



Afterword

Still Critique?

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The recollection of an episode inspired us to reflect on the timely theme of this special issue:

“Why is it that in Paulo Freire’s land you academics still advocate for critical education? Having had all of the freirean theories and reflections, haven’t you implemented them all in your educational programs already?” demanded a participant of the 20th World Congress on Reading: Literacy Across Cultures, in Manila, 2004, as soon as I finished presenting my paper “Investigating the Practice of Freirean Theories in Freire’s Country” (MONTE MOR, 2004). That demand has kept me thinking ever since. That is, it first led me to interpret that the discussant meant I was doing research on an old-fashioned or outdated topic, suggesting that my research provoked reactions such as “who’s interested in critique nowadays?” or “Sounds old!” or “sounds odd!”. Then it made me wonder why anyone would imagine that a supposed strength of ideas – such as those of Freire – could necessarily guarantee change in practice. Yes, Freire’s ideas were really powerful, but demands such as that made to me appeared to come from an unquestioned and naturalized Enlightenment concept according to which it may be presupposed that theory propels practice, or that practice is the product of theory... or, if ideas were taken as products, their consumption could exhaust the Market that, then, in its turn, would have to look for novelties... or, going further, someone who did not know Brazilian History, could presuppose that “the national context is crucial for an understanding of Freire”, as posed in Irwin (2012, p. 24).

In *Pedagogia do Oprimido*, published in Brazil in 1968, and in English in 1970 (translated by Myra Ramos *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, London: Continuum, 1996), we see Freire bringing to the surface the naturalization of oppression that he had been perceiving in the Brazilian population, both among those who were taken as the ones whose ‘social roles’ related to subalternity and those who were thought to be the ones who led. By that time, he described his perception of oppression as encapsulated in the colonizer-colonized relationship and in response identified the need for developing *conscientização*, an awareness-raising-oriented education, asserting that “by making it possible for men to enter into the historical process as responsible subjects, *conscientização* (awareness-raising) inserts them in the quest for self-affirmation, and thus avoids fanaticism” (FREIRE, 1996, p. 18).

While resignifying education in Brazil, Freire [there were others in Brazil who also worked on similar lines at the same time] disseminated awareness-raising within the Brazilian educational, cultural, social and political context. *Conscientização* gained growing relevance in the academic – as well as in the social – scenario. But then came the decades of military dictatorship in Brazil and much of that discourse was veiled for the sake of the “safety” of the voiced and the unvoiced.

After more than twenty years of military government, extreme economic and social differences were visible in the 80’s: Brazil was then internally called ‘*Belíndia*’, meaning a mixture of the wealth of Belgium and the poverty of India (SCHWARTZ; STARLING, 2015). By then, the oppressor-oppressed/colonizer-colonized concept had lost strength in social and academic debates, but little by little its core concern came to surface again from the 1990s onwards, now in the discussions on coloniality and decoloniality (QUIJANO, 1992) and re-readings (SOUZA, 2015) of “*Casa Grande e Senzala*” (FREYRE, 1933). Awareness-raising and critique seem to regain importance. In the social and academic account, claims for a different, diversified and critical education have been more and more voiced/heard. At the same time, the giant of conservative ideals that had been sleeping seems to have been awakened. Adversely, some of the signs may be seen in conservative counter-proposals, such as the government Bill “*Schools without politics*” (*Escola sem partido*) and another project (*Projeto de Lei 1411/2015*) that intends to ban what it sees as “ideological harassment” in Brazilian schools. Both proposals are accompanied by the growth of intolerance towards difference.

That same demand at the 2004 Conference on Literacy comes up to my mind again: “*Why is it that in Paulo Freire’s land you academics still advocate for critical education?*” Can I attribute other meanings to it now? Could it be possible that there is a fear of critical education in Brazil? Why? Who wouldn’t be interested in it? Would it still be legible to think that the majority of the population fears freedom, as Freire supposed (1996, p. 18): “Such an individual is actually taking refuge in an attempt to achieve security, which he prefers to the risks of liberty”? If so, why is this fear of critique generated? What for? Has oppression faded away in people’s relationships?

It is likely that the critical education proposals discussed in this special issue intend to revisit the freirean struggles posed in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: “The struggle for humanization, for the emancipation of labour, for the overcoming of alienation, for the affirmation of human beings and persons” (FREIRE, 1996, p. 26). After all, it seems that Freire is still update although his theories can be even more updated to our times. What would you say, Lynn Mario?

Walkyria, maybe it’s not so much a fear of critique as opposition to the *status quo*, as it is a need to re-think the notion of critique. As you said, Freire’s notion of critique when he wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was very much based on the dichotomy oppressor/oppressed which ran parallel with the colonizer/colonized dichotomy prevalent at the time. In spite of the fact that Freire never claimed to be Marxist, his modernist analytic discourse, giving importance to analytic “rigour” and “consciousness” or “awareness”, presupposing a self-present all-knowing thinking subject ran parallel to much of modernist and Marxist orthodox discourse.

I see the same modernist Enlightenment tendency to privilege rationality, science and progress present in both the early Freire and in the demands made to you at the conference in Manila. The same underlying presupposition seems to be present: as if once a rational, thinking subject *knows* something, one can move on to other, newer knowledge. It’s the supermarket consumer idea you mentioned. As if once the product has been satisfactorily consumed, there is a need for *novelty*, a new product. This presupposes a line of progress from old to new, from the already-known to the not-yet-known.

The role of critique here seems to be to analyse the old and propose the new. It seems to imply constant progress along a linear trajectory. This is perhaps what Freire presupposed when he referred to individuals refusing

critique as doing so out of the fear of the insecurity of newness that he called the “risks of liberty”.

Sousa Santos (1999) discusses the difficulty of constructing a theory of critique without falling into the traps posed historically by western Enlightenment. I think it has a lot to do with the demand put to you at that conference: why *still* talk about Freire? It also has to do with Freire’s idea of awareness-raising and the fear of critique and with your own question “has oppression faded away in people’s relationships?”

Abandoning a concept of rational, cumulative linearity, Sousa Santos proposes that all learning implies a movement from a point of ignorance (as non-knowledge) A towards a point of knowledge (as non-ignorance) B. For Santos, ignorance refers to the not-knowing of a certain type of knowledge but does not refer to not-knowing everything; on the other hand, knowledge refers to knowing something but also not knowing other things; hence knowledge also implies ignorance. What is at stake here is the concept of totality. There is no total knowledge and no total ignorance. Knowledge is always partial and is ignorance. Knowledge therefore includes ignorance in the same way that ignorance includes knowledge.

Besides the concept of totality, what is also at stake is a relationship to different types of knowledge. The Enlightenment, or what decolonial thinkers call ‘Modernity’, privileged rational knowledge and used science as the model for all valid knowledge. Rationality and science, and the desire to rationally explain the universe led to the connection between knowledge and totality: science came to signify total organized knowledge. What science doesn’t know simply doesn’t exist. Similarly, the implication is that what has not been acquired through an organized scientific method cannot be knowledge. No questions are raised about the possible ignorance of science. Also, no questions are raised about those innumerable different knowledges in the world that don’t conform to the models of rationality of modern science. These are simply seen as disorganized non-scientific ignorance and therefore non-existent as knowledge.

Sousa Santos explains this as knowledge based on a desire for *regulation*, a need to impose rules and order; where only the knowledge of the dominant is seen as ordered knowledge. For this *regulatory* view, learning has to progress from chaos to order. It has to progress from a point of ignorance (or chaos) to a point of total knowledge (or order). On this is based the concept of education as the raising of consciousness and hence the access

to total knowledge. It is also the basis of questions such as “why do you still need Freire?” Underlying this is the idea that what has been learned will be known forever; it implies the eradication of not-knowing; the eradication of ignorance. It does not problematise what is meant by knowing and not knowing, and for whom? It also does not problematise knowledge as totality.

Sousa Santos proposes a concept of learning different to the *regulational* concept; he calls this *emancipatory* learning. *Emancipatory* learning is no longer a movement from chaos to order, but a movement from inequality to solidarity. Here inequality is the point of ‘ignorance’ at the start of learning and solidarity is the point of ‘knowledge’ where learning has been attained. This implies that rather than seeing knowledge as totality, knowledge is seen as always partial and local. Besides this perception of the non-totally of knowledge, the learning that takes place in this emancipatory concept, is a movement away from a rejection of other knowledges (hence inequality) towards a respect for the knowledge of others and therefore an acceptance and respect for mutual ignorance, for the fact that some know some things and others know other things.

You may be wondering where critique fits into this picture. According to Sousa Santos, critique (for both the political right as well as for the political left) has been seen as a product of the Enlightenment and, hence, privileges reason and science, and conforms to the *regulational* concept of learning. Because of this, much of what is seen as ‘education for emancipation’ has in fact proposed the movement from chaos to order, from informal to formal education, from common-sense to rigorousness, from orality to literacy. This has all implied a desire to eliminate the different and the plural and impose homogeneity in the name of order.

A critique that differs from the Enlightenment and modernity and therefore seeks to promote emancipation is, for Sousa Santos, a critique that is *solidary with difference and plurality* and values the pedagogical need for *translation*. Translation here is not the movement from the meaning in one language to the meaning in another language. Translation is the *attitude* that sees all knowledge as partial and incomplete and therefore *ethically* demands an attitude for accepting and attempting to deal with one’s own ignorance and that of others, without expecting to overcome this.

Walsh (2017) speaking from a decolonial lens, reminds us that Freire tended to emphasize unequal distribution of knowledge and the economic as major factors in social injustice, whereas post-freirean decolonial thinking

in Latin America now emphasizes the unequal distribution of the *epistemic*; this is seen as inseparable from race, culture, language and gender. Walsh, in similar terms to Sousa Santos' *emancipatory* learning, proposes that decolonial pedagogies should begin *from* a particular location and aim to co-exist *with* their opponents rather than eliminating them or becoming like them. This proposal to think *from* and *with* is both transgressive and convivial. It implies at the same time challenging and dialoguing with. There is no pre-established point of arrival; only the need for justice and change.

As you said, Walkyria, Freire needs to be updated. The thinking we have been exposed to after *Pedagogia do Oprimido*, on post-structuralism, post-coloniality, post-modernism and now decoloniality, would probably alter that question put to you in Manila in 2004 to “which Freire?” “why Freire now?” And, rather than a demand, or an accusation, the question would now probably be an invitation to dialogue; to think *from* each other's locations and *with* each other. And, as you said, this is what this special issue sets out to do.

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