

‘The Intellectual as Transgressor’: Richard Shaull and Latin American Pedagogical Thinking

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Historical existence is a continuous struggle toward liberation, in the midst of which man is time and again surprised by new possibilities of meaning and fulfillment – in individual and collective life (Shaull, 1967: 216)

Abstract: The article analyses the contribution of Richard Shaull (1919-2002), a protestant North American theologian and a pioneer of Theology of Liberation, to Latin American pedagogical thinking. As a missionary in Colombia and Brazil, between 1942 and 1962, he was profoundly touched by Latin American reality and, at the same time, left important imprints on a generation of young people and since then maintained a dialogue with intellectuals that are a reference in Latin American pedagogy: Orlando Fals Borda (1925-2008), Paulo Freire (1921-1996) and Rubem Alves (1933-2014). Places will be presented where the biographies of these four intellectuals meet, as well as marks of transgression of their thinking regarding knowledge and vision of society.

Keywords: Richard Shaull, Paulo Freire, Rubem Alves, Orlando Fals Borda, Latin American pedagogy

Introduction

In academic activity, as in life in general, only a few of the many threads weaving through work and life appear. A text, whether it be a book or the entire work, is the tip of an iceberg that keeps many secrets and mysteries, not only for the reader, but also for the author him or herself. These forgotten connections, however, remain alive in memory and may emerge at any time in consciousness and inspire new thoughts and new practices. This is the *idée-force* that encourages me to write this paper about a North American thinker and three Latin American thinkers who shared the dream of a more just world and a worthy life for all people.

As an introduction, a few explanations or warnings are appropriate regarding the choices made. I met Richard Shaull as a professor at the Princeton Theological Seminary in the United States in the 1970s, when, at an advanced seminar he discussed the topic of *fringe movements* in Latin America, and their impact on the institutions. Only later did I slowly grasp the power of the metaphor of the fringe to think about the role of popular education as an experience that, in Latin America, produced a vigorous pedagogical movement. It was at the same time as the now classical works *Pedagogy of the oppressed* by Paulo Freire and *Theology of Liberation* by Gustavo Gutiérrez were published. In economics, the theory of dependence supported on the center-periphery metaphor, showed how the

underdevelopment of peripheral countries is the by-product of the development of central countries in the same capitalist system.

Shaul had a profound identification with the movements of revolutionary change and resistance to the military dictatorships that began to appear in Latin America, and throughout his academic career and pastoral activity he kept up this interest and commitment, in his own country and in other regions where the ecumenical culture extended beyond the churches.¹ Although he carried out his academic career based on theology, his approach was not limited to his field. His effort to get to know the world of his time and read the signs of change in this world led him to other fields of knowledge such as sociology, philosophy and pedagogy.

In the first part of the article I weave a few connections between the biographies of the three authors, acknowledging that there is much more to be said. These are dense biographies, mostly already known individually, but that also open up to new dialogues and approaches. Orlando Fals Borda is internationally known as one of the creators of participatory action research (PAR); the other is Paulo Freire, whose thinking especially during the period when he was connected to the World Council of Churches, is pervaded by Theology of Liberation; and Rubem Alves, known for his irreverence and metaphoric language, who considers Shaul one of his intellectual mentors.

In the second part, I discuss a few topics that indicate convergence between these very different authors, each with their own personality and academic profile. The convergences take place around the transgressor spirit of which Shaul talked. This is not, therefore, a matter of seeking or justifying influences in a simplified cause and effect relation, but of identifying places where they meet to think about the society of their time and take action.

Encounters, partnerships and complicity

When I visited the library of the Princeton Theological Seminary I went, as customary, to a computer to begin a search for the name of Richard Shaul as author. An attentive employee noticed that I might be needing some help and when she was informed of what I was looking for said that there was another collection for that. She then brought no less than six large cardboard boxes where there were contents ranging from diaries with the record of professional and personal appointments, to drafts of papers, some published, others not; some still written on a typewriter with the traditional revisions using a pen. In this text I am preferentially using the material that I found there, not as an exotic curiosity, but to bring to light aspects of our history stored in it.

Shaul and Freire: Already in the first box I found a major reason to continue the search. I knew that Richard Shaul had written the preface for the English language edition of *Pedagogy of the oppressed* by Paulo Freire², but it was important to find records of the

¹ The ecumenical dimension of Richard Shaul's work cannot be discussed in this article. For this subject I suggest the PhD dissertation of Fábio Henrique de Abreu *Do protestantismo de missão ao protestantismo social: história da militância ecumênica no Brasil* (2015), under the supervision of Zwinglio Mota Dias. The reader will find important information about the relations of Shaul with the World Council of Churches in Geneva, with ISAL (Igreja e Sociedade na América Latina-Church and Society in Latin America) and with CEDI (Centro Ecumênico de Documentação e Informação-Ecumenical Center of Documentation and Information), which later became the Ação Educativa- Educational Action.

² *Pedagogy of the oppressed* was published by the publisher Herder and Herder (New York), in 1970, the same year it was published in Portuguese by Editora Paz e Terra (Rio de Janeiro). The book by Gustavo Gutierrez, *Teología de la liberación*, was published in Spanish in 1971, and in English in 1973.

dialogue of the publication process. In a letter written in Santiago de Chile and dated September 11, 1968, Paulo Freire writes by hand, informing that in January of the next year he would be in New York for a meeting promoted by the *Catholic InterAmerican Cooperation Program* (CICOP), and that on the occasion he would like to meet with Shaull to 'chat about topics of mutual interest'. The letter mentions a training seminar with evangelical groups from 10 countries in Latin America and another one scheduled with Brazilian theologians: 'Next month, probably, I will have here a group of Brazilian Catholic theologians who have just presented an excellent document at an international congress about teaching catechism (I do not like this concept) in Colombia. I would like to exchange ideas with you about all of these things'. The letter ends with references to a certain complicity between two exiles, one of them in his own country after being expelled from Brazil, and another in a borrowed country: 'Since I know that you are occupied, I write you in advance to find out whether it would be possible for us to see each other, after the CICOP meeting ends. Awaiting your news, please receive a fraternal embrace from your friend and admirer (Paulo Freire)'.

The content of this letter reveals, beyond personal admiration, the involvement in progressive sectors of the churches, with the movement of resistance to dictatorships, respectively, of the transformation of their societies. These were movements inside the churches of the North and South, Evangelical (Protestant) and Catholic, uniting around issues that affected the society of their time. Richard Shaull answered a week later, on September 18, in a letter written in English.

The letter clearly indicates that the relationship of friendship between the two extended into the intellectual field. Shaull writes:

My dear friend Paulo Freire: Your good letter which arrived yesterday served to perturb my conscience and to remind me how delinquent I have been in responding to you. Your exciting letter of some months ago arrived here and I read it with great interest. Your discussion of the significance of the reality of oppressor-oppressed in the educational process fascinated me and immediately suggested a number of new thoughts, for which I am grateful.³

The dialogue continues in a letter of February 17, 1969, in which Shaull thanks Freire for his presence in Philadelphia, where it was possible 'to get to know your recent work, and to feel the stimulus of your thought'. He shares that he holds weekly meetings with a very unusual group of young teachers to discuss the content of the new book. He also informs that the negotiations for the publication of *Pedagogy of the oppressed* in English are going very well. Herder and Herder are very interested and so are other publishers and soon he would get in touch again with a specific proposal. The letter ends: 'With warmest personal regards, and thanks for all that you have done for us while you were here, I remain, Sincerely yours (Richard Shaull)'.

Thus one comes to the preface that Shaull (1972: 11) writes for *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Already in the first paragraph he records what motivated the approach between the author and the writer of the preface, between the educator and the theologian: 'Education is once again a subversive force.' Referring to several of the many authors, with different theoretical shades, Shaull concludes: 'He has made use of the insights of these men to develop a perspective of education which is authentically his own and which seeks to

³ In Shaull's file, the letter to Freire which he referred to was not found. It is perceived, however, that Freire was seeking interlocutions about topics of his new book .

respond to the concrete realities of Latin America.' And in a grave tone he denounces the sterility of large part of academic work:

Fed up as I am with the abstractness and sterility of so much intellectual work in academic circles today, I am excited by the process of reflection which is set in a thoroughly historical context, which is carried on in the midst of a struggle to create a new social order and thus represents a unity of theory and *praxis*. (Shaull 1972, 12)

He points out the relevance of the book for the North American context, especially for the struggles of the blacks, the Latino migrants and the young. Also the imminent danger that technological society will transform people into objects programming all of them to conform with the logic of the system. The culture of silence went beyond geographical and ideological frontiers.

Shaull and Rubem Alves

No less revealing were the findings regarding the relationship between Richard Shaull and Rubem Alves, one of the most instigating and restless thinkers of his generation. This relationship is well described in the biography of Rubem Alves by Gonçalo Junior (2015: 153-156). He tells how the arrival of a young professor who had been expelled from Colombia as subversive, created 'confusion' in the seminary, due to his revolutionary ideas. Beyond innovative theological ideas, Shaull organized a group of students who, inspired by the experience of the worker-priests in France developed a project in the factories of Vila Anastácio, in São Paulo. Rubem was among them.

In the obituary published in the *Correio Popular of Campinas* on November 10, 2002 Rubem Alves tells that what intrigued and delighted in this new professor was that he did not show any interests in things pertaining to Heaven, but concerned himself with the realities of people on Earth. This was the fundamental lesson of theology: 'The problem of Heaven, God has already solved for us; there is nothing that we have to do. Since the problem of Heaven has been solved, we are free to take care of Earth, which is our destiny...' This view is clearly reflected in the thesis defended by Rubem Alves at the Princeton Theological Seminary, published under the title *A theology of human hope* (published in Brazil as *Da esperança (On Hope)*).

'Dick Shaull taught me to think.' That is how Rubem Alves summarizes what he learned from Shaull. He tells how, after a test, he went to ask why he had only received a 9.0, when in his opinion he had deserved a 10, because he had written everything the professor had said. And the answer, unexpected for the self-confident student: 'That is the very reason. You only repeated my thoughts. Reading your test I learned nothing. I expected to find your thinking in the test...' Shaull helped shake forever after the certainties of this young seminarian who, at the death of this mentor and friend, wrote about himself:

Whoever has already encountered truths, no longer looks for them. Certainties then rock intelligence to sleep. It is tranquilizing to know that one possesses truths. [...] I was so convinced of my future path that I had even enrolled in a school where certainties and prohibitions are taught, a seminary, because I wished to lead souls along the path I was following. [...] Then, the unexpected happened. A man appeared in my path, walking the other way. Astonished, I asked myself if he did not realize that he was walking in the wrong direction. Then we approached, stood before each

other, and I looked well into his eyes, and saw reflected there as in a mirror, a world that I had never seen, the world that was behind me, the world that I was fleeing in search of heaven. (Alves, 2002)

The other world which opened itself was a world without certainties and prohibitions, a world where there were horizons, possibilities, directions, freedom. 'And that is how I have gone through life, without certainties and prohibitions... All because of that man's gaze.'

Shaull and Fals Borda

Although I did not find copies of an exchange of letters between Richard Shaull and Orlando Fals Borda in the archive, it is very likely that the mark of Shaull's thinking and acting was as strong or stronger in his life than in that of Rubem Alves. In his book of memoirs, Shaull refers to the outstanding Colombian sociologist who produced important research on the violence in Colombia. He mentions that 'in 1950 Orlando Fals Borda was a young university student and he was the director of the choir at the church where I was a pastor'. (Shaull, 2003: 66)

In several autobiographic writings Shaull refers to his pastoral effort in working with young people in the Presbyterian communities of Colombia where he worked, Barranquilla and Bogotá:

My major attention focused on the young people in the Presbyterian churches. I invited them to go with me to the slums and rural areas, to take part in programs of literacy, lay education and evangelism. I was heartened by their response; at the same time I slowly began to realize that our efforts were of little value. Only fundamental structural changes would improve the lot of the dispossessed; and yet the whole liberal 'democratic' political system functioned to preserve and legitimate the status quo. I was deeply disturbed when I had to leave Colombia in 1950. I also sensed that I had reached the end of the road. (s/d - a: 5)

It is in Fals Borda's testimony that the relationship with Shaull becomes clearest. He says that he was not only the conductor of the church choir, but also director of the Presbyterian Youth Center (CJP Centro Juvenil Presbiteriano) in Barranquilla. He recalls the pastor with these words: 'The church pastor was Richard Shaull who would later be one of the initiators of theology of liberation.... He has a very distinct concept of the pastor, and gave this social, youthful dimension to the CPJ' (Fals Borda 2006, 57). A great friendship with Shaull remained, which extended to Bogotá where Shaull was pastor and Fals Borda began his career as a sociologist, and was once more invited to conduct the church choir. Both met again in Geneva, when Fals Borda had already left the university and was working at the United Nations. The topic chosen, 'Subversion and development in Latin America', according to him, was premonitory, because it represented the attempt to focus on subversion from a positive viewpoint, against the negativity assigned to the concept by common sense.

Transgression: its meanings and manifestations

Among the alternatives to discuss the thinking of Richard Shaull and place him in a dialogue with Paulo Freire, Orlando Fals Borda and Rubem Alves, I chose the idea of transgression.

The etymology of the word itself helps us construct the scope of the arguments presented below. The verb *to transgress*, formed by the Latin verb *gredir* (to go, to march) and by the prefix *trans* (beyond, through) signals a movement that may have several meanings or understandings, and can also take on different forms, depending on the historical and social context. As the point of departure we take key topics of Richard Shaull's thinking to then establish a few relations that will seem rather evident to readers who are familiar with the three interlocutors selected, and which unfortunately cannot be further discussed because they are outside the scope of this article.

In the sermon "The Intellectual as transgressor" given by Shaull on March 3, 1968 at the Princeton Theological Seminary we have a good synthesis to begin our discussion.⁴ In this sermon he cites an interview given by Régis Debray, a young French philosopher who had been sentenced to 30 years in prison in Bolivia because of his involvement with the guerrillas. In this interview Debray says that 'he who aspires to be an intellectual should be a revolutionary, because every true intellectual tries to recreate the world in terms of ideas.' Speaking amid the student movement which was taking over universities, Shaull states that this new generation of students helped see that intellectual effort is not worthwhile if it contents itself with less than recreating the world. As a theologian, he seeks in the stories, myths and symbols of Christianity the elements to undertake life and history as a pilgrimage in search of new forms of human experience in new social orders.

In the abovementioned sermon he explores three examples to relate these stories, myths and symbols to the present situation. The first of them is that intellectual vitality is associated with radical iconoclasy. Creative thinking depends on the intellectual having the freedom to destroy idols and denying the order of things 'as they are'. In other passages he argues, theologically, that the radicalness of human action is directly related, paradoxically, to *radical transcendency*, in other words, to know that the construction of society is a task for men and women liberated from (or sentenced to?) living without absolutes, which belong to another sphere, only accessible in signs of human action itself. According to him 'the Kingdom of God is always in a state of tension with any social and political order, exposing and judging their dehumanizing elements' (Shaull, s/d -b). There are times in history when the crisis of the institutions and the respective revolutionary struggle may coincide with the humanizing will of divine providence in the world.

The second aspect emphasized in the sermon is the Messianic character of Judeo-Christian symbols. As even today, the idea of Messianism had a dubious if not negative connotation. Shaull is aware of this and explains that the original force of the concept of Messianism consists in focusing on human beings not as they are, but as they could become through their efforts to create a new future. This Messianic or Utopian vision, characteristic of communities that aim to build a new future, was to a great extent absent in the intellectual world.

Finally, Shaull highlights the image of death and resurrection as a parameter to understand societies. Modern liberalism, on which democracies are sustained, is spending its energies to ensure the status quo and doing all it can to escape from death. The metaphor of death and resurrection is thought to be affirming the need for a disposition to die in order to allow something new to arise.

⁴ For an analysis of the Theology of Richard Shaull and his contribution to theology in Brazil, I refer to the book *Fé e compromisso*, by Eduardo Galasso Faria (2002).

And I would further contend that our world today very much needs a new generation of men and women who will approach the intellectual task in this spirit, who will have no hesitation in getting rid of the unburied dead in the realm of ideas, and will submit their minds and lives to the type of experience and discipline that opens the possibility for creative thoughts on new frontiers.

These force-ideas are strongly present in the thinking of these three authors and of a generation of Latin American intellectuals who in their own way dared transgress. I now underscore a few aspects of the life and work of these Latin American academics, where the transgression referred to by Richard Shaull is present, around two topics in the relation with knowledge and in the relation with the vision of society.

Transgression and knowledge

Transgression begins 'at home', with oneself and one's work. Rubem Alves expresses this very strongly and ironically in his *Estórias de quem gosta de ensinar* (Stories of who likes to teach) (1984a). Suffice it to see the title of some of them: "The 'know-all' technicians", "The feeding habits of science" and "Prostitutes and Madonnas." In one of them, "The vultures and the thrushes", the vultures, birds wearing academic gowns but without any penchant for singing, decide to become great singers and for this purpose they open schools where they bestow a degree and a hierarchy on initiates in their singing, even if they are out of tune and completely charmless. At this time the forest is invaded by a multitude of birds with their beautiful voices and different songs. Thwarted in their desire to control the singing, they decide to expel from the forest the birds who sang without permission. 'The Moral is: In a country where vultures have a degree, no thrush is heard singing.' This is the denunciation of the monopoly of knowledge that science cannot arrogate for itself. This absolutization of technical and scientific knowledge, despite all advances of technology, means the atrophy of the capacity to relate with the world and with others. In terms of education, he will say, school operates the miracle upside down. It receives children of flesh and blood transforming them into wooden puppets. It is the story of "*Pinóquio às avessas*" ("Pinocchio the wrong way round") (1984a: 9). Rubem Alves explored this multidimensionality of knowledge in his work, in which he combined language in the best classic academic style, as in *Protestantismo e repressão* (*Protestantism and repression*) (1979) with texts that mix stories and poems, as in *O poeta, o guerreiro e o profeta* (*The poet, the warrior and the prophet*) (1992) and *A festa de Maria* (*Mary's feast*) (1997).

In Orlando Fals Borda transgression takes on a more explicitly sociopolitical character, although it agrees with many criticisms of the science taught at schools and universities, as denounced by Rubem Alves. Fals Borda, the colleague of Camilo Torres in creating the Faculty of Sociology at the National University in Bogotá, discovers in his practice that the references that he had been taught in Europe and in the United States, with a positivistic functional line were of no use to him as tools of transformation in Colombian society, especially to deal with the problem of violence. 'One talks about the social fact, the social problem, facts. Already one talks about facts it is not very trustworthy, it is limited. A fact may be positive or negative. A fact is analyzed and measured, it is a matter of understanding and that is that' (Fals Borda 2006, 71).

That is how he and his Colombian team develop a research proposal that became known as *Investigación Acción Participativa* (Participatory Action-Research) (IAP), combining classical action-research with an expanded notion of participation, both in methodological

terms and in terms of political radicality. The traditional subject – object relationship between researchers and ‘researchees’ is broken up, and popular knowledge is acknowledged as something valid and people as able to participate in interpreting their world. The classical academic discourse is seen as tautological and unable or insufficient to produce knowledge that will lead to creating alternatives that will not come from erudite books but from the action of those who seek change. The rigidity of university led Fals Borda to abandon his position as professor and researcher, to which he returned after 18 years.

The transgressing perspective of Paulo Freire is similar to that of Orlando Fals Borda at least in two senses: a) in valuing popular knowledge not only as the point of departure to enter erudite or scientific culture, but as having its own legitimacy, which can be problematized just like scientific knowledge; b) in building the capacity of segments of the historically excluded population to become an active part of the society in which they are integrated in a subaltern, when not degrading form, from the point of view of conditions of citizenship and humanity. The transgression for which Freire was punished with an exile that lasted 15 years consisted of unveiling the non-neutrality of education and uniting learning literacy with other possibilities of reading the world. Poet Thiago de Mello (*in* Freire 1980: 27) captured the movement of awareness building feared by the status quo in a masterful manner in his “Canção para os fonemas da Alegria” (Song to the phonemes of joy). According to the poet, phonemes:

These are magic signs that blossom / a constellation of sunflowers turning/ in circles of love that suddenly/ break out like a flower on the house floor.

Sometimes there is not even a house: it is only the floor/, but on the floor who now reigns is a different /man who has just been born.

Because joining pieces of words/ slowly he joins together clay and dew/sadness and bread, yoke and hummingbirds,

And ends up by joining his own life / in his chest that is split and split again / when finally he discovers in a flash twice divided/ That the world is also his [...]

As Paulo Freire will explain in other passages, it is the movement of the word to the world, and from the world to the word, where words are not learned mechanically, but in their relationship with life experience and life context. That is why literacy is then seen as a political act and an act of knowledge whose subject is the ‘educatee’ (Freire 1982, 22). It is the learning of these *words pregnant* with the world that represents transgression in a society where, at the time of the pioneering experiences at the beginning of the 1960s, reading was the privilege of approximately half of the population, and reading transformed into a way of telling one’s world the privilege of an even smaller group.

Transgression and society: rupture and transitions

In 1965 Richard Shaull published an article titled ‘Uma perspectiva cristã do desenvolvimento histórico e social’ (A Christian perspective of historical and social development) in which he defines development as a historical process ‘which represents an effort to create favorable conditions for human life, by using technology and the reorganization of society’ (Shaull, 1985: 111). The backdrop is the situation of poverty imposed on a large part of the Latin American and Third World population in general by national elites with the support of international powers, on the one hand, and the mobilization of the masses that sought spaces for participation and therefore were being

muffled by dictatorships that spread throughout Latin America in the second half of last century.

In other words, it was a period when the word revolution was part of everyday life in society and formed the agenda of academic discussions. Richard Shaull, amid the Cold War, which divided the world between Capitalists and Communists, acknowledges that societies are undergoing a time of transition that offers the opportunity to recreate obsolete social structures which ensure injustice:

There is, as I see it, one promising sign of a new day. Out of this same matrix of frustration and anguish, a new community is emerging, whose members not only understand the problem and are convinced that radical changes are urgently needed, but are also committed to working for such changes and are seeking a strategy by which to do so. I refer to the new revolutionaries and the new movements in which they are involved. (Oglesby and Shaull 1967: 180)

Revolution, for Shaull, has a very concrete connotation of profound social changes, both in the First World and in the Third World. There is no ready project for society to be built, and there is no set of strategies that might ensure success. For him, a revolution can only become close to achieving its objectives if it can create institutions in which self-criticism and sensitivity to discontent are incorporated into their structures. Based on his theological-Christian vision, he criticizes the two large lines that inspired the revolutions in the second half of last century: Marxism and existentialism. Marxism, which presents an attractive Messianic perspective, has, however, excessive confidence in human reason to organize history and thus creates a closed historical interpretation, which in turn limits the creative relationship with reality and threatens the freedom of men and women as subjects of history. Existentialism in its turn affirms the freedom of an individual to create their future and acknowledges the complexity of the historical process, but lacks the foundation to provide history with 'meaning' as a sphere of human achievement (Shaull s/d -b: 52).

Among the three interlocutors chosen, Orlando Fals Borda is certainly the one who goes furthest in the idea of social transformation in Latin America. Like Shaull, he argues, in the book *Las revoluciones inconclusas em América Latina: 1809-1968* (The unfinished revolutions in Latin America: 1809-1968) that in Latin America and in other parts of the world we are undergoing a time of historical subversion in which the bases of a new society are formed. One of his premises is that also concepts need to be read in relation to their social context, from which meanings are assigned to them. Thus, in books and dictionaries, the concept of subversion has a negative meaning, and subversives are seen as antisocial and enemies of society. In the sense turned towards ongoing revolutionary changes, there would be a new meaning:

Subversion is defined as the condition or situation which reflects the internal incongruities of a social order discovered by its members in a given historical period, in the light of new goals (Utopia) which a society desires to attain. (Fals Borda, 2009: 392)

Creating another *topia* for Fals Borda goes through what he calls *socialismo raizal*, i.e., a socialism deeply rooted in the history of Latin American colonialism. He does not present the design of a project of society, but highlights values that are present in society, although in a subaltern form, in marginalized peoples, and that can support the reconstruction of

Colombian society. These are the originary indigenous peoples, with their values of solidarity; the blacks of the *palenques* with their struggle for freedom; the peasants and artisans of Hispanic origin with their notion of dignity; and the farmers of the agricultural interior with their search for autonomy.⁵

Paulo Freire's writings in the 1960s and 1970s are equally marked by the notion that something 'new' was being gestated or forged in Brazilian society. From a closed society there appeared to be a transition to an open society, with the possibility that everyone might participate; from a naïve and acritical consciousness, they were going over to a critical education where men and women see themselves as makers of culture, namely, of their world. It is the passage from man-object to man-subject. In other words, transitioning, different from the simple modernizing adaptation, implies qualitative changes in relations among men, and between these and their world.⁶

In *Pedagogy of the oppressed* this vision becomes more profound (becomes radicalized) and expands through the experience of the Latin American dictatorships and exile, also because of the incorporation of new bibliographic references, as can be seen in the many footnotes of this book, including theological ones. Dialogue is tensioned with conflict in a class society; transit to one type of society gives place to the idea of liberation as a 'painful childbirth' (Freire, 1981: 36). The same metaphor –of death and life– which we saw in Shaull acquires a strong presence in the revolutionary vision now taken up and that becomes more profound and expands in his later work with the World Council of Churches.⁷

The revolution is biophilic, it creates life, even if to create it, it is obliged to stop lives that forbid life. [...] There is no life without death, and there is no death without life, but there is also a 'death in life'. And 'death in life' is precisely the life forbidden to be a life. (Freire, 1981: 201)

Rubem Alves, another of our interlocutors, announces in his doctoral dissertation (Alves, 1972) a messianic humanism that is based on the human capacity to transcend, and liberation is a strictly human conquest. This, however, will only be possible with the liberation of the people's consciousness attached to structures that oppress them. This domestication of consciousness leaves man attached to the present with two definitely unpromising alternatives: on the one hand, the hopeless story connected to cynicism and despair; and on the other hand hope without a story, that ultimately is victimized by its romanticism because it does not evaluate the historical conditions. According to him 'Never hope without history and never history without hope' (Alves, 1972: 100). In language very similar to Paulo Freire, he writes that 'to free itself from the oppressed, the lamb must become a lion, the slave must become a warrior. The wish for liberation is expressed as power against those who make liberation impossible' (ibidem: 124).

Later, Rubem Alves will attempt other languages of transgression, but always betting on the human capacity to transcend in search of freedom. Men and women are not made to be domesticated ducks that, happy in their enclosure, receive their feed until their owner decides to roast them. Human beings have a vocation to become wild geese, although to practice this vocation they must be aroused and trained (Alves, 1984b). In another passage, he asks whether in the beginning there was the garden or the gardener. And he answers: 'It

⁵ See João Colares da Mota Neto, *Por uma pedagogia decolonial na América Latina* (2016).

⁶ In *Educação como prática da liberdade* Paulo Freire spells out this vision of society and of change.

⁷ See Balduino A. Andreola and Mario Bueno Ribeiro, *Andarilho da esperança: Paulo Freire no CMI*.

is the gardener. If there is a gardener, sooner or later a garden will appear. But if there is a garden without a gardener, sooner or later it will disappear. What is a gardener? A person whose thinking is full of gardens. And his disquieting question: "But where are the gardeners?" (*apud* Júnior, 2015: 7). The role of education as a transgressor consists for him in sowing and cultivating dreams and hopes. 'Utopias: like the stars they will never be reached. But how sad the nights would be without them. And how could sailors find their way?' (Alves, 1991: 118).

Final considerations

Once upon a time.... Once upon a time? On the one hand, revisiting the thinking of these four intellectuals seems like a futile exercise of recalling a reality very different from the present one. One no longer talks about revolution; the subversives have become terrorists; society has its progress and fate ensured by the rules and moods of the market; social networks have done away with solitude and promote human solidarity; and, after all, the world is an almost perfect place for people who make use of opportunities. On the other hand, we know well from the data, from analyses and from what we see on the streets and in our houses that this is not the entire story and the entire reality.

Therefore revisiting the thinking of these intellectuals becomes really interesting and relevant. First of all, because they place explicitly on the agenda the topic of humanization as an historical task, beyond the futuristic and metaphysical visions. Theology itself does this movement of secularization and with this provokes an effect of questioning on all ideologies that think themselves absolute, including closed versions of Marxism that captivated the imagination of the revolutionaries. The very human 'nature' is built in the permanent tension between the possibilities of humanization and dehumanization. Neither Christianity nor the supposed 'original nature' of Rousseau and other Illuminists supplies ready models for this human construction

It makes a lot of sense to return to this discussion, now with other theoretical tools and with other challenges of the economic, social and political reality. Suffice it to cite two of them as an example. If in the first decades of the second half of last century the discussion focused on the imposed modernization that was opposed to endogenous development, today the new information and communication technologies place the discussion of the 'human' on another level. We ask ourselves, perhaps even more radically, what it means to be human with the growing breakdown of barriers between the natural and the artificial, between proximity and distance; between past and future.

The second example refers to the changes in society and the reading made of them. Economic globalization created other forms of exclusion and oppression that, similarly or even more dramatically, present challenges to humanization. There are, however, today as in the past decades that we discuss in this reflection, other forms of resistance and contestation that seek to develop emancipatory options, which brings us to the epigraph in which Shaull reminds us that 'human existence is a constant struggle for liberation' and that in this struggle we are occasionally –'surprised by new possibilities of meaning and fulfillment in individual and collective life'. He witnessed a way of reading and interpreting these possibilities.

All four interlocutors in this text have questions for the role of the academic and the intellectual. Beginning with the impossibility of a production of neutral knowledge, each of them seeks ways to make of their intellectual activity a political tool for liberation and/or emancipation. They take on a radicalness that opposes sectarianisms. A radical is he or she

who attempts to reach the roots of the issues in an archeological process, in a continuous reconstruction of the processes of oppression. A sectarian, on the other hand, is someone who is attached to history, or to the eternal present, or who tries to classify it within their thoughts and projects. In times of fundamentalisms of all kinds –religious, political and cultural– nothing less timely than to revisit the discussions of that time.

It should also be noted that we are dealing with intellectuals from different fields who meet for a fruitful dialogue that can inspire us to new dialogues and not the simple adaptation or loaning of concepts and ideas among disciplines. The theologian, the sociologist, the educator, the philosopher all contribute with their instruments, theories and practices to an exercise of reflection about human beings and their world with the humility of someone who is aware of the finitude of their thinking and acting, but at the same time takes on a commitment to values of humanization that transcend the disciplinary idiosyncrasies.

Transcending and transgressing, according to Shaull, Freire, Fals Borda and Rubem Alves are necessary in the light of their reading of their world. Thus they present important questions to think about our role as academics and intellectuals. What are today the places that present themselves as frontiers to be transgressed? What elements do we create to construct new *topias*? With whom do we dialogue to construct them?

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