

Re-reading the world: Critical pedagogy as a tool of transitional justice

Quoc Khai Bui*

Abstract: Paulo Freire (1921–77) was undoubtedly one of the most influential pedagogical theorists of the twentieth century, inaugurating an entirely new direction for education worldwide. He also served as a special consultant for the World Council of Churches, where he championed democracy and the rights of marginalised communities throughout Latin America. Most importantly, after the end of authoritarian rule in Brazil, he returned to the country and participated in its transitional justice (TJ) process as the Secretary of Education in São Paulo. Given these strong synergies between his critical approaches to education and the aims of TJ, it comes as a surprise that thus far there have been no attempts to evaluate the potential of Freirean pedagogy within a transitional context. It will also provide a preliminary analysis of the applicability of Freirean methods to TJ based on an existing account of a literacy class in El Salvador. Its findings are that the lack of attention for Paulo Freire was attributable to the unwillingness of many TJ scholars to go beyond the established "toolkit" and the dominance of English as a language of publication in the field (Freire wrote exclusively in Portuguese, although many of his works have been translated into English). It also found that Freirean pedagogical methods can contribute to TJ process through its use of generative themes which commemorate past atrocities at a grassroots community level and its open-ended curriculum which encourages learners to critically examine their current situation and formulate plans for future actions.

Keywords: Paulo Freire; critical pedagogy; transitional justice; commemoration; social transformation; generative themes

*Quoc Khai Bui is currently an undergraduate student majoring in international relations at Tokyo International University. His research interests are political polarisation in democratic contexts, transnational extremist movements, and the role of pedagogy in deradicalisation. quockhai082004@gmail.com.



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1. Introduction

Paulo Freire was without doubt among the most influential educators of the twentieth century: his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in 1968 was an instant bestseller in both its Portuguese original and English translation. More than high volume of sales, his innovative reconceptualisation of education as revolutionary dialogue helped create the field of critical pedagogy in particular and contributed to the development of critical theory in general. Nonetheless, Freire's impact 50 years on in academia seems much more constrained than his image in popular consciousness. More specifically, critical educators (see interviews near the end of Freire 2018) have consistently warned against the "domestication" of his ideas and their incorporation into neoliberal educational theory, devoid of the original context which made his writings so revolutionary. Perhaps even worse than domestication is complete silence: outside of certain pedagogical and literary theory circles, Freire seemed all but forgotten, even when his thinking should be most relevant, such as in the field of transitional justice (TJ).

There are two main research questions which this paper will address: 1) why have Paulo Freire and other authors within the critical pedagogy space been largely ignored by the field of TJ as a whole, despite their prominence within social justice movements throughout the world? and 2) how can we harmonise critical adult education programmes with larger TJ efforts? For the former, bibliometric research is used to show that TJ, due to the way research has been organised and classified by indexers such as Web of Science and Scopus, unwittingly reproduces neoliberal and Anglocentric assumptions, thus hindering wider appreciation for Freire who himself did not write in English. For the latter, a previous Freirean-based adult education initiative in El Salvador (as reported by Purcell-Gates and Waterman 2000) will be critically analysed according to the criteria laid out by Murphy's (2017) theory of TJ to reveal how such initiatives can be integrated into larger TJ efforts in general.

This paper is organised as follows: first, the background section will briefly introduce Paulo Freire and his contributions to social (and transitional) justice throughout Latin America; second, the literature review will summarise the ongoing debate between "orthodox" and "transformative" TJ scholars and its impact on the inclusion of various mechanisms within the TJ "toolkit"; third, mixed-method bibliometrics and thematic review will be used to show the current under-appreciation of adult education as a TJ tool; fourth, based mainly on a close reading of Purcell-Gates and Waterman's auto-ethnography of their experience leading a Freirean-based literacy class in rural El Salvador (2000), there will be a speculative discussion on the principles of integrating adult education into wider TJ efforts; lastly, the conclusion will summarise the foregoing and offer direction for future praxis.

2. Background

2.1. *A brief biography of Paulo Freire (1921–97)*

1962, Recife. A group of Brazilian sugarcane workers gathered for an extraordinary experiment. Paulo Freire, who had by then spent decades refining his pedagogical approach, would teach them how to read and write the word; and in turn, they would teach him how to read and write the world. This first Freirean literacy class (which he termed “cultural circle”), whose goals were achieved in an unprecedented 45 days, proved beyond doubt the effectiveness of his revolutionary methods over the traditional methods of literacy education (Oxman 2017). The implications for the whole of Brazil were enormous: a literacy test was then in use to prevent many illiterate adults from exercising their democratic right to vote (Martínez Fritscher et al. 2010). Many Catholic and progressive groups thus sought to replicate the Freirean cultural circle on a nationwide scale with the support of then-President João Goulart in order to permanently move the country’s political landscape in a more equitable direction. However, this plan never materialised due to a military coup in 1964, whose leaders immediately exiled Freire and his associates from the country in fear of the threat this humble teacher posed to the old order (Freire 2018, original foreword by Shaull).

Undeterred, Freire remained active in his capacity as a special consultant for the Geneva-based World Council of Churches and brought his methods to marginalised peasant and Indigenous communities throughout Latin America. In 1968, he compiled his reflections on educational philosophy in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which was swiftly banned by the authoritarian regimes of the region. An instant classic, progressive educators around the world found much valuable insights from such ideas as the banking method, conscientisation, teacher-student dialogue, and reading the world. With Brazil starting the slow return to democracy, in 1980 Freire returned to the country to resume his interrupted work once again. In 1988, he became the Secretary of Education in São Paulo, and was instrumental in the city’s implementation of TJ through his educational reforms. Even so, Freire continued to travel around the world to showcase his revolutionary pedagogy to teachers worldwide until his death in 1997 (Pace 1997).

2.2. *Principles of Freirean pedagogy*

His voluminous work and tireless advocacy have made a significant impact on the field of education. Adult education in particular was shaped by his work: his philosophy has been successfully applied not only to teaching the economically marginalised, but also those who were socially excluded due to their race, gender, or religion, as evidenced by the voluminous praise in the series of interviews with many veteran educators near the end of the fiftieth anniversary edition of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire 2018). His central contention runs thus: in

a truly democratic classroom, it is the students who take the lead in posing practical problems as class material. Teachers and students then join in discussion to research the issue and analyse its relationships to the greater social structures controlling their lives before finally finding ways to transform their current situations (Freire 2018). In this way, the students have the initiative to shape the curriculum around their lived experience instead of having the curriculum imposed upon them by educational (and political) authorities.

It must be noted that a Freirean education is explicitly political: for him, reading the word is not an apolitical activity wherein the readers let themselves be filled up with knowledge from truthful sources but rather a constant conflict in which readers use their own pre-existing knowledge of the world to critically evaluate the written word before arriving at a synthesis which would allow them to objectively recognise and potentially overcome the contradictions in their lives (which he termed “limit-situations”), whether imposed upon them or by them on others (Pouwels 2019). Indeed, Freire (2018) went so far as to declare domination a “fundamental theme” of the modern world and liberation (or “humanisation”) the objective of all progressives. From this first pair of themes flows the other “generative themes” so central to his educational methods: these are certain words, phrases, or pictures which highlight an unequal aspect of the students’ lives that can then be used to inspire discussion and reflection. Therefore, in a Freirean-based class the students not only learn how to read and write the word but also to analyse and transform the world around them.

Such an approach has clear synergies with TJ initiatives. Indeed, a recurring theme throughout the latter has been the difficulty of making moral and legal judgments “stick”: from Hungary (Kovács 2008) to East Timor (Kent 2011) and Rwanda (Waldorf 2020), there seems to be an eagerness from many sectors of society, especially those who had benefited and continue to benefit from past repression, to simply move on and forget once the truth commissions and the special courts have completed their mandates. In these contexts, what is needed is not expansive monuments or elaborate rites (see Salemink 2022) but rather community-level initiatives which bring people together to critically reflect on the generative themes of the past and thus arrive at the blueprint for a more hopeful future. However, until now education, not to mention critical education, has only been integrated into TJ in an ad hoc manner, bolted onto recommendations wherever convenient. To understand this reluctance to expand the “toolkit” of TJ, it is necessary to first review the ongoing debate between orthodox and transformative TJ scholars.

3. Literature review

This literature review section aims to compare and contrast orthodox and transformative approaches to TJ through reviewing their accounts of

fundamental areas of research: the goals of TJ and the acceptable “toolkit” for practical application. The aim here is to show how orthodox TJ usually fails to consider almost any mechanisms that fall outside the usual package of trials, truth commissions, lustration and vetting programmes, reparations, and amnesties; meanwhile, transformative TJ is still in a relatively early stage of development, which means that the implications of its approach are not yet fully comprehended.

3.1. Accountability or transformation? The conflicting goals and tools of transitional justice

One of the most common refrains made by TJ scholars is this: TJ is Janus-faced, the Roman god who can simultaneously look forward and backward (Teitel 2003; Murphy 2017). This statement is meant to signify the twofold goals commonly associated with TJ: accountability for past crimes and reconciliation for a better future. Such a dual purpose has also been echoed by Kofi Annan’s official United Nations report: TJ is “the full range of processes and mechanisms associated with a society’s attempts to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses, in order to ensure accountability, serve justice and achieve reconciliation” (2004, 4). Indeed, many working for international organisations such as the United Nations and the European Union or various human rights non-governmental organisations (NGOs) would go further in making the point that reconciliation is impossible without criminal accountability (Salvioli 2023) or at least acknowledgement and apology for abuses prior to political transition (Zalaquett 1991). However, this perception of the complementarity of peace and justice arose largely in the 2000s: indeed, one of the academic controversies which spurred the development of early TJ scholarship in the 1980s and 1990s from the Aspen Institute conference to the New York Charter 77 Foundation conference is how States should navigate the seemingly unresolvable contradiction between the two (Leebaw 2008).

In many regards, no single TJ mechanism can address the two above goals by themselves, which is why at present TJ efforts usually combine several different mechanisms in the hopes of maximising impact. Nonetheless, Leebaw (2008) made a convincing case that the residual tensions between these two goals should not simply be ignored. For example, the goal of countering impulse for violent revenge, which is strongest at the beginning stages of transition, is complicated by the need to observe due process throughout prosecution processes which will most likely not finish until the end of the transition period, not to mention the risk of guilty individuals being released due to lack of evidence. The lesson is clear: trade-offs between peace and justice can be minimised through well-designed TJ mechanisms, but never completely eliminated.

Faced with such an impasse, scholars tend to place more emphasis on the one goal, though rarely to the exclusion of the other. On the transformative

side, Murphy insists that both accountability and reconciliation are necessary in her formula of the “just pursuit of societal transformation” (2017, 112). However, her discussion of short- and medium-term “just pursuit” clearly emphasises only those TJ designs which support the other goals of long-term “societal transformation,” namely strengthening the rule of law, restoring institutional and interpersonal trust, and empowering citizens; meanwhile, such emphasis is lacking in her discussion of the latter’s relationship to the former. A prominent critique of Murphy (2017) from an orthodox perspective was more open in its priorities. Walker (2018) made the point that transformative scholars have long criticised, and orthodox theorists long valued, the conventional TJ “toolkit” of trials, truth commissions, lustration and vetting, and reparations precisely because they are designed to achieve accountability by punishing perpetrators and compensating victims with no consideration for societal transformation. More concerning, Millar and Lecy (2016) have observed a tendency for scholars in these two camps to severely limit their communication with the other camp and instead respond only to voices from their own side.

In relation to these two prominent stances, Freirean pedagogy leans decisively towards the forward-looking transformational approach. Nonetheless, Freire (2018) emphasised that prior to any revolutionary action, both the teachers and the students must first fully understand the mechanisms of social control that dominate their lives through attending to the history of past abuses. Only when they have held social forces responsible for entrapping them within these “limit-situations” can teachers and students actively engineer and conduct revolutionary ‘limit-acts’ which would allow them to break through to fuller humanity.

3.2. Legal or socio-economic? The contested tools of transitional justice

In light of this troubled history, the recent consensus which has coalesced around the conventional TJ “toolkit” as defined by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan (2004) in his report should not be taken for granted. Indeed, recent research has cast doubt on the ability of these “orthodox” TJ measures to fully address the needs of the present in relation to both the past and future. Firstly, criminal prosecutions, even if limited to only “the most responsible,” are extremely costly with ambiguous impacts (Kerr 2020). Even decades after the war in Yugoslavia ended and the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia finished its mandate, there is still a great reluctance from most participants to acknowledge the harm done to “other” groups although such truths have already been definitively established by prior fact-finding commissions (Pavlakovic 2019).

Horne (2014) has also shown that lustration and vetting programmes in European post-Communist countries actually undermined trust on an interpersonal level, which would certainly impact the prospects of social reconciliation and healing in the future. Furthermore, long been

held in esteem since Hayner's (2011) trailblazing work, the ability of truth commissions to actually reveal the truth and lay the foundation for future criminal accountability may also have been overstated as the sobering accounts by Kent (2011) and Teló et al. (2021) revealed. Finally, reparations delivered in a way insensitive to the recipient's culture and sense of identity as a victim, something virtually guaranteed to happen given the reduced State capacity in most transitional contexts, can risk revictimisation and invite social ostracisation (Schulz 2018).

In place of the patchwork of measures which characterised the orthodox approach to TJ, scholars advocating for social transformation have been more receptive to opening up the field. This more welcoming stance is due in large part to the more goal-oriented approach adopted by the transformative side in the debate. As such, it is important to once again briefly review the goals of transformative social justice as outlined by Murphy (2017): social transformation achieved through just means. From these twin goals, she successfully developed a complete theoretical account of the unique demands of TJ without any attempts at categorising the existing tools in the field. Such an omission was unsurprising, as she, and many other transformative TJ scholars, recognised the ambiguous results of the current "toolkit" and as such wished to leave the space open for new tools to be introduced into the field should they meet the criteria set out by her theory.

Naturally, this invitation has been eagerly accepted by scholars working in adjacent fields such as cultural anthropology, memory politics, and art theory, leading to important interdisciplinary work. These new contributions range from debt forgiveness (Gray 2007) and construction of local memorial spaces (Willard 2022) to performative art (Drexler 2022). The recent work on integrating education, and Freirean education, into TJ will be discussed in greater detail in the bibliometric analysis below.

4. Bibliometric analysis

4.1. Overview of bibliometrics

Statistical bibliography first emerged as a method of research in the 1920s with the work of E. Wyndham Hulme at Cambridge University (Lawani 1981). However, the true impetus for growth of this form of research came only with Pritchard (1969) who renamed the method to bibliometrics to avoid confusion with the bibliography of statistics, by then another established field. Since then, this method has experienced enormous development alongside the other two commonly used methods of meta-analysis and systematic literature review (Donthu et al. 2021).

Bibliometrics can be defined as the application of quantitative methods to bibliographic data (citations, author name, publications, etc.)

to discover systematic patterns or relationships within a given body of literature (Donthu et al. 2021). This method has been widely adopted for use throughout the sciences and humanities, ranging from healthcare (Guo et al. 2020) and business economics (Donthu et al. 2021) to chemistry (Yilmaz 2020) and adult education (Nylander et al. 2020) due to its ability to swiftly analyse vast numbers of papers while avoiding the potential biases a human reviewer usually has.

Despite its popularity in many other fields, bibliometric analysis was only recently applied to the study of TJ and peacebuilding (see Millar and Lecy 2016). A possible reason for this is that the field itself only developed recently and as such the amount of research remains manageable for a human reviewer employing the other two techniques mentioned earlier. However, as Millar and Lecy (2016) has shown in their identification of the two major disconnected strands of literature emphasising accountability and reconciliation, this technique has enormous potential to aid scholars in identifying clusters of research and potential gaps in the existing literature.

Following Nylander et al. (2020), this paper will first briefly review how indexation affects the ability of non-Anglophone scholars to participate in the field. After this basic overview has been established, citations will be explored in greater detail through a thematic exploration of TJ papers which referenced Freire, all of which unfortunately remained rather unengaged with Freirean philosophy of education, preferring instead to borrow only certain concepts from his approach to bolster their own. Finally, there will be a few speculative comments on the reason why the field of TJ has not accepted Freire as a member of their academic community.

4.2. The current state of transitional justice

Larsson (2009) posited that there now exists an “economy of publications and citations,” essentially the measures used by outside authorities such as Governments and international organisations to efficiently judge the output of an academic or an institution and allocate their limited resources accordingly (funding mainly but also official recognition and prestige). Such judgement is far from impartial, however, and the prioritisation of citations, number of publications, and impact factor can create perverse incentives. As Fire and Guestrin (2019) have observed, each of these metrics has been compromised: authors are citing themselves more than ever, the average number of authors for a paper has greatly increased, and the papers themselves are becoming shorter. However, alongside such misuse of bibliometrics for grant funding, authors are also developing new critical ways to utilise this method to uncover hidden power relations within academia.

A prime example of this dynamic can be seen in the practice of indexation. Originally developed to help organise and classify research,

major indexation authorities such as Web of Science and Scopus have now acquired authority as “gatekeepers,” with the ability to decide what type of scientific research is ‘high-quality’ (Nylander et al. 2020). This paper will mainly rely on Scopus as that is the only database the author has access to.

Up to 2025, only one TJ journal has been indexed in Scopus, the *International Journal of Transitional Justice* (IJTJ). However, TJ’s closely related sister-field, peacebuilding, has significantly more representation on the platform with four journals: *Peacebuilding* (PB), *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* (JPD), *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review* (ACPR), and *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding* (AJP). Further expanding the search query to all “peace”-related journals produced 25 results; nonetheless, many of these journals are irrelevant to the present topic as they are focused on nuclear disarmament. As such, the rest of this analysis will be solely focused on the TJ and peacebuilding journals.

The first noteworthy detail about this small collection of journals is how they are classified by Scopus. Despite all being focused on similar topics, these five journals are classified under four different fields: Law (IJTJ); Political Science and International Relations (PB; JPD); Cultural Studies (ACPR); and Arts and Humanities (miscellaneous) (AJP). On the one hand, such a fragmented base of knowledge seems to confirm Millar and Lecy (2016)’s claim that the two fields are currently drifting apart from each other into law-dominated and psychocultural theory-dominated halves. On the other hand, it is possible that the managers of Scopus simply have issues categorising such inherently interdisciplinary fields as TJ and peacebuilding. In the final analysis, even if such categorisations are not important to active researchers in the field, it can skew the perception of outsiders, for example those coming from a critical pedagogy background, who wished to contribute to the ongoing academic conversation.

In contrast to the prior fragmentation in terms of subject areas, the language of publication is unsurprisingly uniform: all five journals accept only submissions made in English. That English has become the lingua franca of the academic world in recent years is not a new discovery (see Nylander et al. 2020); Larsson (2009), commenting on this issue, raised the point that the hegemony of English (and American-English as specified by AJP, a journal based in Seoul) risks isolating non-Anglophone research communities and obscuring their contributions from the greater research world. Furthermore, this hegemonic status of English also has troubling implications for the ongoing top-down v. bottom-up controversy in both fields. Although there have been calls to incorporate more “voices from below” into the field (Lundy and McGovern 2008), the fact remains that outside of researchers, aid workers, and their interpreters, most TJ participants are not proficient in English. As such, the latter’s comments require translation before they can be incorporated into publishable TJ research (see, for example, the many interpreters named by Hayner (2011) in her acknowledgements). In this

process, Anglophone scholars require only one round of translation from the local language to English, but non-Anglophone scholars may require several rounds if they have not conducted the initial fieldwork in English. This adds further complexity to their research should they choose to submit their work to one of the indexed journals listed above.

The language barrier which divided Anglophone TJ scholars and those who are part of TJ processes on the ground also separated the former from non-Anglophone research. Indeed, the reception of the Portuguese-speaking Freire in the academic world is most likely impacted by this dominance for two reasons. Firstly, even though the basic principles of his theory were already expressed in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire continued to develop and modify his methods in response to critiques from other pedagogy scholars, such as feminists and critical race theorists, throughout his lifetime (Freire and Macedo 1995). Although parts of this later body of works have been translated into English, much remains available only in Portuguese. Secondly, the contributions of other non-Anglophone authors to Freirean pedagogy also risk being overlooked if they are not already translated into English. Without sufficient engagement with both the English and non-English portions of this body of literature, there is the risk that insights from critical pedagogy will be “watered down” to fit with pre-existing TJ theories, as explored in the next section.

4.3. *Current engagement with Freire in the transitional justice literature*

The analysis will now move on to evaluate Freire’s impact, if any, on the study of TJ as a whole. Firstly, the intersection between TJ and education is a relatively new development. Cole (2007), writing in the very first issue of IJTJ, claimed that until then educational reforms have been conspicuously absent from TJ scholarship. She thus provided a starting point for discussion by reflecting on how history education can play a central role in democratic consolidation using the case studies of Germany and Japan. Since then, there has only been modest development in this subfield which remained largely centred on history education (see Bentrovato 2017; Davies 2017). In fact, Bellino et al. (2017) made the case in their systematic literature review that despite strong synergies between education and TJ, the research volume explicitly linking the two fields remains low. As explored below, the connections between critical approaches to education and TJ are even more sparse.

Searching Google Scholar using the key words “transitional justice” and “Freire” yields disappointing results: only two papers with significant numbers of citations, both firmly in the transformative TJ camp, have included Freire in their bibliography. First, Gready and Robins (2014) invoked Freire’s notion of conscientisation as similar to the transformation of victims into independent agents which in their view should be the

proper end goal of TJ efforts. Second, Shefik (2018), in his analysis of participatory art as a source of valuable information for TJ measures, mentioned the Freire-inspired theatre form developed by Augusto Boal (2008), *Theatre of the Oppressed*. In the first case, as Bellino et al. (2017) have observed, we see once again the instrumentalisation of Freire: his theory did not form the starting point for reflection but rather parts of it were carefully selected to support the author's desired end results. The second case was more faithful to Freire as the author emphasised how Freirean democratic principles can be applied throughout the entire collaborative process of making a play; nonetheless, he did not stress the point as the paper was focused on participatory art rather than pedagogy. There is thus a need for a complete account of how Freirean pedagogy can be applied to TJ contexts as part of broader transformative efforts.

5. Synergies between a Freirean-based curriculum and transitional justice

The analysis in this section will be based largely on the work of Purcell-Gates and Waterman (2000) in the rural El Salvador village of Papaturro in the aftermath of the 13-year long civil war there (1979–92). The village itself was a former plantation which had been abandoned during the war and resettled afterwards by refugees from various regions, who collectively purchased the land with their reparations money and converted the whole area into a farming cooperative. In this respect, the story of Papaturro shared many parallels with Willard's (2022) account of the indigenous Maya Mam village in Guatemala.

Although some of the men in the village had already acquired basic literacy skills during their time as refugees, most women remained illiterate and were thus unable to fully participate in communal spiritual activities and governance duties. Learning of their circumstances and their desire to learn how to read and write, Robin Waterman, a United States-based instructor, volunteered to lead an all-female literacy class in the village as part of the larger literacy programme *El Movimiento de las Mujeres de Custlacan* and to send regular reports throughout an 18-month period to Victoria Purcell-Gates who then authored the book. The two main lessons for TJ gained from this critical look into a Freirean-based class are as follows: open-ended curriculum and commemoration through generative themes.

5.1. Open-ended curriculum

Perhaps one of the most important features of Freire's education philosophy is the emphasis he places on democratic equality of students and teachers. Indeed, the entirety of chapter 4 from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire 2018) is dedicated to the various ways in which the banking model has stripped the learner of their dignity and perpetuated the domination of the haves over the have-nots. In contrast to this, Freire (2018) stressed the

importance of a critical teacher's genuine engagement with the people and the necessity of organising any classes around themes which are relevant to the learners' lives.

Purcell-Gates and Waterman (2000) echoed this dedication in their own discussion of how to design a Freirean-based curriculum. Firstly, Waterman herself moved to Papaturre to live in a small adobe similar to the rest of the villagers. She then actively participated in the everyday life of community members, assisting women learners in their domestic chores while actively recording any major events in their lives, such as their struggles to read drug prescriptions from the local pharmacy or reactions to the installation of a water pump. Such events are then transformed into the generative theme with which she starts each literacy class, at least in the beginning. The women would then be asked to speak on the theme and listen to their classmates' thoughts before writing a short extract related to the day's theme. In later stages of the class, where the women learners had already acquired a rudimentary knowledge of reading and writing, the teacher would often ask them to choose generative themes for the class themselves and lead the discussion. Such a participatory approach to learning ensures that the learners can freely choose to learn topics and words which are most relevant to their lives.

Although this approach is indeed resource-intensive in the beginning due to the low student-to-teacher ratio (as Purcell-Gates and Waterman (2000) frequently lamented), it has strong potential to become self-sustaining over time as the authors themselves noted that many women learners were eager to teach one another outside of class or even volunteer in the literacy programme as assistant teachers themselves. This is entirely in accordance with Freire's (2018) vision of a community of independent learner-teachers supporting one another's quest for humanisation long after the end of official support. Such an open-ended and learner-directed curriculum has strong potential in many TJ contexts which have long suffered from insufficient sensitivity to local customs and traditions (Schulz 2018).

5.2. Commemoration through generative themes

Generative themes do not only serve as a tool to engender mutual literacy; they can also hold potential for commemoration of past atrocities. This fact has seemingly been overlooked by both TJ researchers and Freirean educators. This is surprising as Freirean principles have already been successfully transplanted to the participatory art field as a form of memorial practice (Shelik 2018). However, a close reading of chapter 2 from Purcell-Gates and Waterman (2000) shows the great effectiveness of this approach.

In chapter 2 (which is chronologically close to the end of the literacy class), Waterman asked her learners and other men in the village to narrate

to her the story of the founding of Papaturro. Interestingly, the authors seemed to have intended the section as no more than historical context for the book; however, the resultant stories, as collectively told by the villagers, revealed a strong desire to commemorate the event. The narrative started before the war with the poverty and political exclusion of the *campesino* (peasants), then moved on to their victimisation by both government forces and leftist insurgents throughout the conflict, climaxing with the infamous massacre at Lempa River in which the army killed 250 unarmed refugees. Afterwards, the story turned to the villagers' experience in a Honduras refugee camp where some were inspired to teach themselves how to read and write so as to avoid similar victimisation in the future. Unfortunately, the story ended prematurely (due to late hours) before reaching the actual construction of the village, which would have provided strong comparative material with Willard (2022)'s account.

Throughout the session, it is striking how closely aligned the storytellers' experiences are to what Murphy (2017) has described as the social circumstances which called for TJ: pervasive structural inequality (limited access to education and healthcare); normalised political and collective wrongdoing (pre-war landlord-tenant relations and the Lempa River massacre); serious existential insecurity (fear that peace agreement which ended the war will eventually fail); and fundamental uncertainty about authority (the need for the *campesino* to self-organise to become independent from the State). Like Murphy (2017), they also consciously link these disparate experiences of oppression and precarity together with various generative themes, including *miseria* (extreme poverty) and *operativas* (scorched-earth operations by the army). This unintentional harmony in knowledge between TJ theory and Freirean practices revealed the great potential of generative themes as a means of commemoration in the aftermath of widespread abuses, possibly deployed together with more traditional mechanisms in the TJ toolkit such as truth commissions.

6. Conclusion

This brief linking of Purcell-Gates and Waterman's ethnography (2000) to the greater TJ literature has hopefully been sufficient to convince practicing scholars and social workers of the enormous potential Freirean education holds for transitional contexts. It is unfortunate that Freire had not received greater recognition and acceptance from the field, a situation due in large part to the continued Anglophone dominance over the field's fragmented research. Indeed, Freirean educational philosophy, as have been reviewed near the beginning, not only had great synergies with transformative approaches to TJ but had also been applied to a Brazil undergoing democratic transition by Freire himself in his capacity as São Paulo's Secretary of Education. Unfortunately, the author cannot provide an analysis of Freire's programme at this critical juncture due to lack of

proficiency in Portuguese; nonetheless, this forgotten history of early TJ practices certainly holds much promise for future research.

Another avenue of research is through expanding the scope of analysis through collecting new evidence. Due to the paucity of evidence, this paper is mainly focused on only one well-detailed instance of a Freirean literacy class. However, Purcell-Gates and Waterman (2000) themselves stress the necessity for Freirean educators to adapt to their learners' needs. As such, currently active Freirean programmes worldwide provide another potential window for insights into how his educational methods can support TJ initiatives.

Finally, Freirean pedagogy is not the only school of critical pedagogy. TJ scholars should also turn to the work of other prominent educators in this field, such as bell hooks, for potential lessons on the construction of power relations prior to and during transitional contexts. TJ as a field of study has long benefited from basing their analyses on theories from other fields such as ethics, law, international relations, political science, and more recently cultural and art studies. Further fruitful interdisciplinary exchanges should thus be encouraged in order to help scholars better understand how to achieve the ultimate goal of transformation, namely the creation of a society where everyone has the chance to become fully human.

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