

In your work you discuss various important themes relating to culture and politics. You analyse the relationship between language and power, you develop a theory of education as a dialogical act. Above all however it seems to me that the concept of a pedagogy of the oppressed is of fundamental importance for a true understanding of your work.

P.F. Very well, this first question which to begin with is a conversation with you and with x possible readers challenges me, stimulates me, and takes me back about thirty years to a certain moment of my political and educational practice when this practice was still only educational and I had not yet perceived its political nature. Now your question takes me back to this past during which I was accumulating a particular kind of knowledge and developing a particular way of seeing the practice of education as a practice which involved an act of knowledge. As such it was thus also a dialogical and a political practice - something which I took long to realize - as well as an ethical and aesthetic practice. So, fundamentally, education is an aesthetic, ethical, gnoseological, dialogical and political act. So, when you make this question you shake me up, you reach far back to the very beginnings of my practice and theoretical reflection - since I never dissociated the practice I was involved in from my reflection on this practice. This has always helped me to recognise my mistakes, and limitations, enabling me to improve my practice. At a certain point when I was in exile in Chile, in a context given temporarily to me - and this is something I would like to emphasize - I began to review what I had done together with others in my original context - in Brazil. I arrived in this new context at the beginning of the Christian Democratic government, a moment of intense interest in politics and political activity. This enabled me, through the analysis of what I had achieved in Brazil and through my attempt to understand what was happening in Chile, in this new context, to begin to see the obvious, namely, the political nature of education. That does not mean that my practice in Brazil had not been political. On the contrary, it had been eminently political. I had a certain awareness of that, but theoretically, I had not yet assumed responsibility for the political nature of my practice. In Chile, in exile this awareness explodes into my consciousness, and in the exact moment that I realized this, that I grasped this with my own hands, I had necessarily to conclude that a neutral education is impossible. But, the moment I realised this evident fact, I had also to realize that not being neutral, education always serves a certain political dream, an established or not yet established political power, a particular

set of class interests. And so it seemed absolutely clear to me, that - either you work in favour of a particular social group, a social class, which discriminated against and exploited needs to transform the social and political order in order to become hegemonic and to actualise the necessary social transformation through which it liberates itself from its chains - or you develop an education which, at the service of the dominant and hegemonic class helps to keep the established powers in power. Obviously, in recognising this I am not suggesting that education - as a gnoseological practice, as a practice which affects and touches consciousness and perception - could become the motor of the necessary transformation of bourgeois society and the creation of a socialist society. So, the moment I became aware of the impossibility of the neutrality of education, I had to accept, to conclude, that education either serves the reproduction of the dominant ideology, or otherwise, opposes it. Simultaneously, I had to realize that the education which I had called a liberating education, could not on its own become the motor of social transformation. Education then, is subject to economic, political and ideological limits. But it is precisely because of this that it is effective. The task then which poses itself to the educator as politician, is to see what can be done by and through education, and when, in the political effort to bring about the transformation of reality. And so during my exile in Chile, where I reflected seriously on my previous practice in Brazil, this task revealed itself to me and I wrote 'The Pedagogy of the Oppressed'.

The 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' does not provide a model, a recipe, a universal proposition. The 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' contains a universal dimension - but as a proposition it is not universal. It needs to be reinvented anew in whatever context it is translated to. But the Pedagogy of the Oppressed - the book which I wrote - and which acquired, like most works, a certain autonomy bidding farewell to its author - today has been translated into eighteen different languages, thus covering the world. It is an essay in which I tried to analyse specific circumstances which generate particular interpretations of reality by the oppressed as a collective body, as a social class. The 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' is still today for me a challenge to the reader; and I would like to add that this book has been a source of great joy and never a source of vanity. It has always also awakened a sense of responsibility

in me due to the witness of young revolutionaries from Nicaragua, Central America, Asia and Africa, who have suffered and been tortured killed and imprisoned as a result of their acquaintance with this book. In fact I am thinking at present of writing a short history of this book in which I would like to analyse myself in in the book and to discuss the witness which this book has generated. Sometimes people ask me 'Why don't you write the 'Pedagogy of the Oppressor?', and I answer: 'Because I wouldn't like it if the oppressor became a better oppressor. I hope I have answered your first question.

Q: yes, and taking your reflections somewhat further, what it seems to me you are saying is that a socialist revolution has a dual aspect: it needs to be educational while education itself needs to be revolutionary.

P.F; Yes, going back a little, I would like to repeat that, without being the motor of the revolution, education is essential to the revolutionary process and also that the revolution itself is an educational experience which forms the person. Revolutionary leaders ought to understand this and not to separate the two. At times, in contradiction to their own dialectical thinking, there is a tendency among politicians of the left, to believe that education needs to be changed only after taking power.

Q: This seems to be a fundamental problem with every revolution.

P.F.: Yes, but what I wanted to say to you is that the revolutionary leadership confuses a revolutionary educational practice with schooling, and that is not what I am talking about - for example take the relationship between the leaders and the popular masses, the witness which the leaders need to deliver so that the masses adhere to the revolution. Can you imagine a revolution without the masses, the popular classes? That doesn't exist. So, the task of the leadership is to authenticate itself as leadership - in close relationship with the popular classes. This search for authenticity is a pedagogical act as well. There is a naivety in some revolutionary leaders - absent in Fidel Castro and in Guevara, in Amilcar Cabral - in thinking that when you talk about the educational character of revolutionary practice one is referring to the practice of schooling. No, by no means. The practice of schooling follows the assumption of

power but the pedagogy of the revolution constitutes itself in revolutionary practice.

Q: So you are referring to two different moments of the same practice.

P.F.: The practice of schooling which follows the assumption of power has to be connected to the educational practice which arose during the organisation and mobilisation of the masses. Everything which was achieved during the struggle for power in terms of a new pedagogy, needs to be recovered by the professional revolutionary educators, who unfortunately tend to repeat the traditional and authoritarian methods of the old society. So it is necessary that revolutionary leaders realize that there can be no separation between politics and education.

There is another aspect to the question of the role of education in a radical process of transformation, and it is the following. I have already referred to this earlier, but let us go back to this subject. It is necessary to recognise that educational practice,

a practice which is both political, ideological, ethical and aesthetic, takes place at the level of the superstructure of society. And, like our consciousness of it, it is generated in the interplay of elements at the level of the infrastructure of society. But in my view, what needs to be clarified as well, is that even the consciousness I have of the world and of myself in the world and with the world, is a consciousness which is generated in the material conditions of society in which I live, of society. It is also necessary to recognise, that my consciousness in being generated in the material conditions of society, can see itself being generated; and in thus grasping its own process of generation, my consciousness acquires an historical role, which goes beyond the current mechanical view of consciousness and hence of education. In Marx's work, you can find material to uphold the first thesis, which he himself defined as crude materialism, and you can also find material to defend the second thesis, which emphasises - without falling into any kind of subjectivist idealism - and recognises the role of consciousness and knowledge in the revolutionary act, in history. Take for example a thinker who follows Marx dogmatically and attributes an almost magical importance to the infrastructure - for

this thinker it is not possible to talk of a liberating education. For him education merely changes as a reflection of the transformation of the infrastructure. But for me, to think like that, not to see that my consciousness - which is not of an individual nature but is socially created - has been generated leads me to ask myself: 'how is it then that I can recognise the very limitations of my consciousness.' So, the very fact that I can recognise its limitations, gives consciousness an historical efficacy. So, I prefer the Marx which recognises the fundamental although not primary role of consciousness, of understanding the world, in the process of revolution. That reminds me of a letter of Engels, in which he humbly comments: 'Marx and myself had to emphasise the role of the economy, of the infrastructure' - but - he says, 'it never occurred to us' - I am using my own words, 'to focus exclusively on the economy in the process of understanding history.' So, I think that in order to understand the 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed', as well as my educational and political practice and my theoretical reflection, it is necessary to clarify to the readers that I have always tried to avoid idealist temptations - in particular during the last twenty years. But equally, I have tried not to fall into the mechanist trap, which at heart is a kind of inverted idealism.

Q: So what you are referring to it seems is the difficult notion of praxis, the unity between theory and practice. We could pass now from this concept of praxis to discuss how this concept contained in your thinking has influenced the revolutions in which your work & literacy method were used, for example in Nicaragua, Africa and Chile.

P.F.; I will answer this question in such a way so that you who are interviewing me, and the probable readers will understand me, believing in the sincerity with which I answer. If you ask me - 'Paulo, do you think that you, as a form of thinking, as a proposition, have had a fundamental importance in the process of revolutionary change in Nicaragua, Grenada in the Caribbean, in the subsequent organisation of the new society. Do you think

that you, as educator and politician, as a proposition in the field of political literacy, were of fundamental importance in the organisation of the new States in Africa which emerged out of the former Portuguese colonies? If you ask me this, my answer is: No. But this is not a falsely modest or modestly false answer - for me it is an historically correct answer. But if you ask me, 'does this 'no' mean that you in no way left your mark in the struggles of these peoples?' Then I would also answer 'no'. So where do I answer 'yes'? My 'yes' is the following: I recognise that although I was not fundamental - this is a kind of sinequa non - I was important. That is why I said that my answer was not falsely modest. It is a modest answer, as all historical answers ought to be. And because it is a modest, although historical answer, it is a correct answer. I know how important this book was in the struggle of Nicaragua - I know from the witnesses I received. Last week for example, at a Congress in Amsterdam - the leader of the peasant associations in Nicaragua, drew attention to the immense importance of the 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' in the process of revolutionary struggle. And he said to me: 'Your presence among us, your call, was more significant than you realize.' Also from a strictly educational point of view I think that I have been influential - even if that doesn't really exist, since all education is political. But for the moment I would like to allow myself to use this erroneous way of thinking in order to come closer to common sense. In short, I would like to say to you: I was and I continue being a particular kind of presence in various revolutionary processes. Now, if you ask me: 'Paulo, how does this realisation make you feel', I would say to you: 'Firstly, I feel happy because as a living thinker and actor, I think it is marvellous, a thing of beauty, to know that my work is being used and that I am being recognised during my life time. It is a source of great satisfaction to me to know that I won't have to die and to wait fifty years for people to discover me. It is possible that in fifty years time I will be negated. But historically, today I affirm myself in the struggles of various peoples to become themselves. So firstly, I experience a feeling of legitimate but well-behaved joy, and secondly I have a sense of

great historical and social responsibility. I know that just as I am being and have been recognised and accepted, that I am being remade and reinvented, I can also be negated. And that depends not only on those who negate me, but on me as well, on how I behave, on the witness I deliver of my private and public life. It depends on my capacity to love, on my lack of fear of loving, on my courage to speak of my feelings, to say that a revolution which does not love flowers is incapable of loving men and cannot become itself. A revolution which does not dream and puts limits on joy is mistaken, it has lost its historical address. So, I experience all these feelings while I also perceive that I am alive amidst the various peoples who have struggled and who continue to struggle.

Q: In your life there was an important moment of rupture when you were exiled during the military coup in Brazil in 1964. Before your exile your writings and your adult literacy method influenced the struggles of the popular classes against the established social order in Brazil. But in Guine-Bissau and Nicaragua your thinking was part of the practice of the popular classes already in power. It would be of interest to your readers to know in what way your pedagogy differed in each of these moments.

P.F.: Yes, in fact some of my critics argue that my pedagogy only works in societies which have already carried out a revolution. Others argue that it doesn't work because you no longer need it then. I don't agree, I think again that this is a way of dichotomising revolution and education. In a bourgeois class society the question is: what is the relationship between base and superstructure in a class society like Brazil. In other words, to what extent does the process of capitalist modernisation and the material conditions out of which it arises, ^(-which it itself produces-) to what extent does this process create political spaces which are not under the control of the dominant class. Here a mechanical thinker might argue 'You see, that is why the material conditions are more important than consciousness', and I would answer: 'No, no, no, you are mistaken again'. What is important is the relationship between consciousness and the material conditions and it is this relationship which I try understand and to analyse. What happens is that the material conditions when they generate a particular form of consciousness, create also the possibility for consciousness to recognise itself in that form. This coincides with the recognition of political spaces which can be explored by those

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who question bourgeois society. These spaces exist in the school, the university, in civil society, in popular organisations, in mothers and tenants associations - these are political spaces. And here we are dealing with a dialectical relationship: to the extent that capitalist modernisation gives more power to the dominant class, it necessarily creates possibilities of struggle which did not exist before. These spaces stand in direct relationship with the aspirations of the subordinate classes. The role of the revolutionary educator is to recognise this fact, to analyse it scientifically, that is, to discover which spaces are there to be occupied by political educators, in order to facilitate the revolutionary process of transformation, which is being dialectically generated ^{with} in the material conditions of bourgeois society. In this sense, my pedagogy is equally valid in a society which has not carried out a revolution and in a society which has. - except that the historical time in each is of a different nature. But a revolutionary society does not change mechanically. The assumption of power does not mean that the new society has arrived - society then enters a period of transition, a period which began earlier during the revolutionary struggle to transform society. The assumption of power is but one fundamental moment of this transition. From then onwards, the revolutionary powers must make the greatest effort to bring about the birth of a new society, which itself is linked to a change in the mode of production, from a capitalist to a socialist mode of production. New social relations will arise and a new ideological and political vision will develop. All this requires a new pedagogy, a new educational practice in the revolutionary schools. The problem however, during this transition is that even revolutionary educators are conditioned to such an extent by the former infrastructure, which created in them a contradiction between the desire for revolutionary transformation and their attachment to a traditional pedagogy. Thus although the content of education changes, it is transmitted in an authoritarian form. While previously you had a form of authoritarian education which transmitted a kind of knowledge which benefited the interests of the bourgeoisie, now you have an authoritarian pedagogy which transmits knowledge representing the interests

of the popular classes, as if the method itself was not directly connected with the content. To conclude my answer, and I think I have never expressed it so clearly as I am now to you, I would say that for me, in different spaces and in varying tempos, a form of critical education is as important in a pre-revolutionary as in a revolutionary period, and is possible also.

Q: Yes, in your work you talk about the need for a cultural synthesis in the revolutionary process between the systematic knowledge of the intellectual and the empirical, living experience of the popular classes. This seems to be an important although highly problematic notion.

P.F: You are right, this is a scientifically, politically and ideologically problematic question. I see that, and now I am exposing myself to criticism. This question which I raised in the 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' deals with the relationship between the knowledge of the people, popular wisdom, common sense and scientific rigour; between systematic and non-systematic thinking, between educated language, high culture and popular language - 'corrupt forms' as people often say. So my thesis is the following: firstly, I don't think that popular wisdom is essentially inarticulate - if it were communication between the masses would be impossible. And in popular knowledge there is a coherence, and there are moments of abstraction fundamental to the act of knowing. What happens though, is that at the level of common sense, popular knowledge is based on the pure experience of the subject before and in the the world, which results in a particular finding, but which in a naive manner the subject tends to generalize, without observing reality more precisely. At this level of human experience, which generates knowledge, in the subjects progress towards the object he wants and needs to know, greater rigour is lacking. Historically, we, men and women start out precisely from this non-rigorous stance as we reach out to comprehend the planets, the stars and the flooding of rivers. Egyptian agriculture and astrology are intimately connected to modern astronomy and agriculture. And if astrology had not existed where would modern astronomy be? If you had not had common sense, would the scientific rigour of modern physics exist? I refuse - although I recognise the leap which men and women have

taken historically in their attempt to understand the world - to dichotomise the common knowledge of the popular classes from the rigorous and more precise knowledge of science.

Q: Perhaps, to end, you could tell us about your activities since your return to Brazil in 1980.

P.F: Very well, perhaps before telling you what I have done since my return, I ought to let you know that the whole time that I was away, my period of exile - was a time during which Brazil became a preoccupation of mine. Even when I nourished no hope of coming back and even when pessimistically I thought that my existential time did not correspond to the historical time which would make my return viable, Brazil was for me a preoccupation. When I heard that it would be possible to come back, I returned immediately with Elza, my wife and children to see again the earth and the waters; to feel again the smell of the earth, to hear again collectively the Portuguese language and this was in fact a very fulfilling experience, which moved me deeply. That was in August 1979, and then I returned to Europe to prepare my definitive homecoming. I didn't think it was appropriate to simply drop everything in Europe without preparing my farewell there. So in June 1980 we came back and from then on I started a new apprenticeship - I began to learn again, to rediscover Brazil. I knew that Brazil had not stopped during the almost sixteen years of exile in order to wait for me. History was not to make that concession. So, to begin with I thought that I needed to come to the encounter of my country, to rethink my country, and I began then a kind of pilgrimage throughout Brazil. Invited by students, teachers and popular organisations, I travelled throughout the country from North to South, re-discovering Brazil and simultaneously I began to teach at the Catholic University of Sao Paulo which received me with open arms and then also at Unicamp University. In addition to my teaching at graduate and post-graduate level, I also gave various courses and seminars. I participated in conferences at local, regional and national level. I also travelled abroad teaching at universities in Europe, North America and Latin America. Another activity I devoted myself to was to re-read particular texts as well as Brazilian work I did not yet know. And for the first time in my life, I became involved with a political party when I became a militant and founding member of the PT, the Workers Party. I was still in Europe when I received a telegramme with my

name and the number required legally in order to found a party. I chose the PT because the political dream of this party coincides with mine and because it is a party of the workers which emerged from below as the product of industrial and rural workers as well as intellectuals who chose to side with the struggle of the working classes. I don't think that the PT is made up only of angels - and then I wouldn't be part of it anyway, but I think that it is a party with a powerful presence. It is a party connected to the future, which I hope is not too distant, to the restructuring of public life in this country. I don't think that the PT is made up only of serious and idealistic people, but it was this party which due to its principles, I joined. In addition, I wouldn't say that I am a good militant, because my way of being militant does not involve intense activism, but I am a militant in the sense that I am an intellectual who tries to be consistent with his discourse - in other words with a progressive discourse and who thus exercises a progressive practice. In this sense, I have a role to play in the Workers Party, where I too have learnt a lot. I have continued to write, although my wife's death left me in a state of shock, of hopelessness and disorientation. Although I did not feel completely lost, I was left without my other. A year has passed since then, and I am gradually recovering, I am beginning to live again because of the presence of a woman who had herself lost her other due to her husband's death. We married and we are now experiencing the beauty of loving again. Now I have started writing again as well as teaching abroad in Massachusetts and California and I am very happy to be living here, working with various groups and public bodies involved in popular education. Two days ago for example, I came back from Pernambuco where I spent three days working with the teams of the Secretary of Education of the State and various municipalities around Recife, who are doing excellent work - some of the most interesting work in Brazil in the field of popular education, in the professional formation of teachers and the development of primary schools. This kind of work also gives me great satisfaction. And although my conscience is not absolutely clear in that I am not doing as much as possible, it is nevertheless the restless conscience of someone who achieves something but would like to achieve more. And that is how I am living in Brazil at present.