

Articles

Paulo Freire's legacy through a transmethodological lens: planetary decoloniality, complexity and hope

El legado de Paulo Freire bajo la lente transmetódica: entre decolonialidad planetaria, complejidad y esperanza

Milagros Elena Rodríguez¹ , Ivan Fortunato^{2*}

¹Universidad de Oriente (UDO), Cumaná, Sucre, Venezuela

²Instituto Federal de São Paulo (IFSP), Itapetininga, SP, Brasil

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Abstract

To the Wanderer of Utopia, Paulo Freire, thank you so much! In this transmethodical, decolonial, planetary, and complex study, grounded in rhizomatic deconstruction and reconstruction, we set out to analyze how the Freirean legacy is constituted as a praxis of resistance that interweaves the planetary decolonial option and complex thinking within a horizon of hope. The guiding problem of the inquiry is to understand how Freirean works have been appropriated, distorted, or contested within narratives that strain their emancipatory meaning. Throughout the analytical process we developed the operationalization of the transmethodological analysis through the rhizomes of deconstruction and reconstruction. In the deconstruction, we show how the Freirean legacy has been manipulated by colonial policies that appropriate his discourse while perpetuating oppressive structures. In the reconstruction, we argue that the decolonial struggles of the Global South, with Paulo Freire as a central figure, advocate for dignity, liberation, and justice. Thus, we unveil that the Freirean legacy thus invites us to reflect on liberating education amid global injustice, fostering autonomy and human dignity.

Keywords: Paulo Freire; liberating education; praxis.

Resumen

¡Al Andariego de la Utopía Paulo Freire, gracias por tanto! En una investigación transmetódica, decolonial, planetaria y compleja, sustentada en la deconstrucción y reconstrucción rizomática, nos propusimos analizar, cómo el legado Freireano se constituye en una praxis de resistencia que entrelaza la opción decolonial planetaria, el pensamiento complejo en un horizonte de esperanza. El problema que orienta la indagación consiste en comprender cómo las obras Freirianas han sido apropiadas, distorsionadas o disputadas en diversas narrativas que tensionan su sentido emancipador. En el recorrido analítico desarrollamos la operacionalización del análisis transmetódica en los rizomas de deconstrucción y reconstrucción. En la deconstrucción, mostramos cómo el legado Freireano ha sido manipulado por políticas coloniales que se apropian de su discurso mientras perpetúan estructuras opresivas. En la reconstrucción, argumentamos que las luchas decoloniales del Sur Global, con Paulo Freire como figura central, abogan por la dignidad, la liberación y la justicia. Así, desvelamos que el legado Freireano nos invita, así, a reflexionar sobre la educación liberadora en medio de la injusticia global, fomentando autonomía y dignidad humana.

Palabras clave: Paulo Freire; educación libertadora; praxis.

*Corresponding author:

ivanfrt@yahoo.com.br

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FREIREAN EPIGRAPHS. WITH PAULO FREIRE WE DISPLAY OUR INQUIRY

To the extent that the popular classes emerge, recognize, and critically perceive the way they are viewed by the elites, they tend, whenever possible, to respond with authentic resistance. Frightened by this emergence, the elites, while still in positions of power, seek to silence the popular masses, domesticating them either through force or paternalistic measures. They attempt to halt the very process from which popular consciousness and collective agency arise, along with all its consequences (Freire, 1967, p. 86).



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To speak of reality as though it were fixed, static, fragmented, and neatly ordered, or to lecture about matters entirely disconnected from learners' lived experiences, becomes the central obsession of this form of education. Its uncontrollable drive. Within it, the educator appears as the unquestioned authority, the sole active subject whose task is to "fill" learners with the contents of their narration. Yet these contents are merely fragments of reality, detached from the totality that gives them meaning. In such discourse, language is stripped of its concrete force and turns into hollow, alienated, and alienating verbalism. It becomes more sound than meaning and, as such, perhaps better left unsaid (Freire, 2005, p. 77).

For those who endured the alienating experience of colonial education, the so-called "positivity" of that education only acquires meaning once, through independence, they reject and overcome it (Freire, 2000, p. 24).

[...] making and remaking themselves in the process of making history, as both subjects and objects, women and men became beings fully inserted in the world rather than merely adapted to it. In doing so, they discovered that dreams, too, could become a driving force of history. There is no change without dreams, just as there are no dreams without hope (Freire, 1992, p. 116).

It is impossible to respect learners, their dignity, their becoming, and their identities under construction without considering the conditions in which they have lived and without recognizing the value of the "experiential knowledge" they bring with them to school (Freire, 1996, p. 26).

PREAMBLE. PAULO FREIRE'S LIBERATORY STRUGGLE STILL BURNS: THE URGENCY OF A PLANETARY AND DECOLONIAL READING

To reflect on the decolonial struggles of the Global South throughout history is, in many ways, to remain Freirean. From this standpoint, we seek to contribute to the construction of a critical and complex perspective capable of engaging with Southern epistemologies, recovering subaltern voices, and fostering a broader and more emancipatory understanding of how the Freirean legacy constitutes a praxis of resistance.

In this study, decolonial struggles are understood *as processes aimed at questioning and transforming structures of domination inherited from coloniality; from this perspective, planetary decoloniality becomes essential*. Within this framework, the notion of the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000) is revisited in dialogue with the decolonial option (Mignolo, 2007). In the field of education, these struggles emerge as a praxis committed to transforming relations of power and affirming other ways of knowing and existing (Walsh, 2009), while simultaneously challenging hierarchies of class, gender, sexuality, spirituality, language, territory, and race embedded within the modern/colonial world-system (Grosfoguel, 2006).

For this reason, we approach Paulo Freire's work as an interwoven field of emancipatory meanings that sustain the utopian horizon of a more just world, continuing a Freirean planetary-decolonial path already initiated through lessons in subversion (Rodríguez; Fortunato, 2024) and pedagogical praxis (Rodríguez; Fortunato, 2025).

To illuminate the Freirean path, we revisit several of the steps taken by the patron of Brazilian education, the pilgrim of utopia, Paulo Freire. We propose the hypothesis that the liberation praxis developed by the educator from Pernambuco (Brazil) constitutes a field of emancipatory meanings inaugurated in *Education as the Practice of Freedom* (Freire, 1967), consolidated in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1968), and expanded throughout his lifelong political and pedagogical commitment, extending far beyond 1997, the year of his passing, through the countless lives he transformed.

This investigation is organized around five epigraphs that testify to the enduring relevance of Paulo Freire's legacy today. We begin with a passage from his first published book, *Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1967), and conclude with a passage from the final work published

during his lifetime, *Pedagogy of Autonomy* (1996). Our intention is not to define a beginning or an end to his thought, but rather to weave together a constellation of liberatory resonances that, throughout different moments of his life, denounced dehumanization while announcing an active and transformative hope.

We know that Paulo Freire's legacy has left a profound mark on the deconstruction and problematization of both the colonial narratives of his own time and those that persist today. Across the world, we continue to confront countless educational reforms that ultimately reproduce more of the same, despite their notable exceptions: coloniality, neoliberal policies serving the market logic imposed by global coloniality, timid reform instruments, alienated forms of teacher education, among other pathologies. In the end, oppression prevails in every dimension. Paulo Freire struggled against all of this, and his legacy remains alive. Its urgency is still palpable, as though the pedagogue of the favelas were still there today, wading through the pain of the oppressed.

Despite the enduring relevance of Freirean thought, studies articulating his legacy with planetary decolonial perspectives and with complex approaches capable of responding to contemporary educational crises remain limited. For Jardimino and Soto-Arango (2020), Paulo Freire has become a classic author, and an education aligned with his thought would necessarily draw upon decolonial approaches and the epistemologies of the South in order to destabilize dominant modes of thinking rooted in the technical rationality produced by modernity.

The challenge therefore persists: *how can Paulo Freire be reread critically beyond canonized or merely celebratory interpretations?* Within this context, the guiding question of this study becomes: *in what ways can Paulo Freire's legacy be reinterpreted through a transmethodological reading?*

To introduce this investigation, we selected quotations of particular relevance, which we now unpack in order to provoke reflection and dialogue. In the *first epigraph*, drawn from *Education as the Practice of Freedom*, the world encounters the foundational principle of Libertarian Pedagogy, through which Paulo Freire reveals the dialectic between oppression and liberation, one of the central axes of his theory. Freire argues that once the popular classes develop a critical awareness of their own reality and recognize the ways they are perceived and treated by the elites, they begin to react against oppression. This process is what he calls conscientization: the movement from naïve consciousness toward a critical understanding of social reality.

The elites mentioned by Paulo Freire in the *first epigraph* may be understood, within the Brazilian context of the time, as dominant sectors linked to economic, political, and cultural power. Fearful of the growing participation of the popular classes, these elites attempt to silence them and preserve structures of domestication through force or paternalistic strategies that obstruct the autonomy of the oppressed. This reflects what Freire denounces as the banking model of education, a pedagogical framework that reinforces passivity and obedience, in contrast to liberatory education, which fosters dialogue, participation, and human emancipation. The quotation chosen as our epigraph illustrates the tension between oppression and liberation, revealing how education can function either as an instrument of domination or as a means of social transformation, depending on how it is conceived and practiced.

In the *second epigraph*, taken from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the pilgrim of utopia reminds us that reality cannot be understood as fragmented, static, or detached from lived experience. To alienate education from the realities of learners is one of the great errors of banking education. Does this not resemble many educational realities today? Do educators still appear as figures attempting to fill minds? Or worse still: amid contemporary technologies, has the medium itself become what fills minds, lulling them into passivity for the convenience of today's oppressors?

We continue questioning ourselves and one another: although much is said about the relevance and necessity of a liberatory decolonial education committed to life and to the concrete realities of learners, can we truly say that this is the kind of education being practiced in today's classrooms? Paulo Freire concludes this epigraph from his seminal work with a reflection that remains painfully current: in contemporary education, "[...] the word is emptied of the concrete dimension it should possess and becomes a hollow word, alienated and alienating verbalism. Hence, it is more sound than meaning and, as such, it would be better not to utter it" (Freire, 2005, p. 77). Painful as it may be to acknowledge, has this not always been one of the enduring truths of Freirean critique?

In the *third epigraph*, drawn from *Letters to Guinea-Bissau*, the pedagogue reminds us that the only true meaning colonial education can have in the life of the numbed and subordinated student is liberation itself. The hope lies in overcoming that alienating “positivity” imposed upon their lives and moving toward the learner understood in a fuller sense: not merely as a passive pupil, but as someone who discerns, participates actively, learns with others, and becomes co-responsible for education. When this occurs, the learner begins to achieve independence and overcome the coloniality that once trapped them within educational institutions, for “[...] upon becoming independent, they reject and overcome it” (Freire, 2000, p. 24).

In the *fourth epigraph*, taken from *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire teaches that in the ongoing process of making history, as women and men, as education and liberation, as decoloniality and pedagogy, we gradually become beings fully inserted into the world rather than merely adapted to it. This becomes a vital way of living, capable of moving history itself. For “[...] there is no change without dreams, just as there are no dreams without hope” (Freire, 1992, p. 116). From this, we learn a new verb: to enact hope. Hope, in Freirean terms, is not passive waiting, but permanent action in favor of liberation. It is life itself journeying across distances in search of the historical realization of decoloniality.

In the *fifth epigraph*, taken from *Pedagogy of Autonomy*, we present a passage that expresses some of the fundamental principles of Paulo Freire’s liberatory pedagogy: the recognition of learners as active subjects in the educational process and, implicitly, the ethical responsibility of educators to cultivate exchanges grounded in the knowledge of all those involved. Through this dialogical relationship, a problem-posing and liberatory education gradually emerges, one that encourages a critical reading of the world even before the reading of words. By respecting the dignity and identities of learners as beings in formation, educators break with authoritarian practices and foster a humanizing education grounded in critical reflection.

The breadth of the Freirean legacy expressed in these epigraphs guides the objective of our inquiry: to analyze, from a transmethodological perspective, Paulo Freire’s legacy as a horizon of planetary decoloniality, complexity, and hope, as we further develop and unfold in the rhizomatic discussion that follows.

RHIZOME. PLANETARY-DECOLONIAL AND COMPLEX TRANSMETHODOLOG

This study adopts a planetary-decolonial and complex transmethodological perspective (Rodríguez, 2017) to analyze Paulo Freire’s legacy as a horizon of complexity, decoloniality, and hope. This approach emerges from a critique of reductionist methodologies grounded in the modern-colonial matrix, methodologies that fragment educational phenomena, erase multiple historicities, and limit the understanding of emancipatory processes. In dialogue with Paulo Freire (2005), we argue that it is impossible to conceive genuinely liberatory projects through dependent, external, or alienating epistemological structures, much in the same way that Freire warned of the impossibility of full development within societies subordinated to metropolitan centers of political, economic, and cultural decision-making.

From this perspective, planetary-complex decoloniality constitutes the broader epistemic horizon of the study, articulating a critique of Eurocentric universalism alongside the recognition of historical pluralities and transdisciplinary openness (Rodríguez, 2022a; Rodríguez, 2022b). The term *planetary* points to the understanding that we inhabit a shared common world shaped by global inequalities, while the notion of complexity acknowledges interdependencies, contradictions, uncertainties, and the non-linear dynamics of social reality. In this sense, the study is situated within a complex transparadigm that moves beyond simplifications and embraces multiple levels of analysis (Morin, 1994).

Planetary-decolonial and complex transmethodologies find their foundations in studies on culture and decoloniality developed by Rodríguez (2017), as well as in Enrique Dussel’s (2004) notion of the prefix *trans*, which signals a critical beyond of modernity situated in the exteriority of all that was denied, subordinated, or rendered insignificant by the modern-colonial project. Drawing upon this perspective, transmethodology seeks to recover dimensions excluded by conventional methods: the centrality of the researching subject, the historical density of social processes, the complexity of the object of study, and subalternized forms of knowledge.

This perspective has been progressively developed in Rodríguez (2017, 2019, 2022a, 2022b) and applied to Freirean studies in recent investigations carried out by Rodríguez and Fortunato (2021, 2022a, 2022b), consolidating an analytical line that articulates complexity, planetary decoloniality, and liberatory education. Within this trajectory, it is argued that Paulo Freire's struggles cannot be understood through colonial, rigid, or linear frameworks, but only through open, relational, and historically situated perspectives.

In coherence with this approach, the present study adopts a planetary-decolonial and complex transmethodological perspective that does not merely adhere to conventional methods, but instead problematizes, deconstructs, and reconfigures them. The corpus consists of five works by Paulo Freire selected for their historical and conceptual relevance across different phases of his intellectual trajectory: *Education as the Practice of Freedom* (Freire, 1967), *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, first published in 1968 (Freire, 2005), *Letters to Guinea-Bissau*, first published in 1977 (Freire, 2000), *Pedagogy of Hope* (Freire, 1992), and *Pedagogy of Autonomy* (Freire, 1996). The selection was guided by three criteria: (i) the centrality of these works in the formulation of Freirean thought; (ii) the explicit presence of categories related to liberation, dialogue, critical consciousness, hope, and autonomy; and (iii) their potential to engage contemporary debates on coloniality and complexity.

For the analytical development of the study, we employ the transmethod of rhizomatic deconstruction (Rodríguez, 2017; 2019). This transmethod consists of dismantling crystallized, linear, or domesticated readings of Freirean thought in order to reconstruct multiple connections among categories, temporalities, and contexts. The reference to the rhizome derives from Deleuze and Guattari (2004, p. 26), who understand it as a multiplicity connectable at any point. Applied to this investigation, the rhizome allows Freire's work to be read not as a closed system, but as an open network of concepts, tensions, and historical displacements, including the ruptures and discontinuities woven throughout the fabric of discourse.

The *operationalization* of the analysis unfolded through two recursive and complementary stages, understood not as linear phases but as interdependent analytical movements: *critical deconstruction and rhizomatic reconstruction*. The reference to the rhizome (Deleuze; Guattari, 2004) makes it possible to understand Freirean thought as an open network of concepts and transformative possibilities:

1. **Rhizomatic Deconstruction.** In this first stage, we identified reductionist or domesticated interpretations of Freirean thought, particularly those that reduce it to a depoliticized pedagogy, a merely didactic technique, or an institutional rhetoric emptied of transformative content. At the same time, we examined contemporary forms of educational coloniality, including the commodification of education, pedagogical technocratization, the silencing of dialogue, and the reproduction of structural inequalities. This stage is grounded in the need to dismantle sedimented colonial epistemologies and open space for alternative analytical possibilities.
2. **Rhizomatic Reconstruction.** In the second stage, we reconstructed non-linear connections among categories present across Paulo Freire's different works, tracing continuities, reformulations, and conceptual displacements. Through a complex reading, notions such as conscientization, praxis, hope, decoloniality, autonomy, and dialogue were connected to contemporary educational challenges, allowing Freire's thought to emerge not as a static doctrine, but as a living and dynamic field of critical possibilities.

The central analytical categories employed in this study were: oppression/liberation, conscientization, dialogue, hope, autonomy, and transformative praxis. These categories are grounded in the selected corpus and structure the interpretive reading developed throughout the investigation. Oppression/liberation expresses the historical tension between domination and emancipation that lies at the heart of Freirean pedagogy. Conscientization refers to the movement from naïve consciousness toward a critical awareness of social reality. Dialogue stands in opposition to language emptied of meaning and to alienating verbalism, constituting instead a practice of encounter and collective knowledge production (Freire, 2005). Hope is understood not as passive waiting, but as historical action oriented toward transformation and toward the active enactment of hope itself (Freire, 1992). Autonomy implies recognizing the learner as a historical, ethical, and knowing subject (Freire, 1996). Finally, transformative praxis articulates reflection and action committed to overcoming colonial structures, social injustices, and forms of political and cultural dependency (Freire, 2000).

With regard to research rigor, this study does not seek statistical generalization or positivist verification, but rather the interpretive consistency characteristic of qualitative documentary research. In this sense, it does not pursue statistical generalization or positivist validation grounded in colonial methodologies, but instead analytical coherence among corpus, categories, and conclusions. To achieve this, the study relied upon: (i) comparative analysis across the works included in the corpus; (ii) conceptual triangulation with secondary literature; (iii) argumentative coherence linking the research problem, analytical categories, and conclusions; and (iv) explicit presentation of the interpretive path followed throughout the investigation.

Thus, we reveal that deconstruction, understood as a transmethod, is not limited to dismantling colonial epistemologies, but also opens possibilities for the construction of critical transepistemologies (Rodríguez, 2019). It is precisely within this movement that the present inquiry is situated: rereading Paulo Freire's legacy as a living field of planetary-decolonial and complex struggles, capable of illuminating contemporary educational challenges without diminishing its ethical, political, and historical force.

RHIZOMATIC DECONSTRUCTION. PAULO FREIRE'S LEGACY AGAINST COLONIAL ENTANGLEMENTS

Here we begin the first movement of our investigation: rhizomatic deconstruction. This stage consists of identifying and dismantling the readings that domesticate the radical force of Freire's thought in order, later, to reconstruct them through the lens of an apodictic planetary-decoloniality grounded in complexity and hope. As the pedagogue himself affirmed: "[...] what is not possible is simply to deliver a democratic and anti-discriminatory discourse while maintaining a colonial practice" (Freire, 1992, p. 68).

Paulo Freire remains a beacon of emancipatory education, yet his thought has too often been distorted by narratives that seek to domesticate its radicalism and appropriate his name for purposes far removed from liberation. In some cases, this distortion is explicit, as Brazilian educators exiled during the dark years of the military dictatorship had already demonstrated: every educational reform that leaves structures untouched eventually becomes little more than cosmetic reform. New pedagogical and psychological concepts may be added, yet the banking structure of schooling continues to govern everyday educational life (Harper et al., 1980).

In other cases, such as those represented by the New Right ideologue Olavo de Carvalho (2013), the profound failures of schooling produced by neoliberal and colonizing maneuvers, failures that often result in exclusion or abandonment, are deliberately and unjustly attributed to Paulo Freire. These discourses, however poorly constructed, ultimately seduce society into movements contrary to everything the patron of Brazilian education consistently defended. They are dangerous discourses that pit the oppressed against one another while positively reaffirming the neoliberal model that suppresses freedom and dignity.

As a result, Freirean ideals of resistance and liberation are either deliberately distorted, transforming popular education into an ideological phantom, or emptied of meaning when appropriated incoherently by oppressive colonial narratives, thereby losing their transformative force.

A clear example of this emptying process, as identified by Catini (2021), can be found in the use of the educator's name as the basis for social-educational projects developed by corporations that sustain neoliberal narratives responsible for producing inequality and injustice.

By examining initiatives associated with the Fundação Itaú Social, an institution connected to the financial sector and therefore implicated in the reproduction of existing social structures, the author reveals the appropriation of Freirean language within a context dominated by quantification, pointing to the existence of an "[...] action filled with supposedly Freirean statistics" (Catini, 2021, p. 97). In this way, banking education ceases to function solely as Freire's metaphor for colonizing pedagogy and instead acquires a literal meaning through initiatives promoted by the banking sector itself, initiatives that incorporate education into logics of commodification.

Another example can be found in the way *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is invoked within official educational policies, particularly in the Brazilian case of the Base Nacional Comum Curricular, which repeatedly mobilizes notions associated with Freirean language, such as autonomy and critical thinking. However, analyses such as Silva (2022) demonstrate that these concepts appear in highly polysemic ways and without explicit theoretical grounding, with the term “autonomy” appearing more than a hundred times across different contexts.

Moreover, these notions are frequently linked to preparation for the labor market, the development of skills, and adaptation to contemporary social demands, raising important questions about their emancipatory potential. In this sense, critical language becomes incorporated at the level of discourse without necessarily transforming pedagogical relationships, while educational practices remain oriented toward adaptation rather than problematization, in alignment with curricular models centered on what are commonly referred to as “competencies”.

It has already been demonstrated that terms such as competencies, along with many other fashionable educational concepts such as protagonism, form part of a neoliberal narrative constructed to suggest that success within a competitive world depends solely and exclusively upon the individual (Fortunato, 2023). Yet the narrative proves so seductive that even academics ultimately surrender to the belief that Freirean ideals can be reconciled with competency-based approaches (Farbiarz; Gonçalves; Assis, 2022).

Furthermore, as shown in Fortunato (2024), within many academic and political spaces Freire is cited as a symbol of pedagogical innovation while educational structures continue reproducing mechanisms of social exclusion, such as standardized testing that disregards the diversity of knowledges or curricula that ignore students’ cultural realities. The experiences we have lived and witnessed alongside the wanderer of education, the patron of our educational tradition, led us to recognize something quite obvious: citing Paulo Freire is not the same as being Freirean.

In a previous article (Fortunato, 2024), where we reflected upon our own trajectory through different educational settings, including public schools and social and private institutions, we observed that many of the educator’s most powerful phrases are frequently displayed on walls, posters, and pedagogical texts. Yet these expressions often function merely as ornamental resources within contexts where pedagogical dynamics remain deeply shaped by banking models of education, which stands in direct contradiction to Paulo Freire’s thought.

Freire himself anticipated this distortion of his legacy. He understood that liberation is a difficult process, one that hurts, that is neither linear nor conciliatory. He knew that moving toward autonomy demands perseverance and continuous struggle against structures of power that seek to co-opt even the tools of resistance. As Walter Kohan (2019, p. 3) observed: “[...] the society that gave meaning and significance to Paulo Freire’s life and work promotes inequality at its most diverse levels: economic, political, social, cultural, and educational”. Perhaps this is why so many schools cite Freire without embodying him.

It is worth doing what Paulo Freire himself once did: learning from history itself (Freire; Guimarães, 2013a). We cannot forget Angicos, one of the most emblematic experiences in the life of the educator from Pernambuco. The Angicos experience became concrete evidence that a so-called “Paulo Freire method” existed and that it would be possible to teach adults to read and write in forty hours. For this reason, Angicos marked him both as a popular educator and as a threat to the dictatorial government, which recognized in his work the concrete possibility of politicizing literacy and strengthening oppressed workers.

Through Angicos, we can see just how distorted the narratives surrounding Paulo Freire became, because what drew the greatest attention was not the struggle for the right to education, nor the inclusion of workers within a literate world, but simply the idea that he had developed a literacy method capable of teaching reading and writing in forty hours. Paulo Freire himself insisted: “[...] I repeatedly urged the press not to emphasize so much the issue of the ‘forty hours,’ but rather the right to read and write” (Freire; Guimarães, 2013a, p. 37).

May these words from the pilgrim of utopia resonate far more powerfully and far more widely than the mythologizing obsession with the speed or efficiency of his method:

I will never forget the first nights I spent in Angicos. There was an elderly man there, who at the time must have been older than I am now. He walked nearly three kilometers to get there and another three to return home, yet he made sure never to miss a class. He was filled with joy and insisted, with immense hope, that this was essential for him, and that no one would ever convince him that his time to learn to read those words had already passed (Freire; Guimarães, 2013a, p. 33).

Paulo Freire himself makes it clear that his method has nothing to do with the number of instructional hours, nor merely with literacy understood in the technical sense of mastering written words and reproducing them on paper, because its central purpose is, and always has been, the political education of the people. A political education that bears no resemblance to today's neoliberal meritocracy, which confuses individual achievement with social transformation. Rather, it is a political education oriented toward democracy, dialogue, justice, and equity.

Thus, the entanglement produced by these false colonial policies lies precisely in their ability to appropriate critical language while perpetuating the very forms of oppression that Freire denounced. Dialogue is invoked, yet monologue is imposed; emancipation is proclaimed, while mechanisms of exclusion continue to be reinforced. It is this contradiction that must be deconstructed.

Nevertheless, institutionalized schooling continues to sustain itself precisely through false discourse and actions emptied of transformative force. Some individuals do manage to free themselves from their original conditions of oppression, whether through extraordinary, even superhuman effort that later becomes celebrated as an example of resilience and self-overcoming, or because some paternalistic opportunity happened to extend a helping hand and open certain pathways. In both cases, however, the outcome remains individual and is ultimately mobilized to reinforce meritocratic ideology, while the cycle of oppression continues operating under the logic of contemporary global capitalism.

As a result, no genuine politics of justice and equality is constructed, and therefore no truly liberatory education is consolidated, one whose most distinctive principle is that "[...] there is no one above and no one below" (Kohan, 2019, p. 6). For this reason, the task today is not merely to remember Freire, but to unmask the colonial appropriations of his thought and restore its critical edge, an edge that remains as urgent and necessary as ever.

What follows, then, is a process of reconstruction that unfolds even as we continue reconstructing, in accordance with the transmethod.

RHIZOMATIC RECONSTRUCTION. PLANETARY-DECOLONIAL AND COMPLEX STRUGGLES IN PAULO FREIRE'S LEGACY

Following the unveiling of these colonial distortions, we move into the second movement of our investigation: rhizomatic reconstruction. In this space, we seek to reintegrate the connections among complexity, decoloniality, and hope, restoring to the Freirean legacy its ethical and transformative force.

Planetary-decolonial struggles, that is, the liberatory subversions confronting contemporary global coloniality, find one of their central figures in Paulo Freire, and our approach seeks to recover this centrality through a critical and complex reading. Undoubtedly, there is a profound cogitative force within his legacy that continues to resonate. Thus, the interpretation we propose revisits a series of reflections grounded in Freire's own works.

Paulo Freire *lived in the Northeast of Brazil, a region emerging from slavery into conditions of profound and devastating poverty*. He was deeply outraged by extreme deprivation and by the denial of the most basic human needs, not only in Brazil, but everywhere he lived, taught literacy, and inspired hope. His literacy work reveals itself as a complex process in which the subject does not merely decode letters, but comes to understand the planetary interdependence of human existence itself.

The pedagogue also experienced poverty personally. He struggled tirelessly because he believed educational practice must include concrete possibilities for overcoming domination and social inequality in every sense (Freire, 2005). He did not remain at the level of discourse or abstract proclamation. He left behind a legacy demonstrating how such struggles might be carried out, and his own life became an example of resistance in defense of human dignity.

As we know, the struggles for human dignity of the past remain the struggles of the present, though now shaped by new forms and increasingly cruel realities: attacks against the very conditions of life itself through technologies, medicine, and other mechanisms often directed by those who outwardly claim to defend humanity. Yet, yesterday as today, people continue to die from thirst, hunger, endless wars, epistemicides, suicides, and countless forms of violence that deeply outrage those of us who carry forward the Freirean legacy and continue fighting from our own trenches..

Paulo Freire lived alongside the non-literate populations, alongside those he taught through his educational praxis. That literacy process was, of course, first and foremost an act of learning to read and write through the method he later carried to several countries. Yet at the same time, it was also a literacy of hope, of life, of struggle, and of liberation. We know, for instance, that between 1964 and 1982 many people in Chile learned to read and write through Paulo Freire's literacy method. Literacy, however, is never an act of charity or mere transmission, much less an act of coercion. To teach literacy requires a critical dialogue between educator and learner, both unfinished beings in the world. More than this, the educator becomes a co-participant who experiences the pain and deprivation of the learner as if they were their own. It is through critical dialogue that the separation between educator and learner begins to dissolve (Aguilar, 2020). Indeed, in the words of the pedagogue himself, in *The Politics of Education*, "[...] the literacy process demands from both educators and learners a relationship grounded in authentic dialogue. True dialogue brings subjects together around the knowledge of a knowable object that acts as a mediator between them" (Freire, 1995, p. 34).

The pedagogue embodied and demonstrated through his own teaching that learners are autonomous subjects within their educational processes. In doing so, he revealed what an authentically Freirean educational act truly means: and for this very reason, education is above all a political act: an act committed to the common good and to transformation, through which each day we strive to enact a more dignified form of humanity. This is why Paulo Freire already understood education as something extending far beyond the walls of a physical school. His life itself became the school, shaped by the full complexity of existence, for "[...] his classroom is not a classroom in the traditional sense, but a meeting place where knowledge is sought rather than transmitted" (Freire, 1993, p. 90). This space of educational autonomy is inherently communal, insofar as the pedagogue taught that human beings educate themselves in communion with one another, where no one educates anyone else alone, but rather all are beings mediated by the world.

In our understanding of Paulo Freire's legacy, *his literacy proposals are grounded in the fundamental principle that the reading of the world precedes the reading of the word, a principle of particular urgency for the literacy of life itself amid the ongoing crises of the Global South.* We witness this literacy of life especially among individuals who, despite being professionals or already knowing how to read and write, still do not know how to live, how to defend life, or how to resist the forces that ultimately turn against life itself.

Paulo Freire was the pedagogue of the oppressed, and it is from this point that we begin to think through a decolonial understanding of oppression. Indeed, oppression has often been reduced and legalized through an oversimplified understanding that limits it merely to the physical domination exercised by colonizers. Yet whenever human beings are denied the possibility of living with dignity, denied the right to education, denied access to technologies, or prevented from achieving a complex and meaningful experience of *buen vivir*, oppression is taking place. In this sense, the Freirean legacy reminds us that "[...] instead of encouraging peasants to develop their capacity for decision-making, mechanistic approaches tend to act paternalistically, reactivating the culture of silence and keeping peasants in a state of dependence" (Freire, 1990, p. 55). In other words, peasants were often pacified through palliative measures intended to keep them from awakening from the lethargy of oppression, rather than being empowered through liberatory language and human dignity.

The pedagogue further explains that "[...] the mechanists do nothing to help them overcome their fatalistic perception of boundary situations; they do nothing to help them exchange fatalism for a critical vision capable of seeing beyond these circumstances" (Freire, 1990, p. 55). Today, this reality becomes painfully visible in the forced exodus of people fleeing their countries in search of survival, attempting to escape the oppression produced by false liberatory policies imposed upon their societies, policies that claim to subvert injustice while instead burying dignity and spreading hopelessness. For this reason, countless people perish along dangerous migration routes while carrying their children in their arms, fleeing in desperation, advancing without hope. And when they finally cross the borders of those countries, they are often deported in handcuffs as though they were criminals, realities

witnessed openly in the year 2025 and known through news reports across the world. What we clearly need today are many more Paulo Freires, wanderers crossing countless spaces in search of the liberation of human dignity..

For Paulo Freire carried forward a pedagogy of hope in the midst of the profound hopelessness shaping life across the planet. And this is precisely what we suffer from today: the inability to enact hope amid conditions of oppression. Barbosa (2016), in examining the perspectives of the pedagogy of hope, identified that for Freire hope only acquires meaning when articulated with transformative action: without action, struggle loses its horizon; without struggle, hope becomes naïve. Hope, therefore, is not a given condition, but a construction that must be cultivated through educational processes.

In this sense, Paulo Freire profoundly influenced new movements of liberation throughout Latin America and bequeathed these ideas to the oppressed peoples of the planet. We speak here of a new liberation from the coloniality of power: the liberation to live, to dream, to act, to think, to exist, and to resist. There remains much to say and much to investigate within both his thought and his living legacy.

Undoubtedly, Freire also influenced liberation theology, alongside thinkers such as Enrique Dussel and many other decolonial scholars, leaving us extraordinary political and philosophical paths still worthy of continued exploration. The pedagogue denounced the condition in which human beings, treated as objects, become dependent upon others who impose subjugation through false promises and paternalistic concessions, offering symbolic “grains of corn” while simultaneously stealing land, contaminating rivers, and perpetuating countless other forms of abuse. The oppressor declares that the oppressed deserve their condition and must remain alienated, “civilized”, and deprived of critical consciousness. In this state, the oppressed are prevented from recognizing themselves as subjects before the oppressor, from creating culture, and from participating actively in the transformation of their social and economic realities (Freire, 1968).

Paulo Freire’s legacy reveals him as a profoundly human figure, *a timeless man*, as Peter McLaren (2021) describes him. So enduring is his relevance that it is often hidden beneath thousands of superficial gestures in which the pedagogue is merely remembered symbolically, quoted within false policies, while his actual legacy is excluded from teacher education and from the concrete practice of teaching itself, relegated instead to the margins of injustice. We must remember that “Paulo Freire established a new form of dialogical humanism through his lifelong commitment to the philosophy of praxis” (McLaren, 2021, p. 25). At the same time, he encouraged us to continue his praxis in light of contemporary necessities, for he was far ahead of his time in understanding lived realities. He knew that birth is painful and that liberation from oppression would never be easy, especially because many collaborators would continue selling out the liberation of their own people to those who control state policies.

For Paulo Freire, “[...] the centrality of this praxis manifests itself in the conscious cultivation of the ontological nature of the human being as the starting point for social justice, without at the same time eclipsing or denying the importance of the spiritual self” (McLaren, 2021, p. 25).

Es referente autentico del Sur de una política liberadora desde la educación, sabemos que “[...] la liberación es un parto. Es un parto doloroso. El hombre que nace de él es un hombre nuevo, hombre que solo es viable en la y por la superación de la contradicción opresores-oprimidos que, en última instancia, es la liberación de todos” (Freire, 2005, p. 45). *La liberación como concepto autentico desde el dialogo y la concientización-concienciación con la educación* que llevamos en nuestras obras Freireanos publicadas, donde el “[...] método de concienciación procura dar al hombre la oportunidad de redescubrirse mientras asume reflexivamente el propio proceso en que él se va descubriendo, manifestando y configurando” (Freire, 2005, p. 19).

Undoubtedly, our rhizomatic reconstruction reveals that Paulo Freire’s legacy incorporates a maieutic dimension inspired by Socratic thought. By this, we refer to the realization of a dialogical-dialectical dialogue consistently oriented toward provoking a profound metacognitive awareness within the human being. From this perspective, the reform of thought and the liberation of minds emerge as urgent tasks. At this point, Paulo Freire and Edgar Morin converge toward the same horizon: learning how to think. What is at stake is a deep form of thinking, grounded in metacognitive consciousness, closely aligned with the intellectual reform evoked by Michel de Montaigne when he argued that a well-formed mind is worth far more than one merely filled with information. Paulo Freire transmitted this understanding to countless educators still shaped by

banking education and accustomed to reproducing it within their pedagogical practices. Today, we continue to experience these same forms of oppression, although they are now mediated through new instruments and contemporary dispositifs of control.

To conclude, while continuing to rupture and reweave these reflections, we recognize in Paulo Freire the understanding that *education constitutes the authentic bastion of human fulfillment, and therefore of planetary fulfillment itself*. Alongside it, we must carry love: love for life, for dignity, and for what it means to be human. As Freire reminds us, “[...] love is an act of courage, not of fear; love is a commitment to others”. Can there truly be dialogue beside someone forced to survive on the food you discard? Yet we remain hopeful despite the hardened heart of the oppressor, whose actions continue to humiliate victims. Still, indignation today is necessary, because indignation itself can become an ethical force of resistance.

Undoubtedly, Paulo Freire embodied in his praxis the conviction that no matter where the oppressed may be, the act of love consists in committing oneself to their cause, the cause of liberation.

CONCLUSIONES AL INICIO. FREIREANOS SIEMPRE FREIREANOS POR AMOR A LA NATURALEZA DE LA CREACIÓN, POR AMOR AL EDUCANDO

We have undertaken these initial rupturing movements in order to continue investigating the complex objective of recovering Paulo Freire's legacy as a living praxis of hope in the face of the urgencies of the present. His legacy moves us deeply, and remaining hopeful becomes, for us, an urgent responsibility: to transmit that hope through our work as educators and researchers, as a mission of life itself. Through the rhizomatic reconstruction developed here, we have demonstrated that even amid profound injustice, a liberatory education capable of confronting the wounds of humanity remains possible. Paulo Freire's path was never paved with roses; throughout his journey, he forged his legacy and carried out his work while walking upon painful thorns.

Paulo Freire was born in 1921 and lived in the Northeast of Brazil until he was exiled from the country in 1964. It was a region emerging from slavery while enduring conditions of deeply degrading poverty. We have already stated this, and it should shame us that both there and across other parts of the Global South, the same evils continue oppressing the wretched of the earth, as one great decolonial thinker so powerfully observed.

The memories preserved within the yellowed pages of books, now digitized through Artificial Intelligence, reveal the most degrading forms of inhumanity, exposing the false promises of progress and overcoming. Paulo Freire experienced this reality alongside the non-literate populations, alongside those he taught through his educational praxis. That literacy process certainly involved learning to read and write, yet these were only the most basic aspirations of the pedagogue of hope. His true intention was to educate against inhumanity itself. For this reason, we constantly ask ourselves: What are we doing, as educators, to transform the world?

Indeed, the political nature of education now appears apolitical, deceptive, and even absurd when placed in the hands of technological instruments while countless people continue dying from hunger. Yesterday as today, this remains the horrifying reality produced by state policies that destabilize life and condemn the most vulnerable to submission, even within countries as immensely wealthy as our own. Or is speaking this truth now forbidden?

Those who understand the language of love and Freirean pedagogy know that the pedagogue not only theorized, but also demonstrated in practice that the student is an active and autonomous subject within the learning process. Today, autonomy seems to reside in Artificial Intelligence for those who have access to its tools, while others resign themselves to accepting the conditions imposed upon their lives. Meanwhile, countless people wander the streets gathering the misery that others, in their inhumanity, cast aside. Are we truly conscious of this harsh language of reality? Such awareness is fundamental to praxis because, in the face of technological mediation, the unveiling of reality remains a profoundly human and irreplaceable act of critical consciousness.

When revisiting the narratives surrounding Freire's legacy, we recognize that his literacy proposals are grounded in the fundamental principle that the reading of the world precedes the reading of the word, a concept whose relevance becomes especially urgent amid the current crises of the Global South. These needs remain unchanged, as though Paulo Freire himself were still standing there, in the midst of misery, telling the oppressed: *yes, it is possible; yes, you can do it!*

No one can deny that the patron of Brazilian education, except perhaps those who do not truly know his history, stands as an authentic reference point from the Global South for a liberatory politics grounded in education. Liberation, as an authentic concept emerging through dialogue and conscientization-consciousness raising within education, also extends to every sphere of human life.

Paulo Freire was the pedagogue of the oppressed, and within his work we encounter a profoundly decolonial understanding of oppression. Yes, because the oppressors of today's global coloniality, despite all their opulence, are themselves as deeply oppressed as those who sleep upon soaked cardboard in the streets. They carry lives so impoverished in humanity that not even the greatest wealth in the world can heal the inhuman hardness of their hearts. And yet, remarkably: *Paulo Freire carried forward a pedagogy of hope in the midst of the profound hopelessness shaping life across the planet.*

While dialoguing with his own history, in the mid-1980s, after his exile and journeys throughout the world brought about by *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire stated that "[...] today's pedagogy must be more critical, more profoundly critical than the one I proposed in the 1960s. Fundamentally, it should be a pedagogy capable of filling the gaps where the memory of events was never fixed" (Freire; Guimarães, 2013b, p. 28). In projecting such a pedagogy into the twenty-first century, we believe it must therefore become a praxis that articulates the complexity of thought, the decolonial option, and an unbreakable hope.

Such a pedagogy, as the educator himself explains, reflects a critical and integral approach to education, one that seeks to understand lived reality in a dynamic and contextualized manner, without separating it from its geographical and social dimensions. It is a pedagogy that distances itself from traditional scientism, proposing instead a methodology that values not only cognitive aspects, but also the affective, emotional, and aesthetic dimensions of human existence, thereby promoting an education that integrates reason, feeling, and artistic expression.

This pedagogy, Paulo Freire emphasizes, requires the active participation of the learner, allowing education to be experienced in a fully engaged and meaningful way, while questioning established certainties and promoting both personal and social transformation. It is, therefore, a pedagogy committed to the humanization of the educational process, one in which the individual is recognized as a historical being capable of acting, reflecting, creating, and transforming reality.

It is a pedagogy that has been under construction since the 1960s, sustained by Paulo Freire's courageous commitments and by his understanding of the fundamental role of education. He saw no limits within the teaching vocation when it came to building an education that liberates rather than oppresses.

Paulo Freire's legacy reveals how we can, and indeed must, learn from and dialogue with our own histories. His presence as a decolonial and complex horizon did not end in 1997, when he passed away; it did not end in 2012, when he was officially declared the patron of Brazilian education; nor did it end in 2021, when the world celebrated his centenary. These and many other landmark moments serve only to remind us of our task as teachers, researchers, and educators, as declared by his friend Sérgio Guimarães: "[...] to continue living and learning, even through our own history" (Freire; Guimarães, 2013b, p. 119).

EXVOTO. The first author presents to the reader the urgent possibility of reflecting on their life mission, as well as the philosophical questions regarding the meaning of her existence. For this reason, she invites you, with love for life and a firm decision to bear witness, to recognize that by accepting Jesus Christ she feels filled with the love of God; she invites you to receive His sacrifice on the cross. And let us reflect on our praxis, for we will have to give account of our actions: "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love" (1 John 4:7-8)¹. Meanwhile, the second author of the inquiry dedicates her writings to Paulo Freire, educator.

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¹ Sociedades Bíblicas Unidas (1960).

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