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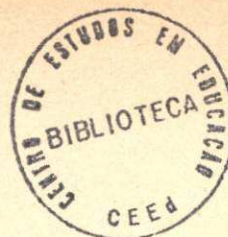




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**DIALOGUE IN THE PEDAGOGICAL PRAXIS  
OF PAULO FREIRE**

**Hilda and Miguel Escobar**

c/o Paulo Freire  
World Council of Churches  
Geneva, Switzerland





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Geneva, May 1981

This paper is being circulated in a pre-publication form to elicit comments from readers and generate dialogue on the subject at this stage of the research.



An anecdote lived by Paulo Freire in connection with a painting seems to provide a good example to introduce our object of study: the dialogue.

During one of the first alphabetization discussions organized with a group of fishermen of the Democratic Republic of Sao Tomé and Príncipe, a painting was hanging in the sitting room in which the meeting took place. Some of the participants who were waiting for the dialogue to start discovered the painting, had a closer look at it, then walked over to the window and, comparing it with what they saw outside, exclaimed: "But . . . this is Monte Mario!"

Monte Mario is the name of a fishery region situated in the south of the island of Sao Tomé. In this area lives the most ancient ethnic group of the country: the Angolarians (Angolares). They are descendants of a group of Africans from the coastal region of the Congo who, searching for some new lands, arrived at this island and were therefore the discoverers of Sao Tomé and Príncipe. This historical fact was of course denied by the Portuguese colonizers — as colonizers in general deny such facts — and they imposed their own history as the only truth.

Only the colonizers "have" a history, and it starts with their "civilizing" arrival and presence. Only the colonizers "have" a culture, an art, or a language and are civilized citizens of the "saviour-world." The colonials are said to have had no history before the merciful effort made by the colonizers; they are seen as illiterate, barbarian natives.<sup>1</sup>



It is therefore not surprising that the government of Sao Tomé and Príncipe chose the area of Monte Mario for that alphabetization campaign in a liberative perspective, soon after the country's independence on 12 July 1975, with the assessorship of Paulo Freire.

The choice of Monte Mario as the first region to start such a campaign implied a political decision on the government's part, as the Angolarians had been the most oppressed and marginalized ethnic group during the period of colonization. They were compelled to remain historically and culturally "silent," a silence imposed by the Portuguese cultural invasion, the principal purpose of which was to eliminate all local culture in order to facilitate the establishment of their own system.

This "silence," however, was often broken by all kinds of resistance against the colonizers; for instance, the refusal to work for the invaders, the development and conservation of their own languages, various folkloristic manifestations, etc.

During that period the word bonito started to represent a whole, very concrete historico-cultural, socio-economic, and political context. Bonito is the name of a fish which, apart from being very much appreciated by the natives, constituted one of the main means of subsistence during the time of colonization.

The Portuguese colonization was based on monoculture (at first, monoculture of sugar-cane, and later of coffee and cocoa). With the increasing need for more land came the marginalization and oppression of the Angolarians, who were forced to leave their lands and flee to the coastal regions in the south.



## II. GENERATIVE WORDS<sup>2</sup>

The word bonito, which before the alphabetization campaign constituted for the Angolarians merely a sound, has become a so-called generative word in Paulo Freire's alphabetization method. Let's see what a generative word is; generative of what and why? Selected on the basis of which criteria?

First, we can say that a generative word is chosen on the basis of its richness: as much sociological and political as phonetic. A generative word should always be related to very concrete problems of the society, be they local, regional, or national.

The generative word must constitute a key word in the vocabulary of the society with which one works. For a word to be classified as generative it is indispensable that it is suitable for generating other words and expressions, in order to weave a basic structure for the reading and writing processes. This kind of approach automatically leads to the critical description and analysis of the situation each group finds itself in — in other words, this method of learning may be called political alphabetization.

Let's have a closer look at this method, keeping bonito as our key word. This word has indeed various characteristics which, from a phonetic and grammatical point of view, permit the creation of new expressions; it is the kind of word that is suitable for the generation of other important and useful words, or key words.

Bonito is composed of three syllables: bo-ni-to; it can be decomposed into so-called families. At each conjuncture of vowels starts a new



"family"; thus, we have the "family" of: ba, be, bi, bo, bu; of: na, ne, ni, no, nu; and of: ta, te, ti, to, tu.

ba-be-bi-bo-bu

na-ne-ni-no-nu

ta-te-ti-to-tu

With this group of "families" we can now start to form a series of other words, such as: banana, Benito, luta (lucha), Neto, etc.

But, at the same time, the word bonito generates a whole, very concrete historico-cultural problématique for the Angolarians. Generative words should therefore always be associated to generative themes, which, in turn, will be discussed and analysed in the process of alphabetization.

The word bonito, for instance, can be decomposed around a series of themes such as:

- a. The situation of the fishermen of the islands. The reasons why the Angolarians had to devote themselves to fishing. The various strategies of resistance developed by the Angolarians against the Portuguese invaders.
- b. Production; the necessity to create a basic infrastructure for fishing, given the fact that the colonizers had no interest in creating one.
- c. The nutritive values of bonito which help to solve health and nutrition problems of the inhabitants of Monte Mario.

History, production, health, etc. are factors which should be discussed in an analysis of political order. Consequently, the Angolarians will be able to develop a critical mind and a perspective of all these problems and participate in the organization of efforts to promote production, health, etc.<sup>3</sup>



### III. CODIFICATION<sup>4</sup>

Turning back to the graphic presentation of the word bonito, we may ask: Why this presentation? Is it important? What does it mean?

As stated above, bonito is a generative word. However, as this word is intimately linked to an existential situation, it must be discussed within that specific situation and in relation to that situation.

Codification is the presentation of an existential situation related to the generative word. It is also the presentation of certain aspects of reality we would like to study. It expresses "moments" in the concrete context. Codification should be seen as an object of recognition, as the symbol of the topic that is to be discussed.

The codification of the word bonito should permit the objectivation of the specific situation in which the Angolarians live. A painting shows Monte Mario; this codification is the intellectual representation of an existential situation, and in this sense is a mediator between the theoretical and the practical contexts. According to the communication channel one uses, codification may be:

- a. Visual.
- b. Audio.
- c. Tactile.
- d. Audio-visual, involving simultaneous use of the visual and auditory channels.

Visual codification may be:

- a. Pictorial: painting, drawing, photography.
- b. Graphic: written expression.
- c. Mimic: expression of thought by means of mime/gesture.



Codification may be simple or complex; this depends on the channels used. The important factor to remember is that codification is a language, which does not necessarily have to be written, and which must be seen as a dialogue to be interpreted. In this sense, it has a "superficial structure" (or suprastructure) and a "deep structure" (or infrastructure), which are dialectically interrelated.

The "superficial structure" is composed of elements that visibly constitute the codification, such as bonito, sea, coco trees, boats, houses, fishes, etc. The "deep structure" is not visible. It emerges according to the extent to which one deepens the analysis of the codification. Bonito is a means of subsistence. The conditions in which the Angolarians live are not sufficiently hygienic. The degree of malnutrition is very high. The risks they run when fishing in the open sea with their small boats are great.

We therefore can say that codification is a "dialogue" to be "read" by those participants in a discussion group, who try to decipher it. No matter what shape the codification takes, the important thing is to use it in practice as an object of learning.

This is why once the generative words are chosen, codifications helping to explain them are formulated thus creating an intimate relationship between the generative word and the codification. Depending on the situation one wishes to study, the two may become one, or the word may merely refer to a certain dimension of the codification.<sup>5</sup>

Other examples, apart from bonito, are given below so we can better understand the relationship between generative words and codification:

a. Generative word (G): work.

Codification (C): men and women at work.

b. G: brick.

C: men working on a construction site with brick stone as the most important element of their work.

c. G: dialogue.

C: some people gather.



#### IV. DECODIFICATION

The discussion or dialogue that a group of persons have around a certain codification is called decodification. It is an analysis of the "superficial structure" down to the "deep (or basic) structure," thus permitting a critical study of reality in order to perceive that reality better and therefore obtain a basis for changing it.

Decodification is one of the most important elements in the process of alphabetization. In order to make an efficient analysis of alphabetization we must deal with various themes such as: the role of the so-called animator; what is a cultural cycle?; what is meant by liberating and domestication alphabetization?; and our object of study, the dialogue.

A society that wants to break away from repression and become independent needs an interior coherence in its political options. Repression is only overcome when the masses are permitted to critically participate in the construction of their society, a process which goes hand in hand with participation in education. It therefore seems impossible to continue to speak about "evening courses for adults," instead of cultural circles (because of the ideological implications). At the same time, one can no longer speak of analphabets, but should use the term "alphabetizing"; instead of "alphabetizers" there are cultural animators; instead of courses there are dialogues, during which the daily experienced reality — referred to in "generative words" and presented in "codifications" — will be analysed and discussed by the people.<sup>6</sup>



## V. CULTURAL CIRCLES

A cultural circle is not an abstract reality that we can rationally define. It is rather the result of a whole critical learning process, intimately linked to the social reality in which the group with which one wants to work lives. Speaking of cultural circles means at the same time speaking of dialogue, animator, education, and politics. We shall try to analyse exactly what a cultural circle is, in order to better understand the alphabetization process in the praxis of Paulo Freire.

The cultural circle, says Freire, is another school, in which we discuss problems that in one way or another concern the inhabitants of a certain region. It is a different school, in which there are neither teachers nor pupils — a place where there are no lessons taught, as in traditional schools.

"The cultural circle" is not a knowledge distribution centre, in which the students are supposed to learn by heart what the teacher "serves" them.<sup>7</sup> It is a place (near a tree, in a small room of a house or a factory) where a group of persons meet in order to discuss their everyday life, and the problems connected to it, such as: their work, local or national events, their family life. This practical life is represented in codifications, and analysed in order to gain deeper and more critical insight, enabling the people to translate the critical view gained into action. In the cultural circle, the groups learn how to read, write, do arithmetical exercises, and so on, and simultaneously learn how to "read" and "write" their own reality.

In this kind of school the traditional teacher is replaced by the so-



called cultural animator. There is no longer a teacher who says certain things for the pupils to repeat and memorize; the animator — as we shall see later — is a militant seeking to participate in and actively defend the interests of the community with his group.

In place of the passive student — the "analphabet" who is fed his/her lesson by the teacher — we now have the alphabetizing one, who is participating in the activities of the circle as actively as the animator is.<sup>8</sup>

Instead of lessons in textbooks, which the pupils have to "do" and repeat, there are generative words, represented in codifications, and analysed critically by each participant in a circle.

In a cultural circle, animator and alphabetizing are equally regarded as subjects who try to better perceive their reality, and not as objects who are "fed" specific knowledge. The animator is teaching and at the same time learning, as are all the other participants in the discussion: "No one educates the other; men and women educate themselves — through their daily reality, their history and their culture."<sup>9</sup> Hence the alphabetizing are people who are learning and teaching at the same time.

In summary, we can say that a cultural circle is a place where men and women have a right and an obligation to express freely what they think and how they live their daily reality, and where one cannot imagine the kind of repressive silence designed to keep the popular masses ignorant.

The President of the Republic of Sao Tomé and Príncipe said of the alphabetizing population: "We already have one cultural circle at the beach of Monte Mario in which the alphabetizing members are convinced silence will not be possible again; they are creating the necessary objective conditions to introduce a permanent dialogue in all cultural circles, through practice and reflection, in which the generative words will be the human beings' own essence; where human beings will engage in and liberate themselves from all kinds of



thoughts and activities by means of the knowledge they acquire and create through their own potentials."<sup>10</sup>

The Angolarians have made many analyses on the basis of the codified word bonito. What we remember best is the atmosphere that reigned in the cultural circles of Monte Mario: each participant felt that it was their discussion and that they could express their views freely.



## VI. CULTURAL ANIMATOR

The role of the cultural animator in a cultural circle is, as mentioned above, not to transfer knowledge, but to try to understand a given reality, together with those alphabetizing, through dialogue.

The cultural animator is not "a coldly objective intellectual" nor "a neutral expert" in the cultural circle; he is supposed to be a militant committed to the transformation of society. His line must always be radical, in the sense of rejecting any type of cheap "dada" or "prefabricated" solution, any kind of cultural invasion — be it obvious or skilfully hidden.

His political awareness must lead him to understand that it is impossible to teach something without learning at the same time; learning to teach together with those who are alphabetizing.<sup>11</sup> With this view of a learning process, says Paulo, experiences are not transplanted but reinvented in harmony with the concrete situation.

It is not essential for a cultural animator — or for any animator or technical, political, etc., assistant — to study methods and techniques of cultural animation. Studying those techniques in the context of a certain theory of knowledge acquired in practical life, which must be faithful to a certain political position, is of critical importance.

"In this sense," says Freire, "if the 'educator's' position is revolutionary, and his practice consistent with that position, alphabetization of grown-ups — as a process of conscientization — finds in the alphabetizing person one of the subjects of that process. The kind of 'educator' we want here is thus challenged to find the



best ways possible for the alphabetizing person to practise his/her role as a subject of conscientization in the process of his/her alphabetization."<sup>12</sup>

### The Cultural Animator: Codification and Decodification

In relation with what is stated above, it becomes obvious that neither the cultural animator nor anybody else can work out a codification without the participation of a group of people. The dialogue, or cultural animation, starts when animator and members of the group together seek codifications. The more actively the group participates in formulating codifications, the greater and richer the possibilities of analysing or decodifying for the whole group.

Decodification means "reading" the reality lived by the whole group. "In that act of reading reality, the animator therefore cannot step back, or refrain from participating — only listening to what the group is stating. Nor can he undertake the decodification process on behalf of the group; he would impede the group in their learning process."<sup>13</sup>

Decodification is a dialogue between the animator and all of the members of the group, as well as dialogue among the members of that group. Therefore, decodification, being equivalent to "reading one's reality," is converted during the dialogue into a "re-reading," during which the entire group tries to analyse the various ways in which that reality can be "read" — excluding the traditional ways of analysing a situation. We are then able to understand the importance of the practice developed by each participant permitting them to better understand that analysis. Reflection and action are two inseparable elements in the "reading of one's reality."

In the process of decodification the role of the animator has many shades which cannot all be explained here. As stated above, it is superfluous to know which techniques the animator should use; what should be stressed, however, is the fact that the animator must always



respect the group's way of "reading" their reality, and the way the group understands it. His major "task" is to gently lead the group to a free, spontaneous "reading" of the codification with the goal being to give everyone a chance to perceive their world in a fresh and unconfined way.

"When we were tenants," said a farmer, "after two months of participating in the activities of a cultural circle in a village, the boss called us naïve, and we thanked him, as for us to be called ingenuous was really a compliment. Now, as we also are becoming more critical, we know what he meant by that word. In fact he meant: 'stupid.'"

"What does it mean to be critical?" we asked this peasant. "It means to think straightly; it means to see reality as it is," he replied.<sup>14</sup>

According to the socio-economic and political situation in which the discussions take place, the political options that enter the discussion vary. Thus, the codification of bonito, for instance, contains a kind of analysis that would have been impossible to discuss during the colonial period. This is why the revolutionary animator and the people alphabetizing cannot behave in the same way as the colonial professor and their students during colonialization, when the professor's teachings had to be in line with the colonizers' ideology.

During the colonial education in Sao Tomé and Príncipe — as in any other colony or neo-colony then and now — the "good" professor was, and is, the one who succeeds in transmitting his/her knowledge to the students. The best students were, and are, those who best "swallow" that knowledge. Of course, in such a situation "knowledge" always seeks to distort and blur reality in order to serve the colonizers' interests.



## VII. DOMESTICATING AND LIBERATING ALPHABETIZATION

In order for us to better understand the difference between alphabetization for domestication and alphabetization for liberation, we should meditate on the following points.

What meaning — asks Paulo Freire — would the following sentences have for men and women, peasants and workers, who work all day long (or worse — who are without work)? "The bird has feathers"; "Eve saw the grapes"; "The cock is crowing"; "John knows how to read. They see his face beaming with joy. John will be able to get a job."

Written and read, such sentences are being learnt by heart by the analphabets, as if they were amulets — something appended to them and about which they have nothing to say. In this kind of learning process there is no space for analysing the concrete situation in which the group lives. And it is precisely this silence, constituting an indispensable basis for that type of "learning" (John knows how to read), that implies another naïve concept: messianism. The analphabet is a "lost man" who needs to be saved (John will be able to find a job!). His salvation lies in absorbing wonder-working words, fed into his brain by the omniscient alphabetizer — who, however, very often is a political analphabet, and therefore a welcome tool in the hands of the dominating classes.<sup>15</sup>

In the liberating alphabetization, analphabetism is not a "sore," nor an "ill weed" that needs to be uprooted, nor a disease. Analphabetism is one of the concrete signs of socio-economic and political injustice. It is not essentially a linguistic, methodological, or pedagogical problem; it clearly is a political problem that needs to be tackled



carefully by the animator, the group, and the government, with a view to finding concrete solutions for everybody. This is why we stated that the animator's role is mainly a political one, as the dialogue they stimulate serves to discover the social reality, to awaken critical consciousness — aiming at the transformation of the repressed society.<sup>16</sup>

This is why — says Paulo — critical alphabetization can never consist in the mechanical repetition of ba, be, bi, bo, bu or ma, me, mi, mo, mu, etc., to make those who are alphabetizing aware of their rights and need to participate in the transformation of their reality.

Liberating alphabetization could never be contained in what the dominant classes pursue and is therefore not compatible with their options. Liberating alphabetization in a cultural circle is a process of searching and creating — a process in which the participating members are challenged to find out about the deepest meaning of language, and the word as such, in order to decipher their reality. To negate the word would in fact mean to negate man's right to "pronounce his world." Therefore "to say a word" for the oppressed does not mean to say anything — but to participate critically in the construction of their society.

"In a preconceived-knowledge-dominated regime, in which those who work most have the least say, and in which large multitudes are not even able to find work, the dominators maintain monopoly over the words — thereby mystifying, stereotyping, and dominating language and society. In such a situation, the dominated classes have to struggle in order to keep control of their words; to learn to take control away from those who try to monopolize it and even negate it is a difficult, but indispensable, learning process. This is 'the pedagogics of the oppressed.'"<sup>17</sup>

Instead of writing and reading that "the feather belongs to the bird," the alphabetizing need another kind of apprenticeship. They need to know how to "write" their own life, how to "read" their own reality.



This will never be possible unless they take their history and their culture into their own hands to form and re-form their own kind of life, as Freire describes it.

The codification of bonito therefore implies that all experiences during colonization and the present possibilities are being discussed in a cultural circle. The bonito is a fish to which all inhabitants have access. Through its production they have a right to things such as health and social welfare. To learn how to read and write bonito means to learn how to "read" and "write" their socio-economic and political organization.

We therefore may conclude by citing Freire's idea that any alphabetization implies two fundamental hypotheses.

First, either the alphabetization process strengthens the mystification of reality, making it blurry, confusing the alphabetizing people with alienated and alienating words and sentences, or secondly, the alphabetization process is one of becoming aware of things, in which the learning members assume a role as participating subjects having a dialogue with the animator (who is also a subject) about a reality that concerns them.<sup>18</sup>

These two hypotheses are also political. One conveys the political line of the dominant class; the other, the political line of the dominated class. One is organized in order to prevent the development of a critical attitude on the side of the oppressed; the other one seeks precisely that development, a class-consciousness in order to eliminate oppression.

As long as critical dialogue is at the service of liberation, it is automatically at the service of a liberating alphabetization. For this reason, only the first hypothesis may be called anti-dialogical.

A critical awareness in the mind of the oppressed inevitably implies the creation of an awareness of itself as a social class. Consequently,



the cultural animator has two options: either to work directly or indirectly with the oppressor, or — as Freire would say — to commit suicide as a little bourgeois alphabetizer in order to be re-born as a cultural animator with and for the alphabetizing in the construction of a society in which silence no longer exists.



## VIII. THE DIALOGUE

Bearing in mind what we said above in connection with the generative words, codification, decodification, the cultural animator, domesticating and liberating alphabetization, we may now draw some conclusions concerning our object of study — the dialogue.

We are convinced that the attentive reader of this paper has many questions in connection with the points treated above. For some the description of the method used by Freire may be insufficient; for others it may be too theoretical. There might also be those who think that all this is simply "idealistic," the fruit of a wrong "humanism."

Yet, we wish to stress that it is not our intention in this work to develop the whole praxis of Paulo Freire from his days in Brazil until today. Our aim is to arouse a critical attitude, as a basis for the practical meaning of the dialogue method in a liberating perspective. If we refer to alphabetization, it is because Freire has developed a method within this analysis and it seems to us to be the best point of reference for the conclusions we should like to draw about dialogue. However, we by no means believe that this analysis is a recipe to be applied in all situations.

As we tried to show, there are no techniques, methods, or universal typologies. This is why any technique, method, or typology, etc., must crystallize in relation with the very concrete reality, which inevitably implies a well-defined political and epistemological option. If not, one runs the risk of falling into a false universalism or ingenuous idealism — far from a starting point for any authentic dialogue within and with the masses.



Coming back to what we said above, we wish to emphasize that it is precisely the critical attitude of the reader to our work that permits us to penetrate the intimacy of dialogue — or to decipher dialogue — each time with more understanding.

To know critically — in itself a process — presupposes a dialogical relationship. Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as "I think" — only "we think." It is not the "I think" that brings about the "we think" — rather the other way round. It is indeed the "we think" that brings into existence the "I think."<sup>19</sup>

Dialogue presupposes the existence of known subjects and of an identifiable object, dialectically united and placed (historico-culturally speaking) into a determined socio-economical and political structure. In other words — dialogue is an epistemological setting in which subjects, confronted with a certain identifiable object, try to learn critically their social reality so as to be able to change it through the insight gained in the analysis.

#### Human Beings as Subjects of Dialogue

The codification of bonito requires — as an epistemological setting — that the Angolarians are taken as subjects, and not as objects, in the cultural circle; in other words, Monte Mario has a history in which — in one way or another — all Angolarians have participated. As we know, their culture had been condemned to "silence" when the Angolarians were considered by the colonizers as mere "objects" — ignorant and illiterate — just because their lifestyle was different from the Portuguese. In order to permit a development of their own culture, the Angolarians have to be given a chance to express it, creating and recreating it until they feel masters of their own history, until they become subjects.

This is why the animator's role can never be one of imposing knowledge, one of depositing the contents of ba, be, bi, bo, bu, etc., in the



minds of the Angolarians, as this would mean to treat them as "objects." The animator should stimulate the dialogue in every way possible, thus permitting his discussion partners to be "subjects" and to express their analysis of bonito.

In a real dialogue, it is essential to overcome the traditional manner of reading and writing, to codify and decodify — and to perceive the concept of dialogue as an act of "swallowing." In doing so, we fall — as Freire says — into what Sartre called the "nutritionist concept of knowledge," in which those who "dialogue" do so in order to become intellectually enriched and important. Thus, we frequently hear expressions such as: "hunger for experience," "thirst for knowledge," or to have or not to have an "appetite for knowledge."

Within this kind of concept, the teachers are the ones who possess knowledge; the students are considered to be like empty recipients who need to be filled by the "deposits" of the educator.<sup>20</sup>

This is a crucial factor in codification, as one of its main functions is to establish a connection between the concrete and the theoretical plane. Codification taken as the object of knowledge serves as a mediator to the learning subjects, who seek to de-veil it through dialogue.

The Angolarians, who during the time of colonialization had to take a certain distance from their culture, are now able to analyse and understand their state of mind during that period. Freire calls this cognitive process, the perception of one's former perception of things and situations, a most important process in the development of the critical capacity of the "subjects" in a cultural circle.

In 1968, a Uruguayan team published a book called One Lives As One Can, which showed the result of various discussions, realized on the basis of codifications that had been elaborated in order to dialogue in the cultural circles. The following is an excerpt of this book:



## The Colour of Water

Water? Water? Why do we need water?  
Yes, yes, this is what I see. Water.  
Ah — my village far away!  
The brook near which I grew up — washing,  
the brook Fraile Muerto — there I grew up.  
And during my childhood there, on one side, on the other.  
Colour of water — good memories; nice ones.  
— Why do we need water?  
To wash. You know, for us washer-women, and also the animals  
went there to drink;  
there were fields — we also washed there.  
— And did you also use the water for drinking?  
We also went to the brook because we had no water, we got it  
from there — and I recall once, in 1945, when a plague of  
"locusts" came — we had to catch them and I say this because  
it is the truth. In those times we were very thirsty and we  
could not watch what we were drinking. I remember, I was a  
little girl and had to get rid of the "locusts" like this  
(makes gesture) . . . . There was the warm water and a great  
drought, the brook almost without water, dirty water, turbid  
and warm, a little bit of everything — and I had to drink it  
— otherwise I would have died of thirst.<sup>21</sup>

The gnoseological function cannot be reduced to simple relations between the understanding subject and the object to be understood; it is not finished when the object to be understood converts into understood object. The object of study cannot be considered as the achievement of knowledge; it only serves to bring about the process of analysing in the subject's mind in relation with the praxis exercised by those subjects.<sup>22</sup>

If the codification of bonito came to an end in the critical analysis the Angolarians make of it, without them being able to participate in the reconstruction of Monte Mario, they and we would fall into another alienated form of acquiring knowledge — namely that it is sufficient to develop a critical view about reality in order for that reality to transform itself — as by a decree.

This is why the dynamization of the mind or the awakening of a critical mind, which finds its expression in the dialogue, must result in action in that reality or, otherwise expressed: in political action.



As stated above, the subjects within a dialogical relationship do not finalize their epistemological analysis in the object of study, as that object only helps to prepare the dialogue which arises precisely from the analysis each subject makes of the same object. It is the group committed to concrete action that has to define the kind of action they want to take in order to change their reality, not only the animator.

Furthermore, in a dialogical relationship, subject A cannot convert subject B by "depositing knowledge" in B's mind and by simply transferring his/her analysis to B — as B has to arrive at his/her own analysis. To proceed as above would mean to break the dialogue and to transform subject B into a mere recipient of knowledge being poured in by subject A.<sup>23</sup>

This is why the animator's role is as important as that of any participant in the cultural circle. No recipes can be worked out indicating what needs to be done and what not. Crucial in a dialogue is that the animator develops the same epistemological attitude that he has with the subjects and object, in each one of the participants. Of course, as he is sharing his view with the participants he simultaneously is learning from them — and after all, an epistemological attitude is not a given fact that one can acquire once and forever; it is a radical position and therefore open to learn the full reality and the process of transformation of that reality.

#### Dialogue as an Object of Study<sup>24</sup>

As already mentioned, codification in the dialogue must be taken as an object of study. Yet as such, codification is not — and does not pretend to be — a copy of reality. One of the characteristics of codification is that it permits the elaboration of the concepts used for the analysis — in accordance with the situation of each group. These concepts are worked out in the function of the praxis which the participants experience and the manner in which they codify — grammatically speaking — their reality.



The basic criterion for making this type of distinction is the actual praxis of the groups' participants. At the base of the construction of any concept (whether these are used in scientific or non-scientific knowledge) there always exists, in one way or another, a praxis; i.e., a way of transforming or controlling reality.

For this reason, "the ideal of any knowledge," that is to say, its truth at the conceptual level, is not so much to reproduce in one's mind the object as it is "in itself," but rather to retain of it all that "matters," and only that which matters, i.e., that which is relevant for a certain praxis.<sup>25</sup>

A good example of this is given by Professor Luis Prieto, relating to an ashtray and a drinking glass. In the praxis of somebody who is thirsty and who comes across a crystal ashtray, a paper cup and a drinking glass, the last two have the same meaning with reference to his praxis, which is to quench his thirst. Yet, if a group of people begin an argument, to the thirsty person defending himself within this praxis, the drinking glass and the crystal ashtray have the same meaning.

Transferring this analysis to the example of bonito, we might say that in relation to the daily life of the Angolarians the important thing is that they can analyse this codification as a group, having as points of reference the colonial period and the present time, with the aim of working out a new kind of socio-economic and political organization.

Thus, alphabetization is not an end but a means to carry out the change of society. As Freire says: education can be the challenging wave to bring about a change of structures; yet if these structures are not changed, the whole effort turns out to be vain and the challenge remains idealistic.

What we are stating about the codification of bonito cannot be said of an alphabetization campaign where one learns that "the bird has wings," etc. There the alphabetization itself is the important factor —



practical experiences and strategies for change that those alphabetizing develop do not count.

It is clear that the praxis presupposed by each learning process is not imposed by the object, but comes from each subject; and as the subject is a social subject who lives in a group, the praxis must respect a certain legitimacy effective in each group.

"The praxes out of which come the various ways the subject conceives his own reality are not chosen by the individual but by the whole group, to which the reality belongs after all. And the choice is made on the basis of the interests of the group as such, not of the individual interests of particular subjects, i.e., the interests of sub-groups, the 'dominant classes' in the group interior."<sup>26</sup>

It is important to emphasize that all knowledge presupposes a praxis. Therefore, no knowledge is "objective" in the sense that that knowledge stems only from the object, and there is no neutral knowledge with respect to the various ways human beings live their praxis.

This is why the praxes selected by the bourgeoisie are different from those selected by the proletariat (although there may be common features).<sup>27</sup>

In a cultural circle, for instance, the practices chosen by the oppressed classes must lead to the conquest of the socio-economical power, and hence of its hegemony as a class, or, in other words: to the conquest of its ideological hegemony. This applies to a society in which no revolution has taken place as well as to a revolutionary one — though in different ways.

In a first stage — referring again to Freire — the strategy will focus on cultural action, aiming at liberation. In a second stage the cultural action serves the cultural revolution that takes place, once the economical and political power is obtained.



## Dialogue as a Utopia

Through dialogue, men and women developing their capacity of thinking critically start also to develop as subjects in a conscientization process. Starting from the concept of objective reality that they were allowed to maintain and from the analysis of their social praxis, they are able to arrive at a true understanding of why things are what they are in their social praxis.

This understanding permits them to go back to the concept of objective reality they held before, analysing and trying to get to know that reality better, and the reason why they had it, so as to critically act upon it afterwards in order to change it. Thus, dialogue is not a mechanical act, but requires a thorough learning process and an attitude of contemplation by the subjects who wish to establish communication.

In Paulo Freire's thinking, to contemplate or admire (from the Latin ad-mirari: to wonder at) has a meaning other than the usual one. To "ad-mire" is to take the object of knowledge as an object in itself, meaning to "objectivize" the "I" separating it from the "non-I," that is, to create distance from the object by separating subjectivity from objectivity. Ad-miration is therefore an eminently human act, as, by taking a certain distance from the "non-I," we are able to come closer to the "it," in order to understand it.

There is no learning process without a previous ad-miration of the object to be understood, and as learning is a process (there is no accomplished knowledge) we ad-mire wanting to learn more — apart from the object of learning — about our previous ad-miration of the same object. This is why Paulo tells us that "when we 'admire' our previous 'admiration' (there is always ad-miration of) we are simultaneously 'admiring' the act of ad-miring and the ad-mired object — in such a way that we are able to overcome the errors or misleading conclusions we eventually have made and come to in our previous ad-miration, and our re-ad-miration carries us further to the perception of the previous perception."<sup>28</sup>



"Now that I am learned . . ." an old Chilean farmer once said in a discussion, when wanting to express through codifications the meaning of work. When asked why he considered himself learned, he answered, very sure of himself: "Because I am working and in working I am changing the world."<sup>29</sup>

Dialogue — in as far as it is a critical way of becoming aware of reality — automatically leads to the discovery of the repressive structures in society, no matter of what kind these are. This is why any group involved in dialogue (dialogue understood in Freire's context) necessarily will arrive at denouncing the repressive structures. Yet, this denouncement must go hand in hand with the announcement of new structures to replace the old ones. The real utopia of Freire implies dialectization between denouncement and announcement, which requires the following:

1. Understanding of the reality that one is denouncing. Further, it is indispensable to have a revolutionary theory, which needs to be worked out on the basis of the history of each society and each human group, as well as a revolutionary praxis (strategy) without which any theory would be void.
2. Announce the new reality in the presentation of a pilot-project, which — emerging from that denouncement — can only be realized in praxis.
3. Know the reality of the concrete facts which are the fountain of understanding.
4. Confide in the popular masses, doing everything in common with them. This is why Paulo says that to speak of dialogue and at the same time to hate men is a lie; in the same way, speaking of democracy and forbidding the masses to speak would be a farce.

The utopia can only be true in the oppressed classes, as the oppressing ones could only denounce their own injustice and announce their own



methods. The dominant classes cannot de-veil themselves, nor can they provide the means for the dominated classes to de-veil them.<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, as any cultural action for the liberation of people is characterized by dialogue in the first place (dialogue being the seal of the act of true knowledge) — any cultural action for the purpose of domestication seeks to alienate people's minds. The first type of action problematizes — the second one uses "slogans." Based on its own myths, cultural action for the sake of maintaining domination cannot problematize reality, proposing its unmasking, because it would collide with its own dominant interests. In any problematizing type of cultural action, on the other hand, the announced reality is a historical pre-project meant to be concretized by the dominated classes.<sup>31</sup>

#### Cultural Action — Cultural Revolution

The process of critical analysis does not stop, says Freire, when the above-mentioned announcement becomes concrete reality. Any cultural action for the sake of liberation of the people must in this moment be transformed into a cultural revolution.

The limits of a cultural action for liberation meet in the oppressive reality — in the silence imposed on the dominated classes by the dominant ones. It is these limits that define the strategies to be used, being necessarily different from the ones used in a cultural revolution.

Whereas cultural action for liberation encounters silence as a concrete fact and established reality, cultural revolution encounters that silence as not really a barrier. Both are an effort to eliminate the dominant culture; yet, cultural revolution has already prepared new material bases which make that negation possible. Cultural revolution and cultural action for liberation are two dialectical moments and are necessary in any revolutionary process. Both are conscientizing.<sup>32</sup>



In abstract terms we may say that conscientization is a process of dynamization of minds — a critical conscience-building process. Conscientization not only requires a change of the content of conscience, but also a change in our mental structures, meaning that the cognizant subject transcends the spontaneous sphere of understanding his/her reality in order to arrive at a critical sphere where reality is taken as a recognizable object and in which men and women assume an epistemological position.

When a group was in dialogue concerning two codifications — the first one containing a native woman hunting with bow and arrow; the second one a farmer hunting with a gun — a peasant in the north-east of Brazil made the following analysis: "Between these two hunters, only the second one can be analphabet — not the first one." When asked why, he made a gesture as to indicate that he found the question shocking and replied: "One cannot say that a native is an analphabet because he lives in a culture without letters. To be an analphabet means to live amidst letters without knowing them."<sup>33</sup>

Conscientization therefore requires a transformation of our mental structures. In other words, the conscience which had been converted into a rigid, dogmatic structure becomes again dynamic, flexible, and dialectical, making a transformatory action on reality feasible.

Freire says: Conscientization is a "test" of reality that does not consist of standing "in front" of reality, assuming a falsely intellectual attitude. Conscientization cannot exist outside the transformative praxis of reality and is therefore historical and permanent; as an epistemological attitude it never ends, but is constantly changing, and thus changes the social reality.

"I now discover" — said another Chilean farmer when confronted with the problématique of men/world relations — "that there is no man without world." And when the animator — within the analysis of another problématique — asked: Admitting all human beings died; only trees, birds, animals, the seas, rivers, and the chain of the Andes



were left: would this world still exist? "No" — said the farmer — "somebody would be missing to say: this is the world!"<sup>34</sup>

Conscientization is a utopian attitude — not because it is not realizable, but because it is a dialectization of the acts of denouncing and announcing. Thus, conscientization requires an organization of classes sufficiently strong to bring about a major change in the power system, permitting the dominated classes to have access to the political power and administration of the State; the creation of a revolutionary "avant-garde" representing and defending the interests of the working class.

Thus, dialogue, as a necessity of a theory of learning, is an integral part of the conscientization process which leads to the taking over of the political power by the people. Quite obviously, the people will have to discover which are their real interests as a class and decide how to want to be organized as such.

However, once the political and economic power is in the people's hands, it is indispensable for them to get organized for a taking over of the ideological power. This is not an easy enterprise — as the contradictions generated by the dominant classes are, as Mao said, a dead body that during its decomposition continues to corrupt the environment.

"The class struggle between proletariat and bourgeoisie, between the various political forces and the proletarian and the bourgeois ideologies," Mao said, "will be very hard and subject to ups and downs — and sometimes it might become very tough. The proletarian tries to change the world according to his concept, and the bourgeoisie again to its own concept."<sup>35</sup>

For Mao, it was evident that a class is not really dominant until it succeeds in making its ideology the dominant ideology. Yet, in a revolutionary society, in which the proletariat has taken over the socio-political power, the class struggle continues — hence the importance of a cultural revolution.<sup>36</sup>



"Cultural revolution is theoretically defined as an antagonistic confrontation between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie classes. The taking over of power by the proletariat in its phase of dictatorship cannot be considered a success without the cultural revolution. Only when also taking over the ideological power can one speak of true hegemony of the popular masses. According to Lenin, 'the real struggle starts once the power is taken over.'"<sup>37</sup>

"It becomes therefore clear that it is not sufficient to take the power (acquire the State apparatus, that is . . . the repressive apparatus of the State). By taking the power a class becomes dominant; yet, this class will prove incapable of changing — in a revolutionary sense — the relations of production if it does not proceed to imposing its own dominant ideology."<sup>38</sup>

"Cultural revolution has as its ultimate goal to convert the proletariat into a 'class for itself.' In Mao's view, the great cultural proletarian revolution is only the first of a series of revolutions. In the future, these revolutions will inevitably be repeated several times. . . . The militant party and the people must avoid falling into the trap of thinking that after one, two, three, or four revolutions all will be fine. It is indispensable to maintain a particularly vigorous tension and never to abandon our vigilance."<sup>39</sup>

Dialogue in cultural revolution takes a different expression than in cultural action. The main concern of a revolutionary society, in which all repressive structures have been removed, is to rebuild society basing itself on those who suffered from the previous structures. Thus, dialogue ultimately aims at permitting this new class to constitute itself as such and to establish its hegemony.

### "Intellectuals" and Dialogue

The first questions we have to ask in order to tackle this topic are: Who do we mean by "intellectuals?"; What kinds of intellectuals do we



have in a society?; and What kind of role do "intellectuals" play in a society? To ask these questions in a study on dialogue seems to us to be fundamental. According to Gramsci, "All human beings are intellectuals" — but not all in a society function as such. Thus, the first criterion to be elaborated in a revolutionary society is one that permits the elimination of the division between homo faber and homo sapiens. All physical work implies — be it only to a small extent — creative intellectual activity, depending on the organization of each society.<sup>40</sup>

One of the first affirmations of Paulo Freire in his pedagogical praxis in Brazil and Chile had as its main goal to break with the myth of absolute ignorance and, consequently, absolute literacy. In fact, Gramsci's statement "All human beings are intellectuals," is easily proven in any cultural circle. All human beings — in accordance with their social praxis — have developed in one way or another a specific manner in which they analyse reality. The role of liberating alphabetization is to permit the alphabetizing to become aware of this capacity and to develop it in order to better participate in the transformation of their society. These affirmations are developed differently by Mao, who said that the masses only have to be given back in an organized form what they possessed before in a disorganized form.

If these hypotheses cannot be proven by every cultural animator, or, better, if any cultural animator does not watch out to discover this reality, dialogue can easily be converted into monologue. This is why it is so important to search for generative words and work out codifications together with the participants in each cultural circle, as it is important in these processes that the various manifestations of their daily life, their culture and their history, etc., emerge.

Freire and Gramsci underline the importance of this fact heavily. If one honestly desires dialogue with the popular masses in a cultural circle, there are many possibilities in which the intellectual capacity of the people may become obvious.



Despite the ideological infiltration attempted by the dominant classes, various human groups are not easily cheated, and they develop an intellectual consciousness with which they analyse their situation, even if sometimes in a rather naïve way.

The cultural resistance<sup>41</sup> that all human groups have developed to defend themselves against oppression is an excellent example to illustrate what we are saying here. Thus, for Amílcar Cabral, cultural resistance is at the same time a cultural factor and a cultural act, as it is at the same time a cultural manifestation and a cultural factor of the people.<sup>42</sup> In other words, popular groups manifest their intellectual capacity to interpret reality in different manners, depending on the socio-economical and political structures that direct time.

We cannot enter here into a discussion on culture and cultural resistance, but would like to underline the role human groups play within the "intellectual" (superstructural) organization of society.

In São Tomé and Príncipe, for instance, culture during the colonial times was determined mainly by the control of the material base by the Portuguese élite, who owned 90 per cent of all cultivable land. The social organization of monoculture impeded the development of the people's culture in general. The lowest social groups within the social pyramid were forced to live in a "culture of silence," in which they were prevented from expressing themselves, and, consequently, their very existence was impeded. "In the culture of silence to exist means to live. The body follows the orders that come from above. To think is difficult and to express one's mind is prohibited."<sup>43</sup>

Nevertheless — despite that "silence" — the people of São Tomé and Príncipe could not be impeded from developing, especially clandestinely, various cultural manifestations. This is why, when speaking of a "culture of silence," we put it in inverted commas, because it means the situation in which the people's culture was marginalized, being ignored, misunderstood, crushed, etc. This was interpreted by the colonizers as "silence."



This is why it is crucial in our view to talk about cultural resistance when focusing on the problem of dialogue. If this was not done, given the importance it has, to talk about dialogue with cultural groups would be a farce or an ideologizing theory that trying to carry out a struggle in favour of the oppressed would result in a struggle against them.

Summarizing the above, we may say that dialogue starts with the understanding and study of each human group, and its various manifestations. We remember, for instance, the congo dance — one of the most ancient folkloristic manifestations of the people of Sao Tomé and Príncipe, illustrating what we are theorizing. According to the Portuguese colonizers' interpretation, the congo dance illustrates the lack of concern of the natives toward their land, permitting anybody more astute than themselves to exploit it. For the population of Sao Tomé and Príncipe, however, the congo dance is the most popular and spectacular folkloristic manifestation. Through the art of pantomime, three individuals are portrayed, who inherit a farm (roça = name given to farms in Sao Tomé and Príncipe), giving it to an administrator in order to organize it for them. Instead, the administrator appropriates the farm. This produces a series of fights, which are represented in a dance whose rhythm gets more and more intensive. In the people's interpretation, this dance represents the expropriation of the Angolarians. (As stated above, they were expelled from their lands and compelled to flee to the coast.)<sup>44</sup>

Folklore — as any other kind of popular manifestation — is a reflection of people's everyday life. It permits human groups to unite with their historical past as part of their culture. Any folkloristic manifestation is a reflection of the people's life and their development. It reflects a concept of life, the people's conscience. According to Gramsci, it is through folklore that the lowest classes of the social pyramid develop a form of resistance against domination. Folklore represents the faithful image of popular conceptions.<sup>45</sup>

The congo dance is only one example, permitting us to reflect about



the implications of dialogue on popular groups. Nevertheless, we should not come to the naïve conclusion that there exist no great contradictions in the minds of the people, or that the alienating role the dominant classes played has not left its traces.

The examples on that level are numerous, and it is also important to understand them. Let's just mention the fact that the Portuguese colonizers prevented the population of Sao Tomé and Príncipe from eating eggs, trying to make them believe that eggs would make them sterile. While the population suffered from that alienation the Portuguese profited from it, improving the quantity and quality of their own food.

Amilcar Cabral agrees that any culture has positive and negative elements. He called the negative aspects "debilities of culture," which express themselves in various manners. During the liberation fight Amilcar was confronted with those debilities. For instance, some of the soldiers thought that the amulets they were wearing could protect them from the bullets of the enemy.<sup>46</sup>

Yet returning to our central theme, the dialogue, we see what it is we wish to retain. We believe that the examples given in this paper stress the importance of popular knowledge within a process of dialogue with the various groups with which one works. To confide in these groups, giving them a chance to develop their intellectual capacities must not be insincere. Critical thinking capacity is latent in every person. It is not about inventing something new, nor about making fabulous discoveries. It is about rendering coherent this already existing activity, which is given within a context of cultural action for liberation, or within a cultural revolution.

Cultural circles therefore must permit the development of the intellectual capacities of the people. Dialogue must practise the critical capacity maximally, starting from popular knowledge in order to permit it to convert into scientific knowledge.



## NOTES

1. Cf. Paulo Freire, Cartas à Guiné Bissau — Registros de una experiencia em processo, p. 63.
2. With reference to this topic see especially the following works by P. Freire: Carta no. 1 aos animadores e às animadoras culturais; Educação como pratica da liberdade; Acção cultural para a liberação e outros escritos.
3. Cf. Freire, Carta no. 1 aos . . ., p. 6.
4. See note 2.
5. See note 2. Also cf. Freire, Cartas à Guiné . . ., p. 22.
6. Cf. Freire, Carta no. 1 aos . . ., p. 3.
7. Ibid., p. 8.
8. Ibid.
9. Cf. Freire, Pedagogia del Oprimido, pp. 73-99.
10. Cf. Freire, Carta No. 1 aos . . ., p. 3.
11. Cf. Freire, Cartas à Guiné . . ., p. 5.
12. Ibid., pp. 6-7.
13. Ibid.
14. Cf. Freire, Acção cultural . . ., pp. 30-31.
15. Ibid., pp. 16-19.
16. Ibid., pp. 17-31.
17. Cf. Freire, Pedagogia . . ., frontispiece.
18. Cf. Freire, Acção cultural . . ., p. 67.
19. Cf. Freire, Extensão o Comunicação, p. 66.
20. Cf. Freire, Acção cultural . . ., pp. 121-133.
21. Ibid., p. 89.
22. Cf. Freire, Extensão . . ., pp. 66-68.
23. Ibid., p. 66.
24. With reference to this topic the following article served as a basis: Professor Luis J. Prieto, "Sull'ideologia e sul ruolo degli intellettuali borghesi nel processo verso il socialismo."



25. Ibid., p. 2.
26. Ibid., p. 3.
27. Ibid., pp. 3-4.
28. Cf. Freire, Acção cultural . . . , p. 74.
29. Ibid., p. 28.
30. Ibid., pp. 82-83, 109-111.
31. Ibid., p. 114.
32. Ibid., pp. 117-119.
33. Ibid., p. 26.
34. Ibid., p. 30.
35. Cf. Maria-Antonieta Macciocchi, De la Chine, p. 379.
36. We would like to stress that it is not our intention to enter into an analysis of the Cultural Revolution in China. We only try to approach this problem on a theoretical basis.
37. Cf. Macciocchi, op. cit., p. 380.
38. Ibid., p. 382.
39. Ibid., p. 409.
40. Cf. Gramsci dans le texte, pp. 138, 158-160, 607.
41. Cf. Hilda Varela and Miguel Escobar, La culture, la resistance culturelle et l'identité culturelle à São Tomé et Príncipe.
42. Cf. Amilcar Cabral, L'arme de la théorie, pp. 316-357.
43. Cf. Freire, Acção cultural . . . , p. 69.
44. Cf. Alda Graça, "Contributo para a interpretação do Folclore de São Tomé e Príncipe," p. 7.
45. Cf. Gramsci . . . , pp. 138, 158-160.
46. Cf. Amilcar Cabral, op. cit., pp. 119-201.



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