Popular media and the issue of plurality in the public sphere[1]

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The use of media has been part of the strategies of social movements and activists for a long time all over the world. Described under several different concepts such as popular communication, participatory communication, citizen's media or communication for social change among others, for the most part, they configure communication processes "which allow people themselves to define who they are, what they want and need, and how they will work together to improve their lives" (GUMUCIO-DRAGON & TUFTE, 2006, p. xiv). We understand that, in recent times, when the balance of power in society is strongly influenced by communication (CASTELLS, 2013), these practices play a double role: the first relates to the articulation of social mobilizations and the other concerns the provision of alternative worldviews in order to fulfill the gap of plurality in the public sphere. It is there where the issue of asymmetry becomes clear.

We assume that Brazil can be considered a stratified society. According to Fraser's definition, stratified societies are those "whose basic institutional framework generates unequal social groups in structural relations of domination and subordination" (FRASER, 1992, p. 122). For the author, in such societies, "full parity of participation in public debate and deliberation is not within the reach of possibility" (idem) and she talks about "subaltern counterpublics" as "parallel discursive arenas" that are important for expanding discursive space with voices of contestation. But the same author also recognize, with Geoff Eley, that "these various publics are situated in a single 'structured setting' that advantages some and disadvantage others" (idem, p.125).

The inequality in the media sphere in the country seems to be very close to the social and economic inequalities. Vilson Vieira Jr. establishes a relationship between poverty in different Brazilian regions and concentration of the media. He takes as reference a study of the Instituto de Estudos e Pesquisas em Comunicação (EPCOM), in 2006, that pointed out that "the poorer is the region the highest is the level of media concentration, i.e., the lower is the number of actors owning media such as radio and television". (VIEIRA Jr., 2007)

Struggles and actions related to the appropriation of media have started in the 1960's with a strong participation of the civil society, both in the development of initiatives as in the debate around public policies for the field (LIMA V. A., 2006). The *Ministério das Comunicações*, the national authority in the domain, concentrates data about legalized TV and radio stations classified as communitarian and educative. In the end of 2014, they were 498 MF educative radio stations, 209 educative TV stations and 4.641 community radio stations (BRASIL, Indicadores em nível nacional, estadual ou municipal, 2014).

It is, however, hard to precise the number of media projects developed by civil society around the country. Many of them do not have any register out of their territories, surveys about printed media cover only the commercial ones, some TV and radio stations operate without legal permission and, currently, many initiatives can be created and dissolved continuously within the digital sphere. Despite of this abundance, their role of counterpublic is permanently jeopardized. On top of all structural inequalities, the balance of power plays an important role and we can identify an asymmetric relationship, as the place of the actors is defined by an unequal distribution of resources and also of competences and attributes[3]. But digital resources may be challenging this situation and paving the way for popular media as an influent source of information within the whole society.

The sample and the methodology

This analysis is based in two field researches conducted between October 2013 and July 2014 in the domain of popular media in Brazil. The studies enrolled two samples. The first one was composed by 18 initiatives distributed all over the country, with ranges of diffusion varying from local to national audiences (Table 1). This group was approached with field visits and interviews with media actors, mainly the leading actors in each experience.

The second sample was composed by 37 reports of popular media actors presented on a national event promoted by the Catholic Church to support and motivate the debate around communication (Table 2). It is important to highlight that, despite the religious affiliation of the event, only half of this sample was composed by experiences directly

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[3] We apply here the concept of asymmetric relationship proposed by authors working in the field of clinical sociology, such as Nathalie Zaccaï-Reyners and Jean-Louis Genard. We find it useful as long as it brings to the analysis the availability of resources but also the recognition of competences and attributes of the actors involved in a relationship.

related to the Catholic Church and they were still considered as representative taking into account the historical support by some sectors of this church to social and popular movements, and particularly to the development of popular communication (DORNELLES, 2007).

Table 1 – List of initiatives approached with field visits and interviews

Initiative	Nature	Region
Adital	Press agency	Latin America
Jornal Sem-Terra	Newspaper	National
Mídia Ninja	Multimedia	National
Rede Mocoronga	Radio	North
Rede de Notícias da Amazônia	Radio	North
Coletivo Nigéria	Video	Northeast
Jornal Fala Mãe Luiza	Newspaper	Northeast
Rádio FM Casa Grande	Radio	Northeast
Rádio Ibiapina	Radio	Northeast
Rede de Comunicadores do Semiárido	Network	northeast
Cefuria	Training	South
Jornal Folha do Sabará	Newspaper	South
Agência de Notícias de Paraisópolis	Multimedia	Southeast
Énois	Fanzine + training	Southeast
Escola de Notícias	Training	Southeast
Jornal Brasil de Fato (regional edition)	Newspaper	Southeast
Jornal O Chiador	Newspaper	Southeast
Núcleo de Comunicação Comunitária São Miguel Ar	Multimedia	Southeast

Table 2 – List of initiatives analyzed through reports of experience

Initiative	Nature	Region
O Rádio na Escola como Instrumento de Evangelização	Radio	Middle West
Banco Católico de Programas	Tv	National
Portal de Notícias baseado na Produção do Rádio	Radio	National
Projeto Rádio pela Educação	Radio	North
Rede de Notícias da Amazônia	Radio	North
Portal da Arquidiocese de Salvador	Multimedia	Northeast
Jornal Fala Mãe Luiza: Comunidade em Foco	Newspaper	Northeast
Jornal São Salvador	Newspaper	Northeast
Programa Debates do Povo	Radio	Northeast
Programa Voltai a Mim	Radio	Northeast
Programa Mais Verão	Radio	Northeast
Ritmo Pastoral	Radio	Northeast
Aprendizagem e Comunicação em Rádio Comunitária	Radio	Northeast
Programa Comunicação Acadêmica da Rádio Ariús FM	Radio	Northeast
Web Rádio São Francisco.Com	Webradio	Northeast

Segura Essa Ondas/Ondas Cidadãs	Radio	Northeast
Educomunicação no Contexto Educativo	Radio	Northeast
Jovens Radialistas o Semiárido	Radioweb	Northeast
Um Olhar para a Cidadania	Radioweb	Northeast
Web Rádio e Web TV na Paróquia Nsa Senhora da Candelária	Multimedia	Northeast
Tv Diferente	Webtv	Northeast
TV do Bem e Projeto Viva Mãe Luiza	Webtv	Northeast
Pascom Arquidiocesana e Site Fécatólica	Website	Northeast
Comunicação e Catequese – Formando o Comunicador Cristão de Amanhã	Jornal Mural	Not mentioned
Revista Rainha dos Apóstolos: 90 Anos de Evangelização	Magazine	South
Revista Catedral	Magazine	South
O Semeador	Radio	South
Webradio Migrantes	Webradio	South
Rádio: Ondas que disseminam conhecimento, cultura e lazer na Escola	Radio	South
O Desenvolvimento da Rede Aparecida de Comunicação	Multimedia	Southeast
Projeto de Inclusão Digital Missionária (Idim)	Multimedia	Southeast
Limites e Perspectivas da Comunicação Cidadã em Chiador	Newspaper	Southeast
Jornal de Opinião	Newspaper	Southeast
Catequese Hoje: Revista Virtual	Magazine	Southeast
Sala Franciscana	Radio	Southeast
Comunicação Comunitária Alternativa na Radio-Web	Radio	Southeast
Experiência da Rede Católica de Radio	Radio	Southeast

The plurality of the public sphere

The role and the quality of media are frequently associated to the health of democracies, being it as a boost for their development or as an element of domination jeopardizing its improvement (MUHLMANN, 2004). Social movements have been introducing this issue as a subject of debate in many places of the world. For recent examples, it has been the case in Mexico, with the young citizens' movement "#yosoy132", that denounced the collusion between two major media consortiums, the economic elite and the results of the last presidential election. The question was also raised during the demonstrations in Brazil in June of 2013, where claims for more democracy in the media figured among the signs in the hands of the protesters and properties of mainstream media were taken as target of manifestations (SUZINA, 2014). At the same time, these movements have mobilized communication as a value and as a strategy to challenge authorities, financial or economic globalization and dominant representations of the world.

In this context, the field researches pointed to two strong directions concerning the reasons for creating a popular media. Each direction focuses in a very specific perspective: the recognition of identities and the legitimacy for interfering in the public debate, as the quotations below can illustrate. Both can be linked to the issue of political inequality which, for Luis Felipe Miguel, is straightly connected to the conditions for the consolidation of democracy. These complementary modes of reasoning carried out by media actors reveal an unequal distribution of discursive representativeness and a struggle for reaching recognition in the public debate (MIGUEL, 2012, p. 18).

In the framework of the first perspective, related to the recognition of identities, Luiz Marinho, a recent graduate in journalism who is responsible for the community newspaper *Fala Mãe Luiza*, in Natal (RN), Northeast region, explains that:

> "When we search for '*Mãe Luiza*' on Google for example, this is what we found: 'shooting in *Mãe Luiza* neighborhood', 'insecurity concerns population of *Mãe Luiza*', 'funk and something *Mãe Luiza*' and so on. If we put on images 'news about *Mãe Luiza*', what shows up? Crime news or social aid or tragedies related to the conditions of risk areas, but it is too much about the crime. When we talk about *Mãe Luiza* here, in Natal, we can tell that there is a widespread fear, because our printed media, televisions and radios, they only give an opportunity for *Mãe Luiza* when there is something related to these facts, something related to deaths, to drug traffic. They do not show the other side of *Mãe Luiza*, the people of the community, the projects. That was, therefore, the reason why the newspaper *Fala Mãe Luiza* was created. (…) The most important feature of *Fala Mãe Luiza* is to give voice to this side of the community to which the Natal's society does not give any opportunity. It is a newspaper that search for delivering to the dweller, to the neighborhood dweller. Because when you – and I can tell it by my own experience –, when you live in a neighborhood that is stigmatized by society and by media, you do not make it to see anything good in this neighborhood, what you want is to leave, you want an opportunity for leaving. But when you have a medium that presents to you the other side, the other actions. Because we can say that 20% of *Mãe Luiza* have crime, yes, but and the other 70%? And the rest? That is why it is a community newspaper, it's not a municipal newspaper, because we want, first, to lead this community to see itself, to meet, this is the objective, for later leaving to wherever one wants, or being proud and feeling like belonging." (MARINHO JR., 2013)

When it turns to the second perspective, concerning the legitimacy for interfering in the public debate, Rafael Vilela, one of the founders of Mídia Ninja, based in São Paulo (SP), Southeast region, says:

> "It is both *[politicizing the citizen and interfering in the governmental and institutional political agenda]*. And we will only be able to interfere in this kind of agenda if we work with the civil society, working with the conscience of lots of people, and it is not formatting the conscience of anyone. When I talk about stimulating the debate, it is triggering issues and pointing out to conflicts that are sometimes a bit invisible, in order to move the people. That is the reason why we are talking openly about a logic of engagement also. Make people engage with relevant issues, take them off the comfort zones, you know? Because the only way to make incidence concretely is from awareness. There is no other way, no other form." (VILELA, 2013)

These two modes of reasoning could be found in most of the experiences. Some are pretty attached to one of them; some mix both in their practices. For example, the *Rede de Notícias da Amazônia*, a regional network of local radios in the Amazon region, defines one of its objectives as showing the cultures of Amazon but it is also interested in triggering debates concerning regional issues from a regional perspective. The *MST*'s set of media combines an interest of gathering voices from the grassroots communities with a clear intention of providing new worldviews to the society at large – the later is done through institutional media focusing on potential adherents of the cause, like the movement's magazine, and through the participation in the development of collective media like the newspaper *Brasil de Fato*.

Freedom of press and freedom of expression, as well as alternative sources of information, can be considered among the core elements that characterize the establishment and progress of a democratic dynamic, under the assumption that the plurality of information can enlarge and improve participation (DAHL, 2005) (DAHL, Political institutions and democracy, 2005). But as the statements above reveal, popular media actors lead the reflection to a relationship connecting the improvement of the media framework to the issue representativeness, through recognition. Identifying media as a central intermediary in the political sphere, they touch the democratic ideals of equality among citizens and opportunities of participation and contestation (DAHL, Poliarquia: participação e oposição, 2005) (DAHL R. , 2001). These struggles connect to a debate around the legitimacy of social arrangements (ANDERSON, 1995).

All initiatives suggest a position towards mainstream media that can actually be transferred to the composition of public sphere. They criticize mainstream media production and charge them with the responsibility of disseminating wrong or reducing stereotypes. Katia Ramalho, journalist in the *Núcleo de Comunicação Comunitária São Miguel no Ar*, in the city of São Paulo (SP), Southeast region, talked about the effects of a piece in Globo television, comparing the community of São Miguel Paulista with Haiti and how it prompted local people to support local media (RAMALHO, 2014). Joildo Santos, coordinator of the *Agência de Notícias de Paraisópolis*, also in the city of São Paulo (SP), explained their interest on having a press officer to guide mainstream journalists coming to the neighborhood: "they come here only to confirm stereotypes already built" (SANTOS J. , 2014). But at the same time, they are talking about the lack of plurality in the public sphere.

It can be related to what Miguel presents as a non-electoral form of representation, parallel to elections, but still conferring some kind of pressure and control towards elected representatives (MIGUEL, 2012). This author talks about three dimensions of political representation, the first having electoral processes as its core feature, and the second concerning the participation in the public debate and the agenda setting.

> "The elected representatives play this role, but there are many other agents by their side, spokespeople of different complains, interests and values. They make efforts in order to call attention to issues, to modify the hierarchy of themes that figure already in the agenda or to highlight certain frameworks related to the problems in the agenda. Their targets are the so called 'public opinion', media and also the formal spaces of decision." (MIGUEL, 2012, p. 10)

These actors are dealing with what Honneth understands as self-respect, which is linked to the sense of being "capable of participating in the sort of public deliberation that Habermas terms 'discursive will-formation'" (ANDERSON, 1995, p. xv).

The concept of public sphere fits properly to analyze this context, considering its focus in the communicative process and taking into account mainly its developments and critics following the 1962's original book of Jürgen Habermas (HABERMAS, 2003). In Habermas's perspective, "the free provision of information was, alongside education, crucial to putting the public in a position to arrive at a considered, rather than merely a common, opinion" (CALHOUN C. , 1992, p. 14). The enlargement of the public communication was directly associated to the "politization of the social life" (HABERMAS, 1992, p. 163).

"The sudden increasing in the number of readers correspond to a considerable higher production of works, magazines and newspapers, to an increasing number of authors, publishing houses and book stores, to the creation of rental libraries and reading offices, specially of reading clubs, as well as so many social gathering points of a new culture of reading." (HABERMAS, 1992, p. 163)

On the other way around, the same media was condemned as an element of degradation of the public sphere in the moment where the first turns into a massive channel of cultural consumerism replacing the exchange of rational ideas. According to Habermas, the individuated reception and the immediacy of radio, film and television benefit personalized politics and trigger a strategic engineering among actors searching for and cultivating friendly dispositions among consumers, creating a false public sphere. As other sectors of modern society, media should then be reformed in order to reverse this situation. The solution would be the democratization of access and selection in direct opposition "to the concentration of ownership and increasing scale of media organizations" (CALHOUN C. , 1992, p. 28).

Several critics were made about the original work of Habermas[4] and two may be considered as capitals in the discussion proposed by this research. They are the predominantly pessimist reflection about the media and the lack of consideration regarding social movements as actors of change in the public sphere (SERGHINI & MATUSZAK, 2009). However, although being aware of the lack of recognition to new forms of politization that were supported by the enlargement of the media sphere as well as to the possibility of other answer coming from the audience than the submission (FRANÇOIS & NEVEU, 1999), Habermas's original critics towards media enhance the elements that are in the heart of the notion of public sphere and fit many of the situations described by the field actors observed in the research: the quality of discourse and the opportunities of participation. Who speaks and under what conditions build the quality of a public sphere, as it appears in the way Nancy Fraser resumes the concept:

"It *[the idea of public sphere]* designates a theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, and hence an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction. This arena is conceptually

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[4] For a large review of Habermas's "The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere", we recommend the book edited by Craig Calhoun, "Habermas and the Public Sphere", where several authors make a deep analysis of the work. (CALHOUN C. (., 1992)

distinct from the state; it is a site for the production and circulation of discourses that can in principle be critical of the state. The public sphere in Habermas's sense is also conceptually distinct from the official economy; it is not an arena of market relations but rather one of discursive relations, a theater for debating and deliberating rather than for buying and selling." (FRASER, 1992, pp. 110-111)

For François and Neveu, Habermas's notion of public sphere refreshes the political analysis, proposing to think about communication as a central mediation in social and political relationships (FRANÇOIS & NEVEU, 1999, p. 14). But by assuming that political participation is triggered by the medium of talk, we immediately identify at least three major problems concerning this communicative process, being **who speaks**, about **what issues** and what are the **available channels**. In a context of asymmetries, these problems can attain even more incidence.

Who speaks?

The issues of recognition and legitimacy can be easily observed in the discussion about who is allowed to speak in the public debate. The field research revealed in one hand struggles for getting out of stereotypes that could weaken the legitimacy of some groups of having their own voice and their recognition as equals in the media sphere as sources of information. In the other hand, it suggested a strategy of convenience concerning the recognition of the power of popular media. Their importance is recognized when the use of their networks can bring benefits to someone and, in the opposite, when it comes to apply any kind of censorship to limit their influence over the society.

Habermas originally proposed the public sphere as a place where the status and the identity of the speaker would be suppressed in order to leave complete room for the objectivity of ideas. However, as pointed by Fraser, even during the XVIII century, that Habermas considered as the golden age of public sphere, this idea carried more vices than virtues. First of all because the principle of public sphere suggests that the inequalities between interlocutors should be set aside as if they were equals. For Fraser, the "as if" is telling because it reveals that actually there were differences, something that would be clearly exposed by later historical research about the period.

"Rather, discursive interaction within the bourgeois public sphere was governed by protocols of style and decorum that were themselves correlates and markers of status inequalities. These functioned informally to marginalize women and

members of the plebeian classes and to prevent them from participating as peers." (FRASER, 1992, p. 119)

In short, the idea of competition for legitimacy, that Habermas identified as a degradation coming with the enlargement of the public sphere, was actually already there in its very first configuration. As proposed by Honneth, it seems to be more fruitful to see the relationships of recognition as results of social struggles generated by the rejection of social arrangements (ANDERSON, 1995).

In this sense, Fraser proposes a critical analysis of the idea of deliberation, where even if subaltern counterpublics are included in the debate, their speech would end up by confirming subtle forms of domination. François and Neveu recall the existence of a certain grammar of public speaking that suppose a particular competence that is not equally distributed in society (FRANÇOIS & NEVEU, 1999, p. 33). According to the researches that Fraser takes as reference, being for the lack of speaking skills of certain groups or for the format of public exchange that inhibits the clarification of ideas, the deliberation model would have been keeping unequal balance of power related to gender, class and ethnicity (FRASER, 1992, p. 119). Their participation in the communicative process would rather confirm pre-established images that were already built upon who these groups are or what their fights are about.

In the Brazilian media sphere, even if there is a valorization coming from the research since the 1970's, popular media can still be depicted as something fragile, done by non-professionals and without appropriate resources. "Is it journalism?" This was one of the central questions about *Mídia Ninja* during *Roda Viva*, one of the main debate programs in the Brazilian television, just after the protests of June 2013 (TV CULTURA, 2013). It focused on *Mídia Ninja*, but it actually concerned all kinds of media initiatives that got attention and audience during the mobilizations.

> "Sometimes, people think that citizen journalism must be amateur. Must be poorly done, under short time. We compete for availability, don't you agree?" (VILELA, 2013)

This kind of evaluation limits the possibility of taking this kind of initiative as a peer in the field of media and, consequently, avoids considering the voices behind it as legitimate. Some actors also reveal a common sense about what these media are expected to seem and to transmit, as reported by Aécio Diniz, from *Rádio Casa Grande FM*, an educative radio station in Nova Olinda (CE), Northeast region:

"Once, Alemberg[5] was with visitants here and someone asked him, while he was talking about the radio, and he said that we have programs broadcasting jazz, blues, classical music. Then the person looked to him and asked: 'Here, in Nova Olinda, how come? Do you have a jazz program? Instrumental music?' And he said 'Yes, we do have a program about jazz in Nova Olinda'. And the person insisted: 'But in small city like this, how come people will listen to jazz, to instrumental music?' And he answered that we have it here. 'And what is the audience share, the number of people who listen to this radio?' And he answered 100%. And the person was astonished. 'But how come 100%?' 'Yes, 100% more than in your city where there is not any jazz programme', Alemberg said. (DINIZ & MAROPE, 2013)

These statements suggest a perspective where society look to popular media – and their audience – as something inferior. As they would be non-professional, the information transmitted by them could not be trusted. In the case of *Mídia Ninja*, the fact that they were not following patterns of journalism would made them illegitimate sources. But at the same time, people do not expect them to be professional, because they are marginal and should keep the stereotypes generally directed towards their audience. Reading the example of *Casa Grande* radio, they should not broadcast what is considered to be genders only consumed by people living in certain conditions different from a poor village in the countryside of the Brazilian arid region. This perspective hurts both the perspective of legitimacy and recognition of these media and their members.

On the other hand, however, these media are also very searched by political actors under purposes of enlarging the number of supporters, especially in the countryside. For instance, during the field visit to *Ibiapina* radio, in Florânia (RN), Northeast region, state governor candidate passed by without previous scheduling and wanted to speak in the radio. Evani Tercio, the director of the radio, accepted it and explained that, as a community radio, they open the microphone to any authority who wants to address a word to the population.

The candidate and a state deputy took the microphone for around 40 minutes and made strong critics to the government in office at that moment. A member of the team told that they were traveling all around the state and would stop in every community radio that they crossed on their way. For them, these media have the power in the countryside.

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[5] Alemberg Quindins is the founder and current president of the Fundação Casa Grande, in Nova Olinda, Ceará

It is a very contradictory statement, considering all the difficulties that these media confront in search for resources, as we will discuss in the following.

Probably for the same recognition as a local power, the *Ibiapina* radio works under the pressure of local administration. Jota Junior, a volunteer broadcaster who has a daily programme in the morning, and Tercio told that there was a news programme in the schedule. Besides reading articles from the regional press, they used to diffuse information about the city and got a great audience. The approach to local issues was disapproved by the local mayor, who called the priest and promised to cut the financial support given both to the radio and to the Catholic Church – the *Ibiapina* radio is owned by a local association, but was created with the support of the local parish and still counts on it to survive. The news were vanished from the whole schedule. Programmes done by local associations suffer the same pressure. The chamber of representatives went to the Justice against an association working on handicap issues because of complains diffused on their programme in the radio. (JR & TERCIO, 2013) The result is that, even if *Ibiapina* radio is the only medium of the city, it is not free for discussing political and social issues, which is one of the objectives of any community radio.

In the city of Chiador (MG), Southeast Region, the local administration also makes hard the development of the community newspaper *Jornal de Chiador*. The publication was a result of an academic work. Rodrigo Galdino studied Journalism and decided to create the first medium in his own city of around 2,8 thousand inhabitants. The financial support comes from a scholarship for a research project related to community media attached to the *Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora*, but Galdino counted on local structures to run the process with the participation of local dwellers. As long as the newspaper discuss social issues of the city, it was taken as a publication of opposition and the local administration decided to forbidden the team of meeting in school rooms or other public places. (FUSER, 2013)

For Fraser, there is no point on taking aside the concrete differences among interlocutors. In a context of asymmetries of power, such as the Brazilian one, pretending that they are equals would mask structural deficiencies and political pressures that need to be solved if there is a clear intention of promoting a qualified public debate.

What issues?

The plurality of the public sphere is also related to the issue of definition of subjects of the public debate. In the context of popular media, it is possible to observe how subjects are gathered and diffused inside and outside the groups attached to each medium.

François and Neveu identify a complete axe of research in the analysis of the public sphere as a complex network of forums and arenas where public problems are defined (FRANÇOIS & NEVEU, 1999). The emergence of issues was actually among the main principles of the definition of the public sphere, meaning the possibility of including the citizens, originally the bourgeois civil society, in the debate of any topic that could be understood as common interest.

> "All sorts of topics over which church and state authorities had hitherto exercised a virtual monopoly of interpretation were opened to discussion, inasmuch as the public defined its discourse as focusing on all matters of common interest." (CALHOUN C. , 1992, p. 13)

But there was also a problem with Habermas's approach. For Calhoun, his theoretical scheme, public x private, system x lifeworld, leads to see the public interest in advance of public life while its very constitution should also be part of the public deliberation (CALHOUN C. , 1992, p. 35). It means that the definition of public interest topics would already be a result of discursive relations, subject to the confrontation between actors and consequently to the balance of power existing among them.

Talking inside the groups

Miguel talks about a third dimension of political representation that concerns the horizontal relationship between those who are represented in the construction of preferences. In this dimension, "the internal dialogue is a crucial moment of the representative process" (MIGUEL, 2012, p. 11). In the field of popular media, it could be applied to the way these practices include their audiences or communities. Making a reference to the work of Clarissa Rile Hayward, the author argues that an asymmetrical society needs the emergence of new public interests, but they must be built upon the participation of affected people if there is any objective of emancipation (MIGUEL, 2012, pp. 17-18).

Considering the field research, it is clear that all initiatives observed look forward to establishing a dialogue with their communities and audiences, but the ways of doing it may vary considerably. One first trend would be the concern about the skills of the

media staff. Considering the preliminary findings, it is possible to say that the presence of professionals is relatively frequent in the popular media currently. Training processes are however still a permanent objective of the actors, including both technical competencies and the appropriation of realities. For this kind of initiative, knowing the context is so important as knowing how to make an article. The *Rede de Notícias da Amazônia*, in the Amazon region, take it as one of its main features.

> "Another objective that guides the work of the network is the development of the communicators. Several of them are not journalists, they come from other fields of study, some does not have any university degree, but they have a communicative potential, they can collaborate and have a lot to say. So, the *Rede de Notícias* also works with this objective of training. (...) They also propose experiences inside traditional communities in order to stimulate the encounter with the communities, to make us know. (…) The ideas are not born from nothing, they must come from experiences, we need to see things in order to propose good coverage. This is the proposal of the *Rede de Notícias*, to meet, to know what happens, to make the Amazon communicators know the Amazon."
> (PEREIRA RODRIGUES, 2013)

Another aspect would relate to the efforts for stimulating direct participation in media processes. All initiatives observed demonstrated willingness to receive contributions from their communities and/or audiences. They are expressed mainly in the report of people asking music in the radios, of comments made by telephone or internet or even when people cross the communicators in the streets, of critics and comments about articles and pieces diffused. Some of the practices even take as an objective to improve participation, declaring an intention of having more appropriation coming from the community. However, more information is required to analyze what are the processes concretely put in place to make it possible for people to set a subject in these media.

The communicators engaged in the *Núcleo de Comunicação Comunitária São Miguel no Ar*, in the city of São Paulo (SP), Southeast region, take the *Fórum dos Moradores* as one of their reference for defining topics for coverage (RAMALHO, 2014). This *Fórum* is a local meeting where dwellers come to discuss their needs and complains. The *Jornal de Chiador* fix posters in the city inviting the inhabitants to take part in the newspaper's preparatory meetings (FUSER, 2013). All radio coordinators interviewed declared that any community dweller can propose a programme, and actually many of these radios work with volunteers bringing their interests and passions to the

microphone. But there are also rules that must be followed and it is important to know who defines these rules and how they are applied. On the other hand, it may be interesting to understand better how long these initiatives end up by gathering issues still proposed by a minority of the most active individuals in one community.

As proposed by Miguel, in the context of civil society associations and militant mobilizations, the representativeness depend upon the existence of mechanisms of exchange between leaders and grassroots levels. According to this situation, they can be recognized as representative and/or democratic for different reasons.

> "If we see them as representatives (as long as these discourses take into consideration demands from sectors that are not directly present), it leads us to observe their democratic deficits (the lack of connection between representatives and represented). But if we see them as democratic (as long as the democracy determines the free access to the public debate), it is not because of their representativeness (because these discourses are not characterized by an effective exchange with a base)." (MIGUEL, 2012, p. 17)

Inside the groups, the recognition of discursive representativeness, would be then related to the mechanisms put in place by media actors in order to include more citizens in the definition of the issues. It would determine how long these media are able to produce new public interests based on collective processes.

Talking outside the groups

The dynamic of introducing new issues in the dominant public sphere configures a main question related to media, while they are considered as a central vehicle of "*mise au monde*" in modern societies (MUHLMANN, 2004, p. 22). Even if when taking into account the existence and relevance of counterpublics, for François and Neveu, the notion of public sphere is related to a common point of reference, where opinions are publicly exposed, role that can be seen in the Parliaments or in the media, for instance (FRANÇOIS & NEVEU, 1999, p. 48). For Muhlmann, the question about how media keep its role as a mediation between the individual and the community is the very question of democracy (MUHLMANN, 2004, p. 22). However, according to some of the actors interviewed during the exploratory research, this mediation is compromised with a distance from the reality and a masked partiality.

Hand in hand with the question about the legitimacy and the recognition of the speakers that would be allowed to propose a topic, there is the issue of defining which one should

be considered as of public interest. Again, the example brought by Fraser on gender makes it clear. She recalls how long it took for turning domestic violence into a matter of common concern and consequently a legitimate public issue (FRASER, 1992, p. 129). This process is close to the operation of appropriation of the social world, which is called by François and Neveu as "*montée en généralité*", and that is in the center of the discussion concerning the public sphere, according to these authors. Through the establishment of categories of issues and beings, this operation makes the world intelligible but at the same time reduced to this same classification.

> "It *[the montée en généralité]* is then, initially, a communication process, a way of constructing the real and, eventually, of sharing with others the principles of worldview and of the world social order, which validity exceed the immediate experience. But it is also, at the same time, a process that allows an appropriation of the social world, that allows talking on its behalf and represent it. In this sense, it is a legitimate condition of access to public debates and serve as a base both for criticism and for the establishment of agreements concerning the common good." (FRANÇOIS & NEVEU, 1999, p. 32)

As mentioned before, many of the popular media observed are justified by their leaders as a mechanism for confronting both stereotypes produced by mainstream media and for introducing new issues in the debate. Some of the actors declare an open interest in interfering in the dominant worldview. Igor Santos, from the national communication team of MST, explained the importance of taking part in the initiative of producing the newspaper *Brasil de Fato*, speaking mainly about its new edition, distributed freely in metro stations of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Belo Horizonte.

> "In instruments such as *Brasil de Fato*, what we want to discuss is what we call a popular project for Brazil. (…) We want to vocalize a project of structural transformation of our country, where one of the elements is the agrarian reform. (…) Before, in the MST, the enemy of MST and of the agrarian reform was the farmer, with his hat, his boots dirty with mud, his belt and his employees, who protected his land, that he used as an equity reserve and for real estate speculation. (…) This farmer was frequently associated to the '*coronelismo*', to the worst political methods, to authoritarianism. In the last period, what have we got? A process in which transnational companies, Monsanto, Bunge, Cargill, Syngenta, come to Brazil and get associated to capitalist farmers, establishing a new model of production in the agriculture, which is the agribusiness. (…) Then,

the society, because of the power of agribusiness over media, with advertisings that created a perspective that the agribusiness is modern, that it produces, it exports, it supports the Brazilian economy; the society looks to agribusiness and say 'it is good'. Now those who are old-fashioned are the ones fighting for redistributing the land, who do not produce anything, because the media do not give any space for diffusing our production experiences. (…) So, today, we have in MST a role that is exactly that of stimulating this process of struggle and organization of the whole Brazilian society. That is why the newspaper *Brasil de Fato* is so important, because it is fundamental in this process of upgrading the level of understanding of society about the need of making huge structural reforms. And, inside this structural reforms, we will fight for the agrarian reform. (SANTOS I. F., 2013)

Some of the initiatives visited included a media relations strategy in their practices, in order to offer to mainstream media different angles about their subject of struggle or their communities. Francisca Rodrigues and Keli Gois, journalists working in the *Agência de Notícias de Paraisópolis*, in the city of São Paulo (SP), Southeast region, declared that they feel responsible for every good new that appears in mainstream media about the neighborhood of Paraisópolis. They guide journalists searching for information and they also propose topics for them (RODRIGUES & GOIS, 2014). The MST also has an intense media relations work since de beginning of the years 2000. But, as other social groups, they believe in the importance of creating their own media and enlarging the possibilities of direct dialogue with society. They are challenging what Bernard Cassen considers as an illusion, that is the belief that mainstream media will open space for plurality and diversity (LIMA V. A., 2006).

What available channels?

Taking the case of stratified societies, Fraser talks about how the inequalities of power can be translated into the marginalization of ideas coming from subordinated groups. It can be translated in the availability of channels but also in the distribution of resources.

Concentration of ownership

The *Intervozes Coletivo Brasil de Comunicação Social* is an NGO that defends the right to communication as a way to free people from the hostage of the media controlled by powerful actors. In a film called "Levante sua voz", they affirm that media content

shape the way people see the world and advocates the democratization of the ownership of media in order to promote the plurality of views (EKMAN, 2009). In this film, they illustrate the control of the media sphere in Brazil by the confrontation of the number of 11 families who own most of the media in the country with thousands of applications for getting authorization for the establishment of a community radio station (Table 3).

Table 3: **Ownership of media in Brazil**

Number of families who own most of the media in the country	11
Proportion of senators who have a permission for exploring TV or radio transmissions	25%
Proportion of deputies who have a permission for exploring TV or radio transmissions	10%

Applications for a permission for establishing a community radio in 10 years	20.000
Applications accepted in 5 years	3.652
Applications denied	3.536
Community radio stations closed by the public administration in 5 years	6.716
People prosecuted for the crime of broadcasting without a permission	3.118

Source: Levante sua voz (EKMAN, 2009)

Data collected by Angelo Serpa can illustrate the situation with the example of Salvador, in the state of Bahia, Northeast region. According to this researcher, between 1999 and 2005, the national authority has prevented 537 radio stations from starting to work in the city and only 31% of all requests made eventually got a permission (SERPA, 2013). In 2010 and 2011, around two radio stations operating without permission were closed every day all over the country (PAIVA, MALERBA, & CUSTÓDIO, 2013, p. 253).

Reports of troubles for getting a permission were abundant in the field research. The project for establishing a community radio station in the neighborhood of Brasilândia, in the northern zone of the city of São Paulo, Southeast Region, started in 1995. Around 250.000 people live in this community of $21km^2$. Even if the local association begun to broadcast as soon as they got all the equipment required, the legal permission for the *Rádio Cantareira FM* was given only in 2010. In their report of experience, the coordinators describe a long way of bureaucratic procedures and tension under the pressure of the national authority (ROSEMBACH & ZOTTIS, 2013).

The neighborhood of Paraisópolis is considered as the second largest slum of the city of São Paulo, with a population of 56.000 people[6]. The permission for a community radio station there also took 11 years, after an irregular radio station was closed. On top of bureaucracy and efforts for getting all the equipment required, the association of dwellers had to accept that the antenna was placed far away from the studio where the *Rádio Nova Paraisópolis* operates. Two requests for radio operation in the same region were running at the same time and for avoiding an even larger delay, the community accepted the deal of displacing the antenna, something that solved the immediate problem but costs a lot in terms of quality and maintenance of the operation (SAMPAIO, 2014).

Community television operations follow the same path. The *Fundação Casa Grande*, in the city of Nova Olinda (Ceará), Northeast Region, is an NGO that promotes access to culture, working mainly with children and young people. The city has around 15.000 inhabitants and is placed in a very dry and poor region of the country. The NGO maintains an educative radio station, operated by the children, and it also tried to put up a community television channel. After getting all the equipment and training a group for the work, they started to produce some programmes about life in the community. It did not last long till the national authority came to put an end in the activity, as reported by one of the current coordinators:

> "We put the TV on and then, differently, as the TV was not legal, democratically, it went on. Astonishingly, we got more audience than Globo, because we started to show the people of the city and it was kind of a shock, even for the community, because we arrived with a camera and showed the popular market, we started to show the people, and they turned on their TVs and started to see themselves. Then it reached a huge repercussion in the city. And what happened so? Without all the legality, all this huge bureaucratic process that we must follow, according to the community TV law, we did not have it *[the permission]*, the Anatel came and sealed our transmitter." (DINIZ & MAROPE, 2013)

Currently, Globo network is the only TV channel producing information in the region, with staff in bigger cities in the state of Ceará. The video production of *Fundação Casa Grande* is still in place however. They created a kind of video producer house named

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[6] This number can arrive to 100.000 people according to different sources.

"*Sem Canal*", which means without channel, and develop small pieces about traditions and icons of the region for a national educative channel, TV Futura, that is also owned by Globo.

According to *Intervozes*, the result of the monopoly of ownership is an homogeneity of issues, sources of information, actors and approaches represented in the public debate. There is a complain regarding the disconnection between the media and the situation of the Brazilian population. The concentration of ownership also means that a lot of the content is produced or selected from urban centers, like São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Brasília, or the capitals of the states, leaving a small space for local facts and perspectives and a lot of room for homogeneity, meaning establishing patterns that do not necessarily correspond to the diversity of Brazilian society.

The example of the community TV of *Fundação Casa Grande* is already a good one, but plenty of others could be added. For instance, the *Rede de Notícias da Amazônia* was created to confront this same problem. Tired of seeing themselves through the eyes of media operated from the South and the Southeast, a group of local radio stations decided to gather for producing news under their own perspective and enlarging the audience of this production. After around five years of training and preparatory meetings, the network started to work in 2008 and has currently two shared productions. One is a 30-minutes daily news programme and the other is a weekly radio magazine. The first combines pieces collected among all 13 members and the latter turns each week under the responsibility of one of the radio stations.

> "The communication in this large region that is the Amazon, where radio stations are isolated here and there, we thought that it was important to gather, to create a chain, a network, where, from its bases, the Amazon could talk to the Amazon. Where Roraima listens to what is happening in Acre, Acre listens to what is happening in Santarém, Santarém listens to what is happening in Belém etc. In this way, we will give importance to the popular fighters that confront the issues of Amazon, the issues regarding human rights, environment, cultural values of our region. It is the Amazon people experiencing themselves speaking." (PEREIRA RODRIGUES, 2013)

Unequal access to resources

Getting the permission is just the first hard step for a community radio or television project. As much as their peers in other initiatives, Joildo Santos, coordinator of the

media set of *Paraisópolis*, and Karina Sampaio, coordinator of the *Nova Paraisópolis* Radio, in the city of São Paulo (SP), Southeast region, describe a situation that shows the permanent challenges for keeping the initiative alive: working mostly with volunteers, pressure coming from different groups of the community regarding the distribution of programmes, costs for updating equipments, need of training for staff and, connecting and deepening all these challenges, the permanent lack of financial resources (SANTOS J. , 2014) (SAMPAIO, 2014). According to the law that rules community radio stations in Brazil, this kind of initiative cannot have any commercial activity, which includes advertising. They must survive from donations and what most of them call as cultural support, that is a kind of sponsorship coming from private actors – i.e., not so far from advertising.

For Sampaio, "the legalization is incomplete", because it does not provide community radio stations with the same rights as other radio stations and the government, who is responsible for the policy, does not support the activity neither.

> "If the government gave a tenth of what it gives for commercial radios *[in advertising]*, the community radio stations could survive better and the information concerning public policies would reach easily the correct audience."
> (SAMPAIO, 2014)

In Florânia (RN), having a radio station was an old dream of the population, but it only came true after a mobilization led by the Catholic Church in the beginning of the years 2000. A priest who was also a lawyer and a deputy helped to move on the process for getting a permission and the community work hard in order to collect the money needed for buying the equipment. According to Tercio, director of *Rádio Ibiapina*, the legal procedures went relatively well, counting on the political position of the priest. The challenge of financial maintenance is nevertheless hard.

The radio searches for cultural support but Tercio reports the need of adapting to the economic conditions of the community, which are low – as happens in *Nova Paraisópolis* Radio where the value of a sponsorship may vary according to the economic profile of the sponsor, i.e. a large company will pay more than a local business for the same sponsorship (SAMPAIO, 2014). But, besides the limits for operating under very restricted financial rules, the impossibility of saving some money put in risk the project as a whole. For several times, the permission was at risk because of technical requirements related to the quality of equipment imposed by the national

authority. As this equipment is expensive, the radio staff call upon the community with emergency campaigns. (TERCIO, 2013)

Printed media do not confront the challenge of getting a permission, but among the cases observed in the exploratory research, most of them registered instable periodicity, i.e., mentioned difficulties for printing and distributing the newspapers in a regular base without any interruption. It is a problem affecting both large and small initiatives. The national newspaper of MST, the *Jornal Sem Terra (JST)*, was created in 1981, even before the movement itself configured a national mobilization. According to Igor Santos, the publication served to unify the struggle for land around the country. But despite of the strategic importance of the medium for its leaders and for the members, it confronts serious problems of distribution. While presenting the newspaper, Igor Santos counted the editions missing in the preceding year and talked about the difficulty of making the publication arrive on time to each of the groups attached to the movement all over the country: it is expensive and requires a lot of organization. (SANTOS I. F., 2013) (OLIVEIRA FILHA, 2002)

Distribution and sustainability are also the challenge for the newspaper *Espaço do Povo*, publication of the neighborhood of Paraisópolis. It counts on advertising for keeping two journalists in the staff and a circulation of 15.000 each month, but Joildo dos Santos revealed that it is not uncommon that the team put money from their own pocket to cover production costs (SANTOS J. , 2014). In another neighbourhood in the east of the city of São Paulo, São Miguel Paulista, the newspaper *A voz do Lapenna* is supported by a corporate foundation, which makes it possible to keep a team of three professionals leading a group of young people collaborating under scholarships offered by the Municipal Labor Secretary (ADEVE, 2014). In Natal (RN), Northeast region, the newspaper *Fala Mãe Luiza* was transformed into an electronic publication, because of the costs, and this situation changed just in 2013 after obtaining a foreign sponsorship for keeping the monthly distribution of a printed version (MARINHO JR., 2013).

In big cities like São Paulo or Natal, these newspapers are not the only mean of information for their public. They are exposed to a countless number of TV and radio channels and printed media – not to mention the possibilities on the internet. The initiatives are however justified by their leaders because of the lack of representation or bad image spread in the mainstream media. Even if they recognize limits of low literacy still present in the communities, these media actors say that they are frequently approached by dwellers eager to see themselves in the local newspapers.

This description fits Fraser's criticism. For her, in stratified societies, the inequality of power gives place to non-official pressures that tend to marginalize the contributions of subordinated groups, dynamic that is amplified inside the dominant public sphere.

> "In this public sphere the media that constitute the material support for the circulation of views are privately owned and operated for profit. Consequently, subordinated social groups usually lack equal access to the material means of equal participation." (FRASER, 1992, p. 120)

Considering the production process, the immersion in the local reality takes time and dedication, i.e., it depends upon availability of human resources. According to several of the popular media actors approached, professionals involved with popular media processes need to know their territory, their field of struggle and frequently to know how to build media through participatory processes enrolling the community and/or the audience. These are skills that must be continuously developed. Rodrigues and Gois, two journalists working in the newspaper *Espaço do Povo*, talk about walking the streets of Paraisópolis in order to meet the people, recognize their central issues and become known by them as those who are writing the news from the perspective of the community (RODRIGUES & GOIS, 2014).

In some cases, the role of the professional is related to keep a group of volunteers motivated and oriented for the media processes. In the *Nova Paraisópolis* Radio, the broadcasters are all volunteers and they just receive some money if they can find by themselves a cultural sponsorship. Sampaio coordinates their work and say that what she tries to offer to them is opportunities of training and a support so they do not feel alone (SAMPAIO, 2014).

The field research revealed a frequent presence of media professionals working in popular media practices. Actually, two of the initiatives approached (*Énois* and *Escola de Notícias*, in São Paulo, Southeast region) and one of the reports of experience analyzed (*Instituto Comradio*, in Piauí, Northeast region) consist of training programmes for popular media actors, which suggests a trend of professionalization in the sector.

The increasing number of professionals can be considered as an advance in the context of popular media, but they still face the challenge of searching for money in order to keep a stable and trained staff. Many still work with volunteers, which brings passion and engagement to the initiatives, but also the risk of instability. Ednubia Ghisi is as a popular communicator in Cefuria, a NGO working on training and articulation of social

movements in the city of Curitiba (PR), South region. She is involved in the development of *Folha do Sabará*, a community newspaper in a marginal neighbourhood of the city. The initiative counted on volunteer journalists working side by side with young people in the community, but they have plans to encourage the latter to assume the responsibility for the newspaper. For her, it can make the dynamic more stable and also improve the character of the medium as a voice of the real dwellers (GHISI, 2014).

The influence of digital culture

The field research suggests that the use of digital technologies is strongly affecting popular media practices. It has an impact on the framework of media ownership and on the access to resources. And it seems to equally interfere in the struggles for recognition, while enlarging opportunities of visibility. On the other hand, it was also possible to observe possible limits of this interference. Digital connection does not seems to be an automatic synonym of exchange in the public sphere, suggesting that the recognition of popular voices would be better related to the articulation between all kinds of media outlets available.

It can be said that the passage to digital platforms via web radio stations and web TVs can take over the barrier of legal permissions and expensive equipment. This is something that was frequently mentioned as an advance in the reports of experiences analyzed, such as the one presented by coordinators of *Rádio Cantareira FM*, in a northern neighbourhood of the city of São Paulo (SP), Southeast region:

> "Communication via radio-web extends the voice of the community since the community radio legislation limits coverage to a radius of 3 km, antenna up to 30 feet tall and 25 watts of power. Another complicating of the law is the limitation of only one frequency channel for community radio stations by county. In this context the web radio breaks certain barriers of community broadcasting legislation and reaches other cities, states and countries."
> (ROSEMBACH & ZOTTIS, 2013)

In parallel, much has been said about the use of social networks during the national demonstrations of June 2013. The employment of different platforms of communication, especially social networks, was central for denouncing the violence and revealing the bias of mass media coverage. Some media activists celebrated the fact that they were able to influence the mass media, which were forced to change their speech from condemnation to the support of the demonstrations. These media have been very

important as well in the call for participation and in the broadcasting of information directly from the streets (MARICATO et al, 2013).

During the field research, services of internet connection could be found in all places visited, but with strong limitations. In Florânia (RN), Northeast region, the local administration made free connection to internet available in the central square. At night, lots of people gather there to check out their social network updates, most of them with mobile phones. It seemed to be very well, but some people explained that the quality of connection depends on how many people are using the service and that, when there is a problem, the only internet provider in the city can take weeks to put it on again. *Ibiapina* Radio, the community radio station of the city, counts on a paid private contract in order to have a more stable connection.

In Nova Olinda (CE), Northeast region, the general service provided for regular clients offer 300k of bandwidth. Even the mailbox can take half an hour to exhibit the new messages; opening one of them can be hard. There is also only one provider in the city and the corporate contracts can arrive to two megabytes of bandwidth, which is used by *Fundação Casa Grande* and its educative radio. Both initiatives count a lot on the internet for accessing content and enlarging the variety of production.

In this sense, the preliminary observations suggest that there is a contribution to the production process, while internet provides an opportunity of accessing more sources of information, including shared contents. The *Rede de Notícias da Amazônia* is based on the exchange of productions between local radio stations spread in the Amazon Region. According to its coordinators, the low connection avoided the installation of a system where all members could upload and download productions from a common server or website, but even if it is unstable, it is enough to send and receive pieces among them (PEREIRA RODRIGUES, 2013).

There is also evidence that the access to internet may be easing the opportunity of reaching new audiences. For Castells, "the advent of digital communication, and the associated changes in organization and culture, have deeply modified the ways in which power relationships operate" (CASTELLS, 2013, p. xix). This author enhances the potential of internet to increase the autonomy of the communicating process, opening opportunities for individuals to produce self-massive information, meaning that a message issued by only one person or group can reach massive audiences without or at least with less interference from owners and regulators of the communicative infrastructure.

The *Fundação Casa Grande* started to use social networks and blogs in 2005. Besides the institutional pages, the coordinators of the project motivate the children to have their own blogs and tell the world their news.

> "We motivate each kid to have his/her blog, because it is a way for showing themselves off virtually to the world. How the *Casa Grande* is doing today, there will be people out there in São Paulo, in Japan, that will know the reality of *Fundação Casa Grande*." (DINIZ & MAROPE, 2013)

The *Rede Mocoronga* is a network maintained by an NGO called *Saúde e Alegria*, which acts in the domain of public health in the Amazon Region for almost 30 years. It develops some blogs and other virtual products from the activities realized in the communities, but many of them do not have internet connection – it must be said that in this region some of the communities still have problems for having electric power. It means that all this production is available mainly for people out of the communities themselves. And even in a huge city as São Paulo, where internet connection should not be a problem, media actors talk about the price of connectivity through private services and also about the limits of digital literacy (RAMALHO, 2014).

The situation leads to some questions. The first one relates to the notion of territory. In the reports of experience from popular media analyzed, there were several descriptions of an "international audience". There is a kind of de-localization or double-localization in place. While people in the local territory keep using mainly the traditional forms of access to popular media products, digital resources may be reaching audiences out of the communities and sometimes new audiences, such as young people with their smart phones.

The analysis of reports shows a predominance of the use of digital resources to broadcast content, without necessarily involving changes in media management process. That means, often, to provide more channels to spread the contents - for example, the same newspaper can circulate from hand to hand and also have an electronic version, and each story published as a post on a blog or Facebook page. Of the 37 cases analyzed, 25 do not associate the use of digital resources to any participatory process. Among those who mention their use, there is a predominance of social media, especially Facebook. Often, these social networks, as well as e-mail accounts, seem to function as another contact channel between the audience and the media, as a complement or replacement for the telephone.

The question is, therefore, if there is a real impact of the use of digital resources in the relationships inside the communities. Even if the quality of production can be improved, it is not clear if digital technologies concretely affect the way members of communities and movements take part in this process. Believing that connecting does not necessarily mean exchange or deliberation, it is important to consider how the enlargement of opportunities of speaking (HABERMAS, 2012) is translated into or contributes to collective and political action.

At the same time, as the idea of media society associates participation with the capacity of elaborating and diffusing discourses, it is important to raise a question concerning what Dominique Wolton considers as the normative ideal of communication, which is connectivity. This author argues that in contemporary societies, "being able to get in contact, to be informed, to learn, to interact are in fact forms of action" (WOLTON, 2005, p. 28), that the possibility of getting connected presupposes that everything can be discussed. But as Habermas, he recalls that even if communication can raise public speaking, reaching connectivity does not mean necessarily promoting exchange.

Venício A. de Lima says that, in Brazil, despite the development of information and communication technologies and the growing use of digital media, the "old media", as he names the traditional mass media, still keep the "monopoly of visibility", of "turning things public" (LIMA, 2013). Social movements and activists have been trying to change this situation for years. The enlargement of audiences could increase the general visibility of these social groups and their issues. Here, there is a link to the power of arguing and to the aspiration of influencing the media setting and the debate in the society.

Mídia Ninja and *Coletivo Nigéria*, for instance, are two initiatives that could be called as born digital. During the demonstrations of June 2013, they turned up as alternative sources of information, diffusing contents directly from the streets. Both groups claim to have among their objectives increasing the level of debate in the society and getting the voice of social movements louder (VILELA, 2013) (GURJÃO & ROCHA, 2013). Their emergence in such an iconic event contributed to bring light into a debate around the communication and the media in the country as a democratic issue.

Igor Santos, from MST, remembers the creation of the newspaper *Brasil de Fato*, in the beginning of the years 2000, as a strategy for spreading to non-militants the concerns and proposals for a new project of society, including the rights to the land. At the same time, the MST starts to work in the professionalization of its press services in order to

deal with mainstream media. Both actions were considered as essential for presenting an alternative perspective of social order. (SANTOS I. F., 2013)

These actors seem to trust in the plurality of information in order to develop more critical audiences. They argue that people can build a better opinion if confronted to several perspectives over the same issue.

> "We have a side, but we want to show all the sides and, from showing both sides, I think you end up by making that people who watch it end up by seeing the incoherencies. The person herself *[identifies]* which *[side]* is less incoherent, which one is more coherent." (GURJÃO & ROCHA, 2013)

In his recent writings, Jürgen Habermas talks about the inclusion of mass audiences in the public sphere as a mechanism for regulating the power structure in the latter. And although the author keeps his confidence in the "truth-tracking potential of political deliberation" as a resource to "generate legitimacy through a procedure of opinion and will formation" (HABERMAS, 2006, p. 413), he does points out to its fragilities. For him, contemporary western countries display an increasing volume of political communication but it does not refer directly to features of deliberation, such as interaction between participants, collective decision or egalitarian exchange of claims and opinions.

Mídia Ninja and *Coletivo Nigéria* propose a progress of general awareness through the increase in the number of worldviews offered to the audiences. The digital world provides opportunities for so many as possible actors to put their perspectives forward online. The question would be if the process triggered by groups such as *Mídia Ninja* and *Nigéria*, because of their connections to social movements, are able to represent collective images in the dominant public sphere − in addition to the sole ability of getting self-represented in the virtual public sphere.

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