CRITICAL LITERACY AND EMANCIPATORY POLITICS: THE WORK OF PAULO FREIRE

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Abstract — This paper argues that Freire’s pedagogical ideas stand in marked reaction against a process of education characterised by prescription. In Freire’s view, such a process consolidates sharply defined power relations and therefore perpetuates oppressive social forms. It argues that contained in Freire’s pedagogy are the elements for a model of an alternative society. In the first section, attention is focused on Freire’s analysis of the process of ideological domination as it takes place among the oppressed, with specific reference to the context which influenced the development of his pedagogical ideas. The second section provides an analytic exposition of the alternative pedagogy which Freire proposes with a view to contributing to what he calls ‘cultural action for freedom’. The third section consists of a discussion on the application of Freirean pedagogy in a post-revolutionary context. The pedagogy is here viewed as contributing to what Freire terms ‘cultural revolution’. Both ‘cultural action for freedom’ and ‘cultural revolution’ constitute key concepts for the development of critical literacy. Freire’s pedagogy is here discussed for the most part with an industrially under-developed context in mind; for Freire’s most significant pedagogical experiences were closely tied to these contexts.

Paulo Freire is synonymous with the concept of critical literacy. Critical literacy is to be distinguished from functional or cultural literacy, the former referring to the technical process of acquiring basic reading skills necessary to follow instructions, read signs, fill in forms etc. and the latter referring to the means of gaining access to a ‘standard’ cultural and linguistic baggage very much on the lines advocated, in the U.S., by the likes of Hirsch and Bloom (McLaren, 1994). Critical literacy, on the other hand, refers to an emancipatory process in which one not only reads the ‘word’ but also the ‘world’ (Freire and Macedo, 1987), a process whereby a person becomes empowered to be able to unveil and decode the ideological dimensions of texts, institutions, social practices and cultural forms such as television and film, in order to reveal their selective interests (McLaren, 1994). In the words of Lankshear and McLaren, this process is carried out in a context wherein the educators are striving to foster what Wright Mills calls a ‘sociological imagination’, the means whereby we are enabled to ‘perceive more clearly the relationship between what is going on in the world and what is happening to and with ourselves’ (Lankshear and McLaren, 1993).

It is a process therefore which ties pedagogical practices in different spheres of social life to configurations of power. Pedagogical practice becomes a political act — a very important maxim in Freire’s work as writer, educational philosopher and pedagogue. Of course, it has also been an important maxim throughout his recent work in educational administration and policy making. Freire carried out this work in his capacity as Education Secretary in the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers’ Party) Municipal Government in Sao Paulo (cf. Viezzer, 1990; Freire, 1991, 1993; Torres, 1993, 1994). Critical literacy is conceived of by the many critical educationists inspired by his work as a form of cultural citizenship. In Henry Giroux’s words, it is defined ‘as a form of cultural citizenship and politics that provides the conditions for subordinate groups to learn the knowledge and skills necessary for self and social empowerment’ (Giroux, 1993).

The reaction to Freire’s advocacy of a process of education predicated on a critical/political reading of the world has been varied, ranging from accusations of being ‘reformist’ (La Belle, 1986) and ‘populist’ (Youngman, 1986) to such approving comments as those by Elias and Merriam who state that Freire’s ‘theory is radical in the political sense of utilising education to bring about social, political and economic
changes in society' (cited in Youngman, 1986). There are those (e.g. Ellsworth, 1989) who regard his critical pedagogy, together with that of other critical educationists like Giroux and McLaren, as being full of repressive myths. During my studies in Toronto, I met feminists who regard his work as being too androcentric and therefore oppressive. Others, like hooks (1993) and Weiler (1991), though acknowledging the limitations of his theory, including his 'phallocentric paradigm of liberation' (hooks, 1993) and his representation of the 'oppressed' as a unitary subject (Weiler, 1991), have acknowledged the inspiration and relevance of his writings for an anti-racist and feminist pedagogy. Weiler attempts to fuse aspects of Freirean pedagogy with those pertaining to feminist ways of learning, including consciousness raising, memory work on the lines carried out by Haug (1987), and theatre. The question of the relevance of Freire's work to processes of learning involving memory, the process of 'redemptive remembrance' associated with Benjamin (cf. Simon, 1992), is also addressed by McLaren and Freire's compatriot, Tomaz Tadeuz da Silva (McLaren and da Silva, 1993). Moriarty (1989) and Bezizza (1989) are among the many who underline the usefulness of his pedagogy for a process of education for peace. Another writer well known for her work in peace education, Kekkonen (1977), underlines his usefulness for a prison education programme, while several writers have drawn inspiration from him for their activism in such diverse but often interrelated spheres as community development (Kirkwood and Kirkwood, 1989), social work (Leonard, 1993), theology (Hartung and Ohliger, 1972; Retamal, 1981; Elias, 1994), classroom teaching (Shor, 1986), higher education (Shor, 1992) and health promotion (Mayo, 1993b), to mention just a few. Resort to Freire's ideas seems to have become de rigeur for cultural workers engaged in confronting structural and systemic oppression as part of the process of imagining a world which 'should and can be'.

In this paper, I shall argue that Freire's pedagogical ideas stand in marked reaction to a process of education characterised by prescription and therefore what Williams (1963) would call a 'dominative' mode of communication. In Freire's view, such a process serves to consolidate sharply defined power relations and therefore perpetuate oppressive social forms of being. I shall also argue that, contained in Freire's pedagogy, are the elements for a model of an alternative society. In the first section, attention will be focused on Freire's analysis of the process of ideological domination as it takes place among the oppressed, with specific reference to the context which affected the genesis of his pedagogical ideas. In the second section, I shall provide an analytic exposition of the alternative pedagogy which Freire proposes with a view to contributing to what he calls 'cultural action for freedom'. The third section will consist of a discussion on the application of Freirean pedagogy in a post-revolutionary context. The pedagogy would here be viewed as contributing to what Freire calls 'Cultural Revolution'. Both 'cultural action for freedom' and 'cultural revolution' constitute key contexts for the development of critical literacy.

Freire's pedagogy will be discussed, for the most part, with an industrially underdeveloped context in mind. After all, Freire's most significant pedagogical experiences are closely tied to this context (Torres, 1992, 1993; Taylor, 1993).

EDUCATION AND DOMINATIVE PRACTICES

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire dwells at length on the means whereby the oppressed are domesticated and as a result develop false consciousness. According to Freire, this consciousness, the result of hegemonic forces which operate on and partly shape people's experiences and subjectivities, is manifest in the internalisation by the oppressed of their oppressor's 'image':

> Their ideal is to be men (sic): but for them to be men (sic) is to be oppressors. This is their model of humanity.

Freire, 1970, p. 30

It is a point which Lorde (1984) also makes, referring to 'the oppressor within' (cited in Weiler, 1991) and which, as Giroux (1981) has shown, makes its presence felt in several everyday situations, for example, in the way oppressed men behave in relation to equally oppressed women. Giroux writes of the 'violence that underpins the discourse and social relationships that male subcultures display towards the women that share their experiences'. The same applies to the racism which white members of the oppressed classes, possibly even from ethnic minorities, direct towards
blacks or other races and ethnic groups (Borg and Mayo, 1994), a situation exacerbated by
the constant reorganisation of capital across different geographical boundaries (Foley, 1994)
and which continues to create labour market segmentation on racial, ethnic and gendered
lines. Violent racist, sexist and homophobic acts are examples of the kinds of behaviour that
indicate the presence of the 'oppressor's' image inside the oppressed. By indulging in such prac-
tice, the perpetrators would be striving towards their particular 'ideal' of the human being, an
'ideal' which makes them want to emulate their oppressors. Freire maintains that such a distort-
ed image of the 'new' person prevents those who project it from gaining 'consciousness of
themselves as persons or as members of an oppressed class' (Freire, 1973).

Echoing Fromm, Freire goes on to maintain that, under such conditions, freedom becomes a
fearful thing for the oppressed. They would be so domesticated that any activity which
entails creativity presents itself to them as a fearful journey into the unknown. This is a
theme he develops in Pedagogy of the Oppressed and to which he returns in We Make the Road by Walking. As Freire argues in
his 'semi-talking' book with Macedo, creativity involves risk-taking (Freire and Macedo, 1987), something in which the oppressed are
not encouraged to indulge. They are therefore encouraged to remain passive, immersed in
what Freire terms the 'culture of silence'. They are not encouraged to question things.
Neither are they encouraged to engage in creative and critical thinking. On the contrary,
they are conditioned to obey: 'one of the basic elements of the relationship between oppressor
and oppressed in prescription' (Freire, 1973).

Traditional methods of education, whereby the teacher becomes the automatic dispenser
of knowledge and the pupil its passive recipient, would therefore contribute towards the
perpetuation of existing structures of oppression — asymmetrical relations of power. Freire
calls this process the 'banking' or 'nutritionist concept of education. In so doing, he almost
re-echoes Dewey's derogatory description of conventional education as 'an affair of “telling”
or being told' (closely related to the 'narration sickness' which Freire decries) and a process of
pouring in' (Dewey, 1964; Shor, 1992). The latter image is remarkably similar to Freire's view
of the learners, under such conditions, as being

'empty receptacles to be filled' (Freire, 1970). Freire describes 'banking education' thus:

Education thus becomes an act of deposition, in which the students are the depositaries and the teacher is
the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the
students patiently receive, memorise and repeat. This is the "banking" concept of education in which the
scope of action allowed to students extends only as far as receiving, filing and storing the deposits.

Freire, 1970, p. 58

Freire maintains that, in this situation, the teacher is the subject of the learning process
while the learner is mere object. This process of education is characterised by a 'top to
bottom' approach and the pedagogy applied is considered by Freire to be that of 'the answer'
(Bruss and Macedo, 1985). It is a pedagogy which can smother any creative impulse that the
individual may have. Borrowing from Eugene Ionesco's play, Rhinoceros, Freire posits that,
under such conditions of learning, the good educatee is

he (sic) who repeats, who refuses to think critically, who adapts to models, who finds it nice to be a
rhinoceros.

Freire, 1972, p. 179

In Freire's view, 'banking' education reduces any sense of relationship that the educatee
may have with the material to be learnt. It is characterised by a process of alienation.
The learner is alienated from the content of his/her education in the same way that workers,
under conditions of capitalism, are, in the Marxian sense, 'estranged' from the product
of their labour. This 'estrangement' facilitates the ideological domination of the ruling class
over subordinated classes. It renders persons receptive to the culture and ideas of dominant
groups in society. Although, in his earlier work, Freire points to social class as the important
variable in processes of domination, he stresses in his later work the multifaceted nature of
power (Freire and Macedo, 1993). The emphasis on class domination in his most celebrated
work immediately recalls the famous statement by Marx from The German Ideology:

the dominant ideas of a particular epoch are the ideas of the ruling class, which is therefore both the
material force of society, in that it owns and controls the means of production and, at the same time, its
ruling intellectual force.

Tucker, 1978, p. 172

This is 'cultural invasion' from above in which dominant ideas, which mystify the social
and economic arrangements, concealing their exploitative nature, become part of a person's 'common sense', the term being used here in the Gramscian sense. They become the taken-for-granted aspects of 'reality' which enable a human being to consent to the existing arrangements, no matter how exploitative they may be in her or his regard. 'Cultural Invasion' also occurs from without as in situations of dependency, colonialism and neo-colonialism, the last mentioned manifest in a variety of interrelated processes, notably an increasingly mobile transnational capitalism and eurocentrism. It is the process which leads the African to see himself or herself as the 'Black European' — a black skin in white mask, to borrow the title of Franz Fanon's book. It is the sort of situation, for instance, which leads people from the small island state of Malta to unwrite the strong Arab element which is part of its history in order to emphasise its so-called 'European vocation'.

It appears that Freire sees the traditional system of 'banking education' as serving to facilitate the process of 'cultural invasion'. And one might add that this 'cultural invasion' continues to render the content of education alien to the learners. They would therefore be deprived of the consciousness necessary for them to live 'with' rather than 'in' the world (Freire, 1970a). Elsewhere, Freire states that such an education enables people only to 'adapt' to their reality rather than achieve 'integration' with their context (Freire, 1973). The implication here is that, by merely being allowed to 'adapt', people would lack the necessary capacity to become agents of social change. Rather than being subject, they would remain object, presenting no threat to the existing social arrangements. Going by Freire's views, a 'top-to-bottom' approach to education would operate in the interest of the existing social and economic arrangements and, using his terminology, one may argue that the education provided serves to 'domesticate' rather than 'liberate' (Freire, 1972).

THE ALTERNATIVE: CULTURAL ACTION FOR FREEDOM

In most Latin American countries, counter-hegemonic activity in education takes place outside the formal system. This is quite understandable since, in several areas of Latin America, a very small percentage of the relevant age group receives formal education. Arnove (1986), for instance, states that in Nicaragua only 65% of the relevant age group attended primary school during the final years of rule by the Somoza dynasty. The same applied to several African countries during the period in which they were colonised. In his famous treatise, 'Education for Self-reliance', former Tanzanian President Julius K. Nyerere writes about lack of schooling in Tanganyka, now part of Tanzania, prior to Independence in 1961. Furthermore, in a book published five years ago, a book which registers the rapid increases in school enrollment in Nicaragua, Cuba and Grenada during revolutionary periods (Torres, 1990), it is stated that in many parts of Latin America 'drop out rates in basic education are above 50% and the average level of schooling is 4.5 years' (Torres, 1990).

All this, together with the fact that it is difficult to carry out counter-hegemonic schooling under conditions of extreme repression, has rendered the area of non-formal education the ideal source for a process of 'education for liberation', even though we should recall, with regard to schooling, that there is never any power without resistance (Foucault, 1980). Since this was the situation obtaining in those countries about which Freire is directly concerned in most of his writings and certainly his better known ones (one must remember that in the talking books, he also dwells on so-called 'First World' contexts), it is only natural that he should regard the alternative to 'education for domestication' as lying primarily in the area of non-formal education. The one notable exception here is Pedagogy of the City, where the focus is on Freire's work as Education Secretary in Sao Paulo and where emphasis is placed on the issue of public school reform (Freire, 1993). In placing the emphasis on non-formal education and work within social movements, Freire did not deny possibilities to work for change also within the sub-system of schooling, arguing that one should have a foot within and another outside the system. This point marks a difference in ideas between him and one of his most recent co-authors, the late Myles Horton:

The ideal is to fight against the system taking the two fronts, the one internal to the schooling system and the one external to the schooling system. Of course, we have much space outside the schooling system, much more space to work, to make decisions, to choose. We have more space outside the system, but we also
can create the space inside of the subsystem or the schooling system in order to occupy the space.

Horton and Freire, 1990, p. 203

Freire referred to the non-formal activity carried out within the wide spaces existing outside the system as ‘cultural action’, the vehicle whereby members of oppressed groups are made aware of the social contradictions which place them in a position of subordination. Torres (1982) cites Freire (1970) as saying something to the effect that ‘Cultural action is developed in opposition to the elite that controls the power’. Cultural action therefore constitutes the means whereby the oppressed acquire consciousness of themselves as a political force.

It is one of the areas where, according to Freire, a sense of agency can be developed. In contrast to some of those who posit a mechanistic theory of reproduction and to orthodox, positivist Marxists who favour an evolutionary economic-determinist view of social change, Freire provides us with a pedagogy which suggests that the existing hegemonic arrangements can be ruptured. Things can change, albeit in circumstances not of one’s own making. Cultural action is also intended to render those who partake of it the agents of change:

I believe that many people under the Marxist banner subscribe to purely mechanistic explanations by depending on a fatalism that I sometimes, humorously, call liberating fatalism. This is a liberation given over to history. Hence it is not necessary to make any effort to bring about liberation. It will come no matter what.

Freire, 1985, p. 179

Freire is here concerned with transformative action. In his early work, especially his most celebrated work, he draws heavily on the Marxist-Humanist tradition, especially the early Marxist manuscripts and, as Elias (1994) points out, the writings of such Marxist-Humanists as Leszek Kolakowski. He shares Marx’s conviction of a reciprocal dialectical relationship between base and superstructure: ‘circumstances make men (sic) just as much as men (sic) make circumstances’ (Tucker, 1978). Freire also creates a whole pedagogical approach around the concept of Praxis, used in a manner akin to Marx’s ‘revolutionising practice’ as cited in the Theses on Feuerbach. Praxis is conceived of as a process entailing transformative action and reflection:

But men’s (sic) activity consists of action and reflection: it is praxis, it is transformation of the world.

Freire, 1973, p. 119

An education based on ‘praxis’ is one whereby people act on their material surroundings and reflect upon them with a view to transforming them. In Freire’s view, any separation of the two (i.e. action and reflection) is mindless activism or empty theorising. It is for this reason that Freire, in keeping with the Marxist tradition, regards one’s material surroundings as the source of one’s knowledge. ‘Cultural action’ is concerned with the relationship between knowledge and one’s material existence. The foregoing considerations lead Freire to conclude, in the words of Youngman (1986), ‘that education must help people in the process of objectifying the world, critically understanding it, and acting to change it’.

The much celebrated ‘Metodo Paulo Freire’ constitutes an attempt to incorporate the foregoing ideals. It involves a process of conscientisation (conscientizacao) through the teaching of literacy. And the process of conscientisation is central to the process of critical literacy itself. The term is strongly associated with Freire, even though he is on record as saying that he should not be credited with it (Zachariah, 1986). It is a term which had been employed by Brazilian radicals in the 1960s (ibid, p. 28), and Freire singles out Dom Helder Camara, former Bishop of Recife, as the individual who rendered it popular, enabling its use to become widespread in English. It is also a term which Freire stopped using since 1974. He felt that it had been loosely used in a manner which stripped it of its actual significance (Freire, 1993). Yet Freire never lost the sense of its significance and tried to clarify it in lectures, workshops, seminars etc. (Freire, 1993). He is quoted as having said, with respect to the term:

As soon as I heard it, I realised the profundity of its meaning since I was fully convinced that education, as an exercise in freedom, is an act of knowing, a critical approach to reality.

Freire, in Zachariah, 1986, p. 36

In a recently published interview with Carlos Alberto Torres, he explains:

Conscientization is the deepening of the coming of consciousness. There can be no conscientization without coming first into consciousness . . . To work, therefore, in a conscientizing posture, whether with
Brazilian peasants, Spanish-Americans or Africans, or with university people from any part of the world, is to search with rigor, with humility, without the arrogance of the sectarians who are overly certain about their universal certainties, to unveil the truths hidden by ideologies that are more alive when it is said they are dead.

Freire, 1993, p. 110

Coming into consciousness refers to the process of ‘taking distance’ from objects, something which ‘presupposes the perception of them in their relations with other objects’ (Freire, 1993). Furthermore, he defines the deepening of this process, conscientization, as ‘learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality’ (Freire, 1970) all part and parcel of being critically literate. The process of ‘gaining distance’ is central to the pedagogy involved. In his discussion on ‘Paradigms of Nonformal Education’, Torres (1990) states with respect to conscientization, ‘In its most radical version, the specificity of conscientisation resides in the development of critical consciousness as class knowledge and practice, that is, it appears as part of the ‘subjective conditions’ of the process of social transformation’. The class factor is important in the Latin American popular education context, even though race and gender factors came into play as the process of Freire-inspired consciousness raising began to be adapted in the contexts of various, often interrelated, struggles worldwide. The specificity of conscientisation, one may argue, borrowing from Torres (ibid), lies in the development of critical consciousness as the knowledge of historically subordinated groups — subaltern knowledge.

For the sake of brevity, I reproduce Dennis Goulet’s succinct description of the process from his excellent introduction to one of Freire’s early publications in the English Language:

- participant observation of educators ‘tuning in’ to the vocabulary universe of the people;
- their arduous search for generative words at two levels: syllabic richness and a high charge of experiential involvement;
- a first codification of these words into visual images which stimulate people ‘submerged’ in the culture of silence to ‘emerge’ as conscious makers of their own ‘culture’;
- the decodification by a ‘culture circle’ under the self effacing stimulus of a coordinator who is no ‘teacher’ in the conventional sense, but who has become an educator-educatee — in dialogue with educatee-educators too often treated by formal educators as passive recipients of knowledge;
- a creative new codification, this one explicitly critical and aimed at action, wherein those who were formally illiterate now begin to reject their role as mere ‘objects’ in nature and social history and undertake to become ‘subjects’ of their own destiny.

Goulet, 1973, p. 11

Because the process throughout is a dialogical one through which the educator learns from the educatees in the same way that the latter learn from her or him, the roles of educator and learner became almost interchangeable. In what has become a classic formulation, Freire (1970) wrote:

Through dialogue, the teacher of the students and the students of the teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher–student with students–teachers. The teacher is no longer the one who teaches, but one who is himself (sic) taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach.

Facilitators must therefore facilitate processes whereby educators and educatees learn together.

... educator and learners all become learners assuming the same attitude as cognitive subjects discovering knowledge through one another and through the objects they try to know. It is not a situation where one knows and the others do not; it is rather the search, by all, at the same time to discover something by the act of knowing which cannot exhaust all the possibilities in the relation between object and subject.

Freire, 1976, p. 115

Freire considers both educators and educatees as subject. The learner’s reality constitutes the subject matter which therefore becomes a mediator between the two subjects in question, i.e. educator and educatee. In his conversation with Ira Shor, Freire makes an even bolder statement regarding the educator–educatee relationship. He states that the dialogical process of education represents ‘the sealing together of the teacher and the students in the joint act of knowing and reknowing the object’ (Shor and Freire, 1987). As Ira Shor argues, in the kind of dialogical education proposed by Freire, anything that the educator already knows is relearned when studied again with the educatees, a point confirmed by Freire in the same conversation.

Freire (1985) stresses the need for reciprocal learning, arguing with reference to peasants as learners that

Of course we have a lot to learn from peasants. When I refer to peasants, my emphasis is on our need to learn from others, the need we have to learn from learners in general. I have continually insisted that we must learn from peasants because I see them as learners
at a particular moment in my educational practice. We can learn a great deal from the very students we teach.

Giroux (1987) takes up this aspect of Freirean pedagogy, according it central importance in a process of critical, radical education:

A radical theory of literacy and voice must remain attentive to Freire’s claim that all critical educators are also learners. This is not merely a matter of learning about what students might know; it is more importantly a matter of learning how to renew a form of self-knowledge through an understanding of the community and culture that actively constitute the lives of one’s students.

The task of the facilitator is to learn the culture and community which partly constitutes the social location of the learner. The facilitator would therefore be, in Giroux’s terms (1992), a ‘border crosser’, in that she or he would move across the border that demarcates one’s social location in order to understand and act in solidarity with the learner/s, no longer perceived as ‘Other’. The learners are also educators in this process since they play a crucial part in enabling the facilitator to cross such borders.

One may argue, therefore, that both educators and educatees are agents in this process. This constitutes an attempt to overcome the dialectical contradiction of opposites characterising traditional education (Allman, 1994), teacher and taught being ‘the unity of opposites’ (ibid). Notice my emphasis on the word ‘attempt’. I do not think that this process will ever be completely overcome, especially given Freire’s insistence that educator and educatee are not on an equal footing in the educational process involved. What we are presented with is not an ‘Education of Equals’, to mention one end of the continuum in Jarvis (1985). While exhorting educators to learn from learners, Freire states that:

Obviously, we also have to underscore that while we recognize that we have to learn from our students (whether peasants, urban workers, or graduate students), this does not mean that teachers and students are the same. I don’t think so. That is, there is a difference between the educator and the student. This is a general difference: This is usually also a difference of generations.

Freire, 1985, p. 177

For one thing, as a host of writers in critical pedagogy have shown, it would be amiss to celebrate student voices uncritically since they are never innocent (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1991). They contain various manifestations of the ‘Oppressor consciousness’ which ought to be challenged. This also involves exposure to views the student resists, ‘ignorance’ in the Lacanian sense. It also involves educators allowing themselves to be challenged and also to constantly undergo self-reflection and scrutiny to confront the ‘Oppressor consciousness’ within.

In a later formulation, Freire emphasises the directive role of the educator.

At the moment the teacher begins the dialogue, he or she knows a great deal, first in terms of knowledge and second in terms of the horizon that he or she wants to get to. The starting point is what the teacher knows about the object and where the teacher wants to go with it.

Shor and Freire, 1987, p. 103

This is an acknowledgement on Freire’s part that the educators can have a political vision and a theoretical understanding that guides their pedagogical action. Freire, after all, considers education to be a political act, there being no such thing as a neutral education: ‘Educators must ask themselves for whom and on whose behalf they are working’ (Freire, 1985). The goal of the educator, when teaching, is part and parcel of the political project that she or he bears in mind:

Dialogue does not exist in a political vacuum. It is not a ‘free space’ where you say what you want. Dialogue takes place inside some program and content. These conditioning factors create tension in achieving goals that we set for dialogic education. To achieve the goals of transformation, dialogue implies responsibility, directiveness, determination, discipline, objectives.

Shor and Freire, 1987, p. 102

The educator therefore exerts his or her control in order to generate a healthy dialogue. Freire speaks of a permanent tension between authority and liberty (ibid). This leads to self-discipline, as a result of which one learns not to misuse his or her participation in the development of the common exercise’. According to Shor, in the same dialogue with Freire, misuse of the dialogical process leads to a ‘false democracy’. The teacher is therefore in control, exercising her or his authority, an authority derived from competence as a pedagogue. It is imperative that such authority does not degenerate into authoritarianism: ‘... the democratic teacher never, never transforms authority into authoritarianism’ (Shor and Freire, 1987). Freire reiterates the point in the edited conversation with Myles Horton,
asserting ‘Authority is necessary to the freedom of the students and my own. The teacher is absolutely necessary. What is bad, what is not necessary, is authoritarianism, but not authority’ (Horton and Freire, 1990). The educator exercises what Shor (1992) calls ‘democratic authority.’ Recognition of such a difference between educator and educatee marked a decisive break with his earlier work in which he had not rendered explicit the belief that educators and educatees are not on an equal footing in the learning process.

Freire has even gone so far in his recent work as to concede that there are moments, especially during initial meetings with learners who are accustomed to prescriptive teaching methods and therefore not used to risk-taking, when the facilitator must show discretion in her or his teaching style, being ‘50% a traditional teacher and 50% a democratic teacher’. This may be taken as a belated recognition by Freire of the fact, often pointed out with respect to his advocacy of a dialogical education, that such adult learners would not be disposed to partake of transformed social relations of education overnight (Mayo, 1991, 1993a, 1994b). Indeed, as Gaber-Katz and Watson (1991) indicate, they can offer resistance to processes of a dialogical education. Elements of the ‘old’ pedagogy can, when absolutely necessary, be incorporated into the new one, the main proviso being that the prevailing spirit in the teaching process would be one of democracy.

In proposing a directive role for the educator, one however which does not deny an ongoing process through which the educator learns from the learner, Freire does advocate a process of learning which recalls Mao. The elements for the learning process — the material to be codified and decoded — are to be taken from the community in which the learners live. The cultural aspects and at times unsystematic ideas of the people will be taken from them and given back to them. Mao had written: ‘In all practical work of our party, all correct leadership is necessarily from the masses to the masses’ (Corrigan et al., 1979). In the same statement, Mao goes on to say that one should take the ‘scattered’ and ‘unsystematic’ ideas of the masses and through ‘study’ render them both ‘concentrated’ and ‘systematic’ until they are embraced by the masses ‘as their own’. The masses are in turn to translate them into action and in so doing test their validity. This is conceived of by Mao as an ongoing process through which the ideas are each time rendered richer, more correct and more vital. This process of taking ideas from the community and giving them back to them is what lies at the heart of Freirean pedagogy. It is the means whereby ‘praxis’ occurs, the means whereby the distancing from one’s everyday world takes place with a view to enabling the participants ‘to come into consciousness’.

The notion that the learners’ ideas constitute the bases of their learning is reinforced by Freire’s advocacy of a process whereby meaningful texts are created out of the learners’ conversations, texts which would enable them to speak both the word and the world. In this respect, the texts would be different from the traditional primers which Freire regards as culturally alien and as promoting the ‘ideology of accommodation’ (Freire, 1985). He regarded these primers as being alien to the peasant’s reality, being full of inane phrases such as ‘The wing is of the bird’ or ‘Did Ada give her finger to Uru?’ and so forth. He goes on to say that primers are ‘illustrated with cute little houses, heart warming, and well decorated, with smiling couples, fair of face . . .’ (Freire, 1985).

Given the strong relationship between knowledge and the learners’ existential situation in Freire’s method, one assumes that the participant has a repository to draw on. What lies in this repository is one’s life experience. The participant is therefore encouraged to draw on this experience in order to arrive at new knowledge, at a new awareness. In drawing on this experience, one is able to relate to the codified material. The facilitator enables this process to occur not by ‘depositing’ knowledge but by engaging the learner’s critical faculties. Rather than dispense knowledge, the facilitator poses questions, problematises issues. In this problem-posing education, the pedagogy applied is not that of ‘the answer’ but that of ‘the question’ (Bruss and Macedo, 1985). This pedagogy is counter-hegemonic in the sense that it stands in direct contrast to the ‘prescriptive’ model of education.

In adopting a democratic, dialogical approach, the cultural circle which provides the context for the process of critical literacy education advocated by Freire serves as a microcosm for a new more democratic society. This alternative society prefigured by the cultural circle is one which derives from a ‘utopian’ social
It is the utopian vision of a society characterised by dialogue, participation and a critical reading of the world at all levels in which an ongoing process of 'denunciation and anunciation' takes place. (Mayo, 1991) Furthermore, in the cultural circle, knowledge itself is democratised and therefore does not remain the prerogative of a privileged minority. Furthermore, the knowledge disseminated is in itself 'democratic' in that it directly relates to the kind of life experienced by the participants, who are members of a subordinated social group, and serves their interests.

**Limits and possibilities of ‘Cultural Action for Freedom’**

The foregoing is all part and parcel of what Freire calls 'Cultural Action for Freedom'. It is the kind of counter-hegemonic activity which is intended to precede and create the climate for social change. The question that arises is: to what extent can this process of education truly serve as a means of liberation? Can this form of adult education engender social and political transformation? Naturally, in countries governed by repressive authoritarian regimes, counter-hegemonic activity would be considered anathema. The repressive state apparatus would be called upon to trample it underfoot. Freire knows this only too well. His activities in the field of adult literacy in Northern Brazil were brought to an abrupt end in 1964 when the military, backed by multinationals, staged a coup to overthrow the ‘populist’ administration led by Goulart. Freire was imprisoned and later ‘invited’ to leave Brazil and live in exile.

Indeed in many parts of the strife-torn El Salvador, teaching is considered to be a subversive activity often resulting in death. In these circumstances, there are limits to the effectiveness of Freire’s method as an instrument of political change. However, in countries like El Salvador and Guinea Bissau, the former ravaged by a terrible civil war and the latter by a war of liberation against the Portuguese colonisers, certain zones would be liberated and these would constitute the right climate for a counter-hegemonic popular education. Furthermore, certain accounts of the Nicaraguan experience prior to 1979 (Arnove, 1986) may continue to instil hope. Here we are confronted by a case in which education has a relative autonomy and ‘can play a counterhegemonic role’ (Torres, 1990). In the conclusion to a chapter which Carlos Alberto Torres co-authored with Daniel Schugurensky, it was stated that:

This autonomy is mostly enjoyed in nonformal education, and it is more evident in prerevolutionary processes. Examples of this assertion can be found in the educational work carried out by the revolutionary guerrilla movements in Cuba and Nicaragua, by the Jesuits of the Universidad Centroamerica in Nicaragua, or by the repatriated intellectuals of MACE and The New Jewel newspaper in Grenada.

Torres, 1990, p. 99

Freire exerted a considerable influence on the popular education activities carried out in the Central American country in the late sixties and early seventies. It appears from the literature that these activities contributed in some measure to Somoza’s eventual overthrow. In this case however, Freirean pedagogy was not carried out in isolation but in relation to a strong social movement which sought to draw together three strands: ‘Sandino’s popular revolt, Marxist class analysis and Christian Liberation Theology’.

The inference that one might draw from the Nicaraguan example is that adult education, or simply education on its own, does not lead to social transformation. It can prove effective in this regard only when carried out in the context of a social movement or alliance of movements capable of causing ruptures in the social structures. Freire warns us that one should not expect from education what it cannot do, namely ‘transform society by itself’ (Shor and Freire, 1987). It is for this reason that Freire advocates that teachers should:

> expose themselves to the greater dynamism, the greater mobility you find inside social movements.

Freire insists that ‘a radical and critical education has to focus on what is taking place today in various social movements and labor unions’ (Freire and Macedo, 1987). In the same passage, Freire refers to feminist movements, peace movements and other such movements as generating in their practices ‘a pedagogy of resistance’. The same point is made in the published conversation with Shor:

But there is another place for the existence and the development of liberating education which is precisely in the intimacy of social movements. For example, the women’s liberation movement, the housewives’ movement against the cost of living, all these grassroots movements will have emerged into a very strong political task by the end of this century. In the intimacy of these movements we have aspects of liberating education, sometimes we don’t perceive.

Shor and Freire. 1987, p. 38
Later, in his transcribed conversation with the exiled Chilean intellectual Antonio Faundez, with whom he worked at the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Freire pointed to the role which movements can play in the struggle for social change, hinting in the process at the role which the church played in the struggle for liberation in Brazil and other parts of Latin America:

I can say without fear of being mistaken that in the seventies in Brazil and elsewhere we began to see clearly the growing development and importance of these social movements, some of them linked with the church and some not: the struggle of environmentalists in Europe, Japan and the United States, resulting in their direct intervention in recent elections in France and Germany; the struggle of organised women, of blacks, of homosexuals, all of them emerging as a force and expression of power.

Freire and Faundez, 1989, p. 66

There is therefore evidence in Freire’s work, particularly in his later ‘talking books’, that he supported the view that regards ‘Cultural Action for Freedom’ as being more effective when carried out within the context of a social movement or movements. In Latin America, there exists a strong social movement, one which is governed by Christian and Marxist principles and which embraces a theology of liberation. Freire’s social and pedagogical vision is, in Giroux’s (1988) words, the product of ‘the spirit and ideological dynamics that have both informed and characterised the Liberation Theology movement that has emerged primarily out of Latin America . . .’

Freire is scathing in his critique of particular forms of religion which deny people agency and the feeling that collectively they can make a difference. In Freire’s view, traditional forms of religion serve to preserve the status quo. Writing specifically about the traditional church, he argues:

The traditionalist church, first of all, is still intensely colonialist. It is a missionary church, in the worst sense of the word — a necrophiliac winner of souls; hence its taste for masochistic emphasis on sin, hellfire, and eternal damnation. The mundane, dichotomized from the transcendental, is the ‘filth’ in which humans have to pay for their sins. The more they suffer, the more they purify themselves, finally reaching heaven and eternal rest.

Freire, 1985, p. 131

It is an institution which prevents the oppressed from understanding the structural and systemic bases of oppression and in so doing immerses them in a sense of helplessness. Such oppression is explained in terms of ‘God’s will’:

They resort (stimulated by the oppressor) to magical explanations or a false view of God, to whom they fatalistically transfer the responsibility for their oppressed state . . . A Chilean priest of high intellectual and moral calibre visiting Recife in 1966 told me: ‘When a Pernambucan colleague and I went to see several families living in shanties (mocambos) in indescribable poverty, I asked them how they could bear to live like that, and the answer was always the same: “What can I do? It is the will of God and I must accept it”.’

Freire, 1970, p. 163

Opposed to this kind of religious practice is a theology which emphasises the role of human agency in the permanent struggle against oppression and social injustice for the creation of the Kingdom of God on earth (ibid). In Freire’s view, this theology, which is a theology from the margins dealing with concerns of the margins and which presents ‘an immense challenge to the evangelising mission of the church’ (Boff and Boff, 1986), is espoused by what he calls ‘the prophetic church’:

It is the prophetic church. Opposed and attacked by both traditionalist and modernizing churches, as well as by the elite of the power structures, this utopian, prophetic, and hope-filled movement rejects do-goodism and palliative reforms in order to commit itself to the dominated social classes and to radical social change.

Freire, 1985, p. 137

It is against this radical religious backdrop that Freire’s work for a critical literacy and an emancipatory politics has to be seen. The similarities between his emancipatory views, affirming an option in favour of striving on the side of the oppressed, and the 1968 Document on Education produced by the Latin American Bishops in Medellin, Columbia, are remarkable: ‘Our thinking about this panorama seeks to promote one view of education that agrees with an integral development of our Continent. This education is called education for liberation; that is, education which permits the learner to be the subject of his (sic) own development’ (cited in Torres, 1993). According to the tenets of Liberation Theology,

In this world of oppressors and oppressed, the reconciling mission of the church is to stand with Our Lord on the side of the Oppressed and to travel with him in this hard, long and narrow road leading to liberation.

cited in Hartung and Ohlinger, 1972, p. 21

Some of the lines could easily have been lifted from Freire’s writings. It must have been this relationship which has led the Church in Latin America, especially in the Christian
Base Communities, to espouse many of Freire’s pedagogical principles. As the earlier citation from Torres (1990) indicated, Jesuits from the University of Central America (U.C.A.) used Freire’s pedagogy when engaging in the kind of consciousness-raising activities that preceded the Somoza overthrow in Nicaragua (Arnove, 1986; Carnoy and Torres, 1987). Cardenal and Miller (1982) state how a church-sponsored programme in the early 1970s inspired the subsequent Freire-inspired pedagogy used in the 1980 literacy campaign. The church can therefore serve as a protective ‘umbrella’ for change-oriented critical literacy/popular education programmes, although such killings as those of a priest in Recife during the Brazilian dictatorship, Archbishop Romero and later the Jesuits in El Salvador indicate that there are limits to the extent to which regimes would tolerate such active struggles by members of the Church against poverty and oppression. Although religion can serve as a source of legitimisation for regimes which justify their actions on the grounds that they are keeping communism at bay, there is a limit to the extent to which it can protect a movement for change centering around it. This having been said, the church does offer important spaces for social-change activists, as the situation in Nicaragua suggests.

It may still be argued however that, irrespective of whether it does or does not take place within a social movement, cultural action does not directly lead to political action destined to bring about social change. In the cases of Guinea Bissau and Nicaragua, military action on the part of a guerrilla movement brought about the desired change. Such considerations should not obscure the possibility that non-formal education of the kind advocated by Freire can serve as a form of cultural preparation for a new social order. It might take a guerrilla movement, acting in the people’s interest, to struggle for and eventually bring about the desired political change. It has often been felt, however, that the people need to be prepared beforehand to be able to accept and partake fully of the cultural change which would be expected to take place following the country’s political transformation. Freire’s pedagogy does not guarantee that people would take up arms once they are conscientised and begin to critically engage with the world. Such pedagogical action contributes however to creating the climate for change.

Freire’s pedagogy works best in a situation when the political climate is congenial and when it is part of a larger movement or alliance of movements. This would be ‘cultural action’. When applied in a post-revolution or post-independence context, his pedagogy becomes ‘cultural revolution’, defined by Torres (1982):

... the cultural revolution occurs in complete harmony with the revolutionary regime in spite of the fact that the cultural revolution should not be subordinate to the revolutionary power.

CULTURAL REVOLUTION

Once the desired political change takes place (as in Guinea Bissau, Sao Tome and Principe, Cape Verde, Nicaragua), Freire’s method of conscientisation through critical literacy can become a vehicle for the consolidation of a new political and social order. It is possible that Freire’s method would be applied by the revolutionary group in relation to a literacy crusade of the kind carried out in Cuba, Nicaragua, Guinea Bissau, Grenada and Tanzania. The ability to read and write would be deemed essential by the new governing group for the vast majority of the population to be able to partake of the revolutionary or post-independence experience. Freire’s process of critical literacy, which entails the use of literacy for a variety of social purposes including participation in all aspects of democratic life, appealed to the leaders of such countries. As a matter of fact, he was engaged as consultant for literacy and popular basic education programmes in some of the countries concerned (Arnove, 1986; Torres, 1990, 1986; Jules, 1993; Freire, 1978; Freire and Macedo, 1987; Freire and Faundez, 1989), even though his involvement with the Unesco prize-winning Tanzanian Literacy Campaign has been described as ‘peripheral’ (Torres, 1982). It is most likely that, in post-independence or post-revolution situations, the governments concerned would pin their hopes for the achievement of widespread literacy on non-formal rather than formal education. The feeling would be that ‘we must run while others walk’, to repeat the slogan from Tanzania. As had been stated in Tanzania’s first Five Year Development Plan.
the nation cannot wait until the children have become educated for development to begin.

Furthermore, economic constraints may prevent impoverished countries from providing adequate schooling facilities, Tanzania being a case in point. Here, it was a major achievement to provide universal primary education, but secondary schooling remained beyond the reach of many. In such situations, non-formal education would constitute a cheaper alternative. A civil war situation such as that which occurred in Nicaragua in the eighties and El Salvador would render schools dangerous places to be in, given that education was made a target of counter-revolutionary attacks (Horton and Freire, 1990; Hammond, 1991; Mayo, 1993b). Julio Portillo, for instance, states:

Then in 1981 and 1982, educators who were members of ANDES were forced to leave the country for exile, because the Duarte government was hunting us down. In the first eight months of the Duarte government in 1980, 18 teachers were killed, and 97 were kidnapped and are still missing.

Non-formal education would therefore allow for greater flexibility in the use of premises (Torres, 1993; Mayo, 1993a). Furthermore, schools are known to be too slow to change (Torres, 1990), even following dramatic political events such as the carrying out of a revolution. People concerned with vocational preparation have for years been emphasising the way schools have been slow to respond to new labour market demands; this has been one of the many points of critique of the Human Capital Theory approach to schooling (Sultana, 1992). The same applies to the issue of radical social change. It is an issue which Myles Horton raised with Paulo Freire in their ‘talking book’:

But it’s quite obvious that a revolution to my knowledge has not changed any schooling system or any that I’ve ever known about. School systems stay pretty much like they were before . . . . It happened in Cuba, happened in Nicaragua.

Horton and Freire, 1990, p. 221

As Nyere once told Freire: ‘Paulo, it’s not easy to put into practice the things we think about’ (Horton and Freire, 1990). Whatever the dream which drives the political action concerning schools such as the creation of a self-financing ‘school farm’ in the rural areas of Tanzania, change though possible is never easy. Freire himself highlighted this at a 1991 AERA meeting in Chicago with respect to his experience as Education Secretary in Sao Paulo (Freire, 1991). It is the sort of situation which led Horton to pin his hopes on work outside rather than inside the system (Horton and Freire, 1990). It would appear that non-formal education would offer greater possibilities for a process of a critical literacy or a critical education.

It is also relevant to remark that the attainment of independence or the successful staging of a revolution does not change popular attitudes and misconceptions. Years of domination naturally leave their imprint on the minds of the oppressed. Colonialism does not disappear with the attainment of independence. It is firmly entrenched in the mind of several people as a form of ideology, therefore heavily influencing certain social constructions of reality. Freire quotes Cape Verde’s President, Aristides Pereira, as having said:

We made our liberation and we drove out the colonizers. Now we need to decolonize our minds.

Freire, 1985, p. 187

Freire goes on to state that, unless the mind is decolonised, the people’s thinking would be in conflict with the new context which would be evolving as a result of the struggle for freedom. Critical literacy activities, whereby one is encouraged to read the ideological dimensions of texts (and I am using ‘texts’ here in the wider post-structuralist sense), should serve as a means whereby subaltern voices emerge from the ‘culture of silence’. In colonial situations, this also involves the emergence and affirmation of the indigenous cultures (the use of the plural is deliberate, lest one resorts to essentialist, totalising discourses regarding ‘the native culture’, ‘the national identity’ etc.). This immediately leads to a discussion concerning the politics of language involved in such a process.

Freire argues that not all that pertains to the colonial experience is irrelevant. He refers to knowledge of the coloniser’s language, in the case of the former Portuguese colonies, as capable of proving beneficial in a post-colonial situation. This statement makes sense particularly in relation to situations where the language of the coloniser is of international importance, knowledge of which constitutes an economic asset. I have argued elsewhere (Mayo, 1994a) that the major economic pre-occupation of those former British colonies
which are developing micro states is 'the active preservation or, better still, the enhancement of their status and desirability as rentier states' (Baldacchino, 1993). This 'rentier status' is characterised by a situation in which revenue is obtained from such services as tourism, transshipment, bunkering, the provision of yacht berths etc. This and the need to guard against the danger of insularity necessitates the use of a language of international currency.

In certain countries where different languages are used by different tribes, the coloniser’s language serves as a lingua franca. However, if praxis is to serve as the cornerstone for the establishment of new and more democratic social relations, the emphasis ought to be placed on indigenous cultures, and where there is a national indigenous medium of expression then this ought to be used. As Freire (1985) maintains with reference to Guinea Bissau’s revolutionary leader Amilcar Cabral, ‘Language is one of culture’s most immediate, authentic and concrete expressions’. After all, ‘language is’, to quote Marx, ‘practical consciousness’ (Tucker, 1978) which is as old as consciousness itself.

Reflecting on the literacy experiences in Guinea Bissau, the subject of much criticism of Freire’s work and the cause of probably the only tension evident in his talking books in English (Freire and Faundez, 1989), Freire insists that the ‘so-called failure’ of his work in the former Portuguese colony ‘was not due to the “Freire Method” but because Portuguese was used ‘as the only vehicle of instruction’ throughout the campaign (Freire and Macedo, 1987). This must have made him more convinced that the use of a national or more congenial language (for example creole) should constitute a feature of both the formal and non-formal system of education. Freire advocates the use of creole in Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau and Sao Tome and Principe:

These countries need to creolize in phases, starting with the first years of primary school through the high school, so that people everywhere would feel free to express themselves in their native language without fear and without perceiving any elitist restriction. Indeed they will come to terms with themselves to the degree that they speak their own language, not the colonizer’s language.

Freire, 1985, p. 183

He also argues that:

Language is not only an instrument of communication, but also a structure of thinking for the national being.

Freire, 1985, p. 4

It is for this very reason that Freire shudders at the prospect of his children having to study the history of Brazil in say English:

You can see what a violation of the structure of thinking this would be: a foreign subject (such as English) imposed upon the learner for studying another subject.

Freire, 1985, p. 194

Freire makes this statement with reference to the fact that Cape Verdians adopt Portuguese as the official language for technical, scientific and political thinking (Freire, 1985). Many other former colonies adopt the language of the colonizers for such purposes. Freire may have perhaps been worried by the possibility that emphasis on such a language would render it a form of ‘cultural capital’, to adopt Bourdieu’s terms. As a result, it would be regarded as one of the vehicles whereby the educational system would reproduce the kind of class differences associated with the previous order. Freire makes statements to this effect with reference to post-independence education in Guinea Bissau. He writes:

In my letter to Mario Cabral, I said that the exclusive use of Portuguese in education would result in a strange experience characterized by Portuguese as a superstructure that would trigger an exacerbation of class divisions, and this in a society that was supposed to be re-creating itself by breaking down social classes.

Freire and Macedo, 1987, p. 110, 111

In the same letter, Freire touches on the issue of cultural reproduction in Guinea Bissau. He states that, because Portuguese is used as the ‘mediating force’ in the education of youngsters and because students are selected for further education on the basis of their knowledge of the colonizer’s language, ‘only the children of the elite would be able to advance educationally, thus reproducing an elite dominant class’ (Freire and Macedo, 1987).

One may feel inclined to think that an educational process characterised by excessive use of a foreign language would stand in stark contrast to the one advocated by Freire, namely an educational process closely connected with the material needs and surroundings of the learners — in short, education through praxis. The issue is of course a complex one, the more
so when in a specific country there exists a dominant indigenous or foreign literacy and other suppressed local literacies (Barton, 1994; Street, 1994). Freire’s use of the Portuguese language in the Nord-este of Brazil can in this regard be considered to be problematic given the existence in that region of other subaltern, indigenous literacies.

To what extent does this serve to undermine the notion of praxis which is the central element in Freire’s critical education process? Freire has addressed the situation of the indigenous populations of Latin America. In a dialogue, ‘Rethinking Literacy’, he tells Macedo that ‘Any literacy project for these populations necessarily would have to go through the reading of the word in their native language’ (Freire and Macedo, 1987). The Sandinista government in Nicaragua sought to address this issue by carrying out, following the end of the National Literacy Cruzada on August 23, 1980, a literacy follow-up campaign on the Atlantic strip of the Central American state (Arnowe, 1986). The campaign was in the three major indigenous languages, namely English, Miskito and Sumo. Freire himself highlights the sensitivity of Fernando and Ernesto Cardenal (the former having been the Cruzada’s Coordinator) to this issue and their insistence that ‘the Mosquitos’ language would have to be a fundamental element in the literacy process’ (Freire and Macedo, 1987).

Whether one should use a local, restricted as opposed to a national popular linguistic medium can be the subject of much debate. I would argue that the choice should fall on the larger language if the programme is to be truly empowering. Otherwise the learners would remain at the periphery of political life. The use of a language for ‘national popular’ unity would therefore be necessary, the point which Freire seems to be making with respect to his insistence that creole should have been used in Guinea Bissau. And what of the dominant standard language? Freire argues in conversation with Ira Shor that although the standard language contains the ruling ideology, knowledge of this language should not be denied to learners from subordinated social groups since it would enable them to survive in the power struggle. In developing micro-states like Malta, for instance, while teaching in Maltese would make the educational process more meaningful to a larger section of the population for whom English does not resonate with their cultural capital, knowledge of the dominant ‘foreign’ language (English) would still be important if they are not to remain at the periphery of economic life. A critical literacy process which incorporates teaching the dominant language would, for Freire, be characterised by a situation in which this language is taught in a problematising manner. Freire states that, while teaching this language, the teacher should discuss its political ingredients with the students:

> While the traditionalist teaches the rules of the famous English (laughs) he or she increases the students' domination by elitist ideology which is inserted into these rules. The liberatory teacher teaches standard usage in order for them to survive while discussing with them all the ideological ingredients of this unhappy task.

Freire, in Shor and Freire, 1987, pp. 71, 72

Freire is here referring to the situation concerning the standard language and its subaltern class variants. But the same situation applies to contexts where the standard elite language is that of the colonizer while indigenous languages are spoken by the subordinated groups.

The issue concerning choice of language is key in a process of critical literacy characterised by learning through praxis. In the context of cultural revolution, a process of knowledge acquisition through praxis would, according to Freire, entail a strong relationship between education and production. This point was emphasised in Pedagogy in Process: The Letters to Guinea Bissau. It marked a notable development in his pedagogical theory. Faced with the task of developing a hitherto impoverished economy in a country lacking an indigenous bourgeoisie, a country seeking to recover from the ravages of a war of liberation, Freire made the social relations of production the focus of his attention and his suggestions to the revolutionary government. While re- emphasising that the organisation of the programmatic content of education is ‘an eminently political act’ (Freire, 1978), Freire writes extensively in Letter II on the unmistakably Marxian tenet that there should be no dichotomy between productive labour and education. In this respect, Freire advocates the avoidance of full-time students and the combination of study time with working hours ‘in intimate relationship with the peasants’ (Torres, 1982). He argued that educational institutions should not be ‘distinguished, essentially, from the factory or
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from the productive activity in the agricultural field'. This notion immediately calls to mind Nyerere and his conception of school farms as an important feature of ‘Education for Self-Reliance’ and Mao with his advocacy of a fusion between manual and mental activity in reaction to the long-standing Confucian separation between the two (Chu, 1980). Freire is explicit on the relationship between education and productive labour:

> In this sense, the new man and the new woman toward which this society aspires cannot be created except by participation in productive labour that serves the common good. It is this labour that is the source of knowledge about this new creation, through which it unfolds and to which it refers.

Freire, 1978, p. 105

Freire states that, in such a situation, the unit themes to be applied in the course of the programme of critical literacy should be derived from the people’s world of action, or more precisely their area of productive labour. He provides examples of themes centering around the word ‘rice’, namely production of rice, geography of rice, history of rice, health and rice (Freire, 1978).

One may assume that a process of critical literacy interrelated with production, a process he sought to promote in Chile during his work with peasants in connection with the Asentamiento, was also intended by Freire to produce the organic intellectual, in the Gramscian sense, the one who would shape the cultural basis for consent to a way of life diametrically opposed to that experienced during the colonial period — a period lasting five hundred years. In this work, Freire refers to Cabral’s affirmation that ‘the middle class intellectual needed the courage to commit class suicide before being reborn as a revolutionary worker, able to contribute to the struggle for liberation’ (Freire, 1978). ‘Class suicide’ is very difficult to carry out. There are many factors that can separate the intellectual from the working or peasant class participants with whom he or she is working, like one’s *habitus* which is considered by Bourdieu and Passeron to entail ‘irreversible’ processes of learning which affect the level of reception and degree of assimilation of the messages produced and diffused by the culture industry, and, more generally, of any intellectual or semi-intellectual message’ (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). There are also one’s educational background, the nature of one’s everyday work (especially cerebral work), possibly even one’s acquired coherent and systematic view of the world (cf. Mayo, 1994c). ‘Class suicide’, however, is what Cabral sought to do.

Cabral was one of the few intellectuals in a country which, during its colonial years, had an extremely elitist system of education. Suffice to mention one statistic: during five hundred years of colonial rule, Guinea Bissau produced only fourteen university graduates (Freire, 1978). While acknowledging the importance of middle-class intellectuals committing class suicide, Freire (1978), echoing Gramsci, is convinced that at the end of the day, ‘it is easier to create a new type of intellectual — forged in the unity between practice and theory, manual and intellectual work — than to reeducate an elitist intellectual’.

One might add that, because of its infinitely greater flexibility, non-formal education characterised by praxis and geared towards engendering critical literacy is more likely than the university to produce such an intellectual. These intellectuals, promoters of critical literacy, would be expected by Freire to carry out the new culture of revolution and, in so doing, consolidate the new order. Pedagogy in *Process* therefore provides an example of Freire’s ideas being applied in the context of a situation where a radical political change has taken place. It provides an indication regarding how Freire’s ideas can be applied to suit a country’s specific needs. The situation in some other part of the world may be so different from that of Guinea Bissau, one of ‘the poorest of the poor’ nations, to necessitate an even more different adaptation of Freire’s ideas. After all, Freire is fully aware of the social and political constraints which may prevent a process, successful in one context, from being applied in another. But the basic philosophy as to what constitutes critical literacy applies in all cases. And it is this element, the political philosophical basis, which constitutes Freire’s major contribution. To reduce Freire’s work simply to a method — the cause of much liberal appropriation (cf. Macedo, 1994) — and divest it of its radical political thrust is tantamount to adulterating his work (cf. Kidd and Kumar, 1981). His philosophy applies to work within a revolutionary regime and to work within a social movement seeking a transformation in social relations in an industrialised society. It applies to the situation in the favelas of...
Brazil or among the campesinos of different parts of Latin America. It also applies to the situation in the U.S. ghettos, in poor quarters like La Kalsa in Palermo (Dolci, 1966) and among the jornaleros, the day labourers, in Andalucia (Evans, 1990) and the homeless in Europe and North America, to name but a few examples attesting to the presence of the ‘Third World’ within the ‘First World’. This notwithstanding, we must heed Freire’s warning: ‘experiments cannot be transplanted; they must be reinvented’ (Freire, 1978).

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