

CHILEAN INFLUENCE IN FREIRE'S THOUGHT INFLUÊNCIA CHILENA NO PENSAMENTO DE FREIRE

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Resumo:

Os anos passados no Chile por Paulo Freire são anos importantes tanto para o país quanto para o pedagogo brasileiro. Sua influência nas políticas e práticas educacionais é indiscutível. Neste artigo, no entanto, analisamos como o período no Chile mudou as ideias pedagógicas de Freire. Em particular, o contexto chileno e as pessoas que ele conheceu trouxeram uma mudança significativa na estrutura conceitual e nas ferramentas analíticas de Freire, pelo menos no que diz respeito a dois pontos-chave interligados: o marxismo heterodoxo e a ideia de alfabetização. A influência marxista se desenvolve principalmente como humanismo marxista e, portanto, envolve a premissa antropológica da pedagogia freiriana; nesta reflexão a noção de práxis assume um caráter central. A ideia de alfabetização, conforme definida no período chileno, está na vanguarda do debate internacional sobre a educação de adultos.

Palavras-chave: Paulo Freire; o marxismo de Freire; Freire no Chile

Abstract:

The years Paulo Freire spent in Chile were important for both the country and for Brazilian pedagogists; his influence on educational policies and practices is indubitable. In this article, however, I analyze the ways in which his time in Chile changed Freire's pedagogical ideas. Specifically, the Chilean context and the people he met there brought about a significant change in his conceptual framework and analytical tools, at least regarding two interlinked key points: heterodox Marxism and the idea of literacy. Marxist influence develops mainly as Marxist humanism and therefore involves the anthropological premise of Freirean pedagogy; in this reflection, the notion of praxis assumes a central role. The idea of literacy, as defined in the Chilean period, is at the forefront of the international debate on adult education.

Keywords: Paulo Freire; Freire's Marxism; Freire in Chile

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FREIRE IN CHILE

Although Paulo Freire lived in Chile for fewer than five years—from November 1964 to April 1969—the influence he exerted in this country was not insignificant (PINTO, 2004). His seminal book, *Education, the Practice of Freedom*, became an essential reference and provided a pedagogical framework for educational reforms carried out during that period; his “psychosocial method” was, in fact, officially adopted by the government Chilean (WILLIAMSON, 2006). Furthermore, Freire was the protagonist in conversations and debates with intellectuals and militant leftists involved in land reform and literacy programs for young people and adults; he therefore contributed to the training of numerous intellectuals and youth workers active in Chile in that time and in the years that immediately followed.

Finally, his role in the growing mobilization process and the organization and accumulation of Chilean workers' groups, which led to the victory of the *Unidade Popular* (UP) political alliance in 1970, cannot be underestimated. The electoral success of the UP and the historic conquest of the Latin American working class did not sprout like a mushroom from the Chilean soil, but was prepared by a long reformist season that culminated with the Chilean Freire period (PALMADA LIU, 2014, p. 53). The adult literacy program that emerged from this movement was an essential component of Christian-democratic efforts to promote land reform and include peasants in the Chilean political system, and Freire has made a decisive contribution in this direction (KIRKENDALL, 2010). When reviewing Chilean history at this time, one cannot fail to recognize Freire's contribution to the educational transformations carried out in Chile since the 1960s (AUSTIN, 2003).

His time in Chile, however, also played a significant role in the development of his pedagogical thinking (AUSTIN, 1995; CARVALHO, 2009; GAJARDO, 2019; HOLST, 2006; PEREIRA PAIVA, 1980). Freire discovered a dynamic and exuberant social and intellectual climate in this country that challenged some of his ideas and helped him to become familiar with new theoretical references, to re-examine and reformulate his educational theories, and to connect those theories to concrete practices and different social contexts. Moreover, the high level of political mobilization that was an integral part of Chilean society in the mid-1960s also helped Freire to link his pedagogical theories to debates on social reproduction and social change. In this way, his Chilean experience was fundamental to his consolidation and reformulation of the pedagogical-political proposals that he had begun to develop in northeastern Brazil in the early 1960s and to the radicalization of his ideas (CABALUZ, AREYUNA-IBARRA, 2020; GADOTTI, 1994; HOLST, 2006; TORRES, 1998).

This influence brought about a significant change in Freire's conceptual framework and analytical tools, as evidenced by the distinct contrast between *Education as a Practice of Freedom* and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The former, which was written in the mid-1960s, was largely influenced by his Brazilian experience and was informed by a liberal development perspective; the latter, which was written in the late 1960s, was deeply influenced by the Chilean context and was largely rooted in Marxist humanism (ELIAS, 1994; GAJARDO, 2016; HOLST, 2006, ROBERTS, 2000).

In this paper I argue that the Chilean period had a decisive effect on at least two aspects of Freire's pedagogical elaboration: the influence of Marxism and Freire's conception of literacy.

Before delving into these two aspects, however, details about the Chilean society he encountered may prove to be useful.

CHILE MEETS BY FREIRE

The 1964 coup against the João Goulart government in Brazil led to a military dictatorship that lasted for more than twenty years, until 1985. Immediately after this coup, Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire was imprisoned for 75 days, then exiled. After a brief stay in the Bolivian city of La Paz, Freire was invited to Chile by Eduardo Frei Montalva's Christian Democratic government; he arrived in November 1964. His fame regarding the effective literacy method he developed in Brazil and the trust of the Catholic Church and the Bishops' Conference in it preceded him (RODRÍGUES BRANDÃO, 2009).

The Frei government was the result of a gradual and progressive accumulation of forces and the mobilization, organization, and awareness of citizens that was carried out by various critical and revolutionary Chilean forces: *Partidos Socialista y Comunista*, *Central Única de Trabajadores* (CUT), *Movimiento de Acción Popular y Unitaria de Obreros y Campesinos* (MAPU), *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria* (MIR), workers "and miners" unions, and left-wing Catholic groups, among others (MOULIAN, 2014; VALENZUELA, 2014).

The Cuban Revolution inspired leftist movements across Latin America, and Frei's reformism was seen as an alternative to a more radical transformation and received substantial financial support from the United States. At the heart of his programs there was agrarian reform based on agricultural cooperatives and popular promotions and the creation of intermediate organizations to increase social participation at the local level, such as neighborhood councils (*juntas de vecinos*) and centers for mothers (*centros de madres*). The challenge of increasing the productivity of the countryside required dismantling large estates through land redistribution; the state incorporating necessary machinery into the production process (i.e., tractors, plows, etc.); socially reorganizing peasants according to different types of settlements and peasant unions; and investing in the technical, cultural, and educational aspects of new forms of production (BENGOA, 1987). Frei's government was a fundamental unifying element in the educational space (SILVA, PÉREZ, 2013). A central focus of Frei's educational process was the realization of the importance of one's political project and integrating the most significant "new Movements" to generate a social base that would support and legitimize the maintenance of political power (FAURÉ, 2017).

Freire immersed himself in this scene, which later emerged in his fundamental works and clarifications that eventually consolidated his pedagogy and political orientation. Working as an advisor at the Institute of Agricultural Development (*Instituto de Desarrollo Agropecuario*, INDAP), a consultant for UNESCO in tandem with the Agrarian Reform Training and Research Institute (*Instituto de Capacitación e Investigación en Reforma Agraria*, ICIRA), and an advisor to the Chilean Education Ministry (*Ministerio de Educación*), Freire actively participated in public debates, pedagogical practices, and experiences related to the Agrarian Reform program and adult literacy. By collaborating with these institutions, he was able to be in close contact and work with settlements, trade unions, and peasant organizations, which is how he learned of the illiteracy problem in rural areas and experienced the problems related to illiteracy and the low schooling rates of Chile's adult population.

When Freire settles in Chile at the end of 1964, two important economic and social transformational processes were already underway: land reform and comprehensive socio-educational reform that included changes to school curricula and program content, literacy programs, and adult education. He understood that these two processes needed to go hand in hand; indeed, it was clearly a question of an old process: “All this requires that the action aimed at increasing production in the process of agrarian reform be eminently cultural. That is to say that the settlement, as a unit of production, must also be a cultural unit or a cultural action. Of cultural action, through an educational task of sensitization, which poses to the peasant, as a problem, as it was in the landowner structure of silence, and as it now begins to be, in the structure of the settlement” (FREIRE, 1968a, p. 6). Freire’s entrance into this context accelerated these ongoing trends.

CHILEAN-ERA WRITINGS

Paulo Freire lived in Chile from November 1964 to April 1969, and in those five years, he wrote and published books, articles, reports and texts that influenced the history of pedagogy. While some of these works are well known to the public, others were not widespread, even among scholars of pedagogical issues. The following bibliographic corpus includes numerous publications of working materials for the institutions for which he worked (GAJARDO, 2019, pp. 98–100). Obviously, the main ones, commonly remembered because they are also more widespread internationally, are the books that have marked his worldwide success:

- The Spanish version of *Educação Como Prática da Liberdade* (Education, the Practice of Freedom) (FREIRE, 1967)
- Texts published between 1968 and 1969 by *Icira*, which were subsequently published under the title *Sobre la Acción Cultural*, thanks to the editorial work of Marcela Gajardo (FREIRE, 1971a)
- *¿Extensión o Comunicación?: Hacia una Asistencia Técnica Funcional* (Extension or Communication), which was published in 1968 by *Icira* (FREIRE, 1968b)
- *Pedagogía del Oprimido* (Pedagogy of the Oppressed), which was written in 1968 and initially published in English in 1970 by Herder and Herder and in Spanish by *Tierra Nueva* soon thereafter (FREIRE, 1970).

CHILEAN INFLUENCE

Based on this bibliographic corpus, I would like to expand upon two theoretical influences that emerged in his texts while he lived in Chile. It is well known that Freire’s references in those years became richer; stemming from the phenomenology, existentialism, and personalism that characterized his studies in Brazil, he built a growing bibliography of Marxist references. It can be hypothesized that Freirean political–pedagogical thought, which is based on lived experiences, was nourished by the Chilean political radicalization he experienced; in theoretical terms, this resulted in an increasing tendency to incorporate Marxist authors and approaches into his work.

This decisive Chilean influence also explains the emergence of a different understanding of adult literacy—specifically, a cultural literacy.

HETERODOX MARXISM

His “Brazilian period” revealed the effect that experiencing a populist government had on his thinking. The theoretical concepts, although clearly and solidly founded on epistemological and philosophical grounds, were somewhat ambiguous when considered from a strictly sociological perspective (NOVOA TORRES, 1981, p. 15). These complex references increased during his “Chilean period,” with a deeper understanding of Marxist literature as it appears in textual citations, conceptual adoptions, and bibliographic indications. In theoretical terms, the political radicalization processes that characterized Chile in the 1960s were substantiated by reading authors associated with heterodox and critical Marxism.

Texts produced in Chile include important references to authors associated with existentialism, personalism, and phenomenology, such as Karl Jasper, Edmund Husserl, Emmanuel Mounier, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Merleau Ponty. One of the main arguments developed as a result of this influence is that of an anthropological–foundational nature that underlies the unfinished character and historicity of a human being; this allowed Freire to emphasize the relevance of transforming the world and social relations, which were shown to be a possibility of humanization. In turn, the Brazilian pedagogical approach to the concept of culture permanently alludes to notions of existential scenarios and experiences that contain clear references to these philosophical currents. Reflections on the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity and between consciousness and the world were also largely inspired by existentialism and phenomenology (ANDREOLA, 2008). While the concepts of structure and superstructure are undoubtedly due to Marxism, and practice became the central tenet for the construction of Freirean pedagogical proposals, these influences were critically incorporated to create an original synthesis. In addition, Freire integrated several specific theoretical influences of a Marxist nature into his works during his Chilean period (CABALUZ, AREYUNA-IBARRA, 2020).

Freire’s thinking was heavily influenced by exponents of the Frankfurt School, in particular Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse. Frommian texts—specifically *The Fear of Freedom* (FROMM, 1960), *Marx’s Concept of Man* (1961), and *The Heart of Man* (1964)—were in line with Marxist humanism and deepened Freire’s understanding of reification of the human being and the problem of human alienation (FREIRE, 1967; 1970); and Freire referred to Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man* (1954) and *Eros and Civilization* (1966) when analyzing the forms of social control deployed by oppressors. These authors also influenced the notions of “cultural invasion” and “cultural synthesis” that were elaborated in the adult literacy process and within the cultural action paradigm as socio-educational action (FREIRE, 1970; 1971a). Marcuse and Fromm derived a reduced version of “concrete humanism” after reading Marx’s *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Marcuse’s analysis of the negative reason in industrialized societies and his proposed massification phenomenon were transposed by Freire; as well as Fromm’s arguments related to reification and psychological freedom, which the Brazilian educator synthesized in his arguments about democracy as a political context.

Another Marxist influence relied on the recovery of critical Marxists, such as György Lukács (1960), who referenced the concept of conscientization (*conscientização*), which Freire had borrowed from intellectuals at the *Instituto Superior de Estudos Brasileiros* (ISEB), particularly Álvaro Vieira Pinto and Alberto Guerreiro Ramos (CRUZ, 2013; FREIRE, 1971b, 1972). Sartre undoubtedly influenced Freire's references to consciousness in itself and consciousness for itself, but one cannot ignore Lukács's theory of the dialectic between class in itself and class for itself (FREIRE, 1970). Freire's concept of conscientization in recent years, therefore, became more precise due to the Lukács's contributions of these Marxist influences. Alongside the Hungarian Lukács, Freire read the Mexican edition of Karel Kosík's *Dialectics of the Concrete*, which included an introduction by Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, in 1967, and this text proved to be a significant influence in this area (KOSÍK, 1967).

During this time, the importance of "praxis," which is fundamental anthropological datum from which educational practices can be elaborated, was emerging (FREIRE, 1970; 1971a). Freire delved into Gajo Petrovic, Lucien Goldmann, and Louis Althusser when he sought to outline a critical perspective towards Marxism, rather than passively accepting Marx's categories. With regard to the concept of praxis, Freire's Chilean period represented his encounter with another Marxist thinker, Antonio Gramsci, thanks to Marcela Gajardo, who introduced Freire to the Gramsci's 1961 anthology *Literature and National Life* (MAYO, 1999; MAYO, 2013; RIGAL, 2011). Studying Sánchez Vázquez's *Philosophy de la Praxis* (1967) led Freire into a deeper intellectual relationship with the philosophical foundations of praxis (CARVALHO, PIO, 2017). Moreover, his in-depth study of praxis allowed him to explain the concept in such a way that the unitary relationship between theory and practice that characterizes praxis is understood. Gramsci, who was an attentive reader of Antonio Labriola, interpreted Marx's concept of human praxis to not only include work, but also activities that are objectified in social relations, institutions, needs, science, and art (BADALONI, 1987; LOSURDO, 1990). Freire crafted his theory on pedagogical consequences from these philosophical–anthropological presuppositions.

In addition to these authors, four international political referents of Marxism influenced Freire's emerging philosophy: Ernesto "Che" Guevara and Fidel Castro in Latin America; Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov—better known by his alias, Lenin—in the Soviet Union; and Mao Tse-tung in China. The main theme he drew from these leaders was revolutionary praxis. When he referenced the Cuban revolution protagonists in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) to exemplify the centrality of love in revolutionary practice, the introjection of the oppressor into the oppressed classes, and the problem of dialogue between the revolutionary leadership and the people, he effectively related this theme to the social participation of the subordinate strata. Referencing the Bolshevik leader in this same work allowed Freire to problematize the positions of those who sanction distances between theory and practice in revolutionary processes; in doing so, Freire inserted himself into his critique of verbalism and activism. While further expounding upon this theme, his inclusion of Chinese cultural revolution protagonist and ideas from *The United Front in Cultural Work*—particularly Mao's theory of the dialogic construction of educational program content—illustrated the verticalism of the revolutionary left that seeks to hegemonize and lead the people (FREIRE, 1970).

Importantly, Karl Marx himself inspired Freire's work. This influence was explicitly shown when Freire referenced the third thesis in *Theses on Feuerbach* to criticize uncritical

objectivism and implicitly criticize the dogmatic, mechanistic, and economic aspects of Marxism (FREIRE, 1968b). Freire used this reflection to develop the complex understanding of the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970); specifically, this relationship provides a way to find praxis that allows mere activism and simple intellectualism to be overcome (FREIRE, 1970, p. 51). In this same work, Freire recalled Marx's anthropological reflections when he was young, which he described in his *Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, and Freire strengthens these anthropological premises to serve as the foundation of pedagogy (FREIRE, 1970, p. 92).

Finally, the "Chilean" Freire's knowledge of Marxism was linked to the early works of the philosopher of Trier, twentieth-century interpretations of his work, and humanistic and heterodox interpretations of Marxism.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE INTERNATIONAL ADULT-EDUCATION DEBATE

As was previously mentioned, Freire travelled to Chile because he was invited to collaborate with literacy projects related to land reform and policies promoted by international agencies to determine development paths for the continuing advancement of communism. Because functional adult literacy contributed to job development and agrarian reforms in Latin America, it was viewed as an economist educational policy. This new concept was seen as an improvement over the traditional literacy models that had been promoted since the 1940s in which learning the rudiments of reading, writing, and calculating was considered to be a sufficient level of literacy; notably, the traditional literacy model was proven to be too ineffective for subjects wishing to participate in the production model.

At the Second World Conference on Adult Education, which was held in 1960, precise guidelines were delineated that underscored the urgency of implementing plans to eliminate illiteracy and facilitated processes in which the relationship between education and work could contribute to an increased productive factor. This was the same theme for the 1962 Punta del Este Conference in Uruguay and at the 1962 Latin American Conference on Education and Economic Development in Chile; in each of these conferences, literacy was portrayed as an integral, gradual process that enables work (SORIA, 1968). The progressive wing of the Christian Democratic party believed that literacy had the potential to increase the peasants' consciousness levels, which was viewed as a fundamental step in the transition from large estates to small settlements; in this regard, Freire's proposed cultural action was perfectly coherent. The young members of the Christian Democrat Party were critical of capitalism and the underlying individualistic logic; they called for a government that was able to represent the needs of the poorest citizens and promote a "truly human society" (KIRKENDALL, 2005, p. 708).

Consistent with this approach, the functional imprint of the early literacy campaigns was abandoned. Freire's idea that education should accompany the processes of change and social transformation of the subjects, which clashed with the functionalist proposals which only required poor peasants to learn how to read and write enough to pay for goods, manage settlements, and increase production became widespread (FREIRE, 1968b). Freire insisted that education as a cultural action must allow impoverished peasants to become aware of their own reality and to establish a link between their mastery of language and their everyday experiences (BENGOA,

1987). He paid a heavy price in Chile for his staunch commitment to these educational and political aims; he was accused of being a Marxist whose pedagogical ideas promoted a class struggle in the peasant and popular sectors, which resulted in the non-renewal of his employment contract and his consequent decision to leave Chile.

Freire's theoretical perspective was similar to the concept of cultural literacy, so it is not a coincidence that he has historically been seen as a protagonist in the debate that eventually moved the pedagogical reflection on adult education out of the functional literacy paradigm and toward the ideal of cultural literacy. By introducing themselves fully in the debate throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s has analyzed his rationale for and methods of continuing education, which he believed was associated with the overall growth of a person, thereby rejecting the notion that literacy should only be utilized as a tool for employment or economic growth. This debate, which began at the 1949 Elsinör Conference and continued to the Tokyo Conference and was featured in the 1972 *Fauré Report*, shifted the focus away from functional literacy and toward cultural literacy. Freire's thoughts on this subject influenced and provided necessary stimuli, as evidenced by the prominence of his preparatory works and documents included in the Fauré report (AUERHAN, BAZENNERYE, BERTAUX, 1975; FAURÉ et al., 1972; SCHUGURENSKY, 2011).

CONCLUSION

The political radicalization process that Chile experienced in the early 1960s proved to be fertile ground for the inception of Freire's educational concepts, which were centered around awareness, dialogue, and liberation. The politicization process that transformed Chilean society during that time was marked by debates on agrarian reform, nationalizing strategic natural resources, strengthening national sovereignty by removing power from the imperialist US forces, proposals and practices that supported an increase in popular power, and the necessity of promoting popular literacy processes to objectively improve conditions in the marginalized social sectors and thereby favor subjective conditions to promote revolutionary processes. This interplay and exchange of ideas and solutions had an indisputable effect on Paulo Freire's work; on numerous occasions, in fact, the renowned Brazilian pedagogist often credited the work he completed while living in Chile for the maturation of his liberation pedagogy (FREIRE, 2004).

During the five years he lived in Chile, his arguments were radicalized and he was inspired by a number of Marxist references that were eventually incorporated into his work. Freire's preferred iteration of Marxism was far removed from the orthodoxy, economism, and mechanism favored in Soviet social circles and cited in official documents. Consequently, his bibliographic references continually expanded during this period, which allowed for a complex and well-articulated theoretical framework, which was simultaneously eclectic and original.

Building upon the foundation of this theoretical trend and the consequences of his educational experiences and implemented programs in Chile, Freire refined his concept of literacy in later years and fully inserted himself into the international debate on adult education. His insistence on recognizing the cultural dimension of literacy unquestionably contributed to criticism of the purely economic and functionalist aspects of literacy, which represents one fundamental

dialectic of education, but has created a dialectical tension that cannot be uncritically resolved in favor of either side of the debate.

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