

# ***Paulo Freire and Pope Francis on Dialogue: an Anticolonial Interpretation***

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**Abstract:** This article aims to further the concept of dialogue beyond language exchange that includes a strategic element in anticolonialism. It examines the concept of dialogue found in the thought of two of modern-day Latin America's most influential thinkers: Paulo Freire and Pope Francis. It argues that in different manners, both authors' concept of dialogue can be considered anticolonial. The article compares and contrasts Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* with Francis' recent encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*. Both texts culminate in a deep and detailed analysis of dialogue. Bringing these two important thinkers into conversation reveals central characteristics of dialogue from a colonized perspective and the importance that dialogue has in anticolonial discourses and practises. The article gives a detailed presentation of each author's understanding of dialogue before highlighting common and complementary features. It then explores some resonances that Freire and Francis' approach to dialogue has with anticolonial concerns. Dialogue as an anticolonial practise is for both Freire and Francis rooted in a philosophical and theological anthropology of what is means to be human and what de-humanizing practices look like. The article concludes by suggesting themes such as pluriversality, polycentrism, border-crossing, and critical thinking that are found in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and *Fratelli Tutti* mark these works as achievements in anti/decolonial thought.

**Keywords:** Paulo Freire; Pope Francis; dialogue; liberation theology; anticolonial.

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## **1. Introduction**

This article compares and contrasts the concept of *dialogue* in Paulo Freire's 1970 seminal text *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and Pope Francis' 2020 encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*. Both texts culminate in a thorough analysis of dialogue. Although separated by half a century, a comparison and contrast of these two texts contributes to contemporary understandings of the complexity of dialogue that extend beyond the common tropes of communicative language and information exchange (Dias, 2020). In this article, I argue that in a complementary manner Freire and Francis's concept of dialogue can be interpreted as anticolonial. After a brief introduction to

some of the historical developments of dialogue in the western tradition, I will exposit Freire and Francis' understandings of dialogue. Then, in a penultimate section I will compare and contrast these understandings of dialogue before concluding with some ways in which they resonate with anticolonial concerns.

Paulo Freire was born in Recife, Pernambuco, Brazil in 1921. Freire's family was plunged into poverty as a result of the Great Depression. After studies in law and education, Freire wrote his doctoral dissertation on adult literacy. In 1963 he was appointed director of a national literacy program. Following the 1964 coup d'état in Brazil he was forced into exile to Chile where he completed *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. In 1970 Freire took up a position in the Office of Education of the World Council of Churches in Switzerland. He was particularly interested in decolonization in Africa. In 1979 he returned to Brazil where he continued his work in popular education and political activism until his death in 1997.

Jorge Mario Bergolio (now Pope Francis) was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1936 to a family of Italian immigrants. Raised in a working-class family, Bergolio witnessed the growing disparity between the rich and the poor that ushered in the government of Juan Peron in 1946 (Miroff, 2015). He entered the Society of Jesus in 1958 and served as Provincial Superior of the Jesuits in Argentina from 1973-1979. Bergolio was named Archbishop of Buenos Aires in 1998 and was elected Pope in 2013. His years of leadership in Argentina were marked by political unrest such as the Dirty War and the 2001 Riots. He is the first Pope from Latin America, and the first non-European since the eighth century.

Freire and Francis may be the most influential Latin American thinkers of the past fifty years; Freire as one of the most cited philosophers of education (Barros, 2020) and Francis as the leader of the universal Roman Catholic Church. Both men are informed by their experiences as Latin Americans: historically, geographically, politically and economically on the periphery of Europe (Napolitano, 2019). Both men lived through violent repression and revolution. Both men are radically motivated by the experience of poverty and oppression. Both men have been influenced by Catholic Action and the Catholic intellectual tradition (Kirylo and Boyd, 2017; Napolitana, 2019). There are clear differences as well. Freire's concept of dialogue is informed by a commitment to Marxist analysis within a dialectical Latin American revolutionary context. Francis, writing fifty years later can be situated in a globalized postmodern and religious context. However, for both thinkers, dialogue is more than the exchange of words and/or information. It is ultimately a commitment to an ongoing and reflective process for the common good that functions to liberate the colonized from regimes of power.

Within the Western tradition there are layers of understandings that inform the concept and practice of dialogue today (Dias, 2020). For the ancient Greeks dialogue had a rhetorical and performative social-political function basic to democratic process (Goldhill, 2008). In the Roman Empire dialogue was a way to negotiate space between the different cultures and traditions that constituted the empire (Goldhill, 2008). Socratic dialogue was a «model for teaching dialectic» through the evaluation of arguments. Power differentials, when acknowledged, were minimized to encourage «talking together» (Greenwood, 2008, p. 36). Platonic dialogue opened the way for respectful disagreement as a «non-authoritarian medium» (Long,

2008, p. 45). Thus, even in hierarchical relationships, disagreement was possible. Dialogue created space for conviviality and the performance of identity beyond merely being right or converting one's interlocutor (Koning, 2008). Classical forms of dialogue declined with the ascendancy of Christianity and the hegemony it imposed (Goldhill, 2008). Medieval dialogues were a form of literature often between student and teacher. These aimed at the education of the student, finally leaving little room for disagreement (Sweeny, 2019). Dialogues between adherents of the Abrahamic religions flourished in the Middle Ages and «victory» was not always granted to the Christian protagonist (Sweeny, 2019). Many of the characteristics of classical dialogue are embedded in Freire and Francis' notions of dialogue: performances of identity, negotiation of space and power, evaluation of argument, discussion of disagreement, conviviality and the conversion of the other.

Dialogue comes from the Greek meaning «thinking/speaking across together» (Swidler, 2018, p. 455). At least two interlocutors and a medium of communication are required for dialogue. Dialogue is conceived of as the exchange between an «ideal speaker» who issues «well-formed utterances» and the hearer who responds to the speaker's utterances (Weigand, 2010, p. 507). Communication is understood as a «conduit» or «information transfer» between interlocutors (Lipari, 2014, p. 506). Contemporary theologies and philosophies of dialogue are informed by either philosophies of alterity and otherness typified by thinkers such as Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas, or else theories of communication, exemplified by thinkers like Jurgen Habermas (Amankwah, 2007). The former emphasizes the value of encountering the face of the other (Barnes, 2002), the latter the rationality of language or the conditions that make authentic communication possible (Cornille, 2008; Swidler, 2018). These approaches to dialogue that retain a sense of dialectic and a powerful ethical narrative are interwoven in both Freire and Francis' notions of dialogue. Freire's strong sense of dialectical encounter between oppressed and oppressor is complemented by Francis' attention to the meaning of the other.

## 2. Dialogue in Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

Freire defines dialogue:

Dialogue is the encounter between men [sic], mediated by the world in order to name the world. Hence, dialogue cannot occur between those who want to name the world and those who do not wish this naming – between those who deny others' the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them. Those who have been denied their primordial right to speak their word must first reclaim this right and prevent the continuation of this dehumanizing aggression... Dialogue is thus an existential necessity (Freire, 2018, p. 88).

Freire makes a strong claim that «To exist, humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it...Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action reflection» (Freire, 2018, p. 88). Thus, to deny someone the right to speak and to

name their world is to deny their very humanity. Dialogue is not the activity of the powerful or the elite or the educated, but a basic human right. To deny the human right to communicate through dialogue «is to reduce men [sic] to the status of “things”» (Freire, 2018, p. 128).

For Freire love is the foundation of dialogue: «The naming of the world, which is an act of creation and re-creation, is not possible if it is not infused with love» (Freire, 2018, p. 89). Love is commitment to others in the context of non-dominating and freeing relationships. A second element of dialogue, according to Freire, is humility. Without humility the «encounter of those addressed to the common task of learning and acting, is broken» (Freire, 2018, p. 90). Humility results in a sense of equality and reliance on others, and an openness to difference. A third ingredient of dialogue for Freire is «faith». Freire comments:

Dialogue further requires an intense faith in humankind, faith in their power to make

and remake, to create and re-create, faith in their vocation to be more fully human (which is not the privilege of an elite, but the birthright of all) (Freire, 2018, p. 90).

The result of the relationship of love, humility and faith is «mutual trust» (Freire, 2018, p. 91). Unlike the trio of love, humility and faith, trust is a consequence of and not a prerequisite for dialogue. Next, Freire enumerates hope as a condition for dialogue.

Nor yet can dialogue exist without hope. Hope is rooted in men's incompleteness, from which they move out in constant search – a search which can be carried out only in communion with others. Hopelessness is a form of silence, of denying the world and fleeing from it (Freire, 2018, p. 91).

Without hope dialogical encounters do not make sense as they are «empty and sterile, bureaucratic and tedious» (Freire, 2018, p. 92). The incompleteness of the present situation draws people into an unknown future. A last condition enumerated by Freire for dialogue is critical thinking. Critical thinking is what emerges from the experience of solidarity with people in the world; where reality is not static but in a process of becoming through engagement and action in history (Freire, 2018, p. 92).

Dialogue is inherently political for Freire as it is «radically necessary to every authentic revolution» (Freire, 2018, p. 128). Dialogue is not merely conceptual or theoretical but praxical as it emerges in the process of action-reflection. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* culminates in an «analysis of the theories of antidialogical and dialogical action» (Freire, 2018, p. 138). Freire enumerates four characteristics of antidialogical action. These characteristics emerge from concrete experiences in the ongoing history of Latin America in his time (Freire, 2018, p. 138). They are conquest; divide and rule; manipulation; and cultural invasion.

From the perspective of Latin America, or any colonized region, *conquest* conjures images of the violent displacement of indigenous peoples and the settlement of their land by foreign invaders. Freire (2018) writes, «The conqueror imposes his objectives on the vanquished, and makes them his possession» (p. 138). The act of conquest is «necrophilic», (Freire, 2018, p. 138) stuck in a nostalgic past, a fixed, static, and predictable world. This static and fixed world of the conqueror is that to which the «vanquished» must adapt. However, conquerors cannot completely destroy the conquered as thinking agents in the world, so conquest must function by internalizing myths about reality «designed to increase their [the oppressed] alienation and passivity» (Freire, 2018, p.139). Examples of these myths include imagined freedom in oppressive societies or the freedom of mobility; the myth of equality in the midst of obvious social stratification; the myth of access to education or work for the poor; the myth of charity and giving by the rich to benefit the poor; the myth of private property; or the myth of industriousness versus laziness (Freire, 2018, pp. 139-140).

The next characteristic, *divide and rule*, is a practical dimension of antidialogical action since the elite oppressors are a minority and the subordinated oppressed the majority. The elite must, therefore, divide and isolate the majority from each other to render the masses controllable. The unification of the oppressed majority through encounter and dialogue «would undoubtedly signify a serious threat to their [the oppressors] own hegemony» (Freire, 2018, p. 141). Divide and rule is antidialogical because it cultivates isolation and alienation and eschews organization and unity. Divide and conquer focusses on specific problems without examining their interconnectedness within the larger context. It privileges an intentionally formed leadership class at the expense of community participation (Freire, 2018, p. 142).

A third dimension of antidialogical action is the *manipulation* of the masses to «conform» to the «objectives» of the dominant elites through a series of myths (Freire, 2018, p. 147). Manipulation «attempts to anesthetize the people so they will not think» (Freire, 2018, p. 149). The dominant elites use all means, even violent, to prevent the emergence of critical thinking since such thinking challenges the dominant narratives and structures of power. Freire calls this thinking «revolutionary consciousness» (Freire, 2018, p. 149). Dialogue leads to the development of a «capacity for criticism» and «true organization» with historical effects.

A fourth characteristic of antidialogical action is *cultural invasion*. Cultural invasion is when «the invaders penetrate the cultural context of another group, in disrespect of the latter's potentialities; they impose their own view of the world upon those they invade and inhibit the creativity of the invaded by curbing their expression» (Freire, 2018, p. 152). It proposes a «parochial» and «static» view of reality and the world (Freire, 2018, p. 160). In this scenario, the conquered or oppressed appropriate the «values, standards, and goals of the invaders» and in the process become convinced of their own cultural inferiority and the superiority of the invading culture (Freire, 2018, p. 153). Thus, «they become alienated from the spirit of their own culture and from themselves» (Freire, 2018, p. 153). Cultural invasion is not only a strategic «instrument of domination» used to colonize a people but also the natural result of such colonization. It is inculturated in myths, educational structures, the creation of professional classes and bureaucracies, as well as in their existential

and psychological appropriations in the psyche of the oppressed. Freire proposes «cultural revolution» that results from the conscientization of the conquered and the transformative naming of their situation as a remedy to cultural invasion. When the conquered society becomes «for itself» and not for the invaders, then their solidarity and leadership will emerge from the dialogue that cultural invasion eschews.

If antidialogical action transforms the oppressed person into a thing, into «a mere *it*» through conquest and domination, then dialogical action recognizes the pre-eminence of human relationality (Freire, 2018, p. 167). Identity and subjectivity emerge from the relationship with the other. Borrowing from M. Buber's existential philosophy, Freire asserts that the «I» is constituted in relation to the «thou» and vice-versa. In opposition to the four antidialogical characteristics of dialogical action, Freire concludes his work by enumerating the constituent elements of dialogical action. They are, cooperation; unity for liberation; organization; and cultural synthesis.

*Cooperation* is the communication between subjects who «focus their attention on the reality which mediates them and which – posed as a problem – challenges them» (Freire, 2018, p. 168). Through dialogue subjects who are committed to one another in relationship reveal the world to one another in order to transform it. In this way, the other is not a mere object of theorizing but becomes integral to one's self. Freire, borrowing from Che Guevara (Freire, 2018, p. 180), names this communion:

In dialogical theory, at no stage can revolutionary action forgo *communion* with the people. *Communion* in turn elicits *cooperation*, which brings leaders and people to the *fusion*... (Freire, 2018, p. 171)

Without cooperation there is hierarchy and duress whether violent or ideological. Through cooperation people together name the world and in so doing reveal the truth of their lived situation.

Next, *unity for liberation* is the dialogical action that seeks unity amongst the oppressed and with the leadership (Freire, 2018, p. 172). Antidialogical oppression alienates and divides the oppressed «adhering» them to a static reality that is not theirs but imposed on them. Unity is achieved by coming to «know the *why* and *how* of their adhesion to reality – it requires de-ideologizing» (Freire, 2018, p. 173). In coming to know their reality, in the process of conscientization, the oppressed together become agents of their own liberation and no longer «“things” possessed by others; and they can move from consciousness of themselves as oppressed individuals to the consciousness of the oppressed class» (Freire, 2018, p. 174). No longer divided as «things» the experience of their humanity and their inhumane situation draws the oppressed and alienated into the unity emerging from a common consciousness.

The third dialogical action that directly counters antidialogical manipulation is *organization*. This characteristic is related to unity as its «natural development» (Freire, 2018, p. 176). According to Freire, the ends of organization are «daring and loving witness» (Freire, 2018, p.177). He writes:

The essential elements of witness which do not vary historically include: *consistency* between words and actions; *boldness* which urges the witnesses to confront existence as a permanent risk; *radicalization* (not sectarianism) leading both the witnesses and the ones receiving that witness to increasing action; *courage to love* (...); and *faith* in people... (Freire, 2018, p. 176).

It is around witness that people organize, not ideas or ideology or sectarianism or fear. Leaders with people organize in a manner that affirms the human value of those to be transformed and transform the world in which they live through naming the world together (Freire, 2018, p. 178).

The last characteristic of dialogical action is *cultural synthesis*. It is the foil to cultural invasion. Cultural synthesis marks the systematic and structural culmination of the dialogical action process. Where cultural invasion seeks to impose foreign ideologies and values on a conquered people, cultural synthesis invites learning about the oppressed other (Freire, 2018, p. 180). Where cultural invasion assigns those without power «the role of spectators, of objects», cultural synthesis integrates those with privilege and those without to become «co-authors of the action that both perform in the world» (Freire, 2018, p.180). Cultural synthesis «establishes a climate of creativity which will tend to develop in subsequent action». Leaders and people «mutually identified, together create the guidelines of their action...[they] are reborn in new knowledge and new action» (Freire, 2018, p. 181). The production of new knowledge and action is ongoing in cultural synthesis, in order to meet the emerging immediate problems that arise and the systemic and structural issues that need ongoing attention (Freire, 2018, pp. 182-183).

Freire's rich and complex notion of dialogue is rooted in an anthropological claim about what it means to be human and to creatively express human agency. The foundations for dialogue are in the cultivation of virtues such as love, humility, faith and hope. The centrality of dialogue to the process of conscientization and revolutionary liberation is found in Freire's thorough analysis of antidialogical action and their counterbalance in the characteristics of dialogical action that culminate in cultural synthesis. Turning now to a text written fifty years after *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* will highlight the continued significance dialogue can have in shaping human relationships.

### 3. Dialogue in *Fratelli Tutti*

Pope Francis' 2020 encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* is a significant contribution to the social teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. *Fratelli Tutti* is the third encyclical issued by Francis in his seven year papacy. An encyclical is a type of «circular letter... used by popes and others from ancient times» (O'Malley, 2008, p. 55). Prior to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, they functioned to pass judgements or to issue «executive orders». Since in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, encyclicals function to instruct the faithful «as a teacher in the classroom», they «propose, expound, and elaborate theological and doctrinal positions» (O'Malley, 2008, p. 55). In the modern era, encyclicals grew in their usage

to become tools for teaching the community. In his 28-year papacy (1978-2005), John Paul II issued fourteen encyclicals, Benedict XVI (2005-2013) issued three.

*Fratelli Tutti* is an «encyclical on fraternity and social friendship». It makes significant contributions to Catholic social teaching on issues such as private property, the death penalty, and interreligious relations. In addition, running throughout the encyclical is the theme of dialogue. In fact, Francis states that the encyclical is «an invitation to dialogue» (*Fratelli Tutti* [FT], no. 6) The word «dialogue» appears 51 times and chapter 6 entitled «Dialogue and Friendship in Society» is devoted to it. Francis notes that the encyclical itself is the product of his dialogue with the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb with whom he signed the *Document on Human Fraternity* in 2019. With reference to the inspiration of *Fratelli Tutti* Francis writes:

I have felt particularly encouraged by the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, with whom I met in Abu Dhabi, where we declared that «God has created all human beings equal in rights, duties and dignity, and has called them to live together as brothers and sisters». This was no mere diplomatic gesture, but a reflection born of dialogue and common commitment. The present Encyclical takes up and develops some of the great themes raised in the Document that we both signed (FT, 5).

Thus, as much as Francis writes about dialogue, the text itself is performative of dialogical relationships. It marks the first time in modern history that a Muslim partner is cited in a papal encyclical as inspiration and encouragement in the exercise of the pope's teaching authority.

For Francis, dialogue has an anthropological foundation as an act of humanizing communication:

Human beings are so made that they cannot live, develop and find fulfilment except «in the sincere gift of self to others» Nor can they fully know themselves apart from an encounter with other persons: «I communicate effectively with myself only insofar as I communicate with others» (FT, 87).

Thus, for Francis, to be human is to be in relationship with the other and human development and fulfilment is in knowing oneself through the engagement with the other. This dynamic of self-knowledge in and through knowledge of the other results in the discovery of mutual gifts, the promotion of unity and respect for differences. Francis comments at length about the relationship of the self with the other:

Just as there can be no dialogue with «others» without a sense of our own identity, so there can be no openness between peoples except on the basis of love for one's own land, one's own people, one's own cultural roots. I cannot truly encounter another unless I stand on firm foundations, for it is on the basis of these that I can accept the gift the other brings and in turn offer an authentic gift of my own. I can welcome others who are different, and value the unique

contribution they have to make, only if I am firmly rooted in my own people and culture (FT, 143).

This affirmation is important in Francis' development of the notion of dialogue as it eschews any sense of easy consensus seemingly achieved through the dissolution of identity and difference. Ongoing forms of imperialism and colonialism occlude difference and impose sameness through consensus achieved by so-called dialogue. Authentic dialogue strengthens one's sense of unique self-identity. In fact, without this unique sense of self and of difference dialogue becomes moot.

According to Francis dialogue is «approaching, speaking, listening, looking at, coming to know and understand one another, and to find common ground» (FT, 198). Dialogue is historical, dynamic (FT, 148), and shaped by dispositions of charity (FT, 184), reconciliation (FT, 236), and trust (FT, 262). Referring to his 2013 meeting with Brazilian political, economic and cultural leaders, Francis places dialogue between the extremes of «selfish indifference and violent protest» (FT, 199). He further contrasts dialogue to the mere exchange of parallel monologues and opinions as found on social media and political discourses today that are «manipulated by powerful special interests» (FT, 201). These often aggressive, ideological, and manipulative exchanges are «concerned not for the common good, but for the benefits of power, or at best, for ways to impose ...ideas» (FT, 202). Francis writes:

We need constantly to ensure that present-day forms of communication are in fact guiding us to generous forms of encounter with others, to the honest pursuit of the whole truth, to service, to closeness to the underprivileged and to the promotion of the common good (FT, 205).

A hallmark of Francis' papacy is a concern for the active place of the underprivileged, marginalized, and vulnerable in shaping policy, and action in their own history.

Francis roots meaningful and authentic dialogue in the «pursuit of the whole truth». This strong claim counters any sense of dialogue as a relativistic exchange that «ultimately leave the interpretation of moral values to those in power, to be defined as they see fit» (FT, 206). Basic to Francis human anthropology is that the search for truth lies at «life's deepest meaning» (FT, 207). Seeking the truth means that no single person or group possess it such that it is to be imposed by the powerful. Instead Francis writes, «We need to learn how to unmask the various ways that the truth is manipulated, distorted and concealed in public and private discourse...as it [the human mind] peers into human nature, reason discovers universal values derived from that same nature» (FT, 208).

Dialogue is not oriented toward static consensus but to the constant discovery or unmasking of truth – even as this means that differences, often radical, stand in creative tension with one another. In practise, Francis is wary that denying this basic human anthropology could lead to the denial of fundamental human rights by those in power «once they have gained the “consensus” of an apathetic or intimidated population» (FT, 209). Fundamental values are acknowledged and appropriated

through consensus but «transcend our concrete situations...Our understanding of their meaning and scope can increase – and in that respect, consensus is a dynamic reality» (FT, 211). Through dialogue «the interests of society, consensus and the reality of objective truth» are «harmonized» (FT, 212).

Dialogue is the linchpin in Francis' dream for society that is a «culture of encounter». This is a culture «passionate about meeting people...seeking points of contact, building bridges, planning a project that includes everyone» (FT, 216). A culture of encounter means «*processes* of encounter, processes that build a people that can accept differences» (FT, 217). Far from being a onetime achievement such a culture is always in process, always inviting people from the peripheries into the creative tension of difference. Francis proposes a spatial image to symbolize the culture of encounter:

The image of a polyhedron can represent a society where differences coexist, complementing, enriching and reciprocally illuminating one another, even amid disagreements and reservations. Each of us can learn something from others. No one is useless and no one is expendable. This also means finding ways to include those on the peripheries of life. For they have another way of looking at things; they see aspects of reality that are invisible to the centres of power where weighty decisions are made (FT, 215).

The polyhedron image gives rise to a social and cultural «covenant» that acknowledges and respects «different worldviews, cultures and lifestyles that coexist in society» (FT, 219).

Dialogue for Francis facilitates the acknowledgment of, and authentic respect for, real differences that often lie in creative tension with one another. He cites the lack of respect for the cultural values of indigenous peoples as grounded in violence (FT, 220). Because of a history of oppression, people at the margins are suspicious of the majority culture in which ideas, even perhaps good ones, are «presented in a cultural garb that is not their own and with which they cannot identify» (FT, 219). On the other hand, «a false notion of tolerance has to give way to a dialogic realism on the part of men and women who remain faithful to their own principles while recognizing that others also have the right to do likewise» (FT, 221).

Although Francis does not share Freire's Marxian economic analysis and class conflict, Francis' understanding of dialogue is no less revolutionary. Dialogue challenges regimes of power by drawing those on the margins into the center to share in power and decision-making. For Francis, dialogue unmask the hegemonic untruths that maintain structures of injustice and oppression. In recognizing, respecting, and celebrating otherness and the difference upon which it is predicated, Francis argues that dialogue is central to human flourishing and fulfilment.

#### **4. Freire and Francis: Comparison and Contrast**

Freire and Francis' concepts of dialogue differ in several ways. Freire's concept of dialogue emphasizes the communicative dimension of dialogue as a linguistic act

that results in a renewed awareness of self and of one's situation, even as it is shared by others. Francis emphasizes the power of dialogue to promote an awareness of the other and the possible social integration of different worldviews and perspectives. Freire's Marxist analysis is more dialectical than Francis' understanding of dialogue. Francis' understanding is informed by the biblical narrative of the Good Samaritan's concern for the stranger (FT, 56-86). *Fratelli Tutti* has a global audience in mind while *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is clearly situated in the socio-political reality of Brazil and Latin America. Nevertheless, Freire's concept of dialogue has global implications as does Francis' for the local context. Though separated by fifty years, there are clear affinities between the conception of dialogue in Freire and Francis. In spite of the differences of time, context, and audience, the complementary aspects of their thought are remarkable and together they assist in thinking through the ramifications of dialogue for anticolonial/decolonial thought.

For both Freire and Francis dialogue is an extension of what is inherently human and what it means to be human. Freire's anthropology hinges on the human need to name the world and to communicate. For Francis, the human person cannot realize oneself without the other through relationship and communication. This human orientation to dialogue with the other is not the product of social or political organization, but instead gives rise to them. Dialogue, in all its complexity, is essential to what it means to be human and so is foundational to any social, political or cultural achievement.

As central to being human, dialogue cultivates virtues, those qualities that are deemed valuable. Drawing on theological language, Freire enumerates these as love as the commitment to the other; humility based on equality and mutual reliance; faith in a common future; hope because of the incompleteness of the present; and intelligence as critical thinking. He does not enumerate the skills required for dialogue, but the virtues and dispositions out which appropriate skills arise. Similarly, throughout FT, Francis variously links dialogue to the virtues of charity, trust, reconciliation, humility, justice, temperance and understanding. Dialogue is inherently generous as a dynamic that intentionally makes room for the other – the underprivileged, the marginalized – and honors their unique experiences and voices.

Both Freire and Francis articulate what is contrary to dialogue. Freire lists the hallmarks of oppressive, authoritarian regimes experienced in Latin America as «anti-dialogical». Thus, conquest, divide and rule, manipulation, and, finally, cultural invasion are endemic to dialogue since they are predicated on a refusal to dialogue, share, exchange and respect the other. In less dialectical terms, Francis warns against insidious anti-dialogical practises such as easy tolerance and superficial exchanges where people do not listen to one another but simply re-state their positions over and again, often aggressively. Francis warns that contemporary practices that may be disguised as dialogue may actually maintain the status quo established by the powerful and fail to unmask the truth that is manipulated to the benefit of the elite.

Freire concludes his chapter on dialogical action with characteristics that would lead to cultural synthesis: cooperation, unity for liberation and organization. Cultural synthesis is not a static, once and for all achievement but part of an ongoing process that results from critical thinking. Likewise, Francis concludes his chapter on dialogue speaking about the process he terms the culture of encounter. Thus,

for both Freire and Francis dialogue is oriented toward a renewed vision of society through a value laden cultural suprastructure achieved through dialogue. This cultural suprastructure is imaged as a polyhedron in Francis' thought (FT, 145, 190, 215). This is a space where those at the margins are drawn into the center of decision making, where differences exist in creative tension, where there is mutual learning and reciprocity. This image resonates with Freire's revolutionary vision of society that does not, in fact, exclude the oppressor or the educated elite or the leadership but includes them in a new type of relationship. For Freire difference, mutuality, and reciprocity are not sacrificed in the liberation of the oppressed. In what may simply be seen as a reversal of Francis' spatial imagery where the periphery comes to the center, Freire envisions the center going out to the peripheries forming a new type of center.

## 5. Dialogue as Anticolonial

In this concluding section I wish to situate Freire and Francis' concept and praxis of dialogue within an anticolonial paradigm. To do so, I will simply draw some examples from their thought that resonate with anticolonial concerns. This interpretation illustrates that dialogue is a complex and rich strategy for ongoing political, social, and cultural transformations. Dialogue is a revolutionary praxis (not in a violent sense) oriented to the transformation of society, the liberation of the oppressed for the establishment of cultural synthesis or a culture of encounter. Francis describes authentic dialogue a counter to the hegemony of the powerful who have shaped the world negatively into what Francis describes as «dark clouds over a closed world». This is world characterized by «shattered dreams» (FT, 10), a «throwaway world» (FT, 18), an insufficiency of human rights (FT, 22), «conflict and fear» (FT, 25) and even pandemics. The alternative to dialogue for Freire and Francis is oppressive and violent regimes.

Freire and Francis' clarion call for dialogue as a dynamic process that shapes the world in a particular way reflects the thought of Gustavo Gutierrez, an early proponent of the theology of liberation (Gutierrez, 1973). In a profound reflection on dialogue, Gutierrez provides an alternate reading of the Babel narrative in Genesis 11 when the whole earth was said to have spoken one language. A common interpretation of this narrative is that motivated by pride, the people decide to build a tower to the heavens to rival the power of God. But God punishes them for their pride, scattering the people, replacing the single language that seemed to be constitutive of their powerful abilities with many languages. Confusion ensues because of the diversity of languages and their building project is left unfinished. If a multiplicity of languages that resulted in confusion was divine punishment for the Promethean building project, then the Pentecost narrative in Acts of the Apostles 2 might be understood as its remedy: unity of tongues in charity (Dias, 2016). Instead, Gutierrez argues, Pentecost does not result in a single language but is «about being able to understand one another» (Gutierrez, 1996, p. 70). Multiple languages are not replaced with a single language but people are able to understand the followers of Jesus in their own unique language: all are speaking their own language but they

understand one another (Gutierrez, 1996, p. 70). The episode actually «illustrates [the] necessary communication out of diversity» (Gutierrez, 1996 p. 70).

In his reflection on different languages and Genesis 11, Gutierrez credits to Babel «the existence and the wealth of languages, enabling us to express ourselves poetically. Punishment becomes reward, curse becomes blessing» (Gutierrez, 1996, p. 67). The people are punished not because of a rivalry with God and God's ensuing jealousy, but because Babel is a «political attempt, totalitarian in nature, to dominate people» (Gutierrez, 1996, p. 67). That human community is expressed through a single language is a fiction. Gutierrez argues that the single language aims at a more efficient domination of the other through «the flow of orders coming from the central authority» (Gutierrez, 1996, p. 68). Dominating and oppressive imperial projects are impeded by dialogue. A single language is non-dialogical; it is an abuse of language and power. Pentecost, on the other hand, promotes multiple languages. It does not replace the diversity but makes dialogue, mutuality, and inter-personal exchange possible through diversity (Dias, 2016).

James McEvoy, drawing from the thought of philosopher Charles Taylor, argues that language is dialogical and not instrumental by nature. Nondialogical language such as «authoritarian monologues» are for Taylor, «abuses of language and power» (McEvoy, 2012, p. 241). Through dialogue we are drawn out of ourselves toward what we recognize as most valuable and what is valuable can only be discerned through dialogue. This dimension of dialogue makes possible «new purposes, new levels of behaviors, new meanings» that would be inexplicable and unachievable without dialogical language (McEvoy, 2012, pp. 241-242).

Freire and Francis' commitment to dialogue illustrates the ongoing challenge of anticolonization that these Latin American thinkers bring to the fore. In the conversation between Freire and Francis, the dignity of the human person stands at the center of their convictions. They are against the commodification of the human person into an «it» that fuels the colonial economy (Mbembe, 2019). Instead, they propose the human as a potential agent of change because of his/her inherent orientation to be in relation with others and to name their own reality truthfully.

Naming one's reality requires critical thinking in a colonial context that manipulates the masses with myths about the marginal, the powerful, and the world in which they co-exist. Dialogue certainly entails the performances of identity, negotiation of space and power, evaluation of argument, discussion of disagreement, conviviality and the conversion of the other. However, Freire and Francis extend the meaning of dialogue to encompass the development of critical thinking so that human agents are able to unmask the myths of colonialism and the ideologies of domination. Both Freire and Francis are extremely suspicious and severely critical of the powerful ideologies championed by the elite that manipulate the truth at the expense of the poor, oppressed, and vulnerable (Hinze, 2016). This ongoing process requires the unlearning of colonial pedagogy by confronting «destructive patterns of thought feeling, and decision making» (Hinze, 2016; Giroux, 2009; Mignolo, 2011). Together human agents create and re-create their reality.

The dialogue between Freire and Francis equally highlights the importance of border crossing, whether from the peripheries to the center (as in Francis) or from the center to the peripheries (as in Freire) (Giroux, 2009). Border crossing includes

crossing the boundaries of class, culture, nationality, education, knowledge, identity, etc. This is significant because it counters a static and homogenized view of the world entrenched in colonial categories and binaries. Thus, cultural synthesis or a culture of encounter is an ongoing, always incomplete process, that creatively crosses ever emerging borders.

Through border crossing and the rejection of a static and homogenized view of reality emerges «pluriversality, a global, polycentric vision of the world» (Hinze, 2016; Mignolo, 2011). Freire and Francis invite the participation of the marginal into a process of unmasking reality through critical thinking. Speaking in 2015, Francis articulated new forms of colonialism: corporate money that disadvantages workers and the poor; anti-corruption and anti-terrorism efforts; and ideological colonization through media and consumerism (Hinze, 2016). While present in a more dialectical and seemingly binary way in Freire, Francis articulates the pluriversal and polycentric vision of the world in his image of the polyhedron. This is the space where differences are respected and exist in creative tension.

## 6. Conclusion

This article has drawn attention to the importance of dialogue as concept and praxis in Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and Pope Francis' *Fratelli Tutti*. It is the culminating trope in both texts, and so merits examination. The dialogue between these two thinkers reveals certain resonances that could be explained in several ways, including but not limited to their context and lived experiences in Latin America and the influence of Catholic social thought. While time and space separate the two texts – Freire writing in Chile in the late 1960s and Francis in Rome in 2020 – the dialogue between them highlights some central features of dialogue and makes a significant contribution to understanding what dialogue might mean today for a praxis of liberation in an anticolonial context.

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