Conscientization as an Antidote to Banking Education

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One of the challenges of defining Paulo Freire's coined concept, *conscientização*, lies not only in the difficulty of pronouncing a Portuguese word (Portuguese speakers also experience varied difficulty pronouncing it), but also in that most definitions of this insightful concept rarely do justice to what Freire had in mind. Freire always insisted that before we even attempt to define *conscientização*, we need to adhere to the essence of this concept and ask: "What definition, against what, for whom, and against whom?" If we begin to answer these questions we soon realize that, even for many followers of Freire's thinking, *conscientização* presents a certain difficulty beyond the hurdles of its correct pronunciation—a term that Freire, at least initially, refused to have translated into English by simply stating: "I refuse. Why not accept this term? I do not have to accept *stress,* but I have. Why do you not accept *conscientização*?" [1] Freire eventually agreed to have his term translated into the approximate English translation: *conscientization.*

Freire's initial refusal to have his term translated into English was both political and pedagogical. It was political in that he asserted in his refusal that the insistence of (even progressive) educators to have *conscientização* translated into English reproduces the quasi-colonial expectation on the part of most English-speaking educators that published works in languages other than English must be simultaneously translated, because English speakers should not be expected to struggle reading works published in other languages. Freire, by refusing to translate his term into English, was in essence pedagogically challenging the arrogance of English monolinguism that, in the long run, constitutes a type of linguistic de-skilling experienced by most English speakers who remain unaware of the obvious benefits of multilingualism—they remain unaware that their monolinguism sentences them to a form of cultural and linguistic exile from the world of other languages and cultures that incessantly produce myriad cultures and world views. Monolinguism, then, as a cultural cage, prevents English speakers from accessing the insights and knowledge so obvious to those educators who dare to cross cultural and linguistic borders. Accordingly, Freire states that "one focus of my efforts (perhaps the preponderant one) is turning myself into a tramp of the obvious, becoming the tramp of de-mystifying *conscientization*…. I have also been learning how important

the obvious becomes as the object of our critical reflection, and by looking deeply into it, I have discovered that the obvious is not always as obvious as it appears." [2]

A point of departure in the de-mystification of *conscientization* would necessarily have to include the reclaiming of the oppressed's own words as a process of coming to voice, which Freire viewed as "the fundamental theme of the Third World—implying a difficult but not impossible task for its people—[which] is the conquest of its right to voice, of the right to pronounce its word." [3] It is this right that the oppressed need to reclaim in order to speak their word, "the right to be [themselves], to assume direction of [their] destiny." [4] It is this right that the dominant forces go to great lengths to suffocate, seeking to sequester the words of the oppressed—words that unveil the mechanism of oppression and are distorted or repressed, as Henry Giroux suggests, in "a society that revels in bouts of historical and social amnesia [in which] it is much easier for the language of politics and community to be stolen and deployed like a weapon so as to empty words such as democracy, freedom, justice and the social state of any viable meaning." [5] The sequestration of language by dominant forces of oppression and even liberal educators who proselytize about "empowering minorities," even when they represent the majority, and "giving them voices" was evident when I was working on *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*, which I co-authored with Freire. I asked a colleague whom I considered to be politically progressive and to have a keen understanding of Freire's work to read the manuscript. Yet during a discussion we had of the book, she asked me, a bit irritably: "Why do you and Paulo [Freire] insist on using this Marxist jargon? Many readers who would enjoy reading Paulo may be put off by the jargon." I was at first taken aback but proceeded to calmly explain to her that equating Marxism with jargon prevented one from fully capturing the richness of Freire's analysis. In fact, Freire's language was the only means through which he could have done justice to the complexity of the various concepts of oppression with which he dealt. For one thing, I reminded her: "Imagine that instead of writing the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Freire had written the *Pedagogy of the Disenfranchised*"—a term that is overly used by the educated class and the media to refer to the oppressed which, in turn, represses while hiding the actors of oppression. The first title utilizes a discourse that names the oppressor, whereas the second fails to do so. What would be the counterpart of the term "disenfranchised"? The *Pedagogy of the Disenfranchised* dislodges the agent of the action while leaving in doubt who bears the responsibility for such action. This leaves the ground wide open for blaming the victim of disenfranchisement for his or her own

disenfranchisement. This example is a clear case in which the object of oppression can also be understood as the subject of oppression. Language such as this not only distorts reality; it is also a much-used technique by dominant forces (the media, political pundits, the educated class) to distract attention from the real issues that ail society, such as the obscene widening of the income gap between the rich and the poor, the pernicious shrinking of the middle-class, and the generalized alienation of the dispossessed. A technique that, according to Arundhati Roy, is used in usurping words and deploying them like weapons, of using them to mask intent and to mean exactly the opposite of what they have traditionally meant has been one of the most brilliant strategic victories of czars of the new dispensation. It has allowed them to marginalize their detractors, deprive them of a language to voice their critique. [6]

When the technique of sequestration fails to work, the dominant forces engage in more draconian measures, as was evident when a Tucson Public Schools official in Arizona banned Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* from classrooms because, according to a Superintendent of the Arizona Department of Education, "we should not be teaching [kids]…that they're oppressed." [7] In other words, *conscientization*—as a process to acquire the necessary critical thinking tools so that students, instead of internalizing their oppression, understand how institutions of power work to deny them equality of treatment, access, and equity—is not a goal of Tucson Public Schools, where courses that deal with issues such as race relations, ethics, and ideology are banned and teachers are encouraged to promote a pedagogy of big lies through which students can be more easily domesticated. The almost total lack of public outcry in the United States regarding the censorship of books and the heisting of language that names reality in order to contest oppression "may prove to be the keystone of our undoing." [8] I am amazed to witness academics engage in euphemisms as they aggressively object to any discourse that both fractures the dominant language and bares the veiled reality in order to name it. It is still more amazing to witness educators who claim to be Freirean fail to see the obvious impossibility of the oppressed apprehending "a deepened consciousness of their situation…as an historical reality susceptible of transformation" [9] through the process of *conscientization* while these liberal educators remain complicit in the erasure of language that empties out, for example, the meaning of the term "oppressed." Many of these liberals eagerly embrace euphemisms such as "disadvantaged," "disenfranchised," "economically marginal," and "minority," among others, to refer to the oppressed—a process that obfuscates the true historical conditions that explain "'the here and now,' which

constitutes the situation within which [the oppressed] are submerged, from which they emerge, and which they intervene" [10] to denounce and confront their oppressors in their "pursuit of full humanity." [11] This sequestration of language denies people the possibility to understand the dialectical relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed. If you have an oppressed, you must have an oppressor.

Thus, language is not only a site of contestation; it is also an indispensable tool for a critical reflexive de-mystification process that is central to *conscientization*—a process through which Freire refuses to vulgarize and reduce it to mere methods to be consumed by the so-called First World progressive educators who, in many instances, remain chained to the "mystification of methods and techniques and, indeed, a reduction of *conscientization* to certain methods and techniques used in Latin America for adult literacy." [12] Hence, Freire's major goal was not to develop a literacy methodology to be used universally with oppressed people of the world. His main goal was to use literacy and the subsequent methods he used to lead people to conscientization. In other words, no matter where we come from, [a]ll of us are involved in a permanent process of *conscientization*, as thinking beings in a dialectical relation with an objective reality upon which we act. What varies in time and space are the contents, methods, and objectives of *conscientization*…[when human beings became aware] and made themselves capable of revealing their active reality, knowing it and understanding what they know. [13]

Freire often cited a story that occurred during his literacy campaign in Guinea-Bissau. He described a Cultural Circle where peasants were first learning to decodify their world so that they could realize that they can also code the word that reflects their decodified reality and later, also, comprehend that the encoded word can also be decoded. Freire told that a peasant, who was part of the oppressed masses that the Portuguese colonialism forbade from becoming literate, got up suddenly and said: "Thank you teacher," before leaving the Culture Circle. Freire remained perplexed, thinking that he probably had said something that was culturally inappropriate and had unknowingly hurt the feelings of the peasant, who eventually returned to the Culture Circle. When Freire, upon the peasant's return, inquired as to why he had left, the peasant, without hesitation, replied: "Teacher, I know now that I can know and I don't need to come every day to know." This story reveals a process of fracturing the yoke of Portuguese colonialism that for centuries had inculcated the Guinea-Bissau natives with myths and beliefs regarding their backwardness, savage nature, their inability to read or write, and their incapacity to

know—myths and beliefs that were used as yardsticks to present literacy always as the hallmark of White European superiority. This story also conveys that learning to "bark" the ABCs without the development of a deeper understanding of the dialectical relationship between the reading of the word and the world, which also implies de-mystifying the process of *conscientization*—an important point, since many First World educators often attribute magical properties to the *conscientization* process, "giving it powers that it does not really have." [14]

Another critical misunderstanding of *conscientization* is to imbue the concept "as a kind of tropical exoticism, a typically Third World entity. People speak of *conscientization* as an inviable goal for 'complex societies,' as though the Third World nations were not complex in their own way." [15] This false dichotomy between the so-called First World and Third World represents yet another sequestration of language designed to lead to a form of mystification—a distraction that functions as a reproductive mechanism designed to create a center or a core of romanticized Eurocentric values while relegating other cultural expressions to the margins. The current attacks on Islam and on Muslims in general are a case in point where Western media, political pundits, and academics often totalize religio-cultural extremists and generalize the extremism to all Muslims, framing them all as potential terrorists. At the same time, we conveniently ignore extremists of the West like evangelist Pat Robertson, who camouflages his bigotry and his constant attacks on women. Take, for example, Robertson's statement that "[t]he feminist agenda is not about equal rights for women. It is about a socialist, anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism and become lesbians." [16] If one substituted Robertson with a Taliban clergy and switched the words "socialist" and "capitalism," the Western political class, the media, and other non-Muslim religious leaders would have a field day attacking the primitive nature of Islam and its radicalism while ignoring the diversity within the Muslim world that consists of billions of people from different cultures, classes, and ethnicities. Hence, institutional mechanisms in the West and in much of the world function, by and large, to contain and maintain these so-called primitive Third World cultures that are often submerged into a culture of silence so as to make these "silent sections of cultures" invisible or, at least, outside the parameters of public discussion or debate. Engaging Freire's *conscientization* process could help reveal the West's penchant for engaging in the construction of invisibility to keep the submerged cultures invisible and also to hide the West's own extremism, which is no less terroristic than Muslim extremism. How else would we characterize the American

savagery in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Vietnam that “often extended to the utmost depravity: gratuitous torture, killing for target practice, slaughter of children and babies” [17] —slaughter that pro-life advocate Pat Robertson and his ilk conveniently refuse to address in ethical and political terms? Our inability or unwillingness to engage a *conscientization* process is why we can easily accept Pat Robertson’s blatant lies about feminism as we embrace the false dichotomy encoded in the distinction between First World and Third World contexts—an ideological distinction that primarily functions to reproduce the Western narrative of Third World “savage and primitive” cultures which, in turn, call for the West’s “moral responsibility” to “slaughter children and babies” so as to save them from themselves— a slaughter justified by an American military superior in the Marines as “[t]ough shit, they grow up to be VC [Vietcong].” [18] Too many Americans also remain silent when “drones” and “smart bombs” kill women and children indiscriminately in Afghanistan and Pakistan while the United States presents itself as an advocate for women’s rights and freedoms. Western media, political pundits, and most academics also remain silent with respect to the West’s extremism as revealed in “the classic former secretary of State, Madeleine Albright’s response of 1996 to the reported 500,000 Iraqi children—casualties of ‘the sanctions of mass destruction’ —‘ it was worth it.’” [19]

Engaging Freire’s *conscientization* process could help make us aware of what we often fail to see (usually through our willful social construction of not seeing) that we have, within the First World order, Third World realities characterized by ghettos and large-scale poverty, human misery, and illiteracy. Concurrently, we also have de facto First World realities in the Third World in the form of class privileges and the accumulation of capital and power by a ruling minority of elites and oligarchs. It is safe to assume that the ruling elite in the Third World shares a worldview that is much more in line with the cultural capital of the dominant groups of the First World. Thus, Freire is correct that through a process of rigorous critical reflection, *conscientization* is just as “viable for complex societies.” [20] It is through *conscientization* that people in the First World can begin to understand that there exists a greater gulf between the First World dominant groups and the First World marginalized cultural groups than between the First and the Third World dominant groups. Those educators, including many liberals, who keep on insisting, for instance, that Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed can work only in the Third World are, on some level, resisting making the necessary linkages between events at home so as to obtain a greater comprehension “of the process of *conscientization* and its practice [which] is linked, then, to one’s understanding of consciousness in

its relations with the world." [21] Thus, even some progressive educators, who often claim to be Freirean, continue their resistance through "the bureaucratization of *conscientization*, which in losing its dynamism and thus fossilizing, ends up transforming *conscientization* into a sort of rainbow of recipes—another mystification." [22]

The transformation of *conscientization*"into a sort of rainbow of recipes" is why even progressive educators who claim to be Freirean are not exempt from fossilizing *conscientization* when they are unable to see through the obvious contradiction between their discourse and their actual practice. Take, for instance, a situation where a North American liberal professor, during a discussion regarding the U.S. college application of a South African student, stated that the student "had prevailed in spite of great odds marked by a highly discriminatory society, and [that]…the student's application showed a great commitment to social reform in her country." [23] However, when it came time to evaluate the application of a Mexican-American student who had an extensive background working with community-based programs ranging from adult literacy to drug prevention programs, this same liberal educator stated that "the only thing she has going for her is that she is Mexican-American." [24] The fact that the Mexican-American female student's grades and letters of recommendation were equal to or slightly stronger than the South African student's, the fact that she had a more extensive work track record in the community, and the fact that she had demonstrated a greater interest and commitment to go back and work in her community was totally ignored by the liberal educator. In the end the Mexican-American female was denied admission to the university. The South African Third World context provided the liberal educator a safe zone to exoticize liberation struggle, leaving unproblematic his inability to acknowledge the similarities (and differences as well) of oppressive structures that operate both in South Africa and in U.S. ghettos.

This graduate admission story is not all that different from the phenomenon of some academics and researchers who are busily writing grant proposals to study and promote, for example, literacy in Haiti while ignoring the tens of thousands of Haitians in the United States who are struggling and dropping out of the public schools that often surround their universities. Since Haiti has been in vogue because of the devastating earthquake, let's use it to exemplify the paternalism Western countries that often turns into charitable racism, which is, according to Albert Memmi, "a consubstantial part of colonialism." [25] While White academics and researchers go to Haiti to collect data and anthropologize the suffering Haitians

who are the subjects of their study, the researchers return to their U.S. campuses to tell exotic stories to their students and colleagues, publish their research studies, and obtain tenure, while tens of thousands of Haitians remain in Haiti sentenced to slum conditions and making cookies out of the mud to trick their stomachs that they are full and therefore not hungry. I remember asking a White American professor who often went to Haiti as part of research projects sponsored by federal grants in the 1980s why he did not devote some of his time working with the thousands of Haitians who surrounded his university. His response was honest if not pathetic: "The funding agencies do not find Haitians in the U.S. 'sexy' enough." Had this liberal, First World academic engaged in an honest and rigorous *conscientization* process, he would probably not have remained so comfortable making a career off the hides of millions of Haitians who remain chained to inhumanity, savage inequality, and human misery. Had he been able to make a linkage between his careerist goals and the reproduction of oppression in Haiti largely supported by U.S. foreign policy, he would probably have detected the pathology of his honest answer. This researcher developed a deeper comprehension of Haitians and understood that their current life conditions had been shaped, in large part, by American interventionist policies through invasions of Haiti, its occupation, and the perpetual support for right-wing dictators who work largely against the interests of the vast majority of Haitians. By engaging in a form of honest reflection and self-interrogation, the White American researcher would possibly have realized that his political project is, first and foremost, the advancement of his career. Had this First World academic made these linkages, he would likely have denounced the almost sainthood status bestowed upon former President Clinton and former President Bush Senior for their humanitarian work in Haiti after the deadly earthquake. This White American educator might come to see that both former presidents were partly responsible for the sea of human misery that predated the earthquake. What the earthquake did was both exacerbate the sub-human conditions to which tens of thousands of Haitians were relegated and make them public in the same manner that Katrina exposed the structural racism and dehumanization of African-Americans in New Orleans. Notwithstanding the horror of the earthquake, the First World liberal educator would probably refuse to pay $1,320 a night per room in a luxury "five-star" Royal hotel overlooking the shanty towns, shacks, and tents, and which was constructed with "$7.5 million from the World Bank's International Finance Corporation…and $2 million from the Clinton Bush Haiti Fund." [26] While this obscene display of First World opulence, if not decadence, marked the humanitarian generosity of First World countries, over one million Haitians displaced by the earthquake remain homeless and continue to exist in sub-human conditions,

living in shacks and tents without plumbing or running water, without electricity, and without much to feed themselves and their families. Had the First World educator engaged in the process of *conscientization*, he would possibly be able to detect the false piety demonstrated by former Presidents Bush and Clinton as they were greeted by thousands of Haitians in Port-au-Prince. Former President Bush's condescending disdain for Haitian people became viscerally visible on YouTube all over the world when he tried to wipe his hand, after shaking it with a Haitian man in the crowd, on former President Clinton's shirt.

The *conscientization* process might have lifted the veil of privilege that the *blans* [27] enjoy in Haiti (White or also outsiders/foreigners who fall in love with the exotic narrative of Haiti they create to fulfill their colonial desires and meet their own needs—a narrative that has, in many respects, little to do with the reality that Haitians experience on a daily basis as they try to survive). In many ways, these First World *blans,* regardless of their political orientation, fail to understand Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed, animated by authentic, humanist (not humanitarian) generosity [which] presents itself as a pedagogy of humankind. Pedagogy which begins with the egoistic interests of the oppressors (an egoism cloaked in the false generosity of paternalism) and makes the oppressed the objects of its humanitarianism, itself maintains and embodies oppression. It is an instrument of dehumanization. [28]

Humanitarianism as the embodiment of dehumanization is best exemplified by the Red Cross, which collected over $400 million to alleviate the suffering of tens of thousands of Haitians displaced and made homeless by the earthquake and has as its signature the building of a luxury hotel costing millions of dollars [29] while over one million Haitians remain homeless. While luxurious hotels can provide stress relief for the army of NGOs and other humanitarian help as they celebrate "happy hour" with other *blan* friends and co-workers who command First World salaries, tens of thousands of Haitians continue to struggle to put a roof over their heads and scavenge enough to eat so they can reclaim their "ontological and historical vocation to be more fully human." [30] While foreign workers maintain the material conditions to access luxury restaurants and health care services, including psychological therapy, most Haitians displaced by the earthquake yearn to know what it means to be fully human. Take, for example, Amy Wilentz's characterization of Mac McClelland, a human rights reporter for *Mother Jones* who acquired PTSD like it was a cold virus by watching a recently raped Haitian woman collapse at a chance of sighting her attacker. Thus traumatized, McClelland published an account of the

home therapy she elected: arranging for a friend to rape her, with the maximum verisimilitude their relationship would allow. [31]

While McClelland's choice of therapy for the exposure to violence in her humanitarian work in the aftermath of the earthquake in Haiti smacks of narcissism on steroids, in varying degrees it also represents the embedded "egoism cloaked in the false generosity of paternalism" of the oppressors' humanitarian interventions packaged as charitable gifts which, in turn, exemplify the benevolence of the First World order. These charitable interventions have not only been, for the most part, huge failures (as in the case in Haiti), but First World humanitarians fail to understand that liberation comes only through a process of resolution of tensions and contradictions in the relation between the oppressor and the oppressed. Hence, "if the goal of the oppressed is to become fully human, they do not achieve their goal by merely reversing the terms of the contradiction, by changing poles." [32] By the same token, the oppressor cannot expect to liberate the oppressed by reversing the poles so as to experience directly the violence of oppression. This is the continuation of the oppressor's need to appropriate even the oppressed's suffering, as McClelland's case seems to indicate. McClelland's choice of therapy is tantamount to the phenomenon of many liberal educators who feel that they need to make a public statement regarding their divestment from the "dominating bureaucracy" [33] from which they have always reaped benefits and by moving their families into the ghettos temporarily until their own kids have to go to school. Liberation is never about the democratization of violence, human misery, and obscene poverty. Liberation will only be achieved through the resolution of the contradictions between the oppressor and the oppressed "by the appearance of the new man [and woman]: neither oppressor nor oppressed, but man [and woman] in the process of liberation."[34]

The inability to resolve the contradictions between the oppressor and the oppressed, to make linkages, and to become a "tramp of the obvious," as Freire would say, is directly linked to another important feature of Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed: the "banking" model of education—a process through which education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the "banking" concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filling, and storing the deposits. [35]

The “banking” model of education is largely supported by instrumental literacy for the poor, in the form of a competency-based, skills-banking approach, and the highest form of instrumental literacy for the rich, acquired through higher education in the form of professional specialization. However, despite their apparent differences, the two approaches share one common feature: they both prevent the development of critical thinking that enables one to “read the world” critically and to understand the reasons and linkages behind the facts and behind what may appear seemingly obvious but remain ill understood. Literacy for the poor through the “banking” concept of education is, by and large, characterized by mindless, meaningless drills and exercises given “in preparation for multiple choice exams and writing gobbledygook in imitation of the psycho-babble that surrounds them.” [36] This “banking” and instrumental approach to education sets the stage for the anesthetization of the mind, as poet John Ashbery eloquently captures in “What Is Poetry?”:

In school

All the thoughts got combed out:

What was left was like a field.” [37]

The educational “comb,” for those teachers who have blindly accepted the “banking” model of education, is embodied in practice sheets and workbooks, mindless computer drills and practices that mark and control the pace of routinization in the drill-and-practice assembly line where the “narration (with the teacher as narrator) leads the students to memorize mechanically the narrated content. Worse yet, it turns them into ‘containers,’ into ‘receptacles’ to be filled by the teacher. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are” [38] as they are later measured by high-stakes tests that reflect an often militaristic, controlled transaction of the teacher’s narration and students’ memorization of the mechanically narrated “content.” Hence, the dominant forces of this mechanistic “banking” education necessarily reduce the priorities of education to the pragmatic requirements of capital and necessarily also create educational structures that anesthetize students’ critical abilities, in order to “domesticate social order for its self-preservation.” [39]

At the other end of the spectrum, the domestication of the social order is achieved

by an equally mechanistic approach to education for the rich via the hyperspecialization that, on the one hand, deposits high-level skills and, on the other, discourages the linkages of different bodies of knowledge in the name of "pure" and specialized science that produces a specialist subject who, according to the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, "knows very well his own tiny corner of the universe [but] is radically ignorant of all the rest." [40] In fact, this inability to make linkages between different bodies of knowledge often produces a level of arrogance exemplified by a math professor in a major university when she stated that she has the right of not knowing. This statement was made in reference to the news coverage of the Iraq War when—perhaps because she was feeling uncomfortable with her colleagues' open opposition to the war—she abruptly proclaimed: "I have a right not to know the news." While she has the *right* to choose not to know, as an academic and citizen in a democratic society she has the *responsibility* of knowing what her leaders are doing in regard to policies full of barbarism, policies that enable horrors like the drone-guided bombing of targets that invariably include the carnage of innocent civilians, women, and children, which policy makers consider an "unfortunate part of war" or simply "collateral damage."

The social organization of knowledge via rigidly defined disciplinary boundaries further contributes to the formation of the specialist class, that is, engineers, doctors, professors, and so on. This sort of specialist is "only acquainted with one science, and even of that one only knows the small corner in which he is an active investigator. He even proclaims it as a virtue that he takes no cognizance of what lies outside the narrow territory specially cultivated by himself, and gives the name 'dilettantism' to any curiosity for the general scheme of knowledge." [41]

This "dilettantism" is discouraged through the mythical need to discover absolute objective truth and, in the process, it domesticates a form of specialized knowledge that not only produces a rupture with philosophies of social and cultural relations, but also hides behind an ideology that creates and sustains false dichotomies rigidly delineated by disciplinary boundaries. This ideology also informs the view that "hard science," "objectivity," and "scientific rigor" must be disarticulated from the messy data of "soft science" and from the social and political practices that generate these categories in the first place. In addition, this "banking" model of education produces a form of fragmentation of knowledge that invariably diminishes the students' critical awareness and "critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more

completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them," [42] thus renouncing their ontological vocation as agents of history who not only transform their world but also reflect on that transformation. According to Freire, "[t]he capability of banking education to minimize or annul the students' creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interest of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor see it transformed." [43]

The "banking" model of education is also often used as a safe haven for most conservative and many liberal educators who hide their materialist and consumerist conception of education in what Freire calls a "'digestive' concept of knowledge, so common in current educational practice" [44] —a practice that considers students to be "undernourished" and, as a result, the teacher must feel compelled to give students an unrealistic list of readings that are never really covered or discussed in class under the pretext that the students' "consciousness is 'spatialized,' and must be 'filled' in order to know." [45] This "nutritionist" approach to education follows the "same conception [that] led Sartre, [when] criticizing the notion that 'to know is to eat,' to exclaim: 'O philosophie alimentaire!'" [46] —a process where "words are transformed into mere 'deposit of vocabulary'—[the teacher's vocabulary]—the bread of the spirit which the [students] are to 'eat' and 'digest'" [47] the teacher's knowledge (i.e., definition lists without the apprehension of the object of knowledge, fetishization of methods, particularly now as it applies to new technologies, formulaic texts masquerading as theory that belittles practice, and glossaries), which students are later asked to "vomit" back in the mandated exams and tests designed, on the one hand, to confirm the teacher's superior knowledge-bank-account and, on the other, to feed his or her narcissistic needs inherent in most humanitarian and not humanist education. In the end, the "nutritionist banking" approach to education, even when offered under the guise of progressive education, has as its major goal the fattening of the student's brains through the "deposits" of the teacher's knowledge and thus, under this pedagogical model, students absorb understandings "not born of [their own]…creative efforts…[as] learners." [48] This kind of education invariably results in the paralysis of the learner's epistemological curiosity and creativity due to the overload of the imposed teacher's knowledge, "which in fact [is]…almost completely alienating and alienated, having so little, if anything, to do with the student's socio-cultural reality."

Notes

[1] Paulo Freire, *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power, and Liberation*(New York: Bergin & Garvey, 1985), p. 185.

[2] Ibid., p. 171; emphasis mine.

[3] Paulo Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom*(Cambridge, MA: Harvard Educational Review, 1970), p. 4.

[4] Ibid., p. 4.

[5] Henry Giroux, “The New Extremism and Politics of Distraction in the Age of Austerity,” *Truthout*, January 22, 2013, http://truth-out.org/opinion/item/13998-the-new-extremism-and-politics-of-distraction-in-the-age-of-austerity

[6] Arundhati Roy, “What Have We Done to Democracy?” *The Huffington Post*, September 27, 2009, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/arundhati-roy/what-have-we-done-to-demo_b_301294.html

[7] Tom Horne, interview by Allison Keyes, *Tell Me More*, National Public Radio News, May 13, 2010, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=126797959

[8] Arundhati Roy, “What Have We Done to Democracy?” *The Huffington Post*, September 27, 2009, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/arundhati-roy/what-have-we-done-to-demo_b_301294.html

[9] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*(New York: Continuum, 1970), p. 85.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Paulo Freire, *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power, and Liberation*(New York: Bergin & Garvey, 1985).

[12] Ibid., p. 172.

[13] Ibid., p. 171; emphasis mine.

[14] Ibid., p. 171.

[15] Ibid., p. 172.

[16] “Timeless Whoppers—Pat Robertson,” *The Nation*, January 10, 2013, http://www.thenation.com/timeless-whoppers-pat-robertson

[17] Jonathan Schell, “The Real American War in Vietnam,” *The Nation*, February 4, 2013, http://www.thenation.com/article/172264/real-american-war-vietnam

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