

**THE DIALOGICS OF NEGATION: GENDER AND SUBJECTIVITY**

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Virtually all the ideas that Paulo Freire has devoted his life's work to explicating – the notion of the active subject, of praxis, of human agency and creativity on the one hand, and of the culture of silence, objectification and internalized oppression on the other – can serve to define the key themes in feminist scholarship, and in what might be called a gendered understanding of subjectivity. In the Freirean perspective, as we see it, it is ultimately in the realm of subjectivity that the educational process must meet its greatest challenge and wrest its triumph. So also in feminist struggle and critical practice. Whether one takes the idea of consciousness-raising as means of empowerment early on in the women's movement, or more recent challenges to a patriarchal post-structuralist paradigm by women of color for whom the articulation of colonizing structures remains a priority, the question of subjectivity is a pre-eminent one. Moreover, for both Freire and feminists, subjectivity is socially and culturally constituted; it is the map of experience and existential reality.

It is the adequacy of this mapping that our paper seeks to address. Our point of reference and interrogation is the Freirean model of dialogue as elaborated in the essay, "Extension or Communication" in Education for Critical Consciousness (Freire, 1973). Without doing injustice to the concrete situation – agrarian and Third World – in relation to which Freire's educational project is elaborated here, we wish to address the larger philosophical issue of knowledge and shared meaning that he advances to frame the viability of the project itself. For Freire, education is but another name for the dynamic process of consciousness, the consciousness of self and other made possible through dialogue. We believe, however, that the categories of "consciousness" and "dialogue" have been collapsed in the Freirean model, whereas the two should remain analytically distinct. In other words, while consciousness is the awareness one garners out of one's total life situation, dialogue (to be distinguished from language) enhances this awareness but does not exhaust its representation. Put in Freirean terms, dialogue as epistemology is not the same as dialogue perceived as mode of action. Freire sees dialogue as the process whereby individuals come together to understand the world and to transform it. But if dialogue is to be foregrounded as a

form of praxis, language itself (and access to it) cannot be taken as a neutral means of expression, but one which is inflected by the dialogic situation. Freire uses "dialogue" both as metaphor (of ontological being) and as concrete practice (intersubjective linguistic exchange), with a consequent slippage from one to the other. But recognizing that dialogue is possible and desirable does not ensure its viability as method.

Our contention, therefore, is that there is a gap between the realm of consciousness and the spokenness of dialogue, a gap that we explore through the notion of gendered subjectivity. The question we ask is not, (or not only), how women as social beings inhabit the dialogic mode, nor is our purpose here simply to reaffirm the specificity of women's silencing, of which enough documentation exists. Rather, we use the subjectivity of women as the space in which the relationship of subaltern consciousness to dialogue may be explored. Our concern in this paper is with the status of what might be called vestigial consciousness, that which is epistemologically and philosophically inadmissible and yet informs subjectivity as the residue of experience. We argue that the dualities of subject/object, speech/silence, humanity/dehumanization, even extension/communication cannot take full account of the social life-process, including the educational process, and that what needs to be articulated is the recognition of negation in speech, dehumanization in humanity, extension in communication. In other words, within the parameters of the dialogic mode, we need ways to draw attention to what is dialogue's shadow self: ambiguity, self-doubt, negation and bitterness. Where, we ask, do models of social change put the "mess," the debris of failed understanding, of communication gone awry? Can the notion of anti-dialogue sufficiently account for the complexity of the unspoken? In what follows, we try to provide an alternative mapping of the process of dialogue, using the subjectivity of women to foreground notions of uncertainty, silencing and negation inherent in dialogue. For, in Paulo Freire's own words, "The world is not made up of certainties. Even if it were, we would never know if something was really certain. The world is made up of the tension between the certain and the uncertain" (Literacy: Reading the Word and the World, 1987; 58).

## Defining Our Terms

We are aware that terms like "negation" and "subjectivity" are philosophically loaded, but we do not wish (and do not have the space) to invoke those associations here. Our use of the terms is more modest and our context limited to that of communication. Negation implies that which is perforce left unsaid or unspoken in the process of dialogue. If we resort to the structuralist linguistic paradigm for a moment, every act of linguistic choice is posited upon a denial. What we say simultaneously silences what we do not say. Negation in this sense identifies a cluster of phenomena such as self-censorship and self-doubt, inexpressivity and the inappropriate articulation. Stated within a Freirean framework, in which the purpose of dialogue is to render into speech that which has been internalized to the detriment of one's social and psychic well-being, we argue that dialogue, particularly in the case of women, often resonates with silence and negation. In fact, negation is the unacknowledged condition of possibility of dialogue. We use the term "subjectivity" to suggest a form of consciousness that informs the individual criss-crossed by social definitions. In recent years, the notion of the subject has, as Paul Smith notes in his book, Discerning the Subject (1988), been "either explicitly or implicitly installed within a number of different areas or discourses of the human sciences." Explicitly, Smith identifies three versions of theorizing the subject: one, the subject as synonymous with the "individual," the "person"; two, the subject in psychoanalytic discourse as "the unconsciously structured illusion of plenitude" which we call "the self"; and three, the subject as object of social and historical forces and determinations. Informing these usages, he claims, is the dualism of subject/object inherited from the western philosophical tradition. Smith argues that the productive contradiction in the notion of the "subject" as determined and determining enables us to see that subjectivity is partial, that an "individual" inhabits multiple subject-positions (pp.- xxvii – xxx). Extended to the dialogue situation, subjectivity has meant the ideal of a fully enabled and self-conscious power (the Subject in Freirean terms, moving from a subject-ed position to its obverse through critical consciousness). But it can also mean the historically specific individual inhabiting diverse subject-positions, a subjectivity constituted by non-coherence and fragmented by multiple oppressions. Thus we

hold that the subject is neither the autonomous fount of meaning nor a mere constellation of discourses as the post-structuralists would have it. Rather, it is the tension between the identification that the subject makes of him or herself as the "I" and the awareness of the tenuousness of this identity in the innumerable crises of daily life and discourse that informs our notion of subjectivity.

By "dialogics" we mean the constitutive conditions of dialogue. Freire has noted: "Communication implies a reciprocity which cannot be broken. Hence it is not possible to comprehend thought without its double function, as something which learns and something which communicates" ("Extension or Communication," p. 138). Here Freire sees communication in relation to "community," reinforcing, like John Dewey and Raymond Williams, the ideas of consensus and shared meaning. Such emphasis, though, cannot account for what Barbara Johnson has called "the warring forces of signification within the text [dialogue] itself" (Johnson, 1980: 5). Moreover, our experience of community is in general mediated and provisional, dependent upon a whole range of social practices, including signification. Our use of the term "dialogics" is inflected by such phenomena. Following Bakhtin, another great exponent of dialogism, we locate utterance "on the border between what is said and what is not said" (Holquist, 1990: 61).

In seeking to elaborate on "the dialogics of negation," then, this paper points not to a derailment of the dialogic process but to its problematization. Our task is a theorization of the inadmissible as inherent in the dialogue process. In other words, dialogue itself is insufficient guarantee that all will be said, revealed or known, that the process will ensure full and equal participation of all concerned. The gendered subject provides the site for the examination of this gap.

## **The Freirean Model of Dialogue**

Before we proceed further, it is necessary to turn to Freire's essay in order to note the intertwining of the philosophical and the political that informs his notion of dialogic communication. Arising out of the specific

context of his literacy campaigns in Brazil and its applicability in the rural Third World, Freire is at once addressing the particular forms of "aid" – financial, technocratic-scientific, educational – that the privileged (both internal and external) proffer to the oppressed and deprived and using this specific model of aid-giving to critique the motivations that underpin them. To develop this critique, Freire is concerned with elaborating on dialogue and communication as the essential human activity which differs from what he calls "extension," the imposition of instrumental knowledge on the poor and illiterate without taking their own understanding of their world into account. For Freire, dialogue can only take place between equal Subjects, in a process in which both the educator and the educated learn from one another. Freire does not investigate that middle ground between the political context of his ideas and the philosophical rationale for the model he proposes. In other words, how is the agronomist-educator to become the dialogic communicator? How is a de-contextualization and re-contextualization to take place? Freire pins his faith on a notion of oral, face-to-face communication, implying that the educator can "leave behind" his/her baggage of thoughts, ideas, prejudices and the like in order to "enter into" the reality of the peasant. Freire therefore posits two unequal but autonomous entities, autonomous, that is, with regard to the situation they arrive from or the situation they create together. This is a theoretical leap of faith that is highly problematic. Not only does Freire presume that the dialogic relation will be the same regardless of the "languages" or systems of meaning that the communicators draw upon; he also posits a gender-neutral model. But surely the situation would differ if the educator-educatee relationship were male-male as distinguished from male-female? Here we are pointing not to essentialisms, but to the extent that gender identity is an index of differential access to and positioning within language. In what follows, we try to explore the implications for dialogue of this differential positioning. Our argument is two-fold: that the social arrangements of power make women less equal in a dialogic partnership and that utterance, the relentless thrust towards verbalization, may actually subvert rather than enhance the dialogic process. In other words, we are claiming that the notion of dialogue elides over the role of silence in the daily maintenance of relationships of empathy, community, social solidarity. The linear and rational underpinnings of the

Freirean mode give it a masculine coding whereby the messy, unstable nature of the communicative process is explained away. Thus rather than see dialogue as developing in an inter-subjective context that is itself left untheorized, we draw attention to the ways in which the social world impinges upon the micro-structures of the dialogic mode, rendering silence as crucial as speech to an understanding of how people communicate.

But first some points of convergence. It might be said that Freire's notion of dialogic communication itself is a feminized one. Women are said to be more oral and communicative (Maltz and Borker, 1982). Freire's description of dialogue conveys a warm and nurturing sensibility usually associated with women. He describes dialogue, for instance, as "the loving encounter of people, who, mediated by the world, 'proclaim' that world. They transform the world and in transforming it, humanize it for all people. This encounter in love cannot be an encounter of irreconcilables." (p. 115) Freire defines power as reciprocity between two subjects, a relationship not of "distance and domination, but rather of intimacy, vulnerability, and exchange" (Christians, 1987: 4). But if dialogic communication evokes a vision of companionate love, nature, another feminized metaphor, is contrasted with the intellect as masculinized form. "'To enter into' reality means to look at it objectively, and apprehend it as one's field of action and reflection. It means to penetrate it more and more lucidly in order to discover the true interrelations between the facts observed." (p. 105) Allied to nature, the peasants take on the attributes of femininity:

There exists between them [the peasants] and their natural world (and 4 obviously their cultural world) a strong "umbilical cord" which binds them. This nearness which identifies them with the natural world makes the act of "entering into" it difficult for them, inasmuch as the nearness does not allow them to see in perspective that which they "enter into." (p. 105)

For Freire the way out of the peasant's unthinking bond with nature and the social world is through rationality. While Freire does not favor the imposition of rationality but rather proposes a deep understanding of social reality on the part of the interlocuters, the speech community he

envisages is a community of equals. We would amend his thesis as follows: within the configuration he posits, it is possible, and it is appropriate, to identify provisional community, and to distinguish between communities on the basis of communication patterns: personally, socially, electorally, academically, sexually, electronically, economically mediated. In other words, "we are with whom we speak," or in the case of the singular, "I am with whom I speak." Thus, we speak and exist differently relative to mediation, time and space, intimacy and authority – authority which we take to include conditions of safety, legitimacy and credibility. In this sense, dialogic processes are indeed subject to changing configurations of power.

Imagining community as somehow synonymous with communication patterns calls attention to the un-fixed nature of both community and subject. It allows for an individual's changing perspective vis-a-vis thresholds of intimacy and safety, and reckons with the likelihood of belonging to many communicating communities simultaneously. Such complexity is crucial to adequately theorize representation. Intrinsic to understanding the experience of persons who exist amidst coinciding systems of oppression, is understanding that subjective positioning within the dialogic process is relative. It is both necessary and unavoidable that our speech not reveal all aspects of ourselves. Similarly, it must be understood that psycho-social/intra-social conflict may supersede revelation within a particular dialogic moment. Such instances of conflict are likely to produce what we have identified as the "inadmissible." Community participation thus defined would account for a multiplicity of potential dialogic involvements and the ensuing complexity of any particular speech act.

In "Extension or Communication," Freire maintains a fine balance between the concrete and the philosophical in that while dialogue can only be developed in specific situations, what he seeks to understand and affirm is the processual nature of dialogue itself. However, in the effort to arrive at or reach epiphany, the state of living through that process, on a day-to-day or moment-to-moment basis, is lost. So Freire's essay considers some contingencies in which dialogue cannot be achieved between the educator and educatee, but ultimately fails to acknowledge that one of the "lived realities" of the process of dialogue is a consciousness of the unsayable. Any



hoped-for unfolding or proliferation of dialogue can only start from that premise.

## Part II

In a film called The Churning made by the Indian director Shyam Benegal, a government-employed veterinarian (much like the Freirean extension agent) goes to a village in western India to help the villagers set up a milk cooperative. Despite his well-meaning attempts, the presence of the outsiders turns the villagers' lives upside down, as the threatened power-structure reacts with a vengeance. At the end of the film the veterinarian leaves, not however, without empowering a fiery untouchable male who as an insider can carry on the fight. The "messiness" of change is displaced onto the female character in the film, a young village woman who is left to face the brutality of her husband who suspects her of a romantic liaison with the veterinarian. The point of this example is that while the lesson of the film is self-empowerment, it is achieved at the cost of the film-maker's unconscious tendency to "resemanticize" (Jean Franco) oppression and the unutterable-unalterable onto the body of woman. The woman at the end is literally left speechless even as the audience is aware that a blow has been struck to behalf of the untouchables. Based on a true account, Bengal's film has been widely used as an educational tool, with the consciousness of the woman's position and subjectivity totally elided. In this way, dominant social discourse's tendency is to marginalize and repress whole dimensions of subjectivity.

Dialogic communication poses language as a tool by which to bring about critical consciousness. By means of dialogue, the processes of dehumanized living and knowing are transformed into critical awareness, naming and self-empowerment.

So much talk or writing, so many ideas seen to stand in the way, to block the awareness that, for that for the oppressed, the exploited, the dominated, domination is not just a subject for radical discourse, for books. It is about pain – the pain of hunger, the pain of overwork, the pain of

degradation and dehumanization, the pain of loneliness, the pain of loss, the pain of isolation, the pain of exile – spiritual and physical. Even before the words, we remember the pain. (bell hooks, Talking Back, 1989: 3-4)

In remembering the pain, in giving expression to experience, in the attempt to make critical one's own understanding of circumstances, decision are made between possible languages. As feminist scholarship has carefully elaborated, languages and knowledge as mediated through gender (and other colonizing structures) differ substantially. Such difference in "language" challenges the success hoped for in the activity of naming. More concisely, disparity between languages jeopardizes dialogue as a process. Amidst one's own kind, the power of naming is an empowering process that renders legitimacy to the named experience, but without the acknowledgment of community, one's self, the subject, may be endangered.

Furthermore, the dialogic process of consciousness-raising is necessarily dialectical, moving from self-definition in and out of self-alienation. In the process of critically identifying one's own subjectivity, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak states, "The question of 'speaking as' involves a distancing from oneself. The moment I have to think of the ways in which I will speak. . . [I] generalize myself, making myself representative, trying to distance myself from some kind of inchoate speaking as such." (Gender/Body/Knowledge, 1989: 413)

Such distancing must be expected, respected and acknowledged, not left unsaid, or dismissed in a hoped-for transgression. The dialectic of self-definition is both an opportunity to represent one's experience, and at the same time, a process of generalization in which the "mess" is again left behind. Similarly we ask, what happens when the Subject central to the activity of dialogue is a subject whose authority is absent, whose position is varied, a subject whose experience and need may well fall outside the scope of rational dialogue, whose experience may be unspeakable, seemingly unthinkable or inappropriate?

The history of women in many cultures has been one in which to speak was to

risk being named "mad." Being named mad, hysterical, uppity, aggressive, feminist or dyke continues to marginalize one's credibility and to incur the suspension of one's right to speaking, naming and authoring. (Naming ourselves as Feminist does not dislocate or dissuade the powers that disenfranchise us and our perspective for use of this term.) Access to naming is not neutral, nor is its enforcement or prohibition. Nor is naming without danger as noted above. Looking into the madness of women it is possible to locate the unsubstantiated, the "mess" – similar to what Freire calls "magic thinking."

For Freire, "magic thinking" is neither "...logical nor pre-logical. It possesses its own internal logical structure and opposes as much as possible any new forms mechanically superimposed..." (p. 104) Extension is the attempt to superimpose knowledge. Because extension does not address the structure and assumptions of "magic thinking," it is a method Freire believes cannot succeed. In contrast, dialogue is a process of personal engagement whereby the participants are encouraged to examine their position within the domain of magic thinking in a critical way. However, communication through dialogue is not immune to negation. While successful dialogue would redress the structures of "magic thinking," by defining "magic thinking" as he does, Freire negates the "mess" of emotional residue, which overlaps but is not the same as "magic thinking."

For women specifically, and for anyone marginalized from dominant social discourse generally, extension has resulted in an unwarranted dismissal of such people's thought as "magical," as not belonging to the realm of critical knowledge. "Critical 'entering into'" must be carefully differentiated from the Master's language.

It is our concern that Freire's classification suffers the same fate as naming, creating a false dichotomy in which the possibly critical value of magical thinking is devalued. Language enables our grasp of reality but not without affecting an organizational composition. "Language reveals its power. ...for no matter how one tries to subject it to control and reduce it to 'pure' instrumentality it always succeeds in giving an inkling of its irreducible governing status." (Min-ha 1989: 58) Dialogue as circumscribed

and elaborated by Freire enables critical awareness but only "entering into" language itself explicitly we suggest, and with the purpose of investigation channels of access and/or prohibition will relativize colonizing discourse and its classifications of knowing.

The social construction of women places them in this more direct relationship to that which we have called "the mess": the inadmissible, that which is taken to be subjective, is thus excluded, censored, negated or simply discouraged in the dialogic process. "Language is one of the most complex forms of subjugation, being at the same time the locus of power and unconscious servility." (Minh-ha, 1989: 54) For reasons we cannot fully explore here, women inhabit this "mess" and it is the place from which each woman attempts to speak her language. Such speaking is uncomfortably in the master's language, even in dialogue, often making it more difficult to practice dialogue critically.

Addressing more specifically the complexity of criss-crossing social definitions, Uma Narayan asserts:

This sense of alienation may be minimized if the critical straddling of two [or more] contexts is part of an ongoing critical politics, due to the support of others and a deeper understanding of what is going on. When it is not so rooted, it may generate ambivalence, uncertainty, despair, and even madness, rather than more positive critical emotions and attitudes. However such a person determines her locus, there may be a sense of being an outsider in both contexts and a sense of clumsiness or lack of fluency in both sets of practices.

(Gender/Body/Knowledge, pp. 266-267)

As a complex of in/unarticulate vestigial motivations and conflict, the subjective self is thus established as a battleground: a battle which may be characterized as occurring between magic thinking and critical thinking with respect to each of these multiple presences." (Minh-ha p.?)

Defining the epistemologically inadmissible unleashes the whole of Feminist

criticism, specifically its challenges to the rationalist paradigm. The triumph of rationalism meant the chastisement of empirical understanding. Science was made chaste by the elimination of the emotive, the tidying of the senses. The realm of the senses was rendered suspect and the relegation of women to the sensorial sphere effectively limited language, experience and culture. As Alison Jagger notes in Gender/Body/Language, "Within the western philosophical tradition, emotions usually have been considered as potentially or actually subversive of knowledge." (p. 145) The sensate, seen as belonging to man the animal, and woman by nature, was made peripheral to the proper activities of civilized man.

In texts now too numerous to mention, the bias of oppositional thinking such as male/female, nature/culture, rational/irrational, have been thoroughly explored and critical inquiry continues across disciplines, asserting a new topography. More recent works such as Carol Gilligan's in a Different Voice (1990), Sara Ruddick's Maternal Thinking (1990), Trinh T. Minh-ha's Woman, Native, Other; (1989), and again the list is long, have begun tentatively to classify the domain of "the mess." This terrain is characterized by its own rhythm, distinct systems of logic and prioritization of value assignment and moral criteria. What has been epistemologically inadmissible, assumes new stature. No longer reducible to the language of "magic thinking" and not simply aspiring to become the Master's language, the mess of vestigial consciousness requires of us as critical beings, new means and metaphors by which to imagine "humane" communication and dialogue.

The legitimation of certain knowledge recreates a hierarchy within the knowable which threatens this communication in dialogue. Hierarchy affords access to certain kinds of action but its cost to those unable to "enter into" the language of codified rationality and relevance may well be inaction, paralysis, speechlessness. In this sense, negation is the risk of speaking at all. In dialogue, what is not spoken, or may be difficult to speak, is understood as part of "magic thinking" and not accepted as part of "true knowledge." This reveals the totalizing tendencies of systems of classification particularly with respect to the production of knowledge. It is not enough, it will not be enough to explain such tendencies to totalize (as

Freire does) as tools of the oppressor – the use of language must be part of the critique.

## **Dialogue and Difference**

Let us turn to the dialogic model as a technical structure in an effort to illuminate how attempts to focus the dialogue risks compromise of subjective representation. Properly situated, Freirean dialogue between two subjects aspires ideally to humanized and humanizing communication. Upon introducing a third member the apparent harmony may be dislocated, exposing the in fact limited, tenuous and illusory nature of the dialogic communication. Dialogic communication is limited in that it cannot account for unarticulated aspects. As we know from the recent history of women's dialoguing, it can undermine the supposed harmony of the group. It is illusory because the achievement of humanized communication is not self-evident and the conditions of one's "entering into" and of "knowing" may be substantially, if not radically, different than those of another. This already has been the experience of women organized in dialogue.

Amidst the realities of multiple oppressions, a dialogic situation is difficult to achieve. Inherent to groups are the issues of diversity, of ethnicity, class backgrounds and sexual preferences. Inhibition, self-censorship and unconscious negation are a hindrance to dialogue as are criticisms of defensiveness, exclusionist accusations, hierarchized discrimination. Communicating "difference" in a diverse group is further endangered because what can be considered within the intimate and personal realm of experience and communication does not comfortably occupy the realm of questionable objectivity. Issues are subjectively sensitive.

In this sense the "I" constitutes the "We." However, this is not meant as a contestation of the Freirean notion that "We think establishes I think," but rather a reminder of the complexity subjecthood brings to the communicating we. For the tendency to focus issues into something manageable and illusively communicative, possibly even "peacekeeping," runs the risk of performing a dehumanizing reduction. Reduction which excludes, which by definition it must,

runs contrary to the dialogic process. Following Freirean thought, reduction is a form of manipulation, a tool of the oppressors serving to maintain power: intentional or not.

This is not to say that humanized dialogue is unattainable. In groups speaking their differences, dialogue can occur but as the arena grows larger, as a coalition expands, dialogue becomes increasingly more difficult. In order to communicate within a group, it may be, or may appear necessary to focus, to speak specifically, but in so doing important differences and experiences in need of naming and validation are often elided. Part of the educator's role is to exert authority to keep the dialogue process focused. This act of focusing can limit the ability of people engaged in dialogue to gain insight into each other's subjective reality. The position of authority that is necessary to maintain focus is problematic and it is not the exclusive domain of the educator. It may also be played out within the communication dynamic of the group. Group process defines the limits of admissible structure and content. As soon as the authority of the educator, or the primacy of the group, or a specific principle of the group is invoked, discreet privileges are created and the dialogue process is compromised. The nature of the compromise is the negation of concerns of members of the group. This negation is the structure of authority reified, rendering certain aspects less important, unsubstantiated or inconvenient. Such is often the case when women of various races, classes, etc. enter into dialogue.

The linearity of dialogic progress from weakness to strength, from magic thinking to naming, oppression to dignity, doxa to logos, obfuscates conditions of simultaneity as experienced by knowing acting subjects. The enactment of self in communication is defined by a range of transforming action, community and concern, and thus draws its significance from eternally changing spheres of interaction, not from a priori established conceptualization of consciousness of knowledge. Posing the practice of dialogue entirely in terms of shared expression under-emphasizes the fact that some form of negation is inevitable because of the very nature of communication, particularly in relation to oppression and colonization. When negation occurs, it is not predictable. While the social and cultural forces

that create the subjectivities of the interlocutors can be discerned, the manner in which they manifest themselves in the process of dialogue cannot be predicted, whether the process is observed from outside, or by the participants themselves. Humanized communication must be defined so as to account for a multiplicity of potential dialogic involvements and the ensuing complexity of any particular speech act. Adequate recognition of this necessitates a more disturbed and disrupted sense of language, of the activity of "entering into," of discursive confidences and subjective discretion.

Women are in a constant state of defining ourselves in relation to race, class and gender. As women in naming, we come to know ourselves as existing within varying degrees and multiple spheres of oppression. Within the Feminist Movement, allegiances[alliances] have become increasingly splintered and divided. Identification as 'women' has become increasingly untenable given the actual diversity among women. Challenging ideas about the hierarchy of oppressions forces greater awareness of the self-constructed nature of identity and subjectivity. The process of "entering into" is differentiated by the variousness of our subjective selves. Creating dialogues towards transformations of hegemonic codes, deconstructing myths and stereotypes of who and what we are is not a road but a mapping. The "dream of a common language" as imagined by the poet Adrienne Rich is mythical. Only acknowledging distinct and multiple languages of experience, of allegiance and of safety affords us the possibility of communication at all.

The struggle to know must be motivated by complexity if there is to be a dismantling and disallowing of dominating knowledges and structures.

"You who understand the dehumanization of forced removal  
– relocation – re-education – redefinition, the humiliation of  
having to falsify your own reality, your voice – you know.  
And often cannot say it. You try and keep on trying to unsay  
it, for if you don't, they will not fail to fill in the blanks on your  
behalf, and you will be said."

(Trinh Minh-ha, Woman, Native, Other, p. 80)



## Conclusion

The need for critical dialogue lies at the heart of Paulo Freire's writings. We have tried to investigate here both the nature of dialogue and the circumstances that must inevitably situate it and define its parameters. In positing dialogue as the process of self-discovery and hence of true education, Freire envisions a situation in which questions of power and unequal relationships are set aside. Dialogue, in other words, functions both as metaphor and means in Freire's model. As metaphor, dialogue is co-extensive with human communication itself; as means, dialogue is equated with language and hence with subjectivity. But dialogue like music is built up of silences and speech. And silence hides as well as reveals. How silence punctuates speech, how it resonates with the unspoken is determined by the specificities of the dialogic moment. The exigencies of the social world are such that dialogue or utterance, by itself, does not provide access to a pristine core of consciousness, but rather dialogue takes shape in against, and around, consciousness, both facilitator and inner demon of the communicative event. The experience of patriarchal and social oppression that informs the subjectivity of women (though not necessarily confined to women) renders them less than full participants in the emancipatory mode of dialogue advanced by Freire. The model itself then needs to be questioned and revised. Notions of hierarchy or social-constituted modes of feeling and thinking are not extrinsic but rather intrinsic to the dialogue process. The dialectic of the said and the unsaid brings home to us the fragile and contingent nature of dialogue even in the most emancipatory of scenarios that we may envisage.