# The Freirean critical perspective of education, power relations and a dialogue with Human Rights discourses

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**ABSTRACT**
This article aims to discuss Freirean critical perspective of education, power relations and liberation/freedom. Hence, it intends to describe Human Rights, especially focused on a counter-hegemonic discourse, and to connect with these initial delimitations. Based on the standpoint theory and situated knowledge in a dialogue with the Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire, 2014b; 2005), I propose to investigate the relations between knowledge and power relations. In addition, supported by the Freirean epistemologies, such as the Pedagogy of the Oppressed and the Pedagogy for Liberation (Freire, 2003), I try to analyze the liberatory education process and education as a political act. Notwithstanding, my main concern here is to what extent Freirean critical perspective of education understands power-relation structures and dialogues with Human Rights discourses. As I will argue, the world is not an abstract and closed narrative, and knowledge, which is not neutral also (as well as education), can be considered a powerful tool in the liberatory education process, since it questions dominant frameworks and reinforces struggles to confront (and dispute) power relations.

**Key words**: critical education; Freirean approach; Human Rights discourses; liberation/freedom; power relations; standpoint theory and situated knowledge.

## 1. Introduction

*"The act of dreaming is a political, ethical and esthetic act"*

(Freire, 2014a, p. 354, my translation).

As a researcher that focuses on Human Rights education (HRE), I am interested in a critical approach to education and also in investigating education as a political act. For this reason, my intention here is to reflect upon the extent that Freirean critical perspective of education understands power-relation structures and dialogues with Human Rights discourses. Based on the standpoint theory and situated knowledge, which emphasizes counter-narratives, especially of oppressed groups, I will argue about the importance of unveiling the concrete world in order to highlight the need to problematize power relations from bellow.

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Towards this end, my three objectives here are: 1. To describe Human Rights and its discourses (hegemonic and counter-hegemonic); 2. To explore a dialogue with standpoint theory and situated knowledge with the Pedagogy of the Oppressed and to investigate relations between knowledge and power relations; and 3. To analyze the Freirean critical perspective of education and its connections with power relations and liberation/freedom.

This article has a qualitative research approach and its research specifications are descriptive, exploratory and explanatory. The documentation used is indirect, through bibliographic research, based on secondary sources. Furthermore, I will present my argumentation in five parts: first, introduction; second to fourth, the development of my three main topics; and fifth, final considerations.

## 2. A critical look at the Human Rights discourse (hegemonic and counter-hegemonic) and power relations

Initially, to describe Human Rights and its discourses, Campbell (2006, p. 39) argues: "Human rights may be a manifestation of what is referred to as "rights-based" approaches to politics in which the vital interest of the individuals are taken to be the fundamental basis for all political decisions." He concludes, with a more inter-relational approach; "Rights are social constructs as diverse and complex as the societies of which they are part of" (Campbell, 2006, pp. 41-42).

This legalist, formal and "universal expression" perspective of rights, based on international treaties, bill of rights mechanisms or national regulations, conceals a moral essence. In my view, this approach is the standard (and hegemonic) Human Rights discourse – which is embedded in our current contemporary societies – endorsing a de-politicized and indisputable approach.

Hegemonic rights narrative is so popular because it is: a language of priority (of some above others); a language of individualism (affirming dignity, founded by a moral thesis, of every human life); a language of remedies (against abuses); a decisive discourse (promotes simple and clear answers); a security discourse (others cannot take away); and a universal discourse (based on the general rather than a particular person)

(Campbell, 2006, pp. 3-4). This reinforces, in my perspective, the quotes on the "innocence", neutrality and universality of Human Rights hegemonic discourse and narratives.

However, the hegemonic Human Rights discourse has very sharp critiques, such as: its western heritage – considered a "parochial culture that is ill-suited to the needs and aspirations of the majority of the world's population" (Campbell, 2006, p. 10); its abstraction – "rights, particularly when expressed in abstract terms . . . [have] background ideologies that come into play when we seek to give them more concrete expression" (Campbell, 2006, p. 78); and its deep root in the egoism, legalism, dogmatism and elitism of rights (Campbell, 2006, p. 34).

Thus, on the one hand, the consolidation of Human Rights discourse is underpinned by documents which came from the medieval period, binding natural rights and law in a dogmatic and theological approach, the Enlightenment – especially supported by a set of "materials" (written) declarations, for instance the United States Declaration of Independence, 1776, and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man, 1789 (Campbell, 2006, pp. 5-7) – and more currently reinforced by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948.

On the other hand, under a critical perspective (counter-hegemonic), the moral Christian theology discourse, which spread "universal equality" under the motto, "All men are equally part of spiritual humanity" (Douzinas, 2007, p. 52), it is still used to sustain vast inequalities and oppressions. Currently, this is apparent under "the dominant ideology of liberalism" (Douzinas, 2007, p. 53) and the capitalist basis, which explains "natural social hierarchies" (Campbell, 2006, p. 8).

In this context, against the linear historical and western arguments of rights, it is essential "to problematize the human rights project" (Mutua, 2001, p. 236) in order to reach a more progressive approach, and to be aware of the limitations of moral and generalization/universalization of rights. As Douzinas (2007, pp. 51-52) argues, Humanity is a modern invention which served to spread a superior civilization. Hence, to clarify: "Humanity is not one, that human nature is not common to all, that nature cannot protect its own" (Douzinas, 2007, p. 68).

In order to unveil these masks, to perceive the fissures between the abstract man and the particular citizen, Douzinas suggests "to add flesh, blood and sex to the pale outline of the 'human'." (2007, p. 54) For instance:

> If we look at the empirical person who enjoys the "rights of man", he is and remains a "man all man" – a well-off citizen, a heterosexual, white, urban male. This "man of rights" condenses in his identity the abstract dignity of humanity and the real prerogatives of belonging to the community of the powerful (Douzinas, 2007, p. 53).

Thus, giving concreteness to the discourse (embodying the discourse), it helps to understand the power-relation structures, which underpin dominant frameworks, and to struggle against the hegemonic standard of Human Rights, carved from degrading bases, which reinforce hierarchy (based on the domination and oppression pattern). Under categorizations of value and behavior, captured by static representation poles, both Douzinas (2007, pp. 68-71) and Mutua (2001) criticize the division of "humanity" between: savages, victims and saviors (SVS).

For Mutua (2001, pp. 202-233), the SVS is based on a three-dimensional metaphor: first, there are the barbarians and cruel savages, who represent the "negation of humanity"; second, the sympathetic and innocent victims, violated by the savage, who needs to be rescued; third, the "angels" and missionary saviors who promise freedom – "from the tyrannies of the state, tradition, and culture . . . to create a better society based on particular values" (Mutua, 2001, p. 204).

Moreover, the hegemonic Eurocentric "Human Rights corpus" (Mutua, 2001, p. 204), is based on other SVS features, such as: first, "the historical continuum of the Eurocentric colonial project" (Mutua, 2001, p. 204) that alienates the struggles for dignity; second, the rejection of cross-contamination of cultures" (Mutua, 2001, p. 205), reinforcing the idea of "othering" and "inferior clones"; third, the language that seems "neutral and universal", but it is far from this; fourth, the "issue of power [which] is largely ignored" (Mutua, 2001, p. 207); and fifth, "the role of race in the development of the human narrative" (Mutua, 2001, p. 207).

In this scenario, supporting, also, the "humanitarian empire", as one of these three pillars, amid Democracy and Law (Douzinas, 2007, p. 83), Human Rights appear mixed with pity (morality) and superiority (hierarchy):

> The main strategy for spreading human rights and democracy is to narrate stories of pain, suffering and humiliation happening all over the world. This pedagogy of pity will put people "in the shoes of those despised and oppressed" and make them more empathetic and less prone to killing and torching others (Douzinas, 2007, p. 56, emphasis added).

In that sense, the pedagogy of pity is a powerful tool which reinforces domination – especially highlighting the "characteristics" of the oppressed group, as we will see later in Freire (2014b) – and strengthening the current power relations. It masks a concrete situation of structure inequalities and exploitation, concealed with homeopathic (and manipulated) doses of "empathy" and simplistic solutions, not challenging the dominant frameworks.

As Douzinas (2007, p. 82) problematizes: "Pity has replaced politics, morality reason, suffering progress. The universal exchange of suffering and market capitalism has finally become a global currency." Thus, in the capitalist market of rights, politics was removed from society and economy was depoliticized.

Comparing, these three authors highlight different narratives: first, the hegemonic discourse, closer to Campbell's (2006) initial claims, about the "innocent" vision of the State that has to support "the vital interest of the individuals into fundamental political decisions"; second, a counter-hegemonic underlined by Douzinas (2007, p. 101), when he criticizes that, in the capitalist society, the State is not politically dominant, on the contrary, the "real power lies" in the economy; and third, a more "balanced" view, argued by Mutua (2001, p. 203), and apprehended by the State as "a receptacle vessel", that can be the guarantor/subject of Human Rights, depending of the cultural[2] deviation, perpetuated by the dominant class or political interest that captures and shapes the State (Mutua, 2001, pp. 220-221).

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[2] Here culture is defined "as the dynamic totality of ideas, forms, practices, and structures of any given society, then human rights, as it is currently conceived, is an expression of a particular European-American culture" (Mutua, 2001, p. 221).

If, according to Douzinas (2007, p. 108), Human Rights can "reveal inequality and oppression and help challenge them", it is imperative to try to understand and problematize the operations of power. Mutua (2001), Douzinas (2007) and Freire (2014b) emphasized that it is fundamental to stop with the naive, innocent and incoherent discourses that end up turning into an anti-political one.

In that sense, in my perspective, it is essential to put into question (through problematization) the power-relation structures that precede the Human Rights discourse, and overlook implicitly or explicitly invisibilize inequalities. In addition, it is fundamental to put into concreteness and embody and intersectionalize the discourse in order to challenge and struggle against the current *status quo*, in a political understanding which can unveil people who claim rights.

In the next section, I will investigate the relations between knowledge and power relations using the standpoint theory in a dialogue with Pedagogy of the Oppressed.

## 3. Standpoint theory and situated knowledge: a possible dialogue with Pedagogy of the Oppressed

As a counter-hegemonic approach, "standpoint theory is a kind of organic epistemology methodology, philosophy of science and social theory that can arise whenever oppressed peoples gain public voice" (Harding, 2004, p. 3). Based in the 1970s and 1980s feminist movements, it was proposed as an explanatory, prescriptive and methodological theory of knowledge and power relations, which can convert "disadvantages" into possible "advantages" (Harding, 2004, pp. 1-8).

Hence, it has the premises which presume that knowledge is: socially and historically situated, especially by situated subjects, thus "social location systematically shapes and limits what we know" (Wylie, 2003, p. 31); not objective or neutral, "the definition of what is 'true' or 'false', 'objective' and 'subjective', more or less 'credible', is not neutral; on the contrary, it reflects and reproduces structural inequalities" (Pereira & Santos, 2014, p. 16, my translation); and political, "empowerment requires a distinctive kind of knowledge . . . and that kind of knowledge can emerge only through political processes" (Harding, 2004, p. 8).

Oliveira & Amâncio (2006, pp. 599-601) claim knowledge is an epistemic and systemic privilege derived from each person's condition. Thus, it is always "partial, contextualized and experimented", rather than a "final result" or an "universal law", and "the situated knowledge corresponds to an incorporation of the knowledge, starting from the option for the responsibility of its production and socio-historical location" (Oliveira & Amâncio, 2006, p. 601). Santos (2012, p. 248) argues also, "our multiple belongings [crossed by intersectionality of gender, class, race, etc.] impacts on our knowledge production".

Grounded by human experience through the empirical world (Harding, 2004, p. 7), Wyle (2003, p. 26) argues: "those who are subject to structures of domination that systematically marginalize and oppress them may, in fact, be epistemically privileged in some crucial respects." However, she also highlights two points: first, one "must not presuppose an essentialist definition of the social categories or collectivities in terms of which epistemically relevant standpoints are characterized"; and second, one "must not be aligned with a thesis of automatic epistemic privilege . . . [and] cannot claim that those who occupy particular standpoints (usually subdominant, oppressed, marginal standpoints) automatically know more, or know better, by virtue of their social, political location" (Wylie, 2003, p. 28).

Intending to deny an essentialist and automatic view of the standpoint theory, I agree with Harding's (2004, p. 8) perspective, which also relates to Freire's (2014b) ideas of knowledge as a process, when he discusses the standpoints as "an achievement, something for which oppressed groups must struggle" and a path to empower and appreciate oppressed groups and their experiences through the development of an "oppositional consciousness" (Harding, 2004, p. 2).

Harding (2004, p. 5) argues, "politics and culture often function as "prison-houses" of knowledge, as conventional wisdom points out". Through questioning the dominant frameworks – androcentric, economically advantaged, racist, Eurocentric and heterosexist ones (Harding, 2004, p. 5) – and their practices, the layers that conceal knowledge as an oppressive tool can be exposed. It is essential to endorse non-Western approaches (the "folk" knowledge embraced here, so labeled by the "scientific" knowledge) and oppressed groups as subjects rather than objects (Harding, 2004, pp. 3-4). Wylie (2003, p. 32) explains:

> When standpoint is taken into account, often the epistemic tables are turned. Those who are economically disposed, politically oppressed, socially marginalized and are therefore likely to be discredited as epistemic agents – e.g., as uneducated, uniformed, unreliable – may actually have a capacity . . . to know things that those occupying privileged positions typically do not know, or are invested in not knowing.

Whereas situated knowledge can provide critical insights about how "systems of social relations" operate in order to consider power structures and oppression, in different ways (Harding, 2004, p. 9) "each oppressed group can learn to identify its distinctive opportunities to turn an oppressive feature of the group's conditions into a source of critical insight about how the dominant society thinks and is structured" (Harding, 2004, p. 7). Thereby, the acknowledgement of a critical and political framework can contribute, through a proactive role, to dismantle prejudice and exclusion (Santos, 2012, p. 242).

In this context, the idea that critical knowledge can be a powerful tool for liberation, impacting social justice projects through a process of understanding different sorts of preconditions (Harding, 2004, p. 10), dialogues closely with the Freirean critical conscience (Freire, 2014b). This approach highlights education as a political act, reached by the problematization and the unveiling of the world, as a continuous and permanent process of *praxis* – "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (Freire, 2005, p. 51).

In that sense, I propose here a deep connection between standpoint and the critical pedagogy in Freirean's approach, perceived in the Pedagogy of the Oppressed and its initial claims for a pedagogy for liberation or freedom.

While opening our discussion on the Pedagogy of the Oppressed, it is important to rescue some elements. To Freire (2014b, pp. 56-64), there is a shared standard belief, based on a myth-creation, of the ignorance of the people and the incapability of the oppressed groups (that he called "the oppressed") to think for themselves or to be able to produce their own knowledge. In that sense, the oppressed are almost "objects" – as the standpoint theory asserts –, without purpose, because of their permanent process of "dehumanization".

Through this "subject objectification", where people become "things", there is no room for freedom. Therefore, if the oppressed humanization is a subversion, their freedom is too, so there is only space for constant control/domination, while the "more the oppressors control the oppressed the more they change them into apparently inanimate "things"."(Freire, 2005, p. 59) This pervasive counter-dialectic process sheds light on the maintenance of the hegemonic power-relation order, since "it would be naive to expect oppressor elites to denounce the myth which absolutizes the ignorance of the people" (Freire, 2005, p. 134).

Notwithstanding, a very problematic moment, pointed out by Freire (2014b), is when there is a permeability of these two puzzling fields (the oppressed *versus* the oppressor, and vice versa) because they can merge in two different ways: first, when the oppressors want to save the oppressed – as I discussed regarding the SVS hegemonic Human Rights discourse in Mutua (2001) and Douzinas (2007); and second, when the oppressed want to rise and become oppressors, having not yet "achieved" liberation – which occurs, in my view, step by step, through problematization, responsibility and permanent political struggle.

Thereby, the oppressors cannot really adhere to the oppressed struggle, since they have a conditioned background, rooted in the savior's cap, with the proposition to be the "converters" and save the victims, established by the "pedagogy of pity", because of biases, misconceptions, and hierarchization, rather than a "Pedagogy for Liberation":

> Our converts . . . truly desire to transform the unjust order . . . [and] because of their background they believe that they must be the executors of the transformation. They talk about the people, but they do not trust them (Freire, 2005, p. 60).

> . . . [the "savior" who] lacks this trust will fail to initiate (or will abandon) dialogue, reflection, and communication, and will fall into using slogans, communiques, monologues, and instructions. . . Political action on the side of the oppressed must be **pedagogical action** [**cultural action for freedom**[3]] in

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[3]  In the translation process (Portuguese to English), many words in the English version of the Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire, 2005) were changed, consequently, some meanings of the book content were also. For instance, this sentence that I emphasized in the quote, the right words are not "pedagogy action", but "cultural action to freedom".

the authentic sense of the word, and, therefore, action with the oppressed (Freire, 2005, p. 66, emphasis added).

Similarly, in another aspect, it is impossible for the oppressed to become the oppressors, even though their features are set on the duality, embedded by the alienation and the "contradictions of the concrete situations", which is based on an "individualistic" and false perspective of liberation. The oppressed will never truly be the oppressors. They can only switch between the victim and the savage positions, never the savior; or they can transform themselves, at the most, into "sub-oppressors".

According to Harding's (2004, p. 9) analysis: "different groups are oppressed in different ways, each has the possibility (not the certainty) of developing distinctive insights about systems of social relations in general in which their oppression is a feature." Through my own critique, I recognize that Freire's Marxist approach is, sometimes, overly embedded in the period of its first launch (1960s) and overloaded by the revolutionary concept of a structural new world change. However, I also consider that there are still some currently valid and relevant categorizations (therefore, simplifications) of how power structures and social relations operate.

Picking up on this point, standpoint theory as well as the Pedagogy of the Oppressed focus on how knowledge reflects and reproduces power relations. Thereby, both argue that knowledge can be appropriated by the oppressed groups to operate as a powerful liberation tool to help them understand and overcome their contradictions throughout the struggle to free themselves.

To summarize, the essence of both epistemologies is to endorse "discredited epistemic agents" and their knowledge (insights, perceptions and experiences) through unveiling the hegemonic order and the empowerment process. Thus, these propositions dialogue with a counter-hegemonic Human Rights discourse, considering they contribute, as a critical approach, to confront power relations and an igniting liberation process from below against oppressions.

In the next section, I will analyze the Freirean critical perspective of education, using his epistemologies of the Pedagogy of the Oppressed and for Liberation, and its connections with power relations and liberation/freedom, to understand the liberatory education process and education as a political act.

## 4. The Freirean critical perspective of education: liberatory education process and education as a political act

Turning back to the Pedagogy of the Oppressed discussion, Freire (2014b, pp. 67-69) highlights some "characteristics" of the oppressed groups, which, in my view, are general features, but they serve to our debate as well: fatalism (the power of destiny, fate or culture, the myth); alienation; "colonized mentality"; and self-depreciation, which reinforces hierarchy and incapability.

These four instruments of domination (fatalism, alienation, "colonized mentality" and self-depreciation) are only unveiled by a continuous and permanent process, when the oppressed start the liberatory education process. It is essential to cross the line, through struggle and conquest (not by gift), and break with the "fear of freedom", substituting it for an emotional autonomous practice and a "responsibility to the world" (Freire, 2005, p. 47).

Towards the oppressed liberation, Freire (2005, pp. 54-57) proposes a "humanist (not humanitarian) pedagogy" and an emotional proposition against "an egoism cloaked in the false generosity of paternalism", that works to unveil the oppressive world to the oppressed. This Pedagogy for Liberation is also based on commitment and responsibility to knowledge as a *praxis* (life, creativity and action) for dialectic transformation and coherence. He argues: "To affirm that men and women are persons and as persons should be free, and yet to do nothing tangible to make this affirmation a reality, is a farce" (Freire, 2005, p. 50).

Nonetheless, Cooper (2004, pp. 23-24) claims that there are three understandings on the freedom concept: firstly, a negative conception, "as the absence of impediments"; secondly, a more positive conception, "oriented towards the socioeconomic and cultural preconditions"; and thirdly, a practice, "the ways in which, through our actions . . . we perceive ourselves as free". In that sense, I believe that the concept of freedom (liberation) claimed by Freire (2005, p. 81) is related to the third option, freedom as a practice within the world of education:

> Education as the practice of freedom —as opposed to education as the practice of domination —denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world; it also denies that the world exists as a reality

apart from people. Authentic reflection considers neither an abstract man nor the world without people, but people in their relations with the world.

Although neo-liberalism claims "that history has ended, that all history-moving political conflict has been resolved and ideology no longer has any value" (Douzinas, 2007, p. 81), Freirean pedagogy says no to the "culture of silence", which renders people, simply passive or silently smoldering, with an angry silence, feeling the aggression of the "symbolic violence" imposed under a passive narrative.

In Freire's pedagogy, this dominant framework is a myth, an instrument of domination above the oppressed groups. Neither the future is given (Freire, 2014b) nor is the knowledge a "final result", abstract and disconnected from the concrete world – as we saw, also, in the critical approach of Human Rights and the standpoint theory. The relations which underpin our societies are not mechanical, but rather historical, dialectic and contradictory (Freire & Shor, 2003, p. 149).

For Freire (2005, p. 37; 2000), the radical (a person commitment to liberation) is not a prisoner of an inner an unveiled reality[4]. On the contrary, he/she has a sense of autonomy and "responsibility to the world", in many ways, and is opened to dialogue and its contents. The true dialogue is always a creative and re-creative process that saddles the learning process, and it is always a collective encounter, although it has individual dimensions (Freire & Shor, 2003, p. 15).

Through this process of analyses involving a comparison overlapped by the transformative, transgressive and deconstructionist approaches (Cooper, 2004), the collective, cooperative and dialogical liberation education gains meaning (Freire, 2014b; 2005). To give a concrete example of the Pedagogy for Liberation (Freire & Shor, 2003), and this idea of dialectical liberatory education process, Freire and Shor start a discussion about teachers' daily lives and education as a political act.

All in all, the first question raised is: How political issues such as race, sex and social class can be framed into the liberatory education process? To illustrate it, Shor gives one of his classes as an example of how to think *with* students:

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[4] The use of the expression "reality" or "real world", in Freire (2005; 2000) perspective, means in the world's concreteness, in concrete daily situations, in the world of *praxis*.

> For a dialectical lesson, I make the construction of the knowledge with the students . . . a "flight without tools", often without a syllabus already determined, or a list of readings that gives the security of a familiar order. I want to learn also with them what are their true cognitive and affective levels, how are their authentic languages, what are their degrees of alienation which they bring to our critical study, and what are their living conditions, as grounds for dialogue and problematization (Freire & Shor, 2003, p. 17, my translation).

In this Pedagogy for Liberation context, to be open to educate and be educated, in a dialectical process, and only after that, prepare specific critical contents that can dialogue, in an intimate way, with the reality which is being put into question and into concreteness. This is one of the first and fundamental steps of this liberatory education process. The idea is to construct knowledge together, not to be a mere deposit of knowledge – based on a banking concept of education.

Freire Freire & Shor, 2003, p. 18) suggests that the knowledge cycle happens in two moments: first, in the production of knowledge; and second, in its transference. The "action, critical reflection, curiosity, demanding inquiry, uncertainty, are necessary to the cognizant act . . . When we separate the production of knowledge from known knowledge, schools are easily transformed into spaces for the sale of knowledge, which corresponds to the capitalist ideology" (Freire & Shor, 2003, pp. 18-19, my translation).

Even though both authors agree that what occurs in classrooms is only the tip of a theoretical iceberg (Freire & Shor, 2003, pp. 12-15), the initial reform, the "revolutionary act" and "ideological revolution" (from cultural domination to cultural revolution), which tries to expose the base of this iceberg, is the use of education as a political act, which demystifies and decodes reality, in a permanent process of *praxis*. Thus, this contrasts with the anti-dialogical, which serves as an instrument of oppression, as a conquering act, alienating students with prescriptive narratives and acts, and transforming peoples into "things" (Freire, 2014b, pp.77-78).

According to Shor, there is a political hierarchy of knowledge, and because of this, Freire adds that the teacher (committed to the liberatory process) has to take responsibility for denouncing and acting against the dominant ideology. This is the reason why he/she has to be the "first researcher" in the classroom: investigating his/her students, preparing him/herself, adapting his/her language, in addition to

contextualizing the background and provoking in his/her students a broader vision to see the world through other lenses (Freire & Shor, 2003, pp. 20-49).

The Pedagogy for Liberation, furthermore, sees education as a political act since it has a critical perspective about the school and the society focused on social transformation (Freire & Shor, 2003, pp. 49) and  tries to unveil society`s intimacy and power structures in different manners, in a critical dialogue about a text or a moment in our societies. Consequently, as Freire (2000, p. 70) says, the act of being a teacher, besides being political, has to be ethical:

> My very presence in the school as a teacher is intrinsically a political presence, something that students cannot possibly ignore. In this sense, I ought to transmit to the students my capacity to analyze, to compare, to evaluate, to decide, to opt, to break with. My capacity to be just, to practice justice, and to have a political presence. And as a presence, I cannot sin by omission. I am, by definition, a subject "destined" to choose. To have options. I honor truth. And all that means being ethical. . . If I have made a choice for open-minded, democratic practice, then obviously this excludes reactionary, authoritarian, elitist attitudes and actions.

Thus, through a horizontal approach (changing the power relations and vertical hierarchy – teacher *versus* students), based on a truly democratic discussion, which is not based on the sole act of transference but rather through the production of knowledge, in a collective manner, the understanding and problematization of a broader political and historical context unveil the "known knowledge" and the concealed discourse.

Yet, this practice challenges the "passive official curriculum" and the official knowledge, set on poor pedagogical practice, embedded in the "culture of silence", which suggests a passive tolerance of domination and reinforces the hegemonic social structure (*status quo*) and the dominant authority, diminishing the creativity of the students. This is the reason why it is essential to read beyond it and connect contents and knowledge with the real world (Freire & Shor, 2003, pp. 21-25).

> What has been most evident is the politics of pedagogy – as a social activity in favor of liberation and against a domination, as cultural action inside or outside the classroom, where the status quo is contested, where the obscurity of the official curriculum and of the mass culture is penetrated by the illuminating study (Freire & Shor, 2003, p. 121, my translation).

Finally, the last reflection is, this pedagogy exposes the classroom not as the unique or even the main room to struggle for liberation, but maybe a secondary place. Freire argues that the fundamental educability act can occur in different places, especially inside social movements (Freire & Shor, 2003, p. 52). Regarding that, Freire states the importance of teachers also being activists, having a kind of "double-agency" – as Santos (2012, p. 246) claims applying to the scholar-activist within the academia: "For me, the best thing possible is to work at the same time in both places, at school and in social movements outside the classroom"(Freire & Shor, 2003, p. 52, my translation).

This is the reason why a critical pedagogy can be found everywhere. If there is a struggle, a problematization, a critical reading of the world, Pedagogy for Liberation, instead pedagogy of pity, will be there, even if not under this name.

## 5. Final considerations

When we look with critical lens through the standard (and hegemonic) Human Rights discourse, which is embedded in our contemporary societies, it is easy to see a linear historical and western argumentation of rights, endorsed by a depoliticized approach. Behind the formal, legalist, universal, moral, abstract and neutral perspective of rights, especially in Human Rights, power-relation structures are concealed, which reinforces inequality and oppression and contributes to affirm the dominant ideology.

Yet, if in the dominant framework a hierarchization process divides humanity (based on SVS metaphor), and expands a pedagogy of pity, the problematization of Human Rights discourse serves to criticize the Eurocentric perspective and to reinforce a counter-hegemonic approach. In that sense, it is essential to put into question (through understanding) and to put into concreteness the Human Rights discourse in order to challenge the status quo.

As a counter-hegemonic approach, the standpoint theory emphasizes the voice (therefore, the narrative/discourse) of the oppressed groups – not automatically but through the recognition of their privileged positions. Nonetheless, it recognizes knowledge as a process, socially and historically situated, not objective or neutral, political and "partial, contextualized and experimented".

Thereby, a dialogue with a counter-hegemonic Human Rights discourse, both standpoint theory and situated knowledge and Freire`s propositions, especially in the Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire, 2014b), can provide critical insights about how "systems of social relations" operate, in order to consider power-relation structures. In different ways, they can contribute, as a critical approach, to confront power relations and to start a liberatory process, acquired by struggle from below, against oppression.

Towards the end of my reflections, instruments of dominant power-relation structures (such as fatalism, alienation, "colonized mentality" and self-depreciation) are still used to perpetuate the hegemonic order. Notwithstanding, to unveil the oppressive world, a Pedagogy for Liberation is necessary, based on autonomous practices and "responsibility to the world". Through a dialectic and coherent transformation, using knowledge as *praxis* (life, creativity and action), the Freirean critical perspective of education tries to struggle against the "culture of silence", which perpetuates a "symbolic violence".

In that sense, a radical commitment to the liberatory education process – inside or outside the classroom (in the social movements) – and a critical dialogue, reveal education as a political and "revolutionary" act, which demystifies and decodes reality and society`s intimacy, in a permanent process; unveiling political hierarchy and, also, denouncing and acting against the current hegemony.

Responding to my main concern about to what extent Freirean critical perspective of education understands power-relation structures and dialogues with Human Rights discourses, I can give a hint: Still today, the process of reading the world is very challenging. The unveiling of the concrete world highlights the need to problematize power relations from bellow. Moreover, the hegemonic and "universal" narrative, which demobilizes and depoliticizes, is incoherent. Neither the future nor the knowledge is given (Freire, 2014; Santos, 2012a).

The critical approaches (as the counter-hegemonic Human Rights discourse, the standpoint theory and the Freirean critical perspective of education) claim all the same: the world is not an abstract and closed narrative, and knowledge, which is not neutral (same is true for education), can be considered a powerful tool in the liberatory education process, since it questions dominant frameworks and reinforces struggles to confront and dispute power relations.

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