

**Peter McLaren and Peter Leonard (eds.), *Paulo Freire A Critical Encounter*, New York and London, Routledge, 194 pp, 1993, ISBN 0-415-08792-9 (pbk), 0-415-03895-2 (hbk).**

**Peter McLaren and Colin Lankshear (eds.), *Politics of Liberation. Paths from Freire*, 229 pp, New York and London, Routledge, 1994, ISBN 0-415-09127-6 (pbk), 0-415-09126-8 (hbk).**

1997 has had its share of commemorative events worldwide. And a number of these centred around personalities who have made an impact in the area of education, including personalities whose work, though influential in different parts of the globe, is rooted in a Mediterranean context. One should mention here the Italians, Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937)<sup>1</sup> and Lorenzo Milani (1923-1967). The former's ideas are very influential in the field of education and, this year, there have been a number of symposia and conferences marking the 60th Anniversary of his death. 1997 also marks the 30th anniversary of Lorenzo Milani's death. Like his compatriot, Danilo Dolci, Milani<sup>2</sup> is one of Italy's better known critical pedagogues who, among other things, set up a radical school for working class students (mainly 'drop outs' of the formal educational system) at the remote village of Barbiana in Tuscany. One hopes that the work of these two figures, particularly that of Lorenzo Milani, who is certainly not as well known internationally as Gramsci, will feature prominently in future issues of this journal.

With regard to commemorative events, though, their work in the context of education was suddenly overshadowed, in the latter part of 1997, by that of the Brazilian, Paulo Freire (1921-1997). This is owing to the unexpected death of the remarkable Brazilian thinker and educationist at the Albert Einstein Hospital in São Paulo, Brazil in the early hours of May 2nd. The field of education has thus lost arguably its greatest figure of the last thirty years, a person whom I have described elsewhere as one of this century's greatest voices of human emancipation. In the first of the two books under review, Cornel West describes him as "*the exemplary organic intellectual of our time.*" In the Preface to a most recent publication (Freire et al, 1997), Joe L Kincheloe writes: "*I suppose Paulo Freire is the closest thing education has to a celebrity. Known or loved (or not) throughout the world, Paulo commands a presence unequalled by anyone who calls himself or herself an educator.*" (p. vii).

However, despite the several commemorative events focusing on Freire at this time of the year, it has to be said that publications and conferences celebrating his

ideas and evaluating their relevance to different fields and forms of social activism, never ceased throughout the last twenty years or so. Freire himself boasts a considerable output of published work, some of which has just seen or still has to see the light of publication. Three books by Freire, including one which is co-authored and another co-edited, were published in 1997. Another, a series of reflections on his life and work in the form of letters to his niece (this invites comparisons with the letters by Gramsci and Milani), was published in 1996. And there are works that Freire wrote in either Portuguese or Spanish which are currently being translated into English. In addition to Freire's own work, which includes several papers published in a variety of journals and ideas expressed on video and audio tape, the last seventeen years or so have witnessed a series of studies concerning the application of Freire's ideas in different contexts, including the ones by Shor (1987) and Kirkwood & Kirkwood (1989). We have seen three comprehensive critical studies in English, namely the ones by Taylor (1993), Elias (1994) and Gadotti (1994), besides a number of edited volumes comprising different studies. Shor's book features among these edited volumes and among the best known works of this type is Robert Mackie's *Literacy and Revolution – the Pedagogy of Paulo Freire*. But the two books edited by Peter McLaren, one with Peter Leonard and the other with Colin Lankshear, are, to date, the most comprehensive and up to date edited volumes of papers on Freire.<sup>3</sup> A review of these two books can easily develop into a fitting commemoration of Freire's work.

The first volume, *Paulo Freire A Critical Encounter*, brings together some of the best British and American names in that area of educational practice and thinking on which Paulo Freire has exerted the greatest influence and of which he is arguably the finest exemplar - critical pedagogy. Ever since the publication of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire's exerted an enormous influence on educators who recognise the politics of education (no longer conceived of as a neutral activity) and who choose to act as educators on the side of the oppressed (the politically subaltern, the disenfranchised) in an attempt to contribute to social change. Among the finest white male exponents of this approach in North America, we find Henry Giroux, Roger I. Simon, Michael Apple, Peter McLaren, Ira Shor and Donaldo Macedo, three of whom are represented in this volume. Afro-American and women writers are hardly evident in this volume, bell hooks being the only one to contribute a chapter, with Cornel West writing a very brief, one page preface. As far as gender is concerned, the situation in the second volume is much better. There are six of the many women who engage with Freire's ideas in their work. Three of them co-author their pieces with male contributors. There are enough good writers on or engaging with Freire worldwide to enable editors to provide volumes which can be very inclusionary in the voices they represent. And the whole issue of an inclusionary politics, while pertinent to any discussion

on education and social change, has been central to Freire's thinking in his later work. This is partly a positive response to the numerous critiques of his earlier work, made primarily by North American feminists, because of its disregard for gender politics. The issue of an inclusionary politics constitutes an important theme in the two books under review and Freire is the first to introduce it in the Foreword to the first volume. The Foreword is translated by Donaldo Macedo who constantly raises this issue in his numerous dialogues with Freire, including the very revealing one in the first of these two volumes. The issue of an inclusionary politics is taken up by many of the contributors to the two volumes but particularly by bell hooks. hooks constantly embraces Freire's ideas, finding them instructive and inspirational despite the "phallogocentric paradigm of liberation" they reflect. With regard to gender, the issue is discussed in depth by Kathleen Weiler, in her memorable 1991 paper from the *Harvard Educational Review*, which reappears in slightly modified form as the first chapter in *Politics of Liberation*. After underlining the important absences in Freire's project of liberation and outlining as well as analysing the different strands within feminism, Weiler explores possibilities for a fusion of Freire's insights and those of a feminist pedagogy. The same theme is taken up, in the same volume, by Jeanne Brady who, however, draws too much on Weiler's paper in her discussion on critical literacy, feminism and the politics of representation. She therefore repeats some of the arguments made in the first paper in the volume. Brady however broadens the discussion to incorporate insights from the literature on postcolonialism and critical literacy, drawing primarily on Henry Giroux, Cornel West and Abdul JanMohamed.<sup>4</sup>

The theme of postcolonialism features prominently in Henry Giroux's essay in the first volume. Giroux is one of the most prolific writers in the areas of critical pedagogy and cultural studies and is one of the most cited authors not only within the educational field but also outside it. In my view, he has provided one of the best essays in English on Freire that I have ever read, namely his introduction to Freire's *Politics of Education* which has also reappeared in Giroux's *Teachers as Intellectuals*. One of the concepts he develops is that of border pedagogue, a recurring one in his later work, forcefully developed in his 1992 book *Border Crossings* but also in other works. And, in the essay under review, he refers to Freire as a fine example of a border pedagogue. Through a variety of experiences, including that of exile, Freire managed to cross the boundaries of the cultural domains in which he initially operated (these domains relate to his location as white, male, heterosexual, Latin American etc.) to enter "*the terrains of Otherness...*" Freire's constantly recognised that there is a limit to the extent to which one can understand the terrain of the Other (see his response to the writings of academics and practitioners in Freire et al, 1997). And yet one winces at

a statement he makes in the dialogue with Macedo (first volume),: “*I am too a woman*” (p. 175). Freire made this statement to express his solidarity with women in their struggle for liberation from patriarchal, *machista* oppression. I would argue that, ‘to be a woman’, one has to feel the pain and share the knowledge of gender oppression. Can men feel such pain and share such knowledge, despite their solidarity with women? Isn’t there a limit to the degree of border crossing in this regard? The same question can apply to the issue of ‘class suicide’, the concept Freire borrows from Cabral. There is one’s *habitus* that stands in the way of committing ‘class suicide’.

The limits to border crossing are, of course, stressed by Giroux in his paper and elsewhere. He cautions white academics from the First World against acting in bad faith by appropriating “*the work of a Third World intellectual such as Paulo Freire without mapping the politics of their forays into other cultures, theoretical discourses, and historical experiences*” (p.184). This raises the issue of postcolonialism and the embeddedness of Freire’s work and thought in a postcolonial politics. The contexts which influenced the emergence of Freire’s ideas are those whose fortunes have historically been guided by colonial and neo-colonial interests. He has dealt with issues relating to what I would call ‘direct colonialism’, to distinguish it from the broader concept of ‘colonialism’ which has gained currency in recent years. Writings like *Pedagogy in Process. The Letters to Guinea Bissau* and numerous other pieces regarding former Portuguese colonies in Africa contain several discussions by Freire around this theme. His contact with the European and North American contexts, during his period of exile, also brought home the new colonial arrangements resulting from the displacement of people from colonised countries and regions<sup>5</sup> of the world, to create a ‘Third World’ within the ‘First World’.

Freire offers us signposts for a pedagogy which can serve to ‘decolonize the mind’, to use the phrase Freire attributed, in a 1985 interview with Macedo, to the then Cape Verde President, Aristides Pereira. Freire’s emphasis on listening to and learning from the oppressed, without romanticising their views, takes on the form of listening to, recuperating, learning from, as well as building upon, the subjugated knowledge of the colonised. Such knowledge is left out of official curricula since it does not represent the ‘cultural arbitrary’ of dominant colonial powers. This process of a decolonizing education entails, among other things, the provision of curricula that are not eurocentric but which valorise indigenous knowledge and perspectives emerging from the ‘Third World’. It entails the valorisation of indigenous approaches to different forms of knowledge, including mathematical knowledge, as indicated in Marilyn Frankenstein and Arthur B. Powell’s excellent piece on ethnomathematics in the second volume. It can be argued, from the standpoint of those living in the area covered by this journal, that

*Mediterranean Studies*, provided that it is representative of different areas within the region and not just Southern Europe, offers an outlet for a post colonial approach to knowledge.

Giroux's paper, as well as other works in the area of postcolonial studies, makes one want to explore how the work of such influential figures as Freire has been taken up and 'reinvented' (Freire would not have it otherwise) in contexts with long histories of direct colonialism. It is important to see compendia of studies centering around Freire's ideas which celebrate not only privileged white anglo American voices but also those from the 'majority world'. What does it mean to 'reinvent' Freire in a country seeking to 'decolonize the mind' following centuries of direct colonisation, characterised by the presence of school curricula obscuring, if not denigrating, that which is indigenous and exalting that which is foreign (read: white, western and eurocentric)?

The books under review allow space for such voices, mainly those emanating from Latin America, the context in which Freire worked before and after his exile. Hence the first volume features the Brazilian sociologist, Tomaz Tadeu da Silva, who co-authors, with McLaren, two pieces, including one concerning the reception of and reaction to Freire's work in his native Brazil. One of the alternatives to Freire's pedagogy in Brazil is provided by Dermeval Saviani who draws on a 'conservative' reading of Gramsci not different from that provided by Angelo Broccoli and Italia de Robbio Anziano in Italy, and Harold Entwistle and Guy B. Senese in the Anglo-North American literature. Then we have a re-publication of that much cited paper by Carlos Alberto Torres, a close friend of Freire's, originally published in 1982 in the University of Botswana journal, *Education with Production*. Torres' paper provides excellent background material for an appreciation of Freire's work and he has updated his earlier piece to incorporate, among other things, an exposition and of discussion around Freire's recent work as Secretary of Education in the PT Municipal Government of São Paulo. This aspect of Freire's work is also taken up by Torres in an interview with Freire, published in the second volume under review.

Excellent background material concerning the Latin American context, which influenced the genesis of Freire's work and the way it has been taken up in countries in this region, notably Mexico and Guatemala, is provided by Edgar Gonzalez Gaudiano and Alicia de Alba. This piece, in *Politics of Liberation*, provides quite an overview which complements the Torres piece in the first volume. The authors indicate that Freire forms part of a great tradition of intellectuals and educators from Latin America which includes Simon Rodriguez (Bolívar's teacher), José Vasconcelos, José Mariategui, Julio Antonio Mella, Farbundo Martí and Augusto Cesar Sandino.<sup>6</sup> I found José Martí to be a surprising omission.

Equally revealing, especially in relation to the climate in Latin America in the 1960s and 70s, is Adriana Puiggrós who replies to questions posed to her by Peter McLaren in a series of interviews and written correspondence. The focus of this interview is her native Argentina, and Freire's work is here discussed against the backdrop of the history of education in this country, characterised by such historical developments as the process of nation building, relations between Church and state, populist regimes, dictatorships etc. Like Freire, the Puiggrós family suffered repression at the hands of military dictatorships, having been a target of several assassination attempts, culminating in the killing of Adriana's brother and a period of exile in Mexico. This invites parallels with Freire's own life which makes the interview even more pertinent and revealing.

Issues relating to struggles for social change in the first world feature prominently in the two books being reviewed. Peter Leonard, for instance, derives insights from both Gramsci and Freire to develop a critical approach to social work at the University of Warwick. The complementary aspects and striking parallels between the work of Gramsci and Freire have often been referred to in the educational literature and have been the focus of studies by Paula Allman and the undersigned.

Freire has constantly been an advocate of a process whereby educators should not act in isolation but explore spaces offered by social movements. The issue of social movements featured prominently in his later 'talking books'. Peter Findlay takes up this issue in relation to social movements in Canada. He sees conscientisation as relevant to social movements in view of their potential to unveil ideological positions and challenge hegemony in significant ways, but he also stresses the fragmentation that such movements create. He argues, echoing many others, that the task is to build coalitions which would constitute the basis for an effective counter-hegemonic force. I have argued elsewhere (Mayo, 1996) that Freirian pedagogy of the kind that evolved in Freire's later work, and which constantly takes into account the intersections between different forms of oppression, can contribute to coalition building. Codification and decodification strategies would serve as a means of interrogating popular experiences in terms of how one is implicated in as well as suffers from processes of structural oppression - how, for example, one is implicated in gender and race oppression while being located in a position of subordination within the class structure. Freire has dealt with this issue in various places and, most recently, in the discussion 'Layered and Multiple Identities: People as Oppressor and Oppressed' (Freire et al, 1997, pp. 311, 312).

The whole discussion on Freire and social movements in a First World context indicates that his approach can be 'reinvented' in contexts which are markedly different from those in Latin America. For Freire offers us a philosophy and an

approach to learning intended to cultivate in us the disposition to engage in a dialectical relationship with knowledge and society. This is part and parcel of a critical reading of the world. The elements which constitute such a critical reading of the world are carefully delineated by Ira Shor, one of the better known Freire 'disciples' in North America, in his piece 'Education is Politics. Freire's Critical Pedagogy' ( first volume). This piece provides echoes from Shor's acclaimed 1992 book, *Empowering Education*. Given the political dimension and dynamic nature of Freire's approach, which ought to be 'reinvented' in different contexts, one would be adulterating his work were one to reduce it to a Method. Alas, many educators reduce Freire's work to a mere set of techniques or Method, therefore missing out on the core of his pedagogical philosophy and approach. It is for this reason that regimes, diametrically opposed to the politics that informs Freire's approach, sponsored programmes whose organisers claimed to have used 'Freire's method'. This was the case with the same regime in Brazil which banished him from his homeland for sixteen years! The tendency to reduce Freire's work to a method is discussed in the two books being reviewed, notably by Stanley Aronowitz in his piece on Freire's 'Radical Humanism' and by Macedo in his Preface to *Paths from Freire*. It is a point which Freire has been at pains to make in several of his writings, including the first part of his 'A Response' in Freire et al, 1997. The political dimension of his work, which is predicated on a struggle against all forms of structural oppression, is also that which distinguishes his pedagogical approach from such purportedly 'value neutral' exercises as the Matthew Lippman inspired 'P4C' (Philosophy for Children) programme in Guatemala which Marguerite and Michael Rivage-Seul criticise in their contribution to the second volume.

The struggle against all forms of oppression is conceived of by Freire as an ongoing process which entails a neverending process of learning as people strive collectively to become more fully human, the theme from Freire's work which is taken up by Michael Peters and Colin Lankshear in their discussion on 'Education and Hermeneutics'. The relevance of Freire's work to different developments in social thought is also taken up by Peter McLaren and Tomaz Tadeu da Silva in a very long essay, in the first volume, which relates aspects of Freire's work to different strands of postmodernist writing. They of course recognise and retain the strong emancipatory dimension found in Freire's pedagogical politics which, it is argued in another piece by McLaren (second volume) , allows us a reprieve from the kind of nihilism and paralysing politics found in different strands of postmodernist thought. The essay by McLaren and da Silva in the first volume relates Freire's pedagogy to the concept of 'redemptive memory' associated with writers like Walter Benjamin and taken up in a variety of works, including Frigga Haug's *Female Sexualization A Collective Work of Memory* and Roger I. Simon's

*Teaching against the Grain . Texts for a Pedagogy of Possibility.* There is nothing explicit in Freire's writings in English about the politics of redemptive remembrance. However, his pedagogical approach allows possibilities for engaging in the recuperation of collective histories, a process through which history is conceived of "*not as a constraint on the present but rather as 'source or precondition of power' that can illuminate our project of emancipation*" (p. 75). I would argue, taking my cue from McLaren and da Silva's chapter, that a critical analysis of a codified situation, a distinctive characteristic of the process of conscientisation involving praxis, advocated by Freire, would be incomplete unless the situation is analysed and placed in its historical context. For this process involves a critical engagement with historically accumulated concepts and practices. This would involve moving between present and past to contribute towards a transformed future.

It is impossible, in the space available, to do justice to all the papers in the two volumes. These two books provide us, to date, with the most comprehensive appraisal of Freire's pedagogy to be published in English. They incorporate some of the most important themes which come to mind when discussing Freire. Perhaps the book would have been more comprehensive had it included a chapter on the relationship between Freire and liberation theology, an important feature of Freire's work. Two of the finest discussions on this theme in English are provided by Retamal (1981) and Elias (1994). The omission of this theme is surprising given that one of the contributors to the second volume, Michael Rivage-Seul, is a moral theologian who specialises in liberation theology.

But this is perhaps carping on my part. The two volumes are rich in background information and critical analyses and, together, constitute a fitting tribute to Freire's memory, even though they were published four years and three years respectively before Paulo Freire's passing away last Spring.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> He is cited widely in a section of the literature on education and is the most influential Marxist theorist in popular education in Latin America. Several studies on the relevance of his ideas to education have been published or are about to be published, including the ones by Mario Manacorda, Angelo Broccoli, Harold Entwistle, Timothy Ireland, Italia De Robbio Anziano, and others currently in press or in the pipeline. A number of papers have also appeared and an entire conference on this aspect of the Sardinian's work was held in Rome in May as part of a series of events commemorating the 60th anniversary of his death.
- <sup>2</sup> His work and ideas are captured in a series of publications in Italian, including letters to and from his students and in a well researched biographical volume by Neera Fallaci (1993).
- <sup>3</sup> One eagerly looks forward to the promised publication of a similar volume, comprising papers from the annual 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' Conference in Omaha, Nebraska. One also looks forward



to the special tribute to Freire, by *Convergence*, the journal of the International Council for Adult Education, scheduled for 1998.

- 4 The last mentioned is the author of critical essays on Freire centering around the concept of 'border intellectual', one of which appearing in Giroux and McLaren's *Between Borders*.
- 5 One such area is Italy's *Meridionale* (the South) which, according to Gramsci, is subjugated to the industrialised North through a process of 'internal colonialism'
- 6 The last mentioned is the Nicaraguan nationalist figure who led the revolt against the U.S. marines in the late twenties and early thirties before being assassinated, and from whom the FSLN derived its name (Sandinistas) and inspiration. See Robert F. Arnove's *Education and Revolution in Nicaragua* (Praeger, 1986).

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**Peter Mayo,**  
*University of Malta*