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Printed in Japan

ISBN 92-808-0330-1

ISSN 0379-5764

HSDRGPID-65/UNUP-330

**A WORLD-SYSTEM CRITIQUE OF FREIRE'S
PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION: NAMING
THE WORLD CAPITALIST REALITY**

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

This paper is a product of the Structural Interpretation of International Inequality Project (S3IP), a research project within the United Nations University's Goals, Processes, and Indicators of Development Project. Thanks to Lily Addo for her research and typing services and to Margaret Blenman-Haris for her editorial advice.

This paper by Herb Addo is a contribution to the Dialogues sub-project, which held its first meeting in Penang, 1-7 September 1979. It might be read in conjunction with HSDRGPID-64/UNUP-329, "Dialogue in the Pedagogical Praxis of Paulo Freire," by Hilda and Miguel Escobar.

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.

I. THE SILENT QUESTION

I shall begin this brief critique of Freire's philosophy of education¹ in a manner which will ensure that I do not fall into the ubiquitous generational trap of rediscovering the importance and the limits of education.² I shall also try to forestall discussion on the obvious point that education, because of its dual ability to preserve and transform societies, has necessarily been controversial at some times — if not at most times — in all cultures. This should leave me free to approach directly the relevance of Paulo Freire's philosophy of education at this stage of the development of the world-system, where the world-system itself has truly become a society "in itself" groping rather confusedly toward becoming a society "for itself" protecting itself against, of all things, itself.

It is in this sense that Freire's philosophy should be evaluated. Any other sense for the critical evaluation of this philosophy will do it an injustice, in that it will remove it from the plane of constructive criticism and place it on the plane where the thrust and ethos of his arguments, the honesty and the sensitivity and the provocative creativity of his thoughts, will elicit commendation, inspire imitation, and, I fear, then become a fad in education practices. As a fad, this timely philosophy would be met by the "stabilizing antidotes" of establishments' "cultured" embrace, and the oppressed of many societies would be left on their own once more. Should this occur, history would proceed without the immediate full impact of this humanizing philosophy.

Let me note at this early point that in a world where sooner or later every adult in any culture becomes "realistic," humanism as the only authentic praxis has always been left to very few thinkers in the history

of thought. At this point in history, Freire's philosophy of education is remarkable because it belongs to the humanist tradition of radical thought in an age of excessive "realism." In the course of reviewing and updating several humanist theories of action, Freire presents a warm humanist philosophy of education as a dialogical theory of action aimed at humanizing history in its unfolding, through making the oppressed majority its subjects and not just its mere objects.

Freire's philosophy of education commands particular attention because, like few philosophies of its kind,³ it is not a "naked" philosophy. It is a philosophy that does not appear to leave its method of implementation and its techniques of application to some vague "others" and to a nebulous future. It is a philosophy that comes translationally equipped. This philosophy of education does not pretend to talk to the whole of the human race. As is typical of praxis-oriented humanists, Freire's constituency, as the apt titles of his books suggest, is the oppressed and their revolutionary associates.

This selection of the oppressed as the transformational constituency from within the totality of societies raises a problem for humanist theories of action. The problem here has always been: how will the revolutionary associates of the oppressed "teach," "train," and "lead" the revolution against oppression? It is in answer to this question that Freire has contributed immensely. In this regard, Freire's actions and thoughts appear to embody enough praxis to make him "a man who acts like a man of thought and thinks like a man of action."⁴

My task in this essay is twofold. Firstly, it is to present a brief statement of Freire's philosophy of education; secondly, it is to provide a paradiplomatic interpretation of this statement⁵ from the critical point of view of the insights provided by the particular conception of the world currently known as "the world-system perspective" to the study of social reality.⁶ Throughout this essay, one question is present in my mind: In what way does the philosophy of Freire throw light on how to reconcile the values of the developing and the developed "worlds" in the course of humanizing world-history?

In an earlier essay,⁷ written before I had access to Freire's works, I had asked more or less the same question concerning the reconciliation of values through the dialogue of civilizations to inform visions of desirable societies, where the problem would be the enhancing of human dignity. In that essay, I argued that it would be unrealistic to consider a desirable society anywhere in the world without starting from the all-pervading and dominant nature of the world-system's capitalist reality.

The reasons for the dialogue of civilizations are many, but the main reason is to make it possible for the world's capitalist historic dominance to be confronted with its historic subordination. The hope was that such a confrontation would lead to the crucial realization that what the present "subordinate" civilizations are about is neither an Asian, African, nor Latin American view of themselves, but the peripheral view of domination by the world capitalist reality, therefore calling for a prior interperipheral dialogue. The point should not be whether the periphery, having experienced capitalist domination, seeks to remove this domination and its dehumanizing props of inequality and dependency. The argument is not whether the ingenuity of transforming the world-system by the force of the logic of transformation should lie with the oppressed, the majority of the human race, in the periphery.

The problem is that the gap between the sublime human idea of humanized history and the organization of this human idea through humanizing the articulation between and within cultures is very wide and very deep. A lot very often falls in the gap between humane ideas and their usually eventual but ugly realizations.⁸ If the dialogue of civilizations intervenes between the humanizing idea and the organization of it and ensures that the gap is not only narrowed but also shallowed, then the question becomes: What should be done, and how is it to be done?

This question is not new. It has been asked by humanist philosophers and tackled by them in their theories of action. Regrettably, however, in our times, this cardinal question often assumes distorted — if not perverted — forms dealing with false notions of the development of

cultural things to the neglect of the growth of the human being, in the deceitful contexts of social stability and world peace.

The humanist Marx (a too often forgotten description of the man)⁹ asked this question in a European class context. He suggested that "where the working class is not yet far enough advanced in its organization to undertake a decisive campaign against the collective power, i.e., the political power of the ruling class, it must at any rate be trained for this by continual agitation against this power. . . ."10 Many others, including Lenin in *What Is to Be Done?* and elsewhere, have attempted to carry out the Marxist praxis. Marx did not pose his praxis in a historical vacuum. He was specific as regards the proper historicals within his precise historic referents.¹¹ He wrote concerning Feuerbach: ". . . the Feuerbachian theory of morals fares like all its predecessors. It is designed to suit all periods, all peoples, and all conditions and precisely for that reason it is never and nowhere applicable. It remains, as regards the real world, as powerless as Kant's categorical imperative."¹²

The question is: Have Marx and other humanists equipped us today to transcend his limited conceptions of the world as Europe writ large and to conceive of the world of today in all its complexity, which includes the European peculiarity, as capitalist totality? Or are we to allow ourselves to be constrained by outmoded conceptions of the world as anything but capitalist?¹³

In this regard, Freire's humanist philosophy, its attendant method of implementation, and its techniques of application compel attention and demand critical evaluation within the only real totality of our times: the world capitalist reality. In this critique, I shall concentrate only on Freire's philosophy as *philosophy* and not on its technique of application.

This will not be easy to do,¹⁴ but it is necessary because criticism of Freire's philosophical conception of man, as a being in historical motion, and the relevance of the concrete world to this being, at this

point in history, appear missing from comments on his works.¹⁵ Significantly, Freire himself makes the claim — and the claim is accepted by many including Shaull¹⁶ — that his ideas in this regard are *historical*. I intend to examine precisely how historical they are. The intention is also to draw Freire's ideas from their excessive, even if understandable,¹⁷ attachment to what he calls the "Latin American reality," or the "Latin American historical context." Given that in our contemporary circumstances the Latin American reality may exist, but that it has no real meaning outside the real meaning of the reality of the world-system, this aspect of Freire's philosophy needs to be looked at critically.

II. THE WRITTEN WORD: DIALOGUE

Essentially, Freire's philosophy is presented very neatly in the first five paragraphs of the first chapter of the *Pedagogy*, where he states:

While the problem of humanization has always, from an axiological point of view, been man's central problem, it now takes on the character of an inescapable concern. Concern for humanization leads at once to the recognition of dehumanization, not only as an ontological possibility but as an historical reality. And as man perceives the extent of dehumanization, he asks himself if humanization is a viable possibility. Within history, in the concrete, objective context, both humanization and dehumanization are possibilities for man as an uncompleted being conscious of his incompleteness.

But while both humanization and dehumanization are real alternatives, only [humanization] is man's vocation. This vocation is constantly negated, yet it is affirmed by that very negation. It is thwarted by . . . the violence of the oppressors; it is affirmed by the yearning of the oppressed [to be free], and by their struggle to recover their lost humanity.

Dehumanization [the mark of both the oppressed and the oppressors, though in different ways] is not an historical vocation. The struggle [of the oppressed] is possibly only because dehumanization, although a concrete historical fact, is *not* a given destiny but the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed.

In order for [the struggle of the oppressed] to have meaning, [the oppressed] must not, in seeking to regain their humanity . . . , become in turn oppressors, but rather restorers of the humanity of both. This, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well.¹⁸

The meaning of the oppressed's struggle against dehumanization is located in the great "humanistic and historical task" of liberating themselves and their oppressors as well. The object of the struggle is to bring into existence an order that dehumanizes no one. The obvious

question, then, is: How is this new order to be approached?

Freire says we are to approach it through "conscientization": the critical process of "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements in reality."¹⁹

The main vehicle of this process is to be the method of dialogue. This method is also a process. It is the process where revolutionaries, committed to transforming the world, go to the oppressed not to teach or lead them to overthrow the existing order, but to learn from and with them. To the extent that committed revolutionaries may teach or lead the oppressed masses at all, it means no more than the revolutionaries give back to the oppressed what they have taken from them.²⁰ The point is that dialogue as a method is meaningful only in the context of love, hope, humility, and sympathy on the part of radicals or revolutionaries towards the oppressed.²¹

Accordingly, dialogue cannot take place between the oppressed and the oppressors.²² This kind of cultural action seeks to learn with the intention of changing; therefore, it is very unlike the Aristotelian conception of dialogue and its present survivals in education, which seek more to "bank" knowledge than to learn with humility and love, in situations where the teacher-student relation is reversible. It is not that radicals and revolutionaries may not "initiate the unveiling on behalf of" the masses.²³ It is rather that "men in communion liberate each other. This affirmation is not meant to undervalue the importance of revolutionary leaders but, on the contrary, to emphasize their value."²⁴

The essence of being revolutionary is being dialogical. The banking method of education cannot even be used by revolutionaries "as an interim measure."²⁵ And there is a good reason for this. Revolutionaries should take chances in the revolutionary process. Indeed, they should chance the very failure of their revolution, for where the revolutionary process cannot live itself it is premature and, perhaps,

it deserves to die. Authentic revolutions can occur only where they survive chances while they live themselves: The legitimacy of revolutions lies in dialogue.²⁶ Where there is dialogue, revolution is inevitable. Revolution then is "dialogical culture."²⁷

Dialogue is a complex phenomenon; Freire says its essence is *the word*.²⁸ The word is constituted by the two dimensions of reflection and action. The two dimensions must be present if the word is to be true and therefore praxis. But which word should initiate the dialogue?

Freire says that "to exist, humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new *naming*."²⁹ Dialogue then becomes "the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world."³⁰ It becomes a simultaneous act of creation and re-creation, which cannot serve as the instrument of oppression. It is, however, important to infer that "the domination implicit in dialogue is that of the world by the dialoguers; it is conquest of the world for the liberation of men."³¹

The initial problem which confronts dialogue as cultural action is the problem of "duality." The difficulty here arises from the fact that for the oppressed, while "their ideal is to be men,"³² to be men for them is to be like the oppressor; to them "*to be is to be like, and to be like is to be like the oppressor*."³³ Shaped by the contradictions of their concrete situations, the very structure of the thoughts of the oppressed is conditioned by the oppressors. This is what produces the "fear of freedom"³⁴ in the oppressed. Where, then, should dialogue begin to apply, and what should be its content? Freire's answer is that:

The starting point for organizing the programme content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situation, *reflecting the aspirations of the people*. Utilizing certain basic contradictions, we must pose this existential, concrete, present situation to the people as a problem which challenges them and requires a response — not just at the intellectual level, but at the level of action.³⁵

History plays a very prominent role in Freire's philosophy. He uses many history-laden and history-derived terms.³⁶ Freire's conception of history is a time frame within which cultures unfold within their "limit-situation"; but the key to understanding this conception is that history is the transformation of cultures. In fact, he argues that animals differ from men in that:

. . . men can tri-dimensionalize time into the past, the present, and the future. Their history, in function of their own creations, develops as a constant process of transformation within which epochal units materialize. These epochal units are not closed periods of time, static compartments within which men are confined. . . . On the contrary, epochal units interrelate in the dynamics of historical continuity.³⁷

This conception of man in history is of crucial importance to my para-diplomatic interpretation of Freire's philosophy in the following section. For this reason, note that Freire further says that:

An epoch is characterized by a complex of ideas, concepts, hopes, doubts, values, and challenges in dialectical interaction with their opposites, striving towards plenitude. The concrete representation of many of these ideas, values, concepts, and hopes, as well as the obstacles which impede man's full humanization, constitute the themes of that epoch. These themes imply others which are opposing or even anti-thetical; they also indicate tasks to be carried out and fulfilled. Thus, historical themes are never isolated, independent, disconnected, or static; they are always interacting dialectically with their opposites. Nor can these themes be found anywhere except in the men-world relationship. The complex of interacting themes of an epoch constitutes its "thematic universe."

As antagonism deepens between themes which are the expression of reality, there is a tendency for the themes and for reality itself to be mythicized, establishing a climate of irrationality and sectarianism. This climate threatens to drain the themes of their deeper significance and to deprive them of their characteristically dynamic aspect. In such a situation, myth-creating irrationality itself becomes a fundamental theme. Its opposing theme, the critical and dynamic view of the world, strives to unveil reality, unmask its mythicization, and achieve a full realization of the human task: the permanent transformation of reality in favour of the liberation of men.³⁸

Even more important, Freire says this about the "size" of generative themes as history:

Generative themes can be located in concentric circles, moving from the general to the particular. The broadest epochal unit, which includes a diversified range of units and sub-units — continental, regional, national, and so forth — contains themes of a universal character. I consider the fundamental theme of our epoch to be that of domination — which implies its opposite, the theme of liberation, as the objective to be achieved.³⁹

And this is not all. He adds that:

Any given society within the broader epochal unit contains, in addition to the universal, continental, or historically similar themes, its own particular themes, its own limit-situations. Within yet smaller circles, thematic diversifications can be found within the same society, divided into areas and sub-areas, all of which are related to the societal whole. These constitute epochal sub-units. For example, within the same national unit one can find the contradiction of the "coexistence of the non-contemporaneous."⁴⁰

Specifically, on the matter of historical-thematics and the link between themes, Freire advises that we should show a concern to pose "themes as problems, and a concern for their historical cultural context."⁴¹

Finally, recalling that domination is the fundamental theme of our epoch and that domination implies its opposite theme of liberation, Freire states that underdevelopment, which represents a limit-situation characteristic of Third World societies, cannot be understood outside "the relationship of dependency."⁴² Because of their dependent situations, these societies cannot develop authentically by transforming themselves from their situations as alienated societies of "beings of others" to the authentic situations of "being for themselves."⁴³

The reason for this is that, to the extent that we can consider societies as beings, these societies also suffer from the problem of duality because they are dependent. Third World societies have "the fear of freedom": they love and hate the invader societies; while they want to be free, their idea of free societies is to be like the oppressor societies.⁴⁴

The interesting thing in this context is that, in the invasion and

domination of dependent societies, "the elite leaders of the dominated society to a large extent act as mere brokers for the leaders of the metropolitan society."⁴⁵

I shall conclude this section by calling attention to the fact that it is from the above philosophical and methodological bases that Freire develops his technique of adult literacy programmes, and from these bases that he examines the validity of the recent Brazilian experiences as a society in transition.

III. THE MISSING REALITY: ANTI-CAPITALIST DIALOGUE

The message is rather clear. Freire begins the *Pedagogy* with the statement of the axiology of human ontology. By so doing he does not so much formulate a question as begin with a problem, the only real human problem: the manner in which being human, as a value, and humanization, as a process, have been thwarted historically by the historical actualization of dehumanization, which in truly "normal" circumstances should only be an ontological possibility.

The very clarity of the message forces a critic to ask what really constitutes the problem. The question becomes whether the basic problem is that man attempts to regain his lost humanity, or whether man, being incomplete from the beginning and conscious of this incompleteness, has always sought completion through increasing humanization.

Let us suppose man lost the state of being fully humanized. The problem then becomes how man lost it and through this loss how man came to acquire the axiology of humanization as an ontological vocation. And let us suppose man seeks increasing humanization in furtherance of a sempiternal vocation of humanization. Then, concern for humanization comes to focus on praxis as coincidental with the full set of dehumanization-negating processes of the existing realities of our times in history.

Freire is equivocal on a choice between the two positions, and yet a choice is extremely important. The importance is derived from the fact that if man is only seeking to retrieve or regain the lost paradise of a fully humanized state, then the whole of human social history becomes

our concern, and the objective is to reinstitute the concrete reality of this lost state. However, if man is only seeking to increase the threatened level of humanity, then the concreteness of man's existing historicity and its transformation become our main concern.

Our problem then becomes both historically concrete and historically precise. It becomes the overdetermination of our historic infrastructure by ideological and political instances, the contradictions which this overdetermination engenders, and the paradoxes which intimate such contradictions.

What is even more important is that, if we do not make a choice, Freire's contribution to the philosophy of humanism runs the unfortunate risk of seeming to be no more than an erudite summary of the pedagogical methodologies of certain humanist thinkers, with a passionate Brazilian flavour added. Further, not until we make a choice can Freire's contribution be considered as anything more than an elegant trans-historic shell in that its message is applicable to the historical resolution of the oppressor-oppressed contradiction through all ages, through all the concretely different historic periods within the generally historical.

I shall therefore make a choice. I shall argue that man in history has never known the paradise of a fully humanized state. The ontological vocation of man in history has been to reach and maintain such a state.

Agreeing with Freire's position that dehumanization is the result of an unjust order that engenders the violence in the oppressor which, in turn, dehumanizes the oppressed, I can cast my problématique in this form:⁴⁶ The dehumanization of man may be historically ever-present but, since different unjust social orders are bound by their concrete and precise historic referents, what is peculiarly specific about our historic epoch that distinguishes it from other epochs and explains or accounts for the unjustness of our contemporary order?

We cannot avoid this crucial question because, as Freire insists, both

the starting point and the contents of praxis as dialogical action must be the "present, existential concrete situation." This situation cannot be divorced from its intimate historic referents which form the complex that sustains the existing unjust order. This is the complex that Freire himself describes as "characterized by a complex of ideas, concepts, hopes, doubts and challenges in dialectical interaction with their opposites, striving towards plenitude." But how do we approach this complex?

What I mean is simply this: what is the contemporary identity of man's historicity?

We must not forget that Freire has said that "the concrete representation of the complex [in relation to man's full humanization] constitute the themes of [an] epoch." These themes, however, do not exist in isolation. Given a particular "world," there is always a theme among themes. What is the theme among themes in our world, aware as we are that once we name this theme, which expresses our view of the world in its concreteness, "the world in its turn reappears to [us] as a problem and requires of [us] a new *naming*?" It should be emphasized that since the humanizing axiology of man's ontological vocation is unquestioned, the name we call the world should suggest much more than just a neutral description of the world: it should unambiguously represent a simultaneous rejection of the main dehumanizing tendencies and the acceptance of the humanizing potential and its growth in the world.

*The Components of the Historic Category*⁴⁷

Human social history can be divided into specific and precise historic periods. The concept *historic* differs from the term *historical*; while the latter is nebulous and evasive of the precise contents of the categories and concepts constituting and describing sections of history, the former stresses the precise and specific contents of the categories and the concepts that constitute definite and prominent periods in

human history, and distinguish them one from the other by real differences in the human-conditioning factors of the different periods. *Historical*, as it is often used, tends to stress the heroic wills and the poetics in history. The term *historic* is intended for viewing history in fundamental and precise terms derived from and related to the distinguishing features of distinctively different periods in history. I suggest that it would be extremely useful to view the historic identities of different periods in history by the differences in their basic historic components, which I suggest are the following: historic themes, historic motives, historic forces, historic concomitants, and historic logical attendants. When I refer to the historic dominance of a period in the history of a society, I am only trying to constitute the complex that sums up reality, and which is composed by a precise historic theme, historic motive, historic force, precise historic concomitants, and historic logical attendants — all of which are peculiar, if not unique, to a historic period of that society.

One could well ask what all these terms mean, and therefore I shall attempt to define them. *Historic theme* stands for the theme of themes during a historic period, and it is best understood as a social order's *raison d'être*. This theme would tend to remain constant over the duration of a historic period. What tend to change are the means for attaining and maintaining the theme during the historic period. The *historic motive* is what motivates and tantalizes individuals to make a fetish of the theme of themes. The *historic force* is the key element in the complex of varying means which keep the theme the same. It is the source of dynamism which must constantly "update" itself, if the historic period is to remain historic of a particular kind. *Historic concomitant* refers to those aspects of social reality that are historical — in the sense of being transhistoric — but which assume radically new relevance, or acquire new meanings, because of new circumstances brought about by the "updatings" in the historic force. *Historic logical attendants* refers to the aspects of social reality that are historic by being peculiar to a historic period, because they are emergent of the changes in the historic force. Within the complex of means in pursuit of the historic motive, the concomitants and the logical

attendants play supporting roles to the historic force of a historic period. Therefore, when I refer to the historic dominance of a historic period, I refer essentially to *the complex emulsion of a historic force suspending and unfolding in the intimate solution of precise historic concomitants and historic logical attendants, all operating in mutually supporting roles in maintaining the historic theme in pursuit of a precise historic motive.* The dehumanization and humanizing opposites are always present in this historic emulsion.

Because means which are thematic can vary — indeed because they need to vary to keep the theme constant — the deception is mistaking changing means for a changing theme. What we should guard against is the false conclusion that social orders have changed because the flamboyance of changing means has obscured the bland constancy of the theme. Means have the uncanny ability to masquerade as a theme or themes; and historic themes have the misfortune of being easily ignored, once the appropriate means have been set in motion to assure the stability of the theme.

This method derives from the world-system perspective. This perspective addresses itself to the cardinal contradiction in social reality. The contradiction, as can be seen from the contrast between the "flamboyance of means" and the "blandness of the constancy theme," is the contradiction that in social orders things can very easily *appear* to have changed while, from the *historic* point of view, they remain essentially the same because the historic theme remains the same.

Concretizing the Capitalist Historic Dominance

Every social order has been part of a particular historic dominance. In the past, different historic dominances (even if similar in some respects) have existed in different parts of the world. For the past 500 years or so, however, for the first time in the history of mankind, the whole world has steadily been coming under the dominance of one historic form: the capitalist historic form. In the world capitalist

historic form, the historic theme is the accumulation of capital; the historic motive is the attainment of the Bourgeois Way of Life;⁴⁸ the historic force is the rising level of efficiency of exploitation of both human and non-human resources; the historic concomitants and the historic logical attendants are those aspects of the capitalist social reality which must be present and which must change as a result of the rising level of efficiency to facilitate capital accumulation by legitimating and maintaining the historic theme of the capitalist order in the pursuit of its motive.⁴⁹ I simply state the obvious when I say that the characteristics of the capitalist world-system — its paradoxes and its contradictions — have developed within the development of the historic dominance of the world capitalist formation. If the theme in this historic identity is the accumulation of capital in the pursuit of the motive of the Bourgeois Way of Life, then what distinguishes it from other possible humanized future economic forms is not the difference between private and public ownership of production (both ownership forms hold as their goal the accumulation of capital through increasing efficiency of production) but the cause of man's dehumanization. In the capitalist mode of production the emphasis is on the efficient production of things, and not on the production of things, efficiently or otherwise, to enhance and dignify human existence in both the individual and the societal senses. Because of this theme, and the way its logical means and concomitants have developed, in the course of nearly 500 years, the previously "unrelated relations" of different parts of the world have dramatically given way to a single world-history. For this reason, we have a world of political societies within one dominant capitalist world-economy.

I have set down the above to stress that the world has become one: a unit whole with an ethos and a pathos, embracing all other units and affecting all else in this whole. This whole is the capitalist world-system, and it is so all-pervading that it is impossible to envision the transformation of any part without considering the transformation of the whole.

If I have followed others in the world-system school of thought by

naming our world today as capitalist, it is not to suggest that all parts of the world are capitalist in the same sense and to the degree. Within the capitalist world-economy,⁵⁰ we have capitalist formations of the central, the peripheral, and the state types. While these capitalist formations may differ in many ways, we call the world-economy, the world-system, and the world-history which it subserves capitalist for two main reasons. Firstly, those units in the world-system which are "fully" capitalist want to remain so; those units which are not "fully" capitalist want to become so; even those units that claim not to be capitalist behave both internally and externally as though they either are or want to be capitalist.⁵¹ Secondly, and more importantly, we call the world reality capitalist because the historic theme of the world-system is the accumulation of capital on the world scale as the individual historic motive of the Bourgeois Way of Life. In the course of pursuing this way of life through methodical accumulation of capital, the world-system - its economy and history and culture - displays the historic tendencies of increasing efficiency of exploitation of both human and non-human resources, and an increasing tendency toward proletarianization.

If the word chosen to name the world is capitalist, it is not meant to denote ideological opprobrium. It is meant to suggest that, in the sense described above, in its ethos as well as its pathos, the whole world as a culture and a process, in its structural and relational terms, is capitalist. It is meant to suggest that the world-system's historic dominance is capitalist.

A World-System Critique of Freire's Philosophy

Freire cautioned that the full meaning of his message could not be grasped if a critic or a reader did not step away from it to allow the world, the real world, to mediate between him and the message. I have tried to do this and, by doing this, I am inclined to think that the usefulness of the mediation depends very much on the extent to which the world is presented as it really is.

It is true that in many parts of his three books under consideration, Freire comes very close to portraying the world's historic identity as both world-wide and capitalist in nature.⁵² But at no point in these three books does Freire come out and *name* the world for us, thus providing us with the only concrete and hence crucial context within which his theory of praxis as dialogical action would have its full meaning.

For example, while it is true that epochal units of history interrelate in the sense of the continuity of the flow of culture, if one's objective is praxis, then one's focus should be on the most relevant and the most immediate epochal unit that one is trying to transform. Should this be done, one would then be dealing with the historicity of an epoch in history.⁵³

Regarding Freire's position that generative themes can be located in concentric circles, moving from the general to the particular, what is interesting is not just the existence of a link between the general and the particular, but the extent to which the dominating general through the link affects and transforms all the subordinated particulars. Thus, if the fundamental theme of our epoch is domination, then, specifically and precisely, our theme is capitalist domination.⁵⁴

Once we come to realize this, we will be in the position to view capitalist domination for what it is. It is the structural-relational reality which ensures that the incidence of accumulated capital between units in the world-system will be unequal and that the resulting incidence of the attainability of the Bourgeois Way of Life will also be unequal.

Freire is correct when he says, with respect to the link, that "one of the methods of manipulation is to inoculate individuals with the bourgeois appetite for personal success."⁵⁵ But is it not also true that the bourgeois appetite and culture can be attained by only a few within the capitalist world-system? Further, is it not true that by holding the Bourgeois Way of Life as universally attainable the élites

of the various units in the world-system are able to cultivate "the culture of silence," which dialogue is supposed to negate?

The arrested dialectical counterpart to valid transition potential⁵⁶ at this phase of the development of the capitalist world-system is, as Freire says, the élites of dependent societies serving "as mere brokers for the leaders of the metropolitan society."⁵⁷ This is true, but what is even more true is that the élites of subordinate cultures within the capitalist world-system suffer from the problem of duality even more than their masses. It is the élites who transmit and help to sustain the historic properties of capitalism from the centre to the periphery of world capitalism; by so doing they transmit and sustain its dehumanizing culture in the dominated areas of the world.

These élites believe that for their "object societies" to be, their societies must be like the "director societies" in the complete sense of imitating all in the latter societies, including the oppressor-oppressed contradiction which ensures that the distributive incidence of the Bourgeois Way of Life will be unequal in the "object societies" also.⁵⁸ In this regard, to what extent does Freire's philosophy escape the problem of duality?

I shall discuss this question in the context of Freire's conceptions of "transition" and "democratic inexperience." From the *Pedagogy*, one gets the impression that by not naming the world Freire does not escape the problem of duality. In fact, it comes out clearly in the other two books that this is the case. From these latter sources, Freire's conceptions of transition and democraticization are extremely limited. They are not meant to transcend the capitalist mode of dehumanization. Rather, they are intended to follow the pattern of development in the "director societies."

There is much evidence to support this view in parts of his works where he discusses the Brazilian experience in the early sixties. His approving references to Jario Quadros and Getulio Vargas⁵⁹ are sure indications that Freire's conception of transition cannot accord with

the conception of transition as a transformation situation "where contradictions have reached a point of maturity and their resolution necessarily implies a qualitatively different situation . . . [and where a] transition is a brief period of intensified activity when new social forms triumph over the old in a context of sharp struggle."⁶⁰

Even conceding that what was going on in Brazil in the early sixties could have had far-reaching transformational consequences for eventual transition, it is still difficult, given what we know now about the capitalist world-system, to confer the name transition on it. If Freire's hopes and expectations for Brazil had been fulfilled, the best that could have been expected would have been the movement of Brazil from the backwaters to the foreranks of the group of peripheral capitalist societies.

The intention here is not to mock Freire's hopes for Brazil in particular and the Third World in general. Far from it. It is to suggest, however, that what Freire called "transition" in Brazilian context would not necessarily have reduced the dehumanization content of Brazilian reality. Taking his philosophy on its own terms, it is to imply that what was going on in Brazil at the time could have brought about certain changes, but that in the circumstances of 1980 — given what we know of the world reality — it is only fair from a praxis point of view to say that whatever could have resulted in Brazil from the experiences of the early sixties could not have drastically reduced dehumanization: perhaps it could have even increased it in a capitalist world. In short, what Freire calls transition is no more than a reformation, with its transformation objective limited to Europeanizing the Brazilian political experience.⁶¹

The main problem is that Freire did not *name* the world. Therefore, while he may have denounced dehumanization, he did not simultaneously announce in what form humanization was to occur. Until Freire brings in the world-system's historic capitalist specificity, his philosophy is not much different from those of other nationalists of the Third World who reason in the "modernization" mode of thought.

The main point is that the starting point of conscientization and the content of dialogue are meaningless outside a philosophy that rejects the dehumanizing and irrational aspects of world capitalism and reconstitutes what is humanizing and rational into a new historic form.

In this connection, Freire's philosophy cannot explain the reconciliation of the values of the developing and the developed "worlds" in the course of humanizing world-history. What links these two "worlds" is capitalism, as it developed and as it has become today. The humanization-dehumanization contradiction, as Freire agrees, cannot be discussed outside culture, which is man in history. What is particularly worthy of note is that Freire tells us that "cultural action for 'conscientization' is always a utopian enterprise."⁶² And that is precisely why he says "it needs philosophy, without which, instead of denouncing reality and announcing the future, it would fall into the mystification of ideological knowledge."⁶³ But how can we avoid such mystification if we shy away from naming the world in order to rename it?

The reconciliation of the values of the two "worlds" is a useless and perhaps even a dangerous exercise if the dialogue does not reject the historic theme of capital accumulation in pursuit of the historic motive of the Bourgeois Way of Life and reconstitute the historic concomitants and the logical attendants into a much more humanized history.

This capitalist dominance is what specifies the scope, the method, and the content of an otherwise empty concept of domination and makes it applicable to us in our historic age. Until we name our world as capitalist, we cannot relate the dehumanization-humanization contradiction to our times — a deformed complex of networks of exploitation. Wallerstein describes the mark of our time as "the imagination of its profiteers and the counter-assertiveness of the oppressed. Exploitation and the refusal to accept exploitation as either inevitable or just constitute the continuing antimony of the modern era, joined together in a dialectic which has far from reached its climax in the twentieth century."⁶⁴

NOTES

1. The critique is based on the following writings by Paulo Freire: *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1968) (referred to in the text and notes as *Pedagogy*); *Cultural Action for Education* (New York: Penguin, 1972) (referred to in the notes as *Cultural Action*); and *Education for Critical Consciousness* (New York: Seabury, 1973) (referred to in the notes as *Education*).
2. It would seem that the Club of Rome fell into this trap in their recent report on "learning," J.W. Botkin, M. Elmandjra, and M. Malitza, *The Human Gap* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1979). The report appears to want to increase the human capacity to learn so that human beings can adapt to the tremendous changes occurring in the world today. Freire avoids this trap. He agrees with Simone de Beauvoir that ". . . the interests of the oppressors lie in changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them" (*Pedagogy*, p. 60).
3. I refer to philosophies of education current in our world. For reference to such philosophies, see E. Faure et al., eds., *Learning to Be* (Paris: UNESCO, 1972), pp. 75 and 139.
4. Kwame Nkrumah, who regards change and revolution as the "life-blood of reality," is cited by Kenneth Grundy as having said that revolutions are brought about by "men who think as men of action and act as men of thought," p. 56 of K. Grundy, "The Political Ideology of Kwame Nkrumah," in W. Skurnik, ed., *African Political Thought: Lumumba, Nkrumah and Toure* (Graduate School of International Studies: University of Denver, 1968).
5. Interpretation differs from reporting or re-statement. It includes paradiplomatic material and betrays the interpreter's own reasons for understanding what is being interpreted in the way he does.
6. This perspective has been advanced by writers such as Samir Amin, Immanuel Wallerstein, Andre Funder Frank, and Eric Williams. For a brief systematic presentation of what the perspective could be, see Braudel Centre, "Patterns of Development of the Modern World-System," *Review*, 1, no. 2 (1977): 111-145.
7. H. Addo, "Informing Visions of Desirable Future Societies through Dialogue of Civilizations: A Peripheral View," in E. Masini et al., eds. (forthcoming), *Proceedings of the WFSF meeting on "Dialogue of Civilization,"* Mexico City, 25-28 May 1979.

8. The reader is referred to T.S. Eliot's *The Hollow Men*: "Between the idea/And the reality/Between the motion/And the act/Falls the Shadow."
9. See Erich Fromm, ed., *Socialist Humanism* (New York: Penguin Press, 1967).
10. Karl Marx, "Letter to F. Bolte in New York," in *Selected Works of Marx and Engels* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970), pp. 673-674.
11. The difference between "historical" and "historic" will become clear in Section III.
12. Karl Marx, "Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Ideology," in *Selected Works of Marx and Engels* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1970), p. 607.
13. Maurice Dobb initiated the "Great Debate" on the nature and the characteristics of capitalism. I am referring to the Sweezy-Dobb, Laclau-Frank, Wallerstein-Frank, and Bettelheim-Emmanuel debates on whether or not the world can be said to be capitalist.
14. Among the many reasons is the space limitation imposed on this critique.
15. See Richard Shaull's "Forward" to *Pedagogy*; Denis Goulet's "Introduction" to *Education*; an anonymous and dateless mimeograph entitled "The Paulo Freire's Method: Literacy Training and Conscientization"; Ivan Illich, "The Futility of Schooling in Latin America," *Saturday Review*, 20 April 1968; and Henrique C. de Lima Vaz, "The Church and 'Conscientizacao,'" *America*, 27 April 1968. A mild case of philosophical cognizance is shown by Joao de Gelga Coutinho in his "Preface" to *Cultural Action*.
16. See p. 12 of *Pedagogy* where Shaull says: "Fed up as I am with the abstractness and sterility of so much intellectual work in academic circles today, I am excited by a process of reflection which is set in a *thoroughly historical* context. . . ." (Emphasis added.)
17. Such an attachment is evident in all the three works of Freire under examination. This is what must have prompted Denis Goulet on p. vii of *Education* to say: "No contemporary writer more persistently explores, the many dimensions of critical consciousness than Paulo Freire, a multi-cultural educator with the whole world as his classroom notwithstanding the *totally Brazilian* flavor of his emotion, his language, and his *universe of thought*." (Emphases added.)
18. *Pedagogy*, pp. 27-28.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 19, note 1 (translator's note).
20. This does not mean that "the objectives of revolutionary action should be limited to the aspirations expressed in the world view of the people." *Pedagogy*, p. 184.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 124.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

24. Ibid., p. 128.
25. Ibid., p. 74.
26. Ibid., pp. 122-124.
27. Ibid., pp. 121-122.
28. Ibid., p. 75.
29. Ibid., p. 76 (my emphasis).
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid., p. 77.
32. Ibid., p. 30.
33. Ibid., p. 33 (my emphasis).
34. Ibid., p. 31.
35. Ibid., p. 85 (my emphasis).
36. These terms include historical, historicity, concrete existential situation, historical moment, historical context, and historic.
37. *Pedagogy*, p. 91.
38. Ibid., pp. 91-92.
39. Ibid., p. 93.
40. Ibid., p. 94.
41. Ibid., p. 99.
42. Ibid., p. 93.
43. Ibid., p. 160.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid., p. 161.
46. Recall Marx on Feuerbach in note 12 above.
47. This sub-section and the next borrow somewhat from my unpublished "Toward a World-System Methodology" (April 1979).
48. Johan Galtung describes the Bourgeois Way of Life as "the mode of production, the mode of consumption, and the goal around which motivation and action do cluster in the world today. It is the particular mode of production which encourages the escape from manual labour, the search and the desire for material comfort, familism, privatism and nuclearism, as a source of security." See his "Global Goals, Global Processes on the Prospects for Human and Social Development" (manuscript in preparation, 1979). See Robert Heilbroner, *An Inquiry into the Human Prospect* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1975), pp. 16 and 75; and also my review essay of this book, "A Context for Reviewing the Human Prospect," forthcoming in the *Caribbean Yearbook of International Relations*, 1978.
49. For a fuller description, see my essay referred to in note 47 above.

50. Samir Amin treats these distinctions exhaustively in his *Unequal Development: An Essay on the Social Formations of Peripheral Capitalism* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1976).
51. See Andre Gunder Frank, "Long Live Transideological Enterprise! The Socialist Economies in the Capitalist International Division of Labour," *Review 1*, vol. 1 (1977): 91-140; and also the reference to Heilbroner in note 48 above.
52. The term "historicity" is actually mentioned on p. 71 of the *Pedagogy* in this context: ". . . problem-posing theory and practice take man's historicity as the starting point"; in note 4 of p. 77, Freire refers to "the capitalist world"; and on p. 144 he mentions "national capitalism." More importantly, in the last paragraph of p. 91 in the *Pedagogy*, Freire's words clearly support a historic conception of domination and its dehumanization-humanization tendencies. See also *Cultural Action*, pp. 57-83, and *Education*, p. 5.
53. *Pedagogy*, p. 91.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 199.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
56. Freire refers to "the validity of . . . revolution . . ." on p. 121 of *Pedagogy*; and he says ". . . old themes had to exhaust their validity before they could give way to the new" (*Education*, p. 9). In my paper "Foreign Policy Strategies for Achieving the NIEO: A Third World Perspective" (*Sage International Yearbook of Foreign Policy Studies*, VI, 1980) and in my unpublished paper "The NIEO, the Imperialist Problématique, and the Politics of Transformation" (1980), I regard *arrested* transition potential as the dialectical opposite to *valid* transition potential; both of which constitute the dialectical unity in the politics of transformation.
57. In the references to my essays note 56, I call this "connection" the *imperialist problématique*.
58. For a socio-psychological discussion of these imitations in the African context, see Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan, "Reactive Identification and the Formation of an African Intelligensia," *International Social Science Journal*, 29, vol. 1 (1977): 149-164; Bennie Khoapa, "The African Personality," UN University, HSDRGPID-25/UNUP-136; and the novels by Ayl Kwei Armah, especially his *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Born* (London: Heinemann, 1968) and *Why Are We So Blest?* (London: Heinemann, 1974).
59. See *Pedagogy*, pp. 147-148, and *Cultural Action*, p. 60.
60. Walter Rodney, "Transition," *Transition*, 1, vol. 1 (1978): 2.
61. *Education*, p. 24.
62. *Cultural Action*, p. 77.
63. *Ibid.*
64. Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System* (New York: Academic Press, 1976), p. 239.