

BOOK REVIEW

Tiziana Rita Morgante

*Educare e disobbedire: in dialogo con Danilo Dolci,
Mesogea, Messina, Italy,
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This book, authored by one of Danilo Dolci's collaborators at Trappeto and Partinico, and published on the birth centenary year of the educator it celebrates, consists of interviews, reflective pieces and seminar proceedings. These are all focused on the tasks and experiences of generating popular consciousness and collective resource creation in a community constantly facing, for this purpose, severe types of what Paulo Freire calls 'limit situations'. The context is characterised by what, many contend, has been a 'State within a state' with its own rules, concerns and *modus operandi*. Many nowadays go as far as to contend that this state within a state has now extended its reach into the more national centers of power.

Danilo Dolci, originally from Italy's 'North', chose Sicily as his terrain of operation, after he abandoned studies in Architecture to take up social engagement on behalf of and with the downtrodden, 'I poveri cristiani', as he calls them. The alternative state to the mainstream one is of course the Mafia. The terrain is also part of that 'Southern' region once constituting the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, also, when under Bourbon rule, arguably the richest province in that then geographical expression called 'Italy'. It was eventually to be reduced to a subordinate province or colony following the Rothschild-induced overthrow of this monarchy, then perceived as a threat to British naval dominance in the Mediterranean. This of course occurred in the course of the Piedmontese-led *Risorgimento*. What we have here is a context marked by an intricate web of colonialism, 'internal' colonialism. The situation foregrounds the 'Southern Question' (la Questione Meridionale), dealt with by Dolci in one of his videos and

elsewhere. It forms the backdrop to the situations discussed in the interviews and other writings in this book.

As with all decolonising discourses, Dolci's approach at the heart of this volume conveys a sense of community and community empowerment at that. This occurs through, among other things, advocacy, including media advocacy via *digiuni* (hunger strikes), activism and communal action. Communal action includes showing the potential and room for actual employment, as with the *sciopero alla rovescia* (reverse strike). This would involve unemployed persons engaging collectively in urgent infrastructural projects which require human power and which, either for lack of imagination or more likely *will*, the mainstream authorities were reluctant to engage. So is the *diga* (dam), involving a mass collective effort which many regard as Dolci's and his followers' crowning success story.

The discussions in this book gravitate around educational approaches intended to generate confidence among the community and in its own resources, including manifestations of what Gramsci would call the 'popular creative spirit'. As with Don Milani and Paulo Freire, the approaches were intended to develop that critical consciousness and 'hermeneutics of suspicion' (Ricoeur) necessary to enable people not to accept things unquestionably in pure 'banking education' fashion.

In this regard, the pedagogical approach favoured by Dolci, to help render community members *cittadini sovrani* (sovereign citizens), as Don Milani would argue, is a *maieutic* one, as derived from Socrates. This *maieutica* is adopted by Dolci as his main pedagogical weapon against social and intellectual passivity. It is the anti-transmission pedagogical, communications model (a community radio was developed by Dolci and his collaborators) and entails constant questioning. One relies on problem-posing questions rather than on receiving answers, prescriptions. This is what Paulo Freire calls "A Pedagogy of the question", the mark of *problematisation*.

The affinity between Dolci, Milani and Freire, as well as other writers, are brought out well with the provision, in the book, of even excerpts of transcripts from a seminar at Trappeto and Partinico, the centre of gravity for coordination, documentation, monitoring and preparation for the many Dolci-led projects, including the Mirto school. Many of the cited figures still alive in Dolci's time even collaborated with him and his fellow activists, especially in the 70s. The book rightly provides ample space for a symposium held at Trappeto in 1975, featuring, among others: Paulo Freire, who travelled from Geneva then as he was in exile from his

Brazilian homeland, Johan Galtung, chief proponent of peace studies and education, Bogdan Suchodolski, great Marxist Humanist philosopher of education from Poland, widely respected internationally, even by Poles well after 1990, and Ettore Gelpi, one of Italy's Radical Party founding members and Head of UNESCO's Lifelong Education Unit. The others included a then young Maltese socialist activist who would eventually, several years later, become a Minister of Education in his country.

This must have been a momentous seminar to discuss an important project in education carried forward by Dolci and his collaborators. It is great that Tiziana Morgante's volume sheds ample light on it, reproducing the actual participants' choice of phrases, albeit, in the case of some, in Italian translation. My only quibble is that I am sure Paulo Freire used *praxis* in his intervention, not the reported *prassi*, as it has been translated, which means *abitudine*, everyday habitual ways. Praxis is more than this. It entails reflection on action, involving recourse to theory as codified reflection, for transformed action that can in turn transform lives. The actual word therefore should have remained the Ancient, Greek, Aristotelian, *Praxis*.

At the end of this excellent book, which reveals how some of Dolci's basic ideas are taken up by Morgante in her own practice as a teacher in a Rome public school (she had joined Dolci's team of volunteers during and after her student days), I have been left with still one intriguing question. How did the entrenched traditionally ruthless forces in Sicily allow Dolci and his followers to survive with his projects? One would think, they would have been perceived as threatening their interests. As Roger I. Simon once asked in the title of a contribution to *The Critical Pedagogy Networker*, "but who will let you do it?".