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Ghiggi, Gomercindo; Kavaya, Martinho; da Rosa Oliveira, Avelino

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Otchiwo, *Ondjango* and Culture Circles: From *Ovimbundu* and Freirian Vital Experiences to Angolan Education. Experiencing Intercultural Dialogue as a Revitalisation of Action Research

Gomercindo Ghiggi, Martinho Kavaya,
Avelino da Rosa Oliveira

This paper aims at reflecting on vital perspectives to think about the contemporary world, mainly the world of Education. Paulo Freire's vision, expressed by the Culture Circles, has been analysed in this text in the light of complex challenges posed by the African/Angolan culture, namely the *ondjango* and the *otchiwo*. From this perspective, this study aims at detailing different pedagogies that are found in the three visions so that interfaces can be identified, and ways to a liberating Education in Angola can be proposed. Freire, Lukamba, Nunes, Kavaya and Altuna enable us to suggest dialogue as one of the vital perspectives exposed by this text: the Freirean, the *ondjangian*, and the *otchiwian* ones. All look at the world we face in everyday life, and at the world we face in schools; the task refers to reading the world and the word in search for freedom. Therefore, the dialogue, which is the core reference, is not only understood as a methodological perspective, but also as an ontological dimension of the human being.

Key words: *Otchiwo*, *Ondjango*, Angolan education, culture circles, Paulo Freire

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1. Initial remarks

This paper aims at discussing issues which might contribute to the revitalisation of action research, by bringing together different cultural perspectives. The socio-educational practices experienced in the Culture Circles proposed by Paulo Freire should be seen as a revitalising force for *Ondjango* and *Otchiwo:* typically Angolan socio-educational practices. Therefore, the paper is intended to be read as an example, indicating that both the cultural perspectives which one works with, and the dialogues and relationships that can be established, are not to be overlooked as a pre-supposition when carrying out action or participatory research.

When we decided on the title "*Otchiwo*, *Ondjango* and Culture Circles: from *Ovimbundu* and Freirian Vital Experiences to Angolan Education", the image of a *mango tree* came to our mind. Found in Angola and Brazil, it reminds us of *Ondjango*, *Otchiwo* and Culture Circles mainly because, under its shade, Paulo Freire used to rest and wait for others in order to intertwine dialogues (*ohango*) that imply commitment and practices of freedom. Likewise, Angolans sit to practice *ondjango*, a live meeting in which conversation is vital. That is what Ana Freire refers to, when she introduces *Pedagogia da Indignação* (Freire, 2000, p. 5), *Pedagogy of Indignation*, in English, a book in which Paulo Freire describes his transformative and vital pedagogical project, mainly when he chooses the *shade of the mango tree* to rest while he waits for the other. For Freire, "*he who merely awaits lives out a time of vain awaitin.*" (ibid.). He would not wait in vain because his *waiting* time was a *what-to-do* time. He would distrust the cautious ones who came to tell him that "*it is dangerous to act; it is dangerous to speak; it is dangerous to walk; it is dangerous to wait, in the way you wait*" (ibid.), because these ones refuse the joy of seeing others come. He would also distrust the ones who came to tell him in easy words that time had already come because these ones, who heralded him naively, would first betray him. Nevertheless, he would be getting ready to the other's arrival, "*as the gardener tends to the garden*" so that the house can be opened in spring. This is why it is necessary to wait for the other to learn to read the world, the word and history together (ibid.).

In his book "*À sombra desta Mangueira*" (2004b), *Under the Shade of this Mango Tree*, in English, Freire writes about his childhood when, under the shade of the trees in Recife, he learns "the solitude of being alone as a way to be with and keep being". When he refers to his experiences in childhood, Freire makes radically meaningful remarks about what he went through and learned in the world of life, and discusses "local and global problems of contemporaneity" (Souza, 2001, p. 365). His reflections include themes such as "... globalisation, post-modernity, acts of leftist parties and his work in the *Secretaria Municipal de São Paulo (1989-91)*. Besides, he reasserts his absolute radicalism in favor of the oppressed and refuses the mechanism and the determinism that generate immobility. As usual, he also reasserts "… history as a possibility, hope, tolerance, dialogicity and problematisation as an ontological requirement of human beings" (ibid.). This is the background that led to Freire's Culture Circles and the basis for our discussion about the relation between Freire and the African culture.

In a broad sense, ondjango and otchiwo: in some instances with other names, are peculiar means of communitarian organisation of African sub-Saharan black peoples, including Angola. Nevertheless, the specific expressions *"ondjango"* and *"otchiwo"*, in the sense of a way of living, are of ordinary and original usage from Angola, more precisely from the South Central region of Angola. This African organisation, according to Kavaya (2006, p. 145), "aimed to permanently control the lives of human groups in tiny societies." In fact, they can be considered like traditional parliaments: a feminine more restrict one and a masculine wider-ranging one, where even females problems are discussed. African societies used to attain a democratic living through these traditional parliaments and therefore *ondjango* and *otchiwo* should be regarded as the African way of democracy.

Ondjango points to the reality of the home (Nunes, 1991, P. 159). But, which home is it? It is the home where conversation, meetings, housing, sharing of things/meals/services, socio-cultural education, entertainment, and/or justice happen. Above all, it is a home: a starting point and a confluence point, where people can sit, and join elders. That is why it is a meeting place. Physically speaking, *ondjango* is a round space whose lateral walls are open, with no plaster, made of bamboo and mud, covered by grass or located

in the leafy shade of a large tree,[1] where men used to sit so that *ohango* (dialogue) could happen. Inside the *ondjango*, there was wood: large logs (*olononga*), which was carried by young people. It was allowed to decorate the place with hunting or war trophies (ibid.). Originally, this house (*ondjango*) did not belong to anyone special (ibid.); it belonged to everyone who would use it on a regular basis.

Life used to come out in the *ondjango*: its pinnacle was there. *Ohango* (conversation/dialogue) got several meanings in this place: "*ondjango*" could mean "*ulonga*" (report of life events since the latest meeting); "*elongiso*" (teaching and learning), "*ekuta*" (food sharing); "*ekongelo*" (decision-making meeting); "*ekanga/okusomba/okusombisa*" (meeting to do justice and pass sentences, aiming at convicting or acquitting the defendant); "*okupapala*" (a meeting to have fun, to party and to dance cultural and traditional dances according to the current situation: death, hunt, wedding, sociocultural and traditional initiation rites, hosting a visitor, etc); and "*ondjuluka*" (meeting to organize a community task force in case of a member's disease, socioeconomic problem, difficulties on the farm, etc) (Kavaya, 2006, p. 147). After all, *ondjango* is a vital community habitat in which geo-historical, economic, sociocultural and political relations are developed towards community welfare.

Ondjango was originally located in an area which was considered a space for all dwellers in that community. It was respected, almost holy, and they were aware that this space was the centre of the community life. It was the centre from where the vital flow of the clan or the community came, including respect to tradition and to important decisions regarding the community welfare (ibid.). Therefore, it was a house to talk, discuss and solve vital themes in life, resulting from *ulonga*.

As for *otchiwo*/*Ehula*, throughout History, it has been considered, by the subgroup *Ovimbundu* from South Central Angola, a kitchen separated from

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[1] Nunes (ibid) says that the meetings of the elderly, "in the shade of a symbolic tree", was a very common event. This is a common habit in communities in Kenya, Tanzania, and Zaire and in several ones in Angola, where elders bring their own "otchalo", i. e., little stools covered by animal skin (leather) to sit around the fire and share food and wisdom.

the main house. This place was essentially the meeting space where mothers taught and their daughters learned during the act of reflecting-on-action. In this African, Bantu, Angolan and *Ovimbundu* culture, women were regarded as homemakers. While they prepared (cooked) delicacies (food), mothers and daughters intertwined pedagogical dialogues regarding their socio-domestic and cultural life, and their sexual education. After cooking activities had finished, the daughters were responsible for taking the food: made during the matriarchal pedagogical acts, to the *Ondjango*, where husbands or fathers and boys who were old enough and capable of listening to elders, enjoyed the feast which consisted in sharing the food. It led to *Ondjango*, as a space and a group act. *Ondjango*, in everyday socio-familiar routine comprised the extended family, i.e., neighbors, relatives that lived close to the community, friends, etc. *Otchiwo*, at its core, aimed at the girls' education for the school of life, the construction of a sound and mature family so that the socio-affective life could indeed promote life, the main issue in African philosophy. From this perspective, *Otchiwo* can also be understood as a dormitory for girls who belong to several families, i.e., a place for true initiation and pedagogical learning.

In Viti's view,[2] *Otchiwo* is the pedagogical space for girls, previously described, that results from several circumstances such as exiguity of space to sleep in the parents' house, parents' and children's need for privacy and the natural rite of passage from childhood-adolescence to youth. Only girls were allowed to enter the *otchiwo*. A sensible and experienced middle-aged woman had the responsibility to take care of this place and, mainly, of the girls' education.

The third ideary deals with Freire's dialogical proposal, which makes sense since in a dialogical act one takes into account the world of life or the culture of the persons who participate in the dialogue. From this perspective, Freire shows this idea in the search for broad comprehension of the ways that lead to change. Therefore, daring is fundamental, and it can be triggered by consciousness upraising which, by its turn, leads to criticism. Such discussion will take place having in mind Freire's experience in the African world.

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[2] Emeritus Archbishop from Huambo-Angola, Mr. D. Viti, on March 15th, 2008.

2. Freire and his path through African world

In order to better understand Freire and his work in the African world, where the *ondjangotchiwian* culture, the dialogical culture, can be found, it is fundamental at least to glance at his career which made up the basis for the meaningful and provocative philosophical, anthropological, sociological, political, theological and pedagogical legacy that he left for mankind.

We understand Freire's life and work in connection with his devotion, experience and sociopolitical commitment and the history he lived in Brazil as a timely opportunity to think about society, mainly about education. The first part of Freire's life happened from 1921 to 1964: "*Paulo Reglus Neves Freire, known abroad simply as Paulo Freire*" (Gadotti, 2001, p. 28) was born in Recife, Pernambuco, Brazil. He finished high school and Law School there. In 1944, he married Elza, an elementary school teacher who introduced him to the cultural and educational world in *recifense* soil. His first activity in the educational world was at the *Serviço Social da Indústria (SESI)* and the *Movimento de Cultura Popular (MCP),* where he started his literacy project with the Culture Circles all over the northeastern region in Brazil. In 1959, at the *Universidade Federal de Recife*, Freire wrote his first book "*Educação e Atualidade Brasileira*", a dissertation for a public contest in *History and Philosophy of Education in Arts in Pernambuco.* (ibid., p. 257) Gadotti states that this thesis presents, for the first time, the *idea of a democratic school* which focuses on a sympathetic relationship between learner and educator and on the community in which both live and work in (ibid.). With new pedagogical practices, this school is able to trigger the transition from magic-ingenuous conscience to critical awareness; only the latter can lead to social changes (ibid.). After few adjustments, this doctoral dissertation resulted in the book *Education and the Practice of Freedom*, which became Freire's first book. It was his entrance into the reading of social reality in the world where people live, and into national and world education.

Nowadays, thinking about this universal thinker's presence/absence, we understand that his work is very important for those who believe in social change. Through his work as an educator, he leaves a legacy which was summarized by Souza (2002, p. 67): a) deep belief in the human being and in his/her capacity to educate him/herself as a subject in History; b) firm politi-

cal choices that are coherent with the causes of the oppressed, who are able to dream and have hope; c) dare to act and fight for what one believes in, with humbleness to recognize that no great work is done by a person alone and that it is necessary to keep learning all the time; d) a way to make people educate themselves to change reality; d) special concern over illiteracy and its mitigation with a pedagogy that teaches people how to read and write the world.

During exile, we see Freire meeting Africa again. We mention a second meeting, rather than a first meeting, because when Freire stepped on African soil for the first time, it seemed to him that he had already visited and experienced the African world (Freire, 1984). Similarities between Africa (Tanzania) and Brazil made him feel as if Brazil were meeting its mother country, Africa, again. Therefore, he said (ibid., pp. 13-14): "The colour of the sky, the greenish blue of the sea, the coconut palms, the mango trees, the cashew trees, the perfume of its flowers, the smell of its land; the bananas, among them, my most loved apple-banana; the fish made with coconut milk; the grasshoppers hopping on low grass…". Freire's attention was drawn by "…the slinky walking of people on the streets; their smile which is available to life; drum sounds late at night; dancing bodies and 'designing the world' at the same time", the expression of a culture which colonisers could not murder.

Freire's life was marked by ups and downs. Some of his dreams died in the scabrous nights of the military Brazilian dictatorship. In 1964, Freire tasted the bitter side of prison for seventy two days, before going to exile. As a wanderer, he lived abroad for sixteen years. In 1964, he asked for asylum in the Bolivian embassy, and then he went to Chile and the USA. In 1970, in Geneva, while he worked in the World Council of Churches, he headed for Africa which was achieving its political independence and planning its educational projects. Thus, he flew over Cape Verde, Angola, Guinea-Bissau… (ibid, pp. 42-43) When he stepped on African soil, he felt as if he were coming back, rather than arriving; he felt as if he were in his own home. That is why he dared say, not afraid of making a mistake, when we was visiting the team at the Instituto de Ação Cultural (IDAC) in Guinea-Bissau for the first time: "When I came back to Guinea-Bissau ..." In the same sense,

"all he saw and felt revealed so many affinities between Africa and Brazil", writes Andreola (2005, p. 66).

It was an affective meeting, "a look of affection, of delight" that recognised the other and, together, both searched for a way to build a society in which everyone could have a voice, a chance and a plentiful life. This meeting recognised the other's potentialities as a subject, a committed activist who works hard to rebuild his/her country (Freire, 1984, p. 15): "the opposite of Hegel's look; a look that expressed only prejudice and total contempt", according to Andreola (ibid.).

Andreola (2005) states that Freire's feelings of affection towards Africa are expressed by his courage to meet the other where she/he lives. It is a feeling of love, which is understood as "an act of courage and never a feeling of fear (…), an act of commitment to men. Wherever these oppressed men are, the act of love means commitment to their cause – the cause of liberation. But this commitment is dialogical because it is affective" (Freire, 2004a, p.80).

By loving Africa, he loved all beings that moved on it and who had lost their land in their search for life, peace and freedom that did not exist among the oppressed. By loving Africa, he loved the African *ecology*. This Freirian ecological view, presented by Dowbor (in Freire, 2004b, p.12), leads Andreola (2005, p.67) to mention "Freire's reminiscence, which is also loaded with a deep ecological feeling, full of authentic affection towards burned trees and animals expelled by the cruelty of war".

This approximation (re-approximation) between Freire and Africa was a meeting to learn, rather than to teach. This statement can be found in his dialogue with Guimarães (Freire & Guimaraes, 2003, p. 61): "— But this is a funny thing, Sérgio. Africa teaches us so much! Reality teaches us so much! (...) In Africa, dear Sérgio, we face a culture whose memory (...) is auditory; it is oral, rather than written." In his encounter with Africa, Freire recognized the value of the culture of the people, mainly the culture that joins words and gestures. Freire mentions this dimension by describing a party on a large square to celebrate Guinea-Bissau's Independence Day, where the party and the word showed a perfect synchrony. "A hot morning in September. Almost suffocating. The Independence Day was being celebrated. A large

square. In the back, a platform on which authorities stood (…)". Freire keeps on writing: "Several groups parade up and down. They represent popular organizations of *Tabankas* and suburbs in Bissau. Colourfully dressed children, young people, women and men. They sing and dance. They move around. They come and go, duck and dodge according to extraordinarily rich rhythms. The whole crowd (…) took part in it." (Freire, 1984, pp. 38-39)

3. Freire: Dialogue and culture

Dialogue is central to the reflection we have proposed in this study. In a precise way, we have brought up something that is related to Freire's work in the African world: he himself considers it a second meeting with the mother continent. It enables us to deepen the Freirian dialogical ideary and, likewise, the sense of the themes: culture and dialogue, awareness and dialogue, through constant search for connections among the three idearies this study deals with: the Freirian one, the *ondjangian* one and the *otchiwian* one. Finally, a cultural synthesis is needed so that it can lead us to the triple dimension of our walk: the certainty that we are starting all the time, the need to go on and the possibility of *stopping* during the walk.

We have pictured Freire in a suburb in Recife and his childhood around oil lamps; we have referred to him in a period of intense sociopolitical changes; we have found his character in his family's world in the backyard of his home, around trees, banana trees, cashew trees, sugar-apple trees, mango trees, etc; we have found Freire learning how to read under the shade of trees, using the ground as a blackboard and a stick as chalk; we have pictured Freire around his family, the youngest child, in his suffering and joy, with his children and women, his friends and his workmates (Ghiggi & Kneip, 2004). Therefore, we are facing, according to Freire himself (2003b, p. 30), "*the man who is in the world and with the world*", a being who is able to relate to others, to move away from himself, to project himself into others, to transcend. We have reassured a relation that does not happen solely with others; it happens in the world, with the world and for the world. For Freire, an animal is in the world, rather than with the world (ibid.). Since the human being understands his/her reality, s/he questions the challenges which reality

poses and looks for answers for conflicts involving "*his/her inner self and circumstances*". A cultural world which fills up geographical and historical spaces is then created (ibid.).

Freire understands that culture is "*everything that is created by men*" (ibid.), something that involves humans' whole life, which ranges from the smallest circumstances to the greatest social processes. Freire looks at culture as reality that "consists in creating, rather than repeating. Man can do it because he has an awareness that can capture the world and change it. It leads us to another characteristic of the relation: consequence, which results from creation and recreation…" Finally, men, for Freire, are not intended "for adaptation". Therefore, "education is not an adaptation process in which men adapt to society. They must change it to be more…" (Freire, 2003b, p. 31)

In this cultural process which happens throughout time, man identifies himself with his own acts in temporality, in which he becomes a history-man, and in transcendentality, in which he can transcend his immanence; this relation does not accept taming, submission, resignation, according to Freire (ibid). Through culture, man can play an active role in his reality (Freire, 2003a, p. 117).

Regarding literacy, illiterate people who join this process, start their change in attitudes. In other words, illiterate people, says Freire (ibid), "... would critically see themselves as creator in the world of culture; they would find out that culture is both the dolls made by their fellow artists, their brothers, as well as the work of a great sculptor". Therefore, Freire recognises and believes in the power of learners who discuss their vital problems, the democratic dimension of the world in their lives and problems related to work, to the country, to the continent, to the world: problems that go through education as an act of love, debate and discussion. According to Freire (ibid, p. 104), "... education is an act of love; thus, an act of courage. It cannot fear either debate or the analysis of reality."

Oliveira (1996, p. 8) states that, doubtlessly, the concept of dialogue did not come out with Freire's philosophical speculations. Such reflection can be found in Aristotle's, Thomas Aquinas' and Maritain's work. Freire himself does not claim that the philosophical-educational analysis which is based on dialogical praxis is his original idea (ibid.). On the contrary, he recognises the

merit of several predecessors, such as Dewey and Jaspers; both emphasise a pedagogical-philosophical action which focuses on dialogue (ibid.). That is why Freire tried to overcome the critics who accused him of lack of originality. He based his arguments on Dewey's statement: "originality will not be found in what is fantastic, but in a new usage of known things" (ibid.). According to Oliveira (ibid., p. 9), what is really new in Freire's pedagogical and philosophical speculations over dialogue is the fact that he inserted such issues in the dialectical context of a theory of knowledge. It brought up active elements of knowledge in the construction of mental models, whose work was to capture different aspects of reality. It meant that anyone always had something to learn from the other, even though s/he started with different hypotheses. In this case, says the same author (ibid.), the deep meaning of dialogue in Freire's educational philosophy is that it was considered neither a simple act of skill nor a polite way to give a polemic or rhetoric speech, rooted in rigid and dogmatic schemes in which discussants were also convinced that they had the truth, and whose objective tactics was to coerce the others to accept their truth.

In literacy, Freire believed in dialogue as a method of pedagogical investigation which made teaching and learning techniques not only incorporate into each fragment of several different theoretical beliefs but also assure the dialectical development of knowledge when taking into account new elements which emerged from social context (ibid.).

We are sure that Freire has also found the concept of dialogue in Buber's work. The reasons that lead us to such statement refer to the fact that Freire quotes this French thinker once in a while. In the book *I and Thou* (2004, p. 30), Buber introduces the word as being dialogical. This author develops the ontology of the word and recognises it as "speaking word" and "carrier of the being" (ibid.). Through the word, men sail on the ocean of existence. The word leads man, rather than the opposite, and keeps him in the being. In Buber's view, "a spoken word is an effective, efficient and updated attitude of human being. It is an act through which man becomes man and places himself in the world with others (…). The word, the carrier of the being, is the place where the being establishes itself as a revelation" (ibid.).

Grounded on these remarks, it is possible to understand how Freire (2004a, p.78) recognises human existence as the one that can neither be mute, silent nor use false words. It must be nourished by true words, the ones men can use to change the world. Therefore, he says: "To exist, humanly, to *name* the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new *naming*" (ibid.). And men become men through words, work and action-reflection, rather than through silence. And this is why action and participatory research cannot be deprived of a dialogical attitude.

But if saying the true word is working, if it is changing the world, if it is praxis, then this act cannot be a privilege of some people; it must be a right of mankind. The consequence of it is that the true word cannot be said by a person alone or by one to others: it must be shared. Freire shows coherence when he states: "no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught. Men teach each other, mediated by the world." (ibid., p. 68)

Therefore, for Freire (2003a, p. 115), dialogue is "a horizontal relation from A to B. It feeds on love, humbleness, hope, faith, trust. That is why only dialogue communicates." It also justifies the statement that says that dialogue originates from criticism and generates criticism. According to Freire (ibid., p. 116), "he who dialogues does so with somebody about something". Dialogue, writes Freire (2004a, p. 78), is the "meeting of men mediated by the world". It is a way in which men get signification. Therefore, Freire is used to saying that authentic education, in a dialogical process, is neither carried on from A to B nor from B to A; neither from A on B nor from B on A, but it is carried on by A with B or by B with A. That is why "*banking education*" is found where there is no dialogue, since dialogue is an existential necessity (ibid., p. 79). As a result, dialogue cannot happen between those who want to name the world and the ones who do not want this naming; between those who deny others the right to say the word and those whose rights are denied.

In the *banking* concept of education, people who are going through a literacy programme are considered objects of the process of learning how to read and write; they are the ones who memorise contents presented by the educators. These people do not create and re-create knowledge. Thus, what happens is "education-taming, a process whose core is the transference of

knowledge; it recognises neither existential experiences nor the accumulation of knowledge which is generated in illiterate adults' experiences" (Schwendler, 2002, p. 106).

4. Conclusion: Freire, *Ondjango* and *Otchiwo* in vital dialogues

The intercultural dialogue among *Otchiwo*, *Ondjango* and Freire's Culture Circles can lead the three counterparts to redefine their meanings, and thus indicate elements to develop education as a practice of freedom in Angola. Inasmuch as dialogue is the inductive element of such tasks, they can also be regarded as examples of ineludible practices concerning action and participatory research.

There were good reasons to make Freire feel at home the very first time he went to Africa. Dialogue strongly defined the meeting of two brother-worlds (Brazil and Africa). *Ondjango* and *Otchiwo* in the life of the Angolan people, says the African spirit, make life become a permanent meeting and enable them to become aware of the fact that they belong to a group of values that must be preserved, mainly the *ondjangian* and *otchiwian ulonga* (a conversation to remind people of life and history).

Freire maintains that dialogue impels each and every meeting between a learner and a teacher. In Culture Circles, instead of using a traditional method, in which education always obeys to the same method, i.e., the blackboard and the teacher standing in front of the students who sit in rows at their desks, Freire preferred to make a circle (as in the ondjangian system) where people sat beside each other, looking face-to-face, and made a meeting happen. Nobody was so "wise" as to have nothing to learn from others. Likewise, nobody was so unlearned as not to have something as a contribution to this school process. Here, every one involved can be responsible for his/her own learning and can build his/her own history.

In the context of Culture Circles, learners: men and women, started to talk about their lives, their everyday tasks (it is *ulonga* in the *ondjango*) and their way of being and living. People sitting in a circle, just like the *ondjango*, carry out the reading of the world of life and the world of the word. In this pedagogical process, everybody: subjects of his/her learning and teaching,

contributes by exposing his/her knowledge. Nobody in the Circle owns the absolute knowledge. Each and every one has responsibilities and limitations. According to Freire, that is why it may be noticed that, from the point of view of Culture Circles, teachers and students at school become sympathetic teachers and learners, since all learn and all teach. Each one is responsible for developing his/her potentialities.

Ondjango is also constituted as a Culture Circle in which nobody plays the role of the teacher, but somebody does play the role of advisor or co-ordinator of the *ondjangian* dialogue whose directivity is the background. The person who guides the *ondjango* is somebody who has much life experience, an elderly person: the *osekulu*, usually an illiterate man, rather than a woman (there is no space for women in the *ondjango*). In Freire's proposal, the co-ordinator of the circle should be a man or woman who already knows how to read and write.

In *Otchiwo*, a female practical-educational space, girls absorb the art of thinking as a group, of doing, of being with somebody, besides gradual sexual initiation and the value and care of life and family. From this perspective, the master of sexual and social, including the family, initiation was an aunt, chosen among other women; after all, the principle was that to educate a woman was to educate the whole society. This woman became the one who listened to the girls since they were in a process of social, human, affective-sexual, intellectual, spiritual, moral and domestic maturity. She was the official educator regarding sexual initiation. However, such initiation only reached its peak after the wedding rituals, but before the couple started to live together and have intercourse (*okukwata epata*). The act of intimacy after the wedding was the solemn moment in which the wife became part of her husband's family.

The essence of the Bantu family is visible in the unity of its members; it is a convergent unity that involves all members. All tend to the same direction and the link of the Bantu family union is the virtuous woman. Therefore, she is considered the health and the bulwark of a consanguineous and extensive family. This view enables us to think about the value of femininity in the Bantu reality of the African/Angolan culture and the *Umbundu* culture in the South Central region of this country (Altuna, 1993).

The Bantu woman that belongs to the ethno-linguistic group *Ovimbundu* has a specific and honourable place in society due to her vocation for maternity (ibid., pp. 255-257). When maternity is mentioned, we refer to a woman who is a mother, who may be a wife, who is hardworking, an educator of new generations, a struggler, a homemaker, "*a major character (...) since it is the condition of most women that live with a spouse, whether or not married, mainly when they have children*" (Perrot, 2006, p. 213).

According to Altuna (ibid.), a woman who is a mother/farmer/blood lineage donator has an important social position. Since she is a mother, this woman plays a fundamental role in the family. As a mother/farmer, she represents the anguish, the strength and the mystery of fecundity. She carries life. The Bantu mother excels the father in sacred deepness because she is rooted in total and cosmic fecundity. The Bantu woman reveals and demonstrates fecundity and participative life, since they flourish in her, and invisible forces change her into a sacred laboratory where she lives in communion with the other descendents. The Bantu mother deserves religious veneration. She preserves and keeps the blood and the home. Therefore, her role is preponderant. She maintains sympathy. In Black Africa, women rank at the top; despite the Arabian-Berber[3] influence that followed the European and the nomadic civilizations, her role has not been weakened and she is still on top.

To summarise, the political and epistemological foundations of Culture Circles might indicate a new approach to cultural and educational practices of *Ondjango* and *Otchiwo*. In spite of the fact that Ondjango is constituted as a Culture Circle where there is no teacher, but a leader or co-ordinator of the dialogue, its gender segregation reveals an anachronism in our times, and calls for a revision. As we have already indicated, the person who guides the *Ondjango* is somebody who has much life experience, an elderly person, usually illiterate. But always a man, since women are not allowed to *Ond-*

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[3] A Berber individual, any nomadic people that live in the northern regions in Africa, in former Barbaria (Morocco, Algeria, Tunis, Libya and Egypt) and in the Sahara. A branch of the Hamito-Semitic family which speaks about 20 languages such as Kabila, Rifean and Tuareg, mainly in Algeria and in Morocco.

jango. As to Freirian Culture Circles, the coordinator should already know how to read and write, regardless of sex.

After all, the most important is that in both Angolan: *Ondjango* and *Otchiwo,* and Freirian: Culture Circles, cultural/educational practices, nobody thinks alone; everybody thinks with others in order to take part in the conversation with everybody. That is why Brandão (2002, pp. 61-63) states that "in the Circle, whatever is good to be talked about, to be thought about, to be learned, to be exchanged and shared, comes up from the conversation among everybody, men and women". And this is the culture that the invader wanted to silence at all costs so that autochthonous peoples could be kept in slavery and silence. The recovery and use of the *ondjangian* culture in the Angolan formal school, based on Freirian praxis, may lead to the recovery of so many other cultural values which have been silenced by the cultural: political or religious, invader/coloniser in Angola. This meeting between Freire and the African/Angolan *Ondjango* is a meeting of affective cultural syntheses, in which the people's life and culture is valued. By reading the world of life, mistakes that contradict life and the values people believe in can be corrected, and new values that lead to criticism and social change may be included.

Ondjango, Otchiwo and Culture Circles can certainly teach us a lot of things, but we would like to underline specially two of them: a) the indication of possible ways to restore education as the practice of freedom in Angola, and; b) the emphasis on intercultural dialogue as a vital posture to be assumed by everyone conducting action and participatory research.

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About the authors

Gomercindo Ghiggi, Doctor of Education, is a member of the research group Philosophy, Education and Social Praxis, and of the research line Philosophy and History of Education at the Federal University of Pelotas (Brazil). His research areas are Foundations of Education and Popular Education based on Paulo Freire's work.

Martinho Kavaya, Doctor of Education, teaches in the field of Foundations of Education and Popular Education. He is currently priest of the Catholic Church in Bengala and teacher at the Ganda-Benguela-Angola College.

Avelino da Rosa Oliveira, Doctor of Education, is currently professor at the Federal University of Pelotas (Brazil). His fields are Philosophy and Social Philosophy, and his main themes are social exclusion, Marxism and freedom.

Authors' addresses
Gomercindo Ghiggi
Rua Andrade neves, 3171
96020-080 Pelotas, RS, Brasil
E-mail: gghiggi@terra.com.br

Martinho Kavaya
Escola Pré-Universitária da Ganda-Benguela
Direcção Provincial da Educação, Ciência e Tecnologia
Avenida Governador G. Coutinho, 11
Bispado de Benguela Centro - 00000-670 - Benguela, - Angola
Caixa-Postal: 670
E-mail: makavaya@yahoo.com.br

Avelino da Rosa Oliveira
Rua Pantaleão Pizarro, 41
Bairro Três Vendas - 96020-617
Pelotas, RS, Brasil
E-mail: avelino.oliveira@gmail.com