Impure Neoliberalism: A Freirean Critique of Dominant Trends in Higher Education

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One of Paulo Freire's principal concerns in the last years of his life was the destructive impact of neoliberal ideas, policies and practices on human dignity and development. In the two decades following Freire's death, neoliberalism has continued to evolve, with its influence extending to a wider range of countries across the globe. In education, as in other areas of social policy, there has never been a 'pure' application of neoliberal ideas. The formation, interpretation and implementation of educational policy is often a complex, messy, contested process, characterised by tensions and compromises between different policy actors and conflicting ethical imperatives. As such, the task of analysing and understanding policy is never easy. Nonetheless, despite myriad variations in the extent to which and ways in which neoliberal principles have taken hold across the Western world, some persistent key themes can be identified. Of special significance for educationists are the ontology of self-interested individualism that underpins neoliberal thought, the reliance on the model of the market as guide when structuring educational systems, the treatment of knowledge as a commodity, and the logic of performativity that drives institutional life. In these areas among others, Freire provides a clear point of difference in examining and assessing current policy directions. This paper addresses these contrasts with particular reference to neoliberalism and higher education reform in New Zealand. [1]

Neoliberalism and Higher Education: A Case Study

In the 1980s, New Zealand was regarded by some political figures and policy makers as a model case of neoliberal reform. [2] Following the election of the fourth Labour government in 1984, New Zealand witnessed a series of sweeping economic changes. These have been well documented over the years (see Roberts & Peters, 2008) but are worth recalling briefly here. Industries that had previously been subject to tight government control were deregulated, agricultural subsidies were removed, and the New Zealand dollar was floated. 'Free' trade was promoted, and tariff levels were reduced. A key architect of the reforms was Roger Douglas, who served as Minister of Finance during Labour's 1984-1987 term in government. Douglas advocated rapid change, in quantum leaps, allowing little or no time for

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interest groups to mobilise. Prime Minister David Lange wanted to slow the pace of reform and when Labour was re-elected in 1987, he dismissed Douglas from the Finance portfolio. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, government departments and public institutions were increasingly expected to operate like corporations. A commitment was made to greater efficiency, improved performance, and thinner bureaucracies. Buffers between government and the institutions affected by policy changes were removed.

Labour was defeated by the National Party in the 1990 general election but the process of neoliberal reform continued. [3] The programme of state asset sales initiated by Labour was embraced enthusiastically by the National government. National was predisposed to an agenda of further privatisation, and this was implemented in fits and starts throughout the 1990s. A strong culture of entrepreneurialism was fostered, and National sought to extend New Zealand's reach on the world economic stage. With the introduction of the Employment Contracts Act, the power of unions was undermined and workers were required to become more 'flexible' in responding to the demands of employers. National sought to minimise state intervention in individual lives, and to place greater faith in market mechanisms as the means for distributing opportunities and resources. Where Labour had focused mainly on economic restructuring, National made its mark in the way it applied neoliberal ideas to the social policy portfolios. Government support for beneficiaries was reduced, hospitals were recast as 'crown health enterprises', and market rates were introduced for state housing tenants. The most far-reaching changes, however, were in the sphere of education.

In universities, neoliberal ideas found administrative and organisational expression via the philosophy and practices of managerialism. The process of corporatisation that had begun during Labour's second term in the 1980s was pushed forward aggressively. The Vice-Chancellor was now regarded as a Chief Executive Officer, and governance structures came to increasingly resemble those found in the world of business. Student loans were introduced, marking the beginning of debt mountain that would grow to billions of dollars within a few short years. The ethos of collegiality that had served as the bedrock of academic life was systematically undermined by discourses of accountability, the adoption of 'performance indicators', and the reconfiguring of staff relationships along more hierarchical lines. New, more rigid, reporting requirements were set in place, and closer auditing of academic activities became the norm. Where before a culture of trust with an attendant sense of responsibility had prevailed, now there was a suspicion among

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some politicians and policy officials that academics could not quite be trusted to manage their own affairs. What needed to be avoided, it was believed, was the phenomenon of ‘provider capture’, where too much control would be granted to institutions, with unacceptable risks for government and tertiary education students. ‘Choice’ and ‘competition’ became the twin pillars of the new tertiary education policy environment. The tertiary system was expected to operate as a quasi-market, with different providers competing with each other to attract educational ‘consumers’ to their courses and programmes.

A change of government in 1999, to a Labour-Alliance coalition, ushered in New Zealand’s version of ‘Third Way’ politics. Labour-led governments were re-elected for two further terms, and during this period two tertiary education strategy documents were released (Ministry of Education, 2002, 2006). Tertiary education was seen as a means for advancing New Zealand as a ‘knowledge society and economy’. The hands-off approach that had been espoused by neoliberal reformists in the 1990s gave way to a process of government steering, with stronger state oversight in shaping a ‘shared vision’ for tertiary education. A more overt commitment to greater social inclusiveness, and to addressing the aspirations of M_ori and Pacific learners, was evident in tertiary education policy. The heavy emphasis on maximizing choice in the tertiary education sector was reduced somewhat. At the same time, some key elements of the 1990s neoliberal agenda were pushed even further under the Labour-led years of 1999 to 2008. Knowledge came to be seen, more and more, as a commodity, subject to the same laws that govern the production, circulation and consumption of other commodities in a capitalist society. Competition, both between institutions and within them, intensified. The marketing of tertiary education, with each institution seeking to promote its distinctive ‘brand’ to prospective students from New Zealand and abroad, became more prominent than ever. The logic of performativity continued to prevail, and new systems for measuring and monitoring academics came into being. One of the most significant initiatives was the Performance-Based Research Fund (PBRF), introduced in 2003 and still in operation today. New Zealand’s universities now compete vigorously with each other to increase their share of the PBRF, as this has become the principal source of government funding for research.

With a shift back to a National government from 2008 to the present day, the push to align tertiary education more closely with the needs of industry and business has become more pronounced. The government has placed a high priority on the STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics), and the humanities and

social sciences have been progressively devalued. Two terms employed in earlier versions of the Tertiary Education Strategy – ‘relevance’ and ‘quality’ – have found a continuing place in more recent policy documents (Ministry of Education, 2009; New Zealand Government, 2014). The government’s primary concern is to make New Zealand more competitive on the world economic stage. Toward this end, a clear message has been sent to tertiary education providers that they will need to respond more directly to labour market signals in their course and programme offerings. A ‘Productivity Commission’ has been established, ostensibly with the aim of providing ‘insightful, well-informed and accessible advice that leads to the best possible improvement in the wellbeing of New Zealanders’ (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2016, p. ii). In an ‘Issues Paper’ released in early 2016, the Commission addressed the question of innovation in the tertiary education sector. The terms of reference for the inquiry were premised on the assumption that the New Zealand tertiary education system is characterised by ‘considerable inertia’ and an ‘unwillingness to try new things’ (p. 1). While the post-2008 period has much in common with the market-driven mentality of the 1990s, there is still considerable government control over the tertiary education system, albeit with a narrower focus. In the Productivity Commission’s Issues Paper, for example, it has been suggested that the government can ‘change the equation of benefits versus cost’, ‘purchase innovation directly’, ‘encourage a flow of new entrants’, ‘reward performance, including by redistributing resources’, ‘set and enforce good intellectual property laws’, and ‘make it easier for participants to diversify their financial risk’ (pp. 80-94).

Humanising Higher Education: The Freirean Alternative

Central to neoliberal thought is an understanding of human beings as self-interested, rational, utility-maximising, autonomous individuals. The neoliberal individual is a perpetual chooser and consumer, who seeks to satisfy his or her wants and gain an advantage over others in a competitive world. Freire’s work proceeds from a very different ontological starting point. From a Freirean perspective, we have an ontological and historical vocation of humanisation (Freire, 1972). We pursue this ideal through praxis: critical, dialogical, transformative reflection and action (Roberts, 2000). Humanisation means becoming more fully what we already are as human beings, but this is not an abstract process. We humanise ourselves as beings in particular contexts, at given moments in history, with others. To impede others in this pursuit is dehumanising. Where neoliberals focus on individuals, Freire emphasises the social nature of human existence

(Freire, 1976). Ultimately, he shows, we can never be completely alone. Even if others are not physically present with us, their influence on us remains. We are always shaped in how we think, feel, act, and relate to others by the social structures, historical practices, and cultural traditions of the worlds we inhabit. This is not to suggest that we are ever fully *determined*; for Freire, whatever our current social circumstances, change is always possible (Freire, 1998a). Freire does not deny that human beings can sometimes be motivated by self-interest in their decisions and actions but he does not see this as an innate drive. Self-interest is not inevitable, and the propensity to appeal to it is itself a reflection of the economic, social and political systems that structure our lives. In education, as in many other fields of human endeavour, much of what we do is demonstrably driven more by an interest in the well-being of others than our own personal economic self-interest (Freire, 1998b; Horton & Freire, 1990).

Freire's epistemology also stands opposed to the neoliberal concept of knowledge. In the New Zealand context, the commodification of knowledge is one aspect of neoliberalism that has remained constant throughout the 'more market' era of the 1990s, the 'Third Way' years of 1999-2008, and the post-2008 period. Students have been encouraged to see knowledge as something to be purchased, with a view to enhancing their earning capacity. Universities and other tertiary education organisations have been portrayed as 'sellers' of knowledge, in competition with each other to package and market their product effectively as they seek to establish their distinctive niche in the market. Knowledge on this model is seen as something that can be contained, possessed, circulated, and traded. It is, for all intents and purposes, indistinguishable from information. Education has been viewed in a similar light, as a commodity with an exchange value. Thus, over the last two decades in New Zealand, 'export education' has emerged as a major growth industry. This way of thinking about knowledge and education would have been repugnant to Freire. Under neoliberalism, knowers are almost incidental to the process of buying and selling knowledge. 'Knowing' is simply another form of 'having' in a neoliberal world. For Freire, knowing is a mode of being: a way of understanding ourselves, others and the world (Freire, 1985, 1996, 1998a, 1998b). Knowledge is not a static product to be bought and sold; it is constantly in the making. Under neoliberalism, there are incentives to make the process of acquiring knowledge as easy and as rapid as possible. From a Freirean point of view, the task of knowing is demanding and difficult; it takes time, effort and dedication. It can be painful as well as joyous (Chen, 2016; Roberts, 2016). Knowers are curious, investigative, probing beings, and they are also persistent. Against the tendency to

try and ‘please the customers’, a Freirean approach sees education as a process that is meant to make us uncomfortable.

The logic of performativity that has become so pervasive in the tertiary education system is also disturbing from a Freirean perspective. The idea of maximising ‘performance’ operates across several levels. At an international level, it is New Zealand’s position on league tables that compare economic or educational performance across countries (e.g., the PISA rankings) that matters. Nationally, performance standards are set for educational institutions in meeting reporting requirements, attracting students, gaining external funding, and staying within designated budgets. The world financial crisis of 2008 was used by the New Zealand government as a justification for saying, explicitly, that institutions would have to do more with less (Ministry of Education, 2009). The gaining of ever greater efficiencies, with ‘outputs’ maximised relative to ‘inputs’, has been another consistent theme across the different permutations of neoliberalism in New Zealand. Within universities and other tertiary education organisations, the language of performance also dominates. Academic staff have been placed under relentless pressure to be productive in their research, effective in their teaching, and entrepreneurial in seeking financial support for their work. Teaching is evaluated through student surveys (typically based on Likert scale rankings), allowing university management, promotions committees, and continuation review panels to reduce a teacher’s value to little more than a number. Overall, academics are monitored and measured more frequently and more invasively than ever before.

Freire was not against the idea of performance *per se.* Across many of his writings, he stresses the importance of meeting high standards in academic work. He spoke regularly of the need for rigour in scholarship and teaching (see Freire, 1985, 1998a, 1998b; Freire & Shor, 1987). He was always insistent that whatever a teacher’s political commitments, he or she has a responsibility to know his or her subject well, to prepare thoroughly, and to be well organised in classroom activities. Teaching for Freire was not an ‘anything goes’ affair. His famous critique of banking education in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1972) was sometimes interpreted as a licence to abandon any sense of structure and discipline in the classroom. A careful reading of that work and many that followed makes it plain, however, that his alternative to banking education – problem-posing or liberating education – was a rejection not of authority but of *authoritarianism*. A teacher needs to be an authority in his or her knowledge of a field of study, and he or she needs to exercise

authority in day-to-day pedagogical practice (Freire, 1987, 1997a). Teaching for Freire is not mere facilitation (Freire & Macedo, 1995). Both teachers and students are important in an educational context but they are not equivalents to each other. Teachers have some responsibilities that distinguish them from students. Knowing when and how to intervene in an educational dialogue can be important, for example, in allowing all students a chance to participate (Freire & Shor, 1987). Teaching, Freire might have been happy to say, is always a certain kind of 'performance' and those who practice this art should be expected to become highly adept at it. But these ideas have little in common with performance as performativity in contemporary tertiary education policy discourse.

In reducing academic work to a series of inputs, outputs and outcomes, all measured at regular intervals, with steps being taken to discipline those who fall short in meeting the specified standards, tertiary education is drained of its humanity. Staff and students themselves become 'outputs' and 'outcomes'. Increasingly, we are led to believe that nothing matters in education unless it can be measured in some way. Under research assessment regimes such as the PBRF, it is not only knowledge that becomes commodified but the researchers who create that knowledge. Researchers are encouraged to sell themselves and their work, in the service of increasing revenue for their institutions through higher PBRF grades. Acceptance of the need for taxpayer's money to be well spent in the tertiary education sector does not mean systems such as the PBRF are well justified. For there are much more well-rounded ways of assessing competence and evaluating achievements (e.g., by looking at a full CV, reading an academic's work, gaining statements from colleagues and thesis students, observing him or her in action in teaching classes or serving on committees, considering community contributions, and so on). But such approaches are too 'messy', too imprecise, too time-consuming and inefficient in the contemporary university. The notion of performance that is embodied in contemporary tertiary education policy and practice is oriented toward compliance, rather than growth and development. In this sense, it is anti-educational, and idea of basing research on a strong culture of collegiality and support is being undermined. The whole process of preparing and submitting PBRF portfolios has become heavily systematised, and participating researchers are expected to become more machine-like in not only producing outputs and outcomes but in recording them (Roberts, 2007, 2013). From a Freirean point of view, this is a degrading and dehumanising approach to research.

The authoritarianism to which Freire objected in his account of teaching is now

present in a more subtle form in the tertiary education sector. Authoritarianism as Freire understands it is evident in pedagogical approaches that deny the critical subjectivity of students. It can exist when a teacher suppresses questioning and critique, or discourages dialogue and discussion, or denies the possibility of alternatives when addressing complex social questions (Escobar et al., 1994; Freire & Faundez, 1989; Freire & Shor, 1987). But one might also say that there is an authoritarian character to the language of performance as exhibited in current policy. It is assumed that economic prosperity is the overriding goal for all human beings, and that tertiary education should first and foremost be directed toward achieving that end – both for New Zealand as a country and for the specific individuals who participate in the tertiary education system. The dominance of economic imperatives has become so complete that contemporary policy documents seem to be unable to offer anything of significance or substance when discussing the social benefits of tertiary education (Roberts, 2014). The notion of tertiary education serving a wider public good has all but disappeared from such documents. There is no questioning of the global economic system into which tertiary students are being ushered. The idea of considering alternatives to capitalism as a part of a tertiary education experience finds no place in this policy discourse. Creativity and innovation are permitted, even encouraged, but only if they adhere to the same basic logic underpinning all tertiary education reform over the last three decades. They must be harnessed to keep driving capitalist growth and to better position New Zealand in world economic markets. Creativity under such conditions ends up becoming conformity.

In his later work, Freire returned to the idea of humanisation, speaking at that stage of a ‘universal human ethic’, against which he placed the ethics of the market (Freire, 1998a). The latter, he believed, largely ignored questions of social justice, and the result, he observed in Brazil and elsewhere, was widespread inequality, poverty and misery. He was upfront in declaring his own preference for democratic socialism and his abhorrence at the injustices of global neoliberal capitalism. Yet, while Freire was never afraid to speak openly about his own political views, he also stressed the importance of allowing alternative positions to be heard. This is a key theme in the book, *Paulo Freire on Higher Education* (Escobar et al., 1994). In that volume, Freire defends a notion of tolerance that goes beyond the mere acceptance of opposing points of view. He maintains that university teachers should not only permit but actively encourage the exploration and discussion of alternative social ideals. Tolerance, he argues, does not mean letting go of one’s own ideals; to the contrary, knowing what one is committed to (and why) is a key component of a

well-lived intellectual life. But what university teachers do not have a right to do is to *impose* their views on others (Freire & Shor, 1987; Roberts, 2010). University teaching is a necessarily interventionist process, but intervention is not the same as imposition. The moment we step into a university classroom, we cannot avoid leaving a mark on other lives, but if we are to respect the intellectual independence of the students we teach we must allow and foster the expression and investigation of views contrary to our own. This speaks to a broader point about the politics of education.

From his earliest writings, Freire argued that education can never be neutral; teaching and learning are always political processes (Mayo, 1999; McLaren, 1999; Schugurensky, 2011, Shor, 1993). In teaching, we cannot but favour some ways of understanding human beings and the world, some cultural practices, some modes of social life, over others. Freire's concept of politics is not limited to party politics. The political dimensions of education are evident in how we teach, what we teach, and why; in the reading we select or recommend; in what does not appear in the curriculum as well as what does; in the forms of assessment employed; in the physical structures of classroom spaces; and in the views that teachers and students bring with them to any pedagogical environment. International organisations such as the OECD, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank have a direct or indirect bearing on educational arrangements in many countries. Multinational corporations, particularly those associated with computing and digital technologies, also exercise an influence over the tastes, aspirations, scholarly habits, and social relationships of participants in higher education. At a national level, the decisions made, laws passed, and policies formed by politicians have a substantial impact on educational lives.

Freire saw that neoliberalism was portrayed as if it was a neutral approach; the only possible sensible and reasonable solution to social, economic and educational problems. This implied appeal to neutrality is no accident; it not only masks the politics at work in neoliberal reform but is itself an indication of those politics. By positioning opposing positions as 'old fashioned', 'irrelevant', or 'unrealistic', neoliberal politicians, knowingly or unknowingly, suppress the kind of robust debate that is necessary to sustain authentic democratic life. The 'TINA' principle ('There is no alternative'), often attributed to former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, has become cemented in political and policy consciousness. From a Freirean perspective, however, there are *always* alternatives. This does not mean all social problems lend themselves to quick or easy solutions. Quite the opposite is true in

most cases, and this is, in part, why Freire referred to problem- *posing* education as his ideal in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, not to problem- *solving* education (Freire, 1972).

The problems Freire saw as an educationist in Brazil in the early 1960s – desperate poverty, malnutrition, poor healthcare, run-down living conditions, widespread illiteracy, and so on – had deep structural roots (Freire, 1976). Education alone could not 'solve' them, and the process of addressing such difficulties would take years, not weeks or months. This does not mean education has no role to play; Freire believed that it can and should engage and address the most difficult social problems we face. But an important quality for any educationist is patience. An understanding of history is helpful also in placing contemporary issues in broader perspective. This too is often lacking in a world structured by neoliberal systems and policies. There is a tendency to deal either just with the here and now, or to become 'future focused' in our thinking. The past can teach, if we know how to 'listen' to it, and provided we are not too quick in imposing our present categories of understanding on others from distant generations. A posture of radical openness is needed, where the present, the past and possible futures can be contemplated with care and humility (Freire, 1976, 1998a; Peters & Roberts, 2011). The desire for instant gratification is very much a feature of our current moment in history, and this phenomenon finds its way into education. But Freire was aware that higher education in particular has a key role to play in slowing us down somewhat – in prompting us to pause, to ponder, to think again about what we want and why. When we allow this process to work, we can often find that what at first seemed most obvious, least questionable, is rather more problematic than we imagined. We can sometimes discover that alternatives to our current social and economic arrangements have been sitting in front of us all along, even if only in nascent form. A seemingly simple idea – e.g., favouring cooperation instead of competition – can assume far greater importance than we imagined if we are prepared to consider, fully and fairly, some of its broader implications for policy and practice.

The University and Critical Citizenship Education

Freire expressed his concerns about neoliberalism in the years immediately following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet empire. For some, these momentous events signalled the beginning of a new era, a world order utterly dominated by one mode of production. It was assumed that debate over the best way to organise social and economic life was now over: capitalism has triumphed,

and the possibility of a socialist future had disappeared for ever. Freire sounded a warning about the danger of becoming too certain of one's certainties, of becoming smug, unreflective and dismissive of opposing positions (Freire, 1994, 1997b). This, he felt, was one of the defining features of neoliberal thought. Not only that; he saw a kind of fatalism at work in neoliberal discourses: an almost casual acceptance of ongoing social inequalities as inevitable (Freire, 1998a, 2004, 2007). He refused to give in to this kind of thinking and fought hard, right up to his death, to demonstrate the flaws and consequences of this fatalistic mindset.

What would he have made, then, of the years that followed? In his native Brazil, the political party he had supported – the Brazilian Workers Party – went on to win power, with Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva ('Lula') serving as President of the country from 2003 to 2011. The shifts in policy thinking during the first decade of the 21st century, not only in Brazil but also in several other South American countries (e.g., Venezuela, Argentina and Bolivia), have prompted some commentators to speak of the emergence of a *post-* neoliberal age (Grugel & Riggirozzi, 2012; Lewkowicz, 2015). It is possible to see other changes – e.g., the emergence of 'Third Way' politics in the United Kingdom and elsewhere, and the 'Occupy' movements that followed the world economic crisis of 2008 – as further indications that the term 'neoliberalism' is no longer helpful in describing contemporary policy trends. Yet, as Springer (2015) observes, it is important not to treat neoliberalism as a 'monolithic, static, and undifferentiated end-state' (p. 5). Neoliberalism is a doctrine with a certain elasticity; it is a way of thinking about human beings and the world that has left its mark in a variety of different ways. We might say, more correctly, that there is no *one* neoliberalism; strictly speaking, what we have observed is a plurality of neoliberalism *s*, each with their own distinctive characteristics in specific contexts, at given times, but all linked to each other by some common trends and ideas.

Some of the features of neoliberalism that troubled Freire most have persisted, or been reasserted, in Brazil and other countries. Policies of renationalisation and government efforts to provide further support to the most vulnerable members of society have, in the longer term, proved inadequate in significantly reducing economic inequalities. The culture of relentless consumption is, if anything, growing more pervasive across the globe. Instrumentalist views of knowledge and education have prevailed over other conceptions, and the idea of securing an economic advantage in a competitive world has remained a key policy goal. New forms of privatisation in education have emerged. Neoliberalism may have 'imploded' with the banking and mortgage crises of 2007/2008 (Hall, Massey & Rustin, 2013), but

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over more recent years it has rebounded strongly. In some countries (including New Zealand) the housing market, particularly in bigger cities, has been buoyant, widening existing gaps between 'haves' and 'have-nots'. In the 21st century, clothing, shoes and other consumer goods continue to be produced via 'sweat shop' labour in massive factories, with appalling wages and conditions for workers, for global markets. Whether our current age is best described as neoliberal or post-neoliberal, there is, from a Freirean perspective, still considerable work to do.

One way of thinking about this 'work' in institutions such as universities is to conceive of it as a process of critical citizenship education. There is a substantial body of theoretical work on citizenship, globalisation and education (e.g., Haynes, 2009; Peters, Britton & Blee, 2008; Petrovic & Kuntz, 2014; Pashby, 2011; Veugelers, 2011). But comparatively little has been said about what we might call 'academic citizenship'. [4] As academics, we live as citizens not just outside the gates of the university but within our institutions. The values we embody in our work with students and colleagues are often the same as those we espouse and exemplify in other spheres of life. How we approach the task of 'being an academic' depends very much on what we understand by citizenship. Many teachers, not just in universities but in institutions at all levels in the education system, are committed to their jobs not just for financial reasons but because they genuinely want to make a worthwhile difference in other lives. [5] But in teaching others, we are not just playing a part in shaping their futures but also in forming ourselves as ethical beings. Our service responsibilities – e.g., on committees, within the wider community, and to our discipline – also contribute to this process of formation. If it is *critical* academic citizenship education in particular with which we are concerned here, what might this mean? New Zealand again provides an interesting case study in addressing this question.

While New Zealand has often been seen as one of the 'least impure' examples of neoliberal reform (Jessop, 2002), at least during the period when the core economic changes were being instituted (1984-1990), even in this country, and especially in the social policy domain of tertiary education, neoliberalism has evolved in uneven, messy steps. This 'impurity' is, potentially, a source of some hope for those who work in the tertiary sector. Managerialism continues to exert a dominant influence over university life but this is by no means a complete victory for neoliberalism. New Zealand academics have resisted neoliberal reforms from the beginning. They have done so in a range of different ways, sometimes quietly, sometimes loudly, both via individual actions and in various collectives. The Tertiary Education Union

has played a significant role in this process, and sometimes academics have protested on the streets over cuts to funding, the closing of programmes of study, and other matters of concern. Some scholars have written critical pieces for daily newspapers, and others have appeared regularly on television to debate contentious educational issues. Equally important are the less visible forms of resistance enacted through teaching and supervision. These may be evident in the questions university teachers ask, the problems they draw to the attention of students, the readings they recommend and make available, the forms of dialogue and reflection they foster, and the implied understanding of the purpose of education they convey, among other ways.

In New Zealand, universities are required under the law to accept a role as 'critic and conscience of society'. There is thus some legal protection for academics who speak out, but there are limits to this – particularly in teaching. Universities can and do impose their own restrictions on curriculum content and academic conduct. For the most part, academics are keenly aware of the sense of responsibility that accompanies the ideal of academic freedom. Cases suggesting an abuse of this freedom are relatively rare. Also unusual, though not unheard of, are examples of direct Ministerial interference in matters relating to an academic's teaching. University classrooms are never entirely open spaces, but even in otherwise quite oppressive managerialist environments, they can still create opportunities for the investigation and exploration of alternative modes of thinking, being and social organisation. Serving as a 'critic of society' in such spaces does not, from a Freirean perspective, mean the principal task of the academic is simply to 'criticise'. Critique is an important form of academic activity but this is ultimately a constructive exercise. Freire's critique of global neoliberal capitalism was simultaneously an expression of his deep commitment to social justice and the ideal of humanisation (cf. Freire, 1993, 1994, 1998a, 2004, 2007; Kirylo, 2011; McLaren, 2000; Rozas, 2007).

The notion of serving as the 'conscience' of society invites further questions. The idea of being a vehicle for, or an expression of, anyone else's conscience is problematic (Roberts & Peters, 2008). A more fruitful way of looking at this, with Freire in mind, is to see *having* a conscience, of one's own, and *exercising* this, as a pedagogical virtue in university environments. Allowing the voice of conscience to work on us as we conduct our daily academic activities is critical if we are to live with integrity in university environments. The formation of academics as critical citizens can be seen as a process of conscientisation. This concept is one of the

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most complex in Freire's philosophy, and it was a frequent source of misunderstanding (as Freire saw it) among his interpreters – so much so that for a time, Freire stopped using the term. Essential to conscientisation is the development of a deeper, more critical understanding of the societies in which we live. But just as important, and often forgotten, is the element of 'conscience' in conscientisation (Freire, 2004; Liu, 2014). Our consciences provide a bridge between the reflective and active aspects of humanising praxis. A well-developed conscience allows us to engage in a kind of inner dialogue, and this can be in the midst of an external dialogue with others, prompting us to action. Our consciences won't let us go; they keep prodding away at us. The academic citizen who is able to listen, attentively, calmly and with a sense of equanimity, to the insistent voice of his or her conscience, will often have a sharper awareness of what he or she is committed to and why. This does not make academic life any easier; indeed, it will often mean taking the harder, more complex, more stressful, more time-consuming path.

A Freirean approach to critical citizenship education places human beings, not the economy, at the centre of any tertiary institution. The humanities have been marginalised under neoliberalism; for an academic committed to Freirean education, they are vital. In particular, Freire would have said, we need to ask and address fundamental ontological, epistemological, ethical, and political questions: ' What does it mean to be a human being? What is the nature of reality? What is "knowledge" and how do we come to know? What ought we to do? (How should we live? How should we structure our society?) What are the impediments to the realization of our ideals?' (Roberts, 2014, pp. 232-233). Critical citizenship education conceived in these terms recognises that much of what matters most in education is not, or ought not to be, measurable. The immeasurability, uncertainty and unpredictability of education need not be abhorred or ignored but can instead be celebrated. A critical academic citizen in the Freirean sense will not be afraid to declare that he or she approaches university life as an act of love. This is not romantic love but love as care, attention and commitment: love for the students we teach, for the colleagues with whom we work, and for the act of study. Students, Freire would want to say, must not be seen as 'consumers' of education but as active, critical participants in the process of constructing and advancing knowledge. Critical academic citizens will, where appropriate to the course of study, find ways to encourage pedagogical engagement with the most pressing global issues of the day (e.g., climate change and terrorism). Such an approach to critical citizenship education recognises that there is no *one* best way to teach, or to understand the

world, or to live in that world. At the same time, the acknowledgement of a plurality of different views should not stop us from saying that some ways are better than others. Freire would have wanted us to give his way, his philosophy and pedagogy, a fair hearing, but as part of a much wider ongoing intellectual conversation and in relation to the distinctive themes and problems of our time and place.

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Notes

[1] In New Zealand, the term ‘tertiary education’ is more commonly used in policy than ‘higher education’. The former is more expansive than the latter, and includes all forms of post-compulsory education (e.g., universities, polytechnics, private training establishments, indigenous institutions of higher education, industry training organisations, and adult and community education). The main concern in this paper, however, is the impact of neoliberal ideas on universities.

[2] On the theory of neoliberalism, see Harvey (2005) and Flew (2014).

[3] The two largest political parties in New Zealand are the National Party and the Labour Party. These are similar in many respects to the Conservative Party and the Labour Party in the United Kingdom. Traditional distinctions between the two parties as ‘right’ (National) and ‘left’ (Labour) have been steadily eroded since 1984. Now, the tendency in the New Zealand media is for National to be portrayed as ‘centre-right’ and Labour as ‘centre-left’, but this masks the fact that there has been a general movement to the right of the political spectrum by both parties. New Zealand operates under a Mixed Member Proportional parliamentary system, allowing smaller parties (e.g., the Greens, New Zealand First, and the M _ ori Party) to exert some influence over policy via coalitions with the larger parties.

[4] A related line of inquiry examines the role of the intellectual from a Freirean point of view. A helpful source in exploring that avenue is Torres (1994).

[5] Freire was highly critical of the comparatively low salaries paid to teachers (see Freire, 1997b). His point was not that teachers should be driven by money in their career decisions but that teaching is not given the respect it deserves.