BRIDGING PEDAGOGIAL "FRONTIERS": ECOFEMINIST PRACTICES WITHIN THE EUROPEAN NONVIOLENT ACTION MOVEMENT (MEAN), FOR PEACE EDUCATION

COLMARE LE "FRONTIERE" PEDAGOGICHE: PRATICHE ECOFEMMINISTE, ALL'INTERNO DEL MOVIMENTO EUROPEO DI AZIONE NON VIOLENTA, PER UNA EDUCAZIONE ALLA PACE

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ABSTRACT

The mission of the Mean, by funding the Civil Peace Corps, is to create the conditions for the inhabitants of crisis areas and areas in danger of conflict escalation to become the protagonists of a process of social, economic, civil regeneration of their territory and of creative conflict management. The first signatories of the Mean are 54 activists (including me as researcher) participating in the peace march in Kiev on 11 July 2022. Of these more than half are women, but the gender point of view is not part of the theoretical reference horizon. That is why I decided to explore how much the situated knowledge of women activists has contributed to building a transformative pedagogy and a pedagogy of life.

La missione del Mean, attraverso il finanziamento dei Corpi Civili di Pace, è quella di creare le condizioni affinché gli abitanti delle aree di crisi e di quelle a rischio di escalation del conflitto diventino protagonisti di un processo di rigenerazione sociale, economica, civile del proprio territorio e di gestione creativa dei conflitti. I primi firmatari del Mean sono 54 attivisti (tra cui io come ricercatore) che hanno partecipato alla marcia della pace a Kiev l'11 luglio 2022. Di questi più della metà sono donne, ma il punto di vista di genere non fa parte dell'orizzonte teorico di riferimento. Per questo motivo ho deciso di esplorare quanto il sapere situato delle donne attiviste abbia contribuito alla costruzione di una pedagogia trasformativa e di una pedagogia della vita.

Introduction

"...and for this reason your activity in the Transvaal, which seems to us to be at the ends of the earth, is the most central, the most important work of all that is at present taking place in the world..."
Lev Tolstoy to Gandhi, 1910

"If the Samaritan had arrived an hour earlier on the road, perhaps the attack would not have been consummated. One must force the dawn to dawn, believing it. Friends, force the dawn. It is the only violence you are allowed".
Don Tonino Bello, 1989

Today there is a strong political demand in volunteering, many are not content with the buffer function they objectively fulfil. Why not turn this extraordinary experience into a 'European civil peace corps'?"
Alex Langer, 1995

Abstract

Starting from the teachings of the great non-violent thinkers and activists of the 20th century, in the aftermath of the Russian attack on Ukraine, the MEAN / EMNA "European Non-Violent Action Movement" was born, a specific project for the promotion of peace launched in Italy by the network "Per un nuovo welfare" together with 35 other organisations. The intention is "to preserve the transformative power of active non-violence within the conflict scenario, not only theoretically but also concretely, through a physical, visible and therefore massive presence of European civil society in Ukraine, on 11 July 2022, the memorial of Saint Benedict Patron of Europe and of the 1995 Srebrenica massacre, a genocide of eight thousand men and boys, mostly Muslims, that Europe and the UN could have avoided". The aim is "to promote the establishment of a European Civil Peace Corps, bringing together the expertise of institutional and non-institutional actors in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peaceful conflict reconciliation, in order to make EU civilian crisis management more credible, coherent, effective, flexible and visible." (*EP Foreign Comm on 29/11/2023*).
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The first signatories of the Mean are 54 activists participating in the peace march in Kiev on 11 July 2022.

Of these more than half are women, but the gender point of view is not part of the theoretical reference horizon. That is why I decided to explore how much the situated knowledge of women activists has contributed to building a transformative pedagogy and a pedagogy of peace.

1. Intersectional eco-feminist practices for a possible peace

Kiev, 11 July 2022

Where does this story begin?

Can one speak of a clash of nationalisms?

In the narrative of this war, do you find a Western 'double standard'?

I had these three questions in mind, prompted by Luigi Cazzato , when I decided, as part of a participant observation conducted within seven groups of Italian ecofeminists, to participate in the peace march on Kiev, which took place on 10 July 2022.

The attempt, within the methodological framework of Grounded Theory, was to place myself in the intersection of visual sociology (Frisina, 2013, 2016), intersectional feminism, decolonial theories and sociology of the urban landscape, placing myself in a lateral condition (physically, during the march, but also as an observer), to give way to the many unresolved questions through which the direction of the subsequent stages of the research was traced.

The research, referred to here, is in fieri, and aims to study the Italian ecofeminist movement (in particular the ecofeminism that I have defined 2.0), to investigate its inspiring principles, modalities and methods of interaction, to be borrowed in the Metaverse through the participatory design of a publishing ecosystem that facilitates communication between small groups. The final objective is to experiment in new digital ecosystems the effectiveness of ecofeminist practices, for a transformative pedagogy for peace and ecofeminism of all agents (researcher and co-researcher).

The participant observation of the ecofeminist groups unfolded through a path strewn with stumbling blocks: moments of reflection and sudden creative flashes, experienced collectively. Despite the clear distinction of roles, the ecofeminists accepted and assumed the responsibility of being co-researchers, together with the researcher-activist, while together, observed and observed, researcher-activist and ecofeminist co-researchers, we oriented the participant observation towards a form of netnography (Kozinets, 2015).

The ecofeminist practice of autonarration was assumed as an 'ontological' practice of group membership and the testing, in the field, of cooperatively developed experiments.

A self-generative and reflexive research path was thus traced in which the flexible and transdisciplinary methodological approach, together with the contamination of languages, facilitated reflexivity as a qualitative method of social research (Pinheiro, Colombo 2021).

Colombo writes (p.4):

Reflexivity is meant to signal the idea that the way one does things has implications for what one does or, in the more specific domain of the social sciences, that the way one produces knowledge about a particular aspect of social reality has implications for what one knows and has effects on the reality one sets out to know.

Questioning the relations existing between individual action and reality, the connections between perception, personal knowledge and the constituent characteristics of the external world, are perhaps an essential characteristic of human beings and have always and in every context had a consistent and problematic relevance.

Without running the risk of lapsing into 'egology', writes Colombo:

'A certain degree of self-reflexivity of the researching subject contributes to placing the researcher - with his characteristics, his body, his emotions, his prejudices, his likes and dislikes, his interests - in the research process, producing a constant reflection on what one does and what one is and the relationship that these characteristics have with the research that is produced' (p.7).

If the term reflexivity has been associated with different meanings in the social sciences over time (without claiming to be exhaustive: Mead, 1934; Garfinkel, 1967; Gouldner, 1970; Baktin, 1981; Bourdieu, 1982; Giddens, 1990; Beck, 1982; Melucci, 1998; Bordieu, 2001)

It was above all the third-wave feminist movement and cyber feminism (Haraway, 1991) that linked the sociological concept of reflexivity to the 'situated' character of the observer, stimulating the debate on the fact that any 'knowledge' presented as universal and objective re-proposes and reinforces existing, prior and entrenched power relations (Harding, 1987; Haraway, 1988).

Reflexivity, in feminist theories, therefore becomes the ability of the observer to adopt a 'situated' gaze that cannot be separated from its precise social location and is aware of this (Woolgar, 1988; Haraway, 1991; Bell Hooks, 1991; Collins, 2015).

Thus, if it is true that we can trace three different meanings of 'reflexivity' in the literature, viz.

the reflexivity of the agent (the researcher) on herself/himself and on the practices adopted;

the reflexivity that we might define as 'autopoietic' or 'circular', where knowledge generates products that in turn generate knowledge and are 'embedded' in it (embedded, we would say, if reflexivity as a process were implemented in the metaverse); and

It is also true that ecofeminists take up these three meanings, sublimate them, practice them all at the same time, and on the other hand, by focusing on the "situated" character of the observer, deconstruct all "knowledge" and question any possibility of knowledge and circularity of knowledge that does not start from oneself, from one's own body, from being there, but together with others. To be together with one's own body is to create meaning; more precisely, it is to be signifier and signified at the same time, in a continuous "reflexive" exchange in which the relationship is at once a method of knowledge and knowledge itself.

For ecofeminists, it is precisely in the practice of relation understood in this way that the practice of peace lies.

I would like to say that in this relational and social reflexive process, in which autonarration takes on an "ontological" and identity-based character of belonging to the group, the ecofeminist activists observed have cultivated "mutual understandings" (Morin, 2001), in which "sisterhood" (Lagarde, 2006, 2009, 2014) becomes the passport to that "earthly identity" advocated by Morin, which places the construction of peace as a process of knowing the other (and the other) at the centre.

A process of "mutual understanding" that takes place far from any centre, far from the centre of the self (albeit in the awareness of producing "situated" knowledge, therefore centreed but not central), is indeed unbalanced towards a territory of "border", in search of a border as a symbolic place where it is possible to "put oneself in a listening position".

Therefore, if peace, as a result of the ecofeminist practice of knowing the other based on situated reflexivity, is the result of an action that is constantly unbalanced towards the border of the self, it is only in this border and in this confinement that one can meet the other.

Peace therefore becomes a constant practice and a constant tension.

If we really wanted to give a name to the border, this place-non-place, a porous mental disposition before being a closed physical place, this border would be the matria for the ecofeminist observers (Marchetti, 2021). A "restorative neologism":

Alternative paradigm, oppositional to the concept of homeland nation; born from the critique of racism and colonialism, ecology, feminism, openness and dialogue with other cultures (...) In the name of this spring democracy, of political happiness, of a fraternal space of sharing, I propose here the word m, a feminine noun that is a neologism in our language. (...) A physical and metaphorical place of welcome, beyond national, ethnic, religious, social, gender, etc. affiliations, as opposed to the homeland as a historical reality defined by the discriminations of national identity and native belonging to a given territory (p. 1).

The eco-feminist practice of "being there", as a "body", "situated", creating knowledge from and through relationships, has become a pacifist practice, put into action in the peace march that the Mean European Nonviolent Action Movement, born from below, on the net, after February 24, 2022, and inspired by the pacifist and ecologist practices of Alex Langer and its motto Lentius, profundius, suavius, which revises the Olympic motto Citius, altius, fortius, is considered exclusionary because it is based on the concept of natural selection, on a colonialist vision that must be deconstructed in a pacifist practice, at every level, starting from the ethnic level (i.e., far from any centre).

"It is a historic moment, to be there with our bodies, to oppose war with our bodies. We did it with Alex Langer[1] in Yugoslavia and Albania, we must do it now' (Pinuccia Montanari[2] , from the Research Diary of 30 April 2022).

The participant observation that was attempted could not therefore be separated from being there, as a researcher, with one's own experience, situated, and with one's own body, in order to also observe the relationship between the co-researchers observed, the landscape and the environment, their perception and the perception of oneself through them, in a circularity that once again is a method of collective apperception but also an element of identity, the 'Matria', precisely.

1. The data set as a result of participatory research construction

I have chosen to collect the self-narratives[3] of the activists and eco-feminists who participated in the peace march on Kiev, on the long outward journey from Krakow to Kiev, and then interview them on the long bus journey back, first from Kiev to Melika, via Lviv, and then from Melika to Krakow.

Almost 20 hours of travelling and crossing the Ukrainian-Polish border on foot.

Frequently resorting to the technique of back talk (Cardano, 2011), I agreed with the participants on both the "centring" of the questions with respect to the focus of my research, discussing them together and identifying, together, the testimonies that would be most significant. In this way I was able to have "*the participants'*

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1   Alex Langer, former director of the newspaper 'Lotta continua' European parliamentarian for two terms (1989, 1994), founder and first president of the European Green group. Ecologist   , environmentalist, pacifist, he is considered by some to be the inspiration behind Francis I's encyclical *Laudato Sii. The inspiring* principle of his ecologist and pacifist theories is inspired by the Olympic motto *Citius, altius, fortius,* which for Langer becomes: *Lentius, profundius, suavius*

2   A historic exponent of Italian eco-feminism, she has been involved in numerous pacifist and feminist missions with Alex Langer, of whose foundation she is a member of the scientific committee. Former councillor for Sustainability in Rome (Giunta Raggi), president of the Eco-institute in Reggio Emilia and Genoa, she was also councillor for the environment in Reggio Emilia and Genoa. Coordinator of the Forum for Ecological Democracy of Icef (International Court of the Environment Foundation). She teaches Information Literacy at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia.

3 Some excerpts of autonomous narratives or interviews proposed here have been published in abridged version in Cazzato L., Mastrogiovanni M.L. (2023). Endless war within modernity/coloniality: decolonial reflections and intersectional practices for lasting peace (pp154-168). Rubini A. (Ed) *Quando si dice pace.* Milan: Franco Angeli.

interpretations of the researcher's interpretations" (Cardano, 1997, p.65), i.e. a qualitative tool to "metacommunicate research" (Ranci, 1998, p.52).

The choice of conducting the semi-structured interviews in the bus, during the return journey, was dictated by the sharing, between the participants and the researcher, of the attribution of a strong symbolic value given to the journey, to the march for peace, to being there, with one's own bodies and one's own experience, in Ukraine, in Kiev, in Lviv, in all possible places: on the streets, in the buildings of the institutions (the City Hall, the State Museums where the thematic tables of discussion and confrontation between European and Ukrainian activists were held), in the anti-aircraft bunkers.

They wanted (we wanted) to collect their autonarratives hot, around the three questions I had anticipated to them on the outward journey, aware on the one hand of the fact that "the personal is political" (Hanish, 1969) and that the so-called "starting from oneself in the 1970s" (Melandri, 2020), broadened the value of the starting point ("the personal is political") when it was shared, allowing reflection to be opened up in an intersectional key.

In short, the personal narrative, through the semi-structured interviews conducted after the peace march, ended up becoming the narrative of different forms of oppression and colonisation, the narrative of different wars, without, however, this intersectional 'look' ever being made explicit.

2. Being there with our own bodies and recognising ourselves: for a pedagogy of the oppressed of all wars

The immersion in the social reality of the ecofeminists made it possible to recognise the centrality of certain 'sensitising concepts' (Blumer, 1969, p.148) that oriented their gaze and determined their situated actions, always from a gender perspective.

The collaborative approach enabled the participants to be recognised as active participants in the research as co-researchers and co-producers of knowledge, from an autoethnographic perspective (Phillips, Larsen, Mengel, 2022):

> "The journey we made during the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, a journey of women along the borders, called by the mothers of soldiers, in order to build bridges of peace. And there Alex Langer, who had followed and supported us on this trip, said something important that also applies here today for Ukraine, that to build peace you have to build bridges between people, between groups of women, as we did then,

between trade unions and trade unions, between students and students, between teachers and teachers. Building relationships at every level that can be the premise for a solid path to lasting peace' (Pinuccia Montanari, 10 July 2022, 11pm).

Tetyana Shyshnyak, is a cultural mediator and opera singer.

She has lived in Italy for 17 years, in Benevento. She is originally from Donbass.

"The War in Ukraine for me started in 2014: the first troops.... of people...they were people, but they were soldiers (winks, with a bitter smile), well-equipped (winks) but you couldn't tell which army, who filled my city.

I managed to get my mum away, in May 2014. She stayed with me in Italy. She didn't study Italian because she thought she would return next month. She was practically living out of suitcases. After 24 February she realised she could no longer return and in two months she recovered her Italian that she had not studied for eight years'.

Marianella Sclavi[4] :

"Reflection on a broader picture, on what is happening, is also fundamental for a negotiation that is not the Dayton one[5] , that is, a negotiation that makes the reasons

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4   Urban ethnographer, former lecturer at the Politecnico di Milano in 'creative conflict management'. She has theorised and applied the 'humour methodology' applied to urban ethnography. She   works on urban regeneration with Ascolto attivo srl, which she founded. A member of the scientific committee of the Alex Langer Foundation, she has worked on reconstruction processes and creative conflict management in Kosovo and Palestine/Israel. She is a consultant for the project, "Ricalabria" promoted by "Progetto Sud" and Goel, which deals with conflict resolution in Locride.

5   The negotiation that ended the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992-1995), signed at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio. Considered a great diplomatic achievement, it was carried out by men only. No women were present and the gender issue was ignored, although rape as a weapon of war on an ethnic basis had been recognised as a crime against humanity and widely used in Bosnia-Herzegovina. "Both in terms of the composition of the key players at the negotiating table and its main features (recognition of territorial gains acquired through ethnic cleansing and genocide), Dayton was a 'strongmen' agreement par excellence. Its ramifications still exert profoundly gendered political and socio-economic consequences, not only on Bosnia and Herzegovina but on the broader South East European (SEE) neighbourhood. The twin anniversaries of Dayton and SCR 1325 offer us an opportunity to reflect on them in relation to the broader WPS agenda' (Hozić, 2021). Five years after the Dayton Accords, UN Resolution 1325 'Women, Peace, Security' was passed, which aims to enhance and promote gender practices as a tool for peace building. The Forum of Mediterranean Women journalists, which has been held in Bari since 2016 organised in collaboration with the University of Bari, funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation -MAECI, in the framework of the call for the implementation of UN Resolution 1325, represents an important part of the Italian contribution

for the conflict persist and does not change the context that made it possible. This is the place from which to launch this message and this European Non-Violent Action Movement. Keep in touch, humanely, tell each other what is happening and what you see.

We are not only important if we can make a material contribution. If there is community building, that also triggers a series of actions, that by talking and talking to others, we can find ways to come up with interesting things. For example: the problem of museums. The Russians or pro-Russians stealing or destroying museum assets that are considered elements of identity: we can find a way to intervene in Italy (through our networks)[6] .

Elizabeth Rijo[7]

"To be here for me means to be physically (...). I was mobilised with my organisation to collect immaterial and material goods...(...) I felt that however it is not enough (...) I felt the need and the desire to go there to see, and to see what more can be done beyond what can be done remotely.

Being here as women for me means finding women, being close to them. In fact, as soon as I arrived, my gaze crossed with that of two women, Julia and Valentine (...) As they crossed my gaze (...) they said to me: 'Your gaze gives us comfort'. I think they felt they had an accomplice coming from overseas to share their pain with them and to see what they could be useful in".

Marija Todorovic[8]

"I am of Serbian origin/ I have lived in Italy for 21 years/ since the last war/ since the NATO aggression against Serbia. It was on... 24 March 1999/ when it started. It ended after... 78 days. I was 20 years old. On the first day/ I was returning from work in the evening/ you could hear sirens everywhere/ the buses were all blocked/ the city was completely in darkness. I was walking in a place called *autocoman*, down in Belgrade/ I heard a roar behind me/ I turned around/ it was an overpass... a bridge... it had fallen. I

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to the implementation of the resolution, enhancing the gendered, Mediterranean and 'southern' view of peace processes.

6   One of the thematic discussion tables held in Kiev after the peace march was on museum heritage: the working group of Mean   activists together with the director of the National Museum of Kiev and Italian and Ukrainian academics produced a paper for an Italy-Ukraine bilateral agreement for the protection of cultural, museum, environmental, architectural and artistic heritage.

7   Originally from Haiti, she is president of the association La Rosa Roja, of the network Coordinamento Diaspore in Sardinia.

8   He works in the field of international cooperation.

kept walking /acting as if nothing had happened/ (smiles). (...) It's not that we weren't afraid / (he scans). It's simply that we didn't have /time/ (emphasis) to be afraid. We weren't even aware of what was happening around us. A bit like the Ukrainians...what's happening now. (...) Especially those who experienced it first hand / Understanding what they feel on the field, I wanted to go back to /that field / (with emphasis on the word 'that' in tone of voice) to try to do something, what I couldn't so many years ago when I was still a child. After 23 years. Because now I feel ready to stop the tanks with my bare hands, I'm there, eh!' (laughs).

If we have ten wars in the world today, nobody talks about the other wars. But children are children all over the world, mothers are mothers all over the world.

I realised that there's so much resentment / so much resentment because... it's right / (nods) it's right to have resentment at this time and / I justify it a lot / (nods) and here I give the example of the war that happened between Serbia and Croatia... little by little, we understood that they are our brothers (...) we could hold a grudge against the presidents who are really responsible for all that massacre / with all of the former Yugoslavia, but we could never hold a grudge against the people / even though some filth happened on both sides / they are unjustifiable things that I think no sane person of my people would ever have wanted to happen.

3. Methods and materials

As I have been illustrating so far, this paper attempts to place itself, within the methodological framework of Grounded Theory, at the intersection of decolonial theories, intersectional feminism and urban landscape sociology, in an attempt to trace and analyse ecofeminist visions and practices within MEAN common to a transformative pedagogy of peace.

I will now briefly outline some of the qualitative and creative social research techniques I used to analyse MEAN from a gender perspective.

The data set is analysed using NVivo software. Here I will limit myself to reporting on some of the core categories that have reached saturation (to use Grounded Theory terminology).

I made use of qualitative social research techniques for data collection:

Qualitative techniques

- Participant observation → Participatory (PR) and collaborative approach
- Hybrid qualitative participant observation technique (in-presence and online)
- narrative and semi-structured interviews
- shadowing
- Backtalks

Visual methods for social research

- Respondent generated visual data (Pauwels 2015) → techniques allowing participants to choose and/or generate representations of their perceptions on a topic proposed by the researcher → co-production of knowledge
- itinerant soliloquies-(Frisina 2016)→ carried out during participant observation in Kiev (8-14 July 2022)
- Self-narrative (written and video verbalisation)-→ mental graphic images led ecofeminists to trace a collective narrative and self-define themselves, as a group, in their own history, values, goals, practices.

4. Results

The following core categories have been saturate (by complying with Grounded Theory):

1. category: domination/colonisation

model of social organisation: top-down

Oppressor: State as absolute institution/patriarchy

Oppressed:

- women's bodies-→ right to health, right to private and family life, right to social reproduction, right to peace
- ecosystem/Nature: war as devastation of all life

2. category: Freedom/Peace

Model of social organisation: participatory based:

- Network;
- round (hugs)

→ Peace is a practice

5. Discussion

The self-narratives were collected before the Kiev peace march. The narrative and semi-structured interviews were collected immediately afterwards, during the return journey. The empirical data were analysed according to grounded theory methodology, searching -through data saturation- for core categories.

All the interviewees elaborated a 'consciousnessisation' (Freire, 1970) of themselves at the intersection (Crenshaw, 1989) of different classes, recognising themselves in the condition of Ukrainian women, doubly oppressed by the men's war. They identified a double standard in the mainstream narrative of conflict. They problematised the idea of peace as an individual and collective 'practice'.

Conclusions

The European civil peace corps - as imagined by Alex Langer - can be a concrete conflict-prevention response when it succeeds in triggering a transformative pedagogy of peace that originates from a process of 'consciousness-raising' both of oneself as a 'political body' and of one's oppressed/oppressor positioning, in order to avert any colonising attitude towards the Other.

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