

Freire's Vision of Development and Social Change: Past Experiences, Present Challenges, and Perspectives for the Future¹

A Visão de Desenvolvimento e Mudança Social de Freire: Experiências do Passado, Desafios do Presente e Perspectivas para o Futuro

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ABSTRACT

This article proposes to view Freire's thinking as a model or even paradigm of communication, development, and social change. To build this as an original argument, we firstly outline Freire's ontological call, presenting and discussing his underlying five principles. Secondly, we trace Freire's legacy by presenting and discussing how Freire inspired three significant Ibero-American thinkers, Augusto Boal, Juan Díaz Bordenave, and Boaventura de Sousa Santos. Finally, we deepen our analysis of Freire's vision of communication, development, and social change, unpacking how he navigates between a normative vision grounded in a utopian aspiration for change, and a very systematic and rigorous methodology, his liberating pedagogy.

Keywords: Development, social change, communication, Paulo Freire, epistemologies of the South

RESUMO

Este artigo propõe tomar o pensamento de Freire como um modelo ou mesmo paradigma de comunicação, desenvolvimento e mudança social. Para tanto, primeiro delineamos a dimensão ontológica de Freire, apresentando e discutindo seus cinco princípios subjacentes. Em seguida, percorremos seu legado, apresentando e discutindo como ele inspirou três importantes pensadores ibero-americanos, Augusto Boal, Juan Díaz Bordenave e Boaventura de Sousa Santos. Finalmente, aprofundamos nossa análise da visão de Freire sobre desenvolvimento e mudança social, destacando como ele navega entre uma visão normativa fundamentada em uma aspiração utópica de mudança e uma metodologia muito sistemática e rigorosa, sua pedagogia libertadora.

Palavras-chave: Desenvolvimento, mudança social, comunicação, Paulo Freire, epistemologias do Sul

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If someone reading this text were to ask me, with an ironic smile, whether I believe that in order to change Brazil it is enough to surrender to the fatigue of constantly stating that change is possible and that human beings are not mere spectators, but also actors in history, I would say no. But I would also say that changing implies knowing that it is possible to do it . . . What is not possible, however, is to even think about transforming the world without a dream, without utopia, or without a vision.

– Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Indignation*

INTRODUCTION

TOWARDS THE END of 2019, the world experienced a strong wave of social mobilization that brought back images and memories of the global movement of mobilizations experienced in 2010-2011 with the Arab Springs across countries like Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria, the Indignados Movements of Greece and Spain, the Occupy Movement of the US that spread globally, and with other uprisings in Brazil and Turkey in 2013, in South Africa and Kenya in 2015, and in numerous other countries. In 2019, we again saw mass protests and uprisings, for example in Lebanon, Hong Kong, Iran, France, and numerous Latin American countries like Ecuador, Haiti, Uruguay, and in particular a very large stream of mobilizations in Chile, the largest since the country regained democracy in the late 1980s. In the midst of this, Brazil was experiencing the first year of the newly elected Government of Jair Bolsonaro, with severe clampdowns on universities, civil society, the LGBT+ communities, indigenous groups, and many others. In Brazil, the resistance and contestation towards the dominant politics emerged as more fragmented than other examples here given.

While the motivations behind the mentioned uprisings obviously vary, we argue that they have a critique of development in common. Recurrently, the mentioned movements have contested and resisted a state of society – and inherently a model of development – that has not managed to tackle poverty, the alarming levels of socio-economic inequality in society, and the unethical practices of corruption. The uprisings, while often being sparked by very specific policy actions, be it a rise in transport fares, a ban on WhatsApp, an unjust law, or a cut in the health sector, tended all to express strong feelings of being left out of influence, of not managing to make ends meet in everyday life and not being heard by decision-makers. Such experiences of lack of participation, of social inequality, and of not having a voice to speak out come together as a power

asymmetry (Suzina, 2016; 2018) and, more concretely, as a negation of the values and principles that are at the centre of Paulo Freire's vision of development.

This article will argue that Freire's thinking constitutes not just a pedagogical vision, but a larger and deeper vision of communication and development. It is a vision with a set of foundational principles and values that guide the constitution of a social order, inspire a practice of communication and social interaction, and also serve as a normative guide for co-existence in society. We will suggest that the reason why the current government in Brazil considers late Paulo Freire a dangerous man and strives to ban his ideas in their entirety from Brazil is because Freire's ideas constitute a vision of development that is fundamentally in opposition to that of the current government.

Accordingly, the model of communication that comes from a Freirean perspective is completely different from the one mobilized (appropriated) by Bolsonaro's government. Silvio Waisbord (2020) argues that "the obsession with Freire's legacy reflects the feisty opposition of Bolsonaro's populism to central principles of the democratic public sphere. Freire advanced a view of public communication that is antithetical to the populist vision" (p. 449). In another article, one of us defined the appropriation of communication by conservative and right-wing movements under the notion of "restrictive dissonance" (Suzina, 2020) mainly for being oriented towards the annihilation of any and all different or contradictory voices or perspectives.

This article will fall into three sections. Firstly, we outline Freire's ontological call and the underlying principles that were recurrent throughout most of his thinking. Secondly, we trace Freire's legacy by presenting and discussing how Freire inspired three significant Ibero-American thinkers and practitioners: Augusto Boal, Juan Díaz Bordenave, and Boaventura de Sousa Santos. Their research and practice have unraveled Freire's legacy into global pathways of theatre, participatory communication, and the realm of epistemology. Finally, we deepen our analysis of Freire's vision of communication, development, and social change, unpacking how he navigates between a clearly normative vision grounded in a utopian aspiration on one side, and a very systematic and rigorous methodology, his liberating pedagogy, on the other.

FREIRE'S ONTOLOGICAL CALL

To understand the actuality of Paulo Freire, we must recognize a distinction between placing his work in the past, in the present or considering its relevance in discussions about future pathways of development. Freire's ideas evolved historically from the late 1940s to the late 1990s. His seminal contributions are



from the 1960s and 1970s, in a time of authoritarianism, high levels of analphabetism, and socio-economic inequalities, not least in the rural outback of the Northeast from where his experience originated. Cicilia Peruzzo (2020) traces these origins, proposing some fundamental pillars within which to understand Freire's thinking in general and, more particularly, how it refers to communication and social change. His work remains relevant because it applies to every situation where a society is confronted with a dispute over its model of development, meaning the way it wants to protect, produce and share the wealth and how its members take part in this process. Waisbord (2020) situates the current right-wing populist government, which is strongly influenced by conservative religious groups, within the broader wave of conservative movements in Latin America. He thereby gives a sense of what is currently at stake in Brazil and how Freire's philosophy can inform a debate that transcends borders.

Freire's *ontological call* is associated with five principles, those of humility, empathy, love, hope, and dialogue (Freire, 1968/2017, p. 33) that he presented as the spirit of one of his main referential works, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, originally published in 1968. As he also recognizes, it is an ontology that tends to divide people, because it might be seen as too idealistic for some while rejected by others who don't align with its critical tone and denunciation against the oppressors.

Strongly rooted in a Marxist analysis of society, Freire's vision places real people, as well as institutions, in a power relationship framework denying the possibility of a neutral positioning. As such he takes a clear normative stand. But Freire's position is also a contextual and dynamic vision that points to windows of opportunity, hope, and transformation, all seen as processes that can change both sides. Humanization, as defined by Freire, is not just about repositioning the oppressed in a better condition. It is about completely redrawing the relationship oppressed-oppressor and addressing the power asymmetry of this relationship under the guidance of Freire's ontological call and its underlying principles, which are unpacked below.

Freire places *humility* as a specific requirement to recognize that people – any people – are knowledgeable. Dialogue, achieved through communication and with humility, becomes a place of encounter in everyday life, where knowledge is constructed and reconstructed on a permanent basis. This is a principle that helps to read the emergence of right-wing voices in Brazil, a subject that is densely and provocatively analyzed by both Helton Levy (2020) and by Fanny Vrydagh and César Jiménez-Martínez (2020)². As their cases reveal, a dispute is evident in order to articulate a process whereby the truth crystallizes from one group. However, humility suggests that the authentic truth does not belong to

² Vrydagh and Jiménez-Martínez's article was translated into English and included in this special issue of *MATRIZES* as well.

any individual or group, nor is it imposed by one group upon another. Authentic truth – or the authentic word, in Freire’s terminology – is rather an outcome of a permanent exercise of action and reflection that takes into account the reality and the perspective of each participant of any relationship (Suzina, 2020).

Empathy goes beyond generosity. In Freire’s vision of development, there is no room for charity in the sense of classifying those in need as lacking capacity or being disabled in any way. Rather the principle of empathy is a form of recognizing different points of departure that make it harder for some to reach their goals. The principle of empathy recognizes inequalities and takes them as collective issues rather than a matter of individual effort or merit. Need, or being in need, is a sign of domination of some over others. Empathy is then required to trigger a change that will provide the dominated with what is necessary to break this cycle of oppression.

The principle of *love* guides an approach that connects reason with the senses. Raquel Paiva (2020) emphasizes the cultural nature of Freire’s pedagogy whereby he places the value of relationships over the rigor of discipline. It is a method that acknowledges the Other in plenitude and all forms of knowledge. Overall, it is a model of development based on collective ties including all beings, humans or not.

Finally, the principle of *hope* is about trusting a new just social order as the horizon to be pursued, like in Eduardo Galeano’s vision of utopia where every step towards it makes it move a step away, under the golden purpose of keeping one walking (Galeano, 2012). Hope is both the principle and the rule with which to achieve a critical view and a permanent search for change: “Freire’s work represents the communicative politics of hope – the notion that humans can change themselves and transform social conditions in order to produce a more just society” (Waisbord, 2020, p. 451). Thereby, Waisbord argues: a Freirean approach becomes a source of democratic resilience. Consequently, the opposite of asymmetry is not symmetry but is the justice and coexistence in the sense of carving out space for different forms of being and understanding.

These principles were developed by Freire in different degrees and forms across all his works, but they also served as inspiration for many thinkers and practitioners all over the world. In the next section, we are going to explore this dissemination and concentrate on his influence over the work of three Ibero-American authors.



TRACKING FREIRE'S VISION OF DEVELOPMENT IN LATIN AMERICA AND BEYOND

Freire's liberating pedagogy was developed and refined over the 50 years of his career, from his first work in 1947 to his passing in 1997. Although he was very visionary and philosophical, his thinking was grounded in a practical experience and a rigorous pedagogical methodology. This made his thinking not only inspirational to many but also accessible and applicable. Many social and development sectors, social movements, civil society organizations, and communities engaging with questions of social justice and social change were heavily inspired by Paulo Freire.

In the field of communication for social change, Freire's influence was documented in Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte's large, edited collection: *Communication for Social Change Anthology: Historical and Contemporary Readings* (2006). From 2004-2006, they conducted a global call to identify seminal texts in the 50-year history of the field of communication for social change. Following a comprehensive global consultative process and a very participatory editorial process involving 10 world-leading experts, 200 texts (from quotes and excerpts to full-fledged articles) were selected as seminal for the field. A total of 40% were texts from Latin America and most had explicit references to Freire. Some texts from Asia, Africa, and the US also made explicit references to him. It was evident that his thinking had global influence.

Looking back, it is well documented how Freire served as a source and as an epistemological foundation not only in the field of education but for a breadth of thinkers and practitioners engaging in the development and social change. In the following, we explore three lines of significant reflection and action that in each their way have engaged with Freire's vision of development and social change. All three constitute significant pathways of scholarly work, internationally led by their own right but with the legacy of Freire's thinking embedded solidly in theirs. They reveal the flexibility of Freire's philosophy but at the same time a normative grounding that ties their approaches to a kind of social change that challenges the current dominant paradigm of development.

The first explores Freire's influence upon theatre for development, Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre in particular. The second refers to Freire's influence on participatory communication and communication for social change, illustrated by Juan Díaz Bordenave's writings. Finally, and possibly most significantly, Freire has influenced Boaventura de Souza Santos' thinking and articulation of the epistemologies of the South. This draws significant lines to current debates about development and, in particular, about the philosophy of science that informs debates, concepts, and theories of communication and development.

Staging oppression: Augusto Boal and the connections between arts and participation

The Theater of the Oppressed constitutes an approach to dramaturgy developed by another Brazilian, Augusto Boal, and is deeply inspired by the work of Paulo Freire. It consists of theoretical and practical formulations consistent with a concrete experience. This approach to dramaturgy aims to break the experience of the one who only watches, the spectator, in order to transform him/her into a *spect-actor* (Boal, 1979), meaning someone capable of proposing changes to the situation of oppression expressed in each scene. Within this dynamic, the character thinks and acts in the place of the spectator since he/she interrupts the action to formulate, through representation, his/her ability to act and his/her understanding of what is happening.

From one's perspective, the Theater of the Oppressed subscribes to a movement of developing participatory art, breaking the silence of the audiences so that the theater does not remain an idea of some who stage (the actors) and others who observe (spectators), totally separate from or with limited participation in each other's role (Carpentier, 2011, chapter 1). From another perspective, the *Theatre of the Oppressed* can be seen as an approach to entertainment-education, where the awareness process of the audiences is embedded in a large array of empowerment purposes (Obregon & Tufte, 2014). In this case, the spectator is the main instrument for the idea of a theater that seeks to break the barrier between the stage and the audience, taking the latter to participate in the entire resolution process and also in the distribution of responsibilities, thus engaging everyone in the process of transformation. This method involves people willing to reflect, propose and give their opinion regarding the example of oppression represented in the theatre play.

The Theater of the Oppressed articulates many of Freire's principles and it particularly reinforces the one related to raising consciousness (*conscientização*) and also to his principle of breaking the silence through the voice of the oppressed. *Theatre of the Oppressed* is internationally appropriated by global and local associations in the field of development, proving its practical character in the identification of common problems and the construction of collective solutions. A good example of this has been the use of *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Forum Theatre in particular, for decades in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa (Tufte, 2015, chapters 3-5).

As an approach to social change, the Theater of the Oppressed engages with Freire's perspective that no one should predict the future on behalf of any individual or community, taking the full participation of people as the only way for a democratic public sphere, as argued by Waisbord (2020). This future can,



for example, not be the reproduction of conservative rules that right-wing actors appreciate as a way of stabilizing society, neither the straight direction towards an ideal future designed by the left-wing. The future is an open-ended piece of art. The autonomy of *spect-actors* in the direction of the scenes is a prefiguration of the autonomy that Freire predicts as the one required for a permanent re-definition of a future based on a constant process of action and reflection.

The participatory society: Juan Díaz Bordenave and the 'arch of participation'

The Paraguayan Juan Díaz Bordenave is probably one of the authors who took the Freirean idea of participation further. In his Ph.D. research, he studied rural communities of Pernambuco, Brazil (Orué Pozzo, 2014), in the same region where Freire had developed and put in place his pedagogical method, alphabetizing hundreds of adult peasants. Together with his experience in rural development and his close interest regarding the Theology of Liberation, this field research influenced Bordenave in the definition of principles that could pull on what he called a *participatory society* (Bordenave, 1989).

At the personal level, it was Bordenave who Freire first approached in 1964, after the military coup in Brazil, as he needed to exile himself. Bordenave was then the director of communications at Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), Peru. However, before Bordenave came around to respond to Freire's request for help, the latter had exiled himself at the Bolivian Embassy to Brazil, shortly after managing to cross into Bolivia, and onwards to Chile where he remained for over 4 years. Only many years later, in the late 1970s, their pathways crossed again when Bordenave re-established a contact, approaching Freire while he was still in exile, now based at the World Council of Churches in Geneva (Tufte, 2013, pp. 12-13).

We generally understand participation through two theoretical paths. One comes from social sciences and highlights any process or practice that integrates different actors in the realization of something. It is about taking part – or allowing others to take part – in a project or activity. The second path comes from political science and discusses how to equalize power. It is still about doing things together, but it goes beyond it to analyze how come people get together and take part in the decisions regarding the way they work and the destiny they pursue. This difference is explored in approaches that define levels or degrees of participation, such as in the “ladder of citizen participation” developed by Sherry Arnstein (1969), or others that distinguish between interaction and participation, such as the one proposed by Nico Carpentier (2012). These

two perspectives are intertwined in the work of Freire and clearly explicit in the work of Bordenave, for whom participation is a human right that enables the emergence of individual subjectivity, as well as their legitimacy as active members of a community, meaning capable of interfering in the definition of collective destiny (Bordenave, 1989, p. 19). The move towards a participatory society implies a deep change in relationships from the level of family to the one of the State.

As a practitioner and an intellectual, Bordenave strongly influenced the field of communication for development, using his thoughts about participation to overcome interventionist methods. A core inspiration was Paulo Freire's book from 1973, *Extension o Comunicacion? La Concientizacion en el Medio Rural* (Freire, 1973). In this small but significant book, Freire unravels a harsh critique of the way communication is conceived in the agricultural sector. Still today you find the notion of the 'extension worker' circulating. Freire saw that as a very linear, non-participatory concept, promoting what he called "cultural invasion". He proposed a whole new way to conceptualize these change agents working in the agricultural sector, aligned with his ideas from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. For Bordenave, Freire's book was crucial, a turning point. Bordenave was originally, intellectually formed by some of the key academics within the diffusion of innovation paradigm, notably Everett Rogers. Like others leading Latin American scholars inspired by Freire, such as Orlando Fals-Borda and Luis Ramiro Beltrán, Bordenave had won a scholarship to study in the US in the 1950s. So, all the while their first intellectual training was embedded in a linear, functionalist paradigm of communication and development, their later acquaintance with Freire made them revisit their stand.

People are knowledgeable: the epistemological challenge of Boaventura de Sousa Santos

The Portuguese professor of sociology Boaventura de Sousa Santos has over the years developed an ambitious project to formulate an *epistemology of the South*. This social science project critiques the dominant discourse in modern science, suggesting alternative epistemological pathways and arguing for an epistemological break. Sousa Santos' ideas are rooted in the fundamental claim for global cognitive justice which, in Freirean terms, explores the hope for a better future through an integrated effort that combines reflection and action.

While Sousa Santos' 2014 book *The Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide* constituted an impactful proposal for this alternative pathway, it is in his more recent book, *The End of the Cognitive Empire* (2018) that



he analyses how to address and challenge the institutions where Eurocentric scientific knowledge is produced. He argues that addressing this global dominance of a specific cognitive empire is about challenging both the research, the kind of knowledge produced, but equally the pedagogies that are part and parcel of developing specific ecologies of knowledge. It is in this context that he unpacks how both the Colombian *father* of participatory action research, Orlando Fals-Borda, and Paulo Freire's liberating pedagogy have influenced the epistemology of the South.

For Boaventura, extra-institutional practices, such as social struggle, are often central to developing the epistemologies of the South. They:

point to practices of criticism and possibility, nonconformity and resistance, denunciation, and counterproposal . . . Prefigurative institutionalities and pedagogies are ways of organizing collective conviviality and promoting liberating learning processes capable of credibly accomplishing, here and now and on a small scale, another possible future (Sousa Santos, 2018, pp. 248-249).

It is in this context that he recognizes the strong influence of Freire: "the epistemologies of the South would not have been possible without two major proposals that revolutionized pedagogy and the social sciences at the end of the 1960s and during the 1970s" (Sousa Santos, 2018, p. 253). Boaventura talks about a "hot reason" as the one that copes with emotions and affects without losing intelligibility. Freire defines the "true word" as something that works both as a way of working, meaning taking everyone as equal, as knowledgeable, and as a projection for the future, where the words do not just describe facts but project a utopia. The ecology of knowledge relates to recognizing different knowledges and restituting the power to all people, representing the world as their own and upon their own terms.

Such an approach is central to several bottom-up development initiatives that Sousa Santos has been involved in. It lay as a guiding principle in the Brazilian experience with participatory budgeting, a process that began in Porto Alegre in 1989 as a project with aspirations to achieve participatory democracy. It encouraged, and achieved, broad political participation around municipal public budgeting in particular, and it has since spread to hundreds of cities worldwide (Tufte, 2017). Sousa Santos saw it as the emergence of a "techno-democratic culture".

Another example, in which Sousa Santos' ideas were influential, were around the World Social Fora, especially the early ones held in Porto Alegre in the first decade of the 2000s. Here, Sousa's thinking, his critique of the global state of

affairs, of the social consequence of globalization, in particular, were important. His arguments for voice and participation and for a social struggle to end social and cognitive injustice resonated strongly with the many social movements and CBOs engaged there. While Freire's ideas were very present and visible in the pro-democracy struggles in Brazil in the 1970s and especially 1980s, they were less visible in the 1990s and 2000s, which was the period when Sousa Santos' influence grew, and he established himself as a significant public intellectual in Brazil and across Latin America. The interesting point established above is the Sousa Santos' intellectual inspiration sourced from Freire.

THE GLOBAL NOW: CRITIQUING DEVELOPMENT – CLAIMING VOICE, PARTICIPATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

The historical development and influence of Freire over these three thinkers reveal epistemological links and help to understand also the connections between the discontent and consequential uprisings flourishing in different parts of the world. As we mentioned before, the latter is frequently triggered by policies that, although punctual, reveal a larger condition of inequality and a sense of power asymmetry experienced by billions of people living under the same unjust model of development that is constantly justified by a dominant cognitive machine. They are the outcry from the concrete experience of injustice trying to occupy the stage and claiming alternatives.

What do these waves of protest have in common with the “pernicious polarization” (Vrydagh & Jiménez-Martínez, 2020) in Brazil that paved the way for the election of an extreme right federal government? From a Freirean perspective, we think that there are two main analytical keys that can serve as entry point to answer this question. Firstly, there is the historical context of social and cognitive injustices. Secondly, seen from the other side, there are the politics of hope.

As we already evoked, experiences of lack of participation, of social inequality and of not having a voice to speak out constitute a general framework of power asymmetry. Elsewhere, Suzina (2018) has described Brazil as an asymmetric democracy because, on the top of structural and historic inequalities, its citizens hardly get to intervene in the (re)definition of the social order, a barrier almost impossible to overtake for marginalized social groups. Levy (2020) offers an illustrative example of this, displaying a periphery that got tired of being (kept) silent and thus developed “grammars of contestation” to express their claims and views. A similar feeling of lack of voice is described by Vrydagh and Jiménez-Martínez (2020), although coming from very different circumstances.



The latter argue that the polarization observed in Brazil was underpinned by perceptions rather than by irreconcilable differences. Both authors analyse the rise of right-wing voices in the country and, in different ways, contribute to confirm the general traits of asymmetries.

Levy (2020) brings up the case of people actually living under the realm of injustices either abandoned by the public powers, treated with paternalism or blamed by their supposed faults and, therefore, consequently deserving a miserable fate. Vrydagh and Jiménez-Martínez (2020) describe what could be called as performances of contestation, where there is an appropriation of the popular awareness of injustice converted into the reproduction of repertoires generally associated with progressist movements, such as popular marches and occupation of public buildings. The pursuit of voice-raising becomes associated with a shared feeling of domination.

The relevance of looking at this issue from the perspective of social and cognitive injustice is that we can see how the prevalence of power asymmetry is a fertile ground for the emergence of anyone seeking a position of leadership. Vrydagh and Jiménez-Martínez (2020) suggest that authoritarian and/or populist regimes might emerge as an outcome of a “pernicious polarization”. Waisbord (2020) situates Bolsonaro’s government as a textbook of populism for, in a way, institutionalizing this asymmetry under the dichotomy of friends and foes. Accordingly, we can also see how a false idea of liberation can emerge in this context.

For Freire, there is no real liberation without a collective, contextual and historical process. In *Pedagogy of Oppressed* (1968/2017), he argues that there is no liberation if it is not part of a mutual process. If the oppressed and oppressors just exchange positions, no sustainable transformation has been achieved. Despite auto-proclaiming themselves as bearers of truth, the right-wing that came into power in Brazil is far away from the true word defined by Freire.

As one of us discussed previously under the concept of dissonance (Suzina, 2020), technically, the appropriation of the word, in these terms, involves action and reflection, as conceptualized by Freire. In the process of social change, it is a word that seeks and causes dissonance. The distinction refers to what it points to as the horizon. The authentic word guides the emergence of voices towards coexistence and cognitive justice while the inauthentic word disrespects a central foundation of Freire’s pedagogy, which is the elimination of any form of domination. The real liberation through the appropriation of the word does

not seek to replace those in power but to break the cycle of domination and create a new order where oppressors and oppressed become equals.

Paulo Freire struggled to work with these ideas of his. He inspired and achieved to articulate such processes of liberation through his life-long experience of working with liberating pedagogy. He had done it in Brazil in the 1940s and 1950s, culminating with his work with national alphabetization campaign for the Ministry of Education shortly before the military coup in 1964. In exile, from 1964-1979, he wrote some of his seminal works while in Chile, spent time at Harvard in 1970, and got employed by the Council of Churches in Geneva to apply his ideas in literacy work in countries like Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Nicaragua. Once back in Brazil in the 1980s, the military dictatorship was loosening its grip, civil society was growing and social movements mobilizing. Freire became both a university professor, later briefly a politician, but he remained primarily a fundamental inspiration to the Brazilian civil society and this in so many ways.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In 1987, when the urban branch of Brazil's landless movements conducted its first land occupations in Eastern São Paulo, one of us had the opportunity to experience the occupations and interview Paulo Freire about this in his home in São Paulo. In reflecting upon what was going on, Freire was adamant on approaching the conflict from the perspective of power. For Freire, Brazil's landless movement was gradually conquering space, not just in the material sense of the word, but a discursive space, conquering the word through dialogue and informed still by his principles of humility, empathy, love, and hope. However, he was clear about this being a process, and a challenge that required action, yes, but also reflection, or strategic thinking (Freire, personal communication, June 7th, 1987).

He spoke about being impatiently patient – he termed it patiently impatiently, see also his wife's description, A. Freire (2004, p. xxix) –, and he clearly reflected the rigour of his own, original pedagogy, the Paulo Freire method, developed and first presented comprehensively in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), but refined in *Extension or Communication?* (1973), in *Pedagogy of Hope* (1992/2009) and in *Pedagogy of Freedom*, published in 1998, the year after his death. In his last book, he reclaims strongly the utopian dimension of his work, a



dimension that is highly action-oriented in the sense that education, he argued, is “that specifically human act of intervening in the world”, and further:

When I speak intervention, I refer both to the aspiration for radical changes in society in such areas as economics, human relations, property, the right to employment, to land, to education, and to health, to the reactionary position whose aim is to immobilize history and maintain an unjust socio-economic and cultural order. (Freire, 1998, p. 6)

He insisted on connecting democracy from below – radical democracy – and human liberation. And, despite speaking about love and empathy, he also insisted on the right to be angry, angry about social injustice in all its forms.

Freire's bold vision of development goes hand in hand with a clear vision of what kind of social change he envisaged. There is a normativity in his perspective of social change, and it is connected to the goal of breaking the asymmetries and to the method of touching ground with action and reflection. It is no surprise, therefore, that many practitioners inspired by Freire say that the good communication does not come from the mind, but from the feet that walk on the mud with the poor (Suzina, 2018).

Freire's vision cannot be pursued partially. It was seen in Boal, in Bordenave, in Sousa Santos' epistemology of the South, and it is a defining criterium when wishing to understand the limitation of applying Freire when analysing the right-wing social movements and dynamics in contemporary Brazil. If such movements claim voices, this must be based on the authentic word. If it is the case of increasing awareness to position oneself in the world, this is still different from the level of conscientization of Freire, in which positioning oneself in the world does not mean replacing the oppressor, but requires putting an end to any kind of oppression and becoming equals, humans. When Freire says that the oppressed might humanize the oppressors, he means it. There is no end to oppression if domination just changes hands. Freire was constantly writing, and often in the format of letters. Thus, the first quote in this article, as well as the last (below) are from one of the four letters published years later in the book *Pedagogy of Indignation* (Freire, 2004), and organized by his widow, Ana Maria Araújo Freire. These letters were written between December 1996 and May 1997, the last months of his life. His second letter was entitled: “On the Right and the Duty to Change the World”, in which he argued against neutral education, and reaffirming his liberating take on intervention, he also reflected upon the

growing Landless Movement in Brazil, associating it with the rebelliousness of the Quilombos, the utopian communal societies established by run-away slaves centuries ago. Reflecting upon the former, but looking far beyond it as well, Freire reaffirms his vision of development in the following way:

How great it would be for the expansion and consolidation of our democracy, above all with respect to its authenticity, if other marches were to follow theirs: marches of the unemployed, of the disenfranchised, of those who protest against impunity, of the ones who decry violence, lying and disrespect for public property. Let us not forget as well the marches of the homeless, of the school-less, of the healthless, of the renegades, and the hopeful march of those who know that change is possible. (Freire, 2004, p. 40) ■

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