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## Re-inventing Paulo Freire: the political-pedagogical practices of the Peasant Women's Movement

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### Abstract

*The paper explores the importance of social movements as reinventors of Paulo Freire's pedagogy and promoters of a radical popular education. It particularly focuses on the Movimento de Mulheres Camponesas (MMC) (Peasant Women's Movement), which was founded in 2004 and is currently organised in eighteen Brazilian States. My reflections arise from a collaborative and multi-sited ethnography conducted with the Movement in the State of Santa Catarina, in the South of Brazil, between 2011 and 2015. In the light of this research, I will argue that the Freirean inspiration represents a path and a challenge for the MMC and is evident in its genealogy, struggles for education, political-educational methodologies and in the process of forming of militant subjectivities. On the other hand, I will argue that the Movement contributes to expanding Freire's proposal to new themes, such as: feminist struggles and the environmental question.*

**Keywords:** Peasant Women's Movement, Paulo Freire, popular education, pedagogy of social movements, collaborative ethnography

### Introduction

The thematisation of the link between education and politics by Paulo Freire<sup>1</sup> has marked a point of no return in the history of pedagogy, after which it is no longer possible to claim education is neutral. In recent decades, however, the educational policies of a neoliberal kind have endeavoured to appropriate the type of adult education, which gave rise to this breakthrough (Mayo & Vittoria, 2017). In this scenario, the question that arises is how to remain faithful to the philosophy and experiences of popular adult education and their transformative and radical goals. Some interesting attempts in this direction have been made by researchers who have sought to explore the educational dimensions of collective subjectivity (Abdi & Kapoor, 2009). Such research promotes the emergence of a pedagogy of social movements as a domain of political pedagogy, by highlighting the educational dimension of political practices and the political dimension of educational



practices. This paper is situated within this horizon of research. In particular it explores the importance of social movements as reinventors of Paulo Freire's perspective and promotion of radical popular education, by dealing with a specific research experience: a collaborative and multi-sited ethnography carried out with the Movimento de Mulheres Camponesas (MCC) (Peasant Women's Movement), in the State of Santa Catarina (Brazil), between 2011 and 2015, and focused on the understanding of political and pedagogical practices of the Movement.

## Theoretical framework: Paulo Freire and social movements

Paulo Freire's pedagogy is one of movements (Streck, 2009). First and foremost because it originated in the practices of social movements, that is, the collective subjectivity, political practices and forms of participation that are not primarily expressed through institutional channels. It is a known fact, of course, that Freire developed the initial elements of his method of literacy-consciousness within adult education movements at a time in Brazilian history when popular participation was extremely vibrant (Brandão & Assumpção, 2009). Moreover, Freire rethought, expanded and radicalised his pedagogy throughout his life in dialogue with movements and intellectuals organic to them (Beisiegel, 2010). In this context, examples could be the Liberation Theology movement in Latin America; the decolonisation movements in Africa; the civil rights movements in the United States; and the re-democratisation movements that played an important part in putting an end to dictatorship in Brazil in 1985. Freire contributed directly to some of these experiences, inspired others, and felt an intense solidarity with others; he allowed himself to be questioned by all of them (Freire, 1992). To give just two examples, one can consider, on the one hand, the incorporation of a discussion based on the concept of class starting from *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* following a deeper analysis of social reality (ibid.) and, on the other hand, the adoption of a sensitive language with gender differences thanks to the dialogue with some feminist thinkers. Freire never denied the importance of institutional politics and was, in fact, the councillor for education in the municipality of São Paulo from 1989 to 1991 (Torres, O'Cadiz, Wong, 1998). But he had a profound faith in grassroots political processes which bring together personal aspirations and collective utopias and generate an essential orientation towards life based on commitment and sharing. In his last interview, given to Luciana Burlamaqui of the TV PUC of São Paulo, April 17th (just fifteen days before his death), Freire referred to social movements, and in particular to the Movimento de Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (Landless Rural Workers Movement [MST]), stressing that it was one of the strongest expressions of the political and civic life of Brazil. In fact, his practice was confirming the analysis of political thinkers about the necessity and fruitfulness of conflict to promote social transformation.

Even today, Freire is still a fundamental reference point for many movements, which in every corner of the world continue to elaborate his pedagogy in the light of current matters, such as: the social and environmental justice (Gutiérrez & Prado, 1999; Gadotti, 2009), the intercultural encounter (Fleuri, 1998; Catarci, 2016), the decolonisation of knowledge and relationships (hooks, 1994; Walsh, 2017), and the challenge of nonviolence (Vigilante & Vittoria, 2011).

As I argued in two of my earlier works (Muraca, 2019, 2020), starting from my research and my educational work in Brazil, Guatemala, Italy and Mozambique, from a Freirean perspective, the educational dimension of social movements unfolds into four dimensions, which qualify the movements as: a) political-pedagogical subjects; b)

learning contexts; c) knowledge decolonisation laboratories; d) generative spaces for pedagogical theories. I will explain each dimension in more detail.

Firstly, social movements are political-pedagogical subjects and agents of transformation in the society in which they interact. They can be viewed as prophets of utopian possibilities of the future. It is exactly their marginal and hidden position, their character of minority and unrecognized forces that allow social movements to interpret reality with lucidity and to understand the need for struggle for change (Freire, 1997).

Secondly, social movements are also complex and plural learning contexts of a theoretical, practical, symbolic, reflexive, ethical, technical and cultural nature, which profoundly affect the formation of subjectivities. That is, in social movements we learn new content and analytical categories but also to participate and to organise ourselves; to critically interpret reality and to build a common language; to reflect on our own practice by elaborating knowledge; to coexist with others, cultivating values such as sharing and solidarity; to recognize and relate to different interlocutors within the public sphere; to value differences and to confront one another in a non-violent way etc. (Gadotti, Freire & Gjuimarães, 1989).

Thirdly, social movements can be considered as knowledge decolonisation laboratories where forms of domination are questioned and alternatives are created by, and in solidarity with, historically excluded subjects, communities, genealogies, rationalities, systems of civilization and life (Fleuri, 2008).

Finally, social movements constitute generative spaces for pedagogical theories, where collective self-research and collaborative research can promote theorising processes based on the need to understand and transform real situations. This aspect is revealed throughout Freire's life: as it was discussed above, the author created his pedagogical theory through constant dialogue with different social movements.

## **The Peasant Women's Movement in the State of Santa Catarina**

The MMC began in the early 1980s under various designations in different regions of Brazil. Notably, in the southern State of Santa Catarina, the Movement was founded in 1983 under the name of the Farming Women's Movement, in the municipality of Chapecó, in the western region, where the state secretariat is still located today. After a long and intense process of dialogue and networking and thanks to the leadership of the more consolidated and structured movements of the Southern region, in 2004, several regional organizations united to become a national one (i.e. the Peasant Women's Movement). This allowed them to wage their battles with more strength and incisiveness. In Santa Catarina, the Movement's initial commitment focused not only on education – as I am going to explain in more detail below – but also on recognising the identity of 'female farmer'. This meant fighting to obtain personal and professional documents, such as identity card, social security number, voter registration card, rural producer notepad, which peasant women did not have access to before, and for defining social security rights, such as maternity pay, a pension at 55 years of age, sickness or accident benefits, etc. This path allowed peasant women to escape invisibility and to obtain social and economic recognition. In addition, the fight against violence towards women has always been at the heart of the Movement's activities. From the beginning, the MMC has adopted political and educational practices of struggle, such as: meetings, workshops, assemblies, marches and campaigns.

Since the turn of the century, and thanks in part to the consolidation of social security rights, the Movement's attention has turned to agroecology, which now represents the core around which all its struggles are articulated. Agroecology is an ecological paradigm

of agriculture in opposition to the dominant agribusiness model. It is not only a farming method which does not use pesticides or chemical fertilisers but also a way of life and a project for society, based on fair relations between men and women and between peoples, other living beings and the planet (Balestro & Sauer, 2009). In the MMC, agroecology takes on a feminist dimension, aiming at recognising and enhancing traditionally women's practices – such as the recovery, self-production and exchange of seeds – but, at the same time, at redefining them in a political perspective. In fact, these practices pursue the safeguard of the people's sovereignty and food security against the monopolies of a handful of multinationals (De Carvalho, 2003). The agroecological commitment connects the MMC to other national and international peasants' organisations, such as the Via Campesina (Fernandes et al., 2009).

## Methodology

The reflections presented in this paper stem from the doctoral research I carried out with the Movement in the State of Santa Catarina from 2011 to 2015. The research aimed at exploring the political-pedagogical practices of the Movement and was based on a collaborative and multi-sited ethnography. This is a method characterised, firstly, by a deep immersion in the research context, secondly, by the participatory involvement of the subjects of the research in all its phases (Lassiter, 2005) and, thirdly, by multiple displacements of the researcher aimed at connecting different places and phenomena (Marcus, 1995). After an initial three-month period of negotiating access, I carried out a more intensive phase of the fieldwork, from July 2011 to February 2012, when I stayed in the homes of twenty-three of the Movement's militants<sup>2</sup>, moving from week to week into their homes and crossing five municipalities in the west of Santa Catarina. Therefore, this approach was based at the same time on coexistence and itinerancy. In line with the collaborative ethnography approach, I later returned to the field several times to discuss the preliminary results of the analysis with my research interlocutors, especially when my interpretations differed from prevailing positions within the Movement.

I was therefore able to collect a large amount of in-depth data through different tools. In particular, I carried out twenty-seven narrative interviews with each of the women who hosted me in their homes and with others, whose life and commitment were significant for the purposes of the research. I conducted six focus groups, four during the intensive phase of the field research involving twenty-six women, followed by two more with seventeen women. Moreover, I compiled a field diary based on reflective participation<sup>3</sup> in the activities of the movement and the daily lives of the women who belong to it. Lastly, I collected and examined the documentation produced about and by the Movement (e.g., reports of Movement meetings, photographs and videos, information and educational material, theses or scientific articles written about the Movement during its history). The narrative interviews and focus groups carried out during the intensive field research phase and the reflective participation followed a common thread. The aim was to explore a) the participation process in the MMC (Rural Women's Movement) and in other organisations; b) the conflicts provoked by militancy and the strategies implemented to manage them; c) the transformations generated at multiple levels; d) the influence of the Movement on agricultural production choices and e) the commitment to agroecology. The focus groups, on the other hand, centred on the migratory path that my interlocutors and their families had taken and on the cultural complexity within the MMC and in the context of the research, which – as I will explain later – proved to be of primary importance during the research but had been rather neglected.

I transcribed and translated the narrative interviews and focus group content myself. For the purposes of the analysis, the transcription provided an initial understanding of the recurring themes which partly reflected the questions I proposed and partly arose spontaneously from what my interlocutors said. Identifying these recurring themes was subsequently fine-tuned by repeatedly reading all the material collected. I was thus able to compile a detailed list of mutually exclusive categories and subcategories, which was as precise as possible and conceptually congruent, to help me draft the final text. I will elaborate on these methodological dimensions later.

## Findings

In this part of the article, I focus on what the research has highlighted in regard to the ways in which the MMC adopts, reinvents and relaunches Paulo Freire's pedagogy. In this respect, I will also focus on the main strengths and weaknesses, contradictions and challenges, which emerge from the Movement's political-pedagogical practices.

### *Freirean genealogy of the MMC*

The first aspect in which Freirean influence can be seen is the *genealogy* of the MMC. In fact, as I have already mentioned, the MMC started up in the early 1980s, at a time of democratic transition (the regime in Brazil collapsed in 1985), in which many popular organisations sprang up in both the countryside and the city. One example is the MST<sup>4</sup>, which is undoubtedly Brazil's best-known movement. This ferment, however, did not arise from nowhere; it was the result of the grassroots work carried out by the Church of Liberation Theology (LT). As shown in the documents of the Episcopal Conferences of Medellin in Colombia and Puebla in Mexico, which mark its foundation, the LT adopted Freirean pedagogy as a fundamental theoretical, political and operational reference (Mayo, 2008). This is especially evident in the intense activity involved in promoting the popular organisation and in training leaders, which was widespread in many rural and urban communities in Brazil (and Latin America). Indeed, many female MMC coordinators began their participation in core ecclesiastical communities as catechists, ministers of the word and of the Eucharist, or social pastoral agents (pastoral care of the land, health and youth, etc.).

This origin is still reflected today in the life of the Movement, particularly in *mística*, a dimension that is difficult to conceptualise, but which can be traced back to a profound sense of belonging to the MMC, which is nurtured, reaffirmed and celebrated in all the Movement's activities (Hammond, 2014). In particular, *mística* is a word with two meanings. On one hand, it is an abstract concept which indicates a form of spirituality rooted in the experience of participation. On the other hand, *mística* designates concrete expressions of this spirituality, that characterise every moment of the Movement's life. For example, a very common *mística* in the biggest and most important events of the Movement is the celebration of remembrance and gratitude for the women who had contributed to the Movement's struggles and who have died: they can be leaders of the MMC but also comrades from other parts of the world, who dedicated their lives to social transformation and in a certain sense have allowed us to carry on this process. In the smaller meetings, however, the *mística* may consist of a simple but well-presented scenario in which agroecological seeds, foods or plants produced by the militants are shared. It could be said that *mística* nurtures gratitude towards other women, the awareness of not being alone in the struggle.

The LT thus represents a dense but also contradictory legacy, which, according to some authors (Paulilo, 2009), has delayed the MMC's self-affirmation as a feminist movement. Although the experience of women living and working in the countryside has always been the main reference point for the Movement's struggles, many women are still reluctant to recognise themselves as feminists. My research has shown that this must also be attributed to the MMC's socialist character, which requires considering the rural family as a cohesive unit in order to better pursue class demands.

### ***Freirean relevance in MMC's struggles for formal education***

The importance of Freirean references also emerges from the *centrality that formal education has assumed in the Movement's struggles* since its foundation. In fact, one of the first needs it faced was to support women who wished to complete their studies, which they had interrupted at an early age due to the organisation of agricultural work within a patriarchal culture. The *No female farmer without education* campaign was devised for this purpose. In the years that followed, the commitment of the MMC and other popular organisations also led to the establishment of their own schools and universities (e.g. the Florestan Fernandes National School in São Paulo); as the creation, in collaboration with public universities, of degree courses, that develop theoretical perspectives relevant to the farming context, such as courses in the Pedagogy of the Land and Agroecology (at São Carlos University, for example), which are in fact much more widespread in Brazil than in Europe; the stipulation of agreements with Latin American universities, especially with Cuban and Venezuelan medical faculties, in order to foster mobility and further the higher education of militants.

A particular mention must necessarily be made to Peasant Education, an approach created to counter the hegemonic perspective that characterises educational interventions within the rural context. Their aim is to educate an uncritical workforce that is functional to the modern agricultural market, subordinate to the industrial sector. Freire's influence can be observed both in the political-pedagogical principles (Paludo, 2013) and in the scholastic organisation of rural education. In relation to the first aspect, the training contents start and aim at generating positive effects on the socio-cultural context of the learners and are, in fact, compiled together with the participants, starting from their interests and needs. As for the second aspect, in this approach scholastic organization is based on the alternation between school time and community time: during school time the students attend school and live together; in community time they return home, helping their family with the farming by applying the knowledge acquired through study. The pedagogy of alternating periods in the classroom and in the community aims at fostering a closer link between theory and practice and between vocational training and general education (Freire, 1978). It also facilitates access to education for rural workers. In other words, Peasant Education is characterized by the recognition of the specific social reality and needs of students living in the rural context.

### ***Freirean dimension of MMC's political-educational methodologies***

The Freirean approach also operates in the *political-educational methodologies* adopted by the Movement, which I intend to explore through the words of my interlocutors. It must be pointed out that, despite the Movement's struggle for formal education, its activities are mainly in the area of so-called informal and non-formal education and include, for example: a) the creation of sharing and collaborative relations in the grassroots groups spread within the rural communities; b) methods of discussion and

decision-making in assemblies and congresses that take place at different levels of the Movement; c) the distribution of responsibilities and the development of coordination strategies; d) training, socialisation and storytelling moments at meetings and workshops; e) the organisation of national and international campaigns by collectives focused on specific themes or synchronized with other movements etc. (Motta & Esteves, 2014). The main features of the educational processes carried out in the MMC are as follows:

they are dialogical and multi-directional, i.e., they involve each participant as a student/teacher, as Raquel Nunes makes clear by emphasising the centrality of each person's experience-based knowledge: 'Everyone shares their experience and this sharing makes training possible. The point of reference is reality itself, not the actual study but rather life's experience, the experience the women share' (from the words of Raquel Nunes, focus group in Guarujá do Sul, 10 October 2012).

they problematise modes of transmission by promoting the exchange, multiplication and re-invention of knowledge. Angela de Deus, for example, focuses on the contrast with the university, giving value to the co-construction of knowledge experimented in the MMC: 'I went to a faculty. Where I studied, we, including the professors, didn't ask ourselves many questions, but later, when I started to take part in the movement, in the training meetings, my way of seeing things changed. It changes the way you analyse society; you try to see what lies behind appearances. If I had learned these things earlier, I would have been better at school, they would have helped me to be more critical' (from the words of Angela de Deus, focus group in Dionísio Cerqueira, 6 March 2013).

They are rooted in the militants' needs, social reality and existential universe, as Mirian Milan states, also underlining the integral character of education in the MMC: 'In the MMC, rather than studying a specific topic, we study everything that affects our lives as workers, mothers, housewives, farmers, everything' (from the words of Mirian Milan, focus group in Anchieta, 29 September 2012).

They are gradual and differentiated, always starting from an interpretation of the world of the women who participate in the Movement in order to foster a more critical and in-depth knowledge. 'In the Seed Recovery, Production and Improvement Programme, the idea was to create a group that would have more theoretical background but could work from what the women knew, for example, how to produce tomatoes. The question is: how can we improve this knowledge? Why doesn't the tomato grow better? And so, we study the components of the soil, how the tomato was produced, where the seed came from... and this creates a link between theory and practice. So, little by little the women improve their production and acquire new theoretical and practical knowledge because there is an exchange among them' (from Catiane Cinelli's interview, 14 June 2013).

They include differences and asymmetries which can favour paths of mutual growth and maturity, even if they can sometimes crystallise into fixed hierarchical positions, as can be seen from the words of Justina Cima on the theme of generational differences: 'I think the great challenge is how to develop the young. How can we, who have had a longer path, not suffocate those who have less experience? And how do we ensure that the young people do not think that what has been done is done and now they have to start from the beginning? It's a very big challenge' (from Justina Cima's interview, 2 May 2013). This is an ongoing challenge in the MMC and is even greater when we consider that the Movement is also fighting against the phenomenon of rural exodus. This is a global phenomenon, which has local repercussions, by driving young women from the countryside.

They combine technical and political education: training activities focusing on agroecology, for example, do not simply aim to replace farming methods but also to



generate reflection, dissolutions and political choices. Here we can consider the words of Lourdes Bodanese: ‘I bought this land more than twenty years ago. It had been abandoned and was full of rubbish. We didn’t even know if it could be improved. Later, when I began to take part in the MMC, I started to cultivate it, to produce more, to put tasty food on the table, and a transformation slowly took place. I can now say: ‘I am a farmer; I am producing healthy products and can also offer them to those who come to buy.’ It is a joy for me to sell a healthy product, the exact same product that I put on my own table. Therefore, I don’t just want to benefit myself, I want to benefit humanity’ (from the documentary *Mulheres da Terra*).

They pursue transformation of the self and of the world as two dimensions of the same path. ‘If I were asked to talk about my personal life as something separate from the movement, I would not be able to because my personal life is very much intertwined with my political path and, from my point of view, they cannot be separated. Many people ask me: ‘now you are retired, you have a minimum wage, don’t you think it is time to live a little better?’ But what is living? For me, living means organising women, mobilising them, nurturing family life, advancing production, building a relationship with my partner’ (from Justina Cima’s interview, 2 May 2013).

### *Freirean echoes in the formation of militant subjectivities*

Freirean influence is also manifested in the *process of militant subjectivity formation*, which can be interpreted as all the profound and decisive effects that participation in the MMC has on women’s lives and which configure commitment to others and to reality as an essential aspect of their personality. When talking about the effects of the MMC on their lives, my interlocutors alluded to complex and always unfinished transformative processes, difficult to name because they involve multiple dimensions of experience. They described militancy as a permanent political-educational process that encourages overcoming a naive vision of reality and the critical unveiling of its reasons for being. In this sense, conscientization is not just an intellectual attitude nor a prerequisite for struggle; it is achieved precisely in the action and reflection dynamics that characterise struggle (Freire, 1987). For militants, being committed to the MMC also means dealing with conflicts. For example, inner conflicts, which are not always easy to recognise, arise from problematisation, provoked by militancy itself, by self-ideals, social models and established trajectories (Benasayag & Del Rey, 2007). But these conflicts also involve the family and community sphere, the dynamics within the MMC, the relationship with other social movements and with society as a whole. Conflicts are usually problematic phenomena. They are not always overcome positively and can often produce further lacerations and suffering (Contini, 1999). However, *love for the world*, which, for the Movement’s militants, is a fundamental motivation for political action, guides them to experience conflicts without reducing them to their destructive components, but rather as a way of transforming situations towards greater justice (Gadotti, Freire & Guimarães, 1989). Commitment to the Movement, therefore, has a profound effect on the lives of the militants, resulting in a constitutive belonging of subjectivity, of the sense of self and of relationships with others. In particular, it encourages a search for personal happiness that is in no way conceived of as *unrelated* to others, *to the detriment of* or *without* others. Recognition of interdependence, therefore, becomes key to a person’s existence in the world, albeit in a way in which problems and the risk of suffering are never excluded.

## *Research as a Freirean practice*

Lastly, the Freirean perspective shaped the very *configuration of the research* that I carried out with the Movement and directed me towards a collaborative ethnographic approach. The value of this approach lies in putting at the centre what is usually left in the background (Clifford & Marcus, 1986), enhancing dialogue and recognising the subjects of the research as co-researchers (Lawless, 1991). This is a distinctive feature of educational and scientific work that draws on popular pedagogy and can be traced back to the beginnings of Paulo Freire's work at the Social Service of Industry. In fact, he motivated participants to express their views at all stages of the research and reflectively take account of the critical issues raised (Freire, 1992). The dialogical option is demanding. It guides research right from the initial choice of the object of study, which must be defined not only on the basis of the researcher's interests but also by considering the needs of his or her interlocutors. In this sense, I have paid fundamental attention to the theme of agroecology and its relationship with feminism, which are issues of pressing relevance for the MMC. In the perspective of collaborative ethnography, restitution also takes on broader and more complex meanings: it is not an action to be relegated to the conclusion of the research, it is not focused exclusively on sharing the final text, but unfolds instead in multiple practices aimed at recognising and nurturing the shared construction of knowledge (Alga & Muraca, 2016). The focus on restitution motivated me to:

- a. share in the daily work of the twenty-three women farmers who hosted me in their homes during the intensive fieldwork phase;
- b. contribute to the Movement's cultural production activities with my specific skills; process the data collected in forms and languages that were interesting to my interlocutors, for example, by producing the documentary (Muraca, 2019);
- c. encourage the Movement's access to institutional and academic areas that are generally precluded, for example, by putting two of the Movement's leaders on my PhD thesis panel;
- d. constantly consult the protagonists of the research about the interpretations I was elaborating, especially when they disagreed with the prevailing positions in the Movement, both by confronting each of them individually and by preparing opportunities for collective discussion during the process.

I would like to delve into this last aspect, in consideration of the importance of these occasions of collective confrontation. Indeed, they allowed me to further extend and complexify the data collected; produce socially meaningful knowledge; enhance polyphony in the elaboration of knowledge. But above all, these actions allowed me to put the formative dimension of research participation to work in a liberating and particularly decolonial<sup>5</sup> direction, promoting a common reflection on the conflicts associated to cultural complexity within the Movement and in the particular context of the research. In fact, in the west of Santa Catarina, the Movement's militants are predominantly white and of European origin, especially Italian and German. This aspect greatly facilitated my access to the field and led me to reflect on intercultural relations. However, whenever I raised the issue of race relations in everyday conversations and life story interviews, my interlocutors appeared reticent. In fact, the development of family farming in the region where I carried out the fieldwork is linked to violent processes of expulsion and land expropriation from the indigenous and mestizo population. These processes were sustained by a racist ideology that still feeds inequalities and implicit conflicts today and that also has repercussions on the Movement (Fleuri, 1998). I

therefore suggested specific opportunities to my interlocutors for discussion based on the community use of the genogram, which is useful for bringing to light forgotten, misunderstood or unmentionable dimensions (Rosenbaum, 1997). These were moments of research, characterised by significant formative depth. They made it possible to problematise the dominant rhetoric regarding indigenous and mestizo people as well as to recognise each person's own positioning by problematising whiteness, which is usually considered as normal both in the MMC and in the context of my research, as well as in social sciences (Corossacz, 2012). It was therefore possible to trace connections and forms of co-implication from specific experiences of oppression, resistance and conflict (Mohanty, 2003). In this sense, the research has contributed to the problematization of the long-time inequalities between women belonging to different socio-cultural groups by decolonising relationships and knowledge (Walsh, 2017). This issue, in recent years, especially since the establishment of the National Movement in 2004, has been gaining increasing relevance.

## Conclusion: Freire's legacy in the Peasant Women's Movement

The educational dimension runs through all the MMC's areas and activities and has a strong political component. In other words, it aims to generate reality transformations by activating processes of awareness. As I have argued, Freire is a crucial reference point for the MMC. Freirean inspiration is evident, especially in the dialogical and participatory approach of the educational processes that take place within it, in their constitutive link with concrete experience and social reality, in their critical and problematising approach. On the other hand, the Movement contributes to keeping Freire's proposal alive, expanding its scope to themes that even Freire hardly explored: feminist struggles and the environmental question, to name two that have emerged several times in these pages. These critical perspectives often feed on and support each other, although sometimes, they can also generate questions and produce contradictions. This is the case, for example, when recognising oneself as a feminist requires opening up conflicts that call into question the comforting unitary representation of the group of the oppressed. It is also important to point out that Freirean heritage continues to represent a path and a challenge for the MMC. Like any social movement, in fact, it does not constitute a homogeneous subject but is crossed by multiple differences, which, in some cases, can become inequalities based on age, the role within the movement, socio-cultural affiliation etc., and giving rise to forms of authoritarianism and exclusion. Throughout the article, I have attempted to show that this aspect particularly emerged in the theme of intercultural relations within the Movement, which are marked by the colonial legacy still operating in the context in which the research was carried out. Participatory and collaborative research, however, can bring these problems into focus, make them the object of reciprocal research and training, and overcome them, favouring the political-educational maturation of the Movement in a non-ideological way.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This aspect characterizes the whole of Paulo Freire's work, starting from *Educação como prática da liberdade* (1969).
- <sup>2</sup> The women who participate in the MMC use two main categories to define themselves: *militante*, which is "militant" and has a political meaning, and *integrante*, which is a more neutral word and can be translated as "member" or "participant". In my writing I use both of them. In particular, I adopt the concept "militant" because, unlike for example the term "activist", it is more appropriate to indicate modes of participation which involve the whole life of a subject, influencing one's sense

of self and the relationships with others (Apostoli Cappello, 2012). Therefore this term is more consistent with my interlocutors' experience.

<sup>3</sup> Reflective participation is a term which I have renamed and redefined from the classic ethnographic practice of participant observation because it is more consistent with my involvement in the research and with the characteristics of pedagogical knowledge.

<sup>4</sup> It is relevant to clarify that there is a deep bond of solidarity between the MST and the MMC: they are organized in the Via Campesina network, therefore many struggles are common; above all, some militants participate in both movements. In this sense, the MMC's specificity consists of its character as an autonomous and feminist organization of women.

<sup>5</sup> This is a concept of the Latin American Decolonial Thinking, a critical perspective which arose in the 1990s in social and human sciences. In particular, according to Catherine Walsh (2013), the "decolonial" category calls into question the existence of a transition from a colonial moment to a non-colonial one, and instead identifies an ongoing process in which positions, transgressions, creations, alternatives and horizons can be traced.

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