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Literacy

Reading the Word and the World

Paulo Freire, Macedo, Donaldo

ROUTLEDGE

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Foreword to this Edition

by Margaret Meek

Paulo Freire is best known for his challenging and therefore unsettling contributions to debates about theory and practice in the promotion of universal literacy. In this book he again confronts, and rejects, the assumptions of those in the dominant literate cultures who take for granted that the ability to read and write is both the cause and the effect of intellectual superiority. In so doing, he forces all teachers, whether they take responsibility for adult illiterates in the so-called Third World or teach children in primary schools anywhere, to look again at what literacy *is*. What are we helping students to learn? Why, exactly, do we think it is important that people should read and write?

These essays catch us, the favoured traditional literates, at a time of general uncertainty and paradox. In our schools we lay great emphasis on literate activities, yet we know that many of our students will make their way without too much recourse to books and papers. Nevertheless, our whole economic life is soaked in the documents of transactions, yet most of these are conducted on screens and by telephones. Freire forces us to confront uncomfortable questions; if literacy is such an obvious benefit, why are there those in literate cultures who cannot read and write? Are they not simply the dispossessed?

In all Freire's writings the core of his argument remains the same: in literacy matters, the obvious is never as obvious as it seems. Implicit in each text is the necessary, but uneasy-making interrogation: why does literacy research and practice seem to ignore the social and ideological evidence of literate behaviour which is visible in the culture itself?

When *Cultural Action for Freedom* (1970), *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972) and *Education: the Practice of Freedom* (1978) were published in Britain, teachers of adult illiterates recognized in Freire someone who understood that literacy is not necessarily a universal benefit to be conferred on those who lack its advantages by those who have traditionally enjoyed them. From his point of vantage—his belonging to and identifying with the unprivileged in Latin America—Freire showed how teaching non-literate populations cannot be conceived of, nor conducted as an a-political, neutral endeavour designed by the knowledgeable rich to bring enlightenment to rural peasants or the urban poor. By mounting a critique of literacy campaigns, including those sponsored by UNESCO, Freire drew attention to the inadequate and authoritarian nature of most attempts to provide a literacy called 'basic' or 'functional'. He showed how this thinner gruel of educational nourishment, literacy which was confining and repressive instead of enlightening and emancipating, had no validity for those whom he called the oppressed because it did not bring with it access to powerful means of 'speaking out' and direct access to publishing what the new literates were writing. Those who were teaching in community reading centres have recognised the situation described by Freire as that of their students, too.

When reading teachers adopt Freire's understanding that literacy must relate directly to

methodologies which change the learners' view of what reading and writing are all about. When he writes as a teacher, he never loses sight of his students. In the fullest sense of education's oldest truism, he begins where they are. He foregrounds their understanding of the task they collaboratively engage in, and if he exhorts them to be critical of their reality, of the institutions and practices which shape it, it is always to enable them, as learners, to emerge from 'the culture of silence'.

No one can really judge the efficacy of Freire's admonitions who has not engaged in teaching someone to read, a child or an adult. At the beginning of this important, yet disturbing book, he gives his readers an important lesson when he writes about his own reading history. He remembers the place, the people, the texts that made up the significant events of his learning. He shows how the way he took reading and writing in hand for his own purposes and intentions before he went to school were extended and made significant when he was being taught.

> Eunice (his teacher) continued and deepened my parent' work. With her, reading the word, the phrase, the sentence, never entailed a break in reading the *world*. With her reading the word meant reading the *word-world*.

The introduction should stop here. The next move is to set Freire's ideas about literacy against our own. In my case, that of an educator of reading teachers, Freire forces me to examine the view of reading and writing which is exemplified in my practice. He supports my belief that teaching a child or an adolescent to read is not a matter of direct instruction, telling them what to do when they confront a text. In that way the words and the world remain those of the instructor. But in the dialogue of teacher and student as they read and share texts which have significance for them both, the nature of reading and writing, the importance of both for both, becomes clear. Freire makes it impossible not to ask what is literacy and why we want others to be literate. He insists that we all answer for ourselves, from our own reading of the word and the world.

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culture or the human soul is simple: wherever there are human beings, there is activity; and human acts are processes, and processes are dialectical. Nothing simply *unfolds,* either in nature or in history: the recalcitrance of environments and structures of all sorts is necessary to growth and development, to change and transformation. That is something obvious and it takes a good deal of tramping before we can claim an understanding.

It is fair to say that Paulo Freire's influence has been worldwide and that success in confronting the problem of illiteracy, whether in the Third World or in the inner cities of the Western world, might well depend on how those responsible for literacy programs come to understand the significance of Freire's ped-agogy of the oppressed. If education is to serve other than as an instrument of oppression, it must be conceived of as a "pedagogy of knowing." Education for freedom is not simply a matter of encouraging teaching that has a political flavor; it is not a means of transmitting received ideas, no matter how "good"; it is not a matter of *extending* the teacher's knowledge to the uneducated or of informing them of the fact of their oppression. Teaching and learning are dialogic in character, and dialogic action depends on the awareness of oneself as knower, an attitude Freire calls conscientization *(conscientização)*. This "critical consciousness" is informed by a philosophically sound view of language and inspirited by that unsentimental respect for human beings that only a sound philosophy of mind can assure.

In my opinion, nothing much can be made of Paulo's ideas unless two conditions are met: we study hard his philosophy of language and learning since it is fundamentally at odds with the views that have been promulgated and institutionalized (for at least forty years) by educationists, researchers, and bureaucrats alike; and we reinvent our conference and journal formats and, of course, our classrooms. I will return to this latter point, but for the time being let me sketch, particularly for the benefit of those for whom this is an introduction to Freire's work, his philosophy of language and the concept of learning it supports.

Language provides generative metaphors for Paulo Freire. His view of man as the language animal *(animal symbolicum)* is consonant with the conceptions of Whitehead, Peirce, Cassirer, Langer, and others from whom a liberation philosophy will be derived. Freire puts it this way: "The act of learning to read and write has to start from a very comprehensive understanding of the act of reading the world, something which human beings do before reading the words. Even historically, human beings first changed the world, secondly proclaimed the world and then wrote the words. These are moments of history. Human beings did not start naming A! F! N! They started by freeing the hand, grasping the world."

That was at the University of Massachusetts at Boston. In chapter three of this book, he puts it this way: "Reading the word and learning how to write the word so one can later read it are preceded by learning how to 'write' the world, that is, having the experience of changing the world and of touching the world." Freire would surely know what Emerson meant when he spoke of "the hand of the mind."

We are sometimes so used to thinking of language as a "communication medium" that it can be surprising to discover, or to be reminded, that language is the *means* of making those *meanings* that we communicate. Freire's pedagogy is founded on a philosophical understanding of this generative power of language. When we speak, the discursive

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always inspiriting, never question begging or sentimental. "Reinvention," he declares, in chapter seven, "requires from the reinventing subject a critical approach toward the practice and experience to be reinvented." *Criticism* for Freire always means interpreting one's interpretations, reconsidering contexts, developing multiple definitions, tolerating ambiguities so that we can learn from the attempt to resolve them. And it means the most careful attention to naming the world. Any "discourse" has embedded in it at some level the history of its purposes, but Freire continually reminds us, as well, of its heuristic (generative) character: we can ask "What if…?" and "How could it be if…?" By thus representing the power of envisagement, language provides the model of social transformation. When Freire writes in chapter three that "the reinvention of society… requires the reinvention of power," he means, I think, that reinvention is the work of the active mind; it is an act of knowing by which we reinvent our "discourse." Freire is never beguiled by Utopian dreams. His dreams are formed by a critical and inventive imagination, exercised—practiced—in dialogue, in the naming and renaming of the world, which guides its remaking.

One way to remain alert to the significance of the distinctions Paulo Freire insists on is to think of them in threes. In *The Politics of Education,* he juxtaposes both the traditional church and the liberal, modernizing church "another kind of church…as old as Christianity itself. It is the prophetic church." That triad—*traditional/liberal-modernizing/prophetic* can serve as a paradigm of those deployed dialectically in this book; *authoritarianism/domestication/mobilization;* attitudes that are *naive/astute/critical;* and pedagogies that are *bourgeois-authoritarian-positivist/laissez faire/ radically democratic*. Most provocative is one with a double middle term, the pedagogical attitudes characterized by *neutrality/manipulation or spontaneity/political praxis*. Half the controversies raging in education could be brought to an end if critical consciousness of the significance of that "or" could be developed.

Each of the chapters in this book contributes to our understanding of what is entailed in the choices we make among these triads. Those familiar with Freire's work will probably find chapter 5 of greatest interest since he discusses criticism of his work in Guinea-Bissau, especially the charge that it was "populist." "I will reflect on past reflections," Freire writes, and he proceeds with a searching analysis of what can be required of an eman-cipatory literacy process in a society with multiple discourses and two competing languages. The chapter all readers will find immediately enlightening, as well as entirely delightful, is the first, "The Importance of the Act of Reading." There is more wisdom in these few pages on "reading the world, reading the word" than in the so-called research cascading from psycholinguists and the agents for computer-assisted instruction, to say nothing of rhetorical theorists, who can not yet bring themselves to speak of *meaning* and *knowing* and *saying,* though they might refer gingerly to "content space" and "rhetorical space"! Positivist researchers who undertake to study literacy with "mechanicist" conceptions of language have concluded that reading the word and writing the word have no effect on cognitive capacity. My own opinion is that they are invincibly ignorant; but for those who have found such research compelling, an afternoon studying Freire's conception of *writing* as a figure for *transforming the world* would certainly be salutary and it could be prophylactic.

Three chapters are in dialogue form, and my guess is that for some readers they will be

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became both a referent and mode of critique for developing forms of counterhegemonic education around the political project of creating a society of intellectuals (in the widest sense of the term) who could grasp the importance of developing democratic public spheres as part of the struggle of modern life to fight against domination as well as take an active part in the struggle for creating the conditions necessary to make people literate, to give them a voice in both shaping and governing their society.

With the exception of Paulo Freire, it is difficult in the present historical conjuncture to identify any major prominent theoretical positions or social movements that both affirm and extend the tradition of a critical literacy that has been developed in the manner of radical theorists such as Gramsci, Mikhail Bakhtin, and others.[2] In the United States, the language of literacy is almost exclusively linked to popular forms of liberal and right wing discourse that reduce it to either a functional perspective tied to narrowly conceived economic interests or to an ideology designed to initiate the poor, the underprivileged, and minorities into the logic of a unitary, dominant cultural tradition. In the first instance, the crisis in literacy is predicated on the need to train more workers for occupational jobs that demand "functional" reading and writing skills. The conservative political interests that structure this position are evident in the influence of corporate and other groups on schools to develop curricula more closely tuned to the job market, curricula that will take on a decidedly vocational orientation and in so doing reduce the need for corporations to provide on-the-job training.[3] In the second instance, literacy becomes the ideological vehicle through which to legitimate schooling as a site for character development; in this case, literacy is associated with the transmission and mastery of a unitary Western tradition based on the virtues of hard work, industry, respect for family, institutional authority, and an unquestioning respect for the nation. In short, literacy becomes a pedagogy of chauvinism dressed up in the lingo of the Great Books.

Within this dominant discourse, *illiteracy* is not merely the inability to read and write, it is also a cultural marker for naming forms of difference within the logic of cultural deprivation theory. What is important here is that the notion of cultural deprivation serves to designate in the negative sense forms of cultural currency that appear disturbingly unfamiliar and threatening when measured against the dominant culture's ideological standard regarding what is to be valorized as history, linguistic proficiency, lived experience, and standar s of community life.[4] The importance of developing a politics of difference in this view is seldom a positive virtue and attribute of public life; in fact, difference is often constituted as deficiency and is part of the same logic that defines the other within the discourse of cultural deprivation. Both ideological tendencies strip literacy from the ethical and political obligations of speculative reason and radical democracy and subjugate it to the political and pedagogical imperatives of social conformity and domination. In both cases, literacy represents a retreat from critical thought and emancipatory politics. Stanley Aronowitz has captured both the interests at work in shaping the current discourse on literacy and the problems it reproduces. He writes:

> When America is in trouble it turns to its schools.… Employers want an educational system closely tuned to the job market, a system that will adjust its curriculum to their changing needs and save them money on training.

hallmark of liberation and transformation designed to throw off the colonial voice and further develop the collective voice of suffering and affirmation silenced beneath the terror and brutality of despotic regimes.

FREIRE AND MACEDO AND LITERACY AS A READING OF THE WORD AND THE WORLD

In this new book, Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo not only build upon the earlier work that Freire has done on literacy, they also dramatically advance and refine its implications for a broader cultural politics and extend its theoretical possibilities in further developing the basis of a critical pedagogy. The combined voices of Freire and Macedo provide a quintessential demonstration of the notion of critical literacy as an unfolding of critique and commitment through the process of dialogue. Drawing upon their different traditions and engagements in Latin America, Africa, and the United States, Freire and Macedo situate the notions of theory and practice in a discourse that is at once historical, theoretical, and radically political. Each of these authors not only reveals his own theoretical and political voice as shaped by his respective politics and pedagogy, but each also provides a referent for the other to further interrogate and reflect upon questions that have emerged in the last decade around the meaning and significance of a radical notion of literacy based on the Freireian model. Theory and practice come together in this book in the way these two constructs are analyzed as a matter of definition and application; they are also demonstrated as a form of radical praxis in the intensely engaging dialogue carried on by Freire and Macedo. There is, for instance, an ongoing attempt to redefine the interconnections between literacy, culture, and education, to examine the issue of literacy in the United States, and to reconstruct and analyze critically the literacy program in Guinea-Bissau to which Freire provided advice and assistance. Within these dialogues, theory becomes an act of producing meaning and not merely a reiteration or recording of previously stated theoretical positions. As a result crucial new theoretical formulations and connections emerge regarding literacy, politics, and empowerment.

Freire and Macedo also analyze and demonstrate how Freire's literacy approach was given concrete political and pedagogical expression in the curriculum and literacy materials used in São Tomé and Príncipe. In this dialogue, Freire responds strongly and clearly to some of the criticisms that have been published recently regarding his work in Guinea-Bissau. This response is useful because it helps to set the historical record straight on a number of important issues and because it reveals a dialectical interaction between Freire's own normative and political principles and the formulations and strategies in which he engaged while participating in the literacy campaign in Guinea-Bissau. Freire also emerges here as a man engaged in a critical dialogue with his own ideas, his critics, and the particulars of different historical struggles. In his intelligent and sensitive efforts to engage Freire in a discussion of his work, Macedo brilliantly sets the stage for a compelling revelation of Freire the human being and Freire the revolutionary. The outcome is one that not only provides us with a broader understanding of the meaning of literacy and education as a form of cultural politics, but also demonstrates the importance of having a voice that speaks with dignity, embodies the language of critique, and

represents more than compliance or rejection.

In the most general sense, schooling is about the regulation of time, space, textuality, experience, knowledge, and power amidst conflicting interests and histories that simply cannot be pinned down in simple theories of reproduction and resistance.[16] Schools must be seen in their historical and relational contexts. As institutions, they exhibit contradictory positions in the wider culture and also represent a terrain of complex struggle regarding what it means to be literate and empowered in ways that would allow teachers and students to think and act in a manner commensurate with the imperatives and reality of a radical democracy.

The task of a theory of critical literacy is to broaden our conception of how teachers actively produce, sustain, and legitimate meaning and experience in classrooms. Moreover, a theory of critical literacy necessitates a more profound understanding of how the wider conditions of the state and society produce, ne-gotiate, transform, and bear down on the conditions of teaching so as to either enable or disable teachers from acting in a critical and transformative way. Equally important is the need to develop as a central assumption of critical literacy the recognition that knowledge is not merely produced in the heads of experts, curriculum specialists, school administrators, and teachers. The production of knowledge, as mentioned earlier, is a relational act. For teachers, this means being sensitive to the actual historical, social, and cultural conditions that contribute to the forms of knowledge and meaning that students bring to school.

If a concept of critical literacy is to be developed in conjunction with the theoretical notions of narrative and agency, then it is important that the knowledge, values, and social practices that constitute the story/narrative of schooling be understood as embodying particular interests and relations of power regarding how one should think, live, and act with regard to the past, present, and future. At its best, a theory of critical literacy needs to develop pedagogical practices in which in the battle to make sense of one's life reaffirms and furthers the need for teachers and students to recover their own voices so they can retell their own histories and in so doing "check and criticize the history [they] are told against the one [they] have lived."[17] This means more, however, than simply the retelling and comparison of stories. In order to move beyond a pedagogy of voice that suggests that all stories are innocent, it is important to examine such stories around the interest and principles that structure them and to interrogate them as part of a political project (in the widest sense) that may enable or undermine the values and practices that provide the foundation for social justice, equality, and democratic community. In its more radical sense critical literacy means making one's self present as part of a moral and political project that links the production of meaning to the possibility for human agency, democratic community, and transformative social action.[18]

LITERACY AND THE LIBERATION OF REMEMBRANCE

In their attempt to develop a model of critical literacy that embodies an ongoing dialectical relationship between a critical reading of the world and the word, Freire and Macedo establish the theoretical groundwork for a new discourse in which the notion of literacy brings with it a critical attentiveness to the web of relations in which meaning is

to the contradictory nature of student experience and voice and therefore establish the grounds whereby such experience can be interrogated and analyzed with respect to both their strengths and weaknesses. Voice in this case not only provides a theoretical framework for recognizing the cultural logic that anchors subjectivity and learning, it also provides a referent for criticising the kind of romantic celebration of student experience that characterized much of the radical pedagogy of the early 1960s. At issue here is linking the pedagogy of student voice to a project of possibility that allows students to affirm and celebrate the interplay of different voices and experience while at the same time recognizing that such voices must always be interrogated for the various ontological, epistemological, and ethical and political interests they represent. As a form of historical, textual, political, and sexual pro-duction, student voice must be rooted in a pedagogy that allows students to speak and to appreciate the nature of difference as part of both a democratic tolerance and a fundamental condition for critical dialogue and the development of forms of solidarity rooted in the principles of trust, sharing, and a commitment to improving the quality of human life. A pedagogy of critical literacy and voice needs to be developed around a politics of difference and community that is not simply grounded in a celebration of plurality. Such a pedagogy must be derived from a particular form of human community in which plurality becomes dignified through the construction of classroom social relations in which all voices in their differences become unified both in their efforts to identify and recall moments of human suffering and in their attempts to overcome the conditions that perpetuate such suffering.[30]

Secondly, a critical pedagogy must take seriously the articulation of a morality that posits a language of public life, emancipatory community, and individual and social commitment. Students need to be introduced to a language of empowerment and radical ethics that permits them to think about how community life should be constructed around a project of possibility. Roger Simon has clearly expressed this position, as follows:

> An education that empowers for possibility must raise questions of how we can work for the re-construction of social imagination in the service of human freedom. What notions of knowing and what forms of learning will support this? I think the project of possibility requires an education rooted in a view of human freedom as the understanding of necessity and the transformation of necessity. This is the pedagogy we require, one whose standards and achievement objectives are determined in relation to goals of critique and the enhancement of social imagination. Teaching and learning must be linked to the goal of educating students to take risks, to struggle with on-going relations of power, to critically appropriate forms of knowledge that exist outside of their immediate experience, and to envisage versions of a world which (in the Blochian sense) is "not-yet"—in order to be able to alter the grounds on which life is lived.[31]

Thirdly, teachers should provide students with the opportunity to interrogate different languages or ideological dis-courses as they are developed in an assortment of texts and curriculum materials. This is important for a number of reasons. A critical pedagogy first needs to validate and investigate the production of differential readings. In doing so,

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based on the critical literacy model proposed by Freire and Macedo.

Of course, before schools can be constructed in ways that can empower both teachers and students, educators need to understand the present ideological and political crisis surrounding the purpose of public schooling. As part of the existing political assault on public services and social justice in general, schools are increasingly being subordinated to the imperatives of neo-conservative and right-wing interests that would make them adjuncts of the workplace or the church. In a democratic society, schools can never be reduced to company stores or training grounds for Christian fundamentalists. In this age in which democracy often seems in retreat, schools need to be recovered and fought for as democratic public spheres. More specifically, progressive educators must join with each other and with members of other social movements to fight for the importance and practice of critical literacy as part of the indispensable process of self and social formation necessary to creating forms of public life essential to the development and maintenance of a radical democracy. This suggests not only a new agenda around which to develop public school reform but also an agenda for linking divergent progressive political groups. Literacy is indispensable to all aspects of critical theory and radical praxis and should provide the basis for injecting the pedagogical back into the meaning of politics. It is to Freire and Macedo's credit that in this book they provide us with a view of literacy and voice that both demonstrate and affirm the importance of schooling as part of the struggle for expanding human possibilities within a discourse that asks new questions, reveals the importance of democratic solidarity, and advances the priority of a logic that dignifies the importance of radical democracy and social justice.

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Insistence on a quantity of reading without internalization of texts proposed for understanding rather than mechanical memorization reveals a magical view of the written word, a view that must be superseded. From another angle, the same view is found in the writer who identifies the potential quality of his work, or lack of it, with the quantity of pages he has written. Yet one of the most important documents we have—Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach"—is only two and a half pages long.

To avoid misinterpretation of what I'm saying, it is important to stress that my criticism of the magical view of the word does not mean that I take an irresponsible position on the obligation we all have—teachers and students—to read the classic literature in a given field seriously in order to make the texts our own and to create the intellectual discipline without which our practice as teachers and students is not viable.

But to return to that very rich moment of my experience as a Portuguese teacher: I remember vividly the times I spent analyzing the work of Gilberto Freyre, Lins do Rego, Graciliano Ramos, Jorge Amado. I used to bring the texts from home to read with students, pointing out syntactical aspects strictly linked to the good taste of their language. To that analysis I added commentaries on the essential differences between the Portuguese of Portugal and the Portuguese of Brazil.

I always saw teaching adults to read and write as a political act, an act of knowledge, and therefore a creative act. I would. find it impossible to be engaged in a work of mechanically memorizing vowel sounds, as in the exercise "ba-be-bi-bo-bu, la-le-li-lo-lu." Nor could I reduce learning to read and write merely to learning words, syllables, or letters, a process of teaching in which the teacher *fills* the supposedly *empty* heads of learners with his or her words. On the contrary, the student is the subject of the process of learning to read and write as an act of knowing and of creating. The fact that he or she needs the teacher's help, as in any pedagogical situation, does not mean that the teacher's help nullifies the student's creativity and responsibility for constructing his or her own written language and for reading this language.

When, for instance, a teacher and a learner pick up an object in their hands, as I do now, they both feel the object, perceive the felt object, and are capable of expressing verbally what the felt and perceived object is. Like me, the illiterate person can *feel* the pen, perceive the pen, and say *pen*. I can, however, not only feel the pen, perceive the pen, and say *pen,* but also write *pen* and, consequently, read *pen*. Learning to read and write means creating and assembling a written expression for what can be said orally. The teacher cannot put it together for the student; that is the student's creative task.

I need go no further into what I've developed at different times in the complex process of teaching adults to read and write. I would like to return, however, to one point referred to elsewhere in this book because of its significance for the critical understanding of the act of reading and writing, and consequently for the project I am dedicated to—teaching adults to read and write.

Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world. As I suggested earlier, this movement from the word to the world is always present; even the spoken word flows from our reading of the world. In a way, however, we can go further and say that reading the word is not preceded merely by reading the world, but by a certain form of *writing* it or *rewriting* it, that is, of transforming it by means of conscious, practical work. For me, this dynamic movement is

assembly, the right to express their thoughts, their right to speak, which corresponds to the educator's duty to listen to them. One must listen to them attentively, with the conviction of one who completes a duty and not with the malice of one who does a favor to receive something in exchange. But since listening implies speaking, the educator has to speak to them as well. To listen to them in the sense discussed earlier is, basically, *to speak with them,* while simply speaking to them would be a way of not hearing them. A good way for educators to affirm their authoritarian elitism is to always express their thoughts to others without ever exposing and offering themselves to others, remaining arrogantly convinced that educators are here to save others. This cannot be a liberating educator's way of acting. He who scarcely speaks and never hears; he who "immobilizes" knowledge and transfers it to students, whether in primary schools or universities; he who hears only the echo of his own words, in a kind of oral narcissism; he who believes it insolent for the working class to attempt to recover its rights; he who thinks the working class is uncultured and incompetent and, thus, needs to be liberated from top to bottom—this type of educator does not really have anything to do with freedom or democracy. On the contrary, he who acts and thinks this way, consciously or unconsciously, helps to preserve the authoritarian structures.

Related to this is the need educators have to "assume" the naiveté of those becoming educated so that they will be able, with them, to overcome this naiveté. If you are walking on one side of the street, you cannot get to the other side unless you cross the street. The same thing happens with a less rigorous, less exact understanding of reality. One has to respect the levels of understanding that those becoming educated have of their own reality. To impose on them one's own understanding in the name of their liberation is to accept authoritarian solutions as ways to freedom. But to assume the naiveté of those becoming educated demands from educators a most necessary humility to assume also their ability to criticize, thus overcoming, our naiveté as well.

Only authoritarian educators deny the solidarity between the act of educating and the act of being educated by those becoming educated; only authoritarians separate the act of teaching from that of learning in such a way that he who believes himself to know actually teaches, and he who is believed to know nothing learns.

In truth, to retrieve the statement "she who knows teaches those who do not know" from its authoritarian character, it is necessary for the one who knows to understand that no one knows everything and that no one is ignorant of everything. The educator, as one who knows, first needs to recognize those being educated as the ones who are in the process of knowing more. They are the subjects of this process along with the educator and not merely accommodated patients. Second, the educator needs to recognize that knowledge is not a piece of data, something immobilized, concluded, finished, something to be transferred by one who acquired it to one who still does not possess it.

The neutrality of education, which results in being understood as a pure task, to serve in the formation of an ideal type of human being, disembodied from what is real, virtuous, and good, is one of the fundamental connotations of the naive vision of education. From the point of view of such a vision, the world is reborn in the intimacy of consciences, moved by the goodness of hearts. And since education models souls and re-creates hearts, it is the fulcrum of social change.

Before all this, however, it is necessary for education to give body and spirit to the

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find degrees of the same nonastute naiveté, the same purely tactical innocence, and the same critical insights, as well as the same magical understanding of the written word, the same minimizing, reactionary elitism of the people, but also the same critical-democratic spirit that is needed in any country with a strong tradition of arbitrary resolutions.

In the chapters that follow, we will discuss in more detail these educational issues by providing a reconstructed theory of education in general, and of literacy in particular.

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literacy work outside the world of culture because education in itself is a dimension of culture. Education is an act of knowledge (knowledge here is not to be restricted to a specific object only) on the part of the very subject who knows. Education has to take the culture that explains it as the object of a curious comprehension, as if one would use education to question itself. And every time that education questions itself, in response it finds itself in the larger body of culture. Evidently, the more it continues to interrogate itself about its purpose in culture and society, the more education discovers that culture is a totality cut across by social classes.

In Brazilian society, for example, one cannot deny certain behavior patterns characteristic of different social class behavior. For example, taste, which is also cultural, is heavily conditioned by social class boundaries.

Macedo: I did not intend to focus only on social classes in cultural production and reproduction. I think we need to investigate other cultural influences on education.

Freire: When a pedagogy tries to influence other factors that could not be strictly explained by a theory of class, you still have to pass through class analysis.

Given this understanding, we still must acknowledge that social classes exist and that their presence is contradictory. That is, the existence of social classes provokes a conflict of interests. It provokes and shapes cultural ways of being and, therefore, generates contradictory expressions of culture.

In general, dominant segments of any society talk about their particular interests, their tastes, their styles of living, which they regard as concrete expressions of nationality. Thus the subordinated groups, who have their own tastes and styles of living, cannot talk about their tastes and styles as national expressions. They lack the political and economic power to do so. Only those who have power can generalize and decree their group characteristics as representative of the national culture. With this decree, the dominant group necessarily depreciates all characteristics belonging to subordinated groups, characteristics that deviate from the decreed patterns.

This is especially interesting when you understand the asymmetry generated by social institutions, and how important a role critical literacy programs play in demystifying the artificial parameters imposed on people. Critical literacy has to explicate the validity of different types of music, poetry, language, and world views.

From this viewpoint the dominant class, which has the power to define, profile, and describe the world, begins to pronounce that the speech habits of the subordinate groups are a corruption, a bastardization of dominant discourse. It is in this sense that sociolinguists are making an enormous contribution to the demystification of these notions. What they show is that, scientifically, all languages are valid, systematic, rule-governed systems, and that the inferiority/superiority distinction is a social phenomenon. A language is developed to the degree that it reaches a certain stability in a particular area and to the extent that it is used in the comprehension and expression of the world by the groups that speak it.

One cannot understand and analyze a language, then, without a class analysis. Even though we may have to go beyond class boundaries to understand certain universal properties of language, we should neither reduce the investigation of language to a mechanical comprehension, nor reduce it to only social class analysis. But we have to do the latter to gain a global view of the total system under investigation.

society like that of the United States, one that has historically acquired an extraordinary advancement in technology and capital production. This extraordinary advancement has given birth to a series of myths, including the myth of technology and science. Educators should assume a scientific position that is not scientistic, a technological position that is not technologic.

Macedo: How can this critical pedagogy fundamentally stimulate the influence of subjectivity in terms of the development of students' creativity, curiosity, and needs? In societies that are technologically advanced it becomes that much more difficult to avoid falling victim to the myths to which you refer, myths that may discourage the possible role of students' subjectivities.

Freire: Yes, but at the same time these societies stimulate the role of individuality, that is, the individuality within an "individualistic" frame. The individualistic frame, in the end, also negates subjectivity. This is a curious phenomenon and we need to understand it dialectically. It could appear that a position that is profoundly individualistic would end up stimulating and respecting the role of the human agency. In truth, it denies all dimensions of human agency. Why does the individualistic position end up working against the real role of human agency? Because the only real subjectivity is that which confronts its contradictory relationship to objectivity.

And what does the individualistic position advocate? It dichotomizes the individual from the social. Generally, this cannot be accomplished, since it is not viable to do so. Nevertheless, the individualistic ideology ends up negating social interests or it subsumes social interests within individualistic interests.

The comprehension of the social is always determined by the comprehension of the individual. In this sense, the individualistic position works against the comprehension of the real role of human agency. Human agency makes sense and flourishes only when subjectivity is understood in its dialectical, contradictory, dynamic relationship with objectivity, from which it derives.

This leads to an enormous problem for critical pedagogy in technologically advanced societies. One method the critical educator can try is what you and I are doing right now, using discussion as an attempt to challenge each other so that we can understand the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity, so that we can in the final analysis understand the enormous and undeniable role of science and technology, and also so that we can understand the risk taking inherent in a humanized life. This type of discourse is one method a critical educator could use to demystify a whole network of mythology: the myth that one should not waste time, for instance. What does wasting time mean? Does one avoid wasting time only in order to make money? Or does it mean one cannot waste time making money? What is it to waste time and what is it to make time? In the end, the work of an educator in a critical and radical perspective is the work of unveiling the deep dimensions of reality that are hidden in these myths.

Macedo: You often mention the role of subject that should be assumed by students. Your preoccupation leads us to Giroux's treatment of what he calls "human agency." What do you think about the role of human agency in the dominant society regarding the complex relationship between literacy campaigns in particular and education in general?

It is precisely in this dynamic relationship between the reading of the word and the reading of reality that Elza and I found ourselves on common ground with the government of São Tomé and Príncipe. In fact, this relationship acts as a central focus of my reflections in this chapter.

All the efforts in São Tomé and Príncipe involved in the practice of adult literacy, as well as postliteracy, are oriented toward this relationship. The Popular Culture Notebooks that are being used by learners as basic texts, whether in the initial stages of literacy or in postliteracy, are not impregnated with manipulative discourses.

"*Popular Culture Notebooks*" is the generic name given to a series of books and primers. The first primer, for instance, is comprised of two parts. The second part is an introduction to the postliteracy phase. As a reinforcement to the first primer, there is an exercise book labeled "Practice to Learn."

The Second Popular Culture Notebook, with which one begins or learns how to begin the postliteracy phase, is written in accessible, but not simplistic, language. It treats various themes linked to the nation's present historical moment.

These texts attempt to address learners' critical curiosity and prevent readers from confronting the text in a mechanical way. (Some examples will be given in Part II of this chapter.) The language in these texts is not reduced to slogans; it is challenging. The text is designed to meet the objective of the literacy campaign, namely, for the people to participate effectively as subjects in the reconstruction of their nation.

Accordingly, these texts could not be neutral. In truth, the opposite of manipulation is learners' critical, democratic participation in the act of knowing that they are also subjects. The opposite of manipulation, in brief, is people's critical and creative participation in the process of reinventing their society, as in the case of São Tomé and Príncipe, a nation that recently freed itself from the colonial yoke to which it was subjected for centuries.

Conscious participation in the reconstruction of society takes place in most diverse sectors and at different levels of national life. It necessarily requires a critical comprehension of the nation's revolutionary transition. This critical comprehension is generated by participatory practice that actually reflects upon itself. In this sense, through generative words and themes, literacy, as well as postliteracy, cannot fail to propose to learners a critical reflection of the concrete contexts of national reality, a process that requires reflection on the present moment of reconstruction, along with challenges and difficulties to be overcome.

It is necessary, in fact, for adult literacy and postliteracy to be at the service of the nation's reconstruction and contribute to the people so that by taking more and more history into their own hands, they can shape their history. To shape history is to be present in it, not merely represented in it. Poor are those people, for example, who passively accept, without the least concern, a notice that reads: "It was decreed that on Tuesdays we begin to say good night starting at 2:00 P.M." This would be the act of a people who are represented but not present in history.

The more consciously people make their history, the more they clearly understand the difficulties in the permanent process of their liberation, difficulties that they have to confront in economic, social, and cultural domains.

To the extent that national reconstruction is the continuation of the armed struggle and

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Once more, the blank space at the end serves as an invitation to those becoming literate to risk expressing themselves in writing. Throughout the Workbook, from the beginning to the end, those becoming literate are constantly challenged to write and read by practicing writing and reading. If it is impossible to write without practicing writing, then in a culture of predominantly oral memory such as São Tomé, a literacy program, respecting the culture as it is at the moment, needs both to stimulate the oral expression of those becoming literate—in debates, in the telling of stories, in the analysis of facts—and to challenge people to begin to write. To read and write are inseparable phases of the same process, representing the understanding and domination of the language and of language.

On page 11 a more complex but less extensive text is proposed that deals with aspects of colonial life and the present stage of national reconstruction. The text is preceded by some words that involve the central themes of national reconstruction.

The page begins like this:

Let's read:

School
Plantation*
Land
To plant
Product

Before Independence, the majority of our People did not have schools. The farms, with their lands for planting, belonged to the colonizers. The product of our work was theirs, too. Since Independence, everything is different. We have more schools for our children and the People began to study.

L*et's write:*

Still considering the oral nature of the culture in the state in which it is found, it is suggested to the facilitators that, not only in relation to this text but to all texts, they do a reading aloud first, slowly, which should be followed along silently by those becoming literate. Next, the learners should proceed in their silent reading for a certain time, after which they will begin to read aloud, one by one. Whatever the text may be, once the reading is finished, a discussion about it is indispensable.

In an effort to continue challenging those becoming literate to read critically and to write, at the same time that one proceeds to stimulate their oral expression, the following exercise is proposed to them on page 12:

* A unit of production; for example, a cocoa plantation. Before independence there were altogether some seventy-five farms whose owners generally lived in Lisbon. The independent government's first action was to nationalize the farms.

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in the vanguard of the People.

Now, together again, we are going to take a step forward in the search to know more, without ever forgetting that it is by practicing that one learns. Let's know better what we already know and know other things that we still do not know. All of us know something. All of us are ignorant of something. For this reason, we are always learning.

The search to know more continues in the struggle that continues.

Victory is ours.

Let us now see the

Second Popular Culture Notebook

Our People

Our Land

Texts to read and discuss

(Introduction to Grammar)

Before beginning the analysis, or more precisely the transcription of texts of this Notebook with commentary, it seems important to point out how practice altered the plans that we had in relation to the Exercise Workbook and the Second Popular Culture Notebook. While the former had been conceived as an aid to the person becoming literate, reinforcing the First Notebook in the literacy phase, the Second Notebook was thought of as the basic book of the first stage of postliteracy. In time it was perceived that this last role would fall to the Exercise Workbook, while the Second Notebook would come to be used on a more advanced level of postliteracy, along with the other Notebooks referred to at the bottom of page 4.[3] The Second Notebook begins with the following:

Introduction

With the First Popular Culture Notebook and the Exercise Workbook you learned to read in the practice of reading. You learned to write in the practice of writing. You practiced reading and writing at the same time that you also practiced discussing matters of interest to our People.

For us, it did not make sense to teach our People only b-a=ba. When we learn to read and write, it is also important to learn to think correctly. To think correctly we should think about our practice in work. We should think about our daily lives.

When we learn to read and write, it is important to try to better understand what colonial exploitation was, what our independence means, to better understand our struggle to create a fair society, without exploiters or exploited, a society of workers.

To learn to read to write is not to memorize "mouthfuls" of words in order to repeat them afterward.

With this Second Popular Culture Notebook you are going to be able to reinforce what you already know and to increase your knowledge, which is necessary for the struggle for national reconstruction. For this reason, you should try hard and work with discipline.

If you don't know the meaning of a word you find in the text, consult the

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which appear in a great number of slogans, was introduced to present them in a dynamic text preserving or recovering their most profound meaning (threatened by the uncritical character of clichés).

Clearly, it has been my intention in the second part of this chapter to excerpt those texts of the Second Popular Culture Notebook that are in consonance with the points I made in the first part. Here is one more such text:

Work and Transformation of the World: I

Pedro and Antonio cut down a tree. They had practice doing it. The practical activity of human beings has objectives. They knew what they wanted to do when they cut down the tree. They had worked. With instruments, they not only cut down the tree but they trimmed it after cutting it down. They divided the large trunk into pieces, which they dried in the sun. Immediately afterward, Pedro and Antonio sawed the pieces of the trunk and made boards with them. With the boards, they made a boat. Before making the boat, even before they cut down the tree, they had already conceived in their heads the form of the boat that they were going to make. They already knew their reason for making the boat. Pedro and Antonio worked. They transformed the tree with their work and made a boat with it. It is by working that men and women transform the world, and by transforming the world, they transform themselves, too.

Work and Transformation of the World: II

Pedro and Antonio made the boat with the boards. They made the boards with the pieces of the large trunk that they cut down. When the big tree was divided into pieces, it stopped being a tree. When the pieces of the trunk became boards, they stopped being pieces of the trunk. When Pedro and Antonio constructed the boat with boards, the boards stopped being boards. They became a boat.

The tree belongs to the world of nature. The boat, made by Antonio and Pedro, belongs to the world of culture, since it is the world that human beings make with their creative work.

The boat is culture.

The way to use the boat is culture.

Dance is culture.

Work and Transformation of the World: III

Work that transforms does not always dignify men and women. Only free work gives us courage. The only work that dignifies us is that by which we contribute to the creation of a just society, without exploiters or exploited.

In the colonial days, our work was not free. We worked for the interests of the colonialists, who exploited us. They took over our lands and our work force and became rich at our expense. The richer they became, the poorer we became. They were the exploiting minority. We were the exploited majority. Today, we are independent. We no longer work for a minority. We work to create a fair society. We still have much to do.[7]

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work.

The boards to be transformed into tables, chairs, doors, and windows are objects of work.

The Productive Process: II

To transform natural materials into raw materials and to produce something with raw materials, we need instruments. We need machines, tools, and transportation. These things we need to help us produce—that is, the instruments, the tools, the machines, and the transportation—are called the *means of work.*

Natural materials, raw materials, and the means of work combine to form the *means of production.*

The following are means of production on a farm:

- lands for cultivation
- natural materials
- raw materials
- instruments, the tools, the transportation.

The Productive Process: III

We already saw that if there was no human work, the tree would not be transformed into boards, nor would the iron, in its natural state, become sheets of metal. All this is done because of human work, because of the work force.

The means of production and the workers constitute what is called the productive forces of a society.

Production results from the combination of the means of production and the work force. In order to understand a society it is important to know in what way its productive process is organized. It is necessary to know how the means of production and the work force combine. It is necessary to know the nature of the social relations that come into play in production: if they are relations of exploitation or relations of equality and collaboration between everyone.

In the colonial period, the social relations of production were those of exploitation. Thus, they were violent. The colonialists took power over the means of production and our work force. They were absolute owners of the land, of the natural materials, of the raw materials, of the tools, the machines, the transportation, and the work force. Nothing escaped their power and control.

When we speak today about national reconstruction to create a new society, we are talking about a really different society, a society in which the social relations of production will no longer be those of exploitation, but of equality and collaboration between everyone.

The following text again discusses the nonmechanic nature of the social transformation.

The Action of Transforming

We are in this room. Here a Culture Circle is at work. The room is organized in

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establishing a collaborative program with Guinea-Bissau. Everybody from IDAC showed great interest in helping the Guinea-Bissau program. The next day I also discussed the invitation with the World Council of Churches. My intentions were to devise a plan in which the World Council and IDAC would work together, studying and planning ways to best contribute and meet the challenges of eradicating illiteracy in Guinea-Bissau. Both IDAC and the World Council accepted my proposal, and that January I wrote Mario Cabral. The first few lines of that letter mentioned that I received a letter from someone who had been in Guinea-Bissau. Why did I not mention Professor Pereira's name in this letter? At the time, Brazil had in place an extremely repressive political machine. My own exile taught me to be careful about citing names because under the Brazilian dictatorship, I might endanger people's positions, or even their lives.

Continuing, I wrote: "The individual who wrote me from Brazil has discussed with you and the president the possibility of organizing a team of educators in which I would contribute to the adult literacy program already in place in Guinea-Bissau. He further suggested that I write you to begin a conversation on how to get started."

In April 1975, two and a half months after I wrote Mario Cabral, he answered my letter. That April I wrote him a second letter, which begins:

"Dear Comrade Mario Cabral: I just received your letter, in which you confirm the government's interest in our collaboration. I do not think it necessary to expand on our satisfaction in receiving this confirmation, satisfaction not only on the part of members of IDAC but also of the World Council of Churches."

In this second letter I proposed some guidelines, including the possibility of sending someone to Geneva to begin discussion on the general educational situation of Guinea-Bissau. We had proposed that Mario Cabral come to Geneva. I realize now that he was probably too busy to accept our invitation.

Macedo: Did you and your team of educators support your own educational activities in Guinea-Bissau?

Paulo: In responding to this question, I can put to rest some small-minded criticism some have harbored against me. Some have said I offered huge grants to Guinea-Bissau and bought my way through Guinea-Bissau. In other words, Guinea-Bissau was not really interested in our contribution to the literacy campaign, but could not refuse the money. This type of criticism not only offends those of us who genuinely wanted to contribute to the reconstruction of the educational system, but also those comrades who fought heroically in the jungles of Guinea-Bissau to defeat the colonialists. It would be unlikely that they would fight for twelve years only to sell their interests so easily in the face of some small offer of financial support that we could have made. But let us put this type of criticism aside and try to answer your question.

As I said earlier, the World Council of Churches played an important role in the movements for liberation in Africa. The World Council never ceased to give assistance to those liberation movements, even in difficult times during their struggles. The World Council also saw to it that the contributions it gave during these struggles would continue during the reconstruction of the new societies after independence from colonial powers. It was certainly not inappropriate that the World Council raised about $500,000 to assist the literacy campaign in Nicaragua, for

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this transforming practice. This understanding of literacy takes me to a notion of a comprehensive literacy that is necessarily political.

Even in this global sense, literacy by itself should never be understood as the triggering of social emancipation of the subordinated classes. Literacy leads to and participates in a series of triggering mechanisms that need to be activated for the indispensable transformation of a society whose unjust reality destroys the majority of people. Literacy in this global sense takes place in societies where oppressed classes assume their own history. The most recent case of this type of literacy is in Nicaragua.

Interestingly, the nature of this process is different from that of emancipation. Literacy in the case of Nicaragua started to take place as soon as the people took their history into their own hands. Taking history into your own hands precedes taking up the alphabet. Anyone who takes history into his or her own hands can easily take up the alphabet. The process of literacy is much easier than the process of taking history into your own hands, since this entails the "rewriting" of your society. In Nicaragua the people rewrote their society before reading the word.

Further, it is interesting to observe that in cultural history the human being, or, more accurately, the animal that becomes human and the human being who is the result of this previous transformation, first changes the world and much later becomes capable of talking about the world that he or she has transformed. A much longer time elapses before he or she is able to write about the talk generated from this transformation. Literacy must be seen and understood in this global sense. Since the reading of the word is preceded by the rewriting of society in societies that undergo a revolutionary process, it is much easier to conduct successful literacy campaigns in these societies.

But all of this discussion is far more general, more political, and more historical than the literacy process itself. One cannot forget the specific dimension of the linguistic code. In the case of Nicaragua, the only problematic area of the linguistic code (which has its own necessarily ideological, social, and political implications) is the situation of the Mosquito Indians. For the rest, the big problem concerning the Spanish language is the multiple discourses you talked about. These discourses, in my view, are linked to the differences among the various social classes and can be appreciated only in light of class analyses.

The great problem that literacy campaigns face with respect to multiple discourses is dealing with the process of rewriting society. In principle, this rewriting breaks down the rigid hierarchical order of social classes and thereby transforms the material structures of society. Let me reemphasize one point: we should never take literacy as the triggering of social transformation. Literacy as a global concept is only a part of the transformative triggering mechanism. There is a difference of quality between a political crusade and the experience of literacy, even in Brazil today. I recall that in the world conference in Persepolis organized by UNESCO in 1975—participating countries included the Soviet Union, the United States, Cuba, North Korea, Vietnam, Peru, Brazil, and numerous European countries—one of the central themes was the evaluation of literacy campaigns throughout the world. "The Letter of Persepolis," published by UNESCO, states, among other things, that the relative success of literacy campaigns evaluated by UNESCO depended on their relation to the revolutionary transformations of the societies in which the literacy campaigns took

and history could not be achieved through the language that negated their reality and attempted to eradicate their own means of communication.

Macedo: Do you think it is possible to conduct a literacy campaign in Portuguese in Cape Verde, where there is some degree of bilingualism in Portuguese and Creole?

Freire: From the political point of view it is not advisable to do so, for the many reasons we have already discussed. From the linguistic point of view, unlike Guinea-Bissau, where teaching in Portuguese is not possible, in Cape Verde it would be less violent to do so, particularly in urban areas, where the colonialist presence brought about some exposure to the Portuguese language and capitalist development required people to learn some Portuguese. I think, however, that Cape Verde should also opt for Creole as the official national language.

Macedo: We should not lose sight of the danger of reproducing those colonialist values that were, and still are, inculcated through the use of Portuguese. I believe it is impossible to re-Africanize the people through the medium that de-Africanized them. Even if it made sense linguistically (and I feel strongly that it does not), in political terms, any decision to continue to use Portuguese as the official language and the only vehicle of instruction in Cape Verde would seriously undermine the political goals set forth by Amilcar Cabral.

Freire: Then the ideal situation would be to stop literacy in Portuguese, attempt to accelerate the development of Creole, particularly the standardization of its written form, and begin gradually to substitute Creole for Portuguese as the language of instruction. Obviously this could not be done all at once. Just imagine the capital required to change the entire educational system overnight. Cape Verde would have to quickly translate into Creole all of the basic texts required by the curriculum. All of the texts on geography, reading, math, and science would have to be translated. Even teacher training in Creole would be no small accomplishment. But as in Tanzania, one could begin slowly to replace Portuguese through a transitional bilingual model in which Creole would play a greater role in education, while Portuguese would diminish considerably over time. Creole could be used effectively, for example, in the first ten years of schooling.

In this way, at some point you could substitute Creole for Portuguese in the early years of schooling and gradually Creole would be introduced in increasing amounts in all areas of the curriculum. This is what Tanzania did when they replaced English with Swahili. I am not sure whether Swahili is used today at the university level in Tanzania, but my impression is that primary and secondary education is conducted mostly in Swahili.

In any case, I think instruction in Creole is required, even from the perspective of those productive forces that may need Portuguese. And, of course, the people of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde can continue to learn Portuguese as a foreign language. But to take it for granted that Portuguese is the national language and the only vehicle for education is totally absurd. In São Tomé, where the degree of bilingualism is much higher than in Cape Verde, it would be somewhat easier. Even in the rural areas of São Tomé people seem to converse more easily in Portuguese. This could be attributed to the small size of the island.

Macedo: The issue of language instruction hides myriad problems that have led to the

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