

## Habermas and Paulo Freire: beyond the commonplaces <sup>1 2 3 4</sup>

### *Habermas e Paulo Freire: para além dos lugares-comuns*

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#### Abstract

In recent times, some works have pointed out a close analytical connection between Jürgen Habermas and Paulo Freire, describing, for example, 'dialogue' as a category that theoretically brings them together. This article aims to verify the existence of effective convergences between Habermas and Freire. In this sense, methodologically, their main productions are reviewed. As a result of this scrutiny, present article differs from the perspectives that highlight such an analytical connection. Although it is possible to identify some convergences involving them, these convergences are general. Thus, what is conceived as approximations between Habermasian and Freirean works often have the status of commonplaces.

**Keywords:** Jürgen Habermas, Paulo Freire, dialogue, modernity

#### Resumo

Ultimamente, alguns trabalhos têm apontado uma estreita conexão analítica entre o pensador alemão Jürgen Habermas e o educador brasileiro Paulo Freire, descrevendo-se, por exemplo, o “diálogo” como uma categoria que adensa a relação teórica entre ambos. Este artigo procura averiguar a existência de efetivas convergências entre Habermas e Freire. Para tanto, metodologicamente, são revisadas as suas principais produções. Como resultado desse escrutínio, o presente artigo discrepa das perspectivas que realçam a referida conexão. Embora seja possível identificar algumas convergências entre Habermas e Freire, elas são genéricas. Assim, o que é concebido como aproximações entre os dois autores tem, muitas vezes, o status de lugares-comuns.

**Palavras-chave:** Jürgen Habermas, Paulo Freire, diálogo, modernidade

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In this paper, I develop an approach establishing a comparison between the German thinker Jürgen Habermas and the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire in the discussion context of a possible convergence between their works.<sup>5</sup>

Considering the analytical task implied and the size limitation of this text, I will synthesize the discussion at the level of conceptual formulation rather than descending to the level of the platitudes that have often guided the debates, in the educational context, about the supposed convergence between Habermas and Paulo Freire.

An approach like the one I have in mind requires a *tour de force* related to some postulates of a specific way of conceiving social science.<sup>6</sup> I highlight four of these postulates, namely:

- i. In many situations, the approaches and concepts handled by the socio-historical sciences can be traced back to authors who are, for various reasons, considered classics. However, it is meaningless to celebrate ideas and approaches just because they come from traditionally known authors. In the context of academic debate, the *argumentum magister dixit* is not valid.
- ii. What matters for assessing the intellectual vitality of past approaches and concepts is the relocation that can be made of them whenever a vigorous intellectual movement tries to rethink old or emerging social processes.
- iii. As much as one wants to frame reality in preconceived ideas of authors and theoretical schools, it makes us, at every moment, *dupes de nous-mêmes*, and surprises us with unforeseen developments.
- iv. Affirmations based on commonplaces have the limitations of the obvious: they may carry grains of truth, but they are lost in the confusing amalgam of a lack of theoretical systematization.

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<sup>5</sup> As a sample of perspectives emphasizing the analytical connection between Habermas and Freire, I follow Morrow and Torres's (2002, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> Such postulates are tributaries of a theoretical-methodological background that, from the viewpoint of the historical-social sciences, guided the distinguished and heterogeneous group of intellectuals that questioned the 'biased focus' of modernization theory on the relationship between development and underdevelopment. As a result of this questioning, dependency theory was formulated. See Cardoso (1991) and Dos Santos (2003).

Considering these postulates, I begin focusing on Habermas and Freire according to their material basis because this has contextual implications for their approaches. Therefore, although the superficiality disseminated by bits of quotes shows a different perspective, concepts and approaches are not only the result of a 'desired imaginary'. It is not enough to outline ideas and establish relationships between them to develop an analytical formulation. We need to consider the socio-historical immanence of approaches and concepts, emphasizing that they derive from conjunctures and socially situated agents' actions in specific spaces and times. Let us understand them.

## **Habermas: material basis, contextual implications and approaches**

Born in Rhineland in 1929, Habermas lived his academic education years in a very different context from the first generation of the Frankfurt School. While the first Frankfurtians witnessed the tumultuous times of the Weimar Republic and the rise of the Nazis, Habermas reached middle age in West Germany, in José Guilherme Merquior's words, "without the left" of the cold war (Merquior, 1986).

Somehow, the spark that initially ignited his thinking was a lecture by Marcuse on Freud in the centenary of the father of psychoanalysis (1956) and Habermas's admission to the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research. Marcuse represented a new lease of life for the young Habermas in Frankfurt's former political flame. The prophecy of *Eros and Civilization* (Marcuse, 1986) seemed to sweep away the 'oppressive state of impotence' that spread from the denunciation of the instrumental reason made by Adorno and Horkheimer: Kulturpessimismus (cultural pessimism). This does not mean, of course, that Habermas was a Marcusean. He cared little about the subject of *Eros and Civilisation* (the 'human nature'); what interested him was the question of human becoming.

His first work of significant relevance was *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, from 1962, which, inspired by Hannah Arendt, emphasized a very different ethos from the resentful hedonism of Frankfurt cultural critics (Habermas, 1989). It combined the thesis of the cultural industry, relevant to the first generation of the Institut für Sozialforschung, with

Arendt's civic problematics and emphasized the public space of speech and action as an indispensable channel for human freedom and dignity. Nevertheless, on the other hand, Habermas saw the public sphere as being threatened by technocratism, the actions of 'pressure groups' and a 'structurally administered reality'. In this perspective, Habermas wrote the book *Legitimation Crisis* in 1973, focusing, for example, on the legitimation problems of late capitalism (Habermas, 1975).

Living at the heart of the world-system - structured by a centre, a periphery and a semi-periphery<sup>7</sup> - and being Germany a typical country of advanced capitalism, Habermas focused on the morphology of late capitalism. He pointed out the displacement of the contradictions and the crisis of the system, from the locus of the economy to the State, from the economic to the political field. I repeat the basics: Habermas stresses the obsolescence of Marx's theory of value in the era of high technology and Keynesian economics. He argues that the critique of political economy understood the meaning of nineteenth-century society because, in the capitalism of that time, social and systemic integration was grounded in the economy. As there was a separation between the State and civil society, class relations became institutionalized through the market, which was "impersonal" and sought to respond to social demands. Hence economic crises echoed as legitimacy crises. Problems in the system reverberated in the social integration sphere. However, Habermas understands that something different occurs in modern societies directed by the State. Social and systemic integration became disconnected. In this context, the issue of legitimacy must be understood as a central dimension of possible crises in the political sphere, given that while the population trusts the State, the crises of rationality, by themselves, do not cause much damage, but when the deficit is of legitimacy the damage is significant.

It follows from this *démarche* that the economic sphere no longer supports the principle of interchange and is also no longer the guiding rule for integration. Moreover, state regulation and the politicization of class relations erase the old contours of the class structure. Hence, according to Habermas, a critical theory of society can no longer take the form of a critique of economic thought. Thus, he understands that some of Marx's categories have become outdated.

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<sup>7</sup> The conceptualization carried out by Immanuel Wallerstein regarding the world-system structured by central, semi-peripheral and peripheral countries seems to be more analytically relevant than the traditional dichotomous classification between center and periphery. See Wallerstein (2011a, 2011b, 1996).

For Habermas, under contemporary capitalism, several statements of historical materialism in its classical form must be overcome because of different factors, such as: i) since the Second Industrial Revolution, science has become a production force; ii) nowadays, economy obeys a set of state regulations; iii) class conflict was regulated, and even 'disarmed', by institutionalization (Habermas, 1970). In the latter case, this means the loss of centrality of class struggle, eroding a central thesis of Marx's materialist interpretation of history, namely that 'the class struggle is the motor of history'. The Frankfurtian even admits that preserving the materialist premise about the relationship between teleological action and historical reality is important. Nevertheless, in his understanding, a reconstruction of historical materialism is necessary for the sense of conceiving the norms of action being validated by morality and legally legitimized by law.

Such perspective is interconnected with the understanding that, substantively, it is no longer possible to refer to "historical actors" as in the past with the classist meaning, typified by bourgeois and proletarians. Instead, it is necessary to pay attention to an 'arena' of human beings in their cognitive dimension of understanding reality and communicating with their social environment. For Habermas, what we have, rather than the old historical actors, are communicative agents.

Thus, we arrive at the end of the road of Habermasian "Holy Grail", as Merquior (1986) argues: the dialogue (Habermas, 1981a; 1981b). Through dialogue, Habermas assertively proposes the passage from the consciousness paradigm to the language paradigm. According to the Enlightenment heritage, this transition is fundamental for him to carry out his diagnosis of Modernity and emphasize it as an incomplete project in fulfilling its emancipatory promises. Habermas understands that the system has colonized the *lebenswelt* (lifeworld), influencing its dimensions: culture, society, and personality. Interpretations, intersubjective coexistence rules, and speaking/acting skills are extracted from these dimensions. To carry out his approach, Habermas needed to settle accounts with Max Weber's sociological theory concerning the modern world and its increasing rationalization. He did this with a "single pen stroke" and claimed that Weber erred in leveling institutional differential growth and increasing rationalization.

This is a far-reaching assertion, and in its context, Habermas stresses the distinction among empirical-analytical, historical-hermeneutic, and critical sciences, focusing respectively

on technical, practical, and emancipatory interests. Thus, we spot the terrain of Habermasian social science epistemology, represented by five phases, each signifying a theoretical overcoming of an intellectual school.

In the first phase, Habermas opposed the principle of reflective analysis to Parsons' structural-functionalism. He emphasized that his postulate of a basic harmony between the motives of social action and the institutional values of the social system implies a theoretical loss, as it does not allow space for the complex role of societal intersubjectivity. In the second phase, he pays attention to the phenomenological social theory of Alfred Schütz. However, Schütz had attenuated the linguistic dimension of social communication. This fact leads Habermas to the third moment, namely, to complement phenomenological sociology with the linguistic philosophy of the late Wittgenstein. However, Wittgensteinian 'language games' constitute modes of life closed in themselves. Thus, considering that an integral sense of intersubjectivity *in actu* implies frequent and open contacts between different linguistic universes, in the fourth moment, Habermas articulates Wittgenstein's theorization with Gadamer's hermeneutics, taking into account namely his emphasis on tradition as a living translation of different sociocultural horizons. However, hermeneutics equally requires rectification since cross-cultural 'translation theory' is prone to forget that language and culture can also serve as instruments of repression. Thus, Habermasian social science epistemology reaches its last phase: the complementation of Gadamer with the Freudian perspective and Marxist critique of ideology. What attracts Habermas to psychoanalysis is not metapsychology, which inspired Marcuse in *Eros and Civilisation*, but the emancipatory potential of self-reflection.

Habermasian work is sophisticatedly imposing, setting itself the daring task of revising all Western thought. However, despite its imposing nature, it has been criticized, in many cases not necessarily rejected, but aiming to discuss the rectifications in its approaches. For example, Axel Honneth, perhaps the most prominent member of the third generation of the Frankfurt School and a former assistant to Habermas (1984-1990), has pointed out what he calls the 'sociological deficit' in the Habermasian perspective. In other words, a deficit inscribed in a tendency to underestimate in social orders their character determined by conflicts and negotiations (Honneth, 1996). Probably the most acid criticism of Habermas was made by the British historian Quentin Skinner. He tells us:

Reading Habermas is extraordinarily like reading Luther, except that the latter wrote such wonderful prose. Both insist that our wills are enslaved by our present unregenerate way of life... Both promise that conversion will free us from our present bondage and bring us to a state of freedom. Above all, both put their trust in the “redemptive power of reflection” [the phrase is Habermas's], hence our ability to save ourselves through the redemptive properties of the Word or Verb (which Habermas prefers to call discourse). But...frankly, we have a right to expect from our social philosophers something more than a continuation of Protestantism by other means (Skinner, 1982, p. 38).

Except for the jagged irony of erudition, Quentin Skinner's assertions seem excessively acidic. Possibly the most meaningful critical scrutiny of Habermas's work is from a sociological perspective, as Axel Honneth pointed out and Anthony Giddens has emphasized. In other words, as Giddens states, Habermas seems to have reduced interaction to spontaneous communication, unrealistically forgetting the imbrications between interaction and power (Giddens, 1982).

In any case, the grandeur of the Habermasian theoretical-conceptual edifice is striking. It represents a breakthrough in the dilemma in which Adorno, with his analysis of the instrumental reason, involved critical theory. From this perspective emerged the idea that aesthetics was the only way out for human agency in "administered societies". I side with those who believe that Habermas's philosophical effort is one of the most daring projects to offer a basis of legitimacy to democracy, namely through the social practices of communication and understanding. In the current context, where populist totalitarianism wants to turn back the history wheel of the civilizational pact, this intellectual contribution significantly contributes to preserving democratic processes.

Moreover, he points out that contemporary pathologies do not result from an excess of reason but from its lack. Therefore, in his perspective, it is essential to broaden the concept of reason because it encompasses (beyond the cognitive-instrumental sphere) the moral-practical and aesthetic-expressive dimensions. Habermas rescues the Enlightenment heritage on reconfigured bases and re-signifies Modernity, with its emancipatory purposes and as an incomplete project. It is certainly a vital contribution that challenges the relativist and irrational wave disseminated as a trend in the academic context and citizen's interventions from both right and left wings. Such a wave has limited social action to microscopic and fragmentary circularities, ignoring the factors that condition them and disregarding the significance of human

agency based on universally referenced values. It rejects the values responsible for structuring the societal pact that made possible the civilization level in which we live.

## **Paulo Freire: material basis, contextual implications and approaches**

The context in which Paulo Freire developed his approaches is entirely different from that of Habermas. While the latter is situated in the material sphere of advanced capitalism, with all its consequences for his perspective, Freire's work is made in the periphery of capitalism (or, in today's conditions, the semi-periphery) and influenced by a Third Worldist perspective based, for instance, in Fanon (2002).

I refrain from focusing on the vicissitudes and inconsistencies at the origin of Freire's *démarche* – at least here, which does not mean that I reject this debate. Nevertheless, this is not my purpose for the moment. Moreover, Brayner has already analyzed this question. Therefore, I remit interest in the subject to his essay suggestively entitled "Paulfreirianism: instituting a secular theology?" (Brayner, 2017).

Freire's approach is developed taking into account various influences and fully appropriating formulations previously undertaken. For example, besides Frantz Fanon, there are influences of the phenomenology of Husserl, the personalism of Mounier, Eric Fromm, Lucien Goldmann, Karl Mannheim, the New School, Hegelianized Marxism through the reading of Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*, liberation theology, the dialogue in Martin Buber, and the thought gestated in the Higher Institute of Brazilian Studies (ISEB), namely the work of Álvaro Vieira Pinto. A crossroads of many trends and inspirations. How can we evaluate this? First, we can consider it a work of difficult classification. This guarantees a substrate of interpretative fecundity but also, counterproductively, it can be used for various types of inferences, even contradictory ones.

Two of the influences that guided the Freirean approach stand out: the thought developed at the ISEB and Martin Buber's formulation of dialogue. On ISEB's influence, I talk specifically of the philosopher Álvaro Vieira Pinto, whom Paulo Freire called "my master". There was a reason for this title, as Vieira Pinto not only inspired Freire but also elaborated concepts (mainly in the book *Consciousness and National Reality*) that Freire incorporated into his works. The concept of conscientization is an example in this regard.



To a large extent, Vieira Pinto's work was produced in a period marked by signs of the construction of the "new" and "change" in Brazil. These were crucial points of the phase that emerged after the election of Juscelino Kubistchek (1955), lasting until 1964 with the civil-military coup d'état, which led Vieira Pinto into exile. Seeking to construct change, the Higher Institute of Brazilian Studies (ISEB) was an active centre for producing knowledge and disseminating ideas.

In the first part of the extensive book *Consciousness and National Reality* published 1960, Álvaro Vieira Pinto defends consciousness's material, physical and social basis. Preliminarily, he explains in his book the conceptualization of the polarised forms of "consciousness of national reality", which, in general, would represent two modes of thinking, namely: i) the naive consciousness, as being a type of consciousness, in essence, without the notion of the factors and conditions that determine it; ii) the critical consciousness, which, contrary to the first, would have a clear perception of the factors and conditions that determine it. In the book's second part, focused on naive consciousness, he highlights various dimensions, attitudes and characteristics of this form of consciousness. He states, for example, that the naive consciousness is marked by a sensitive character, logical incoherence, the inability to dialogue, moralism, hero worship, messianism, exacerbated patriotism, and others, attributes he considered harmful. Vieira Pinto (1960, p. 161) emphasizes: "Naïve thinking must not only be considered harmful to the individual, but also to the community because it is a dangerous obstacle to its development process.

In the nearly 600 pages of the third part of *Consciousness and National Reality*, corresponding to book two, Vieira Pinto deals with critical consciousness, conceptualizing it as a system of seven related categories: objectivity, historicity, rationality, totality, activity, freedom, and nationality. He stresses:

Critical consciousness is a system, unlike naive consciousness, which does not have this character since it does not recognize itself as conditioned by reality. It cannot have such a character because it is structured by an agglomeration of disconnected attitudes, determined by occasional circumstances, limited to momentary interests and without links to the meaning of the collective process in society. In considering critical consciousness as a system, we should not give this word the dogmatic sense it almost always has in philosophy. Here, it means the repertoire of more general ideas that allow us to understand reality, whose knowledge does not result from abstract meditation but from the social practice that

transforms the objective world and from the experience of the historical developmental stage in which the community finds itself. (Vieira Pinto, 1960, p. 520)

The division of the book *Consciousness and National Reality* into three parts shows a rigorous and careful analytical procedure adopted by the author. First, Vieira Pinto, supported initially by a consistent theoretical-methodological basis, deals with defining the categories (the polarity of consciousnesses). After he considers the denial, that is, the problematization of the "naive attitudes". Finally, overcoming naive consciousness, he presents his formulation around critical consciousness.

Paulo Freire completely assimilates Vieira Pinto's conceptual basis on consciousness/conscientization, although many think this conceptualization comes from Freire himself. This is not true and he admitted when affirmed that:

Generally, people believe I am the author of this strange word, "conscientization", because it is the central concept of my ideas about education. In reality, it was created by a team of Higher Institute of Brazilian Studies professors around 1964.<sup>8</sup> The philosopher Álvaro Pinto can be mentioned among them. (Freire, 1980, p. 25)

Moreover, concerning his book *Education: the Practice of Freedom*, he stated:

Well, *Education: the Practice of Freedom* was an expanded revision of my thesis, which I defended for a professorship at the University of Pernambuco... In Chile, I reviewed everything and even realized a series of inconsistencies. But, before concluding the book for publication... I was fortunate to have Álvaro Vieira Pinto close by, who did a critical reading of the originals. (Freire & Guimarães, 2000, p. 176)

On the other hand, in the 1980s, Vieira Pinto (1993) assessed the directions Paulo Freire's work was taking and the behaviour of freirians, and expressed his disappointment. He stated the following:

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<sup>8</sup> Freire's chronological reference, mentioning "around 1964", is wrong. The publication of *Consciousness and National Reality* took place in 1960.

The success of a particular pedagogical attitude must not become an obstacle to the development of education itself. Successful methods, like Paulo Freire's, can become a cyst, which blocks their own continuation. (p. 26)

At the base of Vieira Pinto's this assertion is, for example, the growing laudatory manifestations about Freire, leading to Paulo Freire's, and obstructing the development of theoretical-practical problematization of the educational phenomena. In other words, the "master" who introduced the concept of conscientization seems to have seen it being dulled by the disregard for analytical reflection.

Let us now focus on the second formulation mentioned earlier: Freire's understanding of Martin Buber's concept of dialogue.<sup>9</sup>

A philosopher and pedagogue of Jewish origin who became a professor at the University of Frankfurt - resigning after the rise of Nazism in 1933 - Martin Buber (1878-1965) emphasized that there was no existence without communication and dialogue. For him, the principle words *I-You* (relationship) and *I-It* (experience) show the two dimensions of the philosophy of dialogue that concern existence itself. According to the Buberian understanding, people are born with the capacity for interrelationship; i.e., for intersubjectivity.

For Buber, the human being is never alone, as he defines himself in a double relationship, either with the You or with the It. The universe of the Thou is made up of active, living and enriching relationships, whether established for the I with nature, with the other, or with spiritual essences. On the contrary, the universe of It is degraded, as opposed to the universe of the "person" derived from the relations between I and Thou, the world of "objectivity" where what matters is no longer "relationship" but "experience". Since such universes are interconnected, there is a risk that the relationships between them deteriorate and become relationships of I in It.

A society structured according to the principle of dialogicity demands, for Buber, a political organization based on small communities in which dialogue plays a vital role. Therefore,

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<sup>9</sup> I will focus on Martin Buber's concept of dialogue based on four sources: Buber himself, in his 'I and Thou'; Charles Scott's doctoral thesis, presented to the University of British Columbia, on Buber's dialogue concerning education; Flávio Brayner's careful review about Buber in the work 'Men and women of speech: dialogue and popular education'; and the paper 'Martin Buber: Father of the philosophy of dialogue', by Sylwia Górzna. See Scott (2011), Brayner (2009), Górzna (2014) and Buber (1970).

we find out in Buber a kind of utopian socialism in which the State is conceived as an aggregator of communities.

For Buber, dialogue goes beyond a mere encounter, being human behaviour itself. It is seen in the intersubjective actions of one-to-one-another, whose essential dimension is the reciprocity of inner action, in which the spiritual dialogue is as essential as the earthly one. Buberian spiritual dialogue means the relationship with "divine things". However, Buber emphatically repelled criticism that his theory of dialogue became a mystical relationship of the human being with the world and the idea of divinity. His mention of the relationship between dialogue and love is emblematic. He refers to the importance of love for the dialoguing person, but not as a rule for humans to find themselves in dialogue just because they love one another, but as something that must exist in the spiritualized individual as "faith in our being present and perceiving". Thus, dialogicity cannot be equated with love. After all, Buber understands that no one, at any time, has loved all human beings met.

Fundamentally, in Buber, the innate You of each human being can only be realized or perfected in the individual and unique relationship between You and I and insofar as the You does not degrade into It. Buber's influences on Paulo Freire and, more than that, how Freire assimilates the Buberian perspective is so direct that, frankly, it is hard to understand how certain Freirians do not realize this and still attribute to Freire the approaches to dialogue when, in fact, they are Buber's. In this regard, let us look at the following excerpt from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*:

In the theory of antialogical action, conquest (as its primary characteristic) involves a Subject who conquers another person and transforms her or him into a "thing." In the dialogical theory of action, Subjects meet in cooperation in order to transform the world. The antialogical, dominating / transforms the dominated, conquered thou into a mere if. The dialogical /, however, knows that it is precisely the thou ("not-/") which has called forth his or her own existence. He also knows that the thou which calls forth his own existence, in turn, constitutes an / which has in his / its thou. The / and the thou thus become, in the dialectic of these relationships, two thous which become two. The dialogical theory of action does not involve a Subject, who dominates by virtue of conquest, and a dominated object. [emphases in original] (Freire, 1987, pp. 165-166)

It does not require a tremendous hermeneutical effort to realize that Freire's dialogical approach has its roots in Martin Buber, quoted in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. On the other hand, Freire's work is more than just *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, as he brought other productions to light.

However, the attempt to deny that the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* holds the matrix of Freire's thought can be easily deconstructed. The reason is apparent: his other writings are, directly or indirectly, related to this book. In this sense, it is paradigmatic that one of his last productions is called *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1992). It is also revealing that, in the justification of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire relates the book to his previous major work. This becomes clear when he emphasizes his intention "to deepen some points discussed in our previous work, *Education as the Practice of Freedom*" (Freire, 1987, p. 29). In short, as Brayner (2009) rightly says, "Freire's Summa Pedagogica is 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed': this book concentrates the essence of his educational thought and from which all his previous and subsequent writings point or refer" (217).

After Paulo Freire, the pedagogical status of the oppressed gained relevance, being conceived as the object/subject of a pedagogy which, through conscientization, aims for freedom. Though the oppressed is seen broadly, a central dimension in the Freirian approach is the social class paradigm. We find in Freire expressions such as "right thinking" and "true meaning", showing a movement from a banking education to a problematizing one, demystifying the veiled world that serves the interests of the oppressor. It is a slogan with a strong emotional and political-ideological appeal, especially in contexts marked by forms of oppression. However, the premises of such a slogan are not always backed by the necessary conceptual rigor.

Education, dialogue, conscientization and liberation constitute a path, traced by Freire, which stimulates hope and progressive sensibility. On the other hand, it also calls for steps in a type of theological walk that perhaps, under some circumstances, nullifies the secular sense of education and conscientization (*La bonne nouvelle est-elle annoncé aux hommes?*).

Leaving the proclamation level and thinking about praxeology, there are doubts regarding the effectiveness of Freire's purpose, sheltered in the pedagogical request for each learner to "say his word" in the exchange with other words that "read the world". We can make such an inference because this "reading the world" is expressed by consciousnesses submerged in "alienated" (or "naïve") forms of word representation (Brayner, 2009). This is a challenging problem, but it is not appreciated since there is no comprehensive theory of society and its mechanisms of social action in Freire's approach. The core of his approach refers to the educational and the pedagogical.

Furthermore, as the sample presented here has shown, the content centrality of Paulo Freire's work is substantially inscribed in the background disseminated by the Modernity project.

## **Analytical tensions between Habermas and Freire**

The systematic comparison between the works of Habermas and Paulo Freire, carried out with logical coherence and not under the impulse of "willful imperatives", reveals analytical tensions - or even paradoxes - that should not be ignored by the "academic project" that intends to establish a paradigmatic articulation between them. Otherwise, this "project" loses credibility and, at most, produces a pile of intentions which feeds passive audiences, according to the lucrative games of interests of the scientific field (Bourdieu, 1976) and the market of cognitive goods driven by the publishing industry.

It is pretty revealing that Paulo Freire himself did not carry out a structured analytical articulation with Habermas's work, interconnecting the paradigms. We cannot say he was unaware of the German social theory and, in particular, the production of the Frankfurt School, especially considering that Eric Fromm and Herbert Marcuse were two of his references. Freire (1987) clearly relies on Marcuse - who developed a divergent debate with Habermas about technology - to affirm that the oppressors "it kills life. More and more, the oppressors are using science and technology as unquestionably powerful instruments for their purpose: the maintenance of the oppressive order" (p. 47).

I point out just some of the aforementioned analytic tensions. It is possible to infer part of them from the discussions above.

The first analytical tension refers to the contexts from which Habermas and Freire developed their approaches. The difference is significant. Habermasian perspectives are formulated on the material basis of "advanced capitalism"; that is to say, Post-World War II Germany, where the population's social demands were reasonably equated. For example, there was no illiteracy problem as in Latin America. In other words, we are talking about the European welfare societies, societies in which there was a pact on the "social question" and material claims were assimilated by the establishment. Thus, demands and mobilizations, with some exceptions, have been strongly developed around post-material issues. Therefore, it is not surprising that

Habermas points out the loss of labour centrality and the outdatedness of the class struggle thesis, although these are undoubtedly questionable positions.

Many lines are not needed to show that the context in which Freire's work emerges is entirely different from that of Habermas. In the second half of the 20th century, Brazil was a society moving toward the urban-industrial world, having enormous amounts of illiterate people. It was a common situation in Latin America, tied by the consequences of (semi)peripheral dependent capitalism. Therefore, it was very different from the prevailing reality of advanced capitalism. Consequently, there is no support in Paulo Freire for positions advocating the overcoming of the concept of class struggle and the loss of meaning of the conflicts involving social classes.

Another analytical tension that is difficult to attenuate refers to the debate on the paradigm of language and the paradigm of consciousness. This means, for example, the decentralization of the cognizing subjects. Consequently, according to the language paradigm, dialogue and understanding between social agents are not subject to external injunctions; they are based only on the rules of the discourse itself. Unlike the consciousness paradigm, emphasis is not placed on an inner dimension of the human being – an "a priori consciousness", "right", or "awareness of the true". At the same time, the existence of a social agent who, when seeking knowledge, bases his decisions on a sovereign subjective intentionality is also disregarded. There could be no greater contrast to Freire's perspective, especially when he advocates for a revolutionary process that continues into a cultural revolution after the revolutionaries come to power, in which there should be "a serious and profound effort at conscientização—by means of which the people, through a true praxis, leave behind the status of objects to assume the status of historical Subjects—is necessary." (Freire, 1987, p. 158).

As a result of another "analytical tension", the status of the agents of dialogue contrasts in both. In Habermas, they are "projected as an ideal speech community" shared by linguistically competent agents, which deliberates - free of coercion - on conventions polemicized in historical becoming. Freire's perspective is very different. The agents of his dialogue are illiterate and semi-illiterate, people living in socially unequal situations and subjected to relations of oppression. For no other reason, his *pedagogical Summa* is called *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Last but not least, there are profound differences in how Habermas and Freire conceive social change. Habermas's concern is clearly with the reform of advanced capitalism - so-called

"managed" or "late capitalism". He seeks to focus on its legitimacy crises to ensure that the societies generated do not lose their 'welfare face'. It is a perspective within the framework of classic European social democracy. We must recognize that this is not irrelevant. However, on the other hand, the perspective of social change fostered by Paulo Freire's work is quite distinct. Figuratively speaking, we can say that social change in Habermas is reform, and in Freire, it is transformation. Nevertheless, this poses contemporary challenges to Freirian work because - in general words - his vision of transformation is historically dated and results from a very different time. His dualistic and dichotomous mentions involving, for example, masses, revolutionary leaderships, elites, revolutionary war, etc.. Furthermore, there is a great degree of simplification, reproducing a lexicon of Latin America during the Cold War period. It is a rhetoric that requires a theoretical-empirical adjustment. I suspect, however, that some Freirians, entranced by the laudatory rhetoric, are not inclined to do this "homework". It seems that these Freirians, under a kind of eulogy hypnosis, do not realize the historical gap of their rhetoric and possibly do not have the objective credentials - from a knowledge viewpoint - to consider such an analytical challenge. It is regrettable because, in this way, they, and not their "adversaries", grant Paulo Freire's legacy a residual character, ignoring the specificities of current social and educational phenomena- regardless of the judgment made of him and the perspective each one has on his approaches.

## General convergences between Habermas and Paulo Freire

One could ask whether, after what has been highlighted in this essay, there are effective, concrete, and specific convergence points between Habermas and Paulo Freire. First, the answer will probably depend on how we position ourselves toward a "methodological" perspective that has become widespread in the comparative studies field: reading between the lines what is expressly denied in the text lines. There are several reasons for this, but two stand out: the "imperatives of will", i.e., the "eager" search to find out connections between different fields, and skimming/scanning type readings, pompously repeating expressions to disguise the fact that a text has not been entirely read. "Diagonal reading" or, let us use the correct words, deficit reading.



Returning to our point, if one reads between the lines what is expressly denied in the lines, moreover, disregarding the contexts, countless points of convergence between Habermas and Freire abound. Frankly, I do not see it this way. Moreover, we should point out that they are authors at different intellectual levels. On the one hand, a philosopher, sociologist, and social theorist who has reviewed the entire tradition of Western thought. On the other hand, an educator, humanist, and creator of a literacy method that has earned him great recognition.

In any case, as affirmed at the beginning of this paper, approaches and concepts handled by the socio-historical sciences can circulate involving diverse authors, mainly when these authors share analytical frames of reference inscribed in the tradition of critical theories. In this sense, we can find a certain convergence between Habermas and Paulo Freire on the level of some general theses.

One is that both inscribe their contributions to the project of Modernity in their emancipatory intentions, although with different perspectives. It is of little importance that Paulo Freire sometimes mentions postmodernity because his whole work is rooted in the incomplete project of Modernity.

Given this modern affiliation of both, we can infer the possibility of extracting from their works the basis for a non-relativistic pedagogical approach. However, this sometimes encounters barriers in some of the commonplaces repeated about Freire, for instance, regarding the teacher's role. I repeat what was said about commonplaces and their obvious limitations: they may even have grains of truth, but these are lost in the confusing amalgam of lack of theoretical systematization.

Regarding the dialogicity assumed by Freire – under the influence of Martin Buber – and on the Habermasian communicative rationality, it can be said that the possible convergence between them concerns the general recognition that agents must have a communicative competence. From that point on, their approaches diverge. Habermas conjectures about an "ideal speech community" which, in terms of heterogeneity, is limited to differences in the lifeworld, since the concept of social class is not central to him. Freire, on the other hand, considers the centrality of social class and the inequalities that cross the universe of the oppressed. Hence the nature of the dialogue differs in both. The convergence is limited to the general recognition of communicative competence.

## Conclusion

In this essay, I aimed to develop a *démarche* establishing a comparison between the German thinker Jürgen Habermas and the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, as a condition for discussing the possibility of convergence between their works. Initially, I have highlighted an overview of the two and then focused on what differentiates them. Subsequently, keeping in mind general theses, I discussed the tenuous possibilities of convergence between Habermas e Freire. I believe that the objective of this essay has been achieved.

Given what this paper has set out, I stress one last inference. It is necessary to avoid the reductionist simplification so common in current social analysis, especially in educational research. It is almost like a butterfly collector, establishing relationships between theories, classifying approaches, and gathering authors in bundles of citations, resulting in heaps presented as Nobel-worthy discoveries. On the contrary, the rigour of systematic analysis is essential, rejecting the repetition of generalities and empty approaches.

In this sense, I think comparative studies (between theorists, situations, countries, etc.) can find their legitimacy. Thus, they can demonstrate convergences, for instance, between studied authors - when such convergences do exist - or show that, sometimes, the “detected” convergences result more from a personal desire of those who "identify" them and from the superficiality of the analysis that allowed the identification.

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