

# ACTIVISM IN THE LANDLESS WORKERS MOVEMENT (MST): A PSYCHOANALYTICAL VIEW

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**ABSTRACT:** This article aims to bring contributions from psychoanalysis in order to address activism in the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (MST) as a practice that reframes the past and can be fulfilling for subjects. To do so, we will present contributions from the psychoanalysts Arantes (1999) and Muldworf (2000) to the study of political activism, and briefly characterize the MST and its militants. We highlight that compliance with social ideals and the outstanding place the militant occupies within the movement allows for a narcissistic reward and revitalization, and that the latter should not be disregarded by social movements and studies on the theme.  
**Keywords:** Activism, MST, psychoanalysis, narcissism, ego ideal.

**RESUMO:** Este artigo tem como objetivo trazer as contribuições da psicanálise para pensar a militância no Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST) como práticas que ressignificam o passado e podem ser enriquecedoras para os sujeitos. Para tanto apresentaremos as contribuições dos psicanalistas Arantes (1999) e Muldworf (2000) para o estudo da militância política e faremos uma breve caracterização do MST e de seus militantes. Destacamos que a adesão a ideais sociais e lugar de prestígio que ocupa o militante no movimento lhe possibilita gratificação e revitalização narcísica e que estas não devem ser negligenciadas pelos movimentos sociais e nos estudos sobre a temática.

**Palavras-chave:** Militância, MST, psicanálise, narcisismo, ideal do eu.

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According to its official website, the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement [Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra] (MST) was officially founded in 1982, and its main principles since then are: “fighting for land, for agrarian reform and fighting for a more just and fraternal society” (MST, 2009). According to Stédile (2012), there are today 800,000 families living at settlements taken over by the movement, and 200,000 camped or in process of mobilization. Over its more than 25 years, “the MST has already conquered an area equivalent to 14 million hectares, but its greatest achievement was that the poor no longer walk with their heads down” (STÉDILE, 2008).

In the MST, unlike other current social movements — Sans Papiers<sup>1</sup> in France, for instance — the action is not privileged concerning the ideological debate; practice and theory walk together and are inseparable. In the MST, social transformation ideals keep occupying a privileged space as action guiders, but they are conjugated with practical actions aimed at meeting immediate needs, as well as actions aimed at the construction of a better society, of “a new man and new woman”.

For instance, when the MST gathers together a group of landless families and occupies a large property, it is trying to meet an immediate need, that of giving back to those families their right to work and take from the land what they need to survive. When the MST destroys a multinational company’s transgenic food farm, it shows what model of society and agriculture it defends, its fight against capitalism and its agro-ecological proposal. Occupation of land and destruction of transgenic food farms show different levels of actions which are articulated: fight for land, fight for agrarian reform, fight against the capitalist model. These actions are also understood as a space for the formation of militants, together with courses offered by the movement emphasizing the doctrinal debate.

This article is part of a doctoral research entitled *Entre a utopia e o mal-estar: reflexões psicanalíticas sobre os militantes do MST e seus dilemas* (Between Utopia and Malaise: Psychoanalytical Reflections on MST Militants and Their Dilemmas) (DOMINGUES, 2011)<sup>2</sup>, which is particularly interested in a portion of the movement’s members, the number of which we would not be able to assess, called militants. What are their unconscious motivations? What does characterize a MST militant? These are the main guiding questions in this article, which aims to bring contributions from psychoanalysis to the understanding of the theme from an interdisciplinary perspective. To do so, we resort to some researches about the MST and its militants (BLEIL, 2009; CHAVES, 2000; LEITE, 2008; LERRER 2008; NARITA,

<sup>1</sup> They are illegal immigrants in France who claim for being granted legal status; one of their slogans was “des papeias, pas de politique” (legalization, not politics). (BLIN, 2005)

<sup>2</sup> This research was based on the author’s work field together with MST militants and was described in Domingues (2011).

2000; ROSA, 2009 e TARINI, 2007) and find in them a rich material that has been studied in the light of psychoanalysis, having as support researches about political activism by Arantes (1999) and Muldworf (2000).

### **ACTIVISM AND PSYCHOANALYSIS**

Activism, considered from psychoanalysis, remains as a theme to be explored. We find in Arantes (1999) and Muldworf (2000) important contributions to our reflections on activism in the MST, although those authors approach other contexts and historical moments.

Maria Auxiliadora Arantes, a psychoanalyst and political militant during the military dictatorship in Brazil, lived eleven years in the underground and collected, for the research, testimonies of those who, just as her, lived ten years or more in the political underground in Brazil, from 1964 to 1979. There were four testimonies by militants who were part of the Popular Action and lived the experience of integration in the production. She asked all the interviewees for them to talk about their clandestine experience. Based on those testimonies, she built a “possible interpretation” of the political underground.

For Arantes, to become a clandestine individual in their own country was more than a survival alternative for those militants who had their organizations taken as illegal and wanted to keep on fighting against the dictatorship: it was a choice, though not fully free as it took place amidst a political catastrophe. It was not a simple decision, as it meant the choice of a destination — destination which brought with it the need to take on another identity, another name, a disguise, as a condition to preserve life.

Once the choice is made, what makes the subject to keep with it for a long time is the existence of a necessary or sufficient<sup>3</sup> pleasure, or both. The necessary pleasure is that in which at least minimal conditions for the existence of the ego are present; the sufficient pleasure, in turn, depends on the necessary pleasure and is directly related to choice: it is pleasure enabled by libidinal investments. In the underground, according to Arantes (1999), minimal conditions for self-preservation and the psychic functioning are present, which includes the presence of the other, fundamental as a support point and investment.

The possible (sufficient) pleasure that is available to militants concerns an investment in revolutionary ideals; keeping on fighting and defending their ideas concerns a life with daily risks and challenges. All this constitutes an “extra” pleasure (beyond the necessary pleasure) which has made living in the underground possible.

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<sup>3</sup> The notions of necessary pleasure and sufficient pleasure used by Arantes (1999) are Piera Aulagnier's.

The more challenging the choice, the greater the psychic investment in it should be. The clandestine individual could only stay in the underground situation — with his life at risk and living in disguise — at the expense of an intense affective investment.

The resorting to narcissism is presented by Arantes (1999) as the one responsible for the maintenance of an identity (though concealed) and as something that could enable resistance in extreme situations. She compares the clandestine individual and his libidinal reflux over himself to a cactus that stores inside the water it needs to live in the arid soil, a metaphor which allows thinking of the return of the libido over oneself, as an energy reservation which would “feed” the clandestine man when he needed it most.

Having presented briefly the research by Arantes (1999) about political underground in Brazil, let us move on to the research by Muldworf (2000) about militants from the French Communist Party (PCF<sup>4</sup>), with him being, just as Maria Auxiliadora Arantes, a psychoanalyst and militant as well.

Bernard Muldworf starts his book *Figures de la croyance: amour, foi religieuse, engagement militant* saying that when he was a militant he used to sleep late because of meetings at work and political debates, and that sometimes he did not even sleep at all but, despite being tired, felt “happy and serene”. Time went by and he began to question his beliefs, and the questions became painful. The reflection started with these questions and the suffering which followed him inspired the book.

Muldworf (2000) listened to countless militants from the PCF during his job as a psychoanalyst and at political debates in which he participated. Based on his personal experience and everything he heard from other militants, he concluded, just as Arantes (1999), that activism involves an intense affective investment. It is the affective investment the force that drives activism, and it is from the latter that the author wonders about beliefs, his nature and needs.

For Muldworf (2000), the communist activism, despite having its rational basis on Mark’s and Engels’ works, operates as some kind of creed (“proofs will come later”), a love story, a passion:

One cannot plan “changing the world” or “changing his life” without a great fervor of hope, mobilizing the being as a whole. It is a fervor that comes from the depths of the being and which only the word belief can represent. It is not about disqualifying the belief; belief is there anyway. It is about understanding it, in its psychological needs, its mechanisms of action, and the different figures that express it <sup>5</sup> (MULDWORF, 2000, p. 26)

<sup>4</sup> The PCF was founded in 1920 as a Section of the Workers International, in accordance with the model of the Russian Bolshevik party. Muldworf joined the PCF in 1945.

<sup>5</sup> This and all citations from Muldworf (2000) have been freely translated.

Just as Arantes (1999), Muldworf (2000) finds in narcissism a way to understand the communist activism. According to the author, "the narcissistic fragility produces militants avid for personal recognition, and they find in the militant activity the narcissistic revitalization which is for them a vital necessity" (p.99). The reasoning system that gives foundation to a militant's actions and the action itself gives him the feeling that he is making history, that he can change the course of events and that he is part of something bigger than himself. Such a feeling allows for a narcissistic revitalization, is highly mobilizing, gives strength to face adverse situations and even put life at risk.

The militant believes to be doing what is right, that he is acting on behalf of a truth, believes that he carries the "good word". His action is at the same time individual and collective: individual for involving the subject and his personal story; and collective for involving an institution, a party, a union, an association. Inside the groups of which the militant is part, in addition to the family, socioeconomic and cultural group, the collective in which he fights occupies an important place in his life and gives him a world view, ethics, rules on how to live. The more ambitious the political project defended by the collective is, the bigger the place activism will take in the militant's life, and might even encompass other aspects of his life (MULDWORF, 2000)

The pyramidal and hierarchical structure of parties imposes truths and certainties upon militants and operates as some sort of superego (Muldworf, 2000). It imposes models to be followed, demands, controls, requires certain ethical and moral standards and, at the same time, offers ideals to which subjects tie themselves and which enable a narcissistic satisfaction. The ideal, according to Muldworf, is "the vertebral column of the militant identity".

The ego ideal is the structure that shelters manifestations of ideality. Its role is dual: on one hand, it participates in the drive regulation system; on the other, it gives the individual an image of himself that satisfies him. And it is about this image of himself that the ego ideal measures the esteem to which the individual has right, according to the efficacy of his militant activity; in a way, it is possible to say that the militant is in the same situation of a lover, who benefits from the positive image of the beloved person, as though sharing part of his charm. (MULDWORF, 2000, p. 140).

Idealization is a feeling that constitutes love relationships, including fraternal relationships and friendships. For Muldworf (2000), we should be indulgent with this feeling, because "love blinds", and the representation of the beloved object with its flaws and defects is not consonant with passion. Activism is, for the author, passion, in the strict sense and in the extension of the term, includ-

ing the meaning of passion in Christianity. If we lose the beloved object or the latter rejects us, if faith is shaken, illusion is dissolved and the consequence is the feeling of failure and suffering. This is the feeling which Muldworf (2000) identified in himself and other militants, when, sooner or later, they began to question their faith in the PCF and left the party, experiencing some sort of mourning.

The mourning process implies that the object that has been lost — in this case, the faith in the party and in the ideals it supports — is gradually disinvested, which demands energy and psychic work. Muldworf (2000) highlights that the mourning of the militant who leaves his party did no concern only the faith lost, but also the loss of narcissistic benefits that came along with the act of joining the party, and that such losses shook the very image the militant had of himself, an image built in articulation with ideals supported by the party. About an alleged narcissism or narcissistic fragility of the militant, Muldworf (2000) also states:

In general, 'politics', the engagement in a political activity, with a career plan, is not done by Saints taken by an abrupt feeling of universal love for their neighbors. Whatever the situation, the '*métier*' of the political man comes from a narcissistic aspiration, from an unlimited dynamics, because this '*métier*' is more prone to this type of satisfaction. Even more than the showbiz, and well understood, more than literary and scientific activities. It is not possible to understand differently the narcissistic vein that updates rivalries, low blows, many and diverse tricks that are fruit of a strategy to seize power. (p. 99)

At this point, it is worth highlighting the different uses that Muldworf (2000) and Arantes (1999) make of narcissism. Both would agree on the idea that faith in ideals enables some narcissistic satisfaction to those who believe in them (idea which is already in Freud) but walk different ways regarding the focus they give to narcissism.

Arantes (1999), based on Freud's ideas (1915/2010) about the return of the drive over oneself, the libido shifting from an object to another, and the Ego itself being taken as an object (Freud, 1914/2010), proposes the idea of libidinal reflux over oneself to be able to explain the clandestine militant's resistance in extreme situations. To do so, the author uses as example the cactus that stores inside the water it needs to live in the arid soil: so is the clandestine individual, who would make return to himself the libido invested in the ideals, at the moment when they seem increasingly distant amidst the cruel reality of the underground world.

Muldworf (2000) is very incisive when attributing some narcissistic character to the militant who seeks power and pursue a carrier within the party. In opposition to this type of engagement, he proposes the idea of a mystical or religious engagement, of those who live their “passion in pain” (just as Christ). He narrates his insertion in the PCF, saying that he was: poor, a foreigner and a Jew, and that him joining the party helped him affirm his identity as a Jew (though an atheist), gave him the right to existence and to the word, “revolt word invested in a revolutionary project” (p. 124). He highlights that, just as him, many other militants found in the PCF a “meaning for their lives” and the chance of “better bearing their material and moral miseries” (p. 140).

Muldworf(2000) analyses have a strong affective connotation from somebody who was a PCF militant and lived in his own flesh all conflicts and contradictions a militant faces every day. His analyses also reflect a tendency, found by Péchu (2001) in the French analyses, to attribute to the feeling of devaluation a determinant value for activism engagement. Such analyses propose that in the face of social frustrations the subject would find in activism a way to his valuation.

Unlike Muldworf (2000), Offerlé (2005) considers as mechanistic the division between those who fight for a cause and those who fight for personal interests. For him, it is important to investigate how interests and the cause should be conjugated so they can explain the different forms of activism. Satisfactions, rewards and personal gratifications should not be neglected in this investigation.

If, on one hand, Muldworf (2000) reasoning may be mechanistic, on the other his idea of narcissistic revitalization the militant obtains with his practice — regardless of selfish or altruist motivations —, is very relevant for us to think of MST militants as well. Before that, though, it is worth speaking a little of the idea of narcissistic revitalization, which, though fundamental in Muldworf’s book, is not theorized by him. We will resume the concept of narcissism in Freud, and the narcissistic satisfaction and social ideals relation to propose a possible understanding of the concept of narcissistic revitalization.

Freud (1914/2010) defines narcissism as a “libidinal complement to the egoism of the instinct of self-preservation” (p. 15) and says that narcissism just as in its original stage (in the baby) should be abandoned, which creates the desire for reconstitution of this state of satisfaction in which the subject sufficed to himself, and from that desire and the external influence the ego ideal is formed. With the ideal constitution of the ego ideal, part of the subject’s libidinal investment will be directed to him, and satisfaction, once obtained with the investment in the ego, will also begin to be obtained when the ideal is achieved. Investment in external objects, which starts together with the formation of the ego ideal, also began to be a source of satisfaction, as long as the libido that goes to the object, making the subject poor, returns to him as well, making him rich. From

the formation of the ego ideal, the subject's self-regard will depend on these three sources of satisfaction: what is left from the childhood narcissism, the omnipotence confirmed by experience (the fulfillment of the ego ideal) and the satisfaction of the object libido.

Self-regard, according to Freud (1914/2010), is "an expression of the size of the ego" (p. 45). The fulfillment of the ideal increases self-regard by confirming the primitive feeling of child omnipotence, while the detachment in relation to the ideal may cause a feeling of frustration and failure. Loving someone, in turn, does not increase self-regard, quite the opposite, the one who loves loses part of his libido, which only returns to that individual when he is loved. "Loving in itself, insofar as it is longing and deprivation, lowers self-regard, whereas being loved, having one's love returned and possessing the loved object raises it once more." (p. 47)

The ego ideal "is the substitute for the lost narcissism of his childhood"; the stimulus for its formation, however, comes from the critical influence of parents, which is joined by the criticism of other members of society. This stimulus makes the ego ideal a narcissistic and social instance marked by the abandoned child narcissism and by the critical influence of society represented, at a first moment, by the voice of parents. Freud concludes his text on narcissism emphasizing this social dimension of the ego ideal: "The ego ideal opens up an important avenue for the understanding of group psychology. In addition to its individual side, this ideal has a social side; it is also the common ideal of a family, a class or a nation." (FREUD, 1914/2010, p.50)

An instance at the same time narcissistic and social, the ego ideal plays an important role in the drive regulation system of subjects, articulates and interacts with social ideals. The latter, in turn, offer subjects an anticipation of pleasure in the imaginary plane of that which is expected as a future reality (BERTRAND, 1989).

Social ideals, which are expressed in the symbolic plane, promote great narcissistic satisfaction and for this reason are so strongly invested. Where does this satisfaction come from? Among other things, from a promise of reparation that is inherent to them. Before deprivations imposed by nature or society, before the suffering imposed by other men, there is the offering of a repaired, restored ego, with its fully developed capacities, with its rights re-established. (BERTRAND, 1989, p. 27)

Muldorf (2000), however, does not propose only the idea of a narcissistic satisfaction, he goes beyond with the idea of narcissistic revitalization promoted by activism. Militants avid for recognition would find in activism a way to personal recognition and meeting a certain "narcissistic fragility". This "narcissistic



fragility” is explained by him as a character trait of those who seek prestige and a career in the party or as a result of excluding living conditions like his own, who was “poor, a foreigner and a Jew”. Degrading living conditions may bring as consequence some sort of “narcissistic devitalization”, and compliance with social ideals and activism could meet this need. This second explanation is the one we adopted in this article to think about what unconscious motivations would lead to activism in the MST.

### **MST MILITANTS**

In a research about MST militants, looking for contributions from psychoanalysis to approach this theme, it is important to highlight the work by Maria Rita Kehl, who, since 2006, has been assisting, as a psychoanalyst, militants from the movement at National School Florestan Fernandes (2009), defines her activity as being a militant practice, and when questioned by *Jornal Zero Hora* if she did not fear being idealizing the MST or its militants, she answers:

What I think I idealize in the MST is the human formation they manage to obtain. Most of the militants came from violent social environments, with little education, little notion of dignity and respect, both in the subject and in his relationship with the other. In the movement, the value of reading, of learning, of loyalty and solidarity, is huge. [...] For you to have an idea, do you know what is the biggest meaning of “social ascension” among them? It is not making more money or ascending to a position of power: it is being included among those who can study more, among those who have the right to attend courses, etc. They are very serious about that; and about solidarity too, despite all human flaws, which are the same as the ones we all have.

This fragment of the interview from Kehl (2009) recognizing that admiration for the movement and for all its conquests may lead to some idealization of the movement is what we have identified in other researches, among which we include ourselves. This, somehow, bring repercussions to the characterization of the MST militant we have found in several researches and which we present next. With the presentation of this characterization of the militant, we do not intend to propose a universal type of MST militant that disregards specificities of the subject and of the regional context in which he is inserted, we only intend to highlight common points between the researches.

The MST militant is devoted to the social transformation cause and his activism is very far from the idea of “free service”<sup>6</sup>. The MST militant does not fight only for land and agrarian reform, he fights for social transformation and for the construction of a more just and fraternal society. The title of Bleil’s thesis (2009), *Engagement corps et âmes: vies et luttes des sans terres dans le sud du Brésil*, shows well how the landless’ engagement is. Lerrer (2008), who just as Bleil (2009) also developed a thesis on MST militants in southern Brazil, thinks the same way:

Joining the MST as a militant presupposes a “full engagement”, foundation of the “revolutionary” engagement, which in turn models the arrangements of agents, their representation of the world, their repertoires of action and end up strongly impacting the lives of its militants. (LERRER, 2008, p. 95)

It is hard to know the number of MST militants who have this type of engagement, but these militants do exist, the mentioned researchers have met them, listened to their stories. This research is based on the idea that not all MST members are militants, contrarily to Bleil (2009), who understands that MST participants are all militants, though with different levels of engagement. Bleil (2009) differentiates the “base”, less engaged militants, from “quadros” or groups, better engaged militants. The definition of *quadro* she uses is the MST’s:

They [the *quadros*] are those who have reached a high level of political development, people who know how to act in an autonomous way regarding the application of political lines in their organization and who can pass it on to their base. In addition, the *quadros* execute in a conscious and disciplined way all tasks, comply with all revolutionary principles and are willing to risk their lives for the cause: transformation<sup>7</sup>. (MST, cited by BLEIL, 2009, p. 237)

Instead of speaking of more or less engaged militants, this article adopts the idea that the MST is made up by members who compose the “base” of the movement, and those who are “militants”. Leaders and heads are included among militants, because, although they have a higher post in the movement hierarchy, they are also moved by the same social transformation ideals.

The members that compose the MST base can become militants by participating in activities within the movement. Participation usually starts with the

<sup>6</sup> We found this idea of activism, “free service”, in (ION, FRANGUIADAKIS & VIOT, 2005), which means that the militant is at times fighting for a movement, at times for another. Another term developed by Jacques Ion to characterize activism nowadays is “post-it”; post-it militants are those who engage in a cause without establishing a lasting tie with any organization.

<sup>7</sup> Free translation.

performance of some task in the settlement and can become a political action outside its borders. According to Narita (2000), there are those members who start participating for “their own interests”, whether because participation can be a criterion for them to conquer the land, whether for eventual benefits the militant would have, such as more power or status inside the movement; even if someone starts participating moved by his “own interests”, the very act of participating is formative and transforms subjects, who might happen to identify with MST ideas and become one of its militants.

There are also those who join the movement as militants already, as it is the case of many young people. The latter do not necessarily come from the countryside, and join the movement due to a desire to fight for a more just society and also, as stated by Caldart (cited by LEITE, 2008), because “(...) they are searching for a meaning for their lives, a social space that take away their distress for the disorientation and for the lack of future perspectives” (p. 130)

Political action, unlike other routine activities in a camp or settlement, is the favorite task of militants, who find in it the possibility of personal accomplishment and recognition in the collectivity. It brings to the militant the sensation of being more powerful, increases self-esteem, wellbeing, in addition to promoting greater power or status within the movement and the possibility for the subject to move and occupy other social places. As a consequence, activism can be experienced much more as “an affirmation of oneself in the collective space” than an act of personal sacrifice for the sake of all. (NARITA, 2000).

We understand that compliance with the MST ideals is the first criterion that designates those who are or are not MST militants. This compliance implies not only fighting for the land but also for agrarian reform and for a more just and fraternal society. Noncompliance with all those ideals leads to different feelings of belonging to the MST. Thus, it is common among those who compose the base of the movement to refer to militants and heads as “the MST guys” or to say they left the MST when they stopped being militants, even if they continue to live and work at one of its settlements.

“The MST guys”, the militants, are those in charge of transmitting the movement ideals and mobilizing the base. They “are strategic characters”, fundamental for the fulfillment of MST’s political project (LEITE, 2008). When the MST was being constituted nationwide, militants from southern Brazil had to move to the Northeast in order to form other militants and thus nationalize and integrate isolated fights, as Letter (2008) states.

Those first militants from the South who went to the Northeast in the 1980s had in common the young age, their origins (children of small land owners), middle-level education, some activism in the Catholic Church (Basic Ecclesial Communities, Youth Ministry), and served as a model for those who after them

began to perform the same task. Lerrer (2008) called this generation of militants “activism by devotion” and highlighted that this generation helped build the militant *habitus* of the MST. All militants interviewed by her became important leaders within the movement and ideal types for those who came after them to fight in the movement.

This militant *habitus* of the MST, this MST fighting “style”, according to Lerrer (2008), presupposes a “full engagement”, putting one’s life and personal projects at the service of a collective mission and projects. The influence of catholic missionary values and the devotion to the militant *habitus* are remarkable. For Chaves (2000),

It is as though, having done everything to fulfill their purpose of ‘transforming society’, the MST as an Organization covered not a sphere of life, but life in its various spheres, allowing to those who are part of it the full dedication implied in the concept of vocation — which means to say that the ‘fight’ becomes a sense of life. (p. 52)

Dedication to the movement is a requirement imposed constantly upon MST militants, and devotion to the agrarian reform and social transformation causes means personal sacrifice, and the fight is understood as having a “sacred” nature. Personal projects are left aside or are articulated with collective projects.

Militant is the one who complies with the agrarian reform and social transformation ideals of the MST, compliance implies dedication to the movement. Together with compliance with ideals and dedication to the MST, the performance of a task and attendance in courses organized by the movement compose this picture that characterizes the MST militant. According to Lerrer (2008), militants are

(...) those who have a specific post or role in the MST hierarchy and within its sectors and who, to do so, have attended several formation courses in which they built sociability ties and incorporated not only discourses and the fight banners, but also the militant *habitus* of the organization.” (p. 178)

In the MST, the militant is, by definition, someone who is in constant development, attending courses and congresses held by the movement, participating in meetings, protests, invasions, etc. Receiving an invite from a leader to take one of the MST courses is seen as a sign of recognition, ascension, reward, and the courses are for the MST also an occasion for new militants to be revealed (LERRER, 2008).

To conclude this characterization of what it means to be a MST militant, it is important to add that this is also a choice: a choice, as stated by Lerrer (2008), about how to live young age, since this choice is made at this stage of life.

### **IN SEARCH OF A PSYCHOANALYTICAL UNDERSTANDING OF ACTIVISM IN THE MST**

We believe that activism in the MST can indeed enable a certain narcissistic revitalization for the militant, promoted by compliance with social ideals sustained by the MST and — why not — also by the place this individual begins to occupy within the movement and society. In the case of MST militants, our hypothesis is that the need for narcissistic revitalization would be constituted from social situations which would produce the opposite effect of narcissistic “devitalization” — such as, for instance, situations of social humiliation —, and activism would represent the possibility of facing these situations and obtaining juridical recognition (access to rights of political participation and wellbeing) and social recognition (one being recognized by his individual value).

According to Honneth (2009), there are three patterns of recognition: recognition by love, juridical recognition and social recognition. Each pattern of recognition corresponds to a pattern of disrespect, which occurs when the subject has his recognition refused. Physical aggression is a pattern of disrespect that corresponds to a refusal of recognition by love. Failure to access rights of political participation and wellbeing corresponds to a refusal of juridical recognition. Juridical recognition means for the subject that he has the same value as others in society. On the other hand, if the subject needs to be “equal” to others, he also needs to be recognized in his particularity, what in other times used to be called honor and today can be called reputation, social prestige. The refusal of an individual’s recognition by his individual value corresponds to a refusal of his social recognition. These two forms of recognition and their refusal are deeply connected.

After Freud, many psychoanalysts began to distinguish ego ideal and ego ideal; although there is no consensus in this differentiation, its employment helps us clarify what type of narcissistic satisfaction we are talking about, and we will adopt the definition proposed by Costa (1988). For him, the ego ideal is an idealized representation of the flawless ego, a specular image of the narcissistic ego, definition similar to that proposed by Lacan, the ego ideal as a specular identification, guided by the imaginary record. The ego ideal is an archaic formation linked to child omnipotence and refers to the past and the present, while the ego ideal points to the future, to the transformation of the ego, the perfection to be achieved. The ego ideal is marked by absence, and

perfection is a state to be reached; for this reason, one needs to comply with certain rules and models and postpone the immediate pleasure in exchange of an ideal pleasure that is to come.

The “normal narcissism” of the adult subject implies that the ego ideal (imaginary) is subject to the ego ideal (symbolic), while in the “pathological narcissism” this subordination of the imaginary to the symbolic does not exist, and the latter, far from being an exception, increasingly becomes the norm in the current society. (ZIZEK, 1992)

“Abnegation”, “submission to a higher commitment”, etc., are only a bit pathetic names for the symbolic commitment, for the symbolic authority of the ego ideal. Instead of the integration of a law itself, we have a multiplicity of rules to be followed: rules to succeed, rules to adapt — the narcissistic subject only recognizes ‘rules of the social game’ that allow him to manipulate others, at the same time he keeps distant from a serious commitment. (ZIZEK, 1992, p. 71)

The current society, which promotes the so-called “pathological narcissism”, was called by Lasch “narcissism culture”. For Severiano (2007), the “narcissism culture” offers subjects “particularistic ideals of consumption” as a “privileged source of identity and personal accomplishment”. These “particularistic ideals of consumption” are conveyed to all through the advertising language, which the author compares with and differs from the utopic language. While the utopic language recognizes flaws and criticizes the present projecting the happiness of everyone to a future, the advertising language offers immediate satisfaction, satisfaction which is articulated with the idealization of products to be consumed and consumption itself. Resuming Zizek (1992), it is possible to say that the advertising language acts directly on the subject’s imaginary, appealing to the insubordination of the ego ideal to the ego ideal.

Unlike the “narcissism culture”, the ideals the MST defends aim at the collective and the symbolic and ethical commitment of the subject for the good of all, connect subjects with each other and reach directly the ego ideal of its militants, allowing a narcissistic reward for them.

However, there is a distance between what the subject is now (ego) and what he aspires to be (ego ideal), as well as the distance between the current society and the ideal society. That is what moves subjects. One must always lack something so desire follows its way, but what subjects need in order to not be in distress should anchor on a future project, a hope.

### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In conclusion, it is possible to state that the feeling of valuation of oneself that the militant obtains by occupying an outstanding place in the movement and by complying with social ideals, a feeling which was identified in Lerrer (2008), Narita (2000) and Rosa (2009), can be interpreted from psychoanalysis as a narcissistic reward and narcissistic revitalization. Narcissistic reward or satisfaction through the articulation of the ego ideal — psychic instance — of the militant with social ideals, with something that overcomes the subject himself and the gains he obtains in terms of personal recognition within the movement and before society. We should highlight that these narcissistic gains — even though on one hand we can articulate them with the ego ideal, the latter is subject to the ego ideal — are somehow articulated with social ideals aiming at the common good. Narcissistic revitalization, in turn, presupposes a prior devitalization. In the case of MST militants, we believe that the need for narcissistic revitalization would be constituted from social situations that would produce the opposite effect of narcissistic “devitalization” — such as, for instance, situations of social humiliation —, and that activism would represent the possibility of facing these situations and obtaining juridical recognition (access to rights of political participation and wellbeing) and social recognition (one being recognized for his individual value). These two types of recognition, which were described by Honneth (2009), are fundamental for the permanence of the subject in activism. Rights for the collectivity need to be conquered, but the subject also needs to be recognized and valued as such; otherwise, he may leave the movement in which he fights.

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