

RADICAL DEMOCRACY IN THE THOUGHT AND WORK OF PAULO FREIRE
AND LUIS VILLORO

A Dissertation

by

KIM DÍAZ

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2012

Major Subject: Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Radical Democracy in the Thought and Work of Paulo Freire and Luis Villoro.

(May 2012)

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This project explores democracy *as a way of life* (radical democracy) by drawing from both North and Latin American philosophers. I work with ideas from Paulo Freire (Brazil) and Luis Villoro (Mexico) to develop (a) a criticism of mainstream liberal assumptions regarding freedom, tolerance and the nature of the relationship between the individual and the community as well as (b) a criticism of liberal democracy as a political system, and (c) a formulation of democracy as a way of life. This is relevant because the experiences in Freire's and Villoro's historical background (colonialism, feudalism, dictatorships) have been neglected from the Western liberal approach which emphasizes property rights, individual rights and community obligations towards the individual. Working with philosophers whose theories have been informed by the liberal tradition but whose work was developed in response to living in environments of dehumanizing oppression and corruption provides us with relevant criticisms of the Western liberal tradition as well as its assumptions regarding central concepts such as freedom, tolerance and community.

Zazen practice is the direct expression of our true nature. Strictly speaking, for a human being, there is no other practice than this practice; there is no other way of life than this way of life. - Shunryu Suzuki

For Ivy, my beautiful sister.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When we think of the meaning of democracy, most of us think of democracy as an approach to government, a type of political arrangement or system. There are a number of ways to think about what democracy means insofar as different aspects of democracy are emphasized. For instance, we might emphasize the procedure by which democracy takes place (procedural democracy). We may emphasize the process of deliberating about the problems, the different interests involved, and the possible outcomes (deliberative democracy). Alternatively, we may emphasize the representative aspect of democracy (representative democracy). This project is focused on presenting a version of radical democracy by using the thought and work of the Brazilian pedagogue and philosopher Paulo Freire and the Mexican indigenist and philosopher Luis Villoro. The project introduces the thought and work of two philosophers from outside the Anglo-European philosophical tradition whose cultural locations required them to confront widespread oppression within democratic institutions in new ways. Although there is a fair amount of interest in Freire among pedagogues, Freire's ideas have been largely neglected by philosophers. The same is true of Luis Villoro; most Anglophone philosophers do not know of his work. This is in fact, the first dissertation project written in English about Luis Villoro. The second aim of this project is to deepen the

This dissertation follows the style of *Inter-American Journal of Philosophy*.

contemporary discussion of (a) mainstream liberal assumptions regarding the nature of democracy, freedom, tolerance and the scope of democracy, as well as (b) criticisms made against democracy as a way of life, namely, that it is too naïve, trusting, and complacent.

Democracy as a political arrangement has a very long history, dating back at least to ancient Greece. Our current state of democracy has developed largely out the Western liberal tradition so that our democratic institutions are deeply influenced by liberal values such as individual freedom and tolerance. The classical liberal emphasizes the importance both of individual liberty and the right to private property in the ideal state. For the classical liberal, liberty and private property are intimately related because the ability to own private property allows each of us the liberty to live our life and employ our labor and capital as we see fit. The classical liberal believes that we are not really free unless we are free to make contracts, to sell our labor, save our income and invest it, and run enterprises with the capital we have obtained. Classical liberals believe that the primary role of government is to maintain a free market economy, and they reject the redistribution of wealth as a legitimate aim of government. In order to redistribute wealth, the government takes wealth from individuals whose yearly income is above a certain level by means of taxation and fees and distributes this wealth to those who are poorer through various forms of social programs such as government assisted housing, clinics, employment, welfare, and public schools and parks.¹

Welfare-state liberalism is a more recent development in liberal theory. Both classical liberals and welfare-state liberals believe the state has an important role to play

in the economy. Classical liberals aim to lessen the power the state has over individuals and their property and believe that the government's role is to maintain a free market economy. Welfare-state liberals believe that the government's role in the economy is through planned economic policies and a supervised economic market.

Historically, welfare-state liberalism gained public support as citizens identified democratically elected officials in their governments as being representatives of their interests. Another reason for the emergence of welfare-state liberalism was the role the government agencies played in the U. S. economy during and after WWI. During this time the U. S. turned away from reliance on the market towards a more controlled and planned economy by developing a number of federal agencies such as the Food Administration, the Fuel Administration, the Railroad Administration, and the War Industries Board. The management of the war economy through government agencies persuaded many citizens that it was possible for the government to play an important role in the economy. Due to the government's role in the economy during WWI, citizens supported federal agencies such as the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Agricultural Adjustment Administration during the Great Depression.²

There are different ways of explaining what radical democracy entails. In defining what radical democracy means, I must first make explicit the fact that "radical democracy" is still a nascent democratic approach. Freire and Villoro developed their ideas about democracy out of their colonial experience so that their ideas and approach are more "radical" than most of our Western conceptions of democracy. This is one way in which radical democracy is considered to be "radical." Yet another way, and the one

to which I adhere to and am most sympathetic, is a Jamesian understanding of the word “radical,” meaning that just as radical empiricism is different from empiricism as a theory, likewise radical democracy is different from democratic theories, policies and institutions. The Jamesian connotation of the word “radical” entails the grounded, felt, lived experience of our present circumstances.³ In this sense, democracy is not merely a political procedure, but rather a way of life that takes place throughout our everyday experience. Still another way of understanding what “radical” democracy means is through the difference alluded to by “thin” and “thick” conceptions. A thick conception, such as the word “unjust” has a more substantial connotation than a thin conception, which lacks content such as the phrase “morally wrong.”⁴ In his article "Which Technology and Which Democracy?" Benjamin R. Barber distinguishes between “thin” and “thick” (or “strong”) conceptions of democracy:

In the case of "thin" democracy, representative institutions dominate and citizens are relatively passive... They choose representatives, but leave those representatives, who remain accountable to the voters in the abstract, to do most of the real governing. This is not so much self-government as (in Jefferson's term) elective aristocracy... [whereas] "strong" democracy -- democracy that, while not necessarily always direct, incorporates strong participatory and deliberative elements... where citizens are engaged at the local and national levels in a variety of political activities and regard discourse, debate and deliberation as essential conditions for reaching common ground and arbitrating differences between people in a large multi-cultural society. In strong democracy, citizens actually participate in governing themselves, if not in all matters, all of the time, at least in some matters at least some of the time.⁵

Though the Western liberal tradition runs deep within our democratic institutions, liberalism and democracy are not synonymous, nor does one concept necessarily entail the other.⁶ While liberalism was once supportive of democratic values it has recently been questioned whether in practice it is actually the enemy of Democracy. As Robert

Talisse writes, “a question central to current political theory is: can a society based upon liberal principles generate and sustain the conditions necessary for effective democracy?”⁷ The version of radical democracy that Freire and Villoro articulate is informed by liberal democracy but is also critical of it. Generally, their version of democracy is described as the democratic quality that our experiences in the here and now may exhibit.⁸ Paulo Freire writes, “...the point of departure must always be with men and women in the ‘here and now,’ which constitutes the situation within which they are submerged, from which they emerge, and in which they intervene.”⁹ A democratic quality may be characterized by openness, equality and a willingness to share, learn, and create together, which in turn requires that we cultivate and practice virtues such as open-mindedness, listening, empathy, courage, humility, trust, receptivity to others’ experiences, and a willingness to be transformed by the experience.¹⁰

Proponents of radical democracy contend that it is through our relationships and within the immediate experience we have of each other that our ideals have the capacity to become actualized experiences. Democracy has the potential to be so much more than merely a procedure to elect a few individuals to represent the community’s political interests. Proponents of radical democracy criticize mainstream liberal theories for equating democracy with legal guarantees, or with the procedure of periodic voting, as well as for the belief that it is through private property that individual liberty is achieved.

There are, of course, those who are critical of the general idea of a radical democracy. In her article “From the Foreign to the Familiar: Confronting Dewey Confronting Racial Prejudice,” Shannon Sullivan argues that the idea of democracy as a

transformation of our habits is too simple and naive regarding the psychology of both the oppressed groups of people as well as the oppressors.¹¹ Another related criticism is developed by Charlene H. Seigfried who writes that radical democracy lacks suspicion of the motives of others, it “underestimates the extent and depth of misogyny, racism, homophobia and classism in personal habits and societal institutions and neglect[s] the development of an account of the more irrational sides of human understanding and use of power.”¹² In his book *Pragmatism as Transition*, Colin Koopman argues that it is not enough to focus on our immediate experience and context, that a radical approach to democracy is too complacent regarding recurring tensions, so that a wider and more normative approach is needed to insure that everyone (not merely those in our immediate environment) are affected positively.¹³

This project engages the work of Paulo Freire and Luis Villoro in order to address these criticisms. The theory of radical democracy developed by Freire and Villoro answers the common challenges against the idea that democracy has the potential to be a way of life because Freire’s and Villoro’s version of radical democracy was developed out of and in response to the colonized experience, within contexts characterized by experiences of dehumanizing oppression, corruption and abuse of power. Freire’s analysis of the “internalized oppressor” and Villoro’s analysis of the intentions that lead us to become close to others help us to understand the depth and complexity of experiencing democracy through our everyday interactions and relationships.

In order to accomplish this task, this project examines the intentions and psychology of the oppressed, their oppressors, the psychology of different types of “liberators” as well as the different reasons why we seek to be self-reliant or to join in community with others, and whether what passes for self-reliance and community are indeed worthy of the names. The argument that radical democracy is neither naive regarding the human potential nor complacent regarding the tensions and ambiguity inherent in our everyday experiences and relationships is also developed.

The focus is then to explore what we may learn from other “American” thinkers such as Freire and Villoro if we are to develop a view of democracy that both (a) is more than a political system and legal guarantees, and (b) that avoids certain common problems with theories of democracy as a way of life. The goal *is not to develop a full theory of democracy*, but simply to suggest how such a view may be presented without being naive regarding the extent the experiences of oppressive environments and institutions have had on us as individuals as well as the relationships and communities to which we belong. The goal of this project is not to explore why mainstream liberals have underestimated or neglected the extent to which oppression can color the experience of people. Rather, this project is focused on analyzing why Freire and Villoro did not underestimate the complexity and extent of oppression as well as discerning what lessons can be derived for any formulation of democracy as a way of life that wishes not to have this weakness.

Moreover, engaging the insights of Freire and Villoro is worthwhile because they provide us with criticisms of liberal values and assumptions that have yet to be

addressed in order for liberalism to remain a consistent and viable theory. It is worth our while to engage the insights from Latin American philosophers for us to better understand the history and the scope of democracy in “America.” As North Americans, we have a lot to learn from philosophers who have directly faced the problems of oppression.

The project begins by introducing the historical context of Paulo Freire and of Luis Villoro. The historical background involves both Brazil’s and Mexico’s history with colonization as well as the work and personal history of Freire and Villoro. The aim of the second chapter is to provide the reader with important historical information regarding the contexts from which Paulo Freire and Luis Villoro developed their ideas. These Latin American philosophers continuously worked towards bringing about the recognition and liberation of the Black and Indigenous people who were enslaved and marginalized first by European colonizers, and later by *criollos* (the upper class of European descent). The historical background is first explained and this allows us to better understand the problems that compelled Freire and Villoro to develop their own approaches as ways to address the consequences of the European colonization. It is because of the historical and cultural context from which the thought and work of Freire and Villoro emerged that we are able to gather insights regarding the nature of democracy not available to us if we were to work only with philosophers in the mainstream liberal tradition.

The thought and work of Paulo Freire is the focus of the third chapter. The aim

here is twofold, first to discuss the institutional and psychological challenges that Freire faced in his effort to help the people around him. The next task is to discuss the insights that Freire developed as a result of the challenges he faced. These challenges will be discussed in detail, but briefly stated, they are: First, the fear of recognizing and assuming control of one's agency (for the oppressed), and the fear of losing control over others (for the oppressor). The second challenge is the process of the oppressed internalizing their oppressors. The third challenge is the lack of trust we may display when widening the scope of democracy. As a consequence of these challenges, Freire developed a number of insights, which will be discussed during the second part of chapter three. These insights regard first, the role of dialogue and tolerance. Also how the success or failure in widening the scope of democracy depends both on our intentions (fear, or love and trust), as well as our approach (humanist vs. humanitarian).

The thought and work of Luis Villoro is the focus of the fourth chapter. The structure of chapter four is parallel to that of chapter three. The institutional challenges Villoro identifies as undermining democratic interactions are first discussed, then the insights Villoro developed in response to these challenges. The first institutional challenge that Villoro identifies is the lack of a democratic quality in our democratic institutions. The second institutional challenge is how the dominant culture regards and treats minorities. Third, Villoro identifies problematic assumptions and consequences of liberalism. The last institutional challenge Villoro identifies is the lack of tolerance as a value of the political left, as well as of communitarianism. Villoro's insights in response to these challenges are as follows: First, his suggestions on how to make democratic

institutions democratic. Second, he examines the value of pluralism. Third, Villoro explains how tolerance is a necessary but not sufficient condition for democracy. Fourth, Villoro suggests that we consider the political left as a lifestyle choice instead of a political affiliation. Lastly, Villoro examines the strengths of liberalism as well as of communitarianism.

Freire and Villoro articulate very similar theories of what a radical democracy entails. Their theories complement each other, and one of the goals of this project is to bring them together and to place them in dialogue with one another so that we may see how their historical and contextual differences illuminate the obscurities and shortcomings of the other philosopher's approach. Also, this will enable us as Western liberals with our liberal democratic institutions to see what we may learn from Freire's and Villoro's work with people who are in large part the product of a colonized consciousness. Thus, the aim of chapter five is to draw out the main lessons learned from Freire's and Villoro's work, the insights shared by Freire and Villoro, what they both criticize, the issues that concern them, criticisms of their version of radical democracy, and possible answers to these criticisms as well as suggestions for how their approach may be improved.

The relevance of this project to philosophical scholarship and the contributions this project makes are demonstrating that liberal democracies with their emphasis on positive and negative rights and private property as the main bases for personal freedom lack an understanding of the interpersonal dynamics of individuals. Freire and Villoro are relevant to any formulation of democracy because they do not underestimate the

complexity nor the extent of oppression. Freire's and Villoro's analysis of freedom differs from the liberal conceptions of freedom because they both examine the effects that lack of freedom and oppressive power dynamics have had on the consciousness of those who have undergone these experiences. Consequently, both Freire and Villoro suggest a number of ways to enable people through consistent and authentic ways that go beyond private property and legal guarantees. Both of them argue in favor of horizontal power structures where those in power do not dictate or seek to control others, but rather aim to serve them. They emphasize the importance of the immediate experience both as being the place that gives us the material with which we have to work, as well as the place where we are able to make decisions guided by our ideals.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

This second chapter provides the historical context in which Paulo Freire and Luis Villoro lived their lives. The historical background involves both Brazil's and Mexico's experiences with colonization, as well as the work and personal history of Freire and Villoro. These are the contexts from which Paulo Freire and Luis Villoro developed their ideas. The chapter is divided into four sections. We begin with a brief history of Brazil, followed by the context of Freire's work and thought. Next, is a brief history of Mexico, which is then followed by the context of Villoro's thought and work.

Colonization in Brazil

Brazil was a Portuguese colony from 1500 to 1822 and there are many similarities between Brazil and the Spanish colonies. Brazil's Indigenous population was stripped of their lands and taken to *aldeias* (villages) by Jesuits to be baptized into Christianity and forced into slavery. As was the case with other American colonies, most of the Indigenous people of Brazil died because they did not have any immunity to European diseases. The few Indians who survived were enslaved in *engenhos* (sugar mills). Given the fact that most of the Indigenous population had died, the owners of the *engenhos* bought African slaves to work and to increase the production of sugar. Sugar, coffee, and gold were the main Brazilian exports during the years that Brazil was a Portuguese colony.¹⁴

Most of the Brazilian population during the years of Portuguese colonization was of Indigenous and of African descent. The few European Portuguese who lived in Brazil were in charge of the *engenhos* and of the slaves that worked these. Also, there was little movement of Portuguese immigrants into Brazil. The Portuguese had no intentions of populating the colony, nor of assimilating the colonized into the Portuguese culture. Freire writes: “Our settlement was primarily a commercial enterprise. Our colonists did not - and could hardly have had it – the intention to create in the recently discovered new land, a civilization. They were interested in the commercial exploitation of the land.¹⁵ Portugal focused on exploiting the resources of its colony, thus being able to rival England and Holland economically.

From 1530 to 1840, Brazil's main export was sugar. It was not until the discovery of gold deposits (1700 - 1760) in Minas Gerais that the Portuguese had the incentive to travel to Brazil.¹⁶ Given that the Portuguese saw Brazil solely as an economic resource and were not interested in assimilating the Indians and Africans to the Portuguese culture, no schools or universities were established. Newspapers were not published in Brazil until 1808, and literacy among the vast majority of Brazilians was simply nonexistent.

When compared to the amount of effort and bloodshed the Spanish colonies had to exert through their wars of independence, Brazil's independence from Portugal was not complicated. Although Brazil was the colony, Portugal gravitated towards and became dependent on Brazil because of the large amounts of gold being mined in Brazil. In 1808, the Portuguese court of John VI relocated to Brazil in the new Brazilian capital

of Rio.¹⁷ This event led Brazil to consider itself as being at the same level as the Portuguese kingdom. John's VI relocation to Brazil lasted thirteen years, until the members of parliament requested that he return to Lisbon. When John VI returned to Portugal, he left his son Peter in charge of Brazil. The members of parliament in Portugal attempted to control Peter's activities in Brazil, but Peter ignored their commands and instead declared Brazil to be independent from Portugal. Peter named himself emperor Peter I of Brazil, and ruled Brazil from 1822 to 1831.¹⁸

The fact that Brazil did not have to go through a war of independence made it possible for it to invest the revenue from its exports into its own development. This did not mean, however, that democratic procedures and institutions were implemented in Brazil more promptly than in the former Spanish colonies. Brazil went from being a Portuguese colony ruled by a king (John VI), to being ruled single handedly by an emperor (Peter I), and then by his son, Peter II (1840-1889). Peter II was stripped of his throne by a military coup led by Deodoro da Fonseca who established a provisional government (1889- 1891). After Fonseca's provisional government, Brazil has undergone a series of dictatorships as well as governments intent on advancing democracy.

Paulo Freire's work and history

After Peter II was deposed from his position as emperor of Brazil in 1889, the Brazilian political organization has ranged from provisional military governments brought about by coup d'états, to constitutional governments, presidents, and

dictatorships. Freire grew up during the political instability as well as the economic hardships of the 1930's. A military dictatorship ruled Brazil from 1964 through 1985 with each general handing over power to his successor. This dictatorship took place during the U.S. / Russia cold war, and, as was the case in other North and Latin American countries, the Brazilian dictatorship assumed the inconsistent position of claiming to promote liberal democracy by actually destroying it. Thus, the history of colonization and military dictatorships, along with patriarchy, classism, racism (to acknowledge several more patterns of oppression), have shaped the institutions within which people become socialized. The effects of colonization and "democratic" governments remain actively present even after oppressive institutions end, in the form of authoritarian power dynamics, fear, a need to control others, and unhealthy competition among people. Just as the colonizing culture assumes itself to be the best of all cultures with other cultures seen as inferior, many of us behave as though there is only one correct way to do things (our way) and others are mistaken if they do not agree with us. This behavior takes place at work, in the classroom, at home, and even among friends. This is the everyday experience most of us come to know in our relationships with the people around us.

Paulo Freire was born in Recife in 1921, and he learned what it was like to go hungry as a young child. Freire's father died during the depression of the thirties. This meant that Freire had to drop out of school to work and help his family financially. It was through these experiences that Freire first developed his great sense of solidarity

with the poor. From childhood on, Freire decided to work in order to improve the conditions of marginalized people.

Freire began to work with illiterate peasants and workers in the northeastern region of Brazil in 1947. By the beginning of the 1960's he had organized a popular movement to eradicate illiteracy. Because the Portuguese had only been interested in exploiting the slave labor and raw materials from Brazil, the literacy level of most Brazilians was extremely low. For instance, the population of the northeastern region of Brazil in 1962 was 25 million, and of these, approximately 15 million were illiterate.¹⁹ Freire himself managed to finish elementary school in schools in Recife and Jaboatão, then attended the secondary school, Oswaldo Cruz, in Recife. Mr. Aluizio Pessoa de Araújo, the principal at this school, agreed to allow Freire to study at a reduced tuition because Freire's family could not afford to pay a full tuition. To reciprocate the favor, Freire began to teach Portuguese classes at this school in 1942. Freire then went on to study law at Recife's School of Law from 1943 to 1947.²⁰

In 1962, Freire received a federal grant to support his literacy movement. His plan was to establish 2000 cultural circles by 1964 and help 2,000,000 farmers to learn to read and write. Literacy was one of the requirements for voting in presidential elections. During the 1964 coup, Freire was working as a professor of history and philosophy at the University of Recife. The new military regime stopped the funding to Freire's literacy project, determined Freire to be subversive, and jailed him.²¹ Freire and his family were exiled from Brazil during the years 1964 to 1979.²² They first lived in Bolivia, then in Chile where Freire continued his literacy project with Chilean farmers.

Freire also lived in the United States during 1969-70, and taught at Harvard's Center for the Study of Change and Social Development. Then from 1970 to 1979, Freire lived in Switzerland and worked for the World Council of Churches as a consultant for popular educational reform. When Freire returned to Brazil in 1979, he continued his work as an educator, until his death in 1997.

Freire's work ameliorated the consequences of the Portuguese colonization of the Brazilian people. Slavery was officially abolished in 1888 when Brazil experienced a period of economic growth after its independence from Portugal. However, even during mid-twentieth century, the economic conditions for many people were so negative and the hunger they experienced so unbearable, that many farmers sold themselves or members of their families into slavery in order to avoid starving. "A newspaper from Belo Horizonte found that 50,000 people were sold into slavery and to check, a reporter bought a man and his wife for \$30. 'I have seen many people starve,' said the slave, 'and that is why I do not mind selling myself into slavery.' When a slave dealer was arrested in São Paulo in 1959, he admitted that his clients were some of the farm owners from São Paulo, owners of coffee plantations and construction projects - except that young girls are sold to brothels."²³ The institutions of slavery and colonization officially ended with the abolition and independence from Portugal, but the consequences of slavery and colonization continue to affect the Brazilian people.

According to Freire, the fact that a person is no longer in the political state of being enslaved does not mean that this person is now free. The techniques used by Freire to teach peasants to read and write and the insights he developed through this

process will be explained in more detail in the next chapter. With his strong sensibility of democratic pluralism, Freire worked on several levels (pedagogical, political, local, theoretical, and international), while he remained grounded in the everyday experience of the here and now. He worked against the consequences of the Portuguese colonization of Brazil, against the consequences of the neo-liberal economic policies that were implemented during the 1980's, and against the cynicism that exists today in developed countries.

Colonization in Mexico

For purposes of this project, there are more similarities than differences between the history of Mexico and Brazil. Both countries had Indigenous civilizations that were conquered and colonized, and both countries witnessed the genocide of their people and culture at the hands of the Spanish and Portuguese. As a consequence of these events, Mexico and Brazil have had a similar fate. The differences between Mexico and Brazil can better be noted during this past century, given the influence that the United States has had over Mexico. Although there is some overlap with Brazilian history, we will briefly outline some Mexican historical aspects to better understand the problems at the heart of Villoro's philosophy.

Greed and an utter lack of a pluralistic sensibility in the Spanish culture are what stand out the most from the cultural clash between the Spanish and the Native Americans. Until recently (19th Century) it was common practice to dominate those who lost wars between the tribes, city states, or nations. The colonization of the

Americas by the Spanish began in 1519. The colonizer's plan was simple: subjugate the Indians, take away their land, and exploit their resources while using them as labor. Stories of the first meeting between the Spanish and Moctezuma relate how Moctezuma tried to threaten the Spanish by sending messengers carrying large amounts of gold and jewels which were supposed to be seen as symbols of Moctezuma's great power. The actual effect the "intimidating" gold and jewels had on the Spanish, however, was to make them wonder where the Aztecs kept their gold and jewels.²⁴ Gold, silver and precious minerals were the main reason why the Spanish colonized the Indigenous people of Mexico. While the Portuguese only became interested in populating Brazil in 1700 after finding gold in Minas Gerais, the Spanish did not waste any time. In 1524, the Spanish divided and distributed among themselves the land of Mexico along with the Indians who happened to live on the land.

The Spanish formed *encomiendas* which were large land divisions entrusted by the Spanish King to the Spanish men living in the New World.²⁵ As was the case in Brazil, the vast majority of Indians died, given that they had no immunity to European diseases. The Indians who managed to survive were distributed as part of the *encomiendas*. The main motivation for the Spanish was economic; they sought the wealth of the New World. The approach the Spanish took towards the Indians was simply to subjugate them. Only after years of Spanish subjugation, did the Spanish consider what kind of people the Indians might be. On one hand, the Spanish were impressed by the architecture of Tenochtitlan, and some of the Spanish colonizers acknowledged that the Indians were intelligent people. On the other hand, the Spanish

were not able to accept certain aspects of the Aztec culture such as their religion and the practice of anthropophagy. The Spanish did not spend much time contemplating the ontological status of Indians, however. They were far more interested in exploiting the wealth of their land.

It was not until several years later during the process of converting the Indians to Catholicism that the Jesuits questioned whether the Spanish conquest and colonization was an ethical act. Basque Quiroga and Bartolome de las Casas argued that the Indians were human beings with the same rational capacity as the Spanish. Juan Lopez de Palacios Rubios and Juan Gines de Sepulveda defended the Spanish duty to colonize the Indians because these were “natural slaves.”²⁶ In order to make their point, Lopez de Palacios Rubios and Gines de Sepulveda appealed to Aristotle’s argument of the natural slave, which he articulates in his *Politics* and where he claims that it is in the best interest of the slave to obey the commands of his or her master.²⁷ However as we now know, by simply pointing towards Aristotle’s conclusion, Lopez de Palacios Rubios and Gines de Sepulveda’s argument committed the informal fallacy of authority. From the disagreement between those who defended the Indians’ human status and those who justified their slavery, it was decided that the Indians were not entirely natural slaves, but they were not entirely rational beings either.²⁸ The Spanish concluded that the Indians occupied an in-between status, that is, between natural slave and rational human, characterized by an infantile mind that had yet to develop. Of course, the standard of rational maturity was the Spanish culture. Thus, the Spanish justified to themselves their duty to colonize the Indians. In short, the Spanish said to themselves “...We will take

care of them and convert them to Catholicism. We will take control of their land and make the right decisions for them until they reach a level of maturity when they will be able to make their own rational decisions.” Thus, the paternalistic approach the Spanish took towards the colonized Indians was justified in this way. The well known stereotype of the Indian with an infantile mind who is incapable of making his or her own decisions forms the basis of many of Latin America’s liberation movements such as José Carlos Mariátegui's myth as well as the humanitarian approaches towards social change by mestizos towards Indigenous people. We will examine this issue with more detail in the following sections.

The problem of overt and endemic corruption in Mexico has its roots in the Spanish colony. Corruption is so pervasive in Mexico that it seems to have stopped bothering the people of Mexico. They seem to have resigned themselves to the fact that this is how things work. During the reign of Philip II (1556-1598) the Spanish colony spanned from Manila to Puerto Rico (East / West), and from modern day North Dakota to Tierra del Fuego (North / South). There were two vice-royalties, one in Mexico and the other in Peru. The territory was extensive, and the wealth of the silver mining was vast, but the control over the territory and the wealth by the Spanish King was relatively weak. Under these circumstances, corruption mushroomed as the fastest way to gain power, enact laws and exploit the situation for private purposes. Corruption turned overtly endemic when Phillip II decided to sell government positions to the *criollos* (American born of Spanish descent) to raise funds and exercise some control over the resources being exploited. In 1771, Phillip II established 43,000 troops throughout the

colony. His plan was to train the criollos as soldiers to help him maintain order. Phillip's plan worked briefly until the criollos who had been trained and armed to protect the interests of the king chose to fight for their own economic interests and independence instead.²⁹

Even after gaining its independence from Spain, Mexico has experienced constant political tension. The Mexican territory has been invaded a number of times, by France (1862), as well as by the United States (1846, 1859, 1866, 1914, 1918).³⁰ Mexico lost over half of its territory to the U.S. and Mexico has experienced dictatorships as well as a revolutionary war that lasted over a decade. One could argue that even today Mexico is not quite an autonomous state. Between corrupt government officials, the pressure from the United States, the World Bank, the drug lords that have bought out the government and the International Monetary Fund, the Mexican people have little say concerning the policies they would like to pursue. There is a wide economic gap between the upper and lower classes that continues to widen. Furthermore, the emigration of millions of Mexicans to the U.S. is indicative of at least two things. The first is that most migrants believe it will be easier to risk their lives crossing the U.S.-Mexico border by walking through the desert for days or cramming themselves into vans or trucks, to start from scratch in a new country with a new language and culture, to forgo most rights, to be persecuted by immigration agencies, and to have their labor exploited than to stay in Mexico and change the economic and political situation. The second is that the migration of millions of Mexicans into the U.S. has been an outlet, a type of political pressure valve. If Mexicans did not have the

option to emigrate and had to remain in Mexico, they would be compelled to assume control of their own government and institutions rather than continue to allow foreign businesses and institutions, as well as internal corrupt agencies, to exploit the situation.

Luis Villoro's work and history

Luis Villoro was born in Spain in 1922, the son of Mexican parents. Villoro studied philosophy in Mexico, and was a student of José Gaos and friend of Leopoldo Zea. Gaos and Zea were two of the most prominent Spanish and Mexican philosophers (respectively) who proposed to study Mexican philosophy in its own right. Villoro himself was a member of the Hyperion philosophy group, which explicitly set out to study Mexican philosophy. He has taught philosophy at UNAM, has been Mexico's ambassador to UNESCO, and is currently a supporter of the EZLN (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional).

His intellectual interests began with the study of the history of Indigenous people in Mexico as well as Mexican philosophy. Epistemologically, Villoro adopts a pragmatic fallibilism, which he calls “reasonable reason.” Villoro understands philosophy as being essentially a critical activity. Though he has taken part in several schools of thought (existentialism, phenomenology, and analytic philosophy, for example), Villoro believes it is important to emphasize that these philosophical schools are not philosophy itself, they are simply different ways, different approaches, to partaking in the philosophical activity which goes beyond one or two schools of thought.

In his article “Retratos de Luis Villoro” (2008), Guillermo Hurtado describes

Villoro as follows:

One could say that the main themes of his philosophy are the following: the metaphysical understanding of otherness, the limits and scope of reason, the link between knowledge and power, the pursuit of communion with others, an ethical reflection regarding injustice, a defense of the respect owed to cultural differences, and the critical dimension of philosophic thought... For him, not one philosophy ought to be considered as the correct one, not one philosophy ought to turn into dogma. However, he has always insisted that not just anything can pass for philosophy. Genuine philosophy, he believes, must be the rigorous exercise of reason, and above all, a type of reason in the service of life.³¹

Villoro's interest over the condition of Indigenous people in Mexico and the power inequality they continue to experience began when he was still a child. Villoro recounts a formative experience he had when he returned from Spain with his parents.

...All of them greeted me with great devotion because I was the little boss, I was the son of their landlord. One of these Indians came to me with great reverence, took my hand and kissed it, this left a terrible impression on me, that this old man who was doing the hardest type of work in the fields and heat of the sun would come to me - - a kid who had nothing to do with him, and respectfully kiss my hand. For me, this was at the same time an experience I felt to be deeply insulting, and which also made me feel an incredible amount of respect for this person, this old man. This experience stayed with me throughout my life (I think my book) *Los Grandes Momentos del Indigenismo en México* (...) is due largely to the experience I had that day.³²

As we will see throughout the following chapters, Indigenism has been central to the intellectual interests of Villoro. His interest in Indigenism can be seen from his first book, through his formulation of radical democracy, to his involvement in the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN). His respect for the communal values of Indigenous communities, as well as his hope that these values will help us attain a type of organic community, will be explored in the following sections.

CHAPTER III

PAULO FREIRE'S THOUGHT AND WORK

“I freed thousands of slaves. I could have freed thousands more, if they had known they were slaves.”- Harriet Tubman

Paulo Freire's thought and work was primarily influenced by his context, his cultural history, and his own experiences. The philosophical ideas that contributed in large part to the formulation of his theories are existentialism, phenomenology, Marxism and Christianity. The ideas of Marx, Sartre, Memmi, Fromm, Fanon and Gramsci were his major influences. When accused not only of being unoriginal but of plagiarizing European and American philosophers, Freire responded with a thought from John Dewey in his book *Democracy and Education* (1916) “Furthermore, regarding what is original, we agree with Dewey, for whom 'originality is not the fantastic but the new use of known things.’”³³ Freire's pedagogical strategy is more than a method, it is a process, and in order to explain what this experience entails we may begin with the concept of *conscientização*, the cultivation of awareness.

Conscientização

Conscientização is the process of learning to perceive, of becoming aware of social and political contradictions and to act against the oppressive elements of our reality. This entails developing a critical attitude to help us understand and analyze the relationships through which we discover ourselves.³⁴ This process first begins with an

individual becoming self-aware and expands as the person sees herself as either part of, or empathizing with, various oppressed groups. Conscientização usually begins with the individual person becoming aware of her own gender, social class, and race. The process of conscientização may continue to expand so that this person may be able to identify with the joy or suffering of other groups to which she does not immediately belong such as members of the opposite sex, members of different races, infants, disabled, elderly, as well as animals, and the environment around her. In short, the process of conscientização leads a person to be able to see herself in others and feel what they are feeling, to thus empathize with the joy or suffering of the generalized “other.”

There are several steps in the process of conscientização. Freire begins the process by creating the conditions through which his students may come to realize their own agency. He describes this first step as being able to identify the difference between what it means to be an object (a thing) and a subject (a human being). Once the first step of the process has been taken, namely the recognition of our agency, Freire emphasizes how the consequences of our choices do in fact shape our personal history as well as contribute to the creation of the human culture. Equally important, Freire also highlights the fact that every single human being has the ability to change the world for the better through the work she and he perform throughout their lives.

Optimally, a democratic relationship between the teacher and her students is fundamentally required for the conscientização process to begin taking place. There are times when the process of conscientização begins to take place because the less than optimal interactions we may experience. For example, there are times we may learn

how not to be, and how not to treat each other as a result of us personally experiencing oppressive interactions. However, the process of conscientização that leads to a person's freedom and education cannot be achieved through oppressive conditions alone.

Oppressive, demeaning, violent interactions among people do not generally lead to the growth and freedom of people. There are people who come from oppressive histories who manage to understand that imposing one's will on others does not make for healthy interactions. If they manage to understand this, it is more the result of good fortune than to the deliberate care and concern of their community. It is most often the case that patterns of violent interactions continue from one generation into the next, and so on, into future generations. The ways through which we relate to one another are our cultural inheritance, which is "gifted" upon us for better or worse as we become socialized.

Furthermore, even if individuals have the good fortune of realizing that continuing patterns of oppression is not optimal, these individuals do not have the resources to readily cultivate their own and others' well being. Children brought up in abusive environments do not automatically know that they are not necessarily at fault for other people's suffering. When these children grow to be adults and to have their own children, they have not developed the communication skills, the self-understanding, the empathy and openness required to address interpersonal problems. Instead, they have years of ingrained patterns of violent responses, which are difficult to change even when these are recognized as being damaging to themselves and the people around them.

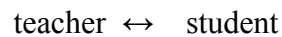
Freire's political thought grew out of his experiences as a teacher and the interactions he had with his students. Rather than continuing with the established cultural patterns of relating to each other through a hierarchy, Freire's starting point in the classroom aims to undermine the power dynamics that hold some people above others. Freire emphasizes that a democratic relationship between the teacher and her students is necessary in order for the conscientização process to take place. He explains how the teacher who intends to hold herself at a higher position of power than her students, does not admit of her own fallible nature and ignorance, thus placing herself in rigid and deadlocked positions. She pretends to be the one who knows while the students are the ones who do not know. The rigidity of holding this type of position negates education as a process of inquiry and coming to know.³⁵ Freire's pedagogy uses a democratic approach in order to reach the democratic ideal. The goal and the process are the same.

Freire is critical of teachers who see themselves as the sole possessors of knowledge while they see their students as empty receptacles into which teachers must deposit their knowledge. He calls this pedagogical approach the "banking method" to education. This pedagogical approach is similar to the process of colonization given that the colonizing culture is deemed the correct and valuable culture while the colonized culture is deemed as inferior and in need of the colonizing culture for its own betterment. The banking method is a violent way to treat students. Although students are human beings with their own inclinations and legitimate ways of thinking, the banking method treats students as though they were things instead of the human beings that they are.

Instead of the banking method, Freire proposes a reciprocal relationship between the teacher and the students in an environment that allows everyone to learn. The banking method of education is characterized as a vertical relationship:



The relationship developed through the banking method between the teacher and the students is characterized by insecurity, suspicion of one another, a need to maintain control, and power dynamics within a hierarchy that are oppressive. The conscientização process that Freire proposes allows for a horizontal type of relationship:



This relationship is democratic insofar as both the teacher and the student are willing and open to the possibility of learning from each other. With this type of relationship, no one is above anyone and there is mutual respect. Both the teacher and the student acknowledge that they each have different experiences and expertise to offer to each other so that both can benefit from the other to learn and grow as human beings.

Institutional challenges

The following sections map out the different types of challenges that Paulo Freire faced throughout his pursuit of democratic interactions within “democratic” institutions.

As previously mentioned, Freire worked with people who had been socialized within institutions shaped by the oppression of colonization. It bears repeating that although slavery was formally abolished in 1888, people continued to sell themselves into slavery during Freire's time (and this continues even today). Freire worked with the sons and daughters of former slaves. Although slavery had been abolished, the power dynamics of the institution of slavery continued to inform how the people with whom Freire worked saw themselves, and how they related those around them.

Coming into one's own freedom

When Freire taught literacy classes to the peasants in Northeastern Brazil, he developed what he called "cultural circles." Through these cultural circles, he came to find out just how damaging and pervasive the institution of slavery continued to be even decades after slavery had been abolished. Freire decided to use the name "cultural circle" instead of literacy classes. He had several reasons for this, one reason was the negative connotation of the word "illiterate." Although most of his students were illiterate, no one wanted to describe or think of him/herself as such. Another reason was that Freire's project did not focus solely on teaching people how to read and write. In the process of working with both Brazilian and Chilean peasants, Freire realized that even though people were no longer enslaved and had learned how to read and write, and, even, in some cases were the owners of their own land, these people did not consider themselves as being free.

One of Freire's goals was to create the circumstances for his students to discover themselves as human beings, with their own agency as subjects and not objects, as members of a community and as creators of culture. Freire writes about an instance when he asked his students what the difference was between animals and humans. The answers given to him are sadly surprising and insightful. These responses are indicative of the fact that the "freedom" of the peasants must be qualified. It is true that technically and politically, they were not slaves. However, they did not think of themselves as being free human beings with their own agency and the ability to decide for themselves.

Before the peasants began their process of conscientização, they of course had the ability to become aware of their own agency, but they had not begun the process of conscientização, so they did not think of themselves as being free. When the students were asked what was the difference between animals and humans, one of the peasants in the cultural circles in Chile responded as follows: "There is no difference between men and animals, and if there is a difference, animals are better off. They are freer..."³⁶ According to this peasant, an animal enjoys a greater degree of freedom than a human being. How can this be?

The peasant's honest answer is indicative of how these peasants saw themselves and the context in which Freire worked. Although they were not legally enslaved, these peasants did not think of themselves as being free agents, as subjects with the option to choose and create their own lives and history. Instead, they saw themselves as objects on whom orders were imposed upon, so that the animals that were not required to follow orders were freer than them. In other words, to these peasants there was no real

difference between them and the beasts of burden used to toil in the fields, unless the animal (a fox or bird for instance) was not used for farm labor. In this case, the animal had a higher degree of freedom than human beings.

Freire writes: “We asked one of the peasants that finished the first level of the literacy class why he had not learned to read and write before the land reform went into effect. The peasant replied: ‘Before the reform... I did not even think. Neither did my friends.’ Why? I asked. ‘Because it was not possible. We lived to follow orders. We just had to do what we were ordered. We could not say anything.’ He said emphatically.”³⁷ The fact that these peasants did not see themselves as human beings (subjects) but as being worse off than animals (objects) coupled with the fact that they believed the only ones who are capable of thinking, deciding and speaking are those who give orders also affected what the peasants thought about and how they saw the meaning of culture. As is the case with most people who experience a colonized consciousness, the peasants that Freire worked with believed that culture was something only the upper class members, or in this context, white people from European descent, possessed.

Part of the conscientização process is to discover the ways through which human beings create culture as they make choices, so that culture is not something that belongs solely to the members of the upper class and people of European descent. The culture of the human race is manifested in a plurality of ways and all are types of cultures. Freire writes:

During the debates, many of them understand the anthropological cultural concept and state happily and confidently that they are not being taught “anything new, but that their memory is being stirred.” “I make shoes, said another, but now I have found that I have the same worth as the doctor that writes

books.” “Tomorrow – an employee of the Prefecture of Brasilia said as we discussed the concept of culture – I will go to work with my head held high.” He discovered the worth of his person. He affirmed his own worth. “Now I know that I am cultured,” an old peasant said emphatically. And when he was asked how he knew this, he replied with the same emphasis: “Because I work and my work transforms the world.”³⁸

Freire is adamantly opposed to authoritarian relationships, which only cause further oppression. This is not merely for the sake of the oppressed, but also for the sake of the oppressors who become oppressed themselves through the dynamics of oppressive relationships. A fear of freedom is embodied by the oppressors but in a different way than in the oppressed. For the oppressed, the fear of freedom is the fear to assume or own up to their own freedom. For the oppressors, the fear is of losing the “freedom” to oppress.³⁹

There exists no worse dynamic among human beings than that of oppression. Authoritarian relationships are harmful to all involved. As we know, women are not the only ones who suffer the negative consequences of sexism. Women are certainly the ones that suffer the worst effects of sexism, but sexism also affects men, when for instance, men are reduced to being a financial resource.⁴⁰ Men are not valued for the human beings that they are, instead, their worth is equated to the size of their bank account.

In a similar way, racism certainly affects dark-skinned people the most, but this does not mean that white people are not affected negatively either. The worst effect racism has on white people is when whites are either active or tacit oppressors (more will be said about this in the coming chapters). The “American” connotation of racism is that of lighter skinned people holding power over darker skinned people. In terms of

historical colonization, we think of European colonizers holding power over the colonized. It is important to acknowledge, however, that racism does not consist simply of the power that whites hold over dark people, and colonization is not simply the power Europeans held over Native Americans or Africans. Historically, there are many examples of racism among white Europeans such as the history of slavery and racism in the ancient Greek and later the Roman, empires. More recently, we can point to the degree of oppression the Irish experienced at the hands of the English, and of course, the Roma people of Europe who have historically been considered to be the scum of the earth. All of these are European experiences speak to the fact that the oppressive behavior of colonization, slavery and racism are not particular to the European vs. Native American and White vs. Dark dynamic. The patterns of oppressive behavior are common to all of mankind.

Instead of tacitly promoting oppressive relationships through the banking method of education, Freire chooses the process of conscientização as his pedagogical model. This is because conscientização utilizes dialogue among human beings who are equals rather than oppressive imposition. One of the negative consequences of the banking method is that students do not learn how to criticize or think analytically. The relationship between a student and a teacher who uses the banking method is similar to that of a farmer who obeys the orders of his boss. As was the case with the peasants with whom Freire worked, when people live dominated by others, most of the dominated people are not capable of developing the ability to think, to question, or to analyze

situations for themselves. Instead, their consciousness develops primarily to obey the orders imposed on them.

To promote democratic interactions between people, Freire suggests that teachers problematize the issue being discussed instead of imposing their ideas on students. The banking method denies the need for dialogue because it assumes that the teacher is the one who possesses all the answers and the students are ignorant and in need of the teachers' knowledge. In order to problematize a subject, the teacher assumes a humble and open attitude. Given the teacher's personal example, the students also become open to the possibility of considering the different positions being discussed. This promotes a dynamic of democratic awareness because conscientização undermines relationships where some people have power and some do not, and where some people give orders and others obey without questioning. Problematizing promotes dialogue and a sense of critical analysis that allows students to develop the disposition for dialogue not only in the classroom but also outside of it. This is of utmost importance because the disposition and value of dialogue spills over in a positive way to the students' other relationships, at home, the work place and the community, where students become active citizens who work to change their political situation.

The internalized oppressor

Freire realized that it is quite difficult to be free, and not only because of conditions that create contexts of economic and political oppression for many people. He discovered that while we may actively seek our freedom, besides the institutional

obstacles like colonization and dictatorships, there are also internal obstacles that prevent us from being free. The concept of internalization treated in this section is psychologically deep and rich in meaning. Internalization is both an obstacle and a pathway in our process of conscientização. In order to begin to describe what Freire means by internalization, we must first explain two important theoretical resources. These are Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony, and the difference between something being “in itself” and “for itself” that Jean Paul Sartre describes.

In his “The German Ideology” (1845), Karl Marx describes how the way of thinking, of seeing the world (consciousness) of the class in power becomes accepted by all, even the oppressed classes.⁴¹ From Marx's concept of ideology, Gramsci developed the concept of hegemony, which explains how the upper-class maintains its power (hegemony) through the widespread acceptance of the upper-class ideology throughout society.⁴² For example, heteronormativity is the ideology with which heterosexuals maintain their hegemony. Heteronormativity is pervasive throughout society. Most of us are socialized to behave, dress, speak, think and even to have goals and dreams according to our gender. Heteronormativity entails that what is gay, bisexual, transsexual, or asexual is outside the accepted norm – it is not normal. Gramsci noticed that the class in power maintains its hegemony by the diffusion of its class ideology through all the social institutions and cultural aspects - - the school, family, literature, music, etc.

In his book *Being and Nothingness* (1944), Jean Paul Sartre argues that there are two types of consciousness, the consciousness that is “for itself” or “in itself.”⁴³ Sartre tells us that only people who exercise their own agency are autonomous and thus their

consciousness is “for itself.” Objects and things such as a table, a chair, animals and even people who do not exercise their own agency qualify as the type of consciousness that is “in itself.”

Paulo Freire worked with people who came from a context of pervasive historical oppression. They had come either from families who had previously been enslaved, and the thought of selling themselves back into slavery was never far from their minds, slavery being preferable than dying of hunger. By working with these people, Freire came to understand that abolishing slavery did not automatically mean that people were now free. He also realized that teaching them how to read and write, that is, enabling them through positive rights, was still not enough for them to realize their own freedom and end their oppression. Freire recognized that the oppression of a human being runs much deeper than political institutions and legal guarantees.

Through working with the South American peasants in Brazil, Bolivia and Chile, Freire came to see that these peasants were not merely a marginalized group of people, but worse than this, these peasants saw themselves as existing solely for the benefit of their bosses, not as existing for themselves, for their own sake. Their social context had socialized them into believing that the purpose of their being was only to benefit their bosses. Their economic and political context conditioned them to not see themselves as human beings (subjects), but rather as things (object that exists “in itself”) to serve the bosses orders. The problem was not simply that they were illiterate. They were completely alienated from their own agency. When Freire understood the extent of his students' oppression, he chose to not only teach them how to read and write but also to

create the conditions necessary in the classroom for the students to realize their own agency and come to see themselves as human beings. The process of conscientização is much more than learning a set of habits or skills. It is becoming aware of one's own agency as a human being.

The concept of “freedom” has many connotations. By “freedom”, Freire means the right of every human being to become more human.⁴⁴ Freire recognized that “freedom” had a connotation different than others for the peasants with whom he worked. Freire writes: “They want land reform, not to be free, but to be able to own their own land, and thus become landowners, or more specifically, the bosses of new employees. Their goal is in fact to be a free human being, but for them to be a free human being within the contradictory context in which they have been socialized, and which they have clearly not overcome, means to be an oppressor. The oppressed find in the oppressor their model of “manhood.”⁴⁵ The peasants equated freedom to the ability to oppress others. This is because the context within which they lived dichotomized the boss as “free,” given that the boss was the one in charge and who commanded the peasants to follow his/her orders. The peasants were in turn dichotomized as not being free because they had no choice but to carry out the boss's orders. Unfortunately, given this historical context, the only example the peasants had of what it may mean to be a free person was the example of an abusive boss.

The peasants who believed their freedom could be found by oppressing others is only one instance of what Freire describes as the process of internalizing the oppressor. Historically, we can observe how from the perspective of the colonized, studying in

European universities meant that a person was very well educated. At this time, given the current state of North American imperialism, a degree from a North American academic institution is deemed of more value than a degree from a Latin American or an African academic institution. Another quite blatant example of internalizing the oppressor are the Mexican and Central American immigrants who begin to work for the U.S. Border Patrol soon after they gain their legal residency status. There are so many more examples of internalizing our oppressors, such as the common ideal of human beauty being that of having blonde hair, blue eyes and white skin. Just as the peasants Freire writes about, the attributes of those we believe to be free, educated, or beautiful are the characteristics of the group of people with power, and this means that we have internalized the hegemony of the class in power.

Having the right to vote, to own property, to free speech, or the right to an education, though undeniably important, do not mean that a person is free. There are different ways in which people may be free and freedom is a matter of degree. Contrary to the mainstream liberal belief, the fact that we are not enslaved physically does not mean that we are not following the orders of our internalized oppressors. Freire writes: “Recently, in a Latin American country, according to the testimony given to us by a sociologist friend of ours, a group of armed peasants took over a plantation. For tactical reasons they wanted to keep the landowner as a hostage. However, not a single peasant was able to guard him. His very presence frightened them. It is possible that the very act of fighting against their boss made them feel guilty. In fact, the boss was “inside” them.”⁴⁶ These peasants had internalized their master. Although the boss was in fact

overpowered by the many peasants who outnumbered him, and was thus not in the position to give them orders or punish them if the peasants disobeyed, the peasants continued to fear him. The freedom of the peasants was not merely contingent upon them physically getting rid of their boss. These peasants had been thoroughly conditioned to obey orders, to behave in a certain way, to know and keep their “place.” Whenever we internalize our oppressors, we behave in the way they command us to behave even if they are not present.

We internalize the patterns of hegemony from the time we are children as we are socialized to behave in certain ways. In his book *Literacy With An Attitude* (2009), Patrick J. Finn describes how students from working-class schools are socialized differently than students from upper-class schools. As part of the research in Finn’s study was the question “what is knowledge?” Working-class students replied submissively that knowledge is something teachers (authority figures) possess. Students from the upper-class schools responded confidently that knowledge is something they have the ability to create or obtain on their own.⁴⁷ Finn’s argument is that students are not so much educated, but rather socialized into seeing themselves as the complying members of the working class or as the leaders and decision makers who make up the upper class.

Most women have internalized patriarchy so that their behavior is subject to the patriarchal values whether a woman is or is not in the presence of a man. The internalization of the patriarchal values by women has been studied linguistically. These studies show that women who defer to men end their statements with a tone of

interrogation, the tone of their voice rises. This is the case even though women may be asserting a statement. The interrogation tone at the end of their claim suggests that their statement requires the approval of a figure of authority (a man or a teacher). On the other hand, instead of ending their sentences with a tone of interrogation, men end their statements with a lower tone, thus creating a sense of confident affirmation.⁴⁸ Becoming aware of the many different ways in which we are conditioned to behave is part of the process of conscientização and the pursuit of our own freedom.

The scope of democracy

As a humanist,⁴⁹ Freire believed that the “ontological vocation of all human beings is to become even more human.”⁵⁰ This is one of the reasons why Freire was against any type of oppressive relationship and thus against the banking method of education. Freire believed that it was important for us to make a distinction between humanitarianism and humanism. Although closely related and although both concepts mean well for the whole of humanity, they are not the same, nor do they achieve the same results.

Freire was critical of social movements that pretend to give humanitarian aid. This was because he noticed that what happens oftentimes is that in the process of “helping,” the helpers rob the people being helped of their own agency to improve their own condition. “A humanitarian welfare on the contrary, is a form of action that robs man of conditions for one of his fundamental needs - - his own responsibility.”⁵¹ There are ways to help people that promote the autonomy of the person or the group of people being helped, and other ways of “helping” that impose our assistance on those who ask

for our help. For instance, if we help a friend who cannot use her own hands and we open everything (letters, bottles, packages, etc.) for her, we are actually not helping her. Instead what we are doing is making her dependent on us for help. Furthermore, we are inadvertently oppressing her despite our good intentions.

Freire invites us to question and become aware of ourselves even when we want to help someone or fight for some cause so that we do this in a humanist and not in a humanitarian way. This is an important distinction because a humanitarian approach does not lend itself to dialogue insofar as the person in the helping position claims to know what the person in need of help needs and imposes the help. The humanist respects the person in need of help and offers help in such a way as to enable the person being helped to help herself. The following section of this chapter provides a historical example of the difference between humanist and humanitarian help, through the work of José Carlos Mariátegui.

To further explore the difference between humanism and humanitarianism, Freire uses the biophilic and necrophilic concepts from Erich Fromm. In his book *The Heart of Man* (1967), Fromm distinguishes between two types of approaches to helping others. One approach is to feel the need to control the situation, and the people who are being helped. The other approach is to allow the situation, and the people to be what they potentially can be. Fromm characterizes the people who feel the need to control as necrophilic because in their need to control other people and the events in life itself, they deny people and life of their own possibilities. According to Fromm, those who are able to allow others and events to unfold into what they may become are characterized by

Fromm as being biophilic because they respect the freedom and creativity of human beings and trust in the unfolding of life's events.⁵²

Freire writes that it is love and respect that allow us to engage people in dialogue and what allows us to discover ourselves in the process. By its nature, dialogue is not something that can be imposed. Instead, genuine dialogue is characterized by respect of the parties involved towards one another. We develop a tolerant sensibility during the dialogue process and it is only when we come to tolerate the points of view and ways of being of others that we might be able to learn from them and about ourselves in the process.

Insights developed - on dialogue and tolerance

“To speak of democracy and to silence people is a farce. To speak of humanism and to deny men is a lie.”⁵³

An important element of Freire's pedagogy is dialogue. As we have seen, Freire prefers dialogue to imposition. He believes that it is necessary for us to develop our tolerance of others so that all may learn from each other. However, tolerating others does not mean that one has to stop being who one is as one tolerates other's behavior and ways of thinking. Dialogue and imposition are diametrically opposed approaches to relating to one another. According to Freire, imposition of our views upon others comes from a lack of confidence in our own beliefs. The person who either imposes or attempts to impose her views on others behaves in a necrophilic manner insofar as she seeks to control others, and insofar as she thinks in absolute terms with predetermined conclusions.

Dialogue on the other hand, comes from a place of tolerance. Dialogue can take place when we are comfortable with and confident in our beliefs and ourselves so that even if others disagree with us, we do not interpret their disagreement to mean that we are wrong. Dialogue is biophilic and allows people and situations to be what they may become; it sees life and people as developing in an open-ended creative process. Instead of believing that “The Answers” or “The Truth” have been determined, a person who engages others in dialogue believes that the answers and the truth will emerge as we listen and speak to one another. The control of the process comes through the development of the dialogue itself. Those who impose their views on others are afraid of losing their false sense of control. Dialogue on the other hand, comes from a place of love, respect, trust, humility and curiosity, and it assumes remaining open to change, to the tensions caused by uncertainty and the precarious as well as to the further developments that unfold.

Insights developed - on humanitarianism vs. humanism

As we saw previously, Freire developed an important distinction regarding the difference between helping others with a humanist approach as opposed to trying to help others by means of a humanitarian approach. In order to draw out the political implications of this distinction, we examine the work of José Carlos Mariátegui along with a Freirean critique of Mariátegui’s approach.

José Carlos Mariátegui was a Peruvian socialist journalist who was deeply influenced by Antonio Gramsci, and Georges Sorel. Mariátegui’s work called for land reform in Peru. As late as 1968, feudal lords owned Peru’s land. The Indigenous people

of Peru “worked” as peasants in the *latifundios* (plantations) or as miners in the silver and gold mines. Although the Peruvian Indians worked, the type of work they performed and the conditions under which they worked were different than what we currently mean by employment and work. As was the case with other Latin American natives who worked in the *latifundios* or in the mines, their labor was not remunerated properly, nor did the workers have the ability to leave their work and seek a more fulfilling or better paying employment.

The *enganche* system was in place in the *latifundios*. The *enganche* system functioned in the following way: The peasants in the *latifundios* borrowed money from their landlords to buy seeds and the equipment needed to farm. The peasants planted, cultivated, and harvested the land. If the farmers had a successful season, they had to give most of the profit of the harvest to their landlord.⁵⁴ If nature’s elements did not cooperate with the peasants, as was often the case, they became indebted to the landlord, so that many families found themselves perpetually working in order to pay back loans. Many families were simply not able to pay back the money they owed. In this case, their children were born into the debt of the family, so that their children’s future was decided before they were born.⁵⁵

Working in the mines of Peru was the other means of making a living for those who were not farmers. Mariátegui writes: “The mining industry is almost entirely in the hands of two large U.S. companies. Wages are paid in the mines, but the pay is negligible, the defense of the worker's life is almost zero, the workers' compensation law is circumvented. The system of *enganche* falsely enslaves the workers and places the

Indians at the mercy of these capitalist enterprises. The feudal land condemns the Indians to so much misery that the Indians prefer the fate the mines have to offer.”⁵⁶ Generally speaking, one can say that the political status of an Indian was between slavery and forced servitude. The miners were under a contract that stipulated they had to work for twelve years. After the twelve years were over, they had the "option" to sign another contract for another twelve years. Shifts were twelve hours long, seven days a week. The life of a miner was extremely harsh and few of them survived to the end of the first contract. The minerals were dug out manually with hammers and chisels. The miners inhaled the dust and the toxic gas that escaped from the mineral deposits. Explosions and landslides were a frequent occurrence.⁵⁷

As if the working conditions were not bad enough, the miners were examined from head to toe by their bosses every time they delivered the minerals. This was done to prevent them from keeping pieces of gold or silver. If the miners were caught stealing, they were sent back to work, and at the end of their shift they were executed for their crime.⁵⁸ If a miner survived until the end of his first contract, his health was most likely ruined. Their way of life, the habit of so many years in the same conditions, and the lack of work alternatives, did not allow them to leave their work as miners. The few miners who survived the first contract saw themselves without options, and agreed to work for another twelve years.⁵⁹

As previously mentioned, Mariátegui called for land reform in Peru. Land reform entailed taking land from the feudal lords and redistributing it among the Peruvian citizens. Mariátegui's strategy was to organize the peasants in a way that would have

them believe in a revolutionary myth. Mariátegui's plan was for the revolutionary myth to be similar to the faith of religious ideology. This is because religious beliefs are often embraced so passionately that these beliefs lead people to kill and fight without questioning themselves or their cause.

It is necessary to emphasize and to clarify that Mariátegui supported and fought along with the Indigenous movements and its leaders. It is more than evident that Mariátegui's intentions were to help the people who were oppressed. The criticism developed here is not so much of Mariátegui's overall project, but rather of the manner in which Mariátegui carried out his project. The criticism is not of Mariátegui directly, but of *how* Mariátegui meant to be helpful. Mariátegui's help was humanitarian. While he was not opposed to dialogue with the people he meant to help, at the end of the day Mariátegui did not trust them.

The Freirean criticism of Mariátegui has several aspects. First, the myth that Mariátegui proposes was questionable because it denied the ability of the Indigenous peoples to determine for themselves their own interests. Second, by proposing that the Indigenous people come to believe in a myth, Mariátegui continued the same pattern of colonization of the colonizers before him. Third, Mariátegui's liberation plan took effect by being imposed upon the oppressed by their "liberators" (top-down). Finally, Mariátegui's myth led to populism and not to the autonomous choices of individual people.

Mariátegui believed that the most effective way to improve the Indigenous peoples' situation in Peru would be through land reform. He believed that the most

effective way to bring about this reform would be if the peasants came to believe in a revolutionary myth combined with religious faith and passion. Mariátegui did not believe and did not trust the Indigenous people to have the ability to engage in dialogue, and to determine their own goals and policies in the process. Mariátegui writes: “The masses do not understand subtleties. Men refuse to follow truths unless they believe them to be absolute and beyond question... we must propose a type of faith, a type of myth, a path to action.”⁶⁰ Freire would not agree that Mariátegui’s approach was the best way to help those who are oppressed.

The Freirean critique of Mariátegui's myth is as follows: “To be replaced by anti-dialogue, by slogans, by vertical top-down approaches, by commands, is to want to liberate people with domesticating contraptions. To pretend to liberate people without their own reflection in the act of becoming free is similar to transforming them into objects that must be saved from a fire. This amounts to lying to them with populist deceits and transforming them into a substance that can be manipulated.”⁶¹ The Freirean criticism of Mariátegui is that Mariátegui manipulated those he intended to help insofar as Mariátegui did not believe in their ability to think and decide for themselves.

In his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire writes that when individuals move from belonging to the oppressor upper-class towards empathizing with the oppressed (in Mariátegui's case - the Indigenous people of Peru), what takes place is that these individuals are so conditioned and “deformed” by their class ideology that they distrust those whom they intend to help. They distrust other people's ability to think “correctly,” their ability to love, and to know.⁶² Freire's observation holds true not only for

Mariátegui but also for other Latin American intellectuals who have come before and after Mariátegui such as Manuel González Prada who argued in favor of Indigenous people. In his public lecture “Discurso en el Politeama,” González Prada ardently argued that Indigenous people were not brutes, but that they had the capacity to be civilized, all the while assuming that European culture was the standard of civilization.⁶³

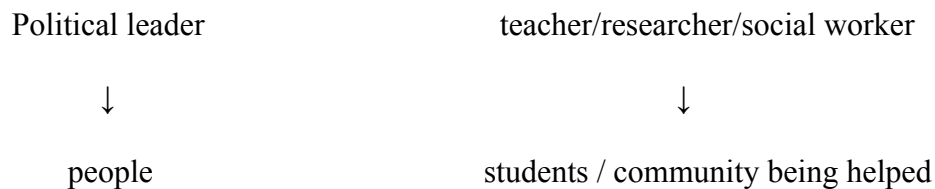
In the same way that education ought not to be imposed upon students, liberation is not something to be imposed upon anyone. Mariátegui's liberation method caused the oppressed to accept the conclusions of their leaders, and to live according to the myths and practices prescribed to them by those in power. According to Freire, all types of propaganda, slogans, “deposits,” and myths are instruments used by oppressors to achieve their goals, that is, to persuade the colonized that they should be “objects” of their commands and to be docile prey of their colonizers.⁶⁴ Mariátegui's myth had essentially the same function as that of a colonizing ideology. The myth was external to the Indigenous' consciousness, it was external to their own will so that if they were to accept it, they would not be liberated, instead they would be manipulated by a new colonizer.

Freire is very critical of all liberation and populist movements that deny the oppressed the right to participate in their own liberation. Leaders of revolutionary movements cannot gift freedom upon the oppressed, nor can they temporarily use oppressive means in order to liberate them after the revolutionary movement comes to an end. Leaders are responsible for coordinating and facilitating dialogue among citizens,

but as Freire points out, leaders who deny the participation of the people they are trying to help, effectively undermine their very goal to help.

Insights developed - on the scope of democracy

Freire is critical of professionals who have internalized the patterns of institutional domination in which they were socialized so that they come to believe that being in a position of power allows them to help the oppressed with top-down strategies and means. Freire's criticism is that these “helpers” have come to believe that they have the right type of knowledge, the expertise, and the answers to what the people they are “helping” need, so that their approach to helping is from those who can and know, to those who have not been able to, or who do not know:



The problem with this approach is that those who offer their help and expertise, who are confident in their good intentions and qualifications, do not always trust that the ones who are the most knowledgeable of the problem and the solutions needed are the same people who need the help.

The process of conscientização is meant to affect not only those who are overtly oppressed (lower-class peasants and illiterate students) but also teachers, sociologists who conduct research, activists, political leaders, social workers, etc., who intend to help

and liberate the oppressed. Freire writes: "...Belief in the people is the indispensable precondition to any type of revolutionary change. A true revolutionary can be recognized more by his belief in the potential of his people, which makes him feel responsible towards them, than by a million actions taken without this belief."⁶⁵ Freire's criticism of those who want to help the oppressed is a type of radically democratic criticism, in the sense that the questions, issues and problems that lead us to formulate our responses and theories must arise from our lived everyday experience. In other words, the answers to the problems must originate from the very people who live these problems. The problems, and answers to these problems, must not come from teachers or intellectuals who have identified the problems and have formulated theories in academic settings, nor by political leaders who claim to know what is in the best interest of the people they want to "liberate."

Any solution must come from the people who know, experience and live the problem. Teachers, researchers and political leaders are there to facilitate and offer alternatives, but not to assume that they know best. Freire is very critical of professionals who disregard the oppressed by believing them to be incapable of knowing their own needs and interests. They mistakenly and paternalistically believe that they know and have the solutions to other people's problems.

Freire continues his critique of top-down approaches and humanitarian methods, insisting that the starting point of identifying problems as well as developing solutions to these problems can be found in the context from which they arise. "The starting point of any social movement lies in men themselves... From this, the take off point is always

with men, in their here, in their now that constitutes the situation in which they find themselves now immersed, now emerged, now insert. Men can only move from this situation which determines the perception of what they are experiencing. And in order to do this authentically, it is necessary that the situation in which they find themselves appears to be not as something fatal nor insurmountable, but as a challenging situation that is merely limiting them.”⁶⁶ Freire insists that we ought to respect the experience of the local to guide us in developing the solutions to our problems.

Besides insisting that the solutions we seek come from problems rooted in our experience, Freire motions us towards adopting a pluralistic sensibility that respects the “other”, given that there is more than one way of being. A pluralistic sensibility is manifested through the tolerance we exercise during any dialogue. Democratic interactions are based on a type of faith in humanity, in the belief that all are able to discuss their problems, the problems of their country, continent, world, work, and the problems of democracy itself. “Education is an act of love. Therefore, it is an act of courage. Unless one is living a farce, one cannot be afraid of debating, of analyzing reality and of creative discussion.”⁶⁷ In order to engage and be engaged by others in dialogue, it is necessary that we cultivate a sensibility of confidence, humility, a willingness to risk loving others and allowing others to be who they are. Genuine dialogue is not possible without these.

It was precisely Freire's insistence on the importance of dialogue that frustrated many of his critics who preferred to implement top-down policies and attacked him for not having a concrete and practical method for helping people that could be used in

different contexts. Dogmatic ideologues on the political left have also criticized Freire for his antireductionist approach and his insistence on dialogue, which in their opinion only slows down the change they want to bring about. Organizers of training events for teachers and social leaders would often invite Freire to help with the planning. Often these organizers became frustrated with Freire's refusal to provide them with rules or a set of ready-made solutions to their problems. Freire did not pretend to have any solutions other than to suggest that an open-ended dialogue could lead them to have a more just and humane world.

The experience of Freire's version of radical democracy may at times be characterized by an abiding tension. It is much more comfortable to adopt eschatological truths that answer all questions as do most religions, or myths such as Mariátegui's revolutionary myth, for example. It is much more difficult to affirm the value of ambiguity. In order to be comfortable with ambiguity, we first need to cultivate a sensibility characterized by curiosity and humility. We need humility to not take ourselves too seriously, and to accept the fact that we are fallible. We need curiosity to continue learning from others and from our own experiences.

Regarding the tension of radically democratic interactions, in his book *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare Teach* (2005), Freire describes an incident that exemplifies what it means to live the tension of radical democracy. This tension comes due to our affirming the value of ambiguity and remaining open to all possibilities, as opposed to simply following rules or applying ready-made solutions to every new challenge. Freire relates that students oftentimes challenge their teachers.

The reasons why they do this are many, but he identifies and explores two of them. The first reason is to find out if the teachers' actions are indeed consistent with the values they claim to adopt. In this case, students do not want teachers to fail; instead they want to be sure of the integrity of their teachers. The second reason students challenge teachers is because students perversely may want teachers to fail.

Freire tells us that once during the first day of classes, he was going over the syllabus and explaining how he expected class discussion to take place: openly, freely and respectfully. One of his students interrupted to challenge him and said: "I will make sure to come to all of your classes. I do not want to miss any of them in order to see if what you are saying is true." Freire replied to the student that she had every right to question him and to do this publicly. "Indeed, this young woman did not miss a single class. She participated in our class discussions and in so doing revealed her authoritarian approach, which must have been triggered by my past and present anti-governmental activities. It was not possible for us to agree on anything, but we maintained a mutual respect until the last day of class."⁶⁸ This is precisely the abiding tension that comes from not imposing pre-established solutions by default. This is the tension that comes with the effort to be consistent, to minimize the distance between what we say and what we do.

Freire's work was consistent, gradual and steady. He worked to teach literacy to millions of Brazilians before the military coup of 1964. Then, while in exile, he continued working with Chilean illiterate peasants, doing research, writing and collaborating with agencies involved in education in the United States and Europe. He

continued with his project to improve the human condition when he returned from exile to Brazil until his death in 1997. All the while, he did not propose any utopian and ultimate answers. He worked to help people one by one, improving his own and their experience and context as much as he could every day. He was critical of intellectuals who erred on the side of reading, thinking and writing for being “verbal,” and critical also of those who erred on the side of blind practice for being “activists” without first being informed by a critical consciousness.

Insights developed - on trust

Thus far we have explained Freire's project with the intention of analyzing how and why Freire's project can be characterized as having a radically democratic approach. This does not mean that Freire's project and suggestions are free of problems. The criticism that can be developed from Freire's project is to extend Freire's suggestions and criticisms to his own work.

One of the elements of the conscientização project that has become clear to us is that we cannot educate other people. Only a teacher with humanist intentions who has confidence in her students' capabilities may create the appropriate conditions for dialogue to take place so that the teacher and the students may learn together. In a similar way, we cannot liberate other people. A person with humanist intentions who trusts the people she works with, may be able to create the appropriate conditions for the people and herself to grow into their freedom together. A sense of trust and open dialogue are necessary in both of these processes.

Even after Freire teased out the psychological inner workings of oppression and articulated this healthy approach to teacher-student relationships, he was unable to follow his own advice. The importance of this section is to demonstrate how deeply most of us have internalized the patterns of oppression through which we become socialized. In other words, even Freire himself, who was able to lay out the psychological inner workings of oppressed consciousness, was ultimately unable to transcend the internalized patterns of oppression.

According to Freire, Ernesto Che Guevara was an exemplary revolutionary who fought alongside the people instead of imposing their liberation on them. Che lived with the people, experienced the context, and was guided by a sense of love. Freire comments on the advice Che gives to his friend, Patojo. Che and Patojo (who was Guatemalan) met and got to know each other in Mexico. Neither one of them had any money so they shared what little they had, thereby forging their friendship. After the revolution was over in Cuba, Patojo decided to go back to Guatemala to help liberate his country. This is what Che wrote about their last conversation: "... I just strongly recommended three things: constant mobility, constant mistrust, and constant vigilance. Mistrust, at the beginning mistrust even your own shadow, mistrust the friendly peasants, the informants, the guides, the contacts; mistrust everything until an area has been liberated."⁶⁹

Regarding Che's advice to Patojo, Freire writes: "In this way, when Guevara draws the revolutionary attention to the need to 'always mistrust – mistrust the peasant that adheres himself to the revolutionary movement, mistrust the pathway guide, and

even one's own shadow,' he is not breaking the fundamental dialogical condition. He is only being realistic."⁷⁰ Freire agrees with Che that at least initially, a revolutionary must be wary of the people he works with. According to Freire, mistrust is not anti-dialogical. This mistrust is realistic because peasants undergo a type of confusion through the conscientização process. Freire writes:

Confidence in the masses of oppressed people cannot be a naïve type of trust. Leaders must trust in the potentialities of the masses and not treat them as objects the leaders can use to reach their own goals. A leader must trust that the oppressed can seek their own liberation, but always mistrust the ambiguous nature of the oppressed. To mistrust the oppressed is not to mistrust them as men, but rather to mistrust the oppressor internalized within them... Thus as long as the oppressed are more their internalized oppressor than they are themselves, their natural fear of freedom may lead them to denounce not so much their oppressive reality but rather the revolutionary leadership.⁷¹

This description of the moment of confusion which the oppressed undergo and which they are not able to overcome and may lead them to denounce the revolutionary leader is actually quite common and not unique to oppressed peasants. Freire describes this moment as a type of confusion that is played out by the inner struggle experienced between a person's autonomy wanting to assert itself and the internalized oppressor. For instance, a woman may want to experience a sexual relationship (her autonomy wanting to assert itself), while at the same time feeling guilt or shame over her feelings (internalized patriarchy). Likewise a lower class student may want to study philosophy (his autonomy wanting to assert itself). He may also feel inappropriate and guilty over the practically useless and luxurious career choice vis a vis the useful and practical skills his family and friends have learned at trade schools. The thought that those around him, his family and friends, have earned their living by working with their hands and that

only the socially privileged study philosophy is his internalized lower class consciousness struggling with his autonomy within him to keep him from being the full human he wishes to be.

This inner struggle and confusion is experienced by most beings who have suffered through oppressive experiences. The confusion of not knowing how to react can be seen clearly in our animal friends given that language does not interfere to cloud their intentions. Perhaps we have tried to play with a dog or animal that was abused and due to the dog's previous experience, he/she now has a hard time trusting people. Similarly, we may have experienced a new friendship that was not able to develop. Because of some negative experience in our or in our friend's past, just at the moment when the friendship may move to a deeper level, the confusion that Freire points to is felt and either we or they are not able to move beyond it. We do not want to go through that negative experience again so we avoid it.

Oppressed peasants are not the only ones who internalize their oppressors. Freire writes that the oppressors internalized within teachers also become confused and rebellious when teachers go through conscientização pedagogical trainings. Freire writes:

Often through the process of training, especially when concrete situations are being analyzed, participants will angrily ask the coordinator: "Where are you taking us with this?" The fact is that the coordinator does not want to take anyone anywhere, but rather to invite them to be critical of themselves. It just so happens that as the coordinator problematizes a situation, the teachers in training begin to sense that further analysis of this situation will necessarily lead them to either affirm or reject their internalized oppressors. To see through one's internalized oppressors and to reject them is a violent act committed by the person against him/herself. Otherwise, in order to affirm the internalized oppressors, the person must stand up against the person who is facilitating the

conscientização process. The way out is through a defense mechanism that transfers to the coordinator what the teacher's normal practice, namely to lead, to conquer, invade, as manifestations of their own anti-dialogical behavior.⁷²

The internalized oppressor may also be observed in ourselves, our students, friends and people close to us. When discussing sexism, racism, animal rights, etc. we may come to realize that we ourselves have been oppressors. This is a crucial moment that allows us two options. The first is the most difficult and few of us take this route because it entails confronting our behavior (the internalized oppressor) in order to realize who we have been and the damage we have caused to others. At this point, the conscientização process entails becoming self-aware, self-critical, and question our choices, character and past, and find out whether we have been oppressors by being racist, sexist, etc. If the conscientização process gets this far, we might feel remorse for the un-critical and un-aware choices we have made, and for our oppressing behavior. Once this takes place, we are able to reject the oppressor previously housed within us and we are able to move forward and grow as human beings. The conscientização is a process of becoming aware, self-aware, politically aware, self-critical, conscious of ourselves, of our thought patterns, our behavior patterns, of our relationships.

The process of conscientização is not an easy one. It is much easier to allow our patterns of thought and behavior, and the way we relate to others, to go unquestioned. Although the person housing the oppressor has the ability to question the intentions behind his/her actions, she rejects the opportunity when the internalized oppressor feels threatened. Most often she dismisses the conversation and her friend or teacher for being crazy, subversive, an atheist, a leftist, a sell out, or whatever other quick label will

allow the internalized master to dismiss the threat upon itself. Psychologically, this confusion leads to a vicious cycle and it is very difficult to get out of it. Violence only creates more violence. A child who grows up with abusive parents or teachers, or who experiences abusive relationships growing up, comes to believe that abusive relationships are normal, that hurting or demeaning others is an acceptable way to treat people. When this child grows up, she in turn treats others in a demeaning manner, unless she becomes self-aware and questions the oppressor housed within her.

According to Freire, both trust and distrust are needed when facilitating the conditions for conscientização. Freire distinguishes between the person and the oppressor they have internalized. He recommends that we trust the person but for us not to be naïve, and so for us to be cautious of the person's internalized oppressor.

This is an important distinction, and it is possible that Freire's recommendation is helpful, but we have to ask ourselves – how can we possibly distinguish between the person (our friend) and the oppressor housed within our friend? Phenomenologically, distrust and anxiety, just like laughter, are contagious. We can notice how the distrust the peasants felt (which was caused by a lifetime of oppression) caused Che to in turn be suspicious of them. Freire agrees with Che that before an area is liberated, the revolutionary must be “realistic” and mistrust the peasants. However, this behavior is inconsistent with the process of conscientização. It would be counterproductive for a teacher to mistrust her students before she gets to know them. If we have confidence in our students, they are able to feel this and they in turn have confidence in us. We can think for example, how preemptive confidence from the teacher towards her students is

crucial for the success of the students not only of relatively safe classes where students might feel intimidated such as logic, but also in sports such as swimming where students might be afraid of the depth of the swimming pool, and martial arts where it is likely for students to get physically hurt. Our lack of trust causes our student, friend, etc. to mistrust us, to mistrust themselves, and to doubt their own abilities and potential, as well as the potential of the relationship.

When we mistrust our students, we become humanitarian and necrophilic. Our mistrust causes us to view the peasant, the woman in the women shelter, or the student in our classroom as someone we want to “liberate” or “educate.” Our mistrust precludes us from seeing ourselves as freedom-seeking selves in the other, and thus to further develop a sense of solidarity with others.

Just as we treasure our freedom and resist the imposition of others, so likewise others value their freedom and resist our imposition on them. We want to have the freedom to ask our own questions, the questions important to us at this moment in our lives. We want to have the freedom to formulate the answers to our questions that can ultimately only come from us, that can only work for us. Any other question that claims to be the “correct” way to frame our problem, and any other answer that is imposed from without by someone who claims to understand our experience and know better than ourselves, will not contribute to our process of conscientização. Regardless of how well meaning the framed problems and answers from without are, they are external, they have not come from us, and they will not work for us.

As in forging a friendship, we do the best we can, but we cannot make another person be reciprocal, we cannot impose our friendship upon them. If the other person reciprocates, this is truly a gift, but if not, then we learn to leave it at that. There is no universal law of nature that stipulates that everyone must be reciprocal. This is why trust and friendship ought not to be required or expected, but rather appreciated when it does take place. Demanding that others be reciprocal, educated, or become liberated are not acts of love, they are necrophilic acts caused by our insecurity and lack of respect for the decisions of others. To educate and liberate from without, besides the important fact that it does not work, is to attempt to colonize another human being, to control them and make them subject to our desires.

There is no question that Freire's work and thought aimed to liberate and help the oppressed help themselves. The insights he developed through his work are extremely helpful to all of us to understand how we relate to others and to ourselves. Freire's own struggle with mistrust demonstrates how deep the patterns of oppression are internalized within us, so much so that even Freire himself was unable to transcend them completely. This is not to cynically conclude that one ought not to try, and the next chapter discusses this issue, but rather to further emphasize Freire's own point, namely, that we ought to continuously grow deeper in our own awareness. As Freire writes: "No one 'is' if he prevents others from 'being'... *The radical man chooses not to deny others their choice.* He does not intend to impose his will but rather to discuss it. He is convinced of his choice but he respects others and their right to be convinced of their choices as well. He tries to convince, but does not oppress his opponents..."⁷³

To conclude, we return to our question: How can we distinguish between the person and the oppressor housed within? Is it possible for us to even make this distinction? Perhaps it is, but in the process we run the risk that our friend or student will feel our mistrust. In her book *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, bell hooks quotes Parker Palmer: “I am fearful. I have fear. But I don't need to be my fear as I speak to you. I can approach you from a different place in me – a place of hope, a place of fellow feeling, of journeying together in a mystery that I know we share.”⁷⁴ This is a risk that may be taken more easily in our classroom and personal relationships than in the Sierra Maestra.

CHAPTER IV

LUIS VILLORO'S THOUGHT AND WORK

This chapter examines the thought and work of Luis Villoro (b. 1922). It begins with the historical context of Mexico and with Villoro's biography. Following the structure of the previous chapter, this chapter is divided into two main sections. The first half spells out the sociopolitical challenges that Villoro encountered, namely, “democratic” institutions, cultural homogeneity, tolerance, the ideologically dogmatic left, and the practical consequences of liberalism and communitarianism. The second half of this chapter explains the insights he developed because of these challenges, namely, the democratizing of democratic institutions, pluralism, the left as a moral attitude/lifestyle, liberalism, and the organic community.

Chapter two of this project gave us the historical background of Mexico through the mid 1800's. Since then, Mexico has experienced two dictatorships, the first being the thirty-four years of the Porfiriato (1876-1910), and the second being the seventy-plus year dictatorship (1929-2000) of the political party PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional). From 1910 through the 1920's Mexico experienced the Mexican revolution, which brought down the Porfirio Díaz dictatorship. The political and economic policies after the Mexican revolution were largely socialist and nationalist so that Mexico drafted a national constitution that reappropriated the land from the latifundio landlords to the Mexican people (Article 27 of the Constitution). Mexico turned its attention away from exporting its resources and foreign markets and instead

nationalized its oil industry. Mexico established a series of social programs such as the nationally subsidized elementary education program SEP (Secretaria de Educacion Publica) as well as a system of social healthcare and retirement fund IMSS (Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social). The nationalist and socialist focus of the Mexican policies lasted from the 1930's until the 1970's.

Since the early 1940's the Mexican people have gravitated north toward the U.S. In 1942, during the Second World War, the U.S. suffered a labor shortage and instituted the Bracero program -- a guest-worker program that utilized cheap Mexican labor. The Bracero program meant to supplement the manual labor shortage the U.S. was undergoing at the time. By 1964, when the Bracero program came to an end, the U.S. had employed over five million Mexican farm laborers. At the end of the Bracero program, many Mexican men remained in the U.S. and never went back to Mexico. Others continued to come back and forth between the two countries as seasonal farm workers, but most importantly, the pattern of immigration from Mexico to the U.S. was firmly established over the twenty-two years of the Bracero program.⁷⁵ The pattern of immigration continues to this day, so much so that in 2005, remittances from Mexican workers earned in the U.S. and sent back to their families in Mexico accounted for \$18.1 billion. Currently, these remittances are the second largest source of national income (the oil industry is the first source), and are more substantial than the tourism industry.⁷⁶ In other words, the Mexican economy is heavily dependent upon the Mexican people who emigrate to the U.S. to work.

Long before, but mostly since the 1970's, many of the Mexican landowners either willingly chose, or have been coerced by, the drug cartels to use their land to grow marijuana and amapola (opium poppy) seeds. As of today, the drug industry has subsumed the human trafficking business. This means that the drug cartels have taken over the U.S. Mexico border so that anyone who crosses the border illegally must see to it that they pay the drug cartels a fee to cross the border and thus not be killed in the process. Of course, paying the fee to the drug lords does not guarantee that the person immigrating will actually not be assaulted, raped, or killed in the process of crossing the U.S. Mexico border.

By the mid 1970's, Mexico was already in the middle of the PRI party dictatorship. This second dictatorship was a type of ideological dictatorship where the same ideology was the dominant one in power and each "democratically" elected president handed down his power to his successor. During the 1970's, the PRI's policies shifted away from national issues toward international markets, the exportation of goods, securing loans from the International Monetary Fund, and finding ways that foreign owned industries could invest in the Mexican national markets. Mexico made a 180-degree turn from the Porfiriato policies of having open markets towards the U.S. and Europe, to the 1930's socialist and nationalist policies, and then back again to the current neo-liberal policies that dominate the Mexican political and economic landscape.⁷⁷

For purposes of this study, three major events took place during 1994. This was the year that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Canada, the U.S., and Mexico went into effect. It was also the year of the Ejército Zapatista de

Liberación Nacional (EZLN) uprising in Chiapas, and the so-called “Tequila Crisis” of 1994 unfolded as one of the deepest recessions Mexicans have experienced. Ernesto Zedillo, the last “democratically elected” president of the PRI dictatorship, took office in December of 1994 and was faced with a failed economy and the Zapatista uprising. More will be said about the connection between EZLN and Luis Villoro later in this chapter. For now, we can say that the EZLN is a group of Indigenous people who spoke up against the centuries of oppression incurred on them first by the European colonizers, then by the criollos, later by the mestizos and now the Mexican government. The EZLN simply aim to be treated with the same dignity that all human beings deserve.

Politically, and this is key to the work of Villoro presented in this study, the two currents that he examines in his work are Western liberalism (in the modern state) and Indigenous sociopolitical dynamics. Villoro explains that Mexicans have forged a national identity that is neither solely Indigenous nor modern mainstream liberal.

Villoro has seen Mexico journey through socialist nationalist policies, through the PRI dictatorship, to the current neo-liberal policies, the emigration of its citizens to the U.S. to find employment, the growth of the drug cartel and human trafficking industry and the Indigenous peoples’ uprising. These events, along with the history of colonization as our background, are the social problems that make up the context from which Villoro formulated his thought.

Institutional challenges - democratic institutions

In his book *El Poder y el Valor: Fundamentos de una ética política* (1997), Villoro distinguishes between two different notions of democracy.⁷⁸

- (a) democracy according to value
- (b) democracy according to power

One kind of democracy is (a) democracy as a type of ideal political association - according to value - in the prescriptive sense. Another type is (b) democracy as a system of government - according to power - in the descriptive sense.

In the first sense (a) democracy is the realization of everyone's freedom, that is, the freedom to flourish. However in our society today, this type of freedom tends to be a privilege only a few people can enjoy. This privileged group has a number of liberties, even negative liberties and they can achieve almost any goal they set for themselves. For Villoro, democracy is a matter of degree. This is the result of the disparity in freedom that we have, which depends largely on one's social class, race, or sex. "Democracy," Villoro argues, is not a concept that has a clear definition. He recommends that we think of democracy as an ideal, a regulative idea, a standard, that guides our policy decisions in order to approximate the ideal, but we must not make the mistake of thinking that democracy already is a matter of fact.

In the sense of democracy as a form of government (b), democracy means a set of rules and institutions that exist with reference to a system of power, such as the equality of citizens before the state, civil rights, the elections of representatives and governors by the citizens, and so on. Moreover, with this sense of democracy (b) the agreements between competing sectors are settled by the strongest sector, which

possesses the most bargaining power. In this sense of democracy, each citizen implicitly accepts being within a situation characterized by domination. The strongest sectors of society maintain their power with the tacit agreement of the less powerful.

The following two options follow from the two notions of democracy described above:

- (a) To justify democracy as an ethical value (prescriptive), or
- (b) To reduce democracy to a type of government (descriptive) as is the case in most countries.

Option (b) does not consider democracy as an ideal, but simply as an agreement to co-exist. If (b) is the case, it makes no sense to ask for a moral justification of democracy. We can simply accept or reject this type of organization for practical reasons. The problem with option (b) is that the view of democracy in the descriptive sense entails accepting any existing practice as valid. This is because we have no reasons beyond what is practical to criticize political arrangements.

If we want to have the option to criticize our institutions, we must think of democracy as a type of value, as an ideal. Our laws and institutions would be a means for us to come closer to a type of society where everyone's autonomy may be realized. In order to justify democracy as an ideal and to be critical of our institutions, we have to ask ourselves if and how our current practices are helping people flourish. For Villoro, the most prevalent problems of our society are the homogenization of society, political parties, and bureaucracy / technocracy.

Regarding the homogenization of the public, Villoro explains that the nation-state conceives itself as a homogeneous unit constituted by the decisions of a number of

individuals who are equal among themselves. The nation-state ignores or destroys individual aspects of different communities, groups and lifestyles. In order to homogenize a society within a nation-state, different tools are used, such as a market economy, a uniform federal law, a central administration, a common language, patriotic celebrations, national heroes, and so on. The modern nation-state is equivalent to all its citizens who are treated as similar elements in a common aggregate. The few in power attempt to assimilate all diverse communities and cultures into a dominant lifestyle. Equality is understood as homogeneity. In order to avoid special privileges, everyone gets the same treatment. The individual is not so much a particular subject or a unique human being, but rather a bearer of civil and political rights just as everyone else.

Villoro explains that the problem with political parties is that people choose who will choose for them (representatives). We have a few political parties, some in the center, some towards the left and some towards the right. Those in the center do not differ much from each other and consequently, voters do not have a real choice. To win, a political party needs electoral campaigns, propaganda, and financial resources. Winning an election depends less and less on reflection, on the rational choice and critical attitude of voters. Winning elections depends more on groups of people who have the financial resources to finance the campaign, and who can publicize their propaganda. Arguments that appeal to reason on important issues are minimal. Instead, political parties are focused on presenting an attractive image to the media, and on persuading relevant interest groups that they will be able to maintain their power. The political party system becomes a type of vicious cycle. This current system seems to be

the only way in which the public's interests can be represented, but at the same time, political parties obey their own rules and in many ways avoid being controlled by the public. In a very real way, the people's will is replaced by the will of the party in power.

Regarding the issue of bureaucracy and technocracy, Villoro writes that bureaucracy is opposed to democracy insofar as the task of a bureaucracy is to maintain a top-down power structure, while the task in a democracy ought to be to question the system and power structures from the ground-up, in other words, to create a system where citizens decide and the administration of the organization executes. In a technocracy, the public has no choice but to trust the experts to make decisions for them. The average citizen is reduced to being an obedient consumer of ideas and products. She is unable to decide for herself regarding society's common everyday problems.

These are some of the limitations resulting from our “democratic” institutions today. The original role of these institutions was to help people to govern themselves, and most institutions have indeed been successful, but as we have seen, these institutions also limit the freedom of individuals. Villoro believes our goal, however, is not to destroy institutions via revolutionary uprisings and build institutions modeled after our new ideals. What we need is to have our institutions serve the purpose for which they were created, namely to help people realize their own freedom.

Institutional Challenges - how the dominant culture treats minorities

Indigenism is the first and central concept that leads Villoro to formulate his theory of radical democracy. In his book *Los Grandes Momentos del Indigenismo en*

México, Villoro describes the interactions between the Indians and the Spanish who conquered and colonized/Christianized them.⁷⁹ Among the Spanish are Hernán Cortés, Fray Bernardino de Sahagún and Francisco Javier Clavijero. These interactions range from the completely dominating end of the spectrum to the defense of the Indians as human beings. Regarding the interactions between the Spanish and the Indians, as well as regarding Indigenism in itself, two things are clear. The first is that although some of the Spanish did believe that Indians were in fact human beings, most Spanish did not consider the Indians as equals. For the Spanish, their culture and religion were unquestionably superior to the cultures and religions of the natives. The second point that is clear is that the Indigenous people have been the objects of the Spanish and the mestizos.

Since the sixteenth century, the Indigenous peoples of America have been for criollos and mestizos, the other – the other who is judged and manipulated for their use, or conversely, for their redemption. We, the non-Indians, have decided for them. We are not only the ones who use them, but also those who intend to save them. The oppression of Indigenous peoples is the work of non-Indians, but so is the Indigenous, which aims to liberate them. While it is us who continue deciding for them, they will continue being the subject of the history that others make. The true liberation of the Indians would be to recognize them as the subjects that they are, who have their own fate in their own hands; subjects who are capable of judging us according to their own values, just as we have always judged them; subjects who can exercise their own freedom without restrictions, just as we demand to exercise ours. To be a complete subject is to be autonomous. The Indigenous “problem” has only one definitive solution: the recognition of the Indigenous peoples' autonomy.⁸⁰

This does not mean that there have been no Indigenous movements based on their own interests. It simply means that through much of the history of Mexico, for better or worse, the Indian has been manipulated and subjugated first by the Spanish, then by the criollos and, the mestizos, and now by the Mexican government.

Villoro reminds us that after their independence from Spain, the new republics followed the same administrative divisions as the Spanish colonies without considering the differences among the various Indigenous peoples. The criollos and mestizos formed the new states and imposed these institutions upon the Indigenous communities. Villoro writes: “The Indigenous people did not enter into this constitutive agreement. No one consulted them regarding whether or not they wanted to form part of the new agreement. However, they ended up accepting it.”⁸¹ The fact is that the Indigenous people never had the option of not joining the modern state.

Overlooking the Indigenous people has been and continues to be the result of criollos’ and mestizos’ behavior. This oversight is the basis of both Indigenism as well as the subjugation of the Indigenous peoples. The way in which the humanity of the Indian is ignored when they are subjugated is obvious. Less obvious but equally damaging is how Indians are not taken into consideration when the mestizos decide to “save” them. The choices the mestizos formulate for themselves are:

- (a) Leave the Indians with their pre-Hispanic culture and values and separate them from the rest of society.
- (b) Assimilate them into the Western culture to emancipate them from their oppressed condition and integrate them into society.

Both options are from a mestizo perspective, and do not consider the Indigenous peoples’ perspectives and interests. Option (a) would undermine their ability to resist their oppression. This option is similar to the way in which the United States government dealt with the Native Americans. They were removed from the rest of society and placed in reservations. Option (b) entails forcing the Indigenous peoples to adopt a

culture foreign to theirs. Villoro writes: “The fanatical Indigenous rights advocate treats the Indian as a free man, but deep down would like for him to remain a slave. The excited Western liberal wants the Indian to be exalted as free, but as a matter of fact treats him as a slave.”⁸² Both options come solely from the mestizo perspective and they completely ignore the Indian's possible interests.

The Spanish colonizers were not able to consider the possibility that the Spanish and Native cultures were simply two different manifestations of our human spirit. For the Spanish, their culture and religion were the “True” culture and religion. This meant that the culture and religion of the natives was a type of abomination, which needed to be properly assimilated to the Spanish culture. It is precisely this lack of pluralistic sensibility that now precludes the mestizos from imagining only the options of either assimilating or separating the Indigenous cultures.

Institutional challenges - problems with the left as a political stance

As we continue our analysis of the social problems from which Villoro's thought has emerged, it is necessary for us to examine the concepts of utopia, the political left, and why the concept of utopia can be mistaken and ultimately dangerous.

Recall that Mariátegui had a leftist utopian vision. He thought that if people came to believe in a revolutionary myth, the revolution would take place, and when this happened, the Indigenous along with the proletariat would strip the bourgeoisie of their power and thus establish social justice. Freire believes in utopia but in a different sense than Mariátegui. Freire does not think that we will actually be able to enjoy a state

where social justice is a matter of fact. Freire still considers, however, that the concept of utopia can serve an important function. The idea of utopia helps us to dream and to formulate our ideals. We dream of a world where everyone has food to eat, a place to live, and clothes to wear, a world where everyone has the opportunity to realize their life plan. In this sense, utopian thinking helps us to guide our choices in the present moment. Villoro is more critical of the utopian concept than Freire, but Villoro nonetheless agrees that our ideals can guide our choices. For instance, Villoro does not believe that the version of radical democracy that he proposes will come in some utopian future. Instead, Villoro considers that we can use the ideal of a radical democracy to organize our institutions and to measure the quality of our relationships.

In his article “The Triple Confusion of Utopia,” Villoro criticizes and rejects the concept of utopia for three different reasons.⁸³ The first reason why Villoro is critical of and ultimately rejects the concept of utopia is because the *ideal* of utopia becomes confused with an actual political state that will somehow come about as the consequence of our actions. For example, Mariátegui thought that utopia – the ideal of social justice that he sought – would be the consequence of carrying out a revolution. The second reason why Villoro is critical of the concept of utopia is because all too often we attribute to the *concept* of utopia a type of concreteness, a matter of *fact*, rather than thinking of the concept of utopia as being the *representation* of a system of values. For example, Villoro explains how the scientific and anarchist interpretations of Marxism thought that the desired society would come at the end of a chain of historical events. The ideal of utopia is then confused with a concrete and specific situation. Villoro's

third criticism of utopia follows from his second criticism. The criticism is that we often confuse the rules of behavior (ideals) with actual commands to behave a certain way.

He explains that a utopia is the ideal of human behavior, but when this becomes confused with a concrete fact that will come in the near future, what ends up happening is that our ideal of human behavior turns into a type of command. Think, for example, of the countless instances when a political party or a revolutionary leader gets into power. At this point their cause or revolution has triumphed, and presumably now with the new leadership, their society is either at the brink of or, at the utopian state promised, by the leadership. This is what Villoro means by his third criticism of the ideal human behavior being confused with actual commands to behave or not behave in certain ways by the party in power: this is a situation that does not allow any type of dialogue or criticism of the party in power, of the new utopian state. Individuals are faced with two options; they must decide whether they will follow the commands of the party in power and help to carry out the ideal (to support the revolution), or be critical of the new party in power, and thus, to betray the revolution. Villoro explains how this confusion creates a situation of utter intolerance such as the totalitarian regime of Stalin where there was no space to criticize either the government or its policies without being accused of betraying the revolution. Villoro concludes that there is no place for utopias in a radical democracy. The values of equality and justice ought to serve as guidelines rather than fixed or final goals.

Another problem with the left as a political stance is that while resisting oppression, people who adhere to leftists principles often succumb to the impulse of

turning the power dynamics around, and not only resisting their oppressors, but also taking revenge against the oppressors once the previously oppressed come to a position of power. Unfortunately, this takes place much too often whenever the previously oppressed gain power. Freire has analyzed this phenomenon and suggested our internalization of the oppressive power dynamics as an explanation. The fact is that this is a paradox of the political left, namely, that the oppressed becomes the oppressor as they seek their freedom. In the struggle against oppression, the oppressed insist that they be regarded as subjects, as human beings, that in a pluralistic sense their humanity be regarded with dignity, and their culture as legitimate. However, once in a position of power, the previously oppressed often fail to adhere by the values that guided their struggle and they become intolerant oppressors of those who oppressed them previously.

Institutional challenges - problems with liberalism

Luis Villoro's criticism of Western liberalism is developed insofar as liberalism has a similar vision as the political left, namely, that of resisting oppression. The criticism developed by Villoro addresses liberal assumptions and the consequences of holding these assumptions, such as exclusion *from* others, exclusion *of* others, lack of opportunities, and our understanding and limitations regarding what it means to be tolerant.

It could be said that the first signs of liberalism in the West began with the Magna Carta (1215), which postulated that the king could not have full and unquestionable control over his serfs. After the Magna Carta, Hobbes, Rousseau, and

Locke developed the concept of the social contract, contending that autonomous individuals in their own right enter into a social contract to govern themselves. Each of the formulations of the social contract has the power of the king / government gradually ceasing to be absolute and unquestionable, as with Hobbes, and moves towards becoming accountable to the people governed, as with Locke. John Stuart Mill's criticism of the power other people hold over individuals moved beyond being critical of the king/government, to questioning the authority of the beliefs that the majority of people held, or as he called this, "the tyranny of the majority." For Mill, the individuality of each human being and his/her right to develop her own life plan is what fundamentally is most important.

According to Villoro, it is necessary that we understand the impetus of liberalism. In short, it is the impetus not to be smothered under the pressure of the community, social customs, and the responsibilities and expectations imposed upon individuals. Although these liberal motivations are legitimate concerns, liberalism and the political left both work under problematic assumptions that are analyzed in the following sections.

The most common criticism of liberalism is that the social contract begins with independent individuals who decide to enter the contract on their own. This criticism goes on to point out that the problem with this assumption is that man is not born alone. All of us depend on others to become who we are. To a certain degree, all of us are dependent on others, and we need a community of people to look after us and to nourish us when we are too young or too old to care for ourselves. From this same community,

we not only receive physical nourishment but we also inherit a culture, and along with it, the values that form our identity, and which in turn help us to confront problems as we go through life and try to understand the world in which we live. Ironically then, freedom is a value we inherit from a community of people. The paradigm of the autonomous free person without ties to a community does not exist in our human experience.

For the sake of argument, let us ignore the criticism of the liberal starting point, the autonomous individual in a vacuum, and continue to hold this liberal assumption. At some point, we run into a different set of problems. One of the benefits of liberalism is that it demands respect for every person to freely choose their own life plan and to not be subjected to the social order of their community. Consequently, liberal ideals pull people away from other people and towards a loss of integration with the community. By focusing exclusively on the individual, on individual rights, liberal ideals have the potential to move individual people toward a lack of a sense of life-meaning/purpose, and a lack of solidarity with humanity. This is because most if not all of the activities and roles through which we develop our sense of personhood are social in nature. For instance, as a friend, lover, parent, wife, husband, teacher, artist, dentist, mechanic, we need a community. Even reclusive monks live in monasteries, and even renunciants need a society for the precise sake of the identity they wish to renounce.

The price we pay for the modern liberal state is based on two types of exclusion. First, liberalism contends that the state must respect everyone's right to choose his/her life plan, but only this much. In other words, liberalism does not ask, and, much less

demand of the state to provide the circumstances or opportunities for every individual to be able to realize their life plan. Villoro writes: “If one wants to accomplish what one chooses, it is not enough to have legal guarantees and consent from others, what is necessary is that there be the adequate social conditions. No individual is free if she is not in a position to realize her reasonable lifestyle choices ... A society that does not seek these conditions for all of its people is necessarily divided. This cannot fail to produce a necessary consequence: the exclusion of a significant portion of the population. The sense of all people belonging to the same community has been broken.”⁸⁴ This is the first sense in which liberalism generates a sense of exclusion.

The equal opportunity of all people to realize their life plan presupposes, first, that the minimum conditions (food, shelter, clothing) are already a matter of fact. Secondly, it also presupposes that there is actual equality of social opportunity to carry out our life plan. However, to demand that these conditions be available to all people is a type of requirement that does not originate from liberalism, which is preoccupied with the interests of individuals. The demand that the minimal social conditions be in place for individuals to flourish originates from a sense of solidarity with our community -- from communitarianism.

Liberalism is concerned with the rights of the individual and with the protection of individual privacy. Consequently, each individual is primarily concerned with his or her own interests, each emphasizes his/her personal life plan and may feel that collective interests infringe on their individual rights. A society based on liberal values is characterized by competition among individuals; it is not characterized by cooperation.

This is the second sense in which liberalism generates exclusion. Villoro points out that liberalism is not necessarily synonymous with democracy. “A liberal state is not necessarily democratic, these are two different things... we often confuse liberalism and democracy, but this is a mistake. A liberal state is an institution that guarantees the negative liberties permitted by a legal system, but it is possible that these did not originate from the choices of the citizens themselves. Instead, a democracy, like a liberal state, also allows negative freedoms, has the additional goal of promoting positive liberties.”⁸⁵

Liberalism emphasizes our negative rights (freedom *from*), such as our right that our community does not infringe upon our private lives. Positive rights (freedom *to*) are for instance, our right to an education. Liberalism is only concerned with negative rights, so that the liberal concerns work well for those who have the financial means to bring about their life plan without the help of a community. It is important to stress this point because a consequence of liberal democracies is that liberal institutions benefit the few who have the wherewithal, and they hide a growing inequality among citizens. The legal guarantee of negative rights is not sufficient for the vast majority of people. The vast majority require not only the right to formulate their own life plan, but also the means and opportunities to accomplish it.

Another problem with liberalism as a theory, and consequently, with liberal institutions, is the value placed on tolerance. Assuming that we agree that all cultures, however different from ours, are manifestations of the human spirit, our new challenge would be to exercise tolerance. Do we tolerate everything? Do we tolerate intolerance?

If our fundamental value is tolerance, then we cannot tolerate intolerance. Ethical relativism is the position many of us assume when we attempt to be tolerant. For example, when comparing the difference in quality of life between people in developed and in underdeveloped countries, an ethical relativist would think something along the lines of “well, it is not strictly necessary that everyone have the same opportunities, or maybe it is, it doesn't matter...” Ethical relativism, though tolerant, succumbs under its own inconsistency. In other words, if we accept everything, we are not able to reject anything.

Villoro explains that an ethical relativist must accept the validity of all beliefs, even the validity of domination and discrimination such as racism. In order to reject racism as a valuable belief, an ethical relativist would have to argue by utilizing and appealing to principles and values that are not relative such as justice or freedom. While arguing that a unprejudiced sensibility is more valuable than a racist sensibility, the ethical relativist is in effect taking a non-relativistic position. This is because if all beliefs and values were relative, then there would not be any justification for rejecting a belief that is contrary to ethical relativism. Therefore, a person would have to appeal to non-relative values in order to justify her own relativism. These are the reasons why if we want tolerance to be a value in our communities, then we must reject bigotry.

Furthermore, tolerance of other people's worldviews is a necessary but not sufficient condition within our relationships and communities because tolerance respects but does not acknowledge the value of our cultural differences. For example, a person may be able to tolerate a different person or culture while feeling superior to her/it. This

type of tolerance is not helpful, we need a type of tolerance that acknowledges the value of cultures and beliefs foreign to ours.

Institutional challenges - problems with communitarianism

According to Villoro, liberalism is not the only political theory with problematic assumptions. Communitarianism stipulates that the community's interests and values hold more significance than those of the individual members. Historically, Hegel and Aristotle are the main philosophical figures who developed the communitarian position. Both argue that our personal character is developed through other people. If we are good or bad friends, selfish or generous, sociable or solitary, and so on, it is in relation to other people. This is relevant not only as a theoretical exercise, but because in the case of Villoro, Mexican society is far more communitarian in its values than it is liberal.

The critique of communitarianism is articulated by liberalism. The liberal concern is that the values of the community restrict and at times crush the individual. The liberal will ask herself, for instance, "why must I limit my options and my life plan so that I follow social norms I do not value?" In his book *On Liberty* (1859), J.S. Mill argues that the right of every person to live her life the way she sees fit is of far greater significance than maintaining social norms.⁸⁶

To sum up this section, the different problems that Villoro pointed out, and the challenges to democratic institutions he noticed, given the Mexican context, have been the lack of democratic interactions within democratic institutions, how the dominant culture attempts to homogenize and assimilate minorities, the values and assumptions of

tolerance, the values and assumptions of the left as a political stance, the values and assumptions of liberalism, and communitarianism. These historical, contextual and theoretical challenges have led Villoro to formulate a version of radical democracy that intends to address these issues. His suggestions are developed in the following section.

Democratizing democratic institutions

According to Villoro, the source of power for radical democracy is within the different communities that make up the public. Generally, power is exercised by a group of people at the top of a social hierarchy. Radical democracy diffuses and reverses the dynamics of power relations by exercising power that originates *from* individuals composing the communities, and *towards* government officials. The power over politics, over the economy and the bureaucratic aspects of society is in the hands of groups of people within the local communities. Villoro is aware that radical democracy is an ideal, but this ideal helps us to have a benchmark by which we can measure our progress. The difference between an ideal and utopia has been discussed in the first part of this chapter, but it is important to clarify this difference to distinguish their importance and how we may work with both concepts.

Villoro writes that democracy is a matter of degrees, and he recommends that we think of democracy as an ideal, a regulative idea, a standard, that guides our practice to approximate our ideal. However, we must not make the mistake of thinking either that democracy is already a matter of fact, or that democracy will be an established fact in the near future.

Perhaps an example will help us to further understand these differences. All of us have values that guide our actions and behavior. These may be efficiency, aesthetics, honesty, creativity, freedom, etc. Values that most pervasively guide our actions vary from person to person. Furthermore, a particular value has different connotations for different people who live in different contexts. Generally, though, “reputation,” for instance, refers to the recognition that others attribute to us given our positive or negative actions. Suppose that serenity is a value that guides our actions, that is, we want to live in such a way that we will not lose our head over sadness, joy, anxiety, anger or fear. What we want is to maintain a healthy level of equanimity throughout our life. Serenity is then our ideal, and it guides and governs our choices. However, serenity or being serene is not a monolithic state of being; it is a matter of degree, and varies depending on the context. Sometimes we get closer to a sense of well-being and inner-peace, and sometimes we get far away from it. Serenity is not an immutable state of being that can be statically preserved, nor one that will come at some future time and remain with us permanently. In a similar way, democracy can function as an ideal to guide our interactions with others. Democracy is not something that is immutable, nor is it possible for democracy to become fully permanent at some future time. Furthermore, democracy as an ideal also functions as a tool of criticism of our existing practices and institutions.

According to Villoro, we can work toward improving our democratic sensibility in several ways. He suggests what he calls an “adjustable equilibrium”⁸⁷ which is the diffusion of power, given that generally, in most liberal democracies and specifically in

Mexico, the political-bureaucratic-technocratic state has most of the power and thus controls institutions down to the local level. Through the version of radical democracy that Villoro formulates, local agencies would make use of the central government. Instead of the central government having a monopoly on power, there would be balanced power relationships between the central government and local communities. Notice the similarity between Villoro's diffusion of power and Freire's conscientização regarding our teacher-student, and other optimal relationships.

While Villoro does not work out the specific details of his proposed adjustable equilibrium, he does give us a general idea of what it would entail. Among the changes he proposes are to give more autonomy to local governments so that the nation state shifts from being a homogeneous unit to being a pluralistic association where different real communities participate in the common power. The power of the central government would be reduced to international relations, the design of the political economy on the national level, promoting constitutional laws, and arbitrating power conflicts. It would also be responsible for promoting the general public goods that none of the local governments would be able to promote on their own, such as promoting basic scientific research, the rational use of national natural resources, making the best use of new sources of energy, and protecting the environment.

The de-centralization of power would entail transference of resources and power, and Villoro is aware that this process ought to take place gradually and carefully until there were substantial guarantees that democratic practices were implemented at the local levels. The transition of power ought to be made in a way that would avoid giving

power to local political bosses, and avoiding disputes between local groups over the resources being distributed.

Villoro writes that in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, we are still able to find traditional community values where furthering liberal individualism is not the core value. He believes it is still possible to preserve and promote community values of radical democracy within liberal democracies. This means that the state would not be a homogeneous unit but would instead be a pluralistic partnership of different communities engaged within the power structures. In countries where the sense of community is minimal, Villoro writes that it is possible to pursue the formation of neighborhood committees, which are far better at representing the local interests than any elected official.

Villoro also believes that direct democracy can be improved. Although it is practically impossible to have the type of direct democracy in which each individual can affect the national government, as individuals we can still participate in discussions and influence our government. Even though it is impossible to transfer all the power to local communities, we can create situations through which local communities are closer to the decisions that affect them.

Furthermore, civil society consists of associations, communities, and all kinds of groups that are organized and that function independently from the state. Civil society allows us to recover the plurality and diversity of lifestyles that make up today's society. It is possible for civil society to control the administration of policies, that is, the technical aspects of government. This situation would create a widened democracy

characterized by democratic organization. The focus of power would be among the people themselves instead of local communities being subject to the authoritative control of a central government. Civil society would not intend to replace the central government; instead it would be an independent force that could regulate the activities of the central government.

Democracy must also be present in the workplace. The diffusion of democracy would mean that workers would have more control over the production and distribution of goods. As mentioned, radical democracy is a critique of liberalism, currently a mainstay political approach of modern nation-states. As we have seen, a problem with liberalism is that groups with greater economic and political power have more bargaining power than other groups so that the nation-state becomes a tool used by powerful groups to further promote their power and interests.

Radical democracy is also a critique of socialism. One of the problems with socialism is that those who have attempted to implement egalitarian values confused democracy with bourgeois individualism. This confusion has had an effect opposite from the one originally intended. In other words, instead of establishing egalitarian relationships and abolishing domination, egalitarianism was imposed by the ruling party, so that the state became the oppressor by means of its bureaucratic/technocratic class. Instead of bringing about egalitarian relationships, the power of individual people was eliminated.

Villoro demonstrates that the mistake socialist states made shows us that what needs to take place is not to do away with democracy, but rather to radicalize it. This

means making our local institutions, such as our work place, our schools, our communities and relationships democratic. This can be achieved by granting power to groups of people who historically have been oppressed. The creation of an egalitarian society as well as enabled individuals are the same project. It is not necessary for oppressed groups to consolidate their efforts into a political party that would represent them. Instead, different interest groups would have a common goal: an egalitarian society, numerous opportunities for advancement, the end of marginalization, and group participation to decide collective issues. Villoro believes that ethics can guide our research. The state would not only be concerned with promoting order and freedom, but would also promote communal values.

The diffusion of power, the active role of citizens in their government through civil society, as well as the plurality of communities instead of homogenization characterize Villoro's radical democracy. Moreover, his formulation of radical democracy emphasizes that rather than viewing democracy as a system of government in which we live, and which, a priori contains a democratic ethos, we may instead consider that democracy is found in the ethical way through which people interact.

Pluralism

Pluralism is the view that there is a multiplicity of ways of seeing the world, and all of these ways are legitimate. Conceptually, the opposite of pluralism would be to believe that there is only one true and correct way of understanding the world. Pluralism is an important issue for Villoro for a number of reasons. One of these reasons is

because it was, in part, the absence of a pluralistic sensibility that led the Spanish to dominate and colonize the Indigenous peoples. Currently, mestizos commit a similar mistake insofar as they objectify Indians, even if their intentions are to help them. Villoro believes that the development of a pluralistic sensibility is essential in the process of reaching our freedom, a sense of community, and radical democracy. However, how are we to develop a pluralistic sensibility if we do not already possess it?

Instead of thinking that there is an absolute Truth, we may consider adopting a pragmatic fallibilism, which stipulates that the truth depends on context, and that humans are fallible creatures. Adopting a pragmatic fallibilism entails not believing oneself to be the possessor of an absolute Truth, but instead believing that truth is constructed as we experience life, or as William James puts it – our ideas become verified.⁸⁸ In the process of suspending the belief of an absolute Truth, we also leave behind the arrogance that comes when we believe ourselves to be possessors of this Truth, and this makes us more receptive to the different ways in which others construct their world.

Another way to gain a pluralistic sensibility is through humility. The previous chapter explained Freire's recommendation that teachers approach their students with humility so as to learn from them. Teachers who believe that they possess the Truth, and their job is to teach their ignorant students are neither pluralistic nor humble. Pluralistic teachers acknowledge that each student is a different person with their own personal experiences and ways of seeing the world. This teacher is then able to learn from her students through a dialogical process.

In his book, *Estado Plural, Pluralidad de Culturas*, Villoro writes that during the Spanish conquest, not even the most subversive monks such as Sahagun and De Las Casas had the capacity for humility in the face of the “other.”⁸⁹ Their disposition was already habituated to dominate. For them, only the colonized had to be transformed; they, as colonizers, had no reason to change. In other words, their desire to dominate was prior to any exchange with the “other.” Villoro writes that a pluralist sensibility is only possible if we begin by considering that “reason is not one, but plural, that truth and meaning is not discovered from a privileged vantage point, but that these are accessible through an infinite number of perspectives. That the world can be understood from different paradigms.”⁹⁰ To accomplish this, Villoro explains how we might question the idea that the universe has one center, and instead consider that “in a pluralistic world, any subject is the center.”⁹¹ Our ability to question would open us to the possibility that all cultures are manifestations of the human race and, therefore, there is a common element in all of them, the human element, even in the vast diversity of its manifestations. “To recognize the validity of that which is similar and different to us is to give up any previous idea of dominion; it is to lose all fear and to discover ourselves to be equal and diverse in the eyes of the other.”⁹²

To develop a pluralistic sensibility, Villoro recommends that we extend to others that which we want for ourselves. People who are physically, emotionally, and psychologically healthy are able to establish their own sense of autonomy. In the existential sense, it is only through our autonomous decisions that we can live an authentic life. “Personal autonomy is the ability to choose a life plan and follow it.”⁹³ It

is by extending to others our own sense of autonomy and authenticity that we are able to understand and judge members of other cultures according to their own expressions, on their own terms. Villoro explains how being able to do this entails understanding and judging others according to their own values and objectives, and not according to the values and objectives of our culture. “This is the only way by which the other is understood and properly judged as a subject and not as an object.”⁹⁴ This does not mean that we must accept everything the other does, it simply means that we attempt to “trust him, which means understanding and judging him by his own criteria, without imposing our own.”⁹⁵ For Villoro, if we understand that just as we ourselves have goals and envision future actions that will allow us to continue our life plan, so likewise all human beings feel the need to live an authentic life.⁹⁶ When this realization takes place “the principle of authenticity opens up and along with it the possibility of recognizing the other as a subject.”⁹⁷ This means recognizing and considering others, however different from our culture, as humans who act based on their goals and values to achieve an independent and authentic life. Villoro believes that this was the central challenge in the encounter between the Spanish and Indigenous cultures in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America. This was the challenge that even the most benevolent missionaries were unable to overcome.

How can a pluralistic sensibility help us to understand and connect Indigenism with the version of radical democracy that Villoro develops? First, pluralism and tolerance are complementary concepts, both necessary for a radical democracy. Second, the Indigenous culture is a constitutive element of the Mexican state and culture, but it is

not the only one. Western liberalism in the form of laws and institutions constitutes most of the modern Mexican state. Villoro writes "...the Chiapas uprising... did not seek to subvert democracy, instead it sought its fulfillment. It did not mean the dissolution of the state, but its transformation. It is not against "modernity," but against injustice. For the first time the idea of unifying the two streams that run through the history of Mexico into a new conception of the nation-state became a possibility."⁹⁸ The two currents that Villoro mentions are Western liberalism (in the modern state) and the Indigenous sociopolitical approach. Villoro explains that it is clear that we cannot go back in history. Mexicans have forged a national identity that is neither solely Indigenous nor solely modern mainstream liberal. Even if it were possible, he does not advocate separating the modern state into its Indigenous and modern elements. What Villoro postulates is that we accept the multiplicity of cultures. "In the face of the *homogeneous* nation-state, a possibility opens up: a *pluralistic* nation-state that fits the social reality which consists of a multiplicity of ethnicities, cultures and communities."⁹⁹ According to Villoro, this would be a state in which no one would impose her values or ideas on others. In a radical democracy, the role of the state would be reduced to coordinating and facilitating the projects of local communities as well as suggesting a common direction. As a consequence of the decentralization in its power dynamics, the homogeneous nation state that currently subsumes the Indigenous and other minorities would become more pluralistic. This is so because the local communities would be encouraged to stand on their own instead of assimilating to the mainstream culture, language, and so forth. "The source of power would get increasingly closer to the

autonomous communities that constitute society. Progress towards a plural state is thus a pathway towards a radical democracy.”¹⁰⁰ The acceptance of the plurality of cultures in Mexico would have the same effect that Indigenism intended, namely, to acknowledge the humanity of the Indigenous on their own terms.

The left as a moral stance / lifestyle choice

Doing away with the ideal of utopia also changes what it means for us to belong to the political left. Guillermo Hurtado writes: “...for Luis Villoro, to be a leftist does not mean we have to adopt a particular ideology, but rather to take a moral stance which consists in adopting a disruptive attitude against any oppressive power. This attitude is linked to an epistemic fallibilism which can be described as being anti-dogmatic and to an understanding of reason as being pluralistic and dialogical.”¹⁰¹ Villoro writes that “the political left is not a doctrine, it is a lifestyle choice.”¹⁰² One of the bases of the political left is encouragement of an emancipating behavior when the left is considered as an expression of a worldview, a philosophy in the broad sense of the word. Villoro believes it is useful to distinguish between the left as a way of life and the political left because “the same political doctrine can have a disruptive role in one context and reiterative of a dominating situation in another.”¹⁰³ The function of the left can be paradoxical. This means that in one context, the left may oppose the imposition of a dominating power. However, if the left stops its opposition and instead comes to take the place of power, then its government only makes sense if it is carried out in a way that contributes to the elimination of oppressive power structures. “If the left ends up

imposing its power, then it has forgotten its dissident vocation and establishes a new system of oppression. The left betrays itself and is no longer a political left.”¹⁰⁴ It is, therefore, useful to distinguish between the political left and the left as a value that guides our actions. The left as a value is more than just a political perspective. It is a moral stance and a lifestyle choice that is critical of power and disruptive of oppression in its actions.

Villoro writes that once we distinguish between the political left and the left as a way of life, we may then take another step towards democracy. This step involves recognizing the other even when they are our oppressors. As mentioned above, often while resisting oppression, the oppressed take revenge against their oppressors. This is yet another paradox of the political left – the oppressed becomes the oppressor as they seek and gain their “freedom.” In the struggle against oppression, the oppressed insists that they be regarded as fully human, and that, in a pluralistic sense the culture of the oppressed be acknowledged as legitimate. However, once acknowledged and in a position of power, the previously oppressed may fail to follow their own principles and become intolerant oppressors of their previous oppressors. Villoro argues that the end of domination of one group of people by another will come about only through the complete recognition of others, a recognition that includes their differences. This recognition will come about as a consequence of our attempt to embody some of the ideas we have discussed such as Villoro’s “razón razonable” (pragmatic fallibilism), humility, curiosity, the diffusion of power, and pluralism.

Villoro does not offer an explanation of why so often the previously oppressed often turn into oppressors themselves. An appendix can be found at the end of this project that addresses this issue specifically. Joseph Marshall, a Lakota elder recounts the time he learned about Wounded Knee through his grandfather. Marshall tells us about the sadness he felt over watching his grandfather crying as he told Marshall what had taken place, and the anger Marshall felt over the slaughter of his people at the hands of European Americans. Why do some of us feel anger and seek revenge when others do wrong by us is a question that merits much more thought and research than is available to us at this time. Sadness, or anger and a desire for revenge, are emotions that most human beings experience when we feel others have wronged us. In Freirean terms, Villoro is aware of the master (the internalized impulse to oppress) the oppressed have internalized due to being socialized through oppressive power dynamics. As mentioned, Freire relates how many of his peasant students wanted to own their own land not just to stop being oppressed by their landlord but more so to be able to give orders to their subordinates. Because of the power dynamics experienced by the peasants, they came to believe that being free meant being able to oppress others. In his book *El Poder y El Valor: Fundamentos de una ética política*, Villoro suggests that members of the oppressed, or the political left that is disruptive of power may look to Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. as well as the Zapatistas because they did not seek power for themselves.

If in 1994 they rebelled against their conditions of marginalization and extreme injustice, if they had to use arms to be heard, their attitude differed radically from the old guerrilla movements. They asked for democracy, for peace and justice with dignity. They used weapons so that no one would have to use them later

and immediately chose the path of negotiation and agreements. The Zapatistas are aware that ultimately it is the need to be in a position of power that is responsible for injustices. This is why they declared their objective was not to take power away from the government but rather to wake up civil society against the government's authority. It was not about replacing one oppressive power by another, but to create the conditions for an organized counter-authority that would resist the coercion of the existing power.¹⁰⁵

According to Villoro, the Zapatistas as Gandhi and King understood that we ought to recognize the other, even if they are our oppressor, allow them the rights we demand for ourselves, respect their perspective as we want ours to be respected, and thus allow ourselves to engage the other in a dialogue that may improve our mutual experience.

We hurt ourselves with the mere intention of hurting others. Oppressing or hurting others not only affects them. We also lose our own humanity when we oppress others. Existentially we stop helping others claim their own freedom, and we become oppressors instead. Also, it is inconsistent to subjugate a group of people while claiming to be seeking the liberation of people. This inconsistency, namely using oppressive means to liberate people, may be, in part, the result of a utopian mindset that wishes to change situations categorically instead of focusing on each situation specifically.

Sexism or racism for example, cannot be eliminated by decree. Although there is much value in top-down approaches such as the abolition of slavery, or by means of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, a top-down approach need not be the only approach. It may be complemented by the radically democratic approach that Freire and Villoro propose, so that every individual, through their own experiences, will, or will not come to understand that behaving towards others in sexist or racist ways is not only unethical, but that this behavior ultimately affects those

behaving in sexist or racist ways adversely. Each and all of our interactions are an opportunity to exercise the social change we seek. Villoro explains:

...Means that are inconsistent with our chosen values will not take us to our intended ideal... Each situation requires us to exercise our chosen values. These values do not merely come about at the final ideal stage, they must be present in each of the choices taken, in each situation. Each situation is also a means, a condition for the following situations... The intended ideal is a criterion that must guide every decision, otherwise the final stage will be the realization of a different ideal. There is not a single situation that fully realizes the ideal. Each particular decision, in each situation, must attempt to be faithful to the chosen values. Only thus can our life plan guide a constant progress towards the realization of the chosen ideal.¹⁰⁶

Freire writes that the revolutionary leader is inconsistent. The revolutionary leader rationalizes treating people as objects (avoiding dialogue and manipulating) during the revolution to treat them as subjects once the new regime is in place. Villoro also insists that the end and the means must be consistent. Democracy is not a political system that will come about some day. It is possible for democracy to characterize our relationships and the quality of our interactions.

Liberalism and tolerance

The radical democracy promoted by Villoro is based on the liberal value of tolerance, as well as on cooperation for the good of the community. The radically democratic state that Villoro proposes not only would aim to protect the negative rights of its citizens, but it would also aim to reduce the marginalization and discrimination that exclude so many people from achieving an equality of opportunities.

Regarding tolerance, Villoro writes:

We cannot tolerate intolerance. Doing so would destroy our society itself. By not accepting intolerance, the tolerant model precludes that differences turn into a singular exclusion of the others. Any group that attributes to itself superior and distinctive qualities, either to impose itself on others or to protect itself, would end up rejecting the other groups and would fall outside of the tolerant model. Given that the possibility of such a society requires the equality of all in their capacity to self-determination, any constraint on that freedom, individual or collective, by one group or the state would be exclusive on principle.¹⁰⁷

After establishing that intolerance has no place in a democracy, Villoro contends that a radically democratic community requires more than simply tolerance. We will need to take steps that take us beyond the minimal level of tolerance and into an understanding of the reasons others have regarding their life plan so that we may then help them to realize their goals.

Villoro's radical democracy is not simply accepting to coexist with other human beings or cultures without having anything to do with them. Pluralism and tolerance are necessary elements in a radical democracy, but a radical democracy further implies that we become concerned with the well-being of the members of our community.¹⁰⁸

Likewise, other communities different from ours would not merely tolerate us, but also share our goals. Villoro explains how tolerance as an intercultural and ethical principle implies reciprocity. We need more than tolerance, however, in order to advance towards an egalitarian and fair state where we are able to maintain a sense of unity while accepting our diversity.

We have seen how tolerance is a necessary but not sufficient condition because tolerance respects but does not acknowledge the value of our cultural differences. It is possible for a person to tolerate other peoples and cultures while feeling superior to them. However, this type of tolerance is not helpful. We need the kind of tolerance that

acknowledges the value of cultures and beliefs foreign to ours. This type of tolerance attempts to understand the perspective of the other, and this in turn leads us to the dialogue and collaboration needed to feel a sense of belonging within a community. Villoro, like Freire, believes that it is primarily through the disposition for dialogue and collaboration as well as the economical and sociopolitical reforms suggested in this chapter, that we may be able to advance the democratic project.

Villoro's organic community

Much of Villoro's work was influenced by his interest in Native American culture. When Villoro writes about democracy, he not only has the ancient Greek and modern European democratic models in mind. He actually derives most of his ideas from pre-Columbian, pre-colonization, Native American democracies. According to Villoro, we do not need to look to European models (ancient or modern) for democratic ideals.

Most often, Europeans and North Americans have considered Latin America as a place that is simply not ready for democracy. In his article "Is Latin America Ready for Democracy?" Victor Raul Haya de la Torre argues that with the long history of colonization, feudalism, military dictatorships, one-party dictatorships, and civil wars, most Europeans and North Americans do not often associate Latin Americans with democracy.¹⁰⁹ The fact is, however, that democracy has been present in Latin America in the interpersonal dynamics of Native American associations from the time of the Peruvian theocracies to our modern day Zapatistas. Villoro writes that the Peruvian

ayllu as well as the Aztec and Mayan sub-communities, for example, are examples of how Indigenous people organized themselves socially and politically so that the members of the *ayllu* had reciprocal duties to each other.¹¹⁰ The most powerful people in their hierarchies were the people who were the most helpful. Power was not attributed to individuals due to their material wealth, titles or status. Instead, those who were deemed by the community to be the most powerful were those who *served* the community the most.

How, then, can we reach the harmony between acknowledging the importance of our community, the positive rights required to live with access to equality of opportunity, while at the same time stressing the importance of individual rights and negative liberty? How may we live in such a way that we are neither crushed by the obligations of our community nor (a) exclude others while seeking our own good and (b) lose our connection with a community while we pursue a life plan of our own?

Part of the solution is to recognize that an aggregate of people do not automatically constitute a community. To constitute a community, it is first necessary that individuals desire to be part of it, just as friendship does not automatically result whenever two people come together. To form a friendship, having at least two people is a necessary but not sufficient condition. Villoro writes: “In order for an association to constitute a community we need something more: that each individual assume the willingness to be of service to the community. What constitutes a community is the set of helpful relationships through which each individual gives something of him/herself, and not merely the submission to a common law.”¹¹¹ This something else is the

willingness to give of ourselves either to another person or a group of people. The giving of ourselves, however, is still not enough to form a community. In addition to our willingness to give of ourselves, it is also necessary that the others be willing to receive what we give and to give of themselves - reciprocity.

Moreover, reciprocity has to be qualified. Villoro writes that when individuals agree to give of themselves not so much because they want to give of themselves but out of fear or necessity for survival, then although they are being reciprocal, their reciprocity does not lead to a sense of community. A community is not constituted by individuals who give of themselves out of fear, or because they are subject to custom, or to social conventions of what a community is, or because of simple inertia.

When we see ourselves as part of a community, what affects our community affects us personally, and by pursuing our own good we benefit the whole of the community. When individuals give freely of themselves to a community, this allows the realization of their character/being/individuality/self in a much more profound level than liberalism which merely requires for others to leave us alone. This does not mean that individuals must deny or suppress their personal identity. Each individual person will be able to "flourish more fully if he includes among his aims to contribute to the good of the whole to which he freely chooses to belong."¹¹² While the main value of liberalism is respect for others' freedom / tolerance, the communal value is not only to respect the freedom of others but also "to contribute to the freedom of others through mutual service."¹¹³ It is important to note, however, that Villoro is not naïve about the dangers of erring too much on the side of communitarian values. While the risk of liberalism is

the exclusion of people and a type of competition that forbids us to see ourselves in others, the risk the communal values is that "the service becomes coercion, and the free gift, an imposed expectation. The person is crushed by the same social relationships that were meant to give a deeper meaning to her life. This is because a community exists only where each personal service to others is at the same time, a step towards achieving a fuller personal life."¹¹⁴ In the same way that the concept of utopia is a dangerous misconception insofar as it confuses the ideal with a particular place and time in history instead of allowing the ideal to guide our actions, Villoro writes that justice does not mean simply following established rules. It is possible for justice to be found in the way we relate to others.

If justice is primarily a way of life, it must be manifested in concrete lived experiences. Justice must be manifested through our actions and relationships in our society, with the people with whom we come in contact. Each one of these relationships is a particular relationship; they do not necessarily repeat themselves in other situations, and they are not necessarily universally valid.¹¹⁵

Love, justice, freedom, friendship, democracy are not simply social ideals that we dream some day to achieve. Love, justice, freedom, friendship, and democracy may be the qualities that characterize our relationships with others. Villoro writes that the best virtue is friendship, even more so than justice.

... contrary to what Aristotle said before, justice is not the main virtue. There is another, higher virtue: friendship (philia). The relationship between justice and friendship in Aristotle is ambiguous. For him friendship is the "highest form of justice," but at the same time, if friendship is in place then there is no need of justice. "Where men are friends, justice is not needed, while if men are just, they still have the need of friendship."¹¹⁶

Friendship is the characteristic quality of a community. It is precisely when we give of ourselves and those who receive from us are reciprocal, that the bond of friendship and a

community is formed among individuals. Their problems become our problems, and their joys also become ours. We develop as human beings through our most intimate communities and we see the world through the eyes of our friends. For better or for worse, it is through others that we become who we are.

CHAPTER V

LESSONS LEARNED

You cannot keep a man down without staying down with him. - Steve Biko

The goal of this chapter is to further examine the implications and lessons from the work and thought of Freire and Villoro. As we have seen, they both articulate similar theories of what democracy might entail. Their theories compliment each other, and one of the goals of this project has been to bring their work together so that we, as Western liberals living within liberal democratic institutions, can learn the practical consequences of their ideas. Freire and Villoro are relevant to a formulation of democracy because they do not underestimate the complexity and the extent of oppression. Both of them emphasize the importance of our local experience as being the place that presents us with challenges and questions, but also provides us with the material with which we have to work, the solutions and inspiration, as well as where we are able to make decisions guided by our ideals. Also, given that liberal democratic institutions do not necessarily lead to democratic interactions among people, mainstream liberal democracy has the potential of becoming more robust by incorporating conceptions of democracy that emphasize the importance of democratic experiences.

This chapter is divided in three sections. The first section addresses the issues that Freire and Villoro have in common and what we as Western liberals can learn from them. The second section develops several possible criticisms of Freire's and Villoro's

approach. The last section is a concise statement of what one may say in defense of Freire's and Villoro's approach to democracy.

What Villoro and Freire share

After having spelled out the context, thought, and work of Freire and Villoro in the previous chapters, our goal now is to make explicit the ideas and motivations that drove the thought and work of Freire and Villoro. The following paragraphs will elaborate on their criticism of liberal institutions with reference to freedom, the relationship we have to our ideals, the importance of our immediate experience, the language that Freire and Villoro use, and their concern for authenticity.

Both Freire and Villoro demonstrated through their work that democratic institutions do not necessarily entail democratic interactions among those who constitute such institutions. By means of their analysis of freedom, it became evident that liberal democracies that emphasize positive and negative rights and private property as the main bases for personal freedom lack an understanding of the interpersonal dynamics of individuals. The liberal notion of freedom relates primarily to the right of individuals to own property as well as their negative and positive rights. These are certainly necessary for the flourishing of most human beings, but they do not take us far or deep enough into the realm of actual human interactions. Freire's and Villoro's analysis of freedom differs from the liberal conceptions of freedom because they both examine the effects that lack of freedom and oppressive power dynamics have had on the consciousness of those who have undergone these experiences. Consequently, both Freire and Villoro

suggest a number of ways to go beyond private property and legal guarantees in our understanding of freedom.

Through his work, Freire noticed that for many people, not just peasants, but also for many educated people such as teachers, social workers, scientists, and policy makers as well, freedom means the freedom to oppress others. Because of the way in which many of us are socialized, we equate being in a position of power with being free. We equate having to follow someone else's orders as not being free. The valuable insight here is that by being socialized within institutions that are hierarchical and oppressive in nature, we internalize these patterns of oppression. Some examples of how we internalize our oppressors discussed throughout this project have been those of Brazilian peasants wanting to own property to then be able to oppress others, or Mexican nationals becoming border patrol agents once they gain legal residency status in the U.S.

Villoro's analysis of freedom is also valuable. He noticed that the liberal impetus for freedom is often based on the fear of the overwhelming power the community may have over individuals. As a result, freedom sought from a place of fear actually undermines the development of individuals because they may see others and their relationships as a threat to their freedom, rather than as opportunities for their development. As explained in the previous chapter, the pursuit of freedom from a place of fear also creates a chasm in the community when it becomes clear that not everyone has the same opportunities to pursue their life plan.

Villoro noticed that, though legitimate and important, the liberal impetus for freedom yields a freedom that is exclusive. The exclusive results of liberalism are

manifested in two different ways, the first at the individual level, and the second at the community level. At the individual level, liberalism may result in the exclusion of individuals from others in their personal development. On the community level, liberalism works well for those who have the wherewithal to pursue their lives' goals. However, the segment of the population who do not have the means to pursue their lives' goals do not have access to as many opportunities as those for whom resources are not an issue to consider when developing their life plan. The result of liberalism is the exclusion of a segment of the population from others so that the sense of community is broken and a division is felt.

Furthermore, when we pursue freedom from oppressive situations out of fear, we are in effect bringing about experiences characterized by fear. One might question whether creating lived experiences characterized by fear amounts to the experience of freedom we sought, and clearly, they do not. One might make the claim that even if individuals have their positive and negative rights enforced, as long as they seek to further their freedom because of fear of oppressive situations, they are not experiencing freedom. Instead, they are experiencing fear. As mentioned, there are many different interpretations of what freedom may mean. Here, the point is that freedom is more than freedom from oppressive situations, it is freedom from the fear of oppression. For instance, many of us when in crisis, may preemptively act out of fear, so that we go to great lengths to prepare for this crisis out of fear. At the national level, many countries preemptively act out of fear that other nations are out to get them, and they excessively build up their defenses in anticipation of an attack. An alternative to seeking freedom

from oppressive situations out of fear is simply to seek freedom out positive expectations for the future. Nations could approach other nations with the intention of helping each other through resources that each have so that both would benefit from their interaction. As long as we seek our freedom out of fear we are not experiencing a sense of freedom. Instead, what we experience is fear that controls our behavior so that we assure our safety as best as we can.

Besides an analysis of freedom, both Freire and Villoro want ideals such as justice and democracy to be more than mere theoretical abstractions, rules, or policies. Both believe that individuals can actually experience democracy rather than merely living within “democratic” institutions. For instance, justice is not merely something that others owe us. The quality of justice may also be experienced by us insofar as we ourselves aim to be just in our dealings with others. In other words, justice is not something external to our personal relationships. It is not something that is merely institutional.

Both Freire and Villoro emphasize that our local experience and relationships provide us with challenging situations that in turn make us search for different ways of solving the challenges. Their approach to democracy sees the local experience as being both where problems arise but also where our solutions emerge. Our local experience is where we practice addressing issues in ways that allow us and others to grow and ultimately to become the people we wish to become, as well as develop the relationships we wish to enjoy. The challenges our local experiences and relationships bring us, challenging as they may be, are also the opportunities we can take to become whom we

wish to become. In this sense, not only our positive interactions, but every aspect of our experience is part of our development as human beings.

Insofar as we contribute to the quality of our local experiences by our ideals, we are in effect bringing our ideals to life. Villoro emphasizes that the ideals we hold are a vision that we can enjoy now and not something that will come about in some distant future. We do not need to wait until some utopian future to live in a society where people will relate to each other in helpful ways. As long as it is within our power to behave in ways that are helpful and that bring out feelings of solidarity with others, then it is up to us to embrace helpfulness as a value that guides our choices and actions. We could choose instead to behave in unhelpful competitive ways that create experiences and ways of relating to others that are unhelpful and competitive, yet hope that some day in the future maybe all of us will be helpful to each other. However, our ideals and our behavior ought to be consistent. If we hope some day to gain a healthy sense of perspective and develop a sense of humor that allows us to laugh at our own worries and our own taking of ourselves too seriously, then the best way to bring these about is to begin laughing at ourselves in our present situation. Likewise, if we strive to live in a democratic society, then our own behavior must be democratic within our local experiences.

This is not to deny that there are times when it is not simply within our power to bring about the types of relationships and communities we seek. This was the case with the peasants with whom Freire worked. Both Freire and Villoro are aware that there are times when changes in individuals and their relationships are not possible without wider

social-environmental changes. The quality of our local experiences, relationships, and communities depends in part on the macro-institutional level.

Both Freire and Villoro are also concerned with our becoming aware of our innermost intentions. They write in terms of conscientização (Freire) and of becoming aware (Villoro). Both philosophers encourage us to become aware of our internalized oppressors, of how we relate to ourselves and to each other, of the reasons why we choose to become members of communities, or seek to leave behind relationships or communities. Both thinkers encourage us to become aware of the difference between us simply reacting to others and to situations, as opposed to being truly aware of our patterns of behavior and of our choices. They both believe that conscientização / awareness will free us from the factors that keep us stuck in unhealthy relationships and oppressive dynamics. For instance, Freire worked in a way that allowed his students to understand the power of their own agency as well as of the way they perceived themselves and others, so that his students would know both their own worth and question the reasons for their own actions, both positive and negative actions. Likewise Villoro's hope is that we will stop relating to each other on the basis of fear, obligation, necessity, or simple inertia.

Freire and Villoro are both very much concerned with authentic transformations. Freire's concern is with authentic conscientização and Villoro is concerned with people creating their experiences deliberately. Because of their concern with authenticity, both encourage the creation of the conditions necessary for conscientização to take place. Both argue in favor of horizontal power structures where the people in power facilitate

the conscientização of others, where those in power do not dictate or seek to control.

Both believe that if we create the conditions for conscientização to take place, this will in turn create organic and radically democratic interactions between individuals, their relationships, their communities and their societies by means of balanced policies and laws, and by their everyday interactions with others.

We learn from Freire and Villoro the importance of our becoming aware of our capacity to contribute to the quality of our relationships, communities, societies, institutions, and governments. The process of conscientização begins with the crucial step of us becoming aware of our own oppression, our oppressive history. Oftentimes, as Freire and Villoro have pointed out, when the oppressed become aware of their oppression, they react by trying to control or oppress those who either directly oppressed them, or have benefited from their oppression. Freire explains that this reactivity may be an internalized master who wants to gain power, to be right, or to oppress those who oppressed us. Freire tells us that insofar as we react from fear, resentment, or anger, that which we fear or resent is in effect guiding our actions, and thus keeping us in bondage. Further along in the process of conscientização, the oppressed become aware of their agency and do not merely react, but ultimately overcome the oppressed or oppressor consciousness.

Freire and Villoro are both critical of similar issues regarding most of the Western type institutions that have been imposed on colonized America. Besides being critical of the liberal assumptions regarding freedom, tolerance, and negative and positive rights, they both are critical of any type of imposed, theoretical, and ideological

answers. This means that answers by revolutionary leaders, policies developed by government agencies, development plans by social research groups to help communities, or any other type of solution developed by someone else than the individual or group being affected are likely to fail. For freedom and answers to be authentic and to have a good chance of leading to better working solutions, solutions must come from the individuals asking the questions, or from within the communities who ask the questions.

Relatedly, Freire and Villoro are critical of the lack of balance that our theories and our practices often exhibit. On one hand, philosophers often assume that we can somehow get it right if only we keep theorizing, and there is something to this. Often, however, theoretical exercises assume that by virtue of theorizing alone we will be able to make progress, or that once we figure out the “right” system we will come up with the “right” way to relate to each other and we can then create and implement policies based on our research. On the other hand, it is also often the case that individual people and communities become the objects of those who intend to liberate them. Just as we treasure our freedom and resist the imposition of others, so likewise others value their freedom and resist our imposition on them. We want to have the freedom to ask our own questions, questions important to us at this moment in our lives, and we want to have the freedom to formulate answers to our questions that ultimately can only come from us, that can only work for us. Although they could be correct, solutions that claim to be the “correct” way to frame our problem, and solutions imposed from without by anyone claiming to understand our experience and know better than ourselves, assume too much, are non-democratic, and are unlikely to contribute to our process of

conscientização. Regardless of how well meaning the framed problems and answers from without, they are external, have not come from us and are unlikely to work for us. The change of consciousness must be authentic, which means individuals must ask their own questions and formulate responses to them. An individual's awareness cannot be imposed from without otherwise it is not authentic. It is only through our autonomous decisions that we can live an authentic life.

As we have seen through the work of Freire and Villoro, learning, understanding, and growing is a process that must happen on an individual basis. We as teachers, policy makers, social workers, and others can work to create conditions for people to flourish, but we cannot get inside people's heads and have them come to these conclusions. This is something individuals must do on their own. We want to allow one another to come to the temporary "conclusions" we need to come into in our process of becoming more human.

There is a parallel here between the individual and the community. With the individuals and with communities, they can best frame their own problems, and they can best reach solutions that are both organic and authentic. Freire and Villoro are both sensitive to paternalism and good intentions, and they drew this lesson from their experience with the effects of colonization. We may be trying to help others with our best intentions, but we must respect those we are trying to help because the process of coming into one's freedom is an individual process and freedom cannot be imposed. Otherwise the experience becomes a type of colonization by those who believe themselves to be in possession of a one and only truth.

Both Freire and Villoro seek simply to create the conditions whereby individuals may come to the conclusions they must come to on their own. This requires sociopolitical reforms, and both thinkers argue for, and encourage, institutional, legal, economic, social, and political reforms. Each one of us is at a different place in the process of conscientização and the best we can do for each other is to create the conditions for our coming into awareness. We cannot become aware for others, and others cannot make us reach awareness. We cannot create the awareness of another any less than we can pull up a plant in order to make it grow. The process must be undergone by the particular person or plant. We can help the plant, however, by nourishing its soil, watering it and placing it in adequate sunlight. Similarly, although we cannot go through the process of conscientização for each other, we can help others by holding a space open for others to come into it. For instance, teachers are indeed in privileged positions. This is not because they are above their students in terms of knowledge, but because teachers are in a position to see their students the way the students wish to see themselves, and insofar as teachers sees students the way students wish to see themselves, students come to see themselves this way too. It is a privilege to be able to do this for others. The teacher-student analogy is not specific to pedagogy, but holds true for all of our relationships. Although the process of conscientização ultimately is undergone by individuals, all of us require the appropriate conditions for the process to take place, the most important of which are our local communities and relationships.

Freire's and Villoro's concerns

As is evident from the Western European perspective, the Western European philosophers can see themselves in much of Freire's and Villoro's work. Freire and Villoro both speak the language of Marxism, liberalism, existentialism, and phenomenology, but Freire and Villoro are not merely repeating the same Western philosophical canon. Because both Freire and Villoro worked in countries colonized by Europeans, their thought was shaped to a very large degree by European philosophical traditions. However, it is *precisely* because of Freire's and Villoro's experience with colonization that studying Freire and Villoro is valuable.

The predicament of the colonized is that due to their having been colonized, their native culture, language, religion and philosophies were either oppressed or ultimately done away with, the colonized are forced by the colonizer to adopt the colonizer's culture, language, religion and philosophies so that the colonized are left having to express themselves through the culture, language, religion and philosophies of the colonizers. Although the colonizer took it upon himself to oppress the originality of the colonized, when the colonized speaks, the colonizer dismisses the colonized expression as unoriginal and thus unimportant, unworthy of his time.

It is precisely because Freire and Villoro's thought was shaped out of a colonized consciousness that their ideas provide the mainstream Western liberal democratic theories and Western philosophical canon with crucial criticisms regarding the assumptions they hold. These assumptions have gone unquestioned, and could not have been questioned by Western liberals from their Western liberal perspective.

Freire and Villoro are both concerned with vertical power dynamics such as colonialism and a banking model of pedagogy. Both philosophers take different approaches and work with different groups of people, but both come to similar conclusions regarding knowledge and tolerance. As we have seen, Freire worked with peasants and Villoro with Mexican Indians, different groups of people but similar insofar as both were products of a colonized consciousness. Both groups were the result of the desire to obtain more power, of a lack of tolerance, a lack of a pluralist sensibility, a lack of intellectual and cultural curiosity, and a lack of humility on the part of colonizers who thought themselves to be the possessors of the legitimate culture and of the correct perspective. For these reasons, both Freire and Villoro argue for the absolutely necessary condition of tolerance in our dealings with one another.

Furthermore, suppose that instead of criticizing them for their power seeking, lack of pluralism, and lack of curiosity, we give the colonizers the benefit of the doubt and assume that they meant to help the colonized. It is certainly possible, and perhaps even likely that there were individuals among the colonizers who honestly believed that their behavior was justified, that they actually were *helping* the Black and Indian slaves by providing them with the alternative to change their ways by civilizing them, and by giving them access to the true religion. If this is the case, then this is yet another reason why it is worthwhile to understand Freire's and Villoro's criticisms of the Western liberals' assumptions regarding freedom and tolerance. Freire and Villoro point out that at the end of the day, our behavior towards either our friends, other members of our communities, or our students when we try to "fix" them is in essence the same as the

behavior of colonizers towards the colonized. This behavior is characterized by someone assuming that they have access to the correct way of being and thinking, which others must accept and emulate for their own good.

Even the few cases where the colonizers had the best of intentions should be subject to criticism from the point of view of Freire and Villoro. Their criticisms and suggestions are a way for us to move beyond oppressive power dynamics inherited from colonization, and gradually move towards decolonized consciousness, horizontal power dynamics, and organic communities.

Freire tells us that to tolerate another is an ethical and political duty, which, however, does not mean that we necessarily agree with those whose views we tolerate, nor does it mean our own beliefs are wrong.

If you ask me: Paulo what is being in the world that calls your own attention to you? I would say to you that I am a curious being. I have been a curious being. But in a certain moment in the process of being curious in order to understand the others, I discover that I have to create in myself a certain virtue without which it is difficult for me to understand the others - - the virtue of tolerance. It is through the exercise of tolerance that I discover the rich possibility of doing things and learning different things with different people. Being tolerant is not a question of being naïve. On the contrary it is a *duty* to be tolerant, an ethical, an historical, a political duty, but it does not demand from me to lose my personality.¹¹⁷

For Freire, to tolerate another is to create the space between individuals where dialogue may take place, where we may learn from them, and where they may learn from us. The conditions for genuine dialogue to take place require that we are comfortable with and confident in our beliefs and ourselves so that even if others disagree with us, we do not interpret their disagreement to mean that we are wrong. As explained in Chapter three, dialogue is biophilic and allows people and situations to be what they may become.

People who engage each other in genuine dialogue acknowledge that life and individuals ought to be seen as open-ended and in a creative process. Tolerance for Villoro is necessary but far from being sufficient. We want people not only to merely tolerate (put up with) each other, we want to get to the point where we allow and help each other to flourish. As Villoro points out, it is our becoming invested in helping each other achieve our life plan that gives meaning and purpose to our own lives, as well as that which actually creates a sense of community.

It bears repeating that although the process of conscientização ultimately takes place on an individual level, it is nonetheless a communal process. We help each other by creating conditions for conscientização to take place. Freire's preferred example is the role of teachers as facilitators, while Villoro argues for the diffusion of power dynamics throughout all of our social institutions.

Criticisms of Freire's and Villoro's democratic approach

We need to state some of the common criticisms leveled against the general approach of radical democracy, as well as some of my own criticisms of Freire's and Villoro's version of radical democracy. Freire's and Villoro's approach is similar to other 20th century approaches to democracy that are "radical" in so far as the general approach of radical democracy intends to (1) show implicit oppressive power dynamics often ignored when seeking democratic consensus and (2) claims that democracy requires more than liberal institutions, laws, policies, rights, and tolerance. The general approach of radical democracy (like other approaches before it: feminism,

republicanism, Dewey's version of democracy)¹¹⁸ has sought to move beyond the traditional "thinness" conceptions of liberal democracy. As mentioned in the introduction to this study, a thick conception, such as the word "unjust" has a more substantial connotation than a thin conception, which lacks content such as the phrase "morally wrong." It seems appropriate that in evaluating the Freire-Villoro version of radical democracy, we subject it to some of the most common and recent criticisms that have been raised against other recent and Western attempts to entertain a more robust or radical conception of democracy. Do we find in Freire's and Villoro's approach ways to answer these criticisms? If this is the case, then this might be a reason why those sympathetic to reconstruct democracy as an ideal (and away from the traditional liberal view), might want to consider the work of Villoro and Freire.

In his book *Pragmatism as Transition: Historicity and Hope in James, Dewey and Rorty*, Colin Koopman accuses radical democracy of being downright passé and provincial: "Dewey too often conceptualized democracy in terms of what might be called the old village morality of the communitarian democrat: 'The heart and final guarantee of democracy is in free gatherings of neighbors on the street corner...'. The quote is from Dewey's *The Public and Its Problems* (1939b, LW 14.227), but its quaint evocations suggest that it could just as well have been a caption to a Norman Rockwell frontispiece for *The Saturday Evening Post*."¹¹⁹ Another of Koopman's criticisms has to do with the scope of our democratic interactions:

An experience-centric democratic theory, to sum up, too readily lends itself to substantive metaphors and concepts reminiscent of a communitarianism not sufficiently impressed with liberal proceduralism... *We should be all for localism if it means pluralistically working outward from where we find ourselves without*

resorting to utopianism or giving in to dystopianism. But if localism means instead focusing our attention on the experiential immediacies of community life, then it is better avoided. The point should not be to develop a democratic community in which we all feel like neighbors to one another. The point should be to develop a plurality of polities in which we lessen relations of oppression and increase relations of inclusion day by day, whether we be next-door neighbors or distant strangers whose eyes shall never meet.¹²⁰

Koopman's criticism of Dewey is relevant to this project because Freire and Villoro, like Dewey, argue for the type of democracy that favors the local experience, local communities and immediate relationships. Koopman's criticism that it is not enough for our immediate interactions to be characterized by a democratic quality, because we want democracy to extend beyond our local experience and include everyone, including the "distant strangers whose eyes [we] shall never meet." How can we have a wider approach to democracy instead of the narrow immediate context that is emphasized by the Freire/Villoro vision of democracy? Koopman's criticisms are important and will be addressed shortly.

Besides Koopman's criticisms of an experiential approach to democracy, Shannon Sullivan and Charlene Seigfried have also developed similar criticisms of democracy as experience. In her article "From the Foreign to the Familiar: Confronting Dewey Confronting Racial Prejudice," Sullivan develops the criticism that an experiential approach to democracy as a transformation of our habits is too simple and naïve regarding the psychology of the oppressed and the oppressors.¹²¹ Sullivan is not alone in being doubtful of the potential of a radical approach to democracy. In her article, "Socializing Democracy: Jane Addams and John Dewey," Charlene Seigfried makes the argument that an experiential approach to democracy lacks suspicion of the

motives of others. It underestimates the extent and depth of racism, misogyny in both individuals and institutions, and it neglects an account of the more irrational sides of human understanding and use of power.¹²²

A personal criticism of Villoro is that more work can be done to define what Villoro calls “adjustable equilibrium.”¹²³ Although Villoro addresses this idea as best as he can and points to the EZLN as an actual example of his version of radical democracy, more work can be done to understand the details of the diffusion of power Villoro has in mind. How exactly are we going to have people command, hold the bulk of the decision making power, and have the central government be there to serve the function of serving the people, while at the same time maintaining some autonomy and control over foreign policy, the military, etc.?

Possible responses to criticisms

Regarding Koopman’s criticism that radical democracy is too passé and provincial and that what we need instead of friendly neighbor interactions is to “develop a plurality of polities in which we lessen relations of oppression and increase relations of inclusion,” maybe there is a better way of framing the problem. We must strive to work beyond the local so that even people who we never meet are affected in a positive manner. We must wonder, however, if Koopman is framing the problem as a false dichotomy, as though the issue is one that forces us to choose between the local (passé and provincial, as Koopman refers to it), or the international (plurality of polities).

It does not seem that a commitment to the starting point or democratic amelioration suggested by Freire and Villoro forces us to choose between mutually exclusive options. We want both. Koopman frames the issue of democracy as being mutually exclusive; either we have face to face democratic experiences and relationships (what he deems to be old fashioned and too village like) *or* we extend democracy to everyone even if we shall never meet them. In response we might consider that the issue does not have to be framed as a mutually exclusive problem. If anyone ever experiences the effects of democracy, it is always you or me, in the local, in the immediate here and now, and not in some abstract space or by an abstract person “whose eyes [we] shall never meet.” It is important that we work locally but also retain and develop liberal institutions and procedures. We definitely want to keep the right to vote, to private property, and other rights available to us. Villoro writes: “...the point is not to destroy the institutions but rather to make them function and serve the purpose they were meant to serve, namely – help people realize their own freedom.”¹²⁴ The fact that Villoro’s vision of democracy is critical of liberal institutions and assumptions does not mean that we want to do away with, or forget about these institutions. Instead, what we come to see is that the institutions and policies by themselves are far from being enough for a democracy to be the case. We want to make our institutions more robust by our radically democratic interactions.

Instead of framing the issue as one that is mutually exclusive, we want to reach for both sides of the issue. We want to hold on to the idea that if we ever experience the effects of democratic institutions, it is always by specific persons in a particular context.

While at the same time noting that Freire's and Villoro's version of radical democracy describes how a radically democratic framework would work from the ground up to reach increasingly outwards, and why radical democracy is consistent insofar as the method and goal are the same. Consistency is of utmost importance. It is in our best interests to keep the legal guarantees, but also to acknowledge that these are not enough for actual democratic interactions to be the case.

Villoro's adjustable equilibrium is his approach for not framing the issue of democracy as a false dichotomy. In other words, the goal to be reached is not simply legal guarantees, and not simply a democratic experience in the local context, but more importantly a balance between both of these. Rather than the central government having a monopoly on power, there would be an adjustable equilibrium between the central government and the local communities. "A radical democracy would...transmit power over to where people are situated, in their concrete social networks, the places where they live and work."¹²⁵

While Freire generalizes his pedagogical approach to social reform and explains why democratic means must be used to achieve democratic ends. Our goals and methods must be consistent insofar as these take human beings to be subjects (not objects) and the makers of their own history. "Attempting to liberate the oppressed without their reflective participation in the act of liberation is to treat them as objects which must be saved from a burning building; it is to lead them into the populist pitfall and transform them into masses which can be manipulated. At all stages of their

liberation, the oppressed must see themselves as women and men engaged in the ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human.”¹²⁶

Legal guarantees will not be enough for democratic interactions if these are top-down policies not informed or developed by people experiencing problems. Instead, top-down policies are a type of colonizing, humanitarian, necrophilic approach that do not help people help themselves. However, we want to continue thinking about and developing liberal theories and policies that help to create democratic spaces where authentic conscientização, growth and democratic interactions may take place. We want to secure certain institutions and legal guarantees such as human and civil rights, for example, but we also want to realize that developing policies are not enough for people to flourish. We want to get to the point where each one of us comes further along in the process of conscientização and takes our daily interactions as opportunities to create the type of experiences characterized by democratic qualities such as mutual help, respect, curiosity, learning, nurturing. It is important for us to acknowledge that we cannot do for others what they are unwilling to do for themselves. We cannot make them free, educate them, become aware / conscientização for them. If extending democratic interactions is our goal, then we need *both* liberal democratic policies and institutions and radically democratic interactions. More importantly, in order to reach out to the person “whose eyes [we] shall never meet,” we have to begin with ourselves and in our immediate context.

To illustrate, I will use an example from my experience as a student and teacher, but this type of interaction holds true outside of the student-teacher relationships. I have

been deeply inspired both in my personal and professional life by the interactions I have had with some of my teachers. These interactions have shaped me as a person, and because of these experiences I seek to approach my students with the same care and enthusiasm as my teachers approached me. I have lost touch with some of my most inspiring teachers, some of them have passed away, and so they do not know that their behavior towards me years ago continues to color the present interactions I now have with my own students. I suspect that if my students appreciate the quality of the interactions they and I have, they will in turn reach for the qualities that characterize our interactions (a sense of humor, enthusiasm, light-heartedness, care), and continue to create interactions of this nature with other people, in time possibly with their own students, and with even more time, their students with their students. Of course, the same is true for oppressive interactions. Many of us who have not reached the minimal levels of conscientização recreate the oppressive interactions we experienced as students and we justify our behavior by thinking that “I had to prove myself to my teachers and now that I am your teacher you must prove yourself to me.” My point is that our actions and choices in our immediate experience do affect those “whose eyes [we] shall never meet.” In fact, our choices now will affect people who have yet to be born, the consequences of our choices extend beyond our immediate experience infinitely outward, but they are always made by a specific person, in a particular context, here and now. This is just one example that has emphasized the personal relationship aspect of the local experience. For Villoro, the community also is part of the local experience that has the potential to extend increasingly outwards.

To further address Koopman's criticism that although we may experience democratic interactions within our local communities and relationships, these democratic interactions do not, Koopman claims, go beyond the local to reach those whose eyes we shall never meet. Again, his concern is valid, and in addition to what has been argued, we may look at Freire's own work as an example of how the local has extended to the international. Freire worked with particular individuals in classrooms where he aimed to create the most appropriate conditions for democratic interactions to take place. Freire emphasized the importance of the local experience, and yet his work has transcended the favelas in Recife where he began. Freire's project to bring about the conditions whereby humans may become more human has been taken up in countries all over the world such as Finland, Malta, Spain, South Africa, the U.S., Mexico, Chile, Germany, and South Korea to name a few.¹²⁷ Freire's work and emphasis on the local has reached us even though few of us had the good fortune to meet Freire and look him in the eye.

Regarding Shannon Sullivan's and Charlene Seigfried's criticism that (A) an experiential approach to democracy as a transformation of our habits is too simple and naïve regarding the psychology of the oppressed and the oppressors, and that (B) an experiential approach to democracy lacks suspicion of the motives of others, the work of Freire deals with these issues explicitly and directly.

Freire has demonstrated how the psychology of the oppressed and the oppressors is far from being simple, and through his work, he has shown that not all experiential approaches to democracy have to be naïve, and it is in part due to this reason that Freire stresses the process of conscientização as being central to the transformation of our

habits. In response to Sullivan's criticism, it is necessary that individual people begin the process of conscientização by becoming aware of our habits of thinking and behavior so that we can then be critical of these habits and patterns. Also, the process of conscientização is *a process*:

Not only have we been unfinished, but we have made ourselves capable of knowing ourselves as such. Here, an opportunity is open for us to become immersed in a permanent search. One of the roots of education, which makes it specifically human, lies in the radicalness of an inconclusion that is perceived as such. The permanence of education also lies in the constant character of the search, perceived as necessary... In order for finiteness, which implies a process, a claim for education, it is necessary that the being involved becomes aware of it. Consciousness of one's inconclusiveness makes that being educable... *Consciousness of*, and intentionality of consciousness does not end with rationality. Consciousness about the world, which implies consciousness about myself in the world, with it and with others, which also implies our ability to realize the world, to understand it, is not limited to a rationalistic experience. This consciousness is a totality - reason, feelings, emotions, desires; my body, conscious of the world and myself, seizes the world toward which it has an intention... *My conscious body's* constant exercise in releasing itself *even to* or *from* my consciousness intending toward the world brings or contains in itself a certain quality of life that, in the human existence, becomes more intense and richer. I am referring to the need for *relational* experience on the level of *existence* and of *interactions*, the level of *living*.¹²⁸

The process of conscientização as described by Freire is one where we become increasingly self-aware, aware of ourselves, of our patterns of thinking, behavior, the feelings within our bodies, and of our own agency within our relationships and social institutions.

In response to Siegfried's criticism that an experiential approach to democracy lacks suspicion of the motives of others, again Freire explores the concept of trust and love, which he calls a biophilic approach to life, and the opposite, that of fear and control, which he calls a necrophilic approach to life. Ultimately both Villoro and Freire

invite us to become increasingly aware, or conscientização of our intentions by means of our interactions with others in our local communities.

Siegfried's criticism is that an experiential approach to democracy lacks suspicion of the motives of others. However, as I have explained in chapter three of this project, Freire distinguishes between the individuals and the oppressors housed within them. He believes it is in our best interests to trust others because when we do, we are not only trusting others, we are trusting life and allowing ourselves to have the experience of trust which is in turn more likely to bring about democratic interactions than otherwise. We could distrust the intentions of others, as Siegfried suggests, but this not only will bring about the undemocratic experience of distrust, but by doing so we also are bringing about future experiences of a similar quality. Freire's suggestion is that we trust the person but distrust the oppressor within, which addresses Siegfried's worry suggesting that we contribute to create a present experience of trust while at the same time acknowledging the possibility of our and others oppressive habits taking over our behavior at times. Simply put, Freire encourages us to pre-emptively give people the benefit of the doubt, while at the same time not be surprised if they betray our trust or behave in ways that fall short of our expectations for them. For example, as teachers we encourage an open dialogue among our students, and yet every once in a while a student feels the need to put other students, or us down. We pre-emptively trust that we will all benefit from an open dialogue while at the same time being aware of the possibility that some might display less than democratic behavior.

Ultimately both Freire and Villoro invite us to ask ourselves whether we are

forming institutions to stay away from commitments out of fear and distrust. Freire points to the oppressor within who feels the need to control others out of fear and distrust of others and of life itself, as well as leaders, teachers, and social workers who do not trust that the people they are helping could possibly know how to help themselves. Villoro addresses how our fear and distrust of each other is exacerbated by liberal institutions that focus on individual well-being at the expense of the community. He also explains how “communities” that are made up of people who are afraid of not forming part of these relationships, are not communities in the true sense of the word because the people who constitute them are not giving of themselves nor reciprocating freely. Both philosophers point to the possibility of relating to one another from a place of pre-emptive trust, and both point to possibilities that this pre-emptive trust may bring about.

Perhaps the best way to explain to others the value of creating democratic interactions is through our own lived example, the lived experience we share with them. This is not necessarily easy, but actions *do* speak louder than words. It is through our experience that we show others the possibilities of optimal interactions and where the rubber meets the road. Ultimately, the way we relate to others is the gauge of how well our institutions are doing in terms of freedom, democracy, tolerance, and a sense of community.

Regarding the criticism of Villoro’s adjustable equilibrium between the central government and the local communities, more work can be done in describing the specifics of how this would take place. Villoro gives many suggestions, which can be

further researched and developed. Generally, Villoro recommends, first, that radical democracy guide us in our dealings with others, and second, to seek the diffusion of power so that civil society would take an assertive role relative to the central government. By means of radical democracy, demands can be made in our institutions so that the positive rights of people come to the fore.

Regarding radical democracy as a personal guide, first, everyone can do what they can through their relationships with others in their work, family, and friends. Regarding the second recommendation, although the central government of Mexico has tried to repress rather than to take seriously the EZLN, Villoro suggests for us to study its history, organization, and manner of carrying out their plans, specifically their Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle. Villoro believes we can learn from the traditional associations of Indigenous peoples. “In an economy of reciprocity, the person who is the most useful is the one with the most prestige. Power does not belong to the one who owns the most. Private property and imposed power is established when an economy of exchange replaces an economy of reciprocity.”¹²⁹ Unlike many who would deem Indigenous traditions as primitive and not worth analyzing, Villoro has taken Indigenous traditions as a resource for current democratic practices. The Indigenous system of reciprocity gives power to people not because of how much material wealth or social status they have, but rather by their ability to be helpful.

The goal is to find out how civil society can be organized to take into account what particular communities need, and to take steps for each community to use state institutions to perform for the benefit of communities. This is in contrast to our current

democratic systems where it is often the case that the few in power use their position to benefit their own group. Both Freire and Villoro believe that we must develop interactions where it is clear that everyone has something valuable to contribute, and where those in power serve the function of facilitating rather than imposing or commanding for the betterment of all.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Not wanting to over simplify the issue, it seems that some of us can go through life unaware of our political circumstances, of our own bodies, of our own thoughts, of the way we feel, of the things we say to others. As long as we are not aware of these, we cannot do anything much about things that may harm us, and others. For example, if we are unaware of our anger, then we might say very hurtful things to others. If we are unaware of our fear, we might hurt other people while seeking the things we think will make us feel safe. If we are unaware of our own agency, as some of Freire's students, then in a way, we have not even begun living. On the other hand, maybe some of us have met people who seem to enjoy a natural state of well-being. It does not seem to matter what happens to them, they always seem to be well-grounded. They always seem to know what to say, or how to best react to the circumstances in ways that are helpful to themselves and to the people around them.

As Paulo Freire came to find out, when we are socialized in institutions that have oppressive power dynamics we internalize these oppressive power dynamics. So Freire calls for conscientização, first he calls for political awareness, but in his latter work, he calls for awareness of our body, our emotions, and our circumstances. Villoro's assessment of the organic community, and the questions he raises regarding what makes for a community between people are invaluable insights.

Summary

As has been shown, liberal democracies with their emphasis on positive and negative rights, and private property as the main bases for personal freedom lack an understanding of the interpersonal dynamics of individuals. Freire and Villoro are relevant to any formulation of democracy because they do not underestimate the complexity nor the extent of oppression. Freire's and Villoro's analysis of freedom differs from the liberal conceptions of freedom because they both examine the effects that lack of freedom and oppressive power dynamics have had on the consciousness of those who have undergone these experiences. Freire and Villoro suggest a number of ways to enable people through consistent and authentic ways that go beyond private property and legal guarantees. Both of them argue in favor of horizontal power structures where those in power do not dictate or seek to control others, but rather aim to serve them. They emphasize the importance of the immediate experience both as being the place that gives us the material with which we have to work, as well as the place where we are able to make decisions guided by our ideals. There are valuable resources and insights in Freire and Villoro, two neglected non-Anglo-Western thinkers worth considering in inquiry about better conceptions of democracy.

Also, Freire and Villoro advocate awareness to different degrees, and this is very important for at least two reasons 1) so that we do the least amount of damage to ourselves and to others, and 2) so that we acknowledge our own power in helping to create the experiences, relationships and communities we seek, instead of expecting for these experiences, relationships and communities to somehow happen to us. Radical

democracy is empowering of individuals because we are not subject to democracy being brought to us by legal guarantees, representatives, or policies. Instead we realize that democracy is up to us in the way we approach situations and people.

Recommendations

Still more work remains to be done. Theoretically, we have only begun to put Freire and Villoro in dialogue with each other and with the Western tradition. In terms of Freire, his concept of pre-emptive trust and how this affects the subsequent experiences we help create with others is rich with possibilities. In terms of Villoro, much more work can be done regarding his adjustable equilibrium. How exactly will it work? Who will determine who gets what resources and power, and how much of them? Also, more work can be done on the Native American social dynamics, and their sense of democracy as experience. More work can also be done on how and why people who have been socialized in liberal democracies would consider and possibly learn from the Native American social values.

But far more important than the theoretical work is the work each one of us can take on with each and every single one of our interactions. Each and every one of our interactions, both with ourselves as well as with others, are opportunities for us to bring about the ideals we strive towards. If solidarity is an ideal that guides us, we can ultimately only experience this solidarity in a concrete situation with other human beings. It is possible to love our ideals and to even develop a relationship with them, even if the relationship is one-sided. But it is ultimately with other human beings in

concrete situations, who, with all of our inconsistencies and contradictions are far from perfect and ideal, that the passion we feel for our ideals comes through in the love we feel for other people.

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- [⁴⁵] Ibid. 46.
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- [⁴⁷] Finn, Patrick J. *Literacy With An Attitude: Educating Working-Class Children in Their Own Self-Interest*. New York: SUNY Press, 2009.
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- [⁵⁰] Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 67.
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- [⁹²] Ibid. 168.
- [⁹³] Ibid. 92.
- [⁹⁴] Ibid. 124.
- [⁹⁵] Ibid. 124.
- [⁹⁶] This is a generalization in Villoro's part, namely, that all human beings feel the need to live an authentic life, but it is a generalization in the sake of what is plural

and specific about each one of us. Here Villoro is making an empirical generalization about humans, not a claim that there is a universal human nature behind our cultural differences.

[⁹⁷] Ibid. 124.

[⁹⁸] Ibid. 47.

[⁹⁹] Ibid. 47.

[¹⁰⁰] Ibid. 48.

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[¹⁰³] Ibid. 131.

[¹⁰⁴] Ibid. 132.

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[¹⁰⁶] Ibid. 136.

[¹⁰⁷] Ibid. 311.

[¹⁰⁸] One may ask if we are assuming that there are shared goals and a reciprocal wish for the well-being of others. Here, I think that a community *is* a number of people who come together because they share concerns, goals or care for each other. Still, one could further push the question and ask if this is also the case across communities. I think it is fine to assume that there are shared goals among people. Pluralism does not necessarily entail a zero-sum game where my goals compete with yours and it comes down to either mine or yours. Pluralism means, in this context, that there are more than one legitimate way of being, more than one legitimate goal, but among these different goals we can still come together and not merely tolerate each other (put up with each other), but see how we can help each other through our differences -- how our differences can help all of us. This is also the case across communities that have very different and on the surface, incompatible cultures and goals. Please see Pieter Le Roux and Vincent Maphai, "The Mount Fleur Scenarios: What Will South Africa Be Like in the Year 2001?" *Deeper News* 7:7 -22.

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[¹¹¹] Ibid. 361.

[¹¹²] Villoro, *De la libertad a la comunidad*, 26.

[¹¹³] Ibid. 26.

[¹¹⁴] Ibid. 27.

[¹¹⁵] Villoro. *Los retos de la sociedad por venir*, 47.

[¹¹⁶] Ibid. 55.

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APPENDIX

JOSEPH MARSHALL INTERVIEW

Tami Simon: ...Today my guest is Joseph Marshall. Joseph Marshall is a teacher, historian, writer, story teller, and a Lakota craftsman. He was born on the Rosebud Sioux Indian Reservation in South Dakota and raised in a traditional native household by his maternal grandparents. Now as a full-time writer, he has published nine nonfiction works, three novels, a collection of short stories and essays, and has written several screenplays. Through Sounds True, he has released the audio learning programs Keep Going, Quiet Thunder, and a book that includes a CD of stories called, Walking With Grandfather: The Wisdom of Lakota Elders.

In this episode of Insights at the Edge, Joseph and I spoke about the wisdom that he received from his Lakota elders and how it applies to our modern lifestyle. We also talked about the sense of guilt and shame that many Euro-Americans—which is the way that Joseph refers to non-Native Americans—feel when considering the tragedies of our early American history. We also talked about the many of the central teachings of the Lakota people and finally, a story about the power of awareness and looking back. Here is my very illuminating conversation with Joseph Marshall.

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TS: Now there are just a couple of questions, Joseph, that I would like to ask you. They are things that I've always wanted to ask a true Native American lineage holder, a true Native American elder. I hope that it's okay. They are a little risky but here we go! What I notice sometimes is that I feel a personal sense of guilt, sometimes, when I am with or when I speak to someone who is of Native American heritage. Guilt for what you call the "Euro-Americans"—a great label—did in coming over to this country a couple hundred years ago. I'm curious what you would say to that—to someone like me or other people who maybe have a sense of . . . maybe it's guilt, or shame for what our collective group of Euro-Americans did, the kinds of tragedies that they created.

JM: It's an interesting question and statement. Yes, I have encountered that. People have asked me that. They declare, "Well, I do feel guilty." I get emails a lot. I get letters from people who say that very thing that you just did—that there is a sense of guilt for how history turned out, how the interaction between our different groups of people turned out. First of all, there's no denying history. There is a reality to history that we all should be aware of for two reasons, not so much to feel guilty but just to have an awareness of it because the premise, the axiom, that those who forget history are doomed to repeat it is very, very true. On our part, we don't want those things to happen to anyone and we certainly don't want those things to happen to us. So along with feelings of guilt, right behind it and linked with it inextricably should be a sense of realistic awareness of how history really came down and why some of the things happened the way they did and why they happened all and what the attitudes were that were behind those actions.

Someone asked me, "Why do you want us to feel guilty?" I never ever said anywhere—I never ever wrote anywhere—that I want non-native people to feel guilty. What I would rather have is awareness: awareness about history so that we learn from it so that we do not treat each other and other people the same way that Euro-Americans treated native people—and wolves as well. If you want to study what happened to native people, then study what happened to wolves. If you want to know what happened to wolves, study what happened to native people. It was that sense of entitlement and sense of superiority that drove all of that and those are the kinds of things, that perhaps as Americans overall, with which we are facing the world at large—with that sense of superiority and entitlement. I think that some of us have not learned from our own history. In place of that guilt, that's what I would rather have—awareness.

History is a difficult thing. It is a difficult thing to remember and know exactly what happened. It's a difficult thing to own up to, and for native people like me, it's often a difficult thing to talk about because sometimes it's not easy to keep the anger at bay and the bitterness at bay, although I try. I try to present history in a way that is a learning tool. Not a bloody stump to hit somebody over the head with, but a learning tool. And when one uses it as a learning tool, then guilt is not the consequence. Awareness should be. And that's really what I would want—that awareness so that we don't do the same stupid, awful thing again.

TS: In that spirit, Joseph, I know that our conversation here is not going to go on for days and weeks but I'm curious, what aspects of the history—of the non-native people coming over to this country and what occurred—what aspects of that history do you think are important to really emphasize that might not be in people's awareness?

JM: What aspects of it? I think all of us function or operate or live from what our values are and what our attitudes are. And I think that Euro-Americans came to this continent with that sense of superiority, that sense that they were a better people, a more moral and enlightened people. And I think that there was one Pope, and I can't remember exactly which Pope it was, who issued an edict that it was acceptable to kill native people because they did not have souls like white people did, like Christian people did. When you have those kinds of attitudes, certainly you're going to act from those foundations, from those attitudes.

Certainly the guns and the liquor and the technology that Euro-Americans had did their share of damage, but without the attitudes driving them, we probably would not have had the kind of damage that guns cause. It is attitudes and how they drive people to do what they do. The whole thing of Manifest Destiny was that "we're entitled, we're supposed to come here and do this, it is our right." If you look around and if you listen to some of the things that are happening today in politics and corporate America, there is still that attitude of Manifest Destiny. And that's dangerous because that causes you to override the basic values of fairness and compassion and balance that all should be driving us instead. It's attitude that is the root cause of a lot of difficult things.

TS: You mentioned that in yourself, you do your best to keep anger and bitterness at bay, especially when seeing not only what has happened in history but as you mentioned, what we currently see happening in our world in terms of people still holding those kinds of attitudes. How do you do that? How do you keep anger and bitterness at bay? How do you personally do that?

JM: Well, it's finding a certain amount of balance, and understanding that anger is a destructive force, it's a destructive emotion. Maybe there is such a thing as righteous anger. Sometimes it is necessary for anger to cause us to be courageous when something goes wrong. But anger in and of itself when it is driven by ignorance is a very destructive force. We need to learn, or at least I'm still trying to learn, that anger is not the best way to teach a lesson—to teach a positive lesson. But having said that, the anger is still there when you consider, when one considers the kinds of stories that emerge from history.

I remember my grandfather saying, because I asked him when I was probably 14 or 15. In school we were studying Western American history, and there was a brief mention of what had happened at Wounded Knee in 1890. My grandfather was born in 1888, so he was only two when that happened. But of course, his parents were alive so I asked what he knew about that event. And he told me what his parents and other people had told him in the years after that had happened and what their reaction was to it, which was basically an enormous amount of shock and sadness that this sort of thing would

happen. He told me the story of what he knew about Wounded Knee and then he ended it by singing an honoring song for all of the people who died there.

I saw my grandfather cry maybe two or three times in my entire lifetime, and that was one of the moments that he cried. When he talked about what happened at Wounded Knee, I saw how it affected him. And when you see when that kind of event affects people, then you feel a certain amount of pity and empathy, certainly, but then you become angry because you're one of those people that it happened to. It was your kind of people that suffered with what happened at Wounded Knee. So it's not easy to keep the anger at bay but still, we have to realize that anger is not a constructive force. That is what I remember day in and day out: that it's best to teach with positive emotion rather than with negative emotion and anger is one of those things. Balance is important. I keep it in its own compartment, aside from everything else I do.

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TS: Joseph, we started our conversation and I was speaking with you about what you know about Lakota wisdom in terms of dealing with difficult times and the art of perseverance. I started with that because it is an aspect of your work that I'm quite interested in and that I think is very important. But I'm curious, beyond that theme, what you feel are the central teachings of the Lakota people that we really need in our world today—that you really want make sure people are aware of. As in, "Here's what the Lakota can offer our troubled world."

JM: Interesting question. The answer probably requires a lot more wisdom than I have at my beck and call at the moment. But what I understand and perceive about what we Lakota stand for—and there are many things that we stand for—but one of the things that we do is that we accept the reality of what is. There is a saying in our language, [which translates to] "that's the way things are." And if you take that simple phrase and look around, there are some realities that exist in our everyday lives, in our immediate environment, but also in the larger environment around us. Some of those realities the Lakota perceived way back when: the sun comes up and it goes down; it comes up in a certain direction and it always goes down in a certain place; and there are other realities as well—there are circles and cycles to life. The seasons run in a cycle and the moon is round. The sun is round—that is a circle. And these are the kinds of realities that are a part of our existence. We don't deny them. We accept them for what they are because we can't change them.

And the biggest reality is about life itself. It has a beginning and it has an ending and it is a cycle itself. We're born, we're infants, then we are children, then we are adults, and then we are elders—that is the cycle of our life. Now I'm at the point where I'm at the beginning of being an elder so I'm into that last phase of my life and that's the way it is. Having heard other people talk about it, especially old people—that this is way things are—it enables me to accept that reality about life and about my life.

The one thing that I think is one of the most important things is how we relate to other forms of life. Out of that, we understand the reality that we, as human beings, are no better or no worse than any other form of life. Whether it is a shrub or a bird or a

snake or any other form of life, we are equal because all of us are born into this life: we live our lives, fulfill our purposes, and then we end our lives. And no creature, no form of life—especially us humans—cannot circumvent that one reality. That's what makes us all equal. We don't regard ourselves as having dominion. We don't regard ourselves as being the one species that is in charge of all other species. We are no more and no less and that is the one reality that I think the world needs to understand in relationship to the Earth. Most of our cultures do not accept that—they look at it from a different viewpoint. That has an impact on, certainly, how we treat one another, how we treat other forms of life, and how we treat the Earth. I think if there is one thing that other people can learn from us is that aspect of reality. We accept that reality in a humble way and we act on that reality from that knowledge that we have of it. So those are some of the things that we Lakota can offer to the world and that's the way I look at it.

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TS: Joseph, thank you so much for this honest and honorable conversation. You have such humility and directness. I really appreciate it so much.

JM: Well, thank you Tami for this great and wonderful opportunity. It was so nice to have this conversation.

TS: Joseph Marshall is the author of the book that also includes a CD of stories with Sounds True called, *Walking with Grandfather: the Wisdom of Lakota Elders*. He has

also created an audio program Keep Going: The Art of Perseverance and a six-session audio-learning course called Quiet Thunder: The Wisdom of Crazy Horse.

Joseph, again, wonderful to be with you. Thank you.

JM: Thank you, Tami.¹³⁰

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