In the Struggle for Radical Knowledge: Autoethnography and Collective Militant Research with the MTST – Homeless Workers' Movement

by

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I, Alberto Fierro, declare that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on independently conducted research and only external information as properly cited in the references. I further declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Alberto Fierro

Berlin, 26 November 2021

Abstract

The dissertation offers an autoethnographic narrative of my encounter with the Brazilian social movement *Movimento dos Trabalhadores sem Teto* (MTST) – Homeless Workers' Movement. The MTST has been struggling for more than twenty years for the right to housing. It organizes the people living in Brazilian cities' peripheries to fight for dignity, equality and against the structural hierarchies of class, race, and gender. The puzzles of the dissertation arouse within the MTST occupations when militants asked me difficult questions and challenged me. The narrative tells of the encounter between colonized and colonial subject positions. The central question is: how can Western activist researchers develop a transformative relationship with social movements from the Global South? Dominant subjectivities (re)produce structural oppressions in their everyday life. Thus, I focus on how researchers align with the movements they support: how do gringo ethnographers start struggling against oppressions together with the oppressed?

The dissertation employs three concepts: fragility, the everyday, and (self)transformation. After having situated them within a Black feminist and critical framework, I use them to address the tensions resulting from my encounter with the MTST. Fragility illustrates how dominant subjects feel when they are made to understand they reproduce hierarchies. The everyday represents a heuristic tool to conceptualize both the reproduction of structural oppression – in the unreflected repetition – and the occupations as sites where hierarchies are challenged through resisting routines – like chanting, demonstrating, collectively cooking, etc. Finally, (self)transformation theorizes the unlearning process of dominant subjects. The narrative is structured around three phases. First, I describe the initial months in the occupations and how I discovered to inhabit a colonial positionality. Then, I interweave memories from Brazil with a student occupation in Kossuth square, Budapest. Mixing Hungary and Brazil helps focus on

how the process of discovery and unlearning crucially hinges on space and context. Finally, I tell how I attempted at developing more participatory research with the MTST approximately one year after the first encounter.

The genre of the dissertation is autoethnographic because of representation problems. Militants made me understand how my research was deemed to objectify them. Thus, I decided to employ the self as a source of deconstruction. Inevitably, I do also represent militants and their struggle. The narrative reflects on how difficult it is for Western researchers to listen to the anger of the oppressed. However, the autoethnographic focus has problems. The dominant subject who 'discovers' social hierarchies risks creating a new form of hierarchy: between those who know and therefore 'check on themselves' and those who do not. In the end, this re-centers the white, male, Western subject. The narrative – divided into evocative and analytic fragments – tackles this tension. I argue that the turning to the self of the dominant must represent a temporary step, after which comes collective militant research – the participatory effort to research and struggle together. In this way, activist scholars stop objectifying their comrades and may develop useful knowledge for the struggle. The dissertation shows that learning to unlearn is a step towards the decolonization of the mind. Dominant subjects should accept to feel fragile but never try to overcome this emotion. In fact, (self)transformation is an unfinished project, and the joint effort at developing decolonized epistemologies takes place through practicing daily dialogue and experiencing rupturing joys.

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To the memory of Luciana Ferreira

Introduction

'Why do they always think by looking at us they will find the answers to our problems, why don't they look at themselves?'

An indigenous person quoted by Linda Tuhiwai Smith[1]

The only things one really deconstructs are things into which one is intimately mired. It speaks you. You speak it.

Gayatri Spivak[2]

The present dissertation offers a narrative of my encounter with the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores sem Teto* (MTST) – a Brazilian social movement that fights for decent housing and to change the socio-economic structure.[3] The following narrative discusses two main topics: first, the complex relationship between Western researchers and social movements in the Global South; second, how people who benefit from dominance and privileges through social hierarchies – because of gender, race, class, country of origin, etc. – can unlearn their

[1] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples* (London and New York: Zed Books Ltd., 1999), 198.
[2] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The post-colonial critic: Interviews, strategies, dialogues* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 135.
[3] For primary sources about the MTST, see Guilherme Simões, Marcos Campos and Rud Rafael, *MTST 20 Anos de História: Luta, Organização e Esperança nas periferias do Brasil* [MTST 20 years of history: struggle, organization and hope in Brazilian peripheries] (São Paulo: Editora Autonomia Literária, 2017); Guilherme Boulos, *Por que ocupamos? Uma introdução a luta dos sem-teto* [Why do we occupy? An introduction to the struggle of the homeless] (São Paulo: Editora Autonomia Literária, 2014). For secondary/academic sources, see Debora Goulart, 'O anticapitalismo do movimento dos Trabalhadores sem teto – MTST' [The Anti-capitalism of the Homeless Workers' Movement], (PhD diss., Universidade Estadual Paulista, 2011); Alberto Fierro, 'Revolutionary Politics of Social Rights? An Ethnographic Account of the Homeless Workers' Movement in São Paulo', *Millennium* 47, no. 3 (2019): 398-416; Alberto Fierro, 'The MTST Politics of Social Rights: Counter-Conducts, Acts of Citizenship and a Radical Struggle Beyond Housing', *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 33, no. 4 (2020): 513-527; Monika Ottermann, 'Hilfspakete statt Grundstücksbesetzungen. MTST in Coronazeiten: Neue Strategien gegen alte Barbareien' [Aid packages instead of occupying. MTST in Corona times: New strategies against old barbarisms], *Brasilien Nachrichten* 161, (2020): 8-10; Monika Ottermann, 'Hoffnung für Leib und Seele. Die Solidarküchen von MTST' [Hope for body and soul. The solidarity kitchens of MTST], *Brasilien Nachrichten* 163, (2021): 39-40.

domination and become more effective allies in the struggle against structural forms of oppression.

The two narratives' puzzles did not arise in a university library, they are the result of the continuous challenges I experienced through my relationships with MTST militants. I went to do fieldwork with a 'traditional' approach: I had prepared a research proposal as part of my Ph.D. program which highlighted a literature gap, a theoretical puzzle, and a planned methodology to conduct the work. The research question dealt with how radical activists conceptualize socio-economic rights: I was interested in looking at how liberal political tools (rights) could be employed and re-signified by an anti-capitalist social movement. However, as often happens, the fieldwork drastically changed my approach. Through the encounter with the MTST, I was compelled to question my role as a researcher and my identity as a white, European, middle-class, man. While discussing with an MTST militant about a text I had written on the strategic employment of rights, she said that the product of my research was useless to the movement's politics and that I was also objectifying the militants' voices. This moment had very strong and lasting effects.

I had started participating in the MTST struggle always having in mind that my work was not a 'traditional' scholarship, I wanted to do 'activist research':[4] being explicit about my political commitment and the desire to develop something which could be useful for the movement itself. However, things were more complex than I thought. As the following narrative will show, there exist intricate tensions in developing collaborative research endeavors with engaged movements. The challenges of constructing useful knowledge for the MTST are deeply related to the effects of my positionality in terms of structural oppressions: to be able to construct a

[4] For a volume which provides a good overview of the concept, see Charles R. Hale, ed., *Engaging contradictions: Theory, politics, and methods of activist scholarship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

collective and liberating research process, I need to unlearn my privileges. Thus, the dissertation is centered around the two following problems:

1) How to imagine a transformative and liberating relation between Western activist scholars and social movements in the Global South? How to develop knowledge which is useful for movements' struggle?
2) How can members of dominant groups become allies in fighting against structural oppressions? How can white, colonial, middle-class, male subjects unlearn their structural privileges?

I approach these two puzzles by showing how they concretely emerged in everyday relations with the MTST. This is the role and power of narrating: it provides insights about how I discovered the effects that social hierarchies had on my encounter with the militants. Throughout the dissertation, it will become clear that the present narrative can only represent a first step in addressing the problem of how to develop a transformative relation between Western activist scholars and social movements in the Global South. In the rest of this introduction, I discuss some important literature that informs the present work. The first two sections introduce the activist approach to research and ethnography. I also show the intrinsic limits of it, by focusing on the politics of representing the oppressed. Then, I discuss the concept of decolonization and its relevance for the dissertation. Finally, I briefly present some of the works that have shown how oppressive structures work in Brazil and I also examine autoethnography – the genre to which the narrative relates.

Ethnography and activist research

The original research process envisioned the employment of ethnographic methods. Therefore, I was preparing myself for participant observation, in-depth interviews, and living in an occupation. Because I was lacking the necessary training, I took a course on ethnographic

methods. Thus, I had the opportunity to be exposed to some of the 'classic' ethnographies of social anthropology.[5] Moreover, I read about how ethnographic methods have been applied by social science practitioners.[6] But more than anything, I was looking for 'how to do' pieces: for instance, how to conduct in-depth interviews,[7] how participant observation looks like in practice,[8] and how to relate my fieldwork with the theoretical puzzle.[9] Especially at the beginning of my encounter with the MTST, I was writing long (auto)ethnographic entries; in fact, the following narrative is substantially based on these notes.

During these first steps, problematizing my role as an activist researcher was not a primary concern; yet I started reading some of the relevant literature. The first encounter with this vast scholarship coming from different disciplines has been with 'activist anthropologists',[10] as I was already studying the ethnographic perspective. Reading these works, I found important ideas concerning my fieldwork. First, the concept of avoiding claims of 'objectivity': activist researchers do not believe that detached observation is possible or desirable, as the very process of knowledge production is political, and "notions of objectivity that ignore or deny" that the

[5] Among others: Paul Rabinow, *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977); Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Mitchell Duneier, *Slim's table: Race, Respectability, and Masculinity* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Philippe Bourgois, *In search of respect: Selling crack in El Barrio* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[6] Good overviews include Edward Schatz, ed., *Political Ethnography: What immersion contributes to the study of power* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Joseph Lauren, Matthew Mahler and Javier Auyero, eds., *New perspectives in political ethnography* (New York: Springer, 2007); more specifically in relation to the IR field, see Wanda Vrasti, 'The strange case of ethnography and international relations', *Millennium* 37, no. 2 (2008): 279–301; Wanda Vrasti, 'Dr Strangelove, or how I learned to stop worrying about methodology and love writing', *Millennium* 39, no. 1 (2010): 79–88.

[7] Joe Soss, 'Talking our way to meaningful explanations' in *Interpretation and method: Empirical research methods and the interpretive turn*, eds. Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea (New York: M.E. Sharpe), 127–149.

[8] Vered Amit, ed., *Constructing the field: Ethnographic fieldwork in the contemporary world* (London: Routledge, 2003).

[9] Michael Burawoy, 'The extended case method', *Sociological theory* 16, no. 1 (1998): 4–33.

[10] See Nancy Scheper-Hughes, 'The primacy of the ethical: propositions for a militant anthropology', *Current anthropology* 36, no. 3 (1995): 409–440; Charles R. Hale, 'Activist research v. cultural critique: Indigenous land rights and the contradictions of politically engaged anthropology', *Cultural anthropology* 21, no. 1 (2006): 96–120; Shannon Speed, 'At the crossroads of human rights and anthropology: Toward a critically engaged activist research', *American Anthropologist* 108, no. 1 (2006): 66–76.

social context is itself deeply politicized "take on a de facto political positioning of their own".[11] Second, the idea that activist scholarship requires a serious engagement in terms of time and energy: the research process is envisioned as being collaborative and in dialogue with the activists; scholars research *with* someone and not *about* someone.[12]

Finally, as Charles Hales notes, activist research implies a commitment to align with oppressed people in their struggle against social hierarchies and domination. He argues that many activist scholars do experience this kind of oppression personally, and, for these researchers:

> The idea of putting scholarship to the service of their own communities' empowerment and well-being is more apt to sound like a sensible, if not an inevitable, way to practice their profession. For those, like myself, who do not claim such experience-based connections, the move is one of active alignment, avoiding the righteous fervor of a convert/ traitor while rejecting the privilege-laden option to remain outside the fray.[13]

A main contribution of the present dissertation is discussing in-depth the tensions arising from this *active alignment*. How do researchers who belong to dominant groups practically contribute to anti-oppression struggles while refraining from romanticizing and simplistic attitudes? Also, Shannon Speed highlights how most anthropological works privilege the ethnographic text over the "research process as a […] site for frontally addressing the critiques and creating mutually defined projects with research 'subjects'".[14] In this respect, my narrative contributes to overcoming this duality because the text itself has the purpose of discussing (and representing) ways through which the research process can become collaborative.

However, while reading on activist scholarship, I also found myself struggling with problems that seemed unresolvable: this happened especially with texts focusing on the positionality of

[11] Charles R. Hale, 'Introduction', in *Engaging contradictions: Theory, politics, and methods of activist scholarship*, 2.
[12] Laura Pulido, 'FAQs: Frequently (Un)Asked Questions about Being a Scholar Activist', in *Engaging contradictions*, 341–366.
[13] Hale, 'Introduction', 3.
[14] Shannon Speed, 'Forged in Dialogue: Toward a Critically Engaged Activist Research', in *Engaging contradictions: Theory, politics, and methods of activist scholarship*, 213–236.

the researcher as Western and, therefore, on the reproduction of colonial relationships.[15] As clearly illustrated by Birke Otto and Philipp Terhorst, the positionality of Western activist researchers is nested in global relations of exploitation: "The research collaboration is embedded in a setting of material, social, political and power differentials resulting from histories of colonialism, development, and local realities".[16] Moreover, "the identity of the activist researcher is constructed and made possible only because of the existence of the subaltern position – that she wishes to change".[17] As the following narrative will show, the idea that Western activist researchers exist because of the very inequalities they want to fight against can be very discomforting; however, this kind of consciousness should not lead to paralysis but rather to stronger and more radical self-reflexivity. Otto and Terhorst highlight two other major problems stemming from the deep power imbalance between researchers from the Global North and the social movements from the Global South: first, the risk that by trying to translate the experiences of the subaltern into Western academia's language, the activist scholar may reproduce colonial forms of representation and knowledge. Second, the fact that the desire to use our privilege in favor of the subaltern – the desire 'to give back' – is inscribed in colonial relationships and, therefore, there exists the risk of reproducing "a hierarchical relationship between those who can give and those who can only take".[18]

Through the encounter with the MTST, I strongly experienced these dilemmas at an emotional level; but with time and dialogue, I learned that these unresolvable tensions should guide the reflection and practice of activist researchers.

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[15] See Birke Otto and Philipp Terhorst, 'Beyond Differences? Exploring Methodological Dilemmas of Activist Research in the Global South.', in *Social Movements in the Global South: Dispossession, Development and Resistance*, eds. Sara C. Motta and Alf Gunvald Nilsen (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 200–23; Samuel Veissiere, 'Making a living: The gringo ethnographer as pimp of the suffering in the late capitalist night', *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 10, no. 1 (2010): 29–39; Marcelo Diversi and Susan Finley, 'Poverty pimps in the academy: a dialogue about subjectivity, reflexivity, and power in decolonizing production of knowledge', *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 10, no. 1 (2010): 14-17.

[16] Otto and Terhorst, 'Beyond Differences?', 203.

[17] Ibid., 201.

[18] Ibid., 211.

The present dissertation takes as a point of departure the problems which arose from the encounter of colonial and colonized positionalities. Through constructing and deconstructing my relationship with the MTST in the narrative, I aim to show that reflecting on privileges and prejudices can produce (self)transformative knowledge. Like Samuel Veissiere, who takes his exploitative position as a gringo ethnographer as a productive source to analyze structural violence in Brazil,[19] I will go through the (painful) process of examining how my position as a white, European, middle-class, man displays several structural prejudices and what consequences these have for collaborative and anti-colonialist research.

The politics and ethics of representation

Now, I move back to the two critiques on my text on the strategic employment of social rights to better grasp some of this narrative's challenges. First, the comrade argued that my proposed reflections were useless to MTST politics. Undeniably, I joined the struggle already with a developed set of theoretical questions. In the beginning, I was not prepared to establish a dialogue with the movement's militants to see together which topics were relevant for them. The knowledge I was set up to produce was probably useless to the movement, for the simple reason that my research design did not include their opinions and feedback. Moreover, the militant considered my text ineffective because it did not tackle the social hierarchies that oppress women, Afro-Brazilians, the working class – i.e., the great majority of MTST militants. Indeed, only because I received this type of critique, did the dissertation's problem turn into how to develop useful knowledge against oppressive hierarchies. Explicitly asking this question represents a contribution of this work to the 'activist research' scholarship. The MTST comrade criticized my piece also because it employed militants' experiences to 'talk back' to a

[19] "It strikes me, as it has struck me many times in the past month, that the whore and I are operating on not-so-dissimilar modes. We are both at different ends of street livelihoods, but our livelihoods are interdependent nonetheless. We both see in each other potential clients and tangible commodities from which we can sustain our livelihoods, and (dare I say it?), generate meaning and capital", Veissiere, 'Making a living', 31.

theoretical problem relevant for Western academia. In the text, I was objectifying people, employing their voices as an instrument to grasp certain meanings about social rights. In this section, I discuss these two problems – *uselessness* and *objectification* – informed by two post/anti-colonial[20] scholars: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak[21] and Linda Tuhiwai Smith.[22]

Both issues are connected to the relationship between research and colonialism. Spivak and Tuhiwai Smith help us to understand that the socio-political realities of colonialism are still deploying their effects, and, therefore, we need to take an active anti-colonial stance. Thus, how Western activist scholars are reproducing colonial domination becomes crucial; as well as the question of which strategies are available to decolonize academic practice. One of the problems my narrative tackles is how the Western scholar is deeply unaware of their colonial positioning: this is not only a matter of lacking goodwill; the problem is structural. Colonialism's socio-political reality makes the colonialists believe that they are not imbricated in these relations, it is a way to hide the oppressive structure. As highlighted by Ilan Kapoor: "By placing themselves as 'outsiders', [Westerners] duck their complicity in North-South politics, often hiding behind naivete or lack of expertise, all the while congratulating themselves as the 'saviors of marginality'".[23]

[20] Some academics prefer to employ the term 'anti-colonial' – instead of 'post-colonial' – to avoid the misconception of colonialism being a finished political project. In the IR field, see for instance Himadeep Muppidi, *The colonial signs of International Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

[21] An introduction to this prolific and theoretically challenging author include: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Houndmills: Macmillan Education Ltd, 1988), 271–316; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The post-colonial critic: Interviews, strategies, dialogues* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990); Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean, eds., *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996). For valuable secondary literature see: Ilan Kapoor, 'Hyper-self-reflexive development? Spivak on representing the Third World 'Other'', *Third World Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (2004): 627–647; Beverley Best, 'Postcolonialism and the deconstructive scenario: representing Gayatri Spivak', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 17, no. 4 (1999): 475–494; Shahnaz Khan, 'Performing the native informant: doing ethnography from the margins', *Canadian Journal of Women & the Law* 13, (2001): 266–284.

[22] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing methodologies* (London and New York: Zed Books Ltd., 1999).

[23] Kapoor, 'Hyper-self-reflexive development?', 631.

At the beginning of the narrative, I show how I struggled with my role as a *gringo*. Even though I was aware of my position as a European in Latin America; with the MTST militants, I was not always willing to feel accountable for it. This is because it is hard to recognize colonial privilege and be ready to challenge it. I believe it is not enough to have a theoretical understanding of the problem; and, as the narrative will show, it was through militants' questioning of my positionality as a European that I became more aware. Unlearning domination "will not come through benevolence, it has to be charted out very carefully step by step"[24] – as it represents a political and emotional loss. Feeling accountable for privileges is not enough to develop useful knowledge for the anti-colonial fight; however, it represents a preliminary step. The other fundamental reflection is about how the academy and colonialism are deeply embedded one in the other:

> Research is one of the ways in which the underlying code of imperialism and colonialism is both regulated and realized. It is regulated through the formal rules of Individual scholarly disciplines and scientific paradigms, and the institutions that support them (including the state). It is realized in the myriad of representations and ideological constructions of the Other in scholarly and 'popular' works, and in the principles which help to select and recontextualize those constructions in such things as the media, official histories and school curricula.[25]

Western research has historically implemented the colonial order. In this sense, the present work aims at thinking about how Western scholarly work can be more aligned with the anti-colonial struggle. Now, it seems clearer how my original idea of employing ethnographic methods in the Global South to 'talk back' to Western theories[26] was problematic; and that the militant was highlighting a serious problem: looking at the MTST occupation as the 'object' of research showed my embeddedness within colonial protocols: "Research has not been neutral in its objectification of the Other. Objectification is a process of dehumanization".[27]

[24] Spivak in, *The post-colonial critic*, 9.
[25] Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing methodologies*, 7-8.
[26] "Indigenous peoples have been, in many ways, oppressed by theory. Any consideration of the ways our origins have been examined, our histories recounted, our arts analysed, our cultures dissected, measured, torn apart and distorted back to us will suggest that theories have not looked sympathetically or ethically at us", ibid., 37–38.
[27] Ibid., 39.

There is another fundamental problem I am facing in writing about my encounter with the MTST. As illustrated by Spivak in her essay "Can the Subaltern speak?",[28] Western representation of the Other has been problematic in two respects (at least). By arguing in favor of the empowerment of the Subaltern – the white man talking about the oppression of Brown women by Brown men – Western intellectuals not only have silenced subaltern people by speaking on their behalf (first meaning of 'representation'); they have also claimed to *know* them and, therefore, to be able to 'depict' them (second meaning of 'representation'). Throughout my encounter with the MTST, I realized that I do not *know* the militants, both because I do not fully grasp the structural oppression they face, and their struggle against it. Moreover, the movement is a political collective that speaks for itself and represents its struggle. In this sense, the following narrative does not aim at describing/understanding MTST politics.

Because of representation problems, I decided to focus on how my encounter with the movement challenged my structural privileges and triggered reflections on decolonizing activist research. I will try to formulate an explicit 'colonial I' because I believe this is a transformative step. However, since I write about an encounter, this work is inevitably (partly) representing MTST militants. Therefore, I decided to construct the narrative also including their voices and experiences. This is a slippery terrain; as sometimes it is hard to remember that my authorial decisions are present and tied to Western geopolitical and institutional interests.[29] Thus, in the narrative, the MTST voices do not represent the other side of the encounter – they do not represent the militants. Or, in other words, I am not claiming that it is possible to hide my 'domesticating' decisions on these voices. However, they illustrate a very important aspect of

[28] Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*.
[29] "When we act in accordance with personal, professional, organisational interests, our representations of the Other say much more about us than about the Other, or at a minimum, they construct the Other only in as far as we want to know it and control it", Kapoor, 'Hyper-self-reflexive development?', 636.

Spivak's reflection about the structural obstacles to the Subaltern speech act. The question is also whether the West is ready to listen:

> So, "the subaltern cannot speak," means that even when the subaltern makes an effort to the death to speak, she is not able to be heard, and speaking and hearing complete the speech act. That's what it had meant, and anguish marked the spot.[30]

The narrative will show how hard it was for me to listen to MTST militants. Because they were challenging my privileges and prejudices; they put me in uncomfortable situations. However, it is only through this challenging act of listening that I started reflecting on structural oppressions. Finally, developing a narrative that incorporates MTST voices represents a risk because it is liable to the same criticism about objectification. However, I believe that it is important to move beyond the feeling of a total 'impossibility of representation'. Again, Spivak illustrates brilliantly the comfort and the risks of taking a black-and-white position:

> I will have in an undergraduate class, let's say, a young, white male student, politically-correct, who will say: "I am only a bourgeois white male, I can't speak." In that situation […] I say: "Why not develop a certain degree of rage against the history that has written such an abject script for you that you are silenced?" […] When you take the position of not doing your homework – "I will not criticize because of my accident of birth, the historical accident" – that is a much more pernicious position. […] to say "I won't criticize" is salving your conscience, and allowing you not to do any homework.[31]

Thus, it is also in the spirit of doing 'my homework' that I am taking the risk of narrating about the encounter with the MTST. The objective is to offer a self-reflexive account of how the latter has triggered a political desire to struggle and research together. In developing the narrative, I also need to avoid the temptation of romanticizing the struggle, as this would only represent a reproduction of colonial relations of power.[32] I do not believe the present work is useful for the movement's politics and liberation goals; however, I hope it is a step to develop participatory

[30] Spivak in Landry and MacLean, eds., *The Spivak Reader*, 292.
[31] Spivak in *The post-colonial critic*, 62–63.
[32] "They also romanticise, tending to eulogise subaltern women, indigenous knowledge and/or local politics. This gives the impression that subalterns are transparent to themselves, immune to struggle or failure; […] This desire for the Other as heroine or hero, this species of 'reverse-ethnic sentimentality', is a desire of the intellectual to be benevolent or progressive; […] It is, ultimately, another form of silencing of the subaltern", Kapoor, 'Hyper-self-reflexive development?', 638.

and collective research. Also, I must be explicit about the fact that my institutional interests as a Ph.D. student at a U.S. university based in Europe cannot be erased.

Decolonial strategies

Growing awareness of the enduring effects of colonialism stimulated a rich literature on 'coloniality'[33] and approaches to decolonization – in this tradition[34] scholars prefer to employ the term 'decolonial' rather than 'anticolonial'. For the objectives of the present dissertation, the most important concept coming from this literature is that of *epistemic (de)colonization*. In fact, not only Western activist researchers run the risk of (re)producing colonial knowledge; in certain ways, that risk is bound to realize. Traditionally erased by Western thought, epistemic domination is a tragic and constitutive element of 'coloniality':

> Modernity/coloniality […] is at the same time a structure in which the historico-structural dependency, as a structure of domination, is the visible face of the coloniality of power. Not only is such a historico-structural dependency economic or political; above all, it is *epistemic* (emphasis mine).[35]

Epistemic domination constructs "a hierarchy of superior and inferior"[36], where the Western white man is the only subject who produces scientific and universal knowledge. I locate the present dissertation in the growing body of scholarly (and political) work that aims at decolonizing social sciences. Meera Sabaratnam, a key proponent of this program within International Relations,[37] conceptualizes the task as developing 'decolonial strategies':

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[33] Ramón Grosfoguel illustrates the relevance of the distinction between 'colonialism' and 'coloniality': "Coloniality allows us to understand the continuity of colonial forms of domination after the end of colonial administrations, produced by colonial cultures and structures in the modern/colonial capitalist world-system", Grosfoguel, 'Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political-Economy: Transmodernity, Decolonial Thinking, and Global Coloniality', *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1, no.1 (2011): 14–15.

[34] See in particular the work of Walter Mignolo, Ramón Grosfoguel, Gloria Anzaldúa, Enrique Dussel and Aníbal Quijano.

[35] Walter Mignolo, 'The geopolitics of knowledge and the colonial difference', *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 1 (2002): 84.

[36] Grosfoguel, 'Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies', 7.

[37] See also Branwen Gruffydd Jones, ed., *Decolonizing International Relations* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), Sanjay Seth, ed., *Postcolonial Theory and International Relations: A critical introduction* (London & New York: Routledge, 2013) and Robbie Shilliam, ed., *International Relations and Non-Western Thought: Imperialism, colonialism and investigations of global modernity* (London & New York: Routledge, 2011).

> These are critical intellectual strategies designed to challenge the centrality of particular ideas about the international which naturalise forms of historic inequality between communities and people. In particular, these are connected to the legacies, broadly understood, of European colonialism and the hierarchies of power, wealth and regard that it sought to institute.[38]

Sabaratnam writes about challenging colonial ideas concerning the international, but, of course, the problem is that epistemic domination encompasses the entire Western mode of thinking. The dramatic idea that there exists a universal 'subject of reason' has been so powerful and long-lasting because its traits were always concealed. Only through the painstaking work of activists, social movements, and critical intellectuals the truth could emerge: this 'universal' subject is racialized, gendered, and located in a specific geo-cultural space. Colonial domination went, from the beginning, together with epistemic conquest. Walter Mignolo shows how the conceptualization of human intellect performed in the 16th Century by Francis Bacon – "from these three fountains, Memory, Imagination, and Reason, flow these three emanations, History, Poesy and Philosophy, and *there can be no others* (emphasis mine)"[39] – "erased the possibility of even thinking about a conceptualization and distribution of knowledge 'emanating' from other local histories".[40]

Thus, it becomes urgent that decolonial strategies must deconstruct the West as "an epistemically privileged or centred subject that can represent, know and treat parts of the world as its objects, through processes of objectification".[41] It is no coincidence that the militant criticized my text because employed the movement's struggle to 'talk back' to a theoretical problem of Western academia. During a conversation, she also called me 'colonialist'. While my first reactions were bafflement and vexation, I now understand why she conceptualized my positionality in that way. I entered Brazil from a specific geopolitical location. Arguably, in the

[38] Meera Sabaratnam, 'IR in dialogue… but can we change the subjects? A typology of decolonising strategies for the study of world politics', *Millennium* 39, no. 3 (2011): 784.
[39] Bacon in Mignolo, 'The geopolitics of knowledge", 59.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Sabaratnam, 'IR in dialogue…', 785.

encounter with the MTST I represented a Western subject who wished to grasp something through objectification. Only thanks to the challenges that the encounter produced, the dissertation now problematizes colonial relations of power and the politics of Western activist researchers. However, as the literature on coloniality has argued, epistemic decolonization implies that knowledge must be produced according to new and distinct logics: "Intellectual decolonization […] cannot come from existing philosophies and cultures of scholarship".[42] In this sense, the present work opens possibilities for thinking of epistemic alternatives because it is based on a critique of the colonial way of producing knowledge. This critique comes from the problematization of the social, political, and human relationship between the 'researcher' and the 'researched' which – too often – is still considered unproblematic.

Not only it is very hard for decolonial knowledge to arise from a colonial "body-politics",[43] but also not all knowledge that is socially located within subalternity is also epistemically *for* the subaltern. As Ramón Grosfoguel argues: "Subaltern epistemic perspectives are knowledge coming from below that produces a critical perspective of hegemonic knowledge in the power relations involved".[44] To create decolonized knowledge one would first need to acknowledge the existence of the colonial difference – "the difference between center and periphery, between the Eurocentric critique of Eurocentrism and knowledge production by those […] who have been left out of the discussion"[45] –and then work from within that difference to liberate people from colonial oppression.

The latter is the objective for future work with the MTST, and I hope this dissertation contributes to preparing for the 'epistemic decolonization project'. A different kind of researching will be the result of painstaking collective work that – from the outset – criticizes

[42] Mignolo, 'The geopolitics of knowledge", 64.
[43] Grosfoguel, 'Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies', 5.
[44] Ibid., 6.
[45] Mignolo, 'The geopolitics of knowledge", 63.

the traditional geopolitics of knowledge and carefully paves the way for "deep empirical engagement with those normally excluded".[46] The following narrative gives empirical substance to the claim that to undo the colonial difference, we need to decolonize our minds:

> This task is at least as important for the colonizer as it is for the colonized. For Europeans, Bernasconi adds, ''decolonizing the colonial mind necessitates an encounter with the colonized, where finally the European has the experience *of being seen as judged by those they have denied*. The extent to which European philosophy championed colonialism, and more particularly helped to justify it through a philosophy of history that privileged Europe, makes it apparent that such a decolonizing is an urgent task for European thought'' (emphasis mine).[47]

While the narrative shows exactly how I experienced 'being seen' by MTST militants and how that changed my (self)understanding, the decision of narrating about prejudices and self-transformation bears a serious risk. Recognizing how hard it is to challenge colonial epistemologies must be a temporary stage. Otherwise, Western researchers would just go basking in their privilege. I believe we need to be explicit that unlearning domination represents a *first* step in fighting against oppression. Focusing on how I reproduced colonial domination and prejudices must serve the objective of liberation, otherwise, it ends up being a form of re-centering on colonial subjectivities.[48] According to Enrique Dussel, decolonial epistemologies develop as conversations oriented toward trans-modernity.[49] He proposes to transcend coloniality/modernity through the realization of a dialogue between different cultures:

> A future *trans*-modern culture, a *new age of world history* […] will have a rich *pluriversity* and would be the fruit of an authentic intercultural dialogue, that would need to bear clearly in mind existing asymmetries.[50]

[46] Sabaratnam, 'IR in dialogue…', 801.
[47] Mignolo, 'The geopolitics of knowledge", 71–72.
[48] An example of this problem in IR: "Despite an anxiety about the hegemony of the West and the political exclusions generated by the liberal peace, these global critiques have largely failed to dislodge it as the central *subject* of inquiry, […]. Although these critiques profess interest in advancing an agenda 'in solidarity with the governed' or more attuned to the 'everyday', their modes of analysing world order end up reproducing, perhaps unintentionally, many of the exclusions they critique", Sabaratnam, 'IR in dialogue…', 796–97.
[49] See Enrique Dussel, 'Transmodernity and interculturality: An interpretation from the perspective of philosophy of liberation', *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1, no. 3 (2012), 28–59.
[50] Dussel, 'Transmodernity and interculturality, 43.

This dialogue, which can be conceptualized as in Paulo Freire's philosophy as a way of discovering and transforming reality,[51] is a possible way to transcend the duality between the colonialist and the colonized. The following narrative will show how the two positionalities talk and how this conversation challenges coloniality. In the next section, I will briefly illustrate the interweaving of various axes of oppression in Brazilian society. This is not only important to provide some context to the dissertation's narrative, but also because it further shows how inhabiting the colonial difference means coming from a different body politics: decolonial epistemologies arise from the experiences and with the knowledge of the oppressed.

An intersectional sketch of Brazilian social hierarchies

In Brazil, structural forms of discrimination linked with the socially constructed categories of race and gender are deeply interlocked and should therefore be analyzed through 'intersectional lenses'.[52] In contrast to the U.S.A., in Brazil, the traditional narrative is of a 'racial democracy': the key element being *mestiçagem* – literally 'miscegenation' – indicating the development of the Brazilian nation through "the historical process of cultural and 'racial' mixing among the three populations that contributed to the formation of the country (Indigenous people, Portuguese and Africans), populations that were subsequently joined by other groups of immigrants".[53] However, the idea of *mestiçagem* always hid white Brazilian elites' desire to 'dilute' the cultural and physical characteristics of the Indigenous and African majority. Scholars explicitly associate *mestiçagem* to governmental policies of 'whitening' the population, as it has been the case at the end of the 19th Century with the induced immigration

[51] See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: The Continuum International, 2005 [1970]).
[52] See Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016).
[53] Valeria Ribeiro Corossacz, 'Whiteness, Maleness, and Power: A study in Rio de Janeiro', *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies* 10, no. 2 (2015), 158.

of Germans and Italians. *Mestiçagem* is a deeply racialized concept, and it relates to the idea of *branqueamento* – whitening.[54]

Brazilian elites made the racial category of whiteness invisible to reproduce their economic and political power: "self-proclaimed whites have been historically subjects and not objects of the gaze that has racialized the world around us".[55] Tianna Paschel adds that "nationalist discourses of race mixture – insomuch as they relied on the logic of colorblindness and the silencing of racial critique – have often served to mask the reality of continued racism and structural inequality",[56] establishing a durable system of discrimination. In the country, racial categories are gendered: Afro-Brazilian women suffer more discrimination and oppression. For instance, Patricia de Santana Pinho analyzes how the aesthetic canon of whiteness differently affects men and women and how the latter have literally to perform a lighter color to fulfill it.[57] In addition, also the converse is true: discrimination based on gender lines is deeply racialized. Sharlene Mollet has written on the sexualized process of animalization suffered by Afro-descendant women in Latin America;[58] while de Santana Pinho describes how sexualization varies according to the *mestiço* phenotype:

> Television, cinema, publicity, novels and lyrics of songs have contributed significantly to producing, circulating, and attaching specific meanings […]: *some* mestiço phenotypes have been preferred as the 'most beautiful' (e.g., cinnamon-colored morenas), others as 'the most sexualized' (e.g., samba-dancing mulatas).[59]

Through ethnographic research with upper-class white men in Rio de Janeiro, Valeria Ribeiro Corossacz shows the up-to-date relevance of slavery: she finds a "symbolical dense site of

[54] As Patricia de Santana Pinho highlights: "Among the 4.5 million immigrants who entered Brazil between 1882 and 1934, more than two-thirds were white. The Brazilian government openly expressed the preference for White Europeans over other potential migrants, associating whiteness with progress and modernity", 'White but not quite: tones and overtones of whiteness in Brazil, *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 13, no. 2 (2009), 42.
[55] de Santana Pinho, 'White but not quite', 53.
[56] Tianna Paschel, *Becoming Black Political Subjects: movements and ethno-racial rights in Colombia and Brazil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 7.
[57] de Santana Pinho, 'White but not quite', 47.
[58] Sharlene Mollett, 'Irreconcilable differences? A postcolonial intersectional reading of gender, development and Human Rights in Latin America', *Gender, Place & Culture* 24, no. 1 (2017): 1-17.
[59] de Santana Pinho, 'White but not quite', 48.

meaning"[60] in the historical account of the sexual initiation of the *fazendero* (the agricultural slave master of the 19th Century) with non-white slaves. Until recent times, it has been common for upper-class white boys to have their first sexual experience with domestic workers (in the majority non-white women). Thus, the historical narrative about the slave-master relationship is a site of meaning for these white men. Along with a vivid analysis of the normalization of the structural violence inherent to this kind of sexual initiation, Ribeiro Corossacz convincingly advances the hypothesis that these men never explicitly talk about the color of the domestic workers (instead emphasizing their working-class origin) not because they grew up in a 'racial democracy', but rather because – in this instance – class and race are interlocked: women who belong to Brazilian lower-classes are mostly non-white, showing that men's silence illustrates Brazilian racial privilege.

The empirical analysis conducted in São Paulo by Peggy Lovell indicates that structural racism and sexism have a deep socio-economic effect: Afro-Brazilians have lower access to education and receive lower wages than white Brazilians.[61] Lovell's conclusions also support the necessity of an intersectional analysis: women suffer from a persistent wage gap and Afro-Brazilian women have lower access to education and high paid jobs in comparison to white women and Afro-Brazilian men. Lovell's analysis helps to focus on a third major axis of oppression in Brazil: economic and social precariousness. The country is widely known for having one of the most unequal wealth distributions in the world,[62] and again it is necessary to look at the class composition of Brazilian society from an intersectional perspective, as the poor are more often women and Afro-Brazilians. Moreover, Brazilian Marxist scholars[63] have since

[60] Ribeiro Corossacz, 'Whiteness, Maleness, and Power', 157.
[61] Peggy Lovell, 'Race, gender, and work in São Paulo, Brazil, 1960-2000', *Latin American Research Review,* (2006): 63-87.
[62] Charles H. Klein, Sean T. Mitchell, & Benjamin Junge, 'Naming Brazil's previously poor: "New middle class" as an economic, political, and experiential category', *Economic Anthropology* 5, no. 1 (2018): 83-95.
[63] See for instance Armando Boito, *Reforma e crise política no Brasil: os conflitos de classe nos governos do PT* [Reform and political crisis in Brazil: class conflicts during Workers' Party governments] (Campinas: Editora Unicamp, 2018).

long conceptualized local economic development and class composition as an effect of unequal global power relations,[64] supporting the employment of coloniality lenses when thinking about social change.

São Paulo – the MTST's stronghold and the city where the narrative unfolds – is a deeply racialized space: it is typically associated with modernity, development, and whiteness.[65] This even though white inhabitants are present in a few wealthy neighborhoods, and the large majority of *Paulistanxs* are *mestiços*. City's urban development has been characterized by consistent migration from other states – especially from the North-East of the country.[66] To sum up, the people of São Paulo's peripheries are Afro-Brazilians, women, the poor, *mestiços*, informal workers. These people are the great majority of MTST militants. Due to the severity of wealth inequality and the inadequacy of public social policies, the Brazilian working-class experiences persistent conditions of precariousness in various aspects of life: from informal work and housing to low access to health care, education, and public transportation.[67]

"Giving an account of oneself":[68] autoethnography and fragility

When I write that the dissertation's puzzles come from the field, I mean that it was through the encounter and dialogue with MTST militants that I started to see my social positioning as a white, European, and male academic. The objective of the narrative is to describe this process. I choose to narrate[69] because this is the form of academic writing which best suits the purpose

[64] See the work of dependency theorists like the former Brazilian President Ferdinando Henrique Cardoso and the critique of this tradition put forward by the 'coloniality scholars'.
[65] de Santana Pinho, 'White but not quite', 50.
[66] Emily Skop, Paul A. Peters, Ernesto F. Amaral, Joseph E. Potter & Wilson Fusco, 'Chain migration and residential segregation of internal migrants in the metropolitan area of São Paulo, Brazil', *Urban Geography* 27, no. 5 (2006): 397-421.
[67] Guilherme Boulos, *Por que ocupamos?*.
[68] The title of this section follows Judith Butler's book, *Giving an account of oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).
[69] Narrative scholarship is becoming more common and accepted in the social sciences, especially in the IR field. See for instance, Elizabeth Dauphinee, *The politics of exile* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013); Paulo Ravecca and Elizabeth Dauphinee, 'Narrative and the Possibilities for Scholarship', *International Political Sociology* 12, no. 2 (2018): 125-138; Megan Daigle, 'Writing the lives of others: Storytelling and international politics', *Millennium* 45, no. 1 (2016): 25-42; Wanda Vrasti, 'Working in Prenzlau', *New Left Review* 101 (2016):

of constructing and de-constructing the self and Others. The narrative is divided into three moments, ordered chronologically, which correspond to three chapters. Firstly, 'Being a gringo ethnographer', tells the story of my initial months with the MTST in 2018. Secondly, 'Interlude', interweaves the political activism I conducted in Budapest with the students' collective *Szabad Egyetem* – Free University – with memories of the Brazilian field trip. In Hungary, we occupied the square in front of the parliament (Kossuth square) for one week.[70] This chapter does not aim at comparing either the two movements or the social structures of the two countries. Even though some authors employed the coloniality framework to analyze Hungarian politics,[71] I do not discuss internal European hierarchies. The objective of writing about the students' struggle against the Orbán government is to show how I saw and perceived oppression in two different contexts. Thus, by interweaving the two forms of occupying, I do not suggest that the struggles are similar (or even comparable). Rather, I reflect on the implications of (not) seeing social hierarchies in Hungary and Brazil. The narrative ends with the chapter 'Coming back', where I tell how I came back to Brazil in 2019 and about the process of developing collaborative research with MTST militants.

The story is constructed primarily through ethnographic notes; while the deconstructive parts are written in Europe throughout 2020 and 2021 and are highlighted in *italics*. The form of the dissertation is narrative, and (critical) autoethnography[72] can be considered the genre to which

49-61; Jenny Edkins, 'Novel writing in international relations: Openings for a creative practice', *Security Dialogue* 44, no. 4 (2013): 281-297; Naeem Inayatullah and Elizabeth Dauphinee. *Narrative global politics: Theory, history and the personal in international relations* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016); Erzsebet Strausz, *Writing the Self and Transforming Knowledge in International Relations: Towards a Politics of Liminality* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018).

[70] See Zoltán Kovács, 'Why are students occupying Kossuth Square?', *Index*, November 27, 2018. https://index.hu/english/2018/11/27/ceu_protest_higher_education_solidarity_occupy_kossuth/.

[71] See Agnes Gagyi, '"Coloniality of power" in East Central Europe: external penetration as internal force in post-socialist Hungarian politics", *Journal of World-Systems Research* 22, no. 2 (2016): 349-372.

[72] See Robin M. Boylorn and Mark P. Orbe, eds., *Critical autoethnography: Intersecting cultural identities in everyday life* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2016); Elizabeth Ettorre, 'Feminist Autoethnography, Gender, and Drug Use: "Feeling About" Empathy While "Storying the I"', *Contemporary Drug Problems* 44, no. 4 (2017): 356-374; John T. Warren, 'Absence for whom? An autoethnography of White subjectivity', *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 1, no. 1 (2001): 36-49. For more traditional approaches to autoethnography, see, among

it relates. However, it is also the ethnography of an encounter. In fact, while I am employing the self as a productive source of reflection (as in autoethnographies), the ultimate origin of knowledge is the encounter with MTST militants. The style of the narrative, with the alternation of (auto)ethnographic glimpses and (self)reflexive theoretical sections (highlighted in *italics*), mirrors the two major strands in autoethnography – evocative and analytic.[73] Furthermore, the present work takes inspiration from a way of politicizing biographies that has in Gloria Anzaldúa a well-known representative. In her *Borderlands/La frontera*, Anzaldúa performs autoethnography – for instance by analyzing her spiritual and emotional relation to the culture of the indigenous people of Mexico – to decolonize.[74] To be precise, her work should not be labeled autoethnography because it departs from traditional Western forms of narrative:

> Anzaldúa herself describes this text [Borderlands/La frontera] as "autohistoria-teoria," a term she coined to describe women-of-color interventions into and transformations of traditional western autobiographical forms. Autohistoria-teoria includes both life-story and self-reflection on this story. Writers of autohistoria-teoria blend their cultural and personal biographies with memoir, history, storytelling, myth, and other forms of theorizing. By so doing, they create interwoven individual and collective identities.[75]

My dissertation speaks to critical autobiographies because it performs a 'politics of positionality'. While I clearly cannot connect with feminist standpoint epistemologies,[76] I show how the point of view of dominant positions is structurally biased. Thus, I employ autoethnography as a critical method.[77] In line with the work of the IR scholar Elizabeth

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others, Stacy Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams and Carolyn Ellis, eds., *Handbook of autoethnography* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

[73] See Cheryl S. Le Roux, 'Exploring rigour in autoethnographic research', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 20, no. 2 (2017): 195-207 and Leon Anderson, 'Analytic autoethnography', *Journal of contemporary ethnography* 35, no. 4 (2006): 373-395.

[74] See Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La frontera: The new mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987).

[75] AnaLouise Keating, 'Introduction: Reading Gloria Anzaldua, Reading Ourselves…Complex Intimacies, Intricate Connections' in *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, ed. AnaLouise Keating (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), 9.

[76] For an introduction to the concept, see Abigail Brooks, 'Feminist standpoint epistemology: Building knowledge and empowerment through women's lived experience' in Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Lina Leavy, eds., *Feminist research practice* (Thousand Oaks: Sage publications, 2007): 53-82.

[77] "We talk about autoethnography as a critical method by using three central features of critical theory, which include: to understand the lived experience of real people in context, to examine social conditions and uncover oppressive power arrangements, and to fuse theory and action to challenge processes of domination", Boylorn and Orbe, 'Introduction' in *Critical autoethnography*, 20.

Dauphinee, the narrative turns the private into public/political.[78] Going through embarrassments and pain, I learn about structural oppressions reflecting on the 'private side' of my research endeavor. However, writing about the self must go beyond 'revelation':

> We do not understand narrative writing as a mechanism of mere exposure—as confession. To expose for exposure's sake—that is, to reveal one's "secrets" for the sake of revelation alone, as though one's experience can speak for itself—is an a-theoretical move with little analytical value. […] What is important for us here is to examine how the reader might see theory working through narratives, as well as to recognize what a text offers (or does not offer): *Does it solidify a position?* How does it deal with other accounts of the world? (emphasis mine)[79]

The present narrative describes the challenges of (self)transformation. I changed through the encounter with the MTST and during the writing process. The main concept I employ concerning social hierarchies and transformation is 'emotional fragility'. With the latter, I characterize a strong gut feeling I often experienced in Brazil. Privileged subjects feel fragile when they start seeing their relation to structural inequalities. 'Fragility' became a popular term thanks to Robin DiAngelo,[80] a scholar from the tradition of critical whiteness studies,[81] but it has also been employed by feminist activists in relation to toxic masculinities.[82] I build on Di Angelo's work by considering emotional fragility as a reaction of dominant subject positions who feel threatened by social hierarchies' democratization. As DiAngelo writes concerning challenges to whites coming from people of color: "fragility functions as a form of bullying; I am going to make it so miserable for you to confront me […] that you will simply back off, give up, and never raise the issue again. […] In this way, it is a powerful form of *white racial control*" (emphasis mine).[83] I follow DiAngelo in conceptualizing (white) fragility as a strong

[78] Elizabeth Dauphinee, 'The ethics of autoethnography', *Review of International Studies* (2010): 799-818.
[79] Ravecca and Dauphinee, 'Narrative', 135.
[80] Robin DiAngelo, *White fragility: Why it's so hard for white people to talk about racism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018).
[81] See for instance Barbara Applebaum, *Being white, being good: White complicity, white moral responsibility, and social justice pedagogy* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010); David R Roediger, 'Critical studies of whiteness, USA: Origins and arguments', *Theoria* 48, no. 98 (2001): 72-98 and Mike Hill, ed., *Whiteness: A critical reader* (New York: NYU Press, 1997).
[82] See Sarah Banet-Weiser, and Kate M. Miltner, '# MasculinitySoFragile: Culture, structure, and networked misogyny', *Feminist Media Studies* 16, no.1 (2016): 171-174.
[83] DiAngelo, *White fragility*, 112.

emotion, that often takes the form of anger, despair, guilt, and shame.[84] However, I find her analysis problematic in two respects. First, by arguing that 'white fragility' is "a very specific white phenomenon",[85] DiAngelo is inadvertently contributing to solidifying and strengthening the category of whiteness. I do not mean it is wrong to accurately detail the features of how white suprematism is reproduced; but rather that her approach does not contribute to understanding how to *deconstruct* white fragility. In fact, according to DiAngelo, it is not clear how to deal with it. She suggests that if society were not racist, white fragility would disappear.[86] While this is certainly true, I believe her harshness on white fragility shows a moralizing attitude that is problematic because it does not seriously tackle the associated emotions. Fragility is a complex phenomenon, and it should rather represent the beginning of white people doing their 'homework' to fight racism more effectively.

In the next chapter, I will develop at length the concept of 'emotional fragility' – together with an analysis of the everyday of occupying. I employ fragility differently compared to DiAngelo – and by doing so I hope to contribute to the literature on critical whiteness – as I do not crystallize the concept. I associate the idea of feeling fragile with self-transformation. Fragility is not only white; it is also colonial and masculine; and as a concept, it serves the purpose of decolonizing our minds. Thus, I insert emotional fragility within the decolonial project – as I do more generally with the autoethnography; it is a tool that helps us move forward in the struggle against oppression. I create a link between critical whiteness studies and decolonial thinking through the concept of fragility. In fact, one could argue that decolonial literature has long been analyzing strong emotions, guilt, and shame, as powerful vehicles to deconstruct

[84] Ibid., 137-38.
[85] Ibid., 113.
[86] "People of color have occasionally asked me how to navigate white fragility. I so wish I had a simple formula to offer them! I want us to stop manifesting white fragility so that people of color don't have to ask this question.", DiAngelo, *White fragility*, 151.

subjectivities. For instance, writing about the consequences of fear on our perception of the world, Anzaldúa argues:

> It is anything that breaks into one's everyday made of perception, *that causes a break in one's defenses and resistance, anything that takes one from one's habitual grounding, causes the depths to open up, causes a shift in perception.* This shift in perception deepens the way we see concrete objects and people; the senses become so acute and piercing that we can see through things, view events in depth, a piercing that reaches the underworld (the realm of the soul) (emphasis mine).[87]

I understand fragility along these lines: as different sensing of social hierarchies. This alternative mode of experiencing social structures should not be condemned but rather investigated. Another author who employs the idea that "learning […] involves recognizing and sharing our most tender and fragile moments"[88] is the feminist activist-scholar Richa Nagar. She develops the concept of 'radical vulnerability' to hint at the constitutive and intimate relations among human beings. Nagar's work is deeply committed to transformative objectives, and she developed this idea after years of co-authorship with women and workers' collectives in India. Radical vulnerability is constituted in the collective and, therefore, "cannot be an individual pursuit; indeed it is meaningless without collectivity. Yet, this collectivity does not seek to erase the singular by subsuming everything in a larger whole; rather, the singular relearns to breathe and grow differently in the plural". [89] Emotional fragility serves a similar purpose: while it is developed from the perspective of the colonialists/oppressors, the idea is to be able to transcend the colonial divide through collective work that seriously engages with 'existing asymmetries', thereby enabling a different plurality. Emotional fragility embraces the idea that transformation must deal with body and emotions. As powerfully put by Anzaldúa: "for only through the body, through the pulling of flesh, can the human soul be transformed".[90]

[87] Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La frontera*, 39.
[88] Richa Nagar, *Hungry translations: Relearning the world through radical vulnerability* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019), 8.
[89] Ibid., 30.
[90] Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La frontera*, 75.

Before concluding the present introduction, it is important to highlight a last problem: the genre of autoethnography is not adequate to represent the entanglement and co-constitutiveness that exists between the self and the other. This limit seems even more acute if one considers that the process of unlearning this narrative describes comes from collective spaces of struggle. Despite the tension cannot be resolved through the present work, as Nagar writes, I strive to "continue to learn ways of being and doing that can make our collective knowledges abide by the terms of the struggles we stand with, even as they escape the limits imposed by the disciplined terms of the academy".[91] In the concluding chapter, I will tease out a possible path for collective research with the MTST. This kind of research could become a space where the entanglement between the self and the other is foregrounded and the decolonial project gains a different kind of traction: when the group of comrades decolonizes together and with one another. Then, I believe that the dichotomies maintained throughout this work (i.e., Western/Southern, dominant/minoritized) – although I try to destabilize them – can be collectively disrupted, and the transformational project will "abide by the terms of the struggle". For now, the current format shows how (self)transformation happens in the occupations as collective spaces where people's proximity is essential. In other words, the autoethnography shows that is it is not the self at the origin of the unlearning process, but rather the collective.

[91] Nagar, *Hungry translations*, 8.

Chapter 1 – The politics of occupying and of self-reflexivity

In this chapter, I do not aim at developing a full-fledged theoretical framework to prepare the narrative. In contrast, the writing represents how I intellectually coped with the challenges, critiques, and emotions coming from the encounter with MTST militants. The knowledge that colonial subject positions are designed to reproduce colonial knowledge emerged only at a relatively late stage of my doctoral work. As described in the introduction, first I struggled with the implications of being a colonialist in the everyday relations with the MTST. Then, back in Europe, I struggled with how one can deconstruct something that is devised to reproduce oppression. In this chapter, I develop three concepts (fragility, everyday, and self-transformation) that help address concrete and conceptual problems arising from the encounter between colonial and colonized positionalities. Without dwelling at length on their genealogies, I put the concepts together because they support a way of thinking about decolonization that moves towards liberatory objectives – through the collective work of people from both sides of the colonial divide.

The most instructive way to introduce the concepts is to briefly describe how I started employing them. In fact, they helped to understand and to address the specific problems I was facing during the research. Fragility came first. From the very beginning of my encounter with the MTST, I felt challenged and, therefore, fragile. As argued in the introduction, this is also a consequence of a mode of thinking that employs dichotomies and impossibilities (e.g., "The relationship between researchers of the Global North and activists of the Global South can only be exploitative"). When the MTST militant identified me as a colonialist, I was shocked. Interestingly, this emotional fragility arose even if I was aware of the tensions between my position and the movement. What I believe explains this apparent paradox is the idea that recognizing the exploitative relation between North and South is not enough to accept it. My

conceptual framework arriving in Brazil was not adequate to develop decolonizing moves. I was designed to be shocked. Then, thanks to the observations of MTST militants, I started reflecting on the implications of colonial representation. As already argued, traditional academia objectifies and instrumentalizes the voices, lives, and experiences of the subaltern. Therefore, I decided to work on an autoethnography, instead of a traditional ethnography, to deal with the problem of representation.

However, fragility does not come from the self-reflexive move of autoethnography; rather, it was the result of the daily relation with MTST militants. The challenges came from the occupations – spaces that resist social hierarchies and domination. Thus, I started thinking about daily life with the movement and employing the concept of the everyday to analyze how colonial positionalities reproduce domination. Moreover, it also helps to think about how occupations and militants create alternative and resisting practices. (Self)transformation came as the last heuristic tool to conceptualize the movement towards participatory forms of activist research. One of the problems of grasping the contours of fragility is that, then, it appears the desire to overcome it. Dominant subjects hope to be able not to feel fragile any longer. Unfortunately, as long as oppressive structures will exist, this is simply impossible. Thus, the concrete risk of an autoethnography that employs the 'dominant self' to write about the struggle against oppression is to ultimately absolve the self. To consider (self)transformation as a completed task. In contrast, I conceive it as a slow and unfinished process. Without conceptual and political tools that enable dominant subjects to act differently, the latter will not be able to identify the colonial divide and work towards its overcoming.

1.1 The everyday of occupying

The narrative of my encounter with the MTST (and with the Kossuth occupiers) shows the everyday of struggles. The story does not focus on notable events, it rather offers glimpses of daily life within the occupations. Also, I exhibit how the movements enable the creation of alternative practices. Chanting, marching, speaking in public, collectively cooking, leafletting, dancing… These are all examples of the militants' daily activities. More specifically, the struggles enabled what I characterize as the 'routinization' of resisting practices. The MTST makes people (I included) step into a new politicized routine, shaped by the rhythm of demonstrations, the chopping of vegetables inside the collective kitchens, and chanting the movement's slogans. In Budapest, during the one-week occupation at Kossuth, we collectively chanted "*Szabad Orszag! Szabad Egyetem*!" [Free country! Free University!] at least a couple of times every day – after an assembly, while partying, to welcome someone in the camp. For sure, the everyday of occupying creates and reproduces alternative (and politicized) routines.

The routinization of struggling practices speaks to the ambivalence of the everyday as a concept employed to characterize daily life's repetition and alienation. The present work adopts a feminist approach to the everyday,[92] thereby showing its nuances. A feminist framework escapes dichotomic understandings and it argues that, first and foremost, everyday life is an embodied lived experience animated by "the tangled boundaries of gender, race, class, and sexuality".[93] If, on the one hand, the everyday has been conceptualized as *social reproduction* (i.e., the "biological reproduction, the work of caring for and maintaining households and intimate relationships, the reproduction of labor, and the reproduction of community itself"),[94] this does not make it a locus of inaction. Various works in International Political Economy

[92] See for instance Juanita Elias and Shirin M. Rai, 'Feminist everyday political economy: Space, time, and violence', *Review of International Studies* 45, no. 2 (2019): 201–220; Genevieve LeBaron, 'The political economy of the household: Neoliberal restructuring, enclosures, and daily life', *Review of International Political Economy* 17, no. 5 (2010): 889–912.
[93] Elias and Rai, 'Feminist everyday political economy', 204–205.
[94] Ibid., 203.

(IPE)[95] showed that the everyday – as social reproduction – is a site of struggle and challenges to power structures. To say it with the words of Juanita Elias and Shirin Rai: "we see a feminist political economy analysis as one that captures both the reproduction of mundanity ('everydayness') alongside a recognition of the everyday as a site of agency and resistance".[96]

The present narrative shows how – within the occupations – the practices of the struggles *are* a new mundanity. In this respect, I believe that my concept of 'routinization of resistance' connects to the intellectual project of re-signifying the division between the categories of the ordinary and the extraordinary. As recent work in IR suggests,[97] the implication of taking the everyday seriously is to develop alternative frameworks for analyzing politics. According to Xavier Guillaume and Jef Huysmans, the everyday invites scholarly work to "thicken the sites of international politics"[98] (what they characterize as 'political densification') and to work with 'ephemeral temporalities' – i.e. practices that would otherwise be considered "irrelevant or insignificant because of their momentary or fleeting presence".[99] In the narrative, extra-ordinary sites – the occupations – create practices that nurture the struggles through their routinized and mundane quality.

To be sure, the idea that daily life contains the potential for a radical critique of the socio-economic structure is present in various Marxist authors. As argued by Kanishka Goonewardena,[100] both György Lukács and Antonio Gramsci looked at certain aspects of daily life's routine as a source of critical knowledge. However, the Marxist scholar most famous for

[95] See for instance the essays contained in John Hobson and Leonard Seabrooke (eds.), *Everyday politics of the world economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
[96] Elias and Rai, 'Feminist everyday political economy', 206.
[97] Xavier Guillaume and Jef Huysmans, 'The concept of "the everyday": Ephemeral politics and the abundance of life', *Cooperation and Conflict* 54, no. 2 (2019): 278–296.
[98] Guillaume and Huysmans, 'The concept of "the everyday", 285.
[99] Ibid., 286.
[100] Kanishka Goonewardena, 'Marxism and everyday life: on Henri Lefebvre, Guy Debord, and some others' in *Space, Difference, Everyday Life*: *Reading Henri Lefebvre*, eds., Kanishka Goonewardena, Stefan Kipfer, Richard Milgrom and Christian Schmid (New York and London: Routledge, 2008. 117–133).

the inclusion of the everyday in his analysis is Henri Lefebvre,[101] who considered the everyday as the space in which socialism ('the new life') had to be defined.[102] For Lefebvre, daily life is first conceptualized as a residual, as what remains after considering all other specialized human activities; however, because of a dialectical relation that resembles the connection between 'fertile soil' and 'flowers and trees' – where the alienated specialized activities (the flowers and trees) cast a shadow over the non-alienated soil – the everyday cannot be characterized only as 'a residual' but it is also produced by all other 'elevated' activities.[103]

Thus, what I find fascinating (and useful) in the concept of the everyday is that it contains possibilities for radical critiques of itself. The ambivalence with which it is treated in scholarly (and more critical) literature helps me to characterize the occupations as sites of repetition. I argue that these extra-ordinary sites enable the development of practices (chanting, collective cooking, etc.) that constitute alternative routines. However, the occupations are not unequivocally creating resisting daily routines. Indeed, they also reproduce established social practices. I agree with Matt Davies when he writes that the everyday cannot be conceptualized as either a space of inertia or resistance.[104] Throughout the narrative, I am also interested in showing how oppressive social structures are produced and re-produced.

1.2 The everyday of oppressive structures

Employing a Lefebvrian framework, Davies argues that the spatialities and temporalities of the everyday (and of international politics) are shaped by colonial practices.[105] In fact, during the second half of the 20th Century, capitalism substituted the colonies "treating daily life as they once treated the colonized territories: massive trading posts (supermarkets and shopping

[101] For an introduction to Lefebvre's oeuvre, see Andy Merrifield, *Henri Lefebvre: A critical introduction* (New York and London: Taylor & Francis, 2006).
[102] Goonewardena, 'Marxism and everyday life', 123–124.
[103] Ibid., 128–129.
[104] Matt Davies, 'Everyday life as critique: Revisiting the everyday in IPE with Henri Lefebvre and postcolonialism', *International Political Sociology* 10, no. 1 (2016): 1–17.
[105] Davies, 'Everyday life as critique', 2.

centers); absolute predominance of exchange over use; dual exploitation of the dominated in their capacity as producers and consumers".[106] Davies' objective is to theoretically revisit the concept of the everyday with Lefebvre and postcolonialism. In the narrative, I do not aim at contributing to more nuanced theorizing of the everyday. However, I employ the suggestive idea that everyday and oppressive structures (such as coloniality) are co-constituted to look at how I (re)produce prejudices within the occupations. In the concluding chapter, I will also dwell on a conception of the everyday that associates Davies with decolonial literature:, because the agency of the dominated is never completely extinguished by daily repetition, the everyday is a space that has potential for decolonization.[107]

The everyday helps to highlight the complex and nuanced relation between daily feelings/activities and the social structures. Here, I do not only mean that it is possible to 'see' social structures starting from – apparently – insignificant things; but rather, that a focus on the everyday can deepen our understanding of colonialism, racism, patriarchy, and classism. Indeed, I stress the (often neglected) idea that oppressive hierarchies are historical and structural, and that we are all immersed and socialized through them. Employing the concept of 'the everyday prejudices' counters a conception that claims hierarchies are 'extraordinary' or exceptional and it opens up to frameworks that resignify these concepts. Thus, my objective – in line with Guillaume and Huysmans' call for "problematizing global life through the concept of the everyday"[108] – is narrating (extraordinary) mundane practices to show the continuous necessity of re-thinking the boundaries of colonization, racialization, gendering, and economic exploitation. Indeed, I believe a contribution of my work is to provide empirical substance to Zeus Leonardo's argument that white domination "is not solely the domain of white

[106] Lefebvre quoted in Davies, 'Everyday life as critique', 10.
[107] Davies, 'Everyday life as critique', 36.
[108] Guillaume and Huysmans, 'The concept of "the everyday", 283.

supremacist groups. It is rather the domain of average, tolerant people, of lovers of diversity, and of believers in justice".[109]

White domination is also the realm of 'everyday prejudices'. In the dissertation, I try to understand social hierarchies through autoethnographic lenses. In this regard, Amanda Chisholm[110] shares a similar objective in a piece about security contractors: through autoethnographic narratives, she shows the construction of the social through everyday performances – how gendered daily encounters shape broader understandings of security contractors in Afghanistan. I believe that the self-reflexive analysis of how 'everyday prejudices' relate and reshape structural oppressions has important implications for the effort of developing more participatory and militant research. First, it suggests that a focus on everyday practices – both within the struggles and 'ordinary' lives – can become a tool to deconstruct social hierarchies by developing alternative knowledge on social reproduction and exploitation. Second, it powerfully shows the embeddedness of the researcher within these violent structures, and how they shape how researchers theorize about the field(s).[111]

The idea that the researcher's positionality deeply affects the kind of knowledge developed from the field had disruptive consequences for my Ph.D. project: I cannot do 'activist research' (re)presenting the MTST in ways that only speak back to convoluted Western theorizations. Thus, I work on an autoethnographic narrative that establishes a dialogue between social hierarchies, the 'everyday of my prejudices', and my subjectivity as a white, Western, middle-class man who reflects on his internalized domination patterns. Chisholm is also discussing her everyday prejudices. In the article, she develops an argument about how daily encounters

[109] Zeus Leonardo, 'The color of supremacy: Beyond the discourse of "white privilege"', *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 36, no. 2 (2004): 137–152.
[110] Amanda Chisholm, 'Clients, contractors, and the everyday masculinities in global private security', *Critical Military Studies* 3, no. 2 (2017): 120–141.
[111] I agree with Chisholm's extensive understanding of field: "broadly defined to include those who engage in the field from 'afar', through mediums such as blogs, websites and secondary sources, and those who engage in dialogue and participatory practices with industry practitioners", 'Clients, contractors', 124.

shaped her understanding of security. Regarding white/western contractors, she argues that the everyday worked against her positive expectations because these contractors behaved in sexist/patronizing ways or because they showed themselves to be vulnerable/insecure. On the other hand, her everyday experiences worked against a negative expectation about the ability of the non-western/non-white security contractors because they were very professional and kind.[112]

Chisholm explicitly recognizes that the prejudices about the non-western contractors must be understood within processes of racialization and colonization. However, these processes exist without that any specific subjectivity is being made accountable for their reproduction:

> The reimagined colonial relationship that informed the everyday interactions between the clients and these men only reinforced the exotic polite gentlemen and fierce warrior mythology recounted in numerous oral and written stories about Gurkhas [the non-western security contractors]. While their ability to keep us safe in our professional capacity, travelling to and from work for example, had to be demonstrated, for me, Linda, and Beth, Gurkhas were less likely to be a source of insecurity, through flirting and male gazes, within our personal and everyday spaces of eating, working out, and socializing.[113]

In the article, the autoethnographic 'I' does not seem to bear either ethical or political responsibility. The fact that the researcher, while conducting the research, is (re)producing racialization and colonization does not have effects. In contrast to Chisholm, the objective of the present dissertation is to 'single out' the subject(s) reproducing social hierarchies. A very insidious risk of this endeavor is that, by having the 'I' at the center of the deconstructive effort, I fall into the trap of reinforcing my 'progressive' subjectivity; an operation that – at best – leaves the hierarchies intact, and – at worst – reinforces them. I suspect that Chisholm falls into this trap in the last pages of her article when she writes:

> Being in their presence and constantly being referred to as ma'am, while they [the Gurkhas] smiled, I realized that for most, I would never form a friendship bond beyond the contractual/racialized relationship we had. *They reminded me of my own privilege as a white female, filled with many entitlements they could only wish to achieve*. Many

[112] Chisholm, 'Clients, contractors', 130–131.
[113] Ibid., 135.

> men, during interviews with me, reminded me of my whiteness not only in the title they gave me, but in the polite distance they showed – *in their gestures of calling me Joanna Lumley, a white female actress known for her 'saving' Gurkhas' rights to settle in the UK* (emphasis mine).[114]

The problem in how Chisholm depicts her relation to structural oppressions is that she is re-inscribing her dominant position. After powerfully analyzing how gendered and racialized everyday relations shape her (and academia's) understanding of security, Chisholm essentially treats privilege as a given, as something the Gurkhas can only 'dream of'. In doing so, she implicitly reproduces a colonial and racialized social hierarchy. In fact, she concludes the paragraph by saying that she felt like a Western woman famous for helping Gurkhas. My point is that Chisholm ends up not only by treating social change as an impossibility but also strongly affirming her own racial and colonial positioning. How dominant positions write and think about social hierarchies is a complex topic. I believe it is important to be explicit and honest about the reasons why scholars employ categories such as racialization and coloniality. At least implicitly, they are committing to critiquing/transforming them. Therefore, we should be very careful not to reproduce racist/colonial narratives. To explore the slippery relation between dominant positions' autoethnographies and social hierarchies I will now develop the concept of 'emotional fragility'.

1.3 The risks of dominant subjectivities feeling fragile

'Emotional fragility' is a concept that expresses how dominant subjectivities feel when they are challenged in their structural position. It is a very strong emotion, a gut sensation hard to describe. I felt in such a way during my encounter with the MTST. For instance, when a militant told me: "I like you despite the fact that you look like a colonialist". Emotional fragility is a loss of comfort. At first, I could not understand the meaning of the sentence without taking it

[114] Ibid., 136.

personally. Then, I grasped a fundamental connotation of it: in that setting, I represented a colonial position. It was not about me but social structures.

Here lies the important aspect of experiencing emotional fragility: it shows our(selves) deep embeddedness with social hierarchies. As some social justice literature has shown,[115] historical oppressive structures are so pervasive that calling oneself out, claiming "not to be racist/sexist/etc." does not help in understanding how to fight the very structures. However, as powerfully demonstrated by Sara Ahmed,[116] what seems to be the counter-approach – i.e. "we are all racist/sexist/etc." – is also deeply problematic and does not necessarily help to modify oppressive hierarchies. Using a different language, what I called emotional fragility could be the effect of the statement "check your privilege" (of course provided that the person addressed successfully starts reflecting on systemic injustices). In recent years, critical scholars questioned the potential of 'privilege' as both a concept[117] and a performance.[118] Leonardo directly engages with Peggy McIntosh, the original proponent of privilege as an 'invisible knapsack'[119] that whites carry with themselves all the time. The knapsack represents several 'unearned advantages' that white people enjoy every day because of how 'society is structured'.

Leonardo argues that the concept of privilege sustains an interpretation of racism in the passive form, as there would be no active subjects: "[the theme of privilege] conjures up images of domination happening behind the backs of whites, rather than on the backs of people of color. The study of white privilege begins to take on an image of domination without agents".[120] Moreover, because it focuses on the current advantages of whites, it emphasizes "a state of

[115] See Ozlem Sensoy and Robin DiAngelo. *Is everyone really equal? An introduction to key concepts in social justice education* (New York and London: Teachers College Press, 2017); Allan G. Johnson, *Privilege, power, and difference* (New York: Mc Graw-Hill, 2006).
[116] Sara Ahmed, 'Declarations of whiteness: The non-performativity of anti-racism', *borderlands* 3, no. 2 (2004): 1–15.
[117] See Leonardo, 'The color of supremacy', 137–152.
[118] See Zahi Zalloua, 'The Politics of Undeserved Happiness, *symplokē* 26, no. 1-2 (2017): 371–383.
[119] See Peggy McIntosh, 'White privilege and male privilege: A personal account of coming to see correspondences through work in Women's Studies', Working Paper 189, Wellesley Centers for Women (1988): 1–17.
[120] Leonardo, 'The color of supremacy', 138.

dominance *in medias res*";[121] thereby obfuscating the historical processes of domination. Privilege "mistakes the symptoms for causes",[122] treating whites' privilege as the origin of racism instead of appropriation and exclusion. Leonardo's powerful argument is that we should move beyond the narrative of 'white privilege' and employ the concept of 'white domination', as the former is only "the daily cognate of structural domination. Without securing the latter, the former is not activated".[123] Leonardo demonstrates that privilege is only a side-effect of domination, something that is less threatening to whites' imagination but does not necessarily lead to a politicized understanding of social hierarchies:

> Looking racist has very little to do with whites' unearned advantages and more to do with white treatment of racial minorities. Said another way, the discourse on privilege comes with the psychological effect of personalizing racism rather than understanding its structural origins in interracial relations. Whites have been able to develop discourses of anti-racism in the face of their unearned advantages. Whites today did not participate in slavery but they surely recreate white supremacy on a daily basis.[124]

Leonardo emphasizes the everyday reproduction of domination, the material process at the origin of 'unearned advantages'. Moreover, he is showing the paradoxical risks of the discourse of privilege, which – instead of foregrounding the structural element of racialization – opens to personalized politics. I agree with Leonardo about the importance of changing our vocabulary, he demonstrates that the decision to employ 'white privilege' instead of 'white domination' only represents the attempt of not 'scaring' whites. However, I argue that there is critical potential in the command "check how you reproduce white domination". If successful – i.e., the addressed person starts reflecting – this statement helps to grasp 'the contours of the structures'; it helps include the (white) self in thinking how social hierarchies are daily reproduced. Yet, as Zahi Zalloua demonstrates, there is also something else going on when someone checks on their domination. The paradox of the basic tenets of privilege theory is that

[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid., 148.
[124] Ibid., 140–141.

one cannot really renounce privileges – they are structural, historical, and institutional. Thus, when a dominant subjectivity asks someone else to check how they reproduce domination, the first person is performing something. Zalloua calls it the production of the tolerant/vigilant subject:

> This self-critical subject is, more often than not, today's liberal subject, the subject who is attentive to the marginalization of others (especially those of different cultures), who prides itself on its multiculturalism (its reformed, liberal, less Eurocentric sensibility) and its respect for diversity, and who stands apart precisely from those individuals who fail to check their implicit biases—the subjects who benefit from the system without knowing it, who blissfully dwell in existential comfort, whose happiness is fundamentally procured at the expense of the unprivileged members of society.[125]

Zalloua argues that proponents of privilege theory ultimately suggest a hypocritical commitment to social justice. I agree that we should be transparent about the fact that 'checking' does not imply any change to social hierarchies. Moreover, I believe it is problematic to conceptualize the emotional fragility that comes with self-reflection as some sort of enlightenment. I see how powerful Zalloua's critique is as – constructing and de-constructing the present narrative – I suffered realizing my imbrication in oppressive structures. Sometimes I felt that through this suffering I was 'redeeming myself'.

The corollary of privilege theory's paradox is this 'self-therapeutic effect': because we cannot fully renounce privilege, then – when checking on oneself – others are produced as the 'real' racists. Privilege theory implicitly suggests that "we are all racists, but some are more racist than others". However, there is a difference in addressing and being addressed by the statement "check how you reproduce domination". When the MTST militant told me that I inhabited a colonial positionality I felt challenged (emotional fragility). It does not make sense to compare it with how I may address some other white, European, men with the same statement: the different relation between subject positions and structural hierarchies makes a difference. To come back to the perils of dominant subjects' emotional fragility, a dangerous risk is to obtain

[125] Zalloua, 'The Politics of Undeserved Happiness', 373.

the opposite result of what one hoped for: namely, to strengthen and re-inscribe their dominance. As clearly argued by Ahmed:

> The shameful white subject expresses shame about its racism, and in expressing it shames, it 'shows' that it is not racist: if we are shamed, we mean well. The white subject that is shamed by whiteness is also a white subject that is proud *about* its shame. The very claim to feel bad (about this or that) also involves a self-perception of 'being good'.[126]

Thus, the subject declaring to be white – because they have checked on their privilege – inadvertently is also saying that they are proud as a *white* subject. To sum up, dominant subjects face the serious risk of re-inscribing social hierarchies while checking on their dominance. Now, keeping this risk in mind, I go back to what happens when someone grasps how they are embedded in oppressive structures. One experiences emotional fragility because they never thought of themselves as 'agents of domination'. In fact, a trick of social hierarchies is that they are not self-evident to dominant subjects. For long, black feminist scholarship[127] and critical whiteness studies[128] have demonstrated how white people create whiteness as a non-color, with the consequence that they think of themselves as being 'racially neutral'. The shock of discovering shows how dominant subjects are emotionally invested in social hierarchies. In her *Cultural Politics of Emotion,* Ahmed provides a framework for conceptualizing how emotions work in society. She writes:

> I suggest that emotions are crucial to the very constitution of the psychic and the social as objects, a process which suggests that the 'objectivity' of the psychic and social is an effect rather than a cause. In other words, emotions are not 'in' either the individual or the social, but produce the very surfaces and boundaries that allow the individual and the social to be delineated as if they are objects.[129]

By suggesting that emotions are constitutive of social structures, Ahmed argues that we are emotionally invested in the latter. In certain ways, here my argument is specular to what Ahmed writes about the relation between emotions and subordination:

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[126] Ahmed, 'Declarations of whiteness', 5.
[127] See for instance Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg: The Crossing Press, 1984).
[128] See for instance Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997).
[129] Sara Ahmed, *Cultural politics of emotion*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 10.

> Why are relations of power so intractable and enduring, even in the face of collective forms of resistance? This book attempts to answer such questions partially by offering an account of how we become invested in social norms. The work to which I am most indebted is the work of feminist and queer scholars who have attended to how *emotions can attach us to the very conditions of our subordination* (emphasis mine).[130]

I claim that emotions can also attach us to the very conditions of our domination. Together with the danger of strengthening social hierarchies, experiencing emotional fragility helps dominant subjects to 'see' their role in the reproduction of oppressive structures. However, Ahmed argues for a critical conception of these gut feelings. Dominant subjectivities feeling emotionally fragile are 'only' experiencing their social domination:

> Those who are 'other' to me or us, or those that threaten to make us other, remain the source of bad feeling in this model of emotional intelligence. It is not difficult to see how emotions are bound up with the securing of social hierarchy: emotions become attributes of bodies as a way of transforming what is 'lower' or 'higher' into bodily traits.[131]

So, the uncomfortable gut feelings are the effect of 'encountering' social hierarchies. In itself, emotional fragility is just a signal that dominant positions are experiencing the hierarchies. To say it differently, it is not a prerequisite for social change and it may inadvertently hinder it. Until now, I conceptualized emotional fragility as the consequence of being asked to 'check on domination'. However, the loss of comfort is also the effect of an environment that challenges social hierarchies. Again, Ahmed helps to think of whiteness as a fundamental characteristic of space and institutions that makes certain bodies feel comfortable:

> Institutions too involve orientation devices, which keep things in place. The affect of such placement could be described as a form of comfort. To be orientated, or to be at home in the world, is also to feel a certain comfort: we might only notice comfort as an affect when we lose it, when we become uncomfortable. […] To be comfortable is to be so at ease with one's environment that it is hard to distinguish where one's body ends and the world begins. One fits, and by fitting the surfaces of bodies disappears from view. *White bodies are comfortable as they inhabit spaces that extend their shape* (emphasis mine).[132]

[130] Ahmed, *Cultural politics of emotion*, 12.
[131] Ibid., 4.
[132] Sara Ahmed, 'A phenomenology of whiteness', *Feminist theory* 8, no. 2 (2007): 158.

What I experienced during my encounter with the MTST can be conceptualized as a 'loss of comfort' because I stayed in a space that did not extend my shape. Of course, here there is another risk that must be avoided: to equate my 'loss of comfort' with the discomfort of non-white bodies. Histories and structures of oppression make them fundamentally different.

So, what is the potential of dominant people feeling fragile? First, we understand that injustices are systemic *because* we are involved in their daily reproduction. Second, dominant positions may develop empathy with minoritized positions. While this is an important (and political) objective, it won't be enough to liberate society from social hierarchies. Third, having experienced emotional fragility, dominant subjects may reflect on it and change their behaviors – e.g. being more prone to listen to the experiences and narratives of minoritized subjects. Let me now highlight once again the most dangerous risk that comes with experiencing emotional fragility: namely, the desire of *domesticating* it. With Ahmed, I argued that emotions attach us to our domination. When a minoritized position challenges a dominant one, the feeling that comes is unpleasant, and this is how the attachment to the social hierarchy works because that feeling becomes the quality of a body that is threatening. However, experiencing that fragility makes us think and see things differently, and this is how it also becomes a potential threat to social hierarchies. Therefore, the easiest thing to do is to learn how to domesticate it. We learn how to feel better about it and how to be proud of it, thereby canceling its disruptive potential. The present dissertation tells the story of this oscillation: feeling uncomfortable, learning how to domesticate that emotion, and then challenging again the self.

An autoethnography that aims at decolonizing must be aware of fragility's risks. The present work suggests fragility as a possible bridge between the work on the self – the autoethnography – and the decolonial project. I employ the concept as a heuristic tool to explain the groping of the colonial activist researcher – someone who wants to help the struggle but cannot because of his theoretical framework. It's important to distinguish the work on the self of the colonialist

from the one of the colonized: it would be unjust to conceptualize them together. One important problem in the decolonial effort of dominant subject positions is that it goes at a slower pace, and therefore it should be minoritized subjects to determine the speed of social change.[133] Moreover, I believe that the autoethnography of the colonialist should go together with a second turn: a movement towards the colonized. Focusing on whiteness, masculinity, privilege, etc. makes sense when it helps to deconstruct hierarchies and to work across structural asymmetries. As powerfully put by Ahmed in relation to academic work:

> whiteness studies should involve at least a double turn: to turn towards whiteness is to turn towards and away from those bodies who have been afforded agency and mobility by such privilege. In other words, the task for white subjects would be to stay implicated in what they critique, but in turning towards their role and responsibility in these histories of racism, as histories of this present, to turn away from themselves, and towards others.[134]

In the dissertation, turning towards social domination is an explicit move towards the self, looking at the emotional attachment to social hierarchies. The temporary detachment, what I called emotional fragility – that at the same time is also the very manifestation of social hierarchies, can represent a challenge to oppressive structures. At this point, it is also important to clarify that the 'check your privilege' performative is only one aspect of how dominant subjects are challenged. Fragility emerges also by the material context where the interaction occurred. As powerfully illustrated by Elspeth Probyn,[135] "subjectivity is not a given but rather a process and a production. It is also undeniable that the *sites* and *spaces* of its production are central. In other words, the space and place we inhabit produce us. It follows too that how we inhabit those spaces is an interactive affair" (emphasis mine).[136] In MTST occupations, my body often was not 'fitting' because of structural differences between subject positions. Militants interpellated me in ways I could not escape. Again with Probyn, interpellation is

[133] See Leonardo, 'The color of supremacy', 141.
[134] Ahmed, 'Declarations of whiteness', 1.
[135] Elspeth Probyn, 'The spatial imperative of subjectivity' in *Handbook of cultural geography*, eds., Kay Anderson, Mona Domosh, Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift (London: Sage Publications, 2003): 290–299.
[136] Probyn, 'The spatial imperative of subjectivity', 294.

always gendered, racialized, and sexed.[137] Occupations enabled unusual interpellations, as Europeans are rarely called colonialists.

1.4 The potentials of fragility: Gramscian reflexivity and slow transformation

Now, I finally turn to the last concept – self-transformation – to think about what comes after experiencing emotional fragility, as an alternative to being 'hailed back' by oppressive structures. In the second step of the double turning, the colonialist transforms, they leave behind colonial epistemology and try to develop 'transmodern dialogue'. It is important to theorize how dominant subjects unlearn domination and how they struggle throughout this unlearning. The Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci[138] offers a concept that helps to think about this process and how it is related to societal change. The term is 'molecular transformation': a change determined by external forces through which certain options that were previously unthinkable, slowly, and inexorably become imaginable.[139] In this section, I am not developing an accurate genealogy of Gramsci's concepts;[140] rather, I employ some of his ideas to create a dialogue with the problem of self-transformation. Gramsci's approach, in contrast to other authors that theorize ruptures in subjectivities and consequent radical transformations,[141] talks back to my experience because it applies to dominant subjects too. In the following, I show how, according to the Italian Marxist, it is ultimately our location within capitalism that determines fragility and (self)transformation. To do so, I will translate the problem of oppressive structures and their reproduction into Marxist terms.

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[137] Probyn, 'The spatial imperative of subjectivity', 292.
[138] My discussion of Gramsci is strongly influenced by Kate Crehan and Michele Filippini.
[139] See Michele Filippini, *Using Gramsci: A new approach* (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 40-41.
[140] I should also specify that my discussion of Gramsci is rather unusual because I adapt arguments developed to discuss subaltern classes and build analogies with dominant subjectivities.
[141] Compare for instance with Franz Fanon's ideas of the rupture in colonized symbolic identification's mechanisms and the subsequent loss of individuality. For an introduction to these concepts, see Alan Ramón Ward, 'The subject of rebellion: Fanon's call for (re) action', *Postcolonial Studies* 18, no. 1 (2015): 40-51 and 'Redefining Resistance: Seeking Fanon's Subject Between "the Unified" and "the Dispersed", *Culture, Theory and Critique* 56, no. 2 (2015): 170-186.

According to Gramsci, there exist certain tensions between our structural position and the awareness of it – in other words between our class position and our class consciousness. Becoming aware of such tension and changing our behavior (for Gramsci 'acquiring personality') is an (individual) step in the (collective) struggle:

> This contrast between thought and action, i.e. the co-existence of two conceptions of the world, one affirmed in words and the other displayed in effective action, is not simply a product of self-deception. […] The contrast between thought and action cannot but be the expression of profounder contrasts of a social historical order. It signifies that the social group in question may indeed have its own conception of the world, even if only embryonic; a conception which manifests itself in action, […] But this same group has, for reasons of submission and intellectual subordination, adopted a conception which is not its own but is borrowed from another group; and it affirms this conception verbally and believes itself to be following it […]. [142]

The Gramscian scholar Kate Crehan puts this Prison Notebook's passage[143] in relation to the previous problematic. The subaltern classes often behave in ways that go against their material interests. In other words, revolutionary consciousness is not simply immanent to workers. Subaltern classes develop their subjectivities in a complex (and incoherent) web of material and symbolic relations that dominate them. Adopting the worldview of the ruling classes, subalterns internalize oppression. However, in the tension between hegemonic narratives and certain aspects of subaltern classes' lives,[144] Gramsci sees the embryonic element of a different conception of the world. In other words, the incoherence between structural positions and consciousness can be productive of social change.

It seems to me that there is no valid reason to assume that the discrepancy between thought and action is an exclusive characteristic of minoritized identities – of the individual members of subaltern classes. Indeed, critical social justice literature demonstrates how dominant subjects exhibit internalized domination and prejudices. Gramsci is not simply describing the

[142] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, eds. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1992 [1971]): 326-327.
[143] Kate Crehan, *Gramsci, Culture and Anthropology* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 115-116.
[144] One of Crehan's central arguments is that subaltern common sense is both an incoherent bundle of the 'taken for granted' and the seed of an alternative popular worldview.

consequences of lack of knowledge (or education), but rather pointing at the complex relations between the narratives that we have about the world and our material insertion in it. Thus, I believe it is reasonable to imagine that dominant subjects experience a similar incoherence.

In the following passage – as illustrated by Crehan[145] – Gramsci describes the relation between intellectuals and the environment where they operate. Intellectuals must continuously reflect on their position in the social structure:

> One could say therefore that the historical personality of an individual philosopher is also given by the active relationship which exists between him and the cultural environment he is proposing to modify. The environment reacts back on the philosopher and imposes on him a continual process of self-criticism. It is his 'teacher'. […] Then do we get the 'historical' realization of a new type of philosopher, whom we could call a 'democratic philosopher' in the sense that he is a philosopher convinced that his personality is not limited to himself as a physical individual but is an active social relationship of modification of the cultural environment.[146]

In Gramsci's thought, intellectuals are not ultimately characterized by 'the intrinsic nature of their activities'[147] but rather by their material position in society. As is clear from the passage, intellectuals also experience an incoherence between thought and action: social structures 'impose' on them a continuous re-adjustment. Only by understanding that their personality is not limited to their 'physical individuality' and that it is in an 'active relationship' with society, intellectuals can support progressive transformations. The 'messiness' of the relationship between subjects and structures is not only the result of the incoherence between the narratives with which we understand the world and our material experience of it. As Michele Filippini argues, Gramsci conceives individuals and society as co-constituted. Their relation exhibits the characteristics of an isomorphism, like two superimposable sets:

> The individual's internal contradictoriness is thus reflected in the contradictory nature of society, in the form of conflict among different groups of people. However, this in turn affects individual personalities, which experience a form of internal conflict as a result. In a letter to his sister-in-law Tatiana, Gramsci wrote: 'How many societies does

[145] Crehan, *Gramsci, Culture and Anthropology*, 156-157. Here, I rest on Crehan's evaluation that the words 'philosophers' and 'intellectuals' can be considered synonyms.
[146] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 350-351.
[147] Crehan, *Gramsci, Culture and Anthropology*, 131.

> each individual belong to? And doesn't each one of us make continuous efforts to unify his conception of the world in which there continues to subsist heterogeneous fragments of fossilized cultural worlds?' The class struggle, in fact, is also a struggle that goes on within each individual, in the constant effort to render one's own individuality coherent.[148]

Certainly, as a Marxist, Gramsci sees social transformation through the category of class struggle. However, as illustrated in this passage, individuals and their agency have a crucial role too. The reasons for it are complex, and, according to Filippini, this Gramscian view crucially hinges on the theoretical influence of French sociology.[149] Human personality has a dual nature: on the one hand, it is singular; on the other hand, it is inextricably linked to social relations. For the class struggle, it is the latter aspect of individuality that matters.[150] Within capitalism, the social aspect of individuality is ultimately represented by the position in the world of production.[151] Thus, people exist as workers, and as workers, they can transform societal relations:

> Man, historically determined and defined by his relationship with other men, thus finds himself potentially, and with the emergence of capitalism, effectively, related to humanity as a whole […]. Awareness of these relations […] comes about 'organically' rather than 'by juxtaposition', and corresponds to 'the greater or lesser degree of understanding that each man has of them'.[152]

Acquiring personality means understanding how social relations determine us as individuals. Gramsci believes it is impossible to disconnect a theory of individuals from their structural position in society. Acquiring personality does not only correspond to self-reflexivity, but also to a transformation of the social relations that co-constituted the individual in the first place.

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[148] Filippini, Using Gramsci, 39.
[149] Ibid., 28-37.
[150] "Gramsci […] distances himself from Durkheim by acknowledging the political potential of the socially determined elements of the individuality of a specific part of society, that is, of that part connected to the new forms of industrial labour. In this way he galvanizes that side of the individual/society relationship that remains immobile in Durkheim, focusing on the relationship between the social part of individuality and society itself, as the struggle to change the relations within society and, together with this, that very part of individuality that represents the individuation thereof: 'So one could say that each one of us changes himself, modifies himself to the extent that he changes and modifies the complex relations of which he is the centre of interaction.'", Filippini, Using Gramsci, 30-31.
[151] For a Marxist conception of university workers and academic labor, see Karen Gregory and Joss Winn, 'Marx, Engels and the Critique of Academic Labor', *Workplace* 28 (2016), 1-8 and Joss Winn, 'Writing about Academic Labor', *Workplace* 25 (2015), 1-15.
[152] Filippini, Using Gramsci, 27.

Thus, Gramscian reflexivity – or the acquisition of personality – is in itself a transformative process. I am looking at this concept to think about what comes after experiencing emotional fragility. I believe oppressive structures tend to 'hail back' to dominant subjects, through the process that I characterized as 'domestication'. Gramsci helps to imagine a radical alternative to the re-constitution of the hierarchical symbolic order. Gramscian reflexivity speaks to dominant subjects' experiences in that subjects go through a slow-paced process of unlearning. By way of concluding this turn to Gramsci, I should make clear again that, when discussing individual transformation and self-reflexivity, Gramsci always thinks of revolutionary objectives. As illustrated by Filippini:

> In an industrial society that develops a specific division of labour, this translates into class struggle. The working class's acquisition of personality means acknowledging, whilst modifying, this division; it means overturning the aforesaid social relations. *Class struggle is thus the characteristic of the acquisition of personality*: […] (emphasis mine).[153]

Thus, understanding one's position in the social structure crucially implies relating it to the world of production and the class struggle. However, relying on Filippini's interpretation, I believe it is justified to imagine Gramscian reflexivity not only at the level of classes but also of individuals. Gramsci's work helps to think of the social constitution of individuals and at the consequences for the struggle against social hierarchies:

> To transform the external world, the general system of relations, is to potentiate oneself and to develop oneself. That ethical 'improvement' is purely individual is an illusion and an error: the synthesis of the elements constituting individuality is 'individual', but *it cannot be realised and developed without an activity directed outward*, modifying external relations both with nature and, in varying degrees, with other men, in the various social circles in which one lives, up to the greatest relationship of all, which embraces the whole human species (emphasis mine).[154]

In the passage, I emphasize the idea – like in Ahmed's double turn – that looking at oneself makes sense if one understands that it also implies turning to the other. Dominant subjects'

[153] Filippini, Using Gramsci, 31.
[154] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 360.

reflexivity must go hand in hand with the struggle for a more just world because the first without the second ends up in a counter-productive reification of domination.

Looking at oppressive structures through Gramscian lenses enabled me to conceptualize self-transformation as a fundamental element of class struggle. However, I believe an important step is missing: to integrate this traditional Marxist conception with authors that locate classes within a specific geo-cultural space. Therefore, in the next section, I will discuss the work of two influential Brazilian critical scholars: Silvio Almeida and Djamila Ribeiro.[155] Both authors help translate the idea of individual (self)transformation from a 'generic' location within capitalism to one that is racialized and gendered. Almeida provides fundamental insights on how capitalism shapes subjectivities in the Brazilian context. He conceives racism as a set of ideological and material practices that lubricates economic exploitation. With Ribeiro, I move back to the initial problems discussed in the introduction. In fact, following the rich tradition of Afro-Brazilian feminism,[156] Ribeiro foregrounds the importance of understanding that social hierarchies are knowledge hierarchies. At the beginning of the chapter, I discussed the implications of this problem for the representation of subaltern struggles; now, I will draw some concluding thoughts on how to imagine the present dissertation as a situated reaction to the critique of Black feminism. I turn to Almeida and Ribeiro because – in contrast to most authors of the decolonial tradition – as Black scholars, they integrate the need for (epistemic) decolonization with an analysis of the interrelation between capitalism, coloniality, racism, and patriarchy.

[155] See Silvio Almeida, *Racismo Estrutural* [*Structural Racism*] (São Paulo: Pólen, 2019) and Djamila Ribeiro, *O que é: lugar de fala?* [*What is: locus of speech?*] (Belo Horizonte: Letramento, 2017).
[156] See for instance Lélia Gonzalez, 'Racismo e sexismo na cultura brasileira' ['Racism and sexism in Brazilian culture'], *Revista Ciências Sociais Hoje* (1984), 223-244; Beatriz Nascimento, *Quilombola e intelectual: possibilidades nos dias da destruição* [*'Quilombola' and intellectual: possibilities in the days of destruction*] (Editora Filhos da África, 2018); Sueli Carneiro, 'Enegrecer o feminismo: a situação da mulher negra na América Latina a partir de uma perspectiva de gênero' ['Blackening' feminism: the situation of black women in Latin America from a gendered perspective], *Racismos contemporâneos* 49 (2003), 49-58.

1.5 The Brazilian intellectual elite

During an interview on a prominent Brazilian television channel, Silvio Almeida was asked why the agrarian and business elite in the country is so 'backward'. His reply is revealing: "white rich people are not the elite of Brazil. In fact, it is black intellectuals".[157] Almeida helps to locate the previous discussion – based on the Gramscian idea that the social part of individuals is connected to the functioning of capitalism – to the specificities of Brazil. He argues that social structures like racism work in the direction of creating both objective and subjective conditions for the flourishing of economic exploitation:

> It is in this sense that, in addition to objective conditions – and here we refer to the material possibilities for the development of capitalist social relations – capitalism needs *subjective conditions*. Indeed, individuals need to be trained and subjectively constituted to reproduce in their concrete acts the social relations whose basic form is mercantile exchange. […] Often, this process involves incorporating prejudices and discrimination that are constantly updated to function as modes of subjectivation within capitalism.[158]

Here, Almeida refers to the idea that racism powerfully operates as a stabilizing force for capitalism both at the subjective and objective levels. In the first sense, structural discrimination and prejudices operate as mechanisms that naturalize the exploitation of Blacks and women in the Brazilian labor market. At an objective level, Almeida shows how white domination permeates the tax system in that it strongly relies on sales and income as financial sources, thereby disproportionally impacting black women.[159] To illustrate the fundamental interrelation between the oppressive structures of racism and capitalism, Almeida refers to the Marxist distinction between formal and real subsumption. The former describes a situation where relations of production are only formally capitalistic, and workers retain some control over their labor: "workers will do in the factory the same activity that they were doing in their laboratories, […]. They continue being the owners of the production technique, with the difference that now

[157] See https://gshow.globo.com/programas/altas-horas/episodio/2020/11/14/videos-do-episodio-de-altas-horas-de-sabado-14-de-novembro-de-2020.ghtml.
[158] This and all following quotations of Almeida are translated by me. Almeida, *Racismo Estrutural*, 103.
[159] Ibid., 104-105.

they receive a salary".[160] In contrast, real subsumption occurs when workers' personality is controlled by capitalism, meaning that "technological innovation and the automation of production turn labor abstract, and workers' individual abilities and characteristics become irrelevant for capitalistic production".[161]

Almeida clarifies that real subsumption is not only about workers' integration into capitalistic production. Crucially, it comes with a transformation of human individuality that affects workers from education to ideological beliefs – i.e., workers adopt the ideology that dominates them. Thus, racism must be comprehended within this material and symbolic set of relations, as an ideological practice regulating individuals' insertion in society:

> It is at this point that the structural relationship between racism and capitalism demonstrates an incredible subtlety, since, by adapting traditions, dissolving or institutionalizing customs, giving meaning and expanding alterities, nationalism, and racism – as ideological practices – realize the community and universalism that is necessary for the real subsumption of work to capital to occur; and thereby make possible the integration to the capitalist organization of production based on the specificities of each social formation.[162]

Almeida convincingly shows that racism integrates a system that produces subjects exclusively dependent on the needs of capitalistic production. By supporting the hierarchization of workers, racism sustains real subsumption – a core mechanism of capitalistic exploitation.[163] Following the eminent Brazilian sociologists Florestan Fernandes[164] and Clovis Moura,[165] Almeida argues that only an intersectional analysis can grasp the relation between racialization and economic exploitation. In Brazil, the struggle against racism has always been a class struggle, as the former is "a fundamental vehicle"[166] of the latter. Moreover, Almeida writes at length about the

[160] Ibid., 106.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Almeida, *Racismo Estrutural*, 107.
[163] Ibid., 111.
[164] See for instance Florestan Fernandes, *Significado do protesto negro* [The meaning of black protest] (São Paulo: Expressão Popular, 2017 [1989]).
[165] See for instance Clóvis Moura, *Dialética radical do Brasil negro* [Radical dialectics of black Brazil] (São Paulo: Fundação Maurício Grabois, 2014 [1994]).
[166] Almeida, *Racismo Estrutural*, 113.

structural relation between racism and colonialism, thereby showing how the former is a constitutive element of modernity: "race emerges as a central concept to justify the apparent contradiction between the universality of reason and colonial destruction so that they can operate concurrently as solid bases of contemporary society".[167] Almeida describes the perduring effects on Afro-Brazilians of colonialism and slavery (e.g. mass incarceration, police violence, structural poverty) as a form of necropolitics.[168] His analysis illuminates the intersectional struggle of the MTST, which not only fights for decent housing in the urban peripheries but also to end racialized, gendered and economic exploitation.

I conclude by briefly referring to how Ribeiro shows the political and epistemological importance of the black feminist critique. I discuss what I believe is one of her most important ideas: the fact that social hierarchies generate a structural bias in the production and diffusion of knowledge. Quoting Lélia Gonzalez, Ribeiro writes that "racism constituted itself as 'the science of eurochristian (white and patriarchal) superiority'"[169]. This hierarchy of knowledge manifests itself in various instances, one example is how white Brazilians historically discarded the language of Afro-Brazilians: it has always been considered 'wrong' as if it were not a normative consideration based on white ignorance of Afro-Brazilian culture.[170] Thus, also incorporating the tradition of U.S. black feminism,[171] Ribeiro argues that knowledge hierarchies put black women in a very particular place in relation to structural oppression: they are 'outsiders within', meaning even that in the feminist movement black women have traditionally been perceived as others. Because of their specific imbrication in social hierarchies, black women have a productive understanding of oppressions, one that affirms alternative forms of

[167] Ibid., 20.
[168] Ibid., 76-77.
[169] This and all following quotations of Ribeiro are translated by me. Ribeiro, *O que é: lugar de fala?*, 16.
[170] Ribeiro, *O que é: lugar de fala?*, 17.
[171] In particular, Ribeiro refers to the work of Patricia Hill Collins. See Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*, (New York: Routledge, 2000) and Patricia Hill Collins, 'Comment on Hekman's "Truth and method: Feminist standpoint theory revisited": Where's the power?' *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 22, no. 2 (1997), 375-381.

social life.[172] Then, Ribeiro argues that to decolonize knowledge it is necessary to acknowledge its relationship with social hierarchy:

> To decolonize knowledge, we need to stick to social identity. Not only to highlight how the colonial project created these identities in the first place, but also to show how – in an epistemic sense – certain identities have been historically silenced and made illegitimate while certain others have been promoted. We believe that a project of epistemological decolonization necessarily must think the epistemic importance of identity, because it shows both how experiences vary along with subject positions and the importance of positionality for knowledge.[173]

Ribeiro explains that the concept which gives the title to her book: 'locus of speech' (similar to the idea of feminist standpoint) does not attribute more legitimacy to specific identities to speak about certain topics. The whole idea of black feminism is to question the historical and structural processes that constructed certain identities as more knowledgeable than others. As made clear by Ribeiro:

> It would be necessary to understand the categories of race, gender, class, and sexuality as elements of the social structure that emerge like fundamental dispositifs to favor inequality and create groups instead of thinking of them as descriptive categories of identity applied to individuals.[174]

The present narrative is an attempt at looking at myself to discuss broader issues of structural oppressions. It is not an easy task to think of social categories not in a descriptive way but as elements that strengthen our knowledge of the hierarchies. Crucially, Western white cis men are not used to thinking of themselves in terms of their positionality. Of course, this is a consequence of the fact that they historically set the social norms. The argument that runs throughout the present dissertation is that, despite problems and insecurities, to struggle for a more just world, white men should ask themselves what they learn from Black feminism. Without pretending to provide conclusive answers, I do think of this dissertation as a situated response to the questions that the MTST militants asked. Thanks to their struggle, I started thinking and acting in different ways. I conclude the chapter with the words of Ribeiro, who

[172] Ribeiro, *O que é: lugar de fala?*, 26-27.
[173] Ibid., 18.
[174] Ibid., 34.

powerfully illustrates the difference between standpoint and representativity. Moreover, she argues that the former *must* become part of white cis men's vocabulary:

> One of the most recurrent mistakes we see is the confusion between 'locus of speech' and representativity. A black transvestite may not feel represented by a white cis man, but this white cis man can theorize about the reality of the trans and transvestite people from the place he occupies. We believe the subject of power cannot continue not being held responsible. […] *To speak from one's subject position is to break with this logic that only subalterns talk of their locations, making those inserted in the hegemonic norm at least think of themselves* (emphasis mine).[175]

[175] Ribeiro, *O que é: lugar de fala?*, 46.

Chapter 2 – Being a gringo ethnographer

Setting the stage

This chapter tells the story of the first months of my encounter with the MTST. These moments represent the discovery of coloniality. In the text, the latter emerges both as my mode of thought – e.g., prejudices – and as a way of understanding the world – e.g., how the militants made sense of a gringo ethnographer within their ranks. The encounter produced strong emotions on my side. Militants welcomed me and at the same time challenged me. They saw me, and by doing so, they checked on me. Learning about the violence and structural oppression of Brazilian society put me in front of my prejudices and the limits of the theoretical framework with which I approached the movement.

The emotional fragility that emerges from learning about my position in the social structure represents an impulse to reflexivity. Despite many difficulties, the relationship with the militants intensifies, I get closer to them. And by doing so, I start to deconstruct the gringo ethnographer and transform. The next two narrative chapters will reflect more thoroughly on how the encounter between colonial and colonized positionalities modifies my mode of thought. Here, I narrate what it means to discover to be a gringo ethnographer. The first part of the chapter focuses on the first weeks in Brazil and at the Marielle Vive (MV) *occupation, in the North periphery of São Paulo. In the second part, I report conversations with MTST militants that represent a first (unconscious) attempt at moving away from colonial ways of doing research.*

Introducing the characters[176]

Rosa Luxemburg – understands what it means to be gringa. She is my first guide.

Ernesto Guevara – coordinator at MV. He takes responsibility very seriously.

Camilo Cienfuegos – has a kind soul.

Carolina Maria de Jesus – because of her age one would think she is fragile. The opposite is true.

Emiliano Zapata – tireless. No one knows where he takes the energy.

Nilde Iotti – the best friend of Carolina. We immediately bond.

Anita Garibaldi – coordinator at MV. She has a very welcoming personality.

Augusto César Sandino – a volcano of energy and an amazing cook.

João Cândido – is playful and loves music.

Frida Kahlo – coordinator at MV. Without her green light, nothing moves.

Lélia Gonzalez – everyone holds her in high regard.

Chiri Yukie – a sharp philosopher and committed revolutionary.

Simone de Beauvoir – an acute observer. We soon become friends.

Fidel Castro – his reputation precedes him.

Antonio Gramsci – the youngest theorist of the periphery.

Dandara – a bright young mother.

Virgulino Ferreira da Silva (Lampião) – wiser than his age would suggest.

[176] For reasons of security, all names are fictional.

São Paulo, 14th of April 2018

Someone I never met sends me to the Faria Lima metro station, in the fancy neighborhood of Pinheiros. The meeting is at 8 am in front of the turnstile. I had arrived in Brazil a few days before and I feel excited: somehow, I managed to get a contact with the MTST. I'm also scared, as I cannot really talk in Portuguese: the words coming from my mouth are what people call "*portuñol",* a mix of Spanish and Portuguese.

I'm supposed to meet Francisco, as the person who sent me to the metro is not in town. I don't know what Francisco looks like, but we exchanged some messages on whatsapp and I could see his beautiful profile picture – an artistic sketch in pencil. I don't see anyone at the turnstile, thus go back on the street. About twenty people are gathering. They have blue t-shirts with a writing impressed: "*teto*" – roof. Did I find the MTST? With my uncertain Portuguese, I ask something. I'm wrong. These people are from an NGO. The little failure makes me more excited and scared at the same time. I go down again to the turnstile and, finally, I see Francisco's profile together with other red t-shirts.

I'm talking to a woman in her sixties, she has short grizzled hair.

- "Where are you from?"
- "Italy". I sense she is not Brazilian; she has an accent…German!
- "*Ich kann Deutsch sprechen!* – I do speak German", I tell her. She looks very surprised and we start chatting in German.

The woman is called Rosa, she will become one of my closest friends in the movement. It started with a European connection. She explains that we are going to the MTST's headquarters, today is the second meeting for a group of newcomers who are joining the movement. Faria Lima is only a meeting point, we need to take a bus that goes to the West periphery of the city, in another municipality. The ride is long, about 45 minutes – São Paulo is huge. After a while

the skyscrapers start to diminish and, from the bus, I see more greenery. There are little restaurants, hardware stores, gardening shops. I thought Brazilian peripheries looked poorer.

The meeting starts. Olga speaks clearly and I kind of understand a lot. I'm already tired but try to focus. Now I feel bad: may I or may I not take notes? Do I look like a psychiatrist if I do so? This is linked with my fear of exploiting the movement. Why am I here and who am I? A white researcher with his pen and notebook? Someone who is not satisfied with his Western life and seeks some satisfaction in the struggle of others? After a while, I calm down a bit. I start to see other aspects of what I'm doing: building nice human relationships, learning things, and also doing politics. Or maybe seeing how these people do politics.

When the general meeting is finished, we are divided into smaller thematic groups. I said I would like to join the 'juridical brigade' – my research puzzle is about how radical leftist movements employ rights discourse. Ernesto leads the discussion. We start with a round of introductions. Most of the newcomers are law students.

I know that at this point they are waiting for more information from my side.

- "I do not speak Portuguese very well. I am doing a Ph.D. on housing movements and their relation to social rights". Ernesto looks at me puzzled.
- "Since when are you in Brazil?"
- "I arrived a few days ago".
- "How did you know about this meeting?"

I tell him the name of the person I never met. He nods and says he knows her. No further information is required from my side.

———————

It's hot, the street panels signal 30 degrees. I learned the shortest way to reach the Avenida Paulista – the most famous boulevard of São Paulo's city center. I walk along the municipal

stadium, then I go up two flights of stairs to reach a street that, after a couple of turns, joins the Avenida. On this street, there are some homeless people. There is a man who sleeps leaning against a garage exit. I already saw him another time here.

On the opposite sidewalk, there are some people encamped with mattresses and shopping carts. I don't look at them because I'm scared. Some Brazilian friends told me to be careful: "If you are walking on the sidewalk and you see someone that does not convince you, go on the other side". "Be careful, in general, and also with homeless people, because you are a foreigner and they can take advantage of it".

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SP, 24th of April 2018

Did I get the right meeting point for the demo? I walk around the block a couple of times and then see a woman with a red t-shirt. She sits on a little rock wall along the sidewalk. There is a small crowd, finally, I understand that I simply must wait there. I stand by the end of the rock wall, there are some people around me. I'm a little scared; working-class faces are not as tidy and as reassuring as the ones of rich people. Tired faces, of thousands of colors but not white, signed by work and poverty. While rolling a cigarette, I feel a bit intimidated by two guys staring at me; but I understand they don't have bad intentions: someone explained to me that people often mistake rollies for joints.

People are arriving. I glimpse Rosa not too far away but I don't want to meet her for now. She is nice to me and I don't want to be sticky. I walk around trying to detect other known faces. A few minutes after, Camilo starts to gather people shouting "assembly, assembly!". Two or three other people are helping him catch the crowd's attention. Camilo starts the speech, spaced out by collective chanting of MTST slogans. I sing along with the few slogans I learned. The mic

goes to an Afro-Brazilian militant. She condemns the eviction of the women's occupation *Tereza de Benguela.* She also motivates the people with chants. Then, Camilo communicates that the demo will start shortly. We are going in front of the housing Secretary's office. "To struggle".

The march starts and I walk with the crowd. I feel a bit out of place as if it were possible to see that I am white and different. And probably this is true, but the crowd is not completely homogeneous: in front of me I glimpse a young white guy with a piercing; he could be a leftist student like me. People are indeed mixed, but it is also possible to see the difference between working-class marchers and people like Camilo, or the guy with the piercing. First, the skin color, but also the clothes. Shoes instead of flip-flops. Or the type of t-shirts, not sure I can describe the difference. We walk for a while through the city center. Narrow and wide streets, lots of big buildings, sometimes it looks like U.S. architecture. There is a slogan people sing a lot. I meet Rosa and she helps me understand the words. It is something about ants, close to: "if you don't manage to subjugate the ant, don't try with the ants' nest".

We have now reached the office of the housing Secretary. Various militants start speeches. A white combative woman is talking. A movement's delegation will go inside to negotiate future steps for all occupations. The crowd must wait, but rarely silently. In front of the Secretary's entrance, people are firmly holding banners. Various speeches at the mic follow one another; people shout slogans and sing. I am on the side, out of the way. From time to time I sing along with the slogans I know. I see the little old woman I met the other day. I glimpsed her during the march, but now she stands alone! Cannot miss this opportunity to talk to her. She is relatively important in the movement.

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Europe 2021

"I feel like the exploiter, I am the psychiatrist".

The fear of exploiting the movement is related to guilt. It is related to the idea of the Global North researcher who goes to the Global South but does not feel 'too good' about it. However, this very concept re-inscribes a dominant position. It shows that colonialism, as a historical, cultural, and geographic phenomenon, has endowed my European positionality with internalized domination. Understanding the social interactions only through the lenses of 'me' exploiting 'them' is probably a psychological mechanism that helps to cope with guilt; however, it is inappropriate to describe an encounter in which they also had power. It does not challenge the injustice, the inequality. Because it leaves MTST militants' agency completely out and the European positionality remains paralyzed – not able to struggle against colonialism as a system of oppression.

European positions are deeply imbricated with internalized domination on a global scale. Before Brazil, I had already traveled to various countries in the Global South. I had even written about my 'adventures' for my family and friends. I never realized that 'writing about others' is not a right, but a privilege granted by the system to some. If I had thought about this privilege, I would have probably considered more seriously the possibility of defeat. I would have considered the chance of not being able to establish a connection with the MTST.

The fear of exploiting the MTST – as a manifestation of a colonial mode of thought – is problematic not only because it takes away agency from the militants but also because it 'seals' the relationship between colonialists and colonized. There is no possibility of moving away from it. However, that same fear represents something that is already a development towards decolonization. Indeed, it is moving from sensing the colonial divide in theory to knowing it in practice. I'm scared of being seen writing notes about the meeting. Being seen by the militants

– being challenged and judged by those the "Europeans have denied" – is a necessary part of the decolonization process. That fear implies starting to deal with the colonial divide. It is similar to seeing whiteness in the demo: it represents a first step in recognizing the racialization of bodies.

Self-reflexivity is the fundamental tool to build this narrative on. It helped me to be critical about internalized feelings of entitlement. It helped to understand the point of view of MTST comrades. Without self-reflexivity, it is not possible to move from engaged ethnography to collective militant research. The latter will also have to deal with Global South/North positionalities. Why is it important to be explicitly self-critical about our prejudices? Because they exist to normalize the structural oppression of dominant groups against minoritized groups. To fight against prejudices in society, we need to be aware of how they work within ourselves.

Poverty is interrelated with other forms of structural oppression. In Brazil, the legacy of slavery has deep and lasting effects on society. Afro-Brazilians suffer from structural economic inequality. I register this in my first impressions of the MTST; however, it seems 'natural'. Because it is normalized, naturalized. Even for a person who did not grow up in a racially mixed society, the economic domination of white people does not represent a 'surprise'. To realize the intersectional character of racism and classism is an important step to fight both. But it's not an easy task; when describing the differences between the marchers and me, I find myself struggling with the acknowledgment of the relation between non-white skin color and working-class outfit. Somehow, being honest with myself would have confirmed my stereotypes. But I preferred not to admit stereotypes because society tells us they are 'bad'. This is how they never get challenged.

My emotional reactions to seeing homeless people in the street (and workers in the demo) are revealing examples of what Sara Ahmed conceptualizes as the relationship between emotions and social hierarchies. I feel intimidated by the "tired faces, signed by work and poverty". There, emotions become attributes of bodies that are categorized as 'lower', dangerous, dirty, etc. Emotions attach me to my domination. Interestingly, the colonial divide is intertwined and reproduced through these emotions. My friends told me to be extra careful because the poor can take advantage of the fact that I'm a foreigner. Thus, while being scared on the streets, I am reproducing the colonial subject.

Identities are complex. It is impossible to reduce the intricacy of human experience to the belonging of a certain social group. But, more importantly for this narrative, there exists the risk of creating dichotomic categories. Of essentializing the experience of people who experience structural oppression. People's suffering and resistance. Finally, it also seems there are only convenient roles for me in this picture. By dividing men and women; whites and People of Color; middle class and working class, and always declaring I belong to the dominant side, I may inadvertently reproduce the very system I want to criticize.

My encounter with the MTST questioned how I see myself in fundamental ways. It produced strong emotional reactions. I had put myself in uncomfortable positions. Throughout this narrative, how I depict the MTST tells probably more about myself than anything else. This is something I accept about this project. Because I do not want to represent the MTST. Neither in the political sense of 'speaking on behalf of', nor in the sense of depicting. I do not assume to know MTST comrades. This narrative should serve the purpose of destabilizing dominant positions. However, it is the narrative of an encounter. Then, how should I think about the fact that I am – inevitably – also depicting the MTST? I (and you too, reader) should accept radical unknowability. I should also avoid romanticizing the movement. Because this would silence the

struggles, the tensions, the conflicts of who fights structural oppression within the movement too.

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SP, 29th of April 2018

On Sunday morning, I go back to the new occupation. It already looks different from how I left it yesterday, the day after the movement took over this unused piece of land. Saturday afternoon the militants built electricity poles; Dante explains to me they take the electricity from the other side of the road. Barracks have been moved, built, and rebuilt. Some of them have already the owner's name stuck on the tape. Some girls call me and ask whether the barracks are going to be moved again. Smiling, I reply that I don't know. Carolina, who is with me, laughs and explains to them I'm Italian.

I start to queue for lunch. Emiliano – an experienced militant of the movement – is coordinating the supply. He signals to go on the side of the kitchen barrack. In the blink of an eye, I think that I feel sorry about skipping the queue, but I don't say anything, as from my point of view he has the authority to decide. Emiliano has been very kind to me the whole day, perhaps it is related to privilege, but maybe it is courtesy and hospitality (at the end of the day I'm a guest here, or he could perceive me as such). Or it could be a sign of gratitude because I contributed to the collective kitchen with tomatoes.

Emiliano puts the plate in my hands, but it's burning, and it almost drops on the ground! Luckily, Sócrates – a guy I already met – helps me with a piece of thick cardboard. Neither the cardboard nor the lunch is particularly tempting; there is rice with beans and some soup with overcooked spaghetti with pieces of chicken. The paste consistency makes me a little sick. I force myself a bit – to be honest not too much – and I finish what I have on the burning plate.

Sócrates also brought me a bag full of clothes where I can sit while eating. He is a bit strange: on Saturday morning, while working at the construction of the toilet, he had asked me whether he could use my phone to call a friend and tell him to join the occupation. Then, after lunch, he takes the phone again. But he waits until I'm finished with lunch. I vaguely feel 'I am being used'.

With Carolina and Nilde – the two elderly women I met at the demonstration in the city center – there is already almost a fully-fledged friendship. Saturday, we laughed a lot with Nilde. Especially when she told me how she likes to whistle alone but this annoys her husband. I replied that besides whistling, it is also very healthy to talk to oneself. She looked at me weirdly: "the only problem is when someone hears you!". I could not stop laughing. We spent a lot of time together; we even went to get a coffee in the little café nearby. There, when I said to Carolina that the bill was on me, Nilde said they are not used to being treated this way. We also talked about more personal stuff. I ask Nilde how she got to know the MTST. She tells me it was a Saturday od some years ago; she was going for some big grocery shopping. Then she passed in front of the People's Cup occupation, which had recently started. Back home with her husband, they watched something about the occupation on tv and decided to go and see for themselves. Nilde says: "It is the people as a whole who struggle for rights, it is hard work, it is ants' work, but this is how the movement is established". I see she is referring to the chant I heard about the ants.

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Anita understands that often I cannot follow her, so, from time to time, she asks me whether I understood that phrase or word. Our conversation is always interrupted by people who come for the first time to the occupation. Anita explains what it is about:

“This occupation is part of the struggle for housing, it’s a collective struggle which tries to pressure public institutions to obtain what belongs to us as a right. Here we don’t ask for money, the only thing we require is participation and struggle. You have to make your barrack by bringing the necessary materials, then leave your name because we are creating WhatsApp groups. The barrack is symbolic, you are not obliged to sleep here. The collective kitchen prepares meals three times per day and today the assembly is at 17”.

At a certain point, Anita says that for me it must feel a bit like camping, while for them it is the daily routine. She does this without any malice, saying things as they are. I feel she found my weak spot, but not attacked, because she doesn’t say it as an accusation. I reply that it reminded me of the bike tour I made when I was 16 and we slept under the stars with my friends.

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SP, 4th of May 2018

I arrive around 13. They are serving lunch, but I already ate something on the way. I bring some salad to the kitchen. I’m always carrying some food. It’s not an idea that came to me. It was Rosa who told me to ask around what was needed. Anita said to bring protein-based food and vegetables. The first time, I asked an ‘expert’ militant where I should leave the food and she directed me to the kitchen. Now it became normal and I feel confident going directly there.

Why do I bring food every time I go to the occupation? On the one hand, it is explicitly requested, on the other hand, if not, I feel I would break some expectations! Interesting…I believe people expect me to bring food, why should I stop? But, can I bring food forever? Can I afford it? Probably yes. Also, maybe soon I’ll ‘be at home’ in the occupation and so I will feel less the urgency to do it to be welcomed. I must remember I don’t do it only to be welcomed, but also because it is needed. So, I’ll continue.

Shortly after arriving, I have a walk around, to see how the occupation developed. In 6 days, it increased a lot. Now, all the barracks on this side of the hill are well organized. Until the big tree they belong to 'group 1', then 'group 2' starts. In the two days I didn't come, they built a lot behind the hill.

While walking, I greet the people: not everyone, but very often I say "hello". Or "hi" to youngsters. From the answers I learned some slang. A couple of times people stop me asking whether they'll get their housing. It's very interesting because it must be my whiteness and the 'activist look' to make them believe I know something. People are nice and on one occasion we chat a bit. I explain who I am and about the research. The man with whom I'm talking – who has temporarily stopped his work on the barrack – explains to the others I'm Italian.

I like to talk to people (I don't understand everything, but we communicate). It makes me happy. Moreover, it gives me the feeling of being on a side, of having a little chat in solidarity. There is also the interesting aspect of having empathy with working-class people. Because sometimes I feel a bit embarrassed. It is 'normal' to feel a bit suspicious when the interlocutor is poor, underdressed, toothless, etc. It is easier to communicate with 'our fellow men'. Both esthetically and because of the type and style of talk. For instance, I feel cautious talking about 'big problems'. I was discussing with someone about the US and why wars start. Off the top of my head, I thought s/he was oversimplifying things; so, in a little spot of my brain there was prudence because of a 'simplified analysis'. On the other hand, I'm not sure this caution does not preexist, as a stereotype: as if people who are not well educated would not be able to discuss complex topics.

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SP, 13th of May 2018. Published on the Facebook page of Anita, author unknown

I am a mother and I live at the *Marielle Vive*!

Despite a suffocating routine, I found my way and managed to raise three children alone. It has been a hard battle that no one sees, but many people judge and assert: “you put them into the world, now you have to raise them”. Well, so I did it and I don’t even know how. They looked at my children and me in my *favela*’s barrack and thought that I would not be able to handle it. My kids have three different fathers, three attempts to be happy that gave me great disappointments. They left their marks on me and left. Now, no one else remembers them. On a Saturday, full of laundry, I stopped everything and went to a meeting under the tree. I was very suspicious, so I promised myself that I would stay only until the clothes were ready. But the discussion was nice and those young girls with red hats knew a lot about me, so I stayed until the end, registered, and waited for the day. With a racing heart, I took my kids and some clothes and left towards the unknown. It was dawn and no one understood one another, but I could see the beauty of the place; the countryside, the forest, and I felt the presence of waters not far away.

I built my barrack imitating others and soon I had my new home. My kids were running around and playing extremely happily. As days went by, we started organizing, creating groups, sectors, picking coordinators. The education sector sent children to school and everything was going all right until the news about the eviction came. But this was not the worst (because we were prepared). The worst has been knowing that a judge in the city decided children would have to be separated from their families and held in asylums. This made people furious and when the bailiff came to report the news, we did not let him speak such stupidities; we sent him a message chanting the slogans of our struggle.

About two hours later, the news came out that another judge – higher in the hierarchy – had suspended the decisions about the eviction and children imprisonment. The happiness we experienced that day can only be understood by someone who already has struggled collectively and gained a victory. The fight continues and the path is long, but we are stronger, we are more

Marielles, that warrior woman who never bowed. I am outraged by the justice's attitude of separating me from my children. Why do they see me only now? They didn't see me when I had to be mother and father at the same time, when I could not find a place in kindergarten, when they cut my social benefits. Now they found me, but they call me a raider, irresponsible, someone who 'uses innocent kids'. But this doesn't scare me! This doesn't scare other mothers! You forgot that we are the result of what you call social inequality and I call the privilege of power.

We are no longer alone. We are a community and we have our arms' strength. We are like a stream, and we don't even remember the time we were scattered drops. We break your prejudice and we will not cease to exist. We will always resist.

Marielle Lives! Always!

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Europe 2021

In the colonial order of things, there is a difference between indigenous leaders asking for historical reparations for centuries of massacres and European NGOs providing help and support to 'Third World' countries. Who is making Europe accountable for what happened? And to what extent? As a European (but crucially also white and male), sometimes I decided to be accountable for the fact that I have higher income and more access to State Welfare. I paid for the coffee for my friends and I didn't get too hurt by Anita's comment about camping because "she is saying things as they are". On the other hand, it was much harder when someone was making me accountable in ways I could not control. I called Sócrates "strange" because he wanted to use my phone; he shows how a narrative of this encounter only in terms of 'me exploiting them' is false and it reproduces power structures. In that moment, Sócrates knew about the colonial order of things.

For how long should reparations be paid? Despite the fact MTST militants ask every assembly to bring food to the occupation (if possible), I find myself struggling. The primary reason for bringing it is the hope of being accepted. And there are good reasons for believing it. Material support and financial solidarity are crucial. However, I find myself struggling with the idea of buying food because I fear that they'll accept me only because of that. My struggle is about 'buying' their friendship and comradeship. This feeling is colonial guilt. Friendship and comradeship cannot be bought. Neither in Europe nor Brazil. Global capitalism developed over centuries exploiting peripheral countries to the advantage of core countries. It is right to pay compensation. We could pay compensation until our wealth is finished. They could have asked me to buy food until I finished my university stipend. Friendship and comradeship do not share anything with compensation.

Racial oppression in Brazil is a fundamental, structural reality. And it is very much interrelated with class structure. As long as I stay silent, people tend to think I have useful information because of my skin color and how I am dressed. This is how the social truth of domination is constructed. How the militants ask me about organizational issues does not only hint at social hierarchies within Brazilian society. It also provides empirical substance to the idea that 'the subject of reason' is gendered and racialized. In other words, it's a manifestation of epistemic coloniality. This mode of knowing the world emerges also when Sócrates uses my phone. The episodes are two sides of the same coin. Certainly, the objective should be to overcome the colonial framework. However – in this challenge – it is the angry reaction of the colonized that sets the rules. Adopting the lenses of coloniality should not equate agents across the divide. Dominant culture's violence is exercised on the colonized, and this makes a whole lot of difference.

Developing militant research implies deconstructing oppression and privilege. How can I develop truly democratic and collective inquiry without challenging the class stereotypes which

are so deeply ingrained in my mind? I dehumanize working-class people when writing "it is easier to communicate with 'our fellow men'". Poverty is associated with crime; moreover, there is another fundamental prejudice that needs to be addressed to develop collective research: it is the idea that people with low education do not have valuable ideas about complex topics. The knowledge we need to create a more just and equal society does not come from people belonging to dominant groups. There is a second important element in the path to militant research: to stop thinking the research is more important than the struggle. Activists' time – "our conversation is always interrupted by people who come for the first time to the occupation" – is more valuable than papers.

"I feel she found my weak spot". When I feel fragile because Anita highlights how for me the occupation must feel a bit like a touristic adventure, I also start to change. In the emotional discovery of the colonial divide lies the beginning of the decolonization of the mind. This is the link between fragility and the struggle against social hierarchies. In the project of epistemic decolonization, dominant subjects must (un)learn how to discover the world with the oppressed and their words. The point is not whether the conversation about international politics was accurate or not; but rather whether that conversation can become a step towards a different form of understanding the self and the reality.

I said my aim is not to represent the struggle of MTST. However, this is the narrative of an encounter. Thus, I am inevitably depicting MTST militants too. Who will make you see the struggle of the comrades? It was a good moment to stop talking and listen to Marielles' voices. I asked for their help.

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SP, 21st of May 2018

I arrive around 7 pm. Just in time for the assembly. I wanted to come back even if I spent the whole of the previous day here because someone said there will be an important assembly. Ernesto talks about future demonstrations. I leave the eggs and the onions with Sandino; he is happy because he had finished the onions and "without some seasoning the food is tasteless!". While walking up the occupation's main street, someone shouts that there is a fight. Emiliano jumps up and immediately calls for the self-defense sector. João and Pancho come out right away from a barrack and go along with Emiliano.

I go to buy cigarettes and return to the assembly stage. Fernando greets me from there. I ask him about his hand injury – last week he got ten stitches because of an accident.

- "Don't forget, Alberto, feel free to sleep in the free barrack close to mine!"
- "Thanks, Fernando! What about the fight? Everything solved?"
- "Sure, all is good now."

I stand on the left of the stage. Pancho invites me to join them there. So, I go through the crowd and jump up on the stage. The scene is beautiful: I can see the big crowd. But not everyone, as the people standing close to the big tree are covered by the little hill. Frida talks at length about next Saturday: there will be a party to celebrate the occupation's first month. Then, Ernesto gives updates about the negotiations with the judge. There is good news, but he makes a long break, so everyone thinks he's going to say something bad. When the positive announcement arrives, the assembly explodes. He's good at rhetoric!

During the assembly I glimpse Ariane – my little crush. She is so beautiful, wearing a red jacket and talking with a guy (!!) with a hoodie. I try to examine him; I notice he looks 'white', and – I'm not sure – but I believe this makes him a more concrete competitor, more at the same level. It is horrible what I'm thinking, but I guess these were my unconscious thoughts…I must reexamine this. Afterward, I meet her again: she is walking with the same guy (who could be

her boyfriend!). When we are one in front of the other, I say “hi”. She reciprocates but we continue walking.

We are all around the bonfire. Ines and Nina – Gilberto’s wife – sit on the couch. I am sitting close to João, who is listening to some music on the phone. I like his taste: Brazilian reggae and a lot of leftist songs (many are from rappers). Men move, they come and go to the kitchen, while women stay at the bonfire. There is also Emiliano, who – despite his age – has incredible energy. Much later, I ask him whether he sleeps at night. Very seriously, he replies that he is responsible for us, he cannot sleep.

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I find myself chopping up carrots quite randomly. The king of the kitchen is Sandino with his cheerful mood. He was dancing a little while listening to some famous US songs. I met Sandino the first night, but I always forgot his name. Back then, he had passionately told me some of his life’s hardships. Sandino lives in an apartment built by the movement if I’m not mistaken. It’s crazy to think that he has been cooking lunch and dinner for hundreds of people for two weeks! I cannot imagine where he gets the energy. Also, I doubt he went home since the occupation started…So, no proper shower and dirty toilet. He has incredible resistance. Sandino was saying that everyone walks along the street in front of the kitchen. He is always smiling and cheerful. “It is these people who transmit me the energy!”.

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SP, 3rd of June 2018

In the early afternoon, we move from the big collective barrack to the open space in front of the stage. Militants are preparing the bazaar in another barrack close to the big tree. I see a red flag

where is written “Struggle Bazaar”. There are about a hundred people. It starts to get cold and a bit rainy.

Lélia and the others from the culture brigade start the activity by forming a circle and inviting everyone to join.

- “Who still feels like a child can come”.

Soon some people arrive; I decide to sit on the rock wall to smoke a cigarette. I ate too much and didn’t sleep well. Once the circle is done and people are holding each other’s hands, a comrade with a wool hat starts explaining the activity. It is an Afro-Cuban rhythm; she says it is symbolic of the fight of the slaves and indigenous people. It begins with a dance move: right foot ahead to the right and then to the left. Everyone must clap their hands following the rhythm. Soon people get familiar with it. The singing part is easy: it’s a couple of sentences that are rapidly learned by participants. There are also a few children in the circle. Women are the majority, but there are some men too. I’m on my own watching, but then I also briefly joined the circle. Also Ernesto is on his own, but then he comes too.

I see Rosa, Gioconda, and Chiri. After some rounds with the texts previously suggested, Chiri has a good idea. She starts singing the movement’s slogans: everyone is now dancing in the same way but singing the ants’ chant. Then, they start with that other evocative song which goes: “If the people knew the talent they have, they wouldn’t tolerate outrage from anyone”. The culture brigade’s activity goes on for a while. People look amused and I can sense a good vibe. I’m particularly impressed by a woman, who – right before the end – shouts slogans in favor of the movement and of the occupation. Chiri played a big role in creating this cool atmosphere, which is often spontaneous and self-organized. There are a couple of moments in which I sense the circle’s bond and I get emotional. I think it’s a consequence of the electricity they are transmitting.

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SP, 16th of June 2018

I wanted to add two things about my positionality. Saturday, I think in the afternoon, Fidel called me. I was leaning against the kitchen counter and he was in the collective barrack. He asked me to bring some wooden tubes – they looked like a cylinder where you roll tablecloths – to the storage room.

- "I cannot lift heavy weights, you know…"
- "Sure Fidel, let me take care of it".

Later, I was drinking beers with Simone in the shopping center in front of the occupation, and we chatted about this episode. She had also noticed it. She told me about one of the first moments in which she felt really 'part of the movement'.

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SP, 31st of June 2018

I wanted to go to the shopping center to watch Argentina against France – it's the World Cup. But I find myself in the collective barrack; Chiri and Frida are preparing roses with tissue paper. Today there is the "Tea of the Marielles": a moment of women's solidarity in the occupation. We sit on a bench with Simone, Chiri, and Chavela. Simone doesn't want me to leave Brazil. She is sweet. Chiri, maybe replying to Simone, says something I don't understand.

She repeats it.

- "Despite the fact you look like a colonialist, I like you."

I ask her what it means that I look like a colonialist. It's because I'm European. Then, Chiri tells me about what the US did in Japan: they forced women into brothels, among other things. Her grandfather barely survived. I would like to tell her that my family is not colonialist at all, that my grandmother was expelled from school when she was 10, but I hold back...I don't know

why. Maybe I thought her sentence was not personal, that it was more connected to my place of birth. This is something beyond my control...

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Europe 2021

There is a similarity between old fears and present concerns. On the first day of my encounter with the MTST, I asked myself: what is this white researcher doing here? Now, I question whether I can construct a truly transformative narrative. Both thoughts relate to an uncertain outcome. I'm looking at what I'm leaving but I'm not sure where I'm going. However, there are also differences in how I approach the problems. Now, I am skeptical about describing the Global South/North division in terms of 'impossible integration' or 'exploitation'. Not because the concepts do not characterize the reality of global capitalism, but rather because they lead to deadlocks. I believe the changes in my approach show I am experiencing a process. Not a linear one. It rather looks like circles that intersect for certain portions. I try to jump from one circle to the other. Often, I am stuck in the intersecting portion. Sometimes prejudices are explicit; often they are hidden and implicit. While getting to know MTST militants at Marielle Vive, *I developed friendships, I started challenging my mental habits. However, the surprise and admiration with which I look at the energy and political participation of working-class militants show a deep class bias. Dominant identities are not used to thinking they are missing something by not sharing experiences with minoritized identities. A prejudice about poverty comes to the surface every time I look at the dedication and the politics of working-class militants.*

I do not feel comfortable dancing with the women in the circle. Patriarchal forms of socialization are so deeply ingrained that it will require a lot of effort to deconstruct them. The unlearning process goes through moments of stability and others of instability. In this respect,

it has therapeutic components. I am trying to break the social taboos which determined my very identity. However, the therapy cannot be only individual, as society's oppression is constructed intersubjectively. We should start this unlearning process collectively. The therapeutic need speaks to the Spivakian motto: "unlearning one's privileges as loss". Belonging to dominant groups determined my socialization, it defines my subjectivity. The unlearning process represents a loss in many respects. Collective deconstruction of structural forms of oppression would generate financial-, prestige-, emotional-losses. If learning usually requires effort, it seems reasonable to expect that unlearning would be even harder. Being socialized in oppressive societies, it is unlikely I will be able to avoid discrimination without a conscious effort.

I must learn how to see the pervasiveness of prejudices. "I feel horrible" thinking that whiteness makes my 'competitor' more real (here racism and sexism intersect). Instead of realizing how I internalized white supremacy, I feel guilty. Because racism is considered a 'moral' problem. A common message of our societies is that it is 'bad' to be racist. This suggests that a person can be racist, instead of the whole society and the institutions governing it. Through the encounter with the MTST, I learned that racism is structural, it has deep socio-economic dimensions determining people's lives. A racist society taught me not to see whiteness. In the narrative, when I see powerful positions, sometimes I do not see the color, because I'm used to associating leadership and power with whiteness. Structural racism taught me to see color unidirectionally, only from the point of view of the dominant group. The latter – white people – do not perceive their color as a 'race', because it represents 'the standard'.

In the beginning, I see myself as white. In a racist society, the possibility of choosing when to perceive color as an important social determinant is a privilege of whites. Interestingly, I see whiteness when I associate myself with a Global North positionality going to the Global South. There is an association between the West and whiteness. However, at that point, realizing my

'race' did not trigger any further thoughts. Looking back, it seems I was just uncomfortable associating myself with the Global North. This is the discomfort of accepting a European colonial positionality. Something that Chiri challenged.

How structural racism works: when whites see a situation that does not question their expectations about color – for instance, a white in a position of leadership – they are colorblind. The effort to unlearn classism is huge, as it seems that these prejudices are implicit and hidden. However, I know there are problems I don't understand (and see) because of my positionality. Being an academic from a middle-class background, I don't know issues related to poverty. It is not enough to ask working-class comrades about it; I must unlearn the prejudices about working-class knowledge. There are unresolved tensions in some decisions I'm making about how to construct the narrative of the encounter with MTST. I don't feel entitled to represent militants, 'the subaltern'; thus, I decided to insert a piece (probably) written by a working-class woman. The problem is that I may inadvertently suggest it is possible to just 'listen' to subaltern voices. Truth is, I'm also domesticating that voice. Again with Spivak, "the West has an interest in representing the subaltern". In other words, my subjectivity does not disappear when deciding to 'let the subaltern speak'. It's not that easy to give voice and to listen. The decision of reproducing that piece does not solve representation problems. While commenting on that piece, I wrote that "I asked for their help". This suggests I can represent subaltern voices with some assistance. I would just need to employ their own words. This is not true. Here, there is the risk of romanticizing subaltern voices. I'm trying to balance this risk with the desire to move beyond the idea of 'impossibility of representation'.

The story I'm telling is also about developing friendships and wonderful human relationships. It is a common saying within the MTST that the movement is like a family. Of course, I'm not only trying to tell a story but also reflecting on how I tell it. Hopefully, this helps understand how privilege and structural oppressions are constructed as social facts.

At Marielle Vive*, I usually don't feel like saying I'm a researcher for two reasons:*

1) *Out of class prejudices, I've always talked less about the research with working-class militants.*
2) *I often feel it's not needed. I started to feel more like a friend/comrade than a gringo ethnographer.*

This partly explains the frustration about Chiri's comment – "Despite the fact you look like a colonialist, I like you". I thought I was becoming an ally, a friend. I felt rejected. Chiri was telling me that friends and 'allies in the anti-colonial struggle' are two different things. It took me a long while to understand it. I was not perceiving the fact of being European as expressing a colonialist positionality. Or maybe I was, but I still felt uncomfortable. Because according to 'progressive values', being a colonialist is a 'bad thing' (pretty much like being racist). I did not know that being a colonialist is a social fact as much as being male or white. Thus, I felt attacked. I felt fragile. This fragility is exactly the feeling that dominant positionalities need to develop self-reflexivity about structural oppression.

Dominant groups' members can choose when to be accountable for their dominance. Indeed, in other parts of the narrative, I felt accountable for being a Global North researcher. It is like the case of Sócrates: it is harder to feel accountable when one is not in control of the 'hailing act'. Being free to decide when race is socially relevant is another example of how decisions about accountability are a privilege of dominance. I know it because of my Jewish ancestry. My grandparents had to flee Italian fascism and escape to Argentina with their families. It does not matter whether I self-identify as Jewish or not, once I decide to 'disclose' that my mum is Jewish, generally people make me accountable for being a member of this minoritized group. In my life, I can decide when to see whiteness, masculinity, middle-class background; not Jewishness.

Apart from a couple of moments during which that part of my socialization became salient because of antisemitic tropes, my Jewish ancestry has not been an important fact of the encounter with the MTST. However, I believe that it helped me a lot in developing empathy about discrimination and oppression. For instance, when someone was telling me about frustrating racist or sexist prejudices, I could always relate their stories to my resentment with antisemitism. Furthermore, this part of my positionality helps understand how intersectionality works. Being discriminated against because of Jewishness does not make me less European. Especially in the Brazilian social context. Oppression in one part of a social identity does not 'cancel out' dominance in the other parts.

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SP, 7th of July 2018. Conversation with Chiri and Antonio

- "So, let's start with your name. We have Chiri and Antonio. How much old are you guys, if I may ask?".

My Portuguese is not good yet. I make mistakes, words come out uncertain, and probably sometimes it is hard to understand me.[177]

Both Chiri and I are surprised about how young Antonio is. He laughs a little.

- "So, the first topics would be: 'you and the time'. Meaning: how you were when you started to know the movement and whether you think something changed after."

Chiri invites Antonio to reply first, but he says:

- "No, you start because I did not understand…"
- "Ok, let's chat together…Look…"
- Antonio asks me: "are you registering already?"
- "Yes"
- "Yes, he is already registering", says Chiri. "But this is a conversation…"
- "I see…But I thought we would have started interviewing him…". She laughs:
- "Ah, I see…It's true."

[177] I try to give a sense of how my Portuguese sounds by transposing language errors into English.

I'm confused:

- "So, you were thinking of…?"
- "Antonio was thinking that we were going to interview you."
- "Oh, really?"
- "I'm going to make you a proposal, researcher. A philosopher's proposal. That we keep having the dialogue we were having so that this becomes truly a conversation. And we can orient ourselves through the themes you suggest. Or the questions you have." Antonio says something:
- "Ok, now I'm back to reality."
- Chiri continues: "I think to interview you is a way to have the dialogue we were already starting."
- "I like this idea. I think is even better", I reply.
- "So, what are your plans here in Brazil?", asks Antonio.
- "You mean my researcher plans?"
- "I mean your plans about everything".
- Chiri asks: "Why did you come to Brazil?"
- "So…Actually, I was doing a project about South of Africa. It was similar to Brazil. Because it was about a social movement which struggles for housing and social rights. But the problem was that to do field research there, I would needed to learn a language called Zulu. A Bantu language, from Africa. And it would have taken me many year of studying to speak it properly."
- Chiri tells me: "You can encounter Bantu in Brazil"
- "Really?"
- "Of course!"
- "You mean Bantu words?"
- "Words and also Bantu life"
- "So, it was because of that that I changed the project to Brazil. Because it's easier for me to speak Portuguese."
- Chiri: "Sure. Also, because you speak a Romance language. But did you have some interest in Brazil? Is there something beyond these bureaucratic problems that brought you here?"
- "Well, look…I'm going to speak honestly: I did not know almost anything about Brazil. Almost anything."
- Antonio: "But did you study the movement before joining it?"
- "Very little. I didn't know much."
- "How did you know about the movement then?"

Firstly, I found about the MST – Landless Workers' Movement (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores sem Terra*), the biggest Latin American social movement which exists since the 80s. There are many works in English about the MST.

Chiri reacts.

- "The MST…The struggle for agrarian reform in the 80s. Did you know that Fidel comes from the MST? So, you can get an idea of how long he's been active! He gave up on one movement and founded another…Do you think that he would desist now? No fucking way!" Antonio asks:
- "Was he the founder?"
- "Yes, Fidel is one of the people who founded MTST. He exited the MST because he perceived that the urban peripheries became more populated than the countryside. You know, I'm talking of the people who grow corn, who have their little agricultural production. 30 years ago, they were many more than nowadays. These people were suffering hunger in the countryside, in the *sertões* of Minas Gerais, of Goiás, of Tocantins, of the Nordeste.[178] They were the precarious workers, but then they left for the urban peripheries, my friends.
  Who is not a son, a grandson, a nephew, a great-grandson of someone who came to São Paulo because in the North East people could not make a living? This happened during the 70s, 80s, 90s. The poor were losing their lands to the rich: the ones who have cattle, who breed horses, plant a lot of fucking soy, or plant the stuff full of pesticides we then buy in supermarkets…Do you know these people? These are the ones with money in Brazil. Oh yes, they have money and they have the Federal Congress too."

Antonio sighs ironically. She continues:

- "The motherfuckers from here, the São Paulo pieces of shit, they have all this land, indeed. And Fidel started perceiving that the peripheries were getting more populated compared to the *sertões*; most workers were no longer in the countryside. So, he said: 'It is in the periphery where people really need housing!'. This is the MTST. More than 20 years ago, Fidel and others said: 'We will go to the urban peripheries as the poor moved there'. Then the movement started growing, it expanded to other States. First, there were two occupations, then three, then four. But I think Fidel himself can tell you better this story."

Antonio looks at me:

- "And there, Alberto. You are being very silent…Say something"
- "I talk questions for you"

We keep talking about the MTST politics, the struggle. We discuss everyday problems: finding a job, paying the bills. Chiri tells us about the difficulties of constructing the movements'

[178] *Sertões* are the "backlands", arid regions in the North East (*Nordeste*) of the country. They are well-known in Brazilian culture and literature. Mina Gerais, Goiás, Tocantins are three Brazilian States.

buildings. Earlier in the morning, we visited together the MTST apartments close to the headquarters. I ask her about the movement's objectives.

- "In my opinion, the MTST does not need to have a final objective. Because if you've got a final objective then you become a universal movement, something for everyone. But we don't need to be like this. We are different. We can be all together in the form that works for today. The *corre* we've got today we do it. And we pierce the rich. If we need to pierce them for our entire lives, I'll go for it. Even if, eventually, I won't be able to overthrow them."

She makes a break and so I ask:

- "What does it mean the word *corre*?"
- Antonio answers right away: "Struggle". Then Chiri: "*Corre* is the daily struggle. It's like *corrida* – running. It means working hard.
  You know, sometimes I think we are in a war…By the way, we are in a war. But it would have been better to be more explicit about it. Every day. Or, at least, to see it every day.
  This is not an exaggeration. It's a real war. I think we can say we live in a world in which 'war' is the concept. Of a daily struggle, of a daily *corre*.

Chiri starts talking about the school system:

- "Sao Paulo's public schools are organized in a way to make kids abandon education and then die. Because police are there to kill those who are not in schools. And who are these kids? Who gets expelled from school? The people from the periphery. Girls with children. Afro-Brazilians. For whom must the school feel like shit?
  I have experience of kids going out of school and getting arrested at the door. Or, police coming inside to inspect everyone. Once, they took a kid because he had a switchblade. The most absurd things you can imagine...School is fucked up.
  So, the MTST is inside society. And Brazilian society is like this. The movement is not gonna be different from society. Because it is made by people of this society: sexist, classist, homophobic, with prejudices against who smokes joints...I'm talking a lot, sorry. And the streetlamps turned on…"

We laugh. Antonio asks me whether I like the weather:

- "I'm in love with the Brazilian winter."

We are tired, everyone feels like leaving.

- Chiri: "Before going back to the occupation, let's use the shopping center's toilets". Good idea. Antonio asks me:
- "But Alberto, do you have more questions?"
- "No. And we could also have another conversation."

We start going towards the shopping center. Antonio remembers he wants to add something about *corre*:

- "*Corre* is like this. Sometimes there is a hardship. You know the meaning of 'hardship', Alberto?"
- "Yes"
- "So, when there is no one that can support you. You're not going to school, not receiving some training. There is no hand available for you, no one is telling you 'I'll bring you there'. Then, what've you got? The street. Friendships.
  Friendships have what? Sometimes they have drugs, little thieves, etc. Friends teach you. The 'crazy *corre*' is this. You are in a difficult situation, you need help, you are not getting employment opportunities, and then comes this proposal. In this proposal, you've got money, drugs, women, drinks, parties…*Corre* is made from these things.
  And when a kid is starting to have some knowledge, getting a bit older, thinking about the future…If he enters organized crime, or he learns about life in the periphery…But he would need to be smart too. Because there are smart thieves but also stupid ones: guys who stole for 20 years and don't have a fucking penny.
  Some thieves rob banks, and – if it works – they become rich. And…thieves study too. The real thief studies. He goes to university. You know, I'm talking about police corruption…Government corruption. Did you understand? The crazy *corre* is all this, brother."

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SP, 9th of July 2018

I meet Zumbi at the Luz train station. We are both going to *Marielle Vive*. He looks very surprised to see me outside of the occupation. We arrive and I hurry up for the preparation meeting of the MTST youth camp: I'm already half an hour late. Chiri is co-organizing a weekend in which the youth of different occupations gather together. Luckily, the meeting has just started. There is a long round of introductions, people talk more than usual.

Chavela makes long praise of Fidel who gets a bit emotional. She says he treats everyone equally: old militants and new ones. She learned so much from him. Also Fidel talks at length. He starts from the origins of MTST. He also says people called him "tramp" so many times. The atmosphere is much more relaxed than in other meetings or assemblies. I do not remember how, but people start speaking about the difference between rich and poor youth. A militant

with a baseball cap says the difference is that rich kids are protected by their families. Then, Antonio continues:

- "Rich kids are individualistic and selfish, it is us, the youth of the *quebrada*,[179] who actually help old ladies to cross the street, while they mind their own business."

Someone adds:

- "They cannot even make coffee for themselves".

João asks to speak. He makes harsh comments.

- "When I go to the city center ladies drawback and hold their bags stronger because they are afraid. They consider me a thief. Not all rich people are like this, but many are, and therefore I want to bother them. This is why when there are fights against the police, I do my part."

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Europe 2021

What is the meaning of interweaving the voices of MTST comrades together with my own? I thought it helped to make the movement more understandable. It would have helped you, reader, to grasp this tireless struggle. At the end of the day, as this is a narrative of an encounter, the presence of militants' voices is simply unavoidable. Also, I must tell about the Other – the people I'm encountering. Thus, I thought I could employ MTST voices to balance the narrative. However, I also realized I was walking into a trap: the idea that my voice would represent (in the sense of depicting) the one side of this encounter; while MTST voices would represent (in the same sense) the other side. For a moment, I believed their voices were 'enough' to accomplish what I could not do: depicting the movement.

In fact, this is not true. These voices are not representing the MTST. Not in the most straightforward sense of 'speaking on behalf': the movement is a political collective that speaks for itself. Furthermore, in this narrative, individuals do not represent themselves. Because I

[179] A vernacular word for "the periphery".

cannot pretend to make myself invisible. I believe this is an important Spivakian lesson: 'the Westerner representing the Subaltern speaking'…In this process, the Westerner makes himself invisible. Here, I'm deciding when and how Chiri and Antonio speak – while, of course, I can't. Thus, interweaving their voices with mine has a different meaning. It shows a problem. The question of whether the subaltern can or cannot speak is not (only) a matter of agency; as – needless to say – subalterns do speak. The problem is also whether colonial positionalities are ready to listen. Often, I did not want to listen to what Chiri and Antonio were telling because it made me feel uncomfortable. So, having their voices explicitly present in the narrative shows how crucial they had been for my self-reflection. These conversations were the sources of my destabilization. I transformed through these dialogues.

Europe does not want to listen to resisting subalterns. Migrants cannot shout, protest, behave aggressively. The benevolent European is ready to accept moderation and reasonable requests. Not radical challenges. We should ask ourselves: who is benefitting from peace? It made me uncomfortable to listen to Chiri saying, "this is a war". I've been socialized thinking that war is bad, that non-violence is a valuable political principle. However, during the discontinuous process of listening to Chiri's and Antonio's ideas, I thought that not feeling rage is a privilege. I write that João makes "harsh comments" because he expresses anger…For whom are João's ideas harsh?

Being open to someone else's voice is hard. I felt annoyed and frustrated by the fact that Chiri and Antonio were escaping a 'classical' interview format. I was not ready to be open to their will and thoughts. Now, I realize that they are showing the path towards a truly collective and democratic research process. I was also naïve. They asked me why I came to Brazil, how I got to know the movement. And my honest answers show the naivety of privilege. I did not have to prepare a lot; I just went there. MTST voices in this narrative disclose that I didn't have any kind of 'revelation' about structural oppressions. The comrades forced me to look differently

at things (and at myself). To face the existence of war against "the people from the periphery. Girls with children. Afro-Brazilians". I believe dominant groups' members must learn to accept minoritized group's rage. And, this is not a smooth, painless process.

The conversation with Antonio and Chiri is a challenge to the colonial way of knowing the world. What happens when gringos stop asking questions and have to provide answers? From my confused and surprised reaction, it is clear that we are not ready for this reversal of roles. The feeling of being seen by the colonized is powerful and destabilizing. I argue that through this emotion it is possible to start decolonizing minds. A fundamental step towards a decolonial epistemology is overcoming the duality subject/object in the research process. When Antonio asks me why I am so silent, my reply reveals how the framework with which I encountered the MTST was not suited to establish a different type of research.

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SP, 16th of July 2018

Some researchers came to the occupation. If I understood correctly, they work for the campaign of Guilherme, the MTST leader who is now a candidate for the presidential elections of October. Researchers gather several militants to make a collective interview. When the meeting with the researchers finishes, Caetano's comment makes me reflect.

- "I'm sorry I did not ask the interviewers to tell more about themselves and to explain better how they'll use the interviews".

This is very important because it represents research's challenges and, in general, the problem of 'researching people'. As once Chiri told me, I am researching people…

- "You're right", I replied. "It's awkward, isn't it?"

All research in social science does this, but ethnographies do it based on some kind of 'sharing'. It's different from just arriving, making the questions you prepared and then leaving (like the researchers of the campaign). However, people's suspects are the same in both cases. For

instance, I still did not manage to interview Thiago. I don't understand whether he doesn't want, or he is just a little scared. Maybe I'll interview Dandara. She was also suspicious at the beginning:

- "Why did you choose me?"

The tension for the ethnographer is whether (and to what degree) to be explicit about her role. For instance, later during the day, when there was a reading circle, it just came into my mind that I could record the discussion. So, without thinking about it twice, I went to Ana Maria and Diego and asked them whether I could record. Ana Maria said that most probably it was ok, but it could have embarrassed the participants. At that moment, I 'saw' her point. Indeed, it would have been weird. Because it was a small group of people. And to record effectively, I needed to go close to the person speaking…impossible, in the sense that it would have seriously damaged the meeting's quality and spontaneity.

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SP, 22nd of July. Interview with Dandara and Lampião

We are in the collective kitchen of group 6, where Dandara and Lampião are coordinators. I start the interview:

- "Let's begin with 'time'. How long have you been in the movement?"
- "For three months, I joined one week after the occupation was established", replies Dandara.

Lampião entered a couple of weeks after her. I move to another question:

- "So, one issue that I believe is interesting is whether you have changed since you joined the movement".

They laugh a little. Then, Dandara goes first again:

- "Yes, I think I have changed. Because I was very…How can I put it…I was a person who didn't know how to deal with others. I clashed with others. If needed, I was ready to argue. I had to learn how to be patient. I had to learn how to create a dialogue."
- "I changed a lot, too.", says Lampião. "I was very demonstrative, very stressed. I managed to save some time for myself, to reflect on everything I want to do…I started

to think before talking. To have a different attitude. It changed a lot how I see life and the world; I think about the neighbor, not only about myself."

I ask whether both are coordinators of group 6 and they confirm in unison. I move to a more personal topic.

- "Another questions: the relationship with emotions…"[180] Lampião sighs ironically and I must laugh. I try to make myself clearer: "For example: which emotions do you associate with the movement?"
- Dandara answers: "they are many, you know? Some are good, others bad…" Lampião jumps in: "It's very hard to describe them…". She continues:
- "Because we are dealing with people we don't know…I mean, we are getting to know them now. Therefore, some show to you they're friendly, that you can count on them in the case you need…The problem is that people don't really know what they are dealing with…So, in the end, they kind of create a mask. I like masks, and I also like to take them off. It's not going to last long before some masks will start to drop. However, I'm wearing mine…". I laugh and ask her what her mask is:
- "Mine? Ah, this one you are seeing! For instance, I talk, I make jokes…But at the same time, I'm nervous, I'm ignorant…you see? It depends also on the other person."
- Lampião: "My turn?", laughing a little. "I don't know how to describe it. For me, the movement is many feelings: happiness, sadness, rage. There are moments in which I even think about giving up, but then I see that the struggle is bigger than the troubles. Everything in life has losses; nothing in life is easy. So, as the comrade Dandara just said, many masks will drop…And I'm only waiting to see them fall."

Someone enters the kitchen asking whether there's gonna be lunch. Kids are shouting and playing around. I ask them what changed after they became conscious of having a right to housing.

- Lampião: "How I'm gonna say this…", laughing a little. "Whether or not you want it, many things change. My point of view changed. Now, I am not afraid of going to the streets to struggle, because I know it's my right. And if someone calls me 'tramp'…Why tramp?! I'm struggling for my rights! I'm not afraid to discuss. From here, I go out head-on.". Then, Dandara says:
- "Look, I'll be honest. I was not imagining myself in the Avenida Paulista shouting slogans and chants…If I looked at the scene some time ago, I would have thought: 'these people are crazy'." I interrupt her:
- "You shout Dandara, I saw you…"
- "Now I'm there. I shout, I run, I jump…I dance. It's my right; so, now nobody can silence me".

[180] I still do many mistakes while talking in Portuguese. Again, I try to give a sense of how it sounds by transposing some language errors.

Then, I ask about the personal bonds developed in the occupation:

- "You already said that the movement is taking care one of the other…". Lampião interrupts me:
- "It's like a family."
- I agree: "exactly! But what does it mean that it is a family? Usually we only have one family, but here it looks like there is another one…".
- Sweetly, Lampião looks to Dandara: "My little sister". She replies: "Indeed, I had only two brothers, now I have some more…Whether you want it or not, here you end up having a bond with people. Not with everyone, it would be a lie saying otherwise.
  These are the people who make you smile when you are sad. People you want to have with you in the future. You'll want to call them for a barbecue when you'll have your apartment. Because they'll create the nicest mood…"

Mercedes – another coordinator of group 6 – enters the kitchen. Lampião includes her in the interview:

- "You'll want to invite the comrade Mercedes, my aunt. Comrade Dandara is my sister, comrade Mercedes, my aunt…"

They laugh. I ask them also about the problems, the tensions of living collectively. Everyone laughs looking at each other. I say:

- "Now it will be one hour of conversations…"
- Dandara: "Yeah, look. If we are struggling for the same objective, we are all equal. Right? But some people – because they lead certain processes – they think too highly of themselves. Or sometimes they like to command. And, it doesn't work like this…I mean, if you are not able to lead a certain function, you shouldn't do it. Similarly, as when you don't know who'll be on the other side. You may mislead a few, but you'll always need to take off your mask in front of others. You see?"
- "More or less. I don't know whether I understood…"
- "Look, how can I explain…"

They tell me about some disagreements. Someone got offended because they were not invited to a house party outside the occupation. They realize I still didn't understand very well. It also depends on my language skills.

Mercedes looks at the others:

- "He doesn't understand…"

Then she explains to me all the details of the argument. I finally get it. Mercedes' point is that there should not be confusion between their private lives and the movement. Lampião starts talking:

- "Because you know, the MTST has everything, is well organized: there is the communication sector, the self-defense sector, the culture brigade, etc. But given this high standard, some people are not that good at leading in certain situations. Sometimes there is a lack of dialogue, or they want to downplay us.
  We are poor but we are worthy. Now, to downplay us because we are from the 'lower class'; this, I don't think is coherent with the MTST. And humiliating a human being is the worst that exists, you know? Because I don't have a car, a house, fancy clothes, money in my bank account, it does not mean I'm 'nothing'.
  We, as the 'lower class', have a lot of fun. Why do you think that the poor are happy? Because of that little thing he gains, he gives value to it. Who has a lot of money does not attribute value to anything…Because he never had to eat the rests from trash, or the rests from the market – taking things from the street. He never had to go door by door, asking for money or clothes for his family.
  So, we don't have anything, but the experience we've got, they will never have. We are poor but we are not stupid."

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Europe 2021

How does it happen that one is 'allowed' to research within a given social group? How do we usually think about the practice of research? What is its – socially constructed – truth? Problematizing my feelings concerning a researcher's positionality with the MTST may help shed light on these questions. Thus, analyzing emotions shows the tensions around the social construction of research. Not surprisingly, the most salient feeling in this context is awkwardness, being 'out of tune' and fragile. I had a very dichotomic understanding of 'the militant' and 'the researcher': as it was impossible to be both at the same time. I believe this black-or-white conception is caused by my struggle with certain 'truths' of how researches are usually conducted and experienced.

Being uncomfortable in declaring myself a researcher points to problems of openness and the democracy of the process:

1) *After having clarified that 'I'm researching you'...what is the space for informants' opinions and decisions? What do they have to say about how the process is conducted and its outcomes?*
2) *Is this research helping the informants?*

For sure, I was a first-time fieldworker. I was unprepared to deal with research participants' involvement. However, it is also true that the researcher usually posits herself 'outside' the group under scrutiny. The scholar intrudes. Hopefully, she makes clear that people will be 'studied', that pages will be written 'on the informants'. The academic voice inevitably objectifies people. With the MTST, when declaring myself 'a researcher' I was pointing at a difference, at a non-belonging. Certainly, there are various degrees of membership within social groups. In the beginning, it would have never come into my mind not to be explicit about my researcher's role. But also, I would have never thought to ask whether I could register a meeting with a microphone. This only happened after having experienced a certain degree of acceptance within the movement. Thus, the social construction of research requires that the 'people being researched' give legitimacy to the researcher. I felt I could ask to record.

However, what about the answer Ana Maria gave me? To a certain extent, there is no doubt that the research process is intrusive: putting a microphone close to someone speaking has strong consequences. Thus, in the narrative, I don't see big differences between me and the three researchers who came only for one day. (At least in terms of how intrusive everyone is). On the other hand, I felt I was sharing something with MTST comrades. But the questions to the researcher point at similar tensions: "Why did you choose me?", asks Dandara. "How will they use the interviews?", asks Caetano.

Feeling uncomfortable being a researcher not only stems from problems associated with the research practice. It is also crucially triggered by MTST militants. From the beginning of our conversation, Chiri and Antonio made me accountable for my position. They were researching me. They led the conversation. I felt uncomfortable because this was changing my plans, research questions, theoretical approach, etc. It is ironic to realize how lasting the impacts of that conversation were. Now, I see more nuances in the relationship between research- and militant- identities. The researcher's social truth positions the scholar outside the group under scrutiny. However, this is exactly what it is necessary to challenge with a collective militant approach. Activist research happens from within. And this goes beyond the idea of becoming a member of the group. Negotiating an in-between space for militant researchers within academia and within movements is not easy. Therefore, I believe that provocations can be useful. "Activists' time is more important than academic papers". What I want to unbalance with this sentence is the weight of the university in relation to the 'people researched'.

By now, it should be clear this narrative does not serve the purpose of analyzing MTST politics. I hope to be able to tell about this encounter without making any claim about the movement itself. However, I found myself struggling with the critical words directed to the movement – whether coming from militants or myself. As Chiri said, MTST operates within a classist, sexist, racist, homophobic society; so, it comes with no surprise that these discriminations exist within the movement too. However, the MTST also struggles against structural oppressions to establish a more just society. What would have been the consequence of excluding these voices from the narrative? By silencing comrades' critical words, I would have reproduced the structural oppressions I want to fight against. Colonial positionalities often romanticize 'Third World' struggles. As a white, middle-class, man I did not suffer any racist, classist, or sexist prejudice during my encounter with the movement. But, by avoiding mentioning these problems concerning the movement, this narrative would have reproduced my privileges in striking ways.

At the same time, I decided to write a narrative starting from my positionality not only because of representation problems but also because I now consider myself a 'gringo militant'. I believe that being close to a political organization implies being aware of what are the appropriate fora to formulate critiques. Militancy means also struggling within the movement. My narrative refuses any claim of objectivity. I'm saying that being a militant researcher also implies being sensitive about how political organizations are criticized. I'm partial in the sense that I'd never discredit the MTST. However, silencing the critical words would also have provided a dishonest account of how I came about thinking of structural oppressions. These tensions and struggles within the movement affected me profoundly. They destabilized my position and made me reflect more. Thus, as one of the purposes of this narrative is to examine how a dominant group's members can change, not highlighting critical words would have downplayed their role in my transformation.

At the beginning of this narrative, I asked how I can change. The question is related to what I can accomplish with this text. Throughout the work of constructing and deconstructing my encounter with the MTST, I realized again and again that the most important reflections and destabilizations came after very intense 'gut feelings'. There is something profoundly relational (being empathic with the other) and hidden (in ourselves) in the social construction of structural oppressions which must be understood at an emotional level. Knowing the theory, it's not enough. In this sense, I'm not sure how the discourse/text – in itself – can be transformative. The feelings I'm experiencing while writing are different from the 'undisciplined experiences' with the MTST. However, I also felt very uncomfortable opening myself to scrutiny and highlighting my prejudices instead of hiding them. Unlearning domination represents a loss that needs a therapeutic response. The text can serve this purpose. Also, if dominant groups' members must feel fragile to challenge their internalized domination, maybe this narrative will inspire others to put themselves in uncomfortable situations. Furthermore, the text also compels

me to reflect on how the individual is related to the collective in striving for social justice. Limiting the deconstruction to myself – being locked in an introspective attitude – has clear political limits. These reflections strive for the collective to establish change.

1) *Challenging individual prejudices is fundamental because structural oppression is validated through a naturalization process that happens to all society's members.*
2) *The (self)therapeutic process becomes political only if I move from guilt to responsibility – from paralysis to action.*
3) *Deconstructing internalized entitlements serves the purpose of becoming allies. Members of dominant groups need to rethink their roles in radical struggles.*

My future with the MTST is to develop a collective inquiry that serves both social justice and the movement's politics. The question is: how can militants gather/develop knowledge that helps the struggle? In this respect, I asked myself how I could progress while having class prejudices. Certainly, to develop collective research with working-class militants I must unlearn those prejudices. However, this also happens in concrete practice and through 'undisciplined experiences'. The point is to listen and be open to challenges. Militant collective research needs dominant positionalities showing accountability with their privileges. The dialogue about oppression often starts with minoritized groups' members 'hailing' in uncomfortable ways.

In the beginning, I also asked what the effects of reducing social complexity to dichotomic terms were: minoritized and dominant groups. First, because I run the risk of essentializing the experiences of MTST militants. Second, because by declaring myself a member of dominant groups, I may fall into the trap of building a narrative that reinforces the social truth of oppression. I believe that interpreting social reality according to the lenses of structural oppression is only one possibility among many. Human experience cannot be completely

reduced to categories such as racism, sexism, colonialism, and classism. Also, categorizing individual identities according to a minoritized/dominant rationale is a subjective and risky endeavor. As I explained about my Jewish ancestry, I cannot completely reduce my socialization to these parameters.

Narrating my encounter with the MTST through a white, middle-class, European, masculine positionality serves a precise purpose. Which is deconstructing the social truths of structural oppressions. By showing the reality of my prejudices and the internalized feelings of domination and entitlement, I aim at developing paths of collective anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-colonial, anti-classist action. To conclude, I should be explicit about who benefits from this text. Again with a Spivakian motto: "I cannot not inhabit the social structure". I am developing this narrative to complete my doctoral studies at a Western university. This implies that I cannot not represent the Global North's interests in representing the Global South. At the same time, I hope that this narrative enables me to develop reflections and thoughts about how research could contribute to the struggle of the MTST. The objective is to establish a democratic, collective, and transformative inquiry.

Chapter 3 – Interlude: occupying in Europe

Setting the stage

This chapter interweaves the stories of the students' occupation in Kossuth square together with memories of the months I spent with the MTST in 2018. From the beginning, I should make clear that I don't want to suggest these two struggles are comparable. At first, I decided to write the story of Kossuth more for narrative purposes than analytical ones. However, I hope that by the end of the chapter it will be clear that Kossuth also shows important truths about structural domination in representation and my biased gaze. Yet, to avoid the impression that it is possible to think the two struggles together (beyond my personal experience), I may have to state a few things explicitly. First, the Kossuth occupation and the fight of the MTST connect in distinct ways to the functional logics of global capitalism. The MTST is a social movement whose militants' majority are working-class, women of color. They struggle for decent housing, dignity, and equality in a country where processes of racialization and sexism – together with the violence of the upper-classes – literally kill an outrageous amount of people (in the households, in the jails, in the streets, etc.).

The students' struggle in Hungary, was conducted by a mixed group of international, mostly middle-class students, who tried to connect with Hungarian civil society and the existing opposition to the Orbán regime. The structural position of the Kossuth occupier is by no means comparable to the majority of MTST militants. However, as the chapter will show, this does not imply that similar processes of racialization, (hetero)sexism and classism, affected the daily routines of the Kossuth occupiers. The chapter will reflect on these differences and how my structural domination influences the representation.

Introducing the characters

In Hungary:

György Lukács – in his previous life he led the ’56 revolution.

Sukarno – a dedicated and smart person. They regard the self-care of the group.

Béla Kun – an organizational machine.

Raya Dunayevskaya – a free soul who practices critical thinking.

Maximilien de Robespierre – with his discipline the revolution would have already happened.

Malvina Reynolds – her motto: “Let’s televise the revolution”.

Lajos Kossuth – lighthearted and reflexive. He organizes the Hungarian students.

Emmeline Pankhurst – trustworthy and radical. A needed presence in the occupation.

Arundhati Roy – her determination goes together with a mild character.

In Brazil:

Palmiro Togliatti – very knowledgeable. His mind moves fast.

Angela Davis – when she speaks everyone is ready to go to the barricades.

Pancho Villa – a kind person. At MV, he often guides me around.

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Budapest, Saturday, 24 November 2018 – Demonstration for academic freedom, the occupation begins

It looks good. People are gathering in front of Corvinus university, at the right corner of the Freedom Bridge. After a couple of weeks of preparation through leafleting and online promotion, our day has come. We – an independent group of mainly CEU students – organized the demonstration. The aim is to struggle against the Orbán regime. It’s hard to say how many

people will show up, the big wave of protests already passed during the spring of 2017 when Lex CEU[181] was first approved.

Marchers come with inspiring billboards, in English, and Hungarian. One says: 'CEU belongs to Hungary'. The leading banner is in Hungarian: '*Szabad Orszag! Szabad Egyetem!*' (Free country! Free University!). After a while, Rhythms of Resistance (RoR) joins. They are about ten people, with colorful dresses, wigs and a lot of drums. Their music boosts the spirit. They remind me of the sound and playfulness of MTST demonstrations. After some inspired dancing, the students holding the banner – all women – start marching.

We stop at ELTE University. Since the first meetings of our group, we have been looking beyond CEU, trying to connect with other Hungarian universities. At ELTE, the government is attacking the Gender Studies program; a few days ago, we were at a protest at their social sciences campus. People shout "*Szabad Orszag! Szabad Egyetem!*". It's a very powerful slogan, not only because it connects the struggle for education to the wider political situation, but also because it is easy to learn, and so many of us speak such poor Hungarian. György starts talking at the mic, I don't understand what he says, but I try to look at the reactions of the Hungarians I know…It seems the speech is effective. When the demo reaches our destination in Kossuth square, it's already dark; we were not in the tens of thousands of 2017, but it can be considered a success. People don't stop chanting; I feel the electric mood.

In front of the parliament, two tents are already set up. They'll be our home for one week. Some of us could not join the march and had to stay in the square to pick them up. Twenty meters away, there is a stage for the speeches. Antoinette – in English – and György – in Hungarian –

[181] In April 2017, the Hungarian government approved an amendment that impeded the functioning of CEU in the country. Afterwards, spontaneous protests took place in Budapest. In late April, about eight thousand people participated to a pro CEU demonstration. See, for instance, Mihály Bence Koltai, "Hungary: The End of Democratic Illusions?", *Jacobin Magazine*, July 5, 2017, https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/05/hungary-central-european-university-george-soros-protests.

launch *Szabad Egyetem* (the Free University), a one-week occupation in front of the Parliament with open lectures, workshops, and political organizing. One hour later, I'm already freezing. Sukarno, with his last energies, reflects on what is happening:

- "We are gonna see it over the next couple of days how we will develop as a group of students. I don't know, it sounds really cliché, like in those movies where there is a group of students doing some kind of collective endeavor in some kind of setting…
  But of course, there is a perspective of privilege; most of us are non-Hungarian. We can go somewhere else. I don't want to appropriate this whole political issue for personal development or whatever…It will play a role in our lives. And it has a totally different meaning for us than for the Hungarians, I think.
  We are not gonna change the Hungarian government, we are not gonna change the regime. But we'll get some attention. Media attention. And, hopefully, it will mean something in a bigger endeavor to make something in Hungary."

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São Paulo, 7th of May 2018 – First demonstration of the two occupations named after Marielle Franco

The news of the first demonstration of Marielle's occupations arrives from Simone, who wrote to me yesterday. I gladly replied asking location and time but then she didn't write again…Is it a situation in which it's not so straightforward to share the information? Probably yes. Anyway, I feel happy because this morning I wrote to Ernesto and he quickly replied with the details. I wrote to Anita too; she replied late, but she did it. These are satisfactions! I arrive on time at the meeting point, but almost no one is there. Simone sits with Chiri; she nods at me and I join. Simone tells me she took pictures and videos of *Marielle Vive* using a drone. Later, when we arrive at the municipality, she explains that militants do not stop singing and making noise for two reasons: first, to boost morale, and second, to pressure the municipality's officers inside who are negotiating with the movement.

While sitting with Simone and Chiri, many militants of *Marielle Vive* pass by. Carlos gives me some packing paper to roll the black tobacco he gave me the other day. I see Dante and Anita. Soon, I understand that Palmiro is a guy that I already saw on my first day at the headquarters. He looks easygoing. Before Palmiro and Ernesto start inciting the crowd, a bulky militant launches some chanting. He looks a bit like an orchestra leader because everyone is sitting on the church's steps while he is standing in front of them, chanting MTST slogans. I don't understand all the words, but I already got used to most of the chants. It's interesting because after a while the crowd self-manages itself: 5 or 6 times consecutively, someone randomly starts singing the refrain and everyone sings back. I think this is already *poder popular* (people's power): there is no need for the orchestra leader any longer.

Palmiro speaks very differently from Ernesto, with a strong and heated voice. He starts employing a football metaphor I had never heard, and it's funny: the struggle is like playing football. "You must defend well and then score in mayor's goal" – he doesn't say this, I forgot how exactly he employs the metaphor. Simone says an interesting thing. Many militants told her that when they entered the movement they were depressed and that through the MTST they found a reason for living. She mentions Boulos' thesis which is about this topic.

- "Not every social movement is as joyful as the MTST", she says.

When Ernesto takes the mic, I think he won't be able to keep Palmiro's high volume. Yet, he surprises me. I'm impressed by a tone more aggressive than usual. It's also interesting that both are men. Also Camilo is a man. The high and aggressive tone strikes me. On the one hand, it fits because the purpose is inciting militants; but it looks to me as part of a stereotype of manly strength. I believe it's exactly the same way in which I was talking during students' demos back in Italy.

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BP, Sunday, 25 November 2018 – 1st day of the occupation in Kossuth Lajos tér

It's evening. Inside one tent, about 15 people sit in a circle. There is an electrical heater in the middle. Students rest below the sign 'CEU belongs to Hungary'. Some people look at their computers. Bina is writing on a word file a tag: 'Office – *Hivatal*'. Probably someone else is taking the minutes of the meeting. Less than two meters away from the assembly (held in English), about six people are playing a board game talking in Hungarian. Béla opens the meeting:

- "Ok, so, we are here! And, there is electricity and some heating. That's exciting. By the end of tonight, we could convert the other tent into a classroom, putting heating and then opening this side as the 'press area'. Maybe also do a reception desk, an entry point?
  We have sound, there is a projector; we have a class starting here at 9 am, which is in like…eleven and a half hours. That's exciting. I think there is a concern about electricity, but I don't know anything about it. So…these are some thoughts on the logistics.

Antoinette raises her hand:

- "Do we have an idea of how much power we can use, or, how much power is wise to use? You know, those sorts of things, like a grown-up would ask."

Béla adds: "Another logistical question…who is spending the night here?". Six people raise their hands. He continues:

- "So, the issue is that we need to know how many people will stay here, and it's totally fine if people want to sleep but we also need someone to be awake to keep the protest going.[182] We don't have any problem finding people for the first shift, but it's pretty hard to get people coming at 3.30…"

After some minutes of discussion, the assembly manages to find enough volunteers both for the first and the second night shifts. Then, Raya continues:

[182] The Kossuth occupation was legally registered with the police. For the protest to be legal, one of the conditions was that it had to continue for the entire registered period. This meant we always needed someone awake at the camp.

- "So, since we seem to be assigning tasks, do you think it would be a good time to decide on a more fleshed-out logistics for the mornings?

We need chairs, whiteboards, pens, and markers for the classes. Speakers are missing. Where to find speakers? Maximilien intervenes:

- "We often say: 'let's do this! Let's do that!'. But, can we have now two/three people saying, 'I'll contribute to the speakers' task?'".

Then, Malvina – from the media committee – shows the promotional video they just realized to advertise the occupation. Everyone listens to György speaking in Hungarian, probably only a few understand, but at the end of the video, everyone is happy and proud. In the other tent, Mikhail and Arundhati prepare the sleeping places. They put a layer of cardboard. Now, they lay exercise mats. Unfortunately, so many blankets got wet. It's still raining.

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Europe, 2021

In this chapter, I interweave the story of my encounter with the MTST with another important event of my life: the students' occupation in Kossuth square. If – on the one hand – this seems a 'natural' decision, – on the other hand – there are complications. The present dissertation employs narrative methods to think about structural oppressions and collective political research. Because of representation's problems, I put myself at the center of the deconstructive effort and try to be self-critical about how I reproduce internalized domination. So far, I've been telling the story of a white, European, middle-class Ph.D. student looking for activist research in Brazil. But, when the Visa expired, the student had to go 'home'. Therefore, telling the story of Kossuth seems 'natural': because it's what happened when I went back to Hungary, during the fall of 2018. I was going to the Ph.D. lab every day to work on my field notes or write papers for academic conferences. Then, at some point in November, we started organizing the protests against the expulsion of CEU.

However, how I tell the story of the Kossuth occupation is not straightforward: it helps to reflect on domination and militant inquiry. At the Kossuth occupation, I felt comfortable. It was completely different from being with the MTST. The axes of structural oppression that made me feel fragile in Brazil were less 'evident': despite a profoundly international environment, at Kossuth, there was a majority of middle-class, well-educated, English-speaking activists.

I may be wrong in this assessment. It may be the case that I felt less challenged in Europe – at 'home'; but, what about the experiences and voices of other subject positions at Kossuth? I probably don't see them. I may silence them. (Possibly, one axis of silencing are the experiences of women, and how the patriarchal logic displayed its effects within the student movement). In Europe (at 'home'), I don't need to think about whiteness. Or about being a colonizer. I didn't need to be as self-reflexive as with the MTST. Yet, this does not mean that many fellow comrades were not struggling within the occupation. There are things I cannot represent because I didn't see them. So, there are representational problems 'at home' too! I describe the occupation because I think I know what happened…The lack of self-reflexivity would hint at the opposite.

To be more precise, as I'm constructing the narrative about Kossuth based on the videos of two comrades, I'm not 'seeing things' in their footage.[183] *I don't know why exactly they decided to film the occupation. Maybe it was a film class's homework which became something bigger. But I very well remember the camera being around us, during meetings and chats. Almost always, they asked whether it was okay to film; and almost always, we permitted them. I don't know whether they conceptualized what they were doing as 'militant filming', but in my understanding, both were part of the movement. I didn't write ethnographic notes during the occupation. A couple of times I thought about it, but I guess – there – I say myself only as a*

[183] Their 10 minutes long documentary about the occupation is available on YouTube. Ifra Asad and Mackenzie Nelson, *Szabad Egyetem*, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZ_3TspD-uo&t=42s. I accessed the whole footage thanks to the kind help of the CEU Media hub team.

'militant'. I suspect that 'feeling more comfortable' contributed to avoiding writing about my experiences as they were happening. Ethnographic writing is also a form of therapy. So, now I'm employing the material of two activist filmmakers to complexify the narrative of how to develop militant collective inquiry with the MTST. I realize that most of the questions I've been asking about this narrative concerning the MTST are valid also concerning the Kossuth occupiers.

For some, that week changed their life, for others probably less. Generally, Kossuth had a long-lasting impact. The occupiers formally developed into a social movement called Szabad Egyetem[184](SzE), which, until today, struggles for free and accessible education in Hungary. I've been part of this movement. Thus, an important question I should ask is whether SzE activists can benefit from this narrative. Am I instrumentalizing our collective struggle in Budapest to reflect on the collective struggle in São Paulo? Moreover, what does it mean to be at 'home'? And, why do I conceptualize my time in Budapest as being at home? Certainly, this has to do with structural oppressions: as a white Italian, I never felt rejected walking on the streets of the Hungarian capital. I know many people being harassed because of racism or xenophobia. At the same time, if I learned something living in Budapest, it is that Western Europeans have some sort of colonial relation towards Eastern Europeans. So, Sukarno is right: what is my perspective on Hungarian politics and society as a Western European who doesn't speak the language?

I'm introducing a different occupying. A more comfortable one. Occupying in Europe (as a white, male, middle-class student). I look at my positionality within the two collectivities. I

[184] For more information about current activities of SzE, see the movement's Facebook page, https://www.facebook.com/SzEgyetem. For an informative account on movement's history and strategy, see Szabad Egyetem Collective, "#stories of Resistance – Szabad Egyetem: A Story of Student Activism and beyond in Hungary." *Civic Space Watch* (blog), November 25, 2019. https://civicspacewatch.eu/stories-of-resistance-szabad-egyetem-a-story-of-student-activism-and-beyond-in-hungary/.

investigate my internalized feelings of entitlement; I question the role of structural forms of oppression in doing research and politics. In the first chapter, I tried to focus on what it meant to be a 'gringo ethnographer'– a colonialist researcher. Now, although identities are never divisible, I want to focus on patriarchy and racism. As I wrote in the introduction, my goal is not to discuss MTST politics. I believe there are more appropriate political spaces to talk about the reproduction of patriarchy within the movement. However, deconstructing my prejudice may come together with seeing how certain moments are political. For instance, when the MTST militants start chanting without the help of the comrade who looks like an 'orchestra leader', I write that this self-organization represents 'people's power'. Probably, this idea tells more about my romanticizing views than about what was actually happening. That moment could be conceptualized as the 'everyday of struggling'. MTST militants entered a new mundanity, a politicized routine made of chanting. After a while, the orchestra leader stopped because all other militants knew very well what was going on and could explore alone the 'chanting routine'. The concept of 'routinization of resistance' shows how everyday moments are political.

I want to employ my ethnographic notes to see how I was (and still am – change is a process) empathic to patriarchal masculinity. Almost all boys are educated to become patriarchal men. I'm not exceptional. I compare myself with Ernesto, Palmiro, and Camilo. I understand them and see myself in the way they talk. Remember: how I see other men tells a lot about how I see myself as a man. It seems I feel sympathy. I'm not scared by their aggressive tone, but at the same time, I feel uncomfortable. As many feminist thinkers say, patriarchy is hurtful to men because it deprives us of a full emotional life. Within patriarchy, the only allowed emotion to men is anger. Thus, it is powerful to analyze feelings about patriarchy. I feel uncomfortable listening to the aggressive tone because this is part of a structure that troubles me. However, how to talk about patriarchy as a man? How may I not essentialize the experience of other men,

and, more importantly, not reinforce the domination of men over women? Again, it seems that the challenge is going beyond the therapeutic feeling of being more in contact with my emotions but then…everything goes on 'business as usual'. How, as men, can we struggle against the patriarchy? How can we develop a 'feminist masculinity'? The tension, which runs throughout the dissertations, is to self-reflect on internalized domination patterns without reinforcing them.

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São Paulo, 19th of May 2018 – Going to *Marielle Franco* in Grajaú

It's a Saturday and I wake up early because google maps says that it will take a long time to arrive at the Santo Amaro bus station, in the South periphery of the city. While I'm heading to the city rail a downpour starts: it's the first time I see tropical rain since I arrived in Brazil. After a while it stops, but the train goes slow. I suspect because of the downpour. At the station, I glimpse Lélia – the militant from the *Vila Nova Palestina* (Town New Palestine) occupation I met during a demonstration. She is with her daughter (much lighter than her) and a man. Later I'll understand he is her partner. Everyone is a bit late, Rosa included. All together, we take a bus that goes to Grajaú.

We arrive at the *Marielle Franco* occupation. It is located at the side of the main road; we go through an open space used as parking and climb up on a little hill. The entire occupation is on a higher level than the street, on small hills. It looks a bit like *Marielle Vive.* But *Marielle Franco* extends in width rather than in length. Here is very green too, they must also have cut a lot of grass. In the open space preceding the barracks, militants are building the stage. At the side, there is the central kitchen and the main collective barrack. Rosa asks immediately about Angela, her friend from the occupation *Povo sem Medo* (People without Fear) of São Bernardo do Campo.

I already met Angela during the assembly in São Bernardo, she has loads of curly Afro-blond hair (I imagine dyed). She is nice and talkative. After a while, she flirts a bit with me: we are walking and she asks me whether I'm hetero, homo or bi. Later, we are all sitting in front of the kitchen. I stand up and she is coming back; so, I ask (also a bit flirtatious):

- "So, when are we going to eat?"

She passes by touching my belly and says something about appetite. There is some chemistry. She has a beautiful face and very fascinating hair. We start walking around the occupation. Angela is our guide. Often someone stops us to ask her something. I talk a bit with Lélia. She also has an Italian grandma! She says some words in Italian, tells me that her mother could recognize the quality of coffee just smelling it. I find myself thinking that I don't discriminate among Italo-Brazilians with white or black skin. Lélia is also Afro-Brazilian: many people would turn their noses up to the idea that she has Italian origins. (This thought shows that it is considered part of 'being Italian' having white skin).

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BP, Monday, 26 November 2018 – 2nd day of the occupation

- "I heard that Ignatieff is coming", says Alexandra while sipping a cup of coffee.

We have so much food. People stop by and leave *pogácsa*, homemade cakes, juices, tea bags. It's very nice to see the support of Budapest citizens. Marcin comes and asks the comrades sitting at the welcoming desk if someone can come to help me unload some gas heaters. It's still raining. A small group of people stands with umbrellas in front of the desk. Someone is chatting in Russian. Then, Ignatieff arrives. He shakes the hands of the students present. People introduce themselves. Malvina asks Ignatieff whether he could publish our video on his twitter account. He seems available, I don't know whether it has ever been done.

Later in the evening, Lajos and Réka from ELTE are talking in a tent. He is writing something on the computer, they speak Hungarian. Malvina asks them whether she can interrupt their work:

- "I have a question. You know, a lot of us have gotten this feeling. We are international students; we can't be the ones to start any kind of revolution here. I would be interested in knowing what's the perspective on your campuses.
  Do people think that here it is just a bunch of international students who don't know what they are talking about?"

Réka – laughing – says:

- "Well, most people do think that."
- "Really?"
- "Well, you know, when they see it on television. I'm talking about those people".

Then, Lajos continues:

- "Those are people not interested in politics. The ones interested don't think it's just a bunch of international students always angry and this kind of stuff."
- "Yes, we know that the propaganda media is gonna tear us apart, regardless of what we do. 'We are Soros agents'. But what about the people who care about politics on your campuses? For instance, one thing that we encountered even in CEU with the Hungarian colleagues is that they would tell us: 'what's the point?' or 'what are you even doing this for?'. Is that something you've encountered too?" asks Malvina.
- "I think there are a lot of Hungarian students who are supporting this fight. And there is a big gap in the Hungarian students' activist scene. If you do something good, people will join", replies Lajos.
- "So, you think people will come?"
- "Yes, people will come. We are working on this right now". He replies smiling.

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São Paulo, 20th of May 2018 – Guilherme Boulos at *Marielle Vive*

Relationship with Ernesto

My relationship with Ernesto is a bit weird. He is not very extroverted and comes rarely for a little chat. Yesterday, there has been interesting contacts. We were in the main collective barrack together with Simone and Frida. She was joking about the fact that she would like to

come to Italy and told Ernesto. He said he has some relatives there, but he doesn't remember where exactly. Then, I don't know how we started discussing the article I wrote for the newspaper *il manifesto*. Surprised, he told me:

- "So, you already wrote it! And why don't you send it to me!?"

I didn't explain that I was first waiting for the publication and asked him where I should have sent it.

- "Send it through whatsapp"

So, I immediately started figuring out how I could convert the file and send it to him.

During the meeting, Ernesto and I were sitting on the couch, close to each other. I felt glad and a bit uncomfortable at the same time: I was honored sitting next to him, but wasn't it a bit inappropriate? After all, I would not have talked much during the meeting. Later, he quietly asked me for a cigarette. I nodded; then, also quietly, I asked him whether he wanted to roll it or whether I should have prepared it. He smiled. When I passed him the cigarette, he touched my arm as a way to say thanks. Also, there has been a misunderstanding with Frida. She thought I would leave Brazil shortly; I explained that no, I'll stay until the end of July. Then, Ernesto said:

- "Alberto stays longer, he will stay until the final victory".

Relationship with João

Yesterday something happened with João. He kept saying: "Alberrrrto", highlighting the 'r', but in a friendly way. Or, at least, I perceived it nicely. At a certain point, I touched him more. That kind of 'male touching' like pats on the shoulders. I don't understand much when he talks, I think he employs a lot of slang. But there was this moment when we were sitting close, he was listening to a local rapper; he made me also listen and I told him the only word I had understood. He smiled. Then, a kid came asking João to repair a hammer and he replied:

- “You must solve it alone, so you’ll learn”.

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Europe, 2021

How do I know whether I’m unlearning privileges? How do I know whether I’m deconstructing internalized domination patterns instead of reinforcing them? These are fundamental questions for which I don’t have exhaustive answers. Throughout the narrative, I have been exposing my prejudices. I brought them to the surface, arguing that the step was necessary to fight structural oppressions. It’s true: our society hides hierarchical structures like racism/patriarchy; so, we first need to understand how they work. Second, we must accept that everyone is socialized according to these hierarchies, and therefore, ‘calling ourselves out’ from the structures only serves the purpose of maintaining them.

Being fascinated by Angela’s hair, being surprised by a non-white person claiming Italian ancestry, registering the difference in skin color between Lélia and her daughter…All these moments show my structural prejudices. They also demonstrate how I reproduce them through everyday practices. Angela did not have some special hairstyle, if it was the hair of a white body, I would not have noticed it in the same way. This mundane episode shows an element of white men’s hyper-sexualization of black women. Now, how to stop reproducing racism and sexism? Articulating the prejudices is not enough. My voice alone is also not enough. By thinking about the hierarchies from my perspective, I run the risk of misunderstanding fundamental things about both structures and personal relationships. I run the risk of eliminating the agency of oppressed subjectivities. How do Lélia and Angela conceptualize their (lack of) power in the structural relationships? To answer this question, it is necessary to develop militant research with them.

Second, how do dominant subjectivities check on themselves? Internalized domination manifests through a feeling of confidence, of certain courage. The idea of being 'fitting', of being 'okay'. This is a consequence of years of socialization: I've been educated to think that, within certain limits, 'I can do whatever I want'. I felt comfortable having flirted with women. I felt comfortable in having flirted with Afro-Brazilian women. The point, of course, is not to ban anything, but to think how a flirt between a (white) man and a (non-white) woman is affected by the underlying oppressive structures. Can I imagine a relationship liberated from patriarchy and racism? Yes. I would probably be less confident. I would ask myself whether how I'm behaving is reproducing prejudices. I guess I would share these doubts and concerns with the other person. I would have to listen and probably feel uncomfortable. Maybe, unlearning privileges – in practice – means to be conscious of how oppressive structures determine our behavior while developing friendships and romances.

Also the Kossuth occupation shows the relevance of conceptualizing internalized domination as a feeling of comfort – of entitlement. We occupied one of the most important public spaces in a country of which we didn't speak the language, whose history and politics we didn't grasp well. How come that the fragility articulated by Malvina ('are we a bunch of international students who don't know what are talking about?') never paralyzed us? I believe that our fluency in English, a perceived connection with Western culture and politics, a predominant whiteness; all these factors shaped a collective feeling of 'appropriateness' in what we were doing. Or, at least for me, these were the reasons for a more comfortable occupying compared to Brazil. I should highlight again that many comrades at Kossuth didn't have structural privileges: women, non-Westerners, non-binary identities. These comrades may describe their relationship with the Hungarian context in very different terms.

I'm not claiming that we needed to speak Hungarian to have an opinion about Viktor Orbán. But we always encouraged the Hungarians among us to have a 'leading role'. I had the feeling they knew what we were doing. They were trying so hard – and with considerable successes – to build alliances with other students and with the workers. I remember feeling like an ally, like a supporter. At Kossuth, no one told me that I looked like a colonialist. However, this doesn't mean that internalized domination contributed not to pose me the question: "what am I doing in front of the Hungarian parliament?" Another element makes Kossuth 'more comfortable' than Marielle Vive. *It has to do with institutionalized whiteness and how spaces are shaped to 'fit' certain bodies and not others. With the MTST, it was not only that militants explicitly challenged my structural domination; also, the space in itself challenged institutional whiteness. This political quality of MV was not always present – it cannot be compared to the institutionalization of whiteness. In fact, in chapter 2 I narrated how, because of my 'look', sometimes militants mistook me for an expert activist.*

However, in the everyday of the occupation, once it became clear who I was, my body in that space sometimes was not 'fitting'. This was not only related to my color but also my profession and education. If at Kossuth was different – meaning that the occupation was not explicitly challenging whiteness – then People of Color probably felt uncomfortable because of the implicit reproduction of whiteness in that space. Moreover, Kossuth adds another point to the 'politics of unlearning privileges'; that it's very easy to stop seeing oppressive structures. Racism, patriarchy, colonialism were the given structures both in Brazil and in Hungary. However, in Kossuth, I didn't see them. Or if I saw them, I was not bothered enough to write about them. On a personal level, I didn't feel the need to write because I was not explicitly challenged by other comrades or by the context. On a political level, there were other priorities: for instance, thinking about our relationship with CEU and how to avoid being co-opted by its leadership. On a professional level, I never conceptualized Kossuth as activist research.

However, I remember some moments where patriarchy has been explicitly challenged in the Hungarian movement. It was during assemblies, and some women expressed their discomfort with how things were going. Often, they perceived the movement as mainly driven by men; they asked for an open discussion about it. I remember how I felt both surprised and empathic. After the first moment of embarrassment, I understood their point of view and tried to support it. Maybe, this is another objective of unlearning male privilege: developing and nurturing empathy with women. But what comes after empathy? How to stop reproducing male domination? I believe an important step is to start being emotionally conscious. First, to accept that I feel; second, to understand what my emotions imply in a certain moment; third, to feel responsible for how emotions affect my behavior. I need the courage to perform different masculinity. Others may not accept it; they may find it ridiculous. It's hard to be conscious of the emotional character of my relationships with other men. It's even harder to talk explicitly about these emotional bonds. With Ernesto and João, there is a complex cosmos of expectations, love, fears. I may start talking with them about it.

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BP, Tuesday, 27 November 2018 – 3rd day of the occupation

I am sitting at the info desk. While drinking hot tea and eating a *pogácsa*, I look at Béla, János, and Viggo. They are in front of two policemen. The cops are probably asking about our new initiative: building a cage that metaphorically represents the 'slave laws' the Hungarian parliament is ready to approve. Maximilien and Mikhail are working at the cage, I hear the hammer against the wood and the barbwire. They ignore the policemen, even while standing so close to them; Ágnes explains the meaning of the cage initiative:

- "They are voting a law which is dubbed in the media discourse as the 'slavery law' because it tragically increases the amount of overtime that Hungarian workers can make

– or, better said, that companies can force on them. The overtime won't be paid for the first three years. German car manufactures will mainly benefit from this. So, students and workers are coming together! Inside this cage, somebody – representing the workers – will hammer and make noise; there will be banners and chanting. It's gonna be cool."

Later, it's already night, seven people gather in the small tent. They all look tired. It's not a formal General Assembly (GA) of the movement, but there are urgent matters to be discussed.

- "Should I put together a quick agenda?" asks György. "There were several important meetings today. Do you want me to moderate?"

Then, looking at Emmeline, "Or, I mean, you are the professional in doing this…". She replies: "let's expand the professionals: you only get good at it by doing it". So, he opens the meeting:

- "We should do a briefing of the last two/three days, and today's GA".

János begins reporting about a meeting that happened during the day:

- "We met the presidents of two important trade unions. They are ready to come here. It would be good to schedule this on Thursday. Probably, we would need to push the concert a bit later. Would it be a catastrophe in terms of organization? What's the schedule?"
- "The schedule can be moved. The point is…what's the goal here?", asks John.
- "Well, Kristina can move the schedule…", underlines Maximilien.

The group moves to the second point on the agenda. Kristina starts reporting about the GA that happened earlier during the day:

- "So, several students came up with the point that the schedule is too overwhelming. Today we had for the first time three events at the same time. This is too much. And the other point is that we should have a tent where we can relax…The one where we are now. This is necessary and useful because we must take care of our well-being as well. We have been here for three days; we don't sleep, we don't eat. I feel it on myself.
  On the other hand…the schedule is set".

Everyone laughs.

- "So, that's the thing. I think tomorrow is not feasible to cancel any events. We'll have several parallel sessions, hopefully, we can deal with it."

Béla intervenes:

- "Yeah, I think we need a lot more help. There need to be a lot more people out there. That's how you deal with it."

Emmeline takes the floor:

- "I think Béla is very right, with the program we have, we could be fully operational if we had three times the number of people.
  But today was extremely stressful, because there were not enough of us, and there were a lot of moving chairs and setting up tents. I was just feeling terrible today. I was cold and stressed out. Everyone around me was also cold and stressed out. We don't even have time to say 'hi' to each other because we are running from tent to tent…It was very hard.
  So, we either fix the program or get more people. Or both, and make sure our camp continues to meet the goal, which is not to make ourselves feel shitty. Maybe that's the lowest goal, and then, after that, revolutions appear."

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São Paulo, 26th of May 2018 – Celebration at *Marielle Vive*

The festive day passes rapidly while chatting with various people. I take courage and go get to know Ariane. I stay until the evening; with Simone, we eat a delicious dinner prepared by Sandino. During the dinner, together with those who stayed after the party, I feel happy and at home. I dance a bit and Sandino is glad to see me dancing. João is tired; he is watching a soap opera on his phone, I give him a pat on the knee, but he pulls back because he feels ticklish. It's probably the first time I feel so relaxed, so integrated. Nina – Gilberto's partner, from the self-defense sector – firmly wants to find me a wife. First, she proposes to me Mariana, a 16 years old girl. Mariana tells me she is pregnant. We talk briefly and I use as an excuse the fact that she is too young. I think I manage to get over the awkwardness because, later, Mariana comes back to ask where to find Ines.

However, my heart beats for Ariane. I finally managed to talk a bit with her. She has two sons, of seven and three years. She is one year younger than me and works as a beautician. She started studying law and then nursing, but then left. "Because I'm stupid", she told me. I think she is a rare beauty. I don't ask about the father/partner, it's too much for the first chat. However, she commented on my sister getting married at 30. Something like: "Better to marry at 40!". Maybe

this suggests she has married young and she now regrets it. I find myself daydreaming about a possible paternal role with the kids! The thing does not scare me much, but later, when I'm home and I reflect again about it, I think that starting a romance with Ariane would be totally crazy.

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BP, Wednesday, 28 November 2018 – 4th day

The sun is finally shining. The new weather conditions bring to the occupation a wave of journalists. János, Maximilien, and Malvina are all in front of the cameras of international media outlets talking – in English – about the occupation. It's about midday. The chairs are prepared in a circle for the General Assembly that will start in a few minutes. Finally, we can sit outside and enjoy the sun. Grandiose music comes from the parliament: in groups, tourists gather in front of the main entry, about 20 meters behind our tents. Probably it's the time for the changing of the guard. Six men, dressed in dark green coats and holding swords, stand on the parliament's staircase. The show is finished, they are now immobile. One of them talks to the crowd:

- "Ladies and gentlemen, you have seen the performance of the Parliament guards. Thank you for your attention. Have a nice day and enjoy your stay in Hungary."

The tourists applaud. With some last military moves, the guards leave the staircase. The crowd of about 50 people starts scattering. We cannot pass up this wonderful opportunity to explain ourselves. György takes the mic:

- "Now that the change of guard has ended, and while you are still all here, feel free to visit our tents. We are protesting for academic freedom and against the Hungarian government's actions: they are forcing Central European University out of Hungary, banning Gender Studies, and privatizing higher education. So, if you all support academic freedom and the right to study, feel free to come to our tents, listen to the lectures. There is one going on right now. And have a nice day."

The comrades around him suggest telling everything again in Hungarian. He follows the advice.

It's night. Although we agreed to be very careful about consuming alcohol in the occupation, Lajos brought a homemade *pálinka*. Impossible not to have some sips with this temperature. Six or seven of us are standing at the info desk, offering the 'special water' to the ones coming closer and enjoying some chit-chat.

- "Did you smell the gas in the tent?", asks Enrico approaching.
- "Are you sure?", replies Emmeline. "Are you sure it's not the *pálinka*?! By the way, of which fruits is it made?"
- "It's a mixture of various ones", replies Lajos.
- "Ah, nice! Then it's a *sangria-pálinka*", I intervene.

Someone else reassures the group that there is no gas leak. It's just the gas heaters smelling a bit. Nancy Sinatra's voice comes out from the music system, ten people are dancing in front of the tents. It must be around midnight. It's so cold. The song ends and I finish my cigarette, I'm ready to go home.

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Europe, 2021

It has not been straightforward to realize that my narrative about the Kossuth occupation has problems. I thought I could offer a relatively unbiased account of what happened during that week; what we experienced as a collective of students fighting for a different Hungary (and for a different CEU). The problem is that I'm trained to think that my perspective about the world is the 'normal' one; that it is unbiased. Now, I'm actively trying to unlearn this belief. I started understanding that Kossuth offered similar representational problems to Marielle Vive *when I realized that I didn't take any ethnographic notes not only because in Kossuth I was not a 'researcher'; but also because I didn't feel the emotional need to do so. There is a connection between my structural privileges and the lack of notes. At Kossuth, I felt less fragile, less*

challenged, more in my comfort zone. Probably, this is the consequence of how my positionality interacted with the Hungarian social space and the student collective. But, what about different positionalities? What about minoritized identities?

It is possible to see my comfort with Kossuth through another aspect of the narrative. The occupation established new politicized routines: singing slogans, marching, talking with journalists, etc. These activities became our everyday very quickly. Concerning my experience with the MTST, the 'routinization of resistance' at Kossuth seems less problematic and more comfortable. However, as the construction and de-construction of this chapter are showing, this comfort is only apparent. The problem is in the routines that (do not) count as political: what about taking care of the food for the camp? The complication of how I write about Kossuth is that I'm silencing the perspective of the comrades who struggled within that space. I cannot represent their experiences. And I also don't want to try to. Similar to the concerns expressed about the MTST: representing minoritized positions from my perspective is a form of domination. However, not actively reflecting on these problems is also a way of reproducing my structural privileges.

The most appropriate way to deal with the ethics and politics of representation would be to construct a collective narrative about Kossuth, another attempt in 'collective militant research'. The collective would develop memories of that political experience considering the external and internal challenges in terms of social hierarchies. Unfortunately, this exceeds the scope of the present dissertation. However, I decided to contact the comrades of Kossuth calling for their opinion on this matter. I wrote to the women of Kossuth asking whether they wanted to share with me their memories and perceptions about gender, race, class, and nationality dynamics. I also asked them whether they would be interested in a project of collective militant

research about the occupation. If it will ever happen, that space will be more appropriate to discuss the politics of Kossuth. Here the purpose is different.

I'm accepting the fact that my narrative about Kossuth is biased because of structural domination and I'm therefore trying to be more honest and fairer to that collective experience by bringing in the memories of other comrades. Moreover, starting this kind of dialogue with them is a way to think about collective militant research. Interestingly, one of the first things I learned confirms my suspect: I don't have written traces of my experience also because of domination. Some women, during those weeks, had a separate whatsapp chat where they supported each other before and after the General Assemblies and other important moments. So, even though they were also not 'researchers', they wrote something. Probably out of political and emotional necessity.

In the following, I report some of the elements brought up by the women comrades of Kossuth. Some of them wrote me letters; with many, I had phone calls and took notes. This is my version of their thoughts, and therefore it is not meant as a possible starting point for collective research. However, here it serves the fundamental purpose of stopping reproducing my biases in writing about the occupation. And it also crucially helps me in continuing the work on unlearning privileges. In fact, through these conversations, I discovered that I had not been self-reflexive enough about my Hungarian activism.

<u>Male leadership.</u> Here the point is not only which kind of leadership is embodied by men, but also the fact that the great majority of leaders were men. Male leadership has been accepted without much questioning, for instance, when male leaders delegated tasks to women.

Characteristics of masculine leadership: speaking a lot, being aggressive, confrontational attitude during meetings, high tone, and a triumphant narrative about 'occupying / direct

actions / civil disobedience'. Leaders were not only men but mostly white men coming from middle-class backgrounds.

The 'silent' & 'invisible' workforce. Here invisibility does not only refer to the fact that some comrades were less visible than others; but also, to the fact that specific tasks were 'invisible'. Women (or less dominant men) were the ones who mostly worried about administrative/executive tasks and food/sleeping/cleaning/lightening related tasks. They were also the ones concerned with the self-care of the group. The ones devoted to 'invisible' tasks were often more silent during assemblies.

Chemical toilet. Not having to worry about where to pee is a typical male privilege. The toilet arrived in the occupation only after few days.

Attractiveness mattered. For women to 'get closer' to the leaders.

Structural sexism in Hungary mattered.

Tokenizing the participation of minoritized identities. When the patriarchy is not felt as a structural and complex issue, then men ask women to join for a meeting just because 'there is not enough female participation'. The feeling of being used to fix a problem. Feeling the pressure to participate. "In the name of equality, you must do something you don't necessarily want to do". Comrades decided to record the time men and women speak during assemblies…What do we do if men speak more? It may make men feel better to 'fix the statistics' so that they can think they are 'politically correct', but it doesn't challenge the patriarchy.

The movement became with time whiter. People of color sometimes did not feel welcomed. White comrades confused comrades of color with other comrades of color. There was Eurocentrism (e.g. EU flags). Solidarity statements for non-Western countries were expected

to be written by non-Western comrades (while often they also wrote statements about Western countries). Radical actions are a privilege: not feeling safe; being worried about deportation or the renewal of the residence permit. Gender has been discussed more than colonial/racist dynamics.

We do it for Hungary! (Do we?) Low sensitivity to the local context (for instance in terms of the risks of direct actions). How many (new) Hungarian comrades did we manage to integrate? There was also a tension between the self-care of the group (feeling overwhelmed, the cold, the tiredness), and the idea that we were not doing this for ourselves, but for Hungary.

The burden of having to 'educate' dominant identities. Some comrades left because they were tired of this. Dominant positions rarely realize that it is on them to (un)learn.

The challenge of seeing the structures. "Why aren't other women just speaking up?". It is not only hard to see the structures but also to realize that we act immersed in them. We were a flat-hierarchy group but society isn't! We did not develop the tools to contrast society's pressures.

Intellectual sophistication & academic elitism. The feeling of being minoritized because of studying for a bachelor at ELTE or Corvinus instead of being a Ph.D. student at CEU.

Classism. How much time does someone need to spend for the cause to be considered an activist? And how much money does s/he need to be ready to anticipate for the occupation's needs? There was a classist component in the prescribed time and financial availability.

Various degrees of experience in political activism made the flat-hierarchy more complicated.

Activism with friends and partners is complex. Sometimes discriminatory behaviors would be justified because "I don't think he meant it like this".

In the beginning, I felt more legitimate in representing Kossuth than the MTST. I could not be as self-reflexive as I was with the MTST. The narrative I'm writing based on the footage shows it. I have described very little of what the women comrades of Kossuth say. And when I did it (e.g. the male leaders, women dealing with the self-care of the group, non-Western comrades taking care of the sleeping places), I didn't feel uncomfortable. I didn't problematize it.

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São Paulo, 23rd of June 2018 – Football tournament at *Marielle Vive*

The day of the football tournament is very nice but exhausting. In the morning, I wake up early: when I enter the kitchen almost no one is there. However, very quickly it fills with people. Frida scolds someone because s/he arrived later than promised. Chiri and the members of the Youth brigade prepared a nice banner for the tournament. Fidel decides where to put it and Luísa helps. I briefly chatted with a comrade from Group 7. He talks, I don't understand much, but I try to interact. He tells me he doesn't either drink or smoke, but some years ago he had 'the vice' of cheating on his wife. He doesn't look slimy, but then another comrade (probably also from G7) passes by with a knee-length dress and he asserts: "Dressed like this, they provoke us". I react by saying something like "But no, please! What are you talking about!?".

It would be necessary to be harsher on this type of sexist comments. I regret a bit that I didn't point out the stupid thing he said. Because later – when the football tournament has already started – Luísa flails her arms and shouts at me, visibly pissed off. She wants me to call someone. I don't understand and go myself; she is upset because the same guy is making sexist comments about the women's game. Things like: "Why do they need so long, these girls should play shorter", etc. Chiri is very upset too, and she is right. She is bothered by sexist attitudes. The problem is that people don't even realize it: they are so used to seeing women doing

domestic works that they don't think about helping. For instance, early in the morning, some players were already on the field; but there were still so many things to be done! Also, simple stuff like going to get the water. When Chiri said loudly: "I'm going to get the water, who comes to help?", only one comrade stood up.

There she got furious:

- "We did four collective task forces to prepare this pitch and now they come only to show chests and biceps!?"

Despite the rage, Chiri has a very strong sense of duty. As soon as the tournament begins, she is at the little table on the pitch-side writing down the statistics: the team names, the yellow cards, who scored, etc.

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BP, Thursday, 29 November 2018 – 5th day

Eight people stand in a circle in front of the tents. They talk about the upcoming direct action. It's afternoon but it feels very cold. The plan is to realize a little demo with the coffin made by Andrassy University's students for last Saturday's demonstration. The casket symbolizes the fate of Hungarian academic freedom. Some international journalists are willing to film us. Viggo explains what he has in mind:

- "My suggestion is that we go to the tourist area of the Christmas market. Then we chant: 'What do we want for Christmas? Academic Freedom!!'.
  We say it three times. Only when we are there. In this way, we shouldn't be stopped by the police."

Greta raises her finger:

- "Just one question. How many Hungarians do we have there? Is it only me? Because the police will not get into all the legal stuff if we speak Hungarian. But…For international people, the paperwork is easier. So, I'm happy to get into that. However, it would be nice to have another Hungarian."

Unfortunately, we don't have a solution to this problem. Navid and Maximilien take two billboards. Everyone is excited; Aruna repeats the plan. Sukarno, Viggo, Greta, and Marcin put the coffin on their shoulders. We start walking. Maximilien and I lead the little procession carrying the billboards in front of us. Some people around us take pictures.

We enter Nádor street, we want to walk in front of CEU and then take a left in Zrínyi street, direction Szent István square, where there is the Christmas market. We are a bit worried; I can sense the tension in the group. Besides Zrínyi, the wooden lodges are selling mulled wine and handicraft products. We silently walk in the middle of the street. A Christmas market's private security guard approaches Maximilien talking in Hungarian. We continue walking, we are only about 50 meters from the square. On the left, a policeman passes by. We are almost in Szent István square; another private security guard stands in front of us with open arms saying something in Hungarian. Maximilien asks him how he's doing. In a blink of an eye, Aruna shouts:

- "What do we want for Christmas?" And we all scream at the top of our lungs:
- "Academic Freedom!"

We chant it three times as planned. The security guard looks at us puzzled. In less than a minute, we executed the plan. The people in the square don't seem to have noticed us too much. We leave quickly.

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São Paulo, 26th of June 2018 – Assembly at MV

Pancho, as usual, is very friendly and brings me in his planned 'tour' of all the collective kitchens. He starts by explaining to me a trick:

- "Do you know how to easily find the kitchens?". (I have no idea).
- "You just need to follow the electric cables!"

I'm impressed. I would have never thought about it. After a slice of cake and a coffee in one of the kitchens, Pancho makes me realize how the temperature went down. He explains there is a water basin under this part of the occupation. We arrive at Group 6's kitchen where Lampião is preparing himself a coffee.

Sometimes I find it hard with both Pancho and Lampião because of superficial talks about girls. Superficial and sexist. Now, I don't want to be unfair: with my Italian friends we also do sexist talks…Maybe only a bit more 'politically correct'? I don't know. Anyway, how many women I should 'bring back' from Italy became a recurrent topic. Honestly, I feel a bit disgusting thinking and writing about it; because it seems like treating women as objects. Of course, it also depends on the intentions: if the intentions are good it looks less disgusting. What is certain, apart from the intentions, is that these ideas are structurally part of the patriarchy and a sexist vision. I would say we are not at war with intentions (it's not a matter of morality), but of patriarchy. How to solve this? I don't know, it's very hard. I hope that the meeting Luísa wanted to organize after the football tournament to talk about sexism will happen.

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Europe, 2021

I believe there are two 'traps' in how I have been describing patriarchy in the narrative about Marielle Vive. *My notes show how I felt uncomfortable because of the explicit sexist comments of MTST militants. I also felt guilty for having taken part in conversations that explicitly objectify women. However, already at that time, I perceived how these conversations – if one considers sexism as a structural problem – are not so different from others I had with Italian friends. We are all immersed in a hierarchical system; therefore, I highlight that the difference between Italy and Brazil seems to be the degree of 'political correctness'.*

Now, I don't want to argue that implicit and explicit sexist comments are the same; what I'm asking is: what purpose serves my embarrassment with non-politically correct verbal expressions? The matter of 'intentionality' looks similar. Of course, intentions do matter. For instance, in the legal realm, it does change whether murder is intentional or not. However, in the narrative, what does perform the analysis of the intentions behind the sexist behaviors? Looking at Pancho's and Lampião's intentions only reassures me about the fact that they are not 'mean'. An unintentional sexist comment does not help to fight the patriarchy. Here lie the two traps of 'politically correctness' and 'intentionality': they often just tone down my uncomfortable feelings. However, performing anti-patriarchal masculinity would require action. Maybe, one of the things I must unlearn is to feel continually uncomfortable when I face sexism. I must (un)learn that intentions don't really matter in terms of how I react to structural domination. It's not a matter of morale or individual responsibilities, but historical and structural hierarchies.

Maybe, if I stop conceiving a sexist comment as a sign of 'meanness', I can start to feel outraged by the patriarchal system. I can understand what my advantages and benefits from the system are. I can start reacting. I guess a good way to start would be to be explicit about my feelings. Something like: "sorry, but this comment makes me feel uncomfortable. Can we change the topic?" Maybe the interlocutor will ask why I do feel uncomfortable. Maybe not. But I guess expressing feelings would be more effective than accusing the interlocutor of being sexist. Exactly because it's considered 'bad' to be sexist, and people feel fragile/attacked. Reacting would have consequences. I guess, sometimes – maybe often –, it would mean that I must renounce the 'bonding' offered to men by sexist chit-chat. We must try to develop a different type of bonding.

Something is going on that becomes visible through my reaction to the militant's comment: "Dressed like this, they provoke us". It's not only political correctness and intentionality toning down my uncomfortable feelings about patriarchy: it's also domesticating the discomfort. What disturbs me most in the comment is the implicit allusion to sexual violence, at the idea that men won't control their reaction to a 'provocation'. So, even if it's hypothetical – because I didn't say much at that moment – in the narrative, I tell myself that I should have 'reacted harsher'. By checking on my reaction, I also indirectly check on the militant, and, therefore, I feel better. I performed a non-sexist subjectivity. As the critique to privilege theory shows, through the act of checking, specific subjects are produced. Domesticating the discomfort carries risks: first, feeling better did not make me 'more feminist'. As argued above, it is by embracing the horrible feeling that the idea of sexual violence entails that I become more outraged by patriarchy. Second, checking on others – producing 'the other' as the sexist – runs the risk of being a moralizing and individualizing endeavor. In the narrative, I don't see how reproaching the militant stating "what you said is stupid" (and it's violent, not stupid), would have reproduced the epistemological domination of middle-class, well-educated people who 'show' others what is smart (i.e. right) and what is stupid (i.e. wrong).

Finally, the militant's plan to marry me talks to the everyday reproduction of some sort of colonial relations. Here, different elements are playing together: on the one hand, being a middle-class European, I'm probably considered a 'good catch'. On the other hand, they maybe thought I felt alone. In any case, the 'everyday of colonialism' was present during the months at Marielle Vive*: in chapter 2 I analyzed at length what it meant to be asked to use the phone or to pay for coffee for friends. I realized that I felt uncomfortable when militants made me accountable for my position in ways I could not control. What I want to emphasize here is that the 'everyday of being a colonialist' entails uncomfortable feelings. However, my de-constructive reflections should not turn the uncomfortable feelings into comfortable ones: in*

fact, accepting that kind of discomfort because "I must be punished because of my position" solidifies Europeanness.

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BP, Friday, 30 November 2018 – 6th day

Arundhati is sitting inside a tent. Her legs lie on a chair, she is writing something on her laptop with a blanket over her shoulders. Malvina enters and starts telling about the press release for the events of tomorrow. It will be the last day of the occupation; we hope many people come to our concluding activities. Malvina speaks:

- "There was some tension before…I mean, Béla asked me to go get some food because we only had donations' leftovers. And while I was out, he texted me like: 'Hey, are you coming with food? Because I'm really hungry.' I was like: you need to fucking apologize to me, first. Second, can we just acknowledge how gendered that interaction was?!"

Arundhati chuckles and, showing with her fingers the inverted commas, says: "gendered labor".

- "Yeah, and it will not be tolerated. But what's going on here?", asks Malvina.
- "I don't know much about the program. I'm trying to work a bit. Did I tell you what the tent-guy said when we went to pick up the weights?"
- "No", replies Malvina.
- "So, we went to pick up the weights and Boglárka came in her car. It was Asa, me and Boglárka. We entered and he opened the door and we went around the door in front of him. The entire time Boglárka and he were talking in Hungarian so I have no idea what they were saying. But when we left, Boglárka started laughing because when he saw us the first time, he said: 'What?! He sent three girls to pick up the weights?!'. And I was like…seriously?! I mean, of course, I would have responded to that if he would have been in English; but Boglárka was laughing and I was like: 'Did he really say that?'. Yeah, basically… 'gendered labor'".

Arundhati laughs bittersweetly.

- "It's okay…we are working for a change", she concludes.
- "Good thing they are banning Gender studies!", says Malvina ironically.

- “Yeah, who needs gender studies?!”, replies Arundhati laughing again.

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São Paulo, 14th-15th of July 2018 – MTST Youth’s camp

It’s interesting talking with the militant of the Marielle Franco occupation. He is a little crazy, or maybe he just says stuff that to me sounds crazy. He tells me a lot about the last judgment, the end of the world. He believes there are many signs that what has been written is happening. He says I’m smart and I listen a lot. When he said that, there was another militant close to us. I felt my role as a researcher had been uncovered! And this is probably true, although I explained to him about my research. He got very upset during the group discussion on drugs legalization. I wasn’t there, but he described to me how one of the guest speakers had a condescending attitude as if he was better because he had studied.

While he’s talking, I’m experiencing mixed feelings: on the one hand, I’m judging him for all the stories about the end of the world; on the other hand, I want to understand his point of view; I think the conversation can be interesting for the research. At no point I think something like:

- “Now I just stop believing that I know more and I listen to him without judging”.

I guess there are different levels. For instance, I listen to him, but I never get off myself. In fact, at a certain moment he stops:

- “Dude, at the end of the day I don’t know whether I’m right or wrong. What do you think about it? What is the meaning of life in your opinion? Why are we here?”

When I tell him that I’m not sure whether there is a reason for human existence, he smirks, something like: “Yes, of course, I already heard this argument”. However, the dialogue does not only create distance but also proximity. I listen to him at length, and I believe he is sincerely curious to know what I think about his ideas.

At another moment he tells me that people want things from me. It can be a cigarette, a material benefit, or some knowledge, an idea, an experience. During the conversation, he makes the different origins – the social classes – explicit: something like "you studied, I didn't". While complaining about the guy's condescending attitude during the discussion, he says 'you', and explains:

- "I don't mean you, but in general".

He is not talking about me but somehow also yes; he is being explicit about a distance/difference but also about the possibility of a dialogue, which is what we do. I am thinking that his freedom of talking in terms of 'we' and 'you' is the result of the camp activities. Chiri put an effort into legitimizing the slang during the weekend, the language of the *quebrada* – of peripheral neighborhoods. Only in a context in which this kind of language becomes legitimate, people speak it and identify as the group who uses it. Something like:

- "It's us. We know each other and we recognize many common problems, of things, of ways of seeing the reality".

The others are rich people, they have different kinds of problems. I think that only if this group-identity-building is done, only then, it is possible for the comrade I talked with to be explicit about the class divide between us. And making it explicit without feeling inferior, or maybe yes, but superior at the same time, or majoritarian, I'm not sure.

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BP, Saturday, 1 December 2018 – 7th and last day of the occupation

It's evening. In Kossuth square, about 30 people just finished packing all the stuff and cleaning the camp. Everyone is excited, the long day is not over yet. It started with some football in front of the parliament, then we had a Hungarian folk dance workshop. Finally, the main event of our last day: the funeral of academic freedom. In the early afternoon, we staged the burial. With

the musical accompaniment of the Rhythms of Resistance, four occupiers brought the coffin in the middle of the occupation, where the floor was decorated with flowers and candles. There were speeches, music, and many journalists. We mourned the expulsion of CEU and the government's attacks on Hungarian Higher education. However, when the funeral finished, we could simply not 'keep' a sad mood. We were not hopeless, because the occupation had been an exciting collective enterprise. So, we danced and chanted until the sunset. Only then, we started dismantling the camp.

Now, in front of the Parliament, it remains the coffin. It's still surrounded by earth and candles. We decided to leave it in the square. György would like to say a few words:

- "I do think we did something incredible this week. I don't want to go into details because we all know what it was…" – people in the circle laugh – "but it just deserves to say out loud. This was incredible, it is incredible, and…"
- "and it will be incredible", adds someone. György continues:
- "I do think it meant something. I do think it meant something that people could meet here and see that there are other people like them and feel this actual solidarity. This was way better than just a one-off protest".

Everyone agrees and makes inciting noises.

- "I really appreciate that this happened and even if we didn't break the Hungarian system, we did contribute to lay the groundwork for that. So…". Someone says:
- "For our next Prime Minister!" Everyone laughs clapping hands.
- "You just ruined my speech!", replies György – also laughing. "Does anybody want to say a few words about this week?", he asks. Looking at the parliament, I shout:
- "I want to say that we will come back. You will see us again". Everyone chants and shouts.
- "Who's the facilitator here?", asks rhetorically Maximilien and everyone laughs again. He continues: "well, tonight is gonna be great, we are gonna have an awesome party but also I hope to see people on Tuesday. I think having this General Assembly would be cool to lead towards the student block on the December 8th demonstration.

Béla also wants to say something:

- "The Rector came out here twice this week and he has invited all of us on Monday for the press conference. I think all of us who are tonight should go there…"
- "And crack it", says Emmeline generating hilarity.
- "The Rector also wants to thank us for what we have done. I think we should all stand and take credit for what we have achieved here and sparking the coalition. I believe we need to commit ourselves to make sure that whatever is transferred to Vienna keeps the same spirit that's been here. So, if there is a call to action, let's party hard tonight and sleep. Monday let's go to this meeting and figure out how we are gonna move to Vienna. Because this government doesn't want us here – for now. It's ok, we'll come back, we'll stay here and we'll fight. But let's make sure that's whatever is transferred to Vienna keeps the spirit that has sampled this…"

Raya utters: "I'm not gonna move to Vienna…" – she's not a CEU student. Emmeline says: "I'm gonna stay here with you Raya".

Speeches are finished. Everyone starts clapping hands, shouts, and whistles. Someone says:

- "Thanks, everyone"
- "Let's get drunk!"

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Europe, 2021

I approached the MTST as an activist researcher. Most of the people around me knew I was conducting research and that I was a Ph.D. student in Europe. However, since the beginning, I have also wanted to do activism with the movement, and this dissertation explores the limits and possibilities of the process. In this chapter, I approached the Kossuth occupation as a researching activist. With Szabad Egyetem, I never thought I was also a researcher. However, now I'm reflecting on our occupation and imagining possible collective research about that experience. In relation to the Kossuth occupation and those exciting months, my present 'researching' has a limited scope. Earlier in the chapter, I asked what my perspective on Hungarian politics is as a Western European who does not speak the language. Even though this is an important and interesting question, this chapter does not attempt at answering it. Here, I do not want to describe Hungarian politics or our relationship with it. Surely, in the

narrative of the occupation, I partly described our relationship to the external environment (e.g. other students, the trade unions, CEU, etc.) but this has been an inevitable consequence of the decision of narrating. In contrast, what I tried to think about were the tensions between different positionalities in the occupation. Hungarians and non-Hungarians. Non-Westerners and Westerners. Similarly, the present chapter does not offer an analysis of the occupation's politics. I believe this type of analysis should be done collectively by the occupiers/activists. Also, the present narrative does not bring any direct benefit to Szabad Egyetem as a political organization.

However, in constructing and de-constructing the encounters at Kossuth and Marielle Vive, *I reflect on how certain practices are political. Engaging with the concepts of 'routinization of resistance' and 'everyday prejudices' shows how daily routines in the occupations (re)produce social structures but also alternative modes of life. In the constitution of the everyday within the occupations (for instance taking care of the food at Kossuth or preparing the football pitch at MV), there exist possibilities for challenging hierarchies and social reproduction. The discussion between Arundhati and Malvina about 'gendered labor' – together with Chiri's rage at the pitch – shows it.*

The extra-ordinary moments (the occupations) are political, and the constitution of the mundane within these spaces – which is both reproduction of hierarchies and 'routinized resistance', enables temporary challenges to oppressive structures. In other words, If I went to Brazil as a tourist, no one would have told me "you look like a colonialist". I would have probably experienced the 'colonialist feelings' in different – I bet fuzzier – ways. Am I implying that Chiri's challenge to my positionality is sufficient to modify social hierarchies? I guess no unless we assume that social structures result from the simple sum of all individual behaviors. However, it changed me.

The militant at the MTST youth camp also challenged domination – he checked on my privileges. He told me I listen a lot – thereby uncovering the gringo ethnographer – and asked my opinion because he had probably seen a skeptical look on my face while he was speaking. In the narrative, I call him 'crazy' because he believes in the last judgment; at the same time, the conversation shows how he talks about class structure (and class struggle) by complaining about the patronizing attitude of the well-educated speaker. During our talk "I experience mixed feelings". However, in the narrative, I domesticate the emotional fragility associated with being challenged. First, I inadvertently reproduce social hierarchies by calling him 'crazy' (a polite version of stupid) while, at the same time, I feel proud of how much I listen to him.

The chapter shows that I have a similar objective with both the MTST and the Kossuth occupation. I neither want to 'represent' nor to 'analyze'. However, in the narrative, there is an interesting connection between the two experiences. Indeed, if I had not seriously engaged with representation's problems with the MTST, I would have not problematized my gaze on the Kossuth's footage. This was one of the triggers that made me open the conversations with the women comrades. Also, if I hadn't talked to them, my initial 'suspects' would have remained as such. Thanks to those conversations, I confirmed that my perspective on Kossuth is biased and that I was reproducing domination through the narrative.

Finally, the present chapter has – also because of the methodology employed – a 'narrow' focus on us, the occupiers. I don't tell the story of the December protests in Budapest, during which thousands demonstrated in front of the parliament for several days.[185] *The great majority of the Kossuth occupiers was there. Also, the fact that I look at Kossuth only from the perspective of*

[185] See for instance Marc Santora and Benjamin Novak, "Protesting 'Slave Law,' Thousands Take to Streets in Hungary", *The New York Times*, January 5, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/05/world/europe/hungary-protests-slave-law.html; and Shaun Walker, "Hungary's 'slave law' prompts days of protest against Orbán", *The Guardian*, December 17, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/dec/17/hungary-opposition-mps-attack-viktor-orban-slave-law-during-state-tv-protest.

the 'organizers', impedes me to narrate the seminars and lectures that took place inside the tents (an interesting form of knowledge production). I decided to interweave the story of my encounter with the MTST with Kossuth because of a chronological reason. I stayed in Brazil for four months in 2018. Then, I came back in 2019 and spent the entire year there. In between, there was Szabad Egyetem. Moreover, the experience of occupying in Europe contributes to the two main topics of the present work.

1) *Throughout the construction of the Kossuth narrative, I realized (again and again) how hard it is to see structural oppression. The context crucially matters. In Brazil, MTST militants continuously challenged me. In Budapest, I felt more comfortable. I stopped being self-reflexive about the advantages that unjust social hierarchies provide me. Writing about Kossuth has been very helpful because it taught me that I should do an extra effort to be self-reflexive when I feel at 'home'. The challenge is to learn how to unlearn domination when we feel comfortable.*

2) *I'm arguing that collective militant research invites dominant identities to be self-reflexive. I'm imagining how to continue the dialogue with the women comrades of Kossuth – these conversations started because I suspected my gaze was biased. The occupying in Europe showed that structural domination is also about what and how we narrate.*

At the beginning of the chapter, I asked whether I'm instrumentalizing our experience in Kossuth to complexify the narrative about my encounter with the MTST. I partly do. At the same time, writing about Kossuth has been an opportunity to remember critically and self-reflexively. It has also represented a possibility to lay the ground for more collective discussion/research.

In this chapter, the work of deconstructing my encounter with the MTST looking at the effects of patriarchy and racism showed two things. First, that unlearning domination means trying to be conscious of the effects of the oppressive structures on my behavior with others. It implies being more sympathetic to the emotions of others. Also, to feel responsible for my emotions and how they affect how I behave. Second, the deconstruction showed that unlearning domination means to feel less 'self-confident'. To question more about my social interactions. At this point, I want to clarify that to 'be more conscious of the effects of the oppressive structures' does not mean to get paralyzed. I'm not trying to suggest that to feel less comfortable in flirting with Afro-Brazilian women implies doing it less. I believe it means to do it differently. It suggests being more conscious about how I enact patriarchal roles and racist prejudices in romances. Similarly to the discussion about inhabiting a colonial positionality in chapter 2: to be paralyzed by the existence of structural hierarchies is 'pointless'. It does not help in struggling against. Quite on the contrary, it represents an easy way out for someone who enjoys privileges.

The opposite of paralysis is to move, to act. Throughout the chapter, I asked in various instances how to change. Let me summarize these open questions:

1) *How to talk about/represent the oppressive structures while inhabiting a dominant positionality? This problem is related to the risk of reinforcing instead of destabilizing my subjectivity by 'taking on' the dominant role. It is also related to the risk of silencing/misunderstanding because I'm looking at the structures from my perspective.*

2) *How to enact a liberated identity? How to act? These questions are related to the issue of stopping reproducing internalized domination and oppressive hierarchies. What comes after a heightened self-reflexivity and empathy is an open issue.*

I believe I should embrace the fact that I make mistakes in the process of unlearning. I need to be open to new fragilities, critiques, uncomfortable feelings. I should not try to have the last word throughout the narrative. Moreover, it is necessary a collective process to imagine and practice a social life liberated from oppressive structures. This struggle has a lot to do with practice, not only with theory. And it depends on choices that will vary according to the specific contexts.

Chapter 4 – Coming back

Setting the stage

In this final chapter, the narrative spans over a year. I tell the story of how I went back to Brazil at the beginning of 2019. This was roughly 6 months after encountering the MTST for the first time and a couple of months after the student occupation at Kossuth square. I continue analyzing the experience of unlearning domination in terms of emotional fragility. After coming back to Europe in 2018, I had started to think about how I felt with the MTST and analyze my ethnographic notes. The present chapter describes the slow process of becoming more conscious about the political implications of fragility. I narrate how I started to domesticate the latter's rupturing power and how – in the company of MTST militants – I was challenged repeatedly.

The narrative shows how these challenges invite me to change my research approach. Moreover, I continue to analyze how I reproduce prejudices in everyday life and how the movement's daily routines fight against structural inequalities. Translating social hierarchies in everyday practices finds a form of resistance in many of the movements' activities; militants live alternative and politicized routines. In the chapter, I try to show how they also affect the research process. For the central months of 2019, I lived in the south of the country for a teaching fellowship. About this period, I add my correspondence with Chiri. Her letters provide important insights into the co-constitution of structural oppression in Brazil. Moreover, they show how the puzzles at the origin of the dissertation came through the encounter with her and the other militants. Finally, the chapter describes and reflects on my transformation, connecting it to the idea of unlearning domination and privileges. In the final part, I describe how the transformation meant moving towards more collective and militant research approaches.

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São Paulo, January-February 2019

Dancing at the women occupation Tereza de Benguela

Once arrived, I immediately see Elis and Anita. Elis recognizes me – she also knew I came back. Instead, Anita only nods. I understand she did not recognize me. So, I get closer and look at her a bit more intensely… At that moment, she sees me and smiles. Then, to minimize the embarrassment, I joke about the fact she had not recognized me and we start chatting. Anita is very sweet, and, in the end, before saying goodbye, she tells me:

- "Don't disappear again!".

Tereza de Benguela was evicted shortly before I arrived for the first time in Brazil (April 2018). The movement occupied it again after long negotiations – this is what Elis tells us before the activities start. Probably, they re-occupied a few months ago. The space is quite big, it's a single room on the ground floor of a building in the East periphery of the city. The street is commercial, there are many shops. Shortly after I arrive, two things happen. First, I start thinking I could have brought something: biscuits, a cake, etc. The food is on the table and I remember how it works with the movement: everyone brings something and contributes a little. The second thing is that Gioconda takes the broom and starts sweeping. At first, I'm a little embarrassed: is part of my duties to sweep? Does it belong to my role there?

Then, maybe because it was Gioconda, maybe because I remembered how it was at *Marielle Vive*, I also take a broom and start helping. Another woman joins us. There is only one other man, a guy who just joined the movement, he sits and looks a bit embarrassed. I kind of realize it only now, but – while sweeping – I was thinking that is not so common to see men doing these things. I always did it also at Marielle Vive. I ask myself what the women of Tereza are

thinking. After some time, I go to Patrícia who is preparing the sandwiches. I ask whether I can help and she replies:

- "Why not, I'll not complain if you help me adding the cheese".

In a certain way, it is always a form of recognition to 'be allowed' to help. On the one hand, it means that one feels at ease; on the other hand, it also means that the others don't treat you as a guest. Dancing is fun. The women who explain what to do emphasize the importance of relaxing; we should not be worried about getting the moves wrong. We dance in a circle and I have two opposite thoughts: I tune into the music and I relax a lot, enjoying an almost physical feeling of pleasure. However, I also feel somehow out of place, as if I were wasting my time. I tell myself:

- "Is this useful? Probably Ernesto or Palmiro would not do such a thing".

When we go back inside after a short break, Patrícia tells something about my rollies:

- "Those are the cigarettes of the rich".

Not being sure I heard correctly; I look a bit puzzled. So, Anita repeats it funnily. Trying to sound funny too, I reply that at Marielle Vive also Carlos smoked this kind of cigarettes. When the dancing activity is over, people start to chat. Others leave. I'm not in a hurry, I can stay for some more time. However, after a while, I feel intrusive, as they start discussing future initiatives and plans. I think I chose the right moment to leave.

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Europe 2021

The various activities dedicated to social reproduction – cooking, cleaning, caring about children – are a complex set of practices. Reproductive labor is an important component of MTST militants' everyday. At the same time, everyday life at the Tereza de Benguela occupation

looks different. It's a collective endeavor, everyone contributes and cares for a collective space where militants rupture structural oppression. For instance, dancing freely in a safe environment becomes liberatory. In other words, feminist practices give a different meaning to the routine activities of social reproduction: cleaning and cooking are collective and political – it sustains and supports the common project. The MTST establishes a new everyday – the old one has become impossible. However, feminist everyday at Tereza occupation is more than that. In fact, the two men present in the occupation feel different in that social setting. In asking myself whether I should help the women, not only I'm hinting at the problematic of feeling a guest (or member) of that space. Crucially, I also reproduce the patriarchal structure that feminizes reproductive work. However, occupations' alternative everyday is strong: I remember how it was at Marielle Vive *and I join the militants. The doubts associated to this decision confirm that, in the 'usual' everyday, dominant (masculine) bodies don't move, as the other embarrassed man shows.*

MTST militants did not only challenge dominant masculinities; they also checked on my class privilege. 'You smoke a cigarette of the rich' implies different things. First, it represents class consciousness. It hints at an antagonistic division of society where the working class bears transformative potential and political responsibility. Second, it ruptures the symbolic order of social hierarchies. I react surprised and I feel attacked. Both emotions have important political meanings. The latter is yet another example of emotional fragility. Surely, it is a domesticated fragility; I already felt in this way other times with the MTST and, therefore, I try to 'strike back'.

Of course, the most important meaning in the interaction is not related to cigarettes. Rather, it is about the 'perils of fragility'; i.e., the fact that I was feeling proud of being 'middle-class'. Meritocracy is a fundamental part of the oppressive narratives that reproduce economic

exploitation. Thus, when working-class militants check on my class domination there is the risk that I solidify the conservative classist pride to justify social oppression and to feel better. The second fundamental emotion I experience is a sense of surprise. 'Did she really say it?'. This emotion goes hand in hand with the potentials of fragility, as dominant subjects are not used to being challenged. In that moment I'm forced to see the oppressive structure. Only rich people 'don't see' that they do act within a classist understanding of the world. In that moment, I interpret the sentence as not only telling me 'you are rich' - but also 'you don't really belong to this place'. This feeling represents a 'potential' of dominant subjects' fragility. Although it cannot be confused with the structural and institutional violence against the working class, the sentence of Patrícia makes me feel lost. In certain ways, I don't know anymore who I am… 'I thought I could be part of the MTST community!'. Someone is denying it. This loss of individuality that comes with experiencing fragility finds a way out in the subjectivities of the other militants.

'I do resonate with the MTST collective identity'. 'Carlos also smoked these cigarettes'. I can relate to him, and by doing so, I can find myself accepted again in the MTST. With the MTST, I strongly rely on others. I started cleaning because Gioconda was. I re-constituted my subjectivity by looking at her – she knew the right thing to do. Slow-paced reflexivity about social structures is a characteristic of both dominant and minoritized subjects. Patrícia – implicitly but proudly – says that she belongs to the working class. In the transformative narrative that puts class struggle at the center of politics, there is nothing to hide about being a worker. Conversely, I want to hide something but I cannot. Can I renounce the privileges associated to be born in a middle-class family? This is the wrong way to express the problem: unlearning domination is about the process rather than the result. However, the transformative path of unlearning domination is scattered with little, micropolitical changes: weeping floors is a good example of it.

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Chatting with Simone

We drink some beers after she finishes work. We are talking about the fact that soon I'll meet Chiri; so, I tell Simone of the anthropological paper I wrote. I put Chiri's sentence – "despite the fact you look like a colonialist, I like you" – at the very beginning of the article. Simone remembers the sentence. Then, I say that I started analyzing my positionality in terms of weakness. She turns up her nose:

- "You are not in a position of weakness. Comrades always looked at you as someone strong, or in a strong position. Because you are a European, a man, and a researcher."

I understand. It's interesting the extreme difference in how we subjectively feel – me and the MTST comrades. Yesterday evening, Lampião wrote me asking whether I finished the research and whether I can send the results to him. I'll talk to Chiri. Maybe she wants to help me share and translate some parts of the paper.

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Trip with Chiri

I was looking for the right moment to talk about Lampião and his request. I also wanted to discuss the possibility of doing more collective research; I wanted to ask her opinion. In the end, I didn't explicitly suggest developing something together, but we talked about it anyway in relation to Lampião. I tell Chiri that in one of the two papers there is a sentence of her at the very beginning; she becomes curious. After my explanation, she laughs a lot. Maybe we were also a bit stoned because of the burning sun. I felt happy and relaxed, but also a bit nervous. In certain moments I didn't know whether to talk or not about researching together.

On the bus, on our way back, she says something that I may have misinterpreted but that sounded like: “your research is indeed a symbol of colonialism here in Brazil”. I was a bit disappointed, but I was not sure what exactly she meant, so, at that moment, I stayed silent. Now, I feel less uncomfortable about what she said. It could be a good starting point. In fact, in theory – in practice I see myself differently – I similarly think of the whole thing. Anyways, I believe Chiri is interested in starting this path/experiment together. This morning I sent her the two papers in English and I replied to Lampião. While talking about racialization, I told her about my Jewish ancestry. I had not done it before; so, I was quite nervous. I feared she would not have accepted this part of my identity, or at least not with the whole ‘discrimination baggage’ that carries with itself.

I’m glad we talked about it. I think she understood. This element will make us bond more. Before saying goodbye, we went back talking about the ‘colonialist sentence’ at the beginning of my article. I was sincere and told her that, back then, I felt sad. I kind of took it personally. But then, I reflected more about it and I realized she wasn’t talking about me. In fact, after that sentence, she had started talking about her family. Chiri replied it’s totally in her style to say something like this:

- “In that moment I was also talking to the colonialist which is inside me”.

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Through the conversation with Simone, it is possible to grasp how emotional fragility is nuanced. On the one hand, I’m expressing a feeling. On the other hand, Simone understandably does not agree with a conceptualization of my positionality in terms of weakness. ‘Why weak?! You are the European here’. She explains that my position in the social structures makes me

strong. Thus, at that moment, I take it as a reassurance. I don't insist: 'Look, I really felt bad!'. I thought we were discussing the issue from different perspectives. Even if her comment disregarded my emotions, I understood what she meant. And what she said allowed me to accept – from a position of dominance – the bad emotions I previously experienced. I thought I was weak. Yet, a militant tells me I never looked weak. And this is because of my relation to social hierarchies. 'It cannot be too bad if it makes me feel so strong, right?' Without being able to recognize it, I was depoliticizing the fragility I experienced. I accepted that a consequence of social hierarchies is that someone is seen at the top. And this idea makes me feel strong. In other words, I found an acceptable reassurance for my fragility. I reconstitute myself as a dominant subject who knows about the hierarchies. A peculiar dominant subject. Someone proud of knowing that social domination is unjust but at the same time enjoys the latter's benefits. As conceptualized by Ahmed, this is the white subject that, by declaring its whiteness as proof of racial sensibility, believes that that declaration performs some sort of anti-racist struggle.

However, overcoming the fragility experienced through the social hierarchy does not only represent a risk of depoliticization. When Chiri tells for the second time that I'm a colonialist – or more precisely that 'my research represents colonization', I feel fragile again. Well, it's not as bad as the first time! During the process of reflexive transformation, I (un)learned something: it's not about being a bad or good guy. It's about the structures. So, domesticating fragility is nuanced, because it also enables dominant subjects to take on more. Chiri continues to check on my domination. Now, I realize that what she is doing is performing an alternative history. She writes the reality upside down. Or, maybe, she just calls things with their name.

In the narrative, I also say something about the difference between knowing things in theory and practice. In fact, in theory, I accept that my research reproduces global relations of

domination. However, what does that mean in practice? This problem is connected to our emotional understanding of the structures. To locate our position in the oppressive structures – to gender and to racialize ourselves – is not enough. In practice, an important aspect of how hierarchies are reproduced is how they work through feelings. Therefore, emotional fragility is a powerful concept that hints at various problems. We (un)learn about our position in the structures also at an emotional level. The intricate relation between hierarchies, subjectivities, and emotions should not lead to the conclusion that, by assigning descriptive categories to people, one 'discloses' their identity. Feminist literature says it clearly: it's about history and structures, not individuals. In the narrative, Jewish ancestry exhibits exactly this idea. Nowadays, I don't have to tell anyone about it if I don't want to. I am a passable white. However, the problem is that my grandparents could not choose the same way I do. It's not only about what defines me (or how I decide to define myself), but also about history.

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Demonstration against rising transportation prices

The discussion about the articles is going forward. Yesterday before the demo, I went to visit Rosa and I thought I could ask her to translate one paper into Portuguese. Chiri printed them and I guess soon she'll give her feedback. She also liked the idea of meeting with Lampião and spending some free time together. Chiri was telling me how free time is subversive. I agree. Only through free time can people go out from the capitalistic dynamics of life. Maybe finding some time to think. I wanted to add some considerations about our meeting the other day. Sometimes I had the half-conscious impression that my speaking time was reduced. Something like an affirmative action to limit the voice and opinions of the colonialist. Surely, it also depends on the fact that Chiri is talkative. Yet maybe is one of the positive effects of ethnography: let the others speak…be quieter. I can always write here.

Rosa told me that Angela would have been at the demo. We meet at *Igreja Matriz* square, in front of the church where Lula married. While chatting, I think I would love to touch Angela's hair. Then, I remember someone telling me how racist this gesture is. Now, I realize that maybe I touched her hair in the past. I hope with Angela's consent. I'm very glad to see her again. She looks a bit less excited about meeting me. We have a short conversation. She talks about the exhaustion after various months at the *Marielle Franco* occupation and the financial difficulties. I don't understand Angela very well. We laugh about it and she says that I don't speak Portuguese so well. I make fun of myself, but – in reality – I get a bit sad.

During the demo, I see Pancho from *Marielle Vive*! I go to greet him; he needs a few moments to recognize me but then he remembers my name. It is even more complicated to understand Pancho. Often, I ask him to repeat. I forgot about his sexist jokes. He wants to make me laugh. I don't react; at first, maybe I crack a smile and then give him a benevolent but reproaching look. Is this a paternalistic reaction? How should one react to a friend that says something sexist?

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What happens during the interaction with Angela is a powerful example of how structural oppression is continuously translated and reproduced through everyday life. Racialization and class structure affect both aesthetics and language. I am offended at Angela's comment about my Portuguese because I thought she was not 'the right one' to tell me whether my language skills were good or bad. I was reproducing racist and classist hierarchies. Indeed, I don't understand Angela and Pancho because we employ different words and pronunciations. However, I was socialized to think that that there is only one 'good' way of talking. Society

dismisses the cultural practices of minoritized subjects. White Brazilians historically mocked Afro-Brazilians for their language. How we conceive knowledge and what is 'scientifically correct' – 'linguistics is also science, it's not about politics!', would argue someone – is related to social hierarchies.

Racism and colonialism established a Eurocentric, white- and male-dominated idea of what is scientific. We do reproduce knowledge and social hierarchies in our daily life. The everyday is not only a residual of the specialized, 'higher' activities. Capitalist alienation casts a shadow over our mundane routines. And daily life is racialized and gendered because hierarchization is a fundamental element of the economic structure. Capitalism needs both objective and subjective conditions guaranteed by racialized and gendered labor markets. An important step in decolonizing knowledge and unlearning social domination is to acknowledge how positionality affects our knowledge of the world.

In the narrative, my positionality changes and is differentially produced. At Kossuth, I didn't feel the contours of oppressive structures. The occupation did not challenge institutional whiteness and Eurocentrism. Back in Brazil, I accept that MTST militants see something I don't see. In my conversations with Chiri, I limit myself. It is not only about the ethnographer's attitude; it is also that my certainties about the world and my place within it were ruptured. I accept the knowledge that Chiri has of me. I re-constitute myself through her gaze and the MTST collective identity. Unlearning domination through checking on other subjects has limits. The narrative has shown this problem in various instances. My patronizing attitude towards Pancho is yet another example of the limits of this approach. By checking on whether he is reproducing sexism, I produce myself as the 'knowledgeable' middle-class subject. On the one hand, the practice of 'checking' runs the risk of individualizing structural hierarchies. On the

other hand, the (self)transformation that comes with 'being checked' shows how it is possible to live the old structures in new ways.

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Visiting Lampião

Yesterday I went with Chiri to meet Lampião. He lives with his family a couple of streets away from where *Marielle Vive* was located. We stayed two hours together; first smoking on the street, then inside his house, and last, we went to the corner shop. He was in a good mood, but cautious about increasing his involvement with the movement. He doesn't have time. Indeed, last year he had problems with school because of his responsibilities at the occupation. Lampião also said that – at *Marielle Vive* – a couple of things happened that disappointed him. I had problems understanding when he was speaking, and he lowered his voice when talking about sensitive topics.

Chiri says, that rather than her, he should be the MTST youth representative:

- "You are smarter than me!", she utters.
- "Come on, Chiri…You studied, you are a teacher", replies Lampião.

Chiri insists. She says he is even smarter than Ernesto. She is serious while saying these things. It's not to flatter him. However, they are such strong sentences that we – Lampião and me – are a bit skeptical. But this the thing about Chiri!

Frankly, I don't understand what she accomplishes in saying that. Shortly after being arrived, Lampião says that I did not send him the research and I defend myself because I sent him an email a couple of days before. Then, as the Portuguese translation is not ready yet, I think we could read some pieces together and translate them simultaneously. He likes the idea.

After some reading, he asks where Dandara's voice is in the text. Embarrassed, I reply that I didn't put her part of the interview in the paper. From the text, Lampião remembers all his quotations.

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What is Chiri accomplishing in saying that? She is disrupting Lampião's subjectivity (and mine too). She is convincing him of a fact. The history that decided that he – a working-class young brown man – was 'stupid', is bullshit. Chiri's revolution is to challenge these stories everyday. This is her alternative routine. Whiteness, classism, masculinity, the west…These ideas determine the narratives that constitute and oppress subjects. They are the hegemonic narratives because they are accepted by minoritized subjects, and in so doing, they become the glue that sticks together various aspects of domination. Chiri is writing stories of rebellion. She tells another narrative to Lampião and me.

We find it difficult to accept Chiri's counternarratives. Why? Because our subjectivities are established in a certain symbolic order. She is showing the latter's arbitrariness. And by doing so, she is also demonstrating its contingency. For me, it's good to be close to Chiri because she continuously challenges me, rupturing my privileged world. I cannot do anything else but accepting that she knows a lot about who I am. What does Lampião (un)learn? I am not sure. As I argued at length in chapter 1, I think I should not represent Lampião in this sense. I never experienced the material conditions of Lampião's life. What I know, is that for me is not easy to understand Lampião's problems, experiences, and desires. I cannot talk for him (or about him). This is the political and epistemological justification of collective militant research. I want to research with Lampião.

Because the collective militant research is a project for the future, I decided to represent what I unlearned in the encounter with the MTST. What is the link between accepting my dominant position in theory and practice? I argued it has to do with our emotional understanding of social hierarchies. However, grasping how I reproduced domination is not in itself enough to unlearn it. There are material and symbolic conditions for (self)transformation. With MTST militants, my subjectivity is continuously challenged symbolically. They check on my privileges and this makes me fragile. Moreover, the space where subjectivities are (re)produced is crucial. In Kossuth, I did not unlearn the same things that I unlearned dancing at the Tereza de Benguela occupation.

My transformation is always a relational process. It depends on where I am and who surrounds me. Indeed, in understanding my imbrication in social hierarchies, I'm not changing the individual part of my personality, but rather the social part. The one that is connected to the Other. I understand my experience through Gramsci: we change ourselves in so far as, at the same time, we change society. However, the importance that material conditions – the class struggle – have in determining us and our transformation, cannot be trivialized. This is why I don't want to theorize about MTST militants, but with them. The emotional understanding of hierarchies – fragility – is a starting point. What comes after?

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Correspondence with Chiri, March-July 2019

Dear Alberto,

This is the text which started forming into my mind to reply to your WhatsApp message…It is a mix of an outburst, an interpretation of our context, and, in the end, a proposal to reflect on

your research and your plans to realize something that could open a space for MTST young militants' voices.

[…]

The Executive and the army

The army, my friend, never left the executive positions of our country. We started 2019 with the conclusion of a phase in the army's plan – together with its articulations in the productive sector – to return to power in my country. Since 1988[186] they plan to return. This year they managed.

[…]

In 2019, we have a bionic president and a vice president who represents the army's high command. My generation is experiencing an unprecedented *coup*. It happened step by step, with patience, because nowadays the army would have never achieved what they did in 1964. They could not take Dilma's power as they took it from Jango.[187] Dilma faced the obstructionism of internal businessmen, unhappy with the concessions to exploit resources. You should know more or less how our wealth is exploited and that our domestic productive sector behaves like the classic elite of colonized countries. Mining, hydroelectric, our oil. Granting private exploitation of these resources to the same families is more than a plan, it is what has always happened with our domestic production. Moreover, we have a relatively strong automotive sector that consolidated during the modernization years (in the 1970s until the early 1980s) and export of cattle and agricultural products like soybeans, corn, and other grains (we still feed much of Europe).

[186] Year of the approval of the democratic constitution after more than 20 years of military dictatorship.
[187] Jango is João Goulart, the progressive President overthrown by the military in 1964. For a good historical account of the military dictatorship, see Thomas Skidmore, *The politics of military rule in Brazil, 1964-85* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

The army is taking control of the executive branch and has the support of a large part of parliament's benches. The 'ruralist-', the 'financial-', and the 'bullet-' (ex-officers of military police or colonels) benches have preexisting agreements that date back to the history of the *República Velha* – seriously, the ruralist bench and the non-agricultural productive sector are represented by the SAME FAMILIES since the decades of the *Bandeirantes* invasions!!![188]

[…]

Coup d'état? Which coup d'état? Bolsonaro has been elected! And immediately the army came back, Alberto! It returned to stay in the executive positions no matter who we elect. Will they retreat again with the emergence of some popular political leadership? In the years of Lula and Dilma, what did make the army unable to retain the power they have today? I don't know. I mean, I do know…But this is the story of what the resistance has obtained. The resistance of the Afro-Brazilians, of the women, of the youngsters, of the queers, of the lesbians and gays, of the Afro-Brazilian mothers, of single moms, of the workers' movements, of leftist church's communities, of leftist parties (ok…I admit it), but above all, of my people who resisted in multiple ways to the dictatorship and its legacies. My people resisted the dictatorship, Alberto, because they are resisting colonization since Brazil was founded under the myth of racial cordiality. My people resist death, making Marielle Franco alive.

Before, much before, that the criminalization of the left started: our people were already criminalized because they existed and were not white

And we are praying, but not without fighting. For whom to pray, Alberto?

[188] Chiri refers to a sedimentation of unequal property's distribution that dates to the XVI Century. The *Bandeirantes* were colonizers, responsible for violence against indigenous populations. The *República Velha* (1889-1930) is the first Brazilian Republic after the end of the Empire. For an overarching historical account in English, see Lilia Schwarcz and Heloisa Starling, *Brazil: a biography* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2018).

Which expiatory ceremonies will we have to do to free ourselves from the guilt of having killed God, of having killed the sacred? Nietzsche asks: “Won’t we have to turn ourselves gods to be worthy of Him?”. There is little to be gained by whitening class struggle when we are the supreme killers.

[…]

“I am searching God! God is dead, God remains dead and we are his supreme killers” writes the Crazy Nietzsche in the 125th aphorism of the Gay Science. Love does not save us. It pacifies us. But we are not pacifists! I want revenge for white people’s revenge. I want revenge through flesh – this anarchist concept. “The cheapest flesh in the market is black flesh”, sings Elza Soares. Our revenge is revolutionary. Only by taking revenge on the white people, we will exit this ideological hole; do you know why? Because I agree with what AD Junior says in a video I sent you some time ago: white people take revenge on us every day because we were not born like them. I want revenge.

[…]

The classroom is my free territory. The joy of Lampião, of Marcelo, of the youth from the Palestine occupation; this is the territory that lives in my heart. And now, Alberto, I get into what I propose as the contextual interpretation for us, for teachers like me, for the young people who fight alongside us.

[…]

Whoever dies first in my country, Alberto, has been dying for a long time. Whoever dies first in my country is who dies first since the first years of colonization. In the early hours of January 1st, 9 indigenous people were killed by rural militias in their reserves. In the first 10 days of the year, we already had invasions of indigenous reserves in Pará, Tocantins, Maranhão,

Pernambuco, and Bahia. The number of deaths we will see, my generation never saw before. We should be prepared to lose Lampiãos, Antonios, and Thiagos. We already lost them a long time ago. We will lose more of them.

[…]

Our possibilities of resistance need to be assessed; resistance must be practiced continuously. Then, we will live up to the history of my people who never stopped fighting. This letter is also a demand for help, my friend. When I read about your desire to continue researching with our youth, thinking about projects with your university, I was only able to answer you with a request for help. A research project is not the salvation and will never be a formula for the left. However, it is the possibility of creating a space for the pursuit of freedom, free and dangerous funky relations of political action. If researching is to pursue an object, I ask you to pursue the freedom of our youth, the freedom of those who are descendants of the compulsory migration flow that produced the capitalist economic system as we know it, in other words, slave-based.

My proposal: make Marielle live, make Lampiãos and Antonios live

Marielle Lives so much, so much! How she lives! If I may say so, a militant research/researching militancy must save the free life that our people bear. I say it more simply: to be the life itself, let life itself speak, narrate, exist, and resist through the writing – what then the research will leave as the bureaucratic and academic record. Do not speak for Lampião or anyone else: let them speak in the research.

[…]

You will forgive this sincerity, but I think that your first text (I don't know the research as a whole) delivers all the details of the movement's functioning to our enemies. Despite being a description of the movement which employs militants' words, it does not dialogue with the

researched people. In your text, the speeches of Emiliano, Lampião, Antonio, are objectified to obtain a more accurate description of what you are trying to understand.

[…]

How to denounce the practices of the white power articulated in the state? How to develop tools for young people like Lampião so that they can become more independent from the whiteness articulated in the leadership of the resisting people? Lampião, master of his action, cannot depend on white people.

[…]

In the texts you showed me, you talk very much alone. Despite challenging your perspective, you speak for yourself about our people. Let the people check on you and you will get militant research. Let the people speak in the space where you would speak about them. I believe that only in this way, in your way, you will manage to denounce the mechanisms of oppression of the power-system of domination you are benefiting from. Only in this way, the denunciation of domination powers becomes clear: when you do it through the voice of who dies first.

[…]

“Alberto, I like you despite the fact that you look like a colonialist!”, do you know why? Because you were the only white person with whom I lived during these months with the MTST who knew exactly what I wanted to say when I showed your colonialist face to your face. “I have my reserves with you. I stay permanently distrustful”, this is what you told me you had understood at the beginning. Then you understood it in the best way: yes, colonized like us, will never know who the real allies are. You accepted the danger for white people of de-structuring the vertical power that puts you at the most privileged end.

[…]

These youngsters will never know whether you an ally for real. And you will never be one. Help us to chase this freedom, my friend, as you can, through what you think you should do. You are going to find good questions for Lampião, for Antonio, and all our youngsters, and to answer them with and through the lives of our people.

[…]

I would like to agree on something with you: they agreed they are going to kill us; we agree we are going to survive. I make this promise with Lampião every time we say goodbye. It is a serious agreement, to realize the promise of surviving together.

Survive with us.

Survive for us.

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It is around this moment of my encounter with the MTST that the puzzle at the core of the present dissertation became clearer. In other words, I began to understand better what are the problems of the activist researcher of the Global North. More important than the question of 'why are you here?', Chiri asked 'what can you do here with us?'. With this question, she sharply challenged my approach to the research. Indeed, what I had written was instrumentalizing the voices of MTST militants and was not useful for the collective struggle.

How to transform the research approach of the European activist? Chiri suggests letting the militants speak through the research. To understand the value of their speech as a manifestation of freedom and revolutionary politics. Truth is, I understand what this means in theory. In practice, I don't know how such research looks like. However, the problem is not only that I

don't know the literature well enough. As a dominant subject, I was not prepared to listen to militants' voices as they challenged the comfortable beliefs I had about my positionality. I conceptualize collective militant research as that research that lets militants speak. Denouncing structural oppression works when one does it 'through the voice of who dies first'. Thus, Chiri's critique is still very actual: in this dissertation, I run the risk of talking 'pretty much alone'. That's a risk I accept given the decisions I made about this project. I followed one of her advice: 'let the militants check on you and you'll get militant research'. At the beginning of writing the narrative, I thought of the advice too literally. I was convinced that by reflecting on how militants checked on my privileges I could get activist research. This is not what Chiri meant.

Now, I understand Chiri's critique similarly to Ahmed's idea of the double turn. I cannot denounce my domination. It just does not work as one wishes. However, the turn of dominant subjects to themselves makes sense if it is a turning to the other. And, if it corroborates the black feminist critique, demonstrating empirically that social hierarchies are co-constituted with knowledge hierarchies and dominant subjects reproduce both. Reflecting on the implications of what happens when militants check on me leads to developing the concepts of (emotional) fragility and (self)transformation. Through the first concept, I analyzed the relation between structural oppression and emotions. Feeling fragile because militants check on me shows how I am imbricated in social hierarchies. In fact, feelings are an important feature of how inequalities are reproduced. The narrative shows that I learned to domesticate the fragility, re-constituting the dominant subject position. However, domestication also made possible another important development: to experience more fragility and to reflect on its political implications.

After feeling weak with MTST militants, I found stability through their struggle. I found new certainties in the knowledge they had of me. Fragile subjects sustain themselves on others. However, narrating about the Kossuth occupation showed that ruptures crucially depend on space's materiality. I transformed in Brazil and not in Europe because, as argued by Gramsci, transformation is related to how our personality is socially determined. With the MTST, I change insofar as I understand how I am individually connected to the social materiality that affects me. I transform the socially mediated part of my personality.

The west does not want to listen to the subaltern speaking. It's not a matter of individual malignity. It's about how structurally unjust systems of material and symbolic relations developed over hundreds of years. In Europe, whites can ignore the consequences of colonialism. In Brazil, I could not. Chiri showed them clearly to me. 'I showed your colonialist face to your face'. However, it's not about me. It is about the violence of a present that kills indigenous people. It is about a system that racialized humankind to be able to flourish. The effects of slavery are still here: racism is a technique of government that kills – a necropolitics. In her letter, Chiri powerfully shows how class structure, racialization, and colonialism are interdependent.

———————

Dear Chiri,

This is the first time I write a letter in Portuguese. I hope I will be able to communicate my thoughts. The good thing is that I write from a Brazilian computer, so I've got the automatic correction of all accents, tildes, etc.

[…]

I think now I understand a bit better what you wrote about death and surviving. It took me some time; I don't exactly know why so long. I imagine it's because of my privileges and the difficulty of accepting a reality that has never been so violent to me. So, thanks a lot for your patience with me!

[…]

I think I also understood better few things about how I see this militant research I'm trying to do. Before coming to Brazil, I was scared about my responsibility as a white European man. I thought the contradictions of the European researchers going to the 'Global South' were irresolvable. And they are. But now, I think that my responsibility as a militant is to go beyond this kind of thinking.

[…]

I'm really thankful for your letter because it also helped to clarify something: that the article I wrote and that was published in a western journal has nothing to do with militant research! You are right. And to understand this I needed some time. Maybe the article is helpful for the movement in terms of building connections with an international audience, but it's not militant in the sense of revolutionary. (I liked your sentence: 'There is little to be gained by whitening the class struggle'). The problem with the article, and also more generally, is how I approached this role of the researcher. As you sharply wrote: militants' voices are instrumentalized. Instrumentalized to discuss certain topics that are interesting for white and western academia. Through your letter, I understood that the problem is not only being complicit with the system. The problem here is not to reproduce relations of domination. I must think about this. Not sure exactly how, but I hope you'll help me. You already helped me so much!

You already gave me a piece of important advice: it's necessary to let the militants speak in the research. Lampião, 'master of his action, cannot depend on white people'. The challenge for

me is reflecting on how to understand and accept militants' voices. Now, one thing became clear: it's better to accept that colonialists will never be true allies. I think the reason is that I can always go back, I can always leave the struggle. As once Anita told me: 'for you, it must feel be a bit like camping, for us it is the daily routine'.

Now I also understand better the contradiction of feeling fragile in the research. Fragile in the sense of being out of my comfort zone. I arrived without knowing Portuguese, everything was foreign, my role was unclear. Simone helped me to understand that my subjective feelings had nothing in common with the objective situation. One day she told me: "You always were strong at Marielle Vive, you were a white European man". And I think I understood another thing: the only way for me to let the militants speak is to leave my position of power, my comfort zone. Maybe I should ask Lélia whether I can have a little barrack at the New Palestine occupation. I don't know whether I'll have this courage. But as an Italian friend who is also doing militant research wrote me: 'to understand things in the belly is different from understanding them rationally'.

Finally, I wanted to discuss with you my ideas and concrete proposals. Ways to answer the questions that you ask in the letter. Truth is, I don't know exactly what my proposals are. Maybe I don't have any. I found very interesting the analysis you make concerning the role of the army, of the financial sector, and the 'elite'.

[…]

I agree with you about the most important topics. The most urgent thing is to pursue the freedom of the movement's youth. They can become more and more independent. I agree also with the questions you ask in the letter:

1) How to denounce the actions of the white power articulated in the state?

2) How to develop tools for the youth so that they can become more independent from the whiteness articulated in the leadership of the resisting people?

Maybe the priority is to continue the work with the MTST youth and to reflect on how to denounce oppression and domination. To find the courage to pursue freedom.

We see each other soon, my friend! A big hug,

We shall overcome!

———————

Alberto, my friend.

I liked your letter in Portuguese with ‘mannerisms’ coming from Spanish and Italian.

[...]

The colonialist who wants to do researching militancy must pursue a very simple experiment. Simpler than assuming responsibility for the daily colonization that we are still undertaking. It is DECOLONIZING ONE’S THOUGHT. We are on the way; this is a lifetime walk. Every day, we will dominate to the same extent that we decolonize. I give you an example: with the same intensity with which I deeply care about what my students think and do; in the classroom, I represent the authority of power and I maintain the whiteness of the educational institution. They decolonize my thinking, but some of my actions ‘colonize them back’.

The thing is to pursue the micro changes that make us live experiments of JOY. The joy that disarticulates the order: the struggle for the right to celebrate, and to celebrate the right to fight. Here, I'm paraphrasing the rapper BNegão.

I want the joy of black youth. HAPPY black people, enjoying life, because – right now – they don't need to fight MORE than they already do to live and make (as ancestors) their descendants live.

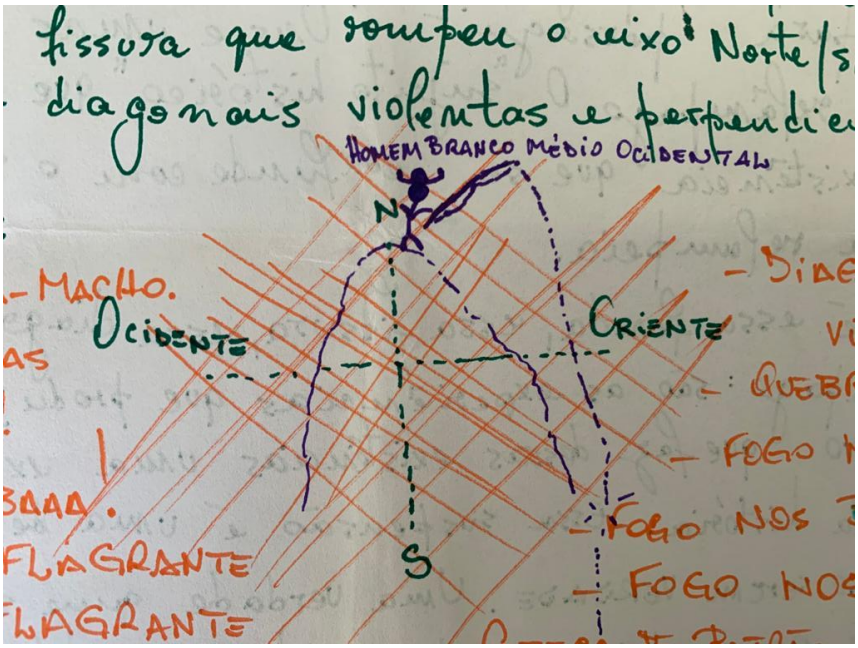
The 'logic' needs to be inverted: it is not the poor, the black, the indigenous, the LGBTQI + people, the women, who need to fight more than they already do; it is the WHITE MALE people must STOP COLONIZATION IMMEDIATELY! Nobody got used to colonization. The humble must be arrogant with power.

[…]

Now, I understand it with another formulation: to act in order not to colonize is, at the same time, acting to DECOLONIZE. What paths to take, what experiences should I pursue to fight the West that exists in me?

[...]

There are historical moments, historical instants, like flashing strikes of a huge fissure that breaks the North / South - West / East axis through violent and perpendicular diagonals! These diagonals are cracks. Any place can produce a crack. In fact...We are, in some ways, these cracks. They can start from ANY POINT. And they converge, run in parallel, collide: BREAK THE LINE OF THE COLONIZER'S FISHING ROD WHO FISHES THE REALITIES AND ASSIMILATES THEM FOR HIMSELF, THROUGH HIMSELF AND IN THEMSELVES.



When the theoretical thread/threads that hang reality break like this, in a historical flash, a political experience takes place where we clearly see a certain 'contemporary subject' in their most present existence.

[…]

‘Marielle Vive’ is a slogan. It represents a thread that must break whenever we realize that, in reality, Marielle no longer lives. Marielle is dead, Marielle remains dead and we kill her! Marielle rotted, putrefied, because “gods also rot”, said the Crazy Nietzsche in the marketplace.

Marielle has rotted and, despite this fact, we say that she lives. We continue to kill young black women while only Marielle is worthy of existence and a slogan. “We don't have to become gods to be worthy of him,” continues Nietzsche. Marielle had to be killed for us to VALIDATE her political action.

I hope we will be able to prefer Marielle ACTUALLY alive, instead of creating a political reference for us, the people who killed her.

This is how I desire freedom: desiring the livable life of those we kill. Because a society that makes you kill every day has the perversion of making us live with the condition of having death faces who never saw themselves as graffiti walls. Martyrs of the blood that we poured on ourselves. Wickedness takes us far: it makes us desire the martyrdom of 'symbols' created by our violence. An atmosphere of violence that, I don't know since when, I breathe in and out.

The mothers and the grandparents of the peripheries no longer want faceless martyrs. I want my students alive. With great pain, I know that we are going to lose many lives too young to die. By the thousands and in a very short time.

[…]

The political experience we are producing now is the MOST VIOLENT of our generation after we got used to massacres that the police could not hide (Carajás, Carandiru, Candelária, May 2006, August 2015, October 2013, NATIONAL prison system crisis in January 2017...)[189]

[…]

There is no method, practice, or tactic that one can employ as a 'strategy'. But there are times when it's impossible to deny what already exists; that there is no way to prevent those female-, black-, disobedient-, happy bodies from living, fighting for the right to celebrate and celebrating their right to fight.

[…]

The passionate joy of black adolescence is what I desire for you. It reaches the West in us. By being passionate about the reach of this joy, by the intensity of living, you decolonize your

[189] For a black feminist account of the structural injustice of the Brazilian prison system (in Portuguese), see Juliana Borges, *Encarceramento em massa* [*Mass incarceration*] (São Paulo: Pólen, 2019).

thinking. It is like letting the power against hierarchies invade your way of life: decolonizing your thinking will be an inevitable effect. Never accept yourself comfortable!

Aren't you passionate about the joy of Lampião, Antonio, Thiago, Emiliano, Anita, Fidel, Carolina (...)?

As I know that the answer is affirmative, say without a doubt: you are already a colonizer in decolonization!

Survive with us.

Survive for us.

I survive with you.

I survive for us.

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Europe 2021

Dear Chiri,

Thanks for agreeing with the idea of including our correspondence within the narrative. I believe your letters provide some fundamental ideas about what comes after emotional fragility. As you ask: "What paths to take, what experiences should I pursue to fight the West that exists in me?". I believe collective research with the MTST is my way to continue this fight. However, as you brightly highlight, it cannot represent a formula for the left (otherwise it would just be again a form of instrumentalization). It should be a liberatory project. The construction of 'the experiments in joy' you write about.

Moreover, the objective of such militant research is to make the oppressed speak. Or maybe better said, to listen to what the oppressed say. And this is a challenge. Spivak shows how there exist structural constraints for this to happen. The researching collectivity should design the project in a way such that it does not reproduce relations of domination. Also, I should avoid romanticizing the movement ("having a little barrack in the Palestine occupation"). Living there is not easy and it would not be a simple decision for me.

Your letters also show that Leonardo is right about whiteness: I think about social change at a slower pace than you do. There are certain truths about structural oppressions whites don't see, and therefore, the language and proposals are catered to specific needs. You break this snail's pace. Colonialists fear the revenge you write about. You are also very clear about the fact that structural violence requires immediate actions. It is about saving the lives of the peripheral youth. Also, what you write about martyrdom illustrates the inadequacy of the white imaginary: Marielle became a symbol with her death! There is no time for martyrs.

I hope this dissertation contributes to understanding how to change the logic: it's not that minoritized subjects must struggle more, but rather that white men should stop the colonization immediately. As usual, you will be the most demanding judge of this attempt. Finally, I'm not sure yet whether I understood your nice image of the fisherman correctly. However, I think you talk about ruptures. The diagonals show to the western subject the arbitrariness of his mode of conduct. Once again, my letter exhibited what I conceptualize as dominant subjects' emotional fragility. Now, I see that being worried about not being an ally in the future misses the point. Fragility does not lead to an unambiguous renouncing of domination and privileges, but rather to the micro-political changes you write about.

Brigado miga, a luta é pra valer!

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São Paulo, August-December 2019

Back again in SP

How to move forward? One idea is to involve Chiri. Of course, she is already involved. Through her letters, I thought a lot about how to change my approach, how to develop militant research. But what about the first steps? Where to materially conduct the research? I could do something with her at the New Town Palestine occupation but…There are various problems: does she have time? Which kind of work could we do? For instance, something with the MTST youth would require a lot of time, especially because we would need collective preparation to develop the first ideas. An alternative, in case Chiri is not available, is to work on establishing dialogues with the militants. As Chiri wrote, 'let the militants check on you'. Maybe this is a path. It would be engaging to imagine how – instead of an interview – we could develop a dialogue.

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Notes on the 'dialogues in struggle' – experiments of collective research

Possible topics/questions:

- Discuss anxieties/hopes/problems?
- How do structural forms of oppression affect society?
- How can one develop progressive research through the social struggle?
- How can research and struggle help each other?

These look to me as bad questions...It's like I would like to know the answers but I also know that I wouldn't get the answers if I ask these exact questions…So, maybe these are more questions that I can keep in mind. Do they talk about the objectives of the 'dialogues'?

Objectives:

To support/sustain/guarantee existence and resistance.

Reflect on the politics/resistance of the community.

Questions from Crehan's book:

- What is the relationship between the knowledge produced by progressive intellectuals/researchers and the world beyond the academy?

  ➔ How do I produce knowledge? And a progressive one?

- One of the greatest problems of Gramsci's work: how do shared opinions (the common sense) shape the social order? A social order that we want to change…

→ *Common Sense*: "heterogeneous beliefs people arrive at not through critical reflection, but encounter as already existing, self-evident truths".

- How to change common sense? How are common sense and structural oppression related?

Chiri's last letter:

- Decolonize one's thought.
- Joyful experiments. The struggle for the right to celebrate and the celebration of the right to struggle.
- White male people must stop colonization immediately!
- Surviving is an act of resistance.

Because there is no politics without a collectivity, maybe there cannot be research without a collectivity – if the research wishes to be political.

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Organizing the 'dialogues in struggle' with MTST militants represented the first step in changing my research approach. How to connect the research with the movement's struggle and the fight against structural oppressions? How to illuminate the already existing connections? We see that I started asking the questions in my notes. Although the dialogues had the purpose of starting to analyze the connections (methodology and objective of collective research must be decided gradually and collectively), I was also beginning to think about possible questions. Chiri's influence on this brainstorming process is present, as it is the work of Kate Crehan – who urged me to think about alternative epistemologies and the importance of shared popular narratives. The concluding chapter aims at putting together empirical and theoretical elements to outline a more concrete proposal of collective militant research.

The idea of developing dialogues came into my mind because of Chiri's suggestion: 'let the militants check on you and you will get militant research'. I thought that dialogues (instead of interviews) would support the kind of reciprocity at the basis of militants checking the researcher. I was conscious of the limits of this idea: mostly, the problem was that comrades didn't have much time for long and frequent meetings. In the following part of the narrative, I will describe two of these experiments. They were two single meetings that lasted no more than 2-3 hours. Although they exhibit differences with the traditional ethnographic approach, it is also clear that they would have needed more preparation. In the concluding chapter, I discuss how this methodology can be an important resource of collective militant research.

After I came back to São Paulo in August 2019, I was mainly thinking about how to conduct a different kind of research. The narrative shows this intellectual and emotional transformation and how it required time and proceeded at a slow pace. However, between September and December, I started to think more concretely of collective militant research and I discussed

these ideas with single militants as well as MTST's collective committees. Unfortunately, I could not explore further the plan of researching with Chiri as she had other professional needs. Moreover, her divergences with the MTST became more and more irreconcilable.

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Dialogue with Anita

Anita is quite popular for interviews and similar stuff. She tells me about it. For instance, a researcher recently wanted to meet her in the city center. Anita could not go and suggested the person come closer, in the East part of the city. In the end, they talked on the phone…Anita was pissed about this. I understand it and say something about how crazy it is that researchers expect militants to go downtown. She smiles and replies:

- "Exactly. Do you understand these 'high' expectations?!"

Towards the end of the dialogue, maybe prompted by this story, I say that the first rule of militant research is that it cannot slow down the fight. What I mean is that it cannot disregard militants' schedules. I say it because I believe it and because I would love to meet again but respect her duties and constraints. Now I remember that Anita, while cooking, said:

- "We just don't have time!!"

And it's so true. During the entire chat, Anita was writing texts, replying to other militants. She sent a summary of a meeting to Olga. Sometimes, while sending voice notes, she also told about what we were doing. It was fun because, in one of these voice notes, she asked me to say hi to Chavela.

There is a moment where I try to articulate the point of my reflections. I go for it because the chat has been very nice, we discussed various topics, but I still didn't try to be explicit about what I would like to do with these 'dialogues in struggle'. By the way, I could not print the

introductory page I had prepared…Maybe, therefore, the situation never turned into a 'working setting': we just chatted freely. There are positive and negative aspects of this open conversation. On the one hand, it would have been important to have her feedback on that introductory page. But it was also good to stay informal. More than once, I thought to take out the notebook where I had a couple of notes but I thought it was inappropriate. Or maybe I just didn't dare to transform the atmosphere into 'formal'. Anyways, there was a moment where I tried to explain the main point of the dialogues. I told her something along these lines:

- "What I'm trying to change from traditional activist research, is that usually, these researchers employ militants to understand/criticize capitalism. More or less, this what I also did at *Marielle Vive*, although my focus was on social rights".

While I tell her these things, I surprise myself thinking that I'm explaining in great detail the theoretical puzzle of social rights. Now, I see that this is a classist prejudice: why would I be so surprised about explaining in detail the problem of social rights to Anita…just because she did not attend university?! I go on:

- "Thanks to the experience with the MTST, I understood that – because I'm a white, *gringo,* male researcher – there are certain things I don't see. Maybe the issue with middle-class activist researchers is that they objectify the struggle to criticize capitalism from their point of view. Instead, a different research should try to have militants as the subjects."

Now, I'm thinking: how to criticize capitalism with research conducted by militants? However, during our chat, I just say:

- "Maybe the research can be different if the subjects are the militants because they see different things".

And Anita replied:

- "But if the movement is no longer the object of the research, what does get its place? Maybe it could be capitalism itself and the forms of oppression".

I don't remember exactly at what point of the dialogue, but then Anita talked about how to stop objectifying working-class people. She said the key element is to develop empathy with the militants, to listen to the life stories, to the difficulties, to the material conditions. I believe this

is a very sharp observation, maybe the constitution of a collective researching subject needs beforehand trust and empathy. Sure thing!

On the bus, on my way back, I thought we didn't talk about her personal history. Or rather, we did talk about it, but not as if it were the material I was looking for. Listen to her story having in mind the research would again be 'objectifying militants'! During the dialogue, we also talked at length about sexism and patriarchy. For me, it's natural to think of the problem in terms of masculinity. I surprise myself by telling Anita that – if I had more time – I would love to organize conversations with the men of the MTST. She says that working-class militants don't have the tools to deeply understand the mechanisms of the patriarchy.

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In chapter 2 I focused on what it means to be a researcher, even if an 'activist' one. I analyzed the problems of the gringo ethnographer and how they are allowed to research a certain social setting. It seems to me that in the dialogue with Anita, the situation that the narrative delineates is different from the times at Marielle Vive. *With the 'dialogues in struggle', my objective is to pursue a different kind of research. Therefore, I'm cautious. There are various boundaries that I do not overcome during our dialogue. Anita cooked for me. She dedicated some of her time, and I see how busy she is. I don't cross the boundaries that would define with more clarity the social situation we were in. Was it a professional meeting? What did I want from her? I agreed to what she wanted from me – taking the bus to reach her home. And, as the narrative shows, this is far from an obvious thing when dealing with researchers.*

I don't explicitly turn the conversation into research because I suspect (and hope) that the meeting just represents the beginning of a longer process. Indeed, we talk about how militant

collective research could look like. We also discuss future projects. However, I behave differently because I started unlearning something. I don't feel comfortable pushing Anita in any sense. Thus, we just chit-chat. And we are friends but at the same time, we are not. I'm a researcher and she is the militant but the roles could be inverted. The whole situation represents already 'researching of a different kind'. Maybe it's because of the alternative everyday. Maybe the dialogue is distinct because it is absorbed by the resisting routine of Anita. Because we are researching while cooking, chatting, sending messages to other comrades, and talking about our romances. Or, rather, the resisting everyday of Anita is the researching.

It's a moment of everyday life and it is a moment of indetermination. The alternative meaning that social reproduction's practices bear within the MTST politicized routine creates an indetermination in what we do. Together with the micro-political changes of the researcher who stops researching to experience joyful moments, they create an 'alternative space'. A theoretical question that the concluding chapter addresses comes from this empirical situation: which conditions enable a different researching?

The dialogue with Anita invites to reflect on which kind of epistemology is demanded by collective militant research. I criticize the hegemonic one because positionality matters. There are important things for the class struggle, for the anti-racist, and trans-feminist struggle that I just don't see. For this kind of research, we need other subjects. They see these things exactly because of their standpoint, because of their social identity. Anita agrees and gives an important hint. To develop an epistemology of (and with) the oppressed, one must understand their ontology. I must listen to their narratives and learn about their lives' material conditions. Without romanticizing the working class, I must unlearn my classist prejudices.

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Reflections

I'm talking about my ideas with many comrades. I realized that what I would like to do is a long process, it would take much more time than the two months I have left. I sent the proposal for the 'dialogues in struggle' to Angela and Bernardo. With both, I had nice and interesting conversations on various topics. Hopefully, we will be able to talk more in the next weeks. Also, I would love to continue the conversation with Anita but before I want to organize a dinner at my place with her (and maybe Chavela too). The matter is simple: we are kind of friends, she cooked for me and I would like to reciprocate before asking again whether she has time for discussing militant research.

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Dialogue with Angela

We talk a lot about prospects, about how the movement should continue its struggle. Angela has clear ideas: the priority is to strengthen the presence in working-class communities. The positive thing is that she says the movement is already doing it. For Angela, the big challenge is to 'put the pieces together'. The MTST is not only housing; this is something to be remembered. Working-class people must start to fight also for education, health care, etc. It's the slow-paced work of the ants:

- "We must have trust because it bears fruit", she says.

Putting themes together serves the purpose of politicizing people. You start with housing and then go beyond. The movement fights for rightS (in plural). There is the risk that people settle for what they achieved. In contrast:

- "We must stir people's curiosity. Show them things from another point of view. The people living in the periphery would not identify as 'homeless', because they have their little house. But the truth is that the labor reform, the pension reform, etc. they represent attacks to them. Who does not need the public healthcare system? Who does not need

the public education system? The rich. These rhetorical questions serve to politicize people in the periphery".

Angela tells me that when she speaks in public she is always spirited; she shows her indignation for the present situation.

- "We cannot be afraid! To strengthen our presence with working-class communities we must do assemblies neighborhood after neighborhood".

She talks about two concrete cases where she managed to make people reflect – to create a new consciousness:

- "A neighbor of mine was complaining about the irrational urban development of the city. He was saying that all the poor were migrants from the North-East of the country who came with their families years ago and this is the reason for our urban chaos. First, I told him: "isn't your nickname 'Bahia[190]'?". Doesn't this mean that your family comes from there?" Then, I told him that people weren't coming to São Paulo randomly, but because factories needed workers! So, there was a socio-political project to make people come. It's not their fault for sure!"

One thing that Angela emphasizes is the firm devotion to the movement. She believes she will be a militant for many years to come. The funny thing is that her enthusiasm is so engaging. At a certain point she tells me:

- "You'll come back for sure. You cannot do without it anymore."

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Talking about the anti-colonial revolt, Fanon writes that once the old everyday is overcome, it's impossible to go back. Angela is talking about this. However, I believe that the case of militant researchers is a bit different. I did not join the MTST and abandoned my previous life. However, with the movement, I started a process of 'molecular transformation', where unimaginable possibilities suddenly became concrete. This process is a consequence of the fact

[190] Bahia is a state in the North East. As a nickname, often it also refers to African ancestry.

that I accepted emotional fragility with its political meaning and consequences. I learned about my social identity through the knowledge of Chiri and the other militants. The questions I was asking changed from 'why am I here?' to 'what can I do here?'.

The dialogue with Angela provides interesting empirical suggestions for collective militant research. She describes one of the fundamental things the MTST achieves: it breaks hegemonic narratives and politicizes people. 'It shows another point of view'. No one would identify as sem-teto (homeless), because within current hegemonic narratives it is a social identity that carries negativity. The movement does what Angela did with her neighbor: it shows an alternative narrative about how society is constituted. One of the objectives of collective militant research can be to develop this problem both theoretically and empirically. How to break hegemonic narratives?

As suggested by Anita, this kind of research would structure along two axes:

1. *The ontology of the oppressed. The collective subject studies the material (and symbolic) conditions that shape the existence of the Brazilian working class. The ontology of the oppressed focuses on the ideological practices and narratives that shape the world of subaltern classes. For instance, one would research patriarchy and racism focusing on how these structures determine both subjective (internalized) conditions of domination and objective ones.*

2. *The epistemology of the oppressed. The second axis of a collective militant study is to develop a critique of hegemonic epistemology. What do the oppressed know? And how one can develop a method to develop progressive knowledge based on the ontology of the oppressed? How can the project of collective research be useful in liberating bodies?*

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Developing collective militant research – whatsapp messages and reflections

"Hi Camilo, how are you? I just wanted to let you know some last thoughts. I'm continually thinking about possibilities of collective activist-researches which try to develop knowledges useful for the movement. I wrote a short draft for a pilot project, on Friday I talked to Lélia and she agrees with the idea. Maybe we will be able to do the pilot at the Palestine occupation by the end of the year. The idea is to discuss daily life and masculinity in the periphery; all in an open format, trying to develop dialogues about prejudices and privileges. If this pilot works, I would love to try developing more organic projects of collective research with movement's militants.
Any critique or idea is welcome 😊 Hugs."

"I think it's very cool, Alberto. Not sure whether the concept of masculinity is understandable for our people. I think that the question generating the meeting – 'What does it mean to be a peripheral man?' – is a good way to introduce the debate."

There is progress in developing the collective militant inquiry-pilot project at the *Vila Nova Palestina* occupation. Saturday, when Lula came back to São Bernardo do Campo, Lélia told me that the pilot had been approved by the MTST regional committee. I had something close to an epiphany preparing the first meeting: I won't be able to use the pilot's material for my Ph.D. dissertation. Otherwise, it would not be a *collective* research pilot.

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Knowledge and struggle in the periphery – experiments of collective research among MTST's militants

Pilot project – masculinity

This pilot project aims at developing knowledge and struggle at the same time. It is an experiment of collective research/struggle. We do not need the elitist approaches to research that reproduce societal forms of structural oppression. The knowledge that strengthens the struggle comes from the subaltern classes. To resist classism, racism, sexism, and homophobia, we need to develop critiques of capitalism based on the experiences of people living in the periphery. The project aims to develop dialogues among MTST militants over three meetings. The proposal is that militants discuss (and resist) capitalist oppression. In this way, they will be the leading subjects of the collective research/struggle.

Topics

The three meetings have the objective of building collective reflections. The first topic will be the daily experiences in the periphery. The proposal is to discuss the knowledge that comes from these experiences, together with difficulties, the daily challenges, and the stereotypes against people living in the periphery. The second meeting will focus on masculinity. Starting from a conversation on men's emotions (love, friendship), we will talk about the consequences of patriarchy on everyday life: the issue of expectations at work and in the household, as well as the relation between men and women. The proposal is to start reflecting on the privilege of men in society. The third meeting will conclude the project with a final conversation and an attempt to make the discussed points more concrete.

Format

The meetings will be structured through collective discussions and conversations. The orienting principle is that developing knowledge needs a democratic relation among all participants. The organizer plans to stir the debate with questions and various activities. For this pilot project, the proposal is of three meetings with the participation of a small group (max 20 participants).

First meeting: Introduction to the project – activity to get to know each other – conversation about the objectives of the collective research and possible outcomes (videos, articles, new discussions, etc.). Conversation about life in the periphery: what are the challenges? And what is the knowledge from the periphery?

Second meeting: Conversation about masculinity. What does it mean to be a man in the periphery?

Third meeting: Concluding conversation and collective work to realize some of the results of the research/struggle.

About the organizer of the project

My name is Alberto Fierro, I'm a researcher at the Central European University (Hungary). Since I know MTST militants, I ask myself how research can develop something useful for the people's struggle. With the MTST, I learned that must unlearn and decolonize my thought. This project develops from that consciousness.

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As I had realized before starting the pilot at the Palestine occupation, the material resulting from the three peripheral masculinities meetings will not enter the present dissertation. I hope they will serve as a basis to continue the collective work with the MTST. The present dissertation did not provide an exhaustive answer to the initial research question: how to imagine a transformative relation between Southern social movements and the Western researcher? While this problem will be the focus of the concluding chapter, so far, I employed the second initial research question – how to unlearn domination? – to propose a path for transformation.

The tentative answer to the first puzzle has been that reflecting and unlearning privileges is a good starting point to change the established relation between 'activist researchers' and social

movements. However, the narrative showed that what 'unlearning domination' means (both in theory and in practice) is far from obvious. The argument I developed comes from the black feminist critique. One must be conscious of their relation to structural societal forces. Theoretically, this is important both because the feminist standpoint produces alternative knowledge and because focusing on positionality discloses the co-constitution of social and knowledge hierarchies. The empirical contribution of the narrative is the focus on how subjects are imbricated in social hierarchies at an emotional level. I argue that one of the crucial elements of the unlearning process is a gut feeling of fragility.

The narrative illustrates how one goes about unlearning domination in practice. It is about how bodies move (or don't) in space. It is about being challenged by others – one must first understand that structural privileges exist! Grasping that our imbrication in social hierarchies has an emotional component that entails practical and conceptual consequences. First, we (un)learn that certain emotional responses are a reproduction of oppression; second, we (un)learn how to accept the disruptive potential of fragility. Understanding things in the gut is different from understanding them rationally because the former process relies on a feeling of belonging. Emotional challenges to dominant subjects hint at social transformation, class consciousness, and structural inequality. The narrative provides empirical substance to the black feminist critique also through illustrations of everyday practices. How I daily reproduce relations of domination shows the co-constitution of social and knowledge hierarchies. Knowing is a political matter that depends on positionality. The fragility that goes together with developing emotional consciousness about social structures also affects our attitude towards the knowledge of others.

Unlearning is not only about micro-political changes like a man remaining silent or sweeping a room but also about the disrupting power of fragility that displaces the unitary subjects and

thus seeks the others' knowledge to find solid ground. I started to know myself through the gaze of the other and the MTST collective identity. The corollary of the emotional consciousness of one's position within oppressive structures is that unlearning is a long process constellated with micro-political changes. By looking at the everyday also as a productive locus of alternative practices, the narrative contributes to the ongoing resignification of (non)political categories. Conceptualizing transformation through routines discloses that the alternative is often immanent to present arrangements.

In this last narrative chapter, the dialogues with MTST militants and Chiri's letters revealed how militants' resisting everyday – together with emotional fragility – produced a different kind of research. A practice shaped by reciprocity, ethical commitment, and joyful experiments. I also argued that unlearning crucially depends on space. Because of capitalist socio-economic relations, several elements connect our individuality to others. These material and symbolic elements (e.g., class position, racialization, sexism, etc.) lubricate capitalist development and determine who is 'higher' and who is 'lower' in the social hierarchy. One transforms in so far as they transform the consciousness about the individual imbrication in societal structural relations. I conclude by restating an idea that will help to address the question of 'what's the politics of collective militant research?' in the final chapter. To pursue joyful experiments of research means letting the militants be the subjects (rather than objects) of the endeavor. I think of the next chapter as a step in preparing for the turn to others (after the turn to the self). To say it with the words of Chiri: "denouncing domination becomes clear only when it is done through the voice of who dies first".

Conclusion: An exploratory agenda for collective militant research (CMR)

This dissertation could not answer the question of how to develop knowledge that helps the MTST struggle. How do militants develop transformative knowledge and how can research enhance the process? These problems represent the limits of the autoethnographic effort. In the present chapter, I outline the concept of collective militant research (CMR), formulating participatory approaches to knowledge production that explicitly focus on liberatory objectives. Throughout the narrative, I argued that political knowledge develops in the joint effort of various individuals – militants and researchers (and the first turning into the second and vice versa). The dissertation provides some advancements in conceptualizing the relationship between Western scholars and social movements of the Global South. To summarize the plan arising from the present work: "decolonize activist researchers' minds!".[191] Decolonization is an intersectional project. Colonialists reflect on their position in society analyzing multiple and connected axes of oppression. The dissertation shows a possible path toward the decolonization of Western researchers. By employing my experience as a source of knowledge, I argued that decolonization goes through a distressing process of self-criticism – with the acknowledgment of one's prejudices and work on them.

The autoethnography performs a politics of self-reflection; and, therefore, in the process of drafting it, I realized that the decolonization process is never complete. One cannot determine

[191] I employ the term 'activist' and 'activist research' building upon the interdisciplinary literature discussed in the Introduction. However, for this chapter I prefer the term 'militant', following a more explicitly Marxist/radical tradition. See for instance, Colectivo Situaciones, 'Something more on research militancy' in David Graeber and Stevphen Shukaitis, eds., *Constituent imagination: militant investigations, collective theorization* (Oakland: AK Press, 2007), 73–93; Katia Valenzuela-Fuentes, 'Militant ethnography and autonomous politics in Latin America', *Qualitative Research* 19, no. 6 (2019): 718–734; Nicholas Apoifis, 'Fieldwork in a furnace: Anarchists, anti-authoritarians and militant ethnography', *Qualitative research* 17, no. 1 (2017): 3–19; and Jeffrey Juris, 'Practicing militant ethnography' in David Graeber and Stevphen Shukaitis, eds., *Constituent imagination: militant investigations, collective theorization* (Oakland: AK Press, 2007), 164-176.

a proper 'after' in this type of work. Thinking of the self as 'fully decolonized' would only bear the risk of developing useless self-satisfaction and new hierarchies. There is no value in being conscious about my own sexist, racist, classist, and colonialist prejudices if that does not lead to struggle against the society that established the hierarchies in the first place. Therefore, it is crucial to conceptualize decolonization as an unfinished process, as a *movement* of the self. Through the analysis of my encounter with the MTST, I wrote about a path that starts with the acceptance of subaltern's challenges to dominant social positions. Western researchers must embrace the emotions associated with and generated by the unjust hierarchical system. To feel fragile can be transformative. But only if one accepts the feeling without domesticating it, without trying to overcome it. Welcoming emotional fragility implies embracing the gaze that the oppressed have of the privileged. This gaze – the knowledge that the oppressed have about oppression – dissolves colonial epistemic arrogance and therewith the logic that regulates colonialists' world.

If Western researchers aim at joining the struggle of the oppressed and start struggling with their dominant positionality, they are already doing a fundamental transformation – at least in a Gramscian sense. Self-transformation is also the transformation of the social relations that constituted the 'I' in the first place. For Gramsci, this is true because the social part of each individual is linked to the economic structure – the world of production.[192] With the word *praxis*, Marxism has conceptualized (self)transformation as an important characteristic of class struggle:

> In his critique of Feuerbach, Marx defines revolutionary praxis in terms of the unity of external, material transformation and self-transformation. Both subject and object are transformed in a continuous and mutually determining process.[193]

[192] See the discussion in Chapter 1, 44.
[193] John Roberts, *Philosophizing the everyday: Revolutionary praxis and the fate of cultural theory* (London: Pluto Press, 2006), 29-30.

The Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire has also theorized the unity between the transformation of the self and the transformation of reality as revolutionary: "people, through a true praxis, leave behind the status of objects to assume the status of historical Subjects".[194] Here, I do not claim that self-transformation looks the same for everyone because we are all connected to the material structure. There are class differences, and capitalism has always hinged upon other social hierarchies.[195] Therefore, (self)transformation is intersectional. Later in the chapter, I will articulate more in detail the Freirean theory of liberation; however, it is important to underline that, to achieve revolutionary change, dominant subjects – in Freirean terms 'the oppressors' – must also transform. Collective militant research builds upon the notion of praxis: the goal of the research is the joint transformation of society and people's subjectivities. In the next section, I will briefly outline two scholarly traditions that shape the concept of CMR.

Investigación-Acción participativa, conricerca, and developing shared narratives

The concept of *conricerca* – literally 'to research with' – was coined within the heterodox Marxist (political and intellectual) movement of Workerism.[196] There, the development of class struggle and revolutionary objectives was closely connected to the transformation of factory workers' subjectivities. In Italy, during the decades of the 50s and 60s, rapid economic development turned the spotlight on new antagonistic subjectivities that the Italian Communist Party had traditionally looked at with suspicion.[197] In the large majority young migrants coming from the South of the country to the industrialized North, *mass workers* reinvigorated workers'

[194] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 160.
[195] See the discussion in Chapter 1, 47.
[196] For an introduction to Workerism, see Steve Wright, *Storming heaven*: *Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism* (London: Pluto Press, 2002).
[197] See Guido Borio, Francesca Pozzi and Gigi Roggero, '*Conricerca* as political action' in *Utopian pedagogy: Confronting neoliberalism in the age of globalization*, eds. Mark Coté, Richard J.F. Day, and Greig de Peuter (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 163–185.

movement conflictuality. A number of intellectuals around the journals *Quaderni Rossi* (Red Notebooks) and *Classe Operaia* (Worker Class) coined the term *conricerca* to describe a method of inquiry that was based on the inclusion of workers as researchers and was loosely inspired by recent trends in U.S. sociology.[198] The epistemological foundation for the inclusion of mass workers in the process of inquiry was determined by praxis: factory workers represented the 'classic' revolutionary subject but they were also more than "an abstract unitary icon. […] they had their own values, everyday qualities, sufferings, imaginaries, desires, pleasures, and material and spiritual satisfactions. In short, they had their own *subjectivity*, both singular and collective".[199] Thus, coresearchers[200] perceived a contradiction in the objective development of capitalist forces and the subjective affirmation of workers' conflictuality. This tension represented an opportunity

> […] for resubjectification that could presage processes of transformation. Thus, conricerca was an instrument not only for the knowledge of subjectivity, but also for the construction of processes of counterformation and for experimenting with organizational forms. These forms were not parachuted in from the outside; rather, they were constructed *internally*, in the relations among vanguards, militants, and workers (emphasis mine).[201]

Researching was an open-ended activity that had as objective "the growth of a knowledge of political intervention".[202] Through systematic collection and analysis of data on the factory, class conflicts and composition, and workers' subjectivities, c*onricerca* represented a participatory research method set to enhance revolutionary knowledge. *Investigación-Acción participativa* – Participatory Research Action (PAR) – shared similar objectives with *conricerca*; however, because it originally developed in Latin America during the 70s, it had a

[198] Borio, Pozzi and Roggero, '*Conricerca* as political action', 167.
[199] Ibid., 166.
[200] Among others Romano Alquati and Danilo Montaldi.
[201] Borio, Pozzi and Roggero, '*Conricerca* as political action', 167.
[202] Ibid., 169.

decolonial approach from the outset.[203] As highlighted by the Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda – one of the key figures of PAR, Latin America cannot be the

> the object of study of foreign people and institutions. They create a specific image of the Latin American problematic, seen through their own frameworks and conceived from the conceptual and ideological biases of their schools and places of origin.[204]

In contrast to *conricerca,* PAR has a more articulated conception of epistemic domination. In fact, the necessity of involving the subaltern in the research arises from the consciousness that dominant classes exercise their power not only through material exploration but also through the control of what counts as useful knowledge and the production of it.[205] Moreover, PAR explicitly problematizes the prejudices of scientists – "Any science as a cultural product has a specific human purpose and therefore implicitly carries those class biases and values which scientists hold as a group"[206] – and the asymmetry of the subject/object relation so typical of traditional research – "the destruction of the asymmetric binomial is the kernel of the concept of participation as understood in the present context".[207] PAR conceptualizes the outcome of the research process as 'people's knowledge': both because the people produced it and also because they continue to own it. Thus, results must be shared and devolved to the subaltern.[208]

To conclude this sketchy review of militant and participatory approaches to research, I focus on issues method; specifically on the challenges that heterogenous groups face enacting meaningful and democratic participation. In this respect, the collaborative feminist work of the

[203] The PAR framework is nowadays not necessarily related to socialist transformational ideals. For an overview of the original purposes and method, see Orlando Fals-Borda and Muhammad Anisur Rahman, eds., *Action and knowledge: breaking the monopoly with participatory action-research* (London: Apex Press, 1991); for more recent PAR experiences, see People's Knowledge Editorial Collective, *People's Knowledge and Participatory Action Research: Escaping the white-walled labyrinth* (Rugby: Practical Action Publishing, 2016).
[204] Orlando Fals Borda in Breno Bringel and Emiliano Maldonado, 'Pensamento crítico latino-americano e pesquisa militante em Orlando Fals Borda: práxis, subversão e libertação' [Latin American critical thought and militant research in Orlando Fals Borda: praxis, subversion and liberation], *Revista Direito e Práxis* 7, no. 13 (2016), 396.
[205] Orlando Fals Borda, 'Some basic ingredients' in *Action and knowledge,* 3-12.
[206] Ibid., 7.
[207] Ibid., 5.
[208] Ibid., 9.

Sangtin collective is illuminating.[209] Sangtin is a group of Indian women coming from poor and rural backgrounds. Together with Richa Nagar,[210] they wrote a book that collects their live stories and develops them into a shared narrative. The Sangtin collective shows the potentials of participation both in political and academic terms. Each component wrote a diary that was later shared with the group; thus, the collective embarked on emotional and political work about their personal lives, histories of violence, and discrimination. Moreover, they also produced an acute analysis of emancipation from various social hierarchies. In the words of Richa Nagar:

> We use reflexive activism and collective analysis of the lives and work of the seven village level activists to articulate the nuanced intersectionality of caste, class, gender, religion, and sociospatial location, on the one hand, and the multivalent and hierarchical character of donor-driven women's empowerment, on the other. We […] critically explore the manner in which social hierarchies based on caste, class, religion, and geographical location become central to understanding the interrelationships among women's empowerment, NGO work, and *the politics of knowledge production* (emphasis mine).[211]

Sangtins' collective work is a source of inspiration for how it enacts ethical responsibility and accountability towards the oppressed.[212] It also shows that one of the key elements for meaningful participation in the research process is establishing trust and transparency within the community.[213] Finally, Sangtins' work deals with a problem that collective militant research with the MTST must tackle, too: how to deal with the unequal distribution of skills within the group? Their proposal is persuasive:

> The process of collaboration taught us what it means to become learners and teachers in the collective. Each of us came to see herself as privileged and handicapped in different ways in the arena of skills. The collaboration became a vehicle for us to understand what each of us could bring to the collective so that all of us could become better educated about the issues we had chosen to struggle for.[214]

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[209] Sangtin Writers and Richa Nagar, *Playing with Fire: Feminist Thought and Activism through Seven Lives in India* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).
[210] On the politics of feminist and decolonial collective research, see Richa Nagar, 'Footloose researchers, 'traveling' theories, and the politics of transnational feminist praxis', *Gender, place and culture: A journal of Feminist Geography* 9, no. 2 (2002): 179-186.
[211] Sangtin Writers and Richa Nagar, *Playing with Fire*, xxii-iii.
[212] "We ask: If we fail to accord full respect and to maintain our ethical responsibility and accountability to those very people whose lives we worry about and whom we claim to work for, will our work have any real force?", ibid., 122.
[213] Ibid., 9.
[214] Ibid., xl.

Collaboration implies that everyone becomes indispensable for the goal that the group has set for itself. And when the latter is developing a revolutionary politics of knowledge, the everyday experiences and skills of the subaltern are essential.

To sum up, the continuing relevance of *conricerca* and PAR for collective militant research is twofold. First, these traditions orient the process of researching towards the working-class, and therefore towards the development of transformational knowledge. Second – especially PAR – locates knowledge production within the global capitalistic structure. Thus, it sets the problem of coloniality and demands engaged researchers/militants to decolonize research. However, the relationship between researchers and subaltern needs a more accurate analysis. Even if both subjectivities find themselves struggling together, it is not clear how the (un)learning process takes place and how they practically conduct the militant research. In this respect, Richa Nagar contributes with fundamental ideas. Her work forefronts the fundamental challenge of overcoming the duality subject-object of traditional approaches: how can researchers learn from the oppressed without performing epistemic violence and instrumentalizing knowledge?[215] She suggests that collective work should be based on methodological radical openness: "Moving together implies a continuous commitment to learn from imaginaries of justice that do not emanate from assumptions about a shared lexicon or vision *that exists prior to the collective process* (emphasis mine)".[216] In the next section, I try to develop some concrete ideas about how this could look based on the work of Freire.

Freirean dialogue as a way to research

In his masterpiece – *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* – Freire outlines a theory of transformative education that is, and cannot be separated from, a theory of revolution. One of the constitutive elements of his progressive pedagogy is the concept of dialogue. This is a horizontal and

[215] Nagar, *Hungry translations*, 18-19.
[216] Ibid., 95.

democratic process of exchange whose outcome cannot be predetermined. Therefore, I develop an analogy with research. Freirean dialogue is not pacifying; in fact, oppressed and oppressors cannot engage in it.[217] They are two antagonistic poles – without the oppressed, oppressors would not exist. When the latter try to establish 'dialogue' with the oppressed, they are usually attempting to dominate them better.[218] For Freire, dialogue is the method of the revolution; educators/revolutionaries dialogue with the oppressed to discover and transform together reality:

> There is no dichotomy between dialogue and revolutionary action. There is not one stage for dialogue and another for revolution. On the contrary, *dialogue is the essence of revolutionary action*. In the theory of this action, the actors intersubjectively direct their action upon an object (reality, which mediates them) with the humanization of men (to be achieved by transforming that reality) as their objective (emphasis mine).[219]

Traditional education is designed to keep the oppressed as such – by considering people empty beings that must be 'filled'. Under these conditions, human consciousness stays "submersed".[220] It is only through "dialogical relations", that educators and students "cooperate in perceiving the same cognizable object".[221] As consciousness and the world are given simultaneous,[222] through dialogue, people 'see' reality and can transform it. Freire makes clear that this exchange does not establish – and cannot come from – hierarchies. People discover the world *together*: "no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught"[223]. Thus, CMR must be conducted horizontally and democratically. Freire's approach to the development of knowledge reflects his general posture toward social transformation: "what distinguishes revolutionary leaders from the dominant elite is not only their objectives, but their *procedures* (emphasis

[217] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 88.
[218] Ibid, 131.
[219] Ibid., 135.
[220] Ibid., 81.
[221] Ibid., 79-80.
[222] Ibid., 81.
[223] Ibid., 80.

mine)".[224] CMR aims at advancing the interests of the subaltern classes with them. As eloquently expressed by Muhammad Anisur Rahman – a key proponent of PAR:

> People cannot be liberated by a consciousness and knowledge other than their own. […] Consequently it is absolutely essential that the people develop their own endogenous consciousness-raising and knowledge generation, and that this process acquires the social power to assert vis-a-vis all elite consciousness and knowledge.[225]

For Freire, it is through dialogue – the practice of liberating education – that people transform their consciousness and develop knowledge. Concretely, his method requires the collective development of "generative themes";[226] i.e., topics that represent intellectual challenges, calls to action, and generate more dialogue. CMR with the MTST would follow this approach. A continuous going back and forth from the research group[227] to the movement itself would show whether the topics and questions chosen for the research are relevant or not. The group must start from "the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people".[228] Thus, CMR approaches the common sense and the worldviews of the oppressed without being patronizing; it is a process of discovering reality with its contradictions. Freirean dialogue is also praxis, as developing meaningful discussions with the people also implies producing self-transformative knowledge:

> To apprehend these themes and to understand them is to understand both the people who embody them and the reality to which they refer. But – precisely because it is not possible to understand these themes apart from people – it is necessary that those concerned understand them as well. *Thematic investigation thus becomes a common striving towards awareness of reality and towards self-awareness,* which makes this investigation a starting point for the educational process or for cultural action of a liberating character (emphasis mine).[229]

Developing self-awareness – conscientization – does not only happen within the oppressed but also among the oppressors. Freire writes that often revolutionary leaders "belonged to the social

[224] Ibid., 167.
[225] Rahman, 'The Theoretical Standpoint of PAR', *Action and knowledge,* 14.
[226] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* 110.
[227] Although the details of CMR would need to be discussed and agreed with the MTST, I imagine a group of five to ten militant researchers.
[228] Ibid., 95.
[229] Ibid., 107.

strata of the dominators".[230] Thus, the transformation from oppressors to revolutionaries happens either drastically thorough the revolutionary process,[231] or through "an act of true solidarity".[232] While Freire may be right in his options, I hope the present dissertation contributes to complexify the discussion about how dominant subjectivities transform. In the next section, I try to develop lessons for CMR drawing from the narrative and the previous analysis of the everyday and (self)transformation. In chapter 1, I theorized the politics of occupying along two axes: on the one hand, I argued that occupations enable the development of resisting routines; on the other hand, I conceptualized the everyday as a site where oppressive structures are reproduced. My understanding of transformation was mostly oriented towards the self – at how militants' challenges ruptured my subjectivity. Now, I move from the self to others, reflecting on how MTST militants (may) change and how this transformation is related to the everyday. By investigating the connections between the latter and common sense, I argue that occupations' resisting routines transform social hierarchies, therefore establishing an alternative everyday.

Everyday liberations: transforming lives through joyful praxis

In the narrative, there is a relation between the everyday of occupying and of oppression. The first transforms the second. When 'resisting routines' (chanting, marching, speaking in public, collectively cooking, leafletting, dancing, etc.) become praxis – meaning that they are both objective and subjective transformations – they affect common sense, and, thus, the everyday. This is not a relation of linear causality; it rather hinges on space- and body politics. Moreover, transformations in the everyday vary intersectionally. For instance, in the narrative, there are more examples of how I enact different masculinity compared to how I stop reproducing racism

[230] Ibid., 163.
[231] "In the revolutionary process there is only one way for the emerging leaders to achieve authenticity: they must 'die', in order to be reborn through and with the oppressed", ibid., 132-133.
[232] Ibid., 163.

or classism. This has to do with the fact that occupations' routines often relate to the reproduction of labor and care-work (e.g., cooking, cleaning, etc.); i.e., labor that is gendered and that can get – unfortunately not always – shared more equally across gender in the alternative everyday. Marielle Vive showed how militants transform, developing self-reflexivity. As highlighted by Lampião: "My point of view changed. Now, I am not afraid of going to the streets to struggle; because I know it's my right".[233] And Dandara: "Now I'm there [on the streets]. I shout, I run, I jump…I dance. It's my right; so, now nobody can silence me".[234] In the occupations, not only do militants change how they see themselves (we all transformed the logic that had governed our lives), they also relate differently to common sense. For instance, they are proud of being part of the working class. On the one hand, because it is the revolutionary subject; on the other hand because the youngsters from the periphery are the ones enacting true solidarity: "Rich kids are individualistic and selfish, it is us, the youth of the *quebrada*, who actually help old ladies to cross the street, while they mind their own business",[235] says Antonio during a meeting at Marielle Vive. Occupations transform militants' common sense. When someone new joins an MTST occupation, a powerful discovery is that the Brazilian Constitution prescribes the right to housing.[236] Daily reproduction of internalized oppressions/domination relies on commonsensical ideas that get challenged by the movement. In my case, an emblematic example is realizing that I associate Italian nationality with whiteness.[237] Here, I argue that the resisting routines at the occupations represent praxis. They transform people and their common sense, thereby producing a different everyday – where social hierarchies get challenged. I do not claim that all oppressions disappear. That would romanticize the struggle. The narrative clearly showed how social hierarchies were present

[233] Chapter 2, 86.
[234] Ibid.
[235] Chapter 2, 82.
[236] See Varun Gauri and Daniel Brinks, eds., *Courting Social Justice: Judicial Enforcement of Social and Economic Rights in the Developing World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
[237] Chapter 3, 105.

either in the Brazilian and in the Hungarian fight. Also, in the everyday not all forms of oppression get transformed in the same way. At least in my case, it was easier to modify sexist behavioral patterns. However, if the everyday is both a site of oppression and of transformations; sometimes, alternative practices – through a transformation of common sense and how oppressive structures affect us – transfigure the everyday itself.

Now, I briefly turn to the Marxist understanding of the everyday to conceptualize how it contains seeds of change and what it represents for the liberatory objectives of CMR. Lefebvre argued that the everyday represents a force of revolutionary consciousness. This idea supports my argument that 'resisting routines' are transformative. For the French Marxist, everyday alienation

> is not so much the inescapable condition out of which revolutionary consciousness emerges, but the *productive* and *conflictual* force of this consciousness. […] Thus, even though the everyday is experienced naturalistically as a universal realm of habit and custom by workers, its routinizations and repetitions are not simply the expression of dominant social relations, but the very place where critical thinking and action begins.[238]

Thus, the revolution must be conceptualized also starting from the daily routines of the working class. One of the cultural transformations that happened after the Russian revolution was an interest in the daily life of the proletariat.[239] Moreover, after the Bolsheviks took the power, the everyday represented the space where social transformation unfolded. Interestingly, this is true also with forms of oppression other than classism: "the central task in the transformation of everyday life is the liberation of women".[240] Illustrating Lefebvre's elaboration of socialist transformation, John Roberts writes: "In Marx, there is no critique of political economy […] without the *collective* aesthetic and *sensuous reappropriation* of everyday experience (emphasis mine)".[241] The overcoming of capitalism implies the liberation of daily life. The

[238] Roberts, *Philosophizing the everyday*, 38.
[239] Ibid., 16.
[240] Trotsky quoted in Roberts, *Philosophizing the everyday*, 22.
[241] Ibid., 12-13.

utopian ideals of the freed everyday consist in the democratization of joy through collective indulgence in creativity and arts:

> The creative activity of art and the work of art foreshadow joy at its highest. For Marx, enjoyment of the world is not limited to consumption of material goods, no matter how refined, or to the consumption of goods, no matter how subtle. […] He imagines a society in which everyone would rediscover the spontaneity of natural life and its initial creative drive, and perceive the world through the eyes of a painter, the ears of a musician and the language of a poet.[242]

Chiri writes it clearly in her letters, the joy of the oppressed challenges oppressive structures: "The thing is to pursue the micro changes that make us live experiments of JOY. The joy that disarticulates the order: the struggle for the right to celebrate, and to celebrate the right to fight".[243] The narrative shows how creativity and celebration – both present at MTST occupations and Kossuth – are fundamental components of the politicized everyday. At Marielle Vive, while dancing and singing in a circle, Chiri spontaneously inserted movements' slogans, creating a joyous atmosphere.[244] At Kossuth, at least a couple of times per day, the occupiers erupted singing "*Szabad Orszag, Szabad Egyetem*". Both examples represent the liberated everyday. Creativity and celebration in the occupations are the pursue of freedom. And as Chiri writes, the latter must be an objective of militant research: "If researching is to pursue an object, I ask you to pursue the freedom of our youth".[245] CMR cannot aim at the liberation of the oppressed without, at the same time, cultivating their joy and creativity. The latter's joy is also profoundly decolonial. Again with Chiri: "The passionate joy of black adolescence is what I desire for you. It reaches the West in us. By being passionate about the reach of this joy, by the intensity of living, you decolonize your thinking".[246]

Thus, if CMR wishes to adopt a decolonial approach, it must exercise creativity and openness to what will emerge during the research process. This implies that the concepts I developed as

[242] Ibid., 13.
[243] Chapter 4, 193.
[244] Chapter 2, 71.
[245] Chapter 4, 153.
[246] Chapter 4, 163.

the building blocks of the CMR approach – common sense, dialogue, praxis, everyday – will be challenged. This concluding chapter leaves some open questions for how CMR will look like in practice: how much will the group develop a shared routine – its everyday? And how to support the creativity of militant researchers? These issues will be continuously tackled by the group itself. However, what the present dissertation shows – especially through the dialogues established with Anita and Angela – is that research often looks different from what one would expect. As MTST militant researchers, we will investigate also marching and occupying, pursuing joyful experiments of freedom through collective cooking, chatting, singing, reading, etc. As Roberts writes about the everyday:

> The revolutionary critique […] is the production of a new 'life style' – of new forms of being and doing. From an intellectual point of view the word 'creation' will no longer be restricted to works of art but will signify a self-conscious activity, self-conceiving, reproducing its own terms, adapting these terms and its own reality (body, desire, time, space), being its own creation; socially the term will stand for *the activity of a collectivity assuming the responsibility of its own social function and destiny* – in other words for self-administration (emphasis mine).[247]

Unexplored directions: towards a decolonial epistemology

In the beginning, I wrote that this dissertation attempts at developing decolonial epistemologies. One of the problems in effectively doing so has been the decision of employing my experience as the main source of reflections. As Chiri writes, "These youngsters will never know whether you are an ally for real. And you will never be one".[248] She implies that there exist limits for colonial subjectivities. In fact, to develop decolonial knowledge, one must focus on different bodies, spaces, cultures, etc. Thus, CMR – as a form of knowledge production based on the material and symbolic experiences of the oppressed – is decolonial. Or at least, it aims at producing decolonial effects. As Mignolo writes, the latter is based on a form of 'delinking' from what are the available intellectual options – a disengagement from what we already know

[247] Roberts, *Philosophizing the everyday*, 109.
[248] Chapter 4, 155.

toward unknown territories.[249] A decolonial epistemology not only challenges the content of dialogue but also the very terms employed in the conversation.[250] This is why CMR will also question the concepts on which it stands. However, even though delinking means refusing the options that are presented to the oppressed, this concluding chapter argued that collective research has a direction. The starting point of the investigation will be the ontology of the oppressed. What are the material and symbolic life conditions of the gendered, racialized, and colonized Brazilian working-class? This question cannot be approached, again, objectifying the people: an alternative conception of the world only comes from their experiences and subjectivities. Therefore, ontology and epistemology of the oppressed are the two sides of the same coin: CMR will investigate the working-class living conditions starting from a politics of knowledge that is based on the bodies, localized experiences, and identities of the oppressed. To say it with the words of Anzaldúa: "they are not helping us but following our lead".[251] Decolonizing epistemology implies working with politicized identities – rather than with identity politics.[252]

CMR will proceed by embracing Anzaldúa's concept of new mestiza:

> a liminal subject who lives in borderlands between cultures, races, languages, and genders. In this state of in-betweenness the mestiza can mediate, translate, negotiate, and navigate these different locations. As mestizas, we are negotiating these worlds every day, understanding that multiculturalism is a way of seeing and interpreting the world, a methodology of resistance.[253]

Understanding militant researchers as mestizas implies imagining a group of people that will daily challenge social and knowledge hierarchies. They will experience fragility and joy, the two disrupting emotions at the basis of decolonization. Before writing this dissertation, I didn't

[249] Walter Mignolo, 'Geopolitics of sensing and knowing: on (de)coloniality, border thinking and epistemic disobedience', *Postcolonial studies* 14, no. 3 (2011): 276.
[250] Ibid., 275.
[251] Quoted in Walter Mignolo, 'Delinking: The rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of de-coloniality', *Cultural studies* 21, no. 2-3 (2007): 492.
[252] Id.
[253] Gloria Anzaldúa, 'The New Mestiza Nation: A Multicultural Movement' in *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, ed. AnaLouise Keating (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009), 209.

know that fragility is part of dominant subjects' decolonization. Chiri had written me about it: "Never accept yourself comfortable!",[254] but it has been only through reading and conceptualizing my experience with decolonial lenses that I figured out this connection. Looking at fragility – and the everyday – through a decolonial framework is a contribution of the present work because it shows how uncomfortable emotions are parts of progressive transformations. However, it has not been 'the theory' that led me to this insight. As I argued, the puzzles arose during the encounter with the MTST. Conceptualizing fragility as a tool of decolonization works only because I had already decided to stay close to the militants, to embrace their revolutionary joy, and to be curious about their knowledge. It is their friendship and challenges that trigger decolonization. To continue being close to the militants through collective researching means working together on developing mestiza consciousness:

> She can be jarred out of ambivalence by an intense, and often painful, emotional event which inverts or resolves the ambivalence. I'm not sure exactly how. The work takes place underground-subconsciously. It is work that the soul performs. *That focal point or fulcrum, that juncture where the mestiza stands, is where phenomena tend to collide. It is where the possibility of uniting all that is separate occurs*. […] a new consciousness – a mestiza consciousness – and though it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary as peer of each new paradigm (emphasis mine).[255]

The main message of this dissertation is that decolonizing is "*learning to unlearn*".[256] I showed an individual path of reflection and transformation. However, the personalized politics of autoethnography makes sense only when the turn to the self serves the purpose of deconstructing it. Thus, "WHITE MALE people must STOP COLONIZATION IMMEDIATELY!"[257]. Chiri's message shows how crucial it is that dominant subjects transform. I hope the present work contributes towards this result.

[254] Chapter 4, 164.
[255] Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La frontera*, 79-80.
[256] Mignolo, 'Delinking: The rhetoric of modernity', 485.
[257] Chapter 4, 161.

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