Race, Religion and Counter-Hegemonic Practice in Empson, Williams and Freire

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This chapter explores the place of race and religion in the work of William Empson, Raymond Williams and Paulo Freire. Beginning with a discussion of Empson's *Structure of Complex Words* (1951), it will argue that the work of Empson was a greater influence on Williams's work than has previously been realised, both in the adoption of a historical approach to linguistics and its application to the sociological analysis of culture. However, there are also two key elements in Empson for which there are no equivalent in Williams: specifically, the idea of a Christian sensibility and a Eurocentric perspective which fails to incorporate racial diversity. Williams's *Long Revolution* (1961), *Keywords* (1976) and *Marxism and Literature* (1977) are all rooted in the work of Empson but say virtually nothing about either religion or race and the jettisoning of these areas of thought relative to the earlier writer has a series of very precise effects. Positively, it enables Williams to move away from the Eurocentric racial politics of Empson so that although Williams himself has rightly been criticised for his inability to incorporate racial diversity, his work can at least be read as a muted corrective to his predecessor's in this regard. On the other hand, since race and religion are closely related in Empson's thinking, getting rid of one simultaneously entails getting rid of the other. This has the effect that the opportunity to identify forms of counter-hegemonic relationships that a sociology of religious organisations can provide is missed – and Williams interprets organisations of religion solely as organs of the dominant ideology. The problem with this assumption is that it fails to account for how the kinds of relationship that typify faith-based communities (of all kinds) are inflected by experiences of race and can provide instances of counter-hegemonic solidarity. This, the chapter will argue, is why it is worth reading Williams alongside his exact contemporary Paulo Freire, because in Freire's work a connection between a critical racial politics and an acknowledgement of the contribution certain religious communities can potentially make to that politics can be re-established. In doing so, it adds nuance to our current thinking about both.

William Empson and the Structure of Meaning

The original occasion for Empson's *Structure of Complex Words* (1951) seems to have been a reaction against the doctrines of high modernism. In the work of those modernist poets who were also critics there was a repeated assertion of the impersonality of poetry and the extinction of the poetic self. Empson on the other hand was interested in supplementing the technical approach to literary language with one based on cognition at the emotional level. In doing so, he acknowledged the formative influence on his thinking about language of a

number of his predecessors and contemporaries, most notably I.R. Richards. However, he found in Richards an insistence on the idea that the emotional content of language is separable from its surface meaning, and that as a result words can only have a singular primary sense at any given time. Empson by contrast was interested in the fact that due to historical variation, single words could carry a range of semantic meaning. Indeed, tracing the emergence of those different uses is in large part the purpose of the book and enabled him to argue that owing to this range of meanings, a series of emotional connotations can be generated:

> Professor Richards conceives the Sense of a word in a given use as something single, however "elaborate", and therefore thinks that anything beyond that Sense has got to be explained in terms of feelings, and feelings of course are Emotions, or Tones. But much of what appears to us as a "feeling" (as is obvious in the case of a complex metaphor) will in fact be quite an elaborate structure of related meanings (59).

In other words, Empson was interested in finding ways of expressing the combination of sense, mood and emotion in a given articulation of a particular word in its cultural and historical specificity so that identifying the emotive content with which he is chiefly concerned is above all a matter of separating and distinguishing between the whole range of related meanings within the overall expression. In fact he proposed an elaborate system of notation to show how particular words can be equated with radically different feelings. Since these change over time, the structure of meaning that he talks about is really the articulation in language of historically different uses of the same word for different concepts, each of which is in a meaningful sense co-present at the moment of usage: 'no doubt there are permanent equations which are more important than the period ones; but the period ones are easier to notice, and there is more need to notice them if you are to get the right reading; and also they allow you to examine the machinery of change' (73-4).

Having established the overall schema, Empson goes on to apply it to readings of established texts within the literary historical canon. In the process, he effectively treats texts as discursive spaces in which the clash between different senses and implications of certain key words becomes particularly manifest. As a result, his main argument is that one prominent word used in a range of different senses holds the key to interpreting a given text. For instance:

> As a source of historical information, the N.E.D. is particularly good on the word *honest*, and I need to explain why it is not supposed to have done enough. It does little about the interaction of senses with "feelings", which for a word like this is the chief difficulty, and since it has to give a historical survey it does not attempt to show the structure of the word at a given date. The main point in showing "structure" would be to say which sense acted as the head one, because the interaction of senses with feelings turns largely on that. I do not say that the work could ever be done completely; no doubt different groups would be giving the word different structures even at one date (188).

At times, Empson misleadingly gives the impression that rather than merely using certain suggestive words to illustrate broader social transformations over the longer term, writers in the literary and historical canon actually wrote their works about the words themselves. For example, his discussion of the Fool in Shakespeare's *King Lear* argues that the play instantiates a gradual historical drift from Erasmus's renaissance understanding of the term *fool* (a normal man unencumbered by complex challenges who nevertheless has the ability to understand complicated matters in a way that his purported betters cannot) to a post-reformation one relating to the loss of wits and onset of insanity. But since the loss of wits is related to the shattering of natural order, its implication is that at stake is not merely the welfare of the individual but the end of the world. As a result, the conflict between different uses of the term *fool* enables Empson to situate *King Lear* in a post-reformation Christian orbit.

If basing this argument on one word seems a stretch, then the number of pages he then dedicates to Shakespeare's attitudes to dogs seems almost preposterous by modern standards. Analysing the use of the word *dog* in *Timon of Athens*, Empson attributes Shakespeare's apparent distaste for the animal to his not belonging to the hunting class. The particular irony is that whereas the word *dog* had mainly negative connotations when used in literary symbolism before Shakespeare's time, in his time it was starting to take on a range of more positive virtues such as loyalty and steadfastness. Apparently disliking dogs himself, Empson suggests, Shakespeare seems to have used the older application of the term in *Timon* in spite of the changes taking place in his own world. But just as the reading of *fool* in *Lear* turned out to have implications for reformation doctrine, so in *Timon* Empson associates the growing reputation of dogs in literature to the development of enlightenment humanism: 'The fundamental novelty was an idea that "Man is no longer an abortive deity, born in sin, necessarily incomplete in the world, but the most triumphant of the animals." To call him a dog playfully is thus to insist on his rights' (159). The argument is that recognising

human qualities in animals (and vice versa) made it possible to see the evolutionary potential in all living things in equal measure, thereby refuting the pre-reformation doctrine of the innate fallenness of man: ‘There was, indeed, a widespread feeling towards evolution before Darwinism, such as both uses of dog-sentiment would suggest’ (159). The different implications behind the word dog at precisely this point of historical change therefore situates the play in a period of transition between a medieval theology of original sin and an enlightenment perspective based on the evolutionary perspective of living things, for whom God is now no longer reckoned as the sole creator but rather the custodian or guarantor.

A similar shift away from the medieval worldview and towards that of the European enlightenment is also discernible in the application of the discussion of the word *honest* to Shakespeare’s *Othello,* where Empson explores how the play dramatizes a historical shift in meaning from *deserving honour* to *telling the truth* or even *keeping a promise*. However, the discussion of *Othello* also introduces a number of problematic assumptions, mainly as a result of Empson’s reading of the play in the context of (protestant) England’s relationship with (catholic) Spain in the period. Drawing attention to the fact that the word used to refer to Othello in the play, a *Moor*, was a word more likely to have been used in Spain to refer to its North African others than in either England (where the play was written) or Venice (where it is ostensibly set) causes Empson to see the play as expressing a faultline in the relationship between the countries. That is, he considers how far it can be considered an allegory of England’s relationship with Spain, even though it is not ostensibly about either. Even granted this is the case, it would then be difficult to identify which character in the play represents which element in the relationship. Othello as a violent and imminently threatening general might then feel like a representation of the Spanish empire, but the play’s construction of his racial otherness also positions him as an enemy of that empire:

> the Othello we are asked to believe in is no longer even like a Spaniard; in fact one could connect him with the Spaniards the other way round, as one of the Noble Savages they were ill-treating. It seems to have been a regular claim of people like Drake that the West Indians or what not would welcome them and supply their ships on the basis of both hating the Spaniards. To be sure, one feels there is more to be known; whether Shakespeare had ever seen a negro seems a relevant question which might be answered. One would like to know why the idea of marrying a European princess to a negro comes into *The Tempest* and *The Merchant of Venice* as well as here (217-18).

Admittedly the point of the discussion of a Spanish Othello is to analyse varying connotations of the word *honest* in their historical context. In the process, however, Empson repeats the racial othering that he found in the play by classifying Othello not only as a Moor but also as a 'negro' thereby making him appear as absolutely other not only for Shakespeare's audience but for Empson's own readers. In a book specifically dedicated to exploring how the evolution of specific words indicates conflicts over social value, that this absolutely fundamental word should remain completely unexamined, and in fact passed on without question, is a significant shortcoming.

Ania Loomba has shown that how words to refer to colours came to acquire connotations for different human emotions 'is precisely the history of racism' (42). And as it with colours, so it is with other forms of behaviour. In a rather prurient footnote, Empson states that the scholar 'Mr G.B. Harrison has produced some amusing evidence that there was a negress prostitute in Shakespeare's London, who may have been the Dark Lady [of the Sonnets]' (218). This fascination with the question of whether or not Shakespeare had ever seen a black person uncomfortably parallels a comment in his commentary on animals in *Timon of Athens*, where he said: 'It is difficult to find out exactly who had seen apes and when; the creatures need to be big, I fancy, if they are to impose any searching reflections' (160). Although Empson does not make the connection explicit, the close juxtaposition of two almost identical comments, one to refer to North African people and the other to apes, feels strongly redolent of much subsequent and vile racist abuse.

As we have seen, the discussion of the Fool in *Lear* is related to Empson's adumbration of post-reformation Christian thought. But the close congruence between it and what he says about black African people in *Othello* means that his handling of the politics of religion is inseparable from his treatment of race, and both reveal an outmoded Eurocentric attitude. This Eurocentricity is then repeated in the discussion of pre-enlightenment ideas of evolution in *Timon of Athens*, where the adumbration of a post-reformation Christian worldview is couched in animal language that – perhaps unwittingly – reinforces the animalist metaphors of much racist ideology. Owing to this uncomfortable imbrication of Eurocentrism with both religion and race, the central paradox of *The Structure of Complex Words* is this: a study devoted to exploring how archaic words become supplemented by new meanings ends up feeling hopelessly historically remote.

From Structure of Meaning to Structure of Feeling

One of the purposes of this chapter is to draw attention to the significant formative influence of William Empson's linguistic method on Raymond Williams's now better-known modes of

cultural analysis, while also evaluating how far Williams's handling of racial politics could be read as a corrective to Empson's. Williams's *structure of feeling* is a direct heir to Empson's *structure of meaning*, and in fact Williams and Michael Orrom first used *structure of feeling* in *Preface to Film* in 1954, only three years after Empson, although it was 'comparatively little noticed' at the time (Middleton, 1161).

Although Williams used the term *structure of feeling* with varying implications across his career (see Matthews 2001), the general tendency is to draw attention to how, when we think about the relationship between the present and the past, it is important to resist the temptation to paint these periods in very broad brushstrokes, based perhaps on a couple of known facts and then extrapolating from these into an impression of the whole society at any given time. Because people do not in fact apprehend history as history, they are not yet aware of what will subsequently be constructed as the predominant characteristics of their world so that when history is experienced, it is experienced in a wide social, political and emotional range. In other words, the character and make-up of a given society at a given time are always more complex and multi-faceted than any singular impressions would suggest, and Williams uses the term *structure of feeling* to replace simplicity with complexity: it is 'as firm and definite as "structure" suggests, yet it operates in the most delicate and least tangible parts of our activity' (1961, 53).

In an early use of the concept in *The Long Revolution* (1961), Williams follows Empson's application of the linguistic method to literary analysis very closely by drawing attention to the fact that the structure of feeling inherited from a given period is often particularly visible in its arts and literature, because here, 'in the only examples we have of recorded communication that outlives its bearers, the actual living sense, the deep community that makes the communication possible, is naturally drawn upon' (53). Not only does this insight follow the text-centred method of Empson, but also the adoption of a key word as a critical concept in cultural analysis is the next component in the general theory that Williams takes from him:

> A key-word, in such analysis, is pattern: it is with the discovery of patterns of a characteristic kind that any useful cultural analysis begins, and it is with the relationships between these patterns, which sometimes reveal unexpected identities and correspondences in hitherto separately considered activities, sometimes again reveal discontinuities of an unexpected kind, that general cultural analysis is concerned (52).

To go from Empson in 1951 to Williams in *The Long Revolution* (1961) is fascinating because it reveals the gradual genealogy not only of the structure of feeling, but also of the now commonplace concept of a key word. In Empson's literary-orientated work, the purpose of identifying one or two such words in a given literary work is to make them the basis for exegesis of meaning of the whole: 'There is a case more or less halfway between the nonce-use of an ambiguity and the period flavour in a word, that is, the "key word" of a long poem, or complete play, in which the structure of meaning for the word is gradually built up' (Empson, 74). By the time of Williams's *Long Revolution* in 1961 the idea of a 'key word' has become more explicitly articulated as a 'key-word.' The term has ceased to be a general descriptor (a particular word which holds the interpretative key for any given text) and has instead become established as a more precise concept.

However, the purpose of developing a new concept is not simply to coin a stylish new term; it is to enable new ways of understanding culture. This is where Williams begins to break away from Empson because as we have seen, Empson's method was above all a textualising one whereas Williams was starting to develop a sense of what is lost when things like art and literature come to be treated in isolation from other aspects of society. He had opened *Culture and Society* (1958) with a discussion of the terms *industry, democracy, class, art* and *culture* in order to trace the social history by which it had become common to think of art and culture as specialist activities separable and separated from the whole nexus of social processes. This separation had occurred in Britain mainly during its transition from a rural society to an industrial one, and had the effect of mystifying the class structure that was created as a result of that transition. Restoring a material (as distinct from abstract) history to the process of how that class structure arose was then the crucial first step towards class consciousness and the adoption of a cultural politics of resistance to the dominant class. In other words, owing to the connection between literature and history there is a commitment to critiquing ideological structures in Williams that is muted in Empson as a result of his habit of treating literary texts as privileged objects of analysis.

Having made this break, Williams would expand upon it throughout his career. His 1976 study *Keywords* began life as an appendix to *Culture and Society* but Williams found there was so much to say on the subject that it expanded to fill an entire book. What is notable is that not only has Williams stopped using 'key word' as a general descriptor as in Empson; he has also stopped using it with the awkward hyphenisation of *The Long Revolution.* In short, by 1976 *keywords* has become a word. With it came a critical theoretical concept that reached its highest expression in Williams's *Marxism and Literature* in 1977, where he revisits the idea of a *structure of feeling* but this time has much more to say about it:

> The term is difficult, but ‘feeling’ is chosen to emphasize a distinction from more formal concepts of ‘world-view’ or ‘ideology’…. We are concerned with meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt, and the relations between these and formal or systematic beliefs are in practice variable…. An alternative definition would be structures of experience…. We are talking about characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity. We are then defining these elements as a ‘structure’: as a set, with specific internal relations, at once interlocking and in tension. Yet we are also defining a social experience which is still in process, often indeed not yet recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating, but which in analysis… has its emergent, connecting, and dominant characteristics…. (132).

It is noticeable that here, when Williams considers an alternative term for *structures of feeling* he does not return to Empson’s *structure of meaning* but advocates instead the idea of a *structure of experience*. The point of cultural analysis now is not to elucidate what this or that word ‘really means,’ but to see words as parts of whole texts which are in turn articulations of real material relationships at a given point in time, so that the reading of the words is in a purposeful sense a reading of the relationships themselves. Moreover, this is the precise point in Williams’s thought at which the idea that a structure of feeling is always in process lays the foundation for his vocabulary of *dominant, emergent* (and also *residual*) ideologies.

Williams on Race and Religion

In his discussion of structures of feeling in *The Long Revolution*, Raymond Williams acknowledged the complexity of the concept and in an attempt to provide a practical example of it he wrote: ‘I think we can best understand this if we think of any similar analysis of a way of life that we ourselves share’ (52). He goes on:

> We are usually most aware of this […] when we read an account of our lives by someone from outside the community, or watch the small differences in style, of speech or behaviour, in someone who has learned our ways yet was not bred in them [...] Though it can be turned to trivial account, the fact of such a characteristic is neither trivial nor marginal; it feels quite central (52-3).

The rhetoric of insider/ outsider, especially with regard to somebody who has learned the ways of the community without having been born into them, is strongly redolent of a concern repeatedly expressed by Empson for students of English from other countries, potentially perplexed by the range of nuance and meaning in a given word, and the jarring effect this can create. At the same time, it raises questions about the ‘we’ and ‘our ways’ Williams refers to.

In a related essay on “Wales and England” in 1983, Williams argued that the common habit in Wales to identify with Celts in contradistinction to the imagined Anglo-Saxons of England is the result of a series of misidentifications which are themselves caused by the binary ‘us/ them’ thinking of nationalist politics. In place of this binary, Williams suggests an idea of complex history which overrides the distinction between England and Wales in these tribal terms and attempts instead to think about the real relationships between them in material terms:

> We need not stay long in one of the most populated regions, that of race. The ethnic history of what is now Wales is one of extreme complexity, from the earliest times. There seem to be quite basic differences between the Neolithic and Bronze Age settlers and the Iron Age arrivals, though in legend and platitude all tend to be assimilated in terms of the subsequent contrast with ‘Saxons’ and to be confused as Celts. When this last difficult description is asserted, we have to reply that, on the available evidence, the ‘Celts’ were the first invading linguistic imperialists (18).

The assertion that the category of race needs no further examination is an ominous sign, even though at this stage Williams’s point is really that compared to the English, the Welsh people are not a race but a cultural construct. To critique the too-easy identification with Celts that he found common in Wales is to unpick the mythologised version of Welsh history by refusing to see the Welsh people or their culture as if they were categorical essences rather than historical – and historically varying – artefacts: ‘If there is one thing to insist on in analysing Welsh culture, it is the complex of forced and acquired discontinuities: a broken series of radical shifts, within which we have to mark not only certain social and linguistic communities but many acts of self-definition by negation’ (20).

The overall argument is that what are often taken to be fundamental elements of Welsh culture are best seen in the context of these forced shifts, discontinuities and conquests. In other words, a number of experiences of defeat, penetration and incorporation over a very long-term historical time period have inflected the typical elements of Welsh culture in a

variety of ways, including at times provoking them into existence through counter-affirmation. Thus for example, the Labour movement and commitment to class-consciousness in the adumbration of modern forms of democracy, which are frequently and rightly treated as important features of Welsh culture, are recognised by Williams as a response to the conditions and relationships historically created by the Industrial Revolution taking place both outside Wales as well as within it. In other words, this typical feature of Welsh culture is not innate, but a response to those specific historical conditions inflicted from outside. Moreover, in an earlier period, that of the English Civil War (1642-46), most of Wales had favoured the Royalist side and Williams points out that although an 'earlier Royalist Wales is not easily included in the projection of a radical and democratic Welsh essence', it nevertheless 'makes more sense that Wales was like that when England was going the other way' (21).

Perhaps the best example he gives, however, is religious non-conformism. For a complex variety of reasons religious non-conformity has historically been treated as one of the most important features of Wales's culture. This is partly because ideas of common organisation, shared responsibility and advancement through education – which are staples of non-conformist thought – can be more easily squared with the idea of a modern social democratic Wales than its earlier incarnation as a bastion of monarchic culture. More significantly, the protestant reformation of the sixteenth century and the contemporary Act of Union (1536) which legally bound Wales to England had resulted in the imposition in Wales of a religious organisation, the Church of England, as an organ of relative political control. That it worshipped in English at a time when the overwhelming majority of people in Wales spoke Welsh therefore limited the cultural and political power of the Welsh people over their own affairs so that non-conformist chapels, whose congregations were mainly Welsh-speaking, were important alternatives to the official Church. Moreover, the Welsh Church Act of 1919, which disestablished the Church of England as the official church in Wales, acknowledged the greater congruence of non-conformism than Anglican Christianity with the Welsh people. Since it was the first piece of British legislation in four hundred years to apply to the whole of Wales and only to Wales, it has been interpreted as a mile stone towards the regaining of greater political autonomy in Wales that came about later in the twentieth century.

In other words, non-conformism has an important place in Wales's culture and history. Yet Williams interrogates the assumption of its inherent position there, arguing instead that the 'cultural forms in which a subordinated people try to express their distinctive identity can be specifically quite discontinuous, and these discontinuities are better related to the realities of

subordination than to the idealizations of a submerged essence' (21). More specifically, he points out that non-conformism itself, so long treated as a mainstay of Wales's culture, actually arose in certain industrial communities in England and 'came in over the English border' (20). His point is not that the pursuit of social responsibility, common purpose and shared undertaking that non-conformity can provide has not been operative in Wales. But that its very presence in Wales is testament to the material history of the relationship between Wales and England. In other words, the history is more complex than surface identification of this or that feature of Welsh culture would suggest and religious organisations, even those like non-conformist ones that arose in opposition to the dominant political formations of the time, are shown to be related to the dominant ideology. In fact, this is how Williams treats religious organisations overall: 'From castles and palaces and churches to prisons and workhouses and schools; from weapons of war to a controlled press; any ruling class, in variable ways though always materially produces a social and political order' (1977, 93).

In another essay again, "The Culture of Nations" (1983), Williams returned to the theme of how very complex histories have tended to be reduced to artificial essences in the construction and promulgation of particular versions of British culture as a whole. He tells an anecdote about a politician opposing British entry into the European Economic Community in 1973 on the grounds that it would be the end of a thousand years of history, and goes on:

> Why a thousand, I wondered. The only meaningful date by that reckoning would be somewhere around 1066, when a Norman-French replaced a Norse-Saxon monarchy. What then of the English? That would be some fifteen hundred years. The British? Some two thousand five hundred. But the real history of the peoples of these islands goes back very much further than that (198).

It is the same argument again. The 'British' people are not Britons or Romans, Anglo-Saxons or Celts, Vikings or Normans but a culturally fostered and ideologically legitimated combination of them all into a unified political entity, the British. In refusing an ethnic basis for defining either Wales or England he goes on:

> All the varied people who have lived on this island are in a substantial physical sense still here. What is from time to time projected as an 'island race' is in reality a long process of successive conquests and repressions but also of successive supersessions and relative integrations. All the real processes have been cultural and historical, and all the artificial processes have been political (198).

To read this passage, however, is to notice a significant contradiction in Williams's thinking, a contradiction that was already there in his earlier vague references to people who are either inside or outside a particular community. It is important to try and unpick the contradiction because it reveals in turn a degree of short-sightedness in Williams's approach to such sensitive issues as immigration and ultimately race. The argument we are asked to accept is in effect that all the peoples who inhabit the island of Britain have been there all along, but at the same time, some of them have apparently been there longer than others:

> It is here that there is now a major problem in the most recent immigrations of more visibly different peoples. When these interact with the most recent selective forms of identity – 'the true-born Englishman' who apart from an occasional afterthought is made to stand for the whole complex of settled native and earlier immigrant peoples; or the imperial 'British', who in a new common identity used economic and military advantages to rule a hundred peoples across the world and to assume an inborn superiority to them – the angry confusions and prejudices are obvious (199).

This contradictory logic draws out into the open the troubling assumptions implicit in Williams's discussion in *The Long Revolution* (1961) of how the best ways of understanding the concept of the structure of feeling are to read an account of our own community written by someone outside it; or to observe the small differences in style and behaviour between members of that community and someone who lives within it but was not born to it. The question this rhetoric leaves unexamined is precisely: To whom does this 'we' and 'our community' refer? For a cultural theorist of black British history such as Paul Gilroy writing in *There ain't no black in the union jack* (with direct regard to Williams) the decisive answer is therefore: not us. Instead, it raises another question:

> how long is long enough to become a genuine Brit? His [i.e. Williams's] insistence that the origins of racial conflicts lie in the hostility between strangers in the city makes little sense given the effects of the 1971 Immigration Act in halting primary black settlement. More disturbingly, these arguments effectively deny that blacks can share a significant 'social identity' with their white neighbours who, in contrast to more recent arrivals, inhabit what Williams calls 'rooted settlements' articulated by 'lived and formed identities of a settled kind' (51-2).

According to Jim McGuigan, although Gilroy's angry response to Williams 'was justified,' he went 'too far' in equating Williams with other explicitly racist figures of the time, such as

Enoch Powell (142). The important point to make here is that both the critique and the qualified defence cut both ways. Relative to the extreme Eurocentrism of Empson, who saw no problem in juxtaposing a discussion of the first time Europeans saw apes with one about the first time Europeans saw Africans and left the word 'negro' suspiciously unexamined, Williams's assertion of racial and cultural complexity seems more sophisticated. Yet the temporal ambiguity at the heart of Williams's writing about race prompted Gilroy quite rightly to ask whether black and immigrant communities could ever therefore be considered comparably British to those living in the rooted settlements and with the formed identities Williams discussed.

For black British citizens of the 1970s and 1980s, one corresponding form of rootedness and identity – in short, one variation of Williams's cherished notion of community – historically came from Gospel churches. Given that this was a period when structural racism against black people was highly prevalent in Britain the form of community, the comradeship, the relationships of support and aspiration provided by those churches cannot fail to have been at least somewhat counter-hegemonic because even if they had little or no ostensible political orientation, the mere fact of their existence was testament to an assertion of belonging and settlement that in many cases was officially denied. Williams, by contrast, was unable to see religious organisations as anything other than vehicles of the dominant ideology. Moreover, this assumption about organised religion is inseparable from the blind spots in his thinking about race. As we have seen, his assertion that all the peoples of Britain had already been there all along is intended as a corrective to the practice common in nationalist thought of treating the difference between England and Wales as an ethnic difference, when really it is a historical one based on cultural practice and political ideology. This argument then leads him directly into a discussion of how the typical elements of Welsh culture – its Royalism during the English Civil War; its dissenting non-conformism from the eighteenth century onwards – are not cultural essences but specific responses to the dominant ideologies of the period. Moreover, although non-conformism ostensibly rejected the then-dominant politics of Anglican worship and the English-language, Williams nevertheless implicitly assumes that the forms of solidarity associated it are instances of the settled and historically complete communities which Gilroy thought were unable to incorporate ethnic diversity precisely because they were settled. Given that this is the case, it is hard to see them, or at least, Williams's way of thinking about them, as instances of counter-hegemonic practice with regard to the dominant and highly racialised structures of his time. And this is why it is worth reading Williams alongside his contemporary Paulo Freire, because although there is no question of a direct influence between Freire and Williams (as there clearly is between Empson and Williams) and although we cannot be

certain whether or not Williams had even read Freire, Freire restores the possibility of a radical critical oppositional politics that is both attuned to the inequalities of race and expressed within anti-establishment religious organisations of the kind that Williams could not imagine.

Paulo Freire's Liberation Theology

Having gone into exile from Brazil following the military coup of 1964, first in Bolivia and Chile, then in the USA and finally working for the World Council of Churches in Switzerland, Freire was invited in 1975 to undertake educational work in the postcolonial West African state of Guinea-Bissau, where he applied the ideas of his most commonly-cited work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968; English translation 1970). In it, Freire rejects a form of thinking that he had noticed in a number of newly decolonising societies, especially in Africa. Specifically, he rejected the assumption that educational structures would be developed in such societies as part of the gradual process of building public services after political independence had been achieved, especially in cases where independence was brought after through revolutionary uprising:

> Some well-intentioned but misguided persons suppose that since *the* dialogical process is prolonged (which, incidentally, is not true), they ought to carry out the revolution without communication, by means of 'communiques,' and that once the revolution is won, they will *then* develop a thoroughgoing educational effort. They further justify this procedure by saying that it is not possible to carry out education – liberating education – before taking power (135).

Freire does not reject taking power through armed struggle as such, but he does draw attention to the fact that it alone will not create the conditions necessary for independence. This is because the pre-condition for political revolution is the adoption of a critical, counter-hegemonic outlook which in turn is generated through pedagogical praxis. In other words, education does not follow revolution but in a meaningful way is a leading factor in its implementation. Moreover, just as independence was not something that could wholly be brought about by the revolutionary activities of the colonised people alone, so too it was not something that could be granted like a gift by the colonisers alone since Freire squarely rejected their right to grant it. Liberation is then a dialogical process in which independence is developed through the complex interplay of action and critical education; and as a mutually constitutive and transformational process arising out of the encounter between coloniser and colonised.

This dialectical approach is the basis of Freire's dialogical approach to education, which entails the replacement of one model of pedagogy with another. In the decolonising phase of colonial history, the dominant educational practice in Portuguese colonies in Africa had been more orientated towards functional literacy than a politically enabling critical literacy. Who got to study, as well as what, where, when and how they studied were all determined by the colonial authorities with the effect that the content of the curriculum, the methods for its dissemination, the skills and knowledge generated and the modes of its assessment all contributed in indirect and sometimes in openly direct ways to the reproduction of the hierarchical social order on which the structure of colonial societies was based. Because it involved providing students with just enough knowledge and skills to take their place within that order, but without equipping them with the critical orientation necessary to question or transform it, Freire referred to this practice as the 'banking' method of education – symbolically depositing so much knowledge in so many student-receptacles for such and such a period of time so that it can be recovered and cashed in when necessary.

At the heart of the banking concept of education, Freire identifies a symbolic contradiction. Because teachers are frequently members of the community in which they teach, they speak from the same place, that is, they occupy the same discursive position vis-à-vis the colonial authorities, as their students and their families. At the same time, because the educational structures were involved in the reproduction of the dominant social order teachers and students had very different roles to play within it. Educational advancement depended on the capacity of the student to provide pre-programmed answers to a limited range of functional questions without critiquing the premises of the questions themselves. That is, to pass exams and move into the next year of schooling, they had to reproduce the dominant systems of thought and belief as dictated by the teacher and hence the relationship between teacher and student was both hierarchical and one-directional.

Owing to this contradiction between the place of the student and the position of the teacher in the society, Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* suggests replacing the banking model with what he calls a problem-posing concept of education. Rather than pursuing an externally imposed educational agenda as a vehicle for the ideological legitimation of imperialism, a problem-posing education would give its students the opportunity to develop programmes of work that were most important for the circumstances in which they were living. A number of other implications followed from this suggestion. Firstly, since the purpose of problem-posing education is to identify and address challenges that affected all members of the community not just – and maybe not even primarily – its children, students did not need to be corralled into cohorts on the basis of age and education could in fact

encompass learners of all ages. The opportunity to participate in education across age ranges implied a subtly altered objective in the aim and purpose of education itself, in which individual advancement was again not the primary objective and where education could be used for the improvement of the community as a whole in a mutual process of enrichment and transformation. At the same time, because teachers themselves are not separate from the communities they too could participate in this mutual process, thereby replacing the hierarchical relationship between teacher and student with a practice of shared endeavour and joint enterprise that would resolve the contradiction at the heart of the banking concept.

Freire's problem-posing education begins with the suggestion that asking questions is more enabling of a critical orientation towards the world than the reproduction of pre-supplied assumptions or surface answers. A problem-posing education requires creating new programme content that is drawn from the world of the students, and this content is identified and discovered through a series of so-called 'generative themes' (86): As students identify want they are trying to achieve in and for their community, this entails an increasing number of secondary identifications. What barriers are there to achieving the objective? How can these barriers be overcome? Who else is equipped by skills, knowledge, experience or role to contribute to the process? Above all, if the programme is successful, what will have changed? In other words, a practice of problem-posing education offers to contribute to raising the critical – as opposed to merely functional – literacy of its students. By creating opportunities to develop their critical consciousness with regard to existing inequalities of power and domination, it enables them to see that what they know of the world is highly mediated both by their experiences of it, and by structures of ideological reproduction such as culture and education. Where these things do not square up with each other, it further creates opportunities for rejecting the dominant ideology and challenging the inequalities it legitimises. In the last instance, therefore, rather than a tool of the capitalist and imperial order, problem-posing education is an instrument for liberation.

To make this change of emphasis in both the object and practice of education in Guinea-Bissau during the period of decolonisation required a further transformation, specifically in how educators were trained and prepared to provide such an education. As part of this process, Freire proposed that trainee teachers should study and observe the life of the community in which they would teach over an extended period of time in order to decode apparently surface signifiers of meaning and use them to gain deep insight into the dynamics, power relationships and challenges common to that community. And this is where his pedagogy of liberation reconnects with a form of liberation theology with reference to both race and religion, because in decolonising West Africa in the 1960s church

organisations were frequently more than places of worship, but also sites of belonging and solidarity and therefore drivers of important social relationships that existed adjacent to the dominant relationships of the colonial hierarchy. Therefore understanding the position of those relationships in the society was an important step in decoding the power dynamics at work and identifying possible means for harnessing pre-existing relations in the service of a pedagogy of political liberation:

> During this decoding stage, the investigators observe certain *moments* of the life of the area – sometimes directly, sometimes by means of informal conversations with the inhabitants. They register everything in their notebooks, including apparently unimportant items: the way the people talk, their style of life, their behavior at church and at work. They record the idiom of the people: their expressions, their vocabulary, and their syntax (not their incorrect pronunciation, but rather the way they construct their thought) (111).

That is, because it is sited in the heart of the community and embodies a number of horizontal relationships within it, a church is well placed as a point of departure for identifying the generative themes salient to its members. As would later be the case in South Africa during the struggle against apartheid, certain church organisations provided community resources which could be used to germinate forms of counter-hegemonic resistance. The point is not that Freire believed that this was always and inevitably the role of church groups in every case; but it is that owing to their geographical situatedness within communities, and their theoretical openness to everyone, churches have the potential to foster relationships of opposition just as much as they do relationships of oppression. This is why Freire also points out that in his commitment to using education to cultivate a radical political consciousness the World Council of Churches 'was offering me that more than any university' (*Paulo Freire Reader*, 198). That is, a pedagogy of liberation opens in his work onto a form of liberation theology.

Coda: On Race and Religion Today

In the work of William Empson, understanding the Christian context of certain key words held the key to restoring the correct meaning in a number of literary texts in the literary and historical canon. Yet because the earlier meanings always turned out to have been lost when language itself had undergone radical change during the European Reformation and Enlightenment, his idea of correct meaning was inseparable from both a Christian worldview and a Eurocentric perspective. Raymond Williams drew widely on Empson's method in the development of historical linguistics, but rather than using key words to analyse delimited

textual objects, Williams applied them to a newly critical reading of dominant ideological structures in the world. Although Williams's thinking about race was not very sophisticated, it nevertheless avoided the worst excesses of Empson in this regard but only by associating religion with the dominant ideology and jettisoning it along with race so that Williams ultimately says little about either. Freire's reading of the relationship between race and religion is implicitly more nuanced both because working in anti-colonial Guinea-Bissau at the very end of the period of European imperialism cannot fail to have involved a highly racialised dimension in the account of the relationship between coloniser and colonised and because he undertook that work on behalf of a church organisation. In other words, the church is no longer – or at least, not necessarily – to be seen as an organ of the dominant ideology and can actually operate as the locus of resistance for the oppressed people who in that case were also an oppressed racialised community.

In the years since Freire's death, it has become common for his ideas to be adopted in critical race education in the USA. Although Stephen Nathan Haymes has argued that owing to his tendency to collapse race into class 'Freire's relevance may be overstated when it comes to African Americans in the United States' (151), Renée Smith-Maddox and Daniel G. Solórzano have proposed that combining Critical Race Theory with Freire's problem-posing method offers teacher educators 'a way to initiate prospective teachers into discourses and pedagogical approaches that meet the needs of students of color while the prospective teachers learn how to examine their notion of social justice' (71). They go on to cite certain African-American churches that are able to provide 'numerous educational and legal research questions, literary and artistic issues, and related curricular and pedagogical materials associated with people of color' (71-2) as well as 'providing information and classes on college access, retention, and scholarships' (79).

In the UK the situation is a little different mainly because since the 2011 census, for the first time in history the majority of citizens have identified themselves as having no religion. But although this is true of the population as a whole, it is not true of the black British population in particular, or indeed of any of the different minority ethnic groups, in all of which religious practice remain prevalent. It is notable that a high number of Britain's public intellectuals are avowed atheists but almost none of them reveal any consciousness at all of the fact that the atheism of which they are proud is itself partly determined by their privileged position with regards to structures of class and race. Among black and minority ethnic populations by contrast, atheism is frequently neither possible nor desirable since black churches have often been among the most important support mechanisms and community resources available. To make this point is not to mystify the practice of faith as such, which is in any

case an individual vocation, but is to draw attention to the forms of social organisation and social behaviour enabled by participation in the relationships and networks of church groups. For this reason, to read Paulo Freire alongside Raymond Williams is to restore a connection between religious organisation and the potential for counter-hegemonic practice with regard to race.

In this year of centenaries, I dedicate this chapter to the memory of my grandfather Leslie Davies, 1921-2006.

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