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WHEN DOES IT WORK? FREIRE'S PEDAGOGY IN CONTEXT(N1)

Paulo Freire has, for years, been regarded as one of the key figures in the area of transformative education intended to generate radically democratic social relations. This paper is concerned with the following question: to what extent and under what circumstances can Freire's pedagogical ideas be successful in contributing to a process of social transformation? In this paper, I shall argue that, whatever the context in which Freire's pedagogy is carried out, there are always forces, often generated by the liberatory practices themselves, that militate against the kind of social relations Freire's pedagogy is intended to promote. The central argument is that the tension between liberation and domestication, two of Freire's preferred terms (Freire, 1972a), is a perpetual one, relevant to all contexts, and that, therefore, the struggle which necessitates transformative adult educational practices remains an ongoing one.

[Domestication and Liberation](#)

Since the possibility of Freire-inspired pedagogy being successfully applied in different contexts will be examined in terms of the antithetical forces of liberation and domestication, it would not be amiss to provide a brief exposition of the way these two concepts figure in Freire's thinking. Originally drawing on experiences in Latin America, Freire regarded society as being characterised by relations of power and domination. He focuses on the ideological means whereby those in power (the oppressors) exert their control over those whom they exploit (the oppressed) and argues that the social relations that are constitutive of such power are 'prescriptive' (Freire, 1970: 31) in nature. This process of prescription is facilitated by a variety of means, including traditional mainstream education. Mainstream education is characterised by what he terms 'Banking Education' (Freire, 1970: 58), a 'top-to-bottom' approach to knowledge transmission, through which the teacher is the sole dispenser of knowledge and the students are its passive recipients (Goulet, 1973: 11). Such a process renders the student the 'object' rather than the 'subject' of the learning process and the 'good educatee' is one 'who repeats, who refuses to think critically, who adapts to models, who finds it nice to be a rhinoceros' (Freire, 1972a: 179). (n2) Banking Education, in short, domesticates human beings.

The alternative to this can only be a liberating education (Freire, 1972a). Freire's liberating education was originally devised to be carried out in the area of non-formal education. This kind of education is referred to as Cultural Action for Freedom. Freire's proposed process of liberating education places the emphasis on participation and dialogue, horizontal relations between educator and educatees, (n3) a problem posing education (a pedagogy of the question) (n4) and on the learners' culture constituting the basis of their own learning. The emphasis is therefore placed on praxis, a concept which is central to Freire's thinking on social transformation, that involves a process whereby the learners are distanced from their world of everyday action (n5) in order to see it in a different, more critical, light with a view to transforming it (Freire, 1970: 119). This, in short, is Freire's proposed process of a liberating education. While 'domesticating' Banking Education is characterised by authoritarian social relations, 'liberating' Cultural Action for Freedom entails transformative democratic social relations. In Freire's view, education can never be neutral. It can either domesticate or liberate. The two concepts are central to Freire's thinking not only about education but also about social relations in the wider society.

Social Transformation: Limits and Possibilities

I shall now explore the conditions under which the struggle for social transformation, under the banner of a liberating education, can successfully take place. Can such action be successfully carried out in a pre-revolutionary context? Looking at Freire's own experiences in Brazil, I would submit that such action was partially successful under a populist regime in an era marked by the staging of a successful revolution in the region (the Cuban Revolution) which must have generated enthusiasm among those striving for liberation (cf. Torres, 1982). The climate was marked by the advance of popular forces. Trade unions, peasant leagues and worker organisations made their presence felt under such circumstances. Situations such as these, during which a populist leader, Joao Goulart, sought to win the support of disenfranchised masses in his struggle against the industrial bourgeoisie and rural landowning oligarchy, are conducive to liberatory educational practices and it is hardly coincidental that it was during this period that Freire carried out his consciousness raising literacy programmes in the north east. Nevertheless, in a situation characterised by a power alliance between the industrial bourgeoisie and the rural

landowning oligarchy (Ireland, 1987), in a nationally-controlled dependent, productive system (Torres, 1990: 274), there would always be limits to the extent to which such liberatory efforts could survive.

The push towards democracy can be confronted by stiff opposition and can therefore be shortlived. The reaction, in Brazil, in the form of a military coup, backed by multinationals (Ireland, 1987), confirms this. From a gradual move towards liberation, there was a sudden swing towards authoritarianism with its concomitant emphasis on domestication. Dictatorships are most likely to consider liberatory practices of the kind advocated by Freire anathema and ruthlessly stamp out any attempts in this regard. Freire knows this only too well, having been first imprisoned and then 'invited' to leave Brazil following the coup. He enjoyed better fortunes in Chile, having worked during the period of the Christian Democrat government led by Eduardo Frei. He was not around when the Allende coalition government was in power but the popular education legacy which he left must have been very powerful, judging from the fact that the Pinochet-led Junta paid him the 'supreme compliment' of declaring him a 'persona non grata' (Walker, 1981). It is not only figures like Freire who suffer for engaging in such transformative activities. Popular educators constantly place their life on the line when engaging in such activities. They are frequently cold-bloodedly murdered in El Salvador and other parts of Latin America. (n6) This type of pedagogy is perceived as a serious threat by reactionary forces since it undermines the very same social relations which are partly constitutive of their power. Situations such as these naturally favour a swing towards domestication.

Nevertheless, I would submit that the tension between liberation and domestication prevails even during the period of extreme repression. As Foucault (1980: 95) would say, 'where there is power there is resistance'. I suspect, with reference to Freire's own experiences in Brazil in the early sixties and in Chile, when the Christian Democrats were in power, that periods of popular mobilisation prior to dictatorships can be long enough to enable transformative activities, of the kind carried out by Freire, to become consolidated within the popular tradition and therefore constitute an important source of popular resistance during times of repression. There is evidence, for instance, that conscientising education, the kind of adult education associated with Paulo Freire, was carried out in Pinochet-ruled Chile, albeit clandestinely and often in connection with (or under the guise of) vocational education (La Belle, 1987: 203). Both the church and the Christian base communities constituted an important site of struggle and resistance during the time of the Brazilian dictatorship, taking on overtly political tasks (Freire and Faundez, 1989: 65, 66). These communities are associated with Freirean pedagogy and consciousness raising. Freire himself relates how priests involved in such work read Italian, French and Spanish translations of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, since the book was banned in Brazil and could only be read furtively (Horton and Freire, 1990: 211). One may argue therefore that, in such instances, processes of education for liberation were serving to resist and counter despotic attempts at domestication. It would be interesting to explore how much of these resistance activities had, within them, residual elements from the pre-coup period? The question becomes even more pertinent when considering that the pre-coup period was marked by a process, albeit a slow one, of radicalisation within the Church and which gave rise to such movements as Acao Popular, which was very much concerned with literacy among the poor (Ireland, 1987). It is in the context of Acao Popular that Freire's ideas were developed (Jarvis, 1987: 268).

The connection between the Church, especially its radical wing, and liberation is a strong one in Latin America. One ought to remark that Freire's work continues to be seen against the background of this tradition of radicalism in the region. And it is arguably in this context that Freirean pedagogy has made one of its most effective contributions to social and political transformation. Robert Arnove (1986), for instance, argues that Freire exerted a considerable influence on the kind of counter-hegemonic activities which took place in Nicaragua in the late sixties and seventies and which preceded the Somoza overthrow. These activities were carried out, in the main, by priests belonging to the 'Liberation wing' of the Church, among them Jesuits from the University of Central America. The Church possibly exerted a protective influence in this respect. (n7) In this particular case, Freirean pedagogy was not carried out in isolation but in relation to a strong social movement which drew together three strands 'Sandino's popular national revolt, marxist class analysis and Christian Liberation Theology' (Arnove, 1986: 8,9).

While one would do well not to generalise from a particular historical experience and should recognise the contextual specificities involved, the Nicaraguan experience seems to suggest that adult education, no matter how emancipatory in process and content it may be, does not, on its own, lead to social transformation. It appears likely to prove effective in this regard only when it is carried out in the context of a strong, all-embracing social and political movement (a kind of Gramscian 'Historic Bloc'). After all Freire himself states that one should not 'expect' from education what it cannot do, namely 'transform society by itself' (Shor and Freire, 1987: 37). If carried out in isolation, Freire's pedagogy would only involve 'intellectual praxis'. This is a kind of praxis which would probably be capable of transforming the people's consciousness but would not lead them to engage in direct political action to change their plight (La Belle, 1986: 181). If linked with social action, however, the educational process would involve 'revolutionary praxis'. This is the kind of praxis which took place in Nicaragua, a praxis which not merely changed the people's consciousness but one which was carried out in the context of a social movement. This particular experience has to be viewed in the light of the strong alliance which exists throughout Latin America between Freire-inspired popular education and a particular social movement, that promoting Liberation Theology, which provided the common link between the liberatory experience of the Church and its Christian base communities in Brazil and the kind of popular education experiences which took place in Nicaragua.

The Nicaraguan experience seems to have indicated that work within an all-embracing social movement proved effective in contributing towards social transformation. There will be those who would argue that, in the case of Nicaragua, as well as Guinea Bissau, it took military action on the part of a guerrilla movement to effectively bring about change. In arguing this way, however, one would be minimising the role of popular education and the related movement/s in providing a sense of liberation, therefore creating the right climate for revolution (Mayo, 1991a) and for the subsequent process of transformation, in the face of the despotic state's increasing tendency towards domestication. It also minimises the role which popular education plays within the context of grassroots movements in prefiguring the kind of social relations that would characterise the post revolution society. Popular education, within the context of social movements, plays its role in the 'war of position' engaged in by the subordinated groups prior to the conquest of power. This would be in keeping with Antonio Gramsci's dictum:

every revolution has been preceded by an intense labour of criticism, by the diffusion of culture and the spread of ideas among masses of men [sic] who are at first resistant and think only of solving their own immediate economic and political problems for themselves who have no ties of solidarity with others in the same condition

(1977: 12)

A question which arises at this stage is the extent to which the foregoing considerations can apply to transformative action not only in non-industrialised societies but also in industrialised ones. The experience of operating in the context of social movements was not lost on Freire even in dialogues, such as the one with Ira Shor, focusing mainly on the struggles for greater social justice in western society. Freire advocates that educators striving for change 'expose themselves to the greater dynamism, the greater mobility' found 'inside social movements' (Shor and Freire, 1987: 39). The link between the role of the church-inspired movement in Latin America and that of the new social movements, in the west, is drawn by Freire in his taped conversation with Antonio Faundez:

I can say without fear of being mistaken that in the seventies in Brazil and elsewhere we began to see clearly the growing development and importance of these social movements, some of them linked with the church and some not: the struggle of environmentalists in Europe, Japan and the United States, resulting in their direct intervention in recent elections in France and Germany; the struggle of organised women, of blacks, of homosexuals, all of them emerging as a force and expression of power.

(Freire and Faundez, 1989: 66)

I would submit that Freire-inspired pedagogy can possibly be effective, in an industrialised western context, when applied in relation to new social movements, recognised by a number of writers (e.g. Bocoock, 1988; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Carnoy and Levin, 1985), including Freire himself (Shor and Freire, 1987: 88; Freire and Macedo, 1987: 61; Freire and Faundez, 1989: 66), to be important agents of social change -sources of liberation in the struggle against existing forces of domination and domestication. I would support my view by virtue of the following considerations. In the first place, it would be erroneous to equate Freire's ideas solely with adult literacy education. I would argue that, for Freire, adult literacy education serves its purpose, in certain contexts where it is necessary, only as a vehicle for a process of political conscientisation and, therefore, does not become an end in itself. His 'codification/decodification' method and broader pedagogical ideas can be applicable to contexts where the participants are 'literate', in the conventional sense of the term. Secondly, they focus on exploring the contradictions that are concealed by the dominant ideology. This is a task which most social movements have to face when raising awareness about the particular issues with which they are concerned. Thirdly, his is a pedagogy that recognises the political nature of all educational activity, where the concern is with doing away with undemocratic social relations and replacing them with radically democratic ones. This, I would submit, is the concern of such new social movements as the Feminist, Anti-racist and Lesbian/Gay movements which challenge the bases of 'legitimised' social relations in the larger society.

Finally, I consider Freire's politics to be non-essentialist. There is no identification, in his work, of a single 'universal' class or group whose role is destined to be of primordial importance in the process of social transformation. The term 'oppressed', which he constantly uses throughout his work, is not a vague term, as critics like Youngman (1986) would have us believe. His usage of the term indicates that he regards oppression as not being group specific. He recently stated publicly words to the effect that one cannot relegate everything - all forms of oppression and domestication - to the class struggle. (n8) In effect, Freire's 'oppressed' vary from context to context. In his early works, they are either the campesinos or marginal urban dwellers, with a recent peasant past, living on the periphery of large cities (Torres, 1982). (n9) Later, they become members of the African peasant class. In more recent works, the range of oppressed people encompasses members of the various social movements struggling for change, including ethnic minorities in the US (Freire, 1985; Shor and Freire, 1987). Considering his recent role as Education Secretary in Sao Paulo, the oppressed are women, who constitute the majority of illiterates in the south-eastern city and who, as Freire admits, face a double daily workload (cf. Freire in Viezzer, 1990: 6), and grossly exploited workers, in the same city's burgeoning manufacturing industry, serving the interests of mobile foreign capital. Furthermore, he has worked as Education Secretary in the ambit of a political party, the Workers Party (PT), which has a history of strong links with grassroots movements (Ireland, 1987). One may argue, therefore, that the term 'oppressed', in Freire's work and thinking, can be attributed to several of the 'polyphony of voices', in Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) terms, that can be heard or are being silenced throughout the world. These are voices clamouring for liberation from different forms of oppression and domestication.

All these, I would submit, are aspects of his work which could possibly render his pedagogical ideas relevant to the struggle of social movements, which movements would, in turn, provide the ideal force in western society, and any other society where they exist, to sustain adult education efforts intended towards social change. Having said this, however, I recognise that there exist problems which, in the view of many, would render this proposed relevance problematic. Freire's earlier work, which focuses extensively on 'popular culture' in Latin America, reproduces the contradictions that characterise such a culture. One notices, for instance, a strong element of machismo in the codifications reproduced in Freire (1973). 'Man' is not only the subject of Freire's theorising throughout the written parts of this and other early texts (Freire has been severely criticised for his constant use of the male referent in his early work) but is very much 'at the centre of the universe' in these codifications. 'He' is depicted as being in a constant quest to dominate nature (using violence in the form of hunting down birds and animals). In settings which separate the 'public' from the 'private' spheres of life, 'Man', for the most part, occupies the former. (n10) This has surely been a case of domesticating elements emerging from a 'liberatory' practice. As Kathleen Weiler (1991) forcefully argues, the obvious shortcoming with Freirean pedagogy is its failure to recognise the multiplicity of subjectivities which can render a person oppressed in one context and an oppressor in another, which consideration renders the dichotomy, in Freire, between oppressor and oppressed problematic. One must concede that the machismo of the early works has been drastically toned down in the more recent ones and I assume that this will apply to codifications which may be illustrated in any future Freire works. (n11)

There are nevertheless other concerns which persist. For all his constant references to social movements in his work, there is, at least in his English language publications, no sustained analysis, of say, gender, 'race' and sexuality issues. These issues and the movements which promote them are mentioned only in passim. Can one speak, in this context, of a process of liberation from domestication being undermined by a politics of absence? I would regard a sustained analysis of such issues indispensable for the purposes of examining the extent to which Freire's ideas are applicable in the context of the various social movements and the struggles they are engaged in. For all the conversational books which Freire has produced and continues to produce, there has not been one involving a sustained conversation between Freire and either a woman or a person of colour.([n12](#))

While on the subject of gender and race, it would be pertinent to consider another aspect of Freire's work within the contexts of the tension between domestication and liberation as well as the relevance of Freire's ideas for the struggles carried out by different social movements. It can be argued that facilitators/teachers who bring into the teaching situation a 'cultural capital' which is at odds with that of the learners([n13](#)) would constitute a powerful force of domestication. Freire emphasised, when dealing with the issue of adult learning facilitation, a kind of 'organic' relationship, in the Gramscian sense, between facilitators and the class or group of people they are dealing with, using such words as 'commitment' to (1970: 78) as well as 'growing' (1971: 61) and 'in communion' (Freire and Faundez, 1989: 56) with the group. Borrowing a memorable phrase from Amilcar Cabral, Freire writes/speaks about the possibility of intellectuals, and one can include facilitators among them, committing 'class suicide' to integrate themselves with the masses (Freire, 1978: 104), 'immersing themselves in the culture, history, aspirations, doubts, anxieties and fears of the popular classes' (Freire and Faundez, 1989: 56). In short, Freire seems to be arguing that, despite having competence, the facilitator must seek every means possible to break any barrier that might exist between her/him and the learners in the interest of creating truly democratic and transformative social relations of education.

Can the concept of 'suicide', as used here, be applied in the contexts of 'race' and gender, especially in situations where logistical constraints create situations wherein, for example, white facilitators teach black students and men teach women? Facilitators inspired by Freire and perhaps sustained in their endeavours by social movements can find themselves in this situation. Freire-inspired pedagogy, after all, can be taken up as a strategy for transformation even by progressive teachers working within the State system, attempting, in Freire's words, to be 'tactically inside and strategically outside' the system.([n14](#)) Would not gender, 'race' and other differences, between educators and educatees, create tensions which result in domesticating forces emerging out of a liberatory practice?([n15](#)) As Weiler (1991) argues:

Without naming these sources of tension, it is difficult to address or build upon them to challenge existing structures of power and subjectivities. Without recognizing more clearly the implicit power and limitations of the position of teacher, calls for a collective liberation or for opposition to oppression slide over the surface tensions that may emerge among teachers and students as subjects with conflicting interests and histories and with different kinds of knowledge and power.

(Weiler, 1991: 454, 455)

One way of countering this problem would be for the movements concerned not merely to generate their own programmes involving facilitators sharing the same gender, 'race' or age of the adult education clientele, but also to help sensitise 'progressive' educators in the State system, caught in the situation described above, to the particular gender, 'race' or age concerns of the learning group. This can be one way of mitigating the element of domestication which could threaten to undermine an otherwise potentially liberatory situation. In my view, this is the nearest that one can get to the ideal of 'suicide' which Amilcar Cabral talks about and which Freire (1978) takes up in his letters to Guinea Bissau. 'Suicide', if it gets taken up to begin to mean more than just 'crass suicide', strikes me as being an ideal, something to strive towards. I would personally interpret the whole notion as entailing a recognition, on the facilitators' part, of the gender/class/'race' difference that may set him/her apart from the learners. Such recognition would be an important step in the direction of minimising elements of domestication that may emerge from her/his position of social privilege. Part of the struggle for social transformation in this regard is coming to terms with the tension between domestication and liberation arising from different social locations.

The tension between domestication and liberation, in so far as the relationship between educator and educatees is concerned, does not end there. It would be naive to assume that adult learners, conditioned to years of 'Banking Education' and, in many cases, a set of social relations which are, by and large, prescriptive, would be disposed to partake of a dialogical education. Freire acknowledges this point in one of his most recent works in English where he argues that there are moments when one needs to 'be fifty per cent a traditional teacher and fifty per cent a democratic teacher' (Horton and Freire, 1990: 160). It would be appropriate to recall Freire's own remarks concerning the fear of freedom experienced by people who have had few, if any, opportunities to explore their creativity. Any activity which entails creativity, that which enables human beings to enjoy and explore such freedom, involves risk taking and therefore presents itself to them as a fearful journey into the unknown. Such conditioning may therefore make them resist attempts at a dialogical education and bring pressure to bear on the facilitator to adopt traditional 'tried and tested' methods of teaching. Going by the experience of my own involvement, for two years, as co-ordinator of the Malta adult literacy programme, I would submit that the pressure faced by innovative educators who persist with encouraging democratic social relations of education are indeed great. This is an impression shared by other writers (Baldacchino, 1990: 53, 54; Arnove, 1986: 24, 25). Once again, this could lead to a situation where a force of domestication emerges out of an ostensibly liberatory practice. The tension between liberation and domestication, therefore, also characterises the relationship between facilitator and learner.

There are other forces, emanating from outside the confines of the cultural circle or adult education centre, which increase this tension. One such force is that of bureaucracy. Bureaucratic control can undermine the very same freedom it may be intended to safeguard. This can cause problems in a variety of ways. Social organisations, engaging in all sorts of progressive adult educational activities, some of which Freire inspired, may often be dependent on state funding or, in the case of EC countries, on money from the European Social Fund. This dependence on the state or 'the larger state' and their bureaucratic procedures could adversely condition the manner in which these organisations implement their projects. Dependence on state funding may also lead to cooption of the organisations concerned. This problem applies not only to

organisations but also to educational workers, within the state system, who are inspired by Freirean ideals.(n16) In my own work in connection with the Adult Education Unit of Malta's Education Department, I have often felt that a lot of ideas, originally introduced with transformative ends in view, get diluted, as a result of stifling bureaucratic procedures, in such a way that by the time they are brought to fruition they end up serving the status quo. In colonial and post-revolution societies, the state bureaucracy would often be an inherited one whose procedures may not be in keeping with the kind of social relations the new government may attempt to promote. In Nicaragua, there were also attempts to institutionalise `popular education'.(n17) Freire was aware of this situation, which would exacerbate the tension between liberation and domestication. As a matter of fact, one of the reasons why he advocated the continuation of conscientisation in the post-revolution or post-colonial phase was to constitute a force against bureaucrats who could `deadend the revolutionary vision' (Freire, 1972b: 78).

There is, I feel, another side to this issue. While not denying the stifling character of bureaucratic apparatuses, I would argue that they could offer organisations an avenue for transformative education in areas not conventionally associated with such a process. For instance, in order to gain access to necessary EC funds, provided from the European Social Fund, social organisations which organise Freire-inspired adult education programmes might have to design projects related to `education for the long-term unemployed', an area which seems to be given priority by funding agencies in Europe. While not denying that their agenda is partly being defined for them by an external bureaucratic body, I would argue that these organisations would be introducing critical pedagogical perspectives in an area which, traditionally, has had a narrow focus - skills transmission.(n18) They would be projecting the image of learners as subject in an area where the latter have traditionally been object. The organisation could thus be making its contribution to the development of industrial democracy. A potentially domesticating influence can turn into a liberating one. Spaces for transformation can possibly be found also in an area which is generally associated with control and lack of freedom.

The tension between liberation and domestication, in any context, is exacerbated by the shadow of mobile, global capitalism. Capitalism's ability to shift its terrain of operation has given it leverage over the state, leading, in Ross and Trachte's words, to a decline in the latter's relative autonomy (1990: 68). This can have an adverse effect on the amount of funding allocated by the state to social programmes which it, traditionally, needed to provide, together with funds for other services, in order to fulfill what Carnoy and Levin (1985) would regard as the contradictory functions of securing its democratic basis and, at the same time, contributing towards capital accumulation. To legitimise itself, the state often had to bow to pressure from social movements for greater expenditure on programmes for the poor, the disenfranchised and so on. Funds for adult education, which would have allowed progressive adult educators, working within the state system or for organisations depending on state funding, the possibility of indulging in Freirean-inspired pedagogy, were made available as a result. My fear is that, with capitalism's greater leverage over the state, as a result of its ability to threaten the withdrawal of investment and set up plant elsewhere, such funding would diminish. The `rhetoric of the business climate', in Ross and Trachte's terms (1990: 68), would take precedence over that of democracy and I suspect that the emphasis, in so far as funding for adult education is concerned, would be placed on upgrading vocational skills. I wonder whether such a situation would make it even more imperative for social organisations, seeking state funding, to design programmes in such a way

that elements of popular education are provided within the context of what would be marketed as a vocational education programme. I also wonder which target learning groups would be excluded as a result of such a process.

Other concerns arise, such as the effect of moving global capital on funding for programmes introduced by Paulo Freire and his ministry in such a dependent country as Brazil. It would not be amiss to assume that the tension between the quest for better education, better working conditions and hence liberation, on the one hand, and the demands of foreign mobile capital must have been felt and continue to be felt in Sao Paulo, where Freire recently served as Education Secretary. As Ross and Trachte argue: 'Manufacturing capital has been attracted to the Third World precisely because the work force receives low wages, has few rights and offers little threat to the interest of capital' (1990: 112). Can the kind of democratic social relations which Freire's policies in Sao Paulo sought to promote survive 'the withholding of investment by global firms, credit denial by the International Monetary Fund and global banks, and economic and political pressures by core states' (1990: 112)?

The foregoing are factors which affect the success or otherwise of the implementation of Freirean or Freire-inspired pedagogy in different contexts. References have been made, at different stages, to post-revolution societies. These references indicate that the tension between domestication and liberation is strongly felt in such societies. It could easily be argued that it is these societies that provide a climate which is most congenial to the implementation of Freirean ideals. As such, it would be appropriate to examine the situation of popular education in such societies more closely. The following section will therefore consist of a discussion on the application/misapplication of Freire-inspired pedagogy in the area of adult education for social transformation carried out in post-revolution societies.

It may be argued that Freire's process of transformative adult education would stand a much better chance of succeeding in a post-revolution society, especially if the political climate is a congenial one. The process would, in such cases, be one of 'cultural revolution' which 'occurs in complete harmony with the revolutionary regime' (Freire, in Torres, 1982: 88). The section following examines the validity or otherwise of this assertion.

Cultural Revolution

Freirean pedagogy has been applied in post-revolution situations. As a form of popular education, it is also of relevance to education in the 'liberated zones' of countries in a state of civil war. It is argued (Torres, 1990: 273) that the kind of education provided in such zones is, with some modification, similar to that carried out in post-revolution societies such as Nicaragua. Freire was directly involved in consultations concerning the launching of programmes in post-revolution societies. When in exile, working for IDAC in Geneva, he acted as advisor to the governments of a number of African countries, including Guinea Bissau, which had been involved in bloody wars of liberation against Portugal. He also acted as consultant to the revolutionary 'New jewel' government in Grenada and the Sandinista government in Nicaragua.

What these societies had in common was the task of altering the kind of social relations prevalent during the dictatorial period. (n19) One can do this, ideally, by changing the prescriptive 'top to

bottom' mode of communication relevant to the previous period, giving due recognition to 'popular culture/s' and rendering it/them the basis of one's learning, increasing the level of participation on the part of a previously subordinated people, allowing these people to reclaim a voice which previous governments had denied them and rendering the country as self-reliant as possible. All these are ideals that lend themselves to Freirean pedagogy. And accounts of the educational changes which took place in some of these countries indicate that the revolutionary governments tried hard to realise such ideals (cf. Arnove, 1986; Carnoy and Torres, 1987; Torres, R. M., 1986a; Freire, 1978, 1981). All this shows that, under such conditions, the possibilities for effectively engaging Freire's transformative pedagogy are great. It can be argued that the spirit prevailing in such a context would be one which is ripe for such practices. I suspect that popular educators, activists and people who have 'liberation' at heart and who operate in western society acknowledge this and I would argue that this might be one of the reasons why so many of them converged, as 'internationalists', on Nicaragua after 1979. Countries like post-1979 Nicaragua would appear in the eyes of many to provide the right context for transformation.

All the achievements attributed to some of the revolutionary governments in question are to be seen as part of what Freire regards as an ongoing process of 'cultural revolution', that is to say, the creation of a new kind of hegemony entailing new social relations. The struggle remains an ongoing one and I would submit that the forces favouring processes of domestication remain. There are visible forces in the form of outside pressure, partly in reaction to the threat to the existing overall hegemony which a revolution such as those in Nicaragua, Cuba or Grenada represents. Embargos, planned invasions, actual invasions (e.g. Grenada) and the funding, for civil war purposes, of counter-revolutionaries (e.g. the Contras) all signify that external threats to the processes of liberation, taking place within post-revolution societies, remain. As such, one may argue that these situations place limits on the extent to which Freirean pedagogy can be successfully carried out within these contexts. They constitute attempts at sabotaging any form of development taking place in these countries, including educational development. An invasion such as that which took place in Grenada creates a situation not unlike those which occurred in Brazil in 1964 and Chile in 1973. A long drawn out war, such as the 'Contra War,' also places material constraints on the successful implementation of popular education programmes, generating fear within popular education circles of the kind that must have been experienced, in clandestine settings, in pre-revolution societies. Educators, including popular educators, have been made the target of Contra attacks in Nicaragua, with several casualties having been recorded among them (Arnove, 1986: 54; Carnoy and Torres, 1987: 31; Horton and Freire, 1990: 224).

These external factors no doubt disrupt the effective implementation of transformative popular education practices, of the kind inspired by Freire, in a post-revolution context. One may argue, however, that such a situation can ironically lead to an increase in exposure to such potentially liberatory practices. In Nicaragua, for instance, schools were also made the target of Contra attacks. As a result, popular education proved to be a viable alternative to schooling in view of its greater flexibility in the use and shifting of premises (Carnoy and Torres, 1987). Can one speak, here, of a situation in which the pressure towards subjugation and domestication can lead people on to greater exposure to potentially liberatory practices?

However, the extent to which a sense of liberation really takes place within popular education circles in post-revolution situations needs to be questioned. It has often been argued that one of the problems with revolutionary governments, in the implementation of popular education programmes, can be their over-zealousness.([n20](#)) I would say that this was very much the case with the Sandinista government in Nicaragua. In order to maintain the revolutionary momentum and to legitimise itself in the eyes of a people who had been denied educational possibilities in the pre-revolution period, the Sandinista government carried out a mass literacy campaign in three months. Judging from the literature (Arnové, 1986; Carnoy and Torres, 1987), I would submit that this campaign was successful as a revolutionary strategy in many respects: bringing urban and rural dwellers together in a spirit of 'national-popular' unity, deprofessionalising knowledge, fostering a greater spirit of popular participation, reducing the illiteracy rate and mobilising mass organisations. And I would argue that these are all in keeping with liberatory, transformative ideals. So too was the attempt to use a Freire-inspired pedagogy throughout the campaign and its sequel, the popular basic education programme. Yet I would also argue that it is in using Freire's pedagogy under such circumstances that the shift from liberation to domestication can occur.

Freire's pedagogy was applied within the context of a programme, the large scale of which necessitated the involvement, as facilitators, of young students and the newly literate. One wonders how well equipped were these people to engage in Freire-inspired pedagogy (Mayo, 1991a). Accounts of the campaign indicate that they were not (Arnové, 1986: 55, Carnoy and Torres, 1987: 31; Lind and Johnson, 1986: 62). It is more likely that they engaged in 'Banking Education' (Arnové, 1986: 58), considering also that they were under the added burden of having to complete the programme in three months. Quite significant, in this respect, are a series of related statements by Fernando Cardenal, Minister of Education in the Sandinista government and Coordinator of the Literacy Crusade. C. A. Torres (1991), citing R. M. Torres (1986b), refers to Cardenal as having made a statement, in 1985, to the effect that, since the Revolution, Nicaraguan education has been 'Banking Education'.

In a recent visit to Toronto, in the aftermath to UNO's electoral victory, Cardenal was reported, in ICAE News, as having made a similar statement, this time to the effect that it is only now that Nicaragua is beginning to break away from 'Banking Education' (ICAE, 1990: 5). This has been interpreted by a community health work organiser to mean that the excessive dependence which the people had on the Sandinistas constantly led them to expect directives from above.([n21](#)) Now that the Sandinistas are in opposition, they can engage in greater grassroots level work. This work necessitates the kind of 'bottom up' communicative approach which Freire advocates and which the Sandinista Government could not promote successfully as a result of its being in the contradictory position of seeking to promote participatory democratic relations from above. This situation may go some way towards showing that there are limits to the successful implementation of Freirean pedagogy even within a post-revolution context. Domesticating practices can gain the upperhand over liberating ones even in such a situation.

Post-revolution societies also face the contradictory situation of, on the one hand, trying to change social relations through popular education and, on the other, needing to produce the qualified personnel necessary to enable the country to survive economically in a competitive world. Two educational systems would develop, under such circumstances, one of which would

be governed by technocratic rationality and therefore be likely to encourage domesticating pedagogical practices, and the other which, in theory at least, would be more congenial to a transformative and liberating pedagogy. Carnoy and Torres (1987) argue that this was very much the case with the formal and non-formal education systems in Nicaragua. The tension between liberation and domestication in post-revolution societies can be reflected in the co-existence of these two systems. There will be moments when the demands of one will take precedence over the demands of the other

There could be moments when the harmony between 'cultural revolution' and the revolutionary regime would not be a smooth one. The notion that Freire's pedagogy works best in a post-revolution period becomes even more problematic if one considers the case of Portugal. Following the so called 'revolution of the carnations' or 'silent coup', Portugal witnessed a profusion of popular education activities (Melo, 1985). The cultural and political climate which prevailed in the aftermath of the revolution was one which should easily have lent itself to the use of Freirean pedagogy, given the strong cultural and political ties that exist between the Portuguese and Brazilian contexts (Mayo, 1991a). The programmes were to promote what the people 'had in abundance . . . popular culture, the people's own store of knowledge . . . in short, their own living culture' (Melo, 1985: 42, 43).

There is an obvious connection between the foregoing ideals and the basic tenets of Freirean pedagogy. This notwithstanding, the national director of the Freire-inspired government sponsored programme in Portugal was, according to Lind and Johnston (1986: 61), suspended because of the programme's 'political implications of action or potential action against the government.' In sponsoring Freire-inspired programmes, therefore, the state would be furnishing the people with a weapon that can eventually be wielded against itself (Mayo, 1991a). The tendency towards domestication can therefore be found also in post revolutionary societies.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have looked at various contexts and situations to examine the limits they impose on and the possibilities they offer for Freire-inspired transformative action. Each situation is characterised by enough complexity to prevent me from providing a straight answer to the question I posed at the outset, namely: to what extent and under what circumstances can Freire's pedagogical ideas be successful in contributing to a process of social transformation? Having said this, there is enough evidence in this paper to suggest that Freirean pedagogy is more likely to prove effective within the context of a social movement, or an alliance of movements, than in isolation. Nevertheless, there are contradictions in each situation to suggest that the tension between liberation and domestication is ever present. In situations governed by extreme repression there could be spaces which allow for resistance and Freirean pedagogy can occupy such spaces, therefore countering the prevailing domesticating practices with liberatory forms of resistance. At the other end, that is to say, in post-revolution societies seeking to promote democratic social relations to counter years of dictatorship, Freirean pedagogy, though often unbridled, can suffer as a result of the contradictions that emerge from the revolutionary situation itself. In societies that lie somewhere in between, especially those characterised by liberal bourgeois democracies, Freirean pedagogy suffers fluctuating fortunes, as a result of the struggle

for democratic spaces carried out by movements and the individuals or organisations that they sustain.

The perpetual tension between domestication and liberation in all contexts renders the struggle for transformation an ongoing process. One of the finest exemplars of a person engaged in an ongoing relentless struggle for transformation is Paulo Freire himself. Well into retirement age, Freire placed his health and reputation on the line by taking up the daunting task of liberalising public and adult education in one of the largest cities in the world where the forces of domestication (dependency, corruption, a powerful military, bureaucracy) strongly make their presence felt.

Notes and References

(n1) I am indebted to Carmel Borg and Angela Miles for responding to an earlier draft of the text.

(n2) The reference is here being made to Eugene Ionesco's play Rhinoceros.

(n3) In so doing, Freire allows the educator both authority and a certain directiveness (Shor and Freire, 1987: 103; Horton and Freire, 1990: 181). He stresses, however, that this authority should not degenerate into authoritarianism.

(n4) Cf. Freire in Bruss and Macedo, 1985:9.

(n5) In Freire (1978) this becomes the world of work.

(n6) The Contras, in Nicaragua, believed by many to include remnants of Somoza's hated La Guardia Nacional, made popular educators the target of their attacks. I would argue that they retained the attitudes shown towards popular educators during the time of the Dictatorship.

(n7) I would argue that, in a predominantly Catholic region, in which even the most repressive of regimes seek to legitimise themselves by appealing to religion, the Church can serve as a protective 'umbrella' movement for people working in the interest of social transformation. Nevertheless, the risk of reprisals against people connected with the Church cannot be minimised as may be evidenced from such incidents as the murder, in 1968, of a priest working in Recife at the time of the dictatorship and the slaying, in El Salvador, of Archbishop Oscar Romero in 1980, six Jesuits and two women, living/working on a Catholic university campus, in 1989, and a host of other religious people.

(n8) Cf. Address to the 1991 AERA Conference, on cassette, Education Policy and Social Change in Brazil: The Work of Paulo Freire as Secretary of Education in Sao Paulo, Teach'em inc., Chicago.

(n9) In a recent interview, Freire indicates that this is still very much the case in Sao Paulo, where he has recently been Education Secretary. He indicates that most of the illiterates are emigrants from the north east who are underemployed and who perform unskilled labour,

working, for example, as auxiliary workers in the area of civil construction (Freire, in Viezzer, 1990: 6).

[\(n10\)](#) *I am indebted to Jennifer Camilleri for drawing my attention to this aspect of Freire's work and for sharing her views on the matter with me.*

[\(n11\)](#) *Freire did voice his concerns about the patriarchal nature of his earlier writings in responses to a question posed to him at the 1991 AERA Conference. See Conference cassette referred to above.*

[\(n12\)](#) *I have argued, in a review of *Learning to Question* (Mayo, 1991 b), that such a conversational book would go some way towards exploring the relevance of Freire's ideas to the issues of race and gender with which two of the most powerful social movements in the west, and throughout the world in general, are concerned.*

[\(n13\)](#) *The idea that facilitators can have a middle-class cultural capital which is at odds with that of the learners is mentioned in Torres, 1990: 280.*

[\(n14\)](#) *See 1991 Aera Conference cassette recording, referred to above.*

[\(n15\)](#) *Cf. Weiler (1991) for a discussion on differences between facilitators and learners.*

[\(n16\)](#) *It would be pertinent to remark here that part of capitalism's dynamism is its ability to co-opt. Paulo Freire's ideas have, on several occasions, been adopted in contexts serving the interests of capitalism and ruling elites (Kidd & Kumar, 1981). Organisations and regimes have appropriated the technical aspects of his method, doing away with its political dimension. The same regime which banned him from Brazil for sixteen years claimed to have used his methods in the government sponsored MOBREAL campaign (Bhola, 1984: 130).*

[\(n17\)](#) *Taped interview with Maria Zuniga from CISAS (Centre for Information and Advisory Services in Health), Managua. I take 'institutionalise' to mean 'bureaucratise' in this particular instance.*

[\(n18\)](#) *This idea arose out of my experience as Malta's representative on the Council of Europe project 'adult Education and Social Change'. I gathered, from study visits related to the project, that several organisations obtain EC funds this way.*

[\(n19\)](#) *I am here also referring to dictatorships in colonial centres which had a direct bearing on quality of life in places like Guinea Bissau, Cape Verde and Sao Tome' e Principe, to name but three former Portuguese colonies.*

[\(n20\)](#) *I gathered this point from a talk delivered by Pablo Latapi' in the Department of Educational Foundations, The University of Alberta, Edmonton, in 1987.*

[\(n21\)](#) *Taped interview with Maria Zuniga from CISAS, Managua.*

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