

## Introduction

Never in my wildest dreams would I have imagined when I first read *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in 1971 that, a decade later, I would be engaged in a very close collaboration with its author, Paulo Freire—a collaboration that lasted sixteen years until his untimely death on May 2, 1997. Never in my wildest dreams would I have thought that, today, I would have the honor to write an introduction to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the publication of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, a book that according to Stanley Aronowitz, “meets the single criterion of a ‘classic’” in that “it has outlived its own time and its author’s.”

I remember vividly my first encounter with *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, as a colonized young man from Cape Verde who had been struggling with significant questions of cultural identity, yearning to break away from the yoke of Portuguese colonialism. Reading *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* gave me a language to critically understand the tensions, contradictions, fears, doubts, hopes, and “deferred” dreams that are part and parcel of living a borrowed and colonized cultural existence. Reading *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* also gave me the inner strength to begin the arduous process of transcending a colonial existence that is almost culturally schizophrenic: being present and yet not visible, being visible and yet not present. It is a condition that I painfully experienced in the United States, constantly juggling the power asymmetry of the two worlds, two cultures, and two languages. Reading *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* gave me the critical tools to reflect on, and understand, the process through which we come to know what it means to be at the periphery of the intimate yet fragile relationship between the colonizer and the colonized.

Paulo Freire's invigorating critique of the dominant banking model of education leads to his democratic proposals of problem-posing education where "men and women develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality but as a reality in the process of transformation." This offered to me—and all of those who experience subordination through an imposed assimilation policy—a path through which we come to understand what it means to come to cultural voice. It is a process that always involves pain and hope; a process through which, as forced cultural jugglers, we can come to subjectivity, transcending our object position in a society that hosts us yet is alien.

It is not surprising that my friends back in Cape Verde—and, for that matter in most totalitarian states—risked cruel punishment, including imprisonment, if they were caught reading *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. I remember meeting a South African student in Boston who told me that students would photocopy chapters of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and share them with their classmates and peers. Sometimes, given the long list of students waiting to read Freire, they would have to wait for weeks before they were able to get their hands on a photocopied chapter. These students, and students like them in Central America, South America, Tanzania, Chile, Guinea-Bissau and other nations struggling to overthrow totalitarianism and oppression, passionately embraced Freire and his proposals for liberation. It is no wonder that his success in teaching Brazilian peasants how to read landed him in prison and led to a subsequent long and painful exile. Oppressed people all over the world identified with Paulo Freire's denunciation of the oppressive conditions that were choking millions of poor people, including a large number of middle-class families that had bitterly begun to experience the inhumanity of hunger in a potentially very rich and fertile country.

Freire's denunciation of oppression was not merely the intellectual exercise that we often find among many facile liberals and pseudo-critical educators. His intellectual brilliance and courage in denouncing the structures of oppression were rooted in a very real and material experience, as he recounts in *Letters to Cristina*:

It was a real and concrete hunger that had no specific date of departure. Even though it never reached the rigor of the hunger experienced by some people I know, it was not the hunger experienced by those who undergo a tonsil operation or are dieting. On the contrary, our hunger was of the type that arrives unannounced and unauthorized, making itself at home without an end in sight. A hunger that, if it was not softened as ours was, would take over our bodies, molding them into angular shapes. Legs, arms, and fingers become skinny. Eye sockets become deeper, making the eyes almost disappear. Many of our classmates experienced this hunger and today it continues to afflict millions of Brazilians who die of its violence every year.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* has its roots in Paulo Freire's lived experiences:

The experience of hunger as a child of a middle-class family that had lost its economic base enabled Freire to, on the one hand, identify and develop "solidarity with the children from the poor outskirts of town"<sup>2</sup> and, on the other hand, to realize that "in spite of the hunger that gave us solidarity . . . in spite of the bond that united us in our search for ways to survive—our playtime, as far as the poor children were concerned, ranked us as people from another world who happened to fall accidentally into their world."<sup>3</sup> It is the realization of such class borders that led, invariably, to Freire's radical rejection of a class-based society.

Although some strands of postmodernism would dismiss Freire's detailed class analysis in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, it is an enormous mistake, if not academic dishonesty, to pretend that we now live in a classless world. Although Freire understood very well that "material oppression and the affective investments that tie oppressed groups to the logic of domination cannot be grasped in all of their complexity within a singular logic of class struggle,"<sup>4</sup> he consistently argued that a thorough understanding of oppression must always take a detour through some form of class analysis.

Until his death, he courageously denounced the neoliberal position that promotes the false notion of the end of history and the end of class. Freire always viewed history as possibility, "recognizing that History is time filled with possibility and not inexorably determined—



that the future is problematic and not already decided, fatalistically."<sup>5</sup> In like manner, Freire continued to reject any false claim to the end of class struggle. Whereas he continually revised his earlier class analyses, he never abandoned or devalued class as an important theoretical category in our search for a better comprehension of conditions of oppression. In a long dialogue we had during his last visit to New York—in fact, the last time we worked together—he again said that although one cannot reduce everything to class, class remains an important factor in our understanding of multiple forms of oppression. While poststructuralists may want to proclaim the end of class analysis, they still have to account for the horrendous human conditions that led, as Freire recounted, a family in Northeast Brazil to scavenge a landfill and take "pieces of an amputated human breast with which they prepared their Sunday lunch."<sup>6</sup>

Freire also never accepted the "poststructuralism tendency to translate diverse forms of class, race, and gender based oppression to the discursive space of subject positions."<sup>7</sup> He always appreciated the theoretical complexity of multifactor analyses while never underestimating the role of class. For example, he resisted the essentialist approach of reducing all analysis to one monolithic entity of race. For instance, African functionaries who assimilate to colonial cultural values constitute a distinct class with very different ideological cultural values and aspirations than the bulk of the population. Likewise, it would be a mistake to view all African Americans as one monolithic cultural group without marked differences: United States Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas is black, after all (and conservative). Somewhat similar gulfs exist between the vast mass of African Americans who remain subordinated and reduced to ghettos and middle-class African Americans who, in some sense, have also partly abandoned the subordinated mass of African Americans. I am reminded of a discussion I had with a personal friend of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who had joined him in the important struggle to end segregation and oppression during the 1960s. During our discussion, King's friend remarked, "Donaldo, you are right. We are using euphemisms such as 'economically marginal' and avoid more pointed terms like 'oppres-

sion.' I confess that I often feel uneasy when I am invited to discuss at institutions issues pertaining to the community. In reality, I haven't been there in over twenty years." Having achieved great personal success and having moved to a middle-class reality, this African American gentleman began to experience a distance from other African Americans who remain abandoned in ghettos.

In a recent discussion with a group of students, a young African American man who attends an Ivy League university told me that his parents usually vote with the white middle class, even if, in the long run, their vote is detrimental to the reality of most black people. Thus, we see again that race, itself, is not necessarily a unifying force.

Freire never abandoned his position with respect to class analysis as theorized in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. However, as he continually did, he reconstituted his earlier position throughout the years, particularly in our co-authored book *Ideology Matters*. In it Freire argues that whereas, for example, "one cannot reduce the analysis of racism to social class, one cannot understand racism fully without a class analysis, for to do one at the expense of the other is to fall prey into a sectarianist position, which is as despicable as the racism that we need to reject."<sup>8</sup> In essence, Freire's later works make it clear that what is important is to approach the analysis of oppression through a convergent theoretical framework where the object of oppression is cut across by such factors as race, class, gender, culture, language, and ethnicity. Thus, he would reject any theoretical analysis that would collapse the multiplicity of factors into a monolithic entity, including class.

Although Freire was readily embraced in societies struggling against colonialism and other forms of totalitarianism, his acceptance in the so-called open and democratic societies, such as the United States and the nations of Western Europe, has been more problematic. Even though he has an international reputation and following, his work is, sadly, not central to the curricula of most schools of education whose major responsibility is to prepare the next generation of teachers. This relative marginality of Freire's work in the school-of-education curricula is partly due to the fact that most of

these schools are informed by the positivistic and management models that characterize the very culture of ideologies and practices to which Freire was in opposition all his life. For example, the Harvard Graduate School of Education sanctions a graduate course called "Literacy Politics and Policies" without requiring students to read, critique, and analyze the work of Freire. In fact, one can get a doctoral degree from this school, or from others, without ever learning about, much less reading, Paulo Freire. This is tantamount to getting a doctoral degree in Linguistics without ever reading Noam Chomsky. The following illustrates my point. In a lecture at Harvard that analyzed Paulo Freire's theories, given by Professor Ramón Flecha from the University of Barcelona, a doctoral student approached me and asked the following: "I don't want to sound naive, but who is this Paulo Freire that Professor Flecha is citing so much?" I wonder, how can one expect this doctoral student to know the work of "perhaps the most significant educator in the world during the last half of the century" in the words of Herbert Kohl,<sup>9</sup> when his graduate school pretends that Paulo Freire never existed?

Whereas students in the Third World and other nations struggling with totalitarian regimes would risk their freedom, if not their lives, to read Paulo Freire, in our so-called open societies his work suffers from a more sophisticated form of censorship: omission. This "academic selective selection" of bodies of knowledge, which borders on censorship of critical educators, is partly to blame for the lack of knowledge of Paulo Freire's significant contributions to the field of education. Even many liberals who have embraced his ideas and educational practices often reduce his theoretical work and leading philosophical ideas to a mechanical methodology. I am reminded of a panel that was convened to celebrate Freire's life and work at Harvard after his death. In a large conference room filled to capacity and with people standing in hallways, a panelist who had obviously reduced Freire's leading ideas to a mechanized dialogical practice passed a note to the moderator of the panel suggesting that she give everyone in the room twenty seconds to say something in keeping with the spirit of Freire. This was the way *not* to engage Freire's belief in

emancipation—unless one believes that his complex theory of oppression can be reduced to a twenty-second sound bite. Part of the problem with this mechanization of Freire's leading philosophical and political ideas is that many pseudocritical educators, in the name of liberation pedagogy, often sloganize Freire by straitjacketing his revolutionary politics to an empty cliché of the dialogical method. Pseudo-Freirean educators not only strip him of the essence of his radical pedagogical proposals that go beyond the classroom boundaries and effect significant changes in the society as well: these educators also fail to understand the epistemological relationship of dialogue. According to Freire,

In order to understand the meaning of dialogical practice, we have to put aside the simplistic understanding of dialogue as a mere technique. Dialogue does not represent a somewhat false path that I attempt to elaborate on and realize in the sense of involving the ingenuity of the other. On the contrary, dialogue characterizes an epistemological relationship. Thus, in this sense, dialogue is a way of knowing and should never be viewed as a mere tactic to involve students in a particular task. We have to make this point very clear. I engage in dialogue not necessarily because I like the other person. I engage in dialogue because I recognize the social and not merely the individualistic character of the process of knowing. In this sense, dialogue presents itself as an indispensable component of the process of both learning and knowing.<sup>10</sup>

Unfortunately, in the United States, many educators who claim to be Freirean in their pedagogical orientation mistakenly transform Freire's notion of dialogue into a method, thus losing sight of the fact that the fundamental goal of dialogical teaching is to create a process of learning and knowing that invariably involves theorizing about the experiences shared in the dialogue process. Some strands of critical pedagogy engage in an overdose of experiential celebration that offers a reductionistic view of identity, leading Henry Giroux to point out that such pedagogy leaves identity and experience removed from the problematics of power, agency, and history. By overindulging in the



legacy and importance of their respective voices and experiences, these educators often fail to move beyond a notion of difference structured in polarizing binarisms and uncritical appeals to the discourse of experience. I believe that it is for this reason that some of these educators invoke a romantic pedagogical mode that "exoticizes" discussing lived experiences as a process of coming to voice. At the same time, educators who misinterpret Freire's notion of dialogical teaching also refuse to link experiences to the politics of culture and critical democracy, thus reducing their pedagogy to a form of middle-class narcissism. This creates, on the one hand, the transformation of dialogical teaching into a method invoking conversation that provides participants with a group-therapy space for stating their grievances. On the other hand, it offers the teacher as facilitator a safe pedagogical zone to deal with his or her class guilt. It is a process that bell hooks characterizes as nauseating in that it brooks no dissent. Simply put, as Freire reminded us, "what these educators are calling dialogical is a process that hides the true nature of dialogue as a process of learning and knowing. . . . Understanding dialogue as a process of learning and knowing establishes a previous requirement that always involves an epistemological curiosity about the very elements of the dialogue."<sup>11</sup> That is to say, dialogue must require an ever-present curiosity about the object of knowledge. Thus, dialogue is never an end in itself but a means to develop a better comprehension about the object of knowledge. Otherwise, one could end up with dialogue as conversation where individual lived experiences are given primacy. I have been in many contexts where the over-celebration of one's own location and history often eclipses the possibility of engaging the object of knowledge by refusing to struggle directly, for instance, with readings involving an object of knowledge, particularly if these readings involve theory.

As Freire himself decidedly argued,

Curiosity about the object of knowledge and the willingness and openness to engage theoretical readings and discussions is fundamental. However, I am not suggesting an over-celebration of

theory. We must not negate practice for the sake of theory. To do so would reduce theory to a pure verbalism or intellectualism. By the same token, to negate theory for the sake of practice, as in the use of dialogue as conversation, is to run the risk of losing oneself in the disconnectedness of practice. It is for this reason that I never advocate either a theoretic elitism or a practice ungrounded in theory, but the unity between theory and practice. In order to achieve this unity, one must have an epistemological curiosity—a curiosity that is often missing in dialogue as conversation.<sup>12</sup>

That is, when students lack both the necessary epistemological curiosity and a certain conviviality with the object of knowledge under study, it is difficult to create conditions that increase their epistemological curiosity in order to develop the necessary intellectual tools that will enable him or her to apprehend and comprehend the object of knowledge. If students are not able to transform their lived experiences into knowledge and to use the already acquired knowledge as a process to unveil new knowledge, they will never be able to participate rigorously in a dialogue as a process of learning and knowing. In truth, how can one dialogue without any prior apprenticeship with the object of knowledge and without any epistemological curiosity? For example, how can anyone dialogue about linguistics if the teacher refuses to create the pedagogical conditions that will apprentice students into the new body of knowledge? By this I do not mean that the apprenticeship process should be reduced to the authoritarian tradition of lecturing without student input and discussion. What becomes very clear is that the bureaucratization of the dialogical process represents yet another mechanism used by even some progressive educators to diminish Freire's radical revolutionary and transformative proposals through a process that gives rise to politics without content. Thus, it is not surprising that some liberals join conservative educators to critique Freire for what they characterize as "radical ties." For example, Gregory Jay and Gerald Graff have argued that Freire's proposal in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to move students toward "a critical perception of the world"—which "implies a correct method of approaching reality" so that they can get "a comprehension of total

reality"—assumes that Freire already knows the identity of the oppressed. As Jay and Graff point out, "Freire assumes that we know from the outset the identity of the 'oppressed' and their 'oppressors.' Who the oppressors and the oppressed are is conceived not as an open question that teachers and students might disagree about, but as a given of Freirean pedagogy."<sup>13</sup> This form of critique presupposes that education should be nondirective and neutral, a posture that Freire always opposed: "I must intervene in teaching the peasants that their hunger is socially constructed and work with them to help identify those responsible for this social construction, which is, in my view, a crime against humanity."<sup>14</sup> Therefore, we need to intervene not only pedagogically but also ethically. Before any intervention, however, an educator must have political clarity—posture that makes many liberals like Graff very uncomfortable to the degree that he considers "Radical educational theorists such as Freire, Henry Giroux, and Stanley Aronowitz . . . [as having a] tunnel-vision style of . . . writing . . . which speaks of but never to those who oppose its premises."<sup>15</sup>

The assumption that Freire, Giroux, and Aronowitz engage in a "tunnel-vision style of . . . writing" is not only false: it also points to a distorted notion that there is an *a priori* agreed-upon style of writing that is monolithic, available to all, and "free of jargon." This blind and facile call for writing clarity represents a pernicious mechanism used by academic liberals who suffocate discourses different from their own. Such a call often ignores how language is being used to make social inequality invisible. It also assumes that the only way to deconstruct ideologies of oppression is through a discourse that involves what these academics characterize as a language of clarity.

When I was working with Freire on the book *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*, I asked a colleague whom I considered to be politically aggressive and to have a keen understanding of Freire's work to read the manuscript. Yet, during a discussion we had about this, she asked me, a bit irritably, "Why do you and Paulo insist on using Marxist jargon? Many readers who may enjoy reading Paulo may be put off by the jargon." I was at first taken aback, but proceeded to explain calmly to her that the equation of Marxism with jargon did

not fully capture the richness of Freire's analysis. In fact, I reminded her that Freire's language was the only means through which he could have done justice to the complexity of the various concepts dealing with oppression. For one thing, I reminded her, "Imagine that instead of writing *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Freire had written *Pedagogy of the Disenfranchised*." The first title utilizes a discourse that names the oppressor, whereas the second fails to do so. If you have an "oppressed," you must have an "oppressor." What would be the counterpart of disenfranchised? "*Pedagogy of the Disenfranchised*" dislodges the agent of the action while leaving in doubt who bears the responsibility for such action. This leaves the ground wide open for blaming the victim of disenfranchisement for his or her own disenfranchisement. This example is a clear case in which the object of oppression can also be understood as the subject of oppression. Language like this distorts reality.

And yet, mainstream academics like Graff seldom object to these linguistic distortions that disfigure reality. I seldom hear academics on a crusade for "language clarity" equate mainstream terms such as "disenfranchised" or "ethnic cleansing," for example, to jargon status. On the one hand, they readily accept "ethnic cleansing," a euphemism for genocide, while, on the other hand, they will, with certain automatism, point to the jargon quality of terms such as "oppression," "subordination," and "praxis." If we were to deconstruct the term "ethnic cleansing" we would see that it prevents us from becoming horrified by Serbian brutality and horrendous crimes against Bosnian Muslims. The mass killing of women, children, and the elderly and the rape of women and girls as young as five years old take on the positive attribute of "cleansing," which leads us to conjure a reality of "purification" of the ethnic "filth" ascribed to Bosnian Muslims, in particular, and to Muslims the world over, in general.

I also seldom heard any real protest from the same academics who want "language clarity" when, during the Gulf War, the horrific blood bath of the battlefield became a "theater of operation," and the violent killing of over one hundred thousand Iraqis, including innocent women, children, and the elderly by our "smart bombs," was sanitized



into a technical term: "collateral damage." I can go on with examples to point out how academics who argue for clarity of language not only seldom object to language that obfuscates reality, but often use the same language as part of the general acceptance that the "standard" discourse is given and should remain unproblematic. Although these academics accept the dominant standard discourse, they aggressively object to any discourse that both fractures the dominant language and bares the veiled reality in order to name it. Thus, a discourse that names it becomes, in their view, imprecise and unclear, and wholesale euphemisms such as "disadvantaged," "disenfranchised," "educational mortality," "theater of operation," "collateral damage," and "ethnic cleansing" remain unchallenged since they are part of the dominant social construction of images that are treated as unproblematic and clear.

I am often amazed to hear academics complain about the complexity of a particular discourse because of its alleged lack of clarity. It is as if they have assumed that there is a mono-discourse that is characterized by its clarity and is also equally available to all. If one begins to probe the issue of clarity, we soon realize that it is class specific, thus favoring those of that class in the meaning-making process.

The following two examples will bring the point home: Henry Giroux and I gave a speech at Massasoit Community College in Massachusetts to approximately three hundred unwed mothers who were part of a GED (graduate-equivalency diploma) program. The director of the program later informed us that most of the students were considered functionally illiterate. After Giroux's speech, during the question-and-answer period, a woman got up and eloquently said, "Professor Giroux, all my life I felt the things you talked about. I just didn't have a language to express what I have felt. Today I have come to realize that I do have a language. Thank you." And Paulo Freire told me the story of what happened to him at the time he was preparing the English translation of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He gave an African American student at Harvard a chapter of the book to read to see how she would receive it. A few days later when he asked the

woman if she had read it, she enthusiastically responded, "Yes. Not only did I read it, but I gave it to my sixteen-year-old son to read. He read the whole chapter that night and in the morning said, 'I want to meet the man who wrote this. He is talking about me.'" One question that I have for all those "highly literate" academics who find Giroux's and Freire's discourse so difficult to understand is, Why is it that a sixteen-year-old boy and a poor, "semiliterate" woman could so easily understand and connect with the complexity of both Freire and Giroux's language and ideas, and the academics, who should be the most literate, find the language incomprehensible?

I believe that the answer has little to do with language and everything to do with ideology. That is, people often identify with representations that they are either comfortable with or that help deepen their understanding of themselves. The call for language clarity is an ideological issue, not merely a linguistic one. The sixteen-year-old and the semiliterate poor woman could readily connect with Freire's ideology, whereas the highly literate academics are "put off" by some dimensions of the same ideology. It is, perhaps, for this reason that a university professor I know failed to include Freire's work in a graduate course that she taught on literacy. When I raised the issue with her, she explained that students often find Freire's writing too difficult and cumbersome. It could also be the reason that the Divinity School at Harvard University offers a course entitled "Education for Liberation," in which students study Freire and James Cone extensively, whereas no such opportunities are available at Harvard's School of Education.

For me, the mundane call for a language of "simplicity and clarity" represents yet another mechanism to dismiss the complexity of theoretical issues, particularly if these theoretical constructs interrogate the prevailing dominant ideology. It is for this very reason that Gayatri Spivak correctly points out that the call for "plain prose cheats." I would go a step further and say, "The call for plain prose not only cheats, it also bleaches."

For me, it is not only plain prose that bleaches. Gerald Graff's pedagogy of "teaching the conflict" also bleaches to the extent that it

robs students of the opportunity to access the critical discourses that will enable them not only to deconstruct the colonial and hegemonic paradigms, but will also help them realize that one cannot teach conflict as if, all of a sudden, it fell from the sky. The conflict must be anchored in those competing histories and ideologies that generated the conflict in the first place. David Goldberg captures this problem when he argues that Graff's suggestion:

presupposes that educators—even the humanists of Graff's address—occupy a neutral position, or at least can suspend their prejudices, in presenting the conflicts, and that the conflicts are fixed and immobile. One cannot teach the conflicts (or anything else, for that matter) by assuming this neutral "view from nowhere," for it is no view at all. In other words, the Assumption of a View from Nowhere is the projection of local values as neutrally universal ones, the globalizing of ethnocentric values, as Stam and Shohat put it.<sup>16</sup>

The problem with the teaching of the conflict is that the only referent for engaging authority is a methodological one. As a result, Graff demeans the ability of oppressed people to name their oppression as a pedagogical necessity and, at the same time, he dismisses the politics of pedagogy that "could empower 'minorities' and build on privileged students' minimal experience of 'otherization'" to help them imagine alternative subject positions and divergent social designs.<sup>17</sup>

As one can readily see, the mechanization of Freire's revolutionary pedagogical proposals not only leads to the depolitization of his radically democratic work but also creates spaces for even those liberals who embrace Freire's proposals to confuse "the term he employs to summarize his approach to education, 'pedagogy' [which] is often interpreted as a 'teaching' method rather than a philosophy or a social theory. Few who invoke his name make the distinction. To be sure, neither does *The Oxford English Dictionary*."<sup>18</sup> This seeming lack of distinction is conveniently adopted by those educators who believe that education is neutral as they engage in a social construction of not

seeing. That is, they willfully refuse to understand that the very term "pedagogy," as my good friend and colleague Panagiota Gounari explains it, has Greek roots, meaning "to lead a child" (from *pais*: child and *ago*: to lead). Thus, as the term "pedagogy" illustrates, education is inherently directive and must always be transformative. As Stanley Aronowitz so succinctly argues, "Freire's pedagogy is grounded in a fully developed philosophical anthropology, that is, a theory of human nature, one might say a secular liberation theology, containing its own categories that are irreducible to virtually any other philosophy."<sup>19</sup> The misinterpretation of Freire's philosophical and revolutionary pedagogical proposals in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and his subsequent books lies not only in the depolitization of his revolutionary aim "to transform what Frantz Fanon terms 'the wretched of the earth' from 'being for others' to 'beings for themselves,'"<sup>20</sup> but also in the disarticulation of Freire's thinking from his enormous debt to a philosophical tradition that included Marx, Gramsci, Hegel, and Sartre among others.

Although I was immobilized when I received the devastating news that Paulo Freire, my friend, my collaborator, my teacher, and my mentor, had died, I found comfort in the certainty that *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* had indeed "outlived its own time and its author's." I found comfort in the immeasurable hope that Paulo represented for those of us who are committed to imagine a world, in his own words, that is less ugly, more beautiful, less discriminatory, more democratic, less dehumanizing, and more humane. In his work and in his life, Paulo teaches us and the world—with his hallmark humility—what it means to be an intellectual who fights against the temptation of becoming a populist intellectual. As always, he teaches us with his penetrating and unquiet mind the meaning of a profound commitment to fight social injustices in our struggle to recapture the loss of our dignity as human beings. In Paulo's own words:

We need to say no to the neoliberal fatalism that we are witnessing at the end of this century, informed by the ethics of the market, an ethics in which a minority makes most profits against



the lives of the majority. In other words, those who cannot compete, die. This is a perverse ethics that, in fact, lacks ethics. I insist on saying that I continue to be human... I would then remain the last educator in the world to say no: I do not accept... history as determinism. I embrace history as possibility [where] we can demystify the evil in this perverse fatalism that characterizes the neoliberal discourse in the end of this century.<sup>21</sup>

Paulo Freire did not realize his dream of entering the twenty-first century full of hope for "a world that is more round, less ugly, and more just." Although he did not hold our hands as we crossed the threshold of the twenty-first century, his words of wisdom, his penetrating and insightful ideas, his courage to denounce in order to announce, his courage to love and "to speak about love without fear of being called ascientific, if not antiscientific," his humility, and his humanity make him immortal—a forever-present force that keeps alive our understanding of history as possibility.

I always accepted with humility Paulo's challenge through the coherence and humility he exemplified. With much sadness, *magoa*, but also with much affection and hope, I say, once more, thank you Paulo: for having been present in the world, for having given us *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, for having taught us how to read the world and for challenging us to humanize the world.

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## Notes

1. Paulo Freire, *Letters to Cristina*. (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 15.
2. Ibid. p. 21.
3. Ibid.
4. Henry A. Giroux, "Radical Pedagogy and Educated Hope: Remembering Paulo Freire." Typewritten manuscript.
5. Ibid.
6. Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo, *Ideology Matters* (Boulder CO: Rowman & Littlefield), forthcoming.
7. Henry A. Giroux, "Radical Pedagogy and Educated Hope."
8. Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo, *Ideology Matters*.
9. Herbert Kohl, "Paulo Freire: Liberation Pedagogy" in *The Nation*, May 26, 1997, p. 7.
10. Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo, "A Dialogue: Culture, Language, and Race" in *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 65, no. 3, fall 1995, p. 379.
11. Ibid. p. 382.
12. Ibid.
13. Gregory Jay and Gerald Graff, "A Critique of Critical Pedagogy," *Higher Education under Fire*, ed. Michael Barube and Gary Nelson (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 203.
14. Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo, "A Dialogue: Culture, Language, and Race," p. 379.
15. Gerald Graff, "Academic Writing and the Uses of Bad Publicity," *Eloquent Obsessions*, ed. Mariana Torgormick (Chapel Hill: Duke University Press, 1994), p. 215.
16. David Theo Goldberg, "Introduction," *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Theo Goldberg (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1994), p. 19.
17. Robert Stam and Ella Shohat, "Contested Histories? Eurocentrism, Multiculturalism, and the Media," *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader*, p. 19.
18. Stanley Aronowitz, "Paulo Freire's Radical Democratic Humanism" in Peter McLaren and Peter Leonard, *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 8.
19. Ibid. p. 12.
20. Ibid. p. 13.
21. Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo, *Ideology Matters*.

## Foreword

Over the years, the thought and work of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire have spread from the North East of Brazil to an entire continent, and have made a profound impact not only in the field of education but also in the overall struggle for national development. At the precise moment when the disinherited masses in Latin America are awakening from their traditional lethargy and are anxious to participate, as Subjects, in the development of their countries, Paulo Freire has perfected a method for teaching illiterates that has contributed, in an extraordinary way, to that process. In fact, those who, in learning to read and write, come to a new awareness of selfhood and begin to look critically at the social situation in which they find themselves, often take the initiative in acting to transform the society that has denied them this opportunity of participation. Education is once again a subversive force.

In this country, we are gradually becoming aware of the work of Paulo Freire, but thus far we have thought of it primarily in terms of its contribution to the education of illiterate adults in the Third World. If, however, we take a closer look, we may discover that his methodology as well as his educational philosophy are as important for us as for the dispossessed in Latin America. Their struggle to become free Subjects and to participate in the transformation of their society is similar, in many ways, to the struggle not only of blacks and Mexican-Americans but also of middle-class young people in this country. And the sharpness and intensity of that struggle in the developing world may well provide us with new insight, new models, and a new hope as we face our own situation. For this reason, I consider the publication of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in an English edition to be something of an event.



Paulo Freire's thought represents the response of a creative mind and sensitive conscience to the extraordinary misery and suffering of the oppressed around him. Born in 1921 in Recife, the center of one of the most extreme situations of poverty and underdevelopment in the Third World, he was soon forced to experience that reality directly. As the economic crisis in 1929 in the United States began to affect Brazil, the precarious stability of Freire's middle-class family gave way and he found himself sharing the plight of the "wretched of the earth." This had a profound influence on his life as he came to know the gnawing pangs of hunger and fell behind in school because of the listlessness it produced; it also led him to make a vow, at age eleven, to dedicate his life to the struggle against hunger, so that other children would not have to know the agony he was then experiencing.

His early sharing of the life of the poor also led him to the discovery of what he describes as the "culture of silence" of the dispossessed. He came to realize that their ignorance and lethargy were the direct product of the whole situation of economic, social, and political domination—and of the paternalism—of which they were victims. Rather than being encouraged and equipped to know and respond to the concrete realities of their world, they were kept "submerged" in a situation in which such critical awareness and response were practically impossible. And it became clear to him that the whole educational system was one of the major instruments for the maintenance of this culture of silence.

Confronted by this problem in a very existential way, Freire turned his attention to the field of education and began to work on it. Over the years, he has engaged in a process of study and reflection that has produced something quite new and creative in educational philosophy. From a situation of direct engagement in the struggle to liberate men and women for the creation of a new world, he has reached out to the thought and experience of those in many different situations and of diverse philosophical positions: in his words, to "Sartre and Mounier, Erich Fromm and Louis Althusser, Ortega y Gasset and Mao, Martin Luther King and Che Guevara,

Unamuno and Marcuse." He has made use of the insights of these men to develop a perspective on education which is authentically his own and which seeks to respond to the concrete realities of Latin America.

His thought on the philosophy of education was first expressed in 1959 in his doctoral dissertation at the University of Recife, and later in his work as Professor of the History and Philosophy of Education in the same university, as well as in his early experiments with the teaching of illiterates in that same city. The methodology he developed was widely used by Catholics and others in literacy campaigns throughout the North East of Brazil, and was considered such a threat to the old order that Freire was jailed immediately after the military coup in 1964. Released seventy days later and encouraged to leave the country, Freire went to Chile, where he spent five years working with UNESCO and the Chilean Institute for Agrarian Reform in programs of adult education. He then acted as a consultant at Harvard University's School of Education, and worked in close association with a number of groups engaged in new educational experiments in rural and urban areas. He is presently serving as Special Consultant to the Office of Education of the World Council of Churches in Geneva.

Freire has written many articles in Portuguese and Spanish, and his first book, *Educação como Prática da Liberdade*, was published in Brazil in 1967. His latest and most complete work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, is the first of his writings to be published in this country.

In this brief introduction, there is no point in attempting to sum up, in a few paragraphs, what the author develops in a number of pages. That would be an offense to the richness, depth, and complexity of his thought. But perhaps a word of witness has its place here—a personal witness as to why I find a dialogue with the thought of Paulo Freire an exciting adventure. Fed up as I am with the abstractness and sterility of so much intellectual work in academic circles today, I am excited by a process of reflection which is set in a thoroughly historical context, which is carried on in the

midst of a struggle to create a new social order and thus represents a new unity of theory and *praxis*. And I am encouraged when a man of the stature of Paulo Freire incarnates a rediscovery of the humanizing vocation of the intellectual, and demonstrates the power of thought to negate accepted limits and open the way to a new future.

Freire is able to do this because he operates on one basic assumption: that man's ontological vocation (as he calls it) is to be a Subject who acts upon and transforms his world, and in so doing moves toward ever new possibilities of fuller and richer life individually and collectively. This *world* to which he relates is not a static and closed order, a *given* reality which man must accept and to which he must adjust; rather, it is a problem to be worked on and solved. It is the material used by man to create history, a task which he performs as he overcomes that which is dehumanizing at any particular time and place and dares to create the qualitatively new. For Freire, the resources for that task at the present time are provided by the advanced technology of our Western world, but the social vision which impels us to negate the present order and demonstrate that history has not ended comes primarily from the suffering and struggle of the people of the Third World.

Coupled with this is Freire's conviction (now supported by a wide background of experience) that every human being, no matter how "ignorant" or submerged in the "culture of silence" he or she may be, is capable of looking critically at the world in a dialogical encounter with others. Provided with the proper tools for such encounter, the individual can gradually perceive personal and social reality as well as the contradictions in it, become conscious of his or her own perception of that reality, and deal critically with it. In this process, the old, paternalistic teacher-student relationship is overcome. A peasant can facilitate this process for a neighbor more effectively than a "teacher" brought in from outside. "People educate each other through the mediation of the world."

As this happens, the word takes on new power. It is no longer an abstraction or magic but a means by which people discover them-

selves and their potential as they give names to things around them. As Freire puts it, each individual wins back the right to *say his or her own word, to name the world*.

When an illiterate peasant participates in this sort of educational experience, he or she comes to a new awareness of self, has a new sense of dignity, and is stirred by a new hope. Time and again, peasants have expressed these discoveries in striking ways after a few hours of class: "I now realize I am a person, an educated person." "We were blind, now our eyes have been opened." "Before this, words meant nothing to me; now they speak to me and I can make them speak." "Now we will no longer be a dead weight on the cooperative farm." When this happens in the process of learning to read, men and women discover that they are creators of culture, and that all their work can be creative. "I work, and working I transform the world." And as those who have been completely marginalized are so radically transformed, they are no longer willing to be mere objects, responding to changes occurring around them; they are more likely to decide to take upon themselves the struggle to change the structures of society, which until now have served to oppress them. For this reason, a distinguished Brazilian student of national development recently affirmed that this type of educational work among the people represents a new factor in social change and development, "a new instrument of conduct for the Third World, by which it can overcome traditional structures and enter the modern world."

At first sight, Paulo Freire's method of teaching illiterates in Latin America seems to belong to a different world from that in which we find ourselves in this country. Certainly, it would be absurd to claim that it should be copied here. But there are certain parallels in the two situations that should not be overlooked. Our advanced technological society is rapidly making objects of most of us and subtly programming us into conformity to the logic of its system. To the degree that this happens, we are also becoming submerged in a new "culture of silence."

The paradox is that the same technology that does this to us also



creates a new sensitivity to what is happening. Especially among young people, the new media together with the erosion of old concepts of authority open the way to acute awareness of this new bondage. The young perceive that their right to say their own word has been stolen from them, and that few things are more important than the struggle to win it back. And they also realize that the educational system today—from kindergarten to university—is their enemy.

There is no such thing as a *neutral* educational process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes "the practice of freedom," the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. The development of an educational methodology that facilitates this process will inevitably lead to tension and conflict within our society. But it could also contribute to the formation of a new man and mark the beginning of a new era in Western history. For those who are committed to that task and are searching for concepts and tools for experimentation, Paulo Freire's thought will make a significant contribution in the years ahead.

RICHARD SHAULL

## Preface

These pages, which introduce *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, result from my observations during six years of political exile, observations which have enriched those previously afforded by my educational activities in Brazil.

I have encountered, both in training courses which analyze the role of *conscientização*<sup>1</sup> and in actual experimentation with a truly liberating education, the "fear of freedom" discussed in the first chapter of this book. Not infrequently, training course participants call attention to "the danger of *conscientização*" in a way that reveals their own fear of freedom. Critical consciousness, they say, is anarchic. Others add that critical consciousness may lead to disorder. Some, however, confess: Why deny it? I was afraid of freedom. I am no longer afraid!

In one of these discussions, the group was debating whether the *conscientização* of men and women to a specific situation of injustice might not lead them to "destructive fanaticism" or to a "sensation of total collapse of their world." In the midst of the argument, a person who previously had been a factory worker for many years spoke out: "Perhaps I am the only one here of working-class origin. I can't say that I've understood everything you've said just now, but I can say one thing—when I began this course I was *naïve*, and when I found out how naïve I was, I started to get *critical*. But this discovery hasn't made me a fanatic, and I don't feel any collapse either."

1. The term *conscientização* refers to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality. See chapter 3.—Translator's note.

Doubt regarding the possible effects of *conscientização* implies a premise which the doubter does not always make explicit: It is better for the victims of injustice not to recognize themselves as such. In fact, however, *conscientização* does not lead people to "destructive fanaticism." On the contrary, by making it possible for people to enter the historical process as responsible Subjects,<sup>2</sup> *conscientização* enrolls them in the search for self-affirmation and thus avoids fanaticism.

The awakening of critical consciousness leads the way to the expression of social discontents precisely because these discontents are real components of an oppressive situation.<sup>3</sup>

Fear of freedom, of which its possessor is not necessarily aware, makes him see ghosts. Such an individual is actually taking refuge in an attempt to achieve security, which he or she prefers to the risks of liberty. As Hegel testifies:

It is solely by risking life that freedom is obtained; . . . the individual who has not staked his or her life may, no doubt, be recognized as a Person; but he or she has not attained the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness.<sup>4</sup>

Men and women rarely admit their fear of freedom openly, however, tending rather to camouflage it—sometimes unconsciously—by presenting themselves as defenders of freedom. They give their doubts and misgivings an air of profound sobriety, as befitting custodians of freedom. But they confuse freedom with the maintenance of the status quo; so that if *conscientização* threatens to place that status quo in question, it thereby seems to constitute a threat to freedom itself.

2. The term *Subjects* denotes those who know and act, in contrast to *objects*, which are known and acted upon.—Translator's note.

3. Francisco Weffort, in the preface to Paulo Freire, *Educação como Prática da Liberdade* (Rio de Janeiro, 1967).

4. Georg Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind* (New York, 1967), p. 233.

Thought and study alone did not produce *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*; it is rooted in concrete situations and describes the reactions of laborers (peasant or urban) and of middle-class persons whom I have observed directly or indirectly during the course of my educative work. Continued observation will afford me an opportunity to modify or to corroborate in later studies the points proposed in this introductory work.

This volume will probably arouse negative reactions in a number of readers. Some will regard my position vis-à-vis the problem of human liberation as purely idealistic, or may even consider discussion of ontological vocation, love, dialogue, hope, humility, and sympathy as so much reactionary "blah." Others will not (or will not wish to) accept my denunciation of a state of oppression that gratifies the oppressors. Accordingly, this admittedly tentative work is for radicals. I am certain that Christians and Marxists, though they may disagree with me in part or in whole, will continue reading to the end. But the reader who dogmatically assumes closed, "irrational" positions will reject the dialogue I hope this book will open.

Sectarianism, fed by fanaticism, is always castrating. Radicalization, nourished by a critical spirit, is always creative. Sectarianism mythicizes and thereby alienates; radicalization criticizes and thereby liberates. Radicalization involves increased commitment to the position one has chosen, and thus ever greater engagement in the effort to transform concrete, objective reality. Conversely, sectarianism, because it is mythicizing and irrational, turns reality into a false (and therefore unchangeable) "reality."

Sectarianism in any quarter is an obstacle to the emancipation of mankind. The rightist version thereof does not always, unfortunately, call forth its natural counterpart: radicalization of the revolutionary. Not infrequently, revolutionaries themselves become reactionary by falling into sectarianism in the process of responding to the sectarianism of the Right. This possibility, however, should not lead the radical to become a docile pawn of the elites. Engaged in the process of liberation, he or she cannot remain passive in the face of the oppressor's violence.



On the other hand, the radical is never a subjectivist. For this individual the subjective aspect exists only in relation to the objective aspect (the concrete reality, which is the object of analysis). Subjectivity and objectivity thus join in a dialectical unity producing knowledge in solidarity with action, and vice versa.

For his or her part, the sectarian of whatever persuasion, blinded by irrationality, does not (or cannot) perceive the dynamic of reality—or else misinterprets it. Should this person think dialectically, it is with a “domesticated dialectic.” The rightist sectarian (whom I have previously termed a *born sectarian*<sup>5</sup>) wants to slow down the historical process, to “domesticate” time and thus to domesticate men and women. The leftist-turned-sectarian goes totally astray when he or she attempts to interpret reality and history dialectically, and falls into essentially fatalistic positions.

The rightist sectarian differs from his or her leftist counterpart in that the former attempts to domesticate the present so that (he or she hopes) the future will reproduce this domesticated present, while the latter considers the future pre-established—a kind of inevitable fate, fortune, or destiny. For the rightist sectarian, “today,” linked to the past, is something given and immutable; for the leftist sectarian, “tomorrow” is decreed beforehand, is inexorably preordained. This rightist and this leftist are both reactionary because, starting from their respectively false views of history, both develop forms of action that negate freedom. The fact that one person imagines a “well-behaved” present and the other a predetermined future does not mean that they therefore fold their arms and become spectators (the former expecting that the present will continue, the latter waiting for the already “known” future to come to pass). On the contrary, closing themselves into “circles of certainty” from which they cannot escape, these individuals “make” their own truth. It is not the truth of men and women who struggle to build the future, running the risks involved in this very construction. Nor is it the truth of men and women who fight side by side and learn together

5. In *Educação como Prática da Liberdade*.

how to build this future—which is not something given to be received by people, but is rather something to be created by them. Both types of sectarian, treating history in an equally proprietary fashion, end up without the people—which is another way of being against them.

Whereas the rightist sectarian, closing himself in “his” truth, does no more than fulfill a natural role, the leftist who becomes sectarian and rigid negates his or her very nature. Each, however, as he revolves about “his” truth, feels threatened if that truth is questioned. Thus, each considers anything that is not “his” truth a lie. As the journalist Marcio Moreira Alves once told me, “They both suffer from an absence of doubt.”

The radical, committed to human liberation, does not become the prisoner of a “circle of certainty” within which reality is also imprisoned. On the contrary, the more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can better transform it. This individual is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled. This person is not afraid to meet the people or to enter into dialogue with them.<sup>6</sup> This person does not consider himself or herself the proprietor of history or of all people, or the liberator of the oppressed; but he or she does commit himself or herself, within history, to fight at their side.

The pedagogy of the oppressed, the introductory outlines of which are presented in the following pages, is a task for radicals; it cannot be carried out by sectarians.

I will be satisfied if among the readers of this work there are those sufficiently critical to correct mistakes and misunderstandings, to deepen affirmations and to point out aspects I have not perceived. It is possible that some may question my right to discuss revolutionary cultural action, a subject of which I have no concrete experience. The fact that I have not personally participated in revolutionary action, however, does not negate the possibility of my reflecting on

6. “As long as theoretic knowledge remains the privilege of a handful of ‘academics’ in the Party, the latter will face the danger of going astray.” Rosa Luxembourg, *Reform or Revolution*, cited in C. Wright Mills, *The Marxists* (New York, 1963).

this theme. Furthermore, in my experience as an educator with the people, using a dialogical and problem-posing education, I have accumulated a comparative wealth of material that challenged me to run the risk of making the affirmations contained in this work.

From these pages I hope at least the following will endure: my trust in the people, and my faith in men and women, and in the creation of a world in which it will be easier to love.

Here I would like to express my gratitude to Elza, my wife and "first reader," for the understanding and encouragement she has shown my work, which belongs to her as well. I would also like to extend my thanks to a group of friends for their comments on my manuscript. At the risk of omitting some names, I must mention João da Veiga Coutinho, Richard Shaull, Jim Lamb, Myra and Jovelino Ramos, Paulo de Tarso, Almino Affonso, Plinio Sampaio, Ernani Maria Fiori, Marcela Gajardo, José Luis Fiori, and João Zacarioti. The responsibility for the affirmations made herein is, of course, mine alone.

PAULO FREIRE

## PEDAGOGY of the OPPRESSED