

# The production of an absence of sense permeates the everyday of schools... and kills<sup>1</sup>

Paulo Freire: education and politics when facing obscurantism

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**T**hey were friends. According to the neighbors, the two would talk for hours on end in front of one or the other of their homes. Together, they would head to a local LAN House and remain there a good while. An employee at the establishment told the news that, when they arrived, they would say good morning, good afternoon, or good evening, and when they left, they said thank you and nothing more. The two friends studied at the same public school, in a city not too distant from the capital. The oldest, at twenty-five years of age, worked with his father as a handyman and, on the morning of March 14<sup>th</sup> 2019, accompanied him to the train station for another work day, only to claim he wasn't feeling well and return home. Before meeting his friend, the youngest, who was seventeen, posted photos on social media in which he appeared dressed for the occasion, carrying a firearm. The two met up, as agreed, and went to the workplace of the youngest's uncle. There, the seventeen-year-old killed his uncle, and the two moved onto the school they had attended until recently.

They arrived armed and unloaded their munition on five students and two staff members. One of the dead employees was the school's supervisor, who used to post appeals on social media networks for more books and fewer guns.

The black women who worked as cafeteria staff, upon realizing the danger faced by the children, improvised barricades with whatever they could find to block the killers' access. Teachers who were in classrooms with their students did the same. They switched off the lights and prayed in silence. When the police arrived, the youngest shot his friend and then committed suicide.

<sup>1</sup> Text presented at the round-table "Paulo Freire: education and politics when facing obscurantism", on October 09, 2019, at the Sedes Sapientiae Institute in São Paulo, with participation by Nita Freire and Pedro Pontual.

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After the “event” that took place at the Raul Brasil State School, in the city of Suzano in São Paulo, there were plenty of official and officious voices declaring that if the teachers and staff had been armed, the killers would not have succeeded. For a number of days, debates and daily conversations led in this direction, with arguments against arming the population set aside or ignored, until the “occurrence at a Suzano school” was quickly replaced by another —just as bloody, schizophrenic, and relating to the policies of death and extermination backed by the State—, setting concrete examples for the concepts of a “banality of evil” (Arendt, 1999) and “necropolitics” (Mbembe, 2018).

What remains is the sorrow, the desolation, and the shamefaced helplessness toward those who are routinely targeted, in body and in their most profound values, by the constant ongoing production of an absence of sense<sup>2</sup> that annuls, disregards, disqualifies, and ironizes any importance and priority given to the basic feelings of coexistence and respect for life.

The machinery for producing an absence of sense is entrenched within the most sophisticated environments of military, economic, political, social, and cultural power, from where it spreads praise for ignorance and contempt for non-conventional lifestyles.

This warmongering, terrifying, and totalitarian machinery turns neighbors or those who were previously close, who would have once established solid emotional ties, into connectors and diffusors of this policy for exterminating lives, sensibilities and lifestyles, as well as political alternatives that are peaceful, viable, propositional, and creative.



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<sup>2</sup> I have worked on the notion of a “Production of an absence of sense” since the beginning of last year within my Ecologist Perspective of Education research group. Key to this research, and to whom I am thankful for our dialogue, are Mary Jane Paris Spink, Murilo Moscheta, and Nita Freire. In this text I introduce for the first time its definition, theoretical bases, and some of the events —personal or collective— which form its groundwork.



What has happened in contemporary Brazilian society to allow people who were once in our closest professional, social, and affective circles to become our detractors, judges, and executioners, delivering cruel, unjust, and irreversible sentences? The political and everyday movement of production of an absence of sense emphasizes the most complete indifference to the “prettiness” (Freire, 2011, p. 126-127) of life in general, and in particular to the relationships of solidarity, responsibility, and effort of people, groups, and institutions working toward building a “just society” (Van Parijs, 1997).

Those same people who would arm the population with destructive artifacts would also, with threatening discursive practices, disseminate intensively their choreographies and their gestures of indifference and collective contempt of history, and of the ecological and cultural patrimony, as well of the knowledge produced by humanity. They disdain and ironize Democracy, Human Rights, and the social and individual fight for liberty and justice. They ridicule and ironize the constant struggle to become citizens by those who are anonymous and marginalized. As if it were not enough that they, who define themselves as “good people” with the highest values of civilization, despise and humiliate those who have need of attention, support, and social policies, and attempt to cancel out any possibility of broadening and strengthening the cultural, social, political, educational, and ecological processes of solidary subjectivation that still resist in the depths of Brazil. The people who intensify and enlarge the collective process of production of an absence of sense within everyday social relationships are accomplices in incidents such as the one that took place at the Raul Brasil State School in Suzano. They are also accomplices of those who claim, shamelessly, that Paulo Freire and his political and educational proposals should be banished and eradicated.

All the attempts (both the predictable and the unexpected) to eradicate Paulo Freire target directly those who fight against the processes for exterminating different forms of life and non-conventional lifestyles, and who might position themselves against the machinery for production of an absence of sense. We are resisting, and will continue to resist, with a “pedagogy of solidarity” (Freire; Oliveira, 2018); actions and encounters where the universal and atemporal feelings of solidarity and friendship (in terms of what these feelings have of most profound) are present and provoke the creation of knowledge, of possibilities of existence, and of collective alternatives that relate in opposition to cruelty, indifference, and the blood spilt in Suzano.

While the necropoliticians and trivializers of evil claim they will rid us of Freirean Pedagogy, those people, groups, and institutions who are committed to constructing a society that is more just, solidary, and ecologically sound can only answer that they will not allow this to take place. Our only response must be that we are and will continue to be dedicated to establishing a broader presence of Paulo Freire at this present moment, by means of his endless contributions, including his indignation (Freire, 2000) when faced with the inadmissible.



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