors, and organizations. It is no longer about “extending to society the knowledge accumulated by the University” but about producing new knowledge in interaction with society. A knowledge that contributes to overcoming inequality and social exclusion and building a more just, ethical, and democratic society. This objective presupposes a two-way action: from the University to Society and from Society to the University. (p. 48)

In the academic field, this synthesis, once put into action, would represent the dialectical leap capable of overcoming the lack of communication between theory and practice that still prevails in its teaching and research. However, for this to happen, it would be necessary to “start a process of transformation





of the university as a whole” (Antunes et al., 2018, p. 212). José Eustáquio Romão (2018) proposes that in the history of the Brazilian University, we could establish a chronology in *three phases*, according to the importance given to each of the institutional missions “First, the emphasis was given to Teaching and then to Research. Only the future will tell when it will be Extension’s turn” (p. 189).

However, the practical realization of this new emphasis and the pro-rectors’ proposal would depend on more than goodwill. In a rare allusion to extension after his 1969 book, in a letter commenting on Renato Quintino dos Santos’ work on the subject, published in 1986 and included in this book as a preface, Paulo Freire expresses a certain skepticism regarding the extension orientation that comes from a conservative university, while observing that the absence of extension would be another manifestation of the institution’s elitism:

I have carefully read your work, in which you make clear your rejection of any kind of political-educational action of an authoritarian character. Generally speaking, extension efforts are hardly ever free of the authoritarian trait you criticize. Authoritarianism is sometimes covert, disguised, sometimes explicit. Nevertheless, with regard to the University’s participation programs in popular areas, there is also a way of being elitist authoritarian without being culturally invasive – that of simply denying the University the exercise of such a task. (Freire, 1986, p. 7)

In the same preface of 1986, Paulo Freire briefly indicates how, in his view, a dialogical and emancipatory extension activity should be oriented:

Ultimately, the University’s presence in popular areas through cultural and educational programs – never neutral – is only justified to the extent that it contributes to the establishment of the dialectical unity between practice and theory, sensitivity to the concrete and exact knowledge of the concrete, popular wisdom and academic scientificity. It is towards this end, in fact, that we should strive to make the University’s presence in popular areas real. (pp. 7-8)

The Guidelines for Extension in Brazilian Higher Education, foreseen in the country’s educational legislation to be implemented by December 2021 (Resolution No. 7, 2018), provide the introduction of mandatory extension activities in the curriculum of all undergraduate university programs (and elective ones in graduate studies). Through its practical implementation, in the next few years, the academic area of communication as a whole will be able to demonstrate how interested and prepared it is for a reunion with Paulo Freire.■

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# Paulo Freire and Agnes Heller: Communicative Radicality and Education

## *Paulo Freire e Agnes Heller: Radicalidade Comunicativa e Educação*

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### ABSTRACT

The author re-encounters texts by Freire and Heller, which dialogue with the whole of both works. He seeks to understand the thought of the educator and the philosopher, both sustained by close epistemological roots and objectives. Under a critical discourse methodology, significant excerpts from the Brazilian educational patron are crossed with blatant examples of political practice in Heller's work. They provide political lessons to enrich a reflection on the Brazilian educational routine, especially embodied in the dramatic formative course of high school, the supposed Achilles heel of Brazilian basic education. In Freire and Agnes, education is realized as a radical communicative action at the service of the citizenship of the new generations.

**Keywords:** Changes in everyday life, crossing texts, education, politics

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### RESUMO

O autor se reencontra com textos de Freire e Heller, os quais dialogam com o todo das duas obras. Busca compreender o pensamento do educador e da filósofa, ambos sustentados em raízes epistemológicas e objetivos próximos. Sob metodologia de crítica do discurso, dá-se o cruzamento de excertos significativos do patrono da educação brasileira com flagrantes da prática política na obra de Heller. Eles promovem lições políticas para enriquecer uma reflexão sobre o cotidiano educacional brasileiro, especialmente encarnado no dramático percurso formativo do ensino médio, suposto calcanhar de Aquiles da educação básica brasileira. Em Freire e Agnes, a educação se realiza como ação comunicativa radical a serviço da cidadania das novas gerações.

**Palavras-chave:** Mudanças no cotidiano, cruzamento de textos, educação, política



## INTRODUCTION, OBJECT AND GOAL

### **Humanization and Humanism: the originality**

**I**N THIS WORK Paulo Freire's and Agnes Heller's texts are understood as a reflection around humanization theories and practices. Envisioned for the present time, Freire and Heller's work emphasizes an essentially radical thought; otherwise, it would not have more significance for a supposedly globalized society, but in fact would be pressured and lacerated by capitalism's ultraliberal way.

Certainly, the works are re-read in order to think particularly about Brazil, that celebrates the patron of education's centenary. Here, Heller is worked through thought proximity. In the exchanges of meaning, it will be possible to see in the Paulo-Agnes connections the projections in search of the conception of the reality lived by peoples, youths, and adults, from the real day-to-day and your imaginary of probable change.

In the perspective, any projects to fulfill or accomplish, be they autonomous or of the citizen constitution, will be met with humanism as a philosophical thought, regardless of the historical meanings that are given to it in many western lines of thought. The vast development of the arts and sciences, of the reflection of dramatic scenarios and the historical possibilities, even if it has resulted in apprehensions, offered many contributions, also arising and showing itself as indispensable as much as unwavering, especially before the horrors and inhumanity.

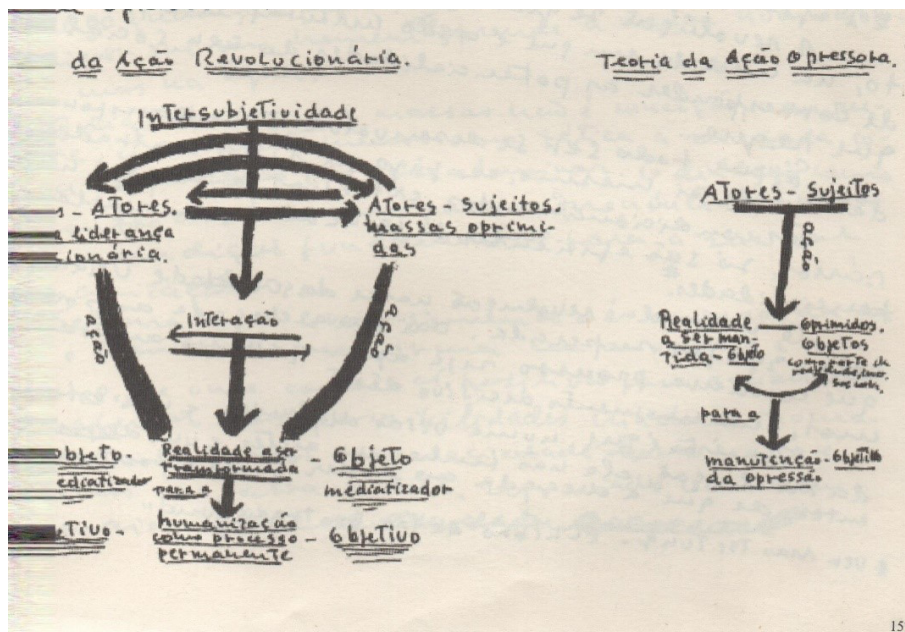
In *Pedagogia do Oprimido (o Manuscrito)* (Freire, 2018), meanings to the humanist work are exchanged, the humanist person, the humanism, the existential experience, the humanization and its opposite, the being in this world to change yourself and it, the subjectivity and objectivity dialect, the condition of the shadow of the self and the accession of the oppressor, the dialogue and the revolution. By the page 19 of the manuscript, it is clear that the *pedagogia do oprimido* is humanist and libertarian. And by the page 29, not to mention many other examples, the humanist "recognizes himself more by this belief on the people, that motives him, than by a thousand actions without them".

There are not reasons to believe that the patron articulates vocables and syntax randomly. He has never done it. He was strict and precise on the limit. Weighed and pondered the vocables in order to extract collections of meanings in a connective movement. In this sense, his understanding of humanization surpasses any dictionary, because he places it in a revolutionary process. Freire worked with human values in History and, because of this, questioned idealisms and technologies, but not humanism, that happens in History and with which Paulo worked with in an exquisite way. As it'd have to be, the humanization

is the peak of the drawing of his own fist he presents on page 157 of the *Pedagogia do Oprimido's* manuscript (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Diagrams created by Paulo Freire



Note. Reprinted from *Pedagogia do Oprimido (o Manuscrito)* (p. 157), by P. Freire, 2018, Editora e Livraria Instituto Paulo Freire; Nove de Julho University (Uninove); Big Time Publisher/BT Academic. Copyright of the author.

The relationship between Heller and the Renaissance humanism goes beyond the love she dedicated to Italy, because it ensures itself in a basic work published in 1967, *O Homem do Renascimento* (Heller, 1967/1982), a type of creation-learning that would never leave her. This book was necessary for another set of texts about this *Renaissance man* published in 1988 under the coordination of Eugenio Garin. This summarizes well Heller's mindset:

In your powerful agreement, precisely titled *Renaissance Man*, published in Budapest in 1967, Agnes Heller, disciple of Lukács observed that the Renaissance was that "age of big biographies", in fact of the autobiography. And this added on, because so many exceptional personalities formed themselves in a society that built itself, transformed itself and retold itself. At a static moment – continued Heller – a dynamic moment occurred. The new man, the modern man, was aware of his own making, made it. This was the "Renaissance man". (Garin, 1988/1993, p. 6)



This making, this demand of awareness of your own place and of the place of your people – others and another – and this indispensable consciousness dynamic towards the new man (which Freire radicalizes in the humanizing revolution) will be his apprenticeship and his *praxis*, notably from his everyday life.

It should be clear that the existence and the dynamic of the humanist mindset do not imply sugarcoating the human. Garin (1988/1993) strives for correcting the Burckhardt's optimism about the Italian Renaissance humanism when shows that “the Swiss master didn't notice the crisis and the transformation of societies and the insertion of multiple types in multiple social insertions” (as cited in Alves, 1997, p. 40). Humanism is obviously much more than splendor of the Sistine Chapel, Garin continues to argue in the sense of

treating of the new man's birth does not spare the analysis of his form of corruption and degeneration, of the cruelty of tyrants and their competent usage of forms and instruments of war, of the definition of spaces and of new ways of political action<sup>1</sup>. (as cited in Alves, 1997, p. 41)

Artists of humanism can become bizarre as much as humanist thinkers can be pedantic.

It is not intended to affirm that Heller and Freire are examples of the humanist mindset. But it is important to see the movement of their works, that meet at the incompleteness, at the unveiling of human possibilities, at the freedom of enunciation beyond the ideological stamp stuck to the forehead, the place in life in process of liberation, through new eyes, sayings and hearings, through meetings and re-encounters with others and the places where nature and culture voice their destiny and reveal their incompleteness.

It'd be possible to quote many parts of Freire and Heller's work in which convergences reveal the humanism. Some noble quotes in *Pedagogia do Oprimido (o Manuscrito)* (Freire, 2018) have already been displayed. Certainly, the humanism in Freire, already well thought-out, does not lack essence or ideas supposedly pure so to be movable inductor of autonomy, freedom, rights and lived citizenship, always confronted with oppression. The article's continuation will clarify, but there are two privileged places from the works studied that demand immediate demonstration. In Freire, the small-great book *Educação e Mudança* (1979/1983), released to the public when Paulo came back from the 14 years exile. Between the pages 27 and 32 there is a speech necessary for everything that'll be read by Freire, including the unpublished texts and published after his passing in 1997.

Although, with some justification, Moacir Gadotti (1979/1983) attack on the preface the idealist humanism and technological humanism in education,

<sup>1</sup> It is worth recalling that E. Garin coordinated the work *Luomo del Rinascimento* (1988/1993). The master Jacob Burckhardt wrote *A Cultura do Renascimento in Italy* (1868/2009), Brazilian edition from Companhia das Letras.

the critical attitude before the nature of the unfinished man and, therefore, necessarily teachable, is a humanist attitude, the *humanitas* phenomenon, neither idealistic nor excessively technological. And there is not a fear of controversy. From there, we have: “The man must be the individual of his own education. He cannot be its object. Therefore, no one teaches anyone” (Freire, 1979/1983, p. 28). In other parts of the work there will be the mediation of the world and an intense process of communication of the enquiring human, which will take to another one, to others, to meetings with close ones, the learning starting point, of conquest of autonomy and of freedom. That’s where the right of being a citizen is established. In this movement, which is also about conquering, the person makes themselves be part of the city.

The communication that mediates these acts and entails many readings of the word and the world will have to be radical to promote education, not as quantity of communicative acts, but fundamentally as quality of the chosen connections, thought-out, judged from the common cultural basis and from the reading of the educational community class, including those who read and write. The communicative acts that promote education cannot be lightened, censored, semi-open, with books, daily practices and closed documents and people afraid of exposing themselves. Free in their own choices by the slow learning that moves the conscious, the communicators educate themselves, from Angicos to the future, having in mind a Brazil which has two adjectives, autonomous and liberated, although it is acknowledged that it was violated several times. We educate ourselves, because, in communicative radicality, which is also a sociological and political radicality.

In Heller (2012), a sharp text about Marx and the human necessities supports the humanization project. In the Italian work by the Hungarian philosopher (cit.) a chapter is developed headed by the title: “Marx Without “Ism” and the Man’s Radical Necessities”. After affirming that Marx wasn’t Marxist, she shows that she has learned a lot from the 1968 occurrences, as a way of re-thinking human necessities and interests in the light of the *O Capital* creator’s mindset. The driving force for his work, according to Heller, were the *radical necessities* of the proletariat, which could not be met by the society of profit and of labor exploitation. Thrilled by the screams of the youth, Heller redefines human necessities: they are qualitative, do not admit subordination, demands the radical development of the human being towards a meaningful life, with free time, dignified and gratifying work, love, contemplation, beauty and emancipation. The youth was the voice of the radical necessities and it felt entitled to make a new hermeneutics in Marx.

The utopia would become real. It is true that later, Heller (2012, pp. 75-86) writes texts mistrustful of the satisfaction of all of people’s radical necessities,





maybe odd to any society. The philosopher preferred to think of a world in which the human being, individual and in group, can shape itself as possible, without uniformity, without definition. Incomplete. This way, a new ideal seems to emerge to her. It is about the man and woman that, later, look back and think that they have done everything that was possible for them. The old Renaissance man dealt with by her, also did and formed the action, contemplating and laboring their own freedom. It was made. The overcoming of the gears of consumerism and of the new forms of exploitation will reveal the possibilities in history... Then the *dasein* craves strong relationships with the *praxis*.

Freire and Heller promote intense dialogues in their texts. Humanization is the priority.

We cannot forget that, ever since the unfolding of the long medieval debate in humanist project history reveals us ruins, all kinds of crises and revolutions, so well revised by Eric Hobsbawm (2007). However, they walk through the secular time (and also suffer) two constitutional and instituting values of new human step: the possible awareness of the real, with its own potential, and the person's growth in emotion and knowledge. Education, Science and Awareness. Sartre (1970) complained that he was criticized for affirming that existentialism is a humanism and, even so, put emphasis on the negative side of human life. Once, said Sartre: "what we can affirm as of now is that we conceived the existentialism as a doctrine that makes human life possible and that, on the other hand, declares that every truth and every action entail a mean and a human subjectivity" (p. 12).

On the intense creation of his stronger arguments, which seeks answer one of the questions done against existentialism, Sartre (1970) gets to humanism. Denies that humanist tendency that makes the man the admirable being that accomplishes many things and, therefore, becomes a paradigm on account of his most sublime actions.

Adopts, however, other humanism meaning. The humanist is the one that does not finish their doing, but is in the process of doing it and does not accomplish themselves as a paradigm in order to take on judgements over others. In this humanism, the man transcends (not towards God but towards the human world) and takes on all the subjectivity of being human and being in this world, knowing that the only universe to exist is the human one. Important, highlights Sartre (1970), is that it does not suit them to go back to themselves, but to build goals outside the self, for example the freedom and whichever other achievements that mean their humanity.

Sartre's projects are not Freirean or favorable to Heller, but there are components in dialogue when the value worked on by the three blooms meanings on the emancipatory task, on the liberating mission, on the *dasein* and on the *praxis*.

**PRIVILEGED WAYS**

Freire's and Heller's work carries out through a privilege of physical ways, in which the distinction not only defines itself the area of knowledge but also the reading of what understand them as a value of social interlocution.

On the side of the author of the everyday in history, the look, the clarifying; as for the patron of the Brazilian education, the sayings that incite dialogues in search of political meanings, synonymous of revolutionary action. One of them speaks for the perspective and the other one speaks in the intuitive and desired conversation. Privileged ways are worked on in order to clarify and stimulate the construction of knowledge and their conscience.

It is worth providing the documents worked on. In the Italian reading of Heller, 1973, entitled "La Teoria, la Prassi e i Bisogni Umani", starting the text which would take her to argue the human necessities under the merchandising society, it has as provision "avere ben chiaro" (having clarity) (p. 28) which tackles the bourgeois society in modern times. Immediately, affirms being necessary "chiarire" (clarifying, enlighten) (p. 28) which will tackle human sciences. It is worth, therefore, add the reading of *La Sociologia de la Vida Cotidiana*<sup>2</sup> (Heller, 1970/1977), with emphasis on the texts between pages 9 and 90. The set chosen is thematic, because it moves the body senses, which are metabolized in direction of the meaningful existence in the world and in life, among mishaps and affirmations. In this text, still in the introduction, the master György Lukács (1970/1977), when presenting Heller's writing methodology creates a model figure, representative of the generic construction of the disciple: "be elected a generic method to illuminate the ways which the many ways of reacting go through, from the moment they bloom spontaneously until the moment in which they acquire an image/full complexion" (p. 12).

In the analogous work from 1970, translated as *Cotidiano e* (Heller, 1970/1985, pp. 28, 36, 69, 85, 99)<sup>3</sup> the mindset that argues "makes see, witness, is seen and sees" in her decisive moments.

On the worldwide seminar about Paulo Freire, Turim, 2014, this essayist found himself with Heller, who discussed a few aspects of the process of humanization on the educator's work and presented her book of 2012 *I Miei Occhi Hanno Visto*<sup>4</sup> (Heller, 2012).

The work is a long interview done in a monastery near Verona. Considers Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Lukács, Marx, her life in the United States and her own philosophy, of special interest to the essay.

The privileged chapters by this essay to the contemporary perspective are "Lukács, the Cows and the Budapest School" (Heller, 2012, pp. 57-74), "Marx Without 'ism' and the Radical Necessities of Man (Heller, 2012, pp. 75-86).

<sup>2</sup>The first Hungarian edition was from 1970. By Edicions 62, Barcelona, released in 1977 and 1987. On the Catalan edition Heller affirms to not have anything to add to the 1970 work. The preface is Lukács's.

<sup>3</sup>It is worth honoring the publisher Paz e Terra, which published the work in 1985. The book is made of variations focused on the central problem of the everyday.

<sup>4</sup>Interview-book with Francesco Comina and Luca Bizzarri. Trento: Il Margine. The work between Heller and the interviewers happened on Easter, 2012.



<sup>5</sup>The poem without a name, opens the book. It was written in Geneva, April of 1976.

<sup>6</sup>It is the “safety copy” done by Paulo Freire and left in the Salvador minister Allende Jacques Chonchol and his wife Maria de Oliveira Ferreira’s hands, in the spring of 1968. On the dedication to the couple Freire concludes: “I wanted you to receive these manuscripts of a book that might not be good, but that embodies the profound belief that I have in men, as a simple homage to who I admire and cherish” (p. 37).

The reading of these enlightenment of the world proposals suggests other way of representation of the humanizing path, Freire’s poetic text, untitled, inserted in a posthumous work organized by Nita Freire (Freire, 2001)<sup>5</sup> – reproduced in the Appendix of this article.. There, there is *the* foreigner, who kept silent and, when spoke to the valley people, talked about nature and its movements of beauty; however, another speech unveils, a “now I tell you” which goes until the end, evangelical, the search in the *palavração* (action-word) of a speech as different as permanent, a speech of freedom. It is added to the analysis the sequel of the book *Pedagogia do Oprimido (o Manuscrito)* (Freire, 2018)<sup>6</sup>. Said sequel, by the testimony of the organizers of the work re-written by hand by Freire in 1968, does not have known translations, because it was removed from the pioneer editions in English. The theory of the revolutionary movement that Freire (2018) develops (pp. 156-158) presents two drawings, one of the revolutionary action and another of the oppressive action. One goes from intersubjectivities (intercommunication) to the transformations and to the objectivity of humanization, through interaction. The other one exists through the individuals of humanization towards objectivity of the oppressive maintenance, through the construction of objects of dehumanization.

As it was suggested, this speech in Freire (2018) does not produce a metaphoric paradigm, but fortunately metonymic shaft, which goes from fragmented parts of society in search of an organizing sense, a knowledge fed by liberating pedagogy, which always allows the returning to man and woman, the people from disregarded classes, capable of gathering in themselves the humanity needed for life on the world.

This work of textual reading and comprehension of thoughts, from the lived and felt of the everyday, will work correlations on the framework of each author, considered elements of the historical-social process. As far as possible, the work of description and analysis will project the significations correlated to contemporaneity, especially about situations of education, culture and communication.

## METHODOLOGY

This work considers Chartier (1990, p. 227), which helps us to create indicators for the reading and the assessment. For him, there are two approaches for the analytical reading of texts: on the one hand the morphology, which works movements of concepts and the figures that make them explicit; on the other hand, the syntactic, which works the specificity of the norms, regularities and the work’s own situations. In this analysis, the textual corpus is conducted by

the perspective (Heller) and by the dialogue (Freire), which induce the phrasal constructions, whether on the argumentative work, or on the poem.

The morphological-syntactic body, with its presence of perspectives and dialogues, your figures, presence/absence, recurrences, constitute the *large corpus* in Bauer and Aarts (2002, pp. 50-51).

Having applied Chartier (1990) approaches to *large corpus* (the data of the lived world, the ideas, images and the projects of change), it is also seen the place of knowledge where the critical reader works. In this relationship a process of communication is created, which takes part of the world knowledge and of its possibilities for change.

This methodological reading gets coherence in the approached author's method. According to the everyday philosopher, it is about electing a method and with it illuminate the steps that lead to political awareness. Such method moves from the generic individual (restrict corpus) to the large corpus, in which the awareness of homology among challenges and social-political forces enable the everyday individual to new confrontations, apprenticeship and accomplishments. Among many recurrent images, the way to build in the Freirean poetry takes on spontaneous sayings about nature and the valley people's local culture, which organize themselves as an initial body that offers space for the second speech, and third. The first of them starts off by adversative conjugation the evangelical way (but now I tell you...), which searches overcoming the naïve consciousness<sup>7</sup>. The next one is about achieving the full figure, transversal to every work by the patron of Brazilian education (coherent with Heller's political force reach). This conquest of images and symbols by the dialogued work is achieved with *palavração* (action-word), different and permanent speech, original phenomenon of the critical conscience according to Freire. It is worth seeing, therefore, how each textual body moves towards achieving their target.

## CORRELATIONS

Stablishing the texts and the authors' how to (the perspective and the dialogue), aware of the methodological bases capable of elucidating them well, it lacks depth in the correlations between text and constructive process, envisioning the targeting of their significance in history.

In the extract, originally published in 1972, and in Italian in the *AUT-AUT* magazine the following year, Heller (1972/2011, pp. 28-30) questions the theory that results in the division of labor and that obtains power in the bourgeoisie society through its disclosure, its *marketing*. Not failing to notice that there is a certain precariousness in the relationship between the creators of theory and its users,

<sup>7</sup> Might be Freire's richest excerpts about the idea of the naïve conscience (and in consequence its opposite) be those who in which think directly the educator's job in the contact with their students. In *Pedagogia da Autonomia* (Freire, 1996, p. 122), He combines the incompleteness of the young person to their passive condition of who receives content to hold on to and maybe answer later if demanded. Remembers the old reflection about bank deposit. The natural incomplete and the cultural passive make out the naïve conscience, main theme of the education seem as a political act.



be it by the manipulation of the market forces, or by the mere functionality of the theory, which drives sectors of society through some models and towards limited pre-established points. This happens because the theories are presented and accepted in the process of communication as hygiene products, types of toothpaste. In this movement of ideas, two points stand out: the praxis meaning and the efficiency of the theory. Heller draws attention to the essential need of not understanding praxis as any other human activity, from which the own theory's efficiency runs.

In turn, the text translated by Carlos Nelson Coutinho and Leandro Konder *Cotidiano e a História* (Heller, 1970/1985) presents the development of the excerpt's ideas, inasmuch as "the structure of everyday life is characterized basically by the change in coexistence of particularity and genericity" (Heller, 1970/1985, p. 23). The way the chapter is especially dealt with in the book impresses: 50 descriptive paragraphs of what is the everyday life, with some adversative argument in favor of the construction of the "generic human", above the awareness of the repetitive everyday life. The last 6 paragraphs start showing that the everyday life is not, necessarily, alienated as definition, since there were historical non-alienated representations, especially connected to science and art. So, the text's orientation is made by the verbs enable, mean, suppose, become, engage, find, must, turn into, make an effort (Heller, 1970/1985, pp. 17-41). However, despite the everyday mindset being driven by spontaneity, the everyday human is not immune of constituting itself as part of the praxis from its practical activity. In this moment the conscience's generic-human can build the new.

Considering Chartier (1990), this culture that seeks becoming generic operates a grammar of many texts, even if fragmented. The discourses of the new social *well-being* of the liberal society, operated at many times by the governance of this century, especially through reforms and, especially, individualist challenges, signaling the paradigmatic movements of new theories of *welfare state* as much as, mainly, the precarious work and outsourced to flood the everyday life and avoid an effective dialogic process. At a moment, institutions, and mediator organizations of society, such as unions and other opinion leaders are charmed by the rulers' speech and adopt their language in the folk everyday life. At another time, the splitting deepens, but the *marketing* operations still act in their efforts to make their speeches go beyond the worldly representation (or a presentation dialogued with society) in order to become meaningful, not to the government agents of speech (who bargain speech, currency and power) but to rebuild society's everyday, which is the *praxis*.

Heller (1970/1985, p. 24) illustrates the granting of a public transport's seat to an old lady and Freire many times has raised the dialogue surrounding everyday words which associate the I to us, such as brick, hut, hoe,

pencil etc. Both understood there the possibility (not the compulsory requirement) of ascending from the everyday life to complete generic figures of morality, generosity, encountering with the other and change, which could lead to creative social relationships, thus being competent for politics.

In practice, or praxis, the similar representation, the foreigner of Freire's poem starts talking to the valley people about the everyday life, their mornings, the singing of the birds, their uncertainties, denials, work, alienation. These sayings meant a "fundamental learning", in other words, the words and formal sentences of the language exercise do not bear the immediate meanings, in its own emergence. The layers of meaning proceed in making history including in the supposed alienation, which implies talking about birds and flowers. In this movement, there are not commanding words, nor dialogue denying speeches. It was about a "tell ye" as "way of talking to you". It proceeds in an evangelical tone the amplification of the syntony between the I and the others. Not even the supposed alienation of previous discussions meant permanent weakness but discursive equalization, needed. The weakness felt on the everyday by the "valley people" was not "a gift from the gods", not "perfume of the flowers". It is about not believing that the "weakness is not an ornament of our bitter lives". Next, it proposes two drawing virtues on the changing everyday: "not believing" in whoever imposes the naturality of alienation/weakness, but "hiding" from the powerful, as a tactic, which we already know, at least for determined time, because they need to keep believing that the "valley people" knows nothing and knows of nothing. Meanwhile, the speech "that will shake mountains and valleys" is prepared, that is, the different speech – "our action-word" (*palavração*) –, which will be a permanent speech. And it is up to the prophecy: "O woe to us, however, if we stop talking/Only because they can no longer lie". The speech of freedom will always "be happening".

The temporal forms of the adverb command the poem: after, only. But only up to the beginning of the dialectic discourse. The adverbs make way for the verbs of action and so the commands change, only punctuated by indispensable adversative conjunctions (especially *but*, *however*) to draw attention to the relapse of the naïve conscience. Getting close to end, the poem gains strength through the locution *therefore*, which has the double force of connectivity adverb and conjunction. *Therefore I tell you*: that's where it is defined that the different speech, freeing, is a *palavração* (action-word) which will have to be permanent. *Palavração* (action-word) can also be revolution.

The foreigner, that makes revolutionary leadership after assuming being from the everyday life, is the revolutionary leader from the manuscript's pages (Freire, 2018, pp. 155-157) prior to Freire's drawing, which is not included in the translations.



Firstly (the biblical tone goes through both texts), on the contrary to the oppressor's process, in which the elites feed from the "death in life" from the oppressed, the way for the revolutionary leadership is "dying to relive through the oppressed and with them". The poem's foreigner denies himself to, in a fundamental moment, talk to the people in the stage of fundamental learning. The leaning implies getting to know, also, the denials and alienations, which merge themselves to the birds' singing and to the succeeding of mornings, everyday phenomena. It is read "men are free themselves in communion" (Freire, 2018, p. 154). Continuous act, the coexistence of the revolutionary leadership with the oppressed (component of generosity) getting rid of the restrains of reification and, when denying commanding words, constitutes a speech on the first person of the plural which walks towards a movement of speech-praxis of freedom.

Freire's drawing of his own fist (see Figure 1) brings two images: the revolutionary action theory and the oppressive action theory. The first one goes through the intersubjectivities in contact, through the interaction of the individuals of humanization (leaderships and oppressed masses) and arrives at the objective of humanization, which faced reality when being transformed collectively. In the long run, there is the humanization as a permanent process. The second one, besides it, is initiated by the individuals of humanization, goes by the mindset in which the oppressed are a reality to be maintained and aims towards the objective of oppression. Therefore, a simpler figure. It does not hold a representative quantity of actors, does not carry realities to be transformed and does not lead to any form of humanization. From the page 43 of *La Sociologia de la Vida Cotidiana*, Heller (1970/1977) studies the fact that "the conscience of the 'us' does not always constitute an antithesis of the conscience of the 'I'. The feelings related to the conscience of the 'us' might be private fondness precisely like those referred to the conscience of the 'I'" (p. 44). Amongst privileged quotations of Marx and Goethe (sometimes of Plato and Aristotle) the author continues to affirm systematically, in key points of her text, that we have to see who is the particular/individual that guides themselves in the everyday life and what is the world in which they should guide themselves in, that is, it is reckoned the guiding eye as a reading key.

At last, for what matters to this work, Heller (1970/1977) quotes Marx of *A Questão Judaica* to give guidance towards the human emancipation, that is, she says "only when the man recognizes and organizes their own strengths as social strengths and therefore do not separate anymore, in themselves, the social force of the political force figure" (p. 90).

**THE HIGH SCHOOL STATUS AND THE UNPRECEDENTED IMAGINED**

Some phenomena of the educational moment we live in allow productive correlations combined with Paulo's and Agnes' texts. The reform of the Brazilian high school education and the *escola sem partido* embodies the challenging framework of representations and lead to the discussion of conscience and action of the "poetic foreigner", which also head to the indicators of conscience.

Even without a broad debate about the status of the Brazilian adolescence (three million out of school, a few thousands convicted by infractions relapse and high rate of mortality among the poorest), in light of the lived through phenomenon and known of the mediocre performance of the Brazilian students on the extensive Pisa exams, Ministry of Education (MEC) releases in 2016 a Brazilian high school *saving* Proposed Amendment to the Constitution (PEC). It proposes the 27 federal educational systems a reduced budget associated to a repertoire of offers of curricular components according the possibilities of each system and even of each town and school community. Therefore, a long-term action and susceptible to many variables.

However, the use of media marketing was intense and produced the image that everything is happening all at once, a mythic time, or that the redemption of this educational stage has already arrived. In fact, the Temer-Mendonça project was not implemented, since it should have, in theory, started when the Sars Cov 2 pandemic hit us. It is worth mentioning that this government is the result of a parliamentary coup against Dilma Roussef's government in 2016 and, therefore, did not guarantee any credibility and lead the country to Bolsonaro's government. In this course, after over two years, there is not a projection for the application of the Initial Education and Continued Magisterium Guidelines, created by the National Council of Education at the end of the prior government in service of the National Plan of Education, 2014. Under the current government there is not a single educational policy that directs an effective change of the high school, considering the magnitude of the country and the atomization of the school units on the territory.

However, the precariousness of the Brazilian elementary and high school magisterium is known, after 50 years of academic formation done through the flavor of theories on duty, of the minimal curriculums, of the voluptuousness of the educational market and of book excerpts and rushed out analyses on the didactic-pedagogical organization.

Nevertheless, the state of the national high school did not avoid the formation of mediator organizations strong in the magisterium areas, which, however, follow pragmatic agendas, wage, signalized by sufferable accomplishments. The exception is National Conference of Education





(CONAE), after transformed in Popular National Conference of Education (CONAPE), founded after the authoritative intervention of the National Forum responsible for the conference made by Temer's government. In it (2010 and 2014 editions) fundamental principles of Brazilian primary education are worked on collectively and referral documents lead to the effective constitution of educational politics.

The phenomena become connected. The accumulated precariousness of the whole formation processes the disorientation of guidelines, and the market expansion of educational services are met with denial of the diverse school and citizenry developer. The day-to-day of the schooling work is a type of Brazilian drama to be redeemed, but still are not open to seeing the structural consciences of the lived-through reality and its future.

However, this level of education goes through a dismemberment similar to what the entire youth goes through in the neoliberal division of work – the new supplying army – and, however, it lacks forces, be it from learners, be it from professionals working in education and trade unions, to new transformative steps of the current circumstance, worsened by the pandemic. Thoroughness, what brought us Freire, the liberation in communion, the arriving to the humanization through the awareness of the lived-through condition and the learning as a phenomenon of meetings and confrontations with others and the world, all of this is unknown to the high school we know and that changes nothing with the alleged reform of the transitory government that resulted in Bolsonaro. Nowadays it already called for on the streets the annulment of the law that created the allegedly new high school. Acknowledge that social and human gathering named high school is a time-space of immense pressure over the youth faced with a future that is already here and that makes a Sphinx question ready to devour the teenager towards the “flexible” world of work, that is, dismantling and operating through barely known technologies. Having understood this stage of the Brazilian education, it becomes distant from the project of change proposed by Heller (1970/1977, p. 90): “recognizes and organizes its ‘own forces’ as social forces and therefore does not separate anymore, in itself, the *social* force from the figure of *political* force”. Or this condition threatened and silent, which does not favor the meetings and confrontations proposed by Freire and towards a new permanent *palavração*, connective, dialogic.

The problem is that this image of the high school before exams in large scale and its mediocre results in languages and math fails to listen to a fundamental part of the process: the student. Especially people who are graduating in the countryside of their territories, their families, their communities, their way they see school and society and its readings of itself. If this inexistent hearing,

the fragmentation, the silence and the disenchantment will remain and the path of this school phase will seem unique, bad and inflexible.

It is not without reason that is wanted to ban the reading of gender in the current misgovernment and inaugurate the infamous apolitical school or pursue privileges and concealment in homeschooling. This, at the same time as insisting on the teenagers' rights of choosing their formative course in this stage of the *new high school*. In practice, those who should make choices is not guaranteed even the acknowledgement of their effective condition as a person and citizen, to whom the Constitution guarantees rights of opinions, study, speech and political stance. If the youth is prohibited of defining itself as a person of its own and an individual of rights, it is still not given the slightest comprehension of personal forces as social force towards political forces. Curricular choices in these conditions correspond to mechanical acts and signs of technobureaucratic imposition. In other words, it seeks killing the right and its sequel in the act of even being a student from a high school. Like that getting rid of the reading of the world and its forces, before which the *I* would assess its possibilities and would learn the links between them and the social and political forces of which it becomes part of. Freire and Heller are again present.

While in Freire is obvious a mediating suggestion coming from the one who had the gift of looking at all the inhibited space and that, from a certain moment, enters communion with the *people of the valley*, in Heller the forces of the *I* and society do not distance themselves, but they should know each other and recognize as force and as figure of force. There is no effective *vision of the valley* of the Brazilian education from the re-democratization in the 1980. During the dictatorship (1964-1985) there was not even a single visible and habited valley due to the repressive force and the cover-up of the possible and of the viable. However, already in democratic times, what was proposed by the Child and Adolescent Statute, 1990, that is, children and adolescents are subjects of life and their rights; more than ever, their own educational process.

Understanding the freedom and the interests of the private *educational services* and lavishing of educational experiences and more than dubious ONGs of education that put themselves as media best sellers guiding the governments and the Brazilian state in educational subjects. Their truths are defined in advance, in the heart of its ideological construction and not on the battle fields of the educational everyday life, where the truths are exposed and faced.

Thus, it is put aside that dialectical mindset which takes place in the foreigner's considerations in Freire's poem. Here, he only gets to an adequate speech after much preparation, beside the synergy acts and the habitants' analyses and the use of their potentials. The adolescent in Brazilian high school is a hidden individual, invisible.



The cognitive imposition of massive exams, including Pisa, is far from respecting the fact that the best skills of the new adolescent will be those drawn from the findings of the social self they represent and from the social forces that leads towards their political representation, or their educational conscience. It is deemed that the educational everyday that prepares the adolescents for massive exams delays the constitution of their political individual by a lot.

It is worth presenting here the densest quali-quantitative research done in the last few years in Brazil. Abramovay and colleagues (2015) followed, heard, tested and dialogued with adolescents and young people from public school, from which resulted in an indispensable work.

The focus groups, held in dozens of Brazilian cities, from many regions, reveal the diverse phenomena of the everyday life that lead to high school students, of Education of Young people and Adults and of Urban Pro-Youth (compensatory of high school) to stay in school, give up, skip class, drop out, having pleasure, get annoyed: lack of teachers, monotonous classes for working students, fights, family disease, work, pregnancy, tiredness, drug trafficking, complete family discouragement, lack of perspective of the future; anyways, a whole universe of facts and conditions that, if on the one hand represent the everyday reality of the Brazilian high school attending youth, on the other hand suggest their leaving, because there are speeches that analyses the lived-through reality and attempts comprehending it and when it comes to the good work of certain teachers, as well as the pleasant interactions inside the school and the reading of future time in the individual's life that is different from the family "that has not studied".

Some of Abramovay and group's texts need to be known by those who educate, especially by those who love youth and the school. The entire first part, in which it is characterized the current youth it can be associated with the excerpt found in page 26:

It is important to consider that young people nowadays experiment a sped-up process of "adultification", being exposed to social vulnerabilities and multiple challenges. They are – maybe more than any other demographic group – the ones that face the biggest uncertainties and risks resulting from the process of globalization. To Reguillo (2000), the XXI century watches a socio-political crisis, excluding Latin American young people from a future project:

[Young people of the XXI century] in many and diverse ways, proceed shattering the certainties and also keep signaling, through many ways, that the social project privileged by modernity in Latin America was, up until today, incapable

of carrying out promises of a future that is inclusive, just and, above all else, possible (REGUILLO, 2000, p. 3, our translation<sup>8</sup>). (p. 26)

<sup>8</sup>The expressions *our translation*, present at the end of some quotes, are from authors of the mentioned work.

However, short after, on page 30 of the work, the Mexican author, known scholar of youth, criticizes harshly the school she knows, the Latin American:

the school sets itself up as an inspector, judge and jury, but hardly ever recognizes itself as part of issue of young cultures, and even less as favorable towards this issue . . . The expressive dimension of young cultures reduce itself to an unhinged behavior of “not kids”, “not adults”, and their practices and readings of the world give us key clues to decipher possible configurations that take on society. (Reguillo, 2000, as cited in Abramovay, 2015, p. 30)

About the technological surrounding of the youth, the team was successful in mentioning Martín-Barbero (2006) and others, scholars of cultural mediations operated in society by the media and its operational echoes, be it in the everyday life, be it on events of which the new generations take part in:

In a reconstruction of what we understand as knowledge, from sources and the criteria of truth, and the authorized individuals and recognized as producers of knowledge. And this restructuration cannot leave the school unaffected, because it is an institution based on another type of organization of knowledge, hierarchical and centered. The scholars that adopt this positioning sustain that we are facing a change of era and that it is necessary to organize the education on the new production traces of the know-hows, how the hypertextuality are, the interactivity, the connectivity and collectivity (MARTÍN-BARBERO, 2006; DUSSEL; QUEVEDO, 2011, p. 12). (Abramovay, 2015, p. 31)

The highlight due to the study of relationships between young people and school quotes Charlot (2001), in a text which *speaks* in Freirean tone:

I) which every relationship with the knowledge is a relationship of who learns with that that is learned and with itself, always using something from the “human world”. The meaning and value of what is learned “is indissolubly connected to the meaning and the value that the individual attributes to itself while learning (or fails the attempt of learn)” (CHARLOT, 2001, p. 27);

II) that every relationship with knowledge is a relationship with the other, as learning gives access to the virtual and present community of those who learn;



III) that every relationship with knowledge is a relationship with the world in which the person lives in, learns and develops activities. “The individual does not internalize passively the world that is offered to it, it builds it” (CHARLOT, 2001, p. 27). Such learnings are more or less important, more or less interesting to the individual. “The meaning and the value of a knowledge . . . are inseparable of this relationship with the world” (CHARLOT, 2001, p. 27-28). (Abramovay, 2015, p. 36)

Before highlighting a few results of the main groups in the research, it is worth presenting data shown in the work which is very relevant to the considerations here developed, that is, the social dimensions, collective and plural that encourage the presence of the youth in high schools.

The high school youth value the school as a place of, by order: having friends, taking part in *cool* classes, going on trips with the class and studying themes related to their lives. Likewise, teachers confirm the same wishes in their everyday lives.

What students think about school was a qualitative dimension of emphasis on the research.

Emblematic of the relation between maintenance of the everyday life and the awakening to the new is the reading of the teachers’ work, as read in the comments of high school students:

We can tell when the teacher does not like teaching. When they are there because they graduated in an area, thought that would find a job in that area and did not find it and ended up becoming a teacher. We can tell, it is clear when a teacher likes it, that puts effort into it, that says: -No, you are having difficulties, I will help you, we will sit together, you will be able to answer this question. They go to a classmate that knows more and say: - You both sit together. So it is that teacher that likes their job. That is a good teacher (2) (Focus Group High School Debate, Cuiabá). (Abramovay, 2015, p. 114)

There is a crisis in the authority relationship. The generic comprehension of the magisterium’s power is in ruins in the education of adolescents and young people, as research shows. However, since it is not an universal position, there are, in fact, “gaps” for a new awareness of the educator’s/teacher’s work, because as a general rule the students feel the main need of a mentor, of an advisor, an opener of new perspectives, which many times is not something found on the limited everyday school, community and work life. But the teachers, especially from high school and parallel programs for the youth and adults, are under harsh analysis of their practice, of their educational reading of the world,

of their didactic-pedagogical attitudes. Which is good for the expansion from the generic readings to the awareness of social relationships in the school community and, consequently, to the construction of the identifications person who studies and works and which is already going towards citizenship.

Another comment from a student exemplifies this process:

Last week, the geography teacher talked to us, and we were explaining how our educational model is very old, it is Jesuit. Then he said we should learn other things, that is why we like his class, his class is a different type of geography. So, I started thinking about this and said “wow, we learn at school but what we study is not what we should really learn, about the world, about the life we will have, and we learn about life on the streets, not in school” (Main Group High School Debate, Rondonópolis, MT). (Abramovay, 2015, p. 135)

“Then I started thinking about...”. The world and life meet at the blooming of thoughts, between the spontaneous and systematic, boosted by the dialogue which is also allowed by the everyday. The interaction had in the geography course from this school provides an individual force which starts to join social forces in life in this world, which can lead to society the political capacity of thinking.

When the team displayed behavioral constructs, there were diverse reactions, either from criticism towards colleagues, or towards teachers, especially by the lack of good explanations about the “subjects”, of the comprehension of individualities, the flow of repressed anger and spread against people from school interactions.

The researchers coordinated by Abramovay (2015) conclude:

It is impressive, not for being specific of this research, but for being an indicator of a cultural citizenry denied, the scarceness of alternatives to have fun, to have pleasure and regulate their life rhythm, extensive field of research and present in the youth's narratives. Theater, museums and trips are scarcely mentioned; the joined parties are limited, with bigger probabilities, to free concerts of local music and gatherings at friends' houses. The movie theater is also scarcely mentioned, especially amongst high school kids. These, in greater numbers, know how to use the internet better than the ones from EJA and from PJU. Young people get to school without a single cultural fund, which, in turn, also is not part of its agenda, prevailing an incomplete socialization, which compromises the process of knowing. (p. 232)

What do the adolescents have to do with the empty agenda that the national system of education imposes on schools that manage the high school education? Are they partially to blame for using the lingo of this society that washes their



own hands and meet others with their hands tied from an everyday life turned as misunderstood as oblivious?

As part of the studies lead to the Common National Curriculum Base (BNCC) (2017-2018) constitution, that is, BNCC of Elementary Education and BNCC of High School Education, the Basic Education's Council of the National Education's Council (CNE) prepared a synthesis of the National Curriculum Guidelines (DCN), some of them prepared by members of the original Guidelines's commissions. It was the case of the High School Education's DCN, reported in 2011 by the counselor José Fernandes Lima, who also prepared the synthesis.

In it there is the clarity of how to and why work with the adolescents and young people from this decisive stage towards the adult world, including the work relationships and, as a right, the university.

Reads:

it is suggested that, to enable the care for all high school students, it is necessary to discuss the social-economic-cultural characteristics from the youth that attend it; understand the representations that the school, its teachers and leaders make of the students; knowing what feelings and meanings the youth attribute to the school experience; getting to know how the youth interact with diversity and to what degree does the schooling culture settled nears or distances itself from the young students' expectations. Besides that, it is important to verify if the schooling experience offered holds any relation with the students' personal interests and life projects; identifying to what degree the developed activities at school can contribute to the students' elaboration of their future projects; and verify if there are any aspects that need to be modified in a sense of favoring successfully the students' staying at school. (Síntese das Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais para a Educação Básica, n.d., p. 37)

Throughout this sociopsychological reading, which provides the day-to-day education of adolescents and young people, the ones who teach should consider that they have voices, they think, plan, choose and judge, not only on the pragmatic of what each school offers, but also in the direction of their destiny as a person and citizen. The few quotes chosen from Abramovay and team's text handle these attitudes.

Therefore, through the optics of the political image, the high school is a *bottleneck*, which shows the ignorance of the bureaucratic states. Through the optics of dialogue in research, it is a space emptied out by the national system of education, misunderstood not only in its diversity but also in its formative paths taken by the individuals-students and, even more so, by the absence of art, ethics, beauty, pleasure and safety communally created.

**FINAL WORDS**

The generic-human conscience made social and political proposed by Heller would demand resumption of debates from 2016 and the questioning of the law that, basically, is still on paper, especially in poorer States. Continuous act, without even consulting with the adolescents, no national common base will reach what Freire understands as the teaching done in the encounter with the others and in the confrontation with the world, since this one begins in the I of the youth and not on the perverted (and darkened) images of the leading state. It is believed that the mindful re-reading – and national – of the National Curricular Guidelines for High School, associated to the specific Guidelines for afro descendent, indigenous, *quilombola*, nomad, riverine and special education and to the peripheral spaces (Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais Gerais da Educação Básica, 2013) bring values, challenges and safe orientations to the BNCC High School document and, thereby, understands itself and become aware that the whole curriculum of this stage should be whole, expanded and capable of guaranteeing autonomy, freedom and the way to citizenship, with fully exercising the talents and vocations of the youth. That is where the stage thought about by Freire and extended as a movement towards humanization. In the context of Brazilian cultural histories, humanization – as thought of in the *Pedagogia do Oprimido (o Manuscrito)* – is a revolutionary act.

The pandemic exacerbated all the awfulness and flaws of the system. But it clarified a lot. In the re-reading of Abramovay (2015), there are signs of never seen before elements – and viable – in the contest in society: the ending of the fragmented school, in which teachers a lot of the times are the students' enemies and in which other disagreements fulfill their part of strengthening the unconsciousness or of the unhappy conscience, in favor of a school empowered by other *palavração* (action-word) and many inclusions that strengthen social bonds, research spirit, discovery of the narratives of the surrounding people, of the neighborhood and the city, focusing on the sciences and none oversight in terms of the peoples' knowledges. This means the educational community as, in fact and truly the creator, maintainer and assessor of integral curriculums, didactic-pedagogic projects and school regimes clearly democratic. Each school is a place of analysis of Brazil and prepositions of changes for the country, which does not have any more excuses to the maintenance of fiefdoms, captaincy, colonies and empires. That is why, thinking about high school education implies thinking about the revolution in the systematically unjust society.

In Paulo's and Agnes' proposals, which humanism/humanization translates into love revolution which leads to new generations, the never seen before becomes viable and the everyday individual's needs are unleashed towards





the changing of illuminated consciences inside the same everyday life, but with clarity of the social and political future that is, of the right of practicing talents and vocations in the city, agriculturable countryside, river, forest, *quilombo*.■

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#### APPENDIX: UNTITLED POEM BY PAULO FREIRE

Some time after his arrival  
 the foreigner said to the men in the valley  
 one dusking afternoon:  
 Thus far I have spoken to you only  
 of the songs of birds and  
 of the tenderness of the dawns.  
 It was necessary to undertake with you some fundamental learning:  
 to feel the uncertainty of tomorrow,  
 living out the negation of myself,  
 through a work that is not our own.  
 Only so, speaking to you would be a form of speaking with you.  
 Now I can tell you:  
 We do not believe in those who proclaim  
 that our weakness is a gift from the Gods,  
 that it is in us as the fragrance  
 or the dew in the mornings.  
 Our weakness is not the ornament  
 of our bitter lives.  
 We do not believe in those who state,  
 in hypocritical intonation,  
 that life is really like this  
 – a few having so much,



millions having nothing.  
Our weakness is not a virtue.  
Let us pretend, however, that we do believe  
in their discourse.  
It is important that not a gesture of ours  
reveal our true intention.  
It is important that they leave happy in their lie,  
certain that we are things of their own.  
We need time  
to prepare our own discourse  
that will shake up mountains and valleys,  
rivers and oceans  
and will leave them stunned and fearful.  
Our different discourse  
– our action-word – will be spoken  
by our whole bodies:  
our hands, our feet, our reflections.  
All within us will speak  
a life-bearing language  
– even the instruments that  
our hands will use,  
when, in communion, we  
shall transform our weakness  
into our strength.  
Poor us, however, if we cease to speak  
simply because they can no longer lie.  
Therefore, I tell you:  
Our liberation discourse  
Is not the medicine for a passing illness.  
If we go silent as the present lies quiet down,  
new lies will appear,  
in the name of our liberation.  
Our different discourse  
– our action-word –  
As a true discourse  
will be made and remade;  
it never is or will have been,  
because it will always be being.  
Our different discourse

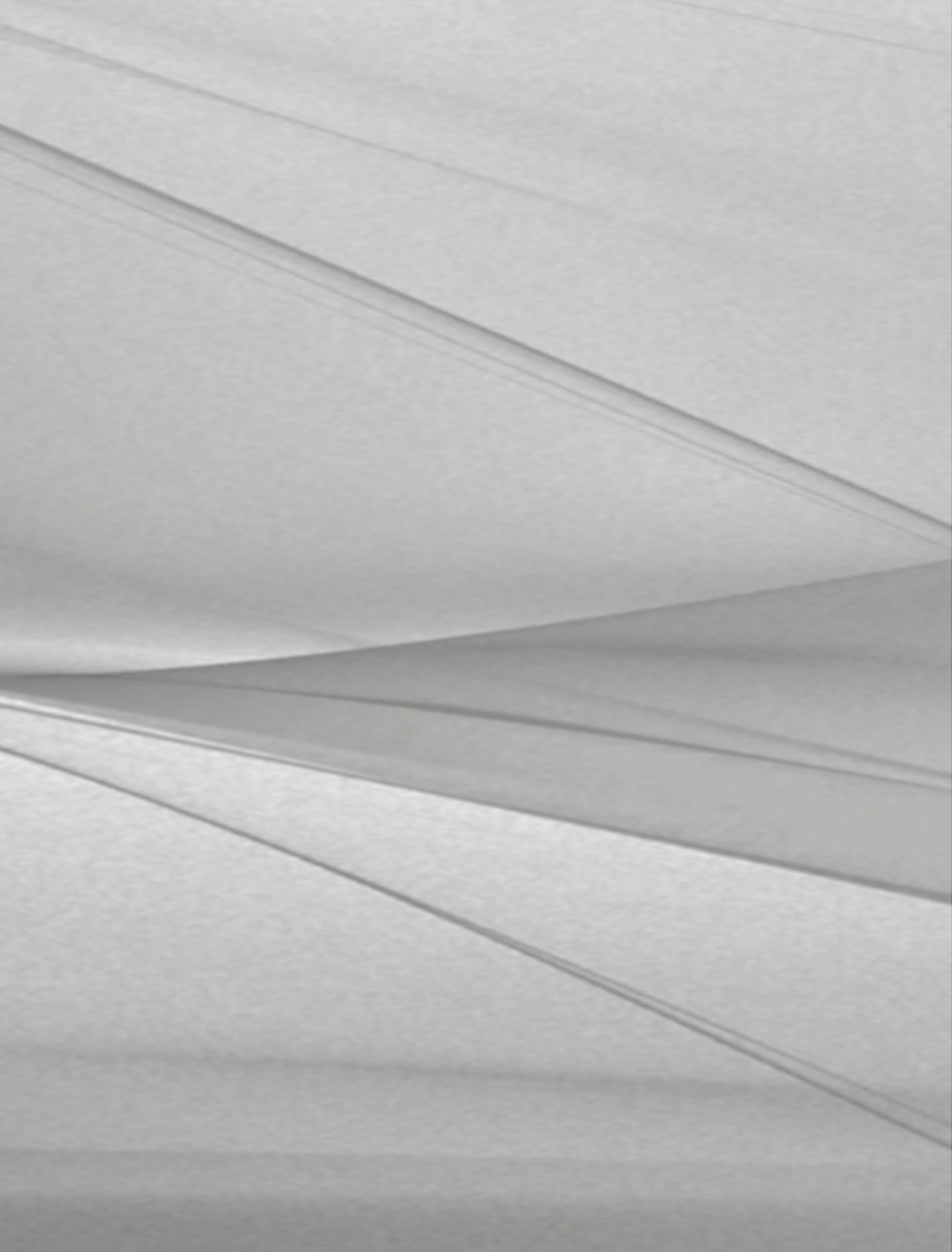
– our action-word –  
must be a permanent one.

Paulo Freire, Geneva, April 1971

From Ana Maria Araújo Freire's collection. Inserted, in the presentation,  
in Freire (2001).

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**COMMUNICATION AND  
CULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS**







# Bridging Identity, Culture and Nation: Applying Freire to Study Abroad in Ghana

## *Criando Pontes entre Identidade, Cultura e Nação: O Uso de Freire no Intercâmbio Estudantil em Gana*

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### ABSTRACT

This essay shows how Paulo Freire's pedagogy has informed a long-running, immersive annual excursion of the USA University of Oregon journalism and communication students to Ghana, West Africa. The students are diverse in many ways: by economic class, racioethnic identity, gender, sexuality, disability, and cultural background. They are doubly challenged to live together and to work in separate internships in an unfamiliar cultural environment alongside Ghanaians, while also completing assignments and meeting program learning outcomes. Freire's concepts and methods sought to break down barriers between teachers and students and empower all participants while engaging in literacy training.

**Keywords:** Identity, culture, Paulo Freire, Ghana, student excursion

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### RESUMO

Este ensaio mostra como a pedagogia de Paulo Freire tem informado um intercâmbio anual imersivo e de longa duração de estudantes de jornalismo e comunicação da Universidade de Oregon, EUA, em Gana, África Ocidental. Os alunos são diversos por classe econômica, identidade racial e étnica, gênero, sexualidade, deficiência e formação cultural. Eles são duplamente desafiados a viver juntos e a trabalhar em diferentes estágios em um ambiente cultural desconhecido, ao lado de ganeses, enquanto completam tarefas e atingem resultados de aprendizagem do programa. Os conceitos e métodos de Freire buscam quebrar barreiras entre professores e alunos, e capacitar todos os participantes ao mesmo tempo que os engajam na formação educativa.

**Palavras-chave:** Identidade, cultura, Paulo Freire, Gana, intercâmbio estudantil





## INTRODUCTION

**I**N ALL ACADEMIC fields there has been an increased and necessary emphasis on global interrelations. Geopolitical events of the past several decades (notably the 9/11 terrorist attacks), transnational globalization, climate change, and recently the Covid-19 pandemic have exposed our global interdependence as well as disparities in accessing vital resources. Also, within many nations there have been calls to diversify organizations, including colleges and universities. Within the United States, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) and related movements have added urgency to address enduring racial, ethnic and other forms of injustice. The rise of xenophobia and anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies show the inseparable connection between domestic and international prejudice and oppression, yet also have sometimes pitted domestic BIPOC (biracial, indigenous, people of color) concerns against those of new citizens and non-citizens, further complicating social justice movements.

It is within this complex context that experiential learning programs, immersing students in an unfamiliar culture and deploying Paulo Freire's insights and pedagogies, can be effective, even transformative, in shaping students' short- and long-term actions and choices. This essay therefore theorizes and illustrates how Freire's concepts apply in a two-decades long study abroad program that brings University of Oregon (UO) students to Ghana. The students are diverse and must work as a team, yet they must also collaborate with Ghanaians in professional media settings.

In this essay, I first summarize the elements of Freire's pedagogy that are foundational to this program, followed by an overview of the program. Then I give examples showing the evolution of student and instructor growth in three, overlapping thematic areas: economic class and power (e.g., the power to travel and to represent); identity and experience (e.g., by gender, race and disability); and culture (navigating differences in media norms and religion).

## FREIRE'S PEDAGOGY

The UO's Media in Ghana program is grounded in concepts of experiential learning and critical pedagogy explicated by Paulo Freire in his many publications, especially his signature book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). In his work with adult literacy students in 1960s Brazil, Freire sought to break down sharp identity and cultural barriers between teachers and students and empower all participants while simultaneously engaging in literacy training; therefore,

they are highly pertinent to a program such as Media in Ghana. Freirean concepts foundational to the program include: the relationality of oppression; historicity; praxis; a rejection of banking education in favor of problem-posing education; dialogue; and a goal of empowerment.

Drawing on Christian liberation theology, e.g., Teilhard de Chardin<sup>1</sup>, Freire (1970) assumed that freedom from internal and external forms of oppression is a defining quality of human life and necessary for growth. From Marx, Lenin and others, he viewed poverty due to class structures sustained by capitalism as a central form of oppression. He also argued that oppressors are as oppressed as their victims because their acts of control are dehumanizing to all involved.

However, freedom from oppression is not a given and requires struggle and commitment.

Freire (1970) conceptualizes the practice of freedom as *praxis*, “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (p. 36). This may be accomplished via emancipatory dialogue, requiring love, humility, empathy, and hope (Suzina & Tufté, 2020). Praxis is limited by historic context or historicity, i.e., the ways in which history and culture dialectically have shaped humans while at the same time humans are shaping history and culture for the future. Historic constraints on praxis vary; therefore learners evolve differently via struggle (Freire, 1974, pp. 4-5).

Freire (1970) further argues that praxis is not possible via traditional forms of “banking education,” where an instructor provides content for students to retain. He argues that banking education is a form of domination that submerges consciousness, inhibiting creative power (pp. 67-68)<sup>2</sup>. He favors “problem-posing education”, in which teachers and students are “critical co-investigators in dialogue,” and are willing to reconsider prior views as they reflect on the perspectives of others (p. 70). Problem posing methodologies include participant observation by educators; defining problems in the languages of students; analyzing the causes of problems, finding new words and images to understand them; modeling risk-taking behaviors; eliciting insights for solutions and actions; and critical reflection and growth (Freire, 1974, 1998).

Freire’s (1974) goal is *conscientização*, i.e., “the development of the awakening of critical consciousness” (p. 15). As participants awaken, their silence and inaction are replaced by “critical transitivity”, which is characterized by increased depth in analyzing problems, the practice of dialogue versus polemics, an openness to different viewpoints, a refusal to transfer responsibility, a rejection of passive solutions, and the ability to see validity in the approaches of others (p. 15).

<sup>1</sup> For the philosophical and theological underpinnings of Freire’s thought, see Thomas (1994) and Melkote and Steeves (2015).

<sup>2</sup> John Dewey (1944) likewise worked against traditional forms of education, which he termed “pouring in” (p. 38).



Since Freire outlined these concepts and methods, numerous scholars and teachers have used them to deploy pedagogies that are *participatory, fully collaborative, engaged, critical, empowering, and community based* (see Giroux, 1988; hooks, 1994; Kolb, 1984; Shor, 1992). Also Freirean thought has informed others leading immersive excursions, particularly those that provide opportunities for service learning or volunteerism<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup>The *Journal of Experiential Education* offers numerous case studies of experiential fieldtrips that likewise draw on Freire.

In a helpful application to development communication practice, but equally relevant to educational programs such as study abroad, Tufte and Mefalopoulos (2009) define four levels of participation: passive participation, i.e., merely informing recipients of decisions; participation by consultation, soliciting periodic feedback with no commitment to act on it; participation by collaboration, which includes horizontal communication components, giving primary stakeholders opportunities for input via discussion and analysis; and empowerment participation, with dialogue during all phases of the process, from planning to evaluation, such that all stakeholders have significant voice (pp. 6-7). Empowerment participation is consistent with Freire's beliefs. I find these levels useful in reflecting on Media in Ghana in subsequent sections.

## MEDIA IN GHANA

The program is set in Ghana, West Africa. Ghana's political stability, emerging economy, vibrant media presence, scholarly expertise at the University of Ghana and other colleges and universities, and widespread use of English as the national language makes it an attractive study abroad site for U.S. media and journalism students. Ghana's role in the trans-Atlantic slave trade and in the U.S. Civil Rights Movement adds interest, especially for BIPOC students. Ghana also remains a developing country with logistical barriers, resource limitations, and cultural differences that provide a challenging and rewarding context for learning. Media in Ghana began in 1999, and the program has continued to the present time<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>4</sup>See Steeves (2006) for a detailed history.

The program has evolved over the years as an outcome of student feedback, instructor experience, and increased demand, though some features have remained constant. Applicants are screened via essays, reference checks, conduct records and interviews. Some knowledge of Ghana (showing initiative), enthusiasm, a flexible attitude, maturity, and adequate skills for a media internship are all considered.

Students live together in one house, though each departs daily for an individually assigned internship. The students also take a course that begins

the spring before departure. While readings on Ghana's history, culture, politics and media are assigned and the students are taught basic phrases in the most widespread local language (Asante Twi), an important goal is simply to get acquainted. Here, Freire's notion of historicity is important in recognizing that each student and instructor will begin in a different place and progress differently. Dialogic strategies to reduce gaps between and among instructors and students are important, as the onsite learning experience will be collaborative, requiring a foundation of trust.

During our first week in Ghana's capitol Accra, we continue the orientation course via group discussions, as well as meetings with Ghanaian media scholars and professionals. We also take local excursions. Internships begin the second week of the program and extend for five weeks full-time, with weekend field trips outside Accra. Students must keep a daily *media log*, recording their communication-related observations both inside and outside their internships. They also must write a paper using primary sources, i.e., interviews with Ghanaians. These assignments require critical observation and reflection, as theorized by Freire. Once onsite, problem-posing strategies per Freire are essential, in that students find themselves in an unfamiliar setting with tasks to do, and therefore need to comprehend, i.e., *problematize* their new realities before identifying solutions (Goulet, 1974, p. ix).

A significant way in which the program has evolved is in the number and diversity of students participating. In the early years and with few financial aid options, groups were small (nine or fewer) and students were almost entirely white, female, and from well-resourced class backgrounds. Even then, it became evident that the group dynamic was a significant part of the trip, and students who wouldn't ordinarily be friends developed deep bonds that have endured. As time went on, scholarships materialized, and applications increased, I began forming larger (15-20) and more diverse groups – by gender, age, sexuality, racioethnic identity, class, disability and more, requiring students to grapple with everyday hierarchies of oppression within as well as outside the group. Evidence of suitability for the trip – flexible attitude, enthusiasm, maturity – remained essential. However, as early applicants always have been considered on a first come, first serve basis and as most apply at the deadline, it isn't difficult to consider diversity while being fair to all applicants. This has since enriched everyone's experience, as we are doubly immersed in unfamiliar culture and with diverse teammates too. Additionally, I have sought funding to include colleagues as co-instructors/participants, with an emphasis on those from underrepresented backgrounds.



<sup>5</sup> My colleague Sung Park created the blog. See: <https://ghana.uoregon.edu>.

In 2011, a colleague created a program blog, and students are required to post on it periodically<sup>5</sup>. The blog offers a space for sharing experiences and showcasing work. At the same time, peer and reader feedback on posts has facilitated dialogue in exposing differences. The rise of social media and students' posts on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram have provided further opportunities. In addition, for several years, between 2015 and 2019, the students formed teams to create assets for local non-profit groups. Students with lower-demand internships thereby had another way to engage with Ghanaians and secure portfolio material, and everyone had another avenue to learn and contribute, as time allowed<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> My colleague Chris Chavez introduced the team project component of the project, beginning with the first client, Alliance for Reproductive Health Rights (ARHR). See the blog for assets created, for instance: <https://ghana.uoregon.edu/category/arhr-video/>.

<sup>7</sup> Current published learning outcomes are: know basic African colonial and post-colonial history; understand shared Ghanaian and North American historical events related to the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, and Ghana's independence movement; understand the history and evolution of Ghana's media, and current/ongoing challenges facing Ghanaian media organizations; better understand, appreciate and respect cultural difference and diversity; be able to live and work professionally in an unfamiliar culture; be able to critically evaluate representations of Africa in Western media.

Another change is in program learning outcomes. Some are preset on the required syllabus in what may appear to be a top-down manner, as in Tufte and Mefalopulos' (2009) lowest level of passive participation. However, in fact, the learning outcomes have evolved over the years in response to feedback via consultative participation<sup>7</sup>. More significantly, the way in which learning outcomes are assessed varies by participant and group context. The most important learning outcomes are unlisted, i.e., those related to heightened consciousness and growth. Students generally come to the program seeking personal growth, and they write and visualize about their personal insights during and after the program. Freire's goal of *conscientização*, i.e., requiring self-reflexive awareness of difference and privilege is paramount. My hope is that students depart with an enhanced consciousness of human relationships and commonalities, a sense of growth, an appreciation for different worldviews, and a commitment to act against injustice.

Next I discuss examples of how Freire's concepts apply in this program and have led to insights and actions in three related areas of difference: class, identity, and culture.

## CLASS AND POWER

The UO students and instructors have the power of class and nation to travel and experience Ghana, whereas few Ghanaians will ever have such an opportunity. We therefore are challenged to understand our political economic privilege while also learning to better appreciate the complexity of Ghana, and to read and make narratives and images that resist simplistic and inaccurate representations.

Despite readily available information on the program, many students are motivated to apply based on images of Africa as a poverty-stricken continent in need of saving. Commonly applicants write about selecting

Ghana over a European site in part because of a desire to *help*. Dialogue to move their mindset from helping to listening, learning and valuing human relations begins in the initial interview, extending throughout the program in spring classes and onsite. Useful resources include Adichie's (2009), "The Danger of the Single Story", Wainaina's (1992) satiric essay, "How to Write about Africa", and current examples of misrepresentations such as CNN's "Troubled Waters", a story about supposed child slavery in Ghana's fishing industry that shows how the enduring Africa-as-victim trope sustains a journalist-NGO nexus whereby journalists get locally sourced stories and NGOs get exposure and revenue (Amenuti, 2019).

Once onsite, and following orientation, students have a heightened consciousness about representation. They want to emphasize positive stories and provide context for negative stories. However, they quickly learn that even positive representations may not overcome hegemonic readings. As an example, in 2013 a newly arrived student posted a photo on Facebook of himself with some neighborhood children with the innocent caption: "Made some new friends in Ghana". His brother reposted it with a new caption: "My older brother is in Ghana saving the kids"<sup>8</sup>. The incident sparked subsequent conversations about the ethics of representation and the recognition that even the most well-contextualized stories will never be perfect, and audience readings cannot be fully controlled. Plus we are all on the learning curve, and must allow ourselves to make mistakes and move on.

<sup>8</sup> See Madison and Steeves (2014, p. 218).

Regarding class consciousness, students move into a shared house in one of Accra's wealthier neighborhoods; however, in part to reduce program cost, the house lacks air conditioning, hot water, strong water pressure, and wifi. They grumble at first about the minor discomfort and inconvenience, but then they are immediately struck by the extreme economic divide in Ghana that they observe: first, from an air-conditioned bus touring greater Accra, and later in their daily activities. Students know that poverty exists in the U.S., but most can choose not to see it. Not so in Ghana, where wealth and poverty are evident daily, and students are forced to grapple with the anxiety that these routine encounters evoke.

Catherine's reaction following the tour of Accra shortly after arrival is typical:

The excursion felt dangerously close to disaster tourism. That was not the intent of the drive-by visit, though, and I'm glad we didn't stick only to the postcard-worthy sights. Poverty is ugly, but pretending it doesn't exist won't put clean water in children's cups or sewer systems in poor communities. Knowing that kids are burning our discarded computers for their precious metals, that families



have to bathe in the street for lack of space, that waterways are clogged with plastic baggies and human waste – just a few minutes’ drive away from where we sleep – humbles me. I hope the day makes us appreciate what we have, low water pressure and all. (Gregory, 2011a, para. 5)

As time goes on, they continue to reflect on these extremes. In a later post, Catherine wrote about visiting a school in a deprived community, the staff’s generosity in preparing her a meal, her failed attempt to eat it, her revulsion at the condition of the washroom, and her reflections after:

I struggled to identify and address a mishmash of feelings: guilt for wasting an entire meal at the school, relief upon escaping the open gutters of Nima, distaste for the consumerist tourist mecca of Osu, anger at my own privilege and delicate sensibilities.

In Accra, I’m constantly grasping for some sort of balance. My days are never “fine;” they’re always a mix of really good and really bad. I ping pong between emotions, swing from contentment to physical discomfort and navigate my way between abject poverty and opulence. This is a land of contrasts, and my internal state mirrors its tumult. (Gregory, 2011b, paras. 11-12)

Eventually, the students begin to discuss previously unrecognized or ignored inequalities at home, as Emily wrote:

Poor Ghanaians are dying from lack of sanitation, but so are Americans. . . .

Across the United States, poor people and minorities are more likely to suffer from environmental degradation, pollution, and poor health. . . .

The divide between rich and poor is far from just an African problem. Perhaps wealthy Americans find the reality easier to ignore – we collect amongst each other, in neighborhoods and work and social circles, and tell ourselves that real poverty is far away. In Ghana it stares you in the face. But the reality of the situation is worldwide and growing: unless we change, and fast, much of this earth will become unlivable. At that point, our gates will not help us much. (Topping, 2019, paras. 9, 11, 15)

In their internships, students struggle with resource constraints. Even though preparatory sessions covered these matters, the limitations are challenging. Students must navigate heavy traffic on public transportation (packed minivans called *trotros*) to reach their internship sites<sup>9</sup>. Compared to early years of the program, smart phones now are ubiquitous and wifi

<sup>9</sup>For an excellent visualization of a typical student workday, see Higdon’s (2016) short video.

is widely accessible; however, internet data is expensive and not all sites offer access. Air conditioning isn't always available and electrical power is unstable. Some sites lack sanitary washroom facilities or proximity to food, so students must figure out how to meet basic needs and stay healthy. Plus, the logistics of everyday work tasks can be frustrating (see, e.g. O'Leary, 2019a). As time goes on, most develop a new respect for Ghanaian media workers and how much they are able to accomplish with comparatively little. Students also are humbled by the immense gratitude and generosity of their supervisors and colleagues, even after just a few weeks. Ben, for instance, expressed his great surprise at the end of the program when advertising agency co-workers treated him and a peer intern to lunch, then took them to a clothing boutique to select Ghanaian outfits (Neal, 2016).

In 2013, our students experienced a particularly traumatic event, one that profoundly changed them – and me as instructor too. One pre-dawn morning when the students were still sleeping (security had dozed off too), robbers entered their home and stole numerous laptops, iphones, cameras, and wallets. We spent the day taking inventory, filing reports, and commiserating. Later I left briefly for other business. When I returned, the students had gathered in a circle. One suggested that they go around and each name something to be grateful for. They expressed gratitude for each other and for the experience of Ghana. They also recognized that this moment would pass and they would one day be able to replace their gadgets, an option most Ghanaians could never have. As a group, they discussed whether and how to report and frame the robbery in their internships and on social media. All comments were moving, and there were tears. I anticipated anger and threats of lawsuits, but their reactions were quite the opposite, revealing profound empathy and recognizing the learning opportunity of the moment. The students' gratitude only increased as Ghanaian neighbors and co-workers offered support and apologized for their country. Carson lost his iphone, laptop, all photos and his entire master's thesis. He wrote:

My connection to my world, my home, and my people had been cut. I felt paralyzed, and it wasn't because of the devices monetary value, it was because of everything of mine they represented and possessed. Then over the next few days, I began to see things for the first time. I recognized moments that previously had passed without notice and identified things that you can't see if you aren't really looking. I learned things about life that would have been lost upon me if my life had not been stolen. When you start looking for the evil and all you find is the good, a country full of people eager to help, smile, and say hi to strangers, you learn about the





human spirit. . . . When you go to work and the office queues to apologize on behalf of their country, all speaking in the first person as if they had robbed you, you learn about the human spirit. When the other students on this adventure, who have all had pieces of their life stolen, sit in the living room and together refuse to let it define this life changing experience, you learn about the human spirit. When that same group becomes closer and smiles more, you learn about the human spirit. Without being robbed and losing a lot of physical property, I may have never learned what I came here to try and understand. I would have never gained real insights into what it means to be human and what is really important within the human experience. (York, 2013, paras. 3-4)<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Numerous students wrote similarly. See, e.g., Armor (2013).

### **GENDER, RACE, AND INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITY**

As noted above, Freire's (1998) analysis of oppression centralized class analysis, usually defining oppressors and oppressed as material *haves* and *have nots*. However, some of his writings do additionally, though briefly, reference other axes of oppression. "The authoritarian, filled with sexual, racial, and class prejudices, can never become tolerant without first overcoming his or her prejudices" (p. 42).

What can be said, for example, of a man considered to be progressive who, in spite of his talk in favor of the lower classes, behaves like the lord over his family, whose domineering suffocates his wife and children? What can be said of the woman who fights for the interests of those of her gender but who at home rarely thanks the cook for the cup of water? (Freire, 1998, p. 67)

Numerous scholars since Freire have sought to further extend his concepts beyond class. Stromquist (2014), hooks (1993, 1994), Melkote and Steeves (2015) and others argue that his pedagogies are relevant to patriarchal ideologies, which remain evident globally. Others (e.g., Custódio & Gathuo, 2020) have applied Freire to ideologies of racism as well as sexism.

As inequalities are inseparable and layered, I favor merging his work with intersectionality, which argues that oppression is rarely a binary and can only be understood in the context of many social intersections and constraints. Although Crenshaw (1991) is often credited with the concept, others made similar arguments earlier, including emerging LGBT feminists, Black feminists, African feminists and others. Frye (1983), for instance, used the metaphor of a bird cage to explain oppression: "The bird is surrounded by a network of systematically related barriers, no one of which would be the least hindrance

to its flight, but which, but their relations to each other, as confining as the solid walls of a dungeon” (p. 2).

Furthermore, and especially in the context of the Global South, political economy (per Freire) and postcolonial theory are important lenses because they require paying attention to geopolitical capitalist structures sustained by divides between wealthy and poor nations and classes within nations. Socialist feminism is helpful too in synthesizing Marxism and feminism, showing how men’s control over women’s labor is a feature of most societies, evident in women’s concentration in lower-paying positions, in inadequate childcare and parental leave support, and in many other ways. In the context of developing countries, class compounded by neocolonial economic structures constitutes an especially salient strand of the bird cage that constrains girls and women. One percent of the world’s people own almost all of the world’s wealth and 90 percent of the world’s millionaires are men (Berti, 2018; Credit Suisse, 2019).

Yang (2016) powerfully illustrates the application of Freire’s dialogic pedagogies, including study circles, as well as feminist, anti-racist and decolonizing pedagogies via an intersectional lens in adult *folk high schools* in Sweden<sup>11</sup>. These schools, originally set up for adults without access to public schools, blend participants from varied identity backgrounds and at different levels of consciousness, much like Media in Ghana. Yang’s study focused on the Women’s Room, a women-only, feminist-identified folk high school for migrants in Sweden. According to Yang, “The positionality of migrant individuals and their teachers reveals the intersected social categories and power at work in the process of othering” (p. 837).

<sup>11</sup>Rasmussen (2013) discusses the history and pedagogy of *folks schools* in Denmark.

Gender and sexuality constitute an ongoing point of discussion before and during the Media in Ghana trip, especially as the #MeToo movement has gained ascendancy in much of the Global North, lesbian and gay rights have been normalized, and non-binary gender has been increasingly accepted. In Ghana, there tends to be less public consciousness around sexual harassment. Homosexuality is widely taboo and same-sex relationships are criminalized (though legal action is uncommon). Non-binary and transgender conversations are not as evolved as in much of the Global North. We discuss these issues extensively, as our students need to be safe in Ghana, while at the same time accept that they are guests with much to learn. We also discuss relevant historic context, such as the impact of colonization on gender roles (e.g., Oyěwùmí, 1997), and we review strategies for handling common situations and when and how to push back or request assistance.



Our women students especially are in numerous uncomfortable situations, enduring marriage proposals, invitations on dates and frequent comments about their personal appearance that would certainly be considered borderline harassment in the U.S. and occasionally do cross a line. Students generally have been able to navigate these situations well, sometimes with assistance, and have had conversations with Ghanaians that have been mutually illuminating. Emily wrote about her experience at the TV station where she interned:

men would tell me I'm beautiful, that they want to take me home or to marry me. . . . I often found myself making it into a joke. . . . At no point did I feel endangered, but it was awkward and uncomfortable.

However looking back now, it was truly a learning experience. Do I wish it didn't happen? Yes of course I do because no woman should ever be treated that way. But by these experiences I was able to get a little taste of how a lot of women are treated around the world. (Port, 2018, paras. 1-2)

Importantly, most of the students begin to recognize that gender roles are complex everywhere. In 2016 Rachel attended an African Union event where Ghana received a gender award recognizing leadership in promoting women's economic and social rights. She later wrote:

Ultimately, life in Ghana has shown me that the progress of feminism does not follow a single, prescribed path. Women in a society can have representation without respect, or respect with immutable cultural limits. A society can embrace women in the workplace, yet refuse to acknowledge any long-term change in gender roles. Nothing in a fight for social justice is as simple as "forward" or "backward." In different cultural contexts, the battles and victories are not the same. Thanks to this international experience, I'll carry that understanding with me as I continue to study and advocate for women's issues. (Benner, 2016a, para. 10)

Difficult situations also arise around sexuality. In 2015 most of the students found themselves coping with the ways that religious fundamentalism affects reporting, especially with a recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling on same-sex marriage. On her first day in her internship Erin was assigned a story on Ghanaian and U.S. reactions to the ruling. Her editor directed her to use his evangelical Christian text messages as sources, creating great inner turmoil, as she recounted in her blog post (Hampton, 2015). In her internship report Erin later wrote:

Nevertheless, I used the messages, along with several quotes from American news sources about the mixed reactions to the Supreme Court ruling, attempting to be as unbiased as I possibly could. . . . I felt I had done a fairly good job. . . . However, when I saw the article on the front page the next day, my heart sank. The headline read: “Gayism is insult to Creator’s intelligence, Ghanaians declare”.

While the headline was hardly representative and would never be approved in a credible U.S. publication, Erin was still proud that that she was able to navigate the situation so the story equally included her sources. It also sparked many frank and mutually consciousness-raising conversations with her co-workers on this topic.

Race constitutes an especially challenging identity issue for American visitors to Ghana in the context of anti-racism activism and the BLM movement. Custódio and Gathuo (2020) foregrounds anti-racist and anti-colonial activism in his case study of the Finland-based Anti-Racism Media Activist Alliance (ARMA), which combines media activism with Freirean dialogue to raise consciousness:

As members of the university community in Europe, we have been on the privileged side of the spectrum in cultural and economic terms. In that sense, Freire’s original understanding of being oppressed in terms of class has not applied to us. Despite that, it was only after accessing media materials and experiencing dialogue with peers already engaged in anti-racism struggles that we realized how racism has affected us and how the suffering of peers also concerns our existence. (p. 140)

Anti-racism constitutes an enduring theme in our program. Ghana was centrally situated in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Around 80 historic forts and castles stand along Ghana’s coast, and many were used to brutally hold captured slaves for weeks or months before being shipped to the Americas. Additionally, Ghana’s independence in 1957, coinciding with the U.S. Civil Rights movement, plus Ghana’s first president Kwame Nkrumah’s friendship with U.S. Civil Rights leaders, led to numerous high profile visitors, including W. E. B. DuBois, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Maya Angelou, and others. Since then, Ghana has increasingly attracted African Americans seeking to learn about their heritage. Ghana declared 2019 the *Year of Return*, marking 400 years since the first slaves arrived in North America. This history also helps draw students and faculty of color to the program.

Diverse groups mean varying consciousness around race, ethnicity, and other intersections. Once onsite, students struggle with their feelings about being publicly labeled *obruni* or *oburoni*, a common term meaning



white person, but also used to reference any foreigner. The term is not meant to offend, but students are uncomfortable being called out in this way. White students often try to connect their discomfort to the U.S. minority experience, but eventually and in conversation, realize that it's a false equivalence, as Rachel wrote:

“Now I know what it feels like to be a minority.” As a white person in Ghana, this is easy to say. I stand out. I'm asked where I'm from. I'm constantly conscious of my race, and it's hard.

But this statement isn't true. Especially in light of the recent horrific police shootings of Philando Castile and Alton Sterling, along with the other forms of racial violence that occur in the U.S. every day, I have to acknowledge that I will never truly know how it feels to be oppressed and disenfranchised on account of my race.

As a “minority” here, I do not experience implicit bias in hiring processes, or feel that people subconsciously link me with crime and violence. I never fear for my life in the presence of police. On the contrary, there is at times an odd respect for white foreigners woven into Ghanaian hospitality. For example, I am interning at a premier radio station in the nation's capital city... with no previous radio experience. My privilege is hard at work. (Benner, 2016b, paras. 4-6)

At the same time, African American and other students of color are disappointed that they, too, are considered obrunis, even during the 2019 Year of Return. As Mercedes wrote,

We were Obrunis (foreigners), but we were still not created equal. I didn't look like my peers. . . . I don't fit the mold that Ghanaians have for the “all-American girl,” so I faded to the background in a lot of social settings. In a place where I thought I would be welcomed, I felt like a stranger. (Wright, 2019, para. 12)

The excursions to two prominent former slave-trading castles always evoke powerful emotions – of guilt, anger, extreme sadness, confusion and even despair. Students of color and especially African American students often find these excursions exceedingly painful; but their experiences are not uniform and it is important to find ways to let everyone express themselves without judgment. Juwan, an African American student, had been well educated on the slave trade, yet found himself overcome by the tour, struggling to grasp how such a massive crime against humanity could be perpetuated for so long:

I want to hate white people. . . . but then you can't really get mad at them, because it's so much bigger than that. . . . if the African people hadn't partook in it, it wouldn't have got that big. . . . I can't get mad at my own people. . . . I'm just mad at the situation . . . there were so many hands playing into it. (University of Oregon, 2013, 3:12<sup>12</sup>)

Varying emotions also can easily be read as disrespect and lacking empathy. Mercedes, quoted previously, wrote about her feelings and her peers following the Elmina Castle tour:

I couldn't speak during the tour. I couldn't think. There was a pain deep inside my heart that I couldn't explain. I was angry. I was hurt. I didn't want to be there. I boarded the bus in silence, where life seemed to resume for my peers. They were laughing and joking as if everything could go back to normal. For me, nothing would ever be the same. (Wright, 2019, paras. 2-3)

Later, in our discussion, Mercedes was able to share her anger and pain with the larger group in a way that was raw and real and immediately changed the tone of the conversation. Donny, a white student, tried to capture his sense of inadequacy guilt, shame, recognition of privilege, and feeling of helplessness in the moment.

It's hard to put into words the atrocities that happened at Elmina Castle. As a writer, my words and the words of others are sometimes all I have. But today, they feel cheap and trivial. . . .

I can also tell you about my selfishness. About my inability to comprehend the mass amounts of pain surrounding me. About the barrage of trivial thoughts concerning my girlfriend back home, about my internship and my cat. For me, the privilege existed in my inability to remain present. To imagine a sea of faces perishing at the hands of colonizers is easier than imagining just one. Because if there's only one, there's a chance I might recognize it.

Yes, I can tell you about all of this, the words tasting flat and diluted on my tongue. I can tell you how uncomfortable I am writing this now. How the idea of me using this experience as a tool for personal growth feels both empowering and utterly defeating at the same time. (Morrison, 2019a, paras. 6, 12-13)

Another white student in the same group, Madeline, reflected similarly, but additionally on gender intersectionality, and on the imperative to act.

<sup>12</sup>Video produced by Ed Madison (University of Oregon, 2013) featuring Juwan's and other students' reactions following the castle tour.



As a woman, I imagined myself here at the will of a foreign predator and tried to comprehend the fear, despair, and anger that millions of women felt here every day for 400 hundred years. It was easier for me to try and sympathize with these women than face the fact that, on the rare occasion that a white woman were to enter this castle, that they would not be standing down here in the courtyard, but up above. . . .

The day of our trip to Elmina was uncomfortable. Not just because of the heat or the stench, but because I was forced to face my privilege in a way that I never had before. I have not only white privilege, which has a whole new meaning to me now, but the privilege to visit this castle and experience this myself, and the privilege that no one who ever lived here did: knowing that it ends. . . . And all of this pain and growth means nothing if we do not act to make sure that history does not repeat itself. (Robinson, 2019, paras. 7, 12)

Whenever powerful emotions are involved, there are dangers in having a discussion circle. As Machado and Freire (1998) note, there may be elements of group therapy in the dialogic method that act to assuage the guilt of the oppressor and/or make the oppressed feel better about their victimization (p. xiv). It is important to stay firmly focused on the political project or praxis of resisting injustice. There is always the risk that words will unintentionally divide the group and negatively affect the dynamic beyond one discussion and even permanently. Words can also have a harmful triggering impact on particular individuals. Having a strong group bond in advance is crucial. Having a maximally diverse group for mutual support helps, as does inviting diverse colleagues (for this particular trip, African Americans and Ghanaians), who can serve as discussion leaders and initiate and model verbalizing complex and difficult feelings. As Freire (1998) recommends for instructors: “The best is to tell the learners, in a demonstration of being human and limited, how one feels at the time” (p. 48). No matter what, the risk is real, and we as instructors need the wisdom to know that risks mean mistakes and the humility to admit them and keep seeking ways to improve.

Finally, space does not allow, but numerous students with disabilities have participated in Media in Ghana, and all have contributed significantly. Particularly memorable is Anais (Annie) Keenon, who is profoundly hearing impaired<sup>13</sup>. Thanks to Annie’s assertiveness, we all learned to include her in conversations – e.g., by ensuring that she was within eyesight of speakers and/or by having someone nearer repeat comments. Because the radio is the most powerful medium in Ghana, I encourage students to listen regularly; but I had to be reminded that Annie could not. Annie did some

<sup>13</sup>Thus far an applicant has not presented or disclosed a disability that couldn't be accommodated on the program, with preparation.

independent research on how deaf and hearing impaired Ghanaians fare, and was troubled to learn that few resources exist and that otherwise normal Ghanaians commonly are institutionalized along with people with unrelated diagnoses, ranging from Down's syndrome to cerebral palsy to mobility impairment. As Annie wrote:

Only the very wealthy can afford to send their deaf child to residential schools, sometimes out of the country. . . .

If I had been born here, I likely would have only relied on sign and not my hearing at all. I might have never learned to speak or even to read. I would have had no other options. (Keenon, 2011, paras. 9, 11)

Annie felt helpless in the moment, but later reported what she did as an outcome:

After returning to the United States, I couldn't stop thinking about the people I had met. I became determined to support disability rights however I could. Gradually my footsteps turned away from journalism (though I did manage to finish my degree) and toward international development. Years later, I found myself working on disability rights internationally, supporting men and women with disabilities in places like Indonesia, Myanmar and Haiti. Though my life has changed course again since, I remain a fervent disability rights advocate – a life's purpose that is easily traced back to that one summer in Ghana. (Keenan, 2018, para. 5)

## CULTURE

Class, gender, sexuality, racioethnic identity and disability identity are obviously entwined with many dimensions of culture that challenge students and instructors and constitute lively discussion topics. Here I will briefly mention two: bribery and religion.

The common practice of *solis*, i.e., sources giving journalists envelopes with *transportation money* at press conferences and events, is initially horrifying, and a common topic of blog posts and final papers. As time goes on, and in dialogue, students are less judgmental. While they do not condone bribery, nor does the Ghana Journalists' Association or other professional media/communication organizations, they recognize that journalists' salaries are appallingly low, and many depend on the revenue. They also begin to understand that *solis* emerged in part from Ghana's gift-giving culture. Plus, while *solis* is not practiced in the U.S., we discuss the many ways that journalists may be compromised





<sup>14</sup>Steeves (2006) and Madison and Steeves (2014) discuss soli in more detail, plus ethical dilemmas related to plagiarism.

by political and economic pressures, and the many challenging ethical issues journalists everywhere face<sup>14</sup>.

Most Ghanaians are religious, and the ways in which religion pervades everyday life are startling at first. Religion is blatant in much advertising signage, as in “Divine Name Plumbing Works”, “Keep Faith Engineering”, or “Grace of God Cold Store”. Many workdays begin with prayers, including at media houses, advertising and public relations firms. Preachers are a common presence on public transportation. News headlines and sources often reference *God* and *Jesus*, as in the previously referenced headline for Erin’s story on gay marriage. While Ghana is predominantly Christian, Ghanaians are tolerant of religious difference, and Christians and Muslims live peacefully side by side. Traditional beliefs also are practiced, often alongside Christian or Muslim practices. Government events commonly begin with three kinds of prayers: Christian, Muslim, and a traditional pouring of libations.

Many of our participants identify as agnostic or atheist. Others may practice a religion but minimally, or a religion uncommon in Ghana. Co-workers frequently confront our student interns with questions about their personal beliefs, and sometimes they are even expected to take a turn leading morning prayers. As with questions about sexuality, they learn how to respond diplomatically and in ways that can sometimes lead to surprising conversations, as in Leigh’s experience after marking “none” on her internship application:

After filling out paperwork I was introduced to my boss who was surprised and intrigued I did not belong to a specific religion . . . I explained to him my perspective on religion and my spiritual beliefs despite fearing he may not respect me for not being Christian. . . .

He revealed he too had many questions regarding Christianity. He described . . . corruption in his church, which motivated him to stop going on Sundays. . . .

My boss described his perspective on religion behind his closed office door so quietly it was barely audible. It was evident he was nervous to share his ambivalent ideas surrounding religion, but it was also clear he wished to talk to someone with a different perspective. (Fahrion, 2019, paras. 3-4, 7)

Similarly, Donny struggled to find common ground with his reporting partner, Melvin, and eventually found that Melvin, like him, was skeptical of organized religion, a discovery that greatly strengthened their friendship (Morrison, 2019b).

Leigh and Donny’s experiences are less common. Most students are invited by coworkers to attend church, even weddings, funerals, and baby-naming ceremonies.

They are consistently grateful for the opportunity and usually find it joyful and far more about relationships and community than dogma. Luke reported several students' three-hour experience in a charismatic church. Having endured long, tiring services in the synagogue back home, he was anticipating something similar, but found it was quite the opposite (Hausman, 2012). Hannah, also Jewish, was similarly dubious, and especially having been in uncomfortable workplace discussions about sexuality, but found the experience uplifting and consciousness-raising about the value of the non-material in Ghana.

I was rightfully nervous entering a place of worship, the epicenter of both the connecting power of religion as well as the fear and ignorance used to discriminate against those who are different from oneself.

Once again, my expectations were proven incorrect. Instead of preaching hate, the service was an enthusiastic display of love and devotion through music. . . .

While traditionally, I have been pretty skeptical about organized religion, it was attending church in Ghana when I began to understand why people turn to spirituality. . . . Instead of focusing on hate and fear, what I experienced was the power of religion to uplift people and bring them together. . . .

As the obrunis were leaving, the Prophet stopped us. Neither he nor his daughter cared that none of us were religious, but he wanted to thank us for coming. It was nerve-wracking to be singled out, but even though I was an outsider, I felt welcomed and accepted. (Steinkoph-Frank, 2015, paras. 8-9, 16-17)

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Evidence from multiple sources over the years – group discussions, blog posts, internship reports, media logs, and ongoing relationships with program alums – show that in just a few weeks students and fellow instructors have profound, even life-changing experiences, with outcomes dependent on multiple factors: where each began relevant to difference and diversity; bonds formed; personal initiative; and reflections during and after the trip. It has been gratifying to see participants experience great personal growth, i.e., to move from a state of profound culture shock to one of self-confidence. In addition to a sense of growth, they become close to one another, develop enduring relationships with Ghanaians; have professional achievements; and continue to reflect critically on their experiences. Most significant of all, students report a greatly heightened, even transformational, consciousness of human interrelations and social injustice, and a commitment to act. For instance, at the end of his program, Francis wrote:



More impactful than any other single moment on this trip, was the sickening experience of walking through slave castles and learning about the atrocities of the European colonizers in the very rooms where their crimes took place. At a time when there are people in cages in my own country, my time in the forts forced me to recommit to the cause of justice and freedom worldwide as a political activist. (O’Leary, 2019b, para. 4)

Many also become deeply committed to bridging differences in their personal lives and finding existential meaning in the non-material. Freire’s thinking extends beyond pedagogy, as Suzina and Tufte (2020) point out, “It is a vision with a set of foundational principles and values that guide the constitution of a social order, inspire a practice of communication and social interaction, and also serve as a normative guide for co-existence in society” (pp. 412-413). Many Media in Ghana students try to find words to express this realization. Just before departure Clare wrote a post titled “On Kindness and Generosity”.

If someone asked me to tell them one thing I learned here I would give them those two words. . . . When someone is eating at work even if it’s just a small snack they always look to me, point towards their corn or bread or cookies and say “you are invited.” When my two coworkers found out I was vegetarian they drove me 30 minutes out, so that I could try fufu at a vegetarian restaurant. . . . The people here have reminded me to be more open to friendships, to remember to share, to look out for those around me, and to show kindness and generosity to everyone I meet. (Malone, 2018, paras. 3-4)

Obviously programs like Media in Ghana are limited. They represent the privilege of the Global North and are largely unidirectional, relying on the hospitality of Ghanaians (see Tilley & Kalina, 2021). Though imbalanced, I have tried to reciprocate as possible<sup>15</sup>. Such programs also are limited by how many they can serve. Not all students are motivated to study abroad, and of those who are, only a fraction choose a program in a developing country. Programs further tend to serve students at two extreme ends of the economic spectrum: those with means, and those who qualify for need-based scholarships. Plus, there are valid climate change arguments for avoiding air travel.

In view of these realities, I encourage returning students to share their insights with others, thereby multiplying the impact, such as by speaking

<sup>15</sup>Ways we have tried to reciprocate include: recruiting numerous Ghanaians to Oregon for graduate degrees, supporting visiting Ghanaian scholars, serving as an external examiner for the University of Ghana (UG) and recruiting other colleagues to do so as well, and by developing and encouraging research collaboration. Likewise, the students are asked to transport requested supplies for the UG and to bring gifts for their new colleagues. Also they are encouraged to build collaborations that may extend beyond the program.

in classes, publishing articles and photos, and via post-trip social justice activism and in everyday personal relations, as indicated by students quoted above. Importantly, sustaining relationships with program alums constitutes valuable participation – even approaching empowerment participation (Tufté & Mefalopulos, 2009) – and continues to shape the program. Several alums have returned to Ghana for jobs or volunteer positions, sometimes joining up with our group for portions of the trip. Many have reported career-changing decisions as an outcome, as in the case of Annie, quoted earlier (Keenon, 2018). Oliver, who participated in 2004, subsequently built a career in experiential education based in Cape Town, South Africa. Cassie and Kayleigh, 2007 and 2013 participants, respectively, have pursued careers in international development for social justice. All three attribute these choices directly to Media in Ghana (DeFillipo, 2017; Hagen, 2017; Young, 2017).

Finally, and given the limits and critiques of travel, it goes without saying that there are other strategies to move college-level students and teachers toward praxis and *conscientização* by applying Freirean concepts to curricula close to home. Transformative personal growth does require engaging in risky and often painful personal struggle, but this can happen in many ways and venues. As Freire (1998) powerfully summarizes:

To study is to uncover; it is to gain a more exact *comprehension* of an object; it is to realize its relationship to other objects. This implies a requirement for risk taking and venturing on the part of a student, the subject of learning, for without that they do not create or re-create. (p. 21)

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# Critical Consciousness and Cultural Emancipation in (South) African Heritages of Communication for Social Change

## *Consciência Crítica e Emancipação Cultural em Legados (Sul) Africanos da Comunicação para a Mudança Social*

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### ABSTRACT

In this article we recognize Freirean thought as pivotal to the articulation of one of four main streams of influence on South African approaches to communication for social change. Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2017) has contended that university scholarship in Africa has three civilizational influences: “Africa’s own rich cultures/traditions, Islamic cultures/traditions, and Western cultures/traditions” (p. 54). This account of the influence of Freirean critical consciousness on the philosophy and practices of the Black Consciousness movement, which originated in South Africa in the 1960s, brings attention to Black Consciousness thought as a foundational framework for studies of communication and social change.

**Keywords:** Paulo Freire, Steve Biko, critical consciousness, Black Consciousness, South Africa

### RESUMO

Neste artigo, reconhecemos o pensamento freiriano como fundamental para a articulação de um dos quatro principais fluxos de influência às abordagens sul-africanas de comunicação e mudança social. Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2017) afirmou que os estudos universitários na África têm três influências civilizacionais: “As próprias ricas culturas/tradições da África, as culturas/tradições islâmicas e as culturas/tradições ocidentais” (p. 54). Este relato da influência da *conscientização* freiriana sobre a filosofia e as práticas do movimento Consciência Negra, originário da África do Sul na década de 1960, chama a atenção para o pensamento do Consciência Negra, considerado um marco fundamental nos estudos de comunicação e mudança social.

**Palavras-chave:** Paulo Freire, Steve Biko, consciência crítica, Consciência Negra, África do Sul

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### INTRODUCTION

**P**AULO FREIRE'S CRITICAL pedagogy and ideas of critical consciousness have made major marks in the field of communication for social change, showing that once people can think critically about their own situation they can change their own lives and the ways in which they relate to the world (Freire, 1970/2017). In simple terms, critical consciousness leads to cultural emancipation.

Freirean ideas of critical consciousness and cultural emancipation are well entrenched in communication for social change, which seeks to use communication in order to advance socially desirable changes to people's lived realities. His ideas also find expression in African heritages of communication for social change. Recently, Sabelo Gatsheni-Ndlovu (2017) has contended that scholarship in Africa has three civilizational influences: "Africa's own rich cultures/traditions, Islamic cultures/traditions, and Western cultures/traditions" (p. 54). This dominant view fails to recognize a fourth tradition that was formed in the struggle against colonialism. We will argue that this fourth tradition is influenced by Freirean ideas and we will illustrate this with reference to aspects of the philosophy and political practices of the iconic leader of the Black Consciousness movement, Steve Bantu Biko. To this end, we note that Biko, under the influence of Freirean ideas, articulated a praxis of communication aimed at raising Black Consciousness.

It is worthwhile noting that in South Africa, Biko and Freire are both significant figures in the contemporary decolonisation debate. Their ideas are fundamental to how a plurality of intellectuals are seeking to imagine how a re-humanized society can yet be established in South Africa. Given the contentious debates around communication for social change and its often cited grounding in Western impositions of cultural practices, reminding ourselves of the Freirean influences on Black Consciousness and in the extension the thoughts underpinning the community projects spearheaded by Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement and the fourth tradition that Black Consciousness represents, is of crucial importance for how we reimagine communication for social change from and within an African context.

### AFRICAN HERITAGES

There are many African cultures. These cultures have similarities and differences, and they often contend and stand in contrast to each other so that when Africans assemble they are often meeting cross-culturally (Janz, 2009; Mudimbe, 1988). Nevertheless, recently, Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2017) echoed, among others, Kwame Nkrumah (1964) in contending that university scholarship

in Africa has three civilizational influences: “Africa’s own rich cultures/traditions, Islamic cultures/traditions, and Western cultures/traditions” (p. 54). Indeed, Nkrumah recognized that the idea of cohesive communities in Africa owes much to these three traditions:

African society has one segment which comprises our traditional way of life; it has a second segment which is filled by the presence of the Islamic tradition in Africa; it has a final segment represents the infiltration of the Christian tradition and culture of Western Europe into Africa, using colonialism and neocolonialism as its primary vehicles. These different segments are animated by competing ideologies. But society implies a certain dynamic unity, there needs to emerge an ideology which, genuinely catering for the needs of all, will take the place of the competing ideologies, and so reflect the dynamic unity of society, and be the guide to society’s continual progress. (p. 68)

Besides Nkrumah’s work which proposes that African traditional cultures are socialist in orientation, the traditional philosophy developed by Africans has been explored and described by numerous intellectuals and thinkers who notably include Tempels (1959), Kaunda (1988) and Nyerere (1968) in a history of scholarship that since the work of Samkange and Samkange (1980) has been increasingly disciplined as evolving under the caption *ubuntu* (cf. Gade, 2012). But we do not propose to review this tradition and the literature about it here. We further do not propose to interrogate the history of Western modernity in Africa – which is Nkrumah codes as the tradition of Christianity. What we will merely do is to note that there is ample literature that discusses how the Western colonization of Africa was delivered in part with the agency of the missionaries who proselytized in ways that supported the colonial process (cf. Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991). Finally, we recognize that the idea of Africa is in some parts a product of historical linkages that involve Islam and its traditions (cf. Blyden, 1994; Mudimbe, 1988). Recognizing that in some part Islam has a colonial history that is older than that of Christianity in Africa, we neither intend to discuss the scope of the influences of Islam in Africa nor to weigh up the harms or gains of Islamic colonialism against those of Western colonialism. Suffice to say that, particularly in the South African context, the colonial heritage of Islam has had less of an impact, although Islam has a significant foothold in the country that presents compelling accounts of more recent slavery, colonialism, and apartheid (cf. Dangor, 1997).



Our argument is that the view that three traditions shape African intellectualism fails to recognize a fourth tradition that has informed scholarship in South Africa. It is our view that this fourth tradition entails blending the various traditions that have come before it in the process of working to rehumanize the oppressed and also their oppressors. To speak of this fourth tradition is, therefore, to attest to a racialized idea that has indigenous, Islamic, and Western influences. But here, one must be quick to note that many African cultures have solved the problem of the foreignness of Islam in complex ways, and over a much longer period than has been possible with Christianity whose recent violent emergence still often crystalizes “around the notion that the encounter between Christian dogma and the indigenous universe of signification was one of loss and splitting [*sic*] that led to the erasure of identity” (Mbembe, 2017, p. 100). Indeed, in the face of the recent history of South Africa and other parts of Africa, it is fair to say that the identities of many Africans bear Western-colonial signage (cf. Mudimbe, 1988).

We do not deny that Western colonialism tore apart whole social, political, economic, and psychological apparatuses by which Africans were able to live *with themselves as the centers of concern* (cf. wa Thiong’o, 1993, 2009). It replaced many extant arrangements and symbols with colonial ones that centered Western realities and needs. Concerning knowledge production, Mbembe (2001) has said that the effect of colonization is “that while we now know nearly everything that African states, societies and economies are not, we still know absolutely nothing about what they actually are” (p. 9) because we read with social and political imaginations that are Western and that *other* Africans (p. 11).

Similarly, Fanon (1986, p. 163) says, it is impossible to understand colonial and postcolonial identities and cultures without thinking about how the racialized identities and histories by which Africans compare themselves with other racialized peoples. This is also to say that African knowledges, even self-knowledges, are fundamentally bound up with colonial vestiges. So if contemporary African ways of belonging arise as quintessential postcolonial problems, it is also the case that the identities that Africans have crafted as solutions to the colonial problems they face are new syntheses that evidence the struggle against colonialism and apartheid (Chipkin, 2007). Even under conditions of colonial oppression, the agency of Africans has been expressed in how “both Christianity and Islam were encountered, absorbed, transformed, and reconfigured in Africa” (Dubois, 2017, pp. xii-xiii).

From this vantage point, the discussion that will follow, of Biko’s views regarding Black Consciousness can be read as celebrating that something has

survived of African heritages and perspectives. Instead, far from the colony having been a site for the utter destruction of African cultures, histories and cosmic perspectives, the colony can be thought of as a melting pot in which cultures, histories, and cosmic perspectives draw upon each other to give rise to something new (wa Thiong'o, 2012, p. 52). At the same time, native and colonial cultures, histories and cosmologies remain recognisable so that one can say that:

In their struggle, the imperial lord and the colonial bondsman leave marks on each other, but with the difference that the bondsman can appropriate the best of the imperial input and combine it with the best of his own into a new synthesis that assumes the “globe for a theatre”. The postcolonial embodies this new synthesis. While having its own particularity, like all other tributaries to the human, the post-colonial is an integral part of the intellectual history of the modern world because its very coloniality is a history of interpenetration of different peoples, cultures, and knowledge. (wa Thiong'o, 2012, p. 51)

To repeat and to emphasize the point, from this vantage point, the fight against colonialism and its legacies involves the (re)claiming of the subjectivities of the oppressed to “appropriate the best of the imperial input and combine it with the best of his own into a new synthesis appropriate the best of the imperial input and combine it with the best of his own into a new synthesis” (wa Thiong'o, 2012, p. 51). Steve Biko (1987) put this well when he said:

you know, cultures affect each other, you know like fashions and you cannot escape rubbing against someone else's culture. But you must have the right to reject or not anything that is given to you. At the moment we exist sort of as a limb of the white culture. (p. 130)

To understand Biko's contribution to the decolonial project we need to locate him in a broader tradition of opposition to colonialism. This broad tradition of radical southern influences is not of a piece with the rich African cultures/traditions, Islamic cultures/traditions and Western cultures/traditions that Ndlovu-Gatsheni writes of – it is instead a new synthesis of these earlier traditions wrought through engagement with the work of powerful radical black and southern scholarship such as that of Fanon and Freire.



### BIKO AND BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS

The iconic leader of the Black Consciousness movement, Steve Bantu Biko, drew on the anticolonial thought of Franz Fanon and Paulo Freire to make a vital contribution to the articulation of a fourth heritage that underpins scholarship in South Africa. But, we need to be careful to not omit how Biko's native cultural context influenced his thought. Indeed, Manchu (2017), in the second chapter of *Biko: A Biography*, makes this point strongly in pointing out how Biko's resistance to colonial domination is a continuation of a tradition of resistance that included Xhosa heroes and renowned global leaders such as Martin Luther King, Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela, and one can argue that Black Consciousness is an extension of the Black Radical Tradition that manifests across the globe wherever people of African descent have faced slavery, colonialism, apartheid and other forms of modern Western domination (cf. Modiri, 2017; Robinson, 1983).

Indeed, Black Consciousness was developed in the late 1960s by gatherings of young black people who were avid readers of texts that sharpened their thinking about their budding involvements in the student politics of the time. Their readings spanned the work of writers such as Paulo Freire, Amilcar Cabral, Frantz Fanon, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr, Chinua Achebe, and James Ngugi (Pityana, 2008). Black Consciousness also drew upon ideas of the black power and civil rights movements in the United States, from early African nationalist movements, the negritude of Senghor and others, and upon influences of the Pan-African movement to put forward a way of life that challenged colonial domination (Pityana, 2008). But, in the view of Joel Modiri (2017, p. 102), who has written a magisterial doctoral thesis on Biko's jurisprudential thought, the concerns of Black Consciousness, self-reliance, unity, and liberation were drawn from the work of Paulo Freire and in particular, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (cf. Modiri, 2017, p. 102). For, as Freire wrote:

No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption. (Freire, 1970/2017, p. 54)

While it is interesting to note that Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970/2017) was, at least in some part, in dialogue with Fanon's (1963) *Wretched of the Earth*, the key thing is that Biko used both sources to articulate a praxis aimed at liberation (cf. Gibson, 2011, p. 8). For Biko realized that to

survive colonial oppression, many blacks resorted to forms of consciousness, which sought to make life bearable. This can be illustrated in the following story that Biko narrated:

to accommodate the existing problems, the black man develops a two-faced attitude; I can quote a typical example; I had a man working in one of our projects in the Eastern Cape on electricity, he was installing electricity, a white man with a black assistant. He had to be above the ceiling and the black man was under the ceiling and they were working together pushing up wires and sending the rods in which the wires are and so on, and all the time there was insult, insult, insult from the white man: push this you fool – that sort of talk, and of course this touched me; I know the white man very well, he speaks very well to me, so at tea time we invite them to tea; I ask him: why do you speak like this to this man? and he says to me in front of the guy: this is the only language he understands, he is a lazy bugger. And the black man smiled. I asked him if it was true and he says: no, I am used to him. Then I was sick. I thought for a moment I do not understand black society. After some two hours I came back to this guy, I said to him: do you really mean it? The man changed, he became very bitter, he was telling me how he wants to leave any moment, but what can he do? He does not have any skills, he has got no assurance of another job, his job is to him some form of security, he has got no reserves, if he does not work today he cannot live tomorrow, he has got to work, he has got to take it. And if he has got to take he dare not show any form of what is called cheek to his boss. Now this I think epitomizes the two-faced attitude of the black man to this whole question of existence in this country. (Biko, 1987, pp. 102-103)

The aims of Black Consciousness were therefore directed at getting the oppressed to authentically experience the world critically in ways that would invariably lead to demanding changes that could bring about the end of colonialism. During the so-called SASO or Black Consciousness trial as it became known, nine young activists stood trial in South Africa on charges of treason, as a witness, Biko took the opportunity to expand on the tenets of Black Consciousness and stated:

basically Black Consciousness refers itself to the black man and to his situation, and I think the black man is subjected to two forces in this country. He is first of all oppressed by an external world through institutionalized machinery, through laws that restrict him from doing certain things, through heavy work conditions, through poor pay, through very difficult living conditions, through poor education, these are all external to him, and secondly, and this we regard as the most important, the black man in



himself has developed a certain state of alienation, he rejects himself, precisely because he attaches the meaning white to all that is good, in other words he associates good and he equates good with white. This arises out of his living and it arises out of his development from childhood. (Biko, witness statement given during the SASO trial, May 1976, as cited in Arnold, 1979, p. 22)

The liberation ethic of Black Consciousness that flowed from this therefore prioritized, first, the emergence of a critical and creative culture of struggle that could marshal the oppressed towards a humanized future, second, the liberation of religion and theology so that they would not act as soporifics which dulled people's abilities to become critical consciousness agents of struggle against colonial oppression, and third, an ethic of black solidarity that manifested itself in community development projects that also, in turn, sought to conscientize students and teachers. These programs "began with literacy training, using the Paulo Freirean psycho-social method of pedagogy. Students later ran clinics and were soon building schools and community centers" (Pityana, 2008, p. 9).

After being expelled from the University of Natal program for training black medical doctors, Biko instead worked on three Black Community Projects which were set up by the Black Consciousness movement: Zanempilo Clinic, Njwasa Home Industries, and the Ginsberg Education Fund which were located at Zinyoka, a rural village in what is now the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa.

The move of the Black Consciousness movement to set up clinics to promote Black Consciousness stands in some contrast with the move of Fanon, who in 1956 decided to resign from the Psychiatric Hospital of Blida Joinville, Algeria. Fanon's (1994) primary reason was that "the objective conditions under which psychiatry is practiced in Algeria constituted a challenge to common sense" (p. 52) as the abnormal conditions of colonial rule made it abnormal for one to be psychologically well in the Algeria of the time. Indeed, speaking as a witness at the South African Students Organization/Black People's Convention trial of 1963/64, Biko said the Black Community Programs, including the Zanempilo Clinic, were intended to help communities to overcome defeatist attitudes which the racist logics of colonialism and apartheid inculcated by showing that blacks could do anything they set their minds to – that it is not true that all that is good comes from White society (Arnold, 1979).

For Biko, achieving success with the Zanempilo Clinic was a way to challenge the ongoing history of how black sovereignty was lost to colonialism



and apartheid domination. In this sense, for blacks to show that they could master Western medicine was a radical act of resistance. Indeed, one study of oral histories collected mainly in 2008, shows that: “Testimonies reveal that, although short-lived, Black Consciousness activists succeeded in improving the economic and physical health of Zinyoka and restoring a sense of human dignity in its residents.” (Hadfield, 2010, p. 80). This is particularly significant given that in colonial settings, black practitioners of Western medicine may be seen by fellow colonized peoples as symbols of their loss of sovereignty, as representatives of the project of Western rationality (cf. Fanon, 1970, pp. 111-112) who therefore merit to be met with both pride and hatred (Fanon, 1970, p. 113). In these lights, the setting up of Zanempilo says a great deal about how Biko should be read as a continuation in black radical traditions which have assumed the mantle of taking the best and most useful of Western innovations and therefore of modernity itself – to realize the liberation of oppressed blacks (cf. Masilela, 1996; Modiri, 2017).

Yet, whereas Hadfield (2010, p. 80) is conclusive that Zanempilo was a success, it has to be acknowledged that this success was only based on the Black Consciousness Movement seeking and accepting funding from white people. The funds to build the clinic were sourced from a German woman who could not externalize her funds to Germany and most of the operational funding to operate the clinic came from white benefactors, including Anglo-American Corporation (cf. Manchu, 2017, p. 13). Indeed, Njwasa Home Industries – which manufactured leather goods and clothing apparel, and the Ginsberg Education Fund – which sourced bursary funding to enable outstanding students to continue with their studies also relied heavily on white sources of funding (Stubbs, 2017, pp. 190-191). This creates the impression that the Black Community Programs that Biko was involved in were not marked by the kinds of black self-reliance that Black Consciousness espoused and that they were therefore failures.

However, one must also see that Biko and the Black Consciousness movement were not only involved in programmatic engagements that aimed at upending colonial domination. They prioritized the recovery of the humanity of those whose lives had been made shells of humanity by these systems. In other words, Black Consciousness, as Gordon (2008) and More (2008) note, has a fundamentally existential dimension under which the ontological resuscitation of humanity began with restoring the dignity and worth of the black oppressed. From the vantage point, success is gained to the extent that strides are made towards what President Mbeki later called an African Renaissance (cf. Reddy, 2009) and to the extent that contemporary calls for



decolonizing higher education in South Africa are underpinned references to Biko and Black Consciousness (cf. Khati, 2020; Sokhaba, 2020).

Black Consciousness, therefore, emerges epistemically as a series of practices that are fundamentally about communication that seeks social changes by enabling the oppressed to experience their situations in ways that enable them to, with critical consciousness, act with agency to achieve the change they need. It is in this sense that Black Consciousness highlights the role of emancipation in communication for social change.

### COMMUNICATION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Chasi (2020) argues that communication of and about pain is an underlying concern of communication for social change. On this view, communication for social change draws on social measures to ameliorate people's conditions of life – by raising critical consciousness of and building capacities for dealing with it and its causes so as to enable people to prevent pain and its causes.

Biko (1987, pp. 64-65) repeatedly excoriated communicative practices that, not only emphasised cultural emancipation among blacks, but also produced plays of images and practices of integration between South African races, describing them in some instances as soporifics for how they dulled the painful experiences of unjust segregation and subjugation.

Something of this concern to enable people to relate to the pain of their situations – so that they can question the situation and change it too, is captured in the closing words of Fanon (1986) *Black Skin, White Masks*: “O my body, make me always a man who questions” (p. 232).

Black Consciousness is fully engaged with the historical implications of the historical, political, social, and economic disinheritance of blacks, so its episteme positively calls for black solidarity to build the capabilities needed to overcome systems of colonialism and its subjugations. Indeed, for example, in his criticisms of blacks who aligned themselves with the system of apartheid authority, Biko (1987) bewails them as “dummy platforms, these phoney telephones” (p. 84) – for he understood that what is at stake is the miscommunication of the pain and suffering of the oppressed that consequently lead to the inability to make the case for the humanization of society.

At bottom, what is positive about Black Consciousness is that it involves calling the oppressed, not to mere “reactionary rejection of whites”, but to engage in the “game of power politics” by building strong institutional foundations from which to operate, “to rise and attain the envisaged self” (Biko, 1987, p. 68). As Ndebele (2017) says:

“The envisioned self” was Biko’s futuristic concept by which he called for more than just the recovery of a human essence dismembered, distorted, disoriented, oppressed, but also for how that essence could be recovered and remoulded under new historical circumstances spanning more than one hundred and fifty years of a painful yet purposeful effort of seeking to reconstitute it into a new human being. (p. x)

The Black Consciousness quest to end colonialism and apartheid requires recognition that all human cultural activity involves the communicative enactment of common grounds and norms on which people construe and act out the good. Black Consciousness, therefore, stands against colonial apartheid narratives and practices that wrongfully take blacks to be different and therefore bad, evil, deviant, harmful, or dangerous. Under colonial apartheid, blacks were marked as grossly different, and their blackness was foregrounded as a catalyst for feelings among whites that they were the subjects of a *swart gevaar* (black danger). This kind of marking out of *out-groups* justifies and produces what communication accommodation theory calls *divergence* in societies (cf. Gallois and Callan, 1991: 264) and is, therefore, the grist of colonial and apartheid Manicheisms – as well told by Fanon (1986) in his *Black Skin, White Masks*. In the words of Biko (1987) himself, Black Consciousness is:

the realization by the blacks that the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed. Once the latter has been so effectively manipulated and controlled by the oppressor as to make the oppressed believe that he is a liability to the white man, then there will be nothing the oppressed can do that will really scare the powerful masters. (p. 68)

Black consciousness, Biko (1987) contends “makes the black man see himself as a being” and he will no longer “tolerate attempts by anybody to dwarf the significance of his manhood” (p. 68).

However, separating people into *in* and *out* groups is not what distinguishes colonial and apartheid societies from others. Instead, apartheid is misanthropic in the ways it paradigmatically attacks what Tomasello (2010) has called the uniquely human capacity for altruism, i.e. the basis for how humans are uniquely informative, sharing and giving in ways that allow unique human communication and culture. Thus, albeit pejoratively, in everyday situations one hears agreement that anything that diminishes a person’s ability to demonstrate altruism, culture, or communication is an



attack on the afflicted individual's humanity. In attacking the possibility for human communication and culture, colonialism attacks the fundamental possibilities that shape the form and function of humanized societies. Black Consciousness recognized therefore that ending colonialism and apartheid is quite simply indispensable to any endeavor to achieve societies that have a more human face. Concerns that forms the basis for cultural emancipation as foregrounded in communication for social change in the African/South African context.

### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Together with others such as Biko, Freire is a name that prominently comes up in South African discussions about how social realities may be changed to achieve more desirable ends. Indeed, Freirean thought has significantly shaped and informed South African debates and actions that have an interest in processes to do with education and emancipation.

Thus, in light of contemporary decolonisation debates and calls for the decolonisation of all spheres of society we do well in evoking and understanding the thoughts underpinning Black Consciousness. Importantly, Black Consciousness marks a way of thinking about African futures that is significant not only in the ways it foregrounds emancipation but importantly also for the praxis of communication for social change. The envisioned self that Black Consciousness articulated is one that aspires to humanize the world. Black Consciousness demands the complete transformation of the system in ways that end dehumanization. In line with Freirean thought, Black Consciousness says that once people are conscientized, they are compelled to use their capabilities to make the world more desirable and therefore more humanized, “for we cannot be conscious of ourselves and yet remain in bondage. We want to attain the envisioned self which is a free self” (Biko, 1987, p. 49). We do well in recalling this in contemporary calls for decolonisation and in communication for social change. As such Black Consciousness grounded – important respects – in Freirean thought as well as other traditions from within Africa and the global South, merits serious scholarly engagement. Seen through this lens, Black Consciousness stands to add to both the theorisation and praxis of the field communication for social change. ■

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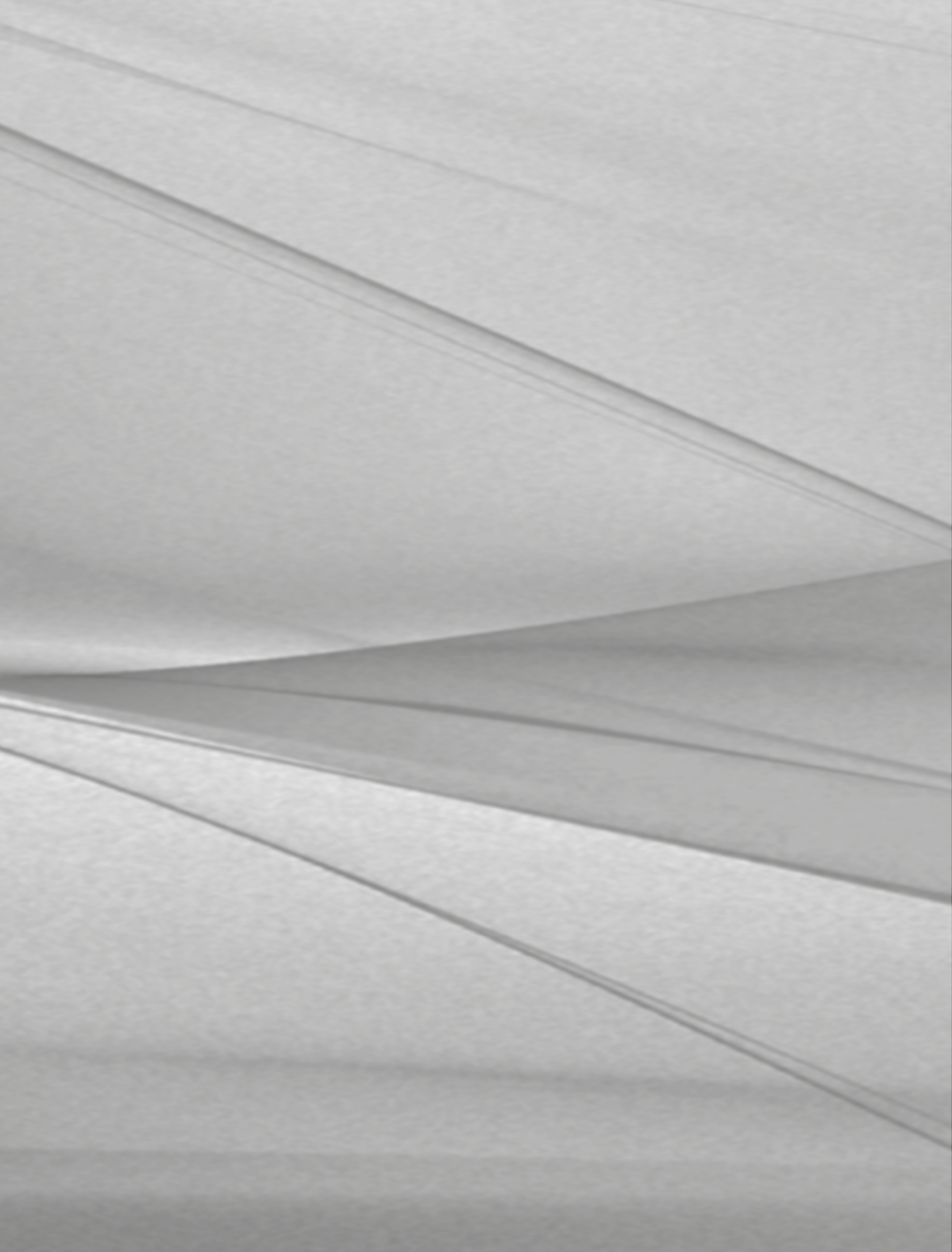


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**COMMUNICATION: POLITICAL  
FRAMEWORKS AND SOCIAL CHANGES**





# Freire's Vision of Development and Social Change: Past Experiences, Present Challenges, and Perspectives for the Future<sup>1</sup>

## *A Visão de Desenvolvimento e Mudança Social de Freire: Experiências do Passado, Desafios do Presente e Perspectivas para o Futuro*

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### ABSTRACT

This article proposes to view Freire's thinking as a model or even paradigm of communication, development, and social change. To build this as an original argument, we firstly outline Freire's ontological call, presenting and discussing his underlying five principles. Secondly, we trace Freire's legacy by presenting and discussing how Freire inspired three significant Ibero-American thinkers, Augusto Boal, Juan Díaz Bordenave, and Boaventura de Sousa Santos. Finally, we deepen our analysis of Freire's vision of communication, development, and social change, unpacking how he navigates between a normative vision grounded in a utopian aspiration for change, and a very systematic and rigorous methodology, his liberating pedagogy.

**Keywords:** Development, social change, communication, Paulo Freire, epistemologies of the South

### RESUMO

Este artigo propõe tomar o pensamento de Freire como um modelo ou mesmo paradigma de comunicação, desenvolvimento e mudança social. Para tanto, primeiro delineamos a dimensão ontológica de Freire, apresentando e discutindo seus cinco princípios subjacentes. Em seguida, percorremos seu legado, apresentando e discutindo como ele inspirou três importantes pensadores ibero-americanos, Augusto Boal, Juan Díaz Bordenave e Boaventura de Sousa Santos. Finalmente, aprofundamos nossa análise da visão de Freire sobre desenvolvimento e mudança social, destacando como ele navega entre uma visão normativa fundamentada em uma aspiração utópica de mudança e uma metodologia muito sistemática e rigorosa, sua pedagogia libertadora.

**Palavras-chave:** Desenvolvimento, mudança social, comunicação, Paulo Freire, epistemologias do Sul

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If someone reading this text were to ask me, with an ironic smile, whether I believe that in order to change Brazil it is enough to surrender to the fatigue of constantly stating that change is possible and that human beings are not mere spectators, but also actors in history, I would say no. But I would also say that changing implies knowing that it is possible to do it . . . What is not possible, however, is to even think about transforming the world without a dream, without utopia, or without a vision.

– Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Indignation*

### INTRODUCTION

**T**OWARDS THE END of 2019, the world experienced a strong wave of social mobilization that brought back images and memories of the global movement of mobilizations experienced in 2010-2011 with the Arab Springs across countries like Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria, the Indignados Movements of Greece and Spain, the Occupy Movement of the US that spread globally, and with other uprisings in Brazil and Turkey in 2013, in South Africa and Kenya in 2015, and in numerous other countries. In 2019, we again saw mass protests and uprisings, for example in Lebanon, Hong Kong, Iran, France, and numerous Latin American countries like Ecuador, Haiti, Uruguay, and in particular a very large stream of mobilizations in Chile, the largest since the country regained democracy in the late 1980s. In the midst of this, Brazil was experiencing the first year of the newly elected Government of Jair Bolsonaro, with severe clampdowns on universities, civil society, the LGBT+ communities, indigenous groups, and many others. In Brazil, the resistance and contestation towards the dominant politics emerged as more fragmented than other examples here given.

While the motivations behind the mentioned uprisings obviously vary, we argue that they have a critique of development in common. Recurrently, the mentioned movements have contested and resisted a state of society – and inherently a model of development – that has not managed to tackle poverty, the alarming levels of socio-economic inequality in society, and the unethical practices of corruption. The uprisings, while often being sparked by very specific policy actions, be it a rise in transport fares, a ban on WhatsApp, an unjust law, or a cut in the health sector, tended all to express strong feelings of being left out of influence, of not managing to make ends meet in everyday life and not being heard by decision-makers. Such experiences of lack of participation, of social inequality, and of not having a voice to speak out come together as a power

asymmetry (Suzina, 2016; 2018) and, more concretely, as a negation of the values and principles that are at the centre of Paulo Freire's vision of development.

This article will argue that Freire's thinking constitutes not just a pedagogical vision, but a larger and deeper vision of communication and development. It is a vision with a set of foundational principles and values that guide the constitution of a social order, inspire a practice of communication and social interaction, and also serve as a normative guide for co-existence in society. We will suggest that the reason why the current government in Brazil considers late Paulo Freire a dangerous man and strives to ban his ideas in their entirety from Brazil is because Freire's ideas constitute a vision of development that is fundamentally in opposition to that of the current government.

Accordingly, the model of communication that comes from a Freirean perspective is completely different from the one mobilized (appropriated) by Bolsonaro's government. Silvio Waisbord (2020) argues that "the obsession with Freire's legacy reflects the feisty opposition of Bolsonaro's populism to central principles of the democratic public sphere. Freire advanced a view of public communication that is antithetical to the populist vision" (p. 449). In another article, one of us defined the appropriation of communication by conservative and right-wing movements under the notion of "restrictive dissonance" (Suzina, 2020) mainly for being oriented towards the annihilation of any and all different or contradictory voices or perspectives.

This article will fall into three sections. Firstly, we outline Freire's ontological call and the underlying principles that were recurrent throughout most of his thinking. Secondly, we trace Freire's legacy by presenting and discussing how Freire inspired three significant Ibero-American thinkers and practitioners: Augusto Boal, Juan Díaz Bordenave, and Boaventura de Sousa Santos. Their research and practice have unraveled Freire's legacy into global pathways of theatre, participatory communication, and the realm of epistemology. Finally, we deepen our analysis of Freire's vision of communication, development, and social change, unpacking how he navigates between a clearly normative vision grounded in a utopian aspiration on one side, and a very systematic and rigorous methodology, his liberating pedagogy, on the other.

## FREIRE'S ONTOLOGICAL CALL

To understand the actuality of Paulo Freire, we must recognize a distinction between placing his work in the past, in the present or considering its relevance in discussions about future pathways of development. Freire's ideas evolved historically from the late 1940s to the late 1990s. His seminal contributions are





from the 1960s and 1970s, in a time of authoritarianism, high levels of analphabetism, and socio-economic inequalities, not least in the rural outback of the Northeast from where his experience originated. Cicilia Peruzzo (2020) traces these origins, proposing some fundamental pillars within which to understand Freire's thinking in general and, more particularly, how it refers to communication and social change. His work remains relevant because it applies to every situation where a society is confronted with a dispute over its model of development, meaning the way it wants to protect, produce and share the wealth and how its members take part in this process. Waisbord (2020) situates the current right-wing populist government, which is strongly influenced by conservative religious groups, within the broader wave of conservative movements in Latin America. He thereby gives a sense of what is currently at stake in Brazil and how Freire's philosophy can inform a debate that transcends borders.

Freire's *ontological call* is associated with five principles, those of humility, empathy, love, hope, and dialogue (Freire, 1968/2017, p. 33) that he presented as the spirit of one of his main referential works, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, originally published in 1968. As he also recognizes, it is an ontology that tends to divide people, because it might be seen as too idealistic for some while rejected by others who don't align with its critical tone and denunciation against the oppressors.

Strongly rooted in a Marxist analysis of society, Freire's vision places real people, as well as institutions, in a power relationship framework denying the possibility of a neutral positioning. As such he takes a clear normative stand. But Freire's position is also a contextual and dynamic vision that points to windows of opportunity, hope, and transformation, all seen as processes that can change both sides. Humanization, as defined by Freire, is not just about repositioning the oppressed in a better condition. It is about completely redrawing the relationship oppressed-oppressor and addressing the power asymmetry of this relationship under the guidance of Freire's ontological call and its underlying principles, which are unpacked below.

Freire places *humility* as a specific requirement to recognize that people – any people – are knowledgeable. Dialogue, achieved through communication and with humility, becomes a place of encounter in everyday life, where knowledge is constructed and reconstructed on a permanent basis. This is a principle that helps to read the emergence of right-wing voices in Brazil, a subject that is densely and provocatively analyzed by both Helton Levy (2020) and by Fanny Vrydagh and César Jiménez-Martínez (2020)<sup>2</sup>. As their cases reveal, a dispute is evident in order to articulate a process whereby the truth crystallizes from one group. However, humility suggests that the authentic truth does not belong to

<sup>2</sup> Vrydagh and Jiménez-Martínez's article was translated into English and included in this special issue of *MATRIZES* as well.

any individual or group, nor is it imposed by one group upon another. Authentic truth – or the authentic word, in Freire’s terminology – is rather an outcome of a permanent exercise of action and reflection that takes into account the reality and the perspective of each participant of any relationship (Suzina, 2020).

*Empathy* goes beyond generosity. In Freire’s vision of development, there is no room for charity in the sense of classifying those in need as lacking capacity or being disabled in any way. Rather the principle of empathy is a form of recognizing different points of departure that make it harder for some to reach their goals. The principle of empathy recognizes inequalities and takes them as collective issues rather than a matter of individual effort or merit. Need, or being in need, is a sign of domination of some over others. Empathy is then required to trigger a change that will provide the dominated with what is necessary to break this cycle of oppression.

The principle of *love* guides an approach that connects reason with the senses. Raquel Paiva (2020) emphasizes the cultural nature of Freire’s pedagogy whereby he places the value of relationships over the rigor of discipline. It is a method that acknowledges the Other in plenitude and all forms of knowledge. Overall, it is a model of development based on collective ties including all beings, humans or not.

Finally, the principle of *hope* is about trusting a new just social order as the horizon to be pursued, like in Eduardo Galeano’s vision of utopia where every step towards it makes it move a step away, under the golden purpose of keeping one walking (Galeano, 2012). Hope is both the principle and the rule with which to achieve a critical view and a permanent search for change: “Freire’s work represents the communicative politics of hope – the notion that humans can change themselves and transform social conditions in order to produce a more just society” (Waisbord, 2020, p. 451). Thereby, Waisbord argues: a Freirean approach becomes a source of democratic resilience. Consequently, the opposite of asymmetry is not symmetry but is the justice and coexistence in the sense of carving out space for different forms of being and understanding.

These principles were developed by Freire in different degrees and forms across all his works, but they also served as inspiration for many thinkers and practitioners all over the world. In the next section, we are going to explore this dissemination and concentrate on his influence over the work of three Ibero-American authors.



### TRACKING FREIRE'S VISION OF DEVELOPMENT IN LATIN AMERICA AND BEYOND

Freire's liberating pedagogy was developed and refined over the 50 years of his career, from his first work in 1947 to his passing in 1997. Although he was very visionary and philosophical, his thinking was grounded in a practical experience and a rigorous pedagogical methodology. This made his thinking not only inspirational to many but also accessible and applicable. Many social and development sectors, social movements, civil society organizations, and communities engaging with questions of social justice and social change were heavily inspired by Paulo Freire.

In the field of communication for social change, Freire's influence was documented in Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte's large, edited collection: *Communication for Social Change Anthology: Historical and Contemporary Readings* (2006). From 2004-2006, they conducted a global call to identify seminal texts in the 50-year history of the field of communication for social change. Following a comprehensive global consultative process and a very participatory editorial process involving 10 world-leading experts, 200 texts (from quotes and excerpts to full-fledged articles) were selected as seminal for the field. A total of 40% were texts from Latin America and most had explicit references to Freire. Some texts from Asia, Africa, and the US also made explicit references to him. It was evident that his thinking had global influence.

Looking back, it is well documented how Freire served as a source and as an epistemological foundation not only in the field of education but for a breadth of thinkers and practitioners engaging in the development and social change. In the following, we explore three lines of significant reflection and action that in each their way have engaged with Freire's vision of development and social change. All three constitute significant pathways of scholarly work, internationally led by their own right but with the legacy of Freire's thinking embedded solidly in theirs. They reveal the flexibility of Freire's philosophy but at the same time a normative grounding that ties their approaches to a kind of social change that challenges the current dominant paradigm of development.

The first explores Freire's influence upon theatre for development, Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre in particular. The second refers to Freire's influence on participatory communication and communication for social change, illustrated by Juan Díaz Bordenave's writings. Finally, and possibly most significantly, Freire has influenced Boaventura de Souza Santos' thinking and articulation of the epistemologies of the South. This draws significant lines to current debates about development and, in particular, about the philosophy of science that informs debates, concepts, and theories of communication and development.



**Staging oppression: Augusto Boal and the connections between arts and participation**

The Theater of the Oppressed constitutes an approach to dramaturgy developed by another Brazilian, Augusto Boal, and is deeply inspired by the work of Paulo Freire. It consists of theoretical and practical formulations consistent with a concrete experience. This approach to dramaturgy aims to break the experience of the one who only watches, the spectator, in order to transform him/her into a *spect-actor* (Boal, 1979), meaning someone capable of proposing changes to the situation of oppression expressed in each scene. Within this dynamic, the character thinks and acts in the place of the spectator since he/she interrupts the action to formulate, through representation, his/her ability to act and his/her understanding of what is happening.

From one's perspective, the Theater of the Oppressed subscribes to a movement of developing participatory art, breaking the silence of the audiences so that the theater does not remain an idea of some who stage (the actors) and others who observe (spectators), totally separate from or with limited participation in each other's role (Carpentier, 2011, chapter 1). From another perspective, the *Theatre of the Oppressed* can be seen as an approach to entertainment-education, where the awareness process of the audiences is embedded in a large array of empowerment purposes (Obregon & Tufte, 2014). In this case, the spectator is the main instrument for the idea of a theater that seeks to break the barrier between the stage and the audience, taking the latter to participate in the entire resolution process and also in the distribution of responsibilities, thus engaging everyone in the process of transformation. This method involves people willing to reflect, propose and give their opinion regarding the example of oppression represented in the theatre play.

The Theater of the Oppressed articulates many of Freire's principles and it particularly reinforces the one related to raising consciousness (*conscientização*) and also to his principle of breaking the silence through the voice of the oppressed. *Theatre of the Oppressed* is internationally appropriated by global and local associations in the field of development, proving its practical character in the identification of common problems and the construction of collective solutions. A good example of this has been the use of *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Forum Theatre in particular, for decades in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa (Tufte, 2015, chapters 3-5).

As an approach to social change, the Theater of the Oppressed engages with Freire's perspective that no one should predict the future on behalf of any individual or community, taking the full participation of people as the only way for a democratic public sphere, as argued by Waisbord (2020). This future can,



for example, not be the reproduction of conservative rules that right-wing actors appreciate as a way of stabilizing society, neither the straight direction towards an ideal future designed by the left-wing. The future is an open-ended piece of art. The autonomy of *spect-actors* in the direction of the scenes is a prefiguration of the autonomy that Freire predicts as the one required for a permanent re-definition of a future based on a constant process of action and reflection.

### **The participatory society: Juan Díaz Bordenave and the 'arch of participation'**

The Paraguayan Juan Díaz Bordenave is probably one of the authors who took the Freirean idea of participation further. In his Ph.D. research, he studied rural communities of Pernambuco, Brazil (Orué Pozzo, 2014), in the same region where Freire had developed and put in place his pedagogical method, alphabetizing hundreds of adult peasants. Together with his experience in rural development and his close interest regarding the Theology of Liberation, this field research influenced Bordenave in the definition of principles that could pull on what he called a *participatory society* (Bordenave, 1989).

At the personal level, it was Bordenave who Freire first approached in 1964, after the military coup in Brazil, as he needed to exile himself. Bordenave was then the director of communications at Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), Peru. However, before Bordenave came around to respond to Freire's request for help, the latter had exiled himself at the Bolivian Embassy to Brazil, shortly after managing to cross into Bolivia, and onwards to Chile where he remained for over 4 years. Only many years later, in the late 1970s, their pathways crossed again when Bordenave re-established a contact, approaching Freire while he was still in exile, now based at the World Council of Churches in Geneva (Tufte, 2013, pp. 12-13).

We generally understand participation through two theoretical paths. One comes from social sciences and highlights any process or practice that integrates different actors in the realization of something. It is about taking part – or allowing others to take part – in a project or activity. The second path comes from political science and discusses how to equalize power. It is still about doing things together, but it goes beyond it to analyze how come people get together and take part in the decisions regarding the way they work and the destiny they pursue. This difference is explored in approaches that define levels or degrees of participation, such as in the “ladder of citizen participation” developed by Sherry Arnstein (1969), or others that distinguish between interaction and participation, such as the one proposed by Nico Carpentier (2012). These

two perspectives are intertwined in the work of Freire and clearly explicit in the work of Bordenave, for whom participation is a human right that enables the emergence of individual subjectivity, as well as their legitimacy as active members of a community, meaning capable of interfering in the definition of collective destiny (Bordenave, 1989, p. 19). The move towards a participatory society implies a deep change in relationships from the level of family to the one of the State.

As a practitioner and an intellectual, Bordenave strongly influenced the field of communication for development, using his thoughts about participation to overcome interventionist methods. A core inspiration was Paulo Freire's book from 1973, *Extension o Comunicacion? La Concientizacion en el Medio Rural* (Freire, 1973). In this small but significant book, Freire unravels a harsh critique of the way communication is conceived in the agricultural sector. Still today you find the notion of the 'extension worker' circulating. Freire saw that as a very linear, non-participatory concept, promoting what he called "cultural invasion". He proposed a whole new way to conceptualize these change agents working in the agricultural sector, aligned with his ideas from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. For Bordenave, Freire's book was crucial, a turning point. Bordenave was originally, intellectually formed by some of the key academics within the diffusion of innovation paradigm, notably Everett Rogers. Like others leading Latin American scholars inspired by Freire, such as Orlando Fals-Borda and Luis Ramiro Beltrán, Bordenave had won a scholarship to study in the US in the 1950s. So, all the while their first intellectual training was embedded in a linear, functionalist paradigm of communication and development, their later acquaintance with Freire made them revisit their stand.

### **People are knowledgeable: the epistemological challenge of Boaventura de Sousa Santos**

The Portuguese professor of sociology Boaventura de Sousa Santos has over the years developed an ambitious project to formulate an *epistemology of the South*. This social science project critiques the dominant discourse in modern science, suggesting alternative epistemological pathways and arguing for an epistemological break. Sousa Santos' ideas are rooted in the fundamental claim for global cognitive justice which, in Freirean terms, explores the hope for a better future through an integrated effort that combines reflection and action.

While Sousa Santos' 2014 book *The Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide* constituted an impactful proposal for this alternative pathway, it is in his more recent book, *The End of the Cognitive Empire* (2018) that



he analyses how to address and challenge the institutions where Eurocentric scientific knowledge is produced. He argues that addressing this global dominance of a specific cognitive empire is about challenging both the research, the kind of knowledge produced, but equally the pedagogies that are part and parcel of developing specific ecologies of knowledge. It is in this context that he unpacks how both the Colombian *father* of participatory action research, Orlando Fals-Borda, and Paulo Freire's liberating pedagogy have influenced the epistemology of the South.

For Boaventura, extra-institutional practices, such as social struggle, are often central to developing the epistemologies of the South. They:

point to practices of criticism and possibility, nonconformity and resistance, denunciation, and counterproposal . . . Prefigurative institutionalities and pedagogies are ways of organizing collective conviviality and promoting liberating learning processes capable of credibly accomplishing, here and now and on a small scale, another possible future (Sousa Santos, 2018, pp. 248-249).

It is in this context that he recognizes the strong influence of Freire: "the epistemologies of the South would not have been possible without two major proposals that revolutionized pedagogy and the social sciences at the end of the 1960s and during the 1970s" (Sousa Santos, 2018, p. 253). Boaventura talks about a "hot reason" as the one that copes with emotions and affects without losing intelligibility. Freire defines the "true word" as something that works both as a way of working, meaning taking everyone as equal, as knowledgeable, and as a projection for the future, where the words do not just describe facts but project a utopia. The ecology of knowledge relates to recognizing different knowledges and restituting the power to all people, representing the world as their own and upon their own terms.

Such an approach is central to several bottom-up development initiatives that Sousa Santos has been involved in. It lay as a guiding principle in the Brazilian experience with participatory budgeting, a process that began in Porto Alegre in 1989 as a project with aspirations to achieve participatory democracy. It encouraged, and achieved, broad political participation around municipal public budgeting in particular, and it has since spread to hundreds of cities worldwide (Tufte, 2017). Sousa Santos saw it as the emergence of a "techno-democratic culture".

Another example, in which Sousa Santos' ideas were influential, were around the World Social Fora, especially the early ones held in Porto Alegre in the first decade of the 2000s. Here, Sousa's thinking, his critique of the global state of

affairs, of the social consequence of globalization, in particular, were important. His arguments for voice and participation and for a social struggle to end social and cognitive injustice resonated strongly with the many social movements and CBOs engaged there. While Freire's ideas were very present and visible in the pro-democracy struggles in Brazil in the 1970s and especially 1980s, they were less visible in the 1990s and 2000s, which was the period when Sousa Santos' influence grew, and he established himself as a significant public intellectual in Brazil and across Latin America. The interesting point established above is the Sousa Santos' intellectual inspiration sourced from Freire.

### **THE GLOBAL NOW: CRITIQUING DEVELOPMENT – CLAIMING VOICE, PARTICIPATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE**

The historical development and influence of Freire over these three thinkers reveal epistemological links and help to understand also the connections between the discontent and consequential uprisings flourishing in different parts of the world. As we mentioned before, the latter is frequently triggered by policies that, although punctual, reveal a larger condition of inequality and a sense of power asymmetry experienced by billions of people living under the same unjust model of development that is constantly justified by a dominant cognitive machine. They are the outcry from the concrete experience of injustice trying to occupy the stage and claiming alternatives.

What do these waves of protest have in common with the “pernicious polarization” (Vrydagh & Jiménez-Martínez, 2020) in Brazil that paved the way for the election of an extreme right federal government? From a Freirean perspective, we think that there are two main analytical keys that can serve as entry point to answer this question. Firstly, there is the historical context of social and cognitive injustices. Secondly, seen from the other side, there are the politics of hope.

As we already evoked, experiences of lack of participation, of social inequality and of not having a voice to speak out constitute a general framework of power asymmetry. Elsewhere, Suzina (2018) has described Brazil as an asymmetric democracy because, on the top of structural and historic inequalities, its citizens hardly get to intervene in the (re)definition of the social order, a barrier almost impossible to overtake for marginalized social groups. Levy (2020) offers an illustrative example of this, displaying a periphery that got tired of being (kept) silent and thus developed “grammars of contestation” to express their claims and views. A similar feeling of lack of voice is described by Vrydagh and Jiménez-Martínez (2020), although coming from very different circumstances.



The latter argue that the polarization observed in Brazil was underpinned by perceptions rather than by irreconcilable differences. Both authors analyse the rise of right-wing voices in the country and, in different ways, contribute to confirm the general traits of asymmetries.

Levy (2020) brings up the case of people actually living under the realm of injustices either abandoned by the public powers, treated with paternalism or blamed by their supposed faults and, therefore, consequently deserving a miserable fate. Vrydagh and Jiménez-Martínez (2020) describe what could be called as performances of contestation, where there is an appropriation of the popular awareness of injustice converted into the reproduction of repertoires generally associated with progressist movements, such as popular marches and occupation of public buildings. The pursuit of voice-raising becomes associated with a shared feeling of domination.

The relevance of looking at this issue from the perspective of social and cognitive injustice is that we can see how the prevalence of power asymmetry is a fertile ground for the emergence of anyone seeking a position of leadership. Vrydagh and Jiménez-Martínez (2020) suggest that authoritarian and/or populist regimes might emerge as an outcome of a “pernicious polarization”. Waisbord (2020) situates Bolsonaro’s government as a textbook of populism for, in a way, institutionalizing this asymmetry under the dichotomy of friends and foes. Accordingly, we can also see how a false idea of liberation can emerge in this context.

For Freire, there is no real liberation without a collective, contextual and historical process. In *Pedagogy of Oppressed* (1968/2017), he argues that there is no liberation if it is not part of a mutual process. If the oppressed and oppressors just exchange positions, no sustainable transformation has been achieved. Despite auto-proclaiming themselves as bearers of truth, the right-wing that came into power in Brazil is far away from the true word defined by Freire.

As one of us discussed previously under the concept of dissonance (Suzina, 2020), technically, the appropriation of the word, in these terms, involves action and reflection, as conceptualized by Freire. In the process of social change, it is a word that seeks and causes dissonance. The distinction refers to what it points to as the horizon. The authentic word guides the emergence of voices towards coexistence and cognitive justice while the inauthentic word disrespects a central foundation of Freire’s pedagogy, which is the elimination of any form of domination. The real liberation through the appropriation of the word does

not seek to replace those in power but to break the cycle of domination and create a new order where oppressors and oppressed become equals.

Paulo Freire struggled to work with these ideas of his. He inspired and achieved to articulate such processes of liberation through his life-long experience of working with liberating pedagogy. He had done it in Brazil in the 1940s and 1950s, culminating with his work with national alphabetization campaign for the Ministry of Education shortly before the military coup in 1964. In exile, from 1964-1979, he wrote some of his seminal works while in Chile, spent time at Harvard in 1970, and got employed by the Council of Churches in Geneva to apply his ideas in literacy work in countries like Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Nicaragua. Once back in Brazil in the 1980s, the military dictatorship was loosening its grip, civil society was growing and social movements mobilizing. Freire became both a university professor, later briefly a politician, but he remained primarily a fundamental inspiration to the Brazilian civil society and this in so many ways.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In 1987, when the urban branch of Brazil's landless movements conducted its first land occupations in Eastern São Paulo, one of us had the opportunity to experience the occupations and interview Paulo Freire about this in his home in São Paulo. In reflecting upon what was going on, Freire was adamant on approaching the conflict from the perspective of power. For Freire, Brazil's landless movement was gradually conquering space, not just in the material sense of the word, but a discursive space, conquering the word through dialogue and informed still by his principles of humility, empathy, love, and hope. However, he was clear about this being a process, and a challenge that required action, yes, but also reflection, or strategic thinking (Freire, personal communication, June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1987).

He spoke about being impatiently patient – he termed it patiently impatiently, see also his wife's description, A. Freire (2004, p. xxix) –, and he clearly reflected the rigour of his own, original pedagogy, the Paulo Freire method, developed and first presented comprehensively in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), but refined in *Extension or Communication?* (1973), in *Pedagogy of Hope* (1992/2009) and in *Pedagogy of Freedom*, published in 1998, the year after his death. In his last book, he reclaims strongly the utopian dimension of his work, a



dimension that is highly action-oriented in the sense that education, he argued, is “that specifically human act of intervening in the world”, and further:

When I speak intervention, I refer both to the aspiration for radical changes in society in such areas as economics, human relations, property, the right to employment, to land, to education, and to health, to the reactionary position whose aim is to immobilize history and maintain an unjust socio-economic and cultural order. (Freire, 1998, p. 6)


He insisted on connecting democracy from below – radical democracy – and human liberation. And, despite speaking about love and empathy, he also insisted on the right to be angry, angry about social injustice in all its forms.

Freire's bold vision of development goes hand in hand with a clear vision of what kind of social change he envisaged. There is a normativity in his perspective of social change, and it is connected to the goal of breaking the asymmetries and to the method of touching ground with action and reflection. It is no surprise, therefore, that many practitioners inspired by Freire say that the good communication does not come from the mind, but from the feet that walk on the mud with the poor (Suzina, 2018).

Freire's vision cannot be pursued partially. It was seen in Boal, in Bordenave, in Sousa Santos' epistemology of the South, and it is a defining criterium when wishing to understand the limitation of applying Freire when analysing the right-wing social movements and dynamics in contemporary Brazil. If such movements claim voices, this must be based on the authentic word. If it is the case of increasing awareness to position oneself in the world, this is still different from the level of conscientization of Freire, in which positioning oneself in the world does not mean replacing the oppressor, but requires putting an end to any kind of oppression and becoming equals, humans. When Freire says that the oppressed might humanize the oppressors, he means it. There is no end to oppression if domination just changes hands. Freire was constantly writing, and often in the format of letters. Thus, the first quote in this article, as well as the last (below) are from one of the four letters published years later in the book *Pedagogy of Indignation* (Freire, 2004), and organized by his widow, Ana Maria Araújo Freire. These letters were written between December 1996 and May 1997, the last months of his life. His second letter was entitled: “On the Right and the Duty to Change the World”, in which he argued against neutral education, and reaffirming his liberating take on intervention, he also reflected upon the



growing Landless Movement in Brazil, associating it with the rebelliousness of the Quilombos, the utopian communal societies established by run-away slaves centuries ago. Reflecting upon the former, but looking far beyond it as well, Freire reaffirms his vision of development in the following way:

How great it would be for the expansion and consolidation of our democracy, above all with respect to its authenticity, if other marches were to follow theirs: marches of the unemployed, of the disenfranchised, of those who protest against impunity, of the ones who decry violence, lying and disrespect for public property. Let us not forget as well the marches of the homeless, of the school-less, of the healthless, of the renegades, and the hopeful march of those who know that change is possible. (Freire, 2004, p. 40) 

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# Freire, Communications and Tolerance in India

## *Freire, Comunicação e Tolerância na Índia*

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### ABSTRACT

This article explores Freire's continuing relevance to education and cultural action in India. It engages with the specificities of Freire's contributions reviewing the work of two key Indian pedagogists, Tagore and Gandhi. It deals with Freirean thought in the specific context of Indian politics characterised by hypernationalism. Drawing from the author's experiences with the praxis of popular theatre, the article deals with challenges posed by critical education in contemporary India, during a pandemic that has highlighted the lack of access to education and the digital divide. It reinforces the need of understanding context and of an enlightened approach to an education that fosters tolerance as a counter to hypernationalism.

**Keywords:** Freire, popular theatre, digital divide, Tagore, Gandhi

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### RESUMO

Este artigo explora a contínua relevância de Freire para a educação e a ação cultural na Índia. Aborda as especificidades das contribuições de Freire, revendo as obras dos principais pedagogos indianos, Tagore e Gandhi. Trata, ainda, do pensamento freiriano na conjuntura específica da política indiana, caracterizada pelo hipernacionalismo. A partir das experiências do autor com a práxis do teatro popular, o artigo discute os desafios da educação crítica na Índia contemporânea, no contexto de uma pandemia que escancarou a falta de acesso à educação e a exclusão digital. O artigo reforça a necessidade de compreensão do contexto e de uma abordagem esclarecida para uma educação que promova a tolerância como contraponto ao hipernacionalismo.

**Palavras-chave:** Freire, teatro popular, exclusão digital, Tagore, Gandhi



## INTRODUCTION

IT IS QUITE extraordinary to think that in 1978, the then government of India actually invited Freire to help with their plans to think through and expand adult education. This was when Freire was in exile and at the World Council of Churches in Geneva. While Freire did meet with representatives of the State and with non-governmental organisations (NGO), there is little that has been documented of his time in India. His legacy, however, has been quite extraordinary. His writings have been translated into many Indian languages, his ideals live on in the work carried out by social and cultural activists throughout India, and even today, debates on the relevance and irrelevance of adult education in India allude to Freire's contributions. Siddartha (n.d.), a well-known NGO activist who worked with Pipal Tree in India describes Freire's influence on NGOs in rural Tamilnadu, South India in the 1970s and 80s:

I remember the time twenty five years ago, when I went to villages around Villupuram, three hours from Chennai, where young dalits were regularly meeting to understand the ideas of Freire. A few university-educated activists from Chennai helped to translate these ideas into Tamil. It was truly a period of hope. In a few months local struggles against caste oppression had begun to erupt all over the area. In the years that followed these ideas spread all over the state. At about the same time similar local movements began to develop all over South India, and shortly thereafter in the North as well. Freire's books were translated into all the major Indian languages, and widely read among social activists. Things would never be the same for dalits, tribals, slum-dwellers, and other excluded communities. (pp. 2-3)

This article will explore Freire's relevance in contemporary India, in particular on popular communications. The phrase *popular communications* does not translate well into Indian languages, unlike it does in Latin America, since it is associated with Bollywood cinema and traditions of Indian film music. Nevertheless, Freire's ideas and ideals did filter through civil society and the NGO movement, and there are records of a Freire symposium in Bombay (now Mumbai) in 1973 (Fonseca, 1973). The influence of his ideas on the praxis of popular communications was derived from Freire's seminal thoughts on the theory and practice of adult education and, in particular, the creation of awareness, the making of critical consciousness and communication as the means to resist domination and the basis for contestation, struggle, and solutions. While Freire's influence on cultural activism in India was widespread in the 1980s and, in particular, in NGOs that were involved in awareness-raising and in the uses

of popular communications, such as popular theatre in grassroots activism, his influence today, while not that apparent, does surface occasionally when there are discussions on the need for universal education and the digital divide in the context of education in pandemic times.

The issues related to critical learning and critical education have become sharpened in the context of what has predominantly become online education characterised by a distancing between the teacher and students. The lack of digital access to education for millions of students in rural India has led to their further marginalisation (Gupta, 2021). This gap reflects the drawbacks of populist politics in India and the gaps between ideological promise and institutional performance in education in India. Having said that, Zinnia Mevawala's (2020) *Critical Consciousness, Social Justice and Resistance*, an account of street children and cultural action in Mumbai offers one of the most comprehensive accounts of using Freirean methods in awareness-raising and conscientisation in India. She specifically explores the uses of dialogue and informal conversation, drawing and storytelling, and child-led photography and tours (pp. 124-128), and recommends the need for a move away from banking forms of education;

the importance of Indian educators recognising and valuing counter-discourses and oppositional worldviews emerging from children's own lived experiences and perspectives are paramount. Moreover, it is recommended that all educators be supported to value counter-discourses and oppositional worldviews as advocates of possibility and human agency. In particular, it is recommended that educators working with subaltern and oppressed groups are supported to engage with pedagogies of indignation, that is, that theoretical tools are provided to children, educators and communities to facilitate shared investigation of the multiple forms of oppression experienced by the students and communities. (Mevawala, 2000, p. 279)

This article will deal with the continuing relevance of Freirean ideas related to cultural action, tolerance, and humanity in a context in which hyper Hindu nationalism has effaced the reasons for commonalities across the divides that exist in contemporary India. It will be based in five parts: 1) situating Freire within the political economy of India; 2) exploring his contributions against that of two key Indian pedagogists, the Nobel Prize-winning nationalist Rabrindranath Tagore, and Mahatma Gandhi; 3) situating Popular Theatre within the context of Political Theatre in India; 4) reflections on the uses of Freirean ideas in the cultural struggles in the 1980s that I had explored in the context of my doctoral work; and 5) situating Freire in the context of the persistence of major divides in India, including the digital divide, and the continuing relevance of his thoughts



to the critical need for dialogue and tolerance in India. I have explicitly attempted to link Freire's contributions to Tagore's and Gandhi's precisely because both these nationalists had a vision of universal education for all Indians. However, and unlike Freire, learning for them was explicitly linked to an education that was primarily culturally relevant, to a freedom through education that was imaginatively constructed in the confluence of Culture and Nature (Tagore), and that was rooted in the local (Gandhi). Freire emphasised the connections between learning and an education that was a precursor to radical social change. I have also tried to connect past and present, Freire then and Freire now, although the politicisation of education and social change today in India in the context of hypernationalism does suggest the need for re-imagining Freire's relevance, and reinvent communications strategies linked to popular struggle. The article deals with the digital divide precisely because affordable access to smartphones, laptops, and the internet are critical to the praxis of education today.

### THE CONTEXT

To begin with – we simply have to deal with the context and political economy of India in the 1970s. When Freire visited India in the late 1970s, the country had just about emerged from being under a national *Emergency* (1975-77), a period of autocratic rule during which time Mrs Indira Gandhi of the Congress Party ruled India with an iron fist. Her political opponents were jailed, and journalists who wrote against her abrogation of the Constitutional rights of citizens were incarcerated while there were numerous cases from around the country of deaths in custody. The coalitional government (Janata) that unseated her in 1977 consisted of a curious mixture of the Left and the Right but who were committed to India becoming an independent nation and who were broadly in favour of the restoration of civil and political rights. This was also a period when Social Action Groups (SAG), an euphemism for non-governmental organisations (NGO), began to expand their operations in India. These SAGs ranged from those involved in mainstream developmental work to those who were ideologically committed to radical social change. This expansion of SAGs in India coincided with the expansion in the funding of such groups by international NGOs, mission agencies and foundations. India was a net recipient of foreign development aid – and, to some extent, the expansion of non-state development was a reflection of the fact that the State, despite its investments in planned, *dirigiste* development, did not have the capacities or resources to invest in development for all. The history of the NGO movement in India needs to be viewed in this context. The involvement of NGOs, however, had its detractors.

The Left, in particular, and the organised Communist parties who were of the opinion that NGOs were part of a neo-imperialist project committed to the advancement of Western imperialism. There were major debates on the space and place of NGOs and non-State actors in the development of India in the pages of India's most prominent journal – the *Economic and Political Weekly* – and other publications.

So, what did the more *progressive* NGOs bring to the table that was different to what the State and established parties had to offer in the development space? I think what they fundamentally brought was an attitude towards development, an understanding of development and its objectives, and the role played by citizens in their own development. The latter was a significant departure since the established Left also had a reputation for being top-down in their approach. In a hierarchical society that was divided by many markers of identity, including caste and class, the leadership of Left movements also reinforced this caste and class divide. In the state of West Bengal, for example, where the Left ruled for close to three decades, their leaders were often described as the *Bhadralok* – educated, upper-class and caste elite. NGOs, in all their myriad permutations, brought flexibility and creativity to development. They enabled solutions in development that were outside of the box, as it were, and that I think were a significant departure from the norm. While progressive NGOs were by no means inured from the grand narratives of progress, such as the overthrow of the bourgeoisie by the working classes, their focus on local development, local capacities based on education, and awareness raising was different primarily because they invested in participation as a process, and because they invested in people deciding for themselves on development trajectories. Getting people to think for themselves in order to act was a major challenge since this was not the norm in a context in which the *banking* model of education, along with *tradition*, reinforced the status quo. So, in a fundamental sense, Freire's thinking humanised radical thought in India, in particular that stemming from Marxism by enabling and facilitating ordinary voices to be heard, recognised, and factored into the making of their own development. Freire's ideas on education contributed to the making of agency – and this was a radical departure, a freedom that was hitherto denied to most people in India.

### FREIRE AND RABRINDRANATH TAGORE

Freire's ideas on education can be contextualised within a consideration of the more progressive variants of education in India associated with two nationalists,





Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), and Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948). Tagore was among the early Indian anti-colonial nationalists who articulated a vision for education that was a blend of the East and its spiritual humanism, and the West – the scientific temper associated with the West. Ghosh et al. (2011), in an article on Tagore and education, compare his approach to Freire's:

Freire tried to get away from “banking education” in which “knowledge” is deposited, while Tagore wanted education to be a process of absorption, not a process of filling the child’s mind with “knowledge” from the books. Similarly, both of them saw the importance of removing ignorance which was the cause of poverty and vulnerability. (p. 67)

Tagore’s concept of education was operationalized through Shantiniketan, a school that has an iconic status in the history of education in India given its emphasis on experiential learning that is centered around the use of the imagination and deep correspondences between Nature and Culture. His learning emphasized naturalism, humanism, internationalism, and idealism – and the self-realization of these ideals in organic ways – the education of the senses and that of the intellect. While learning at Shantiniketan certainly is different from the standard learning route practiced in both colonial and post-colonial India, its focus was on developing rounded students who would go on to serve the nation in its project of nation-building. It was certainly not an education that was meant to question the prevailing system or provide the intellectual means to resist, combat, and overthrow systems such as caste that was, and still is, the architecture for social relationships and sociality in India. As an enlightened scholar, academic, aesthete, and poet, Tagore did address some of the sins of the caste system in his writings, although, as Tapan Basu has observed, this did not result in his wanting to dismantle the system. To Tagore, caste was integrally Indian, and while he fought against its more heinous manifestations, it was a basic principle on which Hindu society was based. In the words of Tapan Basu (2012),

this liberated man – who deliberately and cavalierly defied the taboos of caste in his own life – demurred at attributing transgressive subjectivity of the same order to caste-tormented people within his own narratives. . . . Tagore’s stories about outcastes in general and untouchables in particular were inevitably “narratives of suffering”. His subalterns do not rebel. (p. 169)

## FREIRE AND MAHATMA GANDHI

Tagore's contemporary Mahatma Gandhi was also a fierce anti-colonialist whose entire approach to the challenges of development in post-colonial India was based on a going back to the best of tradition. Unlike Tagore, who believed in a Modernity that was tempered by the traditions of India, Gandhi's ideals related to growth and development in post-colonial India by going back to village India that, to him, represented simplicity, living within one's means, frugality and humanity. This vision was at odds with that of the first Prime Minister of Independent India, Jawarhalal Nehru, who was committed to modernizing India. Gandhi opposed colonial education, wrote extensively on the purpose of education, and worked towards a New Education – Nai Talim – that was fundamentally aligned to vocational training and employability, but that was based on clear correspondences between the dignity of manual and mental labour. Gandhi's emphasis on employability and holistic education has left a lasting impression, and India's New Education Policy (2020) continues to have this dialogue with Gandhian thought. As Jaydev Jana (2020) notes, Gandhi's "educational scheme was nationalistic in setting, idealistic in nature; pragmatic on the one hand while social in purpose and spiritual in intent" (para. 26).

Like Tagore, there are some parallels between Gandhi's and Freire's approach to education; for example, Gandhi's belief in *Ahimsa* (non-violence) and *Satyagraha* (Truth-based, non-violent resistance), ideals that underlie Freire's belief in tolerance. Furthermore, for Gandhi too, education was a tool for political education, for knowing right from wrong, and for learning the essence of love as the means towards the humanisation of society. However, Gandhi too, like Tagore, had a complex relationship with Indian hierarchies – in particular caste. While Gandhi is universally known for his commitment to reforming caste, he believed in the essence of the caste system, and that it could be reformed by the higher castes voluntarily acceding to the need for reform – a conviction that has proven to be unworkable and is today considered an erroneous assumption. Caste is an entrenched system that perpetuates humiliation for one group and privilege and entitlements for another. Ratna Ghosh (2019), writing in the *Wiley Handbook of Paulo Freire* does point out that among Gandhi's many weaknesses were the facts that he had an ambivalent attitude towards women who he considered primarily *homemakers*, and caste, that he believed provided the framework for life in India. However, Ghosh's critique is measured given that Gandhi did



have a less than satisfactory record in his attitude towards *black* South Africans during his sojourn in South Africa, and his inability to rise above his own position and location as a privileged member of his caste – an issue that led to his confrontations with B. R. Ambedkar, a Dalit himself and revered leader of Dalits in contemporary India. Here again, Freire's attitude towards tolerance was universal, it did not discriminate. To Freire, conscientization was the means to not only become aware and get involved in actions to change the world, it was also the means by which the oppressed learned to both understand the dominant syntax, question it, and transform the world, thus bringing about a level playing field. While Gandhi's lasting legacy is his unique approach to the nationalist struggle that he achieved through his extraordinary communicative actions that were based on the fusion of the symbolic, the moral, and the spiritual, and that were aimed at humanising the colonial oppressor, this approach was not successful in transforming the oppressor who was also a fellow citizen.

### **FREIRE AND POPULAR THEATRE IN INDIA**

While there are still conversations with Freire in India in the areas of education and adult education, his impact on popular communications is less tangible; although, there are writings on his and Augusto Boal's continuing influence on popular theatre, such as Jana Sanskriti in West Bengal (see Brahma et al., 2019; Coudray, 2017; Ganguly, 2010; Jha & Sanyal, 2019, and Nath, 2012), and on other theatre groups also in West Bengal (Thakur, 2013). I will, in the following pages, illustrate Freire's influence on the traditions of popular theatre in India as experienced during my own doctoral study-related fieldwork in India carried out in the late 1980s in rural Tamilnadu.

The fieldwork associated with my doctoral studies was carried out in rural Tamilnadu, South India, during 1984 and 1985. Mrs. Gandhi had been assassinated in 1984 by Sikh separatists, and her son Rajiv Gandhi had taken over during what was a sombre time in India. I travelled throughout Tamilnadu, and while visiting and speaking to NGO activists, it was clear that many had read Freire and used many of his ideas in their own work mobilising women, adivasis (tribal), and Dalits. In fact, it was unusual to not come across activists who had not heard of Freire. Many of these NGOs had adopted and adapted repertoires of cultural action associated with the Left, including political, agit-prop theatre, and revolutionary songs and music. West Bengal was the home of protest theatre, although it was very much an urban medium catering to the urban elite. The Indian People's Theatre Association was established in 1942 under the

aegis of the Communist Party of India (CPI) in Bombay, and their plays were initially used to create awareness of colonial failures and their consequences, such as the plays *Jabanbandu* and *Nabanna* (1944) which were on the Bengal famine that led to the deaths of more than a million. Suchetna Banerjee (2019), in an article on the IPTA, highlights their modus operandi:

How did the IPTA plan to carry out this project? It sought to effect change centrifugally and centripetally. First, travelling performing troupes sponsored directly or indirectly by the Communist Party travelled from urban centers into the villages to rally mass support and organize the people's movement. Secondly, local rural troupes would be enlisted on their own to support the cause. The effects of this cultural exchange – between the urban and the rural, the intelligentsia and the peasant/workers – considerably strengthened the movement. Moreover, religious and ritual forms of performance, musical performance genres, and folk performance forms were being reconstituted during this period in order to respond to the political climate. Urban performance forms and the realism of the proscenium stage started to be showcased in rural regions. It became a main task of the people's theatre movement to manage these tendencies. New experimentations in dramatic forms and the demand for representation of contemporary reality in drama emerged out of the democratic struggles. (p. 43)

While the IPTA expanded its reach and presence in post-independent India, this form of political theatre did have limitations. It was didactic, and there were few opportunities for post-performance discussions. While the objective was to agitate the working and other classes to fight for their rights, there was little by way of follow up, limited post-performance discussions, and certainly no involvement of audiences in these productions. In other words, these plays did make people aware of their rights, but these were not accompanied with concrete strategies for translating such revolutionary fervour into a practical blueprint for action. Another important footnote in the history of political theatre is the Third Theatre/Poor Theatre associated with Badal Sircar (1925-2011). Grounded in experimental theatre, Sircar preceded Augusto Boal's attempts to make theatre really accessible by bringing theatre down to people, eschewing the proscenium, and focusing on the actors' ability to not only use their bodies to communicate but also to perform theatre that reflected their own internal journeys to an awakening of consciousness (Jain, 2019). While Sircar's plays – most famously *Spartacus* –, was used to create awareness of enslavement and the need for empowerment, his plays, while intensely political, have been critiqued for attempting to deal with too many issues, thus losing focus (Chatterjee, 2016).



While Freire's writings had percolated into India before Augusto Boal's, the combination of a radical philosophy for adult education that was centered on the making of critical consciousness, and a communicative means – popular theatre – to explore the making of that critical consciousness enabled a praxis that was operationalisable. While both Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed* were certainly academic and directed at literate readers, the strength of these two publications was that facilitators and activists were readily able to appropriate/cull the ideas and techniques from these texts and translate these into primers for popular education and grassroots uses. While Freire's literacy teaching method could not be readily translated into Indian languages, his ideas related to learning in context, based on maximal participation, consciousness raising as the means to understand, advocate, and transform reality were certainly seen as a viable alternative to approaches that fell short on the nature and processes having to do with community engagement. Freire arguably articulated an egalitarianism at the very centre of learning and development, reflected in what was a categorically preferential option for the poor. It was this complete acceptance of the Other as autonomous human beings who had the capacity to understand, agitate, and transform that enabled Freire to be widely accepted by the civil society in India.

Similarly, Boal's dramaturgy lent itself to an engagement with the practice of popular theatre that could be adapted to the specificities of local forms of theatre – such as the *Terrakoothu* (street theatre) in Tamilnadu, India. Boal's approach to theatre was systematic and divided into three stages – the first two involved learning to use one's body to express oneself and understand its possibilities and limitations, the third stage was characterised by three parts: 1) simultaneous Dramaturgy, where the audience demonstrates to the performer what to perform; 2) image Theatre, where the audience inserts itself in the actual production; and 3) forum Theatre, where the audience acts as full participants directing the script of the play, using individual analysis of situations and means of countering them. Boal's approach offered popular theatre artists in India the opportunity to make theatre participatory. Theatre performances were not only opportunities to dramatise issues and find solutions – they were also opportunities to build capacities in local communities, especially among the youth. Critically though, theatre was not just the means to create awareness and conscientize publics, it was one aspect of a larger mobilisation that involved education and grassroots actions that were aimed at the restitution of human rights and the rights to livelihood. In the words of one of the key champions and archivists of popular theatre Ross Kidd (1985),

Popular theatre plays a supportive rather than central role in the organising process. It is one of a number of activities used to build up the courage, participation, awareness, and organisational strength of popular groups and organisations. As an organic part of an educational and organising process, it can play a range of roles – bringing people together and building organisational unity; drawing out participation and the expression of popular concerns and analysis; voicing protest, overcoming people's fears and building confidence; deepening discussion and understanding the major issues; clarifying the target for a specific struggle and assuring support; planning and agreeing on the strategies and tactics for action; stirring people's emotions and mobilising for struggle; building alliances with other groups and communities, etc. (p. 277)

### THE PRAXIS OF POPULAR THEATRE: NOTES FROM THE FIELD

A part of my doctoral fieldwork was carried out with the Association for the Rural Poor (ARP), an NGO that had been established in the early 70s and was one of the earliest such organisations involved in radical development alternatives in India. The organisers of this NGO were mainly Dalits, and they were especially focused on issues related to land and landlessness in parts of rural Tamilnadu, South India. Their founders were influenced by Gandhi's philosophy of non-violence, Freire's theory of conscientization and alternative development, the Latin American liberation theology, Marxian social analysis, and Saul Alinsky's methods of building popular movements. The ARP was explicitly involved in trying to use Freirean adult education methodologies in their action-reflection based work. They were focused on 1) conscientizing rural, mainly Dalit, publics on local and national issues using a *keywords* approach; and 2) using a variety of cultural actions – skits, theatre, songs, cultural yatras (pilgrimages) to strengthen collective solidarities, depict and clarify understandings of key local issues – from the issue of debt and moneylending to landlessness, land rights, and minimum wages. All these were critical issues facing these communities, many of whom were landless labourers working as seasonal labourers in agricultural cultivation.

The leaders of ARP believed in working in a region only after they were explicitly invited to work there by local people. The key words were generated through ARP's amateurs who tried to understand the context of a village before they began the process of building community. Once invited, they were involved in extensive conversations based on transect walks – and this led to the collection of key words that were shared and that denoted common issues such as the lack of water, health facilities, and/or land. These key words were expanded into phrases and sentences that became the basis for thematic analysis,



granular understandings, and solutions that were often dramatized through popular theatre. Cultural action and political action went hand in hand and, in many cases, people were involved in petitioning local administrations, squatting on land or getting legal certificates for the land they occupied. The role of the amateurs were critical since they had to be open and inclusive, had to listen and be involved in the art and practice of dialogue and dialogic communication. They played a key role in facilitating voices, helping people to articulate the difficulties they faced, and establish a relationship unlike, say, a government visitor to the village or a political agent who is an episodic visitor who does not establish an enduring relationship with most people – although they certainly do with the caste hierarchy. Caste oppression was a huge issue then and now. Landless labourers invariably were Dalit or belonged to the lower castes. Caste oppression was a frequent subject in the cultural and political analysis classes and these oppressions included the practices of untouchability, sexual exploitation of women labourers, daily acts of humiliation, caste violence, and social distancing that were prevalent. I remember being confronted by caste as a social reality in these villages – from separate plates and tumblers for Dalits who had to wash them in the local restaurant to upper caste disruption of cultural performances. Popular theatre performances were held at night – and there were occasions when the upper castes threw stones, threatened violence and shut down electricity supplies to the makeshift stage.

To me, these popular theatre performances demonstrated the rich possibilities of using theatre in cultural action. It also had significant limitations since the actors, including the amateurs and locals, had to be well versed with local issues and depict them in ways that could be understood by local people. The danger of rough and ready popular theatre is that it can descend into farce. And so, it was important that there was a shared understanding and a familiarity with the theme. Here is an example of local participation that I had written about in my thesis:

In another skit on the theme of bank loans, a similar scene between the bank officer and the petitioner was frozen. This time there was unanimous agreement that the petitioner was too meek. Prabhu (the amateur) changed the scene around. This time the petitioner refused to be cowed by authority. He demanded his loan and threatened to expose the officer if he did not comply with his request. There was a good deal of excitement during this scene partly because the person acting as the petitioner was a local boy. Frequently, the actor or actors directly addressed the crowd and asked them for their opinions. In Mudaliarkuppam, the audience was asked about the prevailing rates in the Minimum Wages Act. There were differences

in the answers provided by the audience. It pointed to a confused understanding of the wage structure under this Act. Prabhu and Jeyraj immediately launched on an impromptu dialogue between themselves on the Minimum Wages Act and this was appreciated by the audience. (Thomas, 1987, pp. 318-319)

Apart from the issue with amateurs, there was also the issue of what type of theatre to use in cultural action. There are numerous traditions of folk theatre in South India, and in Tamilnadu it was a form called *Terrakoothu* (literally, street play) that was widely used in cultural actions. The content of folk theatre in India is either a dramatization from the Hindu epics or local mythologies, and one of the issues had to do with the adaptation of *Terrakoothu* to cultural action. As the purpose of the exercise was to enable local people to learn this art form, the amateurs decided to discard the accoutrements associated with *Terrakoothu*, including the masks, makeup and costumes. Initially there was some opposition to this, as it was felt that the audience would be confused if they did not recognise the performance as *Terrakoothu*. It was then decided that make up and costumes were optional and not obligatory. Key changes, however, were made to content and to the conventions. The story line was changed, and instead of dealing with traditional myths from the Hindu epics, the story was set in feudal India, and was a story about a king and his religious authorities and their economic, political and religious oppression of the masses. There was a clear analogy with the then political situation prevailing in Tamilnadu. The story was a reflection of contemporary realities – the alliance of local land lords with temple priests and their joint role in the subjugation of people. Some of the conventions were also changed. The traditional invocation was upturned, and instead of an invocation to Lord Ganesh, the invocation was addressed to the audience who were asked to listen attentively to this new version of the *Terrakoothu*. The narrator then spoke directly to the audience, and basically told them that the future was in their hands, that only they could save themselves from the oppressions that they faced as long as they stood united and resisted this tyranny. While the king and his courtiers used classical Tamil, the court jester used the language of the masses. And, like traditional *Terrakoothu*, this version too was about the triumph of good over evil, of the oppressed over their oppressors.

While popular theatre was a powerful tool in the hands of skilled amateurs, I had, in 1995, written an article on the crisis of popular theatre in India in relation to *participation*, its forms, ethos and legitimacy (Thomas, 1995) – in other words, the limitations of using theatre in social change in which neither its expressions nor its context were grounded in locality: “cultural strategies need to respect popular memory – tradition, common understandings, shared





meanings and collective goals. . . . Popular theatre needs to be moored in the popular consciousness as a genuine alternative medium – as an alternative, not as an all-sufficient substitute” (Thomas, 1995, p. 222). To me, one of Freire’s enduring legacies is his insistence on the need to understand people and their cultures in context.

### **FREIRE ON CONTEXT**

Freire believed in context and in the beauty that resided in the dominated *syntax*, their ways of expression, and their traditions of communications. In other words, and in a Freirean sense, the resources of hope are available locally. However, understanding context remains a massive challenge given the global pivot towards online education in pandemic times. Whether in adult education or in popular cultural actions involving traditions such as popular theatre, prior understanding of context is absolutely critical to the advancement of meaningful pedagogies and cultural action. While both Tagore and Gandhi believed in education in context, Freire’s insistence on beginning an education from where people are, shaped by their experiences and circumstances in order to change their world’s was radically different. Neither Tagore nor Gandhi were interested in a transformative education that would result in ordinary people questioning reality and using their critical consciousness to change that reality for the better. Their approach to education was not, by any stretch of the imagination, the means to contest hegemonic power or to mobilize collective solutions. Freire believed that those who had a poor grasp of context were unsuited to getting involved in any transfer of knowledge. In the edited volume, the *Pedagogy of Solidarity* (2014b), he highlights the importance of knowing context in any transfer of knowledge.

I am sure that a foreigner, an American professor, or a Chilean, or French, or Indian, can go to Brazil to help us to change education in Brazil. But he or she can only do that if, firstly, he or she really knows something about Brazil; secondly, if he or she is eager to learn about Brazilian reality; and thirdly, if he or she is humble enough to re-think himself or herself. Without these conditions, it is better for all of us that this person stays at home, do not go there to try to educate us. The same rules apply to me. (Freire, 2014b, p. 18)

That lesson was learned by Freire in his encounters with ordinary people, from fishermen to labourers, in Brazil and elsewhere. In his book the *Pedagogy of Hope* (Freire, 2014a), that provides the background to his writing his classic *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he traces his journey from being an educator

who had knowledge of key education scholars, such as Jean Piaget and his theory of cognitive development, to a transformation that came about through his encounter with a participant at one of his lectures. After listening to Freire's lecture, in the Q&A session, this gentleman pulled up Freire for his class position and class knowledge. In Freire's (2014a) words:

In his intonations, his laborer's syntax and rhythm, the movements of his body, his hands of an orator, in the metaphors so common to popular discourse, he called the attention of the educator there in front of him, seated, silent, sinking down into his chair, to the need, when speaking to the people, for the educator to be up to an understanding of the world the people have. An understanding of the world which, conditioned by the concrete reality that is part explains that understanding. (p. 19)

Freire also believed in the need for educators to be constantly up to date on making sense of the media and imparting media literacy, given the key role played by media in people's lives. In the book *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to those who Dare Teach*, in Letter 9 he pointedly highlights that a critical reading of the world simply has to engage with media content, but also points out the need for educators to use media such as video to exchange information and learn from one another.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The special issue of the *International Communication Gazette* (2020, v. 82, i. 5) on The Legacy of Paulo Freire offers a cogent reading of the opportunities, limitations, and relevance of Freire to popular communications today. A key challenge that Silvio Waisbord (2020) had identified in this special issue is the threat from Freire to right-wing populism in Brazil, a threat that Andrew Woods (2020) describes being made by a number of politicians, including President Bolsonaro:

In speeches and interviews, Bolsonaro and his allies represent Freire as a kind of leftist bogeyman whose influence needs to be purged from the Brazilian education system. On his campaign trail, Bolsonaro boasted to his supporters that he would "enter the education ministry with a flamethrower to remove Paulo Freire". Abraham Weintraub, Bolsonaro's now former minister of education (he recently left for a contentious position at the World Bank), blamed Freire for Brazil's poor education rankings and likened Freirean pedagogy to "voodoo without scientific proof". Similarly, the self-proclaimed Brazilian philosopher Olavo de Carvalho,



who is known as “Bolsonaro’s guru,” dismisses Freire as a “pseudo-intellectual militant” who produced “a collection of tricks to reduce education to sectarian indoctrination”. (para. 3)

This rather violent attempt to erase the legacy of Freire is precisely because Freire’s legacy is a threat to populism, and because it offers possibilities for an anti-populist democratic communications and a democratic public sphere (Waisbord, 2020, pp. 452-452). In India too, in the context of a government that is populist/fascist in nature, democratic communications has been systematically curtailed through the co-option of mainstream media, the levying of legal means, such as defamation law, sedition, national security, the incarceration of journalists and citizens who are seen to be anti-Modi as, for instance, the arrest of twenty ordinary people for putting up posters critical of Modi’s handling of the Covid-19 crisis. The extraordinary mishandling of the Covid-19 crisis in India by the government and its consequences are plain to see, and while there are examples of media dissent, it is clear that these arrests are meant to send a message to ordinary Indians who are expected to bear with the shortage of oxygen, lack of beds in hospitals, lack of vaccines, and not ask questions of what is now recognised as a government that lacks any empathy. The Covid-19 catastrophe in India, as is the case in Brazil, has exposed the gaps, deficits, and divides that exist in these two countries who have invested in their public image as growing superpowers. Covid-19 has exposed the fragile nature of these countries, shambolic governance structures, and the inability of the State to provide citizens with basic health care. But that is just one divide. In the case of India, it has also exposed the nature of the digital divide and the sheer reality of poverty that were downplayed during the feelgood years, and that has been exposed with a vengeance. The digital divide was graphically illustrated by the fact that Covid-19 lock-downs of schools meant that education was delivered online. This immediately exposed the reality of rural India, where students lacked access to smartphones, laptops and internet, and that even led to an increase in suicides among students who were unable to study. As Twitter and government helplines become the means by which desperate people try and access oxygen and health facilities, those who do not have smartphones and social media accounts are unable to do likewise (“Covid Meltdown”, 2021). Kundan Pandey, (2020) writing in the environmental magazine *Down to Earth*, describes the digital divide thus

Kuldip Kumar from Gummer village near Himachal Pradesh's Jawalamukhi town was recently in deep distress. After the Union government announced a country-wide lockdown on March 24, 2020, the school where his children studied, decided to take online lessons. But Kumar did not have a mobile phone as well as the money to buy one.

He moved from pillar to post to get a loan of Rs 6,000. He approached banks and also private lenders, but failed to get it. Finally, he had to sell his cow. . . .

Education is just one area that has highlighted the digital divide between India's rural and urban areas during the lockdown. The trend is evident everywhere – telemedicine, banking, e-commerce, e-governance, all of which became accessible only via internet during the lockdown. (paras. 1-2, 7)

I am pretty sure that if Freire were around today, his curiosity would have extended to figuring out how to extend critical pedagogy online, to advocate for access to new technologies and the internet as a basic human right and to enable critical reflection in a context in which technology, as an intermediary, can be a barrier to the practice of engaged forms of education. In an open letter to Freire, a teacher in Malaysia, Joanna Jeyraj (2021), involved in remote education, asks how *trust* can be built in an online environment:

Could trust be fostered when cameras were switched off and microphones muted; when there was technological surveillance through the recording and uploading of all classes on the institution's LMS? Did common online meeting etiquette which called for microphones to be muted impinge on student voice? . . .

So, Freire, if you were able to read this, I wonder what advice you would have as teachers strive to connect more authentically with students within an online space. I wonder how we can recontextualise critical pedagogy practice to suit the present realities we find ourselves in. (paras. 4, 7)

Forty-three years have passed since Freire's final visit to India in 1978. If Freire would have been alive today, I doubt the present government in India would have invited him to contribute to their New Education Policy (NP), although, perhaps unbeknownst to them, traces of Freire continue to contaminate this policy. In an article on adult education in India, Mandal (2019) observes that in the NEP "literacy, critical life skills, basic vocational skills, basic education, continuing education and digitalization . . .



[are] priority areas” (p. 327) – all of which are Freirean concerns. As a media academic who has had a long relationship with Freire’s writings, I am of the opinion that there is need for renewed attempts to adapt Freirean models of adult education to Indian realities, and for communicative engagements with a dialogue for tolerance. How to shape a tolerant society remains a challenge in India today after many deliberate attempts by the hypernationalist government in power to erase India’s famed reputation for being a secular nation, and for protecting and extending the principle of unity in diversity. To me, more than ever, Freire’s contributions can play a signal role in creating the conditions for critical consciousness and democracy in India. ■

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# Talking with the Right-Wing: Pernicious Polarization in Brazil and the Philosophy of Paulo Freire<sup>a</sup>

## *Conversando com a Direita: Polarização Perniciosa no Brasil e a Filosofia de Paulo Freire*

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### ABSTRACT

The last decade has witnessed the development of pernicious polarization in Brazil, partly due to the emergence of a conservative, populist-nationalist, and neoliberal agenda. This article addresses the viewpoints of individuals who identify themselves as part of the right-wing, drawing on 21 semi-structured interviews with members of the *Movimento Brasil Livre*. By analyzing the interviews through the philosophy of Paulo Freire, we show how their narrative of oppression echoes Freire's ideas of conscientization and liberation in form but not in substance. We also suggest that a Freirean approach opens new ways to discuss and potentially unlock pernicious polarization, incorporating a significant distinction between sectarians and radicals.

**Keywords:** Polarization, Paulo Freire, Brazil, right-wing, digital media

### RESUMO

A última década testemunha o desenvolvimento da polarização perniciosa no Brasil, em parte devido à emergência de uma agenda conservadora, populista-nacionalista e neoliberal. Este artigo aborda os pontos de vista dos indivíduos que se identificam como parte da direita, baseando-se em 21 entrevistas semiestruturadas com membros do Movimento Brasil Livre. Ao analisá-las por meio da filosofia de Paulo Freire, mostramos como sua narrativa de opressão ecoa na forma, mas não na substância, as ideias de conscientização e libertação de Freire. Sugerimos também que uma abordagem freiriana abre novas formas de discutir e potencialmente romper a polarização perniciosa, incorporando uma distinção significativa entre sectários e radicais.

**Palavras-chave:** Polarização, Paulo Freire, Brasil, direita, mídia digital

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## INTRODUCTION

**T**HOUSANDS OF BRAZILIANS took to the streets in cities all over the country on 15 March 2015. They protested against economic recession, the corruption scandals exposed by *Operação Lava Jato* – an investigation into a bribery network involving the entire political spectrum, including former presidents Fernando Collor de Mello and, notably, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva –, and demanded the impeachment of then President Dilma Rousseff. Relatively new conservative or right-wing opposition groups, such as *Movimento Brasil Livre* and *Vem Pra Rua* were behind these demonstrations, which were attended mostly by middle or upper class people (Davis & Straubhaar, 2020). The demonstrations continued throughout 2015 and 2016, with members of these and other groups promoting a conservative, populist-nationalist, neoliberal and even sometimes militarist agenda, whilst depicting the then governing *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (PT, Workers' Party) as a source of corruption, authoritarianism and inefficiency, and da Silva and Rousseff as political figures to topple.

The legal but highly questionable impeachment of Rousseff in August 2016 added fuel to this situation. Right-wing organizations continued to grow during the government of Rousseff's replacement, her controversial Vice-president Michel Temer, and the subsequent presidential campaign that ended in the victory of right-wing populist Jair Bolsonaro in late 2018. The emergence of these groups contributed to a significant social and political shift in the country. Dichotomies between the *left* and the *right* were replaced by a growing perception of "pernicious polarization" (following McCoy & Somer, 2019), partly due to the increasing visibility of a radicalized right that did not tolerate any deviation from its own position and pledged for the symbolic, but also sometimes corporeal, neutralization of *the enemy*. The 2018 presidential campaign election was particularly vitriolic. Lula was forced to abandon the race after being jailed accused of corruption – but released from prison 18 months later –, and Bolsonaro's supporters voiced on the streets and social media anti-establishment and *antipetistas* (anti-PT) views (Davis & Straubhaar, 2020; Hunter & Power, 2019). Notably, one of the numerous targets of Bolsonaro's backers was Paulo Freire and his legacy, accused of being responsible for a supposed *communist brainwashing* of Brazil's educational system.

Whilst Paulo Freire's main concern was education, his philosophical project ultimately aimed to achieve a broader transformation of society, particularly in view of persistent social inequalities in Brazil and Latin America during the 1950s and 1960s. Hence, and without completely abandoning an emphasis on education, some have drawn on Freire's philosophy –beyond the specificities

of pedagogic methods – to address broader questions about democracy, the social pervasiveness of neoliberalism as well as political polarization (e.g. Bolin, 2017; Holst, 2019; O’Cadiz et al., 2018). Whilst our focus is on communication rather than education, we agree that the philosophy of Paulo Freire, particularly his ideas on dialogue, sectarianism and radicalization, can open up new paths to discuss and even unlock processes of pernicious polarization affecting societies in conflict, such as Brazil.

Drawing on 21 interviews with activists from right-wing organization *Movimento Brasil Livre* (MBL, Free Brazil Movement), this article aims to examine perceptions about the recent process of social and political pernicious polarization in Brazil through the eyes of these individuals. We start with a conceptual and contextual overview, examining what we understand pernicious polarization to be, and addressing how this process has been manifested in Brazil in the last decade. We then look at how right-wing activists proposed a narrative of oppression to explain the rise of the right in Brazil, with chronological stages of alleged *victimization*, *conscientization* and *liberation*. Although these stages seem to echo Freire’s philosophy, we are aware that these similarities are in form rather than substance. Finally, we suggest that the philosophy of Paulo Freire can open new avenues of thought to unlock the process of pernicious polarization in Brazil, enhancing the possibility of dialogue and incorporating a significant distinction between sectarians, closed within their view of the world, and radicals, who aim for social change but are open to dialogue and listening, even when disagreeing with the other.

### **BRAZIL’S GROWING PERNICIOUS POLARIZATION**

A competitive gamut of political positions – usually articulated in terms of right and left-wing – is a normal feature of a healthy democracy. When differences are taken to the extreme, and electorates separate out into antagonistic, distrustful camps that perceive the *other* as an existential threat, social and political “pernicious polarization” emerges (Somer & McCoy, 2019). Hence, pernicious polarization does not simply refer to the distance between ideologies, but rather alludes to circumstances when “political identity becomes a social identity, and it takes on characteristics of political tribalism in which members of each camp feel loyalty and sympathy toward their own political group and distrust and antipathy toward the other” (Somer & McCoy, 2019, p. 9). Whilst pernicious polarization is relational, the existence of an extreme right-wing along with an equally extreme left-wing is not a pre-requisite for this to happen. Traditionally, leaders or organizations of one specific political tendency



promote it initially, simplifying the normal multiplicity of society viewpoints into a Manichean politics of *us* and *them* (Somer & McCoy, 2019).

Pressure to conform with the messages and beliefs of one camp may be conducive to gridlock and careening, a deepening of pre-existing crises, and post-truth politics, with facts bent to favour one's position and erode rival ones. Furthermore, when opposition to extreme groups – even by those in the political centre – is driven by equally Manichean terms and attitudes, the process of pernicious polarization may deepen, narrowing the possibility of negotiation and agreement (McCoy & Somer, 2019). Pernicious polarization can therefore undermine democracy, opening the door to institutional collapse, authoritarianism or populism. The latter is underpinned by stressing and exploiting the perceived antagonism between a governing *elite* vis-a-vis a supposedly underdog *people* (Stavrakakis, 2018).

The political and economic stability enjoyed by Brazil since the late 1990s and particularly during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, led some to argue that the country had consolidated its party system, with most electors gravitating around the policies of either the centre-left PT or the centre-right PSDB (*Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira* – Brazilian Social Democracy Party) (Borges & Vidigal, 2018; Braga & Pimentel, 2011). Since 2013 however, it has been argued that Brazil has fallen into a growing process of pernicious polarization, manifested by, among other things, a lack of trust of politicians, the dissatisfaction of the left due to the weakening of ties between the PT governments and social movements, and the significance of *lulismo* and *anti-petismo* as identity markers. This all facilitated the emergence of Jair Bolsonaro and the resonance of his extreme views among significant portions of the electorate (Davis & Straubhaar, 2020; Hunter & Power, 2019). Consequently, the various demonstrations that stormed Brazil in the last decade have been interpreted as both triggers and expressions of such pernicious polarization (Davis & Straubhaar, 2020; Hunter & Power, 2019).

Brazilian commentators and academics have argued that this pernicious polarization, partly fueled by social media, not only facilitated Bolsonaro's election, but deepened further during his government, with a clear division between government supporters scorned as *bolsominions* and PT followers nicknamed *petralhas* (Gomes et al., 2019; Ortellado & Ribeiro, 2018). Pundits have consequently warned about the possible implications of Bolsonaro's extreme views for Brazilian democracy (Muggah, 2018), have complained about the apparent stupidity of voters (as observed by Welp, 2018), and have proposed means for a centrism rebirth (de Campos et al., 2019). Recent surveys

seem to confirm this polarizing trend, with studies arguing that a majority of Brazilians are less willing to engage with individuals who hold different views (Gomes et al., 2019; Simonard, 2020). Evidence however suggests that pernicious polarization in Brazil is actually underpinned only by perceptions, rather than irreconcilable differences (Ortellado et al., 2016). Contemporary social and political developments have nonetheless hardened political opinions and identities across the country, with opposing perspectives dismissed in simplistic terms and political projects becoming impossible to dissociate from religious, family, social, and economic viewpoints. Politics in Brazil, particularly after the election of Jair Bolsonaro, have apparently become a zero-sum game, characterized – especially among Bolsonaro’s most vocal supporters – by purism and passions leading to arguments of being *either with me or against me*, and leaving very limited space for compromise and negotiation.

## METHODOLOGY: TALKING TO THE RIGHT-WING

Despite the increasing attention that the process of pernicious polarization in Brazil has received, discussions have largely overlooked the viewpoints of individuals who identify themselves as part of the right-wing. There has been some work examining media content produced by these individuals, particularly through social media networks (e.g. Davis & Straubhaar, 2020; Romancini & Castilho, 2019; Zanini & Tatagiba, 2019), and on surveys conducted during protest episodes (Ortellado et al., 2016). Few studies (e.g. Barbieri, 2015; Rocha, 2019; Silva, 2016) have directly addressed the perceptions and viewpoints of these individuals.

The scarcity of interviews with right-wing individuals and organizations is partly due to the difficulty of accessing them, as observed in other settings (e.g. Atkinson & Suzanne, 2012). In our own experience, individuals identifying as right-wing expressed distrust towards academics, labelling them as leftist activists. In turn, some academics also expressed sectarian positions, denigrating the value of research about the right-wing, for considering that the right-wing had nothing of value to say. Yet the growth and socio-political significance of these individuals and organizations in Brazil and elsewhere make them impossible to ignore.

The focus of this article is on *Movimento Brasil Livre* (MBL). This group was officially founded on November 2014, directly after the re-election of Dilma Rousseff, yet it emerged from a previous organization called *Movimento Renovação Liberal* (Liberal Renewal Movement), which was born after the June 2013 protests. Founders changed the name to another one more



aligned with the spirit of a social movement and that also mocked the name of *Movimento Passe Livre* (Free Fare Movement), an activist group behind some of the early demonstrations of June 2013 (Davis & Straubhaar, 2020; Jiménez-Martínez, 2020). As mentioned earlier, the MBL was one of the main organizations behind the protests demanding the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff.

Twenty-one semi-structured interviews were carried out with activists belonging to the MBL between November 2015 and July 2017, until data saturation was reached. A sampling strategy was followed (Weiss, 1994), with people suggesting or helping us to contact other participants. Some of the interviewees were among the main leaders and founders of the MBL, and others were activists who joined the organization in 2015 and 2016. All were under thirty-years old, and three were females. The interviews were conducted in Portuguese, in São Paulo, although some were also carried out during a protest outside the National Congress in Brasília in 2015. All interviews were anonymized.

We attempted to apply Freire's ideas on dialogue, trying to put the interviewee at ease, without apprehension or moral judgements, in order to understand why and how these individuals committed themselves to the movement. A Freirean approach meant that, in order to understand the *vision of the world* of each informant, we had to be conducive to the creation of a *safe environment*, where beliefs and values could be cautiously listened to and considered. Hence, despite our own feelings and beliefs about their claims, we did not adopt a normative position or put their actions in jeopardy. Without this approach, informants could have simply dismissed the interview or even claimed it out as another piece of pernicious polarization.

Being non-Brazilian facilitated these exchanges because the interviewer was seen as an outsider. Interviewees were asked about their trajectory as activists, as well as their motivations behind joining the movement. The interviews were later transcribed and analyzed. We looked for patterns of commitment, similarities in narratives as well as their relationship with social media contents. Hence, although the focus is primarily on the perceptions and beliefs of right-wing activists, we decided to incorporate contents that these groups disseminated through digital media networks and platforms.

## A REBELLION OF THE OPPRESSED? THE PERCEIVED RISE OF THE RIGHT-WING IN BRAZIL

The discussion below is based on a preliminary analysis of the interviews. The most striking feature was that the interviewees constructed a simplified narrative, portraying themselves as victims of a dominant ideology – the perceived left-wing agenda of the PT –, and that thanks to their cunning and continuous efforts, they were capable of liberating themselves in order to question their view of the status quo. We divided the narrative into three interrelated chronological stages: *Victimization*, *Conscientization*, *Liberation*. The first stage, *victimization* summarizes the feeling of *ideological* oppression formulated in interviews, against the backdrop of a supposed sociocultural domination of left-wing ideas in Brazil. The second one, *conscientization*, describes the process of becoming aware of themselves as a group, sharing this common feeling and reinforcing this narrative of victimization. The third one refers to a sectarian *liberation*, where the right-wing position is unleashed.

As seen throughout the interviews, whilst the narrative proposed by these individuals appears to be an ideological reversal of Freire's philosophy on the oppressed – which Freire (1968/2005) portrayed as intrinsically associated with the left –, it echoes only in form, albeit not in substance, the perception that groups marginalized by dominant ideologies require securing critical consciousness in order to change power structures. The view of the world of these individuals was characterized by the perception of an impossibility or at least extreme difficulty of dialogue with the left – at least according to the interviewees –, thus portraying each other as enemies rather than political adversaries. Such a perceived impossibility of dialogue has arguably played a crucial role throughout the process of pernicious polarization that has characterized Brazil over the last decade.

### **Victimization: The right-wing constructed as the oppressed**

Most MBL activists stated that they felt stigmatized for being *right-wing*, which they understood as being attached to conservative values and neo-liberalism. Their perception was that during the PT governments, particularly those led by Lula da Silva (2002-2010), it was extremely difficult to voice criticisms of those in power. This was partly due to the moderately optimistic climate dominating Brazil that followed the country's period of political and economic stability, its successful reduction of poverty, and its more significant profile on the international arena during the first decade of this century (Montero, 2014). In this context, founders of the MBL told us that *libertarian* ideas contradicted



what for them was the status quo, namely, the apparently unquestionable governability and popularity of Lula and the PT:

People engaged with the diffusion of libertarian ideas don't have a clue about what public opinion was like years ago. I realized that I was a libertarian between 2004 and 2005, and I remember very well how it felt back then. Lula's approval ratings were something like 90%, even after the *Mensalão*, that was a major corruption scandal that happened during his first term, and Lula could still manage to get re-elected. ("Rodrigo", founder of the MBL, interviewed in 2016)

I read about the [social welfare programme] *Bolsa Família* and I asked a friend of mine who was really talking about it all the time, "why is *Bolsa Família* so good?". And he said to me "What a fascist you are!". I didn't know anything about it, I am asking innocently and honestly, and I get insulted. . . . And then, he started to label me, like 'If you are questioning *Bolsa Família*, it is because you are from the white elite, you know what I mean?' ("Júlio", member of the MBL since 2014, interviewed in 2017)

Members of the MBL, therefore, narrate the past as an oppressive time, when views questioning what for them was the dominant ideology –the one promoted by the PT government– were shut down and rejected. This sense of victimization is nonetheless contradicted by evidence showing that the policies of the PT were far from maintaining the status quo. Brazilian media organizations developed for instance a tense relationship with the governing centre-left authorities, stressing corruption accusations, populism and authoritarianism (de Albuquerque, 2019). MBL members emphasized nonetheless their sense of being stigmatized. As another founder recalled:

Being a right-winger in 2004 in a college environment was a greater taboo than it is today, especially considering that we were students of a Law School actively engaged in the struggle against the military dictatorship. So, we tried to act like we were independents, anarchists, and it worked, because we won the elections for the student body. ("Augusto", founder of the MBL, interviewed in 2016)

Whilst the above quote echoes the previous narrative of marginalization, it also shows the measures needed to overcome it. It is noteworthy that MBL members disguised themselves as independents or anarchists in order to gradually secure positions of power, such as the student body of that particular university. This was partly because right-wing positions were associated with the military

dictatorship. Notably, when the MBL was founded a decade later, some members admitted struggling with promoting right-wing ideas, because they were perceived as boring and unattractive:

We sat together [with two other leaders, in 2014] to talk and we understood we had the same vision of the world. Then, we had this crazy idea to start an enterprise, a start-up, to promote our ideas and world vision with a more attractive packaging. Back in the days, everything connected to this vision was boring, or technically difficult to understand, connected with the economy. They were simply not appealing. (“Vinicius”, interviewed in 2016)

According to “Vinicius”, right-wing ideas – essentially those associated with neoliberalism – were generally considered dull, technical and too rational in comparison with the emotional appeal of those from the left. Although the narrative of oppression is apparent in this quote, it is noteworthy that the proposed solution is explicitly stated in market terms: the MBL was going to become an “enterprise, a start-up”, providing an “attractive packaging” of their political views. The possibility of freedom and liberation proposed by the MBL therefore emerges from the antithesis of Freire’s philosophy, namely the commercial transaction of ideas. For the MBL, politics were perceived as a market where particular viewpoints could be bought and sold. This contrasts with Freire’s politics of hope, based not only on producing social change by collective action, but more fundamentally by stressing that those changes should aim to produce a fairer society, free from a dominant market logic. Later in life, Freire (1998) expressed concern about the pervasiveness of neoliberalism across different fields of life, calling for people “to refuse the dictatorship of the marketplace, founded as it is on the perverse ethic of profit” (p. 115; see also Roberts, 2003; Singh, 2008).

### **Conscientization: Articulating the right-wing through digital media**

In addition to the perception of being victims, MBL members also stressed throughout the interviews the significance of the *affordances* of digital communication technologies for the coordination and articulation of the Brazilian right-wing. This is a significant observation, particularly in view that, until very recently, scholarship used to describe the internet as a technology with the potential to help the marginalized (Singh, 2008), and social media networks as tools through which primarily progressive forces coordinated actions and disseminated information (e.g. d’Andrea & Ziller, 2015).





Whilst academic attention emphasized how left-wing activists employed digital media, the interviewees revealed that right-wing groups were using them early on, not only to react against what they perceived to be the social dominant discourse, but also to develop what on the surface appears to be *conscientization* (Freire, 1968/2005), with them securing an awareness as supposed victims of a leftist status quo. As two of them told us:

I remember an Orkut's community. I was not part of it. I was not taking part in the debates just reading comments. However, I remember its name well; it appealed to me a lot, it was *I am right-winger, so what?* Back in the day, being a right-winger was still looked upon poorly, something to be blamed for, something odd. It was like being left-wing was the only good position to have. I followed the conversations because I was really interested in the question of 'how come being right-wing is wrong?' I wanted to understand, but I did not participate. ("Daniel", MBL activist, interviewed in 2017)

I was an active member since Orkut's time. I remember the *Mensalão* scandal [in 2005]. Obviously, I wasn't surprised. But at the time I used Orkut's communities to insult the PT and criticize Lula, saying that he was going to be put in jail, etc. . . . Later on, I was also in two groups on Facebook. One was a left-winger group and the other one was a right-winger group that we had created. In these groups, we discussed politics, published stuff, and both were public, not private. ("Bruno", MBL activist, interviewed in 2018)

Like "Daniel" and "Bruno", most interviewees stated that they began to be politically active online around 2005 or 2006, after the aforementioned *Mensalão* corruption scandal, via blogs as well as Orkut, a highly popular social media platform in Brazil at that time. Several digital communities with names such as the aforementioned *Eu sou de Direita, e Daí?* (I'm a right-winger, so what?) were created, along with others such as *Liberalismo Verdadeiro* (Real liberalism) or *Fora Lula!* (Lula out!). Notably, and despite the then academic enchantment with the internet as an apparently progressive force, some of these communities had more followers than their left-wing counterparts. Whilst in 2006 PT-supportive *Lula Presidente 2006* had thirty thousand followers, *Fora Lula 2006* had around one-hundred-ten thousand members (Motta, 2006; Terra, 2006). It is notable that some, like "Bruno", were also active members of left-wing online groups. Hence, it cannot be said that they were part of a *filter bubble*, exposed exclusively to similar

views (Pariser, 2011). Yet their engagement with other viewpoints cannot be understood as dialogue either, at least in the Freirean sense. When they were “insulting the PT and criticizing Lula”, basic elements of dialogue, such as listening to the other and mutual respect, were absent. In consequence, several members of the MBL engaged in a sectarian digital monologue, not isolated from other opinions, but nonetheless closed off within one particular view of the world.

When Orkut’s popularity in Brazil vanished, these communities migrated to Facebook, where other groups were created to share allegedly *subversive* content, such as classic literature on libertarianism and neoliberalism. In line with previous studies (Davis & Straubhaar, 2020; Rocha, 2019), the internet sheltered these groups, permitting them to develop a common identity and conscience based on conservative and neoliberal values. As the quotes below illustrate:

I became more interested in politics, and I looked on the internet about capitalism and communism . . . I got overwhelmed and kept looking for more and more. In Brazil, we have these discussion groups on social media, we called them *patotas*, and that’s what we called a closed group of intellectuals. Because the right was seen in Brazil as a military’s stuff, these groups were really closed for us. But, with social media, access was easier and was possible to discuss with them. (“Rafael”, MBL activist, interviewed in 2016)

I was in a faculty where people were more inclined to be left-wingers. Then, you join a movement that they hated [the MBL], it was really complicated. The atmosphere was really hostile, I lost lots of friends. But there is a counterpart of this: I gained a lot of new friends, from all over Brazil, good people who make you feel welcome and like you, people who identify with you. I didn’t know there were so many people believing in our claim. So, it was worth it. (“Isabella”, MBL activist, interviewed in 2016)

The words of “Rafael” and “Isabella” show how, as mentioned earlier, digital technologies facilitated what appears to be a process of *conscientization*, with members of the right-wing aiming to overcome their limitations (Freire, 1974, 1968/2005). Sensing a lack of representation but also a lack of respect within political, journalistic and academic circles, digital networks and platforms became a space not only of shared awareness of a perceived subordinate status, but most significantly a space – as discussed in the next section – where they could put their thoughts into practice, in order to *liberate* themselves and ascend to positions of power.



**Liberation: Battling the left-wing**

The afore mentioned demonstrations calling for the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff were a turning point for the right-wing in Brazil. MBL activists stated throughout the interviews that the protests showed them that they were no longer political outcasts, and should therefore stop being ashamed of opposing the PT. The right-wing, and the MBL in particular, grew stronger during 2015 and 2016, with their ideas becoming more socially visible. As one MBL activist recalled:

Little by little, we succeeded in reaching the public and showing them that liberalism is not about the dictatorship period. I believe this is our objective now. We want to touch young people, supposedly already politicized, and show them that the right-wing's position can be something good too. ("Rafael", MBL activist, interviewed in 2016)

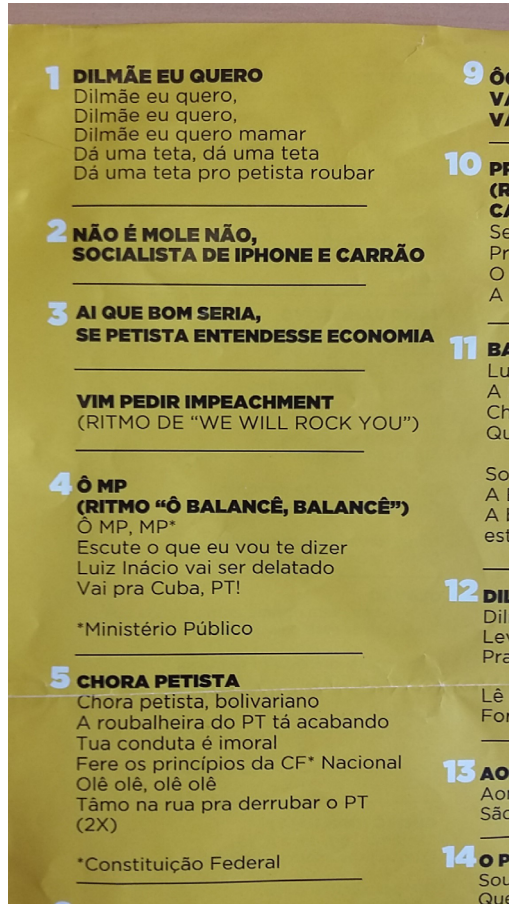
Yet showing other people that the right could be "something good too" meant in practice that their antagonistic and mutually exclusive political positions and identities advanced beyond fringe groups and became part of Brazil's overall political discourse (Davis & Straubhaar, 2020; Rocha, 2019). Significantly, interviewees such as "Rafael" stressed that their support for the right-wing was purely based on their opposition to political corruption and defense of national values, but the contents that the MBL produced and circulated in and through the media tell a different story. Photos, memes, videos and texts actually intended to mock or even offend the left, depicting the latter as an enemy to be defeated and Dilma Rousseff as a symbolic figure to topple. As an MBL leader stated in 2017, during the third national congress of this organization in São Paulo:

I always say that we've created *memes of massive destruction*. The left is like, "no, cultural war doesn't exist". Yes! It does. We are entering a decentralized world and the right is building a counterculture on the internet.

As shown by the above quote, contents circulating online arguably both expressed and strengthened the process of political polarization in Brazil, to the point that memes were compared to weapons that were part of a *cultural war* between the right and the left, with the former attempting to neutralize the latter. A flyer given by the MBL during the occupation of the National Congress in Brasília is illustrative (Figure 1). It showcases the lyrics for several songs that depict the left, and the PT in particular, as economically ignorant, as hypocrites for having iPhones and cars, and Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff as corrupt authoritarian figures. These accusations were not new.

They had been voiced by Brazil's national media since the first Lula government (de Albuquerque, 2019), but are taken here to a whole new level, with left-wingers portrayed not as adversaries, but as an enemy with whom it is impossible and unproductive to relate.

**Figure 1**  
*MBL Flyer*



*Note.* Flyer distributed by the MBL during the occupation of the National Congress in Brasília in November 2015. Photo: Fanny Vrydagh.

Other images produced and circulated by the MBL are in a similar vein. One associated the PT governments with the Maduro regime in Venezuela (Figure 2), stressing that the inefficiency of the latter would be replicated if the Workers' Party remained in power in Brazil. Another one contrasted two popular bands in the country, with the one supporting the impeachment labelled as *legends*, and the other supporting Rousseff as *rubbish* (Figure 3).

**Figures 2 and 3**  
 MBL Contents



Note. Reproduced from the MBL Facebook page, April 2016.

The images are thus a clear expression of pernicious polarization, with the other – in this case, the left – delegitimized in simplistic and offensive terms, portrayed not as a valid adversary, but rather a foe not worthy to be listened to. And yet, the discourse among MBL members depicted themselves simply as protectors of *common sense*, as representatives and even *liberators* of the majority of Brazilians, whom – according to the interviewees – were oppressed by the power of a supposed left-wing status quo:

The ideas we were defending at this time were ideas sharing by all the population. But, at first no one believed it was possible, and we've made it. We got them out

of power and cut relations with the Bolivarian countries. All of this were things people wanted but, at the same time, believed it would never happen. (“Gustavo”, MBL activist, interviewed in 2016)

Despite the narrative of oppression present in the interviews, it should be noted that the experiences of the interviewees differ significantly from the philosophy of Paulo Freire. Firstly, various right-wing online communities received organizational support from think tanks in order to take to the streets and secure seats in Congress (Rocha, 2019). Hence, they were not experiencing material scarcity and were part of, following Freire’s (1997) thoughts in the *Pedagogy of the Heart*, the “network of power” that dominates the production and circulation of information (p. 57). Secondly, circumstances played in their favour. The June 2013 protests were originally interpreted as a triumph of democracy, but actually became a political opportunity for right-wing groups to permeate Brazil’s socio-political discourses (Rocha, 2019). Thirdly, the closed nature of online communities – strengthened over time by changes to the Facebook algorithm, which emphasize *friends* contents over those of publishers and news agencies (Cornia et al., 2018) – created a mirage of dialogue, with different individuals reinforcing their viewpoints and strengthening the process of pernicious polarization in Brazil. Right-wing activists shared through digital media their belief in being members of an oppressed group, crystallizing their perception that those outside *us* – the left-wing – were the enemy, against which they had no other alternative but to stand up and reaffirm their own identities.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The narrative of victimization, conscientization and liberation proposed by members of the MBL is not uncommon among right-wing activists. In other settings, right-wing supporters have voiced the feeling of being oppressed by a dominant leftist status quo (e.g. Nagle, 2017). These groups therefore portray themselves as *subaltern counter-publics*, imbued with the awareness of being subordinated, regardless of whether or not they are actually in a subaltern condition (Warner, 2002). Echoing the previous discussion on pernicious polarization, members of these groups share identities, interests, and discourses on so much conflict with the perceived dominant cultural horizon – such as the supposed dominance of the PT across the Brazilian society – that they would face hostile reactions if they were expressed before audiences whose ways of life are assumed as correct, normal and universal.



It is tempting to see the perception of subordination among these counter-publics as a reversal of the relationship between oppressed and oppressor discussed by Freire (1968/2005), but that would be a spurious comparison. Right-wing activists were mostly part of an elitist segment of Brazilian society that has historically belonged to the oppressors rather than the oppressed, imposing their political, economic and religious views on the majority of the population. They may not have been in government between 2003 and 2016, but still possessed plenty of material and symbolic resources, such as money, access to digital media and the support of think tanks. Furthermore, their discourses echoed those put forward by Brazilian news conglomerates since the first Lula government, which stressed accusations of corruption, authoritarianism and populism against the PT administrations (de Albuquerque, 2019).

Conditioned by the experience of traditionally being the oppressor, these individuals interpreted the socio-political and cultural changes that, within limitations, ended up transforming their previous lifestyle as victimization and marginalization. As Freire (1968/2005) observes, “the former oppressors . . . genuinely feel oppressed. Conditioned by the experience of oppressing others, any situation other than their former seems to them like oppression” (p. 57). Furthermore, dialogue and empathy for the other – that is, the left – were posed as extremely difficult or even impossible. This is a significant difference between the MBL and Freire’s philosophy. Although the victimization and conscientization described by right-wing activists seem to resemble Freire’s approach, their *liberation* actually kills that association. For Freire (1968/2005), liberation is never about killing the oppressor or exchanging positions to become an oppressor in their place. Liberation intends to free both the oppressor and the oppressed. The *liberation* proposed by the MBL conversely proposed the neutralization of their perceived oppressor – Lula, Dilma, the PT –, without seeking to eliminate oppression itself.

Although the oppression described by the interviewees is a construction, it still has social and political implications. The deepening of pernicious polarization in Brazil and the subsequent election of Jair Bolsonaro in 2018 are a clear example of the appeal – at least in part – of this oppression and liberation narrative to the electorate. Yet the question of how to deal not only with this narrative of oppression, but more fundamentally with processes of pernicious polarization facilitating governments such as Bolsonaro’s – which, once in power, often try to reinforce this narrative – has puzzled scholars all around the world. Recent discussions have observed how difficult it is to find antidotes to prevent or reverse pernicious polarization. Protests seem to make little difference, and judicial attempts to establish limits and regulate social discourse have shown

results only if they are applied prior to the emergence of processes of political polarization (McCoy & Somer, 2019). We argue nonetheless that the philosophy of Paulo Freire – who wrote his seminal works in a more acute polarization context – provide potential avenues of thought.

Freire's ideas about dialogue, as discussed in works such as *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968/2005) and *Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1974), offer a key to unlock this process. Firstly, in his examination of the roles of the oppressed and oppressor, Freire (1968/2005) proposes uniting fundamentally and dialectically separated actors through a dialogue fueled by love, humility, faith in people, hope and critical thinking, and in which parties are equal. Relatedly, as observed by some scholars (McCoy & Somer, 2019), pernicious polarization is relational, and depends not only on the rhetoric and actions of particular groups – such as right-wing organizations –, but also on how those opposing them react. Unsurprisingly, calling them racists, fascists, or fools who have fallen prey to fake news deepens pernicious polarization. In consequence, the more they are attacked by the left or the centre, the more they find comfort in their position of being stigmatized (McCoy & Somer, 2019; Stavrakakis, 2018).

However, this type of approach raises the question of how those in the left, the centre and moderate right can respond to the aggressive style of the extreme right – as well as the extreme left. Freire's distinction of sectarianism and radicalism, and this is the second point we want to make, is crucial. According to Freire (1974, 1968/2005; see also Holst, 2019), a radical is strongly committed to their beliefs, yet is open to dialogue and disposed towards humility and critical thinking. If those principles are not followed, a radical therefore becomes a sectarian, closed to dialogue and trapped within their own fanaticism. That was true for the previously discussed online communities, where the dialogue closure contributed to the formation of digital *sects* that portrayed the left-wing as an opposite and irreconcilable camp. Hence, the answer to right-wing sectarianism should not be through left-wing sectarianism (Holst, 2019). The unlocking of pernicious polarization should instead be achieved by radicals who have humility, self-critical thinking and an open mind, particularly in view of the fact that right-wing groups appear to be winning the debate by means of fallacious arguments. A radical can listen to right-wing supporters, yet that does not mean that accepts everything they say. Academics should also embrace a radical rather than sectarian position, and examine these groups not to validate their viewpoints, but to contribute to instances of dialogue that unlock rather than reinforce pre-existing polarized camps. A certain sectarian blindness within academia has for instance prevented a further examination of these groups in their genesis, partly due to romantic





views on the power of digital media as well as due to a disparaging attitude towards right-wing activists. There is consequently a risk that academics may reinforce the demonization and marginalization of these groups, strengthening narratives of oppression and stopping any possibility of dialogue.

In this article, we have shown that individuals engaged in right-wing social movements actually have *something to say*. By looking at their viewpoints through Freire's grammar of oppression, we could unravel the dynamic between this feeling of oppression and their sectarian position. We suggest that our experience may shed some light on how to contribute to tearing down the wall separating these different political positions. Some steps are already being taken in this regard, giving some – even if moderate – hopes to be optimistic. A few scholars have questioned the argument that Brazil is irremediably polarized, shedding light on the multiple and often interrelated social and political viewpoints that Brazilians actually have (Ortellado et al., 2016). Political actors have also engaged in this task, as illustrated by the production of videos discussing differences in values and beliefs between different groups (Quebrando o Tabu, 2020). Furthermore, even the MBL published a mea culpa acknowledging its responsibilities in the development of online pernicious polarization (Linhares & Zanini, 2019). This text, with all its limitations, hopes to be another. ■

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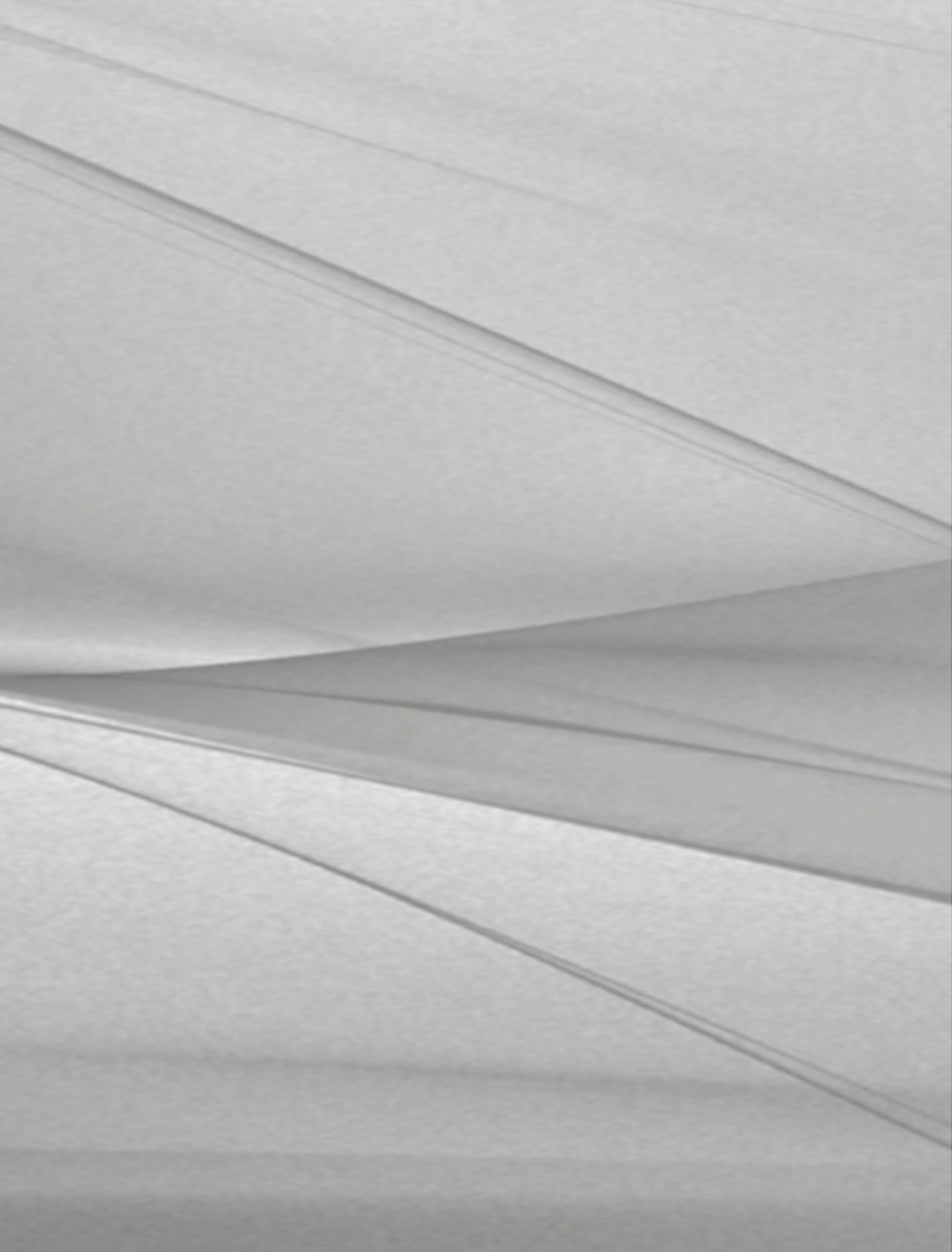


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# TESTIMONIES





# Coexistence and Learning

## *Convivências e Aprendizados*

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Learn from those who can teach you. The experiences of those who preceded us in our “dead poets”, help you walk through life.

–Walt Whitman. *Do Not Let*.

**I**N THIS SECTION OF **MATRIZES**, we dedicate space so that affections, concepts, reflections can freely be expressed. These expressions are often connected to personal experiences with Paulo Freire or experienced as influences and dialogues made possible by the work of the patron of Brazilian education. We have gathered texts coming from authors spread across a wide spectrum of regions across the globe. We thus bring together Germany, Brazil, Denmark, the Netherlands, and the Philippines. Such diversity of speeches, places and cultures testifies to the importance of thought, as well as involvement, in work and in personal relationships, maintained with Paulo Freire.

The multiple statements tell stories derived from situations that show either the human dimension of Paulo Freire, busy discussing ideas and sharing affections, or the clarification and realization of projects whose results reached educational institutions, university departments, lines of research, to mention some examples. Finally, the stories illuminate, from different perspectives and modalities, the testimony of coexistence and learning

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for which the dialogical and intercommunicative procedures, so defended by Paulo Freire, occupy a fundamental place. We live in a historical time influenced by forces of backwardness, intolerance, and authoritarianism, motivated by the primary purpose of naturalizing social inequalities and the intention to promote the neoliberal monologue as a kind of new sense of the world. In this context, it is necessary to listen to the calls of diversity, as they help us to unravel the broad Freirean project, aimed at the emancipation of human beings.

<sup>d</sup>This text is part of an article whose first version was published in Saul (2017).

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## WHAT I LEARNED FROM PAULO FREIRE<sup>D</sup>

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There are few lines of a text to say the much I learned with Paulo Freire. I usually synthesize my experience of working with Paulo Freire, as a teacher and manager of a public education network as a great learning in politics, theory and practice. But more than a great learning, there was the privilege of learning life lessons from a man who surprised, especially by his consistency. Paulo Freire was a professor at the Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo (PUCSP) in the Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação (Currículo), after his return from exile, for a period of 17 years (1980-1997). I had the great happiness of sharing with him for the period of almost two decades the space of the classroom, directing the Tuesday's afternoon seminars, and so, I can witness the coherence between his *teaching*, originated from his reflection about his practice and the constant dialogue, which he maintained with educators and students from different countries of the world, and their political-pedagogical propositions. In 1979 I had the chance to see Paulo Freire being received at the PUCSP's theater, when he returned from exile. I started working with the teacher in 1980, invited by the institution to teach classes in the Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação (Currículo).

The Graduate Program where we worked underwent a reformulation, proposing seminars to guide the student's research. Paulo Freire and I were tasked to coordinate the seminars together. We had weekly contact in the classroom, sharing the teaching, and we met, also in program meetings and in seminars planning moments. For the seminar's planning, Paulo Freire used to "call me" for lunch or a coffee at his house; then "we left", as he said,

to do the planning. He always tried to hear what I was thinking about the next semester, we talked a lot and got to the proposals. He made a point of highlighting that our desires, our teachers' dreams, would be confronted with the student's dreams and therefore proposed that the first thing we would do in the classroom would be to discuss the seminar's work proposal with the students. We considered, for the elaboration of the plan, the student's expectations, the possibilities of theme treatment and the evaluations of previous semesters made by the seminar participants. We tried in these preparatory meetings dialogue about our desires, our dreams like teachers. These dialogues with Paulo Freire had always been very productive, rich and fraternal.

On the first day of class, he initially worried about listening to the students, so that their needs and expectations were contemplated in the work proposal to be developed in the semester. This was done in a classroom arranged in a circle, an environment conducive to dialogue, where all participants could see each other face to face and where Paulo Freire could *touch* some of the participants of the wheel, who were to his right or left, gently placing his hand on his shoulders; he did this in a few moments, in a very spontaneous gesture, as if he wanted to be better understood or even to call your interlocutor to participation. Those who lived with Paulo Freire and had the opportunity to be closer to him will surely remember the expressiveness of his gestures. He was a man who spoke with his hands. In conducting classroom work, Paulo Freire made a point of encouraging the students to talk about their projects, even if they were not detailed or totally clear. From this report or research intentions, a second moment was used in which we worked with the different themes, finding the important axes and the *common threads* between the projects. In a recurrent way in the analyses, the following concepts emerged, with priority: social justice, power, freedom, democracy, utopia, ethics, knowledge construction, social commitment, educator training, education as a political act, reality reading, values of the human being. The presence of Paulo Freire in the classroom has always been very dear, remarkable and significant. His performance in class was discreet. Although he knew that his words made difference, with authentic humility, he was rarely the first to speak. Thus, he exercised one of the knowledge that in his last book he pointed out as necessary for the educational practice: *to be able to listen*. He listened to everyone attentively and respectfully and was comfortable interfering whenever he thought it was appropriate or when someone in the group addressed him. In those moments, we heard his gentle voice, which revealed, however, a strong posture that

invited us to think about the challenges presented by him, in the direction of a critical reading of the world, in the uncompromising defense of the ethics of the human being and the struggle for the oppressed. The meetings with Paulo Freire have always been reflective, interesting, fraternal and surprising. His clarity of analysis of the world was admirable! Restless and thought-provoking, he always sought the coherence between his practice and his thinking, showing himself indignant at the social injustices. He always revealed, however, courage, humility and hope.

The great opportunity I had to live and learn with Paulo Freire at the University, expanded and deepened when I was invited by him to direct the curricular reorientation of the Municipal Department of Education of the Municipality of São Paulo and coordinated the permanent educators training program. Working on Paulo Freire's team, as Secretary of Education, was an unusual experience. In our meetings almost every morning in his office, in a building on Paulista Avenue, I met a tall, elegant man in a suit and tie, white hair, almost always long, with soft ripples on his shoulders. Well-disposed, he arrived on time in the early hours in the morning. He expressed his concern about the more general aspects of education policy. I was surprised, however, by the creative and concrete way in which he treated everyday life. With his seventy years' experience and with the authority of a knowledge recognized by many people around the world, he always had something new to propose, with a view to putting into practice the principles of educational policy announced in his administration, advancing step by step, towards the construction of a public, popular and democratic school.

I experienced with Paulo Freire the true meaning of what participation is. Quite unlike the false participation that manipulates employees, centralizing all decisions in the boss hands and delegating only the execution of tasks, the participation in Paulo Freire's team assumed the most radical of the meanings, truly characterizing itself as a participation at a political level. This meant, effectively, sharing decisions. In the difficult, demanding, challenging daily life of education in the city of São Paulo, in the construction of a democratic management, I was able to experience with Paulo Freire his willingness to dialogue, the demonstration of his tolerance, a patience/impatience and a touch of passion in everything he did.

When Paulo Freire was no longer among us, in his honor, PUCSP created in the second semester of 1998 the Cátedra Paulo Freire, under the direction of the Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação: Currículo. At PUCSP, we have understood the Chair as a space for the development of studies and research on and from Paulo Freire's work, focusing on his theoretical-practical

repercussions in education and the Freirean pedagogy potentiality of fertilizing new thoughts. In other words, we honor Paulo Freire in the way we understand that he would like to be honored, rigorously studying his thinking, to understand him and to recreate it. The Chair has been developing broad cumulative research that seeks to map and analyse the “Presence of Paulo Freire’s thoughts in the Educational Systems, in Brazil, from the 90’s decade”. The results of this research have been recorded in publications, with the objective of systematizing and thickening information that can support researchers and education public policies managers, from a critical-emancipatory perspective, enabling them to analyse and recreate policies and practices.

Paulo Freire misses for his lucidity of interpretation of the world facts, for his power of indignation, for his contagious love for life and human beings, for his incessant struggle for justice, for freedom and for his solidarity and always friendly presence.

## MEMORY IS THE OTHER IN US: PAULO FREIRE CENTENARY

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Every celebration is a work of memory. Without memory, we lose much of our humanity. Without it, there’s no society nor history. A man without memory, by ideological or physical contingency, is a man in a clear process of alienation and mortification.

With the advent of the centenary of Paulo Freire’s birth, I began to rummage through the memory of everything I had thought and written about this educator from Pernambuco. There was a motivation: the edition of the book *Travessias Acadêmicas das Tecnologias de Comunicação para o Desenvolvimento*, organized by me and Professor Salett Tauk (Tauk & Callou, 2019), in commemoration of our 35 years of teaching activity at the Universidade Federal Rural de Pernambuco (UFRPE). When we looked over our academic records to catalogue all the research material developed with our former graduate students I found, in my archives, the original transcript of Paulo Freire’s conference, held in Santa Maria in 1982 which I had the opportunity to attend. The transcript was made by the journalist and friend Néri Pedroso. By a certain academic instinct, I never liked to get rid of documents, even those apparently unimportant, in the belief that one day they could acquire new meanings. And, in fact, that’s what happened.

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When reading the lecture, we faced each passage with the timeliness of the approach to the theme – *A Educação como Espanto* – and decided to publish it word by word, including Paulo Freire’s answers to the questions asked by the audience. It was the guiding thread that we sought to make sense of the vast material we had 80 research reports from 111 authors with a view to systematizing the different theoretical appropriations we made to renew the object of Rural Communication, Rural Extension and Fishing Extension in Brazil. Professor Nita Freire, Paulo Freire’s widow, was selfless with us in attesting the originality of the material and entrusting us with its publication and the choice of the title of the lecture. Thanks to this memory reconstruction, we had the heart-warming realization of the remarkable presence of Freire’s thought in our teacher-student production over decades of academic work.

The first contact I had with Paulo Freire’s work was by chance, as Paul Veyne (1998) states in *Como se Escreve a História*, in the sense that under the moon everything is fate, event and chance. It was 1977. The 4<sup>th</sup> edition of *Ação Cultural para a Liberdade* (Freire, 1976/2013a) fell into my hands, first published in 1976. I perfectly remember this moment, mostly by Paulo Freire’s refined and fulminant critique of literacy primers. When I read his comments on the following sentences – “Eva viu a uva”, “Asa é da ave”, “Ada deu o dedo ao urubu” – for example, I was taken in astonishment, to use an expression of his own, since these sentences were very familiar to me because I was literate in one of these primers in the public school where I studied.

Reading *Ação Cultural para a Liberdade* (1976/2013a) opened a new universe in my university formation, now less *naive*, more critical and, perhaps, more politicized for new challenges. At that time, I became an assiduous reader of Paulo Freire’s works, until my meeting with the booklet as he himself one day referred to the work *Extensão ou Comunicação?* (Freire, 1969/2013b). The sights were becoming clearer as the poet says until one day I woke up as the professor of Rural Extension, Fishing Extension and Communication Theory (in graduate school) at UFRPE.

The access to *Extensão ou Comunicação?* (Freire, 1969/2013b) has a story, at least, curious. It was also by chance of fate that I found this work, in the memorable bookstore Livro 7, in 1979’s Recife, because that’s the way it’s written in the copy that I keep with esteem to this day. At the time, I imagined how interesting it would be if Paulo Freire had written about Rural Extension, such was my desire to pursue a career in this field of Agrarian Sciences. I read everything related to the subject. Again, I was taken in amazement to see my obscure object of desire materialized on one of those square displays

that made up that huge bookstore. I never believed in forces of attraction of this kind. But Hermann Hesse assures that such achievements are possible, like the main character in the book *Demian* (Hesse, 1919/2012). In any case, the booklet literally accompanied me in the most decisive moments of my professional life (selection procedure for university professor, master's and doctoral exams etc). Some sort of mascot, a guardian angel, so important that had in my university formation, that chance gave me.

Recently, reading Paulo Freire's biography written by Nita Freire (2017) – *Paulo Freire, Uma História de Vida* – I perceive a relevant aspect of the confrontation of a generation to have access to school. Paulo Freire's mother, unable to place him in a private school went through, in vain, several public schools in Recife to enroll the future Patron of Brazilian Education in the secondary school. My mother was of Paulo Freire's generation. Likewise, she suffered the same saga in Salvador at the hands of a Spanish migrant. Stories that intersect.

Paulo Freire, however, was lucky enough to knock on the door of a private humanist institution, the Oswaldo Cruz College, considered at the time one of the best schools in Brazil. The owner and director of the institution, Professor Aloízio Pessoa de Araújo, Nita Freire's father, welcomed the young student with a scholarship. Professor Aloízio and his wife, Genove, were people known to be committed to the education of young people in Recife. My mother came to know them, by irony of fate. And a cousin lived with her family for two years, on Soledade Street, to study at one of the schools nearby in the mid-1960s.

With these words, of a very personal kind, I pay my little tribute to Paulo Freire. It is to say that memories, if there is any use to them, is precisely the humility of recognizing the best of us, from the other. In this, Paulo Freire occupies a undying and central place!

## **SPEAKING FOR YOURSELF, FINDING THE WAY FORWARD TOGETHER: WHEN THE COMMUNITY TAKES CHARGE**

BIRGITTE JALLOV<sup>§</sup>

EMPOWERHOUSE. Gudhjem, Denmark

As a young activist in the feminist movement in Copenhagen, our *Redstocking basis groups* met up every week to grow personally and professionally based in a simple – and all-encompassing – feminist activism. Based in our

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core truth to “Turn the personal political” we worked systematically when we met up, taking turns on sharing where we were in our lives, collectively exploring, reflecting, understanding. Our personal experiences as women in Denmark in the 70s was the basis, and from our individual, collectivized experiences we extracted an understanding of our lives – and through that consciousness-raising process, we made sense of ourselves, our lives and the society in which we lived – collectively developing strategies and roadmaps for the way forward.

In 1982, when interning in Washington DC with the Women’s Institute for Freedom of the Press, a feminist DC-based media think tank, one of the Institute’s three principles for feminist journalism was that “women have to speak for themselves”. This resonated deeply with my lived history in the movement, and became one of my personal and professional mantras, and the core of the participatory work methodologies, which have formed along with my praxis as elements in my toolbox: “Women – people – should speak for themselves”.

In 1983, when forming part of the group founding the first feminist radio station in Denmark – *Women’s Waves* – we transformed the work methods of the *basis groups* into feminist journalistic principles, using the new won platform to tell stories in ways not heard elsewhere at the time, building new understandings among the producers, the guests and the listeners. This work partly came from my MA thesis about how to use radio as a liberating tool for feminist consciousness-raising: *A Counter-Image in Sound* (Jallov, 1982), where theories were added to my basic lived truth through the thinking of the ‘Frankfurt School’ with its *Sociological Fantasy* (Negt, 1971) – and not least the universe of liberation theory and thinking through the insight found with Paulo Freire’s reflected practice. With this systematized thinking, my budding praxis found a home together with my other guiding star, represented by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The following thirty years I have continued to witness to the power and the generation of empowerment, when everyone speaks for her/himself and when collective sharing and extraction of experiences helps make sense of the world and move on. This has been at the centre in my work to help communities build their own media, and it comes forward in the below stories of change, based in Mozambique and in Lao PDR, where communities have been supported to create *the community’s own radio station*.

**Paulo Freire and community empowerment**

In 1968 Paulo Freire (1970a) wrote his inspired and inspiring *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and put words to much work carried out not least in his native Latin America including its *liberation theology*. Believing in the power of conscientization as the first step in a people-driven development, his thinking and practice has many similarities with the thinking around *empowerment in my own practice*<sup>1</sup>. Four aspects of Freire's thinking come to mind in particular:

- (i) the importance of dialogue, focusing on the importance of space for community and individual experience and knowledge as opposed to top-down instruction, which Freire called *banking*;
- (ii) praxis, i.e. action that is informed and value-based with an aim to create change. The aim being an enhanced community and building of social capital to facilitate justice and human development;
- (iii) *Pedagogy of the oppressed* or a *pedagogy of hope* which draw attention to those who do not have a voice, and who are oppressed. An important element of this was his concern with conscientialisation developing consciousness to have the power to transform reality; and
- (iv) the need to build on the lived experience of participants as this makes learning/empowerment possible. Building on things you understand and know, opens the mind for new insights.

<sup>1</sup>The presentation here is inspired by Smith (1997/2002).

**Opening communities, hearts and minds - and development options - through dialogue in Lao PDR**

In 2006 the Ministry of Information in Lao PDR together with UNDP decided to do a pilot project, starting a community radio station in Khoun in the Xieng Khuoang Province. It was one of the areas in Laos hardest-hit by the more than 15-year-long *secret war*, during which two tons of bombs per inhabitant were dropped over the beautiful mountainsides and rice pastures (O'Connor, 2020). Rebuilt, Khoun is now a minor district seat in the Lao Xieng Khouang Province, and one of the 47 poorest districts in Laos. The development challenges are immense for the 90 villages with more than 31,000 people: 40.6 percent are Lao Lum, 54.14 percent are Hmong and 5.22 percent are Khamu. According to the 2005 Census, one-third of the district's people had no access to roads back then, and two-thirds had no access to electricity. Eighty-two health centres existed in the district, and in 2000, skilled health personnel in Xieng Khuoang province attended only eight percent of births.



Twenty-five percent of the adults in the Khoun district were illiterate. Two-thirds are mostly ethnic women, and they are the most vulnerable group.

With the Lao Lum living in the valleys, Khmu halfway up into the mountains and the Hmong highest up, the three ethnic groups of the district had little interaction due to the lack of infrastructure but also the many historical political contradictions and conflicts since the latest war, and with the Lao Lum dominating the others. It was in this reality the *Khoun Community Radio for Development* was started.

The decision had been taken as the development challenges in the poorest districts did not seem to decrease despite intense efforts over many years. A one-party state, where the voices of citizens do not have a regular space on the national radio, the Lao Government recognized that something was needed to get the development dynamics going in these small ethnic communities in the mountainous regions of the country. This was the beginning of the *Community Radio for Development* in Khoun.

One year after the *Khoun Community Radio for Development* went on air, an impact assessment was carried out to see whether the hypothesis, that a community radio would stimulate development, actually worked? After only one year with the usual challenges met and resolved, development had, indeed, started to pick up pace, including<sup>2</sup>:

- increased harmony and equality in families, and less abusive practices towards women;
- 60–70% more ethnic women used health facilities when pregnant;
- 50% more ethnic women vaccinated their children;
- important decrease in diarrhoea-related illness due to improved practices;
- parents began to take more responsibility for children's welfare (left to the school before);
- new agricultural techniques had been demonstrated and adopted – with positive results:

With *Khoun Radio* we can know things that we did not know before. Khoun Radio talks about things that are close to us. We can go and see what we hear. This creates trust! (Adult Hmong man)

From within the collective of eighty Khoun volunteer broadcasters, the following impact statements were shared based on the question of how they saw their role in the development process?

Before *Khoun radio*, our people did not get local information in our own language. I am happy to be part of this. My family is really proud that I help our people! And it does help a lot!!! (Khmu man)

<sup>2</sup>The impact assessment was carried out March 2009 – as referred to in Jallof (2014).

I have learnt so much at the radio: to do research for a programme, analyse our problems, interview people, put the weekly programme together, work with computer editing... a lot of new important skills – it is really exciting!!! Working with colleagues and friends from other ethnic groups is also new. We respect each other and work together well. Beginning with us, the producers, the radio has the potential to be a really important tool for unity of our whole Khoun community. (Young Laolum woman)

These ground-breaking changes happened as the broken ‘social tissue’ slowly but sure was mending through *the dialogue and understanding* taking root. The community radio framework, *facilitating the space for community creation and the individual experience of the other*, generated the basis for unity, as the woman says above. as opposed to top-down instruction, which Freire called *banking*.

### **Empowered communities take charge of positive change in Central Mozambique**

Coming out of a 30 year long (partly externally imposed) civil war, and a 25-year socialist Government-controlled one-party press period, Mozambique with the peace accord in 1992 was looking to the media<sup>3</sup> to support lifting the country forward and towards a multi-party democracy. Among the opportunities looked at by Mozambique and its development partners, was as a new feature, to also put media in the hands of the communities, whose voices had never before been listened to in that way.

With four state-controlled *community radios* left from the Socialist period, one of which Catholic, the remaining state-controlled, partners like UNESCO, UNDP, the Catholic Church and the Government Communication Institute (ICS) (<https://www.ics.gov.mz/>) joined hands to explore opportunities for the start up of a movement supporting communities’ own opportunity to form community-owned, and -run radios with radio programmes developed by ordinary volunteer community members about issues of importance in their lives (Jallov, 2015).

Starting the movement in 2000, 30 stations could be identified in 2002, 50 in 2004 and today, in 2021, there are more than 100 community media stations in Mozambique with different ownership structure and orientation. As the background history article linked above describes, more than half of the established stations were ‘real community stations’, not owned and controlled by the state or a church, but by the community itself. The significance and impact of these stations in Mozambique is documented, and findings underscore all that the Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is about, drawing attention to those who do not have a voice, and who are oppressed.

<sup>3</sup> First law passed – already in 1991 (Law No 18/91 of 10 August 1991) – a year before the peace accord and just after the new Constitution.

In Mozambique, in many communities, the community spirit and the social tissue was destroyed after the tragic and tough civil war, where lines of tension were drawn through villages and families, where some on the other side had hurt some on ours. This brought a paralysation and a stand-still, also of development. When community radios started to be created through facilitation, community mobilisation and empowerment, communities changed from being objects moved around by others, to become subjects of their own destiny, collectively. A senior Parliamentarian, coming back to the capital Maputo after a visit to his village a year after the community had started a radio station, was startled by the unexpected local energy, dynamism, and empowered action he had witnessed: “Totally transformed lives in my childhood village – how can a community radio cause that???”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> A personal experience by the author of this article, who lived and worked in Mozambique 1998-2004 (<http://www.mediamoz.com/>).

Systematic engagement by community members in editorial groups about matters of concern (education, culture, health, rights...) based upon effective mobilisation, community mapping and capacity building, generates the *conscientization* the Freire talks about, the insightful consciousness with the power to – through insight – transform reality. The added social capital generated through the collaborative and future-oriented work in the radio (contrary to the paralysation of the past) provides new and productive openings and opportunities.

Based on a year, where local champions with coach support mobilised, inspired and trained community members to lead and fill the community radio in the district capital Dondo, in the Sofala province in Central Mozambique, the following impact results were found – including the overall total change in terms of openness, increased debate and empowered and improved livelihood. Other impact results include:

- Women respected more, more seeking elected office – and much less violence against women;
- Electricity supply (had been halted due to corruptive practices);
- Community policing (limiting neighbourhood thefts and violence);
- No cholera deaths (normal average 160-200 per year during the rainy season);
- Improved public services in hospitals and offices (radio mentioned, when officials did not turn up for work);
- More HIV/AIDS testing (due to more openness and de-stigmatization);
- Increased participation in elections (because of understandable information and encouragement);
- Increased pride in the local culture & language (an important reason why the radio was so trusted).

**With trust at the core of community change**

With the activist origin of my empowerment-focused work methods, and the Freirean systematization, the methodologies I have co-created in the start-up of community radio and media have given added evidence to the power of building insights from the bottom up. The powerful impacts generated within the two community radio stations presented above are very similar to the results of other comparable studies, all having paid careful attention to attribution and the two above have been followed every year for a five-year period, reconfirming the impact.

Searching for answers to what it is within the Freirean *pedagogy* and my own *liberating methodologies in radio broadcasting* that cause the change, that cause the communities to follow the development advice from their local stations, it is actually quite simple. It is because the station is ours; we see and feel this through the community broadcasters being from here, known and respected, speaking our language - in our way, and using our culture, our stories and our history, our idioms and sayings. This generates the trust needed for powerful change to happen because it includes all the Freirean principles of love, empathy, hope and humility. Together we can do it!

**TESTIMONIAL PAULO FREIRE: “TRUST THE PEOPLE”**CEES J. HAMELINK<sup>h</sup>

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I met Paulo Freire in the early 1970s when he worked with the World Council of Churches and I had the privilege of sharing an office with him while I worked on alternative communication projects for the Lutheran World Federation. I remember that at the end of a long office day Paulo would often look at me and say, “Cees, never forget, trust the people!”. Ever since, that sentence continued ringing in my mind as it became the basis for my own work on dialogic communication. I learned from Paulo that the basis of the *communicative freedom* that should guide human communication is trust. I also learned that trust means that I need to know that what the other says is genuine and the other should be assured that what I say is authentic. We found a shared inspiration in Martin Buber who believed that I can only speak to someone in the true sense of the term if I expect him to accept my word as genuine. Trust is essential to living together. It is the basis of social cooperative behaviour. We cooperate because we

rely on others to be reliable. If they turn out to be unreliable there can be no cooperation. Trust is a dependency relation based upon the expectation that this dependence will not be abused and this expectation can be based upon knowledge about earlier behaviour of the other, or knowledge about his character, or strong affective feelings. If an encounter starts from distrust, i.e. the belief that the other cannot be relied upon to speak truthfully, to deliver what he/she promises or to meet a commitment, a conversation may be possible but not a real dialogue. In dialogical communication you need to trust the conversational partners. Equally important however is that you can be trusted as a partner. Thus dialogical communication is also an exercise in critical self-reflection. Can I be sure that I am to be trusted? Do I trust myself? Do I believe my own truth?

I understood the meaning of trust in allowing the other to be free in his/her communication. I remember an evening in the John Knox foyer in Geneva when the audience expected to be treated to the great wisdom of the guru Freire. However, Paulo refused to play that role. He sat in front of the audience and said “Please, share your insights with me”. After a moment of paralysis, people began to talk and argue. That evening I saw my friend practicing *communicative freedom*. The respect for the communicative freedom of others is a basic recognition of their human agency and requires that we accept the other as fundamentally different from us and see their alterity as a unique feature that cannot be assimilated and reduced to similarity. Dialogical communication opens the possibility of recognizing that a different position is justified and that there can be real differences and genuine Otherness. In the dialogue participants do not hold on to only one position as the absolute truth. They accept the willingness to cope with real and deep differences. The respect for the communicative freedom of the other is a recognition of the dignity of human agency. If we deny people agency we do not accept them as autonomous beings, as beings defined by themselves and in charge of their own lives. I discovered in just this one evening that dialogical communication is a fundamental precondition for true humanization. Also that the dialogue cannot exist without a profound love for the world. In her correspondence with Karl Jaspers Hannah Arendt wrote that she wanted her book on political theories (that she never completed) to have the title *Amor Mundi*. Paulo understood that meaningful non-oppressive relations with others are only possible on the basis of love for the world.

In the Geneva office we often talked about power. As a student of the power of propaganda I would refer to the power as it was classically defined by Robert Dahl (1957), “A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to

do something that B would otherwise not do” (p. 202). Paulo helped me to see the other dimension of power. Power not only in the adversarial, competitive sense but also in the spirit of mutuality and solidarity (Freire, 1970b, p. 69). Power as a reciprocal process of empowerment. Power to do something that was also seen by Hannah Arendt (1970) as, “the human ability not just to act but to act in concert” (p. 44). Through our discussions I could see power as capacity, as potentiality and as a resource that continues to be highly unequally distributed in the world.

As I later in life entered the academic world, Paulo’s spirit was there again. I found that most educational policies and practices conceived of education as an instrument to facilitate the conformity of students to the prevailing political-economic and socio-cultural system. Paulo reminded me that education should be a means by which men and women deal critically with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. Education as Paulo would argue is never a neutral process. We have to make a choice between two opposing modes of thought. The conformity approach (that seems to be more and more dominant around the world) versus the freedom approach (inspired by the work of Paulo). Around the world, when talking to teachers, students, and politicians responsible for educational policies I saw a predominance of the conformity mind-set that confirmed Bertrand Russell’s (1916) insight that.

The prevention of free inquiry is unavoidable so long as the purpose of education is to produce belief rather than thought, to compel the young to hold positive opinions on doubtful matters rather than let them see the doubtfulness and be encouraged to independence of mind. (p. 107)

Contrary to this, the conformity approach continues to manifest itself in the following ways:

Education is rapidly becoming an arena of winners and losers: a competition model prevails with focus on economic output so that quantity wins out against quality. This implies that financially less successful programmes will be censored away. It is crucial to get the highest possible Hirsch index score: a measuring standard with little validity that combines citations with productivity but tells nothing about the quality of the research. Academic institutions becoming egoistic entities fighting for the biggest part of the cake. The biggest share (or any share at all) of diminishing funds for research means that educational staff need to spend disproportionate amounts of time to prepare in most cases unsuccessful research project proposals.



Academic education in the spirit of Paulo would stimulate what Russell called “the love of mental adventure” whereas in the conformity approach there is no space for the kind of dialogue that Paulo saw as central to the transformation of the world. The choice between the conformity approach and the freedom approach can be put as a choice between president Jair Bolsonaro and philosopher Paulo Freire. Or as the granddaughter of Freire writes between the eradication of her grandfather’s heritage or the celebration of his liberating approach to education.

Favourite topics in discussions at the restaurant of the Ecumenical Building on the Route de Ferney, dealt with the issue of rational discourse versus imagination. As Paulo would stress the importance of rationality, consciousness, and the use of language, I wanted dialogical communication to be re-enchanted and liberated from rational discourse. As I – many years later – read Enrique Dussell’s critique of the discursive ethics as proposed by Karl-Otto Apel and Jurgen Habermas (Dussell & Ape, 2013), I think Paulo would have agreed with Dussell that the genuine dialogue as political action should not be based upon rational argumentation but should be embedded in the reality of exploitation and exclusion.

If our Genevan coffee stops would have lasted longer I would have wanted to ask him whether he had read Hemingway’s (1940) *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. He probably did, but did he read it with the same fascination that Merleau Ponty and Sartre had for the book?

As always in the encounter with great minds many questions are left unanswered. Yet, even if they were critical, there is the certainty that Paulo would have taken them seriously and responded with a genuine open-mindedness.

### HOMAGE TO PAULO FREIRE ON HIS CENTENARY<sup>1</sup>

FREI BETTO<sup>1</sup>

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When Paulo Freire returned from 15 years of exile, in August 1979, we met in São Paulo. We were neighbours, and we often visited each other. Our personal relationships became a lot closer, which allowed us to write a book mediated by the journalist Ricardo Kotscho; the book was titled *This School Called Life*.

Paulo became ill in 1997 and died on May 2 of that year. I was with him in the final moments, in the moments that I call *transvivênciação*, there in May 1997. And right after that I wrote a text and I want to end my speech,

<sup>1</sup> This testimony was taken from the lecture given by Frei Betto in the Paulo Freire Centennial debate cycle: *Paulo Freire Centennial: 7 Talks in Preparation for the Next 100 Years* held by Loughborough University London, in March 2021. See Libanio Christo (2021).

<sup>1</sup> Frei Betto is a writer, author of *For a Critical and Participative Education* (Rocco) and *This School Called Life* (Ática), in partnership with Paulo Freire and Ricardo Kotscho.

enunciating to you this text, which I think translates the entire methodology of Professor Paulo Freire:

*“Ivo saw the grape”, taught the literacy manuals. But Professor Paulo Freire, with his method of raising awareness, made adults and children, in Brazil and in Guinea-Bissau, in India, in Nicaragua and in many others places, discover that Ivo didn’t just see with his eyes, he also saw with his mind and wondered if grapes are nature or culture.*

*Ivo saw that the fruit is not the result of human work. It’s Creation, it’s nature. Paulo Freire taught Ivo that sowing grapes is human action in and about nature. And the hand, a multipurpose-tool, awakes the potential of the fruit. Just as the human being was sown by nature in the years and years of evolution of the Universe.*

*Harvesting the grape, crushing it and transforming it into wine is culture, Paulo Freire pointed out. Work humanizes nature and, when doing it, men and women become humanized. Work that establishes the relationship node, social life. Thanks to the teacher, who started his revolutionary pedagogy with workers from the ‘Sesi’ of Pernambuco, Ivo also saw that the grape is harvested by workers (so-called “boias frias”), who earned little, and traded by intermediaries, who earn much more.*

*Ivo learned from Paulo that, even without knowing how to read, he is not an ignorant person. Before learning letters, Ivo knew how to build a house, brick by brick. The doctor, the lawyer or the dentist, with all their study, are not able to build like Ivo. Paulo Freire taught Ivo that no one is more cultured than another, there are parallel, distinct cultures that complement each other in social life.*

*Ivo saw the grape and Paulo Freire showed him the bunches, the vine, the entire plantation. He taught Ivo that the reading of a text is more understandable the more the text is inserted in the context of the author and the reader. It is from this dialogical relationship between text and context that Ivo extracts the pretext to act. At the beginning and at the end of learning it is Ivo’s praxis that matters. Praxis-theory-praxis, in an inductive process that makes the student a historical subject.*

*Ivo saw the grape and did not see the bird that, from above, sees the vine and does not see the grape. What Ivo sees is different from what the bird sees. Thus, Paulo Freire taught Ivo a fundamental principle of epistemology: the head thinks where the feet step. The unequal world can be read from the oppressor’s point of view or from the point of view of the oppressed. It results in a reading as different one from another as between Ptolemy’s vision, when observing the solar system with his feet on Earth, and Copernicus, when imagining himself with his feet in the Sun.*

*Now Ivo sees the grape, the vine and all the social relationships that make the fruit a party in the wine cup, but he no longer sees Paulo Freire, who died in*





*God's Love on the morning of May 2, 1997. He leaves us with an invaluable work and an admirable testimony of competence and consistency.*

*Paulo was to be in Cuba, where he would receive the title of Doctor Honoris Causa, from the University of Havana – and in which I could not represent him. However, before embarking to Palestine I went to pray with Nita, his wife, and their children around his calm face: Paulo saw God.*

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### JOURNEY TO THE “INTIMACY OF THE OBVIOUS”

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*For Leda Gusmão Chiappini*

<sup>5</sup>Educator and lawyer, deeply engaged in the democratization of quality public education, she studied and reinvented Paulo Freire in the classroom, having also had a personal contact with him in a congress she participated in in Bahia, still in the 1960s. His enthusiasm for the human figure and the pedagogical-philosophical-political thought of this great educator, infected me through many exemplary conversations and readings.

#### **Background and highlights on an unforgettable conversation**

This brief text is based on the conversation in the subtitle mentioned, briefly circumstantial by some previous memories, because long before it, there were some decisive encounters, even if indirect, with Paulo Freire, either by references to his work, or by testimony of those who had already seen him and listened to him personally. As was the case, of my sister, Leda Gusmão Chiappini, to whom I dedicate these memories<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>6</sup>From the dissatisfaction with this work, conceived by the University as recycling, my desire was born, associating myself with others and other equally dissatisfied colleagues to create alternatives more in the Freirian line. From there was born, at the end of 1970, the Association of Teachers of Language and Literature, of which I was a founding partner and first vice-president and, later, already in the years of 1990, a project that to this day is the girl of my eyes, training the educator in service (EFES), which yielded, among others things, 14 books from collection *Aprender e Ensinar com Textos* (Chiappini, 2015).

Hence to begin to read and reflect on the great educator and his so-called method, it was almost a natural step, as, finishing my studies of Letters and starting in teaching, in the so-called high school and in college, I was increasingly trying to practice a dialogical pedagogy, which also included the extension courses, teachers of first and second grades<sup>6</sup>.

Between 1978 and 1979, I did a postdoctoral research in France on Literature and Teaching, which, in addition to seminars in different universities, and internships, colloquiums and lots of reading on education in general and literature teaching, in particular, motivated me to conduct several interviews with students and teachers more varied. In the case of Paulo Freire, after a systematic study of his work, published until then, I took advantage of the relative proximity of Paris and Geneva, to interview him as well.<sup>7</sup>

In this tribute to his jubilee, having been invited to narrate a little of my conviviality with him, I chose to briefly recall that meeting of ours in Geneva,

<sup>7</sup>With postdoctoral fellowship, granted by FAPESP.

when we had a friendly, fruitful and therefore unforgettable conversation. Yes, because it was not just an interview, in which the interviewer asks and the interviewee answers. It was a true conversation, in the etymological sense of the word, related to the verb<sup>8</sup> to live together and *also to direct and redirect* thought and speak in contact with another person(s). More than talking and listening, it was about dialogue, a key concept in Paulo Freire's thought and practice.

The questions I had sent him by letter, in advance, I realize today, were "about God and the world"<sup>9</sup>. But Paulo knew how to choose those that could be the leader of a reflection from some founding practices of his pedagogy<sup>10</sup>. Thus, he set the tone of the conversation, recalling the beginning of his pedagogical work, in the Serviço Social da Indústria (SESI), with parents and teachers at their schools. It was the "circles of parents and teachers", later considered by himself as "a chapter of adult education". From this experience he highlighted a remarkable episode for the theoretical and practical development of his pedagogical work, emotional and narrating in a very moving way his first attempts to interfere with the families of the students, to end the frequent physical punishments they suffered from their parents. His attempt to teach that this should not be done would have provoked a real lesson on the part of one of these parents, who taught him to learn from the student. From, above all, the direct perception of the social problems they faced, being workers always tired, living, sleeping and eating poorly, in contrast to the social conditions he seemed to guess in *the master*, describing with great concrete condition the house of Paulo and his family, comfortable, with a room for each child and lots of food on the table (Leite, 2005, pp. 309-310).

Episodes like this have become, for the since then, educator-educating, in paradigmatic references to guide the work of thought through the labyrinths of knowing. And this resulted, among others, this reflection about the seemingly obvious:

I am convinced today that one has to break the obvious and expose the intimacy of the obvious. And when you do that, you find that the obvious isn't as obvious as you think. It's obvious to you at a certain point, but it's not for a lot of people. (Leite, 2005, p. 311)

### **An obvious text?**

Among many other things, in the long conversation, it is also worth highlighting what Paulo spoke about his performance in the post-literacy process in São Tomé and Príncipe, carried out already in full Geneva exile. To better illustrate the material elaborated there, under its coordination,

<sup>8</sup> It was a three-way conversation, as she also attended a colleague of the Seminars we attended at the École de Hautes Études of Paris. This is the Chilean philosopher Antonio Faundez, also exiled at the time. His participation was accepted by Paulo, to whom I presented him in the letter requesting confirmation of the interview. Giving an example of openness and readiness to dialogue, Paulo not only received it, but he listened with patience and respect to his criticisms, as an Orthodox Marxist, seeing in them an opportunity to take advantage of to better clarify his ideas, for the other and for himself, learning democratically from the contradictory, rare attitude to this day, when polarizations tend to present themselves in an angry and insupersive way. This exchange was so important that it brought about a lasting partnership between the two, including the publication of dialogical books, books that talk, as is the case of *Por uma Pedagogia da Pergunta* (Freire, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> Resuming the master expression Antonio Candido, on some initial formulations of the thesis projects he guided.

<sup>10</sup> The full interview, with all questions submitted and an initial updated comment, was republished in Leite (2005).

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and its political-pedagogical objectives, he read aloud a text, apparently simple, which has much to do with the Freirian concept of dialogue and dialogical communication, in the process of study and learning, linked to the life and work experience of the students. Here's the text<sup>11</sup>:

<sup>11</sup>This text, with small differences, circulates in other publications before and after the notebooks edited for use in São Tomé and Príncipe.

It had rained a lot every night. There were huge pools of water in the lower parts of the terrain. In certain places, the land, so wet, had turned mud. Sometimes the feet just slipped on it, sometimes more than slipping the feet to get mired in the mud up to above the ankles. It was hard to walk. Pedro and Antonio were transporting baskets full of cocoa in a truck to the place where they were supposed to dry. At one point they realized that the truck wouldn't cross the quagmire that was ahead. They stopped, got out of the truck, and looked at the quagmire, which was a problem for them. They crossed on foot about two meters of mud, defended by their long-barreled boots. They felt the thickness of the mud. Thought. They discussed how to solve the problem. Then, with the help of some rocks and dry branches of trees, they gave the terrain the minimum consistency so that the wheels of the van could pass without becoming tossed. Peter and Antony studied. They tried to understand the problem they had to solve and then found an accurate answer. You don't just study at school. Peter and Antony studied while working. To study is to assume a serious and curious attitude in the face of a problem. (Leite, 2005, p. 321)

<sup>12</sup>It is worth remembering, however, that he dedicated one of his first books to the theme, but focusing, we could say, in the lack of real communication of most of the work developed by experts in extension programs, especially in the rural context, in which he worked, in the Departamento de Extensão Cultural of the Universidade de Recife, where the practice of teaching the language, linked to the communication process, would have led him to reflect on education as an extension. Therefore, it is difficult to think about the extension in Paulo Freire without the act of communicating, beyond the mere "communicated".

<sup>13</sup>In this sense, his books would not be books, but "book-reports".

<sup>14</sup>Education as a producer of knowledge, it is revealed, therefore, a political act, to the extent that those who educate themselves thinking and thinking dialoguing, learning and teaching, resist the impositions of ready, unrelated and alienating thoughts. This underlines not only the conception of non-neutrality of education, but also its dialogical character, conceived in the formation of citizenship, as an act of educommunication, which is explained exemplarily in the text of Citelli et al. (2019).

Paulo wrote little and spoke little about communication<sup>12</sup>, but dramatized it tirelessly in the dialogue with his students of various backgrounds and ages. And in our conversation, he explicitly said that he considered communication the basis of education, thus revealing, as in the case of the Marxist and Christian basis of his thought and practice, part of what, in his writings, is often expressed in silences full of meaning. He also explained that teaching and studying the Portuguese language and reading in the field of philosophy and psychology of language would have made evident the close relations between education and theory of knowledge. Knowing and educating, enabling students to exercise the work of thought, would imply thinking about practice, always social<sup>13</sup>. And dialogue, in conversations that would gain a dimension of work, by examining, analyzing and proposing. Exactly what happens in the short text, in which Antonio and Peter stop, get down together from the car to examine the terrain, look, think, discuss, identify the problem and jointly find the solution to get out of the quagmire. The text thus gains an allegorical dimension, pointing out the confusion that prevents the advance to the light of knowledge and imposes the proposition as an act to overcome a problematic situation<sup>14</sup>.

Study, communicate, discuss, talk, all this is in the theoretical and practical work of Paulo Freire and showed itself in several aspects of our conversation, including this small-large-simple and complex example of the post-literacy work in São Tomé and Príncipe.

### **Then I tell you: come back to relearn, reteach and reinvent the Brazil**

Upon returning from exile in the early 1980s, Paulo told journalists for the first time, who asked him what he would do: first of all relearn Brazil.

In the first half of the return, we had the privilege of being welcomed into his home by him and D. Elsa, his wife and, at the beginning of everything, master. Then we resumed, in the midst of a delicious Pernambuco's *feijoada*, our conversation about his work, which at that moment, according to him, had been criticized. But only from a theoretical point of view, without due attention to his permanent effort to relate theory and practice. This, however, was not the central point of the resumption of our contact. This occurred when he became secretary of education of the government of Luísa Erundina (between 1989 and 1991) and made a broad invitation to professors from São Paulo universities, especially Universidade de São Paulo, Pontifícia Universidade Católica and Universidade de Campinas, to act as advisors in the curricular reorientation of elementary and middle schools in São Paulo, as well as in the training of educators and educators. In this project, which counted in its beginning with close to one hundred advisors of these three universities, I had the honor of collaborating from beginning to end, when only ten of them remained. But this is another story to be retold with more time and space, perhaps in partnership with other participants, who persevered there. It is open to the possibility of, later, in this or another specialized magazine, we think of something broader, including this pioneering experience of the city of São Paulo<sup>15</sup>.

## **ESTABLISHING THE CORE IDENTITY OF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION IN PAULO FREIRE: A TESTIMONIAL BY THE UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES – COLLEGE OF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION (UPLB CDC)**

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<sup>15</sup>Where the role of the so-called *pedagogy of correspondence*. The letters were used and later published in a book as a communication strategy and training of teachers, especially who sought to rid the condition of aunts to reintroduce them to the readers and themselves, as educators. See: Pereira Coelho (2011).

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For us, the soul and essence of development communication as an academic discipline, profession, and practice finds grounding in Paulo Freire’s philosophy and approach in the humanization of the oppressed through the awakening of their critical consciousness via dialogue within his matrix of love, humility, faith in the poor’s capacities, hope, and critical thinking.

Generations of development communication (devcom) practitioners and professionals, teachers, and researchers mostly in the Philippines but also spread out in Southeast Asia and other southern regions like Africa and South Asia, who are alumni of University of the Philippines Los Baños – College of Development Communication (UPLB – CDC) or UPLB – Devcom, have embraced the core principles of Freire’s philosophy and teachings as the foundation of participatory development communication that empowers the poor and marginalized as subjects of their development toward the realization of their full potential as humans with dignity. These devcom alumni are also mentoring future professionals, teachers, and researchers in the discipline in 22 other academic institutions in the Philippines plus some in other developing countries.

UPLB Devcom emerged as a pioneer to offer bachelor’s, master of science, and doctor of philosophy in devcom in the 70s, seeded by Dr. Nora Cruz-Quebral’s seminal paper defining the concept and budding discipline in an agricultural development conference in 1971 in Los Baños<sup>16</sup>.

The focus of Quebral’s (1971) definition of Devcom on the poor and marginalized, that UPLB Devcom alumni have considered foundational, aligns with Freire’s focus on the oppressed and their empowerment as human beings with dignity:

the art and science of human communication applied to the speedy transformation of a country and the mass of its people from poverty to a dynamic state of economic growth that makes possible greater social equality and the larger fulfillment of human potential. (p. 1)

Revised in 2012 as “the science of human communication linked to the transition of communities from poverty in all its forms to a dynamic overall growth that fosters equity and the unfolding of individual potential” (Quebral, 2012, p. 9).

<sup>16</sup>UPLB Devcom traces its roots to an Office of Publication and Extension established by then University of the Philippines College of Agriculture (UPCA) in 1954. It was elevated as an academic department, Department of Agricultural Information and Communication, in 1962; renamed Department of Agricultural Communication in 1968; and again renamed as Department of Development Communication in 1973. It started offering the MS program in 1973; the BS in Development Communication (BSDC) in 1974; and the PhD program in 1976. It was elevated as an Institute of Development Communication in 1987 and as a full-fledged College in 1998. To date, it has graduated 3,019 in the BSDC, 309 in the MS (Devcom), and 95 in the PhD (Devcom).

As third- and fourth-generation faculty members of UPLB Devcom (Quebral, Juan F. Jamias, Ely D. Gomez among the first generation, and Felix Librero, Teresa H. Stuart, and Madeline Mag-uyon-Suva among the second) we first heard of Paulo Freire briefly mentioned by our mentors in some undergraduate classes, and took up his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in depth in graduate class if we were lucky. To those of us who were privileged to interrogate his work, we pleasantly discovered the very essence of devcom in Freire's publications, whose discourse fired up our hearts<sup>17</sup>.

Our first-generation teachers Quebral, Jamias, and Gomez in their respective 1970s writings have asserted that devcom is value-laden, and Dr. Quebral drove this home to us time and again in our many privileged firsthand formal and informal interactions. We found this dimension articulated in Freire's works. While Devcom influenced by Freire is often labeled *participatory*, Dr. Quebral always asserted the label as redundant, underscoring that Devcom is intrinsically participatory.

In our curricula, we review among other concepts and theories Freire's dialogue in foundational courses in the undergraduate and graduate programs. They specifically comprise the basis of the undergraduate core course DEVC 70 *Interpersonal Communication in Development*, instituted in 1992, taken in the undergraduate's third year. The course is more practical and reflexive than theoretical – it invites the students to examine themselves and ascertain their values; emphasizes outlook and perspective rather than technique; arms them with some ground rules in community work; exposes them to real situations in community; challenges them to facilitate problem-posing dialogue and self-reflection to address real challenges in a community with the help of simulations and exercises; and hopes they could deliberately facilitate or experience (given the practical time limits) praxis or the process of reflection-action, which otherwise lies on their teacher's shoulders to jumpstart in the class, at the very least. This provides the balance that Dr. Quebral had long urged the curriculum needed above the media skills it offered undergraduates.

DEVC 126, *Participatory Development Journalism* (PDJ), instituted in 2014, is a journalism course that aims to apply Freire's praxis as learning-in-action. It expands the concepts of community journalism to embody dialogue in teaching the students and communities about the importance and relationship of communication and social change at the grassroots. The course values community agency, that is, a perspective in development that emphasizes the power of the communities to improve their own situation by telling their own stories, in this case, with the use of media-based communication and imbued with the principles of journalism,

<sup>17</sup>Since the 1960s, many faculty members in UPLB Devcom observed a profound shift in the institutional notions of communication and development. Most of them have agreed that there's an awareness and critical attitude toward the diffusion of innovation and behavioral change communication. Senior faculty members, in particular, believed that many of them had been doing work very similar to participatory communication even before they read Latin American critical authors (Dagli, 2018).

i.e. verification towards truthful storytelling. The stories produced by the DEVC 126 classes go through the process of joint storytelling – a dialogue between equals – where each learns from the other. Here, we emphasize that the output is only as good as the process of storytelling that engages participants in reflection and self-reflection toward conscientization and eventually seeing ways toward emancipation. Our students learn from the communities about strengths and opportunities at the grassroots, a grounded view of aspirations of the ordinary folk, about being in a privileged position and how that privilege can be useful in working for social change.

Although it emphasizes the role of digital media, the core of participatory development journalism lies in community engagement that privileges the voices from the ground. Thus, undertaking participatory development journalism requires humility and a certain mindset that respects local knowledge, multiple perspectives, and shared learning about a particular community development concern.

A key feature of PDJ is community immersion. It allows our students to experience community life and converse with community folks hoping to instill understanding and empathy that could make the stories they write truly carry the voices from the ground. This activity also tests the skills in interpersonal communication that they have learned in DEVC 70, and heightens their awareness that knowledge resides in everyone who can articulate experiences and aspirations.

In 2014, UPLB Devcom institutionalized a model of student-community engagement in most of its higher-level courses in the undergraduate program through an academic field instruction program. In this model, undergraduate students and communities work together in planning, developing, and sustaining devcom initiatives that address community-based issues. A committee facilitates activities that support the continuity of community-driven plans from one academic year to the next and ensures that academic outputs of students from various courses contribute to partner communities' long-term visions. In many ways, the academic field instruction program of UPLB Devcom can be seen as a pedagogical experiment where students and partner communities learn to discover what *conscientization* looks like in practice: that learning to perceive and identify the root causes of oppressive elements in society can only happen in spaces and relations of conviviality and through institutional practices that foster emancipatory dialogue and action (Freire, 1970c).

A PhD course, DEVC 391, Participatory Development Communication, includes a rationale that reads,

Development in the 21st century is marked with transitioning communities and sensitivities to different cultures and contexts and highlights inclusiveness in decision-making and charting directions for change. Participatory approaches embrace a plurality of perspectives and cultural diversity that are fit for the demands of the time.

The course discusses participatory approaches in development communication and research that are derived from Freire's praxis in community communication, adult learning, participatory action research, and participatory planning, monitoring and evaluation. The discussions also include the locally adapted models and approaches such as ADIDS or action, discussion, input, deepening and synthesis (Networks, 2001 in Daya, 2010) process in learning, and Socially Shared Inquiry (Alfonso, 2000) for research.

Along with the movements in thought of communication and development and the growing influence of Freire, there has been a shift in focus and theoretical grounding of faculty and student research. Development communication Los Baños style is rooted in the American agricultural extension model (technology adoption models and modernization) informed by socio-psychological and information theories of communication. Research in the first decades of the College was heavily influenced by these theoretical frameworks, with some exceptions.

Alexander G. Flor (2004) wrote and published a few pieces about his own articulations of Freire's conscientization: conscienti-cancion for social movement protest songs in the Philippines back in the 1980s-90s and conscienti-action looking at the role of community theaters in rural change during the same time.

In more recent years, however, research has gained broader horizons moving into the territory of critical and cultural traditions that pay attention to marginal and authentic voices (e.g., Amoyan & Custodio, 2019), and the poetics and politics of participation and empowerment (e.g. Baurile, 2014; Guanio, 2017; Timbreza, 2018).

Recognizing that educational institutions carry vestiges of conservative, authoritarian, and colonial ideologies, the influence of Freirean values in research and course offerings can be seen as paving the way toward decolonizing the curriculum of the College and reimagining an identity for ourselves that is more grounded in critical ways of seeing.

Amid the strong waves of competing discourses on development and communication, Freire's pedagogy and values has provided an anchor for development communication to look into itself and see its value as a field and discipline.





As institutions across the world find ways to address highly complex social-ecological problems, UPLB Devcom will continue to find inspiration in Freire's liberation pedagogy in transforming the root causes of inequality, vulnerabilities, and injustice through reflexive and dialogical communication. Unlike in previous decades when Devcom's role was largely in support of establishing what has now become the dominant regime of knowledge and power on global development and in critiquing the limits of such regime, Devcom's role in the next few decades should be about contributing to the co-production of new regimes of knowledge and power, those that support societies and institutions to transition toward sustainable, more just, and equitable futures. Now more than ever, reflexive and critical reflection is needed to transform previously held assumptions about science/knowledge, power, communication, and change.

### PAULO FREIRE AND THE MEANING OF THE ACT OF EDUCATING

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I'm a teacher, but more than that, I'm a teacher trainer of teachers. That said, I explain myself by stating that my concern goes far beyond presenting to my students the teaching methods and techniques. I'm concerned about the understanding that they may have of what the professional exercise of the teaching function will become for each one of them.

During the period when I studied my Degree in Pedagogy, at the Universidade de São Paulo (USP), Paulo Freire was excluded from Brazilian universities because of the military dictatorship that began in 1964, which even led him to a long period of exile (from 1964 to 1979). It was only after I graduated that I had contact with his work and knowing it was like giving meaning to the daily actions I had been performing as a teacher.

The contact with Paulo Freire's philosophy and work clarified for me the meaning of the act of educating. From the resignification of the practice of dialogue and the appropriation of various concepts presented by him, such as critical awareness, liberating education, unheard of feasible among others, such concepts were incorporated into my daily pedagogical practice and a new meaning of the act of educating was constructed.

If education is awareness, how could I, the teacher that I am, awaken in my students the desirable critical curiosity about the facts and effects of their reality if I did not look at it myself, critically, in my professional duty?

According to Freire (1983), what characterizes a critical, non-prejudiced, restless consciousness, among many other peculiarities, is the search for knowledge of facts, knowing that reality is changeable and that the individual, also changeable, is the subject of its own history.

“If men (and women) are beings of what to do is exactly why their doing is action and reflection” (Freire, 1968/2015, p. 121). Every teacher should, consequently, stimulate in their classes, with the student group, the act of acting and reflecting on the action. The autonomy of our students will depend on this. Educating them with the responsible autonomy is our task, more than that, it is an ethical imperative, given that autonomy,

while maturing the being for itself, it is a process, it is becoming to be. It does not occur on a scheduled date. It is in this sense that a pedagogy of autonomy must be centered on experiences that stimulate decision-making and responsibility, it is worth saying, in respectful experiences of freedom. (Freire, 1996, p. 121)

From traditional or banking education to a democratic, progressive and liberating education, as Freire wanted, there is a wide space to be transposed. Forged as I was, from the first steps, with the mark of the first form of education, becoming a democratic teacher cost me (and still costs) a constant exercise of review of my didactic-pedagogical acts.

The respectful dialogue, advocated by Freire throughout his work, the result of a horizontal relationship developed in the classroom, was the engine of this change. Listening to the students, gently and patiently, giving them a voice throughout the process, made all the difference. Everyone should express themselves and respect others for they expression of opinions, wills and questions that are due. But not the dialogue converted into “unobligated chat that marches to the taste of casualty between teacher or teacher and students” (Freire, 2000, p. 118), but the dialogue seen as a possibility of true encounter. To Freire (1969/2013b),

What is intended with dialogue, in any case, . . . is the problematization of one’s own knowledge in its indisputable reaction to the concrete reality in which it is generated and on which it is based in, to better understand it, to explain it, transform it. (p. 52)

And, if in the classroom, the atmosphere of respect to the knowledge and sayings of both students and teachers is established, everyone will understand the importance of accepting the other without discrimination of any kind. With lucidity, Freire stated that “any discrimination is immoral and fighting it is a duty, even if recognizing the strength of the constraints that will be faced” (Freire, 1996, p. 68). The teacher of the democratic option will always have to express an environment of acceptance and respect in the classroom, based on their own equally respectful actions.

Throughout my many years of teaching in courses, lectures and meetings focused on teacher training, I have always wondered what my purpose is, as an educator, at that time and in those spaces. Would it make any sense to those who listened to the message I was carrying? What has guided me – and still guide – is the hope of getting it right was what Freire’s teachings told me, that interacting with the student would, in fact, be our main task. Guide their doubts, which will always include

more doubts, and, in an open manner, friendly, sometimes quiet, inciting the . . . student. Quiet in with safe response, with timely suggestion, with the necessary bibliography, which will lead to new restlessness. Stillness cannot be a permanent state. It is only in the relationship with restlessness that stillness makes sense. (Freire, 2003, pp. 215-216)

If alive, Paulo Freire would have completed, on September 19, 100 years. An occasion to be marked with his presence, despite his death in 1997.

Without Paulo Freire in those 24 years ago, what has changed in the education of our country? Very little! Truly very little!

Brazilian education continues to be offered unequally to the rich and poor. The quality of education as a whole still leaves to be desired, but for the socially excluded, and to those oppressed by an absolutely perverse economic and social structure, inequality accentuates the precariousness of the means and the efficiency of the ends. The neglect in relation to this problem, deliberately continues to reproduce injustices. Even nowadays we have illiterates in the country: 11 million! If we add to this number the functional illiterates (those who have difficulty interpreting texts and/or perform simple mathematical operations) we will reach 29% of the population<sup>18</sup> (Indicador de Alfabetismo Funcional, 2018)!

About 30% of the Brazilian population, therefore, does not even have the minimum conditions to fully exercise the citizenship to which they are entitled!

<sup>18</sup>Rate of illiteracy in Brazil: 6.6% in 2019 (Pnad, 2020).

However, I'm not a hopeless educator. In the hope, as Freire said (2000), I hope to do my best for all those of whom my honorable profession brings me closer. And I expect better days, but "I hope to the extent that as I begin the search, for it would not be possible to seek without hope" (p. 29), knowing, though, "that there is no hope in pure waiting, nor is it achieved what is expected in pure waiting, which thus sees vain" (p. 11). I think our hope can't be in vain. We hope so.

## COMMUNICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE FOOTPRINTS OF PAULO FREIRE

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Paulo Freire's ideas constitute a watershed between the current of communicational thinking that defends modernization as a so-called way out to promote rural development and the theoretical current of dialogical communication constructed from his thinking.

The communication model for development, in the version of the Rural Extension/Rural Communication, implemented in Brazil in the 1940s, aimed to enable the modernizing policy of the field from the diffusionist model coming from the universities of Wisconsin and Michigan, and with the support of international organizations such as the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Kellogg Foundation (Tauke Santos, 1994), through a system headed by the Brazilian Association of Technical Assistance and Rural Extension (ABCAR, later Embrater – Brazilian Company of Technical Assistance and Rural Extension), the Brazilian government creates a rural communication system, according to the precepts of Timmer's *Planejamento do Trabalho em Extensão Agrícola* (1954) which recommends "persuading rural populations to accept our propaganda". It referred to the technological information that rural populations should incorporate to produce the intended social changes with a view to modernizing the field. The notion of change, within the diffusionist model of Rural Communication was, therefore, that of an induced process, planned from the outside into the environment where it should happen.

The most fruitful criticism of this model was that of Paulo Freire (1969/2013b) in his book *Extensão ou Comunicação?*. Retorting the persuasive posture inherent to the diffusionist model, Freire states: "we cannot persuade and accept persuasion

as an educational action... Neither the peasants nor anyone is persuaded or submits to the mythical force of propaganda when one has a liberating action” (p. 23). “Liberating option” is understood as the problematization of the concrete situation of men so that they, capturing their reality critically, are able to develop actions to transform it (Freire, 1969/2013b).

In the 1970s, philosophical thought was based throughout Latin America, a continent oppressed by military dictatorships, economic and cultural imperialism, and oppression experienced by workers and peasants at the hands of the country’s economic elites (Tauk Santos, 2002).

The flexibilization of authoritarian regimes in the 1980s favored the dissemination of Freire’s theory in the fields of education and communication. It is in this scenario that, when he joined the Departamento de Educação da Universidade Federal Rural de Pernambuco in 1984, it began, under the inspiration of Paulo Freire’s theoretical contributions, in the works *Pedagogia do Oprimido* (1968/2015); *Educação como Prática da Liberdade* (1999); and *Extensão ou Comunicação?* (1969/2013b) an extension action and academic research in Communication for Development.

Right below are brief reports of some of these academic experiences in teaching in undergraduate and graduate courses in Communication and Agrarian Sciences. Experiences I carried out with the help of a constellation of authors, maintaining, however, fundamental matrices of Paulo Freire’s thought: the option to work with popular cultures in a critical posture; valuing knowledge and dialogue with men, women and young people in the countryside; and support for popular forms of struggle, organization and participation:

*Communication, Catholic Church and participation of family farmers*

- analysis of problematic pedagogy to stimulate participation and struggle in the field (Tauk Santos, 1992);

*Action in agrarian reform settlement*

- political support and technical advice to the population based in Engenho Pitanga - PE (Tauk Santos & Callou, 1993);

*Agro-ecological agriculture*

- encouraging participation in the fight for policies favorable to family farming (Tauk Santos, 1994);

*Subsistence fishing communities*

- actions for the construction of local development on the Ilha de Deus, PE. (Tauk Santos, Callou, et al., 2009);

*Subsistence fishing women*

- analysis of leisure and cultural consumption of women in artisanal fishing (Tauk Santos, Fox, et al., 2009);

*Digital inclusion*

- research of digital inclusion policies from the perspective of social inclusion in popular contexts (Tauk Santos, 2009);

*Local development and citizenship in Municipal management*

- analysis of the challenges and participatory communication strategies of the Municipality of Camaragibe (Tauk Santos, 2014a);

*Popular media and cultures*

- analysis of the role of radio in the construction of participatory democracy in the city (Tauk Santos, 2014b);
- analysis of the commitment of the television media to the populations and the local communities (Tauk Santos, 2013);

*Creative economy and popular contexts*

- analysis of the appropriations of creative economy policies by the young people of Bomba do Hemetério, on the outskirts of Recife (Tauk Santos, et al., 2019).

The results of how Paulo Freire's theoretical matrix had repercussions on the training of students of the Programa de Pós-Graduação em Administração Rural e Comunicação Rural; the Programa de Pós-Graduação em Extensão Rural e Desenvolvimento Local and the Programa de Pós-Graduação em Consumo e Desenvolvimento Social of the Universidade Federal Rural de Pernambuco, is found in more than 1000 pages of the book *Travessias Acadêmicas das Tecnologias da Comunicação para o Desenvolvimento* (Tauk Santos & Callou, 2019).

The opening of the work brings an unpublished text by Paulo Freire (2019), "A Educação como Espanto" (The Education as Amazement). A loving tribute to the footprints of this educator who inspired our academic journeys.

**PAULO FREIRE AT CAMBRIDGE AND UNICAMP**

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So soon everything passes by!  
–Fernando Pessoa. *Odes de Ricardo Reis*.

Taking a trip down memory lane about Paulo Freire, I can only remember him in the voice of Vera Queiroga, a roommate of mine, when we used to live together in a university house in Abílio Soares's Street. In the early 1960s, we were

a group of twenty-four girls from the countryside who decided to study in Sao Paulo. At that time, I studied Languages and Vera studied Pedagogy.

She joined an adult education development project in the Vila Helena Maria, Osasco, and excitedly told us about a Northeastern educator who had totally original ideas about education. His name was Paulo and as his ideas were brilliant, it guided the project in which my colleague was participating in.

However, time passed by and the coup of 1964 came up. Popular education projects were cancelled and educators who engaged in it were persecuted. Even though all student good memories stayed in the past, the image of Paulo, that Northeastern educator, remained even more present. Unfortunately, he was persecuted by the dictatorship, arrested and then exiled to Chile.

Moving on time, I got married with Franco and Vera married Zé Carlos – we used to call him Barretão. Zé also participated in the adult education development project, and he was very excited about the “Freirean pedagogy”, which at that time wasn’t called that... (yet).

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After my marriage, I lived in Boston for a while.

It was there, a city of snow and beautiful red brick buildings, that I met in person the Northeastern educator that Vera and Barretão spoke so enthusiastically – Paulo Freire was invited as a visiting professor at Harvard University. He arrived with his family: his wife Elza and children. The news spread in the Brazilian community and when I heard about it, I remembered all those references my colleague mentioned to me so much. The city – notably Cambridge, home to Harvard University – was teeming with political movements: Black Panthers, feminists, and anti-Vietnam War rallies.

The announced arrival of Paulo Freire – the pride of a patrician persecuted in his land and visiting professor at one of the most prestigious universities in the world! – awakened the Brazilian community. Personally, I got involved in a cloud of issues. Where would Vera and Barretão be? Would I really meet Paulo Freire? I was hoping so.

For my luck, I met him at a lecture at Harvard: a bunch of Brazilians along with people from all over the planet, went to the university to hear that educator who had original – and more than that, revolutionary – ideas about education.

The place was packed. As I recall, the theme of the conference was *Popular Education*.

Looking thin and bearded, in addition to being very calm, Paulo began by explaining that he would speak in Portuguese, while a young man beside him would do the simultaneous translation. In Paul’s speech, I was amazed, on the one hand,

by certain rhetorical constructions, enthusiastic remarks about his experiences; on the other, the tone of intimacy with which he aligned his reflections on the right to education and the importance of knowing how to read and write.

After the lecture, I looked for him. I introduced myself as a colleague of Vera and Barretão. He informed me about his university office and then I went to visit him, thrilled.

And since then, we've become friends for now...

I was very impressed by what Paulo told us about his experience of living in a foreign country. He said Chilean Spanish was less foreign than Cambridge English. It was in these conversations, absolutely informal, that I learned the deep relationship that Paulo had between language and life and between language and the world. I began to understand that his literacy proposals – which I will summarize in Freirean's expression of reading the world – were based on the intimate relationship he had in language and in life.

I had the opportunity to accompany Mrs. Elza to the market a few times. During these shoppings, I learned about the family's longing for Brazilian food, and how Paulo has disconnected from his domestic life. After a while, Paulo left Cambridge and went to Switzerland. Franco's postdoctoral work ended, and we (me and my husband) returned to Brazil.

\* \* \*

Again, time passed. About ten years later, I met Paulo again in Unicamp, when he was at the Faculdade de Educação, and I was at the Instituto de Estudos da Linguagem. The conversations returned, in the scenario of Anhanguera and Bandeirantes Highways, roads that unite São Paulo and Campinas. Paulo gave me a ride, and Bernardo (was that his name?) was the competent and good-humored driver of the car, all decorated with objects that reminded me of the Northeast...

Paulo asked me about popular readings. After all, his work was primarily focused on popular education, but I couldn't answer. I had no idea what was being read outside the inner circle of the people of Languages. One day, Paulo asked me to organize a handout with literary texts that I considered appropriate for readers unfamiliar with writing...

After he asked me this, I thought about it a lot. I talked to colleagues, just to make sure and in the end, I decided on poems – as a matter of fact, I like it. Even by hypothesis, rhythmic, close to orality; some love poems and others of what I would call now militant texts. Suddenly I had an idea. I decided to include a concrete poem, somewhat avant-garde of the time: a poem whose verses did not follow the traditional linearity of written language. Some words are no longer those that flow vertically.





So, I gave it to him. A few weeks later, he told me that the concrete poem was the text that the students liked the most.

I was puzzled by this news.

Paulo explained that the students liked the poem because it looked like the writing of the buses, where sometimes the final stop was written and left standing rather than lying down.

...great lesson, coming from an adult education room that morning on the way to university...

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In addition to conversations on the road, some dinners, at his house or mine where, always, the eternal pasta – the only dish I have the courage to serve my friends! – Always accompanied by authentic cachaça from Pernambuco, it still reminds me how much I miss everything...

### MY MEETINGS WITH PAULO FREIRE

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My first contact with the work of Paulo Freire was in 1967, still as a high school student, at the house of the, then Congressman, Franco Montoro. There, together with a group of colleagues, I participated in a course about the literacy method developed by the educator, a preparatory stage for an action aimed at young people and adults who lived in a community close to the school where I studied. We already had, at that time, access to his book *Educação como Prática da Liberdade* (Freire, 1999).

Paulo Freire no longer lived in Brazil, he was exiled in Santiago, Chile, with his wife and five children, due to the civil-military coup of 1964, which persecuted him as he coordinated, from Brasília, the preparatory actions for the National Literacy Program to be launched by President João Goulart. A year earlier, in 1963, a literacy experience with forty rural workers in Angicos, Rio Grande do Norte, would make Paulo Freire a national reference. His method would teach basic literacy skills in 40 hours and he did it by expanding the workers' awareness of their problems, seeking the causes and discussing solutions that were within their reach to overcome them. Such a method, with such characteristics, implemented nationally, would not only put millions of people in a condition to vote, in a society in which illiteracy was a barrier to obtaining this condition, but would put them in

a much more conscious way about their problems, threatening traditional electoral corrals. For the civilian-military group that took power, it would be a threat to political stability, resulting in his imprisonment and, later, exile.

Years later, in 1974, I took over the coordination of a Supplementary Course, in the same school in which I had studied and fulfilled, as a student, the literacy experience mentioned above. The challenge of the course, aimed at young people and adults who had not completed their basic education, was very great. Paulo Freire was once again a reference for the group of young teachers, many recent graduates, who assumed that responsibility. We were in the most difficult period of the military dictatorship, and we saw in that course, from a “Freirian” perspective, an opportunity for political and educational work with working-class people from popular sectors.

Paulo Freire was no longer in Chile. After spending a year in the United States at Harvard University, he had lived in Geneva, Switzerland, since 1970, when he took over the educational department of the World Council of Churches. He had already written *Pedagogia do Oprimido* (Freire, 1968/2015), which would become his work of greatest worldwide recognition, translated into more than 20 languages, inaccessible to Brazilians, as well as several other texts, due to political persecution. We obtained his writings through copies or publications from other countries, in particular from Uruguay and Argentina. They served to guide our work, recognizing that the students had their own knowledge and life stories that should be considered in the processes of collective learning and teaching. We learned from him that we should be consistent with our study programs that talked about democracy and freedom of expression, exercising these values also in our methodologies and practices. We learned to respect the diverse cultures of a classroom formed by people from different places and who lived in the city of São Paulo.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the “Freirian” thinking fueled the work of popular education, those carried out in non-school spaces, in the Christian Base Communities (CEBS), in the popular movements who fight for housing, daycare, and against the lack of essential resources, in unions. In those years, I combined my work in the supplementary course with that of a non-governmental organization called the Centro Ecumênico de Documentação e Informação (CEDI), founded by a group of activists, mostly Protestant, to advise the basic work of CEBS. I immersed myself in these advisories, with Paulo Freire under my arm, working with participant research in Goiás Velho and literacy of adults with rubber tappers in Acre, at the request of Chico Mendes, and in the region of the Solimões River, at the request of the Movimento de Educação de Base (MEB) of the Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil (CNBB). Paulo Freire, his thinking and literacy method were the basis of the work performed.

On his definitive return to Brazil, in 1980, the educator went to live in São Paulo to work at the Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo (PUCSP) and, later, at the Universidade Estadual de Campinas (Unicamp). He was an internationally known person, having made more than 150 international trips to several countries on all continents. He continued to respond to invitations to work abroad, but now also in Brazil, thirsty for updating himself about the Brazilian reality. His works were already published regularly in the country and became easily accessible.

It was on his return from exile that I met him personally as a colleague at PUCSP, where I started teaching after I left the coordination of the adult course. I exchanged with Paulo Freire conversations about my work, sometimes in his residence, to discuss and ask for his support, always attending, despite his busy schedule.

In 1987, I applied for a post at the World Council of Churches as Executive Secretary of the Adult Basic Education Program. To support my process, I asked for letters of recommendation, one of them to Paulo Freire, who promptly answered me, writing at the end of his text: “Being a member of the staff of the WCC, for 10 years, I am pleased to strongly recommend Mr. Haddad... He seems a ‘right person’ for this position, at this moment of his personal history”. I keep his letter to this day as a reminder of his generosity.

When Paulo Freire took over the Department of Education of the Municipality of São Paulo, under Mayor Luiza Erundina, in 1979, he invited me to take responsibility for adult education in the municipality. Unfortunately, I was unable to accept, but I was flattered by the invitation and trust.

Paulo Freire has always been a reference for me as a social activist, working with popular education at CEDI and, since 1994, in The Educational Action. My research in master’s and doctorate and later as a researcher of CNPq or Fapesp, were in the field of adult education and their thinking. The last of these, the results of which were published in the e-book *Grundtvig e Freire: Escolas Populares na Dinamarca e no Brasil* (Haddad, et al., 2020), which introduces to the Brazilian public the pedagogical ideas of the Danish thinker Nikolaj F. S. Grundtvig in comparison to those of Paulo Freire.

In view of this history, I made the decision to dedicate two years to reread his works, read what he had not read, interview people, research in newspapers, magazines and articles about Paulo Freire and, finally, write the book *O Educador: Um Perfil de Paulo Freire* (Haddad, 2019). In it, I trace a biographical profile, seeking, in literary and less academic language, to tell his story, speaking of his life, of the conjuncture in the places where he lived in exile, about his thoughts and works. I wrote in the presentation that the objectives of the book were of

two natures: one conjunctural and the other personal. The conjuncture alerted to the moment of attacks and defenses of his legacy, a mirror to the political polarization in which Brazilian society was divided, sometimes an uninformed debate about the educator and his work. The book intended to cover this gap by offering a text that would be a gateway to a deeper understanding of the biography subject. The goal of a personal nature was to pay tribute to those who accompanied me as an educator and social activist throughout my personal and professional career. ■

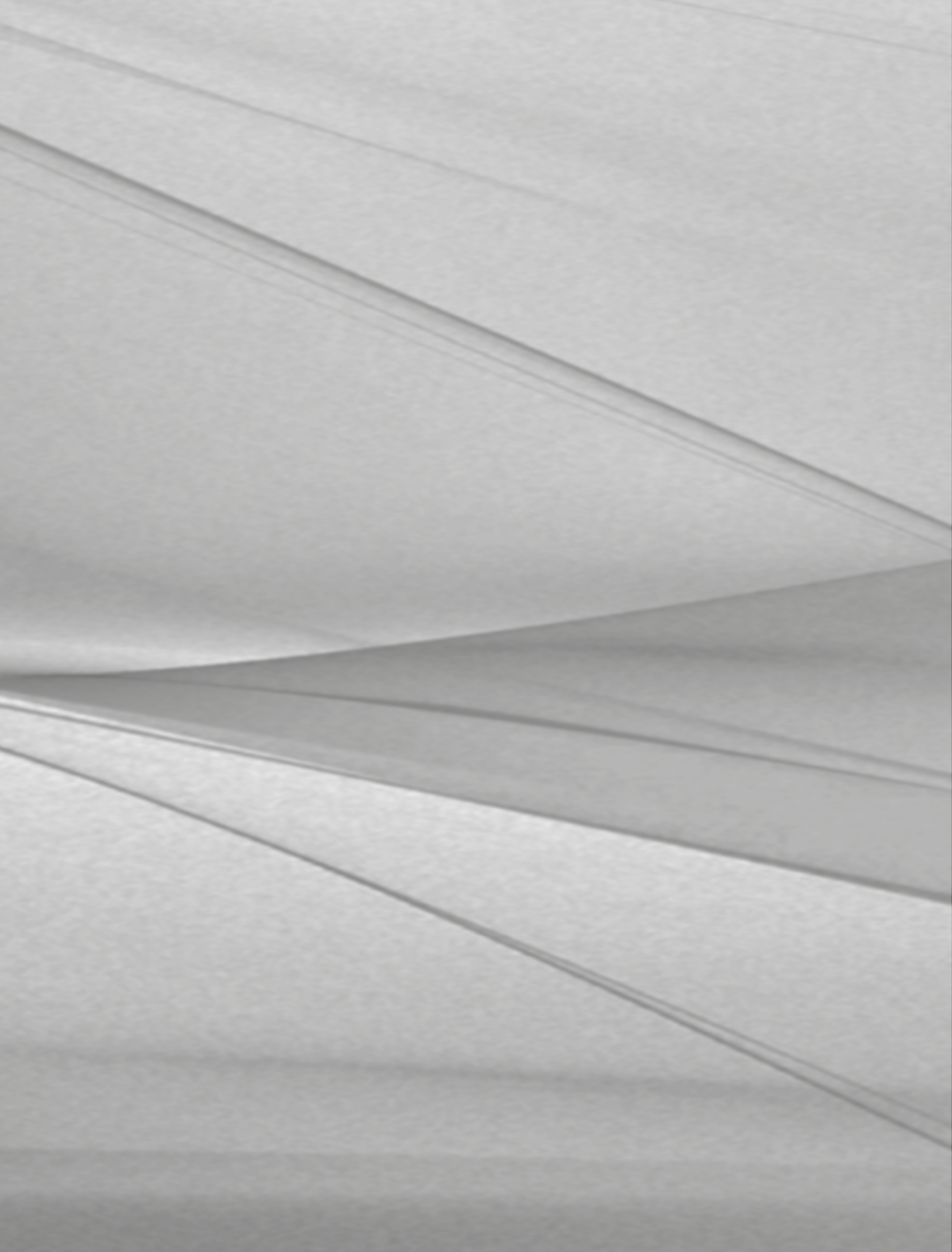
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# THESES AND DISSERTATIONS



# Teses e dissertações

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*Identificação e análise de riscos corporativos de imagem: a relevância da Gestão de Identidades nas Relações Públicas*

ORIENTADOR: LUIZ ALBERTO BESERRA DE FARIAS

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BAADER, Cinira

*Mediação comunicacional das marcas na cultura alimentar infantil*

ORIENTADOR: ENEUS TRINDADE BARRETO FILHO

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*Vozes da trans(formação) docente na perspectiva da Comunicação/Educação*

ORIENTADOR: ADILSON ODAIR CITELLI

doi: <https://doi.org/10.11606/T.27.2021.tde-31082021-195415>

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*Entre o efêmero e as continuidades: tendências da pesquisa na interface comunicação, moda e consumo*

ORIENTADOR: ENEUS TRINDADE BARRETO FILHO

doi: Em processamento

DELGADO, Flavia Daniela Pereira

*Uma voz contra o autoritarismo: crônicas de Antônio Callado durante a ditadura militar*

ORIENTADORA: SANDRA LUCIA AMARAL DE ASSIS REIMÃO

doi: <https://doi.org/10.11606/T.27.2020.tde-04032021-160218>



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*Lógicas de produção jornalística em tempos de transformação digital: um pensamento sobre produto e adoção de metodologias ágeis*

**ORIENTADORA: ELIZABETH NICOLAU SAAD CORREA**

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**ORIENTADORA: LUCILENE CURY**

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**ORIENTADORA: MARIA CLOTILDE PEREZ RODRIGUES**

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**ORIENTADOR: LEANDRO LEONARDO BATISTA**

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*Narrativas visuais e memória. Os acervos que constituem identidade: trabalhos fotográficos com foco no noroeste paulista*

**ORIENTADORA: MAYRA RODRIGUES GOMES**

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**ORIENTADORA: MARIA CRISTINA CASTILHO COSTA**

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*Aceitação da energia nuclear por parte da opinião pública no Brasil*

**ORIENTADORA: HELOIZA HELENA MATOS E NOBRE**

doi: <https://doi.org/10.11606/T.27.2021.tde-30082021-113842>

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**ORIENTADORA: MARIA APARECIDA FERRARI**

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**PENNER, Tomaz Affonso**

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**ORIENTADORA: MARIA CRISTINA PALMA MUNGIOLI**

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**ROSA, Beatrice Bonami**

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**ORIENTADORA: BRASILINA PASSARELLI**

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*Ativismo em um mundo (im)perfeito: relações públicas e cidadania para pessoas com deficiência*

**ORIENTADOR: LUIZ ALBERTO BESERRA DE FARIAS**

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*O papel dos traços de personalidade dos indivíduos na avaliação de propagandas*

**ORIENTADOR: LEANDRO LEONARDO BATISTA**

doi: <https://doi.org/10.11606/T.27.2021.tde-24082021-211307>



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*Entre narrativas enunciadas e o silenciamento: a interface das representações sociais de indivíduos que coabitam em um espaço urbano*

**ORIENTADOR: PAULO ROBERTO NASSAR DE OLIVEIRA**

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**ORIENTADORA: BRASILINA PASSARELLI**

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**ORIENTADOR: VICTOR AQUINO GOMES CORREA**

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**ORIENTADOR: VICTOR AQUINO GOMES CORREA**

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**ORIENTADOR: ANDRÉ CHAVES DE MELO SILVA**

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*Astronomia na cobertura jornalística de ciência: representações e sociedade*

**ORIENTADOR: ANDRÉ CHAVES DE MELO SILVA**

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*Comunicação na esfera pública digital: consequências práticas do uso de Big Data para as pesquisas de opinião pública no Brasil*

**ORIENTADOR:** ANDERSON VINÍCIUS ROMANINI

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*Análise discursiva de comunicação de empresas certificadas sustentáveis pelo Sistema B-Corporation*

**ORIENTADORA:** MARGARIDA MARIA KROHLING KUNSCH

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*Mapeamento da comunicação sobre sexualidade feita por influenciadores no YouTube*

**ORIENTADORA:** BRASILINA PASSARELLI

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*Modelo de adoção de Open Banking: motivadores e barreiras que influenciam o potencial adotante*

**ORIENTADOR:** LUIZ GUILHERME DE CARVALHO ANTUNES

doi: <https://doi.org/10.11606/D.27.2020.tde-04032021-224111>

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*Design de plataformas digitais: o papel da forma nas arquiteturas de participação em rede*

**ORIENTADOR:** MASSIMO DI FELICE

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**FRANCISCHELLI, Giovanni**

*Regulação e fomento para a produção audiovisual brasileira e independente: uma análise da política do Fundo Setorial do Audiovisual*

**ORIENTADOR:** VÍTOR SOUZA LIMA BLOTTA

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**ORIENTADORA:** MARIA CLOTILDE PEREZ RODRIGUES

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*'O que era preto se tornou vermelho': representação, identidade e autoria negra na imprensa do século XIX por Luiz Gama*

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*O self e suas autorrepresentações nas redes sociais digitais: um estudo de perfis profissionais a partir da semiótica*

ORIENTADOR: ANDERSON VINÍCIUS ROMANINI

doi: <https://doi.org/10.11606/D.27.2020.tde-05032021-205841>

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ORIENTADOR: OTÁVIO BANDEIRA DE LAMÔNICA FREIRE

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*Plataformas digitais de autopublicação: reflexões sobre processos criativos e editoriais*

ORIENTADOR: VÍTOR SOUZA LIMA BLOTTA

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KAZAN, Evelyn Medeiros

*Mulheres periféricas e autorrepresentação: uma análise do Nós, Mulheres da Periferia*

ORIENTADORA: CLAUDIA LAGO

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*O fotolivro como espaço de complexidade e potência para a fotografia documental*

ORIENTADOR: WAGNER SOUZA E SILVA

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*Questões da Comunicação Política e da Cracolândia de São Paulo: um estudo sobre consubstancialidade, deliberação e participação cívica na imprensa*

ORIENTADORA: HELOIZA HELENA MATOS E NOBRE

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*Aproximações entre comunicação, transversalidade e técnicas digitais: um estudo sobre a produção científica de cibercultura no Intercom*

ORIENTADORA: ELIZABETH NICOLAU SAAD CORREA

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*Comunicação organizacional: narrativas de empresas focadas em carreiras de jovens profissionais*

ORIENTADOR: LUIZ ALBERTO BESERRA DE FARIAS

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OSHIRO, Marina Kaori Iura

*League of Legends: do esporte ritual ao esporte eletrônico*

ORIENTADOR: PAULO ROBERTO NASSAR DE OLIVEIRA

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*Fotografia e Identidades: expressão pessoal e representação social*

ORIENTADORA: MARIA CRISTINA CASTILHO COSTA

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*Da manutenção à ruptura do silêncio: a cobertura jornalística da Rede Globo sobre os estupros cometidos pelo médium 'João de Deus'*

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**SENLLE, Renata Garcia**

*Conversas de Mães em Rede: um percurso netnográfico, dos blogs maternos até a Bancada de Mães Ativistas nas eleições de 2018 no Facebook*

**ORIENTADOR: PAULO ROBERTO NASSAR DE OLIVEIRA**

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*Existe amor em app?: Percepções sobre a sexualidade, a prevenção e a comunicação do HIV e da aids entre usuários de aplicativos de relacionamento*

**ORIENTADOR: LEANDRO LEONARDO BATISTA**

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**SOUZA, Gabriel Moni de**

*O futebol brasileiro mediado e midiaticizado: uma análise semiótica da marca Corinthians e suas expressividades*

**ORIENTADORA: MARIA CLOTILDE PEREZ RODRIGUES**

doi: Em processamento

**SOUZA, Manuela Thamani Nascimento de**

*Futuro se faz com a história, e história com o povo dentro: Movimentos Negros na interface da Comunicação e Educação*

**ORIENTADORA: CLAUDIA LAGO**

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*O contemporâneo hiperconectado: realidade aumentada e seus usos nas redes sociais e nos videogames*

**ORIENTADORA: BRASILINA PASSARELLI**

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*Os Stories jornalísticos no Instagram: investigando os novos formatos de narrativas nas mídias sociais*

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**MATRIZes** é um periódico destinado à publicação de estudos que tenham por objeto a comunicação. Acolhe pesquisas teóricas e empíricas sobre processos comunicativos, meios e mediações nas interações sociais. Trata-se de uma publicação aberta às reflexões sobre culturas e linguagens midiáticas e suas implicações sociopolíticas e cognitivas. MATRIZes preserva o horizonte transdisciplinar do pensamento comunicacional e espera redimensionar conhecimento e práticas que contribuam para definir, mapear e explorar os novos cenários comunicacionais. No limite, MATRIZes busca ser um espaço de debates das diferentes perspectivas do campo da Comunicação.



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