

THE LANDLESS PEASANT MOVEMENT AND POPULAR EDUCATION: ADDRESSING POSTCOLONIAL VIOLENCE IN BRAZIL

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In the context of Latin America's resistance to hegemonic power relations, several subaltern movements emerged with their own educational projects and pedagogies. The Brazilian Landless Peasant Movement (MST) adopted a model of "popular education" which was recognized as a political actor endeavouring to counter colonial injustices and ongoing forms of neo-colonial violence.

By applying a 4Rs analytical framework (cf. Novelli et al., 2017), the paper analyses how the movement's aims, philosophy, organisation, and role of popular education have been able to promote social justice and peacebuilding processes, at the same time discussing constraints and limits encountered.

Keywords: Landless Peasant Movement, Brazil, Popular Education, Resistance, Postcolonialism, Violence.

Vários movimentos proletariados com projetos educacionais e pedagogias próprias surgiram no contexto da resistência às relações hegemônicas de poder na América Latina. No Brasil, o Movimento Sem Terra (MST) adotou um modelo de "educação popular" pelo qual foi

reconhecido como ator político. O movimento pretendia enfrentar as injustiças coloniais e as formas de violência pós-colonial. Aplicando um quadro analítico chamado 4Rs (cf. Novelli et al., 2017), o artigo analisa como os objetivos, a filosofia, a organização e o papel da educação popular do movimento têm sido capazes de promover justiça social e processos de construção da paz e, ao mesmo tempo, discute restrições e limites encontrados.

Palavras-chave: Movimento Sem Terra, Brasil, Educação Popular, Resistência, Pós-colonialismo, Violência

Introduction

Brazil is a country characterised by persistent contradictions and inequalities. While it emerges as one of the fastest growing economies in the world and the largest economies amongst all Latin American countries (O' Neill, 2022), it presents high levels of inequality in land distribution, income, and poverty amongst different groups (Carter, 2010; Da Costa et al., 2019; Rolon & Vieira, 2020; Silveira et al., 2016). The country has a long history of colonialism and maintains strategic relations with former colonial countries, which provide economic growth and global recognition (Cesarino, 2012). However, as dependency theorists such as Escobar (2004) argue, the colonial roots also maintain the country in a 'peripheral' and 'dependent' position compared to the 'western' world. These neocolonial power relations not only affect the country's material and economic conditions but have repercussions also on the cultural misrecognition of marginalised people. In Galtung's (2000) terms, direct, structural, and cultural violence are thus linked. To resist such forms of domination, during the 1980s, several subaltern collective movements emerged in the context of a 'fourth wave of democracy' and left-leaning governments

in Latin America (Pahnke et al., 2015). One of the most active is the Landless Peasant Movement (MST - *Movimento Sin Terras*, in Portuguese), which emerged as a coalition of peasants claiming land reform. The movement's strategy, organisation, and philosophical principles were reflected in an alternative educational model, which was a key instrument for the movement's struggle (Barbosa, 2016; Kane, 2016).

The paper aims to identify, analyse and discuss how the Landless Peasant Movement (MST from here on), through the promotion of a popular model of education (Kane, 2016), was able to respond to Brazil's forms of violence that continued as a consequence of colonialism. The analysis is based on the 4Rs theoretical framework developed by the *Research Consortium on Education and Peacebuilding (2014-2016)*. The adoption of this framework provides an original contribution to the studies on subaltern forms of resistance. The framework identifies four key aspects (Redistribution, Representation, Recognition, and Reconciliation), which help analyse the contribution of education to sustainable peacebuilding and are seen as necessary to achieve peace-building and social transformation processes (Novelli et al., 2017). The framework is suitable for analysing the Brazilian context, considered a place where violence and inequalities are perpetuated. Using this conceptual framework, I explore and analyse the link between the MST's educational innovations and its wider political and social goals.

The paper is structured as follows. In the first section, a theoretical framework based on Galtung's (1990) concept of violence and the adoption of a postcolonial perspective will present the context where the MST emerged, the legacies of the struggle over land, and the contemporary injustices the marginalised rural population face. The methods and analytical framework adopted are further described. In the main body of the paper, results are presented. I will first explore the emergence of MST as a

form of social movement linked to subaltern forms of resistance, focusing on the role of education and pedagogy in the movement's struggle and achievements. Next, I utilise the 4R framework, Redistribution, Representation, Recognition, and Reconciliation, to describe and analyse the key strategies, approaches and educational aspects of the MST. I then problematize some of the movements' potential contradictions and challenges in achieving its goals. The last part of the paper concludes with a reflective overview of the main points of the discussion.

The contribution of this article in relation to existing literature is based on the achievement of these stated aims. Although there is literature on the MST (e.g., Barbosa 2016; Carter, 2010; Kane, 2016; Machado, 2011; Tarlau, 2013a; Tarlau, 2013b; Tarlau et al., 2014), to my knowledge no study has yet analysed the movement through a conceptual framework which visibilizes and discusses the use of pedagogical and political strategies against multiple forms of systemic oppression.

Context: Brazil's structural and cultural violence

To analyse Brazil's context, Galtung's concepts of structural and cultural violence emerge as relevant. The author refers to three forms of violence: direct, structural, and cultural (Galtung, 1990). Direct violence refers to a direct injury, [a visible event] perpetrated against another human being. Structural violence refers to the contextual [indirect] material conditions, inequalities, and social differences linked to the global and local redistribution of resources (Dilts, 2012). Finally, cultural violence is associated with the symbolic cultural means "that can be used to justify or legitimise direct or structural violence" (Galtung, 1990, p. 1). Cultural violence forms include religion, ideology, art, language, and science. Galtung argues that structural and cultural violence forms become internalised and institutionalised, maintaining and

reproducing a condition of violence through what the author describes as a “triangular symptom of violence” (Galtung, 1990, p. 302). Furthermore, according to the author, a positive peace-building process should come from challenging the status quo and addressing those inequalities and injustices (Galtung, 1967).

Colonialism, postcolonialism, and struggle over land: structural and material conditions

Brazil’s material and economic structures can be considered forms of structural violence. It is essential to acknowledge Brazil’s position within a subcontinent with a long colonial and postcolonial history (Cesarino, 2012). The struggle of the MST is indeed profoundly linked to conflict over land, which emerged during the colonial slave plantation system (the colonial period under Portuguese rule comprises the period from 1500 to 1815). In this context, several large-scale land expropriations caused peasants to lose their land and the establishment of a system of ‘latifundus’ (Barbosa, 2016). Land ownership was concentrated in the hands of creole elites entitled to live on it.

Forms of coloniality continued also after political independence. Indeed, after the abolition of slavery (1888), a ‘land law’ enabled consistent gifts of part of the land to privileged colonial families. The best land was used to export crops and for for-profit use, not for the productive needs of the wider population (Kane, 2016).

Further, during the 1950s and the two dictatorships (1964-84), many rural workers were forced to leave their lands and migrate from rural areas to favelas in the cities with the modernization of agriculture. Those remaining in rural areas faced an increase in impoverishment, misery, and inequality (Tarlau, 2013a).

From the 1960s to the late 1980s, beliefs for radical change in Latin America were strong and several grassroots

struggles for democracy emerged. Through the 20th century, organisations rose, claimed and occupied unused lands as a form of non-violent strategy (Tarlau et al., 2014). However, they were silenced by the 1964 military coup. The land became an investment for new economic groups, which used it for their profit and financial interest (Kane, 2016).

Further on, the economic crisis of the 1970s exacerbated the conditions of rural people. An answer to the economic crisis came from Brazil's administrations (Cardoso to Rouseff presidencies), who opened up to the agri-business sector and rural elites' interests to increase economic gains (Tarlau, 2015), showing a resistance of the elite to the democratic struggles.

As a consequence of a long history of struggles (Tarlau, et al., 2014) and since its return to democratic rule (1985), the country has been actively pursuing agrarian reform (*Brazil - country profiles*, 2011). The 1988 Constitution highlights the government's commitment to agrarian reform, ensuring land rights and cultural diversity for the rural population. However, although the Constitution also enables the expropriation of land that does not comply with its social function, most of it is still underused or misused (Carter, 2010). Forms of inequalities linked to the agrarian structure are thus inherited from the colonial period and further strengthened through neo-liberal agricultural policies and capitalist development.

During the 2000s, the MST established relationships with left-wing governments (PT - *The Workers' Party*), which supported the movement, but through a market integration (Bretón et al., 2022). Agri-business and private interests emerged clearly also in the more recent contemporary governments, escalating into waves of violent repressions against peasants and indigenous communities during the recent Temer (2016-2018) and conservative Bolsonaro government (2018- present).

These processes, as a consequence of the country's history, have led to unequal resource distribution, persistent poverty (Silveira et al., 2016), the lack of employment opportunities, and the violation of human rights in the countryside (Carter, 2010). Brazil is the country in Latin America with the least significant land distribution (Carter, 2010; WCMC, 2021), with almost half of it in the hands of one percent of the population (*Brazil - Country Profiles*, 2011). As can be appreciated in the table here below, Brazilian wealth and land distribution is still and persistently highly unequal. The country ranks amongst the highest in the GINI index (*GINI index World Bank estimate*, 2019) and is amongst the ten most unequal countries in the world (Sasse, 2021).

Table1: Brazil - social and geographical indicators

Indicator, year, source	
Population, total (<i>Brazil - Economic Indicators</i> , 2022)	213.939.639
Population, urban (<i>Brazil - Economic Indicators</i> , 2022)	86.2% of total population
Land (<i>Brazil - Economic Indicators</i> , 2022)	8.358.140 sq km
Land use - agricultural land (<i>Brazil - Economic Indicators</i> , 2022)	32.9%
Arable land (<i>Brazil - Economic Indicators</i> , 2022)	8.6%
Land ownership concentration (UNEP - WCMC, 2021)	GINI index of 0.73 (1% of population owns 45% of all land)
Uncultivated land (<i>Brazil - Country Profiles</i> , 2011 based on National Institute on Colonisation and Agrarian Reform - INCRA)	1mil square km
Indigenous secure land rights (<i>Brazil - Country Profiles</i> , 2011)	12%

GINI Index (<i>GINI index World Bank estimate, 2019</i>)	48.9
Distribution of wealth, by wealth percentile (2021) (Romero, 2022)	Bottom 50%: - 4% Middle 40%: 20.6% Top 10%: 79.8% Top 1%: 49.8%
Occupational index, by race groups (<i>DESIGUALDADES SOCIAIS POR COR OU RAÇA NO BRASIL, 2018</i>)	68,6% (white people) 29,9% (black/mulatos)
Rural youth population (2017) (Rolon & Vieira, 2020)	11,7 million
Poverty in rural/agricultural populations (2013) (Silveira et al.,2016)	19%
Average years of education, by area (rural/urban) (Da Costa, 2019, based on Pnad/IBGE)	9,1 (urban areas) 5,8 (rural areas)
Percentage of students who are enrolled in higher education (Da Costa, 2019, based on Pnad/IBGE)	19,7% (urban areas) 7,2% (rural areas)
Access to water services, by area (Rodrigues, 2021)	88% (urban areas) 72% (rural area)
Children with access to drinkable water, by wealth groups (Hermoza, 2016)	20% richest: 99% 40% poorest: 87,6%

Source: author's elaboration

The Brazilian context can also be referred to as a 'situated postcolonialism,' where the conditions of the indigenous rural population are exacerbated by the country's position as an emerging global actor (cf. De Souza and Andreotti, 2009). The process of domination of the rural areas has led to a division of the country into 'two Brazils': an 'urban modern' and a 'rural traditional' one, with the former being considered the 'shame of Brazilian's modernization' (Cesarino, 2012: 89). In this sense, Brazil has faced a 'double colonisation' (Santos, 2002 in Cesarino, 2012), where the legacies of colonial relations are still present and where external colonial oppression has shifted into the

hands of national elite groups exercising domination over subaltern ones. In this sense, the term “post” in postcolonialism does not mean that colonialism has ended; rather that there are political, economic and socio-cultural consequences of colonialism (Hickling-Hudson et al., 2004). From the perspective of conflict and social justice studies, such economic dimensions (i.e., resource inequalities and struggle over land) generate a sense of resentment and injustice and they can be the underlying causes that fuel conflict (Ellison & Smith, 2012).

Western hegemony and ideology as cultural violence: the role of resistance theories

The hegemonic ideology that reproduces dominant power relations can be considered a form of cultural violence in Brazil. The Brazilian nation-state was built by incorporating indigenous people into modernity and ‘civilization’ (Cesarino, 2012). This has generated a culturist indigenous conflict inherited from the colonial period. ‘Modernity’ is, in this sense, associated with a Eurocentric project, which hegemonically represents the world from its claimed position of centre and universality (Escobar, 2004; Mignolo, 2013). In addition to forms of structural and material inequalities, the ties with colonialism have, therefore, also led to the subordinated cultural position of Brazil’s indigenous population (de Souza and Andreotti, 2016). In this sense, Mignolo (2013) refers to the idea of ‘coloniality’ as the emergence of cultural inequalities and ‘cultural supremacies,’ which exist in the global structures of today. It follows that, according to postcolonial theory, “we cannot assume that colonialism is over, only that colonialism continues to order and reorder the economic and cultural hierarchies of knowledge and discipline” (Hickling-Hudson et al., 2004: 3).

The neo-liberal paradigm and ideology promoted in education, as well as the neoclassical doctrine of the scientific economy, are forms of cultural violence and domination of one group over the marginalised others (Galtung, 1990). In Brazil's context, recent administrations and national elites have served the interests of an international order based on capitalist values and economic profit. Again, in the concept of a 'double colonisation', Brazil is considered a 'third world' periphery to the 'first world.' At the same time, the indigenous cultures are located in a 'peripheral' position in the urban industrialised modern nation-state (De Souza and Andreotti, 2009).

The ideology and actions of the MST can be therefore seen as decolonising struggle and read through the lens of southern resistance theories, which refer to those set of debates, discourses, and practices that challenge the European/'first world' domination and their effects on the distribution of world resources, identities and social relations (Andreotti, 2006). Accordingly, postcolonialism acknowledges "a space for moving beyond the negative patterns that persist after colonialism began (...) seeking to explain opposition, privilege, domination, struggle, resistance and subversion (Hickling-Hudson, et al., 2004: 2). Different postcolonial perspectives exist, but I will refer to a Marxist/neo-Marxist reading, which relates the dominant hegemonic colonialist discourses to a power system. Accordingly, Brazil has a long history of resistance, with peasant leagues and movements which emerged in the North-east of the country during the 1950s-60s, in the call for a 'revolutionary struggle,' creating a mobilised collective identity that contested the western hegemonic power relations of a modern industrialised Brazil (Pahnke et al., 2015). To address and transform the oppressive forces and power relations, processes of self-organised movements and networks, which foster counter-hegemonic discourses and practices

through a ‘politics of difference,’ emerge (Escobar, 2004). These liberation processes aim to create a space of resistance, where the marginalised are heard and included through democratic voice, agency, and self-determination (Andreotti & Souza, 2016; Hooks, 1989). Popular education¹ movements in Latina America are linked to class struggles and [uniquely] connected to a collective class action. Indeed, popular education experiences played a significant role in the grassroots struggles for change, as they encompass active participation, political awareness, collective values, participatory democracy and a range of specific skills (Kane, 2016). They contest the reproduction of class relations and the interest of the dominant class, also resisting the performative, market-oriented, and neo-liberal ideology which dominates the educational agendas (Mayo, 2013). Popular education is based on a clear analysis of inequality, oppression or injustice, and is informed by a clear political purpose, which has to do with the “struggle for a more just and egalitarian social order” (Crowther et al., 1999: 4). In this sense, “popular education is “popular” because it seeks to place its objectives, contents and methodologies at the service of this project of popular emancipation” (Torres, 2008: 18). Such ‘politics of resistance’ challenges the hegemonic cultural means and practices embedded in everyday life (cf. Mignolo, 2013).

In Brazil, this type of education can be traced back to the Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire and the Liberation Theology movements². Freire’s contribution is in fact relevant to understanding the philosophy and struggle of

¹ Popular education, often described as “education for critical consciousness” (Freire, 2000), is a movement, practice and theory of social change that emerged in the 70-80s in Latin America.

² ‘Liberation theology’ was a current that emerged during the 1960s/70s in Latin America by which priests defended the causes of the poor and supported political and economic struggles.

the MST. The author contrasts a popular education to the traditional “banking” educational method, which is seen as reinforcing a system of domination (Freire, 2000). As Bordieu and Passeron (1990) would also argue, forms of hierarchy in knowledge and education maintain and reproduce the structures of the social order. Schools are not neutral places but represent spaces where the values of a dominant class or group are reproduced through culture, relationships, and organisations (Bordieu & Passeron, 1990). In addition, Freire refers to ‘practices of resistance’, meaning a conscious and practical strategy of building a counter-hegemonic project (Freedman et al., 2014), such as a pedagogic model (‘pedagogy of the oppressed), which can emancipate and liberate the oppressed from the violent structures of relations and power they are subject to (Freire, 2000). Freire (2000) also sees education as a political space where critical thinking, dialogue, and collective action should be promoted to intervene and transform social reality.

Therefore, although the term “popular” education does not have a univocal meaning, and is sometimes associated with public schooling, as it supports public education as a fundamental right for everyone (Kane, 2016), it has less to do with helping the ‘disadvantaged’ and is very different in its aims from formal or informal education (Crowther et al., 1999; Barbosa et al., 2016). It refers instead to a set of principles based on critical consciousness, collective empowerment, commitment to social and political change, and a direct link between education and social action (Crowther et al., 1999).

Analytical Methods: the 4Rs Framework

I will use the 4Rs framework (cf. Novelli et al., 2017), an analytical tool created in the context of education conflict and peacebuilding studies (by the *Research Consortium on Education and Peacebuilding (2014-2016)*, in partnership

between UNICEF and the University of Amsterdam, the University of Sussex and Ulster University) to analyze the contribution of the Brazilian MST in resisting forms of cultural and structural violence, in a postcolonial perspective. Literature, web sources, and documents on the movement will be used as data sources. The 4Rs analytical framework will be used to analyse different aspects of the MST's work and philosophy according to Redistribution, Recognition, Representation, or Reconciliation processes. According to this conceptual framework, Redistribution is concerned with addressing inequalities, such as inputs and resources (access, outcomes, and resource allocation in the education sector). Recognition is discussed concerning diversity in terms of cultural recognition, curriculum representation of different groups, and citizenship participation. Representation relates to the dimension of the involvement in decision-making at the political level and in the governance and administration of the education system. Finally, Reconciliation processes focus on addressing past inequalities and injustices to achieve sustainable societal transformation and justice. However, these categorizations should not be taken as fixed boxes. As will emerge, the analysis of the MST and its contribution will be placed in nuanced spaces within these different aspects.

Results

The MST and the resisting role of education

Grassroots peasant movements spread all over Latin America as a way to address inequalities and forms of structural and cultural violence. One of the largest and most active is Brazil's movement of landless peasant workers (MST), which emerged during the mid-1980s to contest the historical inequalities in land ownership. The movement formed as a political actor during a conference

in 1984, which addressed rural issues and aimed to transform landless peasants' political, social, and cultural conditions by acknowledging the need for agrarian reform (Barbosa, 2016). The agrarian reform and rural struggles taking place were supported by priests who followed 'liberation theology.' They saw land redistribution as a way to transform the relations of production and achieve a more just, socialist-oriented society. In this line, the movement focuses on three main goals: land ownership, land reform, and the achievement of a just society (Kane, 2016). The first aim (land ownership) is related to peasants' right to land and land's 'social function,' also embedded in Brazil's constitution. As previously discussed, this right was historically denied because of land expropriation and for-profit use. Thus, to address the injustices over land ownership, groups of peasants and small farmers started to occupy the unutilized lands in the southern part of the country. This political action to contest the expropriation of land was one of the symbols of landless struggle and resistance from there on (Barbosa, 2016). The second aim of the movement is to democratise land use, which would serve as a complete structural change by including marginalised rural populations in society (Kane 2016). In fact, after successfully occupying the land, peasants created 'settlements' (or 'encampments' if considered illegal) in the occupied territories, where families lived while negotiating for the reform and reassignment of lands.

Peasants organised networks of families and small groups with leadership committees, which encouraged protests and promoted alternative rural development plans (Carter, 2010; Mariano et al., 2016). The organisation in settlements also enabled the development of an alternative education project. Initially, the MST mobilised the right to education through forced actions, occupying government sites. The movement then started to develop specific pedagogical and teacher training programs in the camps,

which were sensitive to their cause and needs (Tarlau, 2013b). In 1987, the Education sector of the movement was created, and by 2009 fifty secondary schools and fifty-two 'itinerant schools' (which have permission to move around within the communities) were recognized by the government as state public schools (Mariano et al., 2016).

The movement's overall goal is to create a 'just society' and achieve a 'popular democratic state.' The movement aims at building a political actor and a historical project which can collectively transform the reality of the countryside (Barbosa, 2016; Kane, 2016) and thus achieve broader social justice in the whole country. To summarise, the movement started its struggle through a strategy of 'occupation' of the land and further developed an autonomous project aimed at societal transformation.

In terms of educational methods, the movement uses a popular pedagogy and 'socialist educational project,' which can be seen as resisting the reproduction of social and cultural inequalities and capitalist modes of production (Pahnke et al., 2015; Tarlau, 2013b). The next four sections will discuss how the 4Rs framework of 'Redistribution, Recognition, Representation and Reconciliation' relates to the MST's education project in its socio-political context.

Redistribution: an education for agrarian reform

The first "R" of redistribution relates to a range of 'remedies' to social injustices caused by unequal distribution of resources, exclusive systems of participation in economic structures, and a lack of equal opportunities (Novelli et al., 2017). Redistribution is not only related to the goals of MST's education, but also to the struggle over the redistribution of natural resources and the claims over rights of land, land ownership, and use. Considering the development of the movement's struggle, the redistribution of educational access and

resources would not have been achieved without changes in property and land use. During the four left-wing administrations (between 2003 and 2016), over 51.2 million hectares were distributed to about 720.000 families (da Silveira et al., 2016, pp. 11–12). However, as some authors argue, such redistribution had faced limitations vis-a-vis large private owners, where in the end only between 120.000 and 250.000 families benefited from the agrarian reform (Sauer & Mészáros, 2017).

After having gained control over the land, the MST asked for an increase in access to primary, secondary, and tertiary education for the rural population, due to the government's inadequate attention to access to public schooling for children living in the countryside (Barbosa, 2016). The MST started to put pressure on governments to build schools in their communities and provided education through 'itinerant schools,' which were recognized by the government but administered by the MST and had permission to move wherever the encampments were located (Barbosa, 2016). Incorporating schools in the camps ensured that every aspect of the schooling system reflected the causes and needs of the movement (Carter, 2010). In fact, along with the request for access to public schooling, the movement, after realising that the state's education project was in sharp contrast with the MST goals of social transformation, started to also ask for "another type of school" (Mariano et al., 2016: 213). Demands were related to political training for activists, and the transformation of public schools which contributed to the movement's political and social vision for the countryside. The goal of the itinerant schools was to develop students' capacity for autonomous action and self-governance, who would then fight for new forms of social relations in the wider society (Mariano et al., 2016).

In this sense, there is a profound link between rural schooling and the movement's struggle i.e., concretely attempting to interrupt the capitalist relations of

production in the countryside. The movement fights for values such as solidarity, collectivity, self-governance, and autonomy, against capitalist development, which is seen as having exploited and dehumanised peasants, and sees literacy and knowledge as crucial ways to promote a transformative society (Machado, 2011; Tarlau et al., 2014). Also, the technical and commercial skills promoted in the curriculum are related to agricultural socialist modes of production. A fundamental component of the movement's philosophy is the importance of manual work shaping intellectual study (Machado, 2011). In this sense, students plan the production of school agriculture and take care of the plantations, thus supporting a 'socialist pedagogical model' (Tarlau, 2013b), where rural workers cultivate their land and promote collective modes of production. Family production, indigenous seed preservation, and diversification of crops are examples of alternative models of production (based on cooperative collective work) that are a contrast to the capitalist industrial agricultural system (Pahnke et al., 2015) and to the individualistic and competitive state education model, often based on textbooks and a standardised teaching (Mariano et al., 2016).

Although recognized as public schools, by 2016 most of the itinerant schools were closed because of the critiques, and direct political attacks received by the state, as a consequence of the threat perceived by the elites (Mariano et al., 2016). However, since its formation, the MST has pressured governments to build almost 2.000 new rural primary schools in the occupied encampments with 200,000 children attending them (Tarlau, 2013a). In fact, one of the most important strengths of the MST was that representatives of encampments and settlements came together within the organisation and in social mobilizations to pressure the state; by the 2000s the movement had thus achieved a wide territorial autonomy (Bretòn et al., 2022).

In addition, the movement also received significant recognition and funding from international institutions such as UNESCO and UNICEF, which enabled the expansion of educational access for children and youth living in camps and settlements (Tarlau, 2015). Under President Lula, a bachelor's degree program in pedagogy was implemented (LEDOC). This trained and certified people to teach in rural high schools and aimed at reaching the highest number of rural students possible. The MST thus first addressed broader issues of land redistribution and was further able to develop an education model supportive of the material conditions and ideology of the peasants' struggle.

Recognition: a practice of culture

The second "R" of recognition entails possible solutions to injustices that have to do with status inequalities, often related to inadequate acceptance or space for cultural, ethnic, linguistic, racial, gender, age, or other diversities (Novelli et al., 2017). The socio-cultural recognition of peasants' identity is, in this sense, a relevant part of the program's education and pedagogy. The movement's educational model focuses on peasants' cultural identity and claims for culturally relevant and meaningful education (Mariano et al., 2016). As a result, during the 1990s, the MST achieved a concrete project (*Educação do Campo* - Education of and by the countryside) and developed its educational system, representing the identity and diversity of peasant communities. The *Educação do Campo* project aimed at creating an autonomous space for education that responded to the local needs, culture, and knowledge of rural people (Barbosa, 2016). The MST also has 'itinerant schools,' which have autonomy regarding education. Resistance and learning are thus seen as coming from below, from the "broader thinking" within the

‘peripheral’ countries, to connect language, power, and knowledge’ (Andreotti, 2006; Mignolo 2013). To resist the ‘cultural logic of domination’, it is, in fact, necessary to provide a space of resistance that goes beyond maintaining one’s own culture, values, and knowledge (De Souza & Andreotti, 2016).

To achieve these goals, the movement uses a specific teaching approach named ‘pedagogy of the land,’ based on developing a collective identity and respect for diversity, linking anti-capitalist struggle, education, and culture (Kane, 2016; Tarlau et al., 2014). One of the movement’s principles is the promotion of cultural practice, focused on practising inherited values, activities, and the enhancement of different local cultures (Mariano et al., 2016). Rural culture, beliefs, practices, and traditions remain essential to the MST struggle (Kane, 2016). For example, students engage in a daily ‘mistica,’ which includes creative activities such as songs, performances, theatre plays, national anthems, and other cultural expressions (mst.org website). These are performed daily at schools and before any MST meeting and event. In addition, for education to be critical, relevant, and meaningful, it should be applied to real-life situations (cf. Ten dam & Volman, 2004). Teachers are at the forefront of this principle. They should continue developing a collective reflection of their practice (MST 1996).

The educator is crucial to this objective, as Freire points out (2000). Thus, it is not only curriculum values and skills previously mentioned that are important. Also vital is how the curriculum is transmitted, and how learning takes place. These ideas are reflected in the constitution, which in 1988 ensured a culturally relevant and meaningful education for all citizens, recognising the history of past rural struggles. In addition, through state recognition and MST concern for public schooling, there has been acknowledgment and recognition of the MST’s pedagogical approach by state, left-wing groups, and

international organisations (Tarlau, 2015). Indeed, during the first half of the 1990s, the movement received formal recognition from local municipal councils, which ran their teacher training programs. Also, through the LEDOC bachelor's degree program, thousands of activists could study for bachelor's and master's degrees, which provided an alternative education program for the rural population. Therefore, the role of the MST's system of education is to access and resist hegemonic discourses, and to ensure the right to self-determination and collective identity formation through meaningful, relevant education. The struggle for agrarian reform, through the role of education, can be thus read as a cultural struggle.

Representation: struggle for democracy through citizen action, participatory democracy, and critical thinking

The "R" for representation stems from the goal of transformative politics to counter the unequal participation of citizens in decision-making or claim-making processes (Novelli et al., 2017). In terms of Representation, the movement aims at achieving a socialist democracy, which is rooted in Marxism, socialism, and the theology of liberation ideologies (Tarlau, 2013b). To support this vision, the organisation and governance of the settlements are based on democratic and participatory principles and collective values. The camps are organised in cooperative units and shared housing, and decisions are based on dialogue, reflection, and consensus (Mariano et al., 2016). The collective units are then responsible for dialogue with national and federal committees.

Democratic and participatory principles are also highly promoted in the schooling system. For instance, the movement supports participatory governance of the school, where all members are equally crucial to contributing to the school decisions and collective actions

(MST, 1996). Indeed, education promotes the development of organisational skills such as democratic, cooperative management, and leadership competencies (MST 2005, in Machado, 2011). Also, students are involved in developing lessons and educational activities with the teachers, as well as planning financial and administrative tasks of the school. This horizontal relation is in line with Freire's notion of participatory pedagogy, where students are seen as active citizens and not empty vessels to be filled with information (Freire, 2000). The movement also highly supports the self-organisation and independence of students, who can come together, discuss, and make decisions relevant to their participation in school and society (MST 1996). Therefore, students must have a space to develop their solutions and practice democracy and democratic governance (Giroux, 2010). To support this, the curriculum focuses on enhancing active citizenship skills (i.e., exercising rights and developing awareness of public issues) that lead to engagement in political action. Education is used in this way as a base to exercise advocacy and democratic citizenship participation (Carter, 2010). Along with this, the notion of critical education and critical pedagogy as a way to increase voice, consciousness, and social mobilisation (Andreotti & Souza, 2016; Freire, 2000) seems particularly relevant.

It can be argued that by promoting skills and competencies with a social purpose, the movement is resisting the individualistic, for-profit, capitalist values embedded in neoliberal education agendas (cf. Giroux, 2010). By building a culture of collective work and cooperation, the movement creates a discourse that is counter hegemonic to the neo-liberal instrumental value of education (cf. Mayo, 2013). The movement successfully linked its education project (*Educação do Campo*) to rural public education and, therefore, carried out dialogue and gained representation in educational policy processes. Although successful in implementing its autonomous

educational system, the MST went beyond providing education in rural communities, and managed to transform its initiatives into a national proposal. The proposal was formally institutionalised within the Ministry of Education in 2004, was accredited with legal force by da Silva (2012), and further put into practice by President Rouseff.

Reconciliation: social transformation for the creation of a 'just society.'

The fourth “R” for reconciliation refers to a process that is crucial for (post)conflict societies to prevent returning to conflict and includes education’s role in dealing with the past and historical memory, truth and reparations, transitional justice processes, issues related to bringing communities together, methods of forgiving and healing and the broader processes of social and psycho-social healing (Novelli et al., 2017). Ultimately, the basis of the MST’s ideology is creating a ‘human environment.’ The focus is not only on increasing access to education. The movement has also created a theory of education that enhances the promotion of human values and relationships to build a new social order (Kane, 2016; Tarlau et al., 2014). For instance, according to the MST (2005, in Machado, 2011), the practice of ‘mistica’ earlier described enhances the values of social relations. It acts as a way to welcome new people into the family. For the MST, schools should promote values such as solidarity, social justice, respect for diversity, and realising dreams (MST, 1996). Horizontal, equal relations between teachers and students are precious to achieve these humanistic goals. In addition, in alignment with Freire’s (2000) advocacy of emancipatory and humanising education, for the MST, education should promote a class-consciousness and collective political action aimed at transforming society.

Therefore, the focus of educational content relies on the critical understanding of the movement's history, educational philosophy, principles, and links with the MST's struggle. Students learn from past histories of collective movements and analyse the experiences to move their struggles and action forward (Mariano et al., 2016). The curriculum enhances the application of knowledge to real-life situations and the historical context to promote active citizenship and mobilisation, again underlining the economic dimensions and material relations of production. In this sense, the link between theory and practice is highly valued (Machado, 2011; MST 1996) since the curriculum is based on concrete situations to which students can relate. Students are also continuously embedded in social struggles and participate in debates, protests, and occupations (Mariano et al., 2016). As Freire (2000) puts it, education has a political nature and popular education is intentionally political. The role of education, much broader than knowledge transmitting, is to promote understanding of the more comprehensive social order and the cultural universe in which schools are embedded and to use schools as a space of radical transformative action. The curriculum is not only formative but also socially beneficial, linked to the movement's objectives and broader societal interests (Tarlau, 2015). Schools become politicised through processes of 'conscientização' (Freire, 2000) - which means conscious awareness, critical reflection linked with 'praxis' (i.e., modes of practical and political action) - and which enables schools to contribute to the transformation of society and the 'liberation' of the oppressed (Freire, 2000). The movement is thus profoundly linked to the concrete conditions - by responding with its actions and ideology to the historical conditions from which it emerged, and by creating, through education, a historical, cultural, and political identity able to transform the society and the country's future history (Machado, 2011).

However, notwithstanding the alignment of the MST goals with reconciliation purposes, the extent to which concrete social transformation and the creation of a just society is being reached is to be questioned. The goal of reconciling elite elements in society to the decolonising aims of the MST is ambitious, and may have to remain aspirational. In the next section, I will discuss challenges and contradictions faced by a socialist-style education endeavour to reconcile the interests and goals of the most marginalised with those of elites.

Challenges and obstacles: Limits to complete recognition and reconciliation

a) Perceived threat

The MST faced several challenges and obstacles because of the negative perception and hostility generated by the government, media (Veja magazine in particular), and other interests (Carter, 2010). The movement sometimes failed to become fully democratic, due to hierarchies and control in the camp's organisation (Kane, 2016). In addition to its autonomous radical positions, illegal forms of protests have rendered the movement disruptive of peace and contributing to increased levels of violence, thus discouraging some teachers and students from participating in its education system. The escalation of violence resulted in the massacres of peasants during Cardoso's administration (1995- 1996). Violence also escalated during the recent Temer (2016-2018) and conservative Bolsonaro governments (2018- present), which criminalized social movements.

Over this period, a large amount of land was expropriated, followed by peasants occupying the land and consequent massacres by police forces. Between

1985 and 2003, more than 1000 peasants were killed (Carter, 2010), whilst since 2016, more than 100 rural movements activists were killed, 300 receiving death threats, and another 700 physically assaulted (Bretòn et al., 2022). Its autonomy, activism, and radical position are thus seen as both the success and the limitations of the movement: success in using its struggle to gain wide recognition, limitations in terms of association with disruptive and violent disorder (Pahnke et al., 2015; Tarlau, 2015).

b) Hierarchies, elites and bureaucracies

Integrating the movement within the government structures also brought challenges and obstacles to recognizing the movement's original goals and representing the activists' voice in the government's administration. Initially, the movement dialogued with the Ministry of Education, still maintaining control and coordination over the *Educação do Campo*. With the creation of a department for Citizenship and Diversity, the movement faced a restriction of power, a decline in status, and high barriers when dialoguing with the Ministry and influencing other departments (Tarlau, 2015). Also, under Rouseff's government, the movement felt they lost what they were initially claiming. The recent administrations were more prone to expanding internationally renowned programs and including the MST's cause and struggle in rural education (Tarlau, 2015). In the case of the Bachelor's degree program (LEDOC), the Ministry pushed for universities to make the program part of their structure. This change in administration decreased the MST's capacities to participate in the program interventions while also losing the initial principles and proposal of the MST. That is, no activists were present in the program, and students came from the countryside but had no previous connection with social movements –

therefore resisting collective ideology of the program (Tarlau, 2015). Since Lula's second mandate (2006-2010), land occupations were failing in front of agri-business sectors. Indeed, large private owners increased their coverage, controlling more than 200 hectares (Farah, 2015). In this sense, recent research argues how most of the agrarian reform was not distributed, but only 'regularised', and how the MST's economic autonomy has been challenged amidst growing capitalist interests (Bretón et al., 2022). In the most recent historical period, the repressive policies, violent evictions and dismantling of Agrarian reform implemented by Bolsonaro's government, have also been a challenge for the MST, as for all resistance movements in Brazil. The emergence of right-wing conservative forces marks a further complication for the movements' strategies (Bretón et al., 2022).

c) Political contradictions and constraints

I would like to finally reflect on the political discontinuities and contradictory discourses of the Brazilian federal administrations, which may have limited the effectiveness and recognition of the MST's struggle. After the massacres of 1995-1996, Cardoso's second administration decided to focus on the market-based agrarian reform approaches. The aim was to decrease social tensions while expanding and supporting the agribusiness sector (Tarlau, 2015). Also, Lula's administration, which was a more supportive administration, continued to implement agri-business reforms. Since the 2000s, the influence of the agribusiness sector has increased and it has acknowledged rural education as a way to support their interests, especially in the sense of an educated workforce as potential consumers. In this sense, within the Brazilian authorities, there is a historical combination of populist discourses with a 'threat of co-optation' (Kane, 2016; Pahnke et al., 2015), referred to as "the attempt of powerful actors to use

the language of policy reforms to promote their own goals” (Tarlau, 2015, 3). Indeed, these political contradictions and support for capitalist modes of production have lessened the influence of the movement’s ideologies and demands. As previously outlined, the movement strongly advocated for a socialist production model based on collective practices and rural population owners of their land. The MST argued against the appropriation of their goals by the agri-business sector, and was reluctant to imagine that the industry was interested in overcoming land inequalities (Tarlau, 2015).

Following this reasoning, we should also acknowledge the complex relationship, and the conflicting claims that exist between the MST and the different indigenous communities in Brazil. In Brazil, the MST supports the indigenous communities’ demands, but it is not its main struggle (Bretón et al., 2022). The revolutionary aims, material and pragmatic gains of the MST are at odds with the indigenous community’s claims for sovereignty over their lands and for the survival of their people (Hendlin, 2018). Also, due to government and corporate pressures, and the displacement of landless peasants on indigenous lands, the MST and indigenous communities were found to be against rather than in support of each other regarding environmental justice (Hendlin, 2018), aspect which further reinforces the hegemonic structures and elite power over subaltern social movements.

In summary, although the integration in government structures and the relationship with other grassroots struggles brought an expansion of the movement’s programs and increased recognition, this further affected the MST’s representation, autonomy, and power to implement its initial programs and principles.

Concluding Reflections

From a postcolonial perspective, western ideologies and cultural, social, and economic power dynamics of colonialism have shaped the life of the marginalised groups, especially the rural indigenous population, in Brazil. In this context, the analysis shows how the MST has emerged as an aspirational political actor, which was able to innovatively address the historical inequalities and ongoing forms of structural and cultural violence present in the country. The movement managed to successfully reach families in the settlements and camps and enhance educational access for children and adults living in rural areas, thus addressing inequalities in educational provision. In terms of Recognition, throughout the years, the educational model, which represents the identity and diversity of rural peasants, was recognized by international organisations and leftist administrations, which incorporated the schools into the public education system. The movement was also able to dialogue with the government structures, thus having a voice in the educational policy making, although facing obstacles in terms of hierarchies and bureaucratic processes. Indeed, an aspect which is seen as supporting the MST's success on land claims is the closer relationship and pressure exerted on the government on redistributive gains as compared to indigenous communities (Hale, 2018).

On the other hand, however, some limits have been discussed. These relate to the political, administrative, and economic context of the country, which is ideologically in line with the notion of Brazilian's 'double colonisation, in which the interests of western, neo-liberal market forces are being supported, thus overseeing the requests and socialist ideology of the movement. As shown, the MST has often remained vulnerable to governments' interests and to forms of co-optation and repressions. In this sense, realistic achievements of reconciling the elites with the

MST socialist aims, has been put into question. The MST thus represents a successful actor in addressing and arguing against postcolonial legacies; however, as in the case of other countries with a colonial continuity (i.e., South Africa), colonial arrangements continue to be expressed in different forms and fundamental changes are perhaps still needed to radically shift the inequalities and achieve greater social justice (cf. Christie, 2021). In addition, the radical position of the movement may have limited the achievement of a peaceful society, ultimately restricting the advancement of its struggle.

At the same time however, the analysis has shown how education was a key instrument for achieving the movement's aims due to its political power and pedagogical style. Popular education principles support the promotion of democratisation and social transformation by addressing past injustices and envisioning a just future through the resistance and liberation of the marginalised. By linking the pedagogical and educational philosophy of the movement to the anti-capitalist neoliberal modes of production and ideology, I have argued how the MST resists and transforms the root causes of structural and cultural violence present in Brazil's countryside. As Freire (2000) argues, critical liberatory education is crucial to changing the unjust imbalances of power relations.

Utilisation of the 4R analytical framework (see Novelli et al., 2017), clarifies how the movement primarily focuses on the Redistribution of wealth and resources (land), developing an educational model which entirely supports this cause. Redistribution of land emerges as the key to achieving both the Recognition of the rural identity of peasants and the Representation of the democratic ideals of the movement to support the achievement of a democratic country. It also emerged how the interlink between Redistribution and Reconciliation is profoundly embedded in the movement's philosophy and ideology. Indeed, land reform, in which social and cultural

structures are transformed, is functional for achieving a just and equal society.

To conclude, it has been shown that if overcoming exploitation and addressing past injustices is key to the achievement of a sustainable peace building (Galtung, 1967), the MST's contribution, where the interests and struggles of the marginalised are being addressed, can represent a potential and relevant actor in support of this process.

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