

## **Social movements and critical pedagogy in Brazil: From the origins of popular education to the proposal of a Permanent Forum.**

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### **Abstract**

*One of the hallmarks of anti-capitalist social movements in Latin America is the incorporation of self-organizing processes of political education and involvement in the educational process of their children and youth. This article discusses popular education and critical pedagogy upheld by historical and contemporary Brazilian social movements, particularly the Landless Workers Movement (MST) and its historical struggles in defence of public education.*

*First, it identifies the context of the origins of popular education in the late 1950s and early 1960s, notably Paulo Freire's epistemological and theoretical contributions. After characterizing the political context of the period, the article focuses on the key experiences of popular education. It then discusses Florestan Fernandes' criticism of the Bourgeois-Democratic Revolution strategy that played a leading role in the struggles of the period 1955–1964. Next the period of pedagogical practices that were forged in resistance to the dictatorship are examined, emphasizing the changes in Freire's thinking and the revolutionary political struggle of the MST. Finally, it points out the educational and political training issues of today, discussing strategic dilemmas and proposal of critical pedagogy and popular education.*

**Keywords:** Popular Education, Critical Pedagogy, MST, Social Movements, Gramsci.

### **Popular education in Brazil in the early 1960s: the political context.**

In the early 1960s a set of unusual political convergences occurred in which the common denominator was national developmentalism, recognizing tensions between a pedagogy "within the order" and the struggles to defend socialism and the break with the national-developmentalism, a political model that favoured the domination of rural oligarchies and a process of industrialisation, giving rise to an industrial and financial class - partly linked with rural oligarchy - ensuring political hegemony of the bourgeoisie.<sup>1</sup> The Brazilian Communist Party (PCB) directed its activists, unions and intellectuals to support governments considered "progressive" and developmentalist, even though they might be led by right-wing, pro-

imperialist parties, such as the National Democratic Union (UDN). The Brazilian Catholic Action movement, linked to the Catholic Church, which led the campaign against the National Education Guidelines and Bases Act (LDB) supported developmentalism, assumes a program in tune with its ideals. Sectors with an affinity with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), were also excited about the import substitution policies undertaken as part of the national-developmental project, a position shared by intellectuals at the Institute of Brazilian Studies (ISEB).

In this ambivalent and contradictory environment covering the ten years from 1955 to 1965, several popular education programs thrived in the country, the landmark being the work of Paulo Freire in Angicos, Rio Grande do Norte, in 1962-1963.

In terms of popular culture, the Popular Culture Centres (CPC) organized in the spaces of the National Union of Students (UNE) stood out. These were forums in which artists and social activists discussed the issue of the culture of the people and culture for the people through poetry, theatre, cinema, and music, composing the cultural background to the strikes, demonstrations, clashes, hesitations, advances and setbacks of grass-roots reforms (in agriculture, education, energy, banking, etc.).

In the 1960s the main social programs for popular education were developed in the Brazilian Northeast. In this region the peasant movement had become radicalized, in particular through the Peasant Leagues, which had gathered over 50,000 participants, especially in the states of Pernambuco and Paraíba.<sup>ii</sup> However, these popular education schemes were not initiated by the movement itself, nor were they aligned with its struggles. On the contrary, these educational programs were organised by governments hostile to the radicalized peasant movement and by the Catholic Church, which, until then, had hardly encouraged its struggles.

To understand these seemingly unlikely alliances between popular educators, "progressive" governments (strictly speaking, most were linked to oligarchies) and the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB), a brief summary is needed of the debate on the strategies that guided the great struggles of the period, which culminated in the defeat of 1964.

The strategic conception of popular education in the early 1960s was not only related to the self-organization and collective self-emancipation of the workers. The goal was not always one of education for socialism, but also education for developmentalism. To understand the outlook of the Brazilian left in the late 1950s/early 1960s it is important to emphasize the Communist Party's strategy, known as Bourgeois Democracy. The PCB advocated that socialism presupposed a bourgeois-democratic step in which workers should engage with national-developmental sectors, aiming to strengthen capitalist industrialization and modernization as precondition for the transition to socialism. The underlying thesis was that the country still had pre-capitalist, feudal and semi-feudal regions that hindered the training of an advanced proletariat. One way to suppress the pre-capitalist traces would be to transform the peasants into wage labourers. The workers' support for the "progressive"

sectors was considered a counterpart—a form of pressure—to force the bourgeoisie to undertake social reforms that until then it had not carried out. Thus, the workers would force the bourgeoisie to accomplish its bourgeois revolution.

In the Northeast, this political orientation was materialized through the "Left Fronts," which supported bourgeois fractions regarded as anti-feudal and anti-oligarchic for state and municipal governments, such as landowner Cid Sampaio, affiliated to the UDN for the state government, and Miguel Arraes from the Socialist Labour Party for City Hall in Pernambuco; Aluisio Alves also UDN, in Rio Grande do Norte, an election which also entrusted the government of the City of Natal to the aforementioned socialist Djalma Maranhão. Governors Cid Sampaio and Aluisio Alves made concessions to the left-wing sectors in order to prevent the political growth of certain oligarchic sectors and, secretly, of possible competitors in the left-wing fronts, such as the mayors of the state capitals. The Church, in turn, sought to block the independent peasant organization to maintain its influence amongst workers in the field.

The strategic design of the PCB, however, was criticized and confronted by Peasant Leagues. As pointed out by Clodomir dos Santos Morais, one of the foremost Peasant League leaders and then a PCB activist, many leaders of the Leagues had links with the PCB. The impasse on land reform, the systematic repression symbolized by the murder of the leader of the Leagues in Paraíba, João Pedro Teixeira<sup>iii</sup>, the Leagues' active support of the Cuban Revolution—and others like Francisco Julião outside of the PCB—to confront the PCB's National Directorate. This confrontation challenged the PCB's strategy, which was to form the working class through a national-developmental project, rather than through immediate revolutionary action.

Despite the political wrangling, the Bourgeois-Democratic strategy was hegemonic in the early 1960s. Popular education programs aimed at training new "conscious" voters willing to support governments committed to these reforms (only literate workers had the right to vote). This strategy resulted in paradoxical situations such as the support of U.S. agencies for these popular education programs, such as the Alliance for Progress and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) backing the literacy program led by Paulo Freire in Angicos, as will be discussed later.

### **The historical programs of popular education in Brazil.**

As mentioned above, popular education schemes and arrangements in the period 1960-1964 were developed in the context of national developmentalism. In this section, we present the educational proposals of some of these initiatives. The Popular Culture Movement (1960), founded by Germano Coelho and Miguel Arraes in Pernambuco, proposed a different relationship between the popular classes and culture. A restless movement containing different currents, it was initially going to be called the "Culture and People Movement," but chose the name Popular Culture to affirm the idea that the working classes would be the agents of change. By developing the issue of popular culture, this movement influenced

Freire's concept of the "generative word", as will be seen below in relation to his literacy experience in Angicos.

The Basic Education Movement in Natal (1961-66) created a major literacy and rural education campaign on the radio. Driven by the Catholic Church it introduced important innovations—in educational materials, and in respecting and valuing local culture—that distinguished it from the earlier radio project, which had been broadcast through radio soap operas. Its post-literacy program with the book "Living and Fighting" was a landmark in popular literacy. Based on Popular Culture Movement material, it featured the history of the workers' struggle focused on Agrarian Reform. Some experiences were more significant, particularly the alliance with popular culture groups and interaction with rural trade unions and peasant struggles. In a profound sense, it began a broader reflection on literacy and historical consciousness and made significant inroads in church communities in favour of socially progressive and innovative thinking and action.

The project "*De pé no chão também se aprende a ler*" ("With your feet on the ground you too can learn to read," 1961-64) implemented in Natal (Rio Grande do Norte) by Mayor Djalma Maranhão, sought to extend primary schooling to the working class areas on the edges of the city. In addition to literacy, which was increasingly influenced by the work of Paulo Freire, vocational schools were set up under the slogan "*De pé no chão também se aprende uma profissão*" ("With your feet on the ground you too can learn a trade"). This major campaign put education in peripheral areas at the top of the political agenda, arguing that the fight against illiteracy should raise awareness of and be engaged in a social understanding of the economic and political reality. The revolutionary character of these programs was in conflict with the political and economic oligarchies that, supported by the fascist and military organisations, arrested, tortured or exiled militants and leaders after the civilian-military coup of 1964.

In this political context, an element distinguished by its innovations in the methodological and political fields was the literacy experiment in Angicos (1962-63), led by Paulo Freire, which profoundly influenced contemporary popular education in Brazil and Latin America.

### **The literacy project in Angicos by Paulo Freire: political contradictions**

The spread of social movements in Latin America, the growing number of strikes, and the popular demands for basic reforms were perceived by U.S. State Department as a sign that further revolutions on the 1959 Cuban model could not be ruled out or, at least, that new nationalist governments hostile to imperialism might come to power. The then president of the U.S.A., John F. Kennedy, created the "Alliance for Progress", an "economic aid" program for the countries of Central and South America, in order to counteract the popular revolutionary movements. The Alliance defended U.S. geopolitical interests in the region, which involved strengthening the positive image of American leadership. Among the measures to this end, its creators realized they would have to win over modernizing bourgeois governments to the U.S. side. These governments, in turn, reasoned that Alliance resources

could support urgent reforms and, in addition, establishing an agreement with the Alliance was a gesture of friendship toward the U.S., which would soothe the more openly reactionary oligarchies.

A U.S. priority was the Brazilian Northeast region, embattled by struggles and conflicts in rural areas. Rio Grande do Norte had a school enrolment rate of about 20%. The Aluisio Alves government established an alliance with SUDENE, the federal development agency for the Northeast of Brazil, with financial support from the Alliance for Progress, aiming to implement an ambitious literacy program. For the governing class, investing in literacy would also influence new voters interested in strengthening basic reforms.

The Rio Grande do Norte program, funded by the Alliance for Progress, provided training for elementary teachers, restoration of elementary schools, construction of new classrooms, provision of food assistance, medical and dental care to all children enrolled, and the development of an adult literacy campaign which would include 100,000 people in the region.

Paulo Freire, after 10 years of work at SESI (Social Service for Industries) (1949-1959) was, at the time, the head of the SEC (Cultural Extension Service) at the Federal University of Pernambuco, and was engaged in the Recife Popular Culture Movement (MCP—1959-1960). As Director of the Research Division and Coordinator of the Adult Education Project within MCP, Freire established centres of culture: spaces that included public libraries, theatrical performances, sports and cultural circles.

Alongside the enthusiasm to start an adult literacy project in a region particularly plagued by poverty and social dependency, Paulo Freire felt the tensions and contradictions of coordinating a project sponsored by the Alliance for Progress and by a Government supported by conservative groups. The working group resisted several attempts at interference from the technicians of the Alliance. Freire, in turn, seeking to maintain the autonomy of the project, demanded that the local authorities should be the only interlocutors of the project. The Alliance for Progress itself was criticized by the right-wing press for being tolerant of communism. With the increasing polarization of Brazilian society between left-wing groups (including reformers, with support from the PCB) and allies of imperialism (with support from the large economic groups), the Alliance and USAID withdrew their support for Paulo Freire's projects, which they considered a "factory of revolutions" (Paiva, 1980, p.25).

The dominant sectors expressed discontent with this form of pedagogy, which sought to encourage critical consciousness with a view to turning the undifferentiated mass of rural workers into conscious people aware of their legal social rights.

### **The political-methodological rupture in the literacy process**

Once the literacy campaign started, Freire promoted an epistemological revolution with his literacy methodology based on generative words arising from the everyday language of the community, in cultural circles, through a process that Freire defined as "research into the vocabulary universe" that is, a knowledge of the community's linguistic expressions, which was acquired through dialogical encounters and addressed issues relevant to people's lives, everyday matters, work and social rights under the Constitution. Everyday words, sayings and folk songs were part of the vocabulary universe. Prayers, parties, work meetings or union meetings could be occasions for research, which was conducted so as to minimize the distance between the researchers and the community (Vittoria, 2011).

Through critical analysis of existential situations, developed through immersion in existing problems (generative words and themes), workers broadened the process of investigating reality with a critical tendency. Reality was not observed merely on the surface or in a mechanical way, but as a phenomenon with a deeper vital core linking the subjective condition of illiteracy to the social conditions that determine this condition. Critical consciousness acts at depth, and discovers the world and itself through processes of dialogic inquiry and questioning in groups that recreate their culture from the questioning of the generative words.

Thus, through literacy, a new reality is created that is not reducible to a theoretical, intellectual attitude, but which matures and flourishes through a dialectic between action and reflection necessary for social transformation: one that subsequently Paulo Freire often defined in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as educational praxis (Vittoria, 2011).

The literacy program in Angicos was a successful; Paulo Freire was invited by the then President Joao Goulart to coordinate the national literacy plan. However, dark events that culminated in the 1964 civilian-military coup—arrests, murders, exiles, which also targeted non-communists such as Anísio Teixeira and Paulo Freire—confirmed that significant bourgeois fractions willing to lead a project of nationhood into confrontation with imperialism did not exist. The coup was carried out by bourgeois sectors linked to monopoly capitalism, and quickly unified the main bourgeois fractions. The centres of national developmentalist thinking such as ISEB, all the left-wing forces, including labour movements, communists, and socialists, though allied to bourgeois fractions in terms of social order, and the union movements and peasant leagues that remained more independent of national developmentalism, were outlawed and brutally repressed. Repression certainly reached the above-mentioned popular education schemes and the CPCs. In late 1967 the dictatorship replaced the popular education programs with the Brazilian Literacy Movement (MOBRAL), relegating adult and youth literacy to a technical activity and an apologia for the regime.

It would be a mistake to assert that the history of popular education in Brazil remained frozen in the long winter of dictatorship. In exile, Paulo Freire discussed education in a context of

emancipation and decolonization and moved closer to Marxist authors, developing his understanding of popular education, in particular inspired by political thought of Amílcar Cabral, analysing more carefully the relationship between work, the capitalist mode of production and education.<sup>iv</sup> Groups of land workers in Brazil continued to organize clandestinely with the support of the progressive Church, with its links to liberation theology and the Pastoral Land Commission, and political sectors of the resistance, including trade unions within the framework of the National Confederation of Agricultural Workers (CONTAG), which in the 1980s gave rise to the Landless Workers Movement (MST).

In contrast to previous attempts, the MST was to prioritize the training of its militants in Marxism, leading it to discuss Latin American Marxist thinkers. The most outstanding of these was Florestan Fernandes, who was honoured after his death in 1995 with the naming of the movement's main training school: The Florestan Fernandes National School (*Escola Nacional Florestan Fernandes*). The interpretation of Florestan's ideas on the formation of capitalism in Brazil, highlighting the uneven development of capitalism, the connections between local bourgeois fractions and hegemonic fractions, and the centrality of forms of worker exploitation and expropriation, was claimed to be of great political and strategic importance to the movement, despite the controversies within the MST about the nature of the alliances of the ruling classes in Brazil.

### **Dictatorship and the exhaustion of the bourgeois-democratic agenda: Florestan Fernandes's analysis**

In view of the failure of the political strategy pursued by the Left, led by the PCB and the national-developmentalists in the ISEB and PTB, a systematic and rigorous interpretation was urgently needed of the meaning of the civilian-military coup and especially the reasons preventing the expected bourgeois-democratic revolution that would bring the country up to a democratic and reformist level, erase any pre-capitalist traces, and forge an organized working class willing to fight for socialism. Florestan Fernandes produced one of the most important theoretical works to explain the meaning of the civilian-military coup of 1964 and the reasons for the failure of bourgeois-democratic strategy that had excited most of the Brazilian left, and had largely served as theoretical and political ballast for the popular education schemes in the early 1960s. In 1968, he completed his famous book *Sociedade de classes e subdesenvolvimento* ('Class-based society and underdevelopment'), which questioned the assumptions of the bourgeois-democratic strategy and examined in depth the formation of capitalism in Brazil. In his analysis, the national-developmental theoretical scheme, although apparently plausible, is misleading, as the dependent nature of Brazilian Capitalism made the developmentalist and the strategies of the Bourgeoisie unviable. The genetic-evolutionary view of Marxism based on dialectical materialism blurred the reading of the capitalism that really existed in the country, compromising any analysis of the meaning of the 1964 coup.

Florestan's analysis of dependent capitalism led him to a unique interpretation of bourgeois revolution in Brazil (Fernandes, 1975). In contrast to the Eurocentric and evolutionary

thinking, found both in the supporters of development and in dialectical materialism, Fernandes concluded that the bourgeois fractions in Brazil would not be able to perform a "classical" bourgeois revolution, along the lines of 1789. In fact, archaic and modern elements coexisted in the social-historical formation of Brazil, but that did not mean that the dominant local bourgeois fractions were any less capitalist. Fernandes appropriated ideas from Lenin (the uneven development of capitalism and his analysis of the Prussian Way) and other Marxists such as Trotsky (uneven and combined development, a concept incorporated in his dialogue with Hermínio Sacchetta<sup>v</sup>) and possibly Gramsci (in the "Southern question" and his thesis of passive revolution).<sup>vi</sup>

Fernandes' strategic perspective did not foresee a mandatory step before the fight for socialism, as was supported by the PCB with its proposal of the Bourgeois Democratic Revolution. His strategy was directly socialist, requiring very special conditions for the subjective preparation of the workers as social class in itself and class for itself. Again, the influence of Lenin can be seen in his analysis in that he highlights the importance of training and education for the proletariat to achieve collective self-emancipation. In his conception, the political education of the working class required a specific form of relationship of the party with the masses that was not marked by dogmatism or the projection of theory onto the struggle of the people, but stressed a dialectical perspective: "to drive the political process, that party would have to be in tune with the working class and the masses, following the development of their learning and their political socialization through the fluctuations of the class struggle" (Fernandes, 2012, p. 234).

### **The context of social movements and popular education in Brazil in the 70s and 80s: from resistance against the dictatorship to the MST's educational leadership**

After the outbreak of metalworkers' strikes, such as in Osasco in 1968, and student protests for university reform and against the dictatorship in the same year, repression became even fiercer with the adoption of Institutional Act No. 5 and Decree No. 477/1969, which effectively 'legalised' violent repression of democratic sectors of society. Therefore, the few remaining potentially democratic spaces—those not seen as threatening by the dictatorship—acquired prominence, and it was there that activities were forged that rescued some of the lessons of popular education, in particular Freirean education, in Basic Ecclesial Communities (CEB), the Pastoral Land Commission, Workers' Pastoral Action Groups, and residents' associations.

In the late 1970s, the main left-wing organizations that remained clandestinely organized, together with the CEB and other social movements, founded the Workers' Party (PT), which Paulo Freire joined in 1980. In its early years, the PT criticized the bourgeois-democratic strategy, supporting an originally classist coalition, the Popular-Democratic program focusing on "national" reforms of anti-imperialist orientation, aiming to build up strength for the Socialist struggle.



Gradually, however, these strategic views (Bourgeois-Democratic and Popular-Democratic) were brought closer together due to the PT's electoral victories—which involved greater institutionalization of the party—and the broadening of the spectrum of alliances when right-wing and centre-right parties came to make up the coalition government (Leher, 2011; Leher and Trindade, 2012). That shift had a significant effect on the PT's ideas about education. From being a defender of popular education and free, unitary public education, the party sought an alliance with the major economic groups and, in practical terms, adopted the capitalist agenda for Brazilian education, the agenda of the “All for Education” Movement (Movimento Todos pela Educação): use of standardized quality indicators, through centralized evaluation; establishment of performance goals; public-private partnerships for the occupation of school space-time; conversion of policies for adult and youth education into workforce training programs focused on the “poor” (Rummert, Aigebaile, Ventura, 2012); and expansion of public subsidies for private for-profit enterprises through the “University for All” Program (Universidade para Todos—PROUNI), a program which gives tax exemptions to for-profit educational institutions, and the Student Investment Fund (FIES), a student loan program subsidized by the public sector, a situation that has led to unprecedented control over higher education by the financial sector and equally unprecedented internationalization (Leher, 2010).

Also, from the 1970s onward, peasants' movements regrouped after the resistance struggles against the dictatorship in the Pastoral Land Commission and trade unions that formed the basis of the National Confederation of Agricultural Workers (CONTAG).

With the founding of the MST in 1984, the pedagogy of the Movement was forged for the first time, in terms of scale and consistency, from within the social movement itself in Brazil. This pedagogical orientation came into conflict with the PT, which in its early years had supported its struggles and demands, as explained above. As Roseli Caldart, militant and intellectual of Landless Movement (MST) claims (2004, 2012a), education was first included on the movement's agenda for a practical reason: the lack of schools in the settlements and, more acutely, in the camps of the families fighting for their land. It was inevitable that would lead to criticism of rural education in terms of the ideology of human capital. The problems of “peasant” identity among children and young people and, more broadly, of political awareness are dimensions of this educational issue. In this context, the debate about socialist pedagogy led the MST to resume the dialogue with Freire and, gradually, with other socialist educators, including Gramsci, Pistrak, and Krupskaya, among others, not forgetting the essential presence of the sociologist Florestan Fernandes.

The MST's road to socialist pedagogy was paved largely by the Freirean tradition of popular education, based on the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT) and liberation theology. Other influences came through contacts with universities and, in particular, with the field of Marxist studies on the educational principle of work, in which Marx, Gramsci and the Russian theorists were references. The strength of this influence was due largely to the intersections between Freirean and Marxist thought through the work of Gramsci.

The ideas of Gramsci and Freire converged strongly in the MST, especially in what Gramsci called the Philosophy of Praxis, meaning a philosophy that was not limited to a contemplative view of reality, but had the intention of transforming social conditions to achieve a society without exploiters and exploited: action and reflection for social change. These confluences resulted in an important common ground between Gramsci and Freire: the people-led struggle for the hegemony of the exploited and expropriated working class. As Freire suggested in the book *A Importância do Ato de Ler* ("The importance of the act of reading"),

.. the critical reading of reality, whether in a literacy process or not, related above all to certain clearly political practices of mobilization and organization can become an instrument for what Gramsci called counter-hegemonic action (Freire, 1982, p. 21).

The re-reading of Marx by the two philosophers can be seen in the revolutionary character of their pedagogical ideas, as incorporated into the pedagogy of the MST; in the vision of men and women as creators of culture and transformative beings, in the search for emancipation of the oppressed classes; in the value given to praxis as a driving force behind theoretical reflection and concrete action; in the deeply felt criticism of fatalistic interpretations of social processes; and in the strong link between education and politics.

Although influenced by Marx's thought, Paulo Freire rejected dogmatic interpretations of Marxism that would result in a mechanistic and deterministic view of history. In these matters, there was a clear disagreement with those whom Freire calls orthodox Marxists (perhaps better termed evolutionists or mechanists), in that he opted for a reading of Marxism that differed from Eurocentric trends.

The class struggle was not seen in the abstract, as often occurred in degenerate forms of Marxism, but as a contradiction of the mode of production (an original element in Marx's thinking). What seems more central in the development of Freire's thought, which became radicalized during his experience in Africa, is that relations between classes, the class struggle, could only be understood within the broader (and more complex) scope of the mode of production. In this perspective, what mattered was changing the mode of production, without which class struggle would be meaningless. This would not be possible without popular education, or without forming a new man and a new woman, as Che Guevara had stated, through the struggles and schools of the MST. The revolutionary struggle overflowed into the educational field, which thus cannot be unlinked from political strategy.

The relationship between the MST and Freire's thought expands to the field of Liberation Theology, which re-examines Christianity in defence of the exploited classes. This defence involves religious aspects and constraints deriving from the Church as an institution, but also a political and critical reflection on reality. The process necessarily involves a political, cultural, psychological, linguistic and economic analysis of the condition of oppression and, therefore, requires interpretative tools. One key to the reading of social inequality, which helps to contextualize the conditions of poverty, hunger, and exploitation as consequences of complex structures of capitalist society, rather than situations determined by fate, is Marx's thinking.

We read in Paulo Freire:

In my youth, I went to the peasants and workers of my city, driven by my Christian inclination. I do not disown it. On arriving there, the existential drama of the men and women that I started to talk to referred me to Marx. It's as if the peasants had said to me: "Look here, Paulo, do you know Marx?" That is why I went to Marx. (Oliveira, 2003, p. 32-33).

In this sense, the Christian message in defence of the oppressed is supported by Marxist theories of social - political analysis of social classes. This dialogue between interpretations of Marx and a reinterpretation of Christian messages often attracted criticism and censure from the conservative sectors of Vatican, as in the case of Leonardo Boff, an intellectual who had always supported the MST's struggles. For spreading its principles in his book *Church, Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church* [1985 (1981)], Boff was sentenced to a year of "obsequious silence" and removed from his editorial roles and religious teaching by the Sacred Congregation for the Defence of the Faith, a process that culminated in his resignation from the Church.

In the 1970s and 80s liberation theology inspired popular education movements in Latin America and, as seen, the MST, in particular its mystique. The incorporation of Marxism led to their greater engagement in concrete struggles against exploitation and expropriation, as reflected in the extraordinary period of land occupations by the MST in the 1980s and 90s. The labour issue became central—the settlements demanded that—and therefore education could not neglect labour as an issue to be problematized in the educational practices of the MST.

### **From the 1980s to the present: the role of Social Movements in Popular and Critical Education.**

In the long, dark period of the civilian-military dictatorship there was a considerable expansion of the basic education offered by states and municipalities. In 1971, the first and middle stages of schooling, each lasting four years, were merged to form an eight-year period of compulsory education. However, paradoxically, the expansion of school provision and the extension of fundamental schooling did not in practice democratize, scientific, technological, historical-cultural, artistic and social knowledge. After the coup, publicly funded schools were left with poor infrastructure and teachers' employment conditions became precarious, due to both the lack of a decent career plan and the sharp decline in real wages. In practice, most public education came to be socially regarded as "poor schooling for poor people". Education as a whole was subordinated to crass educational technicism, based on the ideology of Human Capital, culminating in the obligatory professionalization of the entire Brazilian high school system in 1971 (by Law 5692), a measure attenuated by Law 7044 in 1982.

One of the few areas able to guarantee some intellectual and political autonomy for those educators who resisted the dictatorship was the emerging postgraduate sector, particularly from the late 1970s onward. A small group of Marxist researchers or, if not Marxists, critics

of educational reproductivism, gained strength in the new programs. Despite their theoretical pluralism, they converged in their defence of the unitary character of public schooling, confirming the Gramscian influence on Brazilian critical educational thought. It is important to remember that Gramsci's work began to be translated into Portuguese by Carlos Nelson Coutinho in the mid-1960s, even before the French and US editions of the author's works came out.

Marxist critical education was prominent in the debate about unitary schools, particularly in the work of Saviani (2003), a Gramscian intellectual who had a major influence in postgraduate education and, increasingly, in the MST, especially through interlocutors of his work such as Gaudêncio Frigotto, and made an important contribution to the organization of historical-critical pedagogy. Left-wing education in the 1980s emphasized the need for polytechnic schools, which were regarded as the one kind capable of ensuring that students mastered the scientific bases of the various technologies developed and perfected in the process of capital reproduction, aiming to strengthen workers' resistance to the expropriation of their knowledge. Socialist thought permeated the texts because the concept of the unitary, polytechnic school took experience in the world of labour as a fundamental pedagogical principle capable of overcoming the disjunction between thinking and doing, the core of socialist pedagogy, as advocated by Marx, Lenin, and Gramsci. These contributions are widespread in the MST's current propositions for schooling.

In education workers' struggles to protect public education in the Constitution of 1988, in the National Education Guidelines and Bases Act (LDB, 1988-1996) and in the National Education Plan (PNE, 1996-2001), theoretical convergences between left-wing academic sectors and trade unions were consolidated within the National Forum in Defence of Public Schooling (FNDEP).

With the trade union presence in the FNDEP and the increasing use of forms of protest typical of the working class, such as strikes, marches, days of action in conjunction with other groups of workers, the critical debate about education expanded beyond the academic circle that was active in postgraduate programs. The late 1990s saw the establishment of the first university courses based on the MST's demands. In the same period, the State's neoliberal reform measures became more incisive, affecting public education as a whole, and therefore the struggles by the FNDEP and trade unions became more radical after a long period of decline. In a change to their form of organization, FNDEP entities closest to the unions convened a National Education Congress in 1996, repeated in 1997, which led to the drafting of an anti-neoliberal National Education Plan to serve as counterpoint to the government plan.

It was in this context in the late 1990s that the MST – influenced by Paulo Freire, Antonio Gramsci, and Florestan Fernandes – started defending public schooling more directly. This political development was most clearly expressed in the organization of the Pedagogy of the Movement (Caldart, 2012b, p. 546), which included the MST's education policy for rural areas.

Indeed, in the late 1990s, with anti-capitalist social struggles on the retreat and the counter-reforms undertaken by the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso making headway, the two strands of critical thinking came closer together. The historical-critical school, which had greater influence in universities and trade unions and focused primarily on public educational institutions, was recovering from a bitter defeat, because its National Education Guidelines and Bases Act (LDB) had been roundly defeated in the National Congress. The educational school based on the works of Paulo Freire, more prevalent in social movements and NGOs, had been feeling the effects of the offensive against land reform, whereby land occupied by the movements was excluded from any land reform. Meanwhile, NGOs became increasingly separated from the movements, lost resources from international foundations, and gradually fell hostage to the direct funding of capital through corporations or even large public companies such as Petrobrás. Many had to soften the critical content of their educational projects, a process which, a decade later, would result in the complete submission of most NGOs to the Education For All Movement organized by the capitalist General Staff (Evangelista and Leher, 2012).

Among the most important new syntheses resulting from these convergences were certain developments in universities, such as the creation of courses at undergraduate (agronomy, rural education, law, veterinary medicine, geography, etc.), specialization, and extension levels based on left-wing groups and collectives in conjunction with the MST–Via Campesina. These courses were subsequently joined by the MST’s main political training school: The Florestan Fernandes National School (Leher, 2005).

These confluences between the two strands would not have been possible, at least in terms of what occurred in Brazil, without the MST. As pointed out above, the Christian, militant strand of the Basic Ecclesial Communities and the Pastoral Land Commission has always claimed Freire as its own, not least for his connection with Catholicism. However, just as Freire dialogues with Gramsci, so Liberation Theology and, particularly, the MST, claim the Marxist tradition. This is the mainstay that ties the Movement to Marxist intellectuals. The interest of the education and training sectors of the MST in Marxist extension courses paved the way to the convergences between the two critical traditions.

In educational terms, the synthesis expresses the convergence between popular education (pedagogy of alternation, mystical pedagogy, active schooling, pedagogy of the oppressed, praxis) and Marxist critical pedagogy (omni-lateral education, polytechnic education, work as an educational principle, unitary schooling, hegemony, collective class intellectuals). Thus, Marxist educational thought came to value social struggle more effectively as a process of political learning and consciousness formation. As expressed by Caldart (2012):

The Pedagogy of the Movement recovers, reaffirms and, at the same time, continues—from a specific reality, with its particular subjects and at a particular time in history—the theoretical and practical construction of a concept of materialist, historical and dialectical basic education ... It is also the heir of the Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Paulo Freire), which, as an embodiment of the same concept, brings to pedagogical reflection the formative potential of the condition of oppression, which humanly demands an attitude of seeking freedom and

fighting those who oppress and puts the oppressed in the potential position of subjects of their own liberation ... (p. 551).

In contrast to a part of the popular education projects practiced in the 1960s, the goal of Pedagogy of the Movement is directly the anti-capitalist struggle and socialism. The perspective that it upholds includes a strategy to promote public schooling, which, however, is not the only formative space, as can be seen from the existence of two specific sectors in the MST organization chart: education and training. There is no dissociation between them, but complementarity: this Pedagogy has anti-capitalist goals, which requires training in theoretical-practical “doing” of class struggle. The Pedagogy of the Movement won't fit in school, but school fits in the Pedagogy of the Movement, because of the role that it may have in its political and educational project, but it will only play that role if it embodies a historicity not limited to itself (Caldart 2012b, p. 551-552).

The MST's proposals on education have similarities to those of other Latin American movements that are also taking responsibility for the political education of their militants and the education of their children and youth. The experiences of the Zapatistas with their Good Government Councils, the Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO) in Mexico, and the National Coordination of Indigenous Peoples of Ecuador (CONAIE) are representative of this trend. Popular education, as expressed in the Pedagogy of the Movement, is inseparable from social struggles.

The real education of the masses can never be separated from their independent political, and especially revolutionary, struggle. Only struggle educates the exploited class. Only struggle discloses to it the magnitude of its own power, widens its horizon, enhances its abilities, clarifies its mind, forges its will.<sup>vii</sup>

However, differences remain on political education, particularly in the strategic debate on the formation of consciousness in the dialectic "class-in-itself" and "class-for-itself"—which in objective terms involves the problem of "conventional wisdom," "common sense," and "philosophical consciousness," to use Gramscian terms. Political education requires its own spaces, self-organized by the class that lives on its own work and is exploited, and a specific type of relationship between teachers and students. If there are no links between the educational space and the real, concrete movements that effectively carry out the struggles, there is a tendency for education to be dogmatic, as if it were a literary club of bourgeois dilettantes who do not work (Leher, 2012). These ideas were articulated by Gramsci (1925):

We are an organization of struggle and in our ranks one studies in order to improve, to sharpen the fighting ability of individual members and of the organization as a whole to better understand the positions of our enemy as well as our own so that we are better able to adapt our day-to-day action to these positions. Study of culture, for us, is nothing other than theoretical knowledge of our immediate and ultimate goals, and of the manner in which we can succeed to translate them into deeds (Gramsci, *L'Ordine Nuovo*, April 1, 1925).

Every relationship of hegemony is necessarily a pedagogic relationship, as can be seen in the forces that make up the nation (class struggles at national level) and in power relations at

international level (Leher, 2012). This process encompasses material, cultural and aesthetic forms of production.

### **To be subjects of history: A proposal for a Permanent Forum of Social Movements, Popular Education and Universities.**

Starting from the historical process of social movements in popular and critical education, as part of the group COLEMARX at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), we have created a research group on Popular Education and Social Movements that is promoting, with other groups and social movements, a permanent forum of Social Movements, Popular Education and Universities. The Forum started its activities in 2014, and aims to articulate the University with the framework of social movements that are politically engaged in the rural and urban contest of Rio de Janeiro. Included in the Forum are urban and rural workers, peasants, Indigenous peoples, antagonist students, groups that work on literacy with traditional communities on popular culture, acting in social contexts of inequality, from the peripheries to the centre of Rio de Janeiro.

One of the objectives of the Forum is to create the conditions for the University to review and renew its research and action, learning permanently from social movements and opening spaces for a critical dialogue among different groups and movements that are historically suppressed and excluded in Brazil. The proposal is, through seminars, cultural actions, political and artistic actions, to articulate social differences in common cultural actions that involve many groups in the cultural struggle against the expansion of capital in education. It is a collective initiative of academic groups, social movements and research laboratories that act on popular and critical education in rural and urban areas, expanding and systematizing these relationships, creating a systematic and permanent articulation between the University and Social Movements. These actions aim to recreate and expand debate about the political space for popular education against the expansion of capital, and to extend the relationship between culture, popular classes, social movements, public schools and universities as subjects that interact in an organic and systematic way against the pressures of the educational market. It also means questioning the history of these relationships, through debates, research experiences and projects, forums, plenary sessions, meetings, cultural activities.

The main issues/nucleus of the Forum are: “Popular education in rural context”, “Popular education in the urban context”, “Popular education and the public school”, “Literacy and popular culture”, “Indigenous education”, “Organization and criminalization of political movements”. Up to this point, the Forum has included the following groups: Movement of Self Organization (*Movimento de Organização de Base - MOB*), Landless Rural worker Movement (*Movimento dos trabalhadores Sem Terra – MST*), the Collective of Marxism and Education (*COLEMARX – UFRJ University of Rio de Janeiro*), the Forum of traditional communities of the island of Parati (*Fórum Comunidades Tradicionais Parati*), groups of educators for adults literacy (*Grupo de Alfabetização da EJA – Fórum EJA – UFRJ*), groups of Popular Education (*Grupo de Educação Popular - GEP*), Precarious workers

(*Trabalhadores Terceirizados*), Student Movement (*Frente Livre Estudantil*), groups of the Theatre of the oppressed (*Instituto Boal*), Popular Movement for open libraries (*Movimento popular abre biblioteca*), Indigenous Resistance (*Aldeia Resistência do Maracanã*), and others that are gathering in this political process.

The Forum aims to discuss questions such these: how can we work effectively with social movements to create critical pedagogy? How can we work with social movements to carry out research about social movements? How can the Forum contribute to the international movement of Critical Pedagogy and Popular Education in order to propose, develop and advance popular experiences for a democratic and participative education?

Based on principles of collective participation, popular education, and resistance against neo-liberal education, the Forum aims to go beyond the individualism, competitiveness, and selfishness of education under neoliberalism. Rather, it aims to build analysis and debate of public policies with students, researchers, professors, school teachers, and educators, examining in detail the impact of national and transnational capital on educational work, specifying and underlining the specific policies that impact negatively on the work of teachers, communities, and students, and proposing theories, experiences, cultural and political actions, and research based on popular and critical education.

The Forum is guided by a philosophy based on an active, dynamic, and particularly participatory vision of the exercise of educational praxis within and between different and plural cultures, that enables the exchange of visions and other ways of feeling and acting on educational relationships. It features an experience of knowledge based in social reality, promoting dynamic participation of people from different backgrounds and cultures through actions based on dialogue and activities that respect the subjective autonomy of social movements, and that don't accept inequality as normal, but search permanently for possibilities of transformation in a collective process.

Sensitive thought "feels," although classical pedagogy assumes what it does not always understand or know; the intellectual element "knows," but when it confines itself to the rational it does not always understand or, especially, feel. The error of the intellectual consists in believing that one can know without understanding, and especially without feeling and being passionate. In this respect, the *Theatre of the Oppressed* and *The Aesthetics of the Oppressed* by Augusto Boal also represent an important space for reflection and action to train militants, educators, and teachers of the Movements. The process of action and reflection covers the aesthetic that is included as a creative process in the political-pedagogical intentions of the movement.

In a context of mass struggle in Brazil, the issues of education and political training are of huge importance in any strategic debate. A pedagogy that does not enable people's consciousness to rise above the economic and corporate moment, that is not able to fashion out of conventional wisdom a collective core of common sense that can raise their consciousness, will almost certainly reproduce the existing order. The trail forged from the



syntheses of Marxist, popular and humanist points of view in historical-critical education and popular education in Latin America can engender slower education processes, a pedagogy that may allow people to go further, beyond capitalist society.

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<sup>i</sup> The economic policy of national-developmentism, based on growth target of industrial production and infrastructure and the consequent increase of consumption, was particularly criticized by Brazilian sociologist Florestan Fernandes for the relationship between this model and what he defined as “dependent capitalism” in which the integration into the capitalist world happens in a dependence from the advanced capitalist Countries.

<sup>ii</sup> João Pedro Stédile (ed.) *A Questão agrária no Brasil*, vol. 4 – História e natureza das Ligas Camponesas – 1954-1964, SP: Expressão Popular, 2006.

<sup>iii</sup> Teixeira's murder was portrayed in Eduardo Coutinho's masterful documentary "Cabra marcado para morrer", filmed in 1964, but because of the dictatorship it could only be completed after two decades.

<sup>iv</sup> Pereira, A. Vittoria, P. A luta pela descolonização e as experiências de alfabetização na Guiné-Bissau: Amílcar Cabral e Paulo Freire, *Revista de Estudos Históricos*, Rio de Janeiro: FGV, 2013

<sup>v</sup> Marcos del Roio, *Sociologia e socialismo em Florestan Fernandes*. In: Martinez, P. H. (ed.) *Florestan: ou o sentido das coisas*. SP: Boitempo, 1998, p. 104.

<sup>vi</sup> Coutinho (2000) makes some interesting comments on this subject.

<sup>vii</sup> V. I. Lenin, “Lecture on the 1905 Revolution (January 1917)”, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/jan/09.htm> (accessed March 23, 2014).

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