

ARTICLE

LIVING IS FIGHTING: POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES IN THE TEACHING COLLECTION FOR ADULT LITERACY OF THE BASE EDUCATION MOVEMENTKELLY LUDKIEWICZ ALVES¹ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5487-2758>FLÁVIO AMÉRICO TONNETTI²ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9279-1852>

ABSTRACT: The article aims to analyze the content and material aspects of the primer “Viver é lutar” – “Living is fighting” – published in 1963, which was part of the didactic collection of the same name prepared by the Movimento de Educação de Base (MEB) – Base Education Movement – to support adult literacy classes in the context of Brazilian radio schools in the early 1960s, in view of the political context of the Brazilian dictatorial regime (1964-1985) and the repression of social movements aimed at adult education. Also, it were used as documentary sources the didactic set of ‘Living is fighting’, reports produced by MEB and letters written by monitors who participated in the movement. We observe in the material the effort to bring elements of popular culture as a didactic-pedagogical strategy to generate identification with the peasants served by the movement, bearing in mind also the different intellectual and ideological tendencies in dispute within the Catholic Church mobilized in the construction of the material, related to their political, pedagogical and religious conceptions, which resulted in their own model of education for peasants. Finally, we approach the process of restructuring MEB in the context of the dictatorial regime that, according to recent historiography, took place through processes of accommodation to the regime, the consequence of which was the reorganization of its pedagogical principles and the removal of militants from the more radical wings of the movement.

Keywords: adult literacy; base education; primer; Brazilian military coup of 1964.

VIVER É LUTAR: PERSPECTIVAS POLÍTICAS NA COLEÇÃO DIDÁTICA PARA A ALFABETIZAÇÃO DE ADULTOS DO MOVIMENTO DE EDUCAÇÃO DE BASE

RESUMO: O artigo tem como objetivo analisar conteúdos e aspectos materiais da cartilha “Viver é lutar”, publicada em 1963, que integrava a coleção didática, de mesmo nome, elaborada pelo Movimento de Educação de Base (MEB) como suporte às aulas de alfabetização de adultos no contexto das escolas radiofônicas brasileiras nos primeiros anos da década de 1960, tendo em vista o contexto político do regime ditatorial brasileiro (1964-1985) e a repressão aos movimentos sociais voltados à educação de adultos. Também foram utilizados como fontes documentais “O Conjunto Didático ‘Viver é lutar’”, relatórios produzidos pelo MEB e cartas escritas por monitores que participaram do movimento. Observa-se no material didático o esforço em trazer elementos da cultura popular sertaneja como estratégia didático-pedagógica para gerar identificação com os camponeses atendidos pelo movimento, tendo em vista ainda as diferentes tendências intelectuais e ideológicas em disputa no interior da Igreja

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Católica mobilizadas na construção do material, relacionadas às suas concepções política, pedagógica e religiosa, que resultaram em um modelo próprio de educação dos camponeses. Por fim, abordamos o processo de reestruturação do MEB no contexto do regime ditatorial que, de acordo com historiografia recente, se deu por meio de processos de acomodação ao regime, cuja consequência foi a reordenação de seus princípios pedagógicos e o afastamento de militantes das alas mais radicais do movimento.

Palavras-chave: alfabetização de adultos; educação de base; cartilha; golpe civil militar de 1964.

VIVIR ES LUCHAR: PERSPECTIVAS POLÍTICAS EN LA COLECCIÓN DIDÁCTICA PARA LA ALFABETIZACIÓN DE ADULTOS DEL MOVIMIENTO DE EDUCACIÓN DE BASE

RESÚMEN: El texto tiene como objetivo analizar los contenidos y los aspectos materiales de la cartilla “Viver é lutar” - “Vivir es luchar”, publicada en 1963, que integraba la colección didáctica de mismo nombre y fue preparada por el Movimiento de Educación de Base (MEB) para apoyar a las clases de alfabetización de adultos en las escuelas radiofónicas del MEB a principios de la década de 1960, en vista del contexto político del régimen dictatorial brasileño (1964-1985) y la represión a los movimientos sociales dirigidos a la educación de los adultos. También se utilizaron como fuentes “O Conjunto Didático ‘Viver é lutar’”, informes producidos por MEB y cartas escritas por monitores que participaron en el movimiento. En el material didáctico se observa el esfuerzo por traer elementos de la cultura popular del campo como parte de la estrategia didáctico-pedagógica para generar identificación con los campesinos, teniendo en cuenta las diferentes tendencias intelectuales e ideológicas en disputa dentro de la Iglesia Católica que fueron movilizadas en la construcción del material, las cuales están relacionadas con las concepciones políticas, pedagógicas y religiosas de los militantes del MEB, que además resultaron en un modelo propio de educación para los campesinos. Finalmente, abordamos el proceso de reestructuración del MEB en el contexto del régimen dictatorial brasileño que según la historiografía más reciente, tuvo lugar a través de procesos de acomodación al régimen, cuya consecuencia fue la reorganización de los principios pedagógicos del MEB y la retirada de los militantes de las alas más radicales del movimiento.

Palabras clave: alfabetización de adultos; educación de base; cartilla, golpe militar brasileño de 1964.

I

I live and fight.
 Peter lives and fights.
 The people live and fight.
 I, Peter and the people live.
 I, Peter and the people fight.
 We fight to live.
 Living is fighting.

As soon as we open the primer, we are immediately invited to take part in a fight that we will not carry out alone, but in the company of someone we call by a name, someone who is close by and who probably walks with us. Together we are the people, who also fight – more than this: as a people, we are the collective expression of this fight.

This is the opening poem of the primer “Living is fighting” that, from the first lesson on, sets the tone of the political perspective assumed by the didactic material of the Base Education Movement (“*Movimento de Educação de Base*” – MEB), a Catholic Church movement organized with the purpose of teaching literacy to rural workers in the interior of Brazil, in a context where illiterate people, who were denied their political rights, had no access to the vote.

Besides the primer “*Viver é lutar*” (Living is fighting), we found, as documentary sources, “*O Conjunto Didático ‘Viver é lutar’*” (The ‘Living is fighting’ Learning Set), reports produced by MEB and letters written by monitors who worked in the movement³. From this set of sources, we identified in the primer a series of elements of popular culture from the countryside, mobilized as a didactic and pedagogical strategy to generate identification with the peasants assisted by MEB, considering the different intellectual and ideological tendencies in dispute within the Catholic Church, which resulted in a model of peasant education of its own, which was changing due to the impacts resulting from the dictatorial regime installed in Brazil in 1964, with the reorganization of its pedagogical principles and the removal of militants from the more radical wings of the movement.

Prepared in 1963 to be adopted in the beginning of 1964, the primer was produced to assist the monitors in the education work of young people and adults who attended the radio schools of MEB, as part of a literacy program broadcast on the educational radio systems operating in the North and Northeast regions, and also in cities in the north of Minas Gerais state. The MEB's activities from 1961 onwards – the year it was created – were inserted in the context of a strong demand for access to literacy, driven by campaigns made by the Brazilian government from the end of the 1940s (Freitas and Biccias, 2009) in a reality where there was a great lack of public schools in rural areas, which led to a high illiteracy rate also among the young population. According to the IBGE's Demographic Census, in the 1960s, Brazil had 39.6% of illiterates among the population aged 15 years old or older (Freitas and Biccias, 2009).

The primer was part, as a key piece, of a didactic set – also called “Living is fighting” – formed by the teacher support books “*Fundamentação*” (Foundation), “*Justificação*” (Justification) and “*Mensagem*” (Message), elaborated by a working group composed of members of MEB Nacional and teachers of the movement who worked in the states of the Northeast Region. The group met in February and March 1963 in the cities of Natal and Aracaju, respectively. After the initial meetings, partial meetings were held to analyze and review the material which in August was submitted to the opinion of MEB teachers and Bishops and Archbishops, among them D. Avelar Brandão, D. Eugênio Sales and D. José Vicente Távora. In the beginning of January 1964, fifty thousand copies of the primer “*Viver é lutar*” (Living is fighting) were ready – out of the one hundred thousand initially contracted, which were not printed due to the seizure of three thousand copies by the dictatorial regime (Movimento de Educação de Base, 1963a, p. 01 and 02).

³ The documental sources that were used in the text are under the custody of the Center of Documentation and Scientific Information of the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (CEDIC-PUC/SP).

In the design of this distance education strategy, the elaboration of didactic materials was extremely important, given the lack of primers and reading books appropriate for a type of educational action whose target audience was adults in rural areas. Regarding the teaching materials available for adult literacy at the time, the analysis text of the set “Living is fighting” mentions that “the few primers that were available gave adults and adolescents in the areas reached by MEB the same treatment given to children – and often children from big cities” (MEB, 1963a, p. 01). This is why it was so important as a didactic instrument. If we consider only the specificity of its target audience, “Living is fighting” would already deserve recognition: it is one of the pioneers in the genre of textbook for young people and adults; and, more specifically, for the literacy of peasant adults.

Besides meeting this demand for materials appropriate to the needs and reality of young people and adults, we also found a pioneering spirit in the sense of better recognizing the uniqueness of its target audience in yet another aspect: the elaboration of a content and an approach that sought a direct dialogue with the culture and the material living conditions of the peasants for whom the material was intended. This reinforces the fact that there was, in the constitution of the material, a clear effort to bring together content and form, in order to incorporate in its language both the genres of popular culture and the religious themes inherent in the students' imagination, with issues close to daily life, related, above all, to work and access to fundamental rights.

Being a Catholic movement, the pastoral perspective is also an important part of this pedagogical proposal. It is noted, however, that its evangelizing character manifests itself in a very progressive perspective, related, above all, to the militancy of the Catholic Youth, to which the first mentors of the project were connected (Alves, 2019, 2020; Fávero, 2006).

It should be noted that, throughout the primer, literacy is not established as the sole objective of base education: it is also necessary to raise awareness – more than literacy “and” raise awareness, it is about literacy “for” raising awareness. In an articulate way, in “Living is fighting” it was proposed that such objectives – at the same time theological, political and educational – should “focus on the appreciation of man and the community, their culture, their role in the Brazilian reality – everything according to the needs of the different areas” (MEB, 1963a, p. 01), demonstrating a pedagogical premise common to the base ecclesial movements for which “a critical and in-depth knowledge of the social reality has become a condition for evangelization” (Betto, 1981, p. 87). This “social messianism”, as a strategy of political transformation, aimed at organizing communities in favor of the fight for basic rights, among them the organization of unions and access to the vote, understood, at that moment, as fundamental tools for social change. Giving access to education through literacy – a right denied to rural workers – meant, then, offering conditions for other rights to be accessed.

II

In “Living is fighting”, from the point of view of a curricular discussion, such contours are very well expressed not only in relation to the textual content of its lessons and literacy exercises, but also in relation to its form, in what concerns the materiality of the object and its imagistic dimension. With a unique graphic production for the context of the 1960s, in which textbooks were usually reproduced in a handmade way in mimeographs, its printing in letterpress – with lessons accompanied by black-and-white photographs and a two-color cover – represented a significant technological advance from the point of view of publishing pedagogical materials. Added to this is the fact that the use of photographs depicting rural workers and landscapes of the backlands of the Northeast was not common, which reinforces the innovative dimension of the primer in its effort to present content capable of generating identification with the reality of the learners, respecting their culture and in dialogue with their contexts.

As a kind of synthesis of this general conception, the cover of the material itself can be taken as an example: on it we see the image of a clay sculpture representing a group of adults gathered around a table. On top of it we see a radio, around which the people are gathered. Sitting on a backless bench, very characteristic of rural areas, they mimic a situation that is clearly configured as a class. In the image of the small sculpture, we also see one of the people standing, writing a set of letters on a small board, demonstrating the format of didactic articulation experienced in the situation of the radio schools

themselves, which were improvised in community halls, in church backyards, or in the homes of the monitors. It is not, therefore, about just any class, but the radio class itself. It is also not about representing it through an image or any sculptural genre, but about presenting the reality of a learning context that will be created and experienced by the learners through a genre already known to them: the hinterland folk clay sculpture – which is, admittedly, an identity mark of the northeastern popular culture, functioning as an iconic object of wide circulation, whose small works are easily found both in the countryside fairs and in the tourist markets of the northeastern capitals, where they are sold as travel souvenirs, projecting the popular culture beyond the borders of the region itself.

Clay, one must also remember, is both the mythical substance with which God, in Christian mythology, creates the human, and the raw material that organizes life in the hinterlands – the house, the oven, and the cooking instruments are made of clay; it is worth considering that in the peasants' reality the food cultivation itself depends intrinsically on the land. A point of contact between spiritual and material work, clay functions as a synthesis element in a culture whose base is agriculture, for subjects whose land, as a right to be conquered, is the necessary asset for the maintenance of life itself.

The photographs that accompany the literacy exercises, with typical portraits of workers and simple country folk – sometimes accompanied by their children – also fulfill the function of transforming the material into a kind of portrait, an ode to the consciousness of one's own social condition. These images aim to reinforce the perspective that social transformation is only possible through the understanding of the political dimension of life itself, “awakening the adult to the necessary engagement in working groups in the community – clubs, unions, cooperatives, crafts, etc.” (MEB, 1963a, p. 01) in a life – as the very title of the material points out – that needs to be announced and consciously experienced as fight.

In visual figurative terms, extolling the worker as the protagonist of the material transformation of the reality, the presence of these photos can be easily associated with the aesthetic orientation of “socialist realism”, whose outlines were given by communist intellectuals as early as the 1930s in discussions about the contribution of artistic representation to the construction of revolutionary movements. As an aesthetic current, socialist realism foresaw, precisely, the production of realistic and historically concrete representations that could contribute to ideological transformation by collaborating with the education of the worker in the spirit of socialism (Sinjavskij, 1966).

The political engagement expressed in “Living is fighting”, whose project's basis is set on an awareness of the worker against the injustice of his social condition is therefore realized doubly: as content and as form. The material, seen from this double aspect, is placed in the terms of an engaged work, in which the authorial composition sees itself closely related to a very well-defined political objective (Napolitano, 2011). In this sense, it is important to realize and emphasize that the primer, due to its unique characteristics, does not only have an “innovative character”, but rather a “revolutionary” one. This explains, to a large extent, the reasons why its publication and its use in MEB's radio schools was involved in a great controversy, especially in the context of a state that was increasingly repressive towards the demands of the people and agents of popular culture.

Intended for students already in the literacy process, the primer was composed of 30 lessons, spread over 65 pages. The grammatical content, followed by practical exercises, was permeated by texts with political content, and each lesson was illustrated with a photograph. The themes addressed in the lessons referred to the life of the peasants, around the family and the community, their condition as rural workers and their insertion in the religious community, usually ending with mobilizing questions, which sought to propose a debate, according to the way MEB used to work the contents, by posing the problem based on data from reality and then analyzing them. At the end, a sentence was highlighted as the fundamental message to be transmitted in each of the lessons.

Considering these characteristics of the primer in the context of its publication – made a few months before the military coup of 1964 – it is important to consider the modes of action and engagement related to the group of Catholic militants involved in the creation of MEB, as well as the disputes between different currents within the Catholic Church, which were decisive in the restructuring process of the movement that had to occur after the coup of 1964. It is also important to observe the circulation of the didactic material to understand how its reception contributed – and to what extent – to reinforce the identification of MEB as a communist movement in the eyes of society.

The clashes experienced in the social and historical context in which the primer was produced, both within the Church and in society more broadly, are expressed in aspects of the very content of “Living is fighting”. Linked to the documents produced due to its “criminalization”, the analysis of its content and form is important because it allows us to observe the ideological disputes fought inside the Catholic movement from the very development of its didactic material – which focused on the promotion of popular culture, basic education and awareness, in the way they were understood by MEB in its curriculum.

A deeper contact with the primer “Living is fighting” allows us to clearly perceive the political proposal of this education, whose mobilization of the peasants for the fight is presented through lessons. What helps us to understand, with more elements, the performance of popular movements in the contexts before and after the coup of 1964, allowing us to discuss how the coup decisively affected these movements – either through repression or through interferences which, in the case of MEB, implied the rearrangement of its pedagogical principles, which took on a more conservative and much less revolutionary perspective.

III

During the dictatorial regime, MEB was the only base education movement to continue its activities, after a brief period of suspension of its radio programming, which lasted about three months, from April 1964 to mid-July. The close relationship with the Catholic Church since its origin was decisive for the resumption of activities in radio schools after the coup of April 1964. Such relations, however, were not always harmonious within the Church, whose distinct currents of a more progressive, conservative, or even institutional character, disputed space in the educational work with the peasants.

According Osmar Fávero (2006), the permanence of the activities after the coup was due to the fact that it was a Catholic movement conducted by the institutional mediation of the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops (*Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil* – CNBB) which, in 1961, was one of the parts involved in the agreement signed with the federal government – at that time presided over by Jânio Quadros – for the opening of MEB radio schools. The CNBB's partnership with the government expanded previous adult literacy experiences developed by the Catholic Church in cooperation with the state in the archdioceses of Natal and Aracaju, which, since 1958, had already adopted the adult education model through an educational radio programming (Fávero, 2006; Wanderley, 1984).

The creation of MEB also corresponded to other motivations coming from the Catholic Church that, institutionally – attending to the agenda of conservative leaderships – wanted to contain the advance of the popular movements in fight for land, identified with communism, and promote an evangelizing action through grassroots work that would bring it closer to the peasant populations and contribute to its expansion in rural areas.

Parallel to the institutional motivations that contributed to the creation of the MEB, there was the action of Catholic lay groups that acted in other political spaces, such as the student movement, or other social movements, as it was the case of the Catholic University Youth (*Juventude Universitária Católica* – JUC) and, later, the Popular Action (*Ação Popular* – AP). These groups saw in the actions promoted by MEB the possibility of acting as militants engaged in the fight for education and organization of rural workers (Kadt, 2007; Paiva, 1983). Acting as lay political forces, of right or left-wing orientation, they perceived the power of the Church to influence processes of social transformation, taking positions seen as strategic for the promotion of popular culture, through activities of base education (Gavião, 2007).

Since the late 1950s, Catholic lay educators were part of the group that had been severely criticizing the adult education model practiced by the State. At the II National Congress of Adult Education, held in 1958 in Recife, Paulo Freire was part of the group from Pernambuco, which produced a report emphasizing that the problem of the people from the Northeast of Brazil was not illiteracy but poverty. Although the issue of adult education was still linked to the developmentalist project of the Brazilian State, the criticism promoted by this group, as well as their actions, and more particularly the actions of Paulo Freire, represented a change in the conception of illiterate people. These are no longer

people who have an anomaly and therefore need to be cured, but people to whom the Brazilian state has historically denied basic living conditions and citizenship, among them the access to education. According to Vanilda Paiva (1983), that meeting signaled the promotion of experiences developed with the insertion of local communities as a suitable model for a work of grassroots education. From this perspective, the dimension of the action of lay Catholics turned to the defense of actions directed to the formation of people's consciousness, so that they could understand their reality and, from this understanding, they could transform it (Freitas & Biccás, 2009).

Thus, since its origin, MEB was a key player for this change of perspective, and its adult education model – called base education – directly influenced by Freirean pedagogy regarding decentralization, regionalization of education and the need to adapt adult education to the local culture, thinking the community and the school in an integrated way, in order to prepare people for political life (Freitas & Biccás, 2009). In the primer, during grammar lessons, a set of generative words are presented, elaborated from the content addressed in the text that begins the lesson. These terms follow, in some way, the work recommended by the use of generative words proposed by Freire's pedagogy, in the set of procedures that was called the Paulo Freire Method (Brandão, 2006), showing that his influence on MEB's pedagogy was not only due to his ideas about building a pedagogy of autonomy (Freire, 1996) or the fight against oppression (Freire, 1968), but also from the perspective of a politically oriented didactic that had a direct impact on the literacy teaching practice adopted by MEB in radio schools.

However, in Paulo Freire, the generative words used in the literacy process are found and decided together with the learners, as an exercise of an educational praxis whose objective is in itself the learners existential and political awareness of their subordinate condition in an unequal society. This initial moment, when it is decided which words will be learned – based on their relevance to the learning community – is already an exercise in politics exercised by language.

In the case of “Living is fighting”, these terms – which operate more as keywords than as generative words – are suggested beforehand, which marks an apparently subtle difference, but reveals its prescriptive and salvationist dimension, which establishes asymmetrical and hierarchical relations that are quite characteristic of ecclesial structures. In one of the lessons, we can observe how the main words – family, work, community and God – clearly serve a pastoral agenda:

I work for my family.
Peter works for his family.
Our life is work and fight.
Our work is fight and life.
Each one's work helps the other.
Is everyone's work for the community?
Does everyone's work help God's work?

EVERYONE'S WORK HELPS GOD'S WORK
(Movimento de Educação de Base, 1963b, p. 06)

“Work”, “family”, “community” and “God” emulate the function of the generative words. Although they are not generated, but received. The choice of terms is not the result of a political negotiation, but something to be welcomed: the debate around the words is not motivated directly by the interests of the learners, but by what the educators responsible for the material believe to be the learners' – and their own – interests. The very stringing of the terms is intended to express a certain worldview. Work is at the service of the family and the community – and even fight must converge with the interests of God. There is a whole hierarchy established among the terms – which expresses a hierarchical and hierarchizing worldview in itself – that needs to be learned and not discussed. What needs to be discussed and questioned is the very political structure of the world and its inequality, which are out of conformity with God's will. Politics, therefore, is the expression of a certain theology. Thus, the political activity reveals itself, and in the limit, as a religious activity.

Nor can we lose sight of the name that gives life to the first, perhaps the main, character in the book: Peter, the one upon whom, according to gospel tradition, Jesus left the responsibility of spreading the Christian faith and founding his church, in the quest to reestablish the kingdom of God on

earth. These elements demonstrate the proximity that MEB pedagogical contents establish with the Church's social doctrine of reestablishing order and justice by bringing men and God closer together.

This implies considering that, as an educational process, we are still close to the perspective of a catechesis, in which the processes are directed to determined ends that are not elaborated by the learners, but by subjects alienated in instances external to the educational reality. It is in this sense that such practices need to be critically thought of more as a kind of unfolding of a liberation pedagogy than as a liberation pedagogy per se – revealing also here the ideological clashes and intellectual discussions inherent to the MEB group.

In the case of the analysis of “Living is fighting”, the strength of this initial pedagogical orientation is sometimes diluted. Topics such as accentuation, tonic syllables, and pronoun variations receive a much more grammatical than communicational treatment – although these topics of language are not presented or structured formally in the grammarians style. This means that, in this aspect too, the linguistic perspective of the material moves it away from its political-pedagogical goals. Nor is the way of speaking and writing problematized in the material – in the sense of contributing to the students' perception that their personal way of communicating also presupposes a structure and organization of its own. Linguistic discussions about linguistic variation or linguistic prejudice (Bagno, 2002) – which today appear in the materials as problems not only for researchers, but also as teaching content – are still far from the horizon of educators and publishers of this period. This does not mean that these singularities were not welcomed and worked on. We are aware of this effort to approach the popular language and its ways of speaking not only through contact with the primer and the formal analysis of its contents, but also by reading the letters from students, monitors and supervisors of the radio schools, in which we clearly see an effort to welcome these singularities, which are manifested in the written communication exchanged through this correspondence (Alves, 2020).

IV

In “Living is fighting”, the elements that make up peasant culture were worked on to foment a genuinely popular culture. In the conception of the militants who integrated MEB, such strategy would contribute to overcome the cultural gaps that hindered the communication between the various social groups. Popular festivals – carnival, São João, maracatu, capoeira, ciranda, among others – are presented as part of folklore and popular art, in which the soul of the people is revealed. Culture is thus seen as the fruit of human work and creation in society.

Folk art is culture.
 Everything that man invents and does is culture:
 house, tillage, shoe, clay stove...
 All of this is creation.
 Man is a creator.
 The customs of the people are culture.
 By studying, people also create culture;
 They learn to conserve and improve their customs.
 A people only marches to liberation
 when it walks with its culture.

EVERYTHING MAN INVENTS AND DOES IS CULTURE
 (MEB, 1963b, p. 48)

Culture, therefore, is not shown as an elitist concept that would separate the population between cultured and acculturated classes, but as a sphere common to all, expressed as a genuine manifestation of the people, their life experience, and their gestures of transformation of nature, in a conception aligned with the modern sense of the term, as mapped by Raymond Williams (2007). Different passages of “Living is fighting” emphasize, in their lessons, elements such as the “popular art” and the “customs of the people”. They also emphasize their working and production conditions when, for example, it is stated that “the peasant is a man of the land. He works the land”.

However, their conception of popular culture – that highlights the genuine character of the manifestations of the people – reinforces, in another way, the elements of division and polarization of culture, by highlighting a popular, rural and peasant way of life, that distinguishes and defines a type of identity or “being” of the Brazilian people. The use of “customs” to designate a way of acting of the people also reveals to us the field of dispute that the term can represent in the context of the political debate of the time, very concerned with the elaboration of a narrative capable of defining the distinctive elements of the people.

Throughout the primer, the lessons address issues concerning the life of the peasants around the family and the community, their condition as a rural worker and their insertion in the religious community, generally ending with mobilizing questions that seek to propose a debate, attending to the way MEB used to work the contents, posing the problem based on data from reality and then analyzing them – a strategy fully in line with the pedagogical guidelines designed for the work with the base ecclesial communities (Betto, 1981). It is in this final moment, when questions close the lessons, that the dialogue dimension is rescued and people can talk about their own reality. At the end of the lessons there was also the expedient of using a phrase, highlighted as a fundamental message to be transmitted in each of the lessons:

The peasant is a man of the land.
 He works the land.
 He harvests the fruits of the earth.
 Does the peasant own land?
 Does he have everything to cultivate the land?
 Does he have a guaranteed harvest?
 Does the peasant have guaranteed work?

THE PEASANT IS A MAN OF THE LAND
 (MEB, 1963b, p. 18)

What stands out from this excerpt is the way in which the lesson deals directly with the peasants' work and their bond with the land, as an element of their own existence and culture, through which they guarantee the survival of themselves and of others. A kind of genuine and transforming way of being.

Peter knows the life of the peasant.
 Peter knows the fight of the worker.
 Peter recognizes the work of women.
 He sees that many people suffer injustice.
 And they are all men.
 They are sons of God.
 They need to live as men.
 They need to live as sons of God.

EVERYONE NEEDS TO LIVE AS A MAN
 (MEB, 1963b, p. 24)

The mobilizing questions, in turn, propose to the readers to reflect about the absence of access to land, since this is a condition for their work, and continue calling for reflection about the absence of other rights that are natural to man: “Peter is worried and thinks: Why is our life so hard? Why do so many children die here? Why don't people have homes? Why haven't we learned to read?” (MEB, 1963b, p. 26).

Peter returned from the training enlightened.
 He came back enlightened that:
 Government is for everyone.
 All the people must participate in the government.
 Some men have too much and many have nothing.
 Some earn too much.
 Many of them work and their work is exploited by others.

Much is wrong in Brazil.
Complete change is needed in Brazil.

A COMPLETE CHANGE IS NEEDED IN BRAZIL
(MEB, 1963b, p. 32)

Some final sentences do not function as questions, but as assertions that lead to political action. In the lessons, which follow a kind of continuous narrative, as if they were a short novel told in chapters, the story of Peter and his friend Xavier is told while the student advances in the contents of the primer, as if the learners and the characters were both moving toward an awareness that leads them to act decisively in the organization of their communities.

In the first lessons, Peter asks himself questions about his life and, in doing so, comes to understand – to become aware of – the problems of life in the countryside: “Peter also understood other things: The people ignore that they are exploited. The people ignore their rights and duties. Their rights are not respected” (MEB, 1963b, p. 34). Moreover, as they talk and participate in the trainings, the characters realize the importance of the peasants' organization, which will lead them to the opening of a radio school, started by the characters Xavier and his wife, in the 18th lesson. The same occurs with the organization of a rural union, which appears in the last lessons, pointing to the importance of the organization and the fight of the workers as a necessary path for an effective change in their working and living conditions:

The peasants feel the need for unionization.
They feel that united they can act.
Their right to unite is law.
Peter and the peasants want to found a labor union.
They feel the problems of their class.
They want to organize their class.
A labor union is union.
A labor union is strength.
Union is the strength of the labor union.

THE UNION IS THE LABOR UNION'S STRENGTH
(MEB, 1963b, p. 42)

The dialog with reality and with peasant culture, articulating itself in the sense of recognizing it, is a strategy for the invitation to transform it, urging the reader directly to social and political change through direct community actions – whose message is reinforced by the trajectory of the characters in the primer and by the use of proper names, as well as by the insertion of images of people, landscapes and scenes of everyday life in the countryside, as mentioned, reinforcing the identification with the reader of the primer in the perspective of a dialog with his or her reality. It is in the unfolding of the contents presented in the lessons that we perceive a narrative arc that is structured around not only the problematization, but the resolution of social and historical problems, articulated from critical reflection to transforming action – a fundamental perspective for the model of base education promoted by MEB.

V

The structure of the lessons is also a sign of synthesis of the different ideological orientations in dispute – or in accommodation – inside MEB. If on one hand we have the emphasis on the incorporation of popular culture in a revolutionary perspective, on the other hand we have a very structured and stratified mode of organization that gives evidence of a scholastic way of thinking about the world. The approximation between grammar, logic, and rhetoric is noticeable in the structure of the lessons, which are organized from a set of propositions that insinuate themselves as verses – or as verses that mask propositions. There, where we could see traditional grammar exercises, with lessons on verb conjugation initiated by pronoun subjects accompanied by their respective inflected verbs, the developers of the primer seem to have seen, by the visual arrangement of the phrases, the possibility of viewing them as stanzas of a poem, whose characteristic they found in popular poetry of the Northeast, where the

blocks of stanzas are often structured in sets of six verses – the sextain; or *sextilha*, in Portuguese. Thus, we can see in this arrangement of sentences the visual form of the northeastern *cordéis* (plural of *cordel*, a popular Brazilian genre of rhymed poetry). A simple exercise with the verb “*viver*” (to live), which in the traditional form would be presented like this:

I live
 You live
 He lives
 We live
 You live
 They live

It is now understood as a sextain. Where we saw only a list of pronouns accompanied by their verbs, we can now see, in “Living is fighting”, propositions related to verses, creating a contact interface between literate language and popular culture. It is curious to think that the grammatical form of verse conjugation in grammar manuals or conjugation dictionaries, if viewed absentmindedly, look in fact like the images of stanza composition organized in sextains. This becomes clearer if we observe a sextain by Patativa do Assaré, one of the best-known poets of the Northeast, notorious not only for his participations in fairs and popular festivals, but, above all, for his insertion as a reciter in radio shows, the main mass media of the popular classes, which would be adopted as a vehicle for literacy by MEB educators:

Recorder you are recording
 Here, in our environment,
 You record my voice,
 My verse, my rhyme.
 But, recorder, you don't record
 The pain that my chest feels!

*Gravador que estás gravando
 Aqui, no nosso ambiente,
 Tu gravas a minha voz,
 O meu verso, o meu repente.
 Mas, gravador, tu não gravas
 A dor que meu peito sente*

(Patativa do Assaré, 1979).

The use of the form *cordel* (cordel literature) does not refer, therefore, only to the literature of the people: it is also the literature to which one has access through the radio. And the media as a theme is also explored by popular poets, like Patativa, who in the presented poem plays with the verbal inflections of the second and third person singular, even playing with the pronoun “*tu*” (“*tu*” is the formal form of the pronoun “*you*” in Brazilian Portuguese), rarely used among Brazilians, to refer to an inanimate other – the tape recorder – in a strategy of personification of an object with which he dialogues in a monologue. In the verses, subject and verb are accompanied by complements that give complete meaning to the propositions. This strategy is also adopted in the primer lessons, in which each verse forms a proposition with complete meaning. In the same way that in the stanzas the verbs come together to form a unity of meaning, also in the MEB lessons, each line, although it has meaning on its own, is articulated with the others to form a block of sense.

The fact is that using the sextains simply would be a challenge within a syllogistic scheme. In this sense there is a formal concern that needs to be resolved: because it is composed of an even number of propositions, the sextain does not allow the realization of the syllogistic synthesis, which requires an odd number, from whose contrary pairs a conclusive synthesis can be extracted. A solution to this problem would be to divide each of the lessons into blocks of three verses, setting up the structure of a

simple syllogism – first proposition, second proposition, and conclusion – but this would lead the lessons to a departure from both the consolidated grammatical form and the form of the popular *cordel*.

We see that the form:

proposition
 proposition
 conclusion
 +
 proposition
 proposition
 conclusion

is different from

verse
 verse
 verse
 verse
 verse
 verse

The conscious or unconsciously deliberate choice was to think of the initial lesson based on the fixed form of the *septilha* – stanzas of seven verses, a heptastich form – also very popular in *cordéis* written and recited in the countryside. From this structure, one can operate the construction of a kind of general conclusion for each stanza-lesson, whose concluding sentence is repeated again at the end, in capital letters. As structure, this seems to be the origin of a didactic form that will vary throughout the whole primer, combining a pedagogy that articulates logic, rhetoric and dialectics.

The lessons with seven lines, emulating the *septilhas* of the *cordéis* found in market stalls, and the repetition of the final verse, however, will give way in rigor – some “stanzas” gain more verses and the moral of the story stops repeating exactly the final verse – but the structure, in which an entire syllogistic logic is encapsulated, is maintained – very likely imported from the scholastic thought in which many of the Catholic militants, some of them having a seminary background, were intellectually formed.

The formal, ideological, political and, in a certain sense, theological-metaphysical syntheses are composed with great wit, creating, in addition, a narrative that goes from the particular to the general, which also reveals a discursive element supported by logic. The lessons evolve their themes from layers: starting from the individual, they go on to the family, to the school, and to the union; composing a projection of society in growing layers whose accumulation generates complexity, operating a kind of inductive thinking in which society will finally be seen as a complex of individuals – in which the general is concluded, and composed, starting from the individual. A strategy of analysis that is elaborated in order to compose a synthesis – in an operation now of Cartesian nature.

Besides, each layer will be built from a pedagogy based on the see-judge-act method (Betto, 1981), in which the critical understanding of the world aims at the construction of another world through the direct action of the learners who, as individuals, create their family, their school, and their class representation body; and who create – or revolutionize – society through political construction and voting, in a dialectic view of history – of Hegelian-Marxist character. What is intended is to inaugurate a movement that starts from the logic of discourse toward concrete action.

In the general arc of the lessons, therefore, the objective is not only poetic, logical, grammatical or merely metaphysical: far from animating inanimate beings or revealing the fantastic in life – as popular poets do – what is intended is to animate men by means of a dialog among their own peers, so that they disenchant reality and transform it by means of critically grounded action, by means of a pedagogy that contains in itself both reformist and revolutionary, both progressive and conservative elements.

All in all, we have a sophisticated structure supported by popular discursive forms, which is realized through a pedagogical vision of a scholastic character whose logical support seeks the realization of a revolutionary political project through a dialectical rhetoric.

VI

From the point of view of the realization of its intentions, we must reflect on whether this project, which has the primer as an instrument, can be realized through it. Through its form we can reflect on the difficulties inherent in the pedagogies of base education and its paradoxes. To what extent its instruments used to accomplish popular education do not end up hindering the realization of these same goals, creating a relation of authoritarian or colonialist dirigisme. Frei Betto is the one who, precisely, calls our attention to this challenge posed to pastoral agents in their pedagogical practice in base ecclesial communities:

Popular pastoral work created the requirement of going to the people. It was not something exclusive to it. Certain political groups and independent activists also took the same line of work. But those who, in the Church, became animators of popular communities – pastoral agents – could see, in their contact with the popular classes, how colonialist they were. In fact, I should say, we, not they. We thought the people were poor, ignorant, while we were endowed with great academic virtues, diplomas, courses and divine lights. We intended to teach the people what is “good for the people”.

Now, practice has shown that this is a great mistake. We were unmasked by the people themselves who, with their silence, watched the ridiculous role that we, middle-class agents, represented. The people are so tired of being humiliated by the “knowledge” and the “power” of the petty bourgeoisie that they don't even criticize. They pretend to learn and even repeat our vocabulary, a kind of dialect by which we gauge the level of consciousness of the workers. However, when it comes to action, we are alone in our vanguardism. The people know that is not the way, but we have not had the patience to listen to them. Therefore, it is necessary that we re-educate ourselves in intending to educate the popular classes. It is necessary to get rid of academic categories and this Europeanized “erudition”, in a cartesian way distilled into clear and precise concepts, as if the real was what exists in our heads. The real is the life of the washerwoman, the cowboy, the squatter, the native, the worker, the stowaway, the railwayman, the migrant. (Betto, 1981, p. 36-37)

In the pedagogical work with “Living is fighting”, the care taken with listening and the need to divest oneself of a Europeanized and Cartesian erudition might need to be redoubled. The directive character of the primer's lessons lacks dialogical mediation for their emancipatory promises to become effective. As we have seen in some lessons of “Living is fighting”, the final conclusion of each lesson aims to reinforce a conclusion that would be reached through dialogue and not as a mere logical exercise. This means that, in the primer, the conclusion that should be dialogically constructed is offered as something ready-made, as something logically induced, and not as an achievement of students politically engaged in the exercise of constructing their own knowledge. It is as if the primer wanted to “teach the people what is good for the people”. In this sense, there is also a kind of distortion of the genuinely dialogical perspective of popular education.

Added to this is the possibility of thinking of these final conclusions of each lesson not only as a mere syllogistic elaboration, but also as a discursive register supported by fabulous forms of popular narrative that always end with a “moral of the story”, which is generally summarized in a simple sentence of an edifying character. This is also problematic, because in these cases the intention is to inculcate a moral rather than to debate or deconstruct it. It is worth remembering that fables with animals are quite widespread in the northeastern oral culture and often appear as themes in *cordéis*.

This textual form, when associated with the constituent structures of popular poetry, also allows an association of these final lines with the use of the poetic motto – *mote*, in Portuguese – a generating verse that is previously given to the poet as a challenge for the construction of stanzas. The motto is a sentence that is mandatorily placed at the end of each stanza. It is on the motto, and from the motto, that the improvising poets make the other verses of their stanzas, following a strict rhythmic scheme in a fixed rhyme structure, which conditions them to finish their work with the motto sentence exactly as it was conceived. Although in popular poetry the *mote* visually occupies the place of a conclusion, it is actually an initial premise. The art of the popular poet consists in imagining a dialogical process that leads an entire thought structure expressed by the other verses toward that initial verse – experienced as a conclusion, but previously given. Without realizing it, it is as if the authors of the primer

had delved so intimately into folk poetry that they ended up emulating its strategies for falsifying the dialogical process.

The logical conductions do not stop there. We can recall what happens in the first lesson in which the verb to live is accompanied by the verb to fight. If in a traditional conjugation lesson, we would see the word isolated:

I fight
 You fight
 He fights
 We fight
 You fight
 They fight

In the primer lesson, it makes up a sentence within which it is associated with other terms. When the verb to fight is associated with the verb to live, this approximation does not happen in a naive way. It is an operation of logical links produced in order to create a previously oriented understanding of these concepts. The junction of two verbs also creates a logical direction that starts to be worked in the key of a necessary reason. When we relate the concept of living to fighting, we are producing an interpretation about existence, which does not necessarily deal with life as it is: It is, therefore, about producing a specific ideology, removing from the experience of life a set of other notions. “Living is loving”, “Living is celebrating”, “Living is praying” are examples of other possible logical-semantic associations with which a completely different contour to the idea of existing would be produced.

In some moments, even the logical operations overlap the grammatical functions. In the verse “I live and fight” the subject expressed by the pronoun I exerts a function of same – or of thesis. In the next verse, “Peter lives and fights”, the subject Peter, which could be expressed by the pronoun he, instead of you, operates the logical function of other – or of antithesis. In the third verse, “The people live and fight”, closing with a conclusion the little syllogism of inductive base, we have the people in place of the us, working as a general operator of fusion of opposites or different ones, in the function of transcendent – or of synthesis.

I live and fight – first individual premise
 Peter lives and fights – second individual premise
 The people live and fight – inductively based general conclusion

In the lesson, the disused pronoun “*tu*” – the formal form of “you” in Brazilian Portuguese – gives way to another structure, organized in a less grammatical and more logical way: if the *tu* occurs in the relationship with the other who is different from me, we can replace it by someone who is with me as a mark of the difference. The other, represented grammatically by “*tu*”, can then be replaced, from the logical and dialogical point of view, by “he”. This other who antagonizes me, in fact holds the key for us to perceive ourselves as a synthesis in the composition of a more general instance, composed of the “we” – or the society composed of individual subjects different from each other. I am different from the other – represented by “*tu*” or “he” – but this other is with me, because in the logical relation he is human just like me – and at the limit he is, just like me, a child of God, which implies accepting our communion: we are the difference in the unity. It is a logical process intimately anchored in a theological perspective, ingeniously devised in grammar lessons, but with a clear, and very specific, political connotation.

The “*tu*” is replaced by the “He”, who appears personified in the figure of Peter. From the logical synthesis of the “I” and of the “other”, it is possible to compose the “We”, presented here conceptually as “people”. Once again, in the movement from the particular to the general, anchored in inductive logic, where linguists would see an exercise in grammar, some Catholic intellectuals, probably educated by scholastic thought, saw the possibility of a syllogism.

VII

The insertion of left-wing members of the Catholic Church in the university allowed these militants a more comprehensive training space and contact with theories and doctrines that were initially alien to Catholicism, and that were gradually put into practice in their spaces of political action. These doctrines, on the one hand, were related to Jacques Maritain's notion of the historical ideal, focused on the idea that the faith of Christians was materialized in a way of being in the world and that it was necessary, besides knowledge and reflection, the active engagement in the reality to be personally lived. On the other hand, the experience at the university also made possible the contact with the Marxist thought, which motivated a good part of the Brazilian youth to guide their political action aiming at the promotion of a radical social transformation of the country through a socialist revolution (Braghini, 2015).

The militants involved in the creation of MEB and in the first years of the movement were ecclesiastics and lay Catholics who, to a greater or lesser extent, were linked to other movements not directly related to the Catholic Church and who had a relationship not necessarily harmonious with the ecclesiastical hierarchy, in a clergy divided between those who did not look kindly on Catholic militancy in spaces considered as politically radical and those who supported such action. As we have pointed out, the Catholic Church did not constitute an organic whole, once a series of forces and distinct interests correlated inside it in relation to the work with the popular strata.

This tension regarding MEB's work in the communities had been present since its foundation, but it becomes clearer as the political crisis in the country intensified due to the “threat of communism”, in the context before the coup of 1964, but also after the coup, when the dictatorial government tried to consolidate its hegemony. According to Wagner Teixeira (2008), the continuity of MEB's activities during the dictatorial regime was not only due to the religious character of the movement, but more specifically because of the interference of conservative bishops linked to the CNBB, who proposed to the military government the restructuring of the movement through its decentralization around the local dioceses. With this, the more conservative group intended to take over the direction of the movement and soften the radical political content that, as we have seen, was present in MEB since its foundation and that is clearly manifested in the production of the primer “Living is fighting”.

The episode of the seizure, by order of the governor of the State of Guanabara, Carlos Lacerda, of about 3000 copies of the primer “Living is fighting”, in a printer in Rio de Janeiro, months before the coup in 1964, made the primers famous. In the press, the news of the seizure of the “subversive primers from the Bishops” (MEB, 1963a, p. 03) was widely spread in radio and TV news (Fávero, 2006).

During the months of February and March 1964, an inquiry was launched at the Department of Political and Social Order (*Departamento de Ordem Política e Social* – DOPS), in which the employees of printing office where the material was apprehended were subpoenaed to testify, as well as the clergymen Dom José Augusto Távora, president of MEB, and Monsignor Hilário Pandolfo, vice-president of CNBB – and members of the MEB coordination. It was also requested that the DOPS be sent the General Statute of MEB and excerpts of the first lessons of the primer “*Saber para viver*” – “Knowing to live” –, which at that moment was being elaborated.

In some letters written by monitors who worked in the radio schools in Pernambuco, it is reported that after this event the order was given to collect the volumes used in the schools since the beginning of 1964:

I have come across so many barriers and rumors of this school, about the communists, the first rumors was our representative here in Boa Vista, in telling me that the primers were communist. My school is having little attendance because of these rumors, but I always convince the students and also the community. There was talk that Don Antonio was arrested and Father Mansoete, also because of the school that was communist and that these primers were going to be collected by the army and the monitors were going to be arrested. We monitors have worked in favor of this school that only those who know are us, now it is getting better because we have explained a lot about where this school was born and who the leaders of these movements are (Medrado, 1964).

I am anxious that you show up here, because we have serious things to deal with, a girl came to report the school that this school was communist, it is these cases that we need to talk with her

about and there are others saying that many people are giving them advice to leave because this book speaks that the peasant is communist (Ramos, 1964).

I have not been teaching since the 18th of this month because of the rumor and the primers [...] I helped 21 students every night in a row but the judge of law knew, perhaps because of the rumor-mongers on the street, that the primers were communist and then I was prohibited from using the radio, primers, all of this is in the parish house being delivered, so I ask Joao to get the radio with all the material and here is my apology (Olmeido, 1964).

This letter is to let you know that on the order of Father Domingo do Salgueiro the teachers asked to collect the books that are communist and here is the news that the bishop is arrested, I am almost crazy, I am afraid, but I am sorry to leave my school because I love it, it is my greatest pleasure. The students are happy, but with this news they will be saddened. When you receive it, I ask you to let me know what we should do, I will stop until I receive a notice. The books from Salgueiro were not distributed because the teachers and the priest did not deliver them, saying they were communists and I've already been seen as a person without discernment 'cos people are saying and I don't believe, I'm going to stop, today, but I expect more news from there. Here I wait for news (Dantas, 1964).

The monitors' writings reveal the tension caused by the seizure of the primers, which, along with the schools, were identified as communist. The episode had impacts on the activities in the radio schools, such as the evasion of students and the closure, albeit temporary, of some of them. The content of the reports also shows the political scenario in the rural areas before the coup in 1964 and the climate of political persecution that was established against the ecclesiastic and lay militants, revealed in the words of the monitors who give news of arrests and reports of feelings of fear and insecurity experienced after the seizure of the primers by the military:

As for the rumors, many came out. It even came out that they would come to get me in jail, but the more rumors, the more enthusiasm we had (Costa, 1964).

For the coordinators of the state teams, this association was due to the nature of MEB's work, aimed at promoting the change of mentalities and structures, and also due to the lack of habit of some bishops, and of society in general, in assuming the laymen's action as religious work. The group of coordinators, in turn, affirmed the temporal character of MEB and denied any relationship that could be established between the movement and the actions of communists, stating that the persecutions suffered were derived from indirect issues:

MEB is considered subversive in Brazil today because its educational action itself leads to a change in mentalities and structures. The fact that it acts in rural areas, where the social problem is more acute and the situations of inequality and misery are greater, demanding, for this very reason, a more radical change, is what has led to a reaction: from the favored classes; from part of the clergy unaccustomed to see the laity directly assuming the work of the Church, nor even the values of the Gospel explicitly incarnated in the social field; from public opinion, not previously prepared to receive the type of work developed by MEB; which led to identify the action of MEB with that of the communists, due to the fact that they had developed a work in rural areas prior to the Base Education Movement. The greater or lesser intensity of persecution and pressure in the different states was caused by different reasons, from those already mentioned to local political issues. In view of the situation prevailing in the country at the moment and the problems with the work of MEB, we can see that the structures remain the same as before, as well as the reality that motivated and demanded the creation of MEB to meet the needs and aspirations of the people (Movimento de Educação de Base, 1964, p.5).

In the document, the coordinators manifest the disagreement that existed between the group of lay militants, contrary to the CNBB's proposal of decentralization of MEB in the dioceses, and the more conservative sectors of the Church. The coordinators were against the decentralization and in favor of maintaining the national unity of MEB as a fundamental condition for the movement to continue in a unified manner. The defenders of the restructuring of MEB, on the other hand, defended the decentralization as a way to keep the most radical leaders away, but also to redeem any relationship that could be established between MEB and communism.

Faced with the new political conjuncture, it was impossible to maintain the initial proposals that motivated the creation of the MEB. In case the movement broke the partnership established with the Ministry of Education, it would lose its main source of financial resources, which, by the way, became a recurring theme after the coup, due to the discrepancies between the budget funds destined and available and those effectively released. If it opted for direct confrontation, it would lose the right to continue its activities and would cause the regime to intensify persecution of many of its members, also affecting the supervisors and monitors who worked in the radio schools promoting literacy and grassroots work – which would result in the imprisonment of members and the closing of radio schools (Teixeira, 2008).

In that context of political instability in which MEB's activities were somehow impacted by the dictatorial regime, the restructuring proposed by the CNBB was the possible alternative so that MEB could continue to develop its work of base education, carried out through agreements that resulted in processes of accommodation to the dictatorship. As it has been pointed out by more recent historiography, the dictatorship established at that time different levels of relations with its opponents that “differentially combined the use of force and attempts at legitimization” (Ridenti, 2014, p.30). We must remember that the dictatorial regime never assumed itself as anti-democratic, on the contrary, it sought to legitimize itself with expressive sectors of society as the maintainer of order in the face of the threat of communism, even if it was in the name of a “relative democracy” (Ridenti, 2014).

Among the sectors with which the regime established spaces of collaboration was the Catholic Church, whose more conservative sector saw in the agreements with the dictatorial regime the possibility of political rearrangements in society and also within the institution itself, after all, the anti-communist flag was common to both. In any case, as we know, the dictatorial power that was consolidating itself based on these alliances did not give up persecuting the opposition groups with which it could not establish collaborative relations. For these, the only option left was the use of force.

Thus, in 1965, the CNBB took over the management of MEB after the approval, in the previous year, of the document *Diretrizes do Monsenhor Tapajós* (Monsignor Tapajós' Guidelines), which promoted the restructuring of MEB around the local dioceses and changed some methodological assumptions of the movement through adjustments in its pedagogical discourse. At that moment, lay leaders linked to the national and state coordination were removed, coming from the most radical groups of Catholicism that had been engaged in the movement and worked from the beginning in the structuring of educational programs (Teixeira, 2008).

Moreover, the restructuring also led to the dismissal of militants who developed grassroots work among the population, as it was the case of many monitors who were targets of persecution by the military regime for their work in grassroots education and popular culture movements – and for being engaged in other spaces of political action, such as rural unions. In 1966, MEB underwent a new restructuring process that culminated in the reduction of activities in some states of the Northeast Region and the end of its activities in Pernambuco and Bahia, turning its focus of action to the Northern Region of Brazil.

Another consequence of MEB's restructuring, which interests us in a particular way, is that the educational materials abandon the theme of conscientization and change of living conditions in the countryside, as a result of a social and political integration, and it starts defining popular education in the context of cultural integration of individuals (Raposo, 1982). In fact, comparisons between the primers “*Viver é lutar*” (Living is fighting) and “*Mutirão*” (Community Action) – which was published in 1965 already at this time of accommodation to the dictatorial regime – reveal very different treatments in relation to the theme of peasants' life, access to land and right to work.

There are also differences regarding man's role in changing his condition of life. “*Viver é luta*” has a critical view on the situation of peasants and the role of the State, which disappears in the primer “*Mutirão*”. Despite seeking or trying to preserve, in its content, the dialogue with elements of popular culture in the Northeast of Brazil – as, for example, the use of poems with a structure similar to *cordéis* – “*Mutirão*” presents an integrating vision of man in relation to his environment, which is based on the appreciation of a notion of communion forged through a strictly religious bias.

In “*Mutirão*”, there are lessons that reinforce the “union” and the “cooperativism” around work, which are presented as integrating factors necessary for the improvement of the peasants' living

conditions. The themes address, in general, the misery of the people and the right to land, considering change as the fruit of the organization and union of the people in a relationship of mutual help of its individuals, but without alluding to the duty of the State to guarantee basic rights to the people. The name of the primer – “*Mutirão*” (Community Action) – suggests the new tone that guides its political assumption of fostering solidarity association for the benefit of the common good. The change in the pedagogical instrument marks the political reorientation of the movement, motivated by the national political context in everything.

The analysis of MEB's didactic materials, and of the other documental sources, bring us clues so that we can reflect, among other aspects, on the potential of education as a revolutionary political act, especially in the context of an authoritarian state which sought to undermine the experiences of popular education. This examination also helps us to refine our view of the primers as potential sources for discussions in the fields of history of education and curriculum, since they represent in their contents the political-pedagogical orientations of educational movements. These materials, often seen from the point of view of educational technologies, in a prejudiced or ambiguous way, as ideologizing, naive, archaic, or technically outdated, have had their value as a source increasingly highlighted by educational historiography. Moreover, we see that teaching materials can reveal themselves, from a given pedagogical perspective, to be an instrument of social and political fight – with primers in hand, perhaps we can still ask ourselves, today, about the subversive and threatening potential of a certain type of educational practice.

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