Pedagogies of Hope and Resistance:

English language education in the context of the Gaza Strip, Palestine

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Introduction

This chapter explores the values and goals of English language education in the context of the Gaza Strip. The Gaza Strip, in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, has been subject to siege for over 10 years, with significant restrictions on mobility, and three wars resulting in considerable loss of life and infrastructure, increasing poverty and rates of unemployment, and crisis in education, health, environment food safety, etc. As a result, the Gaza Strip is quickly becoming an 'unliveable place' as warned by several reports issued by the official supranational organisations (e.g. UNCTAD, 2012; UNRWA, 2013; The World Bank, 2016).

This chapter reflects on the work of one of the five case studies which were funded as part of the Art and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Large Grant "Researching Multilingually at the Borders of Language, the Body, Law and the State", within the "Translating Cultures" strand. The AHRC Large Grant has been concerned with examining the use of languages in contexts of duress, such as that of the Gaza Strip, where the borders of the body, language, law and the state are implicated in the freedoms to speak and translate. The five case studies that are part of the project looked at languages in different contexts and as used by different actors: in detention estates and with reception centres and NGOs at the Bulgarian and Romania borders; with former child soldiers in Uganda; with unaccompanied minors in Glasgow; on the U.S. / Mexican Border in Arizona; in the Law Courts at bail and appeal stage for asylum seekers

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in both the Netherlands and Scotland; and, in the case study discussed here, in the Gaza Strip, Palestine[5].

The Gaza case study generated from within the Gazan context and in response to the acute levels of youth graduate unemployment, often reaching up to 64% among graduates in education (PCBS, 2016). The aim of the case study was to explore and to develop a grounded, participatory and contextualised approach to foreign language education in a context of occupation, pain and pressure. Our case study comprised two separate teacher training courses: one for teachers of English as a foreign language (TEFL) (Imperiale, 2017) and one for teachers of Arabic as a foreign language (TAFL) (Fassetta et al., 2017).

In this chapter we reflect on the TEFL part of the case study and on the role of English in the Gaza Strip, and we present some of our findings in relation to the values and goals of English education. The chosen research methodology was an interrupted cycle of critical participatory action research: thirteen undergraduates of the English department at the Islamic University of Gaza (IUG) took part in a TEFL training course on 'The use of the Palestinian Arts of Resistance in English Language Teaching'. During the teacher training course Palestinian participants reflected and co-constructed with the researcher critical and creative language pedagogies, suitable for engaging with and representing the context of pain and pressure in which they live. The workshops and the data collected through a variety of methods (e.g. follow-up interviews, focus groups, evaluation forms, etc.) were analysed thematically through the lenses of critical intercultural pedagogy (Freire, 1994; hooks, 1994) - which sees language education as engaging with the *practice of hope* - and by drawing from the capabilities approach (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 1997; Crosbie, 2014).

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[5] In this chapter we will use the names 'Gaza Strip', 'the Strip' and 'Gaza' as synonyms.

English language education: between linguistic imperialism and linguistic resistance

In this section we discuss the literature which inspired the content of the TEFL teacher training course. We outline the complex role of English as both dominating and facilitating global linguistic exchanges, drawing from postcolonial literature as well as from work in critical applied linguistics.

English is associated with world or global audiences and, in recent years, the 'global flows' of English and its contested role have been theorized from a number of perspectives that range from 'lingua franca', to a set of world repertories that allow translingual practice and 'linguistic resistance' (Canagarajah, 2003). In critical applied linguistics, it has been claimed that, as a dominant language, English contributed to imperialism and colonialism, and to structural inequalities between groups on the basis of languages (Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1994; Canagarajah 2003). Dismantling the idea that English is 'neutral, natural and beneficial' (Pennycook, 1994: 9), scholars argue for problematizing the spread of English and of English language teaching (ELT) practices exported from the centre to the periphery (Pennycook, 1994).

English linguistic imperialism finds its colonial expression through teaching resources, normative philosophies, and teaching methodologies exported from contexts of peace and mobility (where they are often designed) into different world-contexts. For instance, Pennycook (1994) considers current ELT practices as the outcome of a monolingualist approach to language learning, developed from Western teaching traditions. According to him, the direct method or audio-oral approaches have been embedded in the communicative language teaching (CLT) methodology and in the task-based teaching approaches: these

methodologies manifest a tendency to nullify the source language of the learners, in line with imperialist traditions. In addition, the author demonstrates that even locally produced ELT materials often promote neoliberal Western perceptions and discourses, rather than being specific to the cultural contexts in which they are adopted.

However, as Pennycook (1994: 146) notes: 'The English language classroom [is] a site of cultural politics, a place where different versions of how the world is and should be are struggled over.' As well as the classroom being a site for contestation, cultural politics and even the practice of conflict transformation (Levine & Phipps, 2011), Giroux (1992) has argued that in classroom contexts, teachers are also cultural workers, thus the work they do may serve to enable a decolonising approach to language pedagogy.

English language education, therefore, can, in some contexts, also open up possibilities to create counter-discourses that oppose dominant narratives, because of its specific role as an international language or as a lingua franca. For post-colonial or oppressed communities, for instance, English language pedagogy has the potential to nurture independent voices of individuals to 'talk back' or to 'write back', (re)appropriating, adapting and using the language in the way that seems most appropriate to the context in which people live (hooks, 1994; Pennycook, 1994, Canagarajah, 2003). This is what Canagarajah (2003) calls 'linguistic resistance'a scrambling and opposing of the linguistic hierarchies that are enacted in everyday life and in the classrooms of the periphery, encompassing both the politics of English and language pedagogies. Canagarajah (2003: 104) argues for the appropriation of localized and contextualised ELT practices, avoiding educational transfer from the centre to the periphery which results in forms of knowledge-dependency that 'has tended to undermine the alternative styles of thinking, learning, and interacting preferred by local communities'. He suggests

creative processes of pedagogical negotiation (Ibid: 117) through which pedagogies are not unproblematically *received*, but are *appropriated* according to the needs of the local communities (Ibid: 122): this process itself embodies linguistic resistance.

In contexts of conflict, occupation and siege, access to the intercultural and linguistic capital which English represents, even in often hotly contested heterogeneous symbolisms (Brutt-Griffler, 2002; Canagarajah, 2003; Pennycook, 2007; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000), is essential to allow communication and spread information. Inspired by Canagarajah's idea of 'linguistic resistance', our research explored and creatively developed localized ELT practices and intercultural pedagogies, shifting from the acquisition of 'tourist-like competences' to a more complex system of relational and transformational meaning making (Kramsch, 2006; Levine and Phipps, 2011). Intercultural language education, in our view, has the potential to nurture individual wellbeing and the whole process of becoming, shifting from a language-user approach in favour of an ontological 'intercultural being' (Phipps and Gonzalez, 2004), one which embodies values of respect, humility, tolerance and compassion.

In summary the TEFL teacher training course was inspired by:

1) Considerations about English linguistic imperialism.

2) The concept of 'linguistic resistance' which encompasses the appropriation of the English language and of language pedagogies to create counter-narratives and locally-sensitive teaching materials.

3) A shift from 'tourist-like competences' to a more holistic approach which views language learners as 'intercultural beings'.

Intercultural language education in the context of forced immobility

This section considers intercultural language education in a context where mobility is not an option. The United Nation Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) - the main provider of formal education to Palestinian refugees both in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and in the neighbouring host countries - highlights, as part of its mandate, the importance of education to develop individuals' wellbeing and to contribute to ameliorating the society in which they live. UNRWA commits to a form of education that

> develops the full potential of Palestine Refugees to enable them to be confident, innovative, questioning, thoughtful, tolerant and open minded, upholding human values and religious tolerance, proud of their Palestine identity and contributing positively to the development of their society and the global community. (UNRWA, 2010:1)[6]

Intercultural language education – and, specific to our context, English language education - offers the possibility for individuals to explore values of openness, tolerance, critical thinking, affiliation and cosmopolitan education. It offers the space for teachers and students to nurture these values, to undertake their cultural work and to aim towards wellbeing. These principles also underpin the capabilities approach, according to which individuals' wellbeing is intertwined with the development of society and the freedoms to transform what people are

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[6] UNRWA stands for United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine refugees in the Near East. It is a UN Agency established in 1949 in order to support Palestine refugees' welfare.

able to be and do into actual beings and doings that they value (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 1997; Imperiale, 2017).

However, the context of siege imposes severe socio-economic-material and political constraints to Palestinians' opportunities to live the life they value and - important to our work in intercultural education – imposes on them a state of 'forced immobility' (Stock, 2016) . The siege, in place since 2007, and the last military operation 'Protective Edge' in the summer of 2014 have had a seriously deleterious effect on living conditions, in addition to the trauma and post-traumatic disorders experienced by the population in Gaza (Winter, 2015; Fassetta et al., forthcoming; UNRWA, 2015). The blockade has created a situation in which nearly two million people are stuck in extremely challenging living conditions, dramatically limited in their ability to move in and out of the Strip.

Our research considers intercultural language education and the values and goals that it encompasses as fundamental in a situation of forced immobility when face-to-face intercultural encounters are severely curtailed. The virtual impossibility to move travel freely in and out of the Gaza Strip imposes a situation of what we term ''enforced monoculturalism', to emphasize the coercive factors imposed by the siege on contacts with individuals from different cultures and backgrounds, which as a consequence results in what Sara Roy has described as the 'de-development of Palestine' (Roy, 1987, 1999) and in a situation of imposed monolingualism (Gramling, 2017). In a context such as the one outlined, online foreign language education and critical intercultural pedagogy, as developed by Phipps and Levine (2011), can represent a chance to bypass the isolation that the siege imposes. As findings of the TEFL course demonstrate, in this context of duress, intercultural language education - and education more broadly - can become a practice of *hope* and *resistance*.

Methodology

The case study involved an interrupted cycle of critical participatory action research (Kemmis et al., 2014). For three months in 2015, thirteen undergraduate students enrolled in the 'English language and literature' course in the English Department of the Islamic University of Gaza – all of them prospective English teachers -- were recruited to attend an uncredited, optional online training course on the 'The use of the Palestinian Arts of Resistance in English Language Teaching'. The training course aimed to enhance students' professional development in the field of language teaching, while researching and developing localized ELT practices. During the course, the researcher and the prospective English teachers (hereafter, participants) explored, devised, and co-constructed critical and creative methodologies for language education in contexts where language is used under duress. For example, participants developed ELT materials using Palestinian context-related cartoons, poems in English and in Palestinian Arabic, traditional songs translated into English, videos, clips, role-plays etc. (Imperiale, 2017).

The course was conducted via Skype, email, and using the WizIQ software in order to bypass the impossibility to move in and out of the Gaza Strip. Poor Internet connection (on all sides), numerous power cuts, audio and video distortion were constant challenges imposed by the online environment, but they were bypassed thanks to determination, a shared desire to establish human connections (Fassetta et al., forthcoming), and creativity. The workshops were video and audio recorded whenever possible.

Within the critical participatory action research, different data collection methods were used in addition to the workshops themselves, to the teaching materials developed during the course,

and to the course assignment, i.e. follow-up interviews, focus groups, document analysis, research journals, participants' reflective journals. In this chapter we rely primarily on presented verbatim of the follow-up interviews, on the workshops evaluation forms that participants filled in after the teacher training course, and on the participants' written assignments. None of the extracts used here have been translated, as they were all originally in English. Data were analysed thematically, through the lenses of critical intercultural pedagogy and the capabilities approach. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured in line with the ethical procedures of the University of Glasgow and of the Islamic University of Gaza.

Findings: values and goals of English language education in an online TEFL course

The analysis of the interview transcripts, of the workshops evaluation forms, and of participants' written assignments highlights how the participants view the English language as instrumental to allow their 'besieged' voices to be heard by audiences whom they believe have the power to influence the dramatic situation experienced by the population of the Gaza Strip. The instrumental teaching of English as a means to be heard is essential in order to keep hope alive and, as such, represents an act of hope in and of itself. Teaching and learning English, moreover, is a pedagogical act which allows hope to be translated into practices of peaceful resistance, and thus also a 'political' act in the Freirean understanding of the term. In the next sections we discuss the intersecting values and goals emerging from the analysis of the data, which reveals how the participants view English language teaching as having two fundamental and intersecting values and goals: to nurture critical hope and to foster peaceful resistance. We also discuss the holistic view of language teaching put forward by the participants as a way to develop individuals' full humanity despite the inhuman condition imposed on them.

a. **Language education to nurture critical hope**

According to Freire, 'critical hope' is the constant development of individuals' critical awareness, and drives the struggle to improve the human existence (Freire, 1994). As such, it is 'an ontological need' anchored in practice: hope by itself does not have the power to ameliorate society, and on the other hand, the struggle to make the world a better place cannot consist of calculated acts or scientific approaches that do not consider hope as a driving force (Freire, bid:2). Hope is, therefore, at the same time an ontological need and an embodied experience, involving the entire body, feelings, desires, cognitions, emotions and intuitions. It is at the intersection of the cognitive and the affective domain.

Hope also acts as 'leading the incessant pursuit of humanity' (Freire, 1970:91), and it is in this search for completeness of the human condition, in this hope-driven quest, that the 'political' value of a transformative education and educability of beings is found. As Freire notes:

> As project, as design for a different, less-ugly 'world', the dream is as necessary to political subjects, transformers of the world and not adapters to it, as it is fundamental for an artisan, who projects in his or her brain what she or he is going to execute even before the execution thereof. (Freire, 1994:78)

The role of education in fostering this 'critical hope' as a way to resist the status quo and strive for change and transformation also come through the words of a participant, when she highlights that:

> After several wars on Gaza, students were about to lose their hopes or smile considering their life in Gaza was just a miserable one with no any right to live as

other ladies […] as a teacher I have this responsibility on my shoulders to reinforce our right in existence as human beings on our own land (A. reflective journal).

The participant, a future teacher committed to an education that engages with societal transformation, stresses the identity of Palestinians as 'human beings' who live in a land they cannot, however, freely *inhabit* or move across. In a situation of denial of basic rights to safety, dignity, and self-determination, the responsibility of a teacher is, according to this participant, to nurture students' hope and smiles, and to provide her students with the vocabulary to articulate this capacity to aspire before the international community.

Similarly, in the extract below, taken from one of the written assignments that participants wrote during the workshop series, L. summarizes the values and goals of English language education in the context of siege of the Gaza Strip:

> English is a golden opportunity for students to speak and discuss the Palestinian dreams and talents to the entire world to spread the truth of Palestinian people who love life and deserve to live better than these miserable conditions. (L. written assignment)

Thus, L. argues for equipping students with a foreign vocabulary that enable them to express their dreams and hopes, as well as denouncing the situation of despair in which they live. Through language education, individuals can articulate their aspiration for wellbeing and manifest their identities as 'full humans', as individuals who 'love life and deserve to live better', who have a capacity to dream and to aspire in the face of despair, and to manifest their dreams and aspirations through the denunciation of their conditions. Within the context of these needs and aspirations, English is seen as a channel to reach the widest possible audience.

By claiming that the students should be aware of the difficult conditions in which they live, L. implicitly discusses a process of 'conscientizacao' (Freire, 1970), of building critical consciousness, as she articulates her belief that her students should be involved in a process of active transformation by producing counter-narratives in English. This involves both critical awareness and a focus on the process of being and becoming.

Freire (1970) claims that the requisites for the awakening of critical awareness are 'favourable historical conditions', and that hope needs practice in order to become historically concrete (Freire, 1994). Historical conditions are not naturally occurring, but are rather the result of the individual's interaction with and intervention on one's own and others' contexts. This leads to the second value and goal that participants identified for English language pedagogy in the Gaza Strip, namely: peaceful resistance.

b. Language education to foster peaceful resistance

In a context of siege, forced immobility, and post-conflict devastation, nurturing a capacity to express and describe harsh living conditions as well as dreams and hopes, could be considered as a coping mechanism to relieve distress, and as such, may be framed as resilience. Chandler (2012: 17) defines resilience as 'the capacity to positively or successfully adapt to external problems or threats'. Ryan (2015) points out that, while in international relations and development discourses, resilience is usually conceived as self-sufficiency, in the context of Palestine resilience and resistance are strictly intertwined.

Drawing on Scott in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990), Ryan posits that resistance consists of everyday practices which are not merely coping mechanisms aimed at survival, but

rather instances of 'spontaneity, anonymity and lack of formal organization' which 'then become the enabling modes of protest rather than a reflection of the slender political tactics of the popular classes' (Scott, 1990: 151 cited in Ryan, 2015: 310). As such, these forms of resistance are politicized and become culturally identifiable and recognizable (Ibid.).

In the Palestinian context, this sort of everyday peaceful practices of resistance are locally expressed in the concept of *sumud,* which could be translated as the 'perplexity, sadness, resilience and weary endurance' (Shehadeh, 2015: 76) that is specific to the Palestinian habitus after decades of occupation, a ten year siege, and generations of displaced people and separated families. Presenting examples of Palestinian women practicing *sumud*, Ryan (2015) defines *sumud* as 'resilient resistance', which primarily consists of rejoicing in Palestinian culture, traditions, and in life in general, *despite* the harsh living conditions, and not *within* those conditions. Shehadeh (2015) and other scholars find a nexus between *sumud* and linguistic habits:

> I wondered how many more terms and behaviours I have unwittingly adopted and to what extent I have made the language of occupation and defeat my own. I've become accustomed to so much. (p.85)

Similarly, our participants find in language one of the possible manifestations of *sumud*, and ascribe to this the critical hope that comes with the value and goal of learning English as *the* international language:

> The language itself can be stronger than military trend. Students should feel that they
> learn English to defend their land and rights and to spread the truth of Palestinian
> reality, not just to have exams and succeed at specific level. (L. written assignment)

Peaceful resistance linked to critical hope, which, as can be seen in the above extract, is embedded in linguistic resistance (Canagarajah, 2003), involves the attempt to overcome isolation and to re-write and disseminate counter-narratives, as these extracts illustrate. It also involves rejecting the oppression and enclosure that occupation imposes, as S. unequivocally argues in her evaluation form:

> We need to learn how to resist by using the western language in order to convey our
> message and our voice to the whole world. [S. evaluation form].

English language education in the Gaza Strip, as these extracts demonstrate, is one of the practices of hope and peaceful resistance to the siege imposed by the multi-purpose isolation of nearly two million people living in the Gaza Strip. It offers the possibility to nurture relationships by breaking the isolation, letting the wider world know about the challenges the siege imposes and looking for solidarity across borders. As is discussed in the next section, language education, therefore, has a holistic value.

c. "Language is not a set of boxes"

The role of education as holistic in fostering individuals' dreams and ambitions and in giving them the tools to 'talk back' (hooks, 1994; Pennycook, 1994) is a perspective that appears to be embedded in how education is perceived in the Gaza Strip. Rather than simply focussing on 'academic' and 'operational' competences (Barnett, 2010), language education is also seen as

having a transformative power, one that has wider social and individual repercussions. Barnett (2010) criticises educational practices that are increasingly instrumentally driven. Rather, he argues for 'lifewide learning', that is a leaning that is the result of several concurrent influences, as opposed to the single, vertical dimension of life-long learning. As Barnett notes:

In comprehending students' lifewide learning […] we need to supplement the domains of knowledge and skills with a sense of a student's being and, indeed, their continuing becoming. (Barnett, 2010: 5)

This holistic view resonates with the transformative power of educational praxis which the participants in the Gaza Strip talk about, and encompasses both changes in the material-socio-economic circumstances, and the individuals' process of becoming. This is reflected in the course's evaluation form by N., in which she focuses on her responsibility of being a 'good model' for her students, of showing them the way to be active and committed political agents, noting that:

I believe that me as a teacher should be a good model to teach students how to defend their cause, rights, and dreams. (N. evaluation form)

N's commitment and understanding of her role as a language teacher goes beyond the context of the classroom. During a presentation that she prepared with one of her peers as part of a classroom activity during the teacher training course (see Figure 1), she emphasized that language teaching needs to be engaged with the daily life, and that language cannot be perceived 'as a set of boxes'.
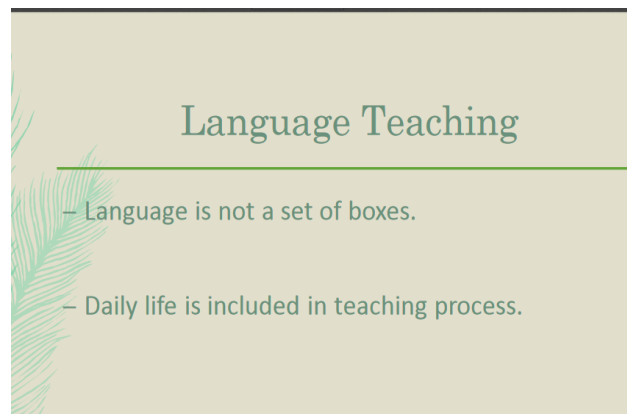
Figure1: PowerPoint slide

As she explained during the presentation, language cannot be taught as a series of gap filling exercises, as a sequence of role-plays, or through listening and reading comprehensions only. Rather, she put forward a view of language education as being part of the everyday life, which, under duress and distress as in the Gaza Strip, needs imperatively both to denounce the harsh living conditions, and also to express dreams and hopes which are constitutive of individuals' ontologies, i.e. their being and becoming in the world.

The performative curricula of the West have insisted on measures, scales, ladders, levels for language assessment and language pedagogy, focusing on what Barnett (1994) has called academic and operational competences. Within this dominant discourse – alongside, of course, that of aims and outcomes - all metaphors assume a linearity and a way of working with language within straight-sided containers. Conversely, N's statement offers a challenge to our metaphorical conceptualization of language education: language pedagogy is a place where, despite the repeated aggressions, interruptions of schooling, malnutrition, long power cuts and homework done by candlelight - despite all the consequences of the devastation and of the

years of occupation and siege – individuals can manifest their process of becoming, and can become political agent, practicing hope and *sumud*. In this conceptualization we find that imagination and aspiration are realized in the language itself, in the words that have been uttered, in *naming the world*: by developing his/her own language and voicing critical discourses, 'the oppressed finds a way to "remake the world"' (Freire, 1994: 31).

Conclusions and recommendations

Palestinians reject the 'closing down' nature of the occupation especially in education because education is always about opening up the future. (Hammond, 2012*: 82)*

In this chapter we discussed the values and goals of English in contexts of occupation, pain and pressure as in the Gaza Strip, Palestine. Findings show that in Gaza English language education has a vital role: despite the forced immobility and the consequent enforced monoculturalism and monolingualism that the siege imposes, participants aspire to open up spaces for intercultural curiosity to be explored and fulfilled. The online space opens a fast developing means to use English language for intercultural exchanges and relationships with international community when immobility prevents face-to-face encounters. Participants manifested their commitment to a kind of education which is the practice of critical hope, as in Freire's understanding of the term (Freire, 1994), and the practice of peaceful resistance. This sort of education goes beyond the context of the classroom, but rather considers the sense of students' beings and becoming, as in Barnett's development of 'lifewide learning' (Barnett, 2010).

Inspired by our findings, we suggest that in contexts of pain and pressure, as it may be with new refugee populations, an appropriate language pedagogy nurtures learners' wellbeing by teaching them a language in which hopes, dreams, injustice, experiences of pain and pressure

are articulated and expressed to the wider international community. We hope that through building academic partnerships promoting knowledge and skill transfer, language teachers may perceive language not simply as a set of boxes, but an ecology of enduring relationships and circles of solidarity and hope.

Our hope – and recommendation – is that the readers of this chapter and international English teachers may continue their cultural work, negotiating ELT pedagogies with their learners and problematizing a market driven approach to language education when appropriate to the context in which they operate. It is our hope that teachers may draw on their creativity, including multilingual and multimodal pedagogies, and dare to transgress task-based and communicative language teaching. It is our hope that language teachers may be involved in a process of radical listening, especially when learners value the opportunity for - and express the need to - 'talk back'. Finally, it is our hope that formal institutions will support the difficult work of language teachers by opening up possibilities for localized curricula to suit the needs of the learners' populations, and - in the words of one of our participants - by considering language as 'a golden opportunity for students to speak and discuss the[ir] dreams and talents to the entire world' (L., written assignment).

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