

Book reviews

Paulo Freire and developmentalist nationalism, by Vanilda Paiva

This first edition of this book dates back to 1980 (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, Series: Educação e Transformação) and except for some small changes it corresponds to the author's research work materialized in her doctorate dissertation. Although translated into Spanish, German and English, only twenty years after the first edition a new one comes to light in Brazil. Yet, within the huge bibliography dedicated to Paulo Freire, this work still persists unknown, or deliberately ignored or forgotten. To this omission its contents is not surely alien as it isn't the originality of its core thesis: the author establishes a connection between Freire's pedagogical activity and theoretical production until 1965 and the developmentalist nationalist ideology, of a populist nature, developed and disseminated by a group of intellectuals institutionally gathered around ISEB (Instituto Superior de Estudos Brasileiros). Vanilda Paiva pictures this ideology as an intellectual and political adaptation of Keynesianism — and the social ideas grounding the Welfare State — to the Brazilian reality of the fifties and sixties, which was a peripheral area of the capitalist world.

This critical approach to Paulo Freire's work and thought, in a period that ends in the 1964 military coup, tries to place Freire's activity and thought back in his own historical time and place, which, contrarily to those who propose a panegyric view of him and simultaneously to his detractors as well, leads her to defend theses and propose hypotheses and questions that resulted in a consideration of Vanilda's work much beyond her credits, which is certainly due to eventual uneasiness her work might produce.

As António Nóvoa^a (1998, p. 169) refers, Paulo Freire's life and work are coined in the 20th century ped-

agogical imaginary, which makes disentangling the *man* from the *myth* an almost impossible mission. Besides, this mythological dimension of Paulo Freire has been feeding an intellectual production, sometimes assuming clear hagiographic features. Yet, the role of Social Sciences and particularly that of Sociology is precisely related to "chasing myths", deconstructing prejudices, re-equating and reformulating problems. Because Vanilda Paiva adopted such an epistemological attitude, her work became susceptible of shaking some simplifying orthodoxies. Yet, it was just her critical reflectivity what allowed her to write a book that, according to João Trajano Sento-Sé in the foreword to this edition, "opens up new possibilities for other books to be read and written", and by rejecting the "pretension to be definite" became a "classic", one of "the most beautiful works on the history of ideas ever published in Brazil".

The famous Angicos experience, legitimated by the presence and political agreement of the then president João Goulart, turned Paulo Freire into one of the most known and credited pedagogues in Brazil, particularly due to the "alphabetization method" he proposed, tried out and presented as capable of alphabetizing adults in only 40 hours. Such a method would become the basis for an ambitious Alphabetization National Plan (PNA) targeted to alphabetize five million Brazilians in a short two-year period. Only hope that "Paulo Freire method" could represent a pedagogical solution of universal value, of quasi-miraculous effects, can explain the notoriety of Paulo Freire in a national and international context where illiteracy and development were viewed as core issues, inextricably linked to each other.

In Brazil, the existence of illiteracy rates close to 50%, with drastic consequences in the universe of electors (literacy was an indispensable condition to exert the right to vote), transformed struggle against illiteracy in an eminently political issue, directly linked to projects

related to the social and economic modernization of Brazil. Such developmental and nationalist projects were obviously encouraged by an international political conjuncture favourable to developmentalism, which from a western perspective represented a response to the fear of a further expansion of the Soviet area of influence in a “cold war” context. The beginning of the sixties is chronologically coincident with North American “Alliance for progress” directed to the South; moreover, as stated by Vanilda Paiva, the experimentation of Paulo Freire method was partially financed by a North American agency for international development (US Agency for International Development). 1964 Military Coup led Paulo Freire to prison, at first, and then to exile. There he became the pedagogic “translator” of the Vatican II, for being fundamentally “practical and a political and religious militant” and because of the prestige he earned in the World Council of Churches. As Vanilda Paiva suggests, 1964 Military Coup saved Freire from the critical erosion to which the implementation of the Alphabetization National Plan almost inevitably would lead. On the other hand, it projected him to an international activity in the context of a tide of national liberation movements, all of them also confronted and yielding to a developmentalist ideology. According to Vanilda Paiva, Paulo Freire’s persistent and growing international notoriety and acknowledgement will not be clear enough unless the source of his ideas and his pragmatic and eclectic dimensions are analyzed in the light of the international and Brazilian historical framework of the fifties and sixties.

As regards the Brazilian context, in her research Vanilda Paiva unveils the direct connections between Paulo Freire’s ideas and activity and the national developmentalism defended by ISEB intellectuals and, through such an influence, a more indirect connection with the populist strand represented by Getúlio Vargas, which branded the whole political reality of the Brazilian 20th century, since the lieutenant rebellion against the “Old Republic”, from the twenties onwards.

In what concerns nationalism, developmentalism and populism, the boundaries between right— and left— wings were fluid; they even share some of the dimensions of this ideological patrimony. Materialized in some sort of conflicting unity of apparently opposing forces in the Brazilian political spectrum, such political osmosis meets its utmost expression in the political itinerary of Luís Carlos Prestes. Taking into account the period when the book was published, i.e., in full military dictatorship, this might justify a certain hostility from the University intellectual community in accepting an attempt to “politically and intellectually explain the emergence of Paulo Freire’s ideas and method”, placing him back into his historical context and trying to “unveil the social through the pedagogical”.

The analytical and interpretative work carried out by Vanilda Paiva constitutes a relevant theoretical contribution to the understanding of Paulo Freire’s work and thought. From our point of view, the importance of such a contribution can be synthesized in the following six main ideas:

— The nationalist and developmentalist affiliation of Paulo Freire’s activity and thought is expressed in the way he interpreted Brazilian reality, relying on a development process that might allow for a transition from an “archaic” society to a “modern” society marked by a true political democratization. As Vanilda Paiva states, “Freire’s concern is to develop a pedagogic model fit for the aimed change”, capable of educating a “democratic individual”, and susceptible of corresponding to the transition the Brazilian society was experiencing (pp. 144-145);

— In the context of a “Brazilian Revolution” based on consensus and ruled by reason — as expected by most Brazilian intellectual community in the fifties and early sixties — there emerges the idea of change associated to Paulo Freire’s pedagogy, whose boundaries become clear on being aware that “for him, change requires social reforms that should be promoted by consensus among different social groups and classes” (p. 150);

— This is the context that allows us to understand the full scope of the concept of conscientization, which at that time represents for Freire not a matter of “class consciousness”, but “a type of consciousness that might afford the perception of the country’s overall situation, in a way to bring forth the activities that might enhance national development and consolidate parliamentary democracy” (p. 159);

— As the author defends, Freire’s pedagogical concept should be viewed from this perspective, as a translation of “the ‘enlightened’ authoritarianism underlying isebianism, though under the cover of a struggle against the traditional authoritarianism of the Brazilian society”;

— It is in this sense that the pedagogical model built by Paulo Freire in late fifties and early sixties can be interpreted as a non-directive pedagogy: “educating the masses meant conquering them for the ‘ideology of development’ as formulated by Isebianism. (...). If we accept that Isebianism is the theoretical expression of populism, then we can’t help understanding this same feature in Freire’s pedagogical translation of developmental nationalism” (p. 209);

— A certain pedagogical authoritarianism is in tune with the role attributed to the State and to its activity, planned to promote a shift from an agrarian and oligarchic society to a modern industrial society. This dimension is in contrast with an increasingly non-directive guidance, conferring Freire’s thought an essential ambiguity be-

tween a “pedagogical non-directivity in face-to-face relationships and a certain directivity in a wider ideological field, which stems from the core values of his historical-social, religious and cultural proposal” (p. 25).

As the author continuously stresses, this research deals with the first phase of Paulo Freire’s work and activity, covering a period that ends in 1965. Freire evolution since the second half of the sixties requires a specific approach which falls off the scope of this research. This work represents, indeed, an indispensable contribution to the analysis and understanding of the further political and intellectual trajectory of Paulo Freire. Because of the issues it raises, the questions it induces and its relevance for the discussion of the emancipating and transforming potential of education, it is urgent to redeem this work from oblivion, and to read and discuss this passionate and stimulating book.

ENDNOTES

1. Vide NÓVOA, António (1998). Paulo Freire (1921-1997): a “inteireza” de um pedagogo utópico. In M. Apple e A. Nóvoa (orgs.). *Paulo Freire: política e pedagogia*. Porto: Porto Editora, pp. 167-187.

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