The production of knowledge in Brazilian social movement families

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Abstract
Analyses of the interplay between media technologies and social movements have been predominantly media-centric, focusing on practices and orientations towards media. Studies looking into communication and media practices within social movements usually have the single social movement as a unit of analysis, overlooking relations and interactions among social movements. We shift the focus to practices and orientations towards media, and to communicative processes among social movement families. The study pays particular attention to communication related to the production and circulation of knowledge. Through the study of the interrelations among three social movements in Brazil, we propose a typology of knowledge constructed and circulated within and among social movements as related to 1) militancy and insurgency, 2) mobilisation dynamics, and 3) framing awareness.

Keywords
Social movements, knowledge construction, communication, Brazil, media practices

Introduction - Social movements and communication
Previous studies have performed analyses of different aspects related to social movements’ collective and communicative ethos (Tilly 1798 and 2007; Tilly & Wood, 2015; della Porta & Diani, 2009; Melucci, 1996). In the field of social movement research, for example, Tilly (1978) applies frame theory to explain the communicative construction of common goals and demands as a cognitive process. Differently, Melucci (1996) has described how social movements’ discursive practices construct and reproduce shared identities. More recently, other social movement scholars have also been interested in the significances of media for social movements as organisations and for social mobilisation as a process (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; della Porta & Tarrow, 2005; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012; Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2002; van den Donk et al., 2004). In the field of communication research, there has been a recent upsurge in studies of social movements and protest dynamics (Downing, 2008; Gerbaudo, 2012; Lester & Cottle, 2011; Lester & Hutchins, 2012; Mattoni & Treré, 2014; Milan, 2013). In general, the focus of media and communication research is on explaining the dynamics through which activists and social

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movements use media as tools for connecting individuals with common interests and organising protests, and other mobilisation repertoires (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Gerbaudo, 2012; Treré, 2015).

In this context, our aim with this study is twofold: to analyse knowledge production as a content of social movements’ communication and to analyse how this process unfolds among a network of social movements. Specifically relevant for our analysis of knowledge production among Brazilian movements is Mattoni and Treré’s (2014) study of media practices in social movements. The authors point towards the existence of inter-movement collectives that they call ‘social movement families’. They argue that in these families we can observe how communication and media-ecologies enable the exchange of information and the construction of broader shared goals and demands. The analysis resonates with Murphy’s (2016: 246) questions about ‘the role for movements of the creation of knowledge, of theory, of social meaning and practice, of political action’.

Our study explores knowledge production through communicative processes among three Brazilian social movements that have been cooperating and mobilising together for many issues. All three movements work to promote different aspects of social justice, which functions as the foundation for communicative processes that produce and share knowledge. In the following sections we discuss the theoretical background that connects the areas of communication and social movements, present our empirical object and methodologies and end with an analysis and categorisation of the different kinds of knowledge produced in interactions among social movements.

**Communication, knowledge production and social movement networks**

Exploring the epistemological intersections of social movement studies and media and communication research (cf. Downing, 2001, 2008, 2010) allows for the construction of frameworks that assist in analysing how movements communicate among themselves and, in so doing, construct, circulate, and share knowledge. In recent years we have witnessed an approximation between communication and social movement scholarship (for instance, Bennett & Segerberg, 2013 and Juris, 2008). While social movement scholars in the late 20th century understood media more as institutions with which movements established a relationship (Melucci, 1996; Tilly, 2004), recent analyses understand media as an integral part of social movements. Scholars in media and communication, in turn, have become more interested in understanding social practices and political structures beyond media representations, production routines and dynamics (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Gerbaudo, 2012; Loader, 2008).

In social movement theory, scholars have problematised the significance of knowledge for social movements. For some, knowledge is a resource that creates favourable conditions for mobilisation (Tilly, 1978 and 2005). Others see it as an element that contributes to the construction of shared identities and collective action (Melucci, 1989 and 1996). Most importantly, knowledge is treated as a social construct. In social movements, knowledge construction may relate to awareness raising processes, also called conscientisation (Freire, 1968). This construction process is communicative and interactive. Through communication and interaction, knowledge becomes a communicative common (Sodré, 2014), that is, knowledge circulated through communication and shared by and among social movements membership.

Specific structures and processes are necessary for knowledge to be constructed and made common. Some authors have called these structures open spaces (see Murphy, 2016 for a critical discussion of the term), while others have used the concept of alternative or contra-hegemonic public sphere (Downey & Fenton, 2003). What these structures have in common is their inclusive character that allows for dialogue and broad participation. The appropriation of media channels and technologies is thus of crucial importance for the formation of such communication structures.
within and among social movements. Without collective understanding and acceptance of the forms and practices according to which media technologies will be used, it is impossible to establish open and inclusive communicative spaces of relevance for a social movement. In this sense, the advent of digital communication technologies and platforms that require recalibration of communicative processes pose new challenges to social movements (Sartoretto, 2015). Established collective social actors will then engage in collective reflection and discussion intending to decide upon the practices that will guide the use of new technologies.

In the field of media and communication, mediatisation theory, which has developed in Latin America in parallel with the Global North (see Scolari & Rodriguez-Amat, 2018), has provided key concepts to analyse the interplay between social movements and media. Verón and Lloveras (1996) first used the concept of semantisation to describe the relation between social reality and its representation in the media. The authors focused primarily on mass media, particularly newspapers and television. More recent developments in mediatisation theory describe the increasing embeddedness of media in all aspects of life, which increases the communicative orientation of all kinds of social processes (Hepp & Couldry, 2016). This kind of theory building in media and communication acknowledges that media are not detached institutions, texts or artefacts but embedded in other institutions, practices and social formations. Empirically, it becomes inevitable to recognise the presence of media, particularly media technologies, when analysing social mobilisation processes. In this context, studies of social movements will use data generated through media and communication technologies to examine spatial and temporal aspects of social mobilisation, as well as grasp demographic configurations in a broader scope. For instance, analyses of communicative processes can help explain constitutive differences between ephemeral and enduring mobilisation (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013), discuss power dynamics within and among social movements and between social movements and other institutions, as well as give visibility to knowledge produced by social movements (della Porta & Diani, 2009; Melucci, 1996).

What is usually absent in these analyses is a discussion about how social movements produce, reproduce and circulate different types of instrumental knowledge. By instrumental we mean knowledge that supports a diversity of mobilisation processes, from protests and direct action to the maintenance of a mobilised constituency during latent phases (Melucci, 1996). It can be both knowledge about mobilising practices and dynamics as well as knowledge about the causes and social problems that drive social movements. An important contribution in the discussion of knowledge production practices among social movements is Mattoni’s (2012) conceptualisation of media knowledge practices and relational media practices. These concepts capture the processes through which movements create and reproduce internal practices to make sense of and systematise their communicative processes and their relations with media. We propose to broaden the analytical scope in relation to Mattoni’s study and look into the production of knowledge among social movements as a communicative process.

Media are crucial elements in producing and circulating knowledge but are also central in the discussion and analysis of communication in social movements. Gitlin (1980) discusses the interplay between media and social movements to propose that this interplay follows a grammar of interaction. The idea of a grammar denotes a series of established, shared, reproducible and recognisable rules and routines as types of knowledge produced within social movements. Tilly (1978) also indicates that social movements engage in communicative processes to produce and reproduce structured social interaction in the form of repertoires of contention. Murphy (2016: 246) distinguishes between the action on the surface and the real movement below the surface and argues that in order to understand a social movement we need to explore the web of interactions, negotiations and exchanges that shape the production of knowledge in social movements. Through this process, social movements also create a communicative space in which
dialogue and collective reflection are exercised. These processes, along with their outcomes and dynamics within social movements in different parts of the world, are extensively described and discussed in the work of Freire (1968) and Illich (1970), but they can now be reassessed in light of the contemporary geopolitical scenario and recent technological developments. Political and economic globalisation coupled with technological development expand the relevance and reach of localised experience and knowledge (Nazneen & Sultan, 2014).

As part of the scholarship at the intersection between media and communication and social movement studies, we analyse the production and circulation of knowledge within social movements. In addition, we are interested in the networking role (Nazneen & Sultan, 2014) that communication plays in the formation of social movement families (Mattoni & Treré, 2014). On the one hand, little has been said about the dynamics and character of these networks. On the other hand, scholars (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Gerbaudo, 2012; Treré, 2015) who have analysed uses and dynamics formed around new media technologies within social movements and contentious groups have either focused exclusively on single collective actors or compared them. Our goal is instead to look at the communicative processes in a social movement family formed by The Landless Workers Movement (MST, Movimento Sem-Terra), the Youth Uprising (LPJ, Levante Popular da Juventude) and the Homeless Workers Movement (MTST, Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem-Teto). In doing so, we argue that part of the content of the information shared is mobilisation related knowledge, and that movements that can construct and disseminate this kind of knowledge can become essential nodes in national and international networks (cf. Castells, 2009, 2015) and coalitions (Smith, Chatfield & Pagnucco, 1997).

**The empirical object – communication and knowledge production among Brazilian social movements**

Communicative processes and practices are key aspects in the formation and maintenance of social movements. From an epistemological perspective, Muniz Sodré proposes that the field of communication should focus on investigating the mechanisms and dynamics through which meanings and understandings are made common. In these circumstances, Sodré argues that communication is a science that recuperates what is common among subjects who interact with each other. For him, dialogue is an ethical category – the action of bridging between differences (2014: 191). We believe this approach is particularly relevant to social movement research because social movements are formations that rely on communication to produce and circulate knowledge about social injustice both among members and in society. Our objective thus is to analyse and discuss the different ways communication as a process plays a constitutive role for this kind of social actor through the analysis of three interrelated and networked Brazilian social movements.

In our study we combine Sodré’s (2014) understanding of communication with Mattoni and Treré’s (2014) notion of social movement families. We do so to analyse how social movements multiply, endure and interact when members of different movements communicate, mutually learn and share knowledge about moral values, social reality, common struggles, and practical mobilisation repertoires. As empirical objects, we look at communicative processes for knowledge production and circulation in the interrelated practices of three Brazilian social movements: MST, LPJ and MTST.

One way to describe the operational interconnectedness and the societal relevance of MST, LPJ and MTST is by briefly looking at the political events and transformations in Brazil in the 2010s. The operational interconnectedness is evident in the history of the movements. Officially founded in 1984 as an outcome of collective actions that started in late 1970s, MST is the most active movement struggling for agrarian reform in Brazil. One of its best-known actions is the occupation of land that is not being used in accordance with Brazilian agrarian regulation and its
subsequent revitalisation with the production of, mostly, ecologically cultivated food crops. In 1997, MTST was founded, originally as an urban arm of MST. Its approach, like that of MST, is to occupy empty and abandoned buildings in their struggles for housing democratisation in Brazil. LPJ was founded in 2005 to be a movement by, for and with working class, peripheral, urban and rural young people who were directly and indirectly associated with MST, MTST and other active movements on the political left (Kunrath & Oliveira, 2010).

In terms of societal relevance, MST, MTST and LPJ have been active movements in recent political events and changes in Brazil. In 2013, when mass protests happened all over the country (Singer, 2013), MST, MTST and LPJ marched together with citizens and other civil society organisations for affordable transportation fares, the original goal of the 2013 protests, human rights and justice. In the following years, MST, MTST and LPJ also acted against the negative human and environmental impacts of the FIFA World Cup in 2014 and the Summer Olympic Games in 2016. Simultaneously, the three movements acted against the rise of right-wing movements pushing for the demise of the Workers’ Party – in power since 2002 – and the (re)establishment of the dominance of morally conservative and economically liberal ideologies in all spheres of political life. Between 2015 and 2016, MST, MTST and LPJ were active against the impeachment process of Dilma Rousseff. In the presidential election of 2018, the victory of extreme right-wing candidate Jair Bolsonaro represented an institutional threat to MST, MTST, LPJ and all movements associated with the left. Throughout his campaign, the elected president pledged to characterise social movements – directly citing MST and MTST – as terrorist groups.

Methodological notes

Our analysis is based on fieldwork and 34 interviews carried out in Brazil between 2013 and 2016 with two social movements: MST and LPJ. In addition, we conducted a content analysis of the website and social media profiles of a third social movement, MTST. Sartoretto carried out interviews and observations with MST in 2013 and 2014 and telephone interviews with LPJ members in 2015. The observations were carried out at MST schools, settlements and campsites, radio stations, press offices, and events organised by the movement. Custodio carried out observations and interviews during the LPJ national congress in Belo Horizonte in September 2016.

Informants were selected among members of the movements who specifically worked with communication and media related tasks – press-contacts, content production, communication and media strategy – either prior to the interviews or at the time the interviews were carried out. The interviews were semi-structured and focused on communication dynamics within the movements and on the informants’ reflections and analyses of their activities. The interviews were all transcribed and processed in a two-step analysis. This entailed first identifying the processes of knowledge production, followed by the categorisation of the processes.

Material from MTST, including the movement’s website, Twitter and Facebook profiles, was analysed after the categorisation of the interview with the aim to see how the categories are materialised in the movement’s digital communication and produced content. This analysis of produced content also had the objective to identify common concepts, practices and dynamics among the three movements.

Communication and knowledge production in the MST, MTST and LPJ family

A social movement family is a group of social movements that share a political culture and mobilisation repertoires (della Porta & Rucht, 1995) and can be found in both national and transnational scales. In Brazil, MST, MTST and LPJ are organised around similar political grounds and have been interacting and co-mobilising. MST, MTST, and LPJ share similar mobilising repertoires such as the occupation of public spaces and satirical representations of antagonist
political actors in a practice called *escracho* (mockery). MST uses land occupation pioneered in the 1980s as a form of direct action in the campaign for agrarian reform. Similarly, MTST occupies derelict buildings in urban areas where militant families come to constitute communities of contention campaigning for affordable housing in a citizen-friendly environment with easy access to transportation, jobs, leisure spaces and education. These two movements have families as units of mobilisation who usually settle and live in the occupied spaces. LPJ militants, in turn, are younger individuals often living with their families and pursuing their studies. For them, the occupation of public spaces usually functions as a temporary form of political demonstration.

The interactive and collaborative character of the relationship between MST, MTST and LPJ became evident in the field observations and interviews. These interactions usually happen because members of the organisations frequent the same spaces such as schools and universities. They also tend to attend events organised by each other. During MST’s sixth National Congress held in Brasília in February 2014, LPJ members helped in the pressroom liaising with journalists and producing content for various media channels. In September 2016, in the 3rd National LPJ Camp at Mineirinho, a multi-purpose sports centre in the city of Belo Horizonte, MST and MTST had representatives among the hundreds of young people from all over Brazil. More recently, in May-June 2018, the three movements collectively participated in the regional LPJ Camp in Rio de Janeiro.

Here it is interesting to notice that these interactions and exchanges happen independently of technologies. They are spatially structured, in the case of schools and universities, and socially structured in the case of the events and meetings – which can be categorised as open spaces (Murphy, 2016). For instance, a journalist working with press-contacts during MST’s sixth National Congress explained that she was an active member in LPJ and had constant and continuous contact with MST members in meetings. It followed, then, that she was invited to work during the Congress.

The interplay between media and pedagogical practices is a crucial aspect in the production of knowledge and the constitution of MST, MTST and LPJ as a social movement family. As the oldest organisation, MST has promoted education through its own pedagogical initiatives in partnership with other institutions such as universities (Chaves, 2000). MST operates schools where courses and training programmes are held and attended by members of other movements, including LPJ and MTST. Among these, there have been, through the years, courses in media and communication, such as radio production, audio-visual production, and a journalism programme leading to a BA degree held in cooperation with a state university in Brazil. The movements put considerable effort into promoting and maintaining these programmes and courses, which require complex logistics from course design and negotiation with partner institutions to recruitment and enrolment processes. These more institutionalised spaces functioning in a systematised manner support the argument that communication as sharing and dialogue is a significant aspect of the survival and endurance of social movements. The educational spaces created by the social movements configure a kind of institutionalised counter-hegemonic space in as much as they aim to promote reflection and raise consciousness about oppression through formal and informal education. Through these processes, the movements’ membership is in continuous individual and collective development, which supports and strengthens mobilisation. In the fieldwork at different MST sites, it was usual to meet militants working with press-contacts and content production. These were students in the journalism programme organised as a partnership between MST and Rio Grande do Norte Federal University (UFRN). Some of these militants also worked with media and communication tasks during MST’s sixth Congress.

The various events and encounters these movements organise in which militants, sympathisers and members of strategically relevant sectors – such as politicians and intellectuals – meet and engage in a series of collective activities constitute less institutionalised spaces for
communicative exchange. Again, as the oldest movement, MST has been the most profuse in co-organising and holding events that also vary in scope and content. These range from movement-oriented events such as the national congress, held every fifth year, to the biannual regional congresses on interest-oriented events such as the biannual agroecology congress in which the movement has active participation, as well as a variety of seminars and workshops.

Finally, there are movement media channels that often overlap and sometimes become transmovement media channels. The interviews with LPJ and MST militants show that media creation and production is an essential activity for the movements, something that has been previously observed among institutionalised social movements (Gitlin, 1980). These two movements and MTST share the view that media conglomerates in Brazil are political antagonists against which they must unite in order construct a counter-hegemonic popular media alternative. An MST militant, who had worked with press-contacts and media production during the 1990s and is now the pedagogical coordinator at an MST school, explains how they learnt the dynamics of the relationship with mainstream media in Brazil and understood that these media institutions would not act sympathetically towards the movement, even if individual journalists could eventually do so. The informant stresses that counter-hegemonic communication in Brazil can only become significant (in the sense of reaching a broad audience) as a network.

In the same vein, a militant who works with communication and is a member of LPJ’s national board points out that the youth movement, which has democratisation of communication as a core issue, works with the development of media partnerships so that the content shared by them will have a more extensive reach. We have identified, among LPJ members, an awareness of the dynamics that regulate the online circulation of content, particularly the subject to algorithms, which may prevent content from being more widely distributed. Some informants in the youth organisation also expressed the awareness that due to these dynamics, posting content to their Facebook page does not mean that this content will reach a broad audience. This reflexive and inquisitive orientation towards emergent media technologies was also present among MST members and underpins the processes through which these groups appropriate media technologies and build their own media channels.

Struggles for redistribution – of land, resources, urban space, education, healthcare, culture, etc. (Fraser, 2010) – are the common contentious issues that approximate these three movements. These struggles form the background for the collective construction of knowledge that happens within the spaces engendered by the movements and through the networks they form. As discussed earlier, media are crucial and play different roles in these inter-movement communicative processes. Our intention here is not to discuss these roles but how they are constituted, developed and reproduced as collective knowledge in the interactions among different social movements. In the following section, we analyse the interplay between knowledge construction as a communicative process and media, proposing a categorisation of different types of knowledge produced by social movements.

Knowledge construction and its interplay with media

In the previous sections, we discussed knowledge construction as a communicative process that is of crucial importance for social reproduction within and among social movements in a so-called social movement family (della Porta & Rucht, 1995). As we argue above, the activities of these movements have always been profoundly interconnected with media (as technologies and institutions). Furthermore, these movements have developed a collective communicative consciousness, which means that militants are continually reflecting and discussing their communicative processes. Through our analysis of MST, MTST and LPJ as movements that have had significant participation in political transformations in recent Brazil, to the extent that they can be considered essential nodes in the networks that were mobilised, we have identified three
categories of knowledge produced within social movements. These are as follows:

1. Militancy\(^2\) and insurgency\(^3\): knowledge about what it means to work and act as a militant for a cause and about history and dynamics of insurgency.

2. Mobilisation dynamics: knowledge about collective processes that lead and maintain mobilisation.

3. Framing awareness: knowledge about the structures, actors and questions that are the background of mobilisation, with varying levels of generalisation and specificity, and principles of social justice to the specific causes such as land distribution, right to public transportation, education, etc.

Underpinning these categories is the notion that knowledge production and circulation are communicative and often mediated processes. The two first categories can be understood as meta-knowledge about mobilisation and organisation and the third as a kind of identity and framing knowledge that plays a role in configuring the ethos of a social movement.

**Militancy and insurgency**

The three movements share an understanding of their action as a constant mobilisation\(^5\) towards the promotion of social change through political participation and representation (Fraser, 2010). They call their collective and individual actions ‘militancy’ (militância), a term continuously and consistently used by informants when explaining what they do within the movement and different channels the movement uses to communicate (websites, Facebook profiles, Twitter, Instagram accounts, videos, and other types of publications). Militancy can be seen as a set of insurgent practices in the sense discussed by Holston (2018), when he writes about insurgent citizenship, and Santos (2014), who uses the term insurgent cosmopolitanism. Both authors argue that the processes through which marginal groups struggle to achieve citizenship, recognition (Fraser, 2010) and social justice often challenge established political processes and seek to reinstate marginalised collectives as the protagonists of political change; this characterising these movements as insurgent.

Within these social movements, militancy as individual and collective actions and processes must be learnt and nurtured; it is dependent on knowledge in the form of self-awareness and a deep understanding of collective action. Those who participate in the movement need to recognise themselves as subjects of social struggles and as protagonists in the social change the movements seek to promote. They also need to identify themselves as part of a collective subject who works towards common goals. The movements construct and circulate this kind of knowledge through the diverse spaces created for dialogue and exchange presented in the previous section.

The most concrete materialisation of militancy and insurgency-related knowledge is the practice of mística (see Issa, 2014) in which struggles and the identity of the movements are objectified and personified. Mística can be described as a ritualistic practice, as it is repeated in any kind of gathering in which movement members are present. It can be the simple act of laying a flag on a table at an event – movement members participating in panels, debates and other public engagements often place a flag or another symbol visibly, and this act is referred to as ‘creating a mística’. It can also be very sophisticated and well-produced theatrical and musical performances representing topics of relevance for MST, as observed during MST’s sixth National Congress. This ritual is symbolically important because of the shared representations and ideas that support the creation of communicational commons (following Sodré, 2014) among movements. It also contributes to collective cohesion through its reproduction and inclusion in all sorts of gatherings. LPJ’s third national meeting in September 2016 also started with a mística entailing an artistic performance that was collectively produced and encapsulated the organisation’s ethos and actions.
Knowledge related to militancy and insurgency is based as much on affects, such as hope and respect, as it is on rationality and reflexivity. It contributes to the rationalisation and legitimisation of resistance practices for those inside the movements. Since these practices represent a break with ‘normal life’ for many and a challenge to established power, which can become individually dangerous, they must have both strong emotional appeal and rational justifications. Knowledge about militancy and insurgency is thus a way of constructing shared meanings – or commons – through individual experience and identification with a cause and a collective. The instrumental strength of this type of knowledge, particularly in its ritualistic form, is precisely the combination of rational reflection with a view to question and change reality with affective and emotional elements.

**Mobilisation dynamics**

Gerbaudo (2012) explains in detail how online/offline practices and activities are combined during mobilisation processes. The accentuated presence of media technologies in the mediation of interactions within and among social movements makes it impossible to discuss mobilisation in its different phases without addressing the use of technologies. However, it is important to note that social actors who achieve a certain level of institutionalisation develop much more encompassing mobilisation dynamics beyond media related practices. The collective processes that structure mobilisation during active and latency periods (Melucci, 1996) are what we have termed mobilisation dynamics, and these are also a form of knowledge that is constructed and reproduced among the social movement family that we analyse. Mobilisation dynamics include the strategies, relations among actors, and temporalities that underpin mobilisation.

The three movements engage in continuous discussions and exchange over mobilisation dynamics. This kind of knowledge is not as clearly and systematically structured as the other two types; it is instead more loosely circulated through informal networks within and among the movements and relies often on the experiences of individuals who share their knowledge with others. An example of mobilisation dynamics is media appropriation – the process through which the movement collectively decides over how to use different media. Media technologies have always been key agitation and propaganda (agitprop) tools and thus essential for mobilisation. However, in order for these tools to be used in ways that benefit the movement without jeopardising its horizontality – which is highly valued by the organisations – the movement must collectively discuss and agree upon the ways in which media can be best used in the collective interest.

Considering that MST, LPJ and MTST see themselves as part of a broader insurgent collective with a common pre-figurative project of society, there are mutual advantages in constructing and sharing knowledge on mobilisation dynamics that will strengthen and legitimate these organisations separately and as a collective. The knowledge is socialised through mutual participation in events organised by each of the movements and through the educational spaces created by them. At an evaluation meeting for the communication task force at the end of MST’s sixth National Congress, attended by members of a number of collectives who had helped during the event, members of LPJ discussed media strategies during the event. They agreed that the network of politically aligned organisations was essential to grant visibility for the event. This was particularly noticeable when the hashtag #marchamst, which was used to refer to the march along Brasília’s main street, as organised by MST on the third day of the Congress, became a trending topic on Twitter.

In a conversation with an MST-militant working on developing radio stations, he explained how he had facilitated discussions about radio production and its connection to mobilisation in MTST occupations in central São Paulo. According to another informant, an MST press-officer working in Brasilia, MST-militants systematically work as facilitators, sharing their knowledge with
MTST-groups and providing support when mobilisation surfaces. Such a dynamic was noticeable in the state of São Paulo, where there is a well-established MST-settlement with around 400 families located a two-hour bus journey from the city of São Paulo, where MTST has its first and biggest occupations.

Since MST and MTST have in common a repertoire of contention (Tilly, 1978) – the physical occupation of space as a form of protest to claim the participation of marginalised groups in the redistribution of material resources – these two movements have constructed and shared knowledge on mobilisation dynamics through the years. The occupation of land in the case of MST, or of a derelict building in the case of MTST, requires complex logistics. This includes the division of work and daily tasks among the occupying families, deliberation and decision-making dynamics among the occupiers, knowledge of the laws and regulations that determine what spaces can be safely occupied and how to claim the right to remain on the occupied space. The process of organising an occupation has been continuously improved by MST, and the knowledge developed by the movement is essential in facilitating the operationalisation of new occupations.

When it comes to its contents, knowledge of mobilisation dynamics constructed and circulated by these movements is currently developing around discussions and collectively constructed normative perceptions of the relation between the networks and the streets. Several MST informants stressed that it is a movement of the streets and will only be a significant social actor in as much as its militants are out occupying physical spaces, be it campsites in rural areas or protests and demonstrations in the cities. There is in this sense a strong belief that social mobilisation must be embodied in order to have any relevance and potential to promote social change. In the view of these militants, digital platforms serve as a form of (re)presentation that allows for the movement’s activities and ideas to extrapolate space-time limitations and reach more numerous audiences (not necessarily more varied), but their relevance is dependent upon the physical presence of the movement on the streets. A similar point of view was expressed within LPJ and is where the connection with MST can be noticed. Even if militants in the youth organisation are more comfortable and fluent with digital media platforms, they recognise the strength of the streets, particularly when it comes to reaching young people at the outskirts of large urban centres, which are one of LPJ’s main constituencies.

**Framing awareness**

Within Resource Mobilisation Theory, the concept of framing refers to the social narratives, including the identification of struggles, which are collectively produced and reproduced among members in a social movement (Tarrow, 1998; Tilly, 1978). In the more culturalist analyses of social movements, the idea of frames is replaced by meanings and understandings that are shared among groups mobilising to promote societal change (Melucci, 1989 and 1996). These two conceptualisations point, however, to the idea that symbolic commons are necessary conditions for the formation of groups and subsequent social mobilisation. Here there is a relation to the conceptualisation of communication as sharing proposed by Sodré (2014), which can in turn be applied to processes of knowledge construction among social movements. In this way, the category of framing awareness encompasses knowledge about social struggles and the reasons why certain groups mobilise and occupy spaces (in the specific case of the movements analysed in our study). This kind of knowledge is shared with the purpose of providing militants and potential militants with a symbolical toolkit with which they will be able to understand and make decisions about their participation in the movement. In the kind of insurgent and horizontal social movements we analyse here, this sort of knowledge is not static and is in continuous negotiation in an interplay with broader social and political change.

Framing awareness is also the kind of knowledge that can be easily translated into mediated content and is a constitutive element in the movements’ media. Instead of analysing each
movement’s media channels separately, what is interesting is to discuss a series of concepts and ideas related to the social struggles these movements aim to act upon, which permeate the movements’ media channels. The struggle for media democratisation is one of these circulating ideas. Media democratisation is not the core cause of any of the three movements; however, it appears often in the movements’ discourses and occupies a prominent place in the movements’ symbolic articulation and framing of their activities. It also indicates the centrality of media as an institution for democratic representation and participation (Sartoretto, 2016).

The three movements identify the concentration of media ownership as a problem that they need to act upon in the struggle for representation. They construct knowledge that aims to raise awareness about media ownership concentration and its consequences through some of the educational programmes discussed above, but also by producing a variety of content for circulation among militants and sympathisers. All three movements have produced texts and visual material about media ownership in Brazil that present and discuss the problem. These can vary from satirical memes criticising media corporations in Brazil and their imbalanced coverage of social and political issues to argumentative analyses of the actual conjuncture aiming to set mobilisation agendas in motion. These texts and images are then mutually published in the channels controlled by the movements – websites, Facebook pages, Twitter profiles and Instagram accounts.

Even though our study cannot provide a panoramic and quantitative view of the network features of this kind of knowledge, we are able to affirm that in terms of the quality of the content, the three movements are consistent in the way they construct and present the problem of concentration of media ownership and propose media democratisation as a solution. Furthermore, there is evidence that this kind of knowledge related to framing awareness is co-constructed and in continuous circulation among the three social movements.

Concluding remarks and following questions

Through this analysis of a social movement family in Brazil, we have discussed the dynamics that permeate knowledge construction and circulation among these social actors. Our aim is to propose a non-media-centric discussion of communicative processes within social movements, moving away from the transmission paradigm of communication towards an understanding of communication as sharing and mutual understanding (Sodré, 2014). This study explores the interface between communication, media practices and knowledge production among social movements as opposed to focusing on one organisation. Social movements that succeed in becoming established social actors are ideal analytical objects for this purpose because they are dependent on the formation of a collective based on shared understandings. The analysis shows that the production and circulation of knowledge through communicative processes is a crucial aspect in the formation and maintenance of social movements’ networks because it crystallises shared goals, collective identities and mobilisation practices.

This study contributes to the knowledge and scholarly discussion on communication within and among social movements in two ways; first by looking into the understudied area of communication and interaction among social movements and second by exploring the production of knowledge as a communicative and mediated process. Our small-scale qualitative study has analysed a limited network of organisations in one country during a short period. Given this shortcoming and considering the connective affordances of media technologies, an analysis of transnational scale would be interesting to test and further develop the typology we propose here. Since we have a contemporary scenario in which social problems and direct action have become more global in scope and fuelled the articulation of transnational alliances among groups demanding social justice, longitudinal and historical perspectives would also deepen our understanding of how social movements produce and reproduce knowledge.
References


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**Notes**

1 Social movement is a contested term that can be defined in different and sometimes contradictory ways (see della Porta & Diani, 2009). In our research and in the discussion that we present here we align ourselves with definitions of collective social action that emphasise change towards social justice (Sader, 1988; Touraine, 2007a; Tarrow, 2006 and Tilly, 2005), recognition, redistribution and representation (Fraser, 2001 and 2010; Honneth, 1996; Santos, 2000).

2 An MST campsite (*acampamento*) is an area that has been occupied by MST militant families. When the families gain legal rights to the land, the campsite becomes a settlement (*assentamento*).

3 Militancy/militant – we opted for the terms militancy and militant instead of activism and activist to stress the permanent and robust character of the involvement with the movements. Our informants consistently call themselves militants, which usually denotes that their engagement with the movements resulting from a process of consciousness-raising in which they realised that the only way to change their living conditions is to become militants, as opposed to activists who choose the causes with which they engage.

4 Insurgency/insurgent – we use these terms following Holston’s (2008) insurgent citizenship and Santos’ (2014) insurgent cosmopolitanism.

5 In Gramscian ([1936]1971) terms, as the permanent action in order to constitute an alternative to the hegemonic power.

6 The three movements have smaller collectives within them called “agitation and propaganda” inspired by the Soviet Communist Party who are responsible for disseminating the ideas of the movements through popular culture.