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Annunciation and denunciation in Paulo Freire's dialogical popular education

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I consider in this paper the question of balance in popular education between what we can call annunciation and denunciation, inspired by the work of Paulo Freire. By annunciation, I mean the role of love, affirmation, encouragement and profound encounters with otherness; by denunciation, I have in mind the spirit of critique and challenge to the established order of things. In the process, I question the marginalisation of liberation theology in Paulo Freire's work among some radical educators. There has, I suggest, been a sundering of spirituality, and especially religious insight, from rational enquiry in the academic mainstream, which has influenced readings of Freire. Modernity has privileged intellectualism and critical rationality as the only valid way of knowing; matters of faith and varieties of religious experience have correspondingly been privatised.

Keywords: *secularism, religion, capitalism, critical spirit*

Introduction: recovering the lost dimensions of Freire's work

I consider in this paper a question of balance in popular education between what we can call annunciation, on the one hand, and

denunciation, on the other. A balance that can shape learner experience, for better or worse, in struggles for radical change, individually and collectively. By annunciation, I mean the role of love, affirmation and potentially profound, agentic encounters with otherness in existentially significant forms of learning; by denunciation, a spirit of critique and fundamental questioning of the established order of things. In the process, I challenge the neglect or marginalisation of the spiritual, and above all, liberation theology in Paulo Freire's work. There has, I suggest, been a sundering of spirituality from rational enquiry in the academic mainstream. Modernity has privileged intellectualism and critical rationality as the only valid way of knowing; matters of faith and varieties of religious experience have been privatised.

There can correspondingly be an overly rigid secularisation of educational experience, and a denial of religious inspiration, bringing a danger of hermeneutical reductionism and ontological sterility, as well as a psychological restriction. Freire developed a living, vibrant, loving religious as well as secular perspective within popular education, doing justice to the richness, complexity and existential challenges of ordinary human beings. He strove to establish the right balance between critique, and affirmation and encouragement, between love and critical action in the world. The roots of his liberation theology lie of course in profound inequalities, injustice and violence against the poor in Latin America, and more widely, as well as the conservatism and corruption of the Catholic Church. He was to insist provocatively that the poor were given the great gift of epistemological privilege within liberation struggles. They knew what it was like to suffer, bringing them closer to a suffering, crucified Christ. And thus, to understanding, experientially, what the priorities might be for wider human flourishing.

Popular education, for Freire, was an agentic, profoundly spiritual as well as material encounter within humanly and ecologically embodied historical processes, like capitalism. The biblical narrative of the annunciation symbolised history turned upside down: new life and hope being found not among the wealthy and privileged but incarnated in the experiences of a poor Palestinian girl from a backwater of the Roman Empire. The symbolism of her story is one of new, maybe divine, loving, spiritual and, critically, emancipatory potential entering the depths of being, providing profound resources of hope for a whole humanity. A story of transcendence in imminence, power in the lowly, and ecstatic

poetry in the Magnificat (Luke 1, 46-55; Luke 4, 18-19). Paulo Freire drew inspiration from the Austrian born theologian Martin Buber's (1937) I/Thou dynamics; of the divine potential in everyone in good enough relationships. Drawing on Freire's inspiration, I bring into the frame two in-depth narratives of the lived experience of actual and potential transformation in the lives of specific learners and consider the symbolic interplay of annunciation and denunciation, for them, on the margins.

There can, to repeat, be a tendency, among Western educators, and in the wider academy, to neglect the theological grounding of Freire's work (see, for example, Mayo, 2004). Freire's deep Catholic religious faith is easily overlooked or is seen, by radicals, as an unnecessary transcendental encumbrance when interpreting his work (McClaren, 1994). After all, the Catholic Church's patriarchal abuses, its demonstrable seduction by power and privilege, its too frequent alliance with colonialism and the abuse of indigenous, poor and marginalized peoples are well-documented. Think of residential schools in Canada, largely run, on behalf of the Government, by the Catholic Church. Or the abuse of children by priests or of young single mothers tyrannised in Ireland. Irwin Leopando (2017) notes how various education disciples of Freire barely mention his faith and theological inspiration. These are not polite topics for radical academic conversation, nor to be taken too seriously.

There is a problem in referencing religious influences in popular adult education as a whole, where once they had an accepted place (Formenti and West, 2018). Fergal Finnegan (2020), for instance, in enthusiastically reviewing a recent book, in part theologically inspired, by Wilma Fraser (Fraser, 2018) on seeking wisdom in teaching and learning, admits to feeling discomfort at acknowledging the inspiration of religion, even when framed through a feminist lens. The dark history of the church in his native Ireland hovers over his reading. Even when the neglected Goddess of feminine ways of knowing, Sophia, is to the fore, and there is a critical spirit towards patriarchy, colonialism and instrumentalisation in a radical adult education. Despite, as stated, the prominent place of religion in the history of adult and popular education, in various countries, modernist secular judgement can be disdainful (Formenti and West, 2018).

Critical rationality and the intellectual denunciation of oppressive economic, cultural and political forces are what really count, among

academic radicals. Annunciation smacks of outdated transcendental, mystical obscurantism. Love gets a mention (Finnegan, 2021) but pivotal resources of hope lie in intellectual activity, like critical theory, critical realism and/or secular feminism, if oppression is to be challenged. Emotionality, relationality, the complex interplay of inner and outer worlds, and love, may get an occasional mention in the literature of transformative learning, for instance, but the place of religious inspiration can be tentative, even though there are notable exceptions (Tisdell, 2017; West, 2016; 2017; Formenti and West, 2018). To bring Mary, the mother of Jesus, into the frame and the symbolism of the annunciation might seem eccentric. Yet, the symbolism of annunciation: of new life created, however fragile, and of certain kinds of 'transcendental' experience in testimonies of learning can be resonant. As in the blessing of a sunflower turning its head to the sun, touching the heart, maybe soul, on a learning pilgrimage, in a moment of grace (Tisdell, 2017; Formenti and West, 2018). Or when new life is created in the recognition given by an emotionally attuned tutor, in a literature class, which could lead, in alliance with the good symbolic object of literature itself, to agency and appreciation of feminist critique. A spirit of annunciation can be observed, in many and diverse ways, if we are hermeneutically and imaginatively open to such metaphors (Tisdell, 2017; Fraser, 2018; Formenti and West, 2018; West, 1996). In the poetic language of the Magnificat new life and resources of hope are created for everyone, most of all the poor and lowly. Perhaps it is the capacity to see and interpret experience afresh, playfully, like a child as well as an adult, in open, eclectic ways, which really matters (Formenti and West, 2018).

I suggest that the symbolism of the Annunciation both celebrates new, embodied, liberating life alongside the messiness, fragility, ambivalence, and pain of such encounters (Formenti and West, 2018). As learners, as people, in such moments, we may be called to take risks, which are existentially difficult, even frightening. Learning, of any significant kind, tends to be conflicted, agonising, anxiety provoking, if potentially liberating too. We get glimpses, as learners, of new life but are asked to take this largely on trust. Learning, as psychoanalyst Deborah Britzman (2003) notes, is often rendered in idealised ways, emptied of human conflict, of hate and ambivalence, as well as love. We need a more inclusive, imaginative, reflexively aware as well as critical sensibility if we are not to close down interpretation prematurely. Quite simply,

Mary's life, or what we know or imagine of it, suggests something altogether darker as well as inspiring in her encounter with profound otherness. Perspectives like these get lost, especially in Marxist readings of Freire's work. It is true that Freire's adoption of Marxism, at a later stage in his development, really mattered to him. Marxism helped him develop a language and interpretive power to unmask the dark, hidden, oppressive workings of capitalism; a theoretical language needed by learners too. Freire was deeply attracted to Marx's analysis of capitalist dynamics, of the power of manipulation, consumption, solipsistic individualism and structural inequalities in human oppression. But, for Freire, Marx consolidated his, Freire's, liberation theology rather than transcended it (Leopando, 2017). It was his religious faith that mattered throughout, even if he would happily have taken communion with both Jesus and Marx alike. To Marx, he may well have said, that in breaking bread together, new life, hope and radical energy, symbolically, were born again. Marx, of course, as a good Jew, would have disagreed but hopefully, they could have exchanged knowing smiles, and allowed a deepening dialogue to develop.

Freire, liberation theology, annunciation and denunciation.

I want to sketch out some key aspects of liberation theology, and its place and inspiration in Freire's work. Liberation theology, Cox (1984) suggests, is a very distinctive way of interpreting the role of theology in the world. It has less to do, for instance, with making Christianity plausible in the eyes of increasing numbers of sceptics, especially educated Western ones, but seeks instead to confront the political, cultural, economic and religious structures that marginalise or oppress countless peoples around the world. Its purpose becomes one of unmasking the suffering and harm done to people, rather than to convince in some more abstract, theological way about Christian 'truths'. Freire (2000) himself rejected abstract theorising or sectarian proselytizing of any kind. Here lies a conception of God who supports people in making history and in their attempts to become more fully, generously and creatively human rather than instructing them in quiescence. Liberation theologians become, in such terms, conscientising, humanising educators in their own right.

There is method at the heart of the process. It was developed in Catholic Social Action programmes where people – theologians and clerics - spent

many hours working in the slums and poor villages among everyday believers, and those who struggled to believe anything. Christians, it was stressed, must incarnate the Gospel in their everyday situations. These were places where God might reveal his or her purpose and presence in surprising ways, as in one intimate encounter with a young woman in a poor Palestinian community, centuries ago. It is not about pontificating on a body of truths. Rather the first step is charity (or love), then action and commitment to the service of others. It is a world-focused philosophy, identifying the cultural and religious ideologies and assumptions of the everyday. Suffering is not about fate, or a result of personal sin, or God's will per se. God desires solidarity with the poor and a life enhancing praxis, including materially and spiritually. Freire himself, (Cone, 1986), provided a language of empowerment at the grassroots, encouraging people to learn from their own experience of the world. We cannot become more fully human without engaging in critical activity. But first, and fundamentally, is love, the greatest gift of all; or what I call loving self/other recognition, in the spirit of critical theorist Axel Honneth (West, 2016). When this is offered - in generous, respectful, empathic ways – a new spirit is incarnated in individuals and whole groups.

History and lived experience matter greatly in these perspectives. Inner peace – for theologians, clerics, Freirean-inspired educators and those with whom they work - will only be found by engaging shoulder to shoulder with ordinary people, helping to name and challenge oppression in lives and thus better to participate in the making of history, agentically. To do so requires a language of inspiration that works for them. Jesus' actions can only be grasped, experientially, by enacting them to the best of our abilities as educators, in the here and now. To seek to embody love, not in the sense of necessarily feeling warm or affectionate but as a theological virtue through which we seek to love our neighbour as ourselves. Love, for Freire, takes precedence over faith, hope and criticality:

> *'Precisely because humans are finite and indigent beings, in this transcendence through love [that] humans have their return to their source (i.e., God), who liberates them' (Freire, cited in Elias, 1994, p. 38).*

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, (Freire, 2000) Freire insisted that love is the foundation of dialogue and a kind of dialogue in itself. Gerri and

Colin Kirkwood (2011, p. 35) write that the possibility of love is 'the simplest point of departure' in Freire's ambition. Humans can only flourish in love and fellowship, solidarity, and dialogue. God participates, in these terms, in the making of history, through loving solidarity with the poor; and in bringing new life and redemption in suffering.

Making history is no painless task. New life and hope do not abolish struggle and suffering but may represent only the beginning of an unfolding process, in which every one of us has a role to play. For Freire educators and leaders must be at one with the people, in communion with them, if any new life is to be made incarnate. Moreover, and provocatively, rebelling against injustice can be a profoundly redemptive act if this includes recognising and restoring the humanity of the oppressor too. Dehumanisation of any kind is death; dialogue between oppressor and oppressed, and processes of self/other recognition, are inherently difficult but can also be profoundly life affirming. Freire's is both a way of peace as well as struggle: to give birth to difficult dialogue, which can help us break the vicious cycles of perpetual violence. But dialogue is often hard and asks no less than everything. Freire in these terms is more Edward Said than Franz Fanon. Said (1993) challenges a rhetoric of blame in the context of colonialism and those who struggle against it (like Freire's landless peasants in North East Brazil). Said (1993, p. 19) seeks an alternative to what he calls 'a destructive politics of hostility', in confrontations between Western and non-Western cultures, imperialism and post-colonial cultures. 'The world', he writes' 'is simply too small to let these [violence and hostility] passively happen' (p. 20). There can be 'a crossing over in discussion, back and forth debate', 'in which the formerly silent native speaks and acts on territory taken back from the Empire' (Said, 1993, p. 34). Dialogue, in other words is possible, if problematic; remembering that to fight violence with greater violence reminds us of endless cycles of violence in places like Israel and Palestine or the hell of the Committee of Public Safety, so destructive of the hopes and aspirations of 1789 (Bainbridge and West, 2021; Said, 1993).

Moreover, educators must experience their own death and rebirth in learning lives if they are themselves to become more fully human. This is reminiscent, in my eyes, of aspects of the psychoanalytic project. Putting aside social status and intellectual pride or an academic mindset, for instance, is always difficult. As is interrogating our capacity for narcissism and self-delusion. Superiority and illusion must die, however,

as must their version of truth (Jenkins and Betsan, 1999). Learning becomes about being born-again. Conscientisation for Freire, (Freire, 2000), demands, in effect, our own Easter. It is like beautiful but painful childbirth, bringing into the world renewed hope alongside the pain of dying and the anxiety, vulnerability and the absolute dependence of birth and early life (Freire, 2000). Literacy circles, for instance, in poor areas, make sense only as part of humanising the world, the casting out of self-blame and the expulsion of the invasive shadow of the oppressor from the psyche of the oppressed; and in the case of educators and academics, from our own psyches too (Freire, 1998).

In fact, Freire's vision of the new order is a mix of Marxism and liberation theology: a place where no man or woman or group exploits the work of others. All workers serve the well-being of everyone (Freire and Macedo, 1996). There is no abandonment in Freire's theology of critical spirit, but it is dependent on love and self-knowledge if it is to incarnate in humanising ways. It is not about the death of tyrants but their transformation in mutually humanising, if perpetually difficult encounters. Such mutual recognition may be reminiscent of aspects of relational psychoanalysis. Of recognising the ambivalence we may feel towards the other, which can, at first, seem overwhelming. Of anxiety at being exposed to what we do not yet know, in the vague promise there is something better. Of being expected to leave behind older ways of being and seeing, that at least got us this far. Of feeling exposed, and vulnerable, in the face of new existential possibilities that may at first seem remote. Of suspicion, initially, of all those - educators, therapists, or Catholic social activists - who offer promise of new life and a new world, if people can learn to trust. Hate and love, hope and anxiety, the conscious and unconscious are handmaidens together in the difficult business of agentically coming to be, in dialogue, and thus of interpreting and changing the world, and ourselves, afresh.

Collective transformation, for certain kinds of ideologically driven radicals, requires, however, more of reason's light than love or religious faith. It is the material roots of alienation that matter, so to speak, rather than appeals to theology, in whatever form. Reason matters for both recognising as well as challenging capitalism's domain and the false consciousness of consumption, religion and all superstition. Religion, to repeat, in these perspectives is indulgent, escapist self-mystification (Leopando, 2017; Thompson, 1993). Religious perspectives of whatever

kind are considered dogmatic and sectarian, resisting the power of critical conscientisaton (Leopando, 2017). But Freire, I have suggested, saw things very differently. Irwin Leopando (2017) demonstrates how Paulo Freire's lifelong pedagogical work derived from a 'sacred sense of inviolable dignity, worth and well-being of the person' (Leopando, 2017, p. 215). And how, consequently, he strove for more humanised, person-orientated, Godly societies. Freire himself was appalled by the estrangement between secular and religious perspectives. For him, the fundamental difference was between sectarian or fundamentalist conviction, and non-sectarian, dialogical and loving relationship, however imperfect. Secularism itself can take fundamentalist forms.

To understand Freire without reference to his radical religious beliefs is equivalent to reducing the history of socialism to Marxism-Leninism. A cornerstone of Freire's pedagogy was to create open, loving, creative spaces for listening, dialogue and mutual recognition. Transformation happens when thinking is in harmony with heart, intuition, imagination, aesthetics and the working of spirit in relationship (Freire, 1998; Leopando, 2017). Moreover, Freire's teaching reminds us that critical discourse too easily lacks empathy and I/Thou qualities. It may encourage the belief that strength in argument and debate matters most, and the aim is discursive victory, even though the process itself alienates, including those who may be close to our own position. This is what Freud labelled the narcissism of small difference (Leopando, 2017; Formenti and West, 2018).

Persons in relationship

Freire continues to inspire many people, in the United Kingdom and more widely. Colin and Gerry Kirkwood (see, for instance, Kirkwood G and Kirkwood, C, 2011; Kirkwood, 2012; 2020) provide a case in point. Their work raises questions about the place and nature of annunciation and denunciation in popular education. Of how we all struggle with the interplay of the inspirational and the critical, the material and spiritual, the personal and collective in our lives. Colin Kirkwood's (2020) recent work is a reflexive interrogation of earlier aspirations as a Freirean educator. He aspired, with his wife Gerri, to a Freirean praxis: reflection and action in a virtuous dynamic. For Kirkwood, Freire's idea of theory arose from sustained reflection on practice and from wide reading. Drawing on diverse sources, Freire, in Kirkwood's view, regards practice

as a theoretical activity – a kind of living, thinking, creative adult education – where there is constant flux and reflux from the abstract to the concrete and back again. And where there is a deep rejection of people being treated as objects, submerged in realities, relationships and supposed educational processes that deny their humanity. Freire, Kirkwood maintains, foregrounds people as subjects who can know and act in their worlds to become more fully human in the process, potentially transforming themselves and their reality in the process.

Kirkwood is strong on the material and relational realities of peoples' lives, and how these may constrain, imprison and objectify, but not to the neglect of the spiritual. He draws especially, but not exclusively, on humanist, personalist, socialist as well as religious perspectives. His writing – about a mining community in the North of England, where he once lived and worked, chronicles the everyday grind of keeping on keeping on when money is tight, disability inhibits, miners' strikes demand savage sacrifice, and people are objectified by those in power. It is a world seemingly controlled by others: local vicars, the National Coal Board, bosses, managers, landowners and/or sundry professionals. Hard labour, in the mine or home, grinds you down, alienates, when your productive and reproductive spirit – your humanity - is controlled and manipulated by others.

In the small industrial town, Staveley, where he worked, formal religion could be part of the command-and-control structure. God, 'he', in these terms, was often at the apex of hierarchical authorities that kept, via the 'divine' word, rich men in their castles and poor men at their gates. The interpretation of biblical texts was served as unvarnished truth, the word beyond words, an authority not to be challenged in the light of your own experience. We get glimpses in Kirkwood's account of a powerful spiritual commitment to a more authentic language, grounded in naming the world as it is actually experienced. Language matters deeply as a distinctively human activity, the means by which the oppressions, suffering and human possibility in the world find a voice. Language, Kirkwood demonstrates, is crucial to the vibrant life of a radical newspaper Staveley Now, for instance. He helped nurture this working alongside local people; encouraging the creativity of a working-class poet, perhaps, or writing forged in local dialect, redolent with the guttural, earthy richness of how people actually talk. There is a depth of meaning and authenticity in what becomes in effect an act of creation.

Acts of creative, heartfelt language, composed both personally and communally to challenge the supposed common sense of power.

There is a Freirean-inspired desire not to paper over the cracks when the language of the powerful controls, blinds and oppresses. This is a quotidian challenge. A local poet called Danny Potter wrote for the newspaper. His poem Llanwern embodies a prescient ecological resonance between then and now: of a marsh drained and filled up by shale, *'brought in by lorries nose to tail, jamming up the town. Shale from the tips in valleys there, dumped on hills once green and fair, pity we never moved Aberfan* (in 1966, in that other mining community, in Wales, a massive, unstable slag heap enveloped the local village school and killed countless children). Potter's poem, Kirkwood observes, is vivid, laconic, loving and critical. Authentic words are given to difficult issues when many may not want to know or feel culturally bludgeoned into a kind of silence. Work of this kind incarnates a constant search for truth, dialogue and some liberation – to create new, transcendent life in making sense of suffering.

Kirkwood (2012) has sought his own spiritual illumination in personalism and John Macmurray's idea of persons in relation. Macmurray sought to reinvent and rediscover some of the core meaning of religion, not discard it. Institutional churches had largely abandoned sufficient concern for the material things of life, he argued, replacing this with the opiate of comfort in the afterlife. Macmurray sought instead, like liberation theology, to place the spirit of Christ in relational solidarity with the poor in their material as well as spiritual struggles (Kirkwood, 2012, pp.10-13). Spiritual in giving focus to the constant quest for meaning, to feel understood and fully accepted, not least in an assumed unworthiness. Or in the shared symbolism of a sacrament like the communion. Henry Miller, the writer, a fugitive from what he saw to be the humbug of the Catholic Church, nonetheless insisted that the eucharist symbolised profundity: of how life begins with bread and that we should constantly offer a prayer of thanks. The making and baking of healthy, nourishing and satisfying bread depends on clean air and water, the sun and our own nurture and care-fullness, in contrast to the cellophane wrapped, mass-produced, overly processed bread of the supermarket. In such ways, everyday life can evoke intimations of divinity, if we choose to see (McCarraher, 2019, 643). Materialism often fails to perceive these moments or the deeply felt personal (as well as shared) struggles for

meaning and direction. It too easily reduces the nuance of deeper, subjective and shared human experience to structural levels of analysis, losing humanity, wonder and enchantment in the process.

Here, the heart of the good lies in the quality of our relationships and dialogue with others, including a good universal other, who suffered that we might live. It can be taken and digested as metaphor, which can be sufficient. There is emphasis on the self-realisation of persons materially and spiritually, individually and in community. These ideas share with socialism the goals of liberation and social justice, but not at the price of a triumph of one ideological position over another in a zero-sum game. Or by neglecting the personal, inner life, or the quality of relationships in which we are embedded. There are direct echoes here of liberation theology. The idea of a divine God/good other, whom, in our praxis we can nurture and empower those with whom we work, at a personal and collective level. All in a language uniting the material and spiritual, the personal and collective that challenges the deeply conservative, hierarchical, overly detached black clothed men of much institutionalised religion.

Annunciation and denunciation: two narratives from auto/biographical, narrative teaching and research

I want to introduce two stories – involving three learners - generated in in-depth auto/biographical inquiry, to consider the place of annunciation and denunciation in the learning lives of two women and a man. The first, an older female student, called Brenda, at a university; the second, a Palestinian woman, called Hanna, who participated in an auto/biographical teaching and research project, as part of a wider European Union funded initiative on cultivating active democratic citizenship and values in teacher education, lasting from 2015-19 (Bainbridge and West, 2021). The third person, linked to Hanna's story, is an Israeli Jew called Elie who served in the Israeli military. Hanna was struggling against historic and contemporary forms of oppression, as a Palestinian, living in the State of Israel. A different oppressive power, so to speak, replacing the Romans in Mary's story. Elie represented both oppressor and oppression.

Auto/biographical narrative inquiry is a process of chronicling people's stories, in a loosely structured, dialogical process, in which the aim is to

create richness and depth of narrative, through trust, respectful listening and reflexivity between researcher/teacher, researched/student. The work is often longitudinal, in Brenda's case over 4 years as she negotiated her way through an Access to higher education programme, on into a university. Donald Winnicott's (1972) notion of a transitional space is a key element in the research process, and for thinking about the kind and quality of space needed for deepening, respectful and open forms of storytelling and dialogue (Merrill and West, 2009; Bainbridge and West, 2021). A transitional space, (it might be in research, or teaching, and could be a literacy circle or university seminar), is where we negotiate who we are and might be, over time, and where love, in the form of recognition, can, when things work well, bring forth new intersubjective life. A moment of annunciation, in short, in profound recognition by a teacher or significant other; and symbolically, in Brenda's case, in a work of literature, transforming her feelings of who and what she was, and might be.

Brenda had been a struggling, non-traditional older student, and she was part of a study on adult learner motivation in higher education (West, 1996). She had learned to love literature, and strongly identified with an abused prostitute when reading Maupassant's short story *Boule de Suif (Suet Pudding),* in preparation for a seminar in the early stages of her time at university. Both the prostitute and Brenda were abused by men. The novel is set in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, and two Prussian officers assault the prostitute in a coach. Brenda told stories of a husband's betrayal, of a mother's control and of always feeling inconsequential in the world. Brenda felt deep solidarity with the prostitute through, in the language of psychoanalysis, projective identification, (in which parts of ourselves are projected into another and can be introjected once more in strengthened, life enhancing ways.). The prostitute herself fought back and kept on keeping on, regardless. Brenda suffered her own hell in university seminars, in a strange habitus, as she experienced tutors looking straight through her as if she did not exist. She felt, at times, no right to be there, as an "ordinary" older female student. However, one tutor encouraged her to speak about Maupassant, at a crucial moment, and she found words and agency to talk about her insights into the novel. The seminar became a place for her, as well as for others, where she felt alive. Being able to tell the story again in the research was a moment of recognition too.

Processes of self/other recognition help explain, in a slightly different language to Freire's, moments like these, or, as Freire might have put it, of "love," in the intuitive solidarity and care of a tutor. Love, as noted, is foundational in human flourishing, in the perspective of critical theorist, Axel Honneth too, as a basis for a more open, less defended presence in the world. Self-respect may come later when we are recognised as a legitimate member of a creative group like a literacy circle or university seminar. In subsequently becoming important to a group, we can experience growing self-esteem, from which we are better able to recognise others and social solidarities can grow (Honneth, 2007; Formenti & West, 2018). A word like annunciation opens us to profounder, if always fragile and contingent transformative processes, encompassing inter-and intrasubjective life. Life animating psyche, creating space for Brenda to appreciate the critical power of feminist analysis of patriarchal oppression, which had initially been difficult to digest. Denunciation in these terms requires annunciation to claim discursive, agentic, intellectual life.

When Hanna met Elie

The second case is of Hanna and Elie, who were involved in teaching and research among Israeli Jewish and Palestinian educators in very recent times. The work consisted of developing auto/biographical, narrative workshops and research within a European Union financed project to cultivate democratic values and active citizenship in Israeli teacher education. The research has continued into the present, (Bainbridge & West, 2021). There have been interviews and week-long workshops in Canterbury, the latter in 2018 and 2019. A typical workshop involved up to 16 people with an opening round in which participants shared an object of biographical significance, like a photograph, poem, drawing, a piece of music, or even a fountain pen. There was a theoretical and methodological introduction to auto/biographical and narrative methods, agreement reached over ground rules, followed by a role play of a narrative interview, in which one of us, as facilitators, told stories of learning to be a citizen, while a colleague modelled good listening. The whole group discussed the experience, agreed on the interview protocol, and moved into small, deliberately diverse groups of four. Participants interviewed each other and then experimented with being interviewees, interviewers, and observers in turn. Over the course of a week, oral

material was developed into written auto/biographical accounts of how they became citizens and/or politically conscious. Written accounts were produced individually and/or in small groups; everyone presented their writing, and we considered how such methods might be applied in the schools, colleges, and universities where they worked.

The project was haunted, however, by questions of trauma and injustice in the bitterly contested geographical and imagined place called Israel or Palestine. The question of where home and security lie haunts Palestinians like Hanna, as it does many Jews. In Hanna's story, her family were forced to flee Haifa when the Jewish Hagenah (or terrorists in her perspective) arrived to ethnically cleanse their district in 1948. In one of our workshops, she met Jewish Elie in a group of four. Elie's family migrated from North Africa towards the end of the last century. Both Hanna and Elie are partly fictional characters, composites of various stories told to us by several people for ethical reasons, among others, to protect identities. Jewish people suffered of course their own catastrophe of the Holocaust while Palestinians suffered their trauma – Al Nakbah, or the Catastrophe – in the forced displacement of the 1948 war, continuing into the present. Our question was whether and if so, how, it is possible to recognise the other in all their humanity as part of a quest for dialogue, peace and justice, in however a provisional way.

For Hanna, Palestinian and Christian, colonisation encompassed a lost home, forced family migration, and stories of the death of a grandmother in 1948, alongside feelings of continuing humiliation. For Israeli Jews, like Elie, the other, Hanna, is a potential terrorist. Elie's family were made to feel unwelcome as Islamism, he said, and before that pan-Arabism, reared its head. Hanna introduced herself as working in an Arab College of Higher Education near Nazareth. She was an active citizen, working in the field of cultural studies for the preservation of Palestinian history and culture. She talked, later, outside the workshop, of the forced migration. Her immediate family now lives in Nazareth. She talked of her family's desperate search for safety in 1948 and of relatives lost, homes seized, and communities abandoned. The family fled to Nazareth, with other relatives, who were escaping a village, Saffuriyya, close by, being 'ethnically cleansed'. 'Surely Jewish forces would not desecrate a place full of Christian churches, for fear of losing Western support?' Hanna's forebears asked. They were right. She talked too of present humiliations with a relative currently living in Gaza

not being allowed to finish her degree studies in Bethlehem. They were arrested by Israeli defence forces on the way back to Gaza: handcuffed, blindfolded, and left waiting for hours in ritual humiliation. Hanna, in part at least, was talking directly to someone who could well have been her family's oppressor.

Hanna later described her family's lost home in Haifa and concluded with a question:

> *Do you know the novel by Ghassan Kanafani, Returning to Haifa? It's about a couple who did go back to their apartment. They arrived at their old home to find a Jewish Polish family living there. Who in fact had adopted a son they left behind. But they cannot communicate, any of them. There is a wall of silence.*

Elie, an Israeli Jew, told a story of Jewish people in North Africa. Persecution, anti-Semitism, and poverty, combined with the 'Arab struggle', and later Islamist fundamentalism, provoked his family's exodus. But his father was a bully and there was abuse in the family home. Later, like everyone else, Elie was conscripted into the military, deployed to deal with 'terrorist infiltration'. As stated, he could have been the person responsible for the abuse of Hanna's relative from Gaza. But his military experience brought him abuse all over again, this time from sadistic authority figures in the army. Elie quit the military:

> *I was instructed to beat up someone I knew. Not to hold back. That I needed to act like a psychopath. I tried. I put my fists to his face, like a boxer. I breathed deeply but began to tremble. It was not good. I couldn't hit him. He was much smaller than I was. Get out the Commander said, you are no use to us. This is not a (f……) kindergarten…*

What difference can a small experiment in dialogical adult education and research make in such a difficult situation? Where do annunciation and denunciation fit in this space? Can we really create open, in-depth forms of storytelling, where the other feels recognised by an imagined oppressor and s/he becomes more humanised in turn? Can narrative work of this kind offer sufficient glimpses of the other's humanity (in their pain but also courage to participate and take risks), thus creating new life, including space for a critical, intelligent denunciation of what destroys hope? Hannah Arendt (2006), in her book Eichmann in Jerusalem,

distinguishes between evil acts and evil doers. There are far fewer of the latter. Israeli troops are not angels, but they are not all demons either. Maybe, as Hanna got to know more of Elie's story, something good and substantial could have been created between them, in processes of self/other recognition. There were glimpses of new life and hope; of I/Thou qualities of interaction, of deeper intersubjective communication, but it was fragile, and time was short. This no doubt happens in countless Catholic Action programmes, popular and university education, in many places, as well as workshops like ours. But if the work does not always succeed, or is only fleetingly successful, maybe, as in the work of liberation priests and theologians, and almost certainly for Freire in his liberation theology, it is the quest that matters, or as Freire terms it, 'a permanent search' (Freire, in Freire and Freire, (2007, p. 87). It is not that certain kinds of outcomes are unimportant - clean water in social action, perhaps, or speaking and writing that vibrantly challenges received wisdom and incarnates existential truth among the marginalised. Rather that history and liberation theology are always unfinished business. A quest for dialogue and humanisation in a troubled world; a quest for sufficient mutuality so that critical theory and realism are incarnated with a human face, calling us, perpetually, to action.

Conclusion: a bigger picture

Paulo Freire (1997) talked, with reference to liberation theology of the divinity - the mystery, the provisional and potentially loving humanity in each one of us - that can be liberated in a pedagogy of the heart; and in the quality of our relationship with others and the symbolic as well as the material world (like Brenda, Hanna and Elie above). In dialogue, in I/Thou dynamics, in the existential theology of Martin Buber. In processes of self/other recognition for Axel Honneth. A real community, in Buber's eyes, lay in comradely access to one another, readiness to give to each other, allowing for what we might term spiritual growth where the whole becomes so much more than the sum of individual parts (Leopando, 2017). Martin Buber (1937) insisted that we begin in relationship, not as isolated, solipsistic beings. The key to human flourishing lies in having sufficient I/Thou experience in contrast to dehumanizing I–It objectification. Of being recognized in our human potential by significant others maybe in a literacy circle or research. When the other and we are face to face, the distance between the stranger and self recedes, when I meets Thou. This is a

moment of annunciation, amid the ordinary debris and darkness of lives. In the quest for balance between annunciation and denunciation, the latter, on its own risks bringing demoralisation and eventually nihilism. Annunciation, without criticality, can induce naivete and ineffectualness. Without annunciation, however, in flesh and blood as well as symbolic terms, there is no humanity to do the critical work of composing a better world.

We can, like Freire, view these processes in religious terms. Radical social critics and adult educators, like E.P. Thompson, who was not Christian, argued that dismissal of the religious impulse in social transformation was profoundly ahistorical. We require, he states, in his study of William Blake (Thompson, 1993), a library ticket to the literatures of radical dissent before the rational or humanist enlightenment. We need a ticket too, I suggest, to liberation theology and to understanding its profound, lasting inspiration for Paulo Freire. Intellectualism and critical rationality take us only so far, whether in a university or literacy circle. We need a more holistic sensibility of what it is to be human in personal, spiritual, material, relational and even mystical terms, if we are to make the most of popular education.

'There must be some redemption' Thompson (1993, p. 221) wrote, echoing William Blake, in which the 'selfish loves' diminish and brotherhood (we should add sisterhood) increases (p. 221). Reason or rationality alone are insufficient without love. Pontius Pilate exercised reason, as do what Blake called the 'hirelings' of a genteel, conformist university culture or conventional, hierarchical religion. Something profound, like love, is often absent, then as now: as in Blake's images of Divine suffering, while Hell, and the Beast, lie in abuses of power and narcissistic, materialist illusion. Transformation required 'the affirmatives, in Blake's Songs of Innocence and Experience, of 'Mercy, Pity, Truth and Love'. They require moments of annunciation. Freire understood this, profoundly, in the symbolic vision of Mary's encounter with the divine. The poetry and soul of popular, adult or for that matter higher education are easily diminished or lost altogether. Freire leads us to challenge reductionism, fixedness and conformity of whatever kind. We are encouraged, among many things, to be open to a biblical hermeneutic of a powerless God coming to earth, in redemptive solidarity with the poor and despised. Not as an exclusive truth but as, for present purposes, an essential way of re-interpreting Freire, and of

imagining what can and does indeed happen, in popular education, to the humans at its heart.

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