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## **FOREWORD**

CMC Magazine presents, in its 52nd issue, the second part of the Dossier “Latin-American Communicational Thinking – Challenges and Perspectives of the De-westernization of the Global South”, coordinated by the researchers Ana Cristina Suzina (Loughborough University London) and Paola Madrid Sartoretto (Jönköping University). You can find below the editor’s presentation on the articles that comprise the dossier. In addition to the articles of the dossier, the journal brings other articles that discuss the relationship between communication and consumption. In the article “Children, Communication and Consumption: A Comprehensive Study of the YouTube Channel Totoykids”, Dimas A. Künsch and Everaldo Pereira approach this production from the point of view of the technical media that made them possible, the vision of the creators and the social place of the children watching it. In “The Spatial Modelization and the Cultural Memory in the Lavapiés neighborhood in Madrid”, Regiane M. de O. Nakagawa presents an analysis of *corralas*, a type of popular housing present in that neighborhood, based in the concept of non-hereditary cultural memory, proposed by Iuri Lotman. In turn, Fábio Ribeiro takes Portugal as a place of study when exploring the theoretical dimensions that relate with the mobilization of citizens and the potential of some technological platforms of information sharing during catastrophes in “Sharing Information during Catastrophes: International Experiences and the Portuguese Case fogos.pt”.

We wish you all a delightful reading!

# **Dossier Latin American Communicational Thinking: Challenges and Perspectives of the De-Westernization in the Global South**

## **Volume II: Breaking through barriers of knowledge**

Ana Cristina Suzina and Paola Madrid Sartoretto

When we started planning this dossier in May 2020, our optimistic expectation was to receive between 15 to 20 manuscripts. Our thought was that, if we received 20 texts, the call would have been successful. Much to our surprise, by the end of the call for manuscripts, in September, we had received 34 articles. Given the quality of the submissions, we put ourselves in the difficult position of having to pick five texts that would constitute the dossier. Luckily, in a gesture of openness and trust to which we are grateful for, the team of Comunicação, Mídia e Consumo offered us the possibility of publishing the dossier in two volumes of five articles each, allowing us to take better advantage of such reach contributions – and, when we have 34 submissions, we must also consider the work of 68 peer reviewers that offered important inputs not only for the selection of the contributions, but also for the improvement of all those selected.

The interest that the call attracted among colleagues in Latin America and beyond shows the urgency and relevance of naming and making visible the different aspects and fields of Latin American communicational thinking in our times. In addition to the publication, a panel with articles of both volumes was accepted for the conference of the International Communication Association (ICA), which happened online from May 27th to 31st, 2021, taking debates and the collective construction

about Latin American Communicational research and theory to a global arena.

The first volume of the Dossier Latin American Communicational Thinking: challenges and perspectives of the de-westernization in the Global South, launched in March 2021, approached the dynamics of construction, development as well as internal and external recognition of Latin American communication research, theory, and practice. This second volume deals, in different ways, with the notion of borders, whether they are geographic, epistemological, or methodological. The articles pay particular attention to the ways in which Latin American research in media and communication, through a solid and rigorous empirical endeavor, contests and expand existing borders and forges new ones. In this volume, there is a strong engagement with communication practices, with the goal of understanding their social, historical, and phenomenological aspects in order to advance in the conceptualization of communication as a social process.

Therefore, to a certain extent, these texts can be considered unfinished or incomplete and we would like to believe that this is part of what makes them valuable and relevant, because they lead us to question established cognitive processes and engage us in reflections in which we consider what other paths we can trace. To trespass borders means to open oneself to possibilities of other forms of thinking, as advocated by Boaventura de Sousa Santos in his notion of Epistemologies of the South (SOUSA SANTOS, 2002). It also means accepting, even embracing, the risk of creating another science, as suggested in Raúl Fornet-Betancourt's proposition of intercultural philosophy (FORNET-BETANCOURT, 2007). This Cuban author, based in Germany, suggests that interculturality is not restricted to accepting other epistemologies and knowledges as alternatives to the established Western, placing them as merely peripheral to the core of the "treasure" Western rationality. According to Fornet-Betancourt, interculturality means to redefine science based on more diverse parameters and with parity in

the articulation between the variety of knowledges and wisdoms existing in the planet.

In this sense, on one hand, de-westernization has to do with the effort of escaping the ‘butler syndrome’, which, according to Karin Bennett (2014) affects many countries considered peripheral and leads researchers to reproduce foreign methodologies and theories, ignoring or marginalizing local production. On the other hand, as argued by Waisbord and Mellado (2014), de-westernization is not limited to including ‘cases’ in a Western theoretical paradigm and requires reviewing and reinventing the paradigm itself through other experiences and social realities.

Fornet-Betancourt argues for retrieving the memory of ‘cultures harmed in their cognitive dignity’ by a still inconclusive Western colonialism (2007, p. 25). In the academic world, this inconclusion is often manifested by the regional label, which illustrates an asymmetrical dialogue in which the classification of ‘regional’ is ascribed by the dominant voice of another regional knowledge accepted as the universal canon. Recently, one of us proposed a critical debate on the notion of “traveling research” (SUZINA, 2021), as this would justify a scale of values for the restriction of knowledge circulation, according to a supposed ‘international interest’ that only some studies would contemplate.

This reflection relates to the feeling of strangeness that we discussed in our introduction to the first volume of this dossier, when we shared the experience of seeing ourselves identified as representatives of a ‘particular knowledge’ when working as researchers in Europe (SUZINA & SARTORETTO, 2021). It also reflects another kind of strangeness also mobilized then, which reviews the recognition of the Latin American research in media and communication as socially committed or engaged, as if other research endeavors were not. In this sense, breaking barriers of knowledge means to value knowledge for its contribution to the understanding of local, regional and global phenomena, in an exercise of permanent dialogue welcoming a diversity of epistemologies.



The articles in this collection show how cultural matrices as well as professional and scientific practices performed in the Global South are capable of inspiring and redressing theories. They expand and deepen the debate initiated in the first volume in which we intended to de-centralize the dominating Eurocentric and Western perspectives in media and communication studies. These texts invite to reflection and strengthen South-South dialogues, valuing knowledges often discarded in the reproduction of colonialist research dynamics in the Global South, both referring to the practices of researchers (BENNETT, 2014) and editorial and financing policies of science (OLIVEIRA et al, 2020).

In her article, Ana Lúcia Nunes de Sousa visits a field frequently associated with Latin American research, that of popular, alternative and community communication. The author argues about the relevance of Ubu-ntu to rethink and deepen the studies of community communication, from the Global South. Her article builds on the work of Muniz Sodré and Raquel Paiva, including other Western and Latin American authors to present and reflect about the African philosophy of the common, Ubu-ntu, explicating their main characteristics.

Isabela Rega and Andrea Medrado explore the approximation between community communication and media activism. The authors present the Models of Scales of Visibility to map the paths of visibility of media activists in countries of the Global South. The model is discussed through analyses of activists' practices using social media to mitigate and prevent police violence in the community of Maré, in Brazil; and the work of a Kenyan photographer that produces night images of Nairobi to discuss social issues.

Matheus Cestari Cunha and Marli dos Santos reflect about media education through another widely known Latin American reference, Jesús Martín-Barbero's Mediation Theory, considering communication as an essential aspect of media education. The article proposes connections between media education and the mediation theory, foregrounded on the concepts of two theoretical propositions arising from the concept of media literacy and media skills presented by Paolo Celot and José

Manuel Pérez Tornero. The authors argue that mediations are essential to understand media literacy and media skills, overriding surrounding elements.

The last two texts of the dossier prompt us to rethink theories of Journalism and Advertising. Aníbal Orué Pozzo discusses the relationship between social actors in the Latin American journalistic practice. Coming from the consideration of journalism as an expression of modernity, the author revisits the work of Latin American thinkers such as Fausto Reinaga, León Cadogan, Jesús Martín-Barbero, Juan Díaz Bordenave and others to advance an epistemological proposition anchored on journalistic practice and theory developed in the region.

Lastly, Patrícia Saldanha discusses to which extent the empirically developed counter-hegemonic perspective of Latin American Social Advertising can be a fertile ground capable of feeding discussions that contribute to the strengthening of participatory and diverse citizenship. Saldanha sketches out an epistemological map developed in six years of action research and introduces a typification of Social Advertising as affirmative, community, cause, public and transversal interest.

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## Repensar a comunicação comunitária a partir da filosofia africana

## Rethinking community communication based on African philosophy

Ana Lúcia Nunes de Sousa<sup>1</sup>

**Resumo:** *Este trabalho se propõe a estabelecer um diálogo teórico Sul-Sul entre as concepções contemporâneas da noção de comum e de comunicação comunitária. Parte de uma revisão bibliográfica narrativa sobre o tema, enfocando nas contribuições de Muniz Sodré e Raquel Paiva, mas também abordando outros autores ocidentais e latino-americanos. Logo, apresenta e reflexiona sobre a filosofia africana do comum, o Ubu-ntu, explicitando suas principais características. Por fim, argumenta a potência do Ubu-ntu para repensar e aprofundar os estudos de comunicação comunitária, a partir do sul global.*

**Palavras-Chave:** *Comunicação; comum; filosofia; sul global; Ubu-ntu.*

**Abstract:** *This work aims to establish a theoretical south-south dialogue between contemporary conceptions of common and community communication. It starts with a narrative literature review on the theme, focusing on the contributions of Muniz Sodré and Raquel Paiva, but also addressing other western and Latin-American authors. Then, it presents and reflects on the African philosophy of the common, the Ubu-ntu, explaining its main characteristics. Finally, it argues the power of Ubu-ntu to re-think and deepen the studies of community communication, from the global South.*

**Keywords:** *Communication; common; philosophy; south global; Ubu-ntu.*

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## Introduction

In Latin America, there are not only projects of community communication, but also theories about this type of communication. If, on one hand, we have this force of rebellious radio (CUBA, 1959) and Bolivian mining radio, on the other, we also have a theoretical thinking that emerges from these practices. And, as diverse as these practices are, the analytical perspectives end up following this move through the continent.

According to Kaplún (2007), communication ended up being populated by similar names as: alternative, popular, educational, community and citizen. Festa (1986) even pointed, in her research, 32 different denominations. Despite the diversity, we risk synthesizing a few Latin American approaches – without the intention of finishing them, but with the goal of understanding them in general to later go through the main proposition of this text – in three great lines: popular communication, alternative communication and community communication.

Mario Kaplún (1987)'s studies – Argentinian researcher, living in Uruguay – on popular communication influenced, and continue to influence, communication researches and projects in Latin America. In Brazil, the term was popularized by the studies of the Brazilian researchers Regina Festa (1986) and, mainly, Cicília Peruzzo (2009). Alternative communication, in turn, was the approach used by Margarita Graziano – Argentinian sociologist, living in Venezuela – and Máximo Simpson Grinberg – Argentinian journalist, who developed his career in the Autonomous National University in Mexico, whose main work date back to early 1980's. Lastly, community communication, which in the last decade has been object of research and practice of the Brazilian researcher Raquel Paiva and the Argentinian researchers Oscar Magarola and Nelson Cardoso.

Kaplún advocates that, in the popular communication, the communicative model must break with the idea of emitter and receptor to build a “emi-rec”, in other words, a horizontal communicative process, where everyone can be both emitters and receptors. Peruzzo (2009) also puts people as the main character of popular communication. According to

her, popular communication “is a political instrument of subordinate classes” (PERUZZO, 2009, p. 5) to express themselves. Berger (1989) gathered a few common traits found in the research about this theme: 1) expression of a context of fight; 2) critical-emancipatory content; 3) space of democratic expression; 4) people as the main character; 5) instrument of the subordinate classes. In this sense, for the popular communication, the foundation points towards the popular participation and the appropriation of the media in a horizontal manner.

Another concept fairly diffused in the Latin American context, alternative communication, has been a target of debate due to its inconstancy (BAEZA, 2011). Graziano (1980) saw in alternative communication a totalizing strategy, which should be a project of a political lead. To Grinberg (1986), this approach disregarded spontaneous praxis, leaving a series of important initiatives behind. According to him, it is the social use that transforms or not a media in alternative. In other words, “Alternative is all media which, in a context characterized by the existence of privileged sectors (...) implies an option to the dominant discourse” (GRINBERG, 1987, p. 30). This margin chosen as battle to the hegemony is also pointed by Sel (2009) and Peruzzo (2009). Therefore, the discursive battle appears as the central element of the alternative communication.

Community communication, in turn, more than defining itself through discourse, would be centered in its social proposition (PAIVA, 2003), in the commitment with the communities where it is located and in the expansion of rights and duties for the citizen (PERUZZO, 2004). Both Paiva and Peruzzo point, also, to the need of plurality of voices in the construction of messages, in the shared management of media and in the active and horizontal participation of the community, in the contribution to education and culture, etc. Cardoso (2007 and 2000) and Magarola (2005) suggest that the community communication, theoretically, would be linked to Marxism, to reception studies, to the Theology of Liberation and Freirean theories.



What is interesting to know is that, even if many of these projects are developed in ancestral territory of indigenous and African descendent people, theories that dialog with these worldviews aren't usually pointed as sources of these practices. The goal of this article is not to add one more concept to the dispute, but to offer a perspective weren't very explored until then. Among the many concepts we listed, we believe community communication has many elements that enable an analysis of this concept through an African perspective.

Therefore, we propose to think about the community communication through this world view, in other words, we suggest a view that considers the points of view, systems and modes of thinking and living in African roots (NOGUERA, 2011). This perspective, despite of structural racism, crosses the Brazilian culture in a deep manner, transforming African philosophy – specifically the *Ubuntu* theory – in an important epistemological source to think about community manifestations in our society. It is important to mention, as Clifford (2014) suggests, that the community philosophy of Ubuntu (GYEKYE, 2003; MENKITI, 1984; RAMOSE, 2003) is not a rival to the community ideas proposed by other currents. Therefore, we propose a contemporary theoretical dialog, South-South, about concept, coming from the theories of Sodré (2014) and Paiva (2003) – Also approaching other authors – to then land in the meanings of Ubuntu philosophy and to rethink community communication.

### **The fight for the common and communication**

According to Sodré (2014, p. 9), humans are communicating beings “because they relate or organize symbolic mediations (...) according to a common to be shared”. Communication has, thus, in its deeper meaning, the idea of “sharing”, “being a part of something” or “putting in common” (SODRÉ, 2014, p. 10). Paiva (2003, p. 10) also links common to communication, when he deffenda that community is a metaphor for “the construction of a new form of social bond”.

Paiva (2003) is emphatic when he affirms there are many paths to understanding community. We extend this assertive to the notion of

common. Sodr  (2014) points towards the epistemological need of making a distinction between common and community, being the first an ontological disposition and the second a subjectivation, manifested in different forms for each specific community. In “The Science of Common: notes for the communicational method, published in 2014, Sodr  performs a deep epistemological analysis about the common. In this text, we chose not to go further this distinction, but to prioritize points of confluence, linking to Paiva (2003)’s suggestion, which says that, when reflecting about the common, it is important to avoid falling in idealization, transforming it in a lost and unreachable paradise.

When we talk about common – mainly considering the irruption of protests in various parts of the world that demanded it, in 2011 – one takes a political stance. Choosing the “community possibility” (PAIVA, 2003, p. 55) is to assume there is a real possibility of building a world in which the “common” can have a say in the issues that affect them. In this sense, the slogan “we are the 99%”, advocated by the *Occupy* movement, seemed strongly related to the demand of a common to be shared. When we speak about sharing, we are bringing up the idea of solidarity, which is a “strategy of those which, due to living in scarcity or in the border, build a particular knowledge of coexistence and local experience” (PAIVA, 2003, p. 19). Therefore, is fairly comprehensible that the ideas surrounding the common and the need of solidarity appear with more strength in the moments of explosion of cyclical crisis of capital, as it been occurring since 2008.

Hardt and Negri (2011) defend that the common gets instituted as a political project. Laval and Dardot (2015) point towards the idea that the concept, as defined by Hardt and Negri, would be conformed by four dimensions: 1) What nature gives at all times; 2) What is universally generated by social life; 3) What historically results from each time of the capital; and 4) what characterizes contemporary fights. Therefore, the common of Hardt and Negri (2011) is a sufficiently wide concept to cover “air, water, the fruits of the land and all the kindness of nature” (p. 10): “The knowledge, languages, codes, information, affection”; the

biopolitical production, which has in its place a wide network of cooperative producers; and, lastly, all the learning process within the processes of political struggle, such as the “immanence of decision-making within the crowd” (p. 14).

As much as we make an effort to list or simplify the forms of common, we cannot lose sight that “the common is felt before being thought or expressed, therefore, it is something that is directly residing in existence” (SODRÉ, 2014, p. 204) and emerges from “a point of convergence” (SODRÉ, 2014, p. 238), of the bonds established in being together daily. The role of communication in this process, would be, in the sense defended by Sodr  (2014), to organize all of these dimensions of common and the invisible bonds that unite them.

These bonds, points of convergence, visible and invisible ties, engender a relationship between human beings. The community is “the own being in relation” (PAIVA, 2007, p. 19). This concept of community as relation is also proposed by Nancy (2000, p. 17): “The being itself that defines itself as relation, as not absolute and it is desired – at least this is what I intent to say – as community”. To Nancy (2000, p. 26), “community is what has a place always through the other and for the other”. Community lets clear that “there is no singular being without another singular being” (NANCY, 2000, p. 39), what converges with the ideas of Negri (2010, p. 412) to whom there is no possibility of thinking the human being as a lonely body, because it only exists in relation to the other. The meeting between beings, this putting the “being in common”, is, therefore, a political decision. It is, for example, a decision that Tunisians had to take when disobeying the law order and leaving, as a people, to the streets to follow the burial of Mohammed Bouazizi, in 2011, during what became known as “Arab Spring”; or the Egyptians, in 2011, answering to the call of Azma Mahfouz to take to the streets in defense of the country’s democracy. Deciding to make that the meeting between bodies and experiences become possible, that is implemented in the action of “being in common”, that the relation, that the bond, that

the opening for the other exists, this is the decision that is taken each time a popular movement is formed and takes to the streets.

Coming from the analysis of “how the space with the other is founded in the essence of being, being possible to perceive oneself as it is discovered through the eyes of others” (PAIVA, 2003, p. 87) we will perform a small digression as an addition of the text. The fortitude of sharing the space and meeting of perspectives in the construction of common, defended by Paiva, it get clear, for instance, in the gathering of protesters that, even in mask, could recognize themselves after months in the street, during the cycle of protests in 2013 in Rio de Janeiro, or in the applause of teachers to young people dressed in black, the Black Blocks, during the protest of October 15th, 2013, also in Rio de Janeiro. This example is also illustrative to understand how “we do not intend to abstract the interaction of differences in the community regimen (PAIVA, 2003, p. 100). The differences within this shared space are possible because, as affirmed by Nancy (2010) there is no common being, there is being “in” common. What is shared isn’t, therefore, being, but the “exposure of being, the declination of self, the tremor without face of the exposed identity: we share ourselves” (NANCY, 2010, p. 423).

To Esposito, what unites individuals in a community is nothing in common. Therefore, he proposes that “it isn’t the proper, but the improper – or, more drastically, the other – that characterizes the common” (ESPOSITO, 2003, p. 31). The author also explains that the community is not a fusion of individuals that results in a bigger individual, it is not a collective bond that unites individuals that were apart and is not a form of being. The community would be, according to Esposito’s interpretation (2003), the interruption of the closure of subject.

When we talk about closures and openings, we also arrive to Rancière, which has one of the most interesting propositions to thin about the idea of community in contemporary days. Rancière (2010) proposes a community as an opposition, a community that puts at stake a common world within another common world. According to him, “modern

politics was made out of these opening of common worlds that put a community within another one” (RANCIÈRE, 2010, p. 426).

This political community exists in a specific moment. “Each time bodies affirm a capacity and fill a distinctive place of the ones that are normally attributed to them” (RANCIÈRE, 2010, p. 427). Here we can also bring back the example of the Tunisian or Egyptian people mentioned before, once the political community are established precisely when these women and men decide to occupy a different place of the ones designated for them. It is in this action of sharing what was private that is established the common, and creating an opposition is what “breaks the rules of inclusion and the modes of visibility that are ordered to them” (RANCIÈRE, 2010, p. 425). It is precisely in this moment which, unexpectedly, appears politics and, because of that, according to Rancière, the community is strictly political and the politics is community-driven.

Politics appear when those who don't have time, take the necessary time to raise as inhabitants of a common space and to show that their mouth perfectly emits a language that speaks of common things, not only a scream that shows suffering. This distribution and redistribution of places and identities, this sharing of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, the noise of language, constitute what I call “the division of sensitive”. The politics consist in resetting the division of sensitive, in introducing new subjects and objects, in making visible what wasn't, in listening as beings that equipped with language the ones that weren't considered more than noisy animals (RANCIÈRE, 2005, p. 13-14).

Politics is what happens when we establish an opposition, creating this new community, which is political, in which we create new relations, new meanings, new places for the bodies and new forms of identification (RANCIÈRE, 2010). The class conflict is a conflict between to forms of community, the one who wants to makes this new political community visible and the one who wants to stop this process (the police community).

The possibility of rethinking the common and community through politics and politics through common allows us to have a reflection

equipped with revolutionary power – that is deemed necessary – to understand the protest movements that are developed in the contemporary world. The community of the 99% fights to introduce new subjects and objects, so that the population could be considered equipped with words and action, putting their bodies in streets and squares; transforming the barricades in places of repositioning of the common.

This repositioning of the common can be seen up close during the fights developed in the last years of Latin America. Specifically approaching the Bolivian case, Aguillar (2017) affirms that a popular community political horizon was open, whose central knot was the “collective re appropriation of the material wealth available, of the possibility of deciding over it, in other words, its management and use” (p. 36).

The struggle embodied by the Bolivian people in the last two decades was about inverting the power order, “seeking to institute the right to decide in common about the existing material wealth”, in relation to the water, hydrocarbons, land and territory. The logics of common, defended with guns by Bolivians, were focused in the conservation and care of material resources collectively available. They demanded to be treated as beings equipped with words and that the decisions on subjects that affect everyone should be collective.

Through this experience, Aguillar (2017) defends that “the common is what is had or shared collectively by many” (p. 74). Within this community, the women and men that share this common are the ones who establish the rules for use and transmission of rights for the next generation. This production of logic of common can be seen as a “contemporary practical update, founded in old collective knowledge internalized – and reproduced – by the ones that are associated to the goals of the present” (AGUILAR, 2017, p. 73).

This production logic of the common, observed in many countries of Latin America (Abya Ayla), instigates us to propose a glimpse of the common through Afro-centric notions, which strongly inhabit the imagination and social practices in Brazil. In the next section, we will present

some reflections about community through African Philosophy, more specifically coming from the concept of Ubuntu.

### **The Common and Ubuntu**

Analysing the common through an African perspective means to propose a view that considers the points of view, systems and modes of thinking and living in African roots (NOGUERA, 2011). This perspective crosses deeply the Brazilian culture, which justifies, therefore, recurring to the African philosophy to think expressions of common in our society. It is worth mentioning, as suggested by Clifford (2004), that the community philosophy of Ubuntu does not rivalize with the community ideas proposed from other landmarks of thinking, being, even, an object of analysis in the previous section of this text. It is important to locate how the general ideas about the common, approached through Afrocentricity, dialog with the ones defended by the Eurocentric philosophy. However, it is not the coincidence that calls our attention, but the fact that this relation wasn't object of analysis and reflection previously. Ramose (2005, p. 4) argues that thinking an African philosophy "was deemed impossible as experience, once the African population was considered, by nature, incapable of producing any philosophy". Thus, thinking through the African philosophy has a "liberating" dimension for the author, which we also take on this text.

The theoretical source we call for this approximation is the South African black philosophy, coming from the Banto people and developed, in theoretical and written form, from the 1980s, mainly in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Thus, when we refer to this concept, in the text, it is important to have in mind this context of development. However, African philosophers argue that the "communal or community" (GYEKYE, 2003, p. 349) character of the African thinking is clearly expressed and is the line marking these cultures, according to Gyekye (2003).

Ubuntu is the base, the foundation, the source in which this African philosophy is born and developed, according to Gyekye (2003) and Ramose (2005). Thus, to think through the Ubuntu perspective is to

think through African philosophy, basing oneself in the Banto principle “*umunto, ngumuntu nga bantu (motho he motho ka bantho)*”, which, according to Ramose (2003, p. 272) means “being a humane person is to affirm your own humanity through recognizing the humanity in the other, and coming from this base, establish human relationships between themselves”.

*Ubuntu*, explains Ramose (2003) is an ontological and epistemological category of African thinking of the people of the Banto language<sup>2</sup>, which keeps the union and indivisibility. *Ubu* is existence and is always guided towards the development of humanity itself, manifesting itself in particular forms and modes of being. *Ntu* is the point where this existence takes on a concrete and particular form of being, in the process of continuous human development. Thus, *Ubu* is always guided towards *Ntu*. Saying that *Ubu* is always guided towards *Ntu*, in Noguera’s (2011) explanation, indicates that a human being can only be perceived as such when humanizing other human beings. The process of de-humanization, which is in the root of racism, for instance, stops the human being from developing their own humanity, because when they do not recognize the humanity of their equal, a human is converted in a being incapable to recognize themselves.

Another important aspect to understand *Ubuntu*, still linked to the totality and indivisibility of the concept is the tridimensional inter-relation of being. In order to perceive oneself as a being, as *Ubuntu*, it is necessary to be in balance with three aspects of the dimension of life experience: 1) the first, *Umu-ntu*, which enables speech, consequently enables the being’s knowledge; 2) the relation with the *abaphansi*, which are the ones that already left the world of the living, the ones whose material existence was discontinued in a concrete and bodily form, but continues to live, free, in contact and guiding the world of the living. A free translation of *abaphansi*, according to Ramose (2005), would have spread through Africa and its diasporas as “*ancestors*”; 3) the

2 The Banto languages are spoken by over 200 million people, in 22 of the 54 African countries, in the region of Níger-Congo. It had a strong influence in the Portuguese language – or *pretuguês*, to Lélia Gonzalez – spoken in Brazil.



third dimension would be the beings that are yet to be born, the beings of the future, whose task to do would be emerge through the living. The being, in *Ubuntu*, would be, therefore, linked to the ones who exist in a material form in the present, to the ones who came before us and the ones that will come after us, revealing a holistic understanding of existence. Life, being, in all its experiences, is linked to these three dimensions for the African philosophy.

Therefore, for the communities with African roots, this concept is extremely important, being mandatory the care with the *abaphansi* and with the beings of the future. The ancestors have the task of guiding and protecting the family and the community of the living. In the world view through *Ubuntu*, the leader of the community, along with the elders, needs to cultivate a strong relationship with their *abaphansi* or ancestors.

For the thinking based in *Ubuntu*, the human person is a being that is necessarily community-driven, inserted in a complex context of interdependent relationships (GYEKYE, 2002; MENKITI, 1984), beginning through the tridimensional understanding of being, but not stopping there. The being is never seen as an isolated individual, but rather immersed in a thread of community relations that partially define them. This “partially” is extremely important. To Gyekye (2003), the community has a big role in *Ubuntu*, since it is through the relationships within that the human being finds themselves, perceives themselves, complete themselves. All of this philosophy is centered in human character, understanding that rationality and morality would be acquired by the being through community living (CLIFFORD, 2004). Therefore, this “community me” is not handcuffed and locked inside a community structure. It is meaningful to call attention to the fact that through a “Afro perspectivist” view, the community does not define a person’s personality, even if it is the key for it do emerge and also its source of power.

The community can be interpreted as a “group of people linked through interpersonal bonds, biological or not, that are considered as members of a group and have interests, objectives and values in common” (GYEKYE, 2003, p. 351). The bond of the human being with the

community is present when and while there is common interests and values to be shared. The bond, reminds Sodré (2014), is “of symbolic nature, of energy or strength” (p. 301).

Another Ubuntu principle that may be linked to the logics of common is sharing, expressed in the proverbs “*Gikuyu, Kiunuhu gitruagwo*” and “*Feta kgomo o tshware motho*”. The first one warns that greed does not feed, the second one affirms that in case of having to choose between human life preservation and wealth possessions, it is imperative to choose the first option. Generosity is fundamental in this lifestyle, and here, as suggested by Noguera (2011), it isn’t about charity, but the idea that personal achievement necessarily goes through the achievement of other human beings. Thus, “it means to work collectively and making the result of this efforts a wide field for circulation and enjoyment of all people” (NOGUERA, 2011, p. 149). More than that, as explained by Noguera (2011), *Ubuntu* is a proposition of re-existence in a collective manner, in which experiences are exchanged and relationships are based in mutual support and constant learning with other human beings.

As philosophy and ethics (RAMOSE, 2003), *Ubuntu* can be seen as a universal value, in any place or time in which there is humanity of human beings, and, by extension, their equality in this human condition. When proposing this view, we think it is essential to overcome the epistemological racism and value African philosophy beyond the exoticism, adopting that their principles are not applicable only to the African continent, the diaspora or small groups. Therefore, Clifford (2004, p. 242) proposes three primary forms or three contributions of the *Ubuntu* philosophy for the theories about common:

1. it keeps the focus of community-driven people in a strong form in the human being;
2. prevents the differentiation between communitarianism and collectivism;
3. it makes unavoidable the moral dimension of communitarianism.

When affirming that Ubuntu contributes in this three forms to communitarianism, Clifford (2004) mainly calls attention on how, when approaching the common through this theoretical landmark, is possible to keep focused in the idea of the human. That allows that, once surpassed the sociological discussion, one can think in a more basic sense of where we share the common: humanity. Considering that all people are human will allow the world to see itself as a big community that shares that common character.

### **Community Communication and Ubuntu**

We believe that *Ubuntu*, as a concept originated from African Philosophy, mainly with Banto origins, whose assumptions are centered in the community can, potentially, contribute with original reflections on how the community communication performed in contexts like Brazil, strongly influenced by cultures and lifestyles of African roots. We trace below some parallels between community communication and *Ubuntu*.

According to Ubuntu, we consider that each person holds knowledge, so, therefore, everyone can contribute in a valuable manner for the community in its entirety (CLIFFORD, 2004). The recognition of the other and their value within the community (RAMOSE, 2003) is the base for the establishment of community relations. This assertive corroborates with the basic idea of community communication, which sees horizontality of the community communication (KAPLÚN, 2007) as an imperious need.

*Ubuntu* also defends that people are capable of articulating their own needs and the possible solutions for their problems, which is in perfect consonance with the ideas of Paiva (2003) and Peruzzo (2004, 2009), when we mention community control, shared management, and active and horizontal participation as unavoidable characteristics of community communication.

Another connection we found between these two perspective is pointed out by Clifford (2004), who defends that narrating from a *Ubuntu* view allows criticism, resistance and deeply contributes to the

communicative ethics, which also is in agreement with the principles that defend a critical position facing the dominant discourses and positions as a necessary battle to community and alternative communication (GRINBERG, 1987; SEL, 2009).

In addition to these parallels we mentioned, there is a dimension of *Ubuntu* which we still haven't found in the studies of community communication, but we believe is a new aspect that can help re-think community communication in contexts like the global south: the tridimensional relation of being (RAMOSE, 2005).

This relationship argues that the being is linked to a *Umu-ntu*, which enables speech and knowledge of self. This first aspect lead us to reflect on how the need of building our own voices is what takes us to community communication and how, many times, the projects of community communication make the community power emerge, "the knowledge of self". The second and third aspect of this tridimensional relationship, in this hypothesis, lead us to think about the need of, in community communication, re-link ourselves, in contemporary days, with "the ones who came before us and the ones will come after us". What we intend here is to think on how community communication could benefit with the link between members of community communication of yesterday – for instance, the ones who initiated community radio and TV in the 1980s – with the new members, that are developed, mainly in social network and media on the Internet, always thinking of making community communication a democratic and horizontal path for the communities of tomorrow.

In addition, this idea of continuity of the existence so shared among the Afro-diasporic community, which had its origin in the tridimensional relationship of being, could, certainly, collaborate in the maintenance of the projects of community communication, because thinking in communicative practice through this continuum of being enables a holistic understanding of existence, not only individual, but collective.

In this section, I intended to point some converging elements between Latin American approaches and the concept of *Ubuntu*, in addition to

another possible connection to think about community communication through the idea of the three-dimensional relationship of being, also present in *Ubuntu*. It is an approximation that still deserves more depth, but we can perceive, through these elements, how African philosophy can be a powerful support to re-think and deepen the studies of community communication, through a South-South dialog.

## Final Considerations

The goal of this work was to propose another form of reflecting about the common, a form that, in our point of view, surpasses all relations and social practices of the spaces that were built through the myth of modernity, this based in the transatlantic traffic of people coming from the continent called Africa<sup>3</sup>. In addition, the Afro perspective, based in African philosophy is a tool for understanding the world wide and deep enough so that it can be applied beyond the contexts that were affected by the transatlantic traffic in a direct manner. We defend, thus, the universal aspect of African philosophy. This defense, as affirmed by Ramose (2005) is a shout of resistance and freedom, because it comes from an anti-racist premise and affirms that the people with African origin are beings capable of producing Philosophy and Science.

The African philosophy is still fairly unknown and marginalized in the Academic contexts and it was with great surprise that we faced their presuppositions and perceived how suiting was to think community communication through *Ubuntu*. The difficulty in finding texts of African philosophers and the ones who follow the Afro perspective is still challenging, in a way that is necessary to recognize that this work is still a first approximation to the concept and it needs to be further analyzed in the next years. However, it is important to locate that the ideas presented here, are, mostly, coming from primary sources of African philosophy.

What the theory of common in *Ubuntu* brings us is a way of interpret the human-centered common, since *Ubuntu* is the humanity of

3 Ramose (2005) raises the discussion that the name Africa as imposed by the “conquistadors” and that, therefore, should be used as a form of protest.

being itself, that is only perceived through the other; and here is not an other as someone to be avoided and/or feared, but as an other that enables that humanity be a common aspect to be shared with everyone. The holistic approach of interpreting African philosophy makes that it can see the individual in an isolated manner, but connected to a fairly complex thread, which goes through ancestry and by beings that are not still materially on Earth; by solidarity, generosity and the well-being of all community. Aspects that are the base of community communication, and, because of that, the theoretical gathering between these perspectives seem auspicious to us.

To wrap up, we can propose a thought on community communication through African philosophy, through *Ubuntu*. An Afro perspectivist community communication could be strongly linked to community bonds; more centered in the human and less dependent of technological apparatuses; narrated, decided and managed by the subjects themselves, with voice and agency, in a horizontal form, shared and democratic, inter-generational, respecting the elders and taking care of spaces, nature and the process for young people and the ones who will come next; and integrating among all people of the community.

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## **Modelo de Escalas da Visibilidade: Mapeando Percursos de Visibilidade e suas Consequências para Mdiativistas do Sul Global**

### **The Stepping into Visibility Model: Mapping out Visibility Journeys and their Consequences for Mediactivists from the Global South**

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**Resumo:** Neste artigo, desenvolvemos o Modelo de Escalas da Visibilidade para mapear os percursos de visibilidade de mdiativistas em países do Sul Global. Desenvolvido com base em observações digitais etnográficas e entrevistas em profundidade, o modelo é aplicado em dois estudos de caso: a) ativistas de uma favela brasileira que utilizam as mídias sociais como proteção contra a violência policial (Maré Vive) e b) um fotógrafo Queniano que produz imagens noturnas de Nairobi para discutir temáticas sociais (Msingi Sasis). O estudo oferece uma discussão teórica acerca do mdiativismo e analisa as múltiplas facetas do conceito de “visibilidade”. Espera-se oferecer uma contribuição à maneira como ativistas de comunidades marginalizadas podem se fortalecer quando se deparam com uma visibilidade negativa não intencional.

**Palavras-chave:** Modelo de Escala da Visibilidade; Mdiativismo; Sul Global; Favela.

**Abstract:** In this article, we develop the Stepping into Visibility Model, mapping out the visibility journeys of mdiactivists from Global South countries. Drawing from digital ethnographic observations and in-depth interviews, we apply the model to two case studies: a) activists in a Brazilian favela and their

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*use of social media for protection against police violence (Maré Vibe) and b) a Kenyan photographer who produces images of Nairobi at night to discuss social anxiety themes (Msingi Sasis). The study provides a theoretical discussion on mediactivism and analyses the multiple facets entailed in the concept of “visibility. We hope to offer a contribution to activists from marginalised communities by helping them become stronger when stepping into negative unintended visibility.*

**Keywords:** *Stepping into Visibility Model; Mediactivism; Global South; Favela*

## Introduction

The term “global south” has a wide and flexible definition, it is not literally linked to the geographical location of South, but rather, to a geography of injustice and oppression. Quoting Boaventura Sousa Santos (2014), the population of the Global South are largely diverse human beings united by the idea that the understanding of the world overcomes, by far, the western understanding of the world. Working on personal and historic narratives centered in the border between the United States and Mexico, Gloria Anzaldúa approaches the geography of “being between places” and the importance of writing from the *margins* for the construction of new decolonial epistemologies. Here, what especially interests us is an articulation of coalition politics between “third world writers” (MORAGA and ANDALZUA, 1983), using the designation that was common at the time and is not used anymore. Such coalition is important because it carries a strong position against the exclusion of otherness of privileged places of construction of modernity. Therefore, it is for this *other* excluded and marginalized that we dedicate our attention in this article. In this sense, Leonardo Custódio (2016) offers us an interesting background when analyzing peripheral political actions realized through communication in different parts of the world. Writing about the Global South is elaborating on the concept of peripheral area, defined in a wide form. According to Custódio, peripheral areas must be understood:

Not only as heterogeneous urban spaces that historically suffer with the precariousness of public services, with the predominant condition of underemployment and violence, especially in unequal societies like the Brazilian, but also as a metaphor for the situation of exclusion and/or discrimination of marginalized groups of legitimate places of speech (for instance: media channels) and power spheres, including in countries commonly treated as developed (2016, p. 139).

Offering a global panorama, Custódio talks about the use of community communication as an instrument of a) fight against the impacts of

social inequality and distance between workers and poor populations and the spheres of power in Latin America (2016 p. 144); b) valorization of local content alternative to media corporations in North America (2016, p. 146); c) expansion of political, cultural and ethnic representation in Europe (2016, 147); d) promotion of development with transmission in local languages in Africa (2016, p. 150); e) work in rural villages and urban slums for the promotion of dialog and information in Asia (2016, p. 152); f) valorization of culture, diversity and legacy of aboriginal people in Oceania (2016, p. 153). Such perspectives are useful because they illustrate the variety and complexity of uses of communication for the search of a less unequal world in different parts of the world.

In this article, we highlight mediativist communicational practices of two countries located in the Global South, respectively, in the Latin American and African continents: Brazil and Kenya. In the next sections, we will bring theoretical discussions on visibility and mediativism, putting the second concept in contrast with other communicational practices coming from the “margins” such as community communication. One of our contributions is the creation of a South-South connection, recognizing that such connections bring significant challenges, given the colonial legacy of fragmented relations among the people in the Global South. Many authors have pointed towards the urgent need of rewriting, re-teaching and re-learning the stories of indigenous and African people for Brazilians that are direct descendants of these people. For centuries, these stories were “concealed, camouflaged, distorted or mutilated”, either by the force of circumstances, ignorance or interest” (KI-ZERBO, 2010). These practices resulted from the activities of the XXX network, financed by XXX<sup>3</sup>. The goal of the network was to gather academics, professionals and members of the civil society to exchange knowledge on how mediativism can fight marginalization in different contexts of the Global South.

3 The name of the network and the sponsor are hidden to preserve the anonymity of the authorship of the article.

Brazil and Kenya were chosen because, when we analyze their mediativist practices, we perceive that the reach of visibility in the social media, something desired by activists, would generate critical moments in both contexts. That would include attacks, hate speech and destruction of reputation, which could become even physical attacks. In both countries, these moments needed to be surpassed so that mediativists could keep using their pages and profiles in social media for socially progressive causes. Therefore, with the goal of supplying to activists a tool for mutual protection against the negative consequences of visibility, we developed a model titled “Model of Scale of Visibility”.

We applied the model to two case studies: 1) A mediativist initiative (Maré Vive), created by residents of a favela in Rio (Maré), which uses social media to report human rights violations and police violence; and 2) a Kenyan photographer (Msingi Sasis), which produces images from Nairóbi at night to create a reflection on social inequality. When presenting the model, derived from the knowledge exchange between Brazilians and Kenyans, the goal is to offer mediativists with reflections on the need of planning their journeys of visibility. That can be relevant when the mediativists face negative and unintentional media visibility. When sharing these experiences between Brazil and Kenya, the article brings a contribution from and to the South-South dialog, opening new paths for an activist research and a mediativism informed by research.

### **The multiple faces of visibility**

In their fight against injustice, social movement need that these same injustices get seen. In contrast, the invisibility creates exclusion and marginalization (BRIGHENTI, 2010; ULDAM, 2017). New technologies, in particular social media, emerge in this scenario as important tools to promote visibility with goals of empowerment. Among some of the advantages are the convenience of access and the capacity of not depending of mass media, exposing arbitrariness of governments or enabling marginalized groups to narrate their stories in their own terms.

However, visibility is a two-way street because it can also work as a form of control. The visibility that Internet technologies give to actors of the alternative, civil society, can easily become surveillance. Private corporations and governments can use such technologies to monitor, censor and contain dissenting voices. According to many authors (DE BACKER, 2018; ULDAM, 2017), the metaphor of the model of panopticon prison of Michel Foucault (1977) gives us a starting point for the discussion on surveillance and control. Andrea Brighenti calls attention to the asymmetric nature of visibility. He affirms that, in an ideal natural context, “the rule is that if I can see you, you can see me”, but things are not as simple. The relation of visibility is often asymmetrical, and the concept of intervisibility, of reciprocity of vision, is always imperfect and limited (2007, p. 326). The efficiency of the panopticon depends on the invisibility of the watchman. At the same time, the role of invisibility is not simply accentuating the power of authorities that monitor, but making the panopticon efficient through uncertainty. Recurring to the technology of invisibility with the panopticon, the spectacle of surveillance (the tower) can be performed. In addition, surveillance does not have any value, alone, in stimulating discipline. It is necessary to also have a threat (and, presumably, in a certain point, the implementation) of punishment. That means that surveillance needs to be supported by power. According to Brighenti, we are facing “regimens of visibility”, which are highly dependent of social contexts and dispositions, complex techniques and policies, which makes visibility a deeply ambiguous phenomenon (2010, p. 3).

For activists in the border of society, visibility in social media is mostly reached in periods of large-scale protests. As Anthony McCosker points out, literature has extensively examined the role of social media in the proliferation of marginalized voices, generating possibilities for the civic participation in different contexts, such as in Egypt, Hong Kong and Spain (2015, p. 1). Here, we choose to emphasize the steps mediativists take in what we call their paths of visibility. Instead of analyzing visibility and social media in a certain large-scale event, we adopt the perspectives

of mediativists in Brazil and in Kenya and we try to follow their paths of visibility, reflecting on the implications that this reach of visibility (or, on the contrary, invisibility) can have for them. Even when activists are aware of the problems caused by surveillance dynamics, many see themselves forced to take risks in exchange of the reach and capacity of mobilization enabled by social media exposure. For example, Lina Dencik et al. noted that “the dependence of dominant social media to execute activist agendas mined the efforts to avoid or resist surveillance practices in an intense manner” (2016, p. 6).

A considerable number of studies focuses on mediativism(s) under a perspective of the Global North, approaching experiences of countries like Denmark (ASKANIUS; ULDAM, 2011), Germany and United Kingdom (DENCİK et al, 2016), among many others. In turn, this study offers a contribution to the growing literature about social activism in the Global South (MILAN; TRERÉ, 2019). In fact, the discussion of potential dangers that involve the conquest of visibility in social media took us to consider specific social and political contexts of Brazil and Kenya, both countries located in the Global South.

Despite the significant differences in terms of public policies of surveillance and security in Brazil and in Kenya, the oppressive character of these policies have similar consequences in people’s daily lives. Being investigated both contexts, Chloé Villalobos shows that they “have roots in the sense of inevitability, practicing a strict policing of poor, informal areas inhabited by the working class as the only solution for their respective security issues” (2019, p. 41). In addition media representations characterized by binary oppositions of – “formal city” versus “informal city”, the “good citizen” versus the “criminal”, and the “State” versus the “enemy” – marginalize poverty and normalize daily assassinations (ibid).

These issues bring out additional challenges to the way mediativists of the Global South deal with the social media visibility. Christina Neumayer and Jakob Svensson (2016, p. 138) offer the outlines of the types of activism throughout two axis. The first turns around how participants

identify in relation to “other” actors and social institutions, such as: media organizations, government authorities and the police, and if this “other” is conceived as an “enemy” (antagonism) or “adversary” (agonism). The second axis is about the state of readiness of the activists to act with civil disobedience, in a general manner, and in violent actions or with damages to property, in particular (NEUMAYER, SVENSSON, 2016, p. 123). In our cases, we suggest that the mediativism of the Global South (especially the mediativism of favela) is not so guided by the way these people see “other” social actors. Before directioning their view to these “other” values, favelas already automatically suffer a process of “otherness”. They are treated as others because the societal forces see them as enemies of the city that need to be excluded and even eliminated. That inversion of order may seem subtle, but it is important. It implies a dynamic in which favela activism is shaped precisely as a response to the treatment given to these communities, considering them as enemies, denying them citizenship. Certainly, we are aware that mediativists in other countries are considered enemies, as it happens in Brazil and in Kenya. However, under the perspective of the Global South, the fact that a person was born in a favela or shantytown community is reason enough to put this person in a situation at a margin of society, without having, necessarily, being engaged in counter-hegemonic actions.

### **Contextualizing and Defining Plural Mediativisms**

Multiple forms of media contestation have been named in different forms such as alternative media, popular and community communication and, more recently, mediativism. It is not this study’s focus to delve into a deep discussion about the distinction of each term. However, it is important to highlight that the different terms appeared in specific contexts and “were employed to describe historically localized practices” (MAZETTI, 2018, p. 79). To quote some examples, the years of military dictatorship in Brazil propelled the existence of an “alternative communication marked by resistance and report”. In turn, the Brazilian process of political reopening blossomed a “series of initiatives of popular



communication, supported in social movements that were originated from sectors of the Catholic Church, unions and other associations” (MAZETTI, 2018, p. 82). Here, Festa (1986, in MAZETTI, 2018, *Ibid*) suggests a differentiation between alternative communication and popular communication through a class bias. The first would be original from the medium level of civil society, while the second would come from social basis. However, even if alternative community would have given space for popular communication after the process of redemocratization of the country in late 1980s, both terms continued to be widely used by academics and communicators (MAZETTI, 2018, p. 85).

Mediativism has been associated to the growth in the number of Internet users in the late 1990s, when “new democratic issues and hopes begin to be articulated within counter-hegemonic critics”. That happened as a consequence of some characteristics of digital technologies that favored communicational mobilizations. Among them, we can cite:

“1) the reduction of leadership issues; 2) the reduction of costs of diffusion; 3) the insertion of communication models ‘many-for-many’ (in contrast to a model ‘one-for-many’ of mainstream media); and 4) the facilitation of collaborative production and the expansion of participation spaces” (MAZETTI, 2018, p. 86).

Nowadays, some of these propositions of Internet as a catalyst of transformation seem romanticized and even naive facing the concentration of property of Tech corporations such as Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft (GAFAM). Still, with their counter-hegemonic character and goals, mediativism keeps operating in the gaps of the corporate hegemonic spaces (ULDAM, 2017). With that, mediativists find obstacles when trying to challenge algorithmic logics, which do not favor their social propositions (instead of profit), and have their digital traces collected and used for persecution and surveillance, as we will show later.

Even operating in these contradictory and complex territories, in the Brazilian context, as highlighted by Cicilia Peruzzo, mediativism has roots in popular movements and in progressive social organizations. The

author adds that the action of these mediativist movements are usually wide, “not setting only in virtual and/or digital (network) profiles in “social media websites” such as Facebook, Twitter, etc.” To cite them integrally:

“Their presence is also constituted by media (channels), in other words, websites, blogs, collaborative platforms like Wiki, YouTube and/or Vimeo channels, networks formed within apps (WhatsApp, Instagram, etc.), the creation and use of free softwares and alternative apps, and many other types of instruments of communication, data transmission, articulation, mobilization, report and ask for support, such as: petitions, consultation platforms, streaming platforms, forums, polling, campaigns, search engines (hashtags), games and representative, emotional or satiric symbols (comics, memes, etc.) that go viral on the Internet” (2018, p. 52).

Having offered a historic context, it becomes necessary to answer to this question: What is mediativism, exactly? Antônio Braighi and Marco Câmara affirm that mediativism represents more than a fusion between the words “media” and “activism”. Mediativism configures a symbiosis as “mediation without activism is a simple media register” and “direct action without medium artifact is pure activism”. Therefore, it is in the intercession of both fronts, and in the manifestation of the most simultaneous form possible that mediativism comes to be (2018, p. 33). With inspiration in Tim Jordam’s work (2002), the authors explain how to dismember the “almost-binomium” media-activism. Activism refers to:

“The set of investments with aim of altering the established social reality. These are undertaken by subjects that, together, sharing feelings about a certain public context, pull efforts in a common goal. Having the solidary logic as reference, they aim to alter the usual forms on how their lives are lived (BRAIGHI and CÂMARA, 2018, p. 33).

The media element results from the reciprocal influence of technology and their manipulation by the subject agent of and in activism. He comes from the recognition that actives are engages in multiple mediations sustained by media devices that do not verticalize their way of acting, but help conform specific and strategic forms of making activism

(BRAIGHI and CÂMARA, 2018, p. 35). Therefore, mediativism configures a sum between activist perspectives and the classic process of mediation. However, citing once again Braighi and Câmara, “being mediativist isn’t only carrying a media”. We need to be aware of the uses and purposes. In other words, more than a syntactic neologism, mediativism forms an almost-binomium and generates a hybrid that must be equated and balance, combining functions of information and mediation to alter reality. In other words, mediativism “is what makes of it, since we do not lose sight of the purpose of social change, the effective involvement and that we keep solidary transgression” as goal (BRAIGHI and CÂMARA, 2018, p. 39). In the next section, we will discuss the methodologic approaches used, with the incorporation of two case studies of mediativist initiatives in Brazil and Kenya.

## Methodology

According to Helen Simons, the approach of the case study represents “an in-depth investigation of a specific project, policy, institution, program or system of real life, with the goal of capturing their complexities and singularities” (2009, p. 21). In particular, the case studies presented in this article are of an interpretative field, according to Sharam Merriam’s (1998) classification, because they are used to inductively develop a Model of Scales of Visibility, mapping how visibility affects groups of mediativists.

With Facebook page, Instagram and Twitter profiles, the Maré Vive project (<https://www.facebook.com/Marevive/>; @Marevive) was created to cover the entrance of the Armed Forces at Favela Maré, in Rio de Janeiro, on April 5th, 2014. Today, in the moment we are writing this article, the page already has over 160 thousand likes. In every social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), “Maré Vive” is described as “a channel of community media made collaboratively. Our news are developed through the collaboration of residents, the channel is made by all of us here at Maré”. In addition, the following description can be found in the “history” tab on the Facebook page.

We keep our news constantly updated, while information and reports arrive, that way we reduce the risks of making mistakes or publishing any wrong data. Your contribution is essential so that we can bring news in a quick and reliable manner. Our policy is to keep the people who collaborate with the page anonymous. [...] We do not have any anti-army, anti-police or any other stance in the moment we report a fact. Our stance is always in favor of the residents, that is our side and we do not have any problems in saying that. We are together, Favela! #Marévive (MARÉ; VIVE, 2018, online, in MEDRADO et al, 2018, p. 288).

Msingi Sasis is a Kenyan photographer who opened a company or cultural production and enterprises called Nairobi Noir, working with different forms of expression, from writing (poems and short stories) to visual arts (video and photography) to sound (music and field records of the streets of Nairobi). The “noir” (the color black, in French) perspective, of Msingi Sasis, is revealed in black and white pictures of Nairobi at night, allowing him to capture and document social issues in the Kenyan capital, such as corruption, prostitution, social anxiety, homeless people and poverty. When explaining the purpose of the mediactivist project, Sassis affirms that:

Nairobi Noir originates from a very concealed social criticism, gearing towards issues that are often neglected. [...] when you look towards the dark side of a city, you can tackle many social issues in a way people do not find too offensive, excessive or obvious. It doesn't look like a traditional protest. [...] You can approach all of these issues in an indirect way (interview with Msingi Sasis, 08/26/2018)

In both cases, we evidently perceive a mediactivism made with the purpose of revealing painful aspects of marginalized realities, aiming social change. In Sasis' case, we have a mediactivism in close dialog with art and creative experimentation (PASQUINELLI, 2002). In turn, in the case of “Maré Vive”, we have an initiative that seeks collective positioning guided by the philosophy “us by us”, characterized by the principle that favela residents must be in charge of telling their own stories (MEDRADO et al., 2018).

As we said before, Brazil and Kenya share a few important similarities. Rio de Janeiro and Nairobi are two global cities marked by their deep inequalities and social conflicts. Their urban environments reveal State policies that tend to discriminate economically vulnerable populations through their offer of precarious transportation systems, deficient access to health and education and public security policies that frequently disrespect their rights. Extrajudicial executions are common in informal settlements in Nairobi and in favelas in Rio, where the “war on drugs”, among other arguments, works to justify the adoption of the logic “shoot first, ask later”. In consonance with this discourse, “those who are considered ‘criminals’ can and must die”. Inherent to these policies is a project in which the political and economical elite tries to “clean up” the urban landscape of what does not fit in the modern neoliberal model (VILLALOBOS, 2019).

Regarding the data collection for both cases, it consisted in:

- a. Digital ethnographic observations of mediactivist initiatives of Favelas in Brazil, especially the profile of “Maré Vive” on Facebook (@marevive), between January and December, 2017.
- b. Digital ethnographic observations in the Facebook and Instagram profiles of Nairobi Noir (@nairobi noir) between September and January, 2018 (after our researchers traveled to Nairobi).
- c. Nine in-depth interviews with Kenyan mediactivists, during the event “In/visible Margins” promoted in the city by the XXX Network, from August 20th to 25th, 2018 and eight in-depth interviews with Brazilian Favela mediactivists, conducted between May 14th and 16th, 2018.
- d. Notes of the field work produced by the authors, during the events produced by the XXX Network, in Niterói-Brazil (May, 2018) and in Nairobi, Kenya (August, 2018).

In terms of ethical procedures, the approval for the conduction of this research was conceived by the Ethics Committee of the XXX University

and XXX University<sup>4</sup> (through the approval of the proposition by Plataforma Brasil). For safety reasons, the real names of the mediactivists involved in the “Maré Vive” initiative were not revealed, because they constantly deal with sensitive issues, such as police violence. Msingi Sasis gave us permission to use his real name, since his story was published in different media in Kenya and in other countries.

Having presented a contextualization of our case studies – “Maré Vive”, in Brazil, and Nairobi Noir, in Kenya – we hope to offer a contribution in the Global South for studies that analyze the efforts of counter-surveillance of mediactivists to mitigate risks and to self-protect. According to some authors, these efforts can be treated as *sousveillance* (MANN, 2004), in a wordplay in which the prefix “sur” of the word surveillance is replaced by “sous”, which, in French, means “under”, to describe “the surveillance that comes from below”.

However, the issue is that, many times, these efforts tend to focus on a techno-legal solutionism, with the implication that they “end up being circumscribed in a specialized discourse between experts” (DENCICK et al. 2016, p. 5). Therefore, it is relevant for us to understand to what extent activists committed with social justice issues engage in surveillance agendas. In this article, we follow this line of thought, analyzing how mediactivists in Brazil and in Kenya experience surveillance and how they manage their visibilities.

## **The Model of Scales of Visibility applied to “Maré Vive”**

### **a) Context:**

In March 30th, 2014, the government installed Federal troops at Complexo da Maré, a group of sixteen favelas located in the Northern Area of Rio de Janeiro. Composed by 2,700 military officials, shielded tanks and jeeps with machine guns, the occupation was estimated to last until July 31st, 2014, soon after FIFA’s World Cup. It was in this tense environment that a group of mediactivist young people decided

4 Names of universities were hidden to guarantee the anonymity for the blind review.

to create a Facebook profile called “Maré Vive” ([www.facebook.com/marevive/](http://www.facebook.com/marevive/); @Marevive). The goal was to cover and monitor the military occupation, under the perspective of favela residents.

### **b) Growth of Visibility:**

Based on our research, we perceive that the “growth of visibility” comes about when mediactivist initiatives are in emerging stages. They adopt strategies to share their message and call attention to their causes and fights. In the case of “Maré Vive”, that happened when mediactivists decided to establish a tool of counter-surveillance (DENCİK et al., 2016) or “sousveillance”, the surveillance that comes from below (MANN, 2004) in order to protect the residents. Therefore, they began to dedicate themselves to document the abuse of authority, recording, taking pictures or receiving videos and photos made by followers. However, the activists chose to describe the initiative not as a counter-surveillance of the military occupation, but rather as a philosophy “us for us”, manifested when favela residents become narrators or their own stories.

### **c) Reach of Visibility:**

In this stage, mediactivists are getting success in the diffusion of their message, both for members of their circle and for a wider audience. In groups that present a significant online activity, this moment can correspond to the reach of high engagement metrics in social media, for instance. In the case of “Maré Vive”, soon after the creation of the profile, an avalanche of complaints against abuse of authority were shared on social media, followed by the hashtags #oqueamarétem, #dedentrodamaré and #marévive. The profile then got 50 thousand followers and likes in three months. Managed by three mediactivists that remained constantly online updating information, the page began to regularly publish posts about different topics, such as: local events, job opportunities, motivational messages and images that referred to the collective memory of the favela. As a profile picture, the page showed a photo of Dona Orosina, one of the first residents of the favela. The page began

to attract the attention of residents of Favela da Maré, from other favelas and areas of Rio de Janeiro through regular and immediate updates of police operations conducted in the favela.

Image 1 – Post published at 5:17 in November 21st, 2017.



Source: Reproduction – Screen capture.

### a) Critical moment:

Here, the growing degree of visibility has the probability of leading to a critical moment. Often, this moment is unpredictable. It is also influenced by the marginalization and “otherization” of activists in society. Therefore, activist groups that reach peaks of visibility inevitably put themselves into a vulnerable position, becoming victims of serious attacks and repression by the authorities. To “Maré Vive”, this page rapidly became a fairly visible resource for daily survival. However, this visibility came at a high cost. In 2015, one year after the creation of the profile, the mediativists were shocked to discover a fake version of their Facebook page. The fake profile began to publish pictures of supposed drug dealers, who put the life of the managers of the profile at risk, because they began to receive death threats by the police and by the drug



dealers. The activists believe that such hostility can be a result of the quick visibility that “Maré Vive” had reached.

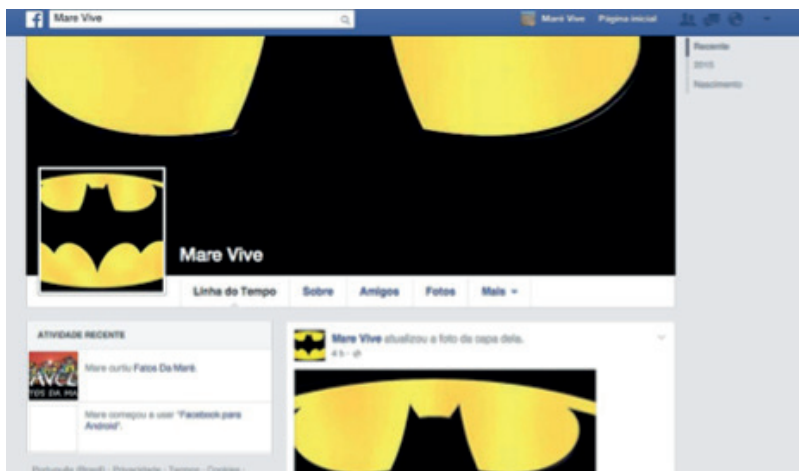
**b) Management of the Critical Moment:**

With this model, we suggest that the way the activists deal with the critical moment is essential to determine the lifespan, and, in the last resort, the destiny of these initiatives, as well as the reach of the fourth stage of visibility. In order to manage their critical moment, “Maré Vive” activists decided to get in touch with reporters of TV Record. Therefore, they got to challenge the silence structures (LOKOT, 2018, p. 342) of the mainstream media in relation to favela residents and their lives in these communities. The strategy was successful: TV Record had broadcast a report about the fake page on *Balanço Geral*. The report helped clarify the confusion, showing that the real profile of “Maré Vive” had the goal of publishing local news, in the favela perspective, not reporting the identity of criminals.

**c) Overcoming the Critical Moment:**

If the strategies put into practice for the management of the critical moment were successful, the mediativist group is capable to overcome the crisis and work in favor of their long-term goals. These could include, for instance, the desire to grow and reach a wider circle, or, in an opposite manner, the decision to remain hidden to the public eye. To “Maré Vive”, after the news were broadcast at *Balanço Geral*, the fake page disappeared from Facebook. A fake profile added one of the managers of “Maré Vive” on Facebook and sent an apology via inbox message.

Image 2 – “Maré Vive”’s fake page, with references to the comic superhero Batman, which also represents a symbol for Rio de Janeiro’s militia.



Source: Reproduction – Screen capture.

#### d) Retraction by the Critical Moment:

The critical moment of visibility can hit a group or a collective harshly, to the point of eliminating the mediativist ecosystem, or, what is even more tragic, result in violence and death. Miller (1999), for example, notices that some groups can become victims of their own success, without getting to deal with the quick expansion that comes with visibility. As a consequence of tensions in the organization of the initiative, they could fragment themselves or even deactivate the initiative. That did not happen with “Maré Vive”, but it can happen in other cases.

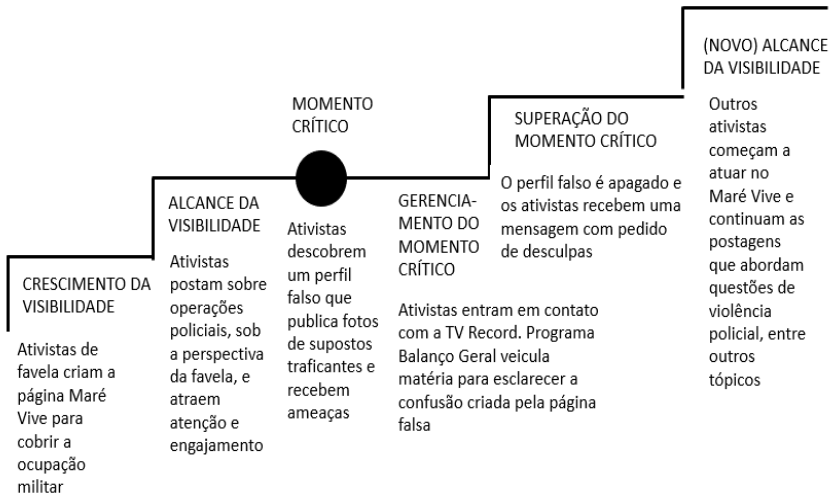
#### e) (New) Reach of Visibility:

The “Maré Vive” profile has now 6 years of activity, having attracted over 164 thousand followers<sup>5</sup>. Time has brought maturity and a better internal organization, and the activists decided to have a rotational team publishing posts and interactions with the residents. This is a way of ensuring that the people behind the page remain anonymous, and that new groups of young mediativists can be trained to take on responsibilities,

5 In November, 2020, when this article was written.

ensuring, thus, that the initiative do not die, in case the more experienced activists no longer get involved.

Image 3 – We present a graphic representation of the Model of Scales of Visibility.



Source: Created by the authors.

We observe that the mediativists of marginalized communities need to reach visibility as a first step to any successful campaign or collective action, because visibility is vital for recognition (BRIGHENTI, 2007). However, we argue that, for favela activists, that are labeled as enemies of society (NEUMAYER; SVENSSON, 2016), reaching such visibility will inevitably lead to a crisis. With “Maré Vive”, this critical point happened after the page attract attention to the violent nature of many police operations, which led to the virtual attack to the page. Oddly enough, in order to defend themselves, the activists developed a strategy to reach an even bigger visibility, getting in touch with a commercial TV channel. The result was the tension between the need to become visible and the risk of being vulnerable (LOKOT, 2018).

The next case study will discuss how the reach of visibility generated a crisis for the Kenyan mediativist Msingi Sasis.

## The Model of Scales of Visibility applied to Nairobi Noir

### a) Context:

In the end of 2007, Kenya had general elections, the dispute for the maximum role between Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga, leader of the opposition party, the Orange Democratic Movement. Declarations that the polling was rigged originated tensions within the party, with violent protest all around the country. Over 1,100 people were dead and over 500 thousand were forced to flee their home. In this period, media played a significant role as fuel for these ethnic divisions, of construction and dissemination of the narratives that provoked inter-ethnic hostility (WACHANGA, 2011).

The consequence of this experience left marks in Kenyan society. Artists, in particular, reacted through a creative combination of uses of activist technologies and aesthetic tactics (LOKOT, 2018). The changes in the technological scenario have also facilitated the promotion and sharing of opinion in virtual spaces (in addition to the physical space). Cartoonists, animators, musicians and multimedia artists created a variety of content, unlike mainstream media, that were distributed online (CALLUS, 2018).

In this context, Boniface Mwangi, an award-winning photojournalist that had documented the events of violence in the 2007 elections, decided to create an organization that gathered artists that desired to use their art to promote political and social change. PAWA 254 was created in 2009 as a non-profit organization. It is, today, a strong artistic and cultural nucleus of Kenya that shelters, motivates and catalyzes creative projects geared towards community, with the goal of social change. Msingi Sasis, the founder of Nairobi Noir ([www.nairobinoir.org](http://www.nairobinoir.org)), is part of this nucleus and his story is another interesting example of the ambiguous face of the regimens of visibility (BRIGHENTI, 2007). The story of Msingi shows the power of social media and the Internet to protect and support activists and their cause, but also highlights the other part of the story, the risks linked to visibility and the importance of online reputation.

### b) Growth of Visibility

In 2012, the work of photographing the streets of Nairobi after sunset was considered a hobby until 2 years later, in 2014, he edited one of these photos and posted on Facebook, having 500 likes overnight. Since then, Msingi started to pick one of the hundreds of photos he took a day, editing and publishing always one picture per day during 2 years. The photos had a repercussion with his followers and his popularity began to grow.

### c) Reach of Visibility

After one month of posts, the photographer received a Facebook message from PAWA254 with an invitation to show his work in an international event, “African Metropolis”. For that occasion, Misingi decided to create a website and establish the brand Nairobi Noir.

Image 4 – Screen capture of Nairobi Noir’s Facebook page.



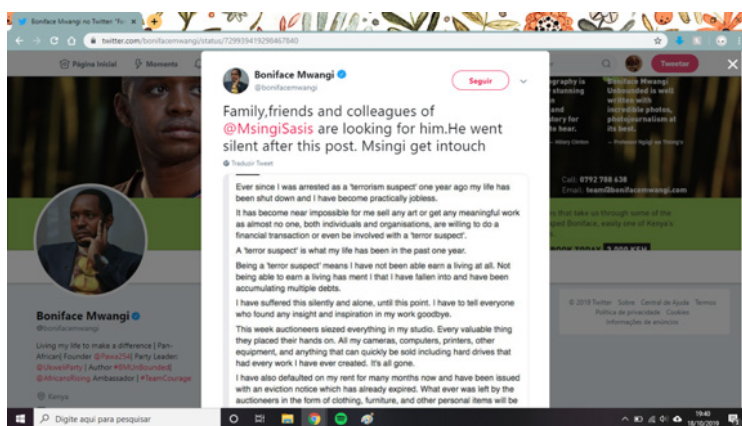
Source: Reproduction – Screen capture.

### d) Critical moment

In April 2015, he went out after sunset, as usual, to photograph the city and the Shopping Center Galleria Mall and a few people were suspicious about his presence. Kenya was still under the impact of the terrorist attacks at *Shopping Westgate*, in 2013, which caused the death

of 71 people and left 200 people injured. Thus, people in the shopping mall began to find the situation odd and spread rumors that Msingi would be planning terrorist acts. The crowd began to act violently and Msingi was almost lynched until the police was called and arrested the photographer.

Image 5 – Twitter’s screen capture of Boniface Mwangi.



Source: Reproduction – Screen capture.

### e) Management of the Critical Moment

After the massacre at Westgate Shopping Mall and other terrorist attacks that took place in the country, the Kenyan government approved a Security Law Amendment Act, in December, 2014. Among other measures, this law gave the police the right to keep any suspect of terrorism under custody for 360 days, without sharing the case to the public. Therefore, when Msingi’s family went to look for him and the police did not confirm his arrest, they sought the help of Boniface Mwangi, the founder of PAWA254.

### f) Overcoming the Critical Moment

The organization PAWA254 began an online campaign, on social media, to report Msingi’s arrest and pressure the police so that the

photographer could be discharged. They were successful and he was released in 24 hours.

After my arrest, I had a huge support and incentive and felt I couldn't simply let an arrest stop me. To all these people, my work had a great resonance. Many people told me how my work had opened their eyes [...] (Interview with Msingi Sasis, 08/26/2018).

His arrest represented an incident of panoptic vigilance. We can infer that the photographic excursions of Msingi through the streets of Nairobi at night had been observed by the authorities. Consequently, the tense and distrust environment that happened that night when he was arrested offered (in an unfair manner) a justification for his arrest and punishment (FOUCAULT, 1977).

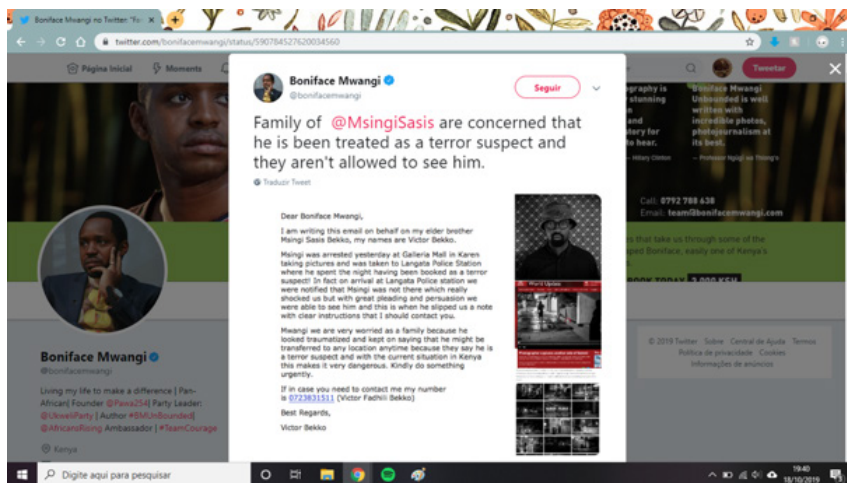
#### **g) (New) Reach of Visibility**

After his arrest, Msingi returned to photography, both for his project, Nairobi Noir, and in his studio. However, clients began to distance themselves from the photographer because of news that identified him as suspect of terrorism, began to spread online and on social media. This process generated a type of involuntary negative visibility, bringing unintentional consequences to him.

#### **h) Critical moment**

The artist began to not achieve professional projects and began to get into debt. He started to owe rent and was evicted, being unemployed and homeless. That was an extremely hard moment in Msingi's life. However, once again, the network of activists gathered by PAWA254 offered support and created an online campaign to find him and make visible his unfair treatment.

Image 6 – Twitter’s screen capture of Boniface Mwangi.



Source: Reproduction – Screen capture.

### i) Management of the Critical Moment

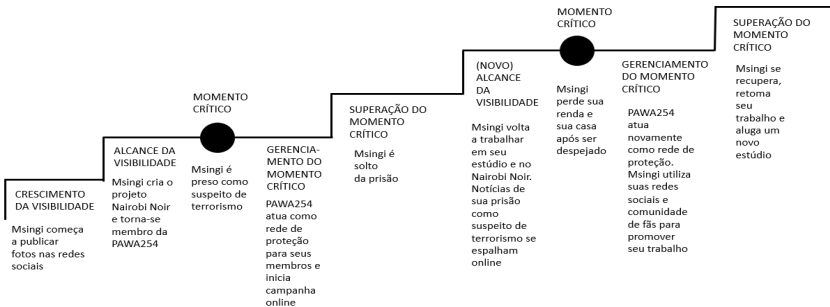
A few weeks after being evicted, still on the streets, Msingi found, by accident, a people who knew him and he learned that people were looking for him on social media. He took this information to publish a call for help on Facebook, encouraging his followers to buy his photographs so that he could reestablish himself.

### j) Overcoming the Critical Moment

The visibility helped Msingi win back his artistic recognition. At the same time, the community of followers he had formed offered support, once again, buying his photos so that could put his life back on track and create a new photographic studio.



Image 7 – The Model of Scales of Visibility applied to Nairobi Noir



Source: Authors.

In both cases, the activists adopted different strategies to overcome their critical moments and manage their unintentional visibilities. A key element in the path of visibility of Nairobi Noir was the relationship with a strong network of activists and with Boniface Mwangi, a famous and connected artist of the country. His organization, PAWA254, was successful when it was necessary to pressure for Msingi's release, through the strategic use of visibility on social media. In Rio de Janeiro, the tactics of "Maré Vive" (LOKOT, 2018) included an appeal to mainstream media. With that, activists got to neutralize the negative effects caused by the fake page that put their reputation and their lives in danger. As suggested by De Backer (2018), it was possible to see the ways in which the elements of control and recognition was mixed. The recognition reached by the page in the community turned into surveillance and control – in fact, the page was attacked because maybe it became too recognized. It was necessary, then, that the wide reach of the mainstream media become visible for the social relevance of this initiative, preventing that the attacks could cause more damage for these activists. Furthermore, the activists could perceive that the critical moment generated by the fast reach of visibility of the page meant the adoption of a few measures for caution, such as the need to keep anonymous the identity of the people behind the page. This decision to promote a rotation of the team of activists responsible for the page, avoiding the association of

their accounts with the management of profiles (Interview, “Mediativist Maré Vive”, 06-18-2019) represents an effort of counter-surveillance. As affirmed by Dencik et al. (2016), these efforts go beyond techno-legal solutions, such as the use of tools of increase of privacy since these activist groups are not a part of a group specialized in technology.

## Final Considerations

With these two case studies, we find a confirmation for the authors perspective that highlight the ambiguities inherent to the concept of visibility. The work of De Baker is useful as he articulates both faces of the concepts of reaching visibility – recognition and control – and their implications. In fact, they can even happen simultaneously, with recognition turning into control or vice-versa (2018, p. 2). In our study, we perceived that mediativism has a transgressor character, geared towards transformation of reality (BRAIGHI and CÂMARA, 2018). In this context, visibility is fundamental for the communication of activist causes, however, at the same time, brings significant challenges for them. In this article, our goal wasn't so much about identifying the counter-surveillance efforts performed by activists. When adopting a perspective of the Global South, our intent was to highlight the paths of visibility of activists, identifying the achievements and challenges brought by the reach of visibility or by the maintenance of invisibility.

Mediativists of marginalized communities or those who deal with marginalization generally have the need of making their work with very limited resources, with little time to prepare for the future. This article had the goal of offering a tool, the Model of Scales of Visibility, so we could map their paths of visibility until the overcoming of or retraction from the critical moments. We argue that these critical moments will inevitably happen with the reach of visibility. That happens as a consequence of the ways in which mediativists of marginalized communities are treated as enemies of society. In these contexts, civil disobedience acquire diverse meanings. Legitimate causes, like the fight against police violence or the artistic representation of social issues can be repressed

with punishment, prison or even execution. With that, we confirm that, when dislocating from the axis of the North for the Global South, the reach of visibility can bring a bigger magnitude with equally bigger and more serious consequences.

However, the model presents limitations. Here, it is important to observe that the paths of visibility of activists not always follow a growing trajectory, as we could infer by the graphic representations included in this article. In fact, they seem to depend on the strategies used by the groups, since the same can choose to become invisible in order to mitigate a crisis for a long period of time, interrupting their online activities. The graphic representation of paths of visibility of “Maré Vive” and “Nairobi Noir” was referring to events that transform the lives of these activists, since it was not possible to include a wider variety of events. After all, the model needed to be simple so it could be a reference for mediativists, without being necessary a high degree of technical specialization. In addition, it is not our intention to try to predict the future of activist initiatives based on a small number of cases. After the development of a model based on both cases, as a next step, it becomes necessary the conduction of more researches on how this could be applied to a larger number of cases in countries of the global south.

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## Mediações e letramento midiático: uma aproximação necessária

### Mediations and media literacy: a necessary approach

Matheus Cestari Cunha<sup>1</sup>

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**Resumo:** Neste texto procuramos lançar um olhar sobre a Educação Midiática inspirado na Teoria das Mediações, na perspectiva de Jesús Martín-Barbero (1987, 1997, 2018), considerando a comunicação como aspecto essencial para se pensar a Educação Midiática. Trata-se de estudo que propõe a viabilidade de aproximações entre as duas propostas teóricas, partindo do conceito de letramento midiático e das competências midiáticas apresentadas por Celot e Pérez-Tornero (2009), tendo em vista que as mediações são um aspecto essencial para compreendê-las, e que extrapolam os fatores de entorno.

**Palavras-chave:** Teoria das Mediações; Letramento midiático; Comunicação

**Abstract:** In this text we seek to take a look at the European media literacy concept, taking into consideration the Theory of Mediations, from the perspective of Jesús Martín-Barbero (1987, 1997, 2018), considering communication as an essential aspect to think about media literacy. This is a study that includes a theoretical reflection that proposes the feasibility of approximations between the two theoretical proposals, starting from the European concept of media literacy and the media skills presented by Celot and Pérez-Tornero (2009), considering that mediations are an essential aspect to understand them, that extrapolate the environmental factors.

**Keywords:** Theory of Mediations; Media Literacy; Communication

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## Introduction

In this article, we approach the Theory of Mediations and media literacy, in an attempt to propose, by the end of it, approximations between both theoretical perspectives. We begin through the mediations of Martín-Barbero (1987, 1997, 2018), which are theoretical-methodological propositions that evolved since his first proposition, and media literacy, with focus in media competences, according to Celot and Pérez-Tornero (2009).

The first map was proposed in 1987 in the seminal work of Martín-Barbero, *De los medios a las mediaciones, comunicación, cultura y hegemonia*, later updated in 1997 and 2018. We tried to comprise this evolution, with focus on a more recent map, in which it inserts the technicity as basic mediation. We also present the criticism made to the author about the concept of Mediations, which makes it harder to develop a Latin American theory of communication.

In the field of Media Education, the path was to present the concept of media literacy, as a field concerned with media competences, adopted by European and North American researchers. Among other approaches in this field, we find educommunication, Latin American perspective; literacy for media, in Portugal; and finally Media and Informational Literacy, expression created by the United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO), in an attempt of unifying the area.

Despite being relevant, we will not go further on the discussion about the fields of Media Education. Each one of these concepts has a finesse, an approach, a specialty within the field, which applies to the demands of each research. We propose, thus, to go through a common communicational thought, and, in this sense, Latin America has a fundamental contribution, the Theory of Mediations.

The Latin American perspective of Communication seeks to understand the subject through their day-to-day life, through their relationship with the context that surrounds him, the negotiation of meaning made through mediations. This approach is more comprehensive than media



literacy, when it approaches the surrounding factors, that are regarding the access and availability of media and apparatus, to the public policies of media-education, to the media industry and civil society. Because of that, we reflect about the possible theoretical and methodological bridges between South and North, in an attempt to extend the concept of media literacy, taking into consideration the Theory of Mediations as a theoretical milestone in the interface Communication/Education.

### **The mediations of the Latin American Communicational thinking**

Just as the other fields of applied human and social sciences, Communication studies had comprised many theoretical and methodological tendencies, coming from the European and North American continent, especially, through the Mass Communication Research, which in its group, comprised the functionalist perspective, the critical theory, through the School of Frankfurt, with Marxist inspiration; Structuralism, which gained prominence with the French intellectuals; and the Cultural Studies, coming from the School of Birmingham, among other theoretical currents. In Latin America, the Theories of Communication had only started to develop in the 1950s, however, they still did not have a local emergency and were influenced by the aforementioned currents.

Lopes (2003) supplies an interpretation on how these theories began to appear in Latin America. According to the author, the functionalist current has dominance in the communication studies until nowadays, with more prominence from 1950s to 1980s. In the 1950s, researches based on quantitative methods are developed, such as audience measurements and polls of attitudes and motivations. In the next decade, the International Center of Superior Studies of Communication for Latin America (CIESPAL) conducted descriptive researches and community studies when it creates the line of research Communication and Development. In 1970, CIESPAL continues with this research tradition, focusing on national and international communication policies. The

descriptive aspect makes way to a systemic analysis of production and circulation of communication in the 1980s. The extensive functionalist tradition could not handle the Latin American specificities:

The use of the functionalist paradigm in studies of Mass Communication and Culture in underdeveloped societies is transposed to these only the concept of social stratification, to which the culture studies of lower classes did not present any specificity, in addition to “obsolete” modalities of social relations and representations (LOPES, 2003, 2003, P. 53).

It is necessary to emphasize in the 1970s the influence of the critical theory in Latin America, due to the context of repression during the military dictatorship in different countries, pointing towards the manipulation in the cultural industry and their market logics. Another aspect is the elitist conception of culture, the idea that “high culture” would be capable of transforming society and developing ways of critical awareness that put a great part of people as victims of this process, without any resistance (LOPES, 2003).

However, by the late 1970s and early 1980s, after overcoming the scenario of repression through the redemocratization of Latin American countries, especially Brazil, the Theories of Communication began to be influenced by Cultural Studies. New technologies of communication, transnationalization, culture and popular communication began to appear as object of studies (LOPES, 2003).

In this context, we perceive the need of our own Communication Theory, taking into consideration Latin American historical contradictions and cultural blends.

The Latin American and Brazilian contributions in this sense are articulated in an attempt of building a Reception Theory, whose originality for the Theory of Communication tend to be internationally recognized. The few, however influent, empirical research on critical reading of media, telenovela reception, leisure and everyday life, popular uses of media, urban cultures and others, point towards this theoretical construction dismounting the thesis of passivity and manipulation of receptors through MCM. We consider that in this theorization are involved efforts to take

back the unity of the object of Communication, avoiding the parcelling and reductionism in the analysis of their components, tendency that constitutes one of the most negative characteristics in the current state of research in communication (LOPES, 2003, p. 69-70).

Corroborating for the analysis of Lopes, Barros Filho and Martino (2003) point towards the receptor delaying to be incorporated in communication studies, which firstly focused in the effects of mass media, then in the production and characteristics of the media.

Therefore, the mediation theory is a construction that makes an inversion of this manipulation logic of receptors through media and accentuates in the communicational process. Martín-Barbero (1987) proposes that the individual negotiates the meanings of media content with the context that surrounds him through mediation. The author's proposition, unlike the Theory of Uses and Gratifications, presented by Blumler (WOLF, 1995), whose focus are the motivation of individuals to consume certain media content, puts mediation at central, crossing meanings produced by the receptors.

Despite mediations being the premise of the theoretical proposition of the author, he refuses to formulate a definition for the term, because the mediations are a continuous process that go through constant transformation. With the advancement in the studies of this theory and observing the maps proposed since the seminal book of Martín Barbero, we can find some elements for a free interpretation, or a clue, that leads us to contemplate mediations as a process in which aspects that are part of the context that surrounds the individual relate to him, directly or indirectly in different levels. They take into consideration the subject, the context and the relation established.

Some authors point towards deficiencies in the presentation of a concept of mediations by Martín-Barbero. Signates (2006, p. 69) says that the definition made by the author is blurry, and that while "the theoretical and methodological limits are not sufficiently defined, it is unlikely that the use of the notion of mediation will endow the studies

of communication of a theoretical support that can be admitted as an overcoming of existing theories and interpretations”.

Signates made a mapping of the seminal work of Martín-Barbero, identifying that the concept of mediation appears 37 times: “Out of these citations, in 21 opportunities the author uses it as a bonding limits of specific dichotomies, and, mostly, antinomic. In the others, he makes simple citations, without an explicit commitment with their definition” (2006, p. 6-7). To sustain even further his argumentation, Signates (2006) presents five ways in which the concept of mediation can be defined, according to the work of Martín-Barbero, to confirm the lack of epistemologic precision.

As construct or theoretical category; as specific discursivity; as linking structures, forms or practices; as a device for enabling and legitimating the imaginary hegemony or resolution of class struggle in the field of culture; and still as an institution or geographic place (SIGNATES, 2006, p. 62).

Sodré (2002, 250) agrees with Signates’ position when he says that “the concept of mediation can no longer surpass the huge cognitive imprecision, already pointed by different authors, including Raymond Williams himself, one of his original sources”. They are followed by Maio (2018, p. 8-9), who, when analyzing the confluences between Martín-Barbero’s and Orozco’s propositions, concluded that “one of the bottlenecks of his proposition is found, however, in the blurry definition of mediation”, but minimizes the criticism mentioning an exaggeration of Signates when he denies the existence of the theory: “Martín-Barbero is, undeniably, vague in the definition of mediation, but such radicalization does not contribute for the theoretical construction, even because the intellectuals of the Barberian work already advanced in the conceptual development”.

Another critic of the Theory of Mediations is Ciro Marcondes Filho (2008). He categorically says that it isn’t a Communication Theory, claiming it to be, most of the time “a sociology, an anthropology, a political economy of communications (almost always dealing with mass

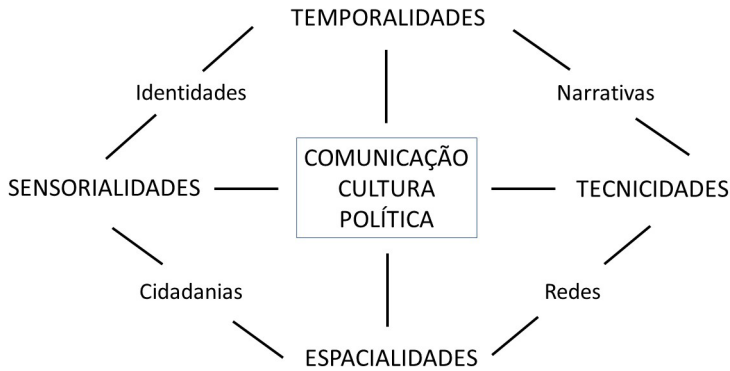
communication), all of that very far from the study of the interpersonal communication, by irradiation or virtual”. The author still reinforces that

The Latin American Theory of Communication is a lonely island, which seeks with their own – and often scarce – theoretical resources comprise the complexity of a communicational process in times of vertiginous changes, overcoming paradigms and technological acceleration. Maybe because of that, it finds few echoes in the United States and in Europe (MARCONDES FILHO, 2008, p. 69).

However, Martín-Barbero (1987; 1997, 2018) systematizes these premises through theoretical-methodological maps. It is important to reinforce that due to the contextual and relational character, it is not easy to identify those mediations. The representation of mediations – which is still quite complex – aims at the operationalization of the referred theory through the reading of the current society, and on how the individual is presented in it and in negotiations of meaning that he makes with the context surrounding him. It isn't possible to say that all mediations are contained in there, even because this would be an instrumental approach of the map. We consider this expansion necessary, given the interdisciplinary nature of theory, maybe this would be their biggest force and virtue.

The use of the map supplies different answers, because it comprises phenomena related to the context of the individual. However, he can be extrapolated and allows many entries through which one can research. In order to exemplify, we took the author's most recent proposition.

Image 1 – Communicative and Cultural Mutations.



Source: Lopes (2018, p. 58).

At the center of the map, we see communication, culture and politics as founding mediations. It is important to highlight the emergency of a communicational reason, that resets social order in a paradoxical manner. On one hand, individuals are connected by a network that allows global exchanges, favoring ageing logics of the market and an apparent social cohesion. On the other, we watch the valorization of individuality and a return to the most primitive roots of humanity, through discourses and practices that reminds us more of instinct than rationality (MARTÍN-BARBERO, 2018, p. 13).

Considering culture, according to Martín-Barbero (2018), the theoretical frontier between anthropology and sociology – in which for the first, culture is everything, and for the second, it summarizes into social phenomena of the canon of arts and languages – is found blurred. After all, today there are mechanisms in which the cultural production of symbolic goods, is offered according to their consumer audience. Then,

Culture escapes all compartmentalization, irrigating social life as a whole. Today, they are subject/object of culture both art and health, work or violence, and there is also political culture, drug traffic culture, work

culture, urban culture, youth culture, gender culture, scientific culture, audiovisual culture, technological culture, etc (MARTÍN-BARBERO, 2018, p. 14).

When leading this reflection towards politics, the author perceives the need of “resetting mediations in which constitute the new ways of interpellation of subjects and representation of bonds that unite society” (MARTÍN-BARBERO, 2018, p. 14). The media gained great importance when constituting discourses and the own political action. They participate of the public life and engender their points of view in society through the strength of their mediations. The television, mainly, enables this process through the “axis of the look”, framing certain representations through the most convenient. Therefore, politics must retrieve their symbolic nexus, their capacity of aggregation in a scenario of constant tensions of culture and market.

Martín-Barbero presents, also, four basic mediations: temporalities, spatialities (since their first proposition), sensorialities and technicities. Before, social temporality was based in the TV schedule that guided the everyday life – the schedule for the novela, the football match, for instance. Spatialities, in this case, were more static and easier to be understood. The family interaction around the TV ended up the “primordial situation of recognition” (MARTÍN-BARBERO, 1987, p. 293).

However, temporalities are not the same anymore. Martín-Barbero (2018) highlights the quickness of these transformations and the hardship of anchorage, due to the rhythm dictated by capitalism. Thus, the diffused present makes the subject seek identification in the past. There’s a fever for memory, a certain attachment to the anchors of the past.

These dispositions of temporality end up setting certain spatialities, expressed in the most recent proposition of the theory. Thus, Martín-Barbero (2018) will categorize four spaces: the inhabited, by the human need of a place to manifest their individuality and having shelter; the imaginary, where imaterial and symbolic exchanges occur and the subject projects and constitutes their relationships with the context

and the other; the produced space, through territorial markings and the material production, product of conquests and agreements, inventions, like machines, that make distances smaller and distract us; and the last one, is the space practiced by the modern city that amplifies the previous, because it amplifies the objective perspective of place and things for subjective relations, like the anonymous in the urban and their interactions in search for their own identity, considering here the interlacing between virtual and material space. The presence of submediation of networks – which appears for the first time in this map – confirms the author's intention in emphasizing this mediation.

Sensorialities are a thickening of other mediations that appear in previous maps, giving importance to close, daily communicational relationships. According to John, Ribeiro and Silva (2019, p. 124, our translation), the challenge is to “think about sensoriality as a central mediation in the understanding not only of the relationships that subjects establish with media narratives, but also with the way they relate with the world they live in”. Another part of this idea is cognitivity, which derives from the cultural competence, the capacity of recurring to previous knowledges and/or scripts to understand a certain communication phenomenon and the rituality, which brings a symbolic meaning to communication.

The relation of these mediations with technicity is given through historic evolution. In the first map (1987), technicity would appear still as a set of abstract ideas, embedded within cultural competences and they still didn't even had this name. In the second map (1997), this mediation appears as a submediation, with the emergency of the internet in late 20th century. Then, technicity is a product of more concerns of Martín-Barbero (2010), who reinforced the need to face new spatialities and temporalities in a social scenario related to digital technologies. In this sense, the thickness of mediation of technicity presented in the last map (2018), rising it to the stage of basic mediation, is coherent with the author's evolution of thinking.



In an interview to Mariluce Moura (2009, p. 3), Martín-Barbero mentions the evolution of society, from its natural surroundings, to the urban, and now to technocommunication, which overcomes the idea of device or media, and in which the subject must be prepared to deal with. Hence the need of developing different sensorialities.

Another submediation, citizenships, gains relevance in the current map with the thickness of technicity (potential of participation) and it comprises the relation between institutions and individuals, rights and duties of citizens. Before, it was pointed out as a submediation of institutionality, tensioned with sociality. These relationships, in turn, are also important agents in the construction of a subject's identity, the only submediation that remains in relation to the previous maps, especially in a scenario of constant and rapid transformation.

Next, we present some essential concepts for the understanding of media literacy, as a strand of Media Education, an interdisciplinary field between Education and Communication.

### **Media Literacy: competences and context**

The concept of literacy, within the major area of Media Education, is defined as: "The need to access media, to understand evaluate in a critical manner the different aspects of media and their contents and creating communication in different contexts", with the aim of "increasing people's knowledge about the different forms of message of media found in their day-to-day". (EUROPEAN UNION, 2009, p. 227). The media messages can have many genres, formats and languages; videos, films, images, texts, sounds that get to the individuals with different forms of communication.

The media literacy exposes a series of competences a subject must acquire (ÁREA, 2008; PÉREZ & DELGADO, 2012; FERRÉS, 2007), but we adopt the reference of Celot and Pérez-Tornero (2009), who systematize the process dividing competence into individual (use, critical comprehension, participation and communication) and surrounding

factors, proposing a pyramid in which there is an order in the acquisition of competences.

According to the authors, the competences of use are linked to the own operation of electronic devices. However, they must be developed holistically in order to the subject fill all their needs, which go from the understanding of simple functions to more complex functions: the capacity of differentiating devices and their functionalities and transmitting these knowledges to others in a formal manner. There must also be a “critical awareness on technical issues of devices” (2009, p. 37 - our translation).

The competences of critical understanding comprise the knowledge on the media ecosystem. The first factor is the understanding on te media content and their functions, with the following linked competencies:

- Coding and decoding, with the goal of understanding the title and the content that was broadcast;
- Competence to evaluate, compare and contrast critically the media content, giving value to information based on the needs of the user;
- Actively exploring and searching for information;
- Capacity of synthesizing and summarizing an information from different publications;
- The capacity of mixing and recycling media content [ that happens when someone shares something and makes a Facebook post, for instance] (CELOT, PÉREZ-TORNERO, 2009, p. 39 – our translation).

The second factor, according to Celot and Pérez-Tornero (2009, p. 40), is the knowledge on media and its regulation, which comprises the competences of critical evaluation referring to regulations, diversity and “rights on media evaluation”, in addition to searching knowledge on media to evaluate and interpret media content.

The third factor lies in the behavior of the user itself, which takes advantage of the semiotic and linguistic capabilities of individuals in the process of interpretation of media contents, “is the way each individual has to understand and relate with the world around them” (CELOT, PÉREZ-TORNERO, 2009, p. 40 – our translation).

The communicational and participative competences are also divided into three factors: social relations, citizen participation and content

creation. In the aspect of social relations, Celot and Pérez-Tornero (2009, p. 42) advocate that subjects must have the competences of “initiating and keeping in touch” through media and social networks; sharing behaviors and appropriating others, being that “media reinforces this mimetic capacity, especially on teens and young adults”.

The same thing happens with the capacities of citizen participation, which demand mindful skills of participation and sharing, management and collaboration to “achieve certain goals”, of presenting an “specific identity”, related to the goal of each established relation, of interacting with “multiple institutions in an appropriate manner, using the appropriate channels” (CELOT; PÉREZ-TORNERO, 2009, p. 43 – our translation).

The content production, according to the authors (2009, p. 44), goes from sending an e-mail, commenting on a Facebook post, or something more complex as news production is reinforced by media and social networks. Therefore, it is necessary to have the competence of sharing tools, stimulating cooperative work, producing original content, having the ability of developing “conditions, norms or factors that affect the content creation made by the media itself, either by pressure, regulation, laws, rights, aesthetics, etc.”

Finally, the surrounding factors are exposed through five spheres, which contain some indicators. The first one is the access and availability of media and apparatus, taking into consideration the amount of smartphones per 100 inhabitants, internet access, the circulation of newspapers and the amount of TVs and movie screens. The second factor is about media education due to the presence of media literacy in the school’s curriculum, in teacher’s training, in educational activities and in financial resources available for the achievement of these processes. The third is manifested through the adoption of public policies related to the promotion of agents and regulating activities linked to media literacy. The fourth and fifth are related to the initiatives of the media industry itself in promoting this process, mainly in joint actions

with organizations of the civil society (CELOT and PÉREZ-TORNERO, 2009).

The proposition of Celot and Pérez-Tornero (2009) was later reviewed by two partner institutions of the European Committee: the Danish Technology Institute (DTI) and the European Association for Viewers Interests (EAVI), which produced a new report (2011). The classification of competences remains, however, with a pyramid character. The report has concluded that the competence acquisition happens in an holistic manner, there is no way to hierarchize them. In addition to that, they added a few individual surrounding factors, such as age, gender, level of education and income. However, they question the way how surrounding factors are applied under the category of competences, because

Neither the availability of media nor the regulations, nor the public policies and industry seem to be understood as aspects of media literacy per se, but as appropriate circumstances for the advancement of media literacy in a social scale (2011, p. 22 – our translation).

Therefore, the big question lies in how these competences articulate among themselves and are acquired by individuals and how these surrounding factors are worked through the concept of media literacy. The own concept of competences is widely discussed in Europe. Unfortunately, there is no space for us to approach in-depth every concept, but it is important to emphasize what two authors think about it.

Marín (2012) makes a historic retrospective, reporting that the idea of competence gained strength in the 1970's, always attached to work issues. Later, it was evolving to other aspects of human nature, however, always in an instrumental, descriptive and limiting manner. The author concludes his reasoning leaving a question: He says not to know whether

competences are a product of the total articulation of knowledge, skills, dexterity and attitude/values of an individual, or whether a combination of some of these can generate an eruption of a competence, or if, by chance, it is possible that each of these on its own provoke a development of the competences in some field of the social and/or professional

practice, or, also, if there is a gradual relation between these fields and, as a consequence, if the competences generated in someone produce the constitution of any other (MARIN, 2012, p. 4).

Drexel is more affirmative: “The concept includes not only formal and informal knowledges and skills, but also ‘personal values’, ‘motivations and behaviors’” (2003, p. 7). In addition, Ferrés (2007), and Ferrés and Piscitelli (2012) say that skills, in this aspect of media literacy, “are defined as a combination of knowledge, aptitude and attitudes appropriate to the context”. But, what is the context we are talking about?

Here we find a possible boundary to media literacy. The context is related to institutional aspects, such as public policies, availability of media and school curriculum (CELOT & PEREZ-TORNERO, 2009). Even when we add factors such as income, gender, age and level of education, the understanding of this complex surrounding gets limited. In addition, the question raised by the report of DTI and EAVI (2011) that surrounding factors seem to be only understood as a conductor for the advancement and amplification of media literacy in society sustains this limitation. When we consider them that way, we exclude the direct influence of the context in the acquisition of individual competences, something that can be observed.

Despite being located in the interface Communication/Education, European and North American communicational paradigms are pragmatic and elitist (LOPES, 2003), which could limit them in a communicational scenario as complex as the one we are living in. Next, we will present the possible bridges between Theory of Mediations and media literacy, in an attempt of exploring the importance of the context that surrounds the individual – beyond the surrounding factors – in the process of acquisition of media competences.

### **Considerations about Bridges between South and North**

As we already said in the introduction of this article, we understand that each concept of the area of Media Education has its finesse, its own

specialty. We work with media literacy, because it comprises, directly, reflecting on the communicational ecosystem, of relationships between people and media, from cinema to the internet.

However, one of the keys is in the interpretation of how these relations come about, bringing up a brief epistemological reflection of phenomenon, to punctuate how the Theory of Mediations can create bridges between the Latin American thinking and the rest of the world.

Despite of the criticism we mentioned before, the Theory of Mediations has evolved in the last two decades. Although the clarity of a context that establish the theoretical and methodological boundaries of “mediations”, as some authors point out, their current perspective finds correspondence with the description of a communicational ecosystem, with the presence of new actors, such as experts in the operationalization of algorithms and traders that work with marketing research to fit media products to consumers’ need (LEWIS & WESTLUND, 2015).

Martín-Barbero (2018) points out that, in order to understand these processes, it is necessary to use specific technicities that are acquired through different sensorialities and with the presence of other submediations, such as networks, citizenship and narratives, for instance.

In this sense, we consider that the concept of media literacy needs a communicational paradigm that does not only deal with the relationship of subject and its surroundings – in the European perspective–, because the communicational ecosystem is much more complex. The negotiation of meaning that the individual accomplishes with the context that surrounds him through his mediations is an important aspect to understand how this process comes about. Therefore, a communicational paradigm that limits the object of study doesn’t seem to comprise the complexities produced through this thinking. It is necessary to build bridges between South and North for a dialogue in a wide perspective coming from mediations.

In practice, that means you should promote changes in the way of thinking, analyse and studies how the subjects acquire, improver and manifest their media competencies. There is a first approach in this

path, considering mediations as a variable of this process. For instance, a research with university students from the outskirts of São Paulo, in an attempt of mapping which are the competencies existing in young adults and how these mediations work in the process of acquisition of these skills give some important signs (CUNHA, 2020).

The research instruments (questionnaires and interviews) were based in the set of competencies from Celot and Pérez-Tornero (2009), presented in the previous topic. It is important to reinforce that none of these subjects of research took part of any formal initiative of Media Education. The conclusion is that even though some participants did not have “competences related to the critical understanding, they presented competences of participation”, creating content. The author says: “We believe that this happens because mediations are an important variant in the acquisition of media competences and must be taken into consideration when analysing this process” (CUNHA, p. 100).

All of the interviewees cited some mediation: family, friends, school, teachers, identity. These aspects are a part of the sensoriality of individuals and are some examples on how the surrounding context relates with the understanding of media content, from the negotiations established.

Therefore, just as the author, we believe that there is a two-way street between media literacy and the Theory of Mediations. The process of acquisition of competencies – and its practical use by the individual – has mediations as an essential aspect, just as it is also a part of sensoriality, as media literacy is an important tool for the subjects’ understanding of today’s world.

When we present the evolution of the theoretical-methodological maps of Martín-Barbero as a proposition for communication studies, bearing in mind the dynamics of mediation in the negotiation of meaning in communicational processes, with focus on the contemporaneity, we could observe possible sources. Instead of the surrounding factors, mediations could offer new clues for us to understand and contribute for the studies in media literacy, specifically when we deal with competences acquired in informal contexts.

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## **Periodismo en América Latina: colonialidad y traducción cultural**

## **Jornalismo na América Latina: colonialidade e tradução cultural**

*Aníbal Orué Pozzo*<sup>1</sup>

**Resumen:** *El presente artículo discute la relación entre sujetos en la práctica periodística latinoamericana. Partiendo del entendimiento del periodismo como una de las expresiones de la modernidad, el texto avanza – desde la perspectiva de pensadores Latinoamericanos como Fausto Reinaga, Jesús Martín Barbero, Juan Díaz Bordenave y otros – hacia una propuesta epistemológica que expresa una práctica del oficio desarrollada desde la región.*

**Palabras clave:** *Periodismo; América Latina; traducción; colonialidad del texto.*

**Resumo:** *O artigo discute a relação entre sujeitos na prática jornalística latino-americana. Partindo do entendimento do jornalismo como uma das expressões da modernidade, o texto avança – desde uma perspectiva de pensadores Latino-americanos como Fausto Reinaga, León Cadogan, Jesus Martín Barbero, Juan Díaz Bordenave e outros – até uma proposta epistemológica que expresse uma prática do ofício desenvolvida desde a região.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Jornalismo; América Latina; tradução; colonialidade do texto.*

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## Introducción general

El presente artículo discute algunos cambios que los amplios y diversos procesos sociales, políticos y culturales han introducido en la teoría y en la práctica periodística latinoamericana. Partiendo de una perspectiva histórica, el texto enfatiza las transformaciones presentes en sociedades latinoamericanas en los últimos 40 años. Más específicamente, cómo es posible pensar la comunicación y el periodismo en la región, desde experiencias que penetran en los poros de la piel, en los cuerpos y mentes de la población, principalmente de sectores subalternos. Para tal efecto, intentaré desarrollar un camino de forma a buscar nuevas perspectivas al entendimiento del campo comunicacional y periodístico y, por su vez, apuntar horizontes que el desafío de enfrentarlos nos depara en la región, y más concretamente, en determinados países sudamericanos.

Así, voy a abordar esta propuesta desde dos puntos específicos. El primero, es una discusión epistemológica que compete al campo periodístico de una manera más concreta: la *relación sujeto-objeto* presente en esta práctica profesional, que se constituye y conforma como distintiva en los últimos cien años. En segundo lugar se discute cómo y de qué manera el periodismo adopta, interpreta y desarrolla modelos pertenecientes a otras o culturas, a otras formas de experiencias particulares, incorporándolas como modelos universales. Para tal efecto, recurriré al concepto de *traducción o mediación cultural*, de manera a poder, desde los mismos, discutir las prácticas culturales de otras regiones que se incorporan al periodismo de América Latina.

## Periodismo y la relación sujeto/objeto: barreras por romper o una relación que no se agota en la objetividad

Voy a iniciar este análisis, discutiendo la relación que *aparentemente* se presenta en el texto o narrativa periodística entre el sujeto, es decir, aquel que inicialmente observa (fuente), y otro sujeto a quien se le comunica un *hecho social*, quien posteriormente lo *interpreta* y *transmite* de diversas formas y maneras (divulgador, difusor, mediador, periodista); este

hecho, más tarde lo presenta como información a un público amplio. Sin embargo, podemos observar que la misma atraviesa varios momentos o varias mediaciones sociales y culturales: no es solo y únicamente un hecho, tiene un contexto y es éste el que se explicita en la *difusión*, *transmisión* o en el *narrar/contar* el hecho. Comenzaré introduciendo una discusión crítica en esta relación sujeto/objeto que, para muchos, siempre fue aquella que definió la práctica periodística. Estas distintas maneras o formas de “llevar” información de un lugar a otro tienen, en el mundo occidental, una larga data. De alguna manera Habermas (1994) nos describe una parte de este proceso analizando lo que sería el mundo europeo moderno. Sin embargo, y este es uno de los puntos centrales de la crítica, esta práctica social no se limita al mundo occidental. El mundo no occidental, en este caso América Latina, ha desarrollado diferenciadas prácticas de llevar información de un lugar a otro y de contar un hecho social. Lo complicado es sustentar a un determinado modelo como universal. Es decir, como la única forma o manera de narrar o contar los acontecimientos, como ejemplos al cual llegar. Si observamos las diferentes sociedades previas a la invasión colonial de 1492 en América, se nos presentan diferentes formas de llevar/almacenar la información de un espacio social a otro, de un territorio a otro. La información contenida en los Códices Náhuatl (LEÓN PORTILLA, 1961), en los kipus del Tiwantinsuyo (BENÍTEZ, 2000), en las narrativas orales guaraní (CADOGAN, 1959) y en las antiguas historias de los Mayas-Quiches (POPOL VUH, 1960), por dar un ejemplo, constituyen otras tantas formas o maneras en que estas sociedades empleaban una determinada tecnología para llevar/almacenar la información de un lugar a otro; pero, tampoco podemos pensar estos ejemplos como modelos a seguir, a semejanza de otros modelos en otras regiones del mundo occidental y no occidental.

Desde una perspectiva occidental, el periodismo fue en algún momento caracterizado como una de las expresiones de la modernidad. Desde este énfasis emerge la posibilidad de un periodismo moderno juntamente con la formación de Europa y la imprenta, por vuelta del

tercer cuarto del siglo XV<sup>2</sup>, pocos años antes del inicio de la ocupación de lo que sería más tarde América Latina. Para Dussel, 1492 es la fecha de nacimiento de la modernidad.

La Modernidad se originó en las ciudades europeas medievales, libres, centros de enorme creatividad. Pero “nació” cuando Europa pudo confrontarse con “el Otro” y controlarlo, vencerlo, violentarlo; cuando pudo definirse como un “ego” descubridor, conquistador, colonizador de la Alteridad constitutiva de la misma Modernidad. De todas maneras, ese Otro no fue “des-cubierto” como Otro, sino que fue “en-cubierto” como “lo Mismo” que Europa ya era desde siempre. De manera que 1492 será el momento del “nacimiento” de la Modernidad como concepto, el momento concreto del “origen” de un “mito” de violencia sacrificial muy particular y, al mismo tiempo, un proceso de “en-cubrimiento” de lo no-europeo. (DUSSEL, 1994, p. 8)

Es decir, el desarrollo y consolidación de esta modernidad es concomitante con el desarrollo del régimen capitalista de producción, ambos se contienen. Para Habermas (1994), el proceso de constitución de la modernidad, que lleva a relacionar la ley con la razón y la opinión pública, es lo que sustenta la moderna sociedad burguesa europea, y su institucionalidad. La emergencia de la modernidad en estos espacios sociales es al mismo tiempo la constitución de una centralidad sustentada en la razón y en la objetividad de los actos humanos. Esta separación entre razón/alma y cuerpo se inicia con Descartes en el siglo XVII, y con ello la larga marcha que lleva a la constitución de la moderna sociedad burguesa europea. La constitución del sistema capitalista en el contexto de la modernidad se presenta como una nueva forma de ver y pensar el mundo, y también de estudiarlo. El periodismo incorpora en su narrativa esta separación entre cuerpo/alma, entre lo externo y lo interno, entre lo objetivo y el sujeto. Al mismo tiempo esta práctica social, que en el tiempo deviene en periodismo, desarrolla la racionalidad como uno de sus ejes constitutivos en la construcción del texto;

2 En realidad, esto es desde la perspectiva de una “historia de occidente”; la imprenta surge en China a comienzos de los años 1000.

esta racionalidad es, al mismo tiempo, objetividad. Al hacerlo, este acto de narrar y contar hechos y situaciones se transforma en narrativa fundacional del mundo moderno europeo; esto es lo que nos fue narrado y contado durante largos años. Pero, veamos el “otro lado” de la misma, y observemos la realidad desde otra perspectiva. Al mismo tiempo, y con la conquista e invasión de 1492 – nacimiento de la modernidad según Dussel – estas epistemes y prácticas se imponen en los nuevos territorios ocupados, como parte del movimiento “expansivo” de las ideas y civilización europeas, es decir, como una forma de colonización del imaginario; la ocupación de vastos territorios implicó también la ocupación y conquista de las mentalidades de los pobladores originarios. Sin embargo, existía en estos territorios ocupados, formas de transmisión de informaciones y conocimientos que, obviamente, fueron silenciados, ignorados y rechazados.

En los espacios y territorios ocupados por el imperio español y el portugués - posteriormente también por el inglés y holandés -, existían “otros mundos” que expresaban por su vez otras formas de ver y pensar la realidad. Desde el *Popol Vuh* (1993) en Mesoamérica, pasando por los trabajos de Guaman Poma de Ayala (1980) en el Tiwantsuyu inka-peruano, el *Ayvu Rapyta* de los Mbyá-Guaraní de Paraguay publicado por Cadogan (1992), y últimamente en trabajos de Reinaga (2010), Kopenawa (2015), Krenak (2019), y otros pensadores contemporáneos amerindios, estos entendimientos del mundo se presentan de manera muy diferente a aquellos expresados por la modernidad europea. En todos ellos podemos observar una estrecha relación entre cuerpo y alma, entre lo racional y los sentimientos, entre el sujeto y el objeto, entre cuerpos humanos animados y otros cuerpos no-humanos. Si, como señalábamos más atrás, el periodismo termina incorporando la racionalidad constitutiva de la sociedad burguesa europea, sería pertinente también pensar cómo y de qué manera el pensamiento no occidental, principalmente en América Latina, se incorpora en la práctica cotidiana, o por lo menos cómo y de qué manera ciertos elementos terminan incorporándose en ella. Esto implica al mismo tiempo un giro epistémico

pasando a entender que es el sujeto – en su multiplicidad y diversidad – quien crea el objeto y consecuentemente la narrativa “objetiva”<sup>3</sup>. Así, la historia de América Latina también ha sido desde su conquista, la tentativa por imponer un modelo epistémico que separa cuerpo/alma y que sustenta a lo objetivo como fuente creadora de lo subjetivo; la ciencia normal europea ha sido el modelo a seguir, y consecuentemente el periodismo latinoamericano, para ser ciencia, debe acompañar este entendimiento y esta matriz euro-norteamericana.

El recorrido señalado más arriba está presente en la historia del periodismo latinoamericano. Cuando a inicios del siglo XX en algunos países de América Latina se presenta la “tensión” entre el “texto literario” y el “texto periodístico”, es decir, una forma subjetiva u objetiva de contar los hechos, podemos señalar que la modernidad euro-norteamericana finalmente toma cuerpo en el periodismo de la región y se impone como modelo a seguir. Este entendimiento se ve reforzado con los cursos de periodismo en facultades y universidades de la región, orientados por este modelo (MEDITCH, 1999); ello significó la presencia de la forma o modo moderno de narrar el hecho social, separando el sujeto del “objeto periodístico”. Sin embargo, los fantasmas vilipendiados del pasado, brujos, magos, *yatiris*, *xapuris* y *chamanes*, no solamente continúan vivos, sino que saltan y bailan, gritan y cantan buscando recuperar, entre otras cosas, sus antiguas vivencias del *tekopora*<sup>4</sup>, del *buen vivir* o *vivir bien*.

### **Colonialidad del poder, ¿y del texto periodístico?**

En las últimas décadas, comenzaron a surgir voces desde las márgenes y fronteras que cuestionan gran parte del pensamiento hegemónico construido desde la modernidad europea. Por un lado, tenemos los estudios poscoloniales que emergen como un movimiento intelectual que se

3 No entraré en la discusión de la filosofía occidental asociada a las distintas posturas “idealistas” y “materialistas”; estas no tienen igual entendimiento en el mundo no occidental al cual me estoy refiriendo.

4 Buen vivir, vivir bien, o tierra sin males, en Guaraní.



desarrolla y consolida alrededor de las ideas de Edward W. Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak y R. Guha, entre otras. Este movimiento, impulsado por una diáspora académica proveniente del Oriente Medio y del Sur de Asia, a pesar de *localizados* en occidente, interpela fuertemente a Europa y Estados Unidos, al occidente imperial (BHAMBRA, 2014). Por otro lado, y desde América Latina, se articula un pensamiento estimulado por los textos citados más arriba, asimismo por investigadores como Aníbal Quijano, Edgardo Lander, Ramón Grosfoguel, Santiago Castro-Gómez, Arturo Escobar, Walter Mignolo, Zulma Palermo, por citar algunos, quienes recogiendo esas ideas y pensamientos colocadas en los textos apuntados, avanzan en una crítica a la *colonialidad del poder*, del *saber* y del *ser*. La característica de este movimiento es que la crítica la hacen *desde* América Latina, donde *casi* todos ellos están *localizados*. Estos aportes se insertan en el contexto de la emergencia de un movimiento social y político que reivindica, al mismo tiempo, otros modelos de desarrollo, otros modelos de pensar sustentando que otro mundo es posible. Sin ignorar los aportes del grupo de estudios poscoloniales, voy a centrar mi análisis de la relación sujeto-objeto inicialmente planteada, y desde la misma pensar el estudio del periodismo en la región. Para tal efecto, partiré de los trabajos críticos de Quijano (2014).

Este pensador peruano, establece como una de las grandes tareas a ser emprendidas, aquella destinada a la “crítica al paradigma europeo de la racionalidad/modernidad”, siendo que ésta es “indispensable, más aún, urgente” (QUIJANO, 2014, p. 65). Para este autor latinoamericano la alternativa es clara:

“En primer término, la descolonización epistemológica para dar paso a una nueva comunicación intercultural, a un intercambio de experiencias y de significaciones como base de otra racionalidad que pueda pretender, con legitimidad, alguna universalidad. Pues nada menos racional, finalmente, que la pretensión de que la específica cosmovisión de una etnia particular sea impuesta como la racionalidad universal, aunque tal etnia se llame Europa Occidental. Porque eso, en verdad, es pretender para un provincialismo el título de universal.” (QUIJANO, 2014, p. 65-66)

La necesidad del momento es, según el autor, la destrucción de la *colonialidad del poder* mundial. Esto implica un proceso que tiene: i) la descolonización epistemológica, que daría paso a, ii) una nueva comunicación intercultural, iii) para un intercambio de experiencias y de significaciones como base en otra racionalidad que, iv) pretenda o busque, legítimamente, alguna universalidad.

Para este investigador es necesaria una *descolonización epistemológica*: pensar y estructurar la producción del conocimiento desde otra perspectiva que no la racional-moderna europea, alejados de la relación sujeto-objeto que este modelo introduce. Igualmente, es necesario un cuestionamiento a la totalidad única, asociada al pensamiento occidental, como punto de partida de toda creación de conocimientos; incluiría también aquí la creación y construcción de la información. Pero, al mismo tiempo, y paralelamente, es necesario sobrepasar la relación de subordinación e inferioridad de otras culturas que no la europea, que implica conceder a este pensamiento y conocimiento su universalidad. La modernidad produce, no sólo *heridas coloniales*, también produce *heridas patriarcales* (normas y jerarquías que regulan el género y la sexualidad) y *heridas racistas* (normas y jerarquías que regulan la etnicidad) (MIGNOLO, 2014). De esta manera se conforma un *otro* que es inferior, porque no pertenece al pensamiento y civilización europea, pero tienen el camino abierto para lograr llegar a la meta civilizatoria. Así fue construida América Latina, como el *otro* que debía seguir los caminos de Europa civilizada e ilustrada; de esta manera fue también pensada América Latina por sus élites económicas y políticas. Pero, no fue pensada de esta manera por sus habitantes y pueblos originarios. La relación sujeto-sujeto contenidas en los trabajos del *Ayvu Rapyta* Mbyá-Guarani, en el *Popol Vuh* maya-quiche, en los trabajos de Reinaga, Kopenawa y Krenak, nos dan a entender que la realidad presente en el universo no-occidental de la región es mucho más amplia, profunda y ha resistido a lo largos años de colonización.

A partir de esta *descolonización epistemológica*, tendríamos una nueva *comunicación intercultural*, un intercambio de experiencia, de

conocimientos entre “pares”, hombres y mujeres – inclusive aquellas/os no binarios -, entre culturas de manera horizontal, aprendiendo, criticando y observando sus particularidades. Esta comunicación intercultural da paso a un intercambio de experiencias y de significaciones como base “de otra racionalidad” según Quijano. En realidad, también es necesario discutir críticamente, cuestionar y radicalizar epistemológicamente el paradigma de la racionalidad en toda su extensión e implicancia. Si se cuestiona la relación sujeto-objeto que introduce el modelo de la racionalidad/modernidad europea, es decir, la idea de totalidad desde una perspectiva única y las demás como subordinadas e inferiores, también debemos cuestionar el paradigma en cuanto parte de la dicotomía racional-irracional, o racional-emocional. En consecuencia, una *descolonización epistémica* también debe implicar no solamente una crítica a la relación sujeto-objeto, también una crítica a la relación o a la construcción del pensamiento como resultado del desprendimiento de la relación racional-emocional. Quijano destaca que la represión colonial cayó sobre los distintos modos de conocer, de producir conocimiento, de producir perspectivas, imágenes y sistemas de símbolos, modos de significación, sobre los recursos, patrones e instrumentos de expresión formalizada y objetivada. A esto le siguió la imposición, por parte de los colonizadores, de sus propios signos y símbolos dominantes, sus creencias e imágenes, los cuales sirvieron como medios eficaces para impedir la producción cultural de los dominados/subalternizados y, al mismo tiempo, como medios eficaces de control social y cultural (QUIJANO, 2014). Lo que hemos tenido hasta ahora es la universalización de la racionalidad como modelo de pensamiento al cual llegar. Las demás formas de manifestaciones humanas que no sean éstas, no pueden ser o cobijar sujetos. En consecuencia, “las otras culturas son diferentes en el sentido de ser desiguales, de hecho, inferiores por naturaleza. Estas culturas sólo pueden ser “objetos” de conocimiento o de prácticas de dominación” (QUIJANO, 2014, p. 61).

De un nuevo dualismo, es como denomina Quijano a la propuesta que la modernidad europea introduce al pensamiento. Citando a

Descartes, quien introduce la mutación del antiguo abordaje dualista entre cuerpo y no-cuerpo, que concluye, finalmente en la introducción de una nueva relación sujeto/objeto, apunta:

La razón no es solamente una secularización de la idea de alma en el sentido teológico, sino que es una mutación en una nueva identidad, la “razón/sujeto”, la única entidad capaz de conocimiento “racional”, respecto del cual el “cuerpo” es y no puede ser otra cosa que “objeto” de conocimiento. Desde ese punto de vista el ser humano es, por excelencia, un ser dotado de “razón”, y ese don se concibe como localizado exclusivamente en el alma. Así el “cuerpo”, por definición incapaz de razonar, no tiene nada que ver con la razón/sujeto. Producida esa separación radical entre “razón/sujeto” y “cuerpo”, las relaciones entre ambos deben ser vistas únicamente como relaciones entre la razón/sujeto humana y el cuerpo/naturaleza humana, o entre “espíritu” y “naturaleza”. De ese modo, en la racionalidad eurocéntrica el “cuerpo” fue fijado como “objeto” de conocimiento, fuera del entorno del “sujeto/razón”. (QUIJANO, 2014, p. 130).

Así, y a partir de las propuestas de Quijano señaladas más arriba, una *descolonización epistemológica* en el campo de la comunicación y del periodismo implicaría:

- a. sobrepasar la relación *sujeto-objeto* en la comunicación y el periodismo.
- b. sobrepasar la dicotomía que opone la relación racionalidad-emocionalidad. Es decir, el texto periodístico deberá ir más allá de la “tradicional” relación sujeto-objeto, que nos viene del paradigma euro-norteamericano, en el cual lo narrado es el objeto.

El entendimiento *tradicional* del periodismo como practica social en América Latina es aquel en el cual el redactor dialoga con un texto-objeto. Por su vez, la crítica a la racionalidad-modernidad europea posibilita, en el marco de ésta, establecer nuevas relaciones y nuevos entendimientos para el texto periodístico. Cuando pasamos a cuestionar y criticar el texto desde la perspectiva de su propia construcción objetiva - y no solamente en el marco o contexto de las representaciones construidas que

expresan realidades -, la crítica a la relación sujeto-objeto, introduce un cuestionamiento *ontológico* al texto periodístico, una crítica a la esencialidad del mismo. Con estas consideraciones estaríamos sobrepasando a la “regla de oro” de la objetividad que durante tantos años comprimió -y aun comprime- al periodismo en América Latina. Inclusive algunas de las críticas más serias al paradigma euro-americano del periodismo producidas en la región, como la que encontramos en el excelente trabajo de Genro Filho (2012), no han conseguido sobrepasar los dos aspectos apuntados más arriba. La relación sujeto-objeto se presenta para Genro Filho como “uma relação na qual o sujeito não só produz o seu objeto como também é produzido por ele” (GENRO FILHO, 2012, p. 196); a pesar de la crítica – sumamente pertinente en varios momentos – a la “objetividad periodística” como parte de la ideología burguesa, observamos que aun se mueve - y dialoga -, en el paradigma de la modernidad euro-norteamericana del periodismo.

### **Traducción/mediación cultural, texto y narrativa periodística**

¿Cómo y de qué manera es posible crear inteligibilidad entre las diversas experiencias del mundo, tanto las disponibles como las posibles? Es decir, ¿cómo y de qué manera saberes y prácticas en una determinada cultura, pueden ser inteligibles en otra? Es lo que el periodismo, de manera general, plantea e intenta resolver. Por otro lado, también tenemos en este contexto el problema del colonialismo del poder. Así, ¿cómo identificar aquellos residuos eurocéntricos heredados del colonialismo y presentes en los más diversos sectores de la vida colectiva como en la educación, la política, la cultura, etc., y al mismo tiempo cómo revitalizar la herencia latinoamericana interrumpida por el colonialismo? Estos dos momentos, uno relacionado al *colonialismo interno* (GONZÁLEZ CASANOVA, 2007) y otro a sus formas de superarlo, están presentes en el periodismo. Más específicamente, ¿cómo identificar en la práctica periodística aquellos elementos o residuos eurocéntricos presentes en

el texto y narrativa periodística que constituyen herencias de un pasado colonial? Y, por otro lado, ¿cómo construir un periodismo desde las prácticas ancestrales presentes en la región e interrumpidas por el colonialismo y por el proceso posterior al mismo? En última instancia, lo que está en juego es cómo sustentar que una particular forma de narrar y contar un hecho social que emerge en una determinada cultura asociada a una región geográfica provinciana (CHAKRABARTY, 2000), se convierta en un modelo universal para todas las culturas. Es decir, una forma determinada y específica, *particular* de escribir y narrar, asume el carácter de una “técnica” *universal*. La historia del periodismo latinoamericano, contada desde una *perspectiva colonial*, no es nada más que el desarrollo de los procesos eurocéntricos en la región, que siguen y acompañan el modelo impuesto. Finalmente, es necesario formular una pregunta que necesariamente se encuentra asociada a estos dilemas: ¿Es posible que una *particular* forma de narrar y contar, se convierta en una forma y manera *universal* de narrar y contar? ¿O sea, un modelo, una forma de narrar, de contar el hecho social que sea *independiente* de la cultura de la cual originalmente emerge? Para intentar entender y dar cuenta de estas interrogantes, voy a trabajar con un concepto que permite apuntar un camino por donde transitar de manera que las preguntas formuladas puedan tener, si no una respuesta clara y contundente, por lo menos un nuevo horizonte hacia el cual orientar nuestras preocupaciones. Este concepto es el de *traducción/mediación cultural*.

### **De las ausencias y las emergencias: Sousa Santos y el trabajo de traducción**

Una investigación sobre globalización desarrollada por Sousa Santos (2005) le lleva a la siguiente conclusión: la experiencia social en todo el mundo es mucho más amplia y variada de lo que la tradición científica o filosófica occidental conoce y considera importante para hacer visibles las iniciativas de movimientos alternativos y darles credibilidad; de poco sirve recurrir a las ciencias sociales tal y como la conocemos. Es necesario, entonces, un modelo diferente de racionalidad. Una de las tareas,

sostiene este autor, es identificar “nuevas totalidades” al mismo tiempo de proponer nuevas formas de pensar esas totalidades. Si el mundo es una totalidad inagotable, caben en él muchas totalidades, todas ellas necesariamente parciales. Sousa Santos observa que, “desde el punto de vista de esta concepción del mundo, tiene poco sentido intentar captarlo por una gran teoría, una teoría general, ya que ésta presupone siempre la monocultura de una totalidad dada y la homogeneidad de sus partes” (SOUSA SANTOS, 2005, p. 174). La alternativa a la teoría general es el trabajo de *traducción*. La traducción es el procedimiento que consigue crear inteligibilidad entre las experiencias del mundo, sin el estatuto de totalidad exclusiva. El trabajo de traducción, según Sousa Santos, incide tanto sobre los saberes como sobre las prácticas y sus agentes. La traducción sería la forma de dar inteligibilidad a los saberes particulares, y a las prácticas sociales particulares, en su relación con otras culturas particulares. Lo universal es, desde esta perspectiva, una propuesta, la cual nunca se cierra y, para dar cuenta de este problema, la traducción actuaría como un momento de lo particular.

La traducción de saberes puede darse entre: i) diferentes saberes hegemónicos y no-hegemónicos, ii) entre diferentes saberes no-hegemónicos. Es en el trabajo de traducción entre diferentes saberes no-hegemónicos, en la inteligibilidad recíproca y en la posibilidad de agregación entre saberes no-hegemónicos, donde reside la importancia y la posibilidad de construir una contra-hegemonía. Es en la traducción de saberes no-hegemónicos donde se construye la contra-hegemonía. Los traductores de culturas deben ser los intelectuales de los procesos sociales, el *arandu kaaty*<sup>5</sup>, y pueden encontrarse tanto entre los dirigentes sociales como entre los activistas de base y otros pensadores sociales.

Antes de continuar, me gustaría señalar rápidamente, algunas pistas que permitirán avanzar hacia una conceptualización del periodismo latinoamericano, desde las perspectivas que introduce Sousa Santos. La traducción que propone este investigador es aquella que se da entre saberes y prácticas sociales, cuyo resultado no puede constituirse en un

5 Conocimiento popular, en guaraní.

nuevo conocimiento o práctica hegemónica. Es decir, si pensamos en el periodismo, es urgente pensar un proceso de traducción entre saberes, entre conocimientos generados en otras culturas que puedan ser inteligibles en la nuestra, y entre prácticas sociales, entre formas y maneras de operacionalizar el periodismo que no introduzca nuevamente prácticas hegemónicas. Si el conocimiento no es universal o no se sustenta en totalidades, si existe una miríada de conocimientos particulares asociados a culturas específicas, los saberes no pueden ser universales, sino más bien, existen varios universales y la traducción debe pensar e impulsar zonas de contacto no hegemónicas entre todas ellas. Si volcamos nuestra mirada hacia América Latina, y más específicamente hacia la región del Sur, con sus culturas variadas y múltiples, no podemos partir de la asunción de la existencia de una universalidad sea ésta eurocéntrica o no. Esto nos lleva a pensar en las particulares formas de contar un hecho social existente en la región, en las formas de difundir y construir informaciones que existen y dan visibilidad a las mismas. En una traducción sin hegemonía, el periodismo asume un papel de mediador social<sup>6</sup>.

### **Los aportes de Fausto Reinaga y el “pensamiento local”**

Varias de las cuestiones colocadas por Sousa Santos, de alguna manera ya habían sido pensadas desde la región latinoamericana a lo largo de los siglos, inclusive contemporáneamente. Uno de estos pensadores y teóricos, Fausto Reinaga, introduce ciertos aspectos que considero importantes para la discusión. Por ejemplo, apunta que “en la piel blanca hay cultura india. El espíritu indio fulge y refulge en la piel blanca” (REINAGA, 2014, p.39)<sup>7</sup>. Reinaga sostiene que en la población blanca-mestiza latinoamericana se halla viva la cultura india. De igual manera, la población originaria de estos territorios incorpora la cultura

- 6 Este entendimiento es cualitativamente diferente al desarrollado por Lazarfeld & Merton (1977) en su texto sobre el papel del periodismo. Se constituye en una crítica a la misma, y no busca equilibrios.
- 7 Este es un pensamiento que de alguna manera invierte al de Fanon (2009) quien señala que bajo la piel negra, se encuentra la máscara blanca; Fanon nada más está describiendo la esencia del colonialismo, al igual que Reinaga, quien apunta otra perspectiva también presente en esta relación colonial.



del “otro”. La primera es resultado de la presencia del blanco en estas regiones; la segunda, resultado de una invasión e imposición violenta. Y esto tiene que ver también con la lengua, con la escritura, y con la presencia de signos e imágenes existentes en una cultura, que busca ser impuesta o “traducida” para otra. Para el teórico aymara-boliviano, el idioma es pensamiento, sin palabra no es posible pensar y, cuando se piensa, se habla mentalmente. Esto lo refuerza cuando sostiene que el castellano y la cultura occidental “son meros elementos de *traducción*”. Cuando el indio se expresa en “castellano, traduce su pensamiento elaborado en quechua o aymara al castellano” (REINAGA, 2014, p. 294). Es decir, para Reinaga, la traducción es un sistema mucho más complejo que el pasaje simple de la lengua indígena para el español.

Estos conceptos de Reinaga nos permiten pensar, al mismo tiempo, posibilidades de existencia y de implementación de un periodismo desde la región, que observe que el soporte no es simplemente una tecnología, es un complejo sistema cultural y social y, sobretudo, político. Al mismo tiempo, la escrita ha sido, a lo largo de todos estos años, un sistema que ha encubierto antes que revelado situaciones de extrema injusticia y pobreza en la región. Esto hace que lo simbólico tome la escena en la batalla de las narrativas (RIVERA CUSICANQUI, 2010).

Por otro lado, también podemos observar que la palabra, para determinados grupos en América Latina, es un elemento constitutivo de la propia vida. Es lo que se desprende de la cosmogonía Mbya-Guaraní, expresada en el Ayyu Rapyta (CADOGAN, 1992), donde la palabra crea la vida y es vida. La objetividad, en el sentido de la separación de alma-cuerpo, sujeto-objeto es entendida de una forma diferente a aquella que el pensamiento occidental sustenta. Podríamos pensar que esta relación sujeto-sujeto está presente solo en algunos géneros periodísticos como crónica o artículos de opinión. Aquí se nos presenta inmediatamente la pregunta, la noticia, continua siendo el género periodístico por excelencia? Si la propia construcción de la narrativa, sea ésta desde el soporte de la escritura, desde lo audiovisual u otro soporte, introduce

desde un primer momento esta relación, es posible pensar en un periodismo diferente, o parafraseando a Mignolo, un *periodismo otro*.

## Hacia un nuevo periodismo en América Latina

La necesidad y urgencia por pensar un periodismo que sea al mismo tiempo crítico y diferente al modelo eurocéntrico no es nueva en la región. En los medios, la disputa por contenidos, asimismo por el control de la propiedad, fue uno de los grandes ejes de disputa de diferentes perspectivas políticas e ideológicas, desde la colonia y durante los procesos independentistas del siglo XIX.

La crítica a la concentración de medios de comunicación en manos de sectores dominantes y de la oligarquía latinoamericana, que ganó fuerza en muchos países de América Latina en los últimos 20 años, también se apoyó decididamente, en una crítica a los *contenidos* manufacturados en estos medios. Consecuentemente, los cuestionamientos apuntan también hacia quienes construyen, elaboran o manufacturan dichos contenidos. A partir de estos dos elementos, la crítica al propio periodismo era solo una cuestión de tiempo. Y ella sucedió y sucede. La concentración de la propiedad de los medios de comunicación en pocas manos implica también la difusión de contenidos únicos, de *particularidades* que buscan transformarlas en *universalidades*. Siendo la sociedad latinoamericana múltiple y diversa, las voces críticas reclaman una democratización de la propiedad de los medios. Esta batalla hegemónica busca que se expresen las diferentes realidades sociales de la región. Tal es así, que en varios países ha surgido últimamente, desde el mismo poder, estrategias que buscan mitigar o disminuir desigualdades en la distribución del espectro radioeléctrico, asimismo de los medios más “tradicionales” en soporte papel. Legislaciones sobre medios de comunicación, sobre comunicación en general, periodismo y, últimamente sobre medios digitales y redes de internet, han sido los campos a partir de los cuales se ha procurado disminuir las asimetrías. La diversidad cultural de la región se instala inclusive en los aparatos legales, constituciones y legislaciones.

En América Latina, en los últimos años emergen y fluyen iniciativas comunitarias que, durante varios años, décadas y siglos, han estado presentes en la población; son distintas formas y maneras de producción de la información. Estas prácticas y saberes que involucran a determinados sectores sociales, son particularidades que, en interacción con otras particularidades, saberes y prácticas en otras regiones, buscan un diálogo intercultural.

La propuesta acerca de la necesidad por desarrollar ciencias sociales nómadas (GARCÍA CANCLINI, 1990), o la de salir de los medios para las mediaciones (MARTÍN BARBERO, 1987), o aquella de buscar propuestas metodológicas distintas (DÍAZ BORDENAVE, 2011) o la de traducción (REINAGA, 2014; SOUZA SANTOS, 2005) constituyen un primer paso sumamente importante. La perspectiva de los estudios de periodismo a partir de estas consideraciones ha enriquecido el campo. Las universidades, facultades y carreras de comunicación y periodismo han sido también un permanente “fermento en la masa”; desde éstas han abierto nuevos caminos, apuntado nuevas críticas.

Sin embargo, y pesar del gran esfuerzo por encontrar caminos propios, desde el aporte de los pensadores apuntados más arriba, considero que es necesario avanzar un paso más. Las críticas a la propiedad y concentración de medios, asimismo a la construcción de contenidos, se da en el contexto del pensamiento de la racionalidad-modernidad eurocéntrica. Lo que necesitamos en América Latina, es avanzar hacia una crítica a este paradigma. La *radicalidad necesaria* no es sólo epistemológica, es también social. Descentrar al sujeto, pensar la realidad como un todo integrado entre sujetos, racionalidades y emocionalidades, puede apuntar una salida al presente impase en el periodismo. Contar un hecho social siempre ha sido una práctica diversa y múltiple en cualquier sociedad, y con mayor razón en América Latina. El *giro epistemológico* necesario al periodismo de la región, que exuda por los poros las experiencias de los pueblos originarios, de los sectores subalternos, mujeres, grupos LGTBI y otros sujetos y practicas populares, es aquel que considere la relación de contar para otros/otras/otres, y se invente a cada

momento: pensar y exponerlo como una relación entre sujetos, no ya como una relación entre sujeto-objeto. Pensar como experiencias particulares que necesitan dialogar con otras formas de contar realidades, que necesitan dialogar con otras culturas. Para ello, el concepto de traducción y mediación cultural es sumamente pertinente.

Pero, me pregunto, ¿qué puede implicar pensar una relación entre sujetos para el periodismo? Y también, ¿qué cambios se introduce en el periodismo al pensar estrategias de traducción como forma de diálogo entre culturas y prácticas? No pensar solamente en una forma de narrar y contar el hecho social, a partir de normas y reglas centradas en la racionalidad euro-norteamericana; dar un giro y estructurarlas desde la realidad latinoamericana, desde las amplias formas con que se cuenta el hecho social de las/os sujetos en la región. La segunda pregunta, podríamos intentar responder desde la consideración que las totalidades y universalidades constituyen estrategias dominantes, formas hegemónicas de pensar y construir la realidad. Es decir, una manera particular de ver y observar el mundo, específica de una determinada parroquia o provincia, que busca imponerse como universal. Incorporar formas y maneras de narrar los acontecimientos de nuestros *retirantes*, e.gr. la producción de cordel en el nordeste brasileño, de los *ñe'engas* o dichos populares guaraní, de los relatos en el campo de la oralidad de los pueblos originarios, de las relaciones que se establecen entre sujetos y objetos que también son sujetos en las culturas de los pueblos originarios. Finalmente, pensar un periodismo desde esta relación implica pensar una nueva forma de periodismo, epistemológicamente radical. Y esto es no solamente necesario, también es urgente.

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## **Publicidade Social e sua tipificação: uma metodologia de transformação social**

### **Social Advertising and its classification: a social transformation methodology**

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**Resumo:** *O objetivo do presente trabalho é argumentar em que medida uma das perspectivas contra-hegemônicas da Publicidade Social Latino-americana, desenvolvida empiricamente, pode ser um terreno fértil, capaz de alimentar a reflexão que contribui para o fortalecimento de uma cidadania participativa com múltiplas vozes. Para tanto, apresentaremos o mapeamento epistemológico desenvolvido durante 6 anos, com a tipificação que demonstrará as derivações que sistematizaram esta vertente da publicidade: afirmativa, comunitária, causa, interesse público e transversal. A abordagem teórica conjugada com a pesquisa-ação fortalece uma metodologia que possibilita o diálogo com uma realidade latino-americana, visto que respeita suas características históricas, culturais e geográficas sem sucumbir às bases teóricas do Norte Global.*

**Palavras-chave:** *publicidade social, pesquisa-ação, comunicação comunitária, contra-hegemonia.*

**Abstract:** *This paper aims to examine to which extent the counter-hegemonic perspectives of Latin American Social Advertising empirically developed can be a fertile ground, capable of feeding the reflection that contributes to strengthening a diverse participatory citizenship. In this sense, we present the epistemological mapping developed over six years, with the typification that systematizes this aspect of advertising: affirmative, community, of cause, of public interest and transversal. The theoretical approach combined with the action research methodology enables dialogue with a Latin American reality, insofar as it respects its*

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*historical, cultural and geographical characteristics without succumbing to the theoretical bases of the Global North.*

**Keywords:** *social advertising, action research, community communication, counter-hegemony*

## Introduction

The strengthening of daily practices linked to Social Advertisement was one of the factors that contributed to the rapid social reorganization in the last decade. Another important factor was the remodelling of behaviors linked to consumption which, impelled by this advertisement bias, resulted in new forms of citizen participation and in alternative of inclusion. Such changes were driven by digital technologies that impacted in the three structuring aspects in the communicational field: The binding, the relational and the critical-cognitive (SODRÉ, 2015).

The aspects are respectively represented, first by the transfiguration of the ordinary life of the common citizen that began to publicize the own productions linked to issues of personal order, to artistic and sport initiatives, including the independent trade, as it is the case of small manufacturer that began to use the sociotechnical networks to disclose their activities to commercialize products and services in the local field, and in some cases, global (binding). Later, by market interest which, to enable the broadcasting of these productions, invested in the popularization of mobile devices as tablets, smartphones among others (relational). Finally, in the academic sphere, investigations related to advertisement took new theoretical-methodological directions. Especially, when the criticism related to the social consequences of the traditional advertisement praxis echoed far, whether to reproduce massive contents detached to social interests, or erasing, in his productions, particularities of the investigated sociocultural realities. This set of factors propelled dissonant voices of the hegemonic communication to claim the right to answer and, consequently, the research in advertisement is reinvented (critical-cognitive).

It became impossible to maintain investigations based in models given, without considering technological, aesthetic, political or social innovations. It was exactly then when emerges a peculiar perspective of Social Advertisement linked to the Brazilian reality, because there is no way to investigate, for instance, Latin American cases with the same principles that rule Social Advertisement in the United States, Spain



or Portugal. As Barbero says, it would be the same as “forging life” so it could fit a mold (BARBERO; BARCELOS; 2000, p. 154).

Let us consider, therefore, different epistemological views of Social Advertisement. On one hand, the currents of the global north scrutinize the bias of Social Marketing and check the goals of the advertiser with productions based on social themes broadcast according to the economic politics that favors dominant interests. On the other, in the global south, the discussion emerges from researches engaged to causes of social movements and human rights, aligning themselves to the principles of Community Communication.

That being said, the goal of the current article is to initially define which bias of Social Advertisement we are talking about, to, later, argue in what extent the counter-hegemonic perspective of advertisement can be a fertile soil capable of feeding the reflection that contributes for the strengthening of a participative citizenship.

The theoretic discussion will support the retrieval of the originary sense of advertisement, of “making something public”, so it is verified as the activity that had its meaning reduced to the marketing aspect. It will also sustain the counter-hegemonic argument of advertisement to debate its action in the tipifications presented in the conceptual synthesis articulated to the following spheres of civil society: Communities, groups that share the same physical (community) or virtual “commonality” (affirmative) State (of public interest), Organizations of international cooperation, NGOs and Social Movements (of cause), and finally, Public or Private Organizations (transversal).

We will argue how the research-action was methodologically fundamental for the accomplishment of projects or analysis of cases referring to the exposed derivations: community, affirmative, public interest, transversal. Through a creative research of the communicational field, we intend to enhance the reflection on Social Advertisement without reducing it to the opposite to mercantile advertisement, since it can have commercial aspects without necessarily weaken or erase their social purpose. It is necessary to embrace these new classifications of

counter-hegemonic advertisement that will appear, or that already exist, even though they aren't identified or seen commercially or academically.

### **Social Advertisement: a convergence between Advertisement and Community Communication**

The current research is propositional and it is linked to a field of studies in permanent mutation or “renovation of meaning, which occurs in a dialogic process of interaction with society, place of praxis that outlines and redesigns these senses” (BACCEGA, 2010, p. 53). This dynamic is linked to the “conceptual mutation” that foresees a hybridization to “the old discursive formations” (SODRÉ, 2002, p. 13). In other words, the changes are continuous and the “constitution of the new will never come about without the presence of “residues” of the old” (BACCEGA, 2010, p. 53). When certain meanings that seem disconnected are mixed, they can bring new meaning to perspectives, originating new views that are able to keep the field moving. An example is the relationship between the conceptions of Advertisement and Community Communication, which, at a first glance, seem antagonistic, but they can conjoin depending on the focus of the Social Advertisement. How does this articulation happen in the field of Social Communication, recently described as a post-disciplinary science in the work *Ciência do Comum* (SODRÉ, 2015) we will briefly go through the field, in order to arrive at the discussion about the axis of Social Advertisement that interests us.

Muniz Sodré updates the structure of the communicative field initially perceived, in *Antropológica do Espelho* (2000), in three “levels of action” (everyday experience). With the latest technologies increasingly rooted in our daily routines, the levels began to be understood as “levels of operation” (life management). Thus, what was once binding, is maintained in the binding order; in turn, binding becomes relational and what was cognitive becomes critical-cognitive (or metacritic). Sodré calls attention on how the lack of connection between the operative levels

has generated a cognitive dispersion in relation to the widely propagated narratives, even when they are not compatible with reality or harmful to certain groups.

Due to the validity of a stage of collective apathy, understanding communicational activities only through the marketing view weakens the critical thinking. The author ponders about the impacts of broadcastings in social relations, whether interpersonal or critical-cognitive. In other terms, naturalizing the relational aspect of everyday life may limit the reflective capability of the receptor, reducing their understanding on communication to the mechanistic aspect, proper of the North American functionalist paradigm, birthplace of the Social Advertisement.

However, in the same arena in which the current discourse emphasizes the centrality of instrumentalization with a certain tone of neutrality, emerges narratives that resist the ubiquity of a dominant knowledge and groups fighting for the legitimacy of their forms of doing and forms of knowing. It is in this arena that grow new strands of Advertisement linked to Community Communication, as it is the case of Social Advertisement dealt here: the one that is not managed by transnational corporations and counts with effective participation of the civil society. If part of the research in communication comes about under the prism of the effects characteristic of hegemonic media production propelling the “commonality” to be absorbed, it is pressing to think about new forms of knowledge production for the field.

If “commonality” is the object of Communication due to being their evolutive core, it is fundamental to understand its origin, production and circulation. According to Sodré (2015), the community is the symbolic space where communication happens, regardless of the code communicated by the hegemonic media. Simultaneous to the creation and massive broadcast of “commonality”, managed by small and medium-sized marketing organizations and even by transnational corporations, “commonality” is also corroborated by its current symbolic wealth within the community.

Because of that, the commonality enters the capitalist dispute. Dominating commonality completely is dominating communication, including the gap that the own system cannot control, once it explains, but does not understand its process. Therefore, it is not possible to dominate Commonality completely, but it is possible to understand it (SALDANHA, 2016, p. 195).

It is in the gap of “non-control” and “non-hegemonic dominion” that the Social Advertising, that we talk here, is located. It is important, then, to retrieve other currents about the theme, so we could propose a Brazilian conception.

Despite continuing being related to the physical territory, the concept of community is no longer limited to “a mere conviviality in a territory, but as a sharing (or exchange) experience” (PAIVA et al, 2014), since the own notion of territory can expand, due to the current configurations of space. In parallel to the territorial re-signification, advertisements extrapolated community centers (physical and virtual) and advanced to other spheres of society, at the same time it began to count with their participation consume the act of making public new forms of knowing and doing. Thus, Social Advertisement retrieves its etymological sense of “making something public” when it invites the civil society to effectively join of the whole or part of the process, since its strategic formulation, going through the phases of creation and production of advertisement campaigns, from the implementation of actions. We emphasize that Social Advertisement was already happening in the everyday practice of communities, performed by their members, with or without the participation of external agents, always aiming towards the benefit of the location itself, regardless of academic validations.

### **Hegemonic Social Advertisement from the Global North**

Historically, the United States inaugurate Social Advertising to release Public Services that would cater to the needs of the North American population. This line is interwoven in the two main world wars: around 1917, the Committee of Public Information (CPI) was created

by the United States president Woodrow Wilson, working from 1919 and helping spread to the population the involvement of the country in the first world war (LIMA, 2015). CPI used advertisement techniques to spread messages of political ideals through posters, pamphlets, films and contents on the news, that compared “hatred towards the enemy” with “love for the country”, creating a desire in the citizens to contribute to the Nation’s success.

By the time of World War II, media executives used advertisement techniques to promote government services. The purpose of the new advertisement category, in the 1940s, was to mobilize the advertisement industry to support the war efforts. That was the moment when the “War Advertisement Council” (former WAC) became the Ad Council and started to direct the term Social Advertisement not only to promote content of government agencies, but for every type of advertiser decided to strengthen the institutional image. Thus, in “the 1950s, companies were aware of the importance of the positive institutional image, and it was at that time that the theme of Social Responsibility became the focus” (SALDANHA, 2019). In the publication *Social Responsibilities of the Businessman*, the American economist Howard Bowen (1953, p. 6) highlights “the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objective and values of our society”.

According to Kunsch (2003, p. 139), many updates about the concept were thought since then, including the ones geared towards the third sector, with the implementation of social balance as an instrument for monitoring organizations

Capable of showing, through social indicators, the amount of investments of organizations in actions enterprised in benefit to the internal audience, of culture, of the local community and society as a whole. [...] a practice adopted in France, since the 1970s, being a part even of the legislation of that country (Law n° 77.769, from 1997).

The definitions of social responsibility are linked to the corporate universe because, “through the modern perspective, social responsibility

becomes part of a management of organizations” (KUNSCH, 2003, p. 138). Because of that, managers publicize not only investments in social actions, but also the respective results.

Well, if “social responsibility” is directly linked to the attributes of the organizational management and North American Social Advertisement, directly linked to their principles, that gradually gained organizational outlines, we conclude that the American strand uses social themes in their advertisements as a strategy of valorization of the positive institutional image and attractive to their stakeholders.

There we perceive a distortion in the original sense of advertisement (“making something public”) which, as public communication, should, by principle, make data available regarding public interests. To Habermas (1997, p. 92), the urgency of these interests is directly linked to the existence of a space of dialogic action in civil society. What the philosopher called public sphere would be a space or “an appropriate network for communication of contents, decision-making and opinions”. However, the Frankfurtian perceives that the changes of publicized interests in these spaces began to be modified in an increasingly systematic manner, due to the pressure made by the market which, even, began to develop laws to enable their own insertion in the ambiance of cultural production to strategically naturalize their own values to “put strategically in place of this argumentation, this principle of advertisement and this public communication (Publizität) forms of communication increasingly inspired in a commercial model of “opinion fabrication”. Habermas sees in that a “re-feudalization of society” (MATTELART, 2000, p. 8).

North American Social Advertisement follows the trail of Habermas’ “re-feudalization of society” in the same directive of the Spanish field. Both aligned to Social Marketing, conceptualized by Pringle and Thompson (2000, p. 3) as a “strategic Marketing tool and position that associates a company or brand to a relevant issue or social cause, [a form of improving the corporative image, differentiating products and increasing sales and fidelity”.

Based on the ideas defended by Moliner Tena in “*Marketing Social: La gestión de las causas*” (1998), Emilio Feliu Garcia says that social advertisement is for advertisement as social marketing is for marketing, when the product is the social cause itself. To Garcia (2004, p. 2), if “*la publicidad es un instrumento del marketing dirigido a los públicos externos, podemos considerar la Publicidad Social como ‘una extensión de la publicidad’.*”

The author points out three ways of approaching “social” in advertisement communication, “*‘lo social’ de la publicidad (función social de la publicidad); ‘lo social’ en la publicidad (publicidad con causa); la publicidad de ‘lo social’ (publicidad social)*” (GARCIA, 2004, p. 3). Despite having a certain redundancy between the three items, the topic “social function of advertisement” takes into account how campaigns that contain “social” as an object were equated to Marketing of Social Causes, because they follow the cobranding strategy which, through persuasive techniques of promotion, strengthen their institutional image through broadcasting advertisements linking the brand to the support of social causes in evidence. Finally, Garcia recognizes social advertisement by the North American axis when he traces back its roots in 1943, through Ad Council, the new advertisement category “[...]: *la publicidad de servicio público (Public Service Advertising); su existencia, por tanto, data de una fecha muy anterior a la del Marketing social, que nacerá ‘oficialmente’ en 1971, con la publicación en el Journal of Marketing*” (2004, p. 3).

The researcher concludes that the studies on advertisement in Spain are strictly commercial, including by the restrictions of regulating norms of the activity “*que ha hecho difícil el desarrollo de estudios sobre otras formas de publicidad, como la institucional, la política o la social. En estos campos existe todavía una considerable imprecisión conceptual que ha provocado, entre otras cosas, una gran confusión terminológica*” (2004, p. 11). In summary, both in the United States and in Spain, social advertisement is defined from corporative content either they are governmental or corporate.

Out of the notions observed in the Global North, the one who approximates the Latin American perspective is the participative advertisement that was levered by Portuguese researchers combined with Colombian researches. In 2018, the book *PartipanAd – Publicidad Participativa: una perspectiva global com un enfoque latinoamericano*, organized by Ana Duarte Melo and Marcela Duque, inspired on the theme of the IAMCR congress that happened in Colombia the year before, presented as central proposition the problematization of the paradoxical relations of the advertisement industry without falling in the trap of demonising it, nor limiting the discussion to the promotion of social themes. The idea was to discuss counterpoints such as “private vs public interests, economic vs cultural interests, corporative vs. community” (MELO and DUQUE, 2018, p. 9) without weakening the thought with manacheistic positions.

One of the divergences regarding to the present proposition are the unequal weight attributed to the extremes of these paradoxes. Despite the researches presented point towards interventive practices, the discussions still use as reference the view of big corporations, since some of the example used in the discussions contemplate campaigns developed by global advertisement agencies. The aspect of Citizen Advertisement worked by Sara Balonas (2011) converges, to a certain extent, on our focus of potentializing citizen participation.

It is precisely in the terrain of participation, as we will see next, that lies the relevance of the complexity about the understanding, not “of the” but “of a” hegemony, since “hegemony is not something univocal; [...] their own internal structures are highly complex, and have to be continuously renewed, recreated and defended, and the same way they can be continually challenged and in certain aspects modified” (WILLIAMS, 2005, [1973], p. 216).

When the social participation in the communicative construction exceeds the limit of technical interactions and strengthens their binding condition through sharing an “attractive nexus between yourself and the other” (SODRÉ, 2002, p. 22), there is Social Advertisement, because it dilates the possibilities of transformation. The process of dilation results



from the civil engagement of new actors that cooperate with alternative knowledges, subverting, therefore, the hegemonic logic of advertisements of mass media, and suggest a counter-hegemonic angulation for another advertisement praxis, because the “counter-hegemony institutes the contradictory and the tension of what seemed unisonous and stable” (MORAES, 2010, p. 73).

The tension is part of the conceptual mutation which, as said previously, predicts a hybridization with the status-quo, because the “total rupture never happens” (BACCEGA, 2010, p. 53). Therefore, in order for us to get to the notion of counter-hegemony, we will begin from the concept of Gramscian hegemony that says that “if hegemony is ethical-political it is also economic; it cannot stop from founding itself in the decisive role that the directing group exercises in the decisive core of economic activity” (GRAMSCI, 1968, p. 33). Therefore, these groups should listen to the different social actors, in order to understand “the interests and trends of the groups on which hegemony will be practiced” and the locus of this interlocution would be “civil society” the amalgam with our approach, whose conceptual synthesis will be presented later.

The concept of Gramsci’s civil society is linked to the superstructure and is compatible with Williams (2005 [1973], p. 216), when he argues that “we can only understand a dominant and effective culture if we understand the social process on which it depends”. Therefore, we need to reflect about the complex relations of the civil society, to predict the connections of Latin American Social Advertisement.

### **Counter-Hegemonic Social Advertisement in the Global South: a Brazilian proposition**

The civil society is in permanent activity, due to the existence of processes more flexible than the imposed ideologies, as it is the case of emerging social movements that react to the impositions, even if residual, of dominant knowledges. Therefore, it is pressing to recognize

Alternative values and meanings, alternative opinions and attitudes, and even a few alternative world views, that could be accommodated and tolerated within a certain effective and dominant culture. That hasn't been very emphasized in our notions of superstructure, and even in some notions of hegemony (WILLIAMS, 2005 [1973], p. 216).

However, more important than recognizing alternative ways, would be to publicize them to potentialize a reciprocal intelligibility with other knowledges and thoughts, for example, the possible junctions between the different social movements. This powerful articulation would be the way for the conversion of "non-hegemonic practices into counter-hegemonic practices" (SANTOS, 2002, p. 266). Or it would be the confirmation of "epistemicide, in other words, the suppression of local knowledges committed by an alien knowledge (SANTOS, MENESES, 2009, p. 8).

The end goal here is not to be a counter-advertisement, but a method that enables the exit of a passive mode. Especially when subordinate groups reinvent techniques with the material they have in hand or appropriate themselves of digital technologies, initially unreachable, to reverberate communications that sensitize members of the civil society in favor of their internal claims. An example was the travelling photo studio made out of a cardboard box and a LED light for registering, via smartphone, the ceramics exposed at Itaboraí's e-commerce, as we will see later. Without aesthetic or discursive appeals, it intends to include and engage external agents (PAIVA, 2003) for collective elaborations of innovative tactical operational plan with interactive actions that go from petitions (for example: Law 7,835/2018), voluntary work, crowdfunding donations, guerrillas, graphic innovations, audiovisual productions promoted in alternative media (@favelacineclube), cultural events (Gastronomic Festival Mangue na Mesa – Caravelas/BA, Cultural Rounds, etc.) and, finally, sharing of a legitimate common: the hopeful feeling of social and human accomplishment, as we will see in the board with a few examples of cases and projects in the final considerations (SALDANHA, 2019).

New propositions appear, such as the Mexican classification<sup>2</sup>, or the “popular advertisement”, identified by Colombian researchers of Unipanamericana Fundação Universitária as an alternative for creating advertisement messages

desde el diseño visual y la publicidad, y aquellas relacionadas con aspectos estéticos que vienen del pop art y del kitsch, y que son fundamentales en la concreción de la estrategia publicitaria: el mensaje, aspectos formales y estructurales, y la cultura, son solo algunos indicadores que pueden dar cuenta de la enorme riqueza simbólica que se encuentra en la publicidad popular (CORTÉS et al., 2018, p. 1).

There is also in Bogotá, the project “Centro de Memoria, Paz Y Reconciliación” (CMPyR) publicized, in public squares, the victims of the armed conflict in Colombia through performances titled: “*Para la guerra Nada. Ya no nos caben más muertos en la memoria*” (2015-2016). The goal was to strengthen the citizen practices in defense of the transnational justice process. The initiative had the participation of professors, students, staff from the Universidad de Bogotá, Jorge Tadeo Lozano, in addition to the participation of residents of the city to consolidate the memory of human tragedy (GUGLIELMUCCI et al., 2018).

There is certainly initiatives flourishing in the Latin American continent, but with little visibility due to the difficulty of scientific publication under the argument of frailty of the object and the production of critical mass about the theme. In this rhythm, Brazil has been presenting an epistemological effort for the area, inaugurated with the typology for Advertisement dna Propaganda, where the only mention to the social aspect is in the classification of ideological Propaganda which, aligned with the principles of Public Relations, groups in “the denomination of social propaganda all the campaigns geared towards social causes: unemployment, adoption, dehydration, drugs, among others. They are

2 Campanhas de imagem, de informação, de atenção, de prevenção, incentivación a la acción inmediata, de sensibilización, de alteración de creencias, de promoción en la participación de actividades de responsabilidad cívica, de solicitud de apoyo a la sociedad frente a las contingencias naturales (FUENTES e ISLAS, 2018, p. 230).

programs that seek to raise acceptance of an idea or social practice to a target audience (PINHO, 1990, p. 24).

Regarding Advertisement, was presented in the 7th meeting of Researchers in Advertisement (2017) a compendium with the update of the classic definitions worked from 1990 to 2016, considering the articulation of the reference work in the area (PINHO, 1990; LUPETTI, 2000; SANT'ANNA, 2015). In the synopsis, all the typifications<sup>3</sup> refer to corporate communication. In an exploratory research on the e-books<sup>4</sup> of the National Encounter of Researchers in Advertisement (PROPE SQ), since the first edition in 2010, it is evident the solidity of the Brazilian studies in Advertisement, with an extensive production of innovative themes and a dense dialog with national and international advertisement. However, the expression “social advertisement is only quoted in the 2016 and 2017 and 2019 editions, after the implementation of the work group Social Advertisement, with a more expressive participation, although it was new. Following on the research with the term “social marketing”, we saw a balanced raise in publication and texts with the keyword “resistance” having an interface with identity studies or linked to technology alternatives. It is clear that the Brazilian literature needs to be updated regarding Social Advertisement, since academic productions do not follow the rhythm or urgencies of the social movements. In practice, the advertisement communication is reinvented and intensified their points of contact with the consumers, that are being increasingly participative. Through the increase of access to digital media

We perceive a substantial and progressive expansion of popular participation in the most varied actions of content production, which goes from games and memes with political stances, to spots with reports and promotions of regional artists, to promotion of local businesses [...] we can see, for instance, that Social Advertisement [...] can be enabled due to the paths opened by cyber advertisement. (SALDANHA; ATEM, 2015, p. 51).

3 Product; service; retail; comparative; cooperative; industrial; cooperative; incentive; sales promotion and promotion.

4 Available in: <https://www.abp2.org/e-books>. Accessed in: 1/26/2021

Cyber advertisement has been strategically contributing for the expansion of the Social Advertisement, in a way the common citizen gradually dislocates from the position of subordination and begins to critically participate in new configurations of what should “become public”. We observe a progressive demise of erasure practices of epistemological cultural and political differences that worked for centuries to the “colonizing mission”, whose project was to homogenize “the world, obliterating cultural differences” (SANTOS; MENESES, 2009. P. 8).

### **A synthesis of the Brazilian proposition**

As main sources for background of this proposition, we recurred to the matrix readings of social communication, to the academic articles<sup>5</sup> and the projects developed by the own researchers<sup>6</sup> linked to the Laboratório de Investigação em Comunicação Comunitária e Publicidade Social (LACCOPS/UFF<sup>7</sup>). They were also essential for the solidity of this proposition, the consultation to the data registered in the field journals throughout the empirical researches guided by the research-action, to the contents diffused in mass media and the broadcast of community media in the period of realizations.

We elaborated and produced throughout the existence of the Research Group an average of twenty projects comprising the five typifications that will be presented in the board one, with the conceptual synthesis. Next, we will illustrate, with at least one example, each type of Social Advertisement. Part of the experiences that base this reflection were made by Laccops since its certification by CNPq, in 2014. All of

- 5 The exploratory research through the keyword “social advertisement”, from 2010 to now, was made in two large-reach free platforms. Google Academics (post of the productions from Portugal and Brazil) and Researchgate (with most of the texts in Spanish, despite the term of the research was written in Portuguese).
- 6 Formed by five professors in the fixed structure and by an average of fifteen to twenty students circulating among egresses, graduate from the Programa de Pós-Graduação em Mídia e Cotidiano (PPGMC/UFF) and students graduating the Communication course at Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF). The accreditation takes place every two years.
- 7 Contemplated in 2019 by the project Grupo de Pesquisa Emergente of Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (FAPERJ).

them were constituted in the dialogic relation of trust established from the first contact with the partner-groups.

The partnership is a foundation that intensifies the “association with an action or with the resolution of a collective problem and in which the researchers and representative participants are involved in a cooperative or participative manner” (THIOLLENT, 2003, p. 14). In this perspective, the researcher needs to exercise listening and be open to meet real demands. Because of that the exhaustive discussion with the project participants was essential to minimize aesthetic or linguistic errors, such as the reproduction of stereotypes, and to make explicit that the focus would be the local agents.

Some techniques of data collection such as interviews and discussion rounds about the partial results of the actions regarding the studies and practical implementation were essential in the decision making process. Local agents, researchers, undergraduates and graduate students were participating in these steps, always respecting the specific deliberation of the projects under development. In six years of theoretical investigation conjugated to empirical projects, it was possible to systematize a typology of Social Advertisement, whose typifications were organically complementary and achievable in the Latin American reality.

## Board 1

<b>Síntese Conceitual da Publicidade Social</b>	
<b>Publicidade Social Comunitária</b>	Direcionada às comunidades de vida física com ações feitas na, pela e para a comunidade, por agentes locais e com a participação de agentes externos. Trabalha com práticas de “visibilidade positiva aos talentos (culturais, artísticos, comerciais, alimentícios, científicos, etc) do lugar ou de um grupo específico e tem por objetivo reverter os benefícios conquistados com as ações para a própria coletividade, seja do lugar ou do grupo.” (SALDANHA, 2019).
<b>Publicidade Social Afirmativa</b>	Surge na Escola Popular de Comunicação Crítica (2005), projeto do Observatório de Favelas (2000). Potencializa valores afirmativos com uso de tecnologias digitais das comunidades que compartilham um 'comum' ligado às demandas expressas em ações no espaço físico ou virtual e é livre do “compromisso com a venda de produtos ou serviços” (Azevedo, 2015). Visa divulgar atividades em territórios populares, além de dinamizar a economia local.
<b>Publicidade Social de Causa</b>	Ligada às causas humanitárias e ambientais, se consolida na parceria com os Movimentos Sociais e ONG's que retroalimentam reivindicações urgentes e emergentes. Está em contínua atualização com as agendas das Instituições intergovernamentais como a ONU, a OMS e a OMC para contribuir de maneira criativa com as causas em evidência, com propostas positivas, em larga escala.
<b>Publicidade Social de Interesse Público</b>	Se opõe à “Publicidade de Utilidade Pública” que faz parte da estrutura da Comunicação Pública do Governo Federal, bem como compreende o “interesse” público a partir do “lugar de escuta” e não pela imposição dos interesses da classe dominante. Propõe resoluções legais para problemas concretos que afetam a vida, a exemplo das questões ligadas aos Direitos Humanos destacando os das minorias.
<b>Publicidade Social Transversal</b>	Nomenclatura definida pela publicitária e ativista Bruna Kassis, pode ter alguma similaridade com a linha da Responsabilidade Social, uma vez que também faz parte do planejamento estratégico das empresas. Entretanto, transcende o aspecto da gestão quando o investimento social ultrapassa a prestação de contas entre financiador e financiado, e equilibra a participação poder público, empresas e agentes locais para viabilizar projetos de transformação social. (SALDANHA, 2019)

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In the counterpart of the first evaluations of the international scenario, the proposition of the Brazilian Social advertisement is not only built in the end (of the promotion, of “making it public”), but it adds to the publicization practice, to the collective construction including the Civil Society in the idealization, the production and implementation of actions of this category of Advertisement that works against the hegemonic path, as we can observe in the board below:



## Board 2

Exemplos de Projetos e Casos	
<b>Publicidade Social Comunitária</b>	<p><b>"Levanta Caravelas-BA 2019!"</b> <a href="https://www.facebook.com/soucaravelasba/">https://www.facebook.com/soucaravelasba/</a>, @soucaravelas,  → Oficinas: audiovisual, redes sociais, gastronomia, plano estratégico para a cidade.  → Criação de brandbook para a cidade, produção de filmes, peças gráficas para os projetos locais e criação das redes digitais de Caravelas</p> <p><b>"Fevela Cineclub: Luz, Câmera, Revolução" (2016-2017)</b>  → impulsionou o aumento de 200 seguidores para mais de 2.600 (adultos e crianças)  → Criação da identidade visual e de todas redes do projeto</p>
<b>Publicidade Social Afirmativa</b>	<p><b>"É Nós na Vida!!" (2020)</b>  → Favela do Jacarezinho, onde o isolamento social é utopia em tempos de Covid-19.  → Campanha de informação para prevenção de contaminação à Covid-19  → Criação da identidade visual e peças veiculadas no Instagram e no whatsapp</p>
<b>Publicidade Social de Causa</b>	<p><b>Produção teórica (2018)</b> desenvolvido em parceria com Ousmane Thiam e Jossana Soares.  → Objetivo: levantar a discussão sobre a causa da comunidade senegalesa de Niterói/RJ  → A campanha para a marca "Dior Thiam", baseada na causa de refugiados e imigrantes, teve como objetivo alavancar o negócio para garantir a autonomia do senegalês Ousmani Thiam na cidade de Niterói. Desenvolvida pela Pares Cáritas-RJ e pelos próprios empreendedores: @diorroupasecessorios; Facebook: Dior Roupas e Acessórios.</p>
<b>Publicidade Social de Interesse Público</b>	<p><b>Produção teórica (2018)</b> para refletir sobre os impactos da publicidade na sociedade civil.  → discutir o papel da Lei 7.835/18 decorrente de pressão popular para punição de campanhas publicitárias do <i>mass media</i> que multa empresas cariocas que veiculam publicidades de cunho misógeno e sexista. A lei proíbe "exposição, divulgação ou estímulo ao estupro e à violência contra as mulheres" e as multas diárias vão de R\$ 33 mil a R\$ 658 mil. (BARREIRAS, 2018)</p>
<b>Publicidade Social Transversal</b>	<p><b>"Moldando o Futuro: Oficinas de comunicação em prol da sustentabilidade dos Oleiros de Itaboraí" (2019-2021) – em andamento.</b>  → criação do e-commerce (site e redes) para que os Oleiros possam comercializar suas peças (cerâmicas e artesanatos), com autonomia, sem depender exclusivamente de atravessadores.  → Criação da identidade visual do projeto e das logomarcas das iniciativas dos agentes locais.  → Construído em parceria entre a ONG Criar Brasil, o Laccops e os Oleiros de Itaboraí.  → Oficinas: planejamento estratégico, redação publicitária (perfis), fotografia (catálogo), audiovisual.  → O edital Luz Solidária é da Enel Brasil.</p>

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## Final Considerations

We understand here as Social Advertisement an umbrella term, with subdivisions linked to "making it public", structured in collaborative, interactive and participative formats among multiple voices. In the pre-ambular diagnosis, we noticed that in most existing currents, the same techniques and intentions of market advertisement are reproduced, because they come from a center of power, whose principles and beliefs are diffused to reinforce hegemonic values that benefit the market and only carry the social aspect in their name. In other words, in the scenario of the Global North, the name is just a persuasive technique that appeals for the sensitization of the public opinion and takes on, often times, an opportunistic posture, using welfarism as a tactic for strengthening a positive reputation for sponsor organizations.



The intention of the Brazilian perspective presented in this article is to establish, through creative productions, elaborated with materials available in conjointment with communication technologies, mainly mobile devices. The focus, however, is not on the instrument itself, but in the way of thinking and acting, in the autonomy of the interacting agent to redefine the modus operandi that give life meaning. Far from stimulating a gnoseological anihilation, the new knowledge must propel an ontological gain, because it takes the subject out of the condition of inferior object, raising them to the lead character of the situation.

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## **Criança, Comunicação e Consumo: Um ensaio compreensivo sobre o canal de brinquedos Totoykids no YouTube**

### **Children, Communication and Consumption: A comprehensive essay about Totoykids toy channel on YouTube**

*Dimas A. Künsch*<sup>1</sup>

*Everaldo Pereira*<sup>2</sup>

**Resumo:** *Este ensaio tem como tema a criança, a comunicação e o consumo e analisa o canal de brinquedos Totoykids no YouTube, com o objetivo de compreender essa produção sob a ótica dos meios técnicos que a tornam possível, a visão de seus criadores e o lugar social da criança frente a ela. Utilizamos dos pressupostos teóricos da comunicação para o consumo, sendo guiados pela ideia de um conhecimento compreensivo, que, no contexto deste ensaio, com base principalmente na noção de multiperspectivismo, implica o debate sobre distintas redes de forças que atuam sobre o fenômeno, com a consequente renúncia a visões que reduzem o esforço explicativo a um lado só dessa relação. Metodologicamente, ainda, o eixo principal da análise se dá a partir da aplicação da Hermenêutica de Profundidade, como formulada por John B. Thompson. Os resultados corroboram a convicção sobre a complexidade e as diferentes perspectivas sob as quais pode compreensivamente se dar o estudo da criança como sujeito da comunicação.*

**Palavras-chave:** *comunicação; consumo; infância; compreensão; multiperspectivismo.*

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**Abstract:** *This essay has the theme of children, communication and consumption and analyzes the toy channel Totoykids on YouTube, with the objective of understanding this production from the perspective of the technical means that make it possible, the vision of its creators and the child's social place in front of it. We use the theoretical assumptions of communication for consumption, being guided by the idea of a comprehensive knowledge, which, based mainly on the notion of multiperspectivism, implies the debate on different networks of forces that act on the phenomenon, with the consequent renouncement of visions that reduce the explanatory effort to only one side of this relationship. Methodologically, the main axis of the analysis is based on the application of Depth Hermeneutics, as formulated by John B. Thompson. The results corroborate the conviction about the complexity and the different perspectives under which the study of the child as a subject of communication can comprehensively take place.*

**Keywords:** *communication; consumption; childhood; understanding; multiperspectivism.*

## An understanding outlook

Toy channels are profiles that produce or share audiovisual contents having toys as their main objects, either to present their characteristics in the act of unwrapping it (*unboxing*), to create stories or in the development of plays through them. A study in the relation children-communication-consumption in this universe, it is possible to suppose that would tend, first and foremost, to reinforce the notion of children as victims of excessive consumption, a terrain more well-mapped in the studies around the subject.

This isn't, however, the point of view or purpose that we take on this essay, as well as, according to the desirable parameters of an understanding thinking, on which we inspire ourselves, it is also not our intention to deny the good reasons there might be to sustain that position. The fair concern with the physical and mental well being of a child, that is found, as a rule, in the base of both one or the other position, just as fertility which can come from understanding talks between both, can be seen as equally legitimate and healthy, in the sense of support and defense of children, but also regarding the legal order and ethics of consumption relations in the society they are living in.

What could be desirable in the universe of concerns of a method of understanding must be, in some way, clear in the development of this text, even if clarifying it in detail wouldn't constitute the focus of our interest right now. Besides, we wouldn't even handle such an important task in a text with a dimension foreseen to it. We can, however, affirm, that putting one and other position in a type of conversation round about a subject represents a good application of the original meaning of the verb *comprehendere*, in the meaning of joining, integrating, or

“embracing”, in the human, cognitive, and spiritual sense of the term, which is found in the basis of understanding.<sup>3</sup>

The proposition of the genre of essay writing also comprises as a first and important indication towards this understanding outlook, since the essay, by principle, invites more for the dialog and the conversation than we think in the extravagant condition of writing prescriptions, defining, conceptualizing, or, worse, taking on the violent gesture of raising fences and walls where a free spirit considers more appropriate to build bridges and open doors.

The goal in this text, that studies the toy channel TotoyKids, is to think in a somewhat different way this interaction, asking ourselves, without neglecting any side of the problem, what happens when you imagine a kid as subject and not (only) as victim – a “you”, not an “it” (BUBER, 2003) – in summary, the child as people, human, social, legally and culturally built in the world of toy channels, and, for, continuous act, also imagine the responsibilities that could come for the adults, fathers, mothers, teachers, the public power, the school, organizations for the defense of children’s rights, and everybody else.

From the nature of the essay is a constitutive part the idea that the conversation doesn’t even need to begin from a precise and specific point in the path, nor lead to a definitive place – “(...) essays have no closing” (ADORNO, 1986, p. 181) –. To final conclusions. Escaping the notion of right vs. wrong and the game of lose and win, agreeing with principles so important for an understanding epistemology while the uncertainty and the complementarity of the opposites, to think about the research object in a comprehensive manner, we imagine, at first, how ancient Greeks may make, which, in this fight for positions, the virtuous

3 Only as a suggestion to anyone that might be interested, the research group website “Da Compreensão como Método” ([www.dacomprendao.com.br](http://www.dacomprendao.com.br)) brings a set of texts that live well with the idea of a theoretically and epistemologically understanding thought. Other texts we deem able to inspire a debate on the subject can be found in the annals of the Encontro Nacional da Compós, to which we especially recommend the two first studies, presented to the GT Epistemologia da Comunicação (KÜNSCH, 2009; 2010). Studies of the same author, in partnership with other authors, were presented to the GT *Comunicação e Cultura* in the years 2016 to 2019.

thinking indicates a position close to the middle. If we get there, we will have renounced the bitter taste of the losers or the arrogant fascination of the winners “in the art of being (always) right” (SCHOPENHAUER, 2005). Also, we will have reinforced the position of those who think the world is more well mixed, diverse and fun than it is thought our mere philosophy, based on different types of small and big hatreds and epistemological and theoretical reductionism – or, god forbid, the pure and simple “epistemological fascism”, as denounced by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2009).

More concerned in including than excluding, in sums more than subtractions, in reticences more than periods, the understanding method seeks to open horizons beyond the growing scientific dogmatization – the idea of only one valid knowledge, the scientific (SANTOS, 2006) –, in a multiperspectivistic manner, both in the framing that it picks and in the theories and methods which, with freedom of spirit, it relates to. The multiperspectivism in communication studies, with roots in Nietzsche, was deepened by Douglas Kellner (2001, p. 129) as a way of studying cultural productions that “uses a wide array of textual and critical strategies to interpret, criticise and deconstruct cultural productions in exam”.

This essay intends to extract a analytical-understanding vitality that deems possible through, especially, the application of the method of Depth-hermeneutics (DH), as suggested by John B. Thompson, in *Ideology and modern culture* (2011). The idea that hermeneutics brings us back to understanding of the whole in relation to the parts and vice-versa, emphasizing, according to Hans-George Gadamer (1997), that whole and part are mechanical illusions, because the part is as determined by the whole than the whole is determined by the parts. DH, as depth of the vision of Martin Heidegger (2012) and Paul Ricoeur (1987), come from the hermeneutics of daily life, in the words of Thompson (2011), and follows a re-interpretative methodology. Thompson proposes then three different moments, after the initial act of the hermeneutics of



daily life to which he names the interpretation of doxa; the social-historic analysis, the formal or discursive analysis and the interpretation/reinterpretation.<sup>4</sup>

The frame about a specific channel – TotoyKids – should temporarily illustrate the main scope of a wider research from which we extract this contribution. As a more relevant result, even though still betraying somehow the “touchy intention” of the essay (ADORNO, 1986, p. 180) one hopes to form the conviction on how it is possible and necessary to think about children as subject of communication – not as individual, but as subject, human, social and political lead character. We also intend, at the same time – even if the focus of the analysis drafted here does not fall over this specific and fundamental point –, help in the understanding on how the speed of media technologies alters children behavior, fragments sociabilities, generates new demands from the kids, creates new meanings for family and affectionate bonds, alters consumption relations and changes the meaning of toys and play.

A comprehensive type of interview (KAUFMAN, 2013; MEDINA, 1986) could be made with the producers of the channel, a couple of Brazilians that lives in Los Angeles, through videochat, using the software Skype. With the artistic names of Totó and Isa, they seemed open to questions and exposed their point of view on the activity of the channel of toys, letting clear from the beginning what, for them, represent the motivations that led them to create the channel: Totó emphasizes his pursuit in the USA for a career in acting and on how he fell for video producing because of his desire to act. The toys, according to their point of view, are acting props for an exercise of art. Other motivations will be shown throughout the following text.

4 We have no fear to affirm that, here, the moments of intervention of method get mixed, at the same time they leave empty spaces where the best to do may be recurring, first, to recur, first, to Thompson himself (2011) or, also, to *Criança, comunicação e consumo: um estudo dos canais de brinquedos no YouTube*, a PhD thesis of one of the authors of this essay (PEREIRA, 2020).

## The channel TotoyKids on YouTube

Research conducted by Luciana Corrêa (2015), with the goal of investigating the relation of the children with technology, had as result that, out of the 100 biggest channel from YouTube in Brazil, 36 had children as target audience (0 to 12 years old). In total, there were mapped 110 channels geared specifically towards this audience, which, together, had in that year an audience of over 20 billion views. Aspects of the audience can be seen in Board 1, through the classification by number of access of the website Socialblade (2020). This website uses public access data to different Internet services, including YouTube, for statistic analyses and related services. In a previous study (PEREIRA; OLIVEIRA, 2016) we noticed a growth of these channels among children in the pre-operational age, according the studies of Jean Piaget (1970) from 3 to 6 years old.

As we already know, these are video channels of plays and unboxing of toys, whose content basically consist in developing narratives with toys, or in taking toys out of their boxes presenting their characteristics and components. The Board 1, already referred in the previous paragraph, shows the list of the 10 toy channels that were most accessed in Brazil in 2018 and offers other data, such as the fifth position filled by Totoykids.

Totoykids is a video streaming channel on YouTube whose main focus is the use of toys for production of narratives. Created by André Vaz and Isa Vaal, Totó and Isa, respectively, and inscribed on YouTube in December 2nd, 2014, it has until the moment of this study over 16 million subscriptions and over 7 billion views. The videos have, on average, 5 to 10 minutes of duration, but there are sections that can last over an hour. The creators are located in the city of Los Angeles, California, United States, and their 773 videos are made in Portuguese, with focus on the Brazilian audience. The videos are available on an average of 15 per month, in other words, one video every 2 days. The average is 452 views per subscription, although not every view is made from subscribed

users. The estimates of monthly revenue are between US\$ 28,800 and US\$ 460,800.5

Board 1 – 10 most accessed channels – Brazil – 2020

General Ranking	Ranking of Toy Channels	Name of the channel	Uploads	Subscribed (millions)	Views
1	1st	Maria Clara & JP	449	15.8	5,923,710,345
3	2nd	Luccas Neto	838	28.5	9,054,214,927
16	3rd	Brincando com o Rafael	147	6.43	1,059,104,433
32	4th	Planeta das Gêmeas	586	12.5	3,352,343,341
40	5th	Totoykids	773	16.2	7,318,320,331
42	6th	Slime Videos	398	3.48	937,298,503
44	7th	Crescendo com Luluca	698	7.08	1,552,650,125
45	8th	Kids Fun	990	12.2	3,111,498,938
46	9th	MC Divertida	136	4.36	745,503,521
53	10th	Slime Sam Sapeca	269	3.29	602,753,096

Source: The authors, through the website Socialblade.com. Accessed in: March 7th, 2020.

An illustration is the video published on the channel in which the narrators speak and manipulate toys, in this case a Barbie doll and Peppa Pig. In the video, we see how the toy Burger Mania works. It is a competition in which the two main characters try to make, as quickly as possible, the sandwiches determined by the cards of the game. Whoever makes them more quickly wins, not letting them fall from the plates. The prizes are suitcases with toys, and a candy dispenser. The winner picks as prize the suitcases, opening them one by one. She shows the prizes contained on each suitcase. The lead characters clarify that this is a play with Burger

5 Revenue estimated according to the website SocialBlade, considering the revenue per thousand views from US\$ 0.25 to US\$ 4.00.

Mania and ask their viewers to subscribe to their channel. That is made in a voiceover, and through the speeches of the characters, as follows.

00:04 – Male voiceover: Hello people from Totoykids, today we will make a competition between boys and girls.

00:12 – BARBIE: And this competition is about who can makes more sandwiches.

00:14 – GEORGE: So move, I'm very hungry.

00:17 – PEPPA: So do I.

00:19 – BARBIE: We will start soon, but first, let me show you the prize. The first place can choose between these Shopkins suitcases or this supercool candy.<sup>6</sup>

At the same time of the interview with the channel creators, we observed that Google had created a system called Family Link, in which the parents or caretakers could create and manage a Google account for their children. This feature allows parents or caretakers to monitor the digital steps of the child on YouTube and other websites and apps on the Internet. We emphasize, with that, the possibility of parent mediation in the relationship between the child and the videos, one of the important aspects, among others, of the social construction of a child as subject.

### **Consumption as hegemonic ambience**

Under the simple point of view of how the thing presents itself – aware to what the Greek term *phainomenon* in its origin indicates, which is “something that presents itself” – it is relatively easy to perceive the hegemonic ambience of consumption in the productions of the channel we are studying, due to the exclusive use of toys in the narratives. In addition to that, there is the fact that toy videos arrive as a differential in the scenario of video streaming, linked to the growth of access and demand on behalf of children. Converges in this sense the increase of bandwidth, the reduction of costs of access displays, such as smart phones and smart TVs and tablets. And also the fact that the YouTube

6 Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xJWMjTociS0> Accessed in: June 29th, 2020.

(2020) platform allows a financial return with advertisement payments, called in this business as “monetization”, which contributes for creators to dedicate themselves full-time to create and share content. Totoykids makes, on average, one upload every 2 days.

Another reason that led this couple to make YouTube videos would be the possibility of living anywhere in the world, in a way that the production would be de-territorialized from the “reception”, even though living anywhere in the world in our current consumption context would mean “specific places”, not “anywhere”. It’s like a “greencard utopia” in which the desire to move from Brazil is directed to specific places. We add to that the intention of working from home, trend that Faith Popcorn (1999) called “encapsulation”, and the perception that this way, Totó and Isa, as shown in their interview, could also see their kids grow, without the feeling of distance perceived by parents with long work hours.

This hegemonic ambiance of consumption, now further and more deeply than the ordinary look about the phenomenon allows, and is particularly perceived, among others, in studies like: *The Theory of Leisure Class*, by Thorstein Veblen (1984 [1899]); *The romantic ethic and the spirit of modern consumerism*, by Colin Campbell (2001); *Economy of symbolic goods*, by Pierre Bourdieu (2005); *Consuming Life*, by Zygmunt Bauman (2008); *Consumer Society*, by Jean Baudrillard (1995); *A sociedade do sonho: comunicação, cultura e consumo*, by Everardo Rocha (1995); and *Consumidores e cidadãos: conflitos multiculturais da globalização*, by Néstor García Canclini (1995).

These works, to a certain extent, approach consumer configurations in a (post-modern, for some) society in which social practices are interwoven by consumption. A brief turning of perspective in studies and research about the theme took over time consumption to dislocate the focus from productive process to a different view, that tries to think about it in the field of relationship and meanings inherent to the communicational process. This is a (small) Copernican revolution in the world of consumption studies. Whatever opinion on how to name this

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dislocation, it seems fair to argue, looking through this perspective, that we have here a child that is far from the world of pure servitude or quietude.

Communication, and, consequently toys videos, take on an important role in symbolic constructions related to consumption. Veblen shows how the consumption of utility goods went through, over time, to a conspicuous consumption, similar to the concept of distinction in Bourdieu (especially in BOURDIEU, 2007), and meets the concept of trickle down, or the idea that the layers of less purchase power model their consumption by the layers of bigger purchase power, proposed by Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J. H. Plumb, in the book *The birth of a consumer society* (1982). The choices of toys in Totoykids videos follow a narrative logic in the moment Totó and Isa choose the product, but they only play a role of consumption per distinction, since their purchase products are different than homemade toys; and that different prices, products and brands are distinguished in meaning.

That differs but does not exclude, what Campbell (2001) proposes, to whom emotion and desire model consumption, which produces self-knowledge and builds a person's identity in their relationship with the product, with the merchandise, close to Daniel Miller's concept, in his work *Acknowledging consumption: a review of new studies* (1995), which sees consumption as our understanding about the world, and close to Baudrillard's concept, which proposes consumption in the formation of social identities through meaning, also classificatory, following Veblen's theory).

Maria Aparecida Baccega, in the introduction to *Comunicação e culturas do consumo* (2008), refines this concept, emphasizing that the consumption does not constitute an isolated action, but it relates, it makes and remakes in social contexts. The consumption process is revealed, in her words, "as a set of behaviors in which the consumer subject retrieves and expands, in his private field, on how he is capable of creating new meanings to cultural changes of society in his surroundings" (BACCEGA, 2008, p. 3). Thus, the choices of products for the

videos are constituted in consumption, and, when they are given new meanings in the video, also affect and are affected by those who consume the video itself. On the other hand, and again, it's important to repeat that the child, regardless of the age, needs to be seen as a subject in these processes, socially located, capable of understanding and create new meanings in their own way – and that has impacts over and with consequences to these same processes.

Through the consumption point of view, the couple knows they are target of criticism in the sense of stimulating (excessive) consumption of toys, mainly by organizations linked to children and teen's rights in their original country, Brazil. Currently, there are new studies on this subject although the theme is still very emerging, lacking depth, as emphasized by Maria Isabel Orofino, in the work *Media and School Mediation* (2005).

The study of children in relation to media takes on different fields, and we see in David Buckingham (2012, p. 93) a look that “refutes the view of meaning as something that the media distributes to passive audiences and says that the audience is active, but works under the conditions that they are not their own choice”. In Brazil, Instituto Alana dedicates itself to the bias that advertisement for kids is abusive, and periodically publishes studies in this sense, such as *Infância & consumo: estudos no campo da comunicação* (VIVARTA, 2009), *Publicidade de alimentos e crianças: regulação no Brasil e no mundo* (HENRIQUES; VIVARTA, 2013), *Autorregulação da publicidade infantil no Brasil e no mundo* (CEREZETTI; HARTUNG, 2018). These works dialog with legal devices such as the Statute of the Child and the Adolescent (BRASIL, 1990) and the National Council of Rights for Children and Teenagers (BRASIL, 1991) and the Convention on Children's Rights, approved by the United Nations (1989), and contribute in their own way to what we call the social construction of the child.

Both the institutional standardization and non-governmental civil organizations, searching for promoting the full right and development of the child and protecting them from a stimulus of advertisement

perceived as negative impact – possible, but not the only one – usually make it under a behaviorist approach. These impacts would be linked to the concept of consumerism and health and violence issues in childhood. It is important to notice – what is important and vital for this essay – that, whatever the social, political and pedagogical orientation may be for the ones instituted as such, these legal orders, as well as the actions and meanings produced by government and non-government entities contribute for the social construction of the child, once they frequent not only the public debate, but also conform concrete actions with focus on children's rights.

We must consider with special attention this political-legal relation when we refer to the second childhood, a time in which the child adapts to the experiences through a playful perspective, of magic and imagination, as we can see in Lev Vygotsky (1997) and in Piaget (1971), absent of socialization of ideas and characterized by egocentrism, once the child is different from the adult logic, thought, and the thinking that kids from other age groups, being centered in themselves. It is important to emphasize that, in the case considered here, the video channels of toys relate to children focusing on narratives exclusively linked to objects in the market. Beyond the analysis of individual nature, that we do not discard, we call attention to this social construct of a child as a social-historic perception, not as an universal and abstract concept, in summary, reductionist.

Even though the creators say they do not advertise, in the sense of propagating or inserting an idea, the mere act of using toys of certain brands, even though they are not sponsored, stimulates advertisement, in other words, the act of making the toy public. Considering that advertisement, public relations, marketing and the diverse competencies related have been modified in the last few years, due to the decline of mass media and the increase of digital media, streaming channels like Tootykids have acquired a fundamental role in the publicization of toys.



## The production of meanings

It is clearly noticeable, through the interview, that the producers locate themselves in an ambiance in which the literature of the field has been accustomed to call cyber culture, which, as we have manifested until now, childhood and video streaming channels of toys are two elements that talk to each other and they are mutually produced and reproduced, even though it is very difficult to conclude to which extent both are located in this relation and in which degrees and with which strength each one of these actors operate. It isn't the case of searching for certainties where certainties may not even need to exist, at least not in the sense of closing an argument. What is clear is that the arrival of video streaming channels specific for toys, such as Totoykids, was possible due to the cyber cultural conditions present here.

The communication technologies, the datafication of society – as we see in *Big Data: The Essential Guide to Work, Life and Learning in the Age of Insight* by Viktor Mayer-Schönberger and Kenneth Cukier (2013) – and the confluences with the children's world leads us, also and comprehensively, to a view of a subjective type in relation to algorithms that regulates the search, selection and recommendation of digital content, in the perspective of the bubble-filter, a concept exposed by Eli Pariser in the work *The Invisible Filter* (2011), which exposes the idea that the mechanisms of search, selection and recommendation end up giving back more of the same, once they are directed to themes we already know, share and with which we relate to. The more a kid watches Totoykids, the more the recommendation algorithm acts so that similar videos appear in this kid's profile. We notice in this context how communication, technology and culture are linked.

The video production is affected by all the technology linked to streaming, even though the producer is not aware of that. Under the technological view, we can observe that there is, in fact, new social aspects. Children who watch Totoykids are already born in this context and begin to perceive the world around them in these different and inter-relational ambiances. Child development, mainly in the pre-operational

age, or from 4 to 6 years of age, is very specific, as we have seen in the vast work of Jean Piaget, mainly in *The Origins of Intelligence in Children* (1970) and *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood* (1971).

Still in the interview, the producers reinforce the idea that the child seeks dialog with play and not with consumption, and that they create new meanings in the real world from what they interpret in the virtual world. It's important not to disregard the location and importance of play in human life from its origins, a data of human nature that serious analysis seem to often hide. Moreover, it would be possible, in this point, to ponder about the playful character of what we can call media pedagogization. It is, perhaps, the case we ask ourselves about the role of responsible for the channel in the fulfillment of children's time, which friendly face to offer, in a certain sense, some aid – and again, we would have to argue that the process never represents a one-way street, once also children, learning to play virtually and to consume these products, end up, in different ways, turning into subjects and co-authors of these narrative creations for Youtube – a type of friendly face as well.

Through an ethnographic perspective of communication, we can understand how this perspective of the creators is aligned with symbolic interactionism, seen in *Mind, self and Society*, from George Herbert Mead (1934) and *Symbolic interactionism: perspective and method*, from Herbert Blumer (1969) and interacts with the cultural studies, such as *Culture and Society*, from Raymond Williams (1969), *The Question of Cultural Identity*, from Stuart Hall (2006), and *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity and Politics Between the Modern and the Postmodern*, from Douglas Kellner (2001), for the unveiling of a critical audience.

Still, when we put under these perspectives the view of cultural mediations of communication, from Jesús Martín-Barbero (1997), and the uses and bonuses, such as in *The uses of mass communications*, from Jay Blumer and Elihu Katz (1974), specifically concerning the question of communication for consumption, we can set multiple perspectives

for a critical view of the relationship between communication, technology and childhood in this toy channel.

From the point of view of mediation, the interviewees say that, in the beginning of the channel, the YouTube environment was “colder”, in other words, they could perform actions more freely, with less control from the website and from the people watching these videos. There were, in their words “total freedom, it was cooler”. Over time, however, YouTube was becoming professional, getting more limited, creating internal rules about what can and cannot be promoted in their platform.

There is, in this same sense, as it is easy to suppose, the creation of rules of conduct by many movements, in a more or less organic manner with the market forces, the social forces and the governmental forces, interacting in a way to modify the conscience of limitations at the moment of creating videos, because they are catering for the child audience. For example, Totó and Isa cite the series of the Barbie doll, one their first creations, in which Barbie marries Ken, something that today they wouldn't be able to due to the new YouTube regulations for video producers, according to them<sup>7</sup>.

It is worth mentioning that the economic power of market agents and the political power of associations are also spaces of meaning and inter-pelation that produce hegemonic symbols for consumption and that are in constant dialog with other spaces of children sociabilities.

### **(Not even close to) Final Considerations on the Theme**

As in all social process, communication brings us closer to two forms of seeing product creators like the ones we have been studying: as subjects in the sense of acting and as objects in the sense of being affected – something that, seeing through this mischievous perspective, is condemned by the most elementary thought that oppositions can and must, in general, be seen as complementary.

7 The video, however, is still active, with over 19.5 million access until now, even though the comments were disabled. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jMijuaqHaJU>. Accessed in: March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

The children as object and one of the sides of this equation, arrives first in the studies and researches about the theme. The children as subject is still a terrain to be explored. This essay, more than putting periods in any small or big framework of this subject, we believe to have raised certain points that can be considered important for the discussion on how a child can be understood as subject in communication.

From the communicational point of view, the channel Totoykids brings new meaning to toys as something natural, “not created”. A toy, in this case, is not the product of an industrial process, thought out and planned for market exchange. It is part of the hegemonic ambiance of consumption, with market brands naming characters that gain a virtual life and interact in narratives, plays and fantasies. The natural side of consumption could generate in a child the feeling of social distinction? “If this is so natural, why I don’t have it?” could be a question to which the child could look for answers outside the virtual environment.

The deterritorialization and the timelessness bring new meanings for the action of playing, once the technological ambiance brings toy and child closer. The repetition, as we saw, in the relation between number of followers and views, linked to the psychological moment in the pre-operational age of a child, brings new meanings to information in a different way each time kids re-watch a video. The child observes different events and learns in a different way every time they access the video.

Even though there is a decrease in mass communication, the system of video streaming, which pays producers per number of views, the systems of selective algorithms and recommendation and the narratives similar to play, tend to generate audience focus, as it is the case in Totoykids. The techno-social conditions had created an ecosystem that is appropriate to this growth of toy channel creators.

The interview with these creators shows parent mediation, perceived in the comments of the videos; school mediation, perceived – in a smaller degree – in children’s comments; mediation of organizations and governments, perceived in the self-regulations of YouTube and Google,

who controls this streaming platform. Social mediations can also be perceived by the creation of the Family Link feature.

We can see, in this case, the feeling creators have of being play buddies of their audience. Play buddies which, however, are not synchronized, in other words, first, creators create plays with a fast pace, volume, timelessness and deterritorialization. Then, children watch and interact with comments, creating new meanings and again interacting with the real world and their toys. They are not literally friends, but they seek, as the creators themselves let clear in the interview, this specific role. In this sense, there is no depletion of the physical experience, but, on the contrary, the virtualization of play increases the importance of the physical experience.

Even without searching for advertising itself, on one hand, the mere fact of publicizing a manufactured toy, within a consumption ambiance, reinforces the meaning of consumption for children. The child grows in this environment and is constantly interacting with it. Consumption is also responsible for the identity meanings and social meanings.

The own act of making videos, as a part of the wider process of different interactions, shows the role of subject of a child, in other words, the one who acts in the communicational process, and not only an object, the one who is affected: the producers, for instance, are concerned with themes linked to childhood, such as bullying in the comments, trying to engage with children in a positive manner. The interviewees ask for opinion, interact, seek to listen to the children and put them as participants of the process, as lead characters of the channel. They understand the micropower of each comment and interaction, and they are discovering their role in this relation, in the parent's pressure for different content, such as the use of the Portuguese language, the religious behavior, the social behavior in plays. The interviewees seek to understand and interpret parents and children comments. In this sense, they have an immediate effect, because comments can be interpreted and the following productions are immediately modified and incorporated. The

least we can say, about the intercrossing of these distinct mediations, is that also in the toy video production, there is no free lunch.

The toy video channel is set as a media of meaning and construction of children social identities. We can understand their role in an evolving society (in the adaptative sense) in a spiral in which people and organizations are mutually asked for exchange of much less utility goods and more meaningful, in which the communication is highlighted in creating and re-creating meaning of the constitutive elements of symbolic exchanges of toys.

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## **Modelização espacial, comunicação e memória cultural no bairro Lavapiés, em Madrid: a questão das corralas**

### **Spatial modeling, communication and cultural memory of Lavapiés neighborhood in Madrid: the question of corralas**

*Regiane Miranda de Oliveira Nakagawa*<sup>1</sup>

**Resumo:** *Tendo por base o conceito de memória cultural não hereditária, proposto pelo semiótico da cultura Yuri Lotman, este artigo apresenta uma análise das corralas, um tipo de habitação popular presente no bairro Lavapiés, em Madrid, que será explorado como um texto cultural, e o modo pelo qual esse símbolo é traduzido no cartaz de divulgação das Fiestas Populares de Lavapiés de 2019. Com isso, objetiva-se pontuar a existência de um modelo subjacente a essas habitações, à qual se vincula um sentido de participação e coletividade, e como esses sentidos são ressignificados na peça gráfica. Por meio da memória, busca-se ainda explicitar de que maneira, de acordo com a perspectiva semiótica, os processos comunicacionais ocorrem na esfera da urbe.*

**Palavras-chave:** *memória cultural não hereditária; cidade; comunicação; coletividade.*

**Abstract:** *Based on the concept that cultural memory is not hereditary, as proposed by the culture semiotician Yuri Lotman, this article presents an analysis of the corralas, a type of popular housing found in the Lavapiés neighborhood in Madrid. This kind of housing will be explored as a cultural text, and the general manner in which this symbol is translated in the poster promoting the Fiestas Populares de Lavapiés de 2019. Therefore, the aim of this article is to punctuate*

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*the existence of a subjacent model to these housing dwells that is linked to a sense of participation and collectivity, and how these senses are re-signified in the printed poster. Through memory, we also seek to explain how, according to the semiotic perspective, communicational processes occur in the sphere of the city.*

**Keywords:** *non-hereditary cultural memory; city; communication; collectivity.*

## Introduction

Located in the central region of Madrid, *Lavapiés* is, along with *El Rastro*, popularly known as one of the “lower neighborhoods” of the Spanish capital, designation resulting from, according to Osorio (2017), two factors: the first is derived from a geographic cause, since both neighborhoods are located in a slope that leads to the Manzanares river, located in a geographically low region of the city; and the second one is linked to historic factors, because, starting in the 16th century, Lavapiés and El Rastro would attract a big amount of migrants mainly coming from rural areas of Spain, firstly due to the public slaughterhouses located there and, later, because it was transformed into an industrial area, which made the area highly populated. Their inhabitants lived in extremely poor material conditions, reinforcing, thus, the association of the neighborhood with something “low”.

It was in this context which, especially in the 19th century, there was a big expansion of *corralas*<sup>2</sup>, a type of popular housing made due to the housing deficit made by the big population influx present in the region. It is the so-called “hallway houses”, constructions with a few floors, built around a main patio that sheltered extremely small houses, which had around 20m<sup>2</sup>, accessible through open hallways, facing the patio. Commonly, there was only one bathroom and one kitchen per floor shared by those who lived in there. As Osorio (2017) reinforces, these were spaces with very few privacy, used almost exclusively for sleeping. The big patio located in the center of the construction made the coexistence with the neighbors basically mandatory, because part of the everyday life of those who lived there actually took place in the outdoor area of the housing. Thus, the *corralas* were constituted similarly to small communities.

In the last decades, *corralas* went through a process of revitalization financed by the public power and became independent housing, which, despite being small, had individual bathrooms and kitchens on each unit. Many of them can still be found in the neighborhood (image 1)

2 The word *corrala* comes from the Latin *carrus*, *carro* (in Spanish) and designed a commonly circular space, rounded by a ditch or a wall.

(image 2) and one of the biggest is occupied by Centro Cultural La Corrala. *Museo de Artes y Tradiciones Populares*, linked to the *Universidad Autónoma de Madrid* (image 3) (image 4) (image 5). Currently, Madrid is the city with the biggest amount of “hallway houses” in the world (OSORIO, 2017).

Although it was brief, this small storyline offers us a glimpse of the reasons why these types of housing came to be an important symbol of the neighborhood. It is not fortuitous that their neighbor association is called La Corrala (Image 6), the same way that numberless are the allusions made to Corralas in the folders of events made in the region.

Beyond these manifested uses and meanings, in this article, what is interesting to us is to punctuate to what extent the corralas can really be understood as spaces of memory in this neighborhood, from which drive from the construction of meanings related to the idea of collectivity and belonging commonly associated to the region. We also seek to locate in what way such mnemonic sign builds its own reverberation in the relationship established with other languages, in a way to amplify and create new meanings linked to communal life, as it happens in the poster for the 2019's *Fiestas Populares de Lavapiés*<sup>3</sup>, which will be analyzed in the last part of this text.

It is important to highlight here that the discussion proposed in this article is a part of a wider research, performed in the Lavapiés neighborhood, geared towards apprehending the constitution of their different spaces (FERRARA, 2002, 2008) and meanings generated by them in the culture. In order to do that, during the period of 7 months, from January to July 2019, there were made numberless derives (DEBORD, 2003) in the region, in addition to the realization of informal conversations with residents and historians, semi-structured interviews, guided tours and bibliographic research, which allowed us to outline the presence of different dominants (JAKOBSON, 1983) in the neighborhood, having in

3 The Fiestas populares de Lavapiés are also known as the trilogy verbena de agosto, formed by the parties of San Cayetano, San Lorenzo and La Paloma. The poster was idealized by Marion Cassabalian, resident of the neighborhood.

sight the recognition of the modes of operation of these different spaces and the roles they exercise.

As Kull points out, “[...] establishing distinctions is, somehow, also a method” (2007, p. 76). In accordance with such line of thought, through discrimination of differences and positions, it was possible to apprehend how memory is put as an important and dominant trait of corralas when seen in the field of the semiotic space of relations built in the Lavapiés neighborhood.

It is important to reinforce that our research path take as base the inherent reasoning to what Machado (2002) locates as a “semiotic issue”. According to such bias, the focus of the research process becomes the explicitation of the way in which, in semiosis, the languages and cultural codes generate new messages and/or texts which, in turn, produce new meanings or re-signify the ones that are already there. As the author says, “the semiotic issue, instead of responding why, it seeks to reveal the ‘how’, always as a critical exercise” (MACHADO, 2002, p. 214). Therefore, apprehending through which mechanism the corralas are articulated as spaces that are built as cultural mnemonic texts related to life in collectivity, which, in turn, lead to the formation of other texts and the re-signification of the sense of community, as it occurs in the aforementioned poster, constitutes the core of our discussion.

In correlation to Machado, such approach is also based in the epistemological perspective of study of culture linked to semiosphere, defined by Iuri Lotman (1996), one of the main representatives of Escola de Tartu-Moscou (ETM), as the semiotic space of relations continuously built and redefined by the exchange and tensions established among the most distinctive systems of language present in the culture through the semiotic frontier.

In the field of semiosphere, according to what we will discuss, a memory is constituted as a device that exercises a double function, since it is both responsible for assuring the continuity of systems, and for inciting the creation of new cultural texts. It is equally through the memory, which, finally, we will seek to explicit in what way, according to the

semiotic perspective, the communicational processes happen in the sphere of urbe, through which it is continuously redefined. Here, it is important to locate that, to the semioticians of ETM, communication is understood, essentially, as “[...] a process of progressive complication [...]”<sup>4</sup> (LOTMAN, 1996, p. 67), a product of relations continuously redefined among different systems, through which non-hereditary memory is active in culture. Next, we will see how this process can be understood in more detail.

### City and Memory

Even though few were the allusions made by Lotman to the city throughout his studies, the semiotician did not disregard the way it can be understood through the continuously built and redefined correlation among various sign formations, as well as the different temporalities that characterize them. According to the author:

Precisely the semiotic multilingualism of any city converts it into a field of different semiotic collisions, impossible in other circumstances. When we gather different codes and texts about national and social style and meaning, the city creates semiotic hybridizations, recordings and translations that transform them into a powerful generator of new information. Source of such semiotic collisions is not only the synchronic meeting of heterogeneous semiotic formations, but also diachrony: architectural constructions, urban rituals and ceremonies, the own city plan and thousands of other remnants of other times work as coded programs that produce again, permanently, texts of the historic past. The city is a mechanism that recreates their past and, thus, obtain the possibility of meeting with the present in the level of synchronic. Culture and culture are opposed to time<sup>5</sup> (LOTMAN, 1994, p. 11-12).

4 In the Spanish translation: “[...] un proceso de complicación progresiva [...]”.

5 In the Spanish translation: “Precisamente el poliglotismo semiótico de cualquier ciudad la convierte en campo de diferentes colisiones semióticas, imposibles en otras circunstancias. Al unir códigos y textos diferentes en cuanto a estilo y significación nacional y social, la ciudad realiza hibridaciones, recodificaciones y traducciones semióticas que la transforman en un poderoso generador de nueva información. Fuente de tales colisiones semióticas es no sólo el encuentro sincrónico de formaciones semióticas heterogéneas, sino también la diacronía: las construcciones arquitectónicas, los rituales y ceremonias urbanos, el propio plan de la ciudad y miles de otros restos de épocas pasadas actúan como programas codificados que generan

In the referred excerpt, Lotman doesn't leave any doubt about how heterogeneity of the semiotic space of urbe is built through the interaction between synchrony and diachrony, or, more precisely, by how, through synchrony, in other words, by a set of relations that are constituted in a certain moment, becomes possible to apprehend the diachrony of a set of cultural text, belonging to different times of culture, which equally intervene in the configuration of new textual arrangements through the dialog established with other codes and languages.

Still according to the author (LOTMAN, 1996), every cultural text is a product of relations of translatability and un-translatability operationalized by the semiotic frontier established between, at least, two systems of language or codes, in a way in which one of the main characteristics of every text is the "semiotic heterogeneity"<sup>6</sup> (LOTMAN, 1998, p. 14). It is also this multilingualism that allows us to understand to what extent one of the main functionalities exercised by the text is reported to memory. To Lotman, "non-hereditary memory of a collectivity"<sup>7</sup> (2000, p. 172) consists in an attribute of the culture itself and the texts that give materiality to it. It is through the correlation between the different extracts that compose a text that becomes possible to apprehend a double intellectual property which characterizes the function of memory: to store and produce new information, which correspond, respectively, an "informative memory" and a "creative (creating) memory"<sup>8</sup> (LOTMAN, 1996, p. 158).

In the first case, when they store an information through time, memory generates a program or a vector geared towards future, which establishes dominant forms of organization of a certain cultural text. That does not mean that such sign arrangements remain unchanged, but that, despite the operationalized transformations due to the dialog established with their surroundings, something remains.

de nuevo permanentemente los textos del pasado histórico. La ciudad es un mecanismo que recrea una y otra vez su pasado, que obtiene así la posibilidad de encontrarse con el presente en el plano de lo sincrónico. Ciudad y cultura se oponen al tiempo."

6 In the Spanish translation: "heterogeneidad semiótica".

7 In the Spanish translation: "memoria no hereditaria de una colectividad".

8 In the Spanish translation: "memoria informativa" "memoria creativa (creadora)".



As the semioticist says, it is about “something invariant of meaning”<sup>9</sup> (LOTMAN, 1996, p. 157), or, according to Machado (2013, p. 17), about “invariants in the context of variations”, passible of being recognized by the presence of a set of “constant texts”<sup>10</sup> (LOTMAN, 1996, p. 157), by the movement of codes or the persistence of certain models and their respective models, as we will discuss later in the area of corralas.

With that, it is possible to apprehend the long duration of certain cultural texts and codes, and the manner in which it creates a hierarchy of values in a specific sociocultural context (LOTMAN, 2000). Far from being static, such hierarchization can only be understood in the field of transformations of a certain cultura, which can result in an alteration of the positions filled by different sign extracts, whose transformations, as Machado indicates (2013, p. 18), demand the consideration about “what changes and what remains”.

Due to this operation of the informative memory, a culture creates their own parameters about what it should remember, and also about what should be forgotten (LOTMAN, 1996). However, over time, such “memory-forgetfulness paradigm”<sup>11</sup> (LOTMAN, 1996, p. 160) can also suffer changes. The heterogeneity and irregularity that characterize the semiosphere demand the consideration of the most varied types of sign arrangements and/or isolated fragments which, at the same time expelled from a certain space of relations do not disappear from culture and, through the dialogue with other texts and “contemporary” systems, through the semiotic frontier, can come to rupture in a certain context, however, with a new configuration.

By the action of the mnemonic device “[...] every piece of semiotic structure or every isolated text conserve the mechanisms of construction of the whole system”<sup>12</sup> (LOTMAN, 1996, p. 31), which, in turn, necessarily, generates a new textual arrangement, the same way it keeps traces

9 In the Spanish translation: “alguna invariante de sentido”.

10 In the Spanish translation: “textos constantes”.

11 In the Spanish translation: “paradigma memoria-olvido”.

12 In the Spanish translation: “[...] todo pedazo de una estructura semiótica o todo texto aislado conserva los mecanismos de construcción de todo el sistema.”

of its memory. Therefore, something that should be “forgotten” does not disappear, since it survives in a state of latency, ready to rupture in a certain context, and, eventually contribute to the redefinition of parameters about what should be remembered or forgotten from a certain culture. It is this mechanism that clarifies the action of the creative memory, in other words, the capacity that every text has to produce new sign arrangements and unpredictable meanings by the translation exchange that is established with the surroundings through the semiotics frontier.

Therefore, seen through the perspective of the semiotic space of relations, city must be considered through different sign systems that are built, their respective memories and reverberations in culture and, as indicated by Lotman, architecture is one of them. About that, there is no way to disregard that, from the semiotic point of view, corralas configure as architectural cultural texts, whose mnemonic device, according to our perspective, is primarily articulated through a underlying model in its design, through which it would be possible to apprehend a vector for the meanings they produce in culture, as it is the case of the idea of collectivity and belonging built around such housings.

As we pointed out in another article (NAKAGAWA, 2019), through the ETM perspective, the model should be seen in consonance with Cybernetics, and, as such, it is reported to diagrams of relations passive of being edified having in sight the recurrence of the way of showing up certain phenomena. It is about forms of inteligibility that leads us to apprehend persistence of certain cultural models, considering both their invariables and their variables. Once formulated, the models distance themselves from phenomena directly related to them and produce their own semiosis, starting to serve as base for the elaboration of hypothetical inferences on the possible ways of organizing culture, often destituted from a singular visuality.

V. V. Inavov, another important ETM intellectual, considering the primordial role played by spatial modelling in the process of organizing cultures, exposes a set of models passible of being apprehended in the development of cities throughout centuries, which would indicate their

different forms of development, taking into account the relation established between constant “semiotic factors”<sup>13</sup> and their variations.

To do so, the author points out the presence of a set of regularities manifested both in pre-urban settlements and in the *urbe per se*, through which would be possible to apprehend the action of the informational memory of culture. It is about two “basic geometric types”<sup>14</sup> (IVANOV, 1993, p. 109): the squared and the circular, which, not rarely, would also be present in models belonging to other systems. With that, Ivanov reports to one of the most elementary processes related to the organization of any culture, in other words: the configuration of the “structural model of space”<sup>15</sup> (LOTMAN, 1996, p. 83) and the consequent delimitation between their “own” space and “other’s” space, which would characterize the semiotic constitution, organization and individualization of any city.

Before we focus on the meaning of those forms of organization, it’s important to reinforce that, as Lotman says, the spatial model of culture is characterized, essentially, through topological aspects. In the field of geometry, topology is reported as the study of characteristics of sets that are maintained unaltered even when deformed, which would allow to identify the relations of connection, neighborhood and continuity between different spaces which, not always, show themselves clearly. Such specification is very important so we could point out that, in the field of semiotic thinking, the delimitation between the “own” and the “other’s” space is not reported to a topographic marking, related to the construction of the physical space built, but to the essentially sign and information dimension of space.

Therefore, both the circle and the square must be understood in their topological characterization, since they are closed ordenations, both would be passible of protecting the internal space against external threats, the same way they can come to orient the physical organization of the space of culture, because, “the semantic interpretation of the

13 In the Spanish translation: “factores semióticos”.

14 In the Spanish translation: “tipos geométricos básicos”.

15 In the Spanish translation: “modelo estructural del espacio”.

model of culture consists in the establishment of correspondence between their elements (space, frontier, spots) and the phenomena of the objective world”<sup>16</sup> (LOTMAN, 1998, p. 102). In this sense, to these two types of geometric types, we could add others that, through the common topological aspects, would play the same role. As Ivanov emphasizes:

[...] The circular and squared concentric shapes, or in general, polygonal, are often an issue not so much of real planning but of symbolic interpretation. The idealized conception of people or city as a circle does not mandatorily suppose a circular construction. The city can really have a shape of a polygon (sometimes of a regular quadrilateral), or a more complex geometric structure, distinct from the circle, but in a symbolic level can be described as a circle or a square inscribed in a circle (mandala)<sup>17</sup> (IVANOV, 1993, p. 111).

We notice that, because they have the same topological characteristic, every geometric image described by Ivanov are regarding to an invariable relative both in architecture and in specific shapes of urban organization, in which is possible to apprehend a remarkable trait of the action exercised by the culture memory. Even though we do not confuse city with architecture, since the second one consists of one of the many systems that build the first one, through the topological perspective, it is possible to perceive how urbe and a certain architectural design can be structured according to the same model, and, with that, be similar in some aspects, given the isomorphic relation established between one and the other. It is, therefore, culture models which, as Lotman says,

16 In the Spanish translation: “La interpretación semántica del modelo de la cultura consiste en el establecimiento de correspondencias entre sus elementos (espacio, frontera, puntos) y fenómenos del mundo objetivo.”

17 In the Spanish translation: “[...] las formas concéntricas circulares y las cuadradas o, en general, poligonales a menudo es una cuestión no tanto de planificación real como de interpretación simbólica. La concepción idealizada del pueblo o de la ciudad como un círculo, no supone obligatoriamente una construcción circular. La ciudad puede tener realmente la forma de un polígono (a veces de un cuadrángulo regular), o una estructura geométrica más compleja, distinta del círculo, pero en el nivel simbólico puede ser descrita como un círculo o como un cuadrado inscrito en un círculo (mandala)”.

are “[...] descriptions of culture text built with the help of resources of spatial modeling, and, particularly, topological [...]”<sup>18</sup> (1998, p. 101).

In the field of architectural design that distinguishes the corralas located in the Lavapiés neighborhood is that, according to what we have emphasized, it is characterized by a central patio surrounded, in general, by three floors in which the small housings are located, it is possible to observe the action of a model similar to what is punctuated by Ivanov: the cell (SENNETT, 2019), characterized by a closed quadrangular format, in which center there is the presence of a patio. It is precisely through that it would be possible to apprehend the action of memory that organizes that spatiality, having in mind the presence of a vector that allows us to notice certain regularities concerning, for instance, the social relations that are articulated there and the meaning production, and, on the other hand, the reverberation that is produced through the exchange with other texts.

### **Corralas and the cell model**

According to Richard Sennett (2019), in general, every city has a “tissue”, in other words, a specific order that establish a direction for the relationship built between the different types of buildings, streets and open spaces.<sup>19</sup> Among the three types of tissue pointed out by the author,<sup>20</sup> one of them reports precisely to the cellular tissue. It is an order that happens through the “unity of patios”<sup>21</sup> (SENNETT, 2019, p. 55), in a way that the buildings built are facing indoors, not outside, on the street. Throughout history, such patios acquired different variations and scales, since they comprised both family groups and public spaces surrounded by big walls, that gathered bazaars, markets and churches.

18 In the Spanish translation: “[...] descripciones de textos de la cultura construidas con ayuda de los recursos de la modelización espacial y, en particular, a las topológicas [...]”.

19 In the same work, Sennett makes an important distinction between *ville* and *cité*. The first reports to the built environment, and the second one is about the relationships built in the daily life. The different tissues are more directly found related to *ville*.

20 The other two are: orthogonal and aggregation.

21 In the Spanish translation: “unión de los patios”.

Still according to the author (SENNETT, 2019), this type of spatial organization is found directly related to the possibility of structuring more welcoming forms of social, given the sensation of proximity given by the intensification of the face-to-face encounter among individuals belonging to small groups to which dekurs the possibility of creating more collective and solidary forms of organization. That is why, not rarely, such type of housing had a central importance for the protection and resistance of socially vulnerable groups, working as a “[...] secret space, hard to penetrate for the authorities [...]”<sup>22</sup> (SENNETT, 2019, p. 57).

It is important to emphasize that, to Lotman, the semiosis generated by any architectural construction does not limit to itself, since it comprises a whole “extra-architectural” series<sup>23</sup> (LOTMAN, 2000, p. 105), which involves forms of sociocultural organization, rituals and many other aspects, which derive from the formation of mnemonic symbols, which are essentially characterized by the capacity “[...] of focusing on themselves, conserving and re-building the “memory” of their previous contexts”<sup>24</sup> (LOTMAN, 1998, p. 156), originating from what Lotman indicates it to be a “symbolic resonance”<sup>25</sup> (LOTMAN, 1998, p. 156), characteristic of the operation of memory in culture.

In this sense, the idea of a more community, horizontal and cooperative organization of social life is frequently associated to cell models, as it happens with the corralas, can be seen as a mnemonic symbol that is reported to a very specific spatial and social modeling which, for a long time, is shown present in the culture and that equally allows us to know a certain “world view” linked to more communal forms of social organization. As Lotman says:

The architectural space lives a semiotic double life. On one hand, it models the universe: the structure of built and inhabitable world is translated to the world in its entirety. On the other, it is modeled by the

22 In the Spanish translation: “[...] espacio secreto, difícil de penetrar para las autoridades [...]”.

23 In the Spanish translation: “extraarquitectónica”.

24 In the Spanish translation: “de concentrar en sí, conservar y reconstruir el recuerdo de sus contextos precedentes”.

25 In the Spanish translation: “resonancia simbólica”.

universe: the man-made world reproduces its idea of global structure of the world. To it is linked the elevated symbolism of everything that, one way or another, belongs to the space of inhabitation created by humans<sup>26</sup> (LOTMAN, 2000, p. 103).

For the cell modeling implied to *corralas* and by the memory linked to it, one establishes a hierarchy of values in which the collective necessarily must be superposed to the individual, which does not mean to cancel it. Still regarding this aspect, as Lotman (2013) points out, the collective can only be understood as such when one considers the relation of similarities and differences put among the distinct individualities, in a way any collectivity is characterized, essentially, by its ambivalence. Even if, in certain circumstances, one of the trends may become dominant, one does not survive without the other. In addition, according to the principles of isomorphism that base the Lotmanian thinking, every individuality is also equated to the whole it is a part of, the same way it brings in itself a seed of the collective, in a way that:

Here, the quantitative index is activated and behaviors become the base of a sense of partition and participation. The individual experiences itself simultaneously as a whole made similarly to universal and as a part, that forms the base of human self-awareness. The self-awareness is not an “exterior” superstructure, but the organizing reality of everyday human life<sup>27</sup> (LOTMAN, 2013, p. 48).

In this sense, we notice that the cell modeling implied in *corralas* builds a memory characterized by a dominant related to a sense of participation, in which the individual is, at the same time, “I and we”, the

26 In the Spanish translation: “El espacio arquitectónico vive una doble vida semiótica. Por una parte, modeliza el universo: la estructura del mundo de lo construido y habitable es trasladada al mundo en su totalidad. Por otra, es modelizado por el universo: el mundo creado por el hombre reproduce su idea de la estructura global del mundo. A esto está ligado el elevado simbolismo de todo lo que de uno u otro modo pertenece al espacio de la vivienda creado por el hombre.”

27 In the english translation: “Here the quantitative indicator is activated and behaviours become the basis of a sense of partition and participation. The individual experiences him or herself simultaneously as a whole made in the likeness of the universal and as a part, which forms the basis of human self-consciousness. Self-consciousness is not an “exterior” superstructure but the organising reality of everyday human life”.

same way that the “double life” of the architectural space both translates the way subjects perceive the world and it produces the spatialities of culture. Therefore, we delimit what should be remembered, despite the significant transformations suffered throughout history of what is understood by individuality and collectivity.

In the scope of discussion proposed in this article, this can be apprehended, especially, when we seek to discriminate the semiosis that the mnemonic sign related to *corralas* produces or, still, their possibilities of symbolic reverberation, as pointed by Lotman. More specifically, let's see how this process can be observed in the poster of the 2019's *Fiestas Populares de Lavapiés*;

### **The redefinition of the idea of collectivity**

As we can observe, the illustration (Image 7) portrays the *corrala* decorated with two strings: in one, there is the presence of colorful flags, and, in the other, among a series of pieces of hanging clothes, two shirts stand out: one with the brand of the feminist movement and a pair of pants with the colors green, yellow and red, which are also present in the Senegalese flag, country from which are the main immigrant group living in the neighborhood<sup>28</sup>, in addition to a “rainbow flag”, symbol of the LGBTQ+ pride.

In the bottom part of the poster, in the center, there is a gathering of people belonging to different ethnic groups with open arms, facing a poster with “2019 Popular Parties of Lavapiés” written and “Parties free from racist, homophobic and sexist attitude”. To the left, there is also the sentence: “weaving a neighborhood”.<sup>29</sup>

It is important to emphasize how the parties are defined in the poster, in other words, as celebrations defined by coexistence and tolerance of singularities that comprise different ethnicities, genders, sexual

28 The most representative groups are, respectively, original from Bangladesh (20.56%), Morocco (6.97%), Equator (6.22%) and Senegal (4.06%) Source: OSORIO, 2017.

29 In the Spanish version: *Fiestas populares de Lavapiés* de 2019; “fiestas libres de actitudes racistas, homofóbicas y machistas”; “tejiendo barrio”.



orientations and social struggles. About that, it is important to reinforce that about 32% of the residents of Lavapiés are immigrants, which makes it the neighborhood with the biggest concentration of foreigners of the Spanish capital (in other parts of the city, this percentage is up to 16%). The region is also known by the presence of numberless occupations and collectives, in addition of gathering numberless movements geared towards the fight for minority rights. According to Fernández (2013), the neighborhood has so many activists that there is a term to designate it: *el rollito*.

Just like it was represented and translated by graphic codes, we can infer that the corrala present in the piece has a polygonal shape, even though, in the illustration, there are only three sides and two vertices, whose position seek to simulate the tridimensionality of the architectural construction in the bidimensional space of the graphic piece. Gathered in the central patio, the individuals portrayed are in front for the sayings and are found centralized in the piece, however, backwards from that contemplates the entirety of the poster. Therefore, when we can position in front of view, the observer put themselves in the same position that are portrayed here, beginning, therefore, to be a part of the group. This action is “allows” the geometric shape/corrala is “completed”, expanding themselves out of the poster, in other words: through what is put as part of the gathering portrayed there, in a way that the tridimensional space of urbe, and, especially, the neighborhood whose walls were pinned in hundreds of posters, turns into a big corrala.

Through operationalized translation by the graphic codes, it is noticed how is intended to build the tridimensional space by the bidimensionality of the poster, whose take place the beginning of sense related to the spatial modeling implied to corralas. As Lotman says, a central aspect concerning to spatial semiotic regarding its “vectorial character”<sup>30</sup> which, necessarily, implies a “guidance”, because “[...] a typologic trait will be the guidance of gaze the point of view of a certain

30 In the Spanish translation: “carácter vectorial”.

ideal observer, identifiable, about their own city”<sup>31</sup> (2000, p. 109). It is, therefore, a communicably indissolubly related to the mnemonic trait of the space which, even in dialog with diverse contexts, is capable of activating meanings built in the development of time.

Consequently, there is no way how to disregard the memory related to the idea of collectivity present in the poster, at the same time in which the context portrayed there implies the redefinition of that is understood a social amplitude much more wide, the same way that goes through considering the singularities that form the whole. About that, it is important to reinforce that, according to Lotman (2013), the delimitation of the individual and the collective only can be done when is taken into account with the wider context that involves both. Therefore, if in the past, corralas were reported to small groups constituted by a set of families, by the resonance enabled by the mnemonic sign, as it happens in the graphic piece, the collective begins to comprise wider groups that involve different ethnicities and political stances, clarifying, at the same time, a characteristic that distinguishes not only the region of Lavapiés in Madrid, but numberless other neighborhoods from other cities.

At the same time the piece seems to point out that such conception of collectivity, far from erasing differences, emerges through them. As indicated by Lazzarato, in fact, “being together” must be understood, primarily, by the relations that arise in the midst of “multiple singularities” (2006, p. 30), which, increasingly erupt in the current geopolitical scenario. It is this ambivalence that generates relations based on cooperation, poitentialized by events geared towards “[...] an experimentation of devices of being together [...]” that favor “[...] the encounter of singularities and the ageing of different worlds” (LAZZARATO, 2006, p. 228).

Retrieving the aforementioned poster, we notice that the diversity it seeks to represent does not rupture with the memory related to corralas and the hierarchy of values inherent to them, however, it locates that, in

31 In the Spanish translation: “[...] un rasgo tipológico de ella será la orientación de la mirada, el punto de vista de cierto observador ideal, identificable, diríase, con la ciudad misma”.

fact, the sense of collectivity and belonging cannot be dissociated from the consideration of singularities. With that, we perceive how, despite their variations, the idea of collectivity seem to persist in setting mode of the city, which, according to Lotman, makes it opposed to time.

In addition, the specificity of the sign configuration of the piece, which predetermines in a very clear form the position to be filled by the observer, results in equally modelling a certain sense of belonging only passible of being built by the sensory dimension of what is put in front of it in the urban space, in a way that “[...] the message only ‘has sense’ if it is ‘felt’” (MACHADO, 2005, p. 290) in the specificity of this context.

One cannot lose sight that the sensory involvement promoted by a certain media and their coding system is one of the fundamentals of the concept of communicational mean proposed by Marshall McLuhan (2005, 1969). According to the author, being constituted as an extension of one or more sensory organs, every media generates a series of transformation in the human perceptocognitive dimension and in the most varied spheres of society and culture. These effects and/or changes that generate the environment, which, in turn, defines the media.

It is worth remembering that, according to the author (McLUHAN; STAINES, 2005, p. 80) the city is constituted as a mean that promotes the distension of different sensory organs, in a way that, as he says “[...] our technologies simulated for millions of years not only the body, but fragments of it. Only in the city is that the image of the human body as a unit became manifested”. We can say that, according to the Canadian intellectual, urbe are both constituted as an extension of the sensory and it intervenes to redefine it.

When inciting the drawing of a corrala which is only built through the singularity of each body, through the reordenation of the bidimensional language to tridimensional, the graphic piece of the 2019’s Fiestas Populares de Lavapiés promotes, precisely, the sensory involvement, which, according to McLuhan, constitutes one of the main attributes of the operation of a city as a communicative media, which correspond to less specialized forms of perception and reasoning. With that, we notice in

what way the piece not only contributes to build the city as it works as a metatext about which one can apprehend the own operation of the urbe as a communicative media and as a semiotic space of relations.

Such aspect also helps us understand the communicative dimension of the city through the semiotic perspective. As we previously pointed out, the idea of “progressive complication” that the ETM semioticians associate to communication<sup>32</sup> is directly related to how the different systems operationalize the translation of the informational memory, in a way of generating the creation of cultural texts increasingly heterogeneous, and, often times, unpredictable, because “[...] the message transmission is not the only role of the communicative mechanism, nor the cultural mechanism in its set. They perform the production of ‘new’ messages [...]”<sup>33</sup> (LOTMAN, 1996, p. 67).

In this sense, communication is understood by the most varied processes of interaction operationalized by the frontier of space of semiosphere, through which an information is translated into language and code, expanding, thus, the meanings it is capable of producing. As reminded by Machado (2005, p. 288) one cannot lose sight that “[...] one of the inalienable properties of communication is the capability of organizing information into languages of different codings”, without which it cannot even gain materiality in culture.

Therefore, when promoting different forms of translation of the informational memory characteristic of the cellular modeling, both corralas and the graphic piece clarify distinct communicational processes that build the urban semiotic space, the same way it amplifies the meanings related to the idea of community and the own operation of the city as communicative media. Through the perspective of ETM semioticians if memory builds spatialities of urbe is because, first of all, it is inserted into

32 Lotman (1996) locates communication as part of the intelligent mechanism of the culture. In order to build his formulation, the author takes as base the two brain hemispheres, whose operation is characterized by an asymmetric relation and an exchange among distinct semiotic individualities.

33 In the Spanish translation: “[...] la transmisión del mensaje no es la única función del mecanismo comunicativo, ni del mecanismo cultural en su conjunto. Éstos, al mismo tiempo, realizan una producción de nuevos mensajes [...]”.

a communicational process between distinct cultural spheres, through which a mnemonic symbol is translated and, with that, it both maintains a couple of distinctive traits and it expands in the relation it establishes with the surrounding.

## **Final Considerations**

As we've punctuated, both the architectural design of corralas and the poster of Fiestas Populares de Lavapiés are considered cultural texts, in a dynamic in which the second is constituted as a reverberation of the mnemonic symbol implied to the cellular spatial modeling of the first. Apprehending such action of non-hereditary memory, in turn, demands thinking about the semiotic space of relations that are established between both of them, once that only in relation with others a text is able to produce meaning. Therefore, the understanding of corralas as mnemonic cultural texts come from not the physical space built in these types housing, but the semiosis that the cellular modeling produces in the culture through communicational processes from which derive certain forms of social organization. About that, it is important to reinforce the recurrence of spatial modeling of corralas in certain forms of occupying public spaces, as, even, we verify in many immigrant groups living in the Lavapiés neighborhood, whose discussion extrapolates the scope of this article.

Still with relation to the existent bond between modelization, memory, communication and processes of social organization, one cannot lose sight that, as Machado says, “[...]” culture as collective memory is equally a modelizing system that acts about the behavior. In this case, it is a program that aims the future, since the semiotic rules of organization of life experience aims behavior” (2003, p. 163). In accordance with such thought, we notice that the action exercised by corralas as an architectural sign of memory and constitutive system of urbe stem from the “extra-architectural series”, capable of inciting certain forms of interaction with the urbe. With that, we can apprehend how the modelization agencied by communicational exchange are interposed in the process

of social interaction, in a way to evoke the constitution of certain types of bonds which, despite their continuous development, do not rupture with the past, but, rather, give new meaning to it.

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## **Partilhando informações durante catástrofes: experiências internacionais e o caso português fogos.pt**

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### **Sharing information during catastrophes: international experiences and the Portuguese case of fogos.pt**

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*Fábio Ribeiro*<sup>1</sup>

**Resumo:** *Durante situações de emergência (inundações, sismos, incêndios etc.), o acesso a informação rigorosa pode ser decisivo para a segurança das pessoas. Atualmente, existem recursos digitais (sites, redes sociais e aplicações móveis) orientados para este sentido. Este artigo procura avaliar experiências dessa natureza, em países como o Japão, México, Espanha etc., através de uma amostra não probabilística, de uma análise de conteúdo manifesta e latente, e de uma entrevista semiestruturada com o responsável pelo projeto Fogos.pt, em Portugal. Os resultados sugerem que a troca de informações durante estes períodos varia entre o voluntariado e a contratualização de um serviço. Os contributos positivos dos cidadãos convivem frequentemente com campanhas de desinformação, destinadas a ludibriar a opinião pública e criar falsas campanhas de solidariedade.*

**Palavras-chave:** *floresta; incêndios; média; cidadãos; participação.*

**Abstract:** *During emergencies (floods, earthquakes, fires, etc.), access to accurate information can be decisive to ensure people's safety. Some digital resources (websites, social networks and mobile applications) are currently geared towards this purpose. This article seeks to evaluate experiences of this nature, in countries such as Japan, Mexico, Spain, etc., through a non-probabilistic sample, a*

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*manifest and latent content analysis, and a semi-structured interview with the head of the Fogos.pt project in Portugal. The results suggest that the exchange of information during these periods varies between volunteering and contracting a service. Positive contributions from citizens often go hand in hand with misinformation campaigns aimed at misleading public opinion and creating false solidarity campaigns.*

**Keywords:** *forest; wildfire; media; citizens; participation.*

## Introduction

The “Arab Spring”, designation attributed to a group of protests initiated in December, 2010, which culminated in the destitution of various key-figures of authoritative regimes in Egypt, Libya or Lebanon, arrives frequently in the frontline of examples to show the impact that the digital ecosystem – from sms to social networks – can have in the public space. However, the *Wired*<sup>2</sup> magazine made the balance of what happened in these Middle Eastern countries and wrote that social media allowed these protests to blossom, but did not save the people from the atrocities of the political power, which, however, had risen to power. The *Economist*<sup>3</sup> made a completely different reading, sensibly at the same moment, in 2016, referring that digital technology continued to be the guarantee of survival of the spirit of the movements that were at the base of the Arab Spring. However, not always these interpretations about these phenomena had such optimistic readings. In a study from Ahindi, Talha and Sulong they consider that “the media undeniably became a valuable tool for protest organization. There were [the media] the discussion platforms par excellence and the information was quickly shared and the public awareness properly warned” (2012, p. 107).

As we can deduce through this example, interpretation not always become univocal when it is intended to analyse with rigor and exactitude the emancipatory power of technology in the day-to-day, applied to specific situations. In some areas, the role of communication has highlighted the dynamization of new social routines, or in the limit, of substantial changes in the life of certain groups or communities. This has been the case of Communication for the Development, a specific branch of Communication Sciences that has been adding, in a recent path, many contributions in a theoretical manner, but especially empirically and demonstratively, that same performance of communication as an alternative of the human action. As we can prove in different scientific

2 Retrieved from: <https://www.wired.com/2016/01/social-media-made-the-arab-spring-but-couldnt-save-it/>

3 Retrieved from: <https://www.economist.com/erasmus/2016/05/25/digital-technology-is-keeping-the-spirit-of-the-arab-spring-alive>

publications, many of these studies incide preferentially in rural areas and the scarce contribution on technology in this social framework. In the magazine *Community Development*, we can verify, in of the last issues (volume 49, n° 3 from 2018), the absence of reference to studies on technology. We observe studies on the connection between rural cities in the USA, processes of urbanization in Lagos (Nigeria) or even social entrepreneurship in Peru. In the *Community Development Journal*, from Oxford Academia, we can observe the same scarcity of integration of technology in this type of academic studies.

### **Communication in catastrophe situations: conceptual lines**

The public discourse, rooted in the daily social relations and linked to social media, frequently uses different expressions that seek to define an abnormal, unexpected or exasperating situation. Terms like catastrophe, crisis or emergency, among so many others, arise as an attempt of summarizing events that involve some level of gravity or emotion. However, from the academic standpoint and for official institutions, the distinction does not seem as simplistic. For example, the Law on Civil Protection, in Portugal, defines a catastrophe in the following terms: “It is a major accident or a series of major accidents susceptible of provoking elevated material damage, and, eventually, victims, intensively affecting the life conditions and the socioeconomic fabric in areas or in the entirety of the national territory (TAPA, 2019, p. 25). This proposition, as reminded by the author, is in line with the definition of the own regulating Entity for the Social Communication (ERC).

However, for several academics, catastrophe is not a synonymous of crisis (COOMBS, 2010, SEEGER, 2006, REYNOLDS, 2004) once they are presented in different levels and circumstances. To Shaluf Ahmadum and Said (2003, p. 1) “a disaster of human origin that happens in an industrial organization can evolve to an industrial crisis”. Bittar (2012) deffends that it is the magnitude that the events take on that make them crises, namely if these events gather the generalized and persistent

attention of the media. One crisis affects the institutional reputation of an organization, with inevitable consequences along the public opinion (AN & GOWER, 2009), an authentic institution open 24 hours a day, in permanent effervescence and agitation (LIPPMANN, 1922). In this diffuse lexical landscape, appears the idea of “risk”, wide and diversified, although apparently less problematic in a spiral of events, but involving emotions, perceptions and even social movements (ULMER, SELLNOW, and SEEGER, 2011, PETRIDOU, et. al., 2019).

In corporative terms, the concern for the thematic of the crisis management also appear with some frequency. Deloitte, in partnership with the Brazilian Institute of Relationship with Investors, had released the Crisis Management Manual for Relationships with Investors: Communication and Strategy for the Preservation of Value, in which they present three evolutionary concepts of negative events that can affect corporate organizations. In this sense, they present the idea of “problem”, associated to small situations of the everyday life, easily surpassable and without public repercussions. Later, they release the concept of “incident/ emergency” which Deloitte defines as “facts or events that do not belong to the standard operation of a service that can cause an interruption or reduction in the quality of service (...) for a certain period of time” (2015, p. 5). In this gradual concept scheme, appears, finally, the concept of “crisis” thought as “any negative event or perception that may bring damage to the image of the corporation or harm their relationship with society, clients, shareholders, investors, partners, regulating organs, public power and other interested parts” (2015, p. 5). Although it was not as exemplified, this proposition is different because of the attribution of complexity to an unexpected event in a spiral of events. In this study, we will only use the concept of “crisis”, as a logic that result from an initial catastrophe.

As already mentioned the triumphant entrance of technology in the daily life (MARTINS, 2011) has challenged the conditions through which society has understood as guaranteed the habitual forms of relationship, access and sharing of information (DETONI, 2015).

Consequently, they promoted a more systematized discussion about the integration of the citizen in different social areas. However, it is not liquid to consider that the promotion of public participation was only motivated by the emergency and definitive consolidation of the technique in the public space. As reminded by Valente (2013), it is possible to identify a few examples of intervention specific from the audience in the urban planning (FORESTER, 1987) in the rural development (WARBURTON, 1997), and even in the environment risk management (GAMPER and TURCANU, 2009), one of the areas this study seeks to complement. Weick (1995), in a provocative phase, question even if common sense begins in chaos.

Circumscribing the scope of this reflection in the case of forest fires, we consider fire, from the historic point of view, as a war weapon, destined to destroy enemies through the propagation of terror (BESENYŐ, 2017). In the Mediterranean countries, fire is, with large distance the main factor of forest destruction (KARANIKOLA, TAMPAKIS and PAPALINARDOS, 2011). The rapid devastation caused by forest fires raise questions about the informations that are exchanged, by public and private organizations responsible for the management of the forest environment, to better generate the flow of information shared about the evolution of a certain damaged area. In urban areas, of big populational concentration and with political, symbolical and media power, there are, in theory, better conditions for a more highlighted media coverage, contrary to what happens in rural zones, and areas more distanced from the big centers. It is probably, in this contexts, that in these contexts that the information about fires – from a preventive point until the unfolding of events in real times – takes on a specially sensitive importance. However, throughout the development of the fire, the media promote along with the audience, even though indirectly, a feeling of direct concern of events, with direct information, which could induce, wrongly, the feeling that, apparently, everything is known about a certain fire (KARANIKOLA, TAMPAKIS, ARABATZIS E MAHERIDIS, 2013). As many studies show, the media practically neglect the publication of content

that reflect the need of a preventive attitude regarding the fire or specific actions of counseling along with this report. According to a study developed by Jacobson, Monroe and Marynowski (2001), out of the entirety of articles published by the big American newspapers, only 19% introduce some issue related to fire prevention. In a similar study, Paveglia et al. (2011) had concluded that nor in local terms, with the social media of proximity, the landscape changes. These facts are not as concerning for the citizens, in fact. According to Karanikola et al. (2011), people tend to respond more consistently to emergency warnings if they truly trust the source of information, more than information found in flyers or newspaper articles.

Well, from a conceptual point of view, the response the citizens can give to a traumatic event such as fires, differ in the reading that some academics make of the same phenomenon (RIBEIRO, 2017). Generally, we consider this response in terms that, facing a fire, can eventually affect directly or indirectly one or more citizens, related to the share of information, in a media environment. Chatfield, Scholl & Brajawidagda (2014) use the expression *Exchange during extreme events*, Sandra Valente (2013) prefers the term *stakeholder participation* to define the same reality. Whittaker, McLennan and Handmer (2015) refer to “citizen action during emergencies and disasters”, Taylor et al. (2007) call it “information of access to evacuate”. However, the implication of the media does not properly show up in the definitions we listed. Running the risk of, eventually, this analysis does not include other concepts that integrate the media sphere in this context, the participation of citizens, during catastrophes, and in the perspective of the media integrates, in our perspective, many actions:

**Table 1** – Types of participation during natural emergency situations

	Type of participation	
	Active	Passive
Behaviors/actions	Production and publication Of their own content	Following the informational flow
	Social media interaction And websites	Sharing with family members (without any associated media)
	Sharing with family members (without any associated media)	

In general traits, the promotion of active participation during situation of natural catastrophes, like the fires, intend to develop a responsible strategy of citizens facing natural resources, in a logic of defense of forest from the constant threats of disappearing. The strong stance of a clear position, in this sense, could also bring the sensation of transparency, efficiency and responsibility along with the entities determining the course of public policies for the forest. The prevention and response to the risks would equally mean an increase in quality of life, in an awareness of sharing a common public space.

### **Technology as response to limit situations**

This works discusses how technology of social, interactive nature, would eventually know how to respond to specific situations in which citizens face natural disasters. Taking as pretext the case of fires, we discuss the revulsive potential of technology, the citizen's predisposition, the knowledge or absence of the same possibilities, and even the degree of efficacy in situations and in considerations.

Seeger (apud TAPA, 2019) defends the need of a credible and operationalized contact network before a possible crisis. "In order to maintain effective networks, the responsible must continue to validate sources, choose specialists in specific areas and develop relations with

stakeholders of all levels”, warns Tapa (2009, p. 30). The coordination of responses to a problem should involve many actors (HADDOW & HADDOW, 2014; PALTTALA et al., 2012), which supposes an anticipated knowledge of the roles and functions that each element plays in this operational process of response to problematic situations. However, the problem persists if this process does not get to citizens.

Technologies and social networks substantially modified the response that entities and citizens offer, in actuality, to impending or emerging catastrophe situations. According to Poblet, García-Cuesta & Casanovas (2014), the Hurricane Sandy, which in 2012 destroyed many cities in North America, has motivated an authentic unprecedented flow of content about the storm with over half a million pictures on Instagram and 20 million tweets, from public and governmental entities, non-profitable organizations, volunteer associations and citizens in general.

In October 2018, in Portugal, the tropical storm “Leslie” has provoked a series of damage in different places of the central zone of the country. During the event, six citizens decided to create the website VOST (Virtual Operations Support Team) Portugal, to inform the population in real time, about the incidents that derive from emergency situations in the country<sup>4</sup>: tweets about the wind speed, the most vulnerable places, roads blocked, suppressed public transportation, help to those who need information about family members. “In 12 hours, it reached more followers than the Twitter for Civil Protection. Information became a source to television and volunteers could locate people without contact. They are six people that do not know each other, but communicate with one another through a server used in online games”, the news reported. The responsible for the VOST Portugal would zeal for the veracity of the information received. The goal would consist in making “Civil Protection gather a team that would do what we were doing”, admits Jorge Gomes, one of the promoters.

4 Available in: <https://www.dn.pt/pais/interior/vost-portugal-nasceu-no-twitter-e-faz-aquilo-que-a-protecao-civil-devia-fazer-10003250.html?fbclid=IwAR2xG8jblKkhbfPptgfEgHJbPIY8DSS-COTPFZmGBlrw9XBMB9cUD-S1oNIKI>.



Maybe because they identified a few problems in the information shared during these situations, the Regulation Entity for Social Communication (ERC), in Portugal, had recently released a guide of good practice for covering fires. As reported by the *Público*<sup>5</sup> newspaper, the organizations of social communication should avoid sensationalism, privilege the contact with official sources, avoiding the exposure of images of victims.

## Methodology

As a way to contribute to a reflection that puts citizens and technologies in the core of the central problem of this article, the study used two research techniques: 1) Through a non-probabilistic sample per convenience, we intend to sign a set of initiatives dynamized by citizens facing situations of imminent danger, with the support of digital communicative tools and strategies. It is proceeded equally in conformity with the understanding of Bengtsson (2016), who proposes models of analysis of social and media facts based on two techniques of analysis: manifested (the researchers draw conclusions from the presented discourse, in an analysis as close to the text as possible) and latent (the researcher advances to a subjective interpretation of the text). This article uses both formulations. We had privileged a diverse geographic criterion, contemplating initiatives from Oceania, Asia, America and Europe; 2) Through a case study, in the fogos.pt platform, in Portugal, we have presented the results of a non-participant observation of the dynamics associated to this initiative and a semi-structured interview to the dynamizer of this initiative that represents, in the Portuguese landscape, an example of an initiative generated by citizens to share information during situations of emergency associated to natural phenomena.

5 Available in: <https://www.publico.pt/2018/07/19/politica/noticia/erc-faz-guia-de-boas-praticas-para-cobertura-de-incendios-e-pede-menos-directos-1838511>.

### Platforms to Share Information

In fact, in Table 2 we observe some experiences that serve as a base to this study:

Table 2 – Sample of international experiences

Country	Initiative
Canada	<i>Fire Smart Canada</i>
Spain	<i>Ciclo Green</i>
USA	<i>NFPA – Firewise USA</i>
Japan	<i>Nippon Volunteer Network Active in Disaster</i>
Mexico	Topos Tlatelolco
New Zealand	<i>Student Volunteer Army</i>

The same initiatives show different interesting approaches to the same phenomenon of prevention and management of information during natural catastrophes, understood here in an expanded perspective.

First, the initiative Student Volunteer Army (SVA)<sup>6</sup>, from New Zealand. It is a community of young people developing efforts to support the local community in the prevention and response to natural disasters. Created by Sam Johnson, a student from the University of Canterbury, after the earthquake in Christchurch, in September, 2010, the idea came from the Facebook Page “Student Base for Earthquake Clean Up”. From then until now, the movement supported essentially by students became more organized. Through a website, we can see the campaigns for prevention they had developed, especially in schools, for the younger audience. SVA centralizes pertinent information in response to natural catastrophes.

In Japan, Nippon Volunteer Network Active in Disaster<sup>7</sup> (NVAD) presents very similar traits to the previously presented initiative. It is organized around different volunteers that seek to give a response to catastrophic events that take place in Japanese grounds. In the disaster

6 Available at <http://sva.org.nz>.

7 Available in: <http://www.nvnad.or.jp>.

that took place in Japan in July, 2018, namely the floods in that territory, this association had published different information about the activities that happened with the support of collaborators.

In Spain, the project *Ciclo Green*<sup>8</sup>, linked to a few autonomous communities with the support of the Spanish Government, offer options of mobility to citizens, through bike rentals that add points to discounts in the purchase of certain sports and wellness goods, access to visitation of public spaces, among others. However, the app, available in Android and iOS, is completely free and allows the submission of geolocalized information for fires, for instance. As referred by the *El País*<sup>9</sup> newspaper, the use of the app is extended to 17 Spanish cities, in a total of 15 thousand users, according to data from March, 2018.

The following initiatives introduce, in this context, the commercial dimension. *Fire Smart Canada* is organized around a service given to communities with a specific focus on environmental issues, related with fire prevention and management. Citizens who join, through a certain payment, will receive a group of information and services that range from actions of environmental formation, management of their own vegetations, legal counseling and exchange of information on emergencies that could put in danger the safety of houses and citizens.

In the USA, *Fire Wise* follows a practically identical commercial model to the previous example. In coordination with the Forest Department of the american government, it is offered a group of fire protection services in housing and updated information about them. In this initiative, apparently, citizen contribution does not seem to be of primary importance.

Lastly, the initiative that is essentially developed in a collaborative spirit with the citizens. An 8.1 earthquake on the Richter scale in September 1985 in Mexico City, would determine the creation, months later, of the movement *Topos Tlatelolco*, a brigade for quick action of retrieving people in critical situations. Over 30 years later of that event,

8 Available in: <https://www.ciclogreen.com/>.

9 Available in: [https://elpais.com/tecnologia/2018/03/13/actualidad/1520930098\\_046718.html](https://elpais.com/tecnologia/2018/03/13/actualidad/1520930098_046718.html).

the organization has over 200 volunteers, which, through the website and social media, seek to act with the population in moments of natural disasters.

Regarding the digital interaction of the aforementioned initiatives, Table 3 identifies different levels of action, among websites, social media and mobile apps.

Even though the defining purpose of this study does not include a content analysis about the interaction between websites, social media and mobile apps, it is possible to identify the digital dynamics of these initiatives. In generic terms, websites and social apps work towards the simple purpose of presenting a catalog of dynamic activities through different platforms. There isn't properly spaces of integration among users, although the NFPA – Firewise (USA) opens a specific separation on the website to internet users, without any register of activity.

All initiatives considered in this analysis are found active on Facebook. However, the use of this tool is diverse. The student platform Student Volunteer Army (New Zealand) is not very active in this network, with an average of one post per month, having 2019 as reference, and there wasn't any register of problematic aspect. The reactions or comments on posts are sparse. The Japanese initiative Nippon Volunteer Network Active in Disaster shows an intense Facebook activity, especially with the storms that took place in late October, 2019, in Nagano, many clarifying images of the storm, with very few comments or reactions. One of the post shows cars tipped over, a trail of disaster, with only two comments thanking for the images.

**Table 3** – Digital presence of the initiatives studied. Data related to January 2nd, 2020.

Initiative	Student Volunteer Army	Nippon Volunteer Network Active in Disaster	Ciclo Green	Fire Smart Canada	NFPA – Firewise	Topos Tlatelolco
Country	New Zealand	Japan	Spain	Canada	USA	Mexico
Website	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Social media	Facebook	29796	9168	1263	6634	27325
	Twitter	1404	4299	595	3081	129326
	Youtube	53	-	-	21983	367
	Instagram	-	-	151	9779	44
Mobile Apps	Android	Yes	Yes	-	-	-
	iOS	Yes	Yes	-	-	-

NFPA – Firewise (USA) and FireSmart Canada (Canada) show a high level of activity but given the commercial mission of these initiatives, they seek only to appeal to the attention of the internet users towards practical sessions of formation about fire. The interaction is almost none.

In Mexico, Topos Tlatelolco follows the same promotional philosophy, with regular publications, few comments, constant donation appeals, the participation of partners in the meeting of that initiative. In 2019, there is no register, in this network of any incident they may have participated.

The second most popular social network in this sample is Twitter. The activity of Student Volunteer Army, from New Zealand, is inconstant in this network, with few publications in 2019. The NFPA – FireWise and FireSmart Canada repeat their posture of constant activity with commercial effect, but with little interaction.

These initiatives practically neglect the role of videos, the main identity characteristic of YouTube. Only three (Student Volunteer Army, NFPA – FireWise and Topos Tlatelolco) of the six platforms analysed operate in this network, but all of them follow an identical approach: few available videos, small interaction, in a type of audiovisual exhibit of coexistence among members, requests for donation or commercial sale of services.

In the other networks, the landscape is not properly dynamic. NFPA – FireWise and ToposTlatelolco have active accounts on Instagram, although the first develops the same commercial activity with less interaction verified in other networks and the second would only have entered this platform on December 4th, 2019.

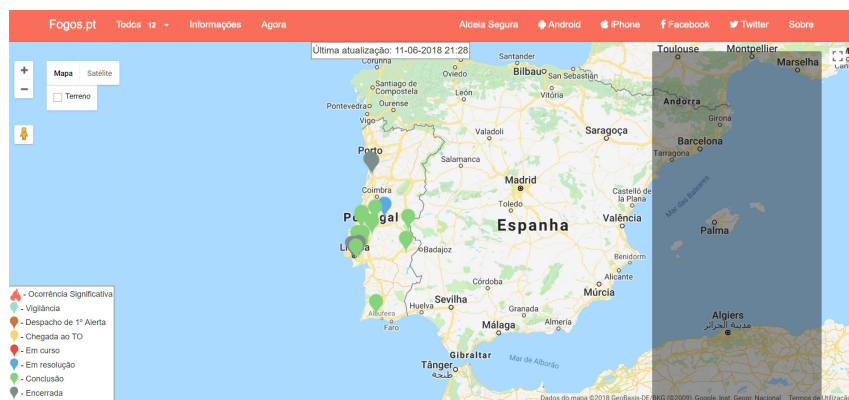
### **Case study: Fogos.pt**

The platform Fogos.pt<sup>10</sup> stands out for being one of the pioneer platforms in the publication of informations on catastrophe situations in

10 Available in: <http://fogos.pt>.

Portugal. Created in August, 2015, by João Pina, computer engineer, it is a web page constantly updated with all the information about forest fire. According to the responsible, Fogos.pt organizes an information that is “scattered”, among different public entities, such as Civil Protection or the Portuguese Institute of Sea and Atmosphere, offering an information on temperature, atmospheric pressure, wind, precipitation, clouds, electric discharge, which later can materialize into forest fire. The information put on this page are updated every 2 minutes, showing an approximated location of the events, allowing desktop notification about the ongoing fires and the already extinct ones. The information graphically presented is only unidirectional, the users can only exchange information among themselves in the social media where the initiative is active, on Facebook<sup>11</sup> and Twitter<sup>12</sup>. There are also mobile apps to access Fogos.pt, both for Iphone (iOS) and for smartphones (Android). The following images show part of the activity of Fogos.pt.

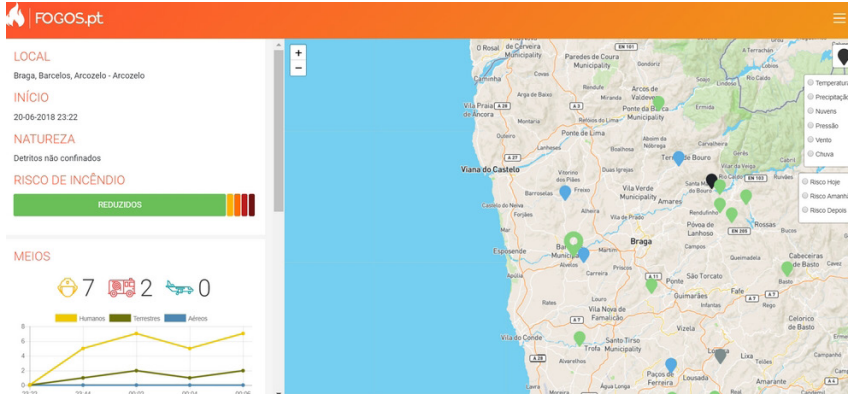
**Image 1** – Screenshot of the platform Fogos.pt Data from June 11th, 2018. However, since then, the platform was updated.



11 Available in: <http://www.facebook.com/fogospt>.

12 Available in: <http://twitter.com/fogospt>.

Image 2 – Updated version of the platform Fogos.pt Data from June 20th, 2018.



The media interest that Fogos.pt had created<sup>13</sup> seems compatible with the number of access of the website that the responsible presents (Table 4).

Table 4 – Evolution in the number of access to the website fogos.pt

		Type of access	
Chronology	Online access	Computer	Mobile
August 2015	101	59%	37%
August 2016	701	58%	41%
October 2017	8,277	65%	35%

Source: Fogos.pt

The numbers show an expressive increase in access to the website in a two-year period, a little over 100 to over 8,000. Regarding the origin of the interaction, the numbers show few significant evolutions, even though we deduce that the access via computer (65%) is still superior to the mobile (35%).

In order to better understand some of the dynamics of this initiatives and the problems that are published daily, we had conducted a

<sup>13</sup> Some examples: 1) <https://shifter.sapo.pt/2017/10/app-incendios-em-portugal/>; 2) <https://www.dn.pt/dinheiro/ha-fogo-no-seu-concelho-esta-aplicacao-vai-avisa-lo-10959482.html>.



semi-structured interview with the responsible for the website fogos.pt, through direct administration, via phone. This technique, according to Quivy & Campenhoudt, contributes “to discover the aspects to have into account that expand or rectify the field of investigation of readings” (1992: 67).

João Pina began identifying that in the creation of the website fogos.pt there is the “unorganized” and “problematic” level of the online page of the National Authority of Emergency and Civil Protection (ANEPC). To João Pina, the information that is present in ANEPC’s website often does not correspond with what is happening in the ground, in terms of number of firemen, aircrafts, vehicles, etc.”. It was this delay between the reality of fire combat and the information available for citizens that motivated João Pina to create this online platform. According to what he previously referred, this website gathers information of different entities, from ANEPC to the Meteorology Institute, screen that retrieves the habitual logic of the Google Maps research. The information that appears in this page is, as he referred, unidirectional. Only on social media the fogos.pt page is more dynamic, where citizens can effectively exchange information among themselves, and it is up to João Pina to move them to the website, after proving its accuracy. According to him, there are differences of user behavior in different networks: “Facebook is still the most popular social network in Portugal, contrary to Twitter. On Twitter, the users share more concrete and direct information, which later translate into more accurate and reliable content”. The Facebook case raises more issues:

In this network we have a specific situation that repeats itself numberless times. Many people send me messages about different campaigns of collecting food, blankets, water bottles, etc. for firefighters. Before putting any information, I need to know if this information is true, and what I easily find out is that 90% of these campaigns are fake, they do not exist. Many of these firefighter corporations did not ask for help.

Admitting that different problems are related to the authenticity of the content sent by citizens, João Pina considers that “good participation

happens most of the time”. The interviewee says that sharing contents in these situations can be decisive, because “at times, an information published 4 hours ago is not properly current, and people need to know the information in that moment”.

In the Portuguese case, the forest management has been in the political and media agenda since the 2017 fires which, from June to October, had killed over 100 people in the central area of the country. At this point, the website fogos.pt had already existed. “I received thousands of messages at that time, because people wanted to know what was happening and there was a sever lack of information that was pertinent, accurate and true. People needed to know where the fire was headed”.

## **Conclusions**

This study comes from the understanding that safety takes on a vital importance in terms of society, and not always deserve the reflection it should. In this complex web of actors, from public to private, of reliable information and other frankly problematic, there are experiences in the international level that maximize the exchange of information among citizens during large periods of forest fires, floods, and other circumstances. As we previously had verified, these possibilities arise, in the international context, through the organization of efforts of volunteer citizens or even through companies that make this commercial service available. As we have explored in this article, the digital activity – websites, social networks and mobile apps – out of the six platforms studied are below what is the emancipating promises of technology. The digital presence arrives as a manifest of presence, absent of any politic proper of the interaction with citizens, of a permanent dialog or appeal to public conscience. It is one of the conclusions that inevitably appear related to the absence of commentary, reaction or sharing.

In the Portuguese case, the initiative Fogos.pt works towards a purpose of reorganization of a dispersed information in the digital space, through the voluntary work of a citizen worried about those issues. This experience takes back, through the words of the creator himself, some of

the main deficits that happen in digital interaction in this environment: the lack of reliability of content and the attempts of manipulation of the public opinion.

The main limitations of this study point towards a selected sample, which, naturally, could have included other experiences in the international level. In fact, we still don't know much about the revulsive potential of technologies in periods of natural catastrophe, especially those referring to the dynamics proper of the citizens in sharing information about these periods. Future projects and works in this area could try to compatibilize these two agendas, through the inclusion of more experiences where technology works as interaction during moments of crisis and the communicational practices of citizens during fires, floods, etc. It still seems vital the renewed bet in the study, on the behalf of academics, of the frontiers where there is a true sociology of communication.

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