

**PAULO FREIRE: BEYOND
ADULT LITERACY**

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*For a long time, I was considered an expert in adult education, a good technician, the author of an effective method. I think however that since my first studies, even with naivety, I already made explicit a broader vision of literacy. If this is not clear in my first book, **Pedagogy of the Oppressed**, this perception becomes quite clear. It is also quiet present in my practice and in the theory of my practice.*

Paulo Freire, *Correio Braziliense* October 24, 1982

**A Brazilian pedagogue
and humanist
internationally recognized**

Paulo Freire (1921-1997) was a Brazilian pedagogue and a humanist mainly known for his literacy efforts designed to combat oppression.

Recognized as the "patron of Brazilian education" by the National Congress (Law 12.612/2012), Freire is the Brazilian educator who has received the most tributes around the world. His masterpiece "Pedagogy of the oppressed" (1968, first published in 1970) is the third most cited book in the humanities literature and is among the top 100 reading books recommended by Anglophone universities. Heinz-Peter Gerhardt (1993), a German expert, says that "Freire is today without a doubt the most renowned educator of our time".

Among the countless honors, Freire was named Professor Emeritus of several major universities, received 39 honorary doctorates, and in particular the UNESCO Prize for Peace Education in 1986. Between 1989 and 1991, Freire was secretary of education of the city of São Paulo; the best São Paulo has ever had, according to several analysts. He is the author of dozens of books, articles, documents, papers and lectures published in more than 30 languages. It is difficult to develop a complete list of doctoral theses and publications on its method, its action and thought. We draw attention to some of his books:

-Pedagogia do Oprimido (1968), ed. Paz e Terra, written in Chile¹; in Brazil, due to censorship, the book only circulated in 1974);

-Educação como prática da liberdade, (1967, ed. Paz e Terra, Rio de Janeiro);

-Extensión o Comunicación? (1969, ICIRA, Santiago de Chile);

-Ação Cultural e Outros Escritos (1976, Ed. Paz e Terra);

-Cartas à Guiné-Bissau - Registros de uma Experiência (1977, Ed Paz e Terra);

-Pedagogia da Esperança - Um Reencontro com Pedagogia do Oprimido (1992, with Ana Maria Araújo Freire, author's widows, notes), ed Paz e Terra;

¹- First edition in English in 1970 translated by Myra Ramos, preface by Richard Shaull. The Seabury Press, NY - Published in French in 1974 in the Maspero Small Collection .(Petite collection Maspero)

-Pedagogia da Autonomia - Saberes Necessários à Prática Educativa (1997, Ed. Paz e Terra).

In his early days, Freire was clearly inspired by the humanistic ideas of one of the creators of the UNESCO, Jacques Maritain, but also by those of Thomas Cardonnel, Karl Mannheim, Karl Jasper, Gunnar Myrdal, Gabriel Marcel, Emmanuel Mounier and some of their Brazilian interpreters, such as Alceu de Amoroso Lima (Tristão de Athayde). His work, although not directly related to the movements of the Brazilian Catholic Action, was parallel to it and was strongly attacked by the military who took power in Brazil in 1964. Some sectors of the Army considered the Catholic left² as more dangerous than the communists. Freire was open-minded and linked to the thinkers of the Instituto Superior de Estudos Brasileiros (ISEB) of Rio de Janeiro (Helio Jaguaribe, Anísio Teixeira, Álvaro Vieira Pinto, Roland Corbisier), and to personalities such as Costa Lima, rector of the University of Recife, and Miguel Arraes, one of the icons of the Brazilian left in the 60s .

Freire was the director of the Department of Cultural Extension at the University of Recife, in the early sixties. He is already a reference for the new generations as well he is one of the main leaders of the Movement of popular culture where he showed that culture is not synonymous with an accumulation of knowledge on the classics in literature or music, but an element of transformation of the universe by man. Freire was 40 at this time.

The success of his actions in a northeast region incited an education minister of the center left, the catholic christian democrat, Paulo de Tarso Santos, to invite him to settle in Brasília and launch a national literacy campaign. The resistance to the method of Freire mobilized the big mass media, political groups, part of the bourgeois intelligentsia who saw a threat to their privileges. According to them, the political panorama of the country could be changed radically if illiterates were given the right to vote. This could provoke a revolution in Brazil. Freire will be forced to exile in 1964 after spending seventy-five days in prison accused of being a "revolutionary." He spends four years in Chile, one in the US and in 1970, he is found in Geneva, where he worked for the Ecumenical Council of Churches. He will return to Brazil in 1980.

² - This involved in particular the Juventude Operária Católica (JOC), the Juventude Estudantil Católica (JEC) and Juventude Universitária Católica (JUC).

**At the heart of his action,
The pedagogy of the
oppressed**

"Conscientização e Alfabetização, uma Visão do Processo" (Conscientization and Literacy, a vision of process), an article published in *Estudos Universitários*, the cultural journal of the University of Recife (No. 4, 1963), lays the foundation for many of his works. This text is perhaps the first to introduce the concepts of Freire on the literacy methodology, which have since this time continued to marvel the world with the possibility of teaching adults with forty hours of instruction or even less. In 1964, Brazil had 40 million illiterates for a total population of 81 million. The editors of the journal specify that the perspective of Freire is strictly realistic, insofar as he states that the reality is not only objective, but also recognizable. As he says, "man is not only in reality, but also with it." Therefore, "men are beings of relations and not just of casual contacts."

Man's ability to understand the reality transforms him in a being essentially critical, capable of distinguishing "different existential orbits" and, in doing so, betrays his temporal nature. Man is therefore more than a being of relations, because he is essentially a historical being.

Freire's long experience with the workers and peasants of the Northeast has led him to consider that the illiterate will become aware of his own reality through a detailed but rather informal discussion of his socio-economic problems. The educational process must be based on the learner's environment. It is not enough to learn how to read: "Eva viu a uva" (Eve saw grapes), yet it is necessary to learn to situate Eve in her context. Talking about a fruit that people have never seen does not make sense. It is necessary to search for the linguistic universe of learners. In the satellite towns of Brasilia, at the beginning of the 1960s, when the alphabetizers were linked to civil construction, the key word used was "brick" (*tijolo*). A pedagogy based entirely on dialogue with the illiterate will be developed, with the aim of getting them to motivate themselves and from there to train themselves.

Among the many works of Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968) is certainly the most important. In a dedication in the meantime 1968, he writes:

I hope you receive these manuscripts from a book that may not be good but that embodies the deep belief I have in men " .

He would not have never imagined that, fifty years later, the book would meet such a worldwide success, but his deep belief in men is certainly the central and most universal thread, not only of the *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, but of all his work.

According to the acclaimed literary Antonio Cândido, "Freire was an active thinker, who transformed education into a humanizing instrument that is both practical and utopian"

and "it is difficult to find a person who, in our time, has conceived in such a vivid and convincing way the democratic nature of education. " Moreover, "his famous method is one of the most positive achievements of the humanizing thought of the twentieth century".

According to Freire, the pedagogy of the oppressed is the one of "men engaged in the struggle for their liberation" .

This is the one to forge with them and not for them, as a men or as a people, in the ceaseless struggle for the recovery of their humanity. A pedagogy that transforms oppression and its causes into an object of reflection of the oppressed , which will result in their necessary commitment in the struggle for their liberation ".

This means, as Freire says, that being aware of oppression is not enough.

To recognize themselves limited by the concrete situation of oppression does not yet mean their liberation (...). They only overcome the contradiction in which they find themselves when they recognize themselves oppressed and engage in the struggle to liberate themselves"

Placing emphasis on those who learn/teach and not on the educator and assert that "nobody educates nobody, nor does anyone educate himself: men educate themselves in communion, mediated by the world" seems to be the hallmark of Freire's thinking .

A revolutionary method of adult education

One of the major limitations of most studies about Freire is the reduction of his thinking and practice to the revolutionary method of adult education. He himself drew attention to the fact that he understood literacy in a broader context. Several basic concepts of Freire's thinking help us to understand the contemporary process of education, communication and culture. We will discuss two of these critical concepts: that of "rural and of educational extension" (as opposed to communication), which has influenced the orientation of extension services in universities, and that of "culture of silence" .

For a long time - until the early years seventy - the concept of extension, and especially that of rural extension, was in Latin America subject to a model of communication developed in the United States, disseminated mainly by David Berlo's book, "*The process of communication*", in which communication is considered a mechanistic process of manipulation of individuals and masses. This model was followed in the communication, particularly in advertising, but it was later extended to activities of educational extension in Latin American universities. The receiver is considered an object and not a subject. Neither are social and cultural conditions or the needs of populations taken into consideration. The media, as the educational activities, only pay attention to the public in the extent they support the modernization based on a Western ethnocentric prejudice that considers the forms of organization of societies as universal regardless of diversity culture, the historical formation of populations, diversity in the conduct of social structures. In the US, rural extension and university area are two closely related concepts that are based on the same philosophical and ideological foundation. They serve modernization by consolidating a political, economic and financial system.

To understand this reality , one must remember that in the fifties and sixties, the United States sent to developing countries thousands of experts, the "diffusionists" responsible for modernizing "backward" countries, by provoking and stimulating changes in their institutions and behavior. The inhabitants should abandon their traditions and accept the values of the market in accordance with the Western model. They were encouraged to change their urban, social and political relations and to seek to establish a democracy based on the copy of Anglo-Saxon systems.

The works of the 'diffusionists' were structured through what was then called the "rural extension". These actions have influenced the Latin American university systems, which have begun to adopt a model according to which universities should base their actions on a tripod made of teaching, research and extension. The later was both rural and cultural; it was an industrial extension, through services, consultations and internships; it was also community-based, with universities able to collaborate in the development of a community,

including in rural areas, by setting up courses, developing service projects, carrying out work in the form of internships, etc.

This concept implied that the university should go to the community to expand its teaching and research activities. The community was seen as an object, a passive element, as the mere receiver of another pole, exogenous and superior. The classic book of diffusionism is that of Everett Rogers and Floyd Shoemaker, *Communication of Innovations* (1971). In 1976, Rogers published with the collaboration of experts from North America and from the Third World, "*Communication and Development - Critical Perspectives*", in which are presented several errors in the application of the 'diffusionist' theory in developing countries.

This elitist perspective and mechanistic perspective was strongly challenged in Latin America thanks to the founder work of Freire in "extension or communication?" published originally in Chile in 1968. In a special issue of the bulletin of the National Association of Higher Education Institutions (ANUIES, Mexico), Ofélia Angeles states:

"The Second Latin American Conference on the Extension and Cultural Dissemination of Universities, held in Mexico City in 1972 (...), fundamentally calls into question the social character of the extension, the lack of participation of society decisions concerning it, with a strong influence of the theories and experiences of Freire in the field of literacy. Extension and dissemination must be liberated in the sense that they must promote the awareness of individuals about their reality so that they assume the commitment of act upon it, transformong it".

On the basis of Freire's thought, the participants in this conference defined extension as "*the interaction between the university and the other components of the social body, through which it assumes and fulfills its commitment to participate in social processes of creation of culture, liberation and radical transformation of the national community.*"

In other parts of the world, and especially in the francophone countries, the term extension is not frequently used. In a statement adopted by UNESCO in 1998 at the World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE), the interaction between the university and other components of society was included in the concept of "relevance", which must be measured by comparing what universities do and what society expects of them, as indicated in the working document drafted by Jean Marie de Ketelle:

"The pertinence or relevance of higher education must essentially be considered in relation to its role and place in society, to its mission of providing education, research and the services ensuing there, as well as to its links to the world of work in its broadest sense, to its relations with the State and the sources of public funding and its interactions with other degrees and forms of education".

Freire is not mentioned in the 1998 WCHE Declaration, but many of his ideas are included there. Thus, the text insists that students should be considered as actors and not as recipients of the education process. This is the opposite of traditional systems that adopt what Freire calls "the banking concept of education".

The principles of the WCHE were ratified by the Second WCHE in 2009 and by the Third Conference on Higher Education (CRES), held in Córdoba, Argentina (June 2018), organized for the celebrations of the centenary of the Córdoba reform and declaration of 1918. More than ten thousand participants adopted a document postulating that higher education³ is a social public good, a universal and human right and a duty of States. Significantly, participants said that the academic world "cannot be silent about the shortcomings and pains of men and women, and as Mario Benedetti vehemently asserted, "there are few things as deafening as silence".

³ - The declaration and reform of Córdoba of 1918 caused the first in-depth reform of the university system in Argentina and influenced the organization of universities throughout Latin America.

Against the "culture of silence"

The latter brings us to the concept of "*culture of silence*" that emerges from Freire's work, because of its permanent search for the historical reasons that have led enormous contingents of men and women to be born, to live and, above all, to remain in the condition of oppressed, mute, without having their voice heard and staying excluded from decisions on the construction of rules determining their life⁴.

Although Freire never wrote specific text dedicated to the culture of silence, he considered its overcoming through cultural action for freedom – which makes it possible for men and women to become aware of themselves as subjects of their own destiny, capable of creating culture and transforming the world- an indispensable condition for the full human achievement.

In his thesis '*Educação e realidade Brasileira*', written in the School of Fine Arts Recife (Pernambuco) in 1959, Freire anticipates many of the observations that will appear revised and updated eight years later, in his first book.

Freire begins a reflection on Brazilian "democratic inexperience", explained by the interpretation that Brazil is "a country without people". To support his argument, he appeals to several classic Brazilian authors such as Caio Prado Junior, Gilberto Freyre, Nelson Werneck Sodré, Fernando Azevedo and Oliveira Viana, and declares :

We understand by Brazilian mutism the merely expectant position of our man in front of the national historical process, a position that has not changed fundamentally and only accidentally with turbulent movements, the constant being always the mutism, the estrangement from public life.

Some years later, in "*Education as a practice of freedom*" (1967), even before resuming the theme of "democratic inexperience", Freire records the "emergence" of the people in the history of Brazil :

We are no longer satisfied to watch. We want to participate. This participation (...) threatens the privileged elites. They are grouped to defend themselves (...). Moreover, in the name of "threatened " freedom , they repel the participation of the people. They advocate a sui generis democracy in which people are sick to whom drugs are applied. Their illness is precisely in having voice and participating. Whenever they try to express themselves freely and intend to participate, it is a sign that they are still sick and therefore need more 'medicines' . Health, for this strange democracy lies in the silence of the people in their immobility.

⁴ - -The references to the various quotes made in this section can be found in Venício A. de Lima, "Sobre a Cultura do Silêncio" (About the culture of silence) in <https://www.cartamaior.com.br/?/Editoria/Midia-e-Redes-Society/Sobre-a-cultura-do-silencio-1-/12/38974>

The second chapter of *Education as a practice of freedom* is entirely devoted to the discussion of "democratic inexperience". Freire emphasizes the lack of community life in the Brazilian colonial experience. He argues that "Brazil has never experienced that sense of community, of participation in the solution of common problems... a sense that is installed "in the consciousness of the people and transformed into democratic wisdom".

Freire takes up the theme of *mutism* and asserts that it is characteristic of a society to which communication and dialogue are refused and to which, on the contrary, "communiqués" are proposed. He insists that these societies become essentially "dumb" and emphasizes that *mutism* "does not mean a lack of response, but rather a response that lacks criticality".

Shortly after, in 1968, Freire used for the first time the expression "*culture of silence*", referring to Latin America as a whole:

" We are convinced – and today more than ever - that what we call "Culture of Silence" , manifested as 'collective unconsciousness' by peasants, could not mechanically or automatically be transformed by infrastructural change achieved through the process of agrarian reform. This culture of silence, a characteristic of our colonial past, is perpetuated, rooted in the favorable terrain of land tenure in Latin America. This culture of silence has historically and culturally taken the form of a 'Peasant Consciousness' (Annual Report of the Instituto de Capacitación e Investigación en Reforma Agraria –ICIRA_, Chile, 1968).

We can say that the culture of silence corresponds to a set of representations and behaviors or "ways of being, thinking and expressing", which are the consequence of a structure of secular domination in Latin America, Spanish and Portuguese, but also manifests itself in countries considered as the first world. Although unequally, it conditions both oppressors and oppressed. The culture of silence is one of the dimensions of 'banking' education in an environment marked by a lack of communication.

What are the forms in which this *culture of silence* survives? Would not those who were historically oppressed – native peoples, blacks, women and working classes- still be silenced today by both specific silencing policies and by the hegemonic public discourse that remains classist, patriarchal, racist and neo-colonialist?

As the technological media - newspapers, radio, television, internet - become the mediators of expressed voices in the public debate, some policies - explicit or not - related to their functioning were added to historical societal characteristics, and function as exclusionary silencing policies, making possible the perpetuation of the culture of silence not only in Brazil but elsewhere.

Education as a public good: a universal right and a social process of liberation

Neoliberal thinking is reinforced since the beginning of the XXI^{century}. Those who dominate political life and control the formation of public opinion in the world media have revived 'diffusionism' and the theory of modernization. New forms of culture of silence are disguised as policies of 'silencing' and a series of processes - some of which were positive in the beginning - became instruments of oppression. These include:

- Pressions to consider education as a commercial service regulated by the principles of the GATS - General Agreement on Trade in Services;
- Attempts to set up a global accreditation system that, instead of comparing what the higher education institutions do with their missions, defined by the universities themselves, consider that quality is always based on the practices of a number of countries, most of them Anglo-Saxon, members of the OECD;
- The insistence in including in the conventions on the recognition of studies and diplomas of higher education, actions that favor members of the Lisbon Convention (1997), which covers Europe, the United States Canada, Israel and Australia;
- Attempts to encourage developing countries to accept methods of action based on the Boulogne Process, without taking into account their specific cultural and social needs ;
- Uncritical acceptance of penetration everywhere of the MOOC-Massive Open Online Courses, again ignoring local needs.
- Imposition of criteria for the definition of quality, inspired by classification systems - "rankings" - designed to highlight a selected number of institutions based in developed countries⁵ .

⁵ These issues were discussed in a series of documents, particularly in MA Rodrigues Dias, "The higher education as a public good. Prospects for the centenary of the declaration of Cordoba " 2017. The Portuguese and Spanish versions have been printed by the Association of Universities Group Montevideo - AUGM Universities, jointly with Universidad de la República (UDELAR) in Montevideo (Spanish version) and in portuguese with the Universidade Federal de Santa Maria (UFSM) , in Brazil. These two versions and another in English are found on the website of the AUGM (<https://bit.ly/2Ufq8bH>).

Modernization theory and ‘diffusionism’, which come back today in new forms, are based, as we have said, on a Western ethnocentrism, which considers as universal its forms of organization of society, without taking into account, cultural diversity, historical development of populations, diversity of social structures. The only valid model for the quality of education (especially in universities) is that developed by the major Western institutions.

Those who destroy the concept of education as a public good use strong ideological tools in addition to concrete actions. Their goal is to replace the objective of universal access to a relevant education by another view designed to transform education into a commodity and instrument of domination. This ideology permeates all the media and even international organizations that abandon any critical point of view and accept that the commercialization dominates everything.

‘Rethinking education - Towards a global common good?’, a document launched in Paris in 1995, criticizes the concept of public good for two reasons: a) there is no unanimity on the issue; b) this conception is individualistic and is based on economic principles. The document does not take into account efforts to associate education with the world of work, which cannot be limited to the interests of enterprises or of financial groups. Without criticism, the privatization of education is encouraged, based among others, on the existence of unexpensive private schools. Admittedly, they exist, but in what proportion, where and under what conditions? MOOCs are also presented without any criticism of their action in developing countries.

UNESCO has always considered education at all levels as a human right, a right for all, which has strengthened the vision of those who see education as a public good. The foundation of this approach is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states in its article 26 :

Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit"⁶

This was certainly one of the sources of inspiration for Paulo Freire's thought. The declaration received an important complement on December 16, 1966, when the United Nations General Assembly adopted the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 13):

"Higher education must be made accessible to all in full equality, according to the capacity of each, by all appropriate means and in particular by the gradual introduction of free education"⁷ .

The World Bank added the adjective "global" to the notion of public good concerning higher education at the beginning of this century. This does not mean that this principle applies everywhere. The term "global" emerged at a time when the World Bank, the Organization for

⁶ - <http://www.un.org/universal-declaration-human-rights>

⁷ - <https://www.ohchr.org/fr/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>

Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Trade Organization were advocating that their quality indicators - in the accreditation process - should apply everywhere. It became clear, however, that these indicators were those of a small group of countries, and quality should not, according to this conception, be related to the relevance, ie the social, political and cultural reality of higher education and its specific missions.

The second argument comes from the fact that, according to the authors of the document, the principle of the public good is based on an individualistic socio-economic theory. This argument is also false. The concept of public good comes mainly from public law.

The public service is based on three principles:

Equality : Everyone has the right to a public service without discrimination.

Continuity or Permanence : the public service must constantly respond to the needs of citizens.

Adaptability or "flexibility": the public service must be "reactive" and evolve according to the existence of changes of general interest. He can and must follow the evolution of society.

The concept of public good does not eliminate the possibility of concession, delegation or authorization. What is needed is the existence of standards in the interest of all, as opposed to individualism, and the creation of mechanisms that compel all those who exercise it to follow precise terms controlled by the legitimate authorities.

The prevalence of neoliberal ideas and the return of silence policies that lead to exclusion have fueled attempts to deconstruct Freire's work in Brazil and elsewhere. Developed with immediate reference to the Cold War in the late 1960s and early 1970s, defending the public character of education, eliminating definitions limited to the field of adult education, Freire's thinking continued to renew itself until its sudden death in 1997. It applies to the entire education system and remains valid to combat ignorance and help liberate the oppressed. More than twenty years after his death, Paulo Freire's thought continues to shed light on the understanding of contemporary societies, especially those facing the enormous challenges posed by the neoliberal order⁸.

⁸ This article was written before the election of Mr. Bolsonaro as President of Brazil in October 2018. Mr. Bolsonaro stated that he would eliminate Paulo Freire's thinking in the country, including in the Ministry of Education and his supporters announced that they would ask the Senate to cancel the title of patron of Brazilian education conferred to Paulo Freire. The authors confirm their analysis. (NDA)

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