

Paulo Freire: Some notes on theory and methodology in the light of current developments in Europe

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Today we are living in a time when more and more people worldwide become silent because they can no longer find words for what is happening to them and all around them. It is not the 'culture of silence' that Paulo Freire described for Latin America in the late 1960s. This silence - which causes many people to experience a feeling of growing insignificance in the face of rapid technological progress and the world-wide web - is the result of repressed experiences of violence in our European societies. In Eastern Europe this was often brought on by a loss of political orientation: Many people have come to feel homeless, they have lost their sense of belonging - and this loss has not been compensated by the now dominating free-market system.

In view of this socio-political background, the need for what Paulo Freire has called conscientization seems greater and more urgent than ever - but it is becoming increasingly unlikely as the social movements are growing increasingly powerless. The 1970s and 1980s saw the rise of numerous social movements which were founded to combat the injustices of the existing system of production and to call public attention to the open discrimination against people from the international migration movements. In recent years, there has also been a growing criticism of the patriarchal and hegemonial patterns of domination in society.

The first generation of Freire movements in Europe was driven by a strong democratic impetus. These groups often formed out of a feeling of solidarity with anti-colonial movements in Viet Nam, Chile or Portugal, and their main concern was not just class struggle but the struggle against existing patterns of domination. One of the main topics of debate was the unmasking of authoritarian and clientelist structures not just in political parties and in economic policy but also, and primarily, in institutions of the state and in education.

In the wake of the opening of the Berlin Wall and the powerful reemergence of nationalist ideas throughout Europe in the 1990s, these social movements and 'third world' movements began to decline - and the Freire groups were no exception. Their various campaigns, which in the previous decades had found an organizational framework in the *European Association for Conscientization* in Namurs (Belgium) and a socio-political voice in the *AG Spak* in Munich (Germany), now 'dissolved' into loosely related networks of autonomous groups which had little or no impact in terms of theoretic or political work. It was in response to this situation that the Paulo Freire Society was established in Germany in 1994. It comprises individuals and groups from various fields of activity and a wide range of different political orientations. The Paulo Freire Society, which soon had more than one hundred members, saw its main tasks "pre-school education", "schooling" and "intercultural education", in socio-pedagogic fields like drug abuse prevention, in development-policy related education, in the "forum and legislative theater" of Augusto Boal, in the grass-roots initiatives of the *Agenda 21* and in conscientization programs which focused on the problem of youth poverty and the political violence of dictatorial regimes. It was obvious quite soon that the publication of theoretical work and the communication of new findings of the international Freire debates were all too ambitious goals which could not be met so easily. The situation was aggravated further when a second organization, the Paulo Freire Cooperation, was established in 1998 - not least in response to escalating controversies between individuals who had their roots in the social movements of the 1970s on one side and those who came from a primarily academic background on the other. It has been obvious for some time that due to severe institutional and financial problems, neither of the two organizations has been able to achieve the kind of political profiling and positioning in the face of current socio-political changes. Even efforts at providing computer-based networks and the publication of two periodicals (*Zeitschrift für befreiende Erziehung* and *Dialogische Erziehung*) are of little help in this context. It seems that in response to a growing tendency toward privatization and increasingly aggressive competition, Freire pedagogues are also concentrating almost exclusively on their individual projects and losing sight of the larger context. This has given rise to the

impression that the much discussed autonomy in current Freire work is primarily the result of the neoliberal policy of competition and not so much an expression of a new political orientation.

Similar tendencies have been reported from the Scandinavian countries as well as from the Netherlands and Belgium where Freire work had also manifested itself in a wide range of curricular and extracurricular activities in the field of education and in extensive social work. What is taking place today, however, can only be described as a retreat into scattered niches of society, and the pragmatic utilization of available financial resources tends to narrow the scope of possible activities. What is no longer, or rarely, taking place in the context of Freire work, however, is a systematic international cooperation; neither are there coordinated efforts at a political analysis of those traits of society which may influence the development of education in the future - such as the rise of nationalism and racism in Europe or the impact of the Maastricht Treaty for our understanding of democracy and participation.

In the former German Democratic Republic and in Eastern Europe, only members of the nomenclatura had access to Paulo Freire's books, although concepts of a pedagogy of liberation were in fact discussed in some church movements which constituted the political opposition, though usually under the perspective of the development of socialist society. Any critique of the ruling system coming from feminist or environmental groups was denounced as signs of 'western decadence' or suppressed as a threat to the security of the state. If the party and state organizations in socialist Europe were dominated by authoritarian and hierarchical structures, the new developments under so-called 'free market economy' are no less so. In the former German Democratic Republic, large segments of industry found they could no longer compete in the now open markets. Some of the ensuing shutdowns were also enforced because West German companies were pushing for a better utilization of their production capacities. The situation was aggravated by the fact that many of the former customers in Eastern Europe were no longer able to buy for lack of funds. The inevitable result were massive large-scale layoffs, and many of the victims obviously felt that they were being marginalized and humiliated and no longer of value within their society. In order to lead a decent life, wage earners need not just an income but also a certain amount of social recognition and the feeling of being needed, of doing something useful, of belonging to the community. In the socialist countries, this involved being part of a collective and of the local neighborhood with many communal activities such as spending one's vacation with the collective in summer camps run by the factory where one was working. This almost patriarchal system of care and control by the socialist state was suddenly abolished, and there was nothing that could take its place. The ensuing loss of orientation gave rise to a widespread call for a new strong leadership. It is not surprising, therefore, that even today - more than ten years after the demise of the socialist states - democratic movements are still facing enormous difficulties. The former unity parties in the socialist states were abolished, and their successors find themselves still very much weighed down by the burden of their authoritarian past. What is more, the trade unions were rendered almost powerless by the shutdown or radical reorganization of many industrial firms; the state-sponsored women's movements have practically vanished into thin air, and the former opposition movements - such as women's movements or environmentalist movements - have broken up into small factions or folded altogether. In the wake of the radical changes currently taking place in society, no new forms of civic organization have manifested themselves yet.

An additional crucial factor which may help to explain the persistent lack of a strong democratic movement is the all-encompassing globalization of the working and living situation of the people - and this is something that applies to Western and Eastern Europe alike. There is only one thing that dominates everything else: the dictate of the economy over politics. In this context, Ignacio Ramonet, a teacher of communication science and publisher of the journal *Le Monde diplomatique*, has coined the term 'totalitarian - totalitarian because the networking of markets tends to create a single market which dramatically increases the pressures of competition because products, services and prices can be more easily compared world-wide. As a result, regional markets lose much of their former significance, and this in turn leads to a new large-scale loss of jobs. It is estimated that in 40 years up to 40 per cent of today's total workforce will have been replaced by robots and computers. Multinational corporations are increasingly redirecting their profits to countries with lower taxes, thereby depriving their former home countries of much needed revenues and forcing them to privatize many of those services they have previously provided. This is felt particularly strongly in the education sector where we are currently witnessing radical changes which are still subsumed under the

ambiguous heading of 'autonomy.'

This development has been outlined very well by Ignacio Ramonet whom I quoted earlier. He writes: "Globalization has destroyed the national markets which were the very foundation of the nation-states. As a result, the national capitalist systems have become largely obsolete, and the state has lost much of its former weight. The nation-states are no longer able to defend themselves against the pressures of the market. The volume of financial reserves of the national banks has become absurdly small compared with the financial power of speculators."

This globalization is so radical and all-encompassing that one cannot help but feel there is nothing one can do to check it. In its 'totalitarian' character, the all-consuming and often veiled violence with which it operates, its boundless expansion and acceleration and its increasing independence of actual production processes make it into something like a moloch which is beyond the reach of human beings. The resulting complexities are so intricate and confusing as to render any political measures ineffective. In most cases it appears futile and senseless to try and combat this force with some kind of counter-force. When we are looking at the political strategies of the Greens in Germany, we can easily see that this is like entering enemy territory - and the result can only be that we become increasingly authoritarian ourselves and run the risk of losing our voice - and in the end, the ethical principles that motivated us in the first place. That is exactly what Ekkehart Krippendorff has warned of not long ago:

"It is one of the fundamental fallacies of the political classes that they continue to always opt for the more centralized solution to a particular problem because it is said to be more effective and more comprehensive - which means being for the alleged expert and against committed citizens. The principle of always shifting the decision-making authority onto the next higher level is part of the very logic which gave Maastricht and Brussels and effectively incapacitated the people of Europe. In this context, incapacitation is nothing but a euphemistic term for the far-reaching destruction of human potentials."

The larger the units of administration, the greater the detachment from the realities. It is true that every single day, television makes us witnesses of events and developments all over the world, but we can no longer personally relate to what is happening out there. It seems that our senses and our perception can indeed be enhanced and broadened by means of new technologies - but the price we pay for that is an increasing loss of reality. While enhanced perception may also increase our competency for evaluation and judgement, but the question remains if we thereby also increase our democratic competency. The more directly we experience and live politics, the more directly can we take responsibility. In the end, responsibility is always inseparable from actual human beings.

What we need therefore is greater clarity and less obscure complexities. We need to solve problems not on an abstract but on a concrete level. We need a new 'bottom-up' orientation. Admittedly, not all problems can be solved on a local or neighborhood level, but as individuals we can make the best use of our manifold social competencies in the context of local and regional activities. Correspondingly, when we find ourselves in a vast, boundless space, we are in peril of losing ourselves, and we are forced to look for a new *ersatz* identity which is usually provided from higher up. A good example of this is what is currently happening in our newly unified Europe, where a new, allegedly 'European' identity is to be created by drawing a clear line between Europe and the rest of the world. The concept of Europe as a 'stronghold' or a 'fortress' is not only directed against the so-called 'others' out there - it also tends to enforce greater homogeneity within and to put an end to diversity and variety. By externalizing the negative sides of our own development and projecting them onto the 'other', we are effectively denying the value of this 'other' in order to create a basis for raising our own value and constructing a more or less artificial identity for ourselves.

In Nazi Germany as well as in divided post-war Germany, this mechanism was followed for long decades and brought almost to perfection. It was only by stigmatizing and excluding the Jews as allegedly 'inferior race' that the concept of the master-race could constitute itself. And in a similar way, the clichés of 'evil communist' or the 'class enemy beyond the wall' served to construct the respective West German and East German identities. At the same time, this mechanism made it possible to avoid and prevent any effort at coming to

terms with the Nazi past and with the social conflicts in one's own country. In his study on European Modernity, the Polish sociologist Zygmunt Baumann came to the conclusion that it was the inability to live with ambiguities and ambivalences - in both Eastern and Western Europe - which led to the dramatic outbreak of unspeakable violence in our 'century of the death camps.'

What continues to influence the way we are responding to globalization and the network of the world-wide web with such ambivalence and hesitation, is the heritage of force and violence in the past century which saw two World Wars as well as the Nazi regime that made all of Europe into accomplices of its racist terror. With every new day we continue to find ourselves faced with the dilemma that the effects of globalization are highly ambiguous and full of contradictions. Indeed, looking at them from different points of view, they can lead to entire different and opposing evaluations. In addition, our everyday lives are shaped by the internet in the sense that events which take place on the far side of the world are increasingly influencing what is happening here. Our 'distant neighbors,' as they have been called, are becoming closer and closer to us in the world-wide web, but the question remains whether that will also make them our equals. The 'third world' movements have always made an issue of this problem, and today there can be little doubt that there are clearly two categories of human beings, at least from the point of view of the economy: those who can participate in the digital world, and those who remain excluded - which is particularly true for the world's poorest countries.

As far as Europe is concerned, no new democratic alternatives have emerged as yet. The traditional organizations in the fight for more social justice and equality, such as political parties and trade unions, have failed to meet the people's expectations, and there is little confidence left that they might be able to provide solutions for the future. Still these organizations continue to play an important part in society - even though they have lost much of their muscle, because the traditional disputes over wages and working conditions have given way, in the wake of the far-reaching reorganization of the economy, to disputes over jobs as such. In this context, there is widespread hope that new self-help organizations founded of by the people themselves will take over many of the services previously provided by the state. Already, there are some 300.000 volunteer organizations in Germany and 350.000 in the United Kingdom. In France, a total of 43.000 new volunteer associations were registered in 1996, and some 350.000 people have been given work in conjunction with the program.

Parallel to these developments, new virtual dimensions have emerged in the form of digital networks, internet links and chat groups which are functioning as new interfaces between the different national economies and research associations cultures. One can now find internet cafés even in the remotest places in the world which provide new channels of communication between people all over the world. What we are witnessing here is the rise of a new culture of communication that opens up new spaces and new fields of activity for participatory social change. Even if the vast majority of users are content with playing a relatively passive role, the possibilities are quite obvious: The web offers a medium for exchanging information without any interference or control from ideologies or from the state. The digital media make it possible for people to take part in virtual conferences, to have access to all kinds of information, to exchange information throughout the web and to share their own personal and political opinions with others. In this way, even small schools in remote rural areas can be provided with modern-day educational materials, and people living in thinly populated areas where there are no institutions of higher learning may enroll in internet classes to earn college degrees. In spite of the numerous encouraging aspects, however, there is still some doubt as to whether this is enough to ensure the necessary processes of social adaptation and integration. It is already becoming apparent today that the digital networks result in increased pressures of competition between those who can afford to access the new technology and those who lack the necessary financial resources. The future will still see a discrimination of those who are not given the chance to learn - and keep learning - how to use the new technologies. It is these social considerations and issues of digitalization - and not the interfaces mentioned earlier - which will ultimately decide the issue of education for all. Today, no one can ignore or escape this development, and that of course applies to its critics as well. In this context I would like to quote Juan Luis Cebrán, who has investigated the impact of the world-wide digitalization on behalf of the Club of Rome:

"For those who are part of the system, the opportunities for employment, education, leisure and prosperity

will rise almost exponentially, while those who have already been marginalized will only be able to watch helplessly as their distance and alienation from the very society they are trying to become a part of will continue to grow."

The dilemmas involving by the impact of world-wide digital networks are the central issue of educational work today. The changes are taking place so fast that neither state planning nor the development of curricula can follow. At this point I would like to present a number of hypotheses and questions on the possible contribution of educational policy - in the sense of a liberating pedagogy - in this race against time. In conclusion, I would like to report on two exemplary projects from the field in order to show what we may learn from them concerning the creation of a democratic basis for education and the public realm in general.

1. World-wide digital networking is made possible by the universal nature of the new technologies and by their standardization and reproducibility, whereas education and the development and mediation of value systems have to do with the immediate relations between people. This is the reason why cultural and social developments are essentially not subject to any form of normatization. With the creation of the world-wide web and digital networking, the significance of technologies is increasing exponentially. We have as yet no way of telling what the consequences will be for our systems of education and the fact that they are deeply rooted in our individual cultural systems. Any technology is always the product of a specific development in a specific time and place. Hence technological transfer is never 'neutral' or independent of systems - it is a manifestation of specific relations of power in a society and in turn influences and shapes these relations. The crucial task of a liberating education must therefore be the decoding of this logic in its social impact. Reality does not constitute itself through anonymous totalitarian processes of change, but through the active social activities of human beings. Only when these human beings talk about social changes and reflect on their everyday life can they arrive at an understanding of the significance of new technologies and the changes they bring to their lives. In this way they can also rethink their past in terms of the present and the future: They become the subjects of change - they become social actors.
2. Globalization has allowed capitalism to transcend the boundaries of the nation-states and to operate on a world-wide level. The result of this development is a far-reaching reorganization of the economy with massive loss of jobs - which means an unprecedented increase in what is called structural violence. In Europe, we see a dramatic rise in unemployment and a decline of the welfare state. In much of the southern hemisphere, however, globalization can only be enforced by resorting to dictatorial measures and serious violations of human rights. In many cases, the regimes establish a climate of fear and terror which effectively destroys the traditional feeling of solidarity among the people and renders them passive - they prefer to repress or externalize the violence they are experiencing. The climate of silence then serves as a fertile ground for renewed despotism and tyranny on the part of those who hold power. The only way to counteract this situation is through a process of conscientization with a special emphasis on the violence suffered in the past and on the ways in which this violence has become embedded in the patterns and conditions of everyday life. Today, this particular situation, so well described by Paulo Freire in the 1960s for Latin America, is gaining new importance for Europe as well.
3. Globalization leads to a decline not only of the economic power but also of the political power of the nation-states which have been the essential frame of reference for the enforcement of human rights ever since the Enlightenment. The growing significance and power of the economic sphere tends to stifle the ethical discourse as well. As a result, human rights themselves are increasingly in jeopardy, because their universal acceptance and validity can only be maintained if they are continuously reviewed and rooted in the individual societies. *Human rights are not given, they are constantly being created.* An additional element which is threatening human rights is the growing inequality in the world in the wake of globalization. After all, the universal acceptance and validity of human rights is based not just on the idea of freedom but also on the principle that all men are equal. Unless a minimum of justice and equality is guaranteed, there can be no freedom for any one. The decline of the state establishes new framework conditions which make it necessary to develop new forms of social participation and

to create new spaces for a policy of ethics. Liberating education can play a crucial part in this process. At the same time, the state cannot and must not be released from its responsibility - it must continue to make an institutional and material contribution

4. In conjunction with the world-wide digital networks, there is also a shift of emphasis in the media in favor of the 'big' issues of national and international politics as opposed to 'small' issues of local or regional importance. The media play an important part in determining what issues politics will take up. One of the effects of the new technologies is that information is increasingly becoming a commodity, which means they are at the disposal of those who have the financial resources and the power to dominate the world-wide market.

The new technologies also change the private and social forms of communication. It has been found that endless 'chatting' in the web can even replace live contact with other human beings. In addition, the web is also a gateway for the unchecked distribution of such things as racism, violence, nazi ideology etc. It would seem be important in this context to establish new criteria for a non-stigmatizing way of dealing with such issues as violence, racism, sexism and pornography. Where should we draw the boundary between legitimate human needs and perversity, between freedom of the press and censorship? These questions are also relevant to educational policy in conjunction with the often advocated idea of the 'teaching of values'. But values cannot simply be taught or even trained - that would be nothing but authoritarian moralizing. A liberating pedagogy as postulated by Paulo Freire can only consist of the decoding and re-coding of meaning in a specific social context. Its principal objective is to foster in the individual the ability to make his own judgements and to take on personal responsibility. To prepare human beings for this and to give them competency - that has always been, and continues to be - the essence of Freire's pedagogy. The future of conscientization will depend primarily on whether we succeed in bridging the distance between our 'distant neighbors' and ourselves and to actually live the maxim of "thinking globally and acting locally".

In conclusion, I would like to tell you something about two different projects which are methodically trying to come to grips with these new issues. Both projects were launched three years ago, and both are still looking for colleagues and partners in other countries.

The project '*Women's Memory*' involves eight different countries in Central and Eastern Europe (Poland, Czech Republic, Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, Ukraine, Russia and Eastern Germany). At the center of this project, which is carried out by women for women, is the attempt to have women reflect on general history by focusing on their own personal history. The original idea for the project, which is being coordinated by the 'Center for Gender Studies,' came from Prague. The first phase of the project, which was financed by the Heinrich Böll Foundation in Berlin, involved only women who were born between 1920 and 1930 and who as young women (at the ages of 20 to 30 years) experienced the establishing of a socialist state in their homeland. Looking back, they reported on their lives before the War, during the War and after the War. Some of the women had held public office and viewed this time with critical detachment, while others, who had not participated in public life, continue to think highly of socialism to this day. The different personal histories and the different experiences of the women provided a good insight into the everyday life under socialism and into the cultural differences. Although it was obviously extremely difficult to survive the War and the early post-war years, the women saw themselves not as victims but as actors in their own right. They conveyed lively accounts not only of 'kitchen cultures' and women's solidarity but of experiences of violence as well. Today these women are between 70 and 80 years of age and know they have not much time left, so they take the opportunity to say what they have to say. They testify, as it were, and give us an insight into social ways of life and into women's culture - insights that may prove useful because they help us consider possible alternatives. The future is unthinkable without the past.

The generative themes in the biographies of the women not only help the interviewees to rethink their own position and to relate to new developments in society, they also provide us with valuable material that can aid us in our efforts at conscientization with young people today. It is planned to translate some of the selected

interviews into the languages of the countries concerned and to make them accessible in these countries. There is something that can be made more transparent by comparing the different experiences and perspectives, and that is "women's cultures" that might offer alternatives to the currently dominating model of society. Women have never been 'invisible' in socialist countries, although the interpretation of their lifestyle and their role models were often 'tinted' by the ideology of official history. That has been - and still is - true all over the world. One of the goals of the project is to 'decodify' - in Paulo Freire's sense of the term - the daily lives of women and to re-codify it in the light of current developments. In this way we hope to keep these things alive, to keep them from being forgotten, and to retrace alternatives to the currently prevailing streamlined model of society. It is currently being planned to extend the project "Women's Memory" to Cuba and Nicaragua.

The second project under the title of "Conflict Resolution in Primary Schools" is being carried out in cooperation with the Chilean Ministry of Education, the German Foundation for International Development and the Paulo Freire Institute in Berlin and funded by the Chilean government and the German Ministry for Cooperation (BMZ). The idea for the project was developed in conjunction with the Chilean Education Ministry's search for new and innovative concepts of advanced teacher's training. The education reform program specified that teachers should not just teach the students in the traditional subjects but also prepare them for the demands of rapid social change. This required a fundamental reorganization of the system of teacher training. One of the main objectives was to not just supply teachers with new contents and suitable methods but also to prepare them for the new task of joining the students in developing new goals and contents of education. Another objective was to make future teachers aware of the authoritarian nature of the traditional system of education and to help them overcome it by acquainting them with group-based methods, integrative teach-and-learn approaches and an intercultural sensitization.

A stipend program was created, and since 1996 close to 900 teachers have been sent to various foreign countries every year to learn new and innovative methods. In the last three years, the two-month project "Conflict Management in Primary Schools" has been held regularly in Berlin in the last three years and takes 20 teachers through a course program focusing on four main aspects:

- the self-conception of the teachers, the situation at their respective schools, and perspectives for possible changes;
- the German educational system, with a discussion of the authoritarian roots of education in the Nazi period and in the post-war German states;
- the concept of pedagogic integration, focusing on the integration of physically handicapped students as well as on intercultural education and gender education; special workshops were held to teach participants new techniques of mediating conflicts, of preventing drug abuse as well as sexual abuse;
- the study of real-life situations in German schools during classes as well as in teachers' and parents' meetings.

In addition, the participating teachers are given an opportunity to meet with people who lived through the Nazi period, with representatives of Chilean exile organizations, with the teachers' union etc. Participants were also invited to visit a former Nazi concentration camp in order to learn about reconciliation work. In addition, they attended concerts and visited museums, and had an opportunity to visit various European cities.

The truly innovative aspect of this project is not so much in the contents listed above but in the different ways in which Chilean teachers were motivated - through group interaction and individual work, through body awareness programs and playful-learning - to reflect on their praxis and to exchange ideas and experiences with fellow teachers from their home country. In many cases, Chilean teachers coming to Germany had their first opportunity to talk to colleagues from remote parts of their own country and to work together with

teachers of opposing political orientation. It seemed that only on neutral territory, so to speak, were they able to finally face themselves and talk about the long repressed experiences of life under dictatorship. By systematically presenting Chilean teachers with curricular contents of the German school system, the participants were motivated to embark on a sort of self-discovery: By being confronted with the 'other' they were motivated to begin questioning themselves.

Similar experiences were made by German teachers when they reciprocated by visiting the schools of their Chilean guests last year. After visiting Chilean schools and the Ministry of Education, the German teachers began to reflect on developments and problems encountered in their own schools back home. Studying the goals and contents of the educational reform in Chile, which had many parallels with the German School Reform programs of the 1970s and 1980s, they began to realize to what extent the achievements of the German school reform has already been rolled back in the current period of neo-liberal thinking, so that they no longer meet the demands of today's young generation. This is particularly evident in Berlin where there is a growing number of conflicts with students from marginalized social strata who are no longer willing or able to make use of the educational possibilities offered to them.

The deeply felt commitment of the participants and the new insights gained on all sides were, in our view, achieved thanks to the constructivist approach of these projects which do not aim to instruct; the main idea is to provide an opportunity to become acquainted with the 'other' in order better to evaluate one's own reality - and perhaps to change it. Motivated by the success of the projects, we are currently planning a similar training program on 'constructivist' conflict resolution with teachers from various European countries. First contacts have been established with the peace center in the Spanish city of Guernica, and we hope to find new partners for cooperation here as well.

The two case studies from the field show how helpful Freire-style conscientization can be in order to foster communication and new ideas where there was only silence before, and how the evaluation of relations of power in another society can help one decodify and change one's own repressed situation. This kind of learning process would be impossible without the 'other' - or as Paulo Freire quoted Martin Buber: "I am because you are." I myself owe it to Paulo Freire that I can now live and work with this feeling of hope.

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