EDITORIAL

Víctor Manuel Marí Sáez. Editor-in-chief of Commons
University of Cadiz (Spain)

The legacy of Paulo Freire in Spain

In this number of *Commons*, we have the great pleasure of publishing a monograph on the legacy of Paulo Freire in the field of communication for social change, in the context of the Brazil of Bolsonaro. This number is the result of the seminar held on the subject on the London campus of Loughborough University in 2019. As the invited editors delve into the legacy of Freire in present-day Brazil in their papers, in this introduction I will focus on the seminar's leitmotif, albeit adapting it to the Spanish context.

Freire in Spain?

For many citizens and researchers (including yours truly), Freire has been a touchstone both when attempting to establish their place in the world and when guiding their research work. In my case, I have expressed this interest in the research that I have published over the years, in which references to Freire's oeuvre have been a constant. Recently, in one such work submitted to what is considered to be a 'high-impact' journal —by the way, a very un-Freirean term— one of the reviewers asked the question with which this introduction begins: Freire in Spain? Are you using Freire's concepts to analyse communication practices in Spain, a northern 'developed' country?

The anonymous reviewer in question, as can be deduced from his report as a whole, is a researcher who is pursuing his career in the field of communication, development and social change, whereby his question (and the perplexity that it oozes) needs to be, quite literally, *problematised*.

As Enghel (2011) has suggested, communication for development (Servaes, 1999, 2002) and communication for social change (Gumucio-Dagron & Tufte, 2006) are different approaches for designating and characterising a field relating to the role played by communication in the strategic efforts to overcome collective social problems. Therefore, situations of social inequality and injustice are the objects of study in this field, whether they occur in the so-called 'Global South' or in 'northern' countries.

In the process of problematising the reviewer's scepticism, it is here where it is highly unlikely that he will be able to find his way out of the blind alley into which he himself has ventured with his question:

1. Spain can be regarded as a *developed* country and, accordingly, Freire has nothing to say or to contribute in this context, insofar as he is a key author only for *developing*[1] or plainly *undeveloped* countries of the *Global South*.

2. The question might implicitly suggest that the social problems existing in Spain have nothing to do with those in Latin American, African or Asian countries.

Having said that, it pains me to have to inform the reviewer in question —and those who share his views— that the two aforementioned theses can be debunked with solid arguments. There are situations of social inequality and injustice even in countries considered to be developed. This also goes for present-day Spain, where it is possible to verify that inequalities are deeply rooted in the country's social fabric. This is something that can be seen in *normal* situations, but has become especially visible in the exceptional times in which we are living with the current economic and social crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This systemic inequality was even greater and more evident during the Franco dictatorship, when Freire's ideas reached Spain. It should be recalled that in post-war Spain there were situations of poverty and deprivation that are nowadays associated with southern countries. The stories of our families and neighbours who were children at the time, plus historical research on that grim chapter in Spanish history —above all the autarchic[2] period of Francoism— coincide and are reiterative: child labour from a very early age, with the consequent lack of universal schooling, situations of widespread hunger and deprivation, slums, etc. Without mentioning the evident absence of civil and political rights characterising dictatorships.

In the 1960s, despite the cycle of developmentalism on which Spain had embarked, the mass exodus of farm labourers to the country's industrialised cities (Seville, Madrid, Bilbao, Barcelona and Valencia, among others) led to a new cycle of social exclusion in the neighbourhoods in which they settled: tenement housing, the lack of regular domestic water and electricity supplies, the absence of social services (education and health), etc. The neighbourhood movement, which began to emerge during the final stage of Francoism (at the end of the 1960s and at the beginning of the 1970s) and which would continue with its demands during the initial stage of the democratic period, was a key element in the organisation of these struggles and vindications.

Nonetheless, the socioeconomic inequalities did not end there. In the mid-1980s, now under the 'modernising' Felipe González government, the research and social studies team at Cáritas published a blunt report highlighting the existence of 8 million people living under the poverty threshold in Spain[3]. While in the most developed countries in Europe the welfare state had been introduced during the three glorious decades (1945-1975), in Spain there was a precarious 'ill-being' state which was insufficient to guarantee minimum levels of social or living conditions for the most vulnerable sectors of society.

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1. Some of the words in this sentence appear in italics in order to underscore the fact that I distance myself from them, since their purpose is to examine critically the theoretical presuppositions of the reviewer in question.

2. For an overview of the situation of the Spanish economy in the autarchic period of Francoism, see: https://bit.ly/3lucNda

3. https://elpais.com/diario/1986/10/11/sociedad/529369208_850215.html

Thus, a cursory analysis of global inequalities from the world-system perspective allows us to confirm that centre-periphery relations are not only apparent between the European powers (centre) and the peripheral economies of the South, but that this pattern is also reproduced in the countries and economies of the centre themselves, even in the cities of these developed enclaves. The economic and social crisis recently triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored this yet again: it has had the greatest social, economic and health impact on those mainly working-class neighbourhoods, where people with precarious and poorly-paid jobs live. And, therefore, in relation to the subject broached here, it is entirely appropriate to talk about communication for development and social change in Spain, insofar as it is not a country unaffected by situations of poverty and social inequality. It is this context that gives rise to the need to initiate communication processes aimed at emphasising the structural and institutional aspects that have brought about these imbalances. Global capitalism also demonstrates its destructive capacity here, although its effects do not have the same intensity or characteristics as in other places of the so-called 'Global South'.

So, dear anonymous reviewer, even though it is highly improbable that you will read this, I would urge you to reconsider your erratic prejudices about 'Freire in Spain', which you conveyed to me in a situation as unconducive to dialogue as the anonymous revision of a scientific paper.

Freire in the liberating educational practices promoted in Spain

As has just been seen, the context in post-war Spain offered the right conditions for the ideas of Freire to find an echo here. And that is precisely what happened. As of the end of the 1960s, those ideas began to circulate in the country, mainly on three fronts. Firstly, among the activists and groups of Catholic Action (Acción Católica, hereinafter AC), which brought together sectors of the Catholic Church that understood that their faith would inevitably lead them to take on commitments in the socio-political sphere in order to transform society. The ranks of the trade unions and working-class political parties that had begun to evolve clandestinely would be swelled by these Christians. On many occasions, these organisations used parish churches to meet and take refuge[4]. AC attracted different groups, including Young Christian Workers (YCW) and the Catholic Action Workers' Brotherhood (Hermandad Obrera de Acción Católica, HOAC), which adopted the Belgian priest Joseph Cardijn's 'Review of Life' methodology, to which Freire's ideas were very much akin.

Secondly, during this period Freire's ideas circulated thanks to the many informal educational initiatives that had been launched in Spain. Their aim was either to introduce education in those places in which there were no state schools or to promote initiatives that have subsequently been lumped together under the labels of 'social education' and 'sociocultural animation', but which were not designated as such at the time (i.e., at the end of the 1960s and at the beginning of the 1970s).

Thirdly and lastly, the ideas of Freire were disseminated in Spain in the so-called 'Movements for Pedagogical Renovation' (Movimientos de Renovación Pedagógica, hereinafter MRPs) which introduced a number of novel educational methodologies for the purpose of creating a new society that was fairer and more democratic and participatory. They had nothing to do

4. DÍAZ- SALAZAR, R. (1998). *La izquierda y el cristianismo*. Madrid: Taurus.

with the methodological innovations of the Bologna Process which, in the main, are serving to perpetuate, in a more sophisticated and perverse manner, the imbalances generated by global capitalism; namely, by changing methodologies without altering the existing social disorder. Through their activities (workshops, summer schools, etc.) the MRPs disseminated the approaches of authors like Freinet, Freire and Milani, among many others.

A paradigmatic example of the synthesis between these three fronts on which Freire's ideas were introduced in Spain (AC, informal education and the MRPs) was the unique experience of the Editorial Popular in its initial stage, when this publishing house was run by Antonio Albarrán and Enrique del Río. They had close ties with AC, especially in the case of the former with his commitment to and work for YCW. Similarly, they were engaged in and had contacts with many initiatives in the field of informal education the length and breadth of Spain. The publishing house also served to highlight and disseminate the work of the most active MRPs, as was the case with, for example, the publication in its catalogue of the book entitled, *Leer periódicos en clase* (1986), by José Luis Corzo, a member of the Milanian Educators' Movement (Movimiento de Educadores Milanianos, MEM), inspired by the work of Lorenzo Milani. The book describes the initiative launched by this movement revolving around the critical reading of the press and the way in which its members went about this especially at the Casa Escuela Santiago Uno in Salamanca.

Not only his ideas circulated in Spain, for Freire visited the country on several occasions, keeping in touch with representatives of the three aforementioned fronts disseminating his thought here. In the 1980s and 1990s, these contacts, together with the recognition of his work, prompted several Spanish universities to put forward the proposal to award him an honorary doctorate: this was the case of the Pontifical University of Salamanca[5] —where the proposal was rejected— the University of Barcelona and the Complutense University of Madrid, where it ultimately came to fruition in 1988 and 1991, respectively.

Freire in the peculiar institutionalisation process of the field of communication in Spain

If in the previous section we have seen some examples of how easy it is to trace the presence of Freirean thought in the field of education in Spain, unfortunately this is not the case in the field of communication. It is not such a simple task to follow its tracks neither in practice nor in research. As I have examined in previous works (Marí, 2013, 2018, 2020), the theoretical currents of the field of communication that are more or less in keeping with Freire's approaches have had a tardy and negligible presence in communication research in Spain.

Apart from occasional, fragmentary and sporadic initiatives, it would not be until the 1990s when Freire came into his own as one of the theoretical fathers of communication for social change in Spain. This glaring absence is related, among other reasons, to the virtual absence of Latin American communication thought when the foundations of communication research were being laid in Spain (Martínez Nicolás, 2008). It was not one of the central threads, for which reason many of its authors were totally unfamiliar to most

5. The book entitled, *Freire en Salamanca* (PPC, 2016), offers an account of Freire's visit to this university and the ultimately frustrated attempt to award him a honorary PhD.

of those studying communication sciences at Spanish universities in the 1970s and 1980s, and to the country's communication researchers. Even nowadays, the majority of Spanish communication graduates have not heard of them or are unfamiliar with the contribution that authors like Luis Ramiro Beltrán, Paulo Freire, José Marques de Melo, Mario Kaplún and Rosa María Alfaro, to name but a few, have made to the field.

Indeed, Freire's thought has been disseminated to a certain extent in the field of communication in Spain through the oeuvre of the Uruguayan Mario Kaplún who, among many other contributions, has applied the educational models formulated by Freire to the field of communication. Thus, for example, in his book *El comunicador popular* (1985) he analyses the characteristics of the banking, manipulation and dialogic models and their expression in the field of communication. However, the book would not be as popular in Spain as its adaptation by Ediciones de la Torre in 1998, included in the collection co-ordinated by Roberto Aparici, under the title, 'Una pedagogía de la comunicación'.

Since then, references to the 'dialogic model' of Kaplún/Freire have appeared more often in communication research conducted in Spain by some of those working in educommunication, in particular, and among those focusing on the intersection between communication and the endeavours of social movements, development cooperation issues or community media.

Lastly, as occurs with key researchers in other fields, the cycles and processes of re-appropriation of Freire's thought are still active years after his death in 1997. He continues to serve as inspiration for individuals and collectives that, in other geographical, social and cultural contexts, have plotted similar courses. Be that as it may, the depth and nuances of Freire's oeuvre call for a large dose of caution when analysing his ideas, for there is the risk of simplifying or incorrectly interpreting them. A risk that everyone runs, even those contributing to this monograph. The other danger into which it is easy to fall with authors of the stature of Freire is to convert their oeuvre and biography into a hagiography, something that would be exactly what the Brazilian philosopher would not have wanted.

Over the next few years, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the birth of Freire, there will be a proliferation of monographs and texts devoted to him, for which reason it will be interesting to see how these issues are addressed. It is now up to the readers of this issue of *Commons* to make a final judgement on how they have been approached here. At any rate, we trust that the reading of its content will serve to keep Freire's legacy alive in years to come.

Cádiz, 9 December 2020

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