Freire's philosophical contribution for a theory of intercultural ethics: A deductive analysis of his work

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ABSTRACT: This article claims that Freire's work offers an important ground for a potential theory of intercultural ethics and, for that purpose, examines his ideas at different levels: (1) the ontological; (2) the ideological; (3) the political; (4) languages and languaging; and (5) cultural identity and diversity. Freire never used the word 'intercultural', although it is suggested here that this is due to the fact that terminology related to cultural diversity has changed over time and in his day this term was not yet common currency. Moreover, Freire uses more often the term '*multiculturalidade*' rather than '*multiculturalismo*' (multiculturalism) since the former suffix '*-dad(e)*' has a different meaning which refers to the ontological nature of the condition and is more usual in both Portuguese and Spanish. This article also argues for the relevance of a theory of intercultural ethics in the contemporary world that imprints (inter)cultural flexibility on the current hermeneutics of ethics while preventing excessive abuses on behalf of relativism, dogmatism, essentialism and fundamentalism.
Keywords: Freire, cultural diversity, intercultural, multicultural, ethics, languages

Introduction

Although he never mentioned it explicitly, Paulo Freire left us with some relevant contributions for a theory of intercultural ethics for the twenty-first century, which can be inferred from the bulk of his work that is mostly devoted to citizenship, education, society and political involvement. While he often referred to ethical and moral education, Freire never used the term 'intercultural', which is not surprising since it was far from being common currency in education in his day. Nevertheless, he used the terms 'multiculturalism' and cultural 'tolerance', which were then widespread, and therefore one must be careful not to be caught in terminological cages that change over time, but rather concentrate on the philosophical message, the pedagogical approach and the sociopolitical perspective. However, his theory of ethics is embedded in an ontology of the intercultural emerging from his dialectical vision of critical reflection, dialogue, active citizenship participation and empowerment; in sum, a critical pedagogy. Therefore, it is possible to compose a conceptual framework for the notion of intercultural ethics while examining various converging dimensions in Freire's work, as analysed in detail below, according to various levels: (1) on the ontological; (2) on

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the ideological; (3) on the political; (4) on languages and languaging; and (5) on cultural identity/diversity.

Giroux (1989) did not hesitate to recognise that radical educational theory 'needs to develop a *moral discourse and theory of ethics*' (p. 39) and to state that 'caught in the paradox of exhibiting moral indignation of a well-defined theory of ethics and morality, radical education theory has been unable to move from criticism to substantive vision' (p. 37). According to this author, the lack of a 'substantively grounded theory of ethics' in education prevents a 'discourse of hope' and weakens its political dimension. In fact, moral and ethical education has been ideologically constrained by religious dogma, secularism, Marxist critique, conservatism, liberalism or relativism that have prevented it from being open to discussion, dialogical and eventually intercultural without being flawed, slippery or fractured. How can moral and ethical education be intercultural? Giroux (1989) proposed radical ethics that takes into account that 'individuals are constituted as human agents within *different* moral and ethical discourses and experiences' and that it 'involves developing a vision of the future, one rooted in the construction of sensibilities and social relations that give meaning to a notion of community life' that therefore implies respect for difference without failing to build a sense of social and political cohesive collectiveness (p. 39).

Giroux then attempts to himself propose a radical theory of ethics in education, firstly, by drawing upon the theory of political education by American social reconstructionists and progressivists, such as Counts, Rugg and Brameld, as well as by Dewey. Together with Kohlberg, Giroux borrows Dewey's pragmatist idea of problem-finding-and-solving that imprints questioning and agency on the core of moral and ethical education. Secondly, although he carries out a critique of postmoderns, poststructuralists and neopragmatists, Giroux nevertheless ends up with a notion of 'provisional morality', which he however describes as 'a continued engagement in which the social practices of everyday life are interrogated in relation to the principles of individual autonomy and democratic public life' (p. 52). The concept of 'provisional morality' is worth considering here despite the fact that, for the purpose of a theory of intercultural ethics, I prefer Derrida's formula of 'différant' that gives one, whoever that may be, the right 'to differ, that is, to dissonance and even dissent, and to defer her/his conclusions, at least partly, without preventing her/him from acting' (Guilherme, 2002). That is to say, it allows one to postpone one's judgment or to endorse a judgment that is not definitive or absolute, or rather, it calls for a provisional judgment instead of 'provisional morality'. Hence, morality is understood here as the background framework of principles and values that condition one's world vision and whose plan of action is designed by (inter/cultural) ethics based on provisional judgments. Later on, Giroux (2002) also focuses, albeit critically, on Habermas' theory of communicative action and its potential to boost dialectical citizenship. It is not only by coincidence that Giroux's sources mentioned above coincide with those reported to have inspired Freire, according to revelations given out by Freire's colleagues who have been publishing studies about his work (Morrow & Torres, 2002; Romão, 2014; Torres, 2014).

On the whole, a radical theory of ethics for contemporary societies cannot but promote '… an ethical discourse *with* an emancipatory political intent … that can provide the basis for organizing and sustaining a community of public spheres inextricably connected to forms of self- and social empowerment …' (Giroux, 1989, p. 60). The widespread civil rights movement and decolonisation in the 1960s made demographic diversity more visible, with populations feeling entitled to participatory citizenship and therefore to cultural and

political empowerment. Hence, a theory of intercultural ethics is greatly needed. Which guidelines did Freire then provide us with that may inspire and direct us towards building a theory of intercultural ethics?

On the ontological

To start with, Freire offered us a theory of action knitted with the idea of hope that stim-ulates the individual in society to be brave and take action against injustice. However, he is very clear, in his earlier *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, that to act does not mean taking irresponsible and irreflective action and this statement provides us with two, apparently contradictory, forces. One drives us into the field of the unknown—the intercultural—and the other gives us direction and prevents us from being asocial and irresponsible towards the common good, that is to say, gives us ethical principles. With no hesitation, he wrote: 'Existir é arriscar. Existir, no sentido mais indefinido possível, e por isso mesmo mais radical, é arriscar' [*Existing is risking. Existing, in the most indefinite sense possible, and therefore in the most radical, is risking*] (Freire, 1995, p. 54, author's translation).

A collection of texts was compiled by his widow and entitled 'Pedagogy of Tolerance', as Freire often used this word in his work. Although tolerance is a controversial concept today, and acknowledged nowadays as inadequate for the purpose claimed throughout his texts, meaning that it falls short of the radicality of his ideas and is even rejected by Freirean followers, it is impossible to ignore that the theories of intercultural relations, and corresponding terminologies, are recent and have evolved very rapidly over the last few decades following his death.

Freire was a humanist in the very sense of the word as used in the Latin American Catholic tradition and an inspiration for Christian social activism. Moreover, 'the Freirean pedagogical method is sufficiently open-ended to generate concrete ethical debate within diverse traditions …' (Morrow & Torres, 2002, pp. 157–158). Nevertheless, the possibility of materially engaging in ethical debate and concerted agency between concrete Others did not prevent Freire from taking into account comprehensive, all-embracing principles and values supportive of everyone's dignity. Furthermore, he called for collective goals of social justice to be formalised and put into practice not only by individuals but also by institutions. These goals are pervasive throughout Freire's writings, as he stated early in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: 'Concern for humanization leads at once to the recognition of dehumanization, not only as an ontological possibility but as an historical reality' (p. 27).

The convergence between classical dichotomies, the pillars of modernist thought, such as theory and practice, reflection and action, ontology and history, is a trait that is pushed to the fore in Freire's theory of critical pedagogy, and as a matter of fact in his implicit theory of (intercultural) ethics, even more so than in the works of his predecessors (e.g. Dewey, Horkheimer, Adorno and, more recently, Habermas). On the one hand, he points to the ontological vision of a new man: 'Liberation is thus a childbirth, and a painful one. The man who emerges is a new man …' (1974, p. 33). This is an idea that also underlies the idea of an intercultural society/person since it also entails the emergence of an intercul-tural redesigned ontological being with a reconstructed and ever-dynamic cultural identity. On the other hand, 'Enquanto necessidade ontológica a esperança precisa da prática para tornar-se concretude histórica' [*As an ontological need, hope needs practice in order to turn into historical reality*] (Freire, 1993, pp. 10–11, author's translation).

Another dichotomy that occupied much of Freire's thought was that of 'objectivity versus subjectivity' which, in my view, can provide a great source of inspiration for a theory of intercultural ethics. Torres (2014), one of Freire's closest companions, identifies 'four key philosophical streams' that influenced Freire's thought: (1) '*existential thought*', on 'being-in-the-world; being-with the others'; (2) '*phenomenological thought*', influencing his idea of consciousness; (3) '*Marxist thought*', from which Freire critically imported some of his political ideas, the notion of social class, the methodology of critique and, to some extent, the social vision of historical materialism; and (4) '*Hegelian philosophy*', from which he borrowed Hegelian dialectics in particular. For some reason, Freire did not acknowledge his sources extensively. However, his mastery consisted in allowing himself to incorporate all the above-mentioned philosophical theories while still retaining his freedom and the capacity to build his own consistent theory.

Furthermore, as an involuntary traveller and worker, being in political exile but with his heart and soul never leaving his home country, Freire added to his readings and to his experience from around the world his deep-seated roots. These provided his theory with a view from the South, a postcolonial perspective that made his theory different while talking about difference, hence capable of inspiring a theory of intercultural ethics. It is against this backdrop that his deconstruction of the objectivity–subjectivity dichotomy, while also questioning the neutrality of science and by proposing that 'subjectivity and objectivity [are] in constant dialectical relationship' (1970, p. 35), lays the first stone for the three-pillar building made up of a critical pedagogy within an epistemology of the South and implying a theory of intercultural ethics as if it were a trilogy that was not immediately unveiled in his theory of radical education.

In addition, 'Freire's critique of the subject–object dialectic moves away from the clas-sic theory of praxis in giving primacy to the intersubjective and linguistic basis of action' (Morrow & Torres, 2002, p. 62), leading the authors to identify another three axes on which Freire's ethics are grounded, that is 'in the link among language, "hope," and "practice," …' (p. 63). These three axes may themselves also be strong supporters for the development of a theory of intercultural ethics in that this favours and validates linguistic exchange between acknowledged linguistic communities, commitment to transformation and engaged agency based on 'what he calls the "gnosiological" [meaning epistemological] relationship or act of knowing grounded in a subject–subject relation' (p. 35). Furthermore, the same authors also maintain that 'Freire's ontological approach (1) suggests a theory of praxis that stresses the *reflective* and *dialogical* dimensions of *action*' (p. 39, emphasis added) that are, in fact, the fundamental axes of Freire's pedagogy, which were, earlier in his work, condensed in the word '*conscientização*'. Even though the term proved to be controversial and was, to some extent, later abandoned by Freire, the idea remained that such 'revelatory processes … are not only cognitive (forms of structural perception); they are also *ethical* in evaluating the consequences of domination' since eventually 'conscientization elicits concrete ethical reflection on practical issues' (p. 104). As has been argued above, Freire's contribution to a theory of radical ethics has persisted in time precisely because it has provided guidelines for the development of emancipatory and participatory citizenship and political education which are suitable for contemporary, culturally diverse societies in that they demand sub-ject–subject reciprocal and equitable relationships.

On the ideological

Freire's 'philosophical work constitutes a wide-ranging synthesis, very hard to grasp imme-diately' and where 'different philosophical leanings complement one another in some cases, and confront and oppose one another in others' (Torres, 2014, p. 26). Therefore, wondering about 'What is Paulo Freire's ideology? What is the ideological substratum of his thought?', as Torres also mentions, is quite common among the questions raised about his work. Nevertheless, Freire's theory of education, although it gathers ideas from different philo-sophical strands and is also interdisciplinary and critical of opposing political sides, provides a comprehensive and consistent ideological and political direction. In his own words: 'my progressive perspective has an implied ethical position, an almost instinctive inclination toward justice and a visceral rejection of injustice and discrimination along the lines of race, class, gender, violence, and exploitation' (Freire, 1996, p. 85). And he adds: 'My relationship with Marx never suggested that I abandon Christ', and further on: 'For those who understand history as a language of possibility … it is not difficult to understand my position' (p. 87).

On the one hand, his critique of what he calls a 'capitalist sense of ethics' is sharp, describing it as an 'astute ideology' whose focus is 'on production without any preoccupa-tion about what we are producing, who it benefits, or who it hurts' (p. 84). On the other hand, Freire does not fall short in his critique of the 'Left' by blaming it for its 'desire for authoritarianism … dogmatic and aggressive discourse … its fatalistic understanding of history … in which the future is so inflexible it is never problematized' (p. 84). Freire was above all a brave nonconformist who sought justice for the weaker members of society, for which purpose any well-intended contribution, either in the form of knowledge or concrete action, was carefully taken into account. He was clear about his priorities: 'my knowledge came from my practice and my critical reflection, as well as from my analysis of the practice of others'. However, he clarified this saying: 'my character also tends to reject knowledge that is antibook or antitheory' (p. 85).

But neither did Freire spare from criticism those 'oppressed' who were not striving for justice through the transformation of society, but instead only aimed to reach the top of the social ladder while preserving the status quo: 'For them [the oppressed] the new man or woman themselves become oppressors. Their vision of the new man is individualistic; because of their identification of the oppressor, they have no consciousness of themselves as persons or as members of an oppressed class' (Freire, 1974, p. 31). Freire was a promoter of collective action and of critical reflection in power relations and tensions in society between what he called the 'superstructure' and the 'infrastructure', which should not be addressed as the two opposing parts of the social structure but in a concrete dialectic relation (Freire, 1970, pp. 457–458). And only by understanding the dialectical relations between the infra- and super-structure of society, can we understand the levels of consciousness, he explained. As an example, Freire refers to the 'historical-cultural configuration' of Latin-American societies which share a 'culture of silence' that he considers as a 'superstructural expression which conditions a special form of consciousness … [and] "overdetermines" the infrastructure in which it originates' (p. 457). Never did Freire renounce his Latin American perspective, which was a perspective from the South, and he was also clear about this when he wrote about how empathetic he felt towards his life and work in Africa. Moreover, one of the most important features of Freire's critical pedagogy is its situatedness, that is, the dialectical relationship between the various layers, social, geographical and of power and

consciousness, within societies. This is the reason why Freire's conceptual framework can provide a sound and firm basis for a theory of intercultural ethics, voicing different per-spectives, in that it is rooted in social and cultural realities, attentive to justice for all and giving voice to those who have been silenced.

No one can say that Freire's theory of ethics is not ideological, for it is ideologically 'placed' in time and in place, down-up and up-down but at the same time horizontal, mainly springing from the grass-roots level. In his case, his point of view never ceased to be placed in the South, more particularly in Latin America, not from the North in the South, the centre in the periphery, but in the South of the South, the periphery of the periphery. Freire absorbed theories and knowledge produced in the North as well as in the more liberating work in the South in order to offer a new look 'placed' in the deeper South. Furthermore, he 'displaced' education and ethics from their imported classical and colonising standards and 'replaced' them in a context where they were not inexistent but had been silenced and made invisible. This process is at the core of the construction of an intercultural perspec-tive towards epistemology, education, society and ethics and therefore worthy of serious consideration for the conception of a theory of intercultural ethics.

In this direction, Freire claimed that: 'Solidarity requires that one enter into the situation of those with whom one is solidary; it is a radical posture' (Freire, 1974, p. 34). However, Freire was a pragmatic idealist and also argued that 'action is human only when it is not merely an occupation but also a preoccupation, that is, when it is not dichotomized from reflection' (p. 38), since '… reflection – true reflection – leads to action' (p. 52). We may therefore conclude that Freire's ideological background was not prior to his theoretical production and did not determine it, but rather it was formed in the process of action-re-flection-action, always critical and political.

On the political

The political is the social arm of the ideological, even more so for Freire since the value of his ideas, according to himself, depended on their impact on social agency and transformation. Giroux follows Freire in this belief and is also clear about it when he argues that 'ethics, in this case, is not a matter of individual choice or relativism but a social discourse that refuses to accept needless human suffering and exploitation' and the author even moves beyond mere unacceptance to responsibility by claiming that 'ethics becomes a practice that broadly connotes one's personal and social sense of responsibility to the Other' (1992, p. 74). Such an understanding of ethics within a broader field puts the individual at the service of the wider society, without having ethical principles to violate individual freedom but rather instigating social commitment among individuals. Moreover, the author declares that 'ethics becomes more than the discourse of moral relativism or a static transmission of reified history' (p. 102) in representation of any sector of culture and society. A theory of intercultural ethics is not unilateral, that is, it is not based upon one cultural group's tolerance of another; it is dialogical, dynamical and reciprocal. According to the same author, such an ethical stance, a radical and critical one, 'moves beyond moral outrage, attempting instead to provide a critical account of how individuals are constituted as human agents within different moral and ethical discourses and experiences' (p. 102).

Freire's radical theory of ethics is summed up in the concept of '*conscientização*' in which he condensed his ideas about reflectiveness and agency as the motor of the political

dimension of education and social life. In his words, 'this 'critical' dimension of conscious-ness accounts for the goals men assign to their transforming acts upon the world' (1970, p. 455), which means that critical-consciousness-and-political-agency is a virtuous-circle, not a vicious-circle, in Freire's living theory in the sense of live theory. This is the reason why Freire's radical theory of ethics can so greatly instigate a theory of intercultural ethics, whose dialogical nature cannot do without critical consciousness and political agency in order to promote collective and permanent negotiation within the diverse societies of our contemporary world. Freire, in an interview carried out in 1992 by Antonia Darder and Peter McLaren in the USA, apropos and ingeniously reminds us of a historical event which had, in his time, been spreading throughout the world and calling for social, cultural and polit-ical change, by simply asking: 'What dynamics are at play in a "post-civil-rights" context?' (Darder, 2015, p. 135). All over the world societies had started a cultural, epistemological and political process, but on a larger scale in Latin America, that was unstoppable and that Sousa Santos (2014) describes as a 'sociology of absences' and 'sociology of emergences', con-sisting of unveiling social elements that have historically been rendered silent and invisible while looking for their potential to re-construct the social structures that have remained crystallised. And, with that in mind, Freire warns us in that same interview about the need for a 'strong ethical position' without which 'it is impossible to change the world' and with-out which 'we are going to always be in danger of contradiction and incoherence' (p. 151).

What has been widely acknowledged is the link that Freire made between education and politics, more precisely between the pedagogical and the political, as well as between education and ethics, that is, more particularly between the pedagogical and the ethical, and consequently between education, ethics and politics, which he considers the three moral pillars of contemporary societies and whose diversity, once made visible and given voice, demands critical intercultural education, ethics and politics. This claim, that of the political nature of education, is recurrent in Freire's work: '… não posso entender a educação fora do problema do poder, que é político' [*... I cannot perceive education beyond issues of power, which is political*] (1995, p. 40) and which he explains in detail: 'O problema fundamental, de natureza política e tocado por tintas, é saber quem escolhe os conteúdos, a favor de quem e de que estará o seu ensino, contra quem, a favor de que, contra quem' [*The main issue, which is of a political nature and touched by colours, is to know who chooses the contents, in whose favour, and how teaching is positioned, against whom, in favour of what, against whom*] (1993, p. 110, author's translation).

The political nature of education that Freire emphasises throughout his theory of critical pedagogy has always been attributed to the influence of his readings of John Dewey which, by the way, he only acknowledged later and only to some extent, as below:

> This position owes a great deal to John Dewey's view on democracy, but it goes beyond his position in a number of ways, and these are worth mentioning. … As an ideal, the discourse of democracy suggests something more programmatic and radical. First, it points to the role that teachers and administrators might play as transformative intellectuals who develop coun-terhegemonic pedagogies that not only empower students by giving them the knowledge and social skills they will need to be able to function in the larger society as critical agents, but also educate them for transformative action. … This is very different from Dewey's view, because I see democracy as involving not only a pedagogical struggle but also a political and social struggle … (Freire, 1988, p. xxxiii)

According to his colleagues, John Dewey might have been introduced to Freire by his Brazilian colleague and friend Anisio Teixeira, who had been a student of Dewey's. In fact, both Freire and Dewey share a strong focus on democratic politics, education policy and citizenship education, but with interesting differences not only due to different times, but also to their deep social and cultural roots in American postcolonial societies emerg-ing from two different colonial matrices. With regard to political philosophy, Freire also endorses new philosophical theories that were appearing late last century which put the stress on the conflicting nature of sociopolitical relations. Therefore, several studies blame Freire for not being very clear about the limits of conflict, rupture and even violence or, more precisely, for not indicating the limits of conflict and violence on ethical grounds. Such limitations are acknowledged, for example by Glass (2001), who nevertheless admits that 'cultural action for liberation wedded to militant nonviolence furnishes an ethical and political framework consistent with a historicized and always partially opaque ontology and a historicized, perspectival epistemology' (p. 23). In fact, as Freire was himself a political refugee, the Brazilian dictatorship of his time clearly influenced his work and his ideas. Moreover, Brazil's demographic history and colonial matrix made his theory 'suitable to a polyvocal discourse giving expression to identities marked by contradictory, multiple and shifting boundaries' according to the views of a North American scholar on Brazilian society (Glass, 2001, p. 23).

Gadotti, Freire's companion, explains: 'Since the 1960s, new social conditions allowed the concept of dialogue to take a new form. It became a political factor in educational rela-tionships' (1996, p. xi). And in this interview with Peter McLaren, Gadotti expands this idea: 'Yes. For Paulo Freire, dialogue is … an encounter which takes place in praxis – in action and reflection – in political engagement, in the pledge for social transformation' (p. xi). Furthermore, for Freire, this political, educational and ethical engagement, which is put into praxis through dialogue, must take linguistic and cultural diversity on board as he mentions throughout his books, affirming especially that 'não há verdadeiro bilinguismo, muito menos multilinguismo, fora da multiculturalidade e não há esta como fenómeno espontâneo, mas criado, produzido politicamente, trabalhado, a duras penas, na história' [*there is no true bilingualism, even less multilingualism, outside multiculturalism, and the latter does not grow spontaneously, but needs to be nurtured, politically produced, elaborated, painfully, by history*] (1993, p. 157).

On languages and languaging

A theory of intercultural ethics encompasses the discussion about language use, language social meaning and linguistic power relations. In Freire's words: 'Linguagem e realidade se prendem dinamicamente' [*Language and reality are dynamically caught up with each other*, author's translation] (2006, p. 11). Language issues are implicit in Freire's endorsement of dialogue, discourse and communication although he seldom mentioned linguistic issues per se with regard to education or social life. However, he left us with some direction in this. Torres refers to 'Freire's thesis of critical literacies, which argues that critical con-sciousness depends crucially on forms of literacy that facilitate a structural perspective for understanding social reality' (2014, p. 110) and mentions 'his mantra of "reading the word and reading the world" meant for the development of "critical communicative com-petence"' (p. 110). Torres also shares with us his understanding of 'what Freire considers

human characteristics' and amongst them he points out that, according to Freire, 'people are "communicative beings"; therefore, they need one another to set up a dialogue, and therefore they have the right to pronounce their word' (2014, p. 81). Freire was an attentive listener, sensitive to different literacies, hence a good translator. In his experience of adult education in rural and distant areas he demonstrated his attentiveness to and respect for different language use and its adaptation to contextual knowledge. As a political refugee and, later on, as a world-known scholar, he had to deal with different languages in Latin America (Chile, Mexico, Bolivia, etc.), in the US, French-speaking Switzerland, Portuguese-speaking Guinea, etc. Although he did not leave us with his reflections on his own linguistic experiences, he left us with a theory of critical consciousness, reflectiveness and empowerment which together call for pedagogical praxis and has provided a theoretical framework that has been illuminating and inspiring for social work and scholarly theories on language use and education (Guilherme, 2002).

In his *Pedagogy of Tolerance*, Freire made some comments on language issues. He was sen-sitive to social and cultural power relations, both in the macro-context and in the micro-con-text and, therefore, he could not help making some ironic remarks about colonial prejudice against the colonised, which also materialised in language performance: 'Língua mesmo só a do colonizador, a do colonizado é dialeto … não é capaz de expressar o mundo, de expressar a beleza, a ciência' [*Real language is only that of the coloniser, the colonised one is a dialect ... unable to describe the world, describe beauty, science*] (1995, p. 29, author's translation). As Freire explains, the real language (implicitly the European version of the language), once recreated by the colonised, is considered as a 'creolized' dialect and therefore it is not up to aesthetic or scientific hermeneutics. This is one of the most important challenges for a theory of intercultural ethics, which has to confront and respond to imperialism, dogmatism and prejudice. It is not that European colonising languages have become lingua franca, which is evident in the power relations which are unmasked above, but that language re-creation in new contexts is considered so legitimate and valuable as to be studied and appreciated. I have proposed elsewhere a new terminology—'glocal languages'—that takes the above assumptions into serious consideration (Guilherme, 2014).

In the same book, Freire also notes the different performances languages can take: 'As línguas orais são tão concretas que viram corporais. … Mas eu lembro que vi na África como o africano fala de modo geral com o corpo inteiro' [*Oral languages are so concrete that they become corporal ... But I remember seeing in Africa how the Africans in general speak using their whole body*] (1995, p. 59, author's translation). In addition, language can be other than sound or writing: 'Em todo o processo de produção de conhecimento, está implícita a possibilidade de comunicar o que foi compreendido, o que você faz não apenas com a linguagem oral, mas também com desenhos e com várias outras linguagens' [*In the whole process of knowledge production, the possibility to communicate what one understood is implicit, which is something you achieve not only through oral language but also through drawings and several other languages*] (1995, p. 103, author's translation). This is how Freire illustrates his radical theory of ethics which orients his critical pedagogy of democratic citizenship education and which may also inspire a theory of intercultural ethics as far as democratic plurilingualism and language use are concerned.

On cultural identity and diversity

Cultural identity and diversity can be characterised as one of the *leitmotifs* in Freire's work. Moreover, it should be kept in mind that Freire's view on cultural identity and diversity is deeply influenced by anti-colonial and postcolonial discourse, determined by 'emergent' epistemologies of the South in the sense of the 'sociology of emergences' by Sousa Santos (2014) and also by the racism still prevalent in Brazil. However, 'cultural domination' was not only a preoccupation for a critical pedagogue, but also justification for taking action. Freire wrote that 'the utopian nature of cultural action for freedom is what distinguishes it above all from cultural action for domination' (1970, p. 472). Freire believed utopia was an ideal to strive for, the motor for action, not an impossible dream, but on the contrary, the 'inédito viável' [*viable unknown*] (Freire, 1993, p. 98), the 'not yet' that is still deemed feasible.[1]

This idea of transforming the world in the sense of accepting it as a given (from God?) and undertaking the mission of continuously improving it in the public interest, for the sake of the weaker, the more fragile, those in need, is a compelling exhortation throughout his books. Such an idealistic stance does not prevent him from having a strategic understand-ing of the social structure which he denounces: 'Cultural invasion is on the one hand an *instrument* of domination, and on the other, the *result* of domination' (1974, pp. 151–152). Nor does it preclude him from being pragmatic in reminding teachers that: 'A questão da identidade cultural … é problema que não pode ser desprezado. É isto que o professor não faz, perdendo-se e perdendo-o na estreita e pragmática visão do processo' [*The issue of cultural identity … cannot be ignored. And this is what teachers do not do, because they get lost and miss this aim in the narrow and pragmatic vision of the process*] (Freire, 2007, p. 41, author's translation).

Freire was sensitive to and aware of the various (inter)cultural implications in any society, even more so in Brazilian society where cultural hybridity, as a result of a colonial matrix different from that of the US and also from the rest of Latin American countries, accounts for various identity and symbolic inter- and cross-cultural layers but, nevertheless, does not prevent violence and racism. Furthermore, he often attempted to point out the intersections between social categories like 'class' and 'culture', that is to say, the suffering resulting from tensions, as he describes in the excerpt below:

> … the tension between cultures in a situation of multiculturality, which is necessary and per-manent, is of a different nature [than that … of the experience of permanent tension, caused by the power of one over the others, which are prohibited from existing]. It is the tension to which they are exposed because they are different in the democratic relation in which they are promoted. It is the tension which they cannot avoid because they find themselves building, creating, producing, step by step, their own multiculturality, never ready or completed. (1993, p. 156, author's translation)

We can understand that there are natural tensions, the necessary and good ones, which come out of the work-in-progress that the creation of intercultural identity-building entails, not only individually but also with respect to the construction of a dynamic multicultural society. On the other hand, we also have to take into account the artificial tensions, the useless and bad ones, which result from conventionally imposed asymmetric power relations. It is also worth noting that Freire uses here the word '*multiculturalidade*' instead of multiculturalism, two words that do not carry exactly the same meaning and do not automatically translate as each other. As I have explained elsewhere, they are the product of different societal

visions, parallel to the difference between 'interculturalidade' and 'interculturalism', both underlying different societal visions and colonial matrices according to their suffixes, as the first in each pair, 'multiculturalidade' and 'interculturalidade', refer to something of a societal ontological nature, while the second, 'multiculturalism' and 'interculturalism', refer to a societal structure (Guilherme & Dietz, 2015).

Freire seldom referred to the indigenous population in Brazil but when he did he claimed they had a right to be part of Brazilian society while retaining their own languages and cultures. It is also worth remembering that Freire was a contemporary of the end of the dictatorship in Brazil in 1985 and the issuing of the 1988 Constitution which ensured, at least in principle, indigenous people's rights to their land and the right to retain their linguistic and cultural heritage, although this has unfortunately remained for the most part only in the written law. In Freire's view 'the problem that is posed is not to preserve the indigenous culture, but to respect it. That is something else. The issue is respect for the indigenous culture and not to keep it in islands, historical-cultural ghettos' (1995, p. 89, author's translation). However, the few remaining indigenous peoples continue to be expelled from their lands and killed in Brazil under democratic governments that have not been protecting their rights. Indigenous communities have cosmovisions and ways of life that are radically different from the mix of voluntary or involuntary (e.g. slaves) immigrants in the larger 'pro-modern' society. Attention to indigenous communities, both academic and political, not only for their own sake but also for the interest of the wider society and for the advancement of knowledge, is urgent. According to Viveiros de Castro, a well-known Brazilian anthropologist, Ameridian cosmology can offer a different cosmovision. This is studied by a movement in anthropology that he entitles 'Tropical Americanism', a knowledge perspective on perspective—'perspectivism'—and methodology—'the Method of Controlled Equivocation' (Castro, 2004). For this, the author focuses on the work of translation as per-ceived by Ameridian cosmology, which he describes by saying, for example, that 'perspec-tivism projects an image of translation as a process of controlled equivocation—'controlled' in the sense that walking may be said to be a controlled way of falling' (p. 5). This is the type of conceptual misunderstanding that is common in intercultural language use which invalidates the possibility of a lingua franca and which is more evident between cultures with rather different cosmologies, as is the case here.

Critical reflection on these issues is fundamental when discussing the development of a theory of intercultural ethics. Viveiros de Castro helps us through his own conclusions: 'For the Europeans, the ontological diacritic is the soul (are Indians humans or animals?). For the Indians, it is the body (are Europeans humans or spirits?)' and he continues: 'European ethnocentrism consisted in doubting whether other bodies have the same souls as they themselves. … Amerindian ethnocentrism, on the contrary, consisted in doubting whether other souls had the same bodies' (p. 9). Having said this, a theory of intercultural ethics, following Freire's proposal for radical ethics and social transformation, proves itself to be a much-needed theory for the critical hermeneutics of contemporary diverse societies and to have the potential to provide us with some guidelines for improving life in such societies where ethics are indispensable, as long as it is not a unilateral cultural imposition which can only generate more violence.

Conclusion

Freire's work, both theoretical and empirical, offers a conceptual framework and practical directions for the development of 'conscientização', a word that results from combining two Portuguese words which can be translated as consciousness and action. This text aims to highlight Freire's contributions to a potential theory of intercultural ethics since Freire's ideas on emancipatory and critical democratic policies, citizenship, pedagogy, dialogue and civic participation can be inspirational for that purpose. Freire views living as acting, risking and practising. However, these operate in a virtuous circle with critical reflection, knowledge redesigning and building, deep thinking and engaged border-crossing, all ruled by radical ethical commitment together with the search for social justice and solidarity. For Freire, acting means reflecting, being a subject and undertaking reciprocal subject–subject relationships in collective action, that is, promoting a liberating praxis. Freire's main concerns were very much linked to issues of cultural identity, personal and community dignity and the freedom to act with total respect for everyone else in the world. Freire unveiled power relations, cultural domination, social prejudice, discrimination and racism; in sum, what-ever could be, implicitly or explicitly, used to affirm the character valuelessness of others by nothing but abusively imposed, conventionally denigrating stereotypes. On the whole, this is precisely what a theory of intercultural ethics will attempt to change.

Note

1. Freire refers to the difficulty that his translator found to translate his expression 'inédito viável' and how she finally came up with the version 'untested viable', which he confessed to feel comfortable with. However, here I decided to propose another translation of my own 'viable unknown'.

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