


*Dossiê: Paulo Freire (1921-2021): 100 anos de história e esperança*

**Paulo Freire in *Abya Yala*: denunciations and announcements  
of a decolonial epistemology\***


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**Paulo Freire en *Abya Yala*: denuncias y anuncios  
de una epistemología decolonial**

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**Abstract:** This article has as starting point the relevance and how updated is Paulo Freire's epistemic and pedagogical thinking for Decolonial Studies. This is a bibliographic qualitative research that aimed to understand the dialectic between denunciation and announcement in the epistemology of Paulo Freire in Abya Yala. For this purpose, the three main works written and published in the period of his exile were taken as an object of analysis: *Education: the practice of freedom* (1967), *Pedagogy in process: the letters to Guinea-Bissau*

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(1978) and *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (1987). Some analysis dimensions are presented: oppressor / oppressed, dehumanization/humanization and culture of silence/dialogue, awareness/colonization of minds, hope/hopelessness, and liberation/domestication, demonstrating that Freire is a modernity-coloniality precursor and critical witness.

**Keywords:** Paulo Freire. Decoloniality. Latin America.

**Resumo:** Este artigo tem como ponto de partida a atualidade e a relevância do pensamento epistêmico e pedagógico de Paulo Freire para os Estudos Decoloniais. Trata-se de uma pesquisa qualitativa de cunho bibliográfico que teve por objetivo compreender a dialética entre denúncia e anúncio na epistemologia de Paulo Freire em *Abya Yala*. Para tanto, tomou-se como objeto de análise as três principais obras escritas e publicadas no período de seu exílio: *Educação como prática da liberdade* (1967), *Cartas a Guiné Bissau* (1978) e *Pedagogia do oprimido* (1987). Algumas dimensões de análise foram apresentadas: opressor/oprimido, desumanização/humanização e cultura do silêncio/diálogo, conscientização/colonização das mentes, esperança/desesperança e libertação/domesticação, demonstrando que Freire é precursor e testemunho crítico da modernidade-colonialidade.

**Palavras-chave:** Paulo Freire. Decolonialidade. América Latina.

**Resumen:** Este artículo tuvo como punto de partida la actualidad y relevancia del pensamiento epistémico y pedagógico de Paulo Freire para los Estudios Decoloniales. Se trata de una investigación cualitativa de carácter bibliográfico que tuvo como objetivo comprender la dialéctica entre denuncia y anuncio en la epistemología de Paulo Freire, en *Abya Yala*. Para ello, se tomó como objeto de análisis las tres principales obras escritas y publicadas en el período de su exilio: Educación como práctica de la libertad; Pedagogía del oprimido; y Cartas a Guinea Bissau. Se presentaron algunas dimensiones de análisis: opresor/oprimido; deshumanización/humanización y cultura del silencio/diálogo; concienciación/colonización de las mentes, esperanza/desesperanza y liberación /domesticación, demostrando que Freire es un precursor y testigo crítico de la modernidad-colonialidad.

**Palabras clave:** Paulo Freire. Decolonialidad. América Latina.

## Introduction

This article has as starting point the relevance and how updated is Paulo Freire's epistemic and pedagogical thinking for Decolonial Studies. A survey of the scientific production on “popular education” and “coloniality (ies)” presented at the 39th Meeting of the National Association of Graduate Studies and Research in Education (ANPED)<sup>1</sup>, the Working Group (GT6) points out that, until that moment, five dissertations and two theses made a relationship between Paulo Freire and decoloniality, and one dissertation and two theses made this relationship between the Brazilian educator to decoloniality<sup>2</sup>. It was also highlighted those 12 dissertations made a relationship between Paulo Freire and coloniality, as well as eight other theses. A similar research was carried out in the Catalog of Theses and Dissertations of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES)<sup>3</sup> pointed out that by October 2019, at least 133 scientific articles

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<sup>1</sup> Information disclosed by professor and researcher Cheron Zanini Moretti (UNISC) and professors and researchers João Colares da Mota Neto of the *Universidade do Estado do Pará* (UEPA) and Reinaldo Matias Fleuri from *Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina* (UFSC) in the mini course entitled “Popular Education and De(S)Colonial Pedagogies: research challenges in the context of struggle, resistance and political action” during the ANPED event, in October 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Those numbers may vary depending on the combination of Boolean operators and keywords used in searches in the mentioned repositories

<sup>3</sup> CAPES is a *stricto sensu* Postgraduate foundation, linked with the Ministry of Education (MEC). The catalog of theses dissertations can be consulted at: <https://catalogodeteses.capes.gov.br/catalogo-teses/#/>

had been published in Portuguese in qualified journals, with peer review, and listed in the CAPES<sup>4</sup> Periodical Catalog, relating some aspect of Freire's thinking to decolonial thinking<sup>5</sup>.

However, to proceed with our proposal, it is important to situate the reader as to the colonial bases that support a domesticating pedagogy and epistemology. We can understand that coloniality is constitutive of modernity and that one was only possible from the existence of the other one. As Mignolo (2003) states, both modernity, and coloniality are two sides of the same coin, in which the second presents itself as the “dark” side of the first. In this way, the modern reason myth, as well as the civilizing progress myth, which has been accompanied by all forms of violence (Dussel, 2005), is based on an alleged universality that was being undertaken by the European and Creole elites. In other words, the coloniality of power presents it as the only possible modernity understanding.

Thus, it is this logic that establishes the scientific knowledge superiority that modern society produces in relation to all other knowledge kind (Lander, 2005). Therefore, according to Porto-Gonçalves (2005), the modernity-coloniality relationship leaves us a legacy, in addition to the capitalist, imperialist and colonialist power relations, which can be better understood as the coloniality of knowledge, as it is a “ [...] the epistemological legacy of Eurocentrism that prevents us from understanding the world from the very world itself in which we live and from the epistemes that are their own” (Porto-Gonçalves, 2005, p. 5). Such hierarchy is based, therefore, on ethnocentric conceptions that support “[...] the imposition of a certain type of social classification that operates on material and subjective levels” (Streck; Moretti, 2013, p. 1).

Hence, not as a “historic accident”, an epistemic turn is necessary to understand the world through our lenses - a decolonial turn. According to Streck and Moretti (2013), Latin America was able to produce radicalized emancipatory thinking in response to the experiences of modernity-coloniality imposition, such as: the theory of dependence, theology of liberation and the pedagogy of the oppressed. Decoloniality, as explained by Mignolo (2007), can be understood as a discontent energy, of mistrust, detachment from those who experience violence. And “[...] this energy is translated into decolonial projects that, ultimately, are also modernity constitutive” (MIGNOLO, 2007, p. 26).

It is in this context that we take Paulo Freire as one of the pedagogy pioneers, and decolonial epistemology, which are permeated with dehumanization and the oppressed humanization announcement. Looking for an alignment about this perspective, we found the term *Abya Yala* to make connections with the decolonialized perspective of territorial and cultural unity, in particular the constitution of Paulo Freire's Latin Americanism in exile. Thus, it is a political, intellectual, and ethical conception (and option). Although we recognize the limits and strong contradictions regarding the term, we consider it significant to present a bet on its representativeness of the global South subjects.

Based on these initial ideas, we spoke with Grazziotin, Klaus and Pereira (2021) to establish some important steps regarding the bibliographic research carried out. According to the authors, researchers who use this methodology need to: survey the works that will be used in the

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<sup>4</sup> The journal catalog can be consulted at: <https://www-periodicos-capes-gov-br.ez1.periodicos.capes.gov.br/index.php?>

<sup>5</sup> It is not our purpose to discuss these numbers, and / or to expand them with other information taken from the Research Group of the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) - Popular Education, Participatory Methodologies and Decolonial Studies, in a complementary way, or with qualitative analyzes of that production. However, this brief survey allows us to realize that there is room for a deeper understanding of Paulo Freire's epistemology from a decolonial perspective.

investigation; study the biography of each author and the empirical corpus definition of the research; build and analyze each work from a reading script; build an analytical framework to organize and systematize the differences and singularities of each work and author; establish, through theories and hypotheses, the categories of analysis. From this, we build our methodological paths that will be better presented as "decolonial epistemology" in the third sub-item of this article.

Our objective is, to understand the dialectic between denunciation and announcement in the epistemology of Paulo Freire in *Abya Yala*. From this, first, we present an author brief biography, with emphasis on his "loan context", that is - exile, accompanied by notes on the bibliographic production selected for analysis. Then, we present historical and epistemological elements for a better understanding of the "decolonial turn". Then, we analyze the denunciation-announcement dialectic in Paulo Freire's epistemological proposal, in a decolonial perspective.

### **A Bibliography of exile**

Paulo Freire's life and work were marked by a deep sensitivity about concrete realities experienced by the "land condemned", as stated by Fanon (2015). In a Freirean sense, experience is a category that is not merely related to practicalism, but that considers a deep subject reading located in a given time and space. Thus, in Freire, experience is the dynamic between language and actual reality.

Paulo Freire experienced life in different contexts to the point that they intertwine with his engaged writing. Evidently, it is not our goal to stand out details of the author's life, since this has been done well enough by the literature, such as: Brandão (2005, 2014, 2017), Ana Maria Araújo Freire (2017), Gadotti (1996), Scoguglia (1999), Souza (2001); in addition to more recent studies published by Haddad (2019) and Kohan (2019)<sup>6</sup>. The wide debate presented by the authors provokes us to highlight elements that help us to think Paulo Freire as an author-educator that can be (re) read and (re) interpreted from the Decolonial Studies key.

Mota Neto (2015) draws attention to the fact that Freire, even before starting his bi-bibliographic production<sup>7</sup> in a more systematic way, already showed the need to overcome coloniality in the learning of the Portuguese language. Therefore, in their perception, it is not necessary to deny grammar, but to transform traditional memorization practices to a meaningful understanding of reality through the language<sup>8</sup> of knowledge made by the subjects' experience.

This perspective was experienced in 1963 during the literacy campaign promoted in the city of Angicos, in Rio Grande do Norte. The place saw 300 rural workers being literate in a record time of just 45 days. The campaign success called the attention to the then Minister of Education Paulo Tarso Santos, in January 1964, to invite Freire to coordinate the National Literacy Program (Andrela; Ribeiro, 2005). The Program's intention was to teach literacy by politicizing about five million adults in Brazil, consequently increasing, by at least 50%, the number of voters. However, on April 14, 1964, 83 days after the beginning of the Program, it was extinguished by the military government.

With the Civil-Military Dictatorship, within 75 days, Paulo Freire was arrested twice and, shortly thereafter, he was taken to Rio de Janeiro for further interrogations, this is when he knew

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<sup>6</sup> Regarding the study of his bibliography, we recommend Pitano, Streck, and Moretti (2019).

<sup>7</sup> To found out more, see Gadotti (1996).

<sup>8</sup> It is important to remember that due to his work as a Professor at the Social Service of Industry (SESI), in Recife, he was concerned with topics on Syntax, Linguistics, Philosophy, and Language Philosophy.

by the press that he would be arrested again. Then he made the decision, together with friends and family, to apply for asylum at the Bolivian embassy. However, the new regime imposed important challenges for Freire and those who shared his thoughts. The author Adriana Puiggrós (1998) interprets that the coup reflected in two ways in Freire's productions: on the one hand, the military actions by accusing him of being subversive and placed him in the realm of “traitor of the country and Christ”; on the other hand, under such label, Freire was thrown to a dogmatic left, who saw in his figure a messiah who developed a universal method. From all possible interpretations, we can certainly understand that the Civil-Military Dictatorship caused changes in the social, cultural, and political context<sup>9</sup> as well as epistemological transformations in Paulo Freire's way of being.

The exile period began in Brazil, when the author had spent just over a month at the Bolivian embassy in Rio de Janeiro, waiting for the Brazilian government to issue his safe-conduct to leave the country. Soon thereafter, he headed to La Paz, Bolivia's capital, where he remained for another month, until another coup d'état took place, and he was forced to leave that country. Invited to work with Jacques Chonchol, then president of the Agricultural Development Institute (INDAP), Freire went into exile in Chile, where he stayed for four and a half years.

In Chile, Freire established an important relationship with Eduardo Frei's Christian Democratic government, working to train technicians in the agrarian sector at the Institute for Training and Research in Agrarian Reform. While supporting changes in the country, collaborating with the Chilean Ministry of Education for adult literacy, he advised as an employee of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), a mixed body between the United Nations and the government of Chile.

It is in this critical capacity of experiencing the everyday life in exile that the author discovered himself as a Latin American, a third world man, an important element to understand his thinking in a decolonial way. Paulo Freire remained in Chile until 1969, the year of yet another military coup on the continent. It was in this country that Paulo Freire completed the writing of *Education as a practice of freedom* (1965) and wrote the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968)<sup>10</sup>.

In *Education as a practice of freedom*, Freire already announced his preference for education for freedom, which would imply a “subject - society” as well as a subject - man and a subject - woman of “[...] self-reflection and reflection of your time and space” (FREIRE, 1967, p. 44). Freire made a clear choice for an “urgent and indispensable education for the masses” through a broad awareness, very different from domesticating education, typical of coloniality. Its pedagogical and epistemological proposal becomes more complex in *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. In this work, Paulo Freire presents his observations of five years of exile, joining the educational experiences carried out in Brazil with those in Chile. In this way, it manifests both, the fear of freedom and the risks of critical thinking and the hope of liberation. It also announces the essence

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<sup>9</sup> In *Por uma pedagogia da pergunta* (Freire; Faundez, 1985), Freire says that it was Álvaro Vieira Pinto who introduced him to the expression “loan context” to designate the reality of exile. Thus, for Paulo Freire, exile became a “loan context” - referring to today, and the “context of origin” - to yesterday, in the relationship between “[...] the indispensable occupation in the new context and the pre-occupation in which the one of origin must deal” (Freire, 1992, p. 34).

<sup>10</sup> It is worth mentioning that the dates are from the original publications. However, throughout the article, we used the following editions: *Educação como prática da liberdade* (Freire, 1967); *Cartas a Guiné Bissau* (Freire, 1978); e *Pedagogia do oprimido* (Freire, 1987).

of Education as a practice of freedom, present in the dialogue, as well as explaining the theory of antidialogical action.

With the repercussion of the work *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, Freire started to be considered as one of the main authors of a political-pedagogical praxis, intentionally counter-hegemonic (Scoguglia, 1999). He developed a critical pedagogy as an onto-epistemic project to affirm the global South world, evocating knowledge in movement, in struggle and / or in resistance, regarding the searching for the (re) existence and humanization of people historically relegated to subordination.

In the beginning of the military coup in Chile, Freire was invited to teach at Cambridge University, soon after, at Harvard University, both in the United States (USA), to teach his epistemology (Andreola; Ribeiro, 2005). In that country, Freire wrote and talked to important educators, or as he himself explained: "It was very important to live in the United States for almost a year, because I had the chance to see the bug in the burrows up close" (Freire, 1994, p. 9). The "bug" Freire was referring to, was segregationist racism, sexism, classism, and authoritarianism, which, in his view, were incompatible with the alleged American globalist democracy. According to Mota Neto (2015), from such perspectives, we can define an important feature about decolonial conception: "[...] the author is concerned not only with issues of social class, but also of race and gender, enabling to develop more comprehensive critical view about mechanisms of modern / colonial oppression" (Mota Neto, 2015, p. 157).

In the 1970s, Paulo Freire accepted the invitation to work as a principal consultant for the Department of Education of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Geneva, Switzerland, this is very significant for the important movements' development also in Africa. During that period, he empathically donated himself as an educator, as shown in the book *Cartas a Guiné-Bissau* (1978). Right at the beginning of his arrival, the author narrates how, during the entire period he was in exile, the only place he felt himself again in his "context of origin" was in Africa:

I make this reference to underline how important it was, for me, to step on the African ground for the first time and feel myself as someone who was returning and not as someone who arrived. In fact, to the extent that, leaving the Dar es Salaam airport, five years ago, to the university "campus", I crossed the city, it unfolded before me as something that I would revisit and find myself in. From that moment on, the smallest things - old acquaintances - started talking to me, about me. The color of the sky, the green-blue of the sea, the coconut trees, the mango trees, the cashew trees, the scent of its flowers, the smell of the earth; bananas, including my beloved apple-banana; fish in coconut milk; crickets jumping in the grass; the swinging of the people's bodies walking on the streets, their smile available to life; the drums' sound in the night; the dancing bodies, and in doing so, "drawing the world", *the presence, among the popular masses, the expression of their culture that the colonizers could not kill, no matter how hard they tried to do it, all of this took me over. and made me realize that I was more African than I thought.* (FREIRE, 1978, p. 9, emphasis added).

We emphasized the last sentences Freire's speech during the arrival in Tanzania to highlight an important feature of a decolonial praxis conception. In this passage, we can see an author intimately connected with those subordinate subjects. Even more, an author who noticed that the habits of a rebellious maintenance, and ways of life are firmly linked to the land and the local culture. As Streck (2005, p. 9) understands: "Freire emerges as an important link [...] between two continents tragically connected by the imperialist exploitation and the transplantation of huge contingents of the African population as slaves in America". And precisely in that same book, *Letters to Guinea Bissau*, Freire further deepens his criticism of the colonialist imposition by the invader's culture.

Freire, politically chose to spend ten years working at the WCC, a space that allowed him to maintain an intimate relationship with several countries in Africa. Together with his first wife - Elza Freire, Miguel and Rosiska Darcy de Oliveira, Claudius Cecon and Marcos Arruda, Paulo Freire founded the Cultural Action Institute (IDAC). Such a partnership was instrumental in assisting him when he was called upon to contribute to literacy campaigns in Tanzania, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe and Angola. One of the main objectives of pedagogical works was to break with the colonial education that sought for hundreds of years to “de-Africanize” those people, or better, to authoritatively withdraw their authentic word, their knowledge, and their ways of being in and with the world. A strong decolonial conception is present in the Freire’s work and IDAC - although it was not thought in that way- in search of liberation from the colonial mentality.

With the growing possibility of political amnesty in the final years of the Civil-Military Dictatorship, Paulo Freire returned to Brazil in 1980, after almost 16 years in exile. Without ever forgetting his original context, Freire understood the period he lived in other countries, in a deeply pedagogical way, as a moment of understanding himself and Brazil. Although difficult, his exile period represented an ode of respect for cultural differences and, therefore, we take this moment as an important part of articulation and radicalization of his thinking, deeply engaged in the struggles of the oppressed. For him, “[...] the previously invaded culture becomes the main reference in the liberation process whose creation must start from the margins” (Loureiro et al., 2020, p. 37).

How up to date it is, and the relevance of Paulo Freire's epistemic and pedagogical thinking is also found in the fact that the Brazilian educator is positioned in / with the world (especially with the oppressed people) walking and learning from different contexts - of origin and / or borrowing, such as the exile.

### **Decolonial studies: A perspective analysis from Abya Yala**

Even though we have collated some introductory words about the modern critique inherent in Decolonial Studies, we seek to densify this approach with historical and epistemological elements. It is also relevant to mention that we have no interest in dealing with controversies existing within the modernity / coloniality network, we emphasize that this article, to better understand the discussion presented, must be understood in its plurality<sup>11</sup>. Another clarification to be made is regarding the option for the term *Abya Yala* instead of Latin America when we refer to the decolonialized perspective of the territorial and cultural unit to which the oppressed find themselves, as mentioned above. According to Porto-Gonçalves (2006, np), “[...] *Abya Yala* has been used as a self-designation of people from the continent as a counterpoint to Latin America [...] aiming to build a feeling of unity and belonging “. From the Decolonial Studies of the modernity / coloniality network and some non-colonial discussions, we understand that the use of the term *Abya Yala* denotes an epistemology that thinks Latin America from itself and for itself<sup>12</sup>.

Therefore, modernity has historically and spatially delimited by historical origins in Europe in the 17th century - mainly in the territories currently known as Germany, France, and England. According to Escobar (2003), some processes were fundamental for the modernity construction, such as: The Protestant Reformation, the French Revolution, the Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution in England. Hence, from the expansion of the modern project, the conceptions of

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<sup>11</sup> As a reading reference we suggest reading Grosfoguel (2013, 2019).

<sup>12</sup> A problematic debate about the origin and the political meaning of terms was carried out in Loureiro *at al.* (2020).

reason, individual and knowledge were introduced. Culturally, this enterprise was based on the rationalization of the world and life, or, as Escobar (2003, p. 56) says, “[...] order and reason are seen as the foundation for equality and freedom, thus enabling a language of rights”. In this sense, the philosophical notion of “man”, white, modern, and European, has been transformed into a reference and measure tool for all things and people around the globe.

For Dussel (2005), the modern mythical discourse justified an irrational praxis of violence (open and symbolic), based on domination mechanisms, such as: the self-perception of European superiority; the European's moral self-demand to develop societies considered “primitive”; the development standards set in Europe; the construction of a “just” colonial war; the production of local victims represented by inevitable violence. It is in this scenario that the conceptions about colonized Indian, the African slave, the subordinate woman, the destruction of nature, among others, are constructed, providing non-European societies, in the imagination of rational progress, that they are transformed into “different”, “archaic”, “primitive” and “pre-modern”.

At the end of the 19th century, the detachment of the Latin American subcontinent, vis-à-vis the decadent empires of Spain and Portugal, implied the establishment of economic and cultural ties with the emerging empires of France and England. Therefore, the end of colonial legal domination did not mean changes in modern dualistic reasoning who denied multiple ways of living, being and knowing. The modern worldview mobilized the universal perspective of history linked to the progress ideals, the naturalization of relations based on liberal-capitalist society and the superiority of scientific knowledge production in relation to other ways of knowing and producing knowledge (Lander, 2005).

In this article, we assume decolonial thinking as a fundamental part, as it is a set of epistemic practices that investigate and act to overcome different oppressions, many of them interrelated. Previously, we have presented that Mignolo (2003) understands coloniality as a constitutive part of modernity itself, which, however, has in decolonial thought an inseparable consequence of the modern project (Mignolo, 2007). Thus, the author challenges us to precisely understand the potential of histories and cultures of colonized populations by tracing a decolonial genealogy thought and elucidating the different knowledge and ways of knowing that weave other paradigms of resistance to colonial imposition.

Broadly, Mignolo (2007) shows that the praxis of decolonial thinking includes names and groups with different emphases, such as: Mahatma Gandhi; W. E. B. Du Bois; Juan Carlos Mariátegui; Amílcar Cabral; Aimé Césaire; Frantz Fanon; Fausto Reinaga; Vine Deloria Jr. ; Rigoberta Menchú; Gloria Anzaldúa; in addition to the Landless Movement in Brazil; the Zapatistas, in Mexico; indigenous and Afro movements in Bolivia, Ecuador and Colombia; the World Social Forum and the Social Forum of the Americas. From this panorama, we can infer that the decolonial perspective does not understand Abya Yala only as a geographical space, but as a political, intellectual, and ethical conception (and option).

In this way, it is a question of acting, thinking and proposing means of decolonial insubmission. It is for this reason that Abya Yala comes to be understood as more of an ethical-political, pedagogical, and epistemological perspective than a region. For Ribeiro (2016), Latin American decolonial thought, even though it distances itself, does not deny nor is confused by the epistemologies of Africa and Asia. Decolonial thinking is detached and is open to other ways of knowledge and knowing the colonized subjects, becoming a project of systematic transformation of modernity and assuming the possibility of interlocutors in different spaces and times.



If, on one hand, the decolonial turn implies understanding the different moments of decolonialization process<sup>13</sup>, culminating in the long-term resignification movement, which cannot be limited to juridical-political events; on the other hand, this intellectual turn must be accompanied by a complex movement that involves power, ways of being and knowledge. According to Catherine Walsh (2013), decolonial pedagogy begins with resistance to colonial invasion, since it must be understood in a context of decolonial struggles that intend to make humanity viable against the colonial matrix and its pattern of racialization-dehumanization, that for over 500 years have oppressed and victimized men and women.

In this sense, we identify decoloniality in Paulo Freire's pedagogy and epistemology, as it takes place in communion with the sub-alternated, racialized and oppressed. According to Maldonado-Torres (2007), the decolonial turn implies,

[...] in the first place, a perspective and attitude change of that is found in the practices and knowledge forms of colonized subjects, from the beginning of the colonization processes, and second, a systematic and global transformation project of presuppositions and implications of modernity, assumed by a variety of subjects in dialogue. (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 160).

In the political-educational spaces that he participated throughout the world (America, Europe, and Africa), Paulo Freire experienced, both theoretical and geopolitical, subalternity and “[...] this, essentially marks his work as a critical *witness of modernity* / coloniality, therefore, as a *decolonial thinker*” (Mota Neto, 2015, p. 149, emphasis added), since he experienced decolonial insubordination.

### **A decolonial epistemology: denunciations and announcements in Paulo Freire**

As mentioned before, we consider Paulo Freire's biobibliography movement to highlight the transformation regarding his way of understanding / acting in and with the world, especially in his exile period. For Paulo Freire, there is no denunciation without annunciation/there is no annunciation without a denunciation, since this conjunction designates not only a correlation of forces, but a political exercise of speaking the word expressing the commitment to transformation. In short, it means not only talking about what could become, but to talk about its reality, to denounce, in order to announce a better world (Freire, 2000).

Here, we return to our methodological path, to explain the choices made and the analytical understandings reached from the author's work, according to the dialogues carried out through the reading and the bibliographic interpretation research proposal in Grazziotin, Klaus and Pereira (2021?). In this way, our path is constituted from the following moments:

- a) Investigated works' review: Paulo Freire's work can be organized by periods, which can be delimited by different criteria, in addition to the literary nature, depending on each researcher's objectives / who is dedicated to understanding it. Here, we seek as references the books published in Portuguese. Such as Pitano, Streck and Moretti (2020, p. 110), we

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<sup>13</sup> In a well-known passage by Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel, we can identify these different moments in the decolonialization process: “The first decolonialization (started in the 19th century by the Spanish colonies and followed in the 20th by the English and French colonies) was incomplete, since it was limited to the peripheries juridical-political independence. Instead, the second decolonialization - to which we refer to the *decoloniality* category - will have to address the heterarchy of multiple racial, ethnic, sexual, epistemic, economic and gender relations that the first decolonialization left intact. As a result, the world of the early 21st century needs decoloniality to complement the decolonization carried out in the 19th and 20th centuries. Contrary to this decolonialization, decoloniality is a process with a long-term resignification, which cannot be reduced to a legal-political event ” (Castro-Gómez & Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 17).

organized the review in five periods: “1) until 1964, before the Military Civil Coup; 2) until 1980, in the period of exile; 3) post-1980, return from exile-dialogued works; 4) production after management experience at the Municipal Education Secretariat, in São Paulo (SME-SP); and, finally, 5) organized, posthumous works”.

- b) Definition of the research empirical *corpus*: after Paulo Freire's periodically work, we delimited the corpus from those that we understand to be the three main works published in exile: *Education as a practice of freedom* (1967), *Letters to Guinea Bissau* (1978) and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1987). Once it is possible to identify a criticism about historical process of colonization of “third-world countries”, to use Freire's own term, we can consider both, domination and liberation legacies in the educational and political processes experienced by Freire.
- c) Study of the author's biography: regarding the periodically work and criteria definition for systematized readings selection, we considered the articulation between the context of his production and the author's biography. Hence, we work with the idea of “biobibliography”. In Paulo Freire: a biobibliography, organized by Moacir Gadotti (1996), the concept of biobibliography is presented as an interpretation of how the author's intellectual production is intimately imbricated in his own life story. Thus, this concept affirms the impossibility of dichotomizing Freire's biography from his bibliography.
- d) Construction and analysis of each work from a reading script: in the three works studied, we considered the dynamic movement between denunciation and announcement, as the main categories of reading and interpretation, identifying their different dimensions.
- e) Construction of an analytical framework to organize and systematize the divergences and singularities of the empirical corpus. Based on Freire's dialectical understanding, we believe it is important to highlight the inseparable relationship between the denunciation and the announcement, as can be seen in Table 1 below.

**Table 1** - Analysis category

<b>Denunciation category</b>	<b>Announcement category</b>
<b>Dimensions</b> Denunciation/Announcement	<b>Dimensions</b> Announcement / Denunciation
<b>Oppressor/oppressed</b>	<b>Awareness/Mind Colonization</b>
<b>Dehumanization/Humanization</b>	<b>Hope/Hopelessness</b>
<b>Culture of Silence/Dialogue</b>	<b>Freedom/Domestication</b>

**Source:** Made by the authors (2020).

Therefore, we began to focus on the specific concepts analysis (dimensions) regarding each of the categories, as well as on the existence of their opposites: every complaint has an announcement inherent to it; every announcement has a corresponding denounce.

So, in the first dimension we have the pair “oppressor – oppressed”. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1987) presents the understanding of the oppressed as antagonistic social classes in constant struggle. An important historical influence and dialectical materialism is evidenced, as in the analysis we perceive the oppressed and oppressors as classes and individuals prevented from being fully human in the ontological vocation of “being more”. In these relationships, violence,

domination, and oppression go along, in the process of dehumanization of both the dominator and the dominated. The first for excess power and the second for lack of it. Thus, they become “almost-things”.

In the oppressive conscience, “[...] sadism, appears as one of the characteristics of the oppressive conscience in its necrophiliac view of the world. That is why his love is a love in reverse – a love of death and not of life” (Freire, 1987, p. 26). So, violence is a domination instrument, in which the oppressors themselves establish the parameters for it:

In general, when the oppressed legitimately revolts against the oppressor, in whom he identifies the oppression, he, the oppressed, is called as the violent one, the barbaric one, the inhuman one, the cold one. It is that, among the countless rights that the dominating conscience is admitted to itself, such as: to define the violence. To characterize her. To place her. And if this right is exclusively available to her, that she won't find an encounter with violence on herself. It will not be herself that she will call violent. In fact, the oppressed violence, in addition to being a mere response in which it reveals the intention of recovering its humanity, is, still the lesson that it received from the oppressor. From an early age, as Fanon points out, the oppressed learn to torture. With a subtle difference in this *learning – the oppressor learns to torture, torturing the oppressed. The oppressed, being tortured by the oppressor.* (Freire, 1967, p. 50, emphasis added).

We highlight the last sentence of the previous quote, as it indicates that the oppressor and the oppressed learn together what violence and torture are. However, the main difference is that the first one learns by torturing, and the second one, by being tortured. This passage demonstrates the complexity of the social relationships between these actors and these actresses, through which we can infer that if the oppressed learn to torture (albeit from their own oppression), it means that they will be capable of reproducing such denominations. Therefore, when we understand that the dimension of oppression is intimately connected to colonial violence, it becomes essential to identify the structures that compose it

We start from our second dimension of analysis, which concerns the dimension of “dehumanization”. Freire's entire biobibliography is crossed by criticism of dehumanization, referring to it at different times as massification, objectification, alienation, reification, among others. For the author, only after verifying their dehumanization the subjects ask themselves about another possibility of existence: humanization. This leads us to understand that humanization and dehumanization are historical possibilities (Freire, 1987).

Consequently, for Freire, dehumanization is not a predetermined destiny, but a fact in the history of subjects conditioned to this situation through the unfair and violent gears that lead them to “be less”. In the preface to *Education as a practice of freedom*, Weffort (1967) challenges us to understand how education plays a prominent role in men's construction (and women) as subjects of their own history. In this sense, the need for education is presented as a force for change and liberation from dehumanization: “The option, therefore, would also have to be, between an 'education' for 'domestication', for alienation, and an education for freedom. 'Education' for the man-object or education for the man-subject” (Weffort, 1967, p. 42).

If invasion and subjugation are constitutive parts of the colonialist logic, these processes cause the death of the capacity for critical problematization of the conquered world. In this bias, the liberation from such a situation is only possible through a liberating reason that problematizes the Euro centered reason (Streck; Moretti; Pitano, 2018). Therefore, the search for a subject man and woman necessarily implies a subject society.

Both are only possible through critical self-reflection about themselves in the time and space in which they are inserted.

Mota Neto (2015) crosses the Decolonial Studies approaches, and Freirian debates, understanding that, when Freire points to traditional education as a space that dehumanizes and alienates subjects, he is inaugurating the problematization known today as the “coloniality of being”. In this perspective, we agree with Mota Neto (2015), because, we have seen the human being’s objectification that consists in the ontological vocation of “being more” denial, expressed in colonial silencing, people's alienation, and political authoritarianism by the elites.

In Freire's anthropological understanding, dehumanization involves the dimension of the “culture of silence”, the third aspect analyzed here. We can interpret that “silence” is a fundamental example of the complexity of colonial relations, since, as an authoritarian exercise of power, it demonstrates the introjection of coloniality into all forms of domination. Thus, the humanization process implies the ability to say “your” word and not someone else's, or rather, not the colonizer's word.

We highlight Freire's contribution regarding the political role of Linguistics. As pointed out by Andreola and Ribeiro (2005), in Freire's epistemology, linguistics is an instrument used to ideologically justify the process of death of ways of thinking and expressing by the colonized. The authors understand that in the “culture of silence”, the use of the oppressor language, to the detriment of the colonized language, means the destitution of their own word. Thus, the absence of the word to which Freire refers is not only related to the physical act of speech, but mainly to the impossibility of thinking and acting based on their own ways of enunciating the world.

For Freire (1987), human existence cannot be changed or nourished with false words. Therefore, living (and not just existing) is being able to pronounce and transform (your) world (Loureiro, 2020). In this sense, the right to the true word – the one produced in praxis – belongs to everyone, men, and women.

Precisely for this reason, no one can say the true word alone, or say it to others, in an act of prescription, in which he steals the word from others. Dialogue is this meeting of men, mediated by the world, to pronounce it, to not being exhausted, therefore, in the I-you relationship. Therefore, dialogue is not possible between those who want the pronunciation of the world and those who do not; between those who deny others the right to speak the word and those who find themselves with their right denied. (Freire, 1987, p. 44).

In the preface of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Ernani Maria Fiori (1987) proposes that, only by taking on the responsibility of “speaking their word”, men and women are able to humanize themselves as well as to humanize the world in which they live at. In this “culture of silence”, subjects are prevented from meaning their own existence, leading them to become “almost-things”. According to Freire: “They discover that, as men, they cannot continue to be 'almost-things' possessed from self-awareness as oppressed men, they go to the consciousness of the oppressed class” (Freire, 1987, p. 101).

Hence, the break with the “culture of silence” involves dialogue, which is the opposite of the act of placing ideas and conceptions of one subject over another, and through the simple exchange of information. Dialogue is, above all, the meeting of men and women who pronounce their world on an equal footing and, therefore, create and transform their situation of subordination/oppression/racialization.

In the book-report *Letters to Guinea Bissau*, Freire (1978) expresses his deep concern with the attempt of “de-Africanization” of subjects sub-alternated by European elites. From this, the author points out the need for the formation of the new man and woman, who recreate themselves in the perception of their situation, freeing themselves from colonialism and rejecting neo-

colonialism: “And in this effort to re-create society the reconquest by the People of their Word is a fundamental fact” (Freire, 1978, p. 161). However, understanding the importance of language and the word, Freire (1978) found an important challenge: how would it be possible to “re-Africanize” the people, using the language that had tried to “de-Africanize” them?

The experience in Guinea-Bissau strained the author's understanding of liberation, which is linked with the ability to enunciate his world and his word in his own language: “One of the colonialism's legacies, after five centuries of works in Guinea, was to leave 90 to 95% of its population illiterate” (Freire, 1978, p. 72). The fact was that you could not choose between more than 30 languages from the different Guinean ethnic groups, or the most popular language (spoken by almost 45% of the population), which was Creole, since this language was exclusively oral. However, based on his reading of Amílcar Cabral, Freire considers the need not to isolate the country internationally; thus, since the 1960s, the country had already taught militants to read and write in Portuguese.

In an intellectual dialogue with Amílcar Cabral, developed in the book “Letters to Guinea-Bissau” (Freire, 1978), Freire understood that the process of “re-Africanization” required a recognition of literacy intellectuals as subjects historically situated in their time. The activity would not end with a mechanical repetition and memorizing words. The knowledge of books would give space to the knowledge that arises from the critical praxis of men and women about their concrete work practice: “Hence the insistence, also, with which I always speak of the dialectical relationship between a concrete context in which such practice takes place and a theoretical context, in which the critical reflection on that is done” (Freire, 1978, p. 111). In this sense, the delimitation of what to know, how to know, what to know for, in favor (and against) of what and who to know, cannot be thought from outside the proposal of an education as a practice of this freedom.

As we can see, even the complaint dimensions are accompanied by announcements. Therefore, we started to present those related to the announces, the first one is the awareness. In *Education as a practice of freedom*, in a phenomenological perspective, Paulo Freire (1967) discussed the three consciousness dimensions: 1- intransitivity, which addresses all human beings who, in an immersion situation in their realities, cannot reflect on them; 2- naive transitivity, the moment when the subject perceives social contradictions and adopts unreal/illusory explanations for those phenomena; and, finally, 3- critical transitivity, characterized by autonomous thinking that leads the subject to political engagement for the transformation of oppressive situations.

It is important to emphasize that in “naive transitivity”, men and women are unable to understand the domination rules, in which they are submitted, interpreting in a simplified way the problems and oppression structures. In the “critical transitivity” (or critical consciousness), they understand beyond the immediately apprehensible facts, or rather, they develop a reflection on the intersubjectivities that compose it. From this perspective, if the concrete reality is limited by certain situations, the critical conscience needs to understand these limits (Puiggrós, 1998).

We assume, that the process of political commitment (awareness), given the historical context, is only possible through critical awareness. Attentive to the diversity of possible interpretations, with different interests, in the 1970s, Freire warned about the risks of appropriation of the “emblem word” by conservative groups and, later, by neoliberals of banking education.

Paulo Freire criticized the “colonialism of minds” of Brazilian intellectuals, as they introject European (and currently US) views on Brazil as a backward country. In *Letters to Guinea-Bissau* (1978), the author understood that power has ties not only to the economy, but also to racialization and colonization. Therefore, in *Pedagogy of Hope* (1992), the educator talks about the revolution as a political-pedagogical praxis of existence and fights against the dehumanization of sub

alternation/racialization/oppression. We can see in these works a clear connection and radicalization of their opposition to the intellectual subjugation promoted in modernity/coloniality.

We can see that the oppressors' conscience lives within the oppressed conscience. Therefore, in education as a practice of freedom, critical awareness plays a prominent role as it is an organization and apprehension instrument of reality by the oppressed, requiring a critical position to understand reality as a knowledge object (Torres, 1996).

In this way, our second dimension of investigation – the space of hope. In Freire's epistemology, hope is the ontological struggle need to make human existence better. According to the author, if hope is part of the human construction in the search for “being more”, hopelessness is the hope that lost its way towards this ontological need, becoming immobilizing and fatalistic. Certainly, hope alone does not have the power to transform oppressive situations, since without concrete praxis, it becomes just vain hope:

I'm not hopeful stubbornness, but out of an existential and historical imperative. I don't want to say, however, that, because I am hopeful, I attribute to my hope the power to transform reality and, thus convinced, I go to the confrontation without considering the real, material data, affirming that my hope is enough. My hope is necessary, but it is not enough. She, alone, does not win the fight, but without her the fight falters and stutters (Freire, 1992, p. 5).

Nevertheless, hope is directly linked to the praxis to become historical real. Therefore, without hope, the struggle for social transformation is not feasible, given its individual and social importance. One of the roles of the progressive educator, through political analysis, is to understand the possibilities of transforming hope into something unprecedented-viable, or, in other words, into something that has not yet been tried, but that can be achieved.

From this context, the author proposes that Brazil (and Abya Yala) needs to stop “importing recipes” for its social problems, replacing them with projects and plans that deeply recognize its reality people's reality too. Impelling the need for a hope that mobilizes and transforms reality, which, by giving up banking and alienating postures, enables subjects to develop a critical and responsible hope for their future. From the Freirian perspective, we understand, therefore, that the decolonial option of reading the world is, above all, a hopeful option.

Therefore, hope gives impetus to a critical awareness of intervention on dehumanization and oppression in coloniality, referring to the act of hope, a verb of action, indignation, and zeal. So, freedom as a hope action appears as a frequent theme in Freire's works. For the author, hope reveals the work of critical conscience to produce individual and collective freedom in overcoming “limit-situations”. At this point, we arrive at the third dimension of analysis: liberation.

According to Mota Neto (2015), *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1987) marked a radicalization in Freire's thought, since, in this book, the author demonstrates that the problem of freedom is not only ontological, but historical. It is a conquest of the subjects that needs political organization and a transformative struggle. For Freire (1987), liberation is a painful birth, which presupposes a political commitment to overcome the contradictions in the relationship between the oppressive and the oppressed.

Based on this theoretical contribution, we understand that the term “liberation” in Freire's works is not deliberate, but points to a decolonial break with modernity. Working with the CMI, in collaboration with African countries, Freire analyzed the role of culture in liberation, understanding that its permanent valorization does not only mean the victory consolidation over the colonizers, but also the realization of a society project based on non-domination.

Without being a violence defender – even because of his Christian background – Freire differentiated the oppressors' violence from the revolutionary reconquest violence of the oppressed liberation, since one would guarantee the maintenance of the colonial *status quo* of exploitation and dehumanization, the other would seek to highlight the very practice of violence. The strength of the liberation of oppressors and oppressed arises from their own weakness and pain, strong enough to release both. So, when oppressors seek to alleviate colonial violence, they express themselves in false generosity, which ends up perpetuating the power and social injustices structures.

All analyzed dimensions so far converge to the following question: What mechanisms will the oppressed (that host the oppressive consciousness) work towards the construction of the epistemology of their own liberation? For Paulo Freire, the pedagogy of the oppressed is an instrument for his critical and decolonializing discovery of the presence of the oppressors in the minds of the oppressed. In this way, the educator recognizes that a liberating pedagogy permeates the promotion of the liberation of the pedagogy itself.

In this way, the author questions the positivism of Western rationality, denouncing an alleged universality of pedagogical theory. Thus, it assumes the oppressor's pedagogy as a possibility and not as the only and legitimate pedagogy. An example of this is the praxis constant valorization, in concrete reality. Therefore, the need to make a pedagogy in the other-paradigm, a pedagogy of (and not for the) sub alternated, racialized, oppressed.

## Final considerations

According to the introduction to this article, there is a set of research and studies published as theses, dissertations and scientific articles that demonstrate the curiosity for Decolonial Studies and the production of knowledge of his relationship with Paulo Freire.

Even though the place and the Decolonial Studies sense of political vocation are in dispute, some of the researchers and activists of popular social movements would ask: Is it “a theoretical bet or an everyday struggle?”. Therefore, the original sources of this field seem to be consolidated: in a non-Western and non-Eurocentric forms of knowledge (as in the wisdom of indigenous peoples, in collective memories of resistance, in African ancestry, in the forms of struggle and collective organization of various groups); in theology and philosophy; in dependency theory; in European and American critical theories of modernity; in the South Asian subaltern studies group; in *Chicana* feminist theory; in postcolonial theory and African philosophy, as mentioned by Escobar (2003); as well as in Latin American popular education and in participatory action-investigation, as pointed out by Mota Neto (2015).

As we can see, the discussion we present is more closely linked to popular education as “a historical accumulation” (Mejía, 2013) and does not intend to adhere to the dichotomization between theory and practice as a “validation” of scientific production and/or popular knowledge, since we identify with the dialectical perspective of knowledge. We were interested here in presenting Paulo Freire's work from a decolonial perspective, even though the Brazilian educator himself can be considered as a precursor of the critique of modern hegemonic reason, when questioning and proposing an epistemology and a politically situated pedagogy. So, he, becomes a proponent of self-criticism as an essential element of the popular educator's engagement with the transformation of dehumanizing situations into dialogue with subjects: by denouncing, announcing; when announcing, denouncing.

It is important to mention that the author's theoretical and epistemic thinking is quite complex, not only in proposal, but also in elaboration. The influences are many. According to a study coordinated by Pitano, Streck and Moretti (2019), the number of authors, experiences, theoretical approaches, and institutions exceeds 500 in 32 books published in Portuguese by Brazilian publishers. The authors, however, in another publication about the subject, draw attention to the expansion of authors present in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* compared to *Education as a practice of freedom*, which is strongly influenced by Brazilian existentialist and developmental thinking (Pitano; Streck; Moretti, 2018).

Therefore, when observing the trends pointed out in previous works, in two of the three works analyzed, we highlight the more accentuated presence of historical and dialectical materialism, especially in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and in *Letters to Guinea Bissau*. However, in the three works studied, the dynamic movement between denunciation and announcement is present, whose dimensions were identified as: oppressor/oppressed; dehumanization/humanization and culture of silence/dialogue; in addition to awareness/colonization of minds, hope/hopelessness, and liberation/domestication. In this sense, the bibliobibliography chosen for the investigation dialogues with both theoretical and geopolitical aspects of Decolonial Studies. As Mota Neto (2015) points out, this relationship marks Paulo Freire's work as a critical testimony of modernity/coloniality.

Hence, the contribution to the understanding of pedagogical action “with” the other and not “on” the other open paths for a decolonial epistemology. The concern with the “colonization of minds” and the movement for the liberation of subjects is central in Freire's works and life, as well as in the relationship between denunciation and annunciation.

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