Voices from the margins

People, media, and the struggle for land in Brazil

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Abstract

This study looks into communicative processes and media practices among members of a subaltern social movement. The aim is to gain an understanding of how these processes and practices contribute to symbolic cohesion in the movement, how they develop and are socialized into practices, and how these processes and practices help challenge hegemonic groups in society. These questions are explored through a qualitative study, based on fieldwork and interviews, of a subaltern social movement. The empirical object of the study is the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (MST), which was founded in 1984 to promote agrarian reform and defend the rights of rural workers in Brazil.

At the macro-level, the discussion addresses social realities marked by the meta-processes of globalisation, neo-liberalisation, and mediatisation. Against this background, the experiences of MST militants and of the movement as a whole help us to understand how different communicative processes play a role in the ways people experience globalisation, neo-liberalisation, and mediatisation in their daily lives. Departing from an understanding of communication as a process that structures practices (mediated and non-mediated), this study questions the media-centric understanding of communication, arguing that media practices are created through appropriation processes.

The results show that communicative processes are crucial to reinforcing values and symbologies associated with the rural worker identity. There is also a high level of reflexivity about media practices and an understanding that they must serve the principles of the collective. As a consequence, the movement seeks to maintain control over media, routinely discussing and evaluating the adoption and use of media. The interviews show ambivalence towards the alleged dialogic and organisational potential of digital media and to the adaptability of these media to the MST’s organisational processes. Through observation, it is possible to conclude that media have an instrumental function, as opposed to a structural function, in the processes of social transformation engendered by the MST.
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List of abbreviations

CONFECOM (Conferência Nacional de Comunicação) – National Conference on Communication

EZLN (Ejercito Zapatista de Liberación Nacional) – Zapatista National Liberation Army

FEPAGRO (Fundação Estadual de Pesquisa Agropecuária) – Regional Foundation for Agriculture and Husbandry Research

FNDC (Fórum Nacional pela Democratização da Comunicação) – National Forum for Democratisation of Communication

IBGE (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística) – Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics

IEJC – Instituto de Educação Josué de Castro

INCRA (Instituto Brasileiro de Colonização e Reforma Agrária) – Brazilian Institute of Colonisation and Agrarian Reform

IPEA (Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada) – Institute for Applied Economic Research

MST (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra) – Landless Workers Movement

NSM – New Social Movements (theory)

OWS – Occupy Wall Street

RMT – Resource Mobilization Theory

UFC – Universidade Federal do Ceará – Federal University of Ceará
1 Introduction

People, media, land and struggle

The year is 2011, and *Time* magazine’s December/January double issue is out featuring the person of the year: the protester. This was a year that will be remembered for the Arab Spring; mass demonstrations in Athens, Madrid, and Moscow; and the Occupy movement. At the same time that widespread insurgency caused by discontentment with the symptoms of neoliberal globalisation was catching the attention of media worldwide, the scholarly community was beginning to question the role of media technologies and platforms in these protests. The subsequent years saw a steady flow of books, articles, seminars, and conferences dedicated to scrutinizing the interplay between media (so-called new media in particular) and social mobilisation. At the core of the discussion is the question of whether new media technologies can reinvigorate public debate by making it more dynamic and democratic by including marginal and misrepresented groups. Analysis so far ranges from more optimistic (Castells, 2009 and 2012; Constanza-Chook, 2006; Rodriguez 2011), which see a in new communication technologies a great potential for a renewal of public spaces of discussions, to more critical (Morozov 2012; Curran, Fenton and Freedman, 2012; and McChesney, 2013, for instance), which recognise underlying interests and mechanisms that hinder the democratic potential of these technologies.

More optimistic analyses see the advent of relatively cheap and fast digital communications, available particularly in developed countries, as having the potential to enable different forms of social change from shopping and mobility patterns to political participation and reform (see, for instance, Bennett 2008 and Castells 2009). Moreover, these inexpensive, easy-to-use, many-to-many technologies are said to have dramatically changed the way certain groups organise and communicate both among themselves and with the wider public.\(^1\) Such analyses are often reflected in public policy when programmes are

\(^1\) An example of such developments is the differentiation between collective and connective action, identified and discussed by Bennett & Segerberg (2013).
created and policies are devised to guarantee access to technologies for the have-nots or the ‘have-less’ (Qiu, 2009). Resources are deployed to increase the diversity of voices reaching the arenas of discussion that we have today. The Swedish Program for ICT in Developing Regions (SPIDER), for instance, was established in 2004 and has a mission ‘to support the innovative use of ICT for development and poverty reduction through synergistic partnerships, while strengthening the global ICT4D knowledge base through networking, brokering, and open sharing of information’ with an annual turnover of 15-20 million SEK.\(^2\)

Another facet of the spread of digital communications, especially in the West, is that social movements that, until recently, needed to make it into the headlines of corporate mainstream media in order to get their message out can now share information with potentially limitless audiences that can be reached through the Internet and digital communications media. The mimeographed newsletter and leaflet, the protest at the town square, and the low-frequency radio programme can now be multiplied, amplified, and endlessly shared with no more effort than a few clicks. Scholars in media and communication have closely followed the appropriation of such technologies by civil society movements during the last decade.\(^3\) This new scenario comprising ever-multiplying, changing, and fragmented messages, in an intensified communication flow, constitutes a challenge for scholarly investigation (already noted by Gitlin in 1998). The focus is then turned to how communication unfolds at the expense of why communicative processes unfold and what sets such processes in motion. Mediated public communication of the kind social movements and their members usually engage in is a means to accomplishing something. It is an avenue to be traversed in order to achieve certain goals, and it is in this light that I propose an analysis of media practices and communicative processes.

Despite being profuse, current discussions about the interrelationship between media and mobilisation have been lacking a more diverse perspective when it comes to their objects of study and to placing them

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\(^2\) The SPIDER homepage is available at www.spidercenter.org/about, accessed on 7 July 2013.
\(^3\) See, for instance, volumes edited by de Jong, Shaw and Stammers (2005); Cottle and Lester (2011); and Milan (2013).
in a broader historical perspective. In this sense, what I propose with this study is to add to the diversity and historical depth of current scholarship. It would be unfair to claim that I have found definite answers, but I can at least point to a few problems and questions that deserve more attention. This study is thus concerned with a kind of social movement (and forms of mobilisation) that has not been present in recent analysis – a relatively older social movement, formed by others besides the middle classes in developed countries, and based outside large urban centres. In addition, the social movement that is the empirical object of the study is composed of subaltern classes (Spivak, 1988), those that have not been granted basic citizen rights and need to mobilise in order to promote structural changes that may lead to improvements in their lives.

Against this background I intend, with my analysis, to make a modest contribution to the theorisation and understanding of the ‘interrelationship between historical changes in media communication and other transformational processes’ (Hepp 2011, p.38), a meta-phenomenon described by the concept of mediatisation. I also aim to be able to incorporate to the analysis theories and discussions developed by Latin American scholars. Departing from different epistemological standpoints than those found in Euro-American scholarship, Latin American media and communication studies are often strongly engaged in the praxis of social transformation. Such a commitment with social transformation, I argue, can be a way into discussing a media ethics, along the lines proposed by Couldry (2012).

Moreover, the characteristics of the most frequent study objects, namely social movements and other groups formed by middle classes in urban centres and developed countries, prevent an appreciation of communicative processes that goes beyond the timely action and the content of communication. Thus, I address the need to contemplate historical conditions that set forth processes of social change. When theorising contemporary communicative processes in social movements and insurgent groups, it is important to take into account that: a) access

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4 In particular, the so-called alternativist paradigm, which emerged as a form of contestation to the authoritarian regimes that took over the region in the second half of the 20th century, with a view to changing conditions of marginality and exclusion (Sunkel and Catalán 1993, p.87).
to the Internet is not widespread in developing and underdeveloped countries (or outside the Western world); and b) big conglomerates still dominate the media landscape in many developing countries. Furthermore, it is necessary to bear in mind that beyond the ephemeral contemporary forms of organisation and mobilisation, there are still enduring social movements with a pragmatic agenda that use mediated communication in tactical ways. Among such movements, rural workers’ or peasants’ organisations are an interesting case because they congregate a class that has been historically exploited but lacked the physical spaces of the factory and the city in order to organise and mobilise as a collective. At the same time, these movements have a relatively clear agenda of restructuring land ownership and implementation of a progressive post-developmental project for rural areas. Work towards these agendas includes different media practices, such as media relations, creation and development of media channels, and also the construction of a collective identity and shared codes and symbols.

My theoretical-analytical aim will therefore be achieved through the study of communicative processes and media practices in one of Latin America’s biggest social movement organisations, which has a history of over thirty years, the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem-Terra). Almost three decades before both Occupy Wall Street (OWS) and the Global Justice Movement became known for their creative and innovative ways of using media (so-called new media, like the Internet in the case of Global Justice Movement and mobile phones and social media platforms in the case of OWS), the MST succeeded in mobilising and organising thousands of people who built an organised collective that was able to press for political reform. Austere economic policies imposed on Latin American countries by the IMF during the 1980s and the worsening of overall social conditions, as noted by Escobar and Alvarez (1992), posed strong obstacles to social mobilisation in the years after the start of the democratisation process in Brazil. Despite this adverse scenario, organised rural workers around the country succeeded in constructing an important social actor that played a strong role in national and international political constellations.
With this analysis, I aim to contribute to current discussions about the interplay between media and organised political action, providing an alternative to currently accepted views of the communicative processes enacted by social movements. Thanks to its size, membership, scope of action, and significance in Brazilian and international political scenarios, the MST serves as a formidable empirical object for the analysis of the motivations and accomplishments of media practices. The MST utilises a multilayered and rich array of communicative forms, as well as a multitude of media platforms. In addition, it acts as the organised representative of a very vulnerable and disenfranchised group of people.

The aim of this study is thus to examine the communicative processes and media practices enacted by members of a subaltern social movement so as to gain an understanding of:

a) how these processes and practices relate to the construction of a collective identity;
b) how these processes and practices foster political action; and
c) how these processes and practices contribute to challenging hegemonic groups in society.

While doing this, the study will look into the triangular relationship (Downing 2000) between social movement, media (alternative self-generated and mainstream), and the public sphere.
**Research questions**

The research aim outlined above will be explored through the following three research questions, which look into communicative processes and media practices from three different dimensions: symbolic (question 1), material (question 2), and political (question 3). These dimensions, and how they are analytically operationalised in the study, will be addressed in detail in Chapter 3. Although these dimensions might sometimes overlap, I delimit them from an analytical point of view in order to facilitate the process of data collection and analysis. In this way, the symbolic dimension looks into narratives and symbols and the processes through which they are circulated, the material dimension looks into practices related to different media, and the political dimension looks into the ways in which the MST, as a collective subject, relates to media in order to advance its political projects (considering that the organisation has a prefigurative ideal of society and works towards this ideal). The three overarching research questions are subdivided into specific and observable aspects, as follows.

1. **In which ways are communicative processes enacted in order to mobilise rural workers and achieve symbolic cohesion among movement militants?**

This question addresses the processes of mobilisation and formation of a collective identity and is concerned with relations and legitimisation processes that occur among militants. It seeks to explore: 1) the structuring and cohesive properties of communication, as well its inherent conflicts, when deployed and operated by individuals as members in a group; and 2) the processes of conscientisation, construction of shared meanings, and mobilisation. The concepts of conscientisation (Freire, 1967/1982) and mobilisation are of crucial importance to the operationalisation of this question because they set this study apart from an ordinary study of organisational communication, which is usually concerned with the construction of a shared symbolic repertoire within organisations. Moreover, the communicative processes that support conscientisation and mobilisation cannot be isolated from the political scenario in which they
unfold (this relationship is dealt with in question 3). In this type of social movement, identity formation is a process of subjectification in which individuals learn to recognise themselves as subjects capable of acting and changing the conditions of their own existence. To act therefore requires collective mobilisation towards shared goals and a common horizon, which, in turn, demands the construction of symbolic cohesion.

Question 1 is subdivided as follows:

a. What are the prominent symbols and narratives circulating in the movement?
b. In which ways are these symbols and narratives objectified through communicative practices?
c. In which ways do communicative practices legitimate mobilisation and action?

2. How are media practices organised in the processes of mobilisation, collective identity formation, and image construction?

This question addresses actual practices connected to different media seeking to analyse, at a concrete material level, the motivations, rationales, and accomplishments related to mediated communication as experienced by militants. This line of inquiry follows a socially situated focus on media studies (Couldry, 2010) in which the affordances of media and processes of appropriation are combined. It aims to explore the two-way relationship between people and the media by looking at the ways in which individuals, in their capacity as members of a collective, organise media practices while being guided, at the same time, by the affordances of the medium. By focusing on social relations and communicative processes in which media are an important element, I move away from a technological determinist media-centric approach. This move enables me to perform an in-depth analysis of the ways in which media are embedded and play a role in social processes such as mobilisation, legitimisation, and conscientisation. By questioning and analysing how people relate to media, we can start to explore questions related to an ethic of media, as Couldry (2013) puts it, to ‘how we live with media’. Given that many of us live lives that are increasingly surrounded by media, exploring the ethical dilemmas that
arise from living with media, including the inequalities in access to media, is of undeniable relevance. While question 1 looks into the ways in which mobilisation and action are enacted as communicative and interactional processes, question 2 approaches the material level of such communicative processes by attempting to grasp how militants experience and utilise different media.

Question 2 is subdivided as follows:

a. What kinds of media practices can be identified within the movement?
b. What are the rationales for using and producing different media?
c. Who participates in the production of media?
d. In which ways are identity and image rendered in media content?

3. How do movement militants\(^5\) evaluate the potential of the media practices and communication processes they enact to challenge the hegemony of dominant actors in society in general and in the media sector in particular?

Considering that a social movement, far from operating in a political vacuum, needs to engage in a variety of relationships with other social actors in order to achieve its goals, this question addresses precisely these interactions with other sectors of society. Here, the interactions with mainstream media, the state, civil society, and the private sector are analysed from the point of view of the militants. Considering the communicative processes within the MST as highly reflexive and dialogic, and the history of the movement’s relations with media, the militants themselves have an advantage that allows them to critically evaluate their own activities. Question 3 places communicative processes and media practices in the political scenario in which they unfold. It widens the focus of question 2, looking into how the media

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\(^5\) Originally, the term ‘militant’ designates those who participated in militias. The *Oxford English Dictionary* even defines the noun ‘militant’ as someone who is ‘Combative and aggressive in support of a political or social cause, and typically favoring extreme, violent, or confrontational methods’. However, the current usage of the word ‘militant’ to encompass those participating in certain kinds of political action in Brazil deviates from the original definition. The noun ‘militant’, in its usage in Brazil (and to a certain extent in other Spanish and Portuguese countries), stresses active, confrontational, and political orientations and downplays violent connotations. In this sense, it is possible to speak about militant scholars, militant politicians, etc. In this study, the term ‘militant’ is preferred instead of activist due to the latter’s association with contemporary forms of political action popularised among the middle classes.
practices enacted by a social movement can have an impact on the broader political sphere, as well as through a longer timescale. The compelling reason for moving from so-called internal practices to relations with other sectors is that the dialogue with both civil society and the government is one of the core principles guiding the MST’s communication efforts, materialised in the movement’s communication policies and strategies. Not to account for this level of the communicative processes would mean to leave untouched a very important element of the movement’s activities that is crucial to understanding the relations between social movements and the media. Like question 2, this question also starts a discussion on media ethics, albeit from a political and systemic perspective. It speaks to normative theories of media, such as the habermasian model of the public sphere and the gramscian dialectical relationship between hegemony and counter-hegemony. At the same time, I attempt to expand on these theories by providing a non-Western perspective that will contribute to broadening the understanding of the relationship between social movements, media, and politics. My intentions with this question are twofold: 1) to explore to what extent counter-hegemonic media contribute to subverting the existing social order dominated by hegemonic narratives and institutions; and 2) to problematise the idea that certain forms of self-generated and alternative media (usually produced by social movements) have the capacity to promote a pluralistic dialogue and challenge dominant actors, or, in other words, that they change the balance of power in public debate.

Question 3 is subdivided as follows:

a. How do movement militants at different levels evaluate the communicative processes in relation to the counter-hegemonic ethos of the MST?

b. What, in the view of militants at different levels, is accomplished through communicative processes in terms of challenging the existing relations of dominance?

c. What, in the view of militants at different levels, are the potential of, and possibilities offered by, different media to challenge existing relations of dominance?

6 See the discussion in Downing (2008, pp. 40-50).
These questions are explored through interviews with MST militants and fieldwork that included observation of various situations and places in which communicative processes play a central role (press offices, radio stations, events, and educational environments). The study contributes thus to current discussions on the roles of media and communication for mobilisation and social action by analysing the perspective of a rural and established organisation in the global South.

**Thesis outline**

This thesis is composed of nine chapters and a conclusion. Chapter 2 presents the MST as the empirical object of the study, situating it in its political and social context, and also providing a brief historical outline of the struggle for land in Brazil. Chapter 3 presents the epistemological framework in which the study is situated, i.e., social movements theories, as well as different perspectives on how social movements relate to media and communicate. Chapter 4 starts with a presentation of a theoretical-conceptual map that is intended to guide the reader through the processes of empirical research and analysis, followed by a presentation and discussion of the theories and concepts that inform the study. After the theoretical discussion, Chapter 5 addresses the methods utilised, ethical questions, as well as issues related to reliability and validity in qualitative research. It also addresses challenges to carrying out empirical research on a social movement and outlines the design of the study. Chapter 6 contains an overview of the different materials gathered and produced during fieldwork. In Chapter 7, the multi-site fieldwork is described from preparation to operationalisation. The chapter also discusses technical and methodological aspects of the treatment of interviews. The three following chapters – 8, 9, and 10 – analyse and discuss the material in light of the theories and concepts presented in Chapter 4. Each analytical chapter addresses one of the research questions and one of the dimensions – symbolical, material, or political – of communicative processes. Chapter 11 completes the thesis with a final discussion and conclusions.
2 Mapping the empirical field

In this chapter, I situate the MST in the different scales and political scenarios in which it is active. The MST is presented here as a historical collective subject interacting with other social actors in order to implement a political project. The chapter also delimits and spells out the dimensions of empirical reality that concern the study. The movement as a collective subject is the empirical object that provides the material structure for the analytical process guided by the research questions. The MST is the empirical object in its capacity as the social formation that sets forth the communicative processes that are the case, or the epistemological object, of the study.

In her ethnographic study of the MST, anthropologist Christine de Alencar Chaves (2000) concludes that it is both a social movement and an organisation. This dichotomy permeates the forms of socialisation enacted within the movement and shapes its communicative processes. As a social movement, the MST was founded upon radical ideals of participation, solidarity, and equality. The ideological horizon of the MST is in stark opposition to private ownership of land and to its use as an economic asset. As an organisation, the MST is structured in a way that allows the allocation of resources for mobilisation and the performance of actions, as well as deliberation according to shared beliefs and common rules. Such an understanding of the MST is the backbone of the analysis of its communicative processes and media practices in this study. The research questions attempt to examine both sides of the MST, looking into the ways in which communicative processes constitute the fabric of continuity and cohesion, as well as that of conflict and change.

The MST is thus the empirical object for studying communicative processes in subaltern social movements due to its uniqueness (Sjöberg et al., 1991 and Yin, 1989, cited in Snow and Trom 2002, p.157) as a social movement that has become an organised collective, having gone through decades of organised action.
A (very) short history of land distribution in Brazil

Before presenting the movement that will be the empirical object of this study, it is necessary to contextualise the scenario of land ownership politics in Brazil in order to set out the background for the MST’s activities since it was founded in 1984. My aim is not to provide a comprehensive historical account, but rather to offer a historical perspective of the situation in which the movement finds itself today and the problems and challenges that it is dealing with as an organisation.

In a way, it would be possible to say that the problems faced by rural workers today are a reflection of the model of development imposed upon the people of Brazil during the colonial and imperial periods. As Holston (2008, p.117) points out, ‘throughout Brazilian history, land and labour supply have conditioned each other and are, in that sense, interdependent’. This interdependency identified by Holston means that there has always been a close (and sometimes contentious) relationship between land as a natural resource and as a form of capital and the work necessary to create value from land. Holston also observes that, although cultivable land abounds in Brazil, ‘its availability – as well as organisation as property – is an artefact of a particular economic enterprise and its legal foundation’. Thus, since colonial times, land has been seen as private property and as a form of capital – belonging either to the Crown or to private individuals – to be used for the purpose of capital accumulation.

Since the Hispano-Portuguese Empire started the colonisation process in the sixteenth century, various groups have controlled cultivable lands in Brazil. During the first decades of colonisation, Jesuit missionaries were sent out by the Portuguese Crown in order to turn the native population into workers who would produce the commodities necessary for the process of the primary accumulation of capital. The Portuguese Crown retained ownership of the lands, granting leaseholds to certain trusted individuals. Land units called sesmarias were distributed to those with the resources to cultivate them. Many analysts see this
system as the root of the unequal land distribution that led to the existence of extensive estates (*latifúndio*) today. The indigenous population supplied the labour force until Portugal started the slave trade from Africa in the seventeenth century.

The extent and actual production of the *sesmarias* were loosely controlled by the Crown, which resulted in large extents of irregular land. The holders of the rights to use the land, the so-called *sesmeiros*, were not interested in regularising the land because the labour-intensive agriculture and cattle rearing practiced required them to move constantly, which resulted in the clandestine and unlawful use of land.

With the abolition of slavery in 1888 and the gradual replacement of slaves by European immigrants, the government of the new republic was again forced to limit and organise land ownership to Brazilian citizens who had the resources to produce. In addition, the Land Law of 1850 had already made buying the only legal way to obtain land and criminalised those people who had been using and cultivating public holdings (*posseiros*). According to Holston (2008), the demarcation of public and private land in Brazil has been chaotic since the colonial period. Moreover, the policies put in place by different governments have restricted access to land to the most powerful, thus leading to the concentration of land ownership that we see today in Brazil.7

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Contemporary media landscape in Brazil: politics, conflicts, ownership structure, and emerging actors

It would be impossible to carry out an analysis of the MST’s communicative processes without looking into the Brazilian media landscape. Since its foundation in 1984, the movement has had a complex, turbulent, and close relationship with media institutions. The

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7 Based on data from government bodies, the MST claims that medium-sized and large properties control 85 per cent of arable land in Brazil. According to data from the National Institute for Colonisation and Agrarian Reform (INCRA), more than half of all rural real estate in Brazil is owned by 5 per cent of proprietors.
purpose of this section is to provide a summary of media ownership structures in Brazil, focusing on political and economic aspects and also attempting to provide a historical outlook. The purpose is not to provide a detailed and in-depth account but to introduce the background against which the MST’s actions have developed. The focus here is on the contemporary media landscape (for a historical account, see Marques de Melo, 2003 and Paiva, Sodré, & Custódio, 2015). Throughout the years, the MST has become more politically active in the area of media democratisation in Brazil, acting at a more structural level in an effort to change the balance of power in the Brazilian media landscape.

Private media conglomerates have dominated the Brazilian media landscape for almost a century (Paiva, et al., 2015, p.110), with some participation of the state. The biggest media conglomerates, Globo, SBT, Bandeirantes, Record, and Abril, own a variety of media outlets, including television channels, radio stations, Internet portals, and newspapers. Two other groups, Grupo Folha and O Estado de São Paulo, are also key actors in print (and lately digital) media. All these companies are still privately owned by the families that founded them: Marinho (Globo), Mesquita (Grupo Estado), Frias (Grupo Folha), Civita (Editora Abril), and Saad (Bandeirantes). A new contender in the group that has emerged in recent years is Grupo Record, owned by the Universal Church, an evangelical religious group that has grown exponentially in Brazil during the last decade.

While print and digital publications are usually regional businesses – even though the newspapers Folha de São Paulo, O Estado de São Paulo, and O Globo, with newsrooms based in São Paulo and Rio the Janeiro, are considered national newspapers – broadcasting is an enterprise of national reach. Television groups like Globo, SBT, Bandeirantes, and Record have a national reach with programming that is partly broadcast by regional subsidiaries.

Media corporations have, for a long time, been nourishing a relationship of complicity with the holders of political power, managing to resist interference from the central government and become powerful conglomerates (Paiva, et al., 2015, p.114). Today, media enterprises at
the national, regional, and local levels usually have a close relationship with the political system, as they are dependent on state advertising, which, in some cases, makes up a large percentage of advertising revenues. At the regional level, it is not uncommon for congressmen or local politicians and their families to own local television channels, radio stations, or newspapers. A report published in 2013 by the international organisation Reporters Without Borders raises concerns about the ‘incestuous’ relationship between media and politics in Brazil (Reporters Without Borders, 2013).

The MST

João Pedro Stédile, one of the founders of the MST, recalls that the events leading to the formation of a rural workers organisation took place in 1979, with a conflict between rural workers and an indigenous nation (Caigangs) at a reservation in the southern town of Nonoai (Bosi et al., 1997). The Caigangs occupied land that was theirs by right, but was being tended by families of rural workers, and they expelled around 1,400 families from the reservation. Stédile, then working at the rural workers union in the area, was designated to help the evicted families. The strategy adopted was to convince the workers that they had a right to land, but not the land they were using, because that land belonged to the Caigangs. After a number of quasi-secret meetings, they decided to occupy two large properties in the area on 7 September 1979. These were public holdings that the government had leased to political allies and that, according to the law in force, could be expropriated because they were not productive. According to Stédile (1997), this occupation gave rise to the MST, as the local press started calling the occupiers sem-terra (landless) and the workers then started calling themselves sem-terra.

Three months later, the families won property rights to the land and constituted the first MST settlement (assentamento). The success of this occupation served as an incentive to other similar actions taken by landless workers between 1980 and 1982 (Stédile 1997). However, a movement of the magnitude of the MST, with an agenda that was completely opposed to the ideas and development project advocated by
the military dictatorship in power at the time, could not act openly. The military-led government ruled Brazil until 1984, but started to gradually loosen their tight grip after 1980. This small political opening allowed rural workers to start organising themselves as a group, and the leaders of the emerging movement were able to travel around the country and try to establish unity among peasants in different parts of Brazil (Brandford & Rocha, 2002). The MST was formally created during a meeting attended by representatives of agrarian reform movements in thirteen states at the town of Cascavel in the southern state of Paraná in 1984. The pool of organisations then started to operate overtly as a movement. According to Stédile (1997), the name *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra* was chosen after discussions and a search for a common identity by very different groups from many parts of the country. Many accounts of this meeting (Stédile, 1999; Fernandes, 2002; Morissawa, 2001; Branford & Rocha, 2002; Wolford & Wright, 2003) describe how other decisions that would guide the MST’s actions throughout the following decades were reached then, such as a national presence, autonomy from other organisations, independence from political parties, open membership with an emphasis on women and families, a participatory and democratic structure, and a revolutionary anti-capitalist ideological perspective. A number of guidelines framed the MST’s actions (Harnecker, 2002, pp.135-136), including: 1) organising rural workers from the grass-roots level; 2) insisting that the workers direct the movement; 3) allowing women to participate on equal basis; 4) facilitating the participation of rural workers in unions and political parties; and 5) seeking collaboration with workers from cities and rural workers from other parts of Latin America. During these initial years the movement’s organisational principles were also devised, they are: 1) collective direction; 2) division of tasks; 3) discipline and study; and 4) formation of new militants (ibid., pp.136-138).

According to accounts from the MST (MST 2010), a National Plan for Agrarian Reform was designed in 1985 that promised to distribute land to 1.4 million families. The Plan failed and, by 1989, only 6 per cent of the original number of families had been given land. During the following governments of presidents Fernando Collor de Melo, Itamar Franco, and Fernando Henrique Cardoso, during the period from 1990
through 2004, a series of legal measures such as reclassification of rural properties coupled with the reluctance of banks to lend money for small properties led to a rural exodus and the weakening of the movement.

Several authors (Stédile, 1997; Fernandes, 2002; Morissawa, 2001; Branford & Rocha, 2002; Wolford & Wright, 2003) agree that the murder by military police of nineteen MST militants on 17 April 1996 in Eldorado dos Carajás, in the northern state of Pará, evoked a strong reaction from the movement and also, according to Stédile, attracted support from the general public. Data from the Pastoral Lands Commission (Fernandes, 2002) indicate that the number of occupations and families involved almost doubled from 1995 to 1996. In 1997, thousands of militants from across the country participated in a march to Brasília to mark the anniversary of the Carajás massacre. The weekly current affairs magazine Veja reported on the march in two issues as its cover feature – No 1491 on 16 April 1997 and No 1492 on 23 April 1997 – where the headlines read ‘The march of the radicals’ and ‘They have arrived – what to do now’.

The awakening of the movement was met by a backlash from the government of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who adopted a divide-and-conquer strategy, promoting land distribution and settlement projects at the same time that it was isolating and criminalising the MST. The land distribution programme promoted by the government at the time gave land to individual families and not to organised collectives and did not expropriate unused land, which many see as a tactic aimed at dismantling the movement (Coletti, 2006). Furthermore, during Cardoso’s government, the Ministry of Agrarian Development, in an attempt to fulfil election promises, registered older settlements as new ones. This tactic allowed Cardoso to claim that he was promoting Brazil’s biggest agrarian reform.

With the election of Lula da Silva from the leftist labour party (PT) in 2002, which is still in power today, there was an opening for dialogue with the government. Both da Silva and Dilma Rouseff, the current president, are sympathetic to the movement and have been more receptive to it than previous presidents, possibly because the PT is ideologically close to the MST, having emerged from industry trade
unions. The movement has nonetheless criticized the PT government for its concessions to agribusiness and for the model of technology-intensive agriculture it has been promoting through its agencies. During its sixth national congress in 2014, the MST strongly criticized President Rousseff’s government for failing to redistribute land, for closing schools in rural areas, and for its relationship with agribusiness.  

Today, the MST is represented in 23 (of 26) states and the federal district. There are 350,000 families living in more than 900 MST settlements. According to INCRA, there are around 150,000 families living in occupied estates (so-called occupations) and campsites, 90,000 of which are under the MST’s flag. Many occupations have been turned into settlements (when the occupiers gain legal rights to the land), and the situation of these settlements varies across the country. Some settlements, notably older ones, have become communities that manage to live off their production, which is often organised through cooperative systems, while others are still nothing more than a group of tents where the settlers are still struggling to produce enough to support themselves (Oliveira & Pinheiro, 2012). Data from the MST state that there are currently more than 100 cooperatives and more than 1,900 associations in the settlements that are aiming to organise and commercialise their production.

Communication in the movement: a media biography

Since the early years of its existence, the MST has lent great importance to communication: according to reports from the movement, there are groups dedicated to communication at all levels. A document called ‘A Communication Policy for the MST’ (Por uma Política de Comunicação para o MST) issued in March 1995 defines a communication policy as a set of norms and procedures that contribute to solidification of an organisation’s image within its constituency and among society in a

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8 The new minister of agriculture as of 2015 is deputy Kátia Abreu, a well-known advocate of agribusiness who also fronted the agribusiness-friendly Confederation of Agriculture and Husbandry.
9 This information comes from a background document (documento de subsídio à imprensa) distributed to journalists during the MST’s sixth congress.
broader scope. According to the document, the communication policy must fulfil the internal objective of maintaining the militancy motivated and the external objective of publicising the successes of the organisation (Berger, 1996). The document spells out the role of communicative processes in class struggle, defining communication as a privilege of the dominant classes that control the means of symbolic production. The militants in the movement thus have the task of subverting this order by creating and developing alternative communicative arenas. The ‘theoretical elements’ of the communication policy introduce the notion of strategic communication that is divided into organisational, strategic, and operational parts. The production of messages is seen from the start as a process of struggle in which rural workers collectively learn to utilise the means of meaning production (this process is called appropriation by MST militants). In the movement literature, this appropriation refers, in most cases, to cognitive and material processes of learning and utilising different media (print media, radio, audiovisual, and, later, digital media). But it can also refer to a symbolic process of learning and becoming able to express oneself as member of a collective and legitimising rural workers’ knowledge as valid.

When the movement was created, communication was not a sector with specific activities and members as it is today. The production of media – which then was limited to the Sem-Terra newspaper – was a task for the education sector. The newspaper had a ‘housekeeper’ (zelador) who was in charge of news production and distribution of the newspaper in the settlement, occupation, or region where he or she lived. The production, distribution, and consumption of the newspaper are considered part of the educational process within the movement.

As the MST gradually became structured as an organisation and consolidated its action as a social movement, work with communication and media became more specialised. When militants in the settlements felt the need to communicate within that local community – which could be as big as 2,000 families – they looked for ways to use radio for disseminating important information. By 1996, there were as many as

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10 Interviews with Itelvina Masioli and Miguel Stédile.
16 MST radio stations in the state of Rio Grande do Sul (where the first MST occupation took place) alone. Radio became such an important medium for the movement that in 2002 that one of the MST’s schools offered a secondary-level vocational course in communication with a specialisation in radio.

The 1990s were a decade of profuse activity for the MST in terms of direct confrontation with the police and privately hired security guards, protests, and, consequently, its presence in the national mainstream media intensified. As the Brazilian press at all levels began to cover occupations and other forms of direct action, the movement started to organise and professionalise its work with press contacts. The first step was to form a network of press officers operating throughout the country. Many of these press officers were journalism students who had developed a relationship with the MST through their political action and militancy in other movements. These press officers were responsible for monitoring press coverage, handling contacts with journalists, and producing different sorts of content. During this period, between 1996 and 1997, the MST’s first webpage was created, and the press officers automatically became responsible for producing content for this page. In addition to generating their own coverage during direct action, the press officers produced other kinds of materials about different aspects of life in the settlements and occupations.

As organisational and physical entities, press offices did not exist until the early 2000s. The need to deal with the increased demand for content production and circulation stemming from the creation of the above-mentioned website resulted in the establishment of a press office in São Paulo, where the MST’s national secretariat is also located. For a short period, there was also a press office in Rio de Janeiro that responded to demands from international press. This press office was closed, and the organisation prioritised opening one in Brasília where, due to political activities, there is a concentration of both national and international press.

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11 Interview with Raquel Casiraghi, former MST press officer.
12 This was the case for seven of the informants for this study.
13 Interview with Miguel Stédile.
14 Interview with Mayrá Lima, MST press office, Brasília.
Since its creation, the communication sector has had a representative on regional and national leadership boards and has been responsible for the activities of the press offices. As happened when radio was introduced, the need for a specialised workforce for the communication sector was an incentive for the movement to begin collaboration with the Federal University of Ceará in order to offer a degree in journalism. A group of around 30 students – the majority of whom are MST militants, with some students from other social movements - completed their degree in December 2013. Many of the new graduates are now working as press officers, radio presenters, or communication officers in the movement.

Audiovisual collectives or brigades were formed as an arm of the communication sector without their own representation in the national leadership. These groups function on a more ad hoc basis, producing and circulating audiovisual materials within the movement and outside. The collectives also sometimes work in collaboration with the education and production sectors to produce videos and radio programmes, as well as to promote events such as screenings and film festivals. During the MST’s congress, the sectors worked together to produce radio programmes with MST children (sem-terrinha). They also organised, together with universities and schools in Brasília, a cinema festival showcasing MST’s film and audiovisual productions.

Today, the press office based in São Paulo is responsible for running the website, Facebook pages, and Twitter account; producing audiovisual materials; handling press contacts; and editing the magazine Sem-Terra that circulates both internally and among certain audiences considered strategic by the movement, such as universities and trade unions. The movement also established, together with other South-based social movements during the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in 2003, a newspaper called Brasil de Fato, which today is also operating as a news agency. Apart from that, the press office, in partnerships with other sectors or collectives, is responsible for periodical publications such as the newspaper Jornal Sem-Terra and occasional publications such as books, reports, and compilations of chronicles and poetry.
In parallel with these activities, the relationship between MST and mainstream media institutions in Brazil has been subject to debate within both the movement and academic circles. Stédile, as leader of the movement, has, on different occasions, criticised Brazilian media for criminalising social movements, a specific example of this claim is the fact that the Brazilian press often use the verb *invade* instead of *occupy* when referring to MST action. A 2010 study of the press coverage of a parliamentary investigation that the MST was subjected to, carried out by Brazilian media watchdog *Intervozes*, showed that the Brazilian press used clear strategies against the MST, such as the use of negative wording, invisibilisation of the MST’s demands, and exclusion of the organisation as a source for news.\(^\text{15}\) In a 1997 interview (Bosi, Coelho, & Borelli, 1997), Stédile claimed that the press were carrying out a campaign against MST and emphasised that the actions of the movement were not planned with the intention of ‘forming public opinion’ but had been carried out in order to solve specific problems (provide land and means of subsistence for the occupying the land). He also pointed out that, in many cases, the occupations took place far away from the cities where the media companies had their headquarters and that there was no interest in sending correspondents to those places.

3 Mapping (and delimiting) the epistemological field

This chapter introduces the epistemological field in which the study is situated. The main purpose is to identify connections between the fields of social movements and media studies. The chapter also discusses the ethnocentric bias in these fields and argues for more plural understandings of social movements and their communicative processes.

Social movements: theories and research

Even though this is not a study of social movements per se but an analysis of communicative processes in a social movement, the long-standing sociological tradition of social movement studies needs to be given due credit. In the context of this study, theories that aim to understand and explain social movements provide an overarching understanding of what a social movement is, its internal social relations, and its position in the sociopolitical scenario. Their relevance to the study lies in their ability to show a social movement as part of a sociopolitical system. Investigation and analysis of social movements as particular entities have been carried out primordially in the areas of sociology and political science. Sociological analyses of social movements usually try to understand them as entities in the social world by looking at forms of organisation and socialisation, while political science addresses the roles of social movements in the political realm, exploring, among other questions, conditions and possibilities for sociopolitical change.

The term social movement as a defining noun for certain groups and activities started to be used in the first decades of the 20th century (Chester & Welsh, 2011). Classical theories of social movements formulated in the first years of the 20th century were largely informed by Durkheim’s concepts of cohesion and anomy, theories that understood social movements as disruptions of the social order and
tried to explain them as manifestations of collective behaviour. Modern theories of social movements, in contrast, understand social movements as socio-politico-cultural phenomena. Along this line of thought, Sidney Tarrow (2008, p.2) defines social movements as ‘collective challenges, based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities’, locating them in a politics of contention. According to Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani (1999), it was in the 1960s and 1970s that interest for collective action within the social sciences in North America and Europe became more prominent, fuelled by events that were taking place in those regions at that time. The authors (1999, p.3) identify four dominant perspectives in the study of social movements: collective behaviour; resource mobilisation; political process; and new social movements. The typology suggested by the authors takes into account the epistemological stands of a given tradition, in other words, how social movements are understood within the tradition and which aspects of social movements are considered relevant. Tarrow (2008) differentiates between two branches of theories that explain how social movements emerge: culturalist theories informed by Gramscian concepts of framing and collective identity formation and more functionalist theories informed by the political opportunity model. Gohn (2008, p.27) identifies three theoretical branches: historico-structural, culturalist; and institutional/organisational behaviourist.

Because the social sciences are a constitutive element of the society they aim to analyse, these different traditions in the study of social movements reflect the socio-political-spatial contexts that they arise within. Hence, social movements that were formed in the 1960s and 1970s challenged sociological analysis of political conflict because they ‘could only partly be characterized in terms of the principal political cleavages of the industrial societies’ (della Porta and Diani, 1999, p.2). The two principal theoretical models of explaining and interpreting social conflict – Marxist and structural-functionalist – did not provide satisfactory analytical tools with which to explain the new waves of social unrest. North American\textsuperscript{16} criticism to structural-functionalist

\textsuperscript{16} The authors cited originally use the demonym \textit{American}, which I do not find appropriate since the scholars connected to the tradition in question come from the United States. I therefore use the demonyms \textit{North American} and \textit{Latin American} when referring to traditions coming from the respective geographic zones.
theories came mainly from the interactionist version of the collective behaviour perspective and from the resource mobilisation and political processes perspectives, while, in Europe, the ‘new social movements’ perspective developed as a response to the inability of Marxist theory to address changes on the structural bases of conflict (della Porta & Diani, p.1999). In synthesis, these are historically and spatially grounded criticisms that reveal the need to devise new analytical categories and redress the overall theories that explain the phenomenon of social mobilisation. Criticism of a similar nature can be directed at structural-functionalist theories from the point of view of post-colonial studies. A structural-functionalist outlook is unable to explain the formation of a collective as subject – as opposed to a structure; furthermore, it is not very useful in dealing with complex processes of identity formation, exclusion, and inclusion that characterize certain post-colonial societies. Moreover, there are aspects of the formation of collectives and of the creation and maintenance of communities - which permeate Latin American popular movements as collective processes - that cannot be understood from the framework of ‘northern epistemologies’ (Santos, 2007). This shortcoming will be discussed in detail in the next section.

Another area of contention is issue of what are the mechanisms that foster social collective action. Melucci (1996:15) points out that Marxist studies and analyses of social movements have not been able to bridge the gap ‘between the contradictions of the capitalist system and class action’. The questions of whether mobilisation is structurally determined or voluntary have not been resolved by traditional Marxist analysis, which sees class action as a response to the contradictions of capitalism. In Melucci’s view, neither Marxists nor collective behaviour analyses have resolved the problem of ‘how the collective subject of action comes about and persists in time’ (ibid). Melucci further identifies ‘an open, still unexplored theoretical space’ that involves the ‘ways in which actors construct their action’ (emphasis in the original). Della Porta and Diani (1992) and Melucci (1996) have tried to bridge the gap between the North American and European traditions by

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17 The term ‘popular’ is commonly used in reference to movements or collectives of the people or popular classes across Latin American countries (e.g., trade unions, rural workers associations, women’s groups, etc.). This usage of the term ‘popular’ thus differs from the English ‘popular culture’, which refers to mass and commercialised cultural manifestations.
attempting to address the contention between structure and agency. Melucci acknowledges contributions by several scholars in ‘addressing the processes through which actors give meaning to their action’. These processes are part of a context of interconnecting relationships, or structuring field, which must be taken into account in the analysis of social movements and collective action.

Charles Tilly (2005) has also tried to connect cultural and instrumental dimensions of social mobilisation. He coined the concept of repertoires of action in an attempt to reconcile questions related to both how and why individuals mobilise collectively. A repertoire of action can, for example, be a march or a strike, which, in turn, is a response to a sociopolitical situation that will be decisive in shaping how the mobilisation and action unfold. Mobilisation became a key concept for the interpretation of social movement action in the last decades of the 20th century. Instead of understanding social movements as static formations, there was an effort to understand mobilisation as a temporal process. Scholars who attempted to theorise mobilisation paid attention to temporality and to how social phenomena arise and develop. These analyses, however, still have the self-interested individual as their epistemological subject. This epistemological and analytical focus on the individual subject that permeates Eurocentric thought and scholarship generates certain absences (in the sense employed by Santos (2007) when he speaks of a sociology of absences): it makes invisible or non-existent the collective subject’s process of construction and its capacity of action.

During the last three decades, processes of globalisation and subsequent transnationalisation of political action have led to the formation of networked groups that act beyond the sphere of national politics. These include alter-globalisation movements, as well as environmental and human rights action groups (Gohn, 2008). Analyses of such formations have focused on their characteristics and modus operandi as centre-less networks (Castells, 2009 and 2010) in which actors mobilise, unite, exchange knowledge and resources, and disband in processes enabled by communication technologies. In this context,

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communicative processes and media practices will emerge from the background to the centre of analyses.

Gohn (2008) notes that the scope of action of social movements has broadened in recent years, reaching beyond political, socio-economic, and religious demands to include also claims for cultural and identity recognition at a transnational level. Her analysis resonates with Nancy Fraser’s (2009) argument that representation (together with redistribution and recognition) should be used as an analytical tool and normative concept with which to address matters of global justice. Representation, according to Fraser, is a category of rights that ensure the political participation of all the affected. Representation rights reach beyond redistribution and recognition rights because they grant the possibility of active participation in political processes. Contrary from other authors analysing social movement action, she does not attempt to explain why or how they mobilise but aims instead to devise a normative framework for claims and demands of subaltern social actors in the political arena.

Social movements and the media

While social movement theories provide a panoramic view that places the object of study on a broader system of relations, they do not deal directly with questions concerning social movements’ relation to media. Although Tarrow (2008, Chapter 3) sees print media as the cornerstone for the emergence of a sense of community and connection, sociological accounts of social movements address media only tangentially (see, for instance, Della Porta, 1999 and Melucci. 1996) as the conduits of symbolical exchanges that configure processes of identity formation; as instruments to facilitate organisation, mobilisation, networking, and action; or as social actors playing a role in advancing social agendas. Downing (2008) points out that the two most prominent scholarly journals\(^\text{19}\) dedicated to social movement studies ‘rarely focus on media dimensions of social movements’. In these journals, he continues, media are usually referred to as ‘technological message channels’ and

\(^{19}\) Mobilization and Social Movement Studies.
not as ‘complex sociotechnical structures’ (emphasis in the original). Media studies, in contrast, look closely into the roles of media in the aforementioned processes. Social movements that emerged during the 20th century, such as the labour, civil rights, and women’s movements, and their uses of, and practices around, different media have caught the attention of media scholars who have been trying to understand the conditions through which these relations unfold.

Within media and communication studies, research on the media used by social movements is usually carried out in connection with direct action and activism or as studies of alternative media. Studies of activism and direct action, in turn, tend to focus on media coverage of demonstrations and protest, news production processes, source selection, and framing, as well as communication dynamics among activists. Examples of such studies are Halloran, Elliot, & Murdock’s (1970) analysis of coverage of the demonstration against the Vietnam War in London in October 1968, and Gitlin’s (1980) analysis of the relationship between student movements and the press in the United States.

Recently published edited volumes by della Porta & Tarrow (2005), de Jong et al. (2005), and Cottle and Lester (2011) compile studies that look into social uses of media by activists, media relations, and the interplay between communication and mobilisation. Others, more practice-based, are interested in understanding the internal dynamics, motivations, and experiences of activists. Such studies usually draw on news-production theories or media usage by movement members, such as Gerbaudo’s analysis of social media use during insurgent mobilisations (2012) and Bakardjieva’s (2009) study of online proto-activist groups in Bulgaria.

Yet another area that has been much explored in recent years is the interplay between activism and new technologies. Many attempts have been, and are still being, made to describe and discuss the ways in which media technologies modify or enable practices of activism. In a study of Iranian youth, Wojcieszak and Smith (2014) point out that, even though their findings supported ‘sceptical voices about technology’s ability sustain revolution’, there were also ‘hubs of
politicised Iranian youth’. Gustafsson’s (2012) study of political action in social networks in Sweden reaches similar conclusions that ‘using social network sites alone does not drive previously inactive respondents to political participation’. According to studies carried out by Tatarchevskiy (2011), Banks (2010), Tufecki & Wilson (2012), and Harlow (2011) in the United States, Egypt, and Guatemala, digital media facilitate the mobilisation and organisation of protests. These studies highlighted the ephemeral character of digitally enabled activism in which mobilisation is effectively organised with the help of technology. They do not question, however, the sustainability of these formations. These types of social movements can also be connected to the character of contemporary mobilisation, which revolves around ‘personal life-style values’ (Bennet, 2012).

In a critical review of literature about social movements and media, Mattoni and Treré (2014, pp. 253-254) emphasise that it ‘suffers from two main biases: the one medium bias and the technological-fascination bias’ (as the examples above illustrate), which lead to fragmentation in the study of the interplay between social movements and media, which in turn obliterates a more in-depth understanding of the roles played by media in social mobilisation. The authors (ibid, p. 254) also point out that sociological approaches such as resource mobilisation, political process, and new social movements theories only ‘evoke media’ without systematically analysing their role in mobilisations. In order to tackle these biases, Mattoni and Treré introduce a conceptual framework for the study of social movements through the analytical lenses of media practices, mediation, and mediatisation. They argue that these three concepts allow an analysis that spans from the micro-level of social practice through the meso-level of mechanisms to the macro-level of processes. In this framework, media practices account for the micro-level of interaction between individual actors and are short-term actions performed in ‘punctuated moments’, mediation is cyclic and accounts for medium-term mechanisms within collective actors, and mediatisation is a long-term process among ‘social movement families’. The process of mediatisation will be crucial in structuring which ‘templates for collective action are available to protesters’ (Mattoni and Treré 2014, p. 257). The conceptual framework proposed by the authors is a welcome development for the study of social movements’ relation to
media. The socially situated outlook and acknowledgement of the temporal dimension in social movement action are relevant contributions. It should be noted, though, that the framework suggested by the authors presents an inward look at social movements – even if the category of social movement families suggests a relationship between different social movements. This shortcoming can be resolved by adding an outward-looking approach that places the social movement in political scenarios of different scales, critically addressing the relationship between the movement and other sectors of society.

In recent years, the globalisation of media industries coupled with technological development have made the communication strategies of social movements and their use of communication technologies more visible to a potentially broader audience and therefore more interesting as a research subject. This has happened particularly in the Northern Hemisphere, where many social movement organisations (SMOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are based. During the 1990s and 2000s, studies and commentary about SMOs and NGOs self-generated media content, organisational dynamics, and globally broadcast protests and demonstrations abounded. Almeida & Lichbach (2003), for instance, compared activist-based coverage of protests with conventional media sources to find out that activist media report a greater number of protests at all levels and are less influenced by what the authors call ‘intensity properties’ of protest events.

Commenting on the possibilities offered by the Internet for opposition groups, Kahn & Kellner (2004, p. 93) conclude that:

> online activist subcultures have materialized as a vital new space of politics and culture in which a wide diversity of individuals and groups have used emergent technologies in order to help to produce new social relations and forms of political possibility.

Bennet (2003) notes that the changes brought by digital communications to activism and protest go far beyond reducing the costs of communication or ‘transcending geographical and temporal barriers’. What digital communications offer, he argues, is the

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20 In this study, the focus will be on the national scale.
possibility for the formation of networks that enable permanent campaigning.

As the examples show, it has become common to associate protest, demonstration, and social mobilisation with new information and communication technologies. The amplifying and organising properties of today’s media platforms have contributed to the widespread reach of localised insurgencies and protests in recent years. Consequently, the attention and importance attributed to these events by scholars have been, at times, overblown. In this sense, Downing (2013) points out that:

Following uprisings in the Arab region, Iran, and elsewhere in recent years, there has been a huge bubble of nonsense floated into the public sphere about the latest technological versions of such media projects, attributing to them fantastic magical powers (and blithely skipping over the real, patient, painful story of social resistance which paved the varied paths to these political explosions).

Far from denying that different technologies have an impact on the ways in which social movements communicate and plan strategies, what the author is criticising is the lack of a broader perspective of analysis. Such a perspective would place communication technologies within a range of strategies and practices enacted by individuals when engaging in collective action.

Following the trend described above, many studies were carried out analysing social movements’ and activists’ appropriation of emerging technologies. Kavada (2005) analysed social movements’ websites and concluded that they were seen primarily as an instrument for planning and organisation of movement activities and sharing information among current and potential participants. In the same vein, in a report of 23 social movement organisations in Latin America, León et al. (2001) conclude that the Internet brings about possibilities for social movements due to its collaborative potential and rupture with the strictly temporal and sequential system that characterised other media (radio, print media, and television). The authors question, however, whether the decentralised configuration of the Internet could resist trends in the direction of concentration and monopolisation that pervade other media.
In Latin America, social movements’ communicative processes have been extensively studied. Particular attention has been paid to the ways in which symbolic exchanges are enacted through group communication, which is enabled, amplified, facilitated, and modified by media. Media can thus be seen as channels for the exchange of symbolic goods. In this sense, Peruzzo (2007) highlights the importance of community radio programmes and publications in the formation and strengthening of community associations in the peripheries of São Paulo, and Gumucio-Dagron (2005) stresses the importance of miners’ radio stations in Bolivia in securing their political participation in different arenas in the country.

Yet another common object of studies that analyse the relationship between social movements and media is the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN), especially due to their innovative and successful use of the Internet to build networks and bypass the filters of mainstream media. An insurgent movement emerging publicly at the same time as electronic communications, the Zapatistas have been analysed by many as a model for an insurgent movement formed by subaltern classes (indigenous people and rural workers in southern Mexico) using the network properties of electronic communication to reach beyond geographic borders (Ortiz, 2005 and Russell, 2005). Russell (2005) argues that the Zapatistas used digital communication with the purpose of maintaining control over their image and the myths that were constructed around the image of their leader, Subcomandante Marcos. In its primitive form, digital communication allowed higher levels of control over the flow of information than mainstream media did. Cleaver (1995) observes that, through self-generated media (communiqués and interviews with independent journalists), the Zapatistas succeeded in breaking through the initial limitation of press coverage imposed by the Mexican government via the state-controlled television network Televisa. The author points out the importance of digital communication in reaching out to activists and supporters since the state had ‘all too effectively limited mass media coverage and serious discussion of Zapatista ideas’ (1998). He is, however, more careful in ascribing an all too important role to the Internet for the Zapatista struggle; instead, he suggests that:
There is already an enormous amount of information in The Net about all sorts of struggles which have not yet been connected, not to the Zapatistas, not to each other. The availability of information and a vehicle of connection do not guarantee either that a connection will be made or that it will be effective in generating complementary action.

Cleaver describes the formation of the EZLN as a self-organised collective of rural workers and indigenous people trying improve their living conditions by demanding collective rights. With Mexico joining NAFTA, the Zapatistas adopted direct protest action. The reports of such action reached the public as an alternative view to that shown by mainstream media in the country. Nevertheless, Cleaver questions the myth that Subcomandante Marcos sits in the jungle from where he uploads EZLN communiqués to the world and argues that the movement and its members ‘have had a highly mediated relationship with the Internet’ because they lacked the technological infrastructure necessary to be digitally active. What did happen, according to the author, is that EZLN members were able to depend on a network of friendly reporters and supporters with access to telecommunications that, in turn, uploaded and distributed the material digitally. In a study that compared the MST and the Zapatistas, Simonetti (2007) observes that, while the latter sought to reach a public beyond national borders (which, according to the authors mentioned above, they succeeded in doing), the former is focusing on the Brazilian public and on establishing a network of cooperation with other rural workers movements internationally. This difference in strategic focus can be connected to the different positions occupied by Brazil and Mexico in the geopolitical context and to Mexico’s bilateral relations with the United States.

As can be seen, social movements have being using different media to communicate for a long time, actively seeking ways to produce and distribute self-generated content as an alternative to official and hegemonic accounts of their activities. In consequence, new forms of production and distribution of content will reorganise both the way movement members and the mainstream media of the day relate to each other and the way movements as a social formation communicate with other spheres in society. In 1980, Gitlin wrote that ‘people as producers of meaning have no voice in what the media make of what they say or do or in the context within which the media frame their
activity’ (emphasis added). He suggested that professionals within media institutions held the power to attribute meaning (or frame) social movements’ activities and actions; they controlled the field of news production and dominated its habitus (news routines, values, and organisational culture). Among news reporters, Gitlin concludes (1980, p. 42), certain elements certify facts as news, for instance, arrests in protest events. Activists then ‘learn how to turn the tables by getting strategically arrested’ (ibid., pp. 42-43). Berger’s (1996) analysis of the interplay between the MST and the regional newspaper Zero Hora resonates with Gitlin’s assessment of the relationship between journalists and activists, as she concludes that both compete in the field of discourse, struggling to define words that carry with them symbolic or material capital. Both authors share the view that, conflicts and struggles aside, mainstream media, represented by the institutions they have studied, had the primacy in interpreting and framing the social movement. Due to the nature of media companies as capitalist enterprises and to individual journalists’ submission to the interests of their employer, the actions of a movement like the MST are framed not as legitimate political acts but as a threat to an otherwise well-functioning system.

The power imbalance between mainstream media and social movements is being revived in light of the development of new forms of media that could potentially redistribute interpreting and framing privileges and reorganise power relations. According to Atton (2002), community and alternative media emerge then as counter-forces to the hegemonic power of mainstream media. However, the extent to which such initiatives represent a significant platform for dialogue with other spheres in society and their capacity to subvert dominant communication flows is still contested.

21 There are, of course, questions of agency and structure involved in the way journalists perform their work in so far as they are usually employees of a media organisation and, as such, have to comply with organisational rules and routines.

22 Zero Hora is a newspaper that circulates in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, in southern Brazil. It is owned by the RBS group, a family enterprise that operates mainly in the media sectors in Brazil’s southern states of Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina. RBS is one of the largest media conglomerates in Brazil, encompassing open and cable TV channels, eight radio stations, nine local and regional newspapers, a news agency dedicated to agribusiness, and an independent digital platform.

23 Peruzzo, Atton, and Downing include social movement media in the category of alternative media.
At the same time, internationalisation and professionalisation stand as catalysing forces behind the colonisation of social movement and community communication by the institutionalised aid sector. Waisbord (2008) notes that grass-roots communication initiatives from social movements originating in less privileged strata of society without the guiding hand of international organisations have become rare. It is thus necessary to explore and understand existing initiatives that are ‘born out of the community itself, financed and managed by the community, genuinely participatory on a daily basis, well integrated into the social movement’, as Gumucio-Dragon (2008) rightly points out. In this sense, Paiva (2007) presents one of the most compelling arguments for the need for research in community communication. She argues that analysing community communication in countries like Brazil is a political endeavour given all the constraints experienced by those trying to produce and circulate messages. Paiva positions the study of community communication within the broader area of communication rights, calling attention to the relevance of such rights in a historical period when media are increasingly pervasive.

*Social movements and the struggle to communicate*

Scholarly enquiry and research addressing the relationship between social movements and media is usually based on the premise that social movements (as well as other kinds of marginal and insurgent social formations) occupy a fringe position in the public space. At this marginal position, social movements will have to deploy different strategies and varying amounts of effort in order to raise public awareness about their demands. In Euro-American research traditions, there is a tendency to utilise the idea of the public sphere (Habermas, 1962/1991) as a normative horizon towards which social movements’ communication is directed.

Research that addresses social movements’ efforts in order to engage in public discourse with other social actors and sectors usually places social movements in the categories of weak publics (Habermas, 1992; Fraser, 2007) or challengers (Wolfsfeld, 2005). This area of enquiry
analyses social movements’ ability to move beyond processes of identity construction and internal cohesion building - enabled in part by communicative processes - and engage in a dialogue with other sectors of society. In these terms, access to common arenas where social movements can communicate with other sectors of society is of crucial importance for the advancement of social projects and sociopolitical demands. Such arenas, where conflicting worldviews can be confronted, are becoming less prominent, however, as Gitlin noted in 1998, at the dawn of deregulation processes and the introduction of satellite and multichannel television. Since then, others have discussed this fragmentation (see, for example, Deane, 2005) and the possibilities and hindrances for the formation of new arenas. Deane (2005 and 2008) has warned about the fragmentation of the public sphere brought about by the multiplication of possibilities for producing and distributing content. He questions whether the circulation of information can be characterised as communication, a concern shared by Waisbord (2005, p. 88), who argues that:

it is dangerous to fall into a romantic position that sees grassroots media as the only spaces where citizens can voice opinions, get information, and redress social conditions, while ignoring the fact that large-scale media institutions are of tremendous importance in people’s everyday lives.

Downey and Fenton (2003:188) add similar concerns about the fragmentation and polarisation of public discourse on the Internet:

While the mass-media public sphere may be subject to periodic crises that may be exploited by groups in civil society, new information and communication technologies such as the world wide web may contribute to the fragmentation of civil society, as well as political mobilisation and participation.

In a later publication, Curran, Fenton, and Freedman (2012) still question the idea of an inherent democratic ethos in online communication. They argue that power is ‘the starting point for understanding all social change and political upheaval, even within social movements’. Power relations, according to the authors, are ‘not only an argument for political economic interrogation’ but also ‘a plea for a consideration of the social dimensions of political life and citizenship – what brings people together and why they seek solidarity’ (2012, pp. 156-7).
In Latin America, specifically in Brazil, the discontentment of certain groups with the character of the dominant media institutions, particularly with their failure in configuring the symbolic arena of a national public sphere, has led to sharp criticism from organised social movements. Since the 1980s, an empirical and theoretical body of work on communicative aspects of popular mobilisation has been formed in Latin America. Peruzzo (1982 and 2007), for example, has studied for many years the role of public relations in different social movements. The author uses the term ‘popular public relations’ to describe activities that have as aims ‘awareness raising, mobilisation, organisation and cohesion in the internal level of social movements’ (2007). She also recognises the importance of strengthening ties and gaining support from wider society and from the government through mass communication vehicles (newspapers and TV in this case). This is a view of communication within oppositional, insurgent, or subaltern social movements as a system of strategies and techniques that are employed in an organised process. As an example of this way of looking at popular communication, Henriques (2004, p. 12) observes that mobilisation is constituted by the strategic formulation of communication actions capable of sustaining both public legitimacy and the trust that maintains cooperation. Further, the author stresses that the success of mobilising strategies relies on the capacity to continuously feed the public debate and strengthen the sense of belonging and identification among mobilised subjects.

Outside academia, various groups have been actively discussing alternatives for the existing media landscape in Brazil and other developing countries. In a debate initiated at the first World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in 2001, social movements, journalists, scholars, and policymakers contemplated more diverse and plural alternatives to the media monopolies that are a rule in many countries in the Southern Hemisphere. One of the outcomes of these debates was the creation, in 2003, of the weekly newspaper Brasil de Fato, which still in circulation today. Media’s role and functions in democracy, as well as the relations between social movements and mainstream media, have been recurrent themes in subsequent editions of the World Social Forum.
In 2011, the FNDC organised a national conference (CONFECOM) that took place in Rio de Janeiro, where the platform for a regulatory document was discussed with various regional groups and entities. The result was a document with 20 guidelines for the democratisation of communications in Brazil, including strengthening community radio and TV, imposing limits on the concentration of ownership, prohibiting the concession of radio and TV channels to politicians, and establishing journalistic codes to ensure the diversity of points of view. Concentration of ownership and sheer domination of the media landscape – and consequently of news production – by commercial enterprises coupled with the absence of a strong public service media (outlined in the previous chapter) are seen by Brazilian social movements as the main obstacles to be overcome. The guidelines proposed by the FNDC resonate with Thompson’s (1995, pp. 240-243) principle of regulated pluralism, which is suggested by the author as a way to ‘stimulate a kind of publicness which is neither part of the state nor wholly dependent on the autonomous processes of the market’. The principle of regulated pluralism is thus intended to ensure the diversity of the media landscape by fostering the development of independent media organisations and restraining the formation of large media conglomerates.

In Brazil, as noted by Matos (2012, p. 105), there are segments of society that are excluded from the public debate that takes place in mainstream media. As a result of this structural exclusion, some trends can be observed in various sectors of Brazilian civil society. First, there is the spread of community media initiatives documented by Peruzzo (2007) and Henriques (2004), among others. Second, there is increasing pressure for investments in strengthening the incipient public service media (Matos, p. 2012). In sum, the debate on media and democracy in Brazil gravitates around the possibilities and challenges for the creation of a media landscape that can serve ‘the multiple publics and their needs, political interests and diverse cultural identities’ (Matos, 2012, p. 145). In essence, it is a discussion about the

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25 In the recently published report ‘The Country of Thirty Berlusconis’ (Reporters Without Borders, 2013), the NGO Reporters Without Borders highlighted that mass media in Brazil are controlled by 10 leading groups owned by 10 families that have an ‘incestuous relationship’ with the state.
systems and structures that are necessary to foster democratic participation, diversity, and discussion in the media rather than which technologies might enable it.

Regarding the Internet, Matos (2012) points out that it has similarities with commercial global media, which is ‘accused by scholars of being heavily skewed towards a few dominant commercial players and economic forces’ that prevent alternative voices and small groups from competing equally, a concern also expressed much earlier by Léon et al. (2001). The architecture of the Internet, she argues, ‘makes its use as a medium for the public interest even more problematic’ than broadcasting. According to an online survey carried out by the University of Rio de Janeiro and discussed by Matos (2012), university students and cultural elites are the growing public of the Internet, and public media impose limitations on the extent to which the Internet can be used to broaden the public sphere in Brazil. She suggests that (2012, p. 129):

> debates on media policy and media democratisation should focus more on the ways in which television can better assist in this, and less on the unrealistic assumption that the web can ‘revolutionise’ politics and contribute to diminishing economic and social inequalities.

She does not disregard the potential ‘for developing the internet as a counter-public sphere’ (ibid) in countries where commercial media have a strong presence, but at the core of her argument is the fact that ‘older’ forms of broadcast media are those that need to go through a profound process of democratisation if they are meant to constitute the symbolic arenas of the public sphere. Thus, considering the national media scene in Brazil (which has similarities with other developing countries), it is of great importance to analyse the uses and potentialities of social movements’ self-generated media in conjunction with the roles of institutionalised commercial media. Doing so will lead to a broader understanding of how communicative processes contribute to historically situated processes of social change.
Towards a non-Eurocentric outlook

Since the second half of the 20th century, efforts to understand and explain social action have been an endeavour of Euro-American scholarship. Researchers and scholars in the so-called developed world have undertaken the task of analysing and explaining the emerging events of social unrest and organised political action in these areas. Although functionalist, structuralist, and culturalist theories of social movements can help us understand social mobilisation outside the limits of the developed world, it is necessary to acknowledge, with Santos (2008, p. ix) that there is ‘an epistemological foundation to the capitalist and imperial order that the global North has been imposing on the global South’. Santos particularly criticizes (ibid., p. xxi) the denial of ‘collective identities and rights considered incompatible with Eurocentric definitions of the modern social order’. This epistemological hiatus in North-based scholarship will mean that the theories originating from these social settings have very little to say about the construction of certain collective subjects and the values and practices imbued in this process.

European sociology was born from a desire to understand and explain the social as formed by individuals acting in their own self-interest, overlooking social bonds based on communitarian and emancipatory values, as well as on radical forms of democracy. This kind of sociability, because it exists in so-called primitive or pre-civilised societies, has always been left to anthropologists, who, in turn, have attempted to understand this as deviant from the norm. As a result, the different insurgent groups that emerged in Latin America during the 20th and 21st centuries, with their claims for identity recognition, resource redistribution, and political representation anchored on communitarian values26 and on an understanding of human life as part of an ecosystem (as opposed to the understanding of the rational human subject and human society as dominant) cannot be understood and explored through the lenses of Western sociology alone. Furthermore, an understanding of society as superior to community is

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26 For instance, the Tupác Amaru in Peru, the Tupamaros in Uruguay.
well accepted in classical sociology. An ideal society succeeds in rationally organising itself, whereas communities rely on affective ties and *ad hoc* decision-making processes, and are guided by belief systems based on myth instead of scientific rationality.

The view of a rationally managed society modelled on the developed post-war world was one of the core principles that guided development policies devised for Latin America (see Escobar, 2012). During this period, the continent, which had large native and rural populations, was subjected to developmentist projects financed by Northern nations and international organisations. The planned efforts to develop industries and urban centres in Brazil from the 1950s (Holston, 2008) related to principles of social engineering that prioritised the rational society to the detriment of organic communities.

Another aspect that impacted the emergence of social movements in the region was the institution of military dictatorships that stretched for nearly three decades from the 1960s through the 1980s (for a comprehensive account, see Klein, 2007). Dictatorships and authoritarian regimes, development strategies devised by North-based agencies, and austerity measures for economic adjustment imposed from the 1980s onwards shaped and provoked various kinds of insurgency. Many scholars (Calderón, et al., 1992; Gohn, 2008) have noted that the deep economic crisis in which Latin American countries found themselves in the 1980s shaped forms of social mobilisation different from those encountered in Europe and North America in the second half of the 20th century.

Berger (1996) calls our attention to the fact that the study of social movements in Europe and North America departs from relations established in a capitalist and industrial social formation, which is reflected in their emphasis in the urban reality. Latin American societies, in turn, have gone through a different process of industrialisation and urbanisation set off by the end of World War II, rapidly increasing the complexity of Latin American societies. In this

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27 Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, for instance, all see capitalist society as more developed and advanced than primitive communities found in colonies and the undeveloped world, mainly because a society has rationalised its complexity so that individuals can live together and share a common life without having any type of close bonds (family or kinship).
context, Calderón et al. (1992) argue that social movements emerged on the continent from the tension between social demands and the inability of the existing institutions to meet these demands. The authors point out (1992, p. 25) that, in the last decades of the 20th century, there was ‘a terrible tension between society and the state’ in Latin America that resulted in ‘the germination of a new power structure’. In their view, social movements emerged as a sort of alternative representation to the party system in which some sectors of society did not see themselves represented.

Urbanisation is also an important geo-social process that, among other factors, shaped social relations in Brazil during the 20th century. Brazil became an urban country (with more than 50 per cent of its population living in urban areas) only in the 1950s. After that, the industrialisation process resulted in a rural exodus with the consequent worsening of conditions in rural areas, which were left behind in development policies that favoured emerging cities. As Escobar (2011) explains, the hegemonic view at the time was that commodities produced by agriculture and farming should employ the least possible amount of labour, as they were not as profitable as industrialised goods. As a consequence, agribusiness, following the logic of minimum input for maximal output, was adopted as a paradigm in development strategies. As a production model, agribusiness based on advanced technologies encroaches rural workers as a class, affecting the culture and way of life in rural communities. It is in this context that rural workers organised and constructed the issues towards which they targeted their militancy. In this sense, Gohn (2008, pp. 444-5) affirms that:

the subjects of social movements will know how to read the world and identify convergent or divergent projects if they participate integrally in collective action, from the start generated by relative socio-economic or cultural demands, not by simple recognition in the realm of morals or values.\(^{28}\)

She identifies the specific nature of the demands and scope of action in which Brazilian social movements developed. Referring back to Fraser (2009), such demands for representation in the political realm extrapolate the demands for recognition exactly because rural workers demand not only agrarian reform (recognition of rural workers as a

\(^{28}\)Translated from Portuguese by the author.
class with specific rights and the redistribution of available resources), they also struggle for participation in the policymaking process, i.e., in decisions about how resources are going to be used and distributed. Calderón et al. (1992, p. 30) thus observe that the contradictory demands of contemporary Latin American social movements ‘are difficult to meet by relying on existing paradigms’, namely functionalism and structural-Marxism. The authors (1992, p. 309) conclude that:

it is clear that the limitations of functionalist and structuralist theories have triggered types of analysis that focus on the complexities of social life, incorporating in their explanations political, social, cultural, spatial, and temporal dimensions that are not reducible to structural domination, economic or otherwise.

Alongside Melucci (1996), Calderón et al. also note that there are gaps left by the structuralist and functionalist approaches, which call for ‘theoretical innovations that permit us to visualize the new actors and processes that are becoming so salient throughout the continent’. At the dawn of the 21st century, the authors identified four major trends in the analysis of social movements in Latin America: 1) theories of social movements based on Alain Touraine’s work, which analyse the relationship between social movements and political change at a critical/theoretical level; 2) new forms of class analysis, which are more common in Central American studies than in the Southern Cone where, according to the authors, democratisation processes have impacted on the value of class as an analytical tool with which to address social movements; 3) analyses of communal practices, which focus on the level of everyday practices within communities and emerging new forms of sociability, solidarity, and cooperation found in communal kitchens, mothers committees, consumer cooperatives, and peasant movements in rural areas. The authors acknowledge that ‘[t]his type of communitarianism has had an impact on researchers interested in analyses based on participant observation and participatory action research’. Finally, the fourth trend is what Calderón and his co-authors identify as a more recent research trend, which focuses on social movements formed around the idea of identity politics, pluralism, and ‘the right to difference’. Many of the studies that address communication in social movements and grassroots organisations in Brazil fit into the third trend identified by the authors. Such studies
analyse communication in connection with alternative forms of sociability that emerge in response to commodification and marketisation of all realms of social life. In this context, the ability to produce messages; create meanings; resignify practices, places, and symbols; and to construct mechanisms and dynamics for the organisation of social life are closely connected to sociabilities based on communitarian values.

In conclusion, it is possible to say that the hybrid configuration of social movements in Latin America poses an empirical challenge to social theories based on Euro-American social realities. Contemporary social movements in Latin America combine class-based and identity-cultural demands in ways that cannot be fully explained by dominant paradigms in social movement studies. As a consequence, following Santos (2007), it is necessary to do away with knowledge monocultures developed by Eurocentric thought and embrace plural epistemologies. In the case of social movements, plural epistemologies recognise that the ethos of a social movement is to construct a collective subject and to demand rights, because certain rights can only be demanded and successfully obtained within the framework of collective recognition.

**Delimitation and contribution of the study**

This study makes a contribution to the understanding of communication processes and media practices connected to legitimation processes, political mobilisation, and action enacted within subaltern social movements in their capacity as counter-hegemonic formations. It attempts to address the lack of contemporary studies in media and communication that approach the political mobilisation of others besides urban middle classes in developed post-industrial countries.

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29 Santos (2007, p. 29) argues that absences are actively produced in sociology when certain realities and experiences are made invisible to the hegemonic reality of the world. He further suggests that absences are produced in five different ways (monocultures): 1) the knowledge and rigour monoculture; 2) the linear time monoculture; 3) the difference naturalisation monoculture; 4) the dominant scale monoculture; and 5) the capitalist productivism monoculture.
Current research on contemporary social movements places unbalanced focus on social media platforms and communication within movements, among their members at the expense of a broader look into the ways in which these movements put forward their claims and relate to other sectors of society. In this sense, this study can be considered centrifugal because it addresses media practices also as ways to communicate with those outside the symbolic boundaries of the social movement in question, seeking to problematise alleged democratising and pluralist features of so-called new media.

The aim is to provide an assessment of the possibilities of different media and the practices related to them for the reorganisation of civil society’s symbolic arenas, leading to the formation of a plural public sphere. By analysing a social movement based in rural areas that has a clear political agenda, as opposed to contemporary urban movements, which are deeply entangled with their communication strategies (Gerbaudo, 2012), the study will add to the body of knowledge about the relations between media practices and social change and about media practices of urban social movements, broadening its scope. In addition, the study speaks to Mattoni & Treré’s (2014) call for exploration of social movements in their temporal dimension by looking to communication as a process, thus avoiding one-medium and technological-fascination biases.

Scrutiny of communicative processes engendered by social movements can help to fill the ‘theoretical space’ identified by Melucci (1996) that concerns the construction of action by actors. This is not to say that the construction of action has not been explored since then but that it should also be seen as communicative processes that include media practices. At the same time, addressing these very processes and practices as interactively constructed means to move away from a purely instrumentalist view of communication, setting it onto a broader, materially situated, sociopolitical context.
4 Theoretical points of departure

The purpose of this chapter is to clarify how the three theoretical branches that will be introduced in the individual sections can be connected and deployed in an analysis of communicative processes and media practices in the social movement that is the empirical object of the study. In order to establish a working relationship from general meta-processes to specific, research-object-oriented questions, I introduce here the analytical categories that guide the study.

A theoretical-conceptual map

As this is a study that aims to understand communication in its processual character, with multiple actors operating in different systems, it is necessary to employ an array of theories and concepts that aid the understanding of communication as a complex temporal-historical, evolving, and ongoing process. Furthermore, in order to analyse and understand communicative processes in a complex social actor such as the MST, we must attempt to contemplate all the different spheres in which these processes occur.

Because the MST is a social actor, it would be impossible to analyse their communicative processes without accounting for meta-processes and developments that encompass society as a whole and that influence the ways in which social actors adapt and change. In other words, a social actor, in this case an organisation, cannot be bracketed off from society as a whole in order to be analysed. In this study, the meta-processes considered when analysing the MST’s communicative processes are globalisation, neo-liberalisation, and mediatisation. Globalisation is understood here as an ongoing process that increases geographical interconnectedness and interdependency between and among regions.\textsuperscript{30} As discussed in the previous section, globalisation involves power and political struggles, because some see it as a neutral

\textsuperscript{30} For an in-depth discussion of different uses and understandings of the term ‘globalisation’, see Sparke (2013, Chapters 1 and 2).
and unavoidable development process, while others add the adjective ‘neoliberal’ to globalisation in order to emphasise the political agendas that guide globalisation. To imply that globalisation is neoliberal means to acknowledge that increased interconnectedness and interdependency turn social and political relations into market relations. Neoliberalisation is thus a process through which economic exchange performed within increasingly global market crowds out other kinds of social and political relations (see Harvey, 2005). Finally, mediatisation describes the relationship and interplay between developments in media and communication and social change (Hepp, 2011), accounting for phenomena such as ‘globalisation, individualisation and the growing importance of the market economy as a reference system’ (Krotz, 2005, p. 256). Krotz thus suggests that mediatisation is a conceptual framework that accounts for the influence of globalisation and neoliberalisation in the specific field of media and communication. These processes affect the MST as an organisation in different ways (which have been discussed earlier and will be incorporated into the analysis in coming chapters) and impact their communicative processes and media practices. Therefore, when the MST’s communicative processes and media practices are analysed, the analysis is performed against the backdrop of such meta-processes.

As discussed in Chapter 1, communicative processes are analysed in the study through three different dimensions, which in turn shape the way media are analysed. Accordingly, each dimension means a different epistemological understanding of media that calls for a theoretical framework with subsequent analytical concepts. These different dimensions are delimited for analytical purposes so that communicative processes can be analysed in their complexity and depth. This does not imply an either/or essentialist view of media, as the dimensions are not mutually exclusive, but rather an analytical strategy to dissect media in their different roles. In reality, media have multiple and interplaying roles and functions, and it is exactly in order to grasp this complexity that I distinguish analytically between the different dimensions. Empirically, symbolic, material, and political dimensions may, of course, overlap because people do not differentiate between these dimensions when performing actions. These analytical dimensions also grasp the MST’s dialectical position as both an organisation and a social
movement, a condition that demands the creation and maintenance of cohesion but also the capacity of mobilising quickly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meta-process</th>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Media</th>
<th>Theoretical framework</th>
<th>Concepts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Globalisation</td>
<td>In which ways are communicative processes enacted in order to mobilise rural workers and achieve symbolic cohesion among movement militants?</td>
<td>Symbolic</td>
<td>Channels of communication</td>
<td>Constructionism</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
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<th>Neo-liberalisation</th>
<th>How are media practices organised in the processes of mobilisation, collective identity formation and image construction?</th>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Communication artefacts</th>
<th>Freirean approach to práxis</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mediatisation</td>
<td>How do movement militants evaluate the potential of the media practices and communication processes they enact to challenge the hegemony of dominant actors in society in general and in the media sector in particular?</td>
<td>Political</td>
<td>Political arenas, Social actor</td>
<td>Hegemony/counter-hegemony</td>
<td>Media system</td>
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<th>Political arenas, Social actor</th>
<th>Hegemony/counter-hegemony</th>
<th>Media system</th>
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<tr>
<td>Representation (cf. Fraser)</td>
<td>Domination</td>
<td>Social actor</td>
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</table>
The MST exists as a social actor in an overarching context composed by increasing economic, cultural, and political globalisation; advancement of neoliberal ideas that influence the economy, politics, and culture; as well as asymmetrical and unequal mediatisation of social relations. In this context, communicative processes and practices are analysed in the following dimensions:

- a symbolical dimension comprised of histories, narratives, symbols, and meanings that are collectively constructed and shared;
- a material dimension that structures the circulation of shared meanings and comprises everyday media practices within the movement as a collective;
- a political dimension that grasps the actions of the MST as a social actor within a conflicted political framework.

Accordingly, when the symbolical dimension is observed and discussed, the focus is on identifying and analysing the narratives, symbols, and legitimation and subjectification processes that are materialised through communication. The analytical apparatus of symbolic interactionism is thus used as a foundation against which the analysis of meaning construction within an oppositional and insurgent social movement is built. Media practices, in turn, are analysed with a focus on identifying and discussing social practices oriented towards the media that play a role in the processes of mobilisation and direct action. Such practices involve the use of media as artefacts and the strategic use of different forms of communication in a society where the meta-processes of globalisation, neo-liberalisation, and mediatisation are, at varying scales, integral parts of the empirical reality.

In this context, the purpose of research is to gain an in-depth understanding of the rationales for using different media, considering their affordances, and also to highlight the process of appropriation, in which the movement as a collective is seen as having an active intellectual role in enacting media practices. By using appropriation as

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an analytical concept, it is possible to avoid a technological determinist view of media, while at the same time acknowledging that the features of different media will guide their use. Finally, the political dimension will bring to the fore the relations and conflicts that exist between the MST and other social actors, as well as the movement’s struggle to participate in the public debate through the symbolic arena formed by national media in Brazil. Even though this political conflict is present in the symbolic and material dimensions of analysis, in the political dimension it becomes the object of analysis per se. The focus of the analysis is thus on the MST as a social actor in a media system, as well as on the media as a symbolic-political space.

In order to understand communication processes in their depth and complexity, it is necessary to adopt a multifaceted view of media that fits into the different epistemological dimensions analysed in the study. Therefore, depending on the dimension analysed, media can be seen as channels of communication, communication artefacts, or as political arenas. This analytical move resonates with Martín-Barbero’s (1987/2003, p. 258) proposition to dislocate the debate ‘from the media to the mediations’, which he defines as the ‘practical articulations between communication practices and social movements’. As stated above, this does not mean that media are one thing or another but that they have distinct properties depending on which aspects of communication and of society we are looking into. This deconstruction is needed in order to gain a deeper understanding of the multiple ways in which individuals and societies deal with media. This differentiation also aims to better grasp the ways in which the MST, as a collective actor, deal with media, considering that their relation to media is part of ongoing communicative processes. These different views of media will be developed in the analytical chapters.

Symbolic systems and narratives

In his last published book, Freire (2001) introduced the concept of world-reading, which, according to him, precedes the reading of words. World-reading, Freire explains, is the reading and interpretation of
signs that people perform from very early in life. The first readings are later reconstructed and negotiated throughout life. We constitute ourselves as individuals by comprehending the reality we have been continuously forming since birth, through various lenses that we inherit and reconstruct (Streck, 2009). While world-reading is an individual process, constructing the references and frameworks that enable individual world-readings is a social one. In Freire’s view (1967/1982 and 2001), educational systems play an important role in how we, as individuals, learn to read the world. He criticises the education system for teaching conformism and acceptance of oppression and has advocated that education should instead make individuals more aware of their position in society and provide them with cognitive tools to change an oppressive situation. Freire’s views on education have, in recent years, been applied not only to school education but also to other disciplines and fields that deal with social learning, awareness raising, and the formation of critical consciousness. A considerable amount of work in the field of media, communication, and development, particularly in its more critical tradition, builds on Freire’s ideas of participation, conscientisation, and collective construction of critical consciousness.

Complementary to world-reading, conscientisation (Freire 1967/1982) can be understood as a cognitive process in which individuals recognise themselves as subjects capable of acting in the world and of transforming social reality. Conscientisation can thus be defined as the awareness of domination, which, according to Boltanski (2011), bears important differences from exploitation. Boltanski makes an analytical differentiation between exploitation and domination, whereas the former is exercised with the purpose of obtaining material gains from the exploited subject, the latter is exercised in a more subtle way and involves exerting different kinds of power over the dominated subject. Because of its subtlety, it is much more difficult for dominated subjects to become aware of domination. According to Boltanski (2011, p. 2), domination is rooted in ‘profound, enduring asymmetries which, while assuming different forms in different contexts, are constantly duplicated to the point of colonising reality as a whole’. These asymmetries, Boltanski claims, are not directly observable and must therefore be unmasked both by the dominated subject and by the social
researcher. It follows that conscientisation makes the dominated subject aware of the domination, which is not always apparent or direct. Boltanski’s core argument is that critical sociology should work to identify the mechanisms and dynamics that make domination possible in order to instrumentalise emancipation, as opposed to a descriptive sociology whose role is to describe the world as it is without trying to interfere in it. Critical sociology’s endeavour to interfere and change reality can be related to the aims of the alternativist paradigm in media and communication studies that emerged in Latin America in the 1980s (see Introduction).

Concepts such as conscientisation, world-reading, and domination help us analyse and understand the formative process that is enacted through media within the MST. The education of militants is aimed at promoting radical change and transformation through the conscientisation and subjectification of rural workers. This process entails much more than unmasking exploitation, which subjects may already be aware of and willing to accept, but unmasking domination and its causes, which requires continued and consistent work. This cannot be achieved without a degree of unity, continuity, and cohesion and the development of a collectively shared comprehension of reality, or world-reading. The process of conscientisation can be connected to culturalist explanations of social movement formation because, in addition to class consciousness, it constructs and fosters a collective identity based on cultural elements that fall beyond classical labour-capital conflict. As an analytical tool, conscientisation grasps both the individual and the collective dimensions of mobilisation, as well as its material aspects, rendering it more useful than concepts like imagined communities, which focus on symbolic shared constructions of a we-ness; and than certain readings of citizenship that focus on the individual enterprise of becoming a citizen - and bearer of rights - of a national state.

The achievement of a relative level of consensus around shared values is crucial to facilitating the mobilisation of the members of a social movement of the scope of the MST. With a membership of nearly 1.5 million people spread around a geographic area of more than 8 million square kilometres, most of them in rural areas with scarce access to
transport and communications, the movement needs to develop a sense of community that does not rely solely on geographic proximity. In other words, it needs to be more than a place-based community, despite being a place-based community as well. In addition, political action requires the construction of political subjects and of an interest-based community through legitimation processes. How is it possible to analyse conscientisation and construction of a shared world-reading as social processes taking place within a specific group? The theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism can, in this case, be used in order to explain the mechanisms through which this symbolic cohesion is achieved at the same time that a critical consciousness is developed. There is, however, a shortcoming that must be acknowledged. Symbolic interactionism is an apolitical theory in the sense that it grounds its premises on the internal necessity of social systems to establish a functioning order and not on historical processes of class conflict or other group or interest-based conflicts. As a consequence, symbolic interactionism does not offer any analytical tools with which to approach the political action of social movements. Boltanski (2011), for instance, considers phenomenological sociology (in which symbolic interactionism is rooted) a kind of descriptive sociology because it does not aim to unveil underlying power relations in order to disrupt them. On the contrary, this sociological tradition is concerned with reality and society as lived and understood by individuals. Boltanski admits, however, that despite its shortcomings, descriptive sociologies can provide useful analytical tools for dealing with material reality as experienced by individuals (the phenomenological dimension of reality).

Studies of social movements aligned with the social interactionist framework utilise the notion of frames (della Porta & Diani, 1996) and the method of frame analysis, which is a way to explain the process through which individuals’ interpretive schemata are translated into collective frames through the work of social movement organisations (Chesters & Welsh, 2010). Many authors have used frame analysis as a theoretical framework to address the formation and action of social movements such as the environmental movement, ethnic movements, and extreme political party formations in Europe and North America (Gerhards & Rucht, 1992; Mooney & Hunt, 1996; Ryan, 1991; and Fuks,
1998, to name a few). Frame analysis begins with the presupposition that activists and militants are already subjects of action before they mobilise (compare with the concept of subactivism in Bakardjieva, 2009, which is used to describe everyday activities that have an activist ethos without an activist rationale). Given the particular case that this study is concerned with and the nature of the research question (R.Q. 1), which is aimed at analysing the significance of communicative processes in achieving symbolic cohesion, frame analysis does not provide the most appropriate analytical tools. It cannot fully grasp the process of subjectification and development of critical consciousness because frame analysis ignores the processual character of social constructions.

World-reading and conscientisation are politically charged terms (or, using Boltanski’s terminology, belong to a critical sociology) that can for the purpose of this study replace the concept of framing. They can be related to the epistemological standpoints of symbolical interactionism in the study of a collective such as the MST. Both typologies deal with systems of meaning – creation and adaptation thereof to a given reality, as well as the use of systems of meaning to justify action (Turner & Killian, 1987, cited by della Porta and Diani, 1999, p. 6). It is important to note that, when it comes to social movements, the value systems that are constructed are usually opposed to, or conflict with, another value system. Thus, as a counter-hegemonic formation, the MST has constructed its system of values based upon the development of critical awareness and subjectification of rural workers and their opposition to agribusiness, big landowners, and certain politicians.32 Thus, the construction of the ‘other’ is an important symbolic aspect within the movement. Others in relation to the MST can be politicians, landowners, and corporations; accordingly, there will be narratives about their nature and accepted modes of interaction with them.

The combination of concepts from Freire’s work with a symbolic interactionist epistemological point of view also addresses a common critique of the latter, namely that it pays no attention to ‘structural origins of collective behaviour’ (della Porta & Diani 1999, p. 6). It is

32 In Brazil, there are political parties closely connected to agribusiness, and some deputies and senators own large extensions of land and have interests in agriculture-related industries.
undeniable that collective action has a symbolic dimension insofar as mobilisation requires (in addition to resources and political opportunities) that mobilised subjects believe in common objectives and share certain worldviews. In this sense, della Porta & Diani observe that the contemporary school of collective behaviour, rooted in symbolic interactionism, particularly influenced by Blumer’s work, is more attentive to the importance of social structures as experienced by social actors and sees social movements as agents of change to the extent that social movements ‘represent attempts to transform existing norms’ (della Porta & Diani, 1996, p. 6). This is an acknowledgement that the symbolic level exists in parallel to an objective social reality and that these two levels of experience are mutually influential. For Freire (1967/1982), the objective social reality that does not exist by itself but as a product of human action cannot be transformed by itself. If people are the producers of this reality, he continues, then the transformation of the oppressive reality is the historical task of oppressed people. In order for oppressed subjects to be in a position to change the conditions (reality) in which they find themselves, Freire argues, it is necessary that they become aware of these conditions and become a subject in the process of change.

In this study, symbolic interactionism functions as a theoretical entry point to the analysis of the relations and interactions at the micro-level, or the actions of individual movement members when relating to media in different forms in order to participate in and form a collective. The aim here is to gain an understanding of shared rationales and explanations of how militants learn to relate to media from the perspective of their role as a movement militant and to ‘objectify’ (Berger & Luckman, 1967) the meanings of mediated communication. I set out from the assumption that developing critical awareness, collective identity formation, and political action are different facets of an all-encompassing legitimation process in which individuals interact with media as artefacts, platforms for communication, and, not least, as institutions. Beyond this material dimension, legitimation is also a communicative process because explanations, rationales, and meanings are constructed, or objectified, through communicative interaction. Berger & Luckman (1967, p. 93) explain that legitimation is necessary when objectifications that were accepted as facts in the first phase of
institutionalisation (when a group is formed) must be transmitted to a supposed second generation, or new members. In the case of the MST, explanations and justifications need to be passed forward to new members and even to a second generation. Indeed, since children are born in settlements, they need to be educated about the modus operandi of the movement. There are a number of MST schools, and children are encouraged to take part in the Movimento Sem-terrinha (the Little-landless Movement) and engage in a series of activities that have the purpose of ‘explaining the institutional order by ascribing cognitive validity to its meanings’ (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 93).

Berger & Luckman (1967, pp. 94-5) draw an analytical distinction between four levels of legitimation, which have different degrees of complexity and theorisation. The first two levels - incipient legitimation and rudimentary theorisation - are characterised by low-complexity explanatory schemes and simple associations. In this study, I am interested in the third and fourth levels of legitimation. The third level ‘contains explicit theories by which an institutional sector is legitimised in terms of a differentiated body of knowledge’ (1967, p. 94). It is at this level that mediated communication has a significant function, especially because this level requires the highest degree of specialisation for its transmission. The fourth level, which the authors call symbolic universes, is comprised of bodies of theories that ‘encompass the institutional order in a symbolic totality’ (1967, p. 95). The defining characteristic of symbolic universes is that they extrapolate everyday experience and ‘transcend the sphere of pragmatic application’, having a totalising nature that both entails and transcends experience. Here it is possible to situate the rationales and ideas about land ownership and use, as well as the narratives about the role, trajectory, and destiny of the MST in the realisation of the ideals they defend. Thus, slogans such as ‘Occupation is the only solution’ and ‘Occupy. Resist. Produce.’ can be seen as objectivations of a higher-level theory that not only legitimates occupation as a valid way of obtaining land but also ascribes certain meanings to the ownership of land. Death can also be objectified into an integral part of narratives and rituals. Accordingly, the death of 19 militants in a massacre has become a shared historical moment, being incorporated into the practices of the movement in the form of an

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33 The authors acknowledge that, empirically, these levels might overlap.
annual event that takes place in April as a tribute to the memory of those militants and an opportunity for members to reconfirm their loyalty to the movement.

As with any system of symbols, symbolic universes rely on conduits and transmitters (among other factors) in order to be shared and circulated among all members in a group. Because of material conditions such as the size of its membership and spatial organisation, the MST needs media to aid the totalising functions of a symbolic universe and not least to operationalise mechanisms of universe maintenance (Berger & Luckman 1967, p. 105). Media will thus offer the material structure for circulation of symbols and narratives. Such processes of circulation and sharing are what I call media practices and will be performed according to rationales, responding to the affordances of the medium. These practices are structured socially – which means that they are influenced by external factors such as social, political, and material conditions - but they are also structuring, in the sense that they may give rise to new forms of sociability and social relations. The next section will discuss how the material level of communication, composed of media practices, will be addressed in the study.

*Media practices and communicative processes in social movements*

Symbolic interactionist concepts combined with the political dimension offered by Freirean ideas of conscientisation and subjectification form the theoretical apparatus to explain the symbolic dimension of mobilisation and action. But mobilisation and action are also anchored in the material dimension of practice. It is through practices that the symbolic dimension of mobilisation and action gains the realm of socially embodied experience. Because a social movement is a collective with its own rules, routines, and dynamics, practices are often constitutive elements of overarching processes. Communicative processes are explored in this study as performed by individuals in order to join and actively participate in a collective and as a framework supporting the emergence of a group that seeks to challenge hegemonic formations. At first, these two levels of action and subsequent analysis
seem dislocated from each other and incapable of being combined analytically. However, when we acknowledge that, in the material and practical dimensions, communicative processes that support conscientisation, subjectification, mobilisation, and challenge hegemonic formations are enacted through media practices, the link between the levels of analysis becomes more apparent. The analysis of media practices, informed by theories that connect media use to political and social change, will unveil the material dimension in different strategies of political participation.

Different approaches within media and communication studies recognise the social role of media as both technologies and institutions. As technologies or artefacts, media enable, facilitate, complicate, and modify communication, thus playing a role in social interaction. As institutions, media structure and organise myriad relations in several dimensions of human life. Hence, a great extent of human experience can be said to be mediated experience and not direct experience. In this sense, media are ontologically understood from the perspective of human thought, experience, and action. It is human beings as individuals or collectives that organise, structure, and determine the existence of media as institutions or artefacts. Conversely, the affordances of the medium will play a role in how it will be used and for what purposes, not dictating but guiding aesthetical and functional decisions. When a social movement uses media, this usage will be guided by assumptions and ideas about what media are, what kind of interactions are accepted, and in which ways these interactions should take place. Or, as Martín-Barbero (1987/2003, p. 154) suggests, the technical materiality of media will be mutated into socially communicative potentiality. Moving away from a technological determinist perspective, Martín-Barbero (ibid.) argues that technologies materialise exchanges that are situated in social life, as already discussed in the previous section. Media thus have an important role in the social process of mediation, as they are situated in between individuals, groups, and institutions in communicative processes. Hepp (2011, p. 10) has a similar understanding of the interplay between media and culture when he argues that media culture is not just ‘the culture represented in the media’, but ‘a much more complex enterprise, since our entire construction of reality is increasingly
effected through communication which, at least in part is conveyed through media” (italics in the original). What these authors emphasise is the centrality of communication, which exceeds the materiality of media, in social life.

Lately, the development and emergence of new communication technologies, together with processes of globalisation, deregulation, and increased concentration of ownership of media have led to the intensification of communication flows within and across national borders and to a growing incidence of media in various sectors of societies. This phenomenon has been analysed within the field of media and communication in attempts to develop new theories, typologies, and analytical tools with which to address recent developments and how they are individually experienced. In this sense, some argue that media went from being institutions distinct from other fields to permeating all sectors of society (Kellner, 1995; Appadurai, 2005; Silverstone, 2007; and Hjarvard, 2008). While Kellner sees media as an ever-expanding cultural form, advancing an argument that culture already is or is becoming mediated, Hjarvard takes a structuralist standpoint, seeing media as a meta-system that permeates other institutions in society. Silverstone (2007) calls this new structural environment the medapolis and Appadurai (2005) calls ‘the distribution of economic capabilities to produce and disseminate information’ the mediascape (2005, p. 90). Appadurai and Hjarvard attribute a stronger role to electronic communications as the material environment through which social processes take place, whereas Kellner and Silverstone highlight societal processes that have an organic relation to material artefacts.

These authors may differ in the importance they attribute to the materiality of media within contemporary societal processes that they describe but they indicate that clear patterns of social change have taken place during recent decades, modifying the way societies and individuals relate to media. One of the aspects of this new social condition (Hjarvard, 2008) is the blurring of boundaries between production and consumption of media content that is now shared, modified, appropriated, and adapted by audiences with very little or no possibilities of control on the part of the original creator. Kellner (1995,
p. 162) problematises such processes and draws attention to sometimes ignored power relations embedded in the phenomenon of prosumption. If, on the one hand, marginal groups can become producers of meaning instead of mere providers of information to media institutions, they are subject to politics of visibility that they cannot control, on the other.

This tension between media and people over control and power is not new; however, it gains new contours whenever new technologies emerge. Over thirty years ago, in 1980, Williams argued that the public had very little power over media. Choice and control, according to Williams, were limited to ‘a set with a tuner and a switch: we can turn it on or off, or vary what we are receiving’ (1980, p. 135). As a result of technological, political, and social changes, today’s media landscape (particularly in developed industrialised countries) differs drastically from that which was described by Williams in 1980. Contemporary media are seen more as an environment than as separate artefacts. Therefore, some will argue, we can no longer turn media on and off, as suggested by Williams, because we are permanently immersed in this media environment. Krotz (2007) suggests that the most appropriate way to explain these long-term changes is by analysing them as developments that are non-linear and encompass different dimensions of reality. According to Krotz, mediatisation is a meta-process. For him, meta-processes are not abstract constructs. On the contrary, they are embodied in reality and are ‘important for people, their actions and their sense-making processes at micro level; for the activities of institutions and organizations on the meso level; and for the nature of culture and society at a macro level’ (2007, p. 257). In this sense, as a conceptual framework, mediatisation frames the interrelations between people, social systems, and media in a way that other conceptual frames, namely globalisation and neo-liberalisation, could not grasp. Calling attention to the non-linear character of mediatisation, Krotz (2007, p. 258) points out that new media do not substitute old media, but, instead, make media environments more complex and differentiated, forming ‘dense networks of mediated communication’ (2007, p. 269) in which people live.

Explaining the emergence of ‘mediatisation’ as a concept, Couldry (2009, p. 153) claims that, in the first years of the 21st century,
communication is at the centre of cultural and social life and suggests that communication is leaving an engineering paradigm and becoming connected to the concept of interfaces. The paradigm shift lead to a crisis of the object of communication studies, which could no longer be the medium, and contributed to the emergence of the mediatisation concept. If media are a constitutive element of the environment in which we live, a great deal of embodied practice will be media practice(s). Thus, media have extrapolated the in-between (sender and receiver) position (Couldry, 2011). This new condition would mean the conflation of media and mediation, which for Martin-Barbero are two separate categories, as he explained in 1987 (p. 258):

Impregnated both by trans-nationalisation processes and by the emergence of new social subjects and cultural identities, communication is converting itself into a strategic space from which it is possible to imagine the blockages and contradictions that make up the dynamics of these crossroads-societies, halfway between an accelerated underdevelopment and a compulsive modernisation. Thus, the axis of the debate must be dislocated from the media to the mediations, that is, to the articulations between communication practices and social movements, to the different temporalities, and to the plurality of cultural matrices.34

Referring to a situated reality, which Latin America is in the final decades of the 20th century, Martín-Barbero suggests that in order to understand social change in what he calls ‘crossroads-societies’, we must look to communication, or the process he calls mediation. Martín-Barbero understands mediation as a process of communication between cultures, in which the materiality of media plays a secondary role. Both Couldry and Martín-Barbero criticise media-centric approaches to the study of communication. However, while Couldry understands that the materiality of media is an integral part of communication, Martín-Barbero emphasises the cultural exchanges that are the essence of mediations and sees the ‘technicality of media’ as externalities to the process of cultural mediation.

Even if this study is concerned with processes and practices enacted by a collective in their internal and external relations and does not address mediatisation processes directly - I do not intend to analyse how a social movement becomes mediatised or the impact of mediatisation on a social movement - it is necessary to place these relations in a wider

34 Translated from Portuguese by the author.
theoretical and analytical perspective. This study is thus located in a scenario well described by Hepp (2011:29) in which there is an ‘increasing omnipresence of media of communications’, where ‘media are constitutive of reality’, and where there is an ‘increasing reliance of communication on particular technologies’. With the meta-process of mediatisiation as a background against which to discuss communicative processes, it is possible to move beyond questions of media effects, and include intention, a move that allows the analysis of a whole process instead of separate moments. As Williams (1980, p. 122) suggests, the formula established by Lasswell according to which communication studies ask questions concerning ‘who says what, to whom, with what effect’ should be rephrased as ‘who says what, how, to whom, which what effect and for what purpose?” (emphasis added). Albeit not explicitly, Williams implies that there are underlying motives to communication that are not necessarily rational. This epistemological step brings with it the understanding that acts of communication extrapolate the time-space limits within which they occur.

Thus far, much of the literature on mediatisation has addressed it as meta-process of social change through which media become embedded in a range of social relations, from the alteration of oral cultures by writing (Hepp, 2011), to media imposing their logic on other sectors of society (Strömbäck & Esser, 2009; Hjarvard, 2013). Another strain of literature has a more phenomenological nature and addresses how the omnipresence of media affects the individual and alters experiences of being in the world (Hjarvard, 2013, Chapter 6; Jansson, 2009, for instance). In this strain, we can also include Madianou & Miller’s (2012) study on communication between transnational families in the Philippines and in Trinidad, which led to the development of a theory of polymedia. In the view of the authors, polymedia is an environment that ‘becomes inextricably linked to the ways in which interpersonal relationships are experienced and managed’ (ibid., p. 169). Their theoretical development relates to Tacchi’s (2006) concept of communicative ecologies, as both concepts take an ‘environmental’ approach to communication in which technologies are embedded in social and interpersonal relations. Even though this theoretical approach is now well developed, studies that analyse how mediatisation
is experienced at a collective level are still a few,\textsuperscript{35} as are studies coming from non-European perspectives.\textsuperscript{36}

While acknowledging the meta-process of mediatisation and the changes it encompasses, it is important to maintain a balanced posture towards technological developments and their social outcomes. After a first period of celebration of new technologies’ democratic potential, and an overinflated belief in their role in social change (Negroponte, 1996 is an iconic example), recent analyses have, with the benefit of hindsight, offered a more complex understanding of media’s role in democratisation processes (McChesney, 2013; Curran et al., 2012). In this sense, Mosco (2005) calls attention to the myths that are constructed in connection with the emergence of new technologies. He argues that, ‘it is when technologies such as the telephone and the computer cease to be sublime icons of mythology and enter the prosaic world of banality – when they lose their role as sources of utopian visions – that they become important fora for social and economic change’ (2005, p. 6). From a phenomenological perspective, we could say that when media become a constitutive aspect of being in the world – as opposed to a mystified technology – their importance for social change will increase.

Mosco further suggests that myths constructed around new information technology at the end of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century included the ‘refashioning of politics’ in a way that communication became the basis of politics, taking away the power from ‘the public as an entity’ and giving it to ‘a collection of discrete individuals who are serviced’ (2005, pp. 111-112). Dean (2012) has further developed a critique of the idea of democracy through communication. She argues that the focus has shifted from the content of political struggles to the form of communication, constituting a phenomenon she calls communicative capitalism. Mosco follows the same path, although not as radically, and claims that the myths depoliticise communication because they maintain that, ‘[w]ith the help of information technology, capitalism is presumed to have the power to end all injustice and create a world where all are equally free to pursue

\textsuperscript{35} An exception is Mattoni and Treré’s (2014) analysis of how mediatisation can be incorporated into the study of social movements.

\textsuperscript{36} An exception is Jack Linchuan Qiu’s study of network building among the working classes and the ‘ICT have-less’ in China, published in 2009.
life as entrepreneurs’ (2005, p. 105).

Alongside Mosco, Williams (1980) is very sceptical of technological determinist mythologies (although he never uses the word myth) and argues that ‘the ability to change theory and practice depends not on properties of the medium or the character of its institutions but on a continually renewable social action and struggle’ (p. 138). The mythical representation of technologies criticised by Mosco resonates with Williams’ critique of an ‘ideological representation of technology as a cause’ epitomised by Marshall McLuhan’s (1964/2005) idea that media are extensions of human beings and exert the power to fashion how messages will be formed.

Mythological accounts of the development of technology and its influence on society often ignore ongoing political struggle and consequently deny history. As Curran et al. (2012) discuss regarding the 2010-11 Arab uprisings, the tale of technology bringing about democracy usually overlooks historical and social aspects. In this myth of powerful and liberating technologies, ‘the Information Age transcends politics because it makes power available to everyone in great abundance’ (Mosco 2005, p. 54) in the form of access to information technologies and therefore to governing institutions. Alongside Mosco and Williams, Martín-Barbero noted as early as 1987 (1987/2003, pp. 198-200) how the discourse of technological development as a ‘continuous process of acceleration of modernity’ became dominant in Latin America.

Against this background, it is crucial to place communicative processes and media practices within a political landscape in which communication technologies are not tools that instrumentalise a kind of post-historical and post-political society but the ‘cultural forms’ (cf. Williams 1980) through which media practices are enacted precisely in order to set politics in motion. This view does not attribute any mythic powers to media, but it does put media at the centre of a range of practices and processes. Therefore, the resulting analysis will not be a sociological account of social movements as constitutive formations in sociopolitical processes but a media-centred analysis of communicative processes in social movements. Such an analysis is, to a great extent,
informed by Williams’ work concerning television as a cultural form. Already in the 1970s, he saw the possibilities for ‘a different kind of television production’ as a result of low-cost videotape recording. Williams also noted that the use of such equipment by communities for ‘radical cultural enterprises’ served ‘radically different interests from large-screen and cassette production’ (1980, p. 143). In agreement with Williams, Martín-Barbero (1987/2003, p. 201) points out that if it is not possible to redesign a technology, there is still the possibility of redesigning its function. The process through which individuals and groups redesign the functions of technology is crucial to the understanding of how social movements use and relate to media. In this study, I call this process appropriation.

With his pioneering work analysing television as a cultural form, Williams inaugurated a tradition that sees media as embedded in an array of social practices and not as causes or effects of determined phenomena. In Williams’ work, media are thus not seen as the causes of change at the individual or societal level, nor are they seen as texts or products; media are seen as structuring components of social life. Without denying the importance of research on media effects or on media texts, Williams (1980) argued that there are other aspects of people’s relation to media that should be addressed by research. With the development of media technologies (much of it in the way predicted by Williams in the 1970s), the materiality of media in everyday life became more prominent, directing the attention to mediated/mediatised practices and processes. Adding to the discussion about the importance of technology in media studies, Ipsen (2010, p. 172) observes that:

[i]f we follow the paradigm of media studies [...] whatever is a media process is necessarily a process guided by the delimitation of technology. Whatever is a media practice then is an activity defined by the opportunities provided by technology instead of mind.

Continuing his reasoning, he argues that there are two reasons to abandon this paradigm, the first being ‘that meaning is not being generated within or by technology’ and second that ‘[w]hatever a medium means should be defined by and within the process and practice of its usage’.
Couldry (2010) has also called for a shift in the object of media studies from media texts and audiences to media practices. This shift, he argues, does not exclude previous inquiries about texts and audiences but places them within social settings in which practices are enacted. Couldry suggests that the guiding question in media studies should be, ‘What, quite simply, are people doing in relation to media across a whole range of situations and contexts?’ (p. 39). The new paradigm proposed by the Couldry that ‘treats media as the open set of practices relating to, or orienting around, media’ (2010, p. 32) shares the guiding principles with Williams’ critique of effects studies that see media as social facts. As opposed to Couldry, who suggests that media studies should focus on ‘the study of the open-ended range of practices focused directly or indirectly on media’ (2010, p. 37), Williams gives a great deal of importance to intention, which, according to him, directs the attention to interests and agencies. By accounting for intention when studying media practices and processes, we bring the political to the fore. This move enables analysis of the ways in which collective identities are constructed and struggles are played out in a media environment. With consideration to intention, I propose an analysis that aims to identify the frictions, tensions, and conflicts caused by the incidence of media, especially when it comes to unequal societies. This analysis departs from the presupposition that members of a social movement like the MST interact with media from their social perspective as militants in a subaltern social movement.

The communicative processes enacted within the movement are, to a certain extent, a response to the actions of institutionalised media. In this sense, media are also a resource (Hernes, 1978) for which anyone with a message must compete, in the way described by Wolfsfeld (2005) when he analyses the actions of antagonists seeking the attention of the media. Media are a resource insofar as they constitute the arenas or platforms where different framings of reality compete and are confronted. In the particular case analysed in this study, media are used to construct different and conflicting views about the MST, about land reform, and about environmental issues in Brazil.

For social movements and civil society organisations, a focus on media practices means that media are not only institutions to which they relate
but that their actions and activities are increasingly unfolded in a media landscape in which communicative processes take place. The diversification of available media outlets through which a message can be conveyed may be seen as an opportunity but it may also exert a pressure to communicate and to adapt to a new media configuration. Media also amplify communicative processes and modify the organisation of time and place. This is not a new phenomenon, nor is it a phenomenon that is chiefly contemporary; instead, it is constantly renewed by the emergence and use of new technologies. Against this background, the study aims to explore the constraints and possibilities represented by different media for an organisation that sees communication in general, and mediated communication in particular, as instruments to be interacted with throughout the historical process of class struggle. In this sense, the study dialogues with a socially oriented media theory, defined by Couldry (2012) as ‘concerned to deconstruct the tremendous forces the interpret media products and systems as “natural”’ (emphasis in the original).

In face of the increased pervasiveness and ubiquity of media, Couldry (2012) invites us to return to Boltanski’s critical sociology and envisage ethical and just ways to live with media. Couldry’s epistemological standpoint is admittedly normative when he asks questions about how we should live with media and what role media should play in the organisation of our collective life. He defends the normative standpoint with the argument that ‘media affect how we are “simultaneously present” to each other’, thus making normative thought on life with media necessary. Drawing from Couldry’s proposition, it is possible to ask the following questions: In a society where media is everywhere and there is pressure to communicate, what happens to those who don’t have access? Moreover: What are the implications of unequal access to media’s symbolic resources (Couldry, 2012)? These are crucial questions that bring to the surface perspectives and ways of being outside the Euro-American context. In a period when a large number of analyses are looking into the experience of the abundance of access and of information, we must acknowledge and discuss experiences and realities that are sometimes made invisible because they contradict these dominant narratives.
This means to critically assess the distributive character of media practices. Just as banks and finance institutions organise the economy, allocating and distributing resources, media institutions organise a symbolic exchange by exerting a strong power on the mechanisms through which symbolic value is distributed. Such distributive power is clear in Wolfsfeld’s (2005) definition of *challengers*, those groups or people who do not have free access to the privileged place provided by media exposure and that therefore have to comply with the rules of media institutions in order to gain visibility. For interest groups, this may mean that they have to appeal to visually impacting strategies and attention-grabbing ways of protesting. Indeed, as Gitlin (1980, p. 287) argues, knowledge about media routines and frameworks does not guarantee that a movement will achieve visibility in its own terms but ignorance of these values and frameworks can ‘condemn a social movement to marginality’. Social movements and interest groups have also sought to produce their own media and create outlets to which they would have easier access at their own prerogatives. In this sense, the principle of self-representation through communicative practices precedes the materiality of media (a case of the separation between medium and mediation, as Martín-Barbero would argue). At the same time, historical conditions that go beyond, but still include, technological development set the framework within which communicative processes take place.

Media practices become thus intertwined with the conflicts and tensions surrounding the construction of meaning. Battles that were fought before within other arenas (justice and education systems, for instance) are now mediatised. It follows that different worldviews are constructed through media, and the incidence of media imposes new constraints on, and possibilities for, the ways in which such struggles are played out. The concepts of process and practice are important in the study due to the multidimensional character of the MST’s media production, which merges the categories of internal and external communication, participation as result, and participation as process.37

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37 In the study of communication interventions, there are different views of participation that will guide the implementation and analysis of projects. Political and citizen participation can be seen as the end result of initiatives that use media as instruments to enable participation. In a different understanding, participation is seen as a dialogical and dialectical process, and also as a process in which active production of messages and self-representation constitute an open-ended kind of participation.
Media practices are therefore enacted both as a way to construct symbolic universes and achieve symbolic cohesion and in order to challenge hegemonic dominance and ensure the participation of the MST as a collective in the public sphere.

Counter-hegemonic communicative action and participation

Since the questions concerning the symbolic and material dimensions of communicative processes have been addressed, I now turn to the political dimension of the study. Beyond their symbolic and material dimensions, communicative processes enacted by social movements usually unfold with the aim of challenging existing hegemonic groups and promoting the participation of movement members as a collective (rural workers) in the political processes that characterise democratic societies. This could, at first sight, be seen as a struggle for power, particularly within a framework delimited by a Eurocentric understanding of power as the end to which a self-interested individual’s actions are the means. This understanding is epitomised in Weber’s (in Giddens & Held, 1982, Chapter 3) view of distribution of power in society through the axes of class relationship, status groups, and political parties. In Weber’s theorisation, group solidarities are rooted in rational calculations that have power as a goal and end in itself. Freire (1967/1982) has a different reading of power relations, as he sees power as the weapon of the oppressor. Consequently, the final objective of the oppressed cannot be to gain power, because, in doing so, he argues, the oppressed would not become liberated, but would turn themselves into oppressors instead.

Contrary to the instrumental nature of Weber’s view, for Mouffe (1999, p. 753), power is a constitutive aspect of politics. She explains that:

There is no unbridgeable gap between power and legitimacy – not obviously in the sense that all power is automatically legitimate, but in the sense that: a) if any power has been able to impose itself, it is because it has been recognised as legitimate in some quarters; and b) if legitimacy is not base in an a prioristic ground, it is because it is based in some form of successful power. This link between legitimacy and power is precisely what the deliberative model is unable to recognise, since it has to posit the
For Mouffe, the fact that the deliberative model of politics replaces power with rationality as the basis of political deliberation undermines democratic and pluralistic debate. In her view (1999, p. 752), deliberative democracy:

by postulating the availability of a public sphere where power and antagonism would have been eliminated and where a rational consensus would have been realised, this model of democratic politics denies the central role in politics of the conflictual dimension and its crucial role in the formation of collective identities.

In her model of democratic conflict, she differentiates between enemies and adversaries, who are ‘legitimate enemies with whom we have in common a shared adhesion to the ethico-political principles of democracy’ (1999, p. 755). The confrontation between adversaries is what Mouffe calls an agonistic debate, ‘a requisite for a vibrant democratic society’ (2005, p. 225), and may lead to conflictual consensus, which is ‘the kind of consensus needed in a pluralist democracy’ (ibid., pp. 227-228). Here, my contention is that there are certain differences and antagonisms between groups that cannot be considered an abstract ideological conflict, particularly when one group subsists and thrives at the expense of another group’s exploitation. Such is the case of rural conflicts in Brazil, where the relationship between large landowners and agribusiness corporations, on the one hand, and rural workers and native communities, on the other, cannot be called anything other than antagonism.38 The conflicting relations between these groups extrapolate the field of ideas, and consist on concrete and measurable violence as well as disrespect for human dignity. According to a report published by the Pastoral Lands Commission (CPT) in 2013, ‘there is a merciless dispute for territories between the capital and native communities’. The CPT further argues, in its report, that the ‘capital continues to plunder territories that belong to native communities in an unequal dispute’.

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38 The Pastoral Lands Commission (CPT) documents violence in rural areas in Brazil since the 1970s. The organisation reported in 2012 a growth of 24 per cent in the number of assassinations, 51 per cent, in the number of attempted murders and 11.2 per cent in the number of rural workers arrested, from the previous year. CPT, Caderno Conflitos – Conflitos no Campo no Brasil 2012. The CPT also claims that the growth of neocolonialist exploitation is one of the main causes of violence against rural workers and traditional communities in rural areas.
Even though Mouffe’s ideas of a multipolar world with multiple ‘regional hegemonic poles’ and the view of the world as a pluriverse, as opposed to a universe (shared by Escobar, 2012) offer an adequate normative framework to understand political conflicts in the developing world, her conceptualisations work less well as analytical tools. Mouffe’s notion of adversaries who ‘have [a] different interpretation of shared principles and fight for their interpretation to become hegemonic’ (2005, p. 228) does not describe the specific nature of certain struggles for justice and recognition. To an extent, they consist of a post-modern denial of the empirical reality experienced daily by those who are forced to live on the edge of human existence. Considering such understandings of power and the nature of the research problems that I am dealing with in this study, I argue that representation (cf. Fraser, 2009) is a more adequate analytical tool with which to address the political dimension of communicative processes.

Defining representation as the extent to which all those affected by a determined phenomenon are represented in both symbolical and political terms, Fraser includes the notion of justice, which is not present in the concept of power. This analytical move does not eliminate the need for a conflictual consensus but shifts the root of conflict from power to justice. This does not mean that a struggle for justice does not include power disputes but that justice encapsulates the distributive character of the conflict more fairly than power. In order for this conflict to take place, there needs to be an arena where antagonistic positions can meet and engage in conflict. This is exactly why the normative idea of a media landscape that is representative of the diversity in the national public sphere is so crucial here.

In order to analyse the political dimension of communicative processes, it is necessary to acknowledge at the outset the position occupied by rural workers in the sociopolitical settings where they act. The first step is to highlight how dominant hegemonic thought and discourse in transnational arenas are translated into practice and normalised within the sociopolitical context in Brazil. In an article published in Le Monde Diplomatique in 1995 and widely reproduced worldwide, communication theorist Ignácio Ramonet explained the doctrine he
called _la pensée unique_.\textsuperscript{39} According to Ramonet, _la pensée unique_ is ‘the translation, in ideological terms of a universal pretention from the interests of a conjunction of forces, particularly those of international capitalism’.\textsuperscript{40} Early in the text, he establishes the role of mass communication, in a media society, as resonance boxes of that doctrine and explains how culture industries normalise the idea of life as a consumerist enterprise.

The relevance of Ramonet’s idea lies not in his description of end-of-the-century imperialist globalisation or in his critique of technologically enabled surveillance. Nor does it lie in his – far from original – critique of culture industries. What remains of his now canonical essay is the idea that there exists a universalising doctrine from which there is little escape and that, in this doctrine, the market is the sole force able to organise and systematising human experience. Ramonet has also suggested that increasing rationalisation backed by technology invades the terrain of politics and redresses political conflicts as market anomalies. Drawing on Ramonet’s conceptualisation of imperialist market globalisation, geographer Milton Santos (2000) suggests that transnational corporate projects subsume national projects diminishing national ideas of self-determination in detriment to pragmatic and immediate private objectives, thus producing imbalance, structural distortions, and inequality. He was nevertheless hopeful that urbanisation and access to information would revive collective ideals, but he stressed the need for conscientisation and critical thought in order to see past the totalising discourse of neoliberal dogmas.

The kind of technicist discourse rejected by Ramonet and later discussed by Santos has been present in rural development initiatives since the 1960s, when the first projects aimed at agricultural extension started to be financed by international agencies. Escobar (2012) points out that the discourse of institutions such as the World Bank aims to ‘transform the conditions in which they [individuals] live into a productive, normalised social environment: in short, to create modernity’. He then calls attention to the representation of peasants as

\textsuperscript{39} This could be loosely translated into English as ‘the only thought’. In French, the phrase indicates the universalising dominance of the market over other sectors that characterises neoliberal thought.

\textsuperscript{40} Translated from Portuguese version of the article by the author.
economic subjects by international agencies. In development rhetoric, backward peasants ‘would behave like good and decent capitalist farmers if they were provided the conditions for doing so’ (Escobar, 2012). When rural development programmes did not work as planned, Escobar continues, this was credited to ‘the peasant’s inability to respond adequately to the program’s inputs’.

Escobar locates rural development programmes of the 1960s within the conceptual framework of the Green Revolution. The Green Revolution can be seen as the application of the neoliberal dogmas identified by Ramonet to agricultural and rural development. As a doctrine, the Green Revolution has the same dogmatic characteristics as the pensée unique, or neo-liberalism. As Escobar puts it:

> It is […] about disallowing anything that is outside the market economy, especially the activities of subsistence and local reciprocity and exchange, so many times crucial to peasants, women, and indigenous people; it is, finally about a definition of progress that is taken as universally valid, not as marked by culture and history.

Neo-liberalism, as Harvey (2005, p. 7) explains, is a political-economical theory based on ‘the assumption that individual freedoms are guaranteed by freedom of the market and of trade’. Accordingly, the role of a neoliberal state will be to ‘facilitate the conditions for capital accumulation’. During the 1960s and 1970s, Latin American countries were used as laboratories for neoliberal policies aided by military governments. As Uruguayan writer and journalist Eduardo Galeano puts it, ‘Milton Friedman’s theories gave him the Nobel Prize; they gave Chile General Pinochet’. By curbing and swiftly forbidding social mobilisation and the articulation of popular demands through social movements, the military governments created the ideal situation for market-friendly policies.

Whereas neo-liberalisation was accomplished by means of military coups in Latin American countries, other countries like the United States and Great Britain succeeded in pushing neo-liberal policies through democratic means (Harvey 2005, p. 39). Harvey argues that in northern countries, neo-liberalisation was accomplished through the

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41 For a detailed account, see Klein (2007), for Harvey (2005, p. 7), after the coup on 11 September 1973, Chile became the ‘first experiment with neoliberal state formation’.
construction of consent. He invokes Gramsci to explain how common sense (‘the sense held in common’) is ‘constructed out of long standing practices of cultural socialization often rooted deep in regional and national traditions’ (2005, p. 49).

The dogmatic character of neoliberal thought, highlighted by Ramonet, its intersections with technology, shown by Santos, and its application to rural development, explained by Escobar, provide the epistemological and empirical framework in which rural workers organisations find themselves. The MST is a collective subject that emerges from this scenario, organising and negotiating rural workers’ claims. Such claims can be understood through Fraser’s (2008) typology of redistribution, recognition, and representation with which she addresses ontological aspects of justice in a globalised world. This normative view of justice can be connected to Couldry’s (2012) guidelines for analysing media in contemporary societies. A more developed discussion of the intersections between Fraser’s global justice typology and Couldry’s media ethics will be provided in Chapters 9 and 10. For now, it is important to note that rural workers are not only demanding redistribution of resources (economic and material) or recognition of their specific group demands, which differ from those of urban workers, they are also demanding to be politically and symbolically represented as a group, and to have their interests taken into account by those in charge of running the political system.

Such claims and disputes, Fraser argues, unfold during ‘abnormal justice’, which ‘correlates with periods of overt struggle for hegemony, in which counter-hegemonic formations achieve sufficient cohesion to problematise what had previously passed as common sense’ (2008, p. 74). Adopting Fraser’s definition, it is possible to say that rural workers in Brazil have, since the second half of the 20th century, been trying to organise an agenda of issues and ideas that challenge land ownership and hegemonic conceptions of development. It is crucial to stress here the importance (noted by Fraser) that a social movement achieves cohesion in order to challenge hegemonic powers. Although she does not specifically define what kind of cohesion is sought, it is reasonable to attribute a relevant role to symbolic cohesion, which means that
movement members recognise themselves individually as subjects belonging to a group advancing collective demands.

The position of the MST as a counter-hegemonic formation advancing a set of demands against the background of a transnational (or globalised) political scenario makes up the analytical framework within which communicative processes and media practices are analysed. As an organisation acting in the political realm, the MST’s ultimate objective is to change the structure of land ownership in Brazil, subverting the hegemonic capitalist model that submits work to capital. This objective is to be achieved by means of the mobilisation of rural workers not so much as a class in orthodox Marxist terms but as a collective united by a common identity that, in turn, is connected to the material conditions of their existence (access to land and resources in order to produce and subsist). In this context, communicative processes and media practices have an informative and formative character. They are deployed to raise awareness, unite and mobilise rural workers and promote dialogue with other sectors in society. Under such conditions, the concept of hegemony as a non-violent co-optation process through which the dominant classes maintain control over the working class provides an entry point to the understanding of the MST’s media practices.

Hegemony (Gramsci 1936/1971) can be seen as a dialectical process through which non-violent domination is constantly contested and negotiated. In Gramscian terms, hegemony is exerted by a dominant class that co-opts subaltern classes, neutralising opposition forces. Non-violent co-optation is constantly negotiated through a series of institutions that are controlled by the dominant classes, including the media. Here, it is important to note that Gramsci differentiates the dominant classes from the state. The state is the institutionalised power that is able to use violence as means to enforce rules. The dominant class, in turn, succeeds in subjugating subaltern classes through institutions such as the church, education system, or the media (the

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43 Here, I refer to the orthodox Marxist view of class as a collective defined by its access to material resources, i.e., capital. Although the MST’s struggle might, at the outset, appear as a classic conflict of labour versus capital (rural workers own their labour force but not the capital, which is the land they claim through agrarian reform), the movement’s actual activity also encompasses a well-developed symbolic dimension where the peasant (camponês) is constructed as a subject of demands.
newspaper, to which Gramsci refers). Anderson (1976, p. 26) observes in his analysis of Gramsci’s work that ‘hegemony pertains to civil society, and civil society prevails over the State’, the ruling class thus ascends culturally over the subaltern classes and ‘ensures the stability of the capitalist order’. He stresses that, in Gramsci’s usage, the term ‘hegemony’ ‘means the ideological subordination of the working class by the bourgeoisie, which enables it to rule by consent’.

Writing about European civil society in the first decades of the 20th century, Gramsci acknowledged the role of rural bourgeoisie in power formations on the continent. According to him (1936/1971, p. 213), the small rural bourgeoisie was the force against which the peasants struggled. He argued that, ‘any improvement in the relative position of the peasant would be catastrophic for its (the bourgeoisie) social position’. Because the peasants posed such a threat to the rural owners, according to Gramsci, the latter will go to great lengths to curb any kind of organisation outside the scope of official religion. Even if Gramsci’s analysis is very time- and place-based, we can still learn lessons from it and use his reasoning to enlighten an analysis of contemporary social movements in rural areas. Today, peasant organisations are still seen as a threat by large landowners, who, in turn, have a close relationship with local, regional, and sometimes national governments, forming a hegemonic elite that also dominates commercial media outlets.

Gramsci (1936/1971) observed the tendency to see the countryside as less progressive. In the urban centres of Italy, there was ‘hatred and scorn for the peasant, an implicit common front against the demands of the countryside – which, if realised, would make impossible the existence of this type of city’ (1936/1971, p. 91). Indeed, as Santos (2012, p. 50) observes, the critical theory produced in many European countries does not recognise associative or collective groups that are common in the global South (peasants, indigenous, and insurgent groups) as capable of being the protagonists of social change. However, such emancipatory practices that are located beyond the limits of the union or the party are at the forefront of contemporary movements that question and propose alternatives to capitalism and neo-liberal globalisation. Advanced post-industrialist societies have reached a development stage in which the demands of the city can make the
existence of the countryside impossible. Cultures and ways of living associated with rural areas are considered primitive and underdeveloped because they do not comply with the production and market logic of advanced capitalism. Demands for cheap food and fuel are the backbone of the expansion of agribusiness and consequent dismantling of rural communities. Moreover, rural labour is nowadays dissociated from the commodities it produces, putting a further constraint on the ideological battle of rural workers as a class.

There are nonetheless class formations within rural areas that have overcome geographical and technological hindrances and managed to unite and claim their political rights. Such formations differ from many urban highly connected social movements in the sense that they are strongly anchored on a collective identity. As Gramsci (1936/1971, p. 202) puts it:

> The ‘collective worker’ understands that this is what he is, not merely in each individual factory but in the broader spheres of the national and international division of labour. It is precisely in the organisms which represent the factory as a producer of real objects and not of profit that he gives an external, political demonstration of the consciousness he has acquired.

Although Gramsci was writing about the situation of factory workers in the first decades of the 20th century in Europe, the idea of an understanding of their class as producers of commodities that are vital for society can be applied to rural workers. Gramsci (1936/1971) is among those who have not ignored the existence of resistance outside factories and urban centres. He called attention to the mobilising forces among peasants and acknowledged the importance of organic intellectuals among peasant groups. In a similar vein, Freire (1967/1982 and 2001) also analysed and discussed the possibilities for resistance and action in order to overcome an oppressing situation. Freire does not devote the same attention as Gramsci to the overarching structures – even if he acknowledges them – in which the class struggle exists and unfolds. His foremost contribution is an understanding of oppression and overcoming it first as an individual enterprise that then extrapolates to collective action, emphasising the importance that those oppressed be active in articulating their resistance and fighting the root causes of oppression.

Within social movement studies in Brazil, gramscian thought and
terminologies became popular during the democratisation period at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s, when mobilised groups saw the need to contest the emerging neo-liberal ideology that permeated the state. At this time, many scholars were doing action research or advising different movements and groups inspired by Freire’s work on praxis and the necessary connection between theory and practice (Gohn, 2008). There was then a fruitful theoretical-analytical dialogue between gramscian and freirean ideas. Semeraro (2007) argues that the ideas of Gramsci and Freire are complementary: while Freire develops the idea of liberation from oppression and subject formation, Gramsci extrapolates these ideas to the social reality in which subjects organise against the hegemony of the dominant class. This process includes the recognition that the dominant classes are hegemonic because, apart from dominating the economic sphere, they also dominate other sectors, such as the media and the production of knowledge (Semeraro, 2007, p. 98). Although the word hegemony is absent from Freire’s work, the concept permeates his Pedagogy of the Oppressed. He argues that there is a ‘force of conscience immersion’ in an oppressive situation that compels the oppressed to accept the situation as a given, to believe that this is their place in a structure that cannot be changed. In order to overcome the oppressive situation, Freire suggests that the oppressed need to develop a critical consciousness that enables them to act in the world as subjects. Liberation through the development of a critical awareness (conscientisation) and counter-hegemonic action are in practice enacted through communicative processes that, as the MST’s communication policy spells out, are supposed to form and motivate workers as militants and to open spaces for dialogue with society. The idea of a counter-hegemonic field of activity thus has its basis in gramscian theorisation of hegemony. Gramsci argued (in line with Boltanski) that domination takes place also at the symbolic level, where dominant groups can create systems of justification. A hegemonic group can thus control both material and symbolic production, which leads to the acceptance of domination and the systems that enable it by those who are not part of hegemonic groups. As a result of this material and symbolic asymmetry, there are strata in society that not only do not possess the means for emancipation but also lack the symbolic repertoire to engage in an emancipatory project.
After this brief clarification of the meaning of hegemony in Gramsci’s work, it is possible to move on to one of the main concerns of this study, namely, the *counter-hegemonic*. As is well understood, hegemonic control and consent are not static; instead, they are always contentious and negotiated. Counter-hegemonic action can arise from the subaltern classes, who will try to use the same means as the bourgeoisie or dominant class to question the dominant ideology and beliefs. This is a symbolical struggle as much as a material one. As a system of beliefs, an ideology must be symbolically articulated and circulated so that it becomes a counter-hegemonic alternative. Articulation and circulation of an ideology can be seen as elements of the communicative process, and media constitute the arenas where this process materialises. Atton (2002) observes that alternative media – as opposed to the hegemonic media – offer ‘radical, anti-capitalist relations of production often coupled to projects of ideological disturbance and rupture’. Based on this, it is possible to infer that a social movement’s media production is alternative in two aspects: in the relations of production and in the resulting content, which is counter-hegemonic by nature. Atton (2004:9) has also proposed, inspired by Gramsci’s notion of hegemony, that alternative forms of media be examined ‘not as discrete fields of symbolic production, but as inhabiting a shared, negotiated field of relations’. In this sense, the development industry’s (see Escobar, 2012) view of agriculture and rural populations occupy a hegemonic position through a variety of strategies (presented in Chapter 2). These include communication campaigns, production of teaching support material,44 and alliances with politicians at the local, regional, and national levels. All these strategically located efforts make views that are aligned with agribusiness corporations the norm among rural workers, politicians, and policymakers.

A ‘hegemonic media analysis’, Atton argues (2004, p. 10), accounts for the relations between mainstream and alternative media cultures and practices and sees them as interrelated fields (inspired by Gramsci’s notion of hegemonic practice as ‘an unstable, non-unitary field of

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44 For instance, the transnational agribusiness company Monsanto launched, in December 2014, a world campaign to ‘promote dialogue with society’. The campaign includes a web portal in several languages to promote its products. See [http://www.monsanto.com/whoweare/pages/unitedstates.aspx](http://www.monsanto.com/whoweare/pages/unitedstates.aspx) (US website). The Brazilian Agribusiness Association created a school programme in which state schoolteachers receive support from the association to create different strategies that promote agribusiness (fairs, events, blogs, etc.) (Lamosa, 2012).
relations’). It is opposed to a binary media analysis that presents mainstream and alternative media as formations independent of each other (Atton, 2004). Considering both the heterogeneous and multifaceted nature of alternative media and the inapplicability of mainstream media theories (Frankfurt School with Adorno’s oppositional media, Enzenberger’s politically emancipatory media, McQuail’s democratic participant model) to this sort of media practice, Atton (2002) proposes a model of analysis that transcends texts and seeks heterogeneity, transformation, and experimentation in productive and organisational processes, as well as in the social relations. He takes inspiration from Williams’ (1980) approach to communication as a socially and materially produced form of interaction.

The role and functions of media in maintaining or disputing hegemonic positions have been discussed at length. From a liberal standpoint, Habermas (1962/1991) developed a genealogy of the bourgeois public sphere. As a space between the private sphere and the state, the public sphere was the place for discussion of matters of public concern. In its normative or deontological format, the public sphere is characterised by equal access to all and by a discursive process that is devoid of private interest. A recent and original critique of the concept of the public sphere is offered by Santos (2012), who acknowledges Habermas’ work in conceptualising a discursive public space, but questions whether the ‘Global South needs the concept of [the] public sphere’ (p. 44). Making a very close reading of Habermas, Santos criticises (like Dahlgren, 2009 and Thompson, 1995) the exclusiveness of the public sphere and its blinding focus on consensus. At a meta-theoretical level, he criticises European universalism that makes invisible realities and experiences outside its epistemological boundaries and thus concludes that a ‘new set of adjectives, be they subaltern, plebeian, oppositional, or counter-hegemonic’ does not solve the problems that arise when we try to apply the concept of the public sphere to non-European political concerns. Other critics of Habermas (Fraser and Thompson, for instance) argue that he ignored the public spheres that developed in parallel with the bourgeois public sphere, so what he sees as the ideal democratic public sphere was actually an exclusive realm of the European bourgeoisie in the 19th century. According to the argument advanced by Habermas’ critics, marginal groups have also been capable of forming arenas for
public discussion that functioned at the edges of the dominant bourgeois public sphere. In sum, the original idea proposed by Habermas suggests that a democratic and politically significant discursive space is a necessary condition for a society where individuals and groups can participate under equal conditions. Although this is a valid normative premise, critics argue that it has analytical shortcomings because it does not allow a discussion of communicative processes enacted by counter-hegemonic groups.

This phenomenon still happens in practice when there is strong polarisation and certain conditions for counter-hegemonic groups to build their own arenas. In Brazil, for instance, what has come to be known as popular communication (as defined by Peruzzo, 1986) comprises a vast array of initiatives that have in common their connection with minority, resource-poor, or marginalised groups. These initiatives emerge and flourish despite politico-economic developments that have historically favoured large corporations (as discussed in Chapter 2). These kinds of alternative communication and media have been present for decades in Brazil and became more intense after the end of military dictatorship. Nevertheless, some (Matos, 2011 and Moraes et al., 2014, among others) have highlighted the fact that the strength and breadth of popular communication in Brazil should not overshadow the power asymmetries and conflicts of interest within the media sector.

For Habermas, in liberal democracies, the ‘interplay between a constitutionally instituted formation of the political will and the spontaneous flow of communication’ (1992, p. 451) is a crucial pillar of social and political life. In practice, though, individuals may be free from the surveillance of an authoritarian state and enjoy civil rights that grant freedom of expression, opinion, and assembly and still fall prey to inequality’s shortcomings due to the way in which communicative power is distributed. One of the outcomes of inequality is the differentiation of citizenships that Holston (2008) identifies in Brazil, where citizenship is ‘universally inclusive in membership and massively inegalitarian in distribution’ (p. 7). An inegalitarian citizenship, Holston argues, ‘uses social differences that are not the basis of national membership [...] to distribute different treatment to different categories
of citizens’ (2008, p. 7) (emphasis in the original). As a consequence, rural workers are citizens included in the universal category of national citizenry but excluded from many of the rights deriving from their citizenship on the basis of education, class, and occupation. Thus, if we accept the public sphere as a normative horizon (as opposed to an analytical concept), it is necessary to recognise inegalitarian citizenship as a differential factor. It will play a role in the dynamics of the public sphere, functioning as a structuring element for the participation of certain groups in the national public sphere. It means that, currently in Brazil, marginal groups have to act on two fronts: the structure of the social reality that deems them marginal and the symbolical representations that disqualifies, diminishes, or delegitimises their demands or simply makes them invisible. In a society with a more diverse public sphere, their action would be limited to the former.

What needs to be investigated and discussed then is the extent to which the formation of alternative public spheres through popular communication outlets and strategies grants a political voice, or representation in Fraser’s (2009) sense, to these marginal organisations. The analytical question is whether subaltern groups succeed in gaining political representation through communicative processes that are marginal to mainstream media discourses. By performing this analysis, it is possible to make an analytical compromise between the habermasian normative public sphere - an ideal discursive space where matters of public interest can be discussed by a diversity of actors - and the actually existing discursive space in which antagonist groups contend and where power and resource asymmetries influence possibilities for representation.

In such a scenario, mass media domination by commercial enterprises has always been subject to challenge from below and from the margins. If, on the one hand, concentration of ownership and increased commercialisation reinforce hegemony, on the other hand, technologies facilitate the formation of networks and the creation of alternative arenas of communication. In this sense, Habermas (1992, p. 456) identifies a shift from the 19th and early 20th centuries when ‘the physical presence of the masses demonstrating in the squares and streets was able to generate revolutionary power’ to the late 20th century
when the stamp of reality provided by television was needed to broadcast their presence and confer symbolic capital on demonstrations. The necessity to appear on a screen in order to have political voice adds a complicating factor that resource-poor and marginal organisations need to deal with if they want to participate in public discourse. The increasing pressure to communicate and to contribute to the flow of conversations can strengthen what Dean (2012) calls communicative capitalism: a discursive space devoid of political significance where producing messages is an end in itself. There is no doubt as to whether technologies facilitate the production and broadcasting of information – anyone with a device and access to the Internet can ‘contribute’ to the flow, in Dean’s terms. This apparent facility to produce and circulate messages can, however, overshadow the final objective of producing a message, which is to be heard and understood by an interlocutor. Such an illusion of participation is particularly harmful for insurgent and counter-hegemonic social actors, who can be lured into a belief that they are participating in a public debate when in reality they are just contributing to the flow. This kind of dynamics can in turn favour hegemonic actors insofar as individuals and groups satisfy themselves by performing the acts of producing and circulating messages.
5 Method

This chapter discusses the methodological questions concerning the study and describes the methodologies used in the data collection processes. It also addresses operational and ethical issues related to performing research on a social movement.

Methodological considerations: the intersection between ethnography and case study

The aim of this study is to gain an understanding of how communicative processes and media practices are related to the construction of a collective identity and the promotion of political action at the same time that they challenge hegemonic groups in society. Because the study seeks to understand, the methodologies used need to generate rich and varied material about the processes that are the empirical object of the study. The study also aims to establish a relationship between certain processes and practices related to media in their roles as communication channels, artefacts, and political arenas, and an array of socially enacted processes (according to the theoretical-conceptual map in Chapter 4). Also, the study is carried out within the socio-symbolic limits of an entity that is a social movement. Considering all these aspects, the methodological choice points towards methodologies that allow the construction of an analytically deep narrative of the relationship between the processes and practices mentioned above. At the same time that the data collection needs to be systematic and guided by the aim of reaching an understanding, it also needs to generate ‘thick descriptions’ (Ryle cited by Geertz, 1973) of the phenomena that are to be understood. At this point, the methodological planning reaches an impasse between the systematically oriented research strategy of a case study and the exploratory nature of ethnography or, in other words, between description and analysis. The whole research effort will then become an attempt to find a balance between induction and deduction, description and analysis.
Considering the exploratory nature of the research questions, it is clear from the outset that a case study design would be the best approach because of the level of depth that it allows. Snow and Trom (2002, p. 151) conceptualise the case study as:

a research strategy that seeks to generate richly detailed, thick, and holistic elaborations and understandings of instances or variants of bounded social phenomena through the triangulation of multiple methods that include but are not limited to qualitative procedures.

This conceptualisation is similar to certain definitions of ethnographic methods. In fact, when Snow and Trom say that multiple methods can be used to generate the ‘richly detailed, thick, and holistic elaborations’ that characterise a case study, they implicitly call for the use of ethnographic methods in the design of a case study.

As a method that aims to explore the ways in which people view and understand themselves and experience a variety of situations, ethnography stems from anthropological studies born out of Western researchers’ desire to understand cultures in what they considered a primitive stage of development. From an epistemological perspective, ethnographic studies are methodological approaches anchored on a phenomenological understanding of research subjects, insofar as phenomenology seeks to understand the nature of lived experience. Geertz (1976, p. 12) observes that the phenomenological understanding of cultures as structures of meaning ‘reached’ anthropology and led to an increased focus on the social – rather than the individual – as the locus of meaning construction. Geertz draws on Weber’s concept of ‘webs of meaning’ as the epistemological object to be understood by anthropology, which he considers an ‘interpretive science in search of meaning’ as opposed to an ‘experimental science in search of law’ (1976, p. 13). Acknowledging the social framework of culture, i.e., that culture is constituted through social relations, we identify an area where anthropology intersects with sociology.45

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45 According to Santos (2007), sociology and anthropology deal in essence with the same questions, but from a Western perspective, sociology developed as the study of ‘our societies’ and anthropology as the study of ‘others’.
Ethnography has evolved from being the study of ‘others’ and their habits and customs to the contemporary attempts of the social sciences to understand processes that include people, artefacts, texts, and relations. Thus, as media (as channels, artefacts, or arenas of communication) came to occupy a significant place in people’s lives, media ethnography emerged as a methodological approach to understand the ways in which people relate to media.

When describing what ethnographers do, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p. 3) use a number of verbs – participate, watch, listen, ask, and collect – that encapsulate the work of the ethnographer. All the actions described are performed by the researcher in the natural environment of the subjects and generate data in form of diaries, interview transcripts, and documentation. Geertz (1973, p. 6) argues, however, that anthropological analysis, which is the knowledge derived from ethnographic work ‘is not a matter of methods’ but of the ‘intellectual effort’ invested in the production of the ethnographic narrative. This is what Geertz, borrowing the term from Ryle, calls ‘thick description’. Thus, while in a case study research strategies are important, anthropologically oriented ethnography will focus on the interpretive intellectual effort that relates ethnographic narratives to overarching cultures.

It is possible, however, to combine certain aspects of a case study design with an ethnographic approach. As discussed above, the methodological strategies have similarities that make possible a combination in which the culturally situated character of the ethnography complements the holistic outlook of the case study. The social context is a very important element of ethnographic studies and what will differentiate a case study from other approaches in social sciences. But more important than the data collecting actions per se is what Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, pp. 230-236) call ‘a distinctive analytical mentality’ (compare with Geertz’s statement that ethnography is characterised by an ‘intellectual effort’). ‘Distinctive analytical mentality’ is shorthand for the commitment to deeply observe and analyse a given empirical reality without trying to quickly jump to conclusions or taking appearances at face value. Such commitment is especially relevant when analysing data generated from interviews in connection with what is observed and
documented on-site, or the tensions between what people say they do and think and what they actually do. It is also particularly useful when analysing processes and practices in relation to a given culture in order not to fall into the traps of functionalistic systemic explanations.

Yin (2009) argues that case studies are usually the method of choice when ‘how’ questions are posed, as the investigator does not have much control over events, and ‘the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real life context’. He emphasises the importance of the context for a given phenomenon as the reason to use a case study instead of other methodological approaches. In practical terms, the case study approach guides the data collection from the outset when it comes to the selection of informants and observation sites. The aim is to obtain a wide array of sites and informants with varied profiles who work or have worked with communication in a broader sense within the MST. This includes members in the areas of political strategy, education, propaganda, and culture promotion.

For Snow and Trom, a case study is not a method but a research strategy that ‘is associated with a number of data-gathering methods or procedures’ (2002, p. 151). Conversely, there is not a particular method that defines a case study; rather, a case study ‘is likely to include one or more qualitative procedures in the mix of methods used to excavate and understand any particular case’ (ibid.). In this study, different methodologies (see the table below) will be used to assess the rationales, expectations, experiences, and understandings related to media among members of the movement. The authors (2002, p. 147) also observe that the characteristics of a case study include:

(a) investigation and analysis of an instance or variant of some bounded social phenomenon that (b) seek to generate a richly detailed and ‘thick’ elaboration of the phenomenon studied through (c) the use and triangulation of multiple methods or procedures that include but are not limited to qualitative techniques.

When a case study is exploring a social movement, the authors explain that it usually looks into a movement that illustrates a particular analytical type or is representative of a genre, investigates particular social movement processes, serves to illustrate a theory or perspective, or constitutes an ‘instance of an especially representative social
phenomenon’. These elements or characteristics have to do with the types of research questions that are asked at the outset of the research process, they identify and define what is being studied, unveiling the ontological standpoint of the researcher. However, ticking all these boxes is not enough to classify a study as a case study, Snow and Trom (1992, p. 149) argue. According to them, a case study attempts to produce a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. It is possible to argue then that, together with the ontological standpoint that defines which aspects or elements of a social movement are being studied, the epistemological standpoint guiding what kind of knowledge is produced about a social movement (thick and rich contextualisation) define this study as an ethnography-informed case study. An ethnographic outlook is particularly useful as a research strategy when looking into people’s and groups’ daily relations to media, which is discussed in the next section.

Media ethnography

Media ethnography is a research strategy in which ethnographic fieldwork is performed with the aim of investigating diverse forms of media production and use, and, recently, the intersection between the two. Media ethnographies carried out with publics/users have produced a vast body of work in which researchers seek to understand diverse aspects connected to reading, listening, and watching different media products (Morley, 1980; Radway, 1984; Martín-Barbero and Rey, 2001; Rantanen, 2005, to name a few studies). Recent technological developments that make production and circulation of content more available catalysed the use of media ethnography as an approach to describe and understand digital production by individuals and citizens, as well as by pressure and marginal groups46 (Bakardjieva, 2005 and 2009; Gerbaudo, 2012, for example). Without disregarding the relevance of this recent wave of research on digital production and circulation by individuals, so-called prosumption, it is important not to

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46 Not to mention the vast number of studies using media ethnography to address questions of mobility, social ties, and media consumption, among other themes. I do not refer to these studies here since they do not deal with dimensions of media and communication that are relevant for my study.
lose sight of relevant ethnographic work carried out on the production of fanzines and community radio during the 1980s and 1990s. It is only through a temporally aware outlook that we can avoid the construction of apocalyptic myths (Mosco, 2005) to explain our relations to media.

Ethnographic work has also been carried out in the area of sociology of news, concentrating primarily on the experiences of journalists as individuals or as a group (Gaye Tuchman’s Making News, 1978, and Ulf Hannerz’s Foreign News, 2012, are two among many examples) and less on the political implications of journalism or on its relationship with other sectors of society. These studies can be classified as phenomenological approaches to journalistic work, as they attempt to grasp ‘how it feels’ to be a journalist under certain conditions. They also look into the internal logic of news production, exploring rationales, motivations, and justifications in routine journalistic work. Certain studies of social movements and political engagement also have some elements of ethnography, an iconic example being Todd Gitlin’s The Whole World is Watching (1980) or the more recently published Tweets and the Streets (2012) by Paolo Gerbaudo.

What these media ethnographies have in common is their immersion, to different degrees, in the daily routines (or lived experience) of informants and the use of similar data production techniques such as interviews, diaries, and documentation about the empirical reality they seek to analyse. The studies also have a common ontological standpoint, whereby they place media in a relational position with other aspects of the social such as interpersonal relations, political engagement, work, etc. In doing so, these studies approach media and mediated communication as a constitutive element of the life-world. The life-world can be seen as the experienced and discursive complement to the systems-world, as Habermas proposes that ‘we conceive of society simultaneously as system and as life-world’ (1987, p. 120). In this way, media ethnographies pay attention to empirically observable aspects of communication as embodied experience.

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47 Atton (2002, Chapter 3) provides a summary of studies and cases of fanzine production in the UK. Gumucio-Dagron, Bordeneuve, and Peruzzo (1998) provide accounts of different aspects of community radio in Latin America.

48 Habermas (1987, p. 119) defines life-world as a horizon within which communicative actions move.
Based on this reading of media ethnography, it is possible to say that it has gained a status as a methodological approach independent from anthropology even though it is born out of anthropological work. This means that media ethnographies will often be informed and guided by theoretical frameworks rooted in media and communication studies (e.g., agenda setting, reception) and informed by analytical concepts (e.g., news values, mediated communication, mediation) that originated in this field. Usually, ethnographic datasets are constituted by written texts – interview transcripts, diaries, and documentary data – produced either by the researcher or by the informants in the case of solicited diaries or accounts, or collected by the researcher in the case of documental material. The corpus of material composes a narrative that is the sum of subjective experiences embodied by the informants, as well as documentation that complements subjective accounts.

The MST as a research object

Having defined the research strategy as an ethnography-informed case study, it is now time to look into the research objects. This study is concerned with an empirical object, the MST, as a collective social actor, and epistemological objects, the MST’s communicative processes and media practices. The ethnographic outlook comes into play during the fieldwork and production of data, conducting the construction of a dense, thick, and deep narrative about the reality observed.

The reasons for choosing the MST as the empirical object of the study have been discussed in Chapter 2. It is important, however, to stress that the scope, scale, and trajectory of the movement make it an empirically rich object for the study of communicative processes and media practices within a group. The MST’s place in the region’s geopolitical scenario during the last 30 years is an important aspect if we want to observe and discuss the development of media practices in relation to the broader sociopolitical landscape. I must nevertheless stress that the purpose of the study is not to generalise but to add to the body of knowledge about media, communication, and political action.
Having pointed that out, I also acknowledge that because the MST has similarities with groups in other developing countries and even in developed ones, a detailed and in-depth analysis of its activities might serve as grounds for further research and analysis. If not, the study could at least redirect focus to a kind of insurgency that has, on many occasions, been delegitimised or disregarded in its political ethos.

The analysis of the social relations carried out in this study has two levels: a macro-level that looks into the interaction between a definite group (social movement) and the society as a whole, and a micro-level that looks into the relations and construction of shared meanings among members of this group. Because the social movement is the relational structure that regulates both macro- and micro-relations, the case study was chosen as the overarching research strategy. A case study presupposes the existence of a case, which in this study is a social movement, the MST. The MST is the empirical object in which epistemological objects, communicative processes and media practices, will be observed. Communicative processes can be observed in various social formations, but because this study looks into such process in one determinate organisation, it is defined as a case.

Contrary to many media ethnographies that focus on the media being studied and how individuals relate to these media, this study focuses on the group. It sees the group (social movement) as one of the forces structuring people’s relation to media and looks at their relation to media in their capacity as members of a social movement, as opposed to individuals’ relation to media, which is not the focus of the study. This is not, however, a study of a social movement, as the primary interest is not to understand motivations to act, the sociopolitical aspects of activism and mobilisation or the processes of individual identity formation. In other words, these aspects are not epistemological objects of the study; rather, they are part of the structure in which people interact and relate to media and that organises (if even in a loose way) their relation to different media. In this sense, the data collected, with an emphasis on interviews, will serve to construct the narrative and support the analysis of communicative processes and media practices against the background constituted by the macro- and micro-relations enacted by and within the movement.
I am not claiming to be doing ethnography in its strict sense, as this would require a much longer period of observation and presence on-site, as well as an epistemology grounded on an anthropological understanding of the study object. The research questions are concerned instead with the social, or, more precisely, with people’s relation to media across a range of social processes and with the ways in which media contribute or not to creating certain types of social bonds that lead to mobilisation and political action. The primary material for the analysis are interviews, while visits to relevant sites and participation in certain activities provide the social context necessary in order to gain a deeper understanding of the narratives generated through the interviews. I am also choosing to reject the researcher-centred ethnographic account of field experiences and am focusing instead on the construction of a narrative based on a research design planned a priori in order to generate a version of reality grounded on theoretical and epistemological standpoints.

Doing research on a movement that is active in a country the size of Brazil, with limited time and resources, I opted for breadth of observations – more sites – at the expense of depth. This decision was made hoping to look into the ways in which communicative processes may help the organisation to remain as a unity and into the conflicts that arise in creating and maintaining a collective. The MST’s membership is located in remote rural communities spread through an area the size of Europe with drastic differences between regions. Not to mention the socio-economic and political differences between Brazilian states. For instance, illiteracy levels among those over 15 years old are twice as high in the northeast region compared to the south (IBGE 2010), and while 94 per cent of the population in the state of São Paulo live in urban areas, 61 per cent do so in the state of Piauí, in the northeast.

When it comes to communication and media work, a multisite approach is crucial to comprehend the differences between the work of the MST’s press offices located in central São Paulo and in Brasília and that of radios and communication coordinators in settlements located in remote areas of Brazil that can only be reached by driving over

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kilometres of unpaved roads. Another level of differentiation are the periods in which communication work is carried out – 'low-profile' and 'high-profile' periods, as they are called by the press offices. So-called high-profile periods are when members are mobilised for actions of national scope such as the national congress every fifth year and the yearly actions during the month of April that mark the assassination of 17 MST militants in 1997 by privately hired hitmen.

The study begins with an interactionist point of view to look into the experiences of individual members of the movement with mediated communication in order to gain an understanding of communicative processes in the collective. As stated above, the reason for choosing the MST is that it is constituted by people in a vulnerable position who are trying to organise themselves in order to change and improve their situation. The movement also makes for a relevant case study because it is rooted in rural areas as opposed to urban areas, where a great extent of today’s activism (or at least the kinds of activism that catch media and research attention) takes place.

**Study design**

The study design outlined here served as basis to writing a fieldwork guide (Appendix 3) that informed the collection and production of the materials that are presented and analysed in the following sections. This and next chapter represent distinct time slots during the research and writing processes and must be read with the chronological aspect on the background. The option for chronologically faithful writing aims to give the reader an opportunity to follow the development of the study from planning to execution.

The purpose of the study is to examine the MST’s communicative processes and media practices connected with the processes of conscientisation, subjectification, and mobilisation in order to gain an understanding of how these processes and practices are related to the construction of a collective identity and promotion of political action at the same time that they
**challenge hegemonic groups in society.** The questions derived from the research aim require an in-depth look at the policies, routines, and processes involved in the production of the MST’s communicative channels. Moreover, the study aims to place these processes in relation to the movement’s sociopolitical position in order to understand the relationship between communicative processes and media practices and conscientisation, subjectification, and mobilisation.

From the beginning, there were two challenges to be dealt with when planning the study: the membership size and complexity of the movement as an organisation, including its territorial placement. The organisational complexity of the MST was addressed in the study design by trying to assess as many different organisational unities as possible. Accordingly, settlement radios, press offices, schools, sectors, and task forces (brigadas) are considered units\(^5\) for the collection of data. In the same way, the large territorial spread of the movement will be addressed by a multisite approach with an eye to achieving a diverse sample of locales – cities and rural areas, as well as states with different socio-politico-economic conditions. Another strategy to achieving a varied sample is to carry out fieldwork both in periods of low activity and periods when the movement is nationally mobilised.\(^5\)

The study will thus look into a range of media-related practices across the movement both territorially and organisationally. These practices include the activities of the press office, production of the website, social media pages, print publications, audio and video production, and media relations, as well as the activities of communication task forces at a number of settlements. Investigation in its various forms (see below) will be carried out both at times of normal activities and of heightened mediated communication activity such as the MST’s national congress.

In the context of the study, the MST’s communicative processes and media practices constitute the epistemological object, to be approached

\(^{50}\) A unit here does not have the same meaning as a unit in quantitative research. In this study, the term ‘units’ is used because they are considered as areas distinct from each other in which activities related to communication and media are performed.

\(^{51}\) There can be at any given time a number of local and regional mobilisations such as demonstrations, protests, and land occupations. These will not be the subject of the study because they concern particular territorially delimited sectors of the movement, and the study is an investigation of the MST as a nationally organised collective.
using the case study as research strategy – the movement, in its capacity as the collective or entity that performs processes and practices, is the case being studied. With this in mind, the case study will entail a range of research tactics – or methodologies – used to produce the raw data that will ground the analysis and provide answers to the research questions. The production of research data is informed by ethnographic approaches in the sense that it seeks to produce contextualised and detail-rich accounts of the empirical reality observed. More precisely, the methodologies used are variations of direct observation and interviews (Yin, 2009): direct observations are used in order to assess the rationales for using media and strategies for communication with other spheres, while interviews are used in order to assess experiences and understandings connected with media usage.

Through the observation of the work at the press office, it will be possible to assess the ways in which different media are combined and utilised in order to achieve different goals. Observations at events of relevance for the movement – the general assembly and national demonstrations – provide access to the communicative processes enacted in order to raise awareness and consciousness, construct shared meanings, and counteract hegemonic actors. Interviews provide an insight into the experience level of communicative processes and media practices, as well as into the different relations individuals experience with media in their capacity as members of a collective. The methodologies follow a ‘multi-perspective orientation’, as suggested by Snow and Trom (2002, pp. 154-155) in the sense that they aim to account for the views of individuals in different positions of relevance in the communicative processes within the movement (press officers, leaders, and militants).

The material that is analysed was produced and collected through the following strategies:

*Semi-structured interviews*: were carried out with press officers, spokespersons, leaders, and members of communication groups, as well as with active MST members in settlements. These interviews will be used to assess how people experience and relate to different media and what, in their view, are the outcomes of such relations.
**Observations**: took place at the press offices, settlements, and national congress. The observations complement the interviews and have the purpose of assessing the rationales for using media and gaining knowledge of the dynamics and processes involved in the ways people relate to media.

The table below connects the research question to the methodologies that will address them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. In which ways are communicative processes enacted in order to mobilise rural workers and achieve symbolic cohesion among movement militants?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. What are the prominent symbols and narratives circulating in the movement?</td>
<td>Observation at the press office, settlements, and relevant events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. In which ways are these symbols and narratives objectified through communicative practices?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. In which ways do communicative practices legitimate mobilisation and action?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. How are media practices organised in the processes of mobilisation, collective identity formation, and image construction?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. What kinds of media practices can be identified within the movement?</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews with press officers and other members with key roles in communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. What are the rationales for using and producing different media?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Who participates in the production of media?</td>
<td>Observation at the press office and communication groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. In which ways are identity and image rendered in media content?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. How do movement militants evaluate the potential of the media practices and communication processes they enact to challenge the hegemony of dominant actors in society in general and in the media sector in particular?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. How do militants at different levels evaluate the communicative processes in relation to the counter-hegemonic ethos of the MST?</td>
<td>Interviews with movement leaders, key members and press officers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. What, in the view of militants at different levels, is accomplished through communicative processes in terms of challenging the existing relations of dominance?</td>
<td>Expert interviews with individuals who, in different capacities, have a deep understanding of the MST and the issues that the movement deals with.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. What, in the view of militants at different levels, are the potential of, and possibilities offered by, different media to challenge existing relations of dominance?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overview of methodologies applied to each area of the movement:

Press offices - São Paulo, SP and Brasília, DF
- Interviews with press officers
- Observation

Settlements - Fazenda Pirituba, Itapeva-São Paulo
- Visit to radio station (Fazenda Pirituba)
- Observation
- Interviews

Assentamento Ernesto "Che" Guevara, Wenceslau Guimarães - Bahia

MST School (IEJC)
Veranópolis - Rio Grande do Sul
- Observation
- Interviews

MST National Congress
Brasília, DF
- Observation
- Interviews

The semi-structured interviews were carried out following the fieldwork guide that was based on the concepts outlined earlier and that worked through thematic cues rather than closed questions. The main purpose of the guide (and the reason for using this method rather than closed questions) was to direct interviews towards different media practices and experiences, while keeping the interaction as open as possible. Taking into consideration informants’ different life stories, as well as experiences with communication and media, the guide was designed to be open-ended and to concentrate on experiences, practices, and opinions. An illustrative example is the difference between professional journalists who joined the movement to work as press officers and local communicators who joined the movement as militants or were born into the movement as the children of militants. These are two distinct groups encountered during the fieldwork whose experiences and
practices differ to a great extent. As a consequence, questions relevant for one group are not as relevant for the other, which rules out designing a too specific interview guide. The interview guide was inspired by Bisaillon and Rankin’s (2013) guide for institutional research and aimed to connect the analytical concepts present in the research questions to cues or topics to be covered during the interview. The flow of the interview reflects the informant’s experiences and life story. In order to direct interviews towards the most relevant questions considering the informant’s background, I asked informants at the beginning of the interviews to tell me how they became involved with the MST. Following this question, I asked them to describe their current activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analytical concept</th>
<th>Interview thematic cue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Contextualizing questions**                          | • Ask informants to tell how they became involved in MST  
• Ask informants to describe their current activities                                                                                     |
| **Rationales - connected to media practices**          | • Ask informants to describe what kinds of media they use in their capacity as movement members.  
• Ask informants to explain why they use                                                                                                    |
| **Identity – connected to media practices**            | • Discuss group communication (cf. Peruzzo, 1998 and 2011; Henriques, 2007) with a view to learning about its cohesive properties  
• Ask about motivations to engage with group communication strategies/media  
• Discuss how media facilitate/enable communication in the movement                                                                              |
| **Image – connected to media practices**               | • Discuss the differences between self-produced texts and texts about the MST produced by others  
• Discuss outward communication strategies – purposes, planning, text/visual choices                                                                 |
| **Counter-hegemonic potential of media practices**     | • Discuss expectations, experiences, and appreciation of the outcomes of different communicative processes and media practices  
• Learn about members’ evaluation of the movement’s communicative processes in their potential to challenge hegemony |
| **Potential of media – as channels for countering dominance** | • Discuss possibilities and hindrances associated to different media channels  
• Ask informants to describe their experiences with different media channels  
• Discuss the ways in which movement members experience participation in the public sphere.                                                          |
The strength of this guide is that it works with prompts instead of closed questions, allowing adaptation to each interview situation and to the experiences of the person being interviewed.

**Production of data and selection of settings and informants**

Contrary to other designs, in a case study, samples are selected according to their depth and variety, as opposed to statistical significance. The aim is to provide a thick and dense account of the problem being studied instead of a panoramic view of a whole population achieved with a representative sample, as is the case in quantitative research. In this study, the selection of settings is as important as the selection of informants. As mentioned in the methodological discussion, in order to assess the breadth of communicative processes and media practices enacted by the MST, it is important do gain access to different places where these processes and practices are actually embodied. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p. 29) suggest a pre-fieldwork assessment of sites as a strategy to decide which sites can offer the best opportunities for investigation of the research questions. At the outset, the criterion for selection of settings was that work with media or communication should be carried out that led to the selection of press offices and settlements with a radio station. A third site where communication and media work is performed came up later during the fieldwork preparation: an MST school where a vocational secondary-level course in communication had been held. There are two more centralising MST press offices, one in São Paulo and one in Brasília, and these were primarily chosen for visits. When it comes to the settlements, another criterion was added, which is geographical variation, for the reasons already stated in the methodological discussion. The third criterion for selection of sites was time-based, i.e., observation had to take place in both high and low mobilisation periods. This diachronic focus tackles a common gap in research and literature on social movements, which is the tendency to focus on mobilisation periods, leaving latency periods unobserved (Mattoni and Treré, 2014). The table below summarizes the criteria for selection of observation sites.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Selection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work with communication and media</strong></td>
<td>Press offices, settlements, school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Geographic variation</strong></td>
<td>Settlements in different regions: São Paulo (centre-east), Bahia (northeast), Rio Grande do Sul (south)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High/low mobilisation (LM, HM)</strong></td>
<td>LM: July-September 2013, HM: February 2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The selection of informants was carried out in parallel with the selection of sites but in a less structured way. The selection method could be defined as a mix between purposive and snowball sampling. Informants should have been working or have had worked previously in the communication sector or sectors closely connected to communication such as education, culture, agitation and propaganda, and political strategy. The aim was to achieve a variety of biographies when it comes to gender, age, location, and time in the movement. Contact with the informants was made through so-called gatekeepers who could introduce me to other informants. The preliminary selection was not very structured from the beginning because it was expected that, once at the observation sites, I would be able to make direct contact (without the intermediation of gatekeepers) with people who might have relevant information and life stories of interest to the study.

The variation aimed for within the group of informants is twofold: vertical variation, i.e., different levels in the organisation (leadership, press officers, members in the settlements and occupations), and horizontal variation, i.e., different units across the country. Added to these guiding criteria were: time active in the movement, age, and gender. Vertical variation was achieved by carrying out observations at the press office, interviewing spokespersons and leaders, as well as militants in the settlements. By participating in events such as the national congress held in February 2014, I also hoped to be able to interview members at different levels. Horizontal variation was achieved by visiting occupations and settlements across the country with different characteristics. It was anticipated that it could be more difficult to gain access to members who occupy leadership positions such as national board members or sector coordinators due to the scope

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52 Purposive sampling is a sampling strategy in which the researcher chooses cases according to defined criteria as opposed to random sampling, where cases and material are collected randomly from a given universe (Flick 2009, p.122). Snowball sampling is a strategy in which the researcher starts from one or a few subjects to reach a wider sample through contacts provided by the original informants (Flick 2009, pp. 109-110).
of their activities and to their irregular schedules. This difficulty was circumvented by securing the collaboration of gatekeepers who could help me be in a position to interview the MST’s leaders. Once again, the selection of settings came into play, as the leaders and coordinators were usually present at mobilisations, demonstrations, and national meetings, so by being there, I was able to at least make preliminary contact with these people.

Apart from interviews and observation diaries, documents are an important source of data in qualitative research. In this study, there are two types of documental data: visual documentation produced by me in the role of researcher and movement documents. The visual documentation (photographs and eventual footage) produced by me has the primary function of illustrating the written descriptions of settings and activities in the analysis section. Since the study is concerned with symbolic cohesion, meaning construction, and image as aspects of communicative processes, visual documentation is important because it shows the ways in which symbols are used in different contexts and settings in order to construct the image of the movement.

Various documents can be used to deepen the investigation into the research problems. In qualitative research designs, documents such as reports and guidelines can be useful for comparisons with information obtained in interviews. Particularly in institutional research, as institutions produce a variety of documents such as reports, handbooks, memorandums, and evaluations, documental data provides an insight into crystallised processes and practices within the institution. For this study, documents that relate to media production and communicative processes and routines are of particular interest. These can include written guidelines, descriptive documents, media coverage evaluation, and overall media production such as newsletters and journals. The documents will be analysed not as separate units but in conjunction with the interviews and observations aimed at investigating communicative processes as a whole composed of symbols, texts, rationales, and messages. In this sense, reports, press clippings, literature about the MST, and internal documents such as letters of procedures, policies, and handbooks will be used as secondary data,
providing the background information necessary in order to analyse the data generated from interviews and observations.

Treatment of interviews

In total during the two field trips, I carried out 25 interviews, 21 of which were transcribed, coded, and analysed. The first coding of the interviews followed the guidelines below:

1) highlight the concepts and analytical cues from the interview guide; and
2) identify key themes not covered in the interview guide.

The coding according to the concepts and thematic cues in the interview guide was deductive, with the guide as the starting point; identification of key themes was inductive. The bidirectional analysis allowed me to ensure continuity to the guide through the operationalisation of the concepts but also to remain open to new ideas and themes. The interviews were coded using software for analysis of qualitative data, NVivo, in which each one of the concepts below was made into a node.

The concepts and thematic cues from the guide were as follows:

1) Rationales and practices: these included all explanations and reasoning that related to the use of media (cf. Couldry’s, 2010, concept of media practice: what people do in relation to media), as well as descriptions of practices within the framework of the MST’s varied activities. As will be discussed in the analyses, rationales and practices were often embedded in the same answer: the informants explained what they did and how they reasoned in relation to what they did. By rationales, I mean why determinate media are used and, by practices, I mean how these media are used. Here, the term ‘media’ refers most of the time to an artefact or technology, such as video, radio, the Internet, of newspapers, but it can sometimes also refer to institutions. The reference to media as institutions comes up usually in interviews with

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53 Two pilot interviews, one accidentally deleted interview, and an interview with a software developer who was helping with the redesign of the MST’s website were left out of the analysis.
press officers because they see media institutions such as newspapers, television and radio stations as instruments to reach and speak to a wider public outside the movement and its networks.

2) *Identity*: refers to the ways in which media reinforce the collective identity of MST members and militants departing from the idea of group communication (Peruzzo, 1998 and 2011, and Henriques, 2007) that describes how community media and popular communication are used in order to strengthen communities’ collective identities. In Latin American communication scholarship, the term ‘popular’ is related to cultural manifestations that are outside the scope of elites. Contrary to English-language scholarship, where the term ‘popular’ has the connotation of commercial culture in opposition to more artistic cultural forms, in Latin American scholarship, popular communication (as defined by the authors above, among others) is produced as a demand for cultural and democratic rights.

3) *Image*: relates to collective ideas of how the MST should be perceived by society and what strategies are used in order to achieve the desired perception.

4) *Counter-hegemonic potential of media practices*: this category is intended to account for how members of the MST experience their relations with different media institutions and how they evaluate the potential to challenge hegemonic groups and ideas through these media.

5) *Potential of media as counter-dominance channels*: in contrast to the previous category, this one attempts to encompass the views of MST members about their experiences of building their own media channels and arenas, as well as whether these channels can grant their participation in the public sphere.

After this categorisation into predetermined concepts, each node or concept was coded internally, looking for new categories of practices and views on the movement's political action and on the personal experiences of the militants.
Questions concerning reliability and validity in qualitative research are the source of much discussion and contention (see Bryman, 2008, pp. 376-383, for a summary of the main points). At the core of the discussion is a preoccupation with quality and rigour in qualitative research, considering 1) lack of control of the environment by the researcher, and 2) the interpretive character of qualitative methodologies.

Yin (2009) stresses that one of the most compelling problems with case studies is the difficulty to be systematic when adopting the approach in comparison with other methods such as surveys and experiments. The main obstacle to systematisation is that, once fieldwork starts, new information can come up and situations can take unexpected turns. Although reliability as a criterion for quality in qualitative research is quite disputed (Bryman, 2008, pp. 366-377; Flick, 2009, pp. 385-386) because qualitative research (particularly of ethnographic orientation) is difficult to replicate, it is important to aim to plan fieldwork in a systematic way. Systematisation will mean that the rationale behind the choices is transparent and that fieldwork choices reflect the study’s research questions and theoretical background. Silverman (2011, p. 360) cites Moisander and Valtonen (2006), who suggest that reliability can be achieved in qualitative research by methodological and theoretical transparency. Methodological transparency means that all steps in the research process must be accounted for and reported in detail. Theoretical transparency means that the researcher makes explicit the theoretical standpoint from which she interprets the data.

A recurrent discussion in ethnographic studies is the reliability of observations. Different authors suggest a number of strategies aimed primarily at distinguishing between what is being observed and the researcher’s own analysis. Since my field notes are not the primary material to be analysed – they are used as background for the interviews – I have not used the recommended systematic notation (Bryman, 2008; Flick, 2009; Silverman, 2011). Notes were usually taken during observations and then expanded shortly after, as suggested by Spradley (1979, cited by Silverman 2011, p. 362).
A systematic fieldwork plan (Appendix 3) does not exclude the possibilities of unexpected situations but allows these situations to be set into the perspective of the research aims. Such possibilities are even more likely when it comes to research on social movements, as these are organisations operating in very dynamic routines. Careful planning and informed choices rationalise the project prior to the fieldwork and ensure a fair level of systematisation from the onset. A fieldwork plan\footnote{A fieldwork plan detailing the activities to be performed during the fieldwork was written prior to the first field trip.} ensures that there is an overarching rationale to the choice of settings and informants.

Because the whole study is based on gaining access to MST militants in various sites and being able to talk to people, it demands the trust of the members of the movement. The extent to which the researcher is in control of the fieldwork or is dependent on the collaboration of gatekeepers can also be a shortcoming in this kind of design exactly because it can jeopardise the reliability of the study. In this sense, the fieldwork plan was used to ensure that I had as much control as possible over the choice of informants and that these informants had relevant experience for the study.

Mistrust and doubts about the work I am doing can have a serious impact on the unfolding of fieldwork and on its results, as it might lead to having limited access to certain settings, people, documents, and events. In order to address these issue, I elaborated a short document outlining my research; this document was sent together with the interview request or an introduction email (in the case of press officers or other potential gatekeepers). Believing on the importance of building a rapport with those whose collaboration I sought for my research (see Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, Chapter 4), I initiated talks and negotiations with people working in different areas of the MST well ahead the scheduled fieldwork.

Lastly, questions of validity in a qualitative study must be addressed. Flick (2009, p. 387) explains validity as a ‘question of whether the researcher sees what they think they see’. Taken in these terms, valid results will require coherence within the material and conclusions that
are based on the material and the concepts that guided the study. Since it is neither possible to totally control the research settings nor to have access to all persons of interest as informants, it is necessary to adopt strategies in order to ensure the validity of the research. The first strategy was to seek informants who were working or had worked with communication (as a broad area, including content production, media relations, radio and audiovisual production). Further, within this group, there was a variety of gender, age, location, and time in the movement.

The interview guide ensured that the same concepts were addressed in the interviews, allowing for variations depending on the experience of each informant. The interviews focused on actions and activities related to media rather than closed questions so that they could be used with a vast array of informants at the same time that they remained relevant regardless of the specific work experience of each informant.

**Ethical considerations**

The most pressing ethical issues in this project are those concerning the participation of MST militants in the research. At the outset, research relying on ethnographic methodologies should strive for as much openness as possible (without compromising the integrity of the research project), seeking to obtain informed consent and protecting the privacy of those observed or interviewed (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). In practice, these matters are more complex, particularly when it comes to researching large organisations using a research design that is susceptible to the unpredictable events of fieldwork. While seeking as much as possible to obtain the consent of those interviewed or observed, the nature of the activities and the size of the organisation might sometimes make following this step difficult, especially during participant observation. As a researcher, I find myself in an asymmetrical power relationship with the informants, when I can decide how much I will share about my project, which role – researcher or guest – I will play, and how I will interpret and write about my fieldwork experience. This is a balance between respecting the integrity
of those who participated in my research project and assuring empirical and analytical rigour.

The fact that the MST is an organisation with limited resources and that is subject to a vast amount of research in various areas may make members, particularly those in settlements who are in a very vulnerable situation, feel exploited (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995:210) by researchers who are advancing their careers at their expense. This is a concern, because it is crucial for the integrity of the project that whoever is involved in the process of data collection has a meaningful experience. In this sense, I attempted to make the interview situation an opportunity for self-reflection and discussion of issues that are not often discussed. Furthermore, during the course of writing, articles and partial publications of results and analyses were made available to the MST as a way to socialise the research and make it useful to the movement. A number of these works are now available through the MST’s digital library, which is fully accessible to the public on the organisation’s website.

There are different degrees of possible transparency and mutual understanding in an ethnographic project – given all the different situations and settings where research activities are performed. Considering such variety, all possible measures were taken to ensure that informants were aware of the research aims and how the data produced with their cooperation would be used. All informants interviewed signed a consent form allowing me to use the interview for research purposes. They had also the option of remaining anonymous, but none of the informants wished to remain anonymous. I have, however, changed names, while publishing the actual positions and places where interviews and observations were held. Efforts were made to make the transcripts available to informants for later commentary. Only two informants made minor factual corrections to the interview transcripts. These systematic steps ensured that all those who participated in interviews were given a fair amount of control and autonomy over the interview situation and over the information they shared with me during the interviews.
A more complex ethical concern that arises due to the MST’s position in the political scenario of the country has to do with the consequences of disclosing strategic information about the organisation in a publicly available document. Details about how actions are planned and who participates in them can be particularly sensitive. This becomes a pressing issue in ethnographic work, in which my role as a researcher may not be clear to everyone at all times. While I always made clear who I was and what I was doing, I can say that I did not play the researcher role at all times during my fieldwork. While I maintained the analytical mindset that characterises ethnographic work, my personal posture was not always that of an outside observer because I was fully conscious that this might have undermined informal interactions with informants during my fieldwork. This double identity, as researcher and guest, can pose a threat to the integrity of those involved in fieldwork activities.

People may feel more comfortable sharing personal information about their lives with me while we share a meal than they would in a formal interview situation. I was fully aware of the power asymmetries in this case because I could deliberately choose which role to play (also see the discussion in Chapter 7 – Reflecting on my role in the fieldwork) and which information I would disclose when writing about my fieldwork. I was also aware of the cultural and social background I shared with many of the people I interviewed, which worked in my favour but may also have put many informants in a situation where they disclosed more than they would have were I a foreign researcher.

At the same time that interview data is crucial for the analysis and exploration of the research questions, the material should not expose informants in a way that may cause them harm. During the course of the fieldwork, I had to constantly evaluate whether particular details of what I heard or saw could become a liability for those involved should it be made publicly available. Although describing the experiences and practices in which MST militants were involved is crucial for the analysis, full disclosure of sensitive details, information, and opinions proved not to be essential to answering the questions in the best possible way. It was possible to extract opinions and reflections while leaving out more sensitive and compromising personal stories.
Lastly, in my role as researcher, I have the privilege of interpreting data, which, in this case, includes personal stories, opinions, and experiences of those with whom I had contact during my fieldwork. By being part of the fieldwork in different ways, informants entrusted me to make ethical use – in a way that will not cause them harm – of the information they shared with me. While it is impossible to do away with this kind of asymmetry, I can ensure that the data was interpreted according to the analytical framework provided by relevant theories and that the resulting analysis will be publicly available so that once my interpretations become public, they will be open for contestation, including by those who participated in the research.
6 Material

This chapter presents and describes the research materials that serve as data to be analysed in the following chapters. There are three kinds of materials in the dataset: those produced by the researcher alone, such as the field diary; those co-produced by the researcher in collaboration with informants, such as interviews and footage; and, finally, the documental materials produced by the MST and collected by the researcher during field trips.

Interviews

A total of 25 interviews with 23 informants were carried out during both field trips (including the two pilot interviews and an interview with a software developer who was working on the new MST website), listed in Appendix 2. The interviews left out of the list are two pilot interviews with former press officers in order to test the interview guide and the interview with a software developer who was then helping in the redesign of the MST’s webpage. All but the first pilot interview and the last interview – whose recording was lost due to technical problems – were entirely transcribed. The transcribed interviews were then coded according to the concepts in the interview guide. During the second field trip, five interviews were carried out, three of them with new informants and two with informants who had already been interviewed during the first field trip.

All informants worked with communication directly or indirectly either at the time of the fieldwork or prior to it. The informants were between 20 and 49 years of age, 13 of whom were younger than 35, at the time the interviews were carried out.

The communication sector is a relatively new sector in the organisation. Within the movement, it is informally seen as a formative sector where young militants learn before being moved to sectors such as production, education, and international relations. As a result, most people working with communication are young militants. It was thus a challenge to talk to older members of the sector who are now in other functions, most
occupying strategic positions in the organisation, because of their busy schedule of meetings and work-related travel.

Among the informants, two distinct life trajectories became apparent. The first involved media and communication students (journalism and film studies) who sympathised with the movement, became close to it during their university years, and kept working among its ranks. This was the case with three of the four press officers and the members in the audiovisual, propaganda, and agitation task forces. Most of the informants were, however, children of older militants, some born in settlements or at camp sites. Two of the informants had worked in unskilled jobs in cities and came into contact with the MST and decided to join the movement.

Producing data from observations

During the course of the fieldwork, observations happened usually in connection with interviews, as observation sites were selected according to the presence of potential key informants. During the time spent at the sites, observation was focused on understanding the context in which communicative processes take place. I was particularly attentive to the social relations that take place, what activities are performed by whom, how people perform such activities, and how they interact to each other. The observations in settlements, the school, press offices, and radio stations were particularly relevant in exploring questions 1 and 2, which deal with the symbolical and material dimensions of communicative processes. During the observations, I followed normal daily activities that related to communication, such as radio broadcasting, meetings at the school radio, class discussions about media reporting, press-office activities, and evaluation meetings during the MST’s National Congress. From these observations, I wrote field diaries that describe communicative processes in practice: what happens during a radio broadcast, how students at the MST school talk about their interactions with journalists and what they see in the media about the organisation, what the daily routine of press officers is like, what the different views of the roles of communication are between the
school radio and the press office, for instance. Being at the sites, I did not need to rely only on interviews to understand how shared meanings are constructed and how militants relate to media in their daily activities.

Besides knowing the aspects that I wanted to focus on, my observations were not systematic (Flick 2009, p. 222). I observed and moved around the settings where I found myself whenever I was not conducting interviews. Taking Gold’s typology (1958, cited by Flick, 2009, p. 223 and Bryman, 2008, p. 411) as reference and fine-tuning it, I consider that I assumed a role between that of participant-as-observer and observer-as-participant. Most members in social settings were aware of my role as researcher, and I interacted freely with them, without partaking in their professional activities.

The main problem with observations (highlighted by Bryman, 2008, p. 417) and the resulting field notes is that they rely on ‘the frailties of human memories’, which in turn can have a negative impact on the quality of the research. In order to overcome this obstacle, I adopted a strategy of writing down short notes during the time of observation that were later (on the same day) developed into a more detailed diary.

**Secondary data**

**Fieldwork diary**
The diary consists of my field notes taken during the visits to settlements, press offices, the MST school, and from the interviews during my first field trip. During the second field trip, a more detailed fieldwork diary was written during the MST National Congress.

**Audiovisual material**
Photographic and audiovisual material produced during both field trips is used as a form of documentation comprising just over 500

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55 In the article ‘Roles in Sociological Field Observation’, published in 1958, Raymond conceptualises research roles in fieldwork, departing from Budford Junker’s theoretical typology ranging from the ‘complete participant’ to the ‘complete observer’.
photographs and around four hours of raw footage. Some of the photographs are used as illustration to the text. During data collection and analysis, these materials played a documentary role, helping me keep track of the places where I had been and people I met in the field.

**Documents**

Documentation includes guidelines for communication work at different levels, the document called the ‘thermometer’, which is an analysis of media coverage prepared by the press officers and circulated among the MST’s leadership, and informational material distributed to MST militants and to the press during the National Congress. All these documents were made available to me during my fieldwork. The guidelines for communication work include a handbook-like text that is used for educational purposes within the movement and instructions for the students in charge of communication at the MST school. The thermometer and detailed press releases were obtained during the National Congress. Informational material about the organisation and the agenda for the five-year period starting with the National Congress in 2014 were distributed to all participants at the event.

**MST media production**

The MST’s media production consists primarily of the movement’s newspaper *Jornal Sem-Terra* and its website. MST media production materials are used to support the analysis of interviews in a non-systematic way, which means that I did not perform any kind of content analysis with this material.
7 Fieldwork

This chapter provides a report on my fieldwork including also methodological discussions concerning fieldwork design and research activities. Also, a detailed description of the fieldwork sites is provided in the chapter.

Fieldwork preparation

Flick (2009, pp. 106-107) highlights the importance of gaining access to the field and informants’ trust in qualitative research, since the production of data depends on people’s willingness to share information with the researcher. Apart from issues of trust, multisite research can also be a challenge from a logistical point of view. Considering the fact that the fieldwork sites were distant from the place where I was based, the logistical planning of the fieldwork started early in 2012 with negotiations to grant access to sites and to get in contact with relevant people. In parallel with my first field contacts, preparation for my fieldwork also included designing a fieldwork plan that used the research questions as a guideline to select observation sites, as well as to identify possible gatekeepers and informants.

Contacts with informants before and during my fieldwork followed the strategy of purposive sampling, while snowballing happened organically to be used as a technique, as the first contacted informants were key individuals in the organisation who could put me in touch with other potential informants. Being introduced by these first informants to fellow MST militants meant that I could count on their initial trust in my work. The first step in my fieldwork was to contact people who could lead me to the settlements or who had contact with the MST. One of these contacts, an officer at FEPAGRO- Porto Alegre, a regional foundation for agricultural research, led me to the MST’s school in Veranópolis, a town in southern Brazil, where they had in previous years held a vocational course in communication (radio and theatre).
By then I also tried to contact the MST’s press office through the e-mail address provided on their website and also through Facebook, but without success. After a number of attempts, I came across a journalist working at the newspaper *Brasil de Fato*, located in the same building as the MST’s press office in São Paulo. The journalist gave me the personal e-mail addresses to the two press officers, who promptly responded, and we agreed on a preliminary interview through Skype, which happened on 10 October 2012. This interview was not recorded, as it had prospective and introductory functions. During this interview, we also agreed that I would carry out observations during the MST’s 6th National Congress in 2013, which was later postponed until 2014.

During this first contact, we discussed which settlements I could visit, in accordance with my requirements to get in contact with militants working with communication in different forms. Following my research aims, the ideal sites were settlements were there was active communication work, which in the case of the MST meant the presence of a radio station or a communication task force. I offered to produce a short written description of my research in case the press officers had to discuss and request approval for the interviews from other sectors of the movement. In the months prior to my departure for Brazil, I remained in contact with one of the press officers to decide more specific details of the visit: the date, times, and what I would do at the press office. At this point, I was aiming to negotiate non-participant observation and interviews.

Another important source of further contacts was one of the coordinators at the MST’s school who had also taught in their media and communication course. He provided me with an email list of former students (six in total), one of whom answered my first email. This student is currently a coordinator at an MST radio located in a settlement in the state of São Paulo, and we agreed on a visit to the settlement during my fieldwork.

Through correspondence with one of the press officers in São Paulo, I became aware that the press office in the capital, Brasília, was also important and active in organising demonstrations and protests and mediating the MST’s relations with journalists. Being the capital of the
country and government centre, Brasília is the place where important political decisions are taken, attracting social movements and pressure groups as well as journalists. After email correspondence with the press officers in Brasília, a visit and interviews were also agreed upon.

Later, I got in contact with the coordinator of a journalism programme created in collaboration with the MST at the state university in the state of Ceará, in northeastern Brazil, for members of various social movements. The majority of the students in this programme were MST militants, and it ran in a system called alternance pedagogy. I learned then that during two weeks in August 2013 the students would be having classes at Ceará Federal University (UFC). After discussion with the programme coordinator, we agreed that I would be able to meet them for interviews and possibly organise a focus group. However, two weeks before the trip to Fortaleza, capital of Ceará, I was informed that the course had been postponed to mid-September of the same year, as the funding body, the National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA), had not released the funds for students’ travel and accommodation expenses on time. With the change of dates, it became impossible for me visit the university.

As mentioned earlier, I made a conscious choice for a geographically broad distribution of observation sites. Aware that the MST is very strong in the south of Brazil, where it was founded in 1984, I deliberately tried to avoid concentrating all the visits to that region. I therefore tried to contact members in the northeast of the country. For logistical reasons, the easiest state to visit was Bahia, and during my visit to the press office in Brasília, I was given the contact information for the communication representative in the state, and a visit to a settlement in southern Bahia was agreed.

At the end of June, two weeks before leaving Sweden for my first field trip to Brazil, I had agreements to visit the press offices in São Paulo and Brasília, the school in Veranópolis, and the settlement in Itapeva, São Paulo, as well as one pilot interview booked with a journalist who

56 Alternance pedagogy (pedagogia da alternância) is a system used in MST educational programmes. In this system, students spend 10 weeks at school in a period called school time (tempo escola) and 10 weeks in their communities, which are usually located elsewhere. This latter period is called community time (tempo comunidade).
had been involved with press contacts and the production of media content for the MST in southern Brazil. It is important to stress the fact that due to both the dynamics of the movement that require members to travel often and with short notice, and to the wave of protests that took over Brazil in June 2013 in which the MST played an active role, no dates were set for the meetings. The uncertainty about the meetings and visits – considering my limited time and resources to carry out the fieldwork – added an element of stress to the experience but was at the same time an initiation into the dynamics of a social movement organisation.

After the first field trip, I had made contacts with people in different areas of the movement and secured the collaboration of press officers in São Paulo and Brasília. I negotiated my participation in the MST’s 6th National Congress, which would happen from 10 to 14 February 2014 in Brasília. The agreement was that I would observe the activities of the press officers and carry out interviews. From the beginning of the negotiations, it was made clear to me that I would not be able to observe certain members-only activities and meetings. These were strategic meetings in which militants defined the lines of action for the coming periods.

During first field trip between July and September 2013, I was able to get an overview of the communication processes in the movement – how communication flows between the press office in São Paulo and the settlements, between the press offices in São Paulo and Brasília, and in loco in the settlements. Such an overview was important to plan the second field trip and select the sites with most potential for observations and where I could potentially find interesting informants for the interviews.

Apart from observing the press-office team at work during the National Congress, my goal for the second field trip was also to carry out more interviews and visit more settlements. I was particularly interested in interviewing long-time militants who joined the MST during the 1980s, when the movement was created. After visiting two settlement radios, one in the state of São Paulo and the other in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, I became aware of the importance of the radios for the settlement
and their role in establishing a channel for dialogue with the neighbouring community. The settlement radios are going through a difficult period after an upsurge in the 1990s; many settlement radios closed in recent years, and others have been forced to adopt commercial strategies in order to remain active.

Considering these aspects, I decided to visit two more successful settlement radios in the southern states of Santa Catarina and Paraná. I was able to establish contact with people working in these radios, but the visits never happened. A few days before leaving for my second field trip, I learned that the radio in Santa Catarina had caught fire, and during the congress in Brasília, I was told that the radio in Paraná had been temporarily deactivated, as the militants feared that the police would visit the settlement and take their equipment, forcing them to close the radio.

**Entering the field**

The fieldwork started on 19 July 2013 with a pilot interview with a journalist who had unofficially acted as an MST press officer from 2005 to 2007 in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, while working in the cabinet of a state deputy politically allied to the MST. As a routine procedure, I asked if he knew of any people who could be of interest for my research, and he gave me the contact details of one of his former colleagues, who also agreed to be interviewed. The second pilot interview was held on 31 July 2013, and the informant was also a journalist who had worked as an MST press officer from 2007 to 2011. These two pilot interviews proved useful in two aspects. The first was to gain access to first-hand accounts of communicative processes and media practices in the movement, and the second was to test the guide as a research instrument. I started the interviews by asking the informants to tell me about how they got involved with the MST and what their activities in the movement were. From these first accounts, I could focus the following questions on their particular activities.
Both pilot interview informants had experience with radio production and as a consequence we discussed the ways in which radio was used to circulate information about the movement and the relationship with local radio stations in areas where there were/are occupations or settlements. One of the informants had experience with organising protests, direct action, and media training, which opened for discussion the subject of relations with mainstream media in the state of Rio Grande do Sul during these events.

Having an open guide focused on topics rather than questions allowed me to adapt the questions to the experiences of the informants. In the case of these two particular interviews, the questions naturally tended to cover press relations and the involvement of the militants in the work of the press officers, as well as the relations between press officers and the coordination of the movement. It required, however, extreme attention and awareness in order to quickly grasp the relevant experience of the informant and direct subsequent questions towards this experience. For instance, when these informants told me about their experience setting up a radio news agency, I had to quickly direct the conversation towards questions that would grasp this experience in full. This strategy was useful during all of my fieldwork since informants, albeit all working with communication, performed different tasks in different positions within the movement and had different militant biographies. The semi-structured interview with an open guide allowed the flexibility to change the course of conversations when needed, or to focus on more relevant aspects depending on the activities of the informant.

**MST school**

The first site I visited was the MST’s secondary school, Instituto de Educação Josué de Castro (IEJC), located in Veranópolis north of Rio Grande do Sul state (see the map at the end of this section) on 24 July 2013. Josué de Castro, who the school is named for, was a Brazilian physician, politician, and novelist. He worked actively for the
eradication of hunger, wrote about the social contexts of poverty in the northeast of Brazil, and was chairman of the United Nations’ Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Naming the school after someone with this profile shows the awareness within the organisation of constructing a coherent symbology, which will be discussed in Chapter 8.

Veranópolis is a town of 23,000 inhabitants situated north of Rio Grande do Sul state, 160 kilometres from the capital, Porto Alegre, in an area that received a large number of Italian immigrants during the second half of the 19th century. The school is located in an old Franciscan monastery. Having suffered a drastic decrease in its number of priests, the congregation, with which the MST had a good relationship, decided to hand over the building to the school, and it opened for the first students in 1995. Since 1995, the IEJC has held vocational secondary-level courses. In order to be entitled to a place, the students must be members of a social movement. In the past, the school offered teacher training courses, a course forming public health technicians, and a communication programme with two tracks – radio and theatre. In September 2013, the school started a BA programme in History. The students stay at the school for periods of ten weeks and are also responsible for running the school during the time: helping in the kitchen, tending the vegetable garden, cleaning and planning leisure, as well as ordinary pedagogical activities. One of the activities that are part of the ‘communication post’ is to run the school radio, which is broadcast internally in the building. Apart from the radio, the students responsible for communication also need to update the notice boards and organise a weekly discussion of the news.

The purpose of this visit was to do one interview with one of the pedagogical coordinators who also was the coordinator of the communication course and the son of one of the founders of the MST. However, he had to travel at short notice and was not present on the day of the visit. I was nevertheless able to talk to teachers and administrative personnel at the school, who showed me around and promptly invited me to return for a longer stay.

About a month later, I went on my second visit to the IEJC in Veranópolis. I arrived at the school and was met by an administrator
whom I had met during my first visit. We discussed the logistics of the interviews, and I asked to see a number of documents, such as students’ assignments in the communication course and curricula. We agreed that I would interview students in charge of communication, which is assigned work at the school. These students run the radio, organise film screenings, and update information boards around the school. The assignments and curricula were part of the communication programme held twice by the school in previous years. Because it is a boarding school, there are usually a group of 60–70 students living at the premises during the 10 weeks they spend there. The students have activities from 8:00 in the morning to 9:00 or 10:00 in the evening with a couple of free hours in the morning or afternoon. They are divided into groups (núcleos)\footnote{A núcleo is the base-unit of organisation in the MST. In settlements and at campsites, families are also organised in núcleos.} with a coordinator, and many activities are organised through the groups, which also serve to allocate the daily work at the school.

In the school, I was given a room in the teachers’ quarters. Many teachers come from other towns and states and usually stay in the accommodations offered by the school during the teaching periods. The school operates a strict routine, in the morning the alarm goes off at 6:15, breakfast is served from 6:45 to 7:00, and before the working day starts, students and personnel participate in a ceremony called mística, which is organised by the students in the communication group. As a guest, I also participated in the mística and was allowed to take pictures. The functions of the mística in the communicative processes of the MST will be discussed in depth in the following chapters.

The ceremony is also when attendance is taken, after which the students and personnel continue with their daily activities. Some students will have classes while others will work on different tasks. In the morning, I conducted two interviews: one with two students in charge of communication and the other with the pedagogical coordinator, who had previously worked as a press officer. Upon my request, one of the school administrators tried to arrange an interview with a student who would take charge of a settlement radio after lunch, but she had a
meeting and did not have time that day. With no more interviews booked for the day, I left the IEJC after lunch.

The IEJC proved to be a relevant observation site because it is a place where MST militants are educated and young people are educated and socialised into the organisation. The school is a place where communicative processes that aim to achieve symbolic cohesion among members are constantly enacted. Although locally managed, the offer of courses in the school responds to the national demands of the movement. Teaching methods and course content are nationally debated internally within the movement. This gives the school an important position within the MST’s communicative processes, making it a site where some practices that shape such processes become part of the organisation’s socially shared universe. For all these reasons, during the first visit to the school, I evaluated that it deserved more in-depth observation.

I came back to the IEJC as part of a second field trip and stayed there from 24 to 28 February 2015. During this visit, I accompanied the students in the communication unit and participated in their meetings and in other activities related to communication, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

Press offices

About two weeks after visiting the school in Veranópolis, I went to São Paulo to visit the MST press office in the capital (see the map at the end of the section) and the settlement located between the towns of Itapeva and Itaberá, south of the state. Due to the press officers’ unpredictable schedule, it was not until the week before my trip to São Paulo that we decided on a date for the visit. The MST press office and the national secretariat are located in two separate buildings on the same street in central São Paulo. The MST press office was established between 2002 and 2003.58 Before that, there was localised communication work in

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58 Interview with press officers Igor Felippe Santos and Luiz Felipe Albuquerque, from the São Paulo press office.
some states, with *ad hoc* communication activities often being carried out by people outside the movement, as was the case with the two former press officers in the pilot interviews. There were also militants responsible for communication work in the settlements and production of the movement’s newspaper, but the activities were sometimes disconnected and did not have any central steering or dedicated team working at the national level, as is the case today.

The press officers occupy a room in the building (a former residence) shared with the newspaper *Brasil de Fato*, the radio agency *Notícias Populares*, which produces news and other radio programmes, and Via Campesina’s audiovisual archive. At the time of the visit, there were three press officers working on-site. During my visit, one of the press officers was away covering the national congress on agro-ecology, an event co-organised by the MST. The national press office works as a centralising unit for communication within the movement and between the movement and other sectors of the society, particularly the national press, but also other social movements and government bodies. One of the press officers has the responsibility of managing the website, which is fed with news from the whole country. The press officers also manage the movement’s social media accounts on Twitter and Facebook. In my first day at the press office, I was able to observe the dynamics and some of the routines of the daily work of the press office, as well as to gather relevant data through informal conversations. I also occasionally met an MST youth leader who agreed to be interviewed the next day.

Apart from allowing me to sit at their office and observe their activities, showing me around in the press office and the secretariat, the press officers were extremely helpful in providing contacts and suggesting possible informants according to my requests. By then, one of the difficulties was to find MST members from older generations, those who had been active in building and organising the movement in late 1970s and early 1980s. All my informants so far, as well as those who had agreed to be interviewed, had joined the movement during the 1990s and first years of the 2000s.

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59 La Via Campesina is an international organisation founded in 1993 that unites peasant’s movements around the world comprising about 164 organisations in 73 countries. (www.viacampesina.org)
The next field trip was to Brasília, where two press officers and members of the propaganda and agitation section, and audiovisual brigades (Brigada de Agitação e Propaganda, Brigada de Audiovisual) had agreed to be interviewed. The press office in Brasília is located in an office building and shared with other areas of the MST. The offices are under the name of Instituto 17 de Abril (17 April Institute), which is the date when MST militants were killed in 1997 during a confrontation with the police. Two press officers work there, one focusing on press relations and the other on liaising with the communication sector and following the progress of projects in the National Congress. One of the press officers was then enrolled in the Journalism programme at UFC (mentioned above). In Brasília, also as part of the communication task force, there are the groups, or brigades, in charge of propaganda and agitation, and communication and culture. Apart from the interviews with the two press officers, I also interviewed two members of these groups and one former press officer.

*MST settlements*

After two days at the press office, I left the city of São Paulo for Itapeva (shown on the map at the end of the section), located 290 kilometres south of São Paulo. I was met in town by one of the presenters at the radio and her father and taken to the settlement where they also live. The settlement is located about 30 kilometres from town and is home to around 450 families divided into five allotments called agrovilas. There is a small centre consisting of the radio, a house that is used to host guests who come for a variety of events, the administration of the production cooperative, an events venue, a school building that was not in use, and three houses where some militants currently lived.

My first contact was with those living and working in the centre. All of them were keen on showing me around and talking about their work and what they produced at the settlement. From what they told me, it is common for the settlement to receive guests and visitors, sometimes

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60 The MST is not registered as an organisation. All of its property is registered under foundations and cooperatives. This is a strategy to avoid lawsuits.
from other countries. Guests can come for courses and seminars – usually MST internal events or events organised in cooperation with other social movements – and also technical visits, which is the case of universities, international organisations, and government bodies. During the first day, I conducted two interviews with communicators at the radio station and followed the broadcast of the afternoon programme.

On the second day, I was taken to see one of the agrovilas, where around 100 families live and work in a cooperative system. At first sight, the agrovila looks like any small village town in Brazil, with unpaved narrow streets and small houses, a grocery shop, and a bar. Looking closely, it was possible to see that the houses displayed MST flags. Since both informants were in their twenties and both had been born into the MST, as their parents lived in the settlements, I asked again whether they could put me in contact with someone from their parents’ generation and was introduced to one older member who helped establish the settlement’s radio in the 1990s. He was the uncle of one of my informants and a member of the first group of settlers at Fazenda Pirituba.

The second settlement visited is located in the state of Bahia in the northeast region. I arrived in Bahia’s capital, Salvador, coming from Brasília and travelled south by bus to Wenceslau Guimarães (see the map at the end of the section), a town of 27,000 inhabitants, located 290 kilometres south of Salvador. In Wenceslau Guimarães, members of the MST occupy positions in the local government: the secretary for agrarian development and one city councillor are MST militants. Upon arrival, I was met by the coordinator of the communication sector in the state, a young man in his early twenties, who was also working as a press officer in the aforementioned secretariat.

My contact met me at the minuscule bus station and we walked through town to the settlement, where I stayed at the house of the settlement’s leader, a woman in her thirties with a degree in agricultural sciences. She shared the house with her partner and daughter, and other neighbours and friends were constantly coming in and out. The house is located in the settlement’s Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara centre, in a similar
disposition as *Fazenda Pirituba* in São Paulo, with a sports stadium and school. The difference is that this settlement is located practically in town, allowing closer relations with the community. I was told that the sports stadium in the settlement is the only one in town and is used for all kinds of events, not only those organised by the MST.

The communication officer whom I was going to interview also had dinner at the settlement leader’s house, and the interview was carried out before dinner. The interview happened under rather stressful conditions, as the interviewee’s mother had just been hospitalised with high blood pressure. He nevertheless insisted on going ahead with the interview since other people had followed his mother to the hospital. Once again, all the people I met were keen on showing me around, showing their produce, and talking about the life in the settlement. I asked many questions about their activities, relations with the community and local government, production, and conflicts with the police and landowners, all of which were duly answered.

The next morning, I was picked up at the house by the local councillor, who is a member of the MST, and taken to the campsite (*acampamento*61), where I was first supposed to stay. This campsite is located on land that belonged to a family in the cocoa production business and consists of around 25 houses, one of which is the school. There is also a house that is used for roasting cocoa beans, which are then sold to middlemen who, in their turn, sell the produce to companies manufacturing chocolate. Bahia is a state in Brazil known for its cocoa production, and wealthy cocoa farmers portrayed in the books of world-renowned Brazilian writer Jorge Amado, and in soap operas such as *Renascer*, which told the story of a decadent cocoa magnate’s family.

At the campsite, I met the leader, Aline, a woman who left her job as a cleaner in São Paulo to join the MST. As they were about to start a meeting, I stayed in the room for an informal chat while waiting for the settlement’s leader, who would show me around. The meeting was

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61 *Acampamento* is an MST occupation in which the families have not gained legal rights to the land and live in a very unstable situation, risking being evicted or thrown out at any time, sometimes in a violent manner.
being held at the school premises, and leaders from settlements in the region were present. The school is located in the old farmhouse, a common feature in MST settlements. Farmhouses are deliberately made into schools to symbolise the shift of power – from being the house of the landowner to becoming houses of knowledge and liberation for children and adults. According to those living and working at the settlement and campsite, the MST in Bahia is not as well structured as in the south of Brazil, and they were starting to find ways of producing and selling their produce, thus making the settlements self-sustainable. Contrary to the settlements visited in the south of Brazil, there was no radio in Bahia, and one of the members coordinated the communication sector and was trying to create a blog for the movement in the state. The young communication officer was also, at the time, enrolled in the journalism course at the university in Ceará.

After Bahia, the next interview was conducted at Radio Terra Livre in the settlement Vitória da Conquista, located Hulha Negra (see the map at the end of the section), a town of just over 6,000 inhabitants, located on the border between Brazil and Uruguay. This is one of the oldest operational MST radios in the south of Brazil and the only one that survived a decline in audience and resources during the first years of the 21st century. Radio Terra Livre was named several times by different people in the Veranópolis school, and I decided there that it would be interesting to interview its communicators. I obtained an e-mail address from an administrator at the school and contacted Radio Terra Livre. The email was quickly answered by one of the communicators and a visit was arranged.

The radio is situated in an area with a number of MST settlements about 30 kilometres from the town centre along an unpaved road. The interview with the communicator who had answered my request was conducted during the time he was broadcasting his programme, a mix of music, interviews, and short informative bulletins.
Since my first contact with the MST in 2012, I had been planning to participate in the organisation’s National Congress, held every fifth year. The sixth National Congress was to be held initially in 2013 but, for a number of reasons (logistical and financial), it was postponed until 2014. The congresses are considered a meeting point and an arena to discuss and plan the activities and political guidelines for the coming period of five years. Apart from the national congress, there are also biennial national meetings.

Planning for the National Congress usually starts two years before the event when militants in settlements and regional sectors start discussing the issues that should be addressed in the coming congress. The discussions are forwarded to the national leadership who organise the activities. Each congress has a slogan that captures the essence of the discussion and the challenges for the coming period. The slogan of the sixth congress could be loosely translated as ‘Act! Construct popular agrarian reform’ (*Lutar! Construir reforma agraria popular*).

As part of my fieldwork, the congress is considered a period of high communication activity, hence my interest in observing the event. In the meetings with press officers in Brasília and São Paulo, I had already obtained their consent to observe the communication activities. In the days prior to the congress, I was informed by the press officers with whom I had contact that I would be given press credentials for the congress. This way, I would be able to enter the designated press area. I was told to contact one of the press officers upon arrival at the congress venue.

I arrived from Sweden direct to Brasília on 9 February 2014, the day before the congress started. The MST’s 6th National Congress was held at Nilson Nelson Stadium. The activities, which will be discussed in detail in the following chapters, included *místicas* prepared by each of the five Brazilian regions, demonstrations, plenary discussions, and tactical meetings. Around 15,000 militants from the whole country
attended the congress, as well as just over 200 international guests. It was also possible to participate in the congress as a guest by paying a fee of 10 Brazilian reals, which I did as I arrived, because I could not find the press officers with whom I had previous contacts. This proved to be beneficial because apart from the press credential I also obtained a guest credential. Later, I learned that the press was not welcome everywhere and by everyone.

A press credential granted journalists access to the room that was being used as a press office, an area where journalists could obtain materials such as press releases, do interviews, and participate in press conferences. The room also provided access to an enclosed press area inside the stadium, where reporting teams could take photographs of the congress and film the activities. Apart from these areas, journalists had restricted access to the congress and had to be accompanied by someone from the communication team when circulating outside the stadium and interviewing MST militants. On the other hand, ordinary guests had no access to the press room, which was restricted to the MST leadership, the communication team, and journalists. Thus, the two credentials granted me wide access to almost all areas during the congress. The only area to which I had to be accompanied by a member of the communication team was the radio and video production suite, where certain meetings were also being held. It was nevertheless relatively easy for me to get there, I only needed to ask a member of the communication team to follow me to the area, usually because I wanted to speak to someone who was working there.

My main objective at the congress was to observe the activities of the communication collective, which occupied the main lobby at the stadium by way of a traditional press office (more on the structure of the communication collective will be provided in the following chapters). This was also the only entry point for journalists, who, upon showing their credentials, could access a designated area from which they were able to set up cameras and watch some of the sessions and plenaries. Since I had already met and interviewed many of the people working in the collective, I was able to count on their support to find

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62 Guests included mostly students, researchers, politicians, and bureaucrats and members of other civil society organisations and NGOs.
other relevant informants. During the congress, apart from observing communication activities (press conferences, meetings, interviews, and other routine activities), I conducted two interviews and tried to book other interviews and visits to settlements.

The map below shows the sites visited during my first and second field trips.

1) São Paulo, SP – 6-7 July 2013 and 19 February 2014, visit to MST press office and interviews
2) Itaberá/Itapeva, SP – 9-10 August 2013, visit to MST settlement at Fazenda Pirituba, observation and interviews
3) Brasília/Planaltina, DF – 27-30 August 2013, visit to the MST’s press office, five interviews. 10-19 February 2014, observation during the National Congress and interviews
4) Wenceslau Guimarães, BA – 2-3 September 2013, visit to MST settlement and campsite, one interview
5) Veranópolis, RS – 24 July and 19-20 August 2013 and 24-28 February 2014, visit to MST school – observation and interviews
6) Porto Alegre, RS – 23 September 2013, visit to MST regional office, one interview
7) Hulha Negra, RS – 16 September 2013, visit to MST Radio in the settlement of Conquista da Fronteira,

Brazil is divided into five regions: south, southeast, northeast, central and north. Apart from the north region, which is also the least inhabited, as it includes part of the Amazon forest, all other regions were visited. The sites visited are all located near coastal areas, which is also the most populated area in Brazil. Due to logistical reasons and time constraints, the settlements visited had to be located within easy reach from the state capitals.

Reflecting on my role in the fieldwork

An important aspect of research work in ethnographic traditions – as well as in certain types of qualitative research - is the relationship that the researcher establishes with the research environment. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p. 63) point out that ethnographic settings and the relations that are played out in them are quite varied. For this reason, it is impossible to generalise to the point of devising a model for field relations. However, a discussion about the role(s) assumed by, and ascribed to, the researcher contributes to the transparency of the study because it makes visible the social settings, relations, and concerns that make up the context in which data was collected. As data collection is performed in the informants’ milieu, a relationship that goes beyond the processes of data collection develops during fieldwork.

In the course of the fieldwork, I entered homes, offices, and spaces of study and militancy. Although I did not perform participant observation, I frequented the informants’ environment for activities that exceeded interviews – I stayed at their houses, shared meals with
them, and took part in other daily activities. From the outset, I was open about my intentions and the scope of my research, revealing different levels of detail depending on who my interlocutor was. The press officers received a two-page document explaining the research project, and I told most people I met in the field that I was researching the MST’s communicative processes. The openness towards my objectives minimised one of the main concerns in ethnographic work – gaining the trust of informants (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, Chapter 4; Bryman 2008, Chapter 17; and Flick 2009, Chapter 10). Some informants – the press officers in particular – were used to interacting with researchers and treated me as just one more researcher. They helped me with what I needed and tried to accommodate my needs, suggest places and informants accordingly, and, when possible, grant access to places such as offices, settlements, and meetings.

In the settlements, I was treated as, and assumed the role of, a curious foreigner. For many informants, the fact that I lived in Sweden (despite being born and raised in Brazil) was enough to be treated as a foreigner who should be shown around and receive a full explanation about the many aspects of living in a settlement. It also happened that some people I met in the field had been to Sweden or Norway for exchange and study trips, which became a point of conversation.

It was unexpectedly easy to gain access to the settlements and to the school. After the first contact, I was promptly invited to stay at these places. I later learned that, in the settlements I visited, as well as in the school, it is common to receive visitors – schools, universities, researchers, and friends of the MST. On the weekend after my visit to Fazenda Pirituba, they received a visiting journalism class from a university in São Paulo, and the settlement Ernesto Che Guevara had received visits by Swedish farmers on a study trip. During the MST National Congress, I met an Italian couple who were going to spend time at a settlement in the state of Santa Catarina after the congress. This can explain, to a certain extent, my frictionless access to such places. Since I knew from the start that I would not have much time in the field, I made a point of being aware and learning the social rules, patterns, and practices among militants. One of these rules is that
discipline is highly valued in the movement (it is even one of its guiding principles – discipline and study), and that militants have tasks that they need to perform. This is especially important in the school, so I never approached students directly, always asking a teacher or member of staff to introduce me to the students and to advise the best times for the interviews.

When interacting with press officers and other professionally trained journalists, my role was that of an outside peer, as I also have a journalism degree and work experience in the field. As a consequence, they were able to speak to me from that reference point, which means that they did not spend time on contextualisation and background information about their activities as journalists in the movement and relations with the press.

Even though I had virtually free access to the areas I wanted to visit and to the people I wanted to speak with, I never became an insider in the movement or a peer militant, despite being known and recognised by many militants after a short time in the field. This means that I was not a stranger either and was able to circulate freely during, for instance, the National Congress. Even though my opinion was asked on some occasions (at the national press office, regarding the layout of a blog and at a meeting with the students in charge of the school radio in Veranópolis, regarding programming), I tried to keep a marginal position (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 88) as an interested observer, without being too detached to the point that it would prevent me from informal interaction with informants.

My presence in the field was only challenged once, at the National Congress during the demonstration at the square in front of the Presidential Palace in Brasília. As mentioned above, during the congress I had two different credentials, a press pass that allowed me access to the press area where the communication task force worked, and a guest pass that gave me access to areas where journalists were not allowed. I was taking pictures at the demonstration when I started talking to a young man who was also taking pictures and filming the police officers at work guarding the Presidential Palace against the protesters. He asked me what I was doing, and I explained that I was doing research
for my doctoral thesis. He told me he was also an academic and was studying Geography at a university outside Brasília. The conversation went on peacefully – albeit taking place at a protest, between the protesters and the police – until he saw that I had a press pass and started questioning my agenda and showing mistrust for what I was really doing there. He told me to take off the press pass or that I was otherwise going to suffer retaliation by militants. Apart from this episode, my interactions with militants went on without any major conflicts, and I usually noticed a professional and helpful attitude towards my activities and myself.
8 Communication and mobilisation: construction of the ‘landless we’

My first contact with the movement was in March ‘97, when they arrived here in Brasilia. It was a visual contact. I saw it. I was going to work and saw that huge crowd of people arriving at the bus station. I thought to myself: ‘Man, these are brave people, I want to be part of this!’

Sandra, Planaltina, DF

This chapter analyses and discusses how the collective identity of landless rural workers is constructed within the MST, trying to trace how narratives and symbols are constructed and circulated. It explores communication as a social process, discussing the mechanisms that contribute to the formation of the collective entity that is the social movement.

The construction of the collective subject – theory and practice

It is an accepted idea among social movement scholars (Melucci, 1996; della Porta and Diani, 1999; Gohn, 2003) that a social movement constitutes itself into a collective subject, channelling individual demands into the demands of a group of people. Touraine (2002) sees
social movements as processes of subject construction in the struggle against market dominance. Within this framework, a social movement can be understood from a culturalist perspective in which new forms of sociability arise from the subjectification process that constructs a collective subject. Narratives and symbols that circulate through an array of communicative processes are a formative aspect in such a collective subject and construct the historicity of the movement.

Within the MST, many practices (mediated or not) strengthen the collective ethos and make certain symbols part of shared repertoires. This symbology is constructed according to the original narratives (cf. Berger and Luckman) of the movement, and, in the case of the MST, they have strong uniformity across time. The movement’s flag and its visual identity – male and female rural workers holding tools with raised fists against the background of a Brazilian map – are the most prominent symbols connected to the movement. They could be found in all sites visited during my fieldwork. There are also narratives that sustain the collective ethos and justify the need for rural workers to form and maintain a collective organisation such as the MST. These include workers’ right to land, the status of land as a national natural resource to serve the people and not corporations or private interests, and the preservation of nature as a collective resource. By arguing that these are narratives, I am not downplaying their concrete relevance in the political scenario, but highlighting their character as symbolic systems circulated among the collective.

This section addresses the construction of such narratives that make up the substance of the collective subject that constitutes the symbolic basis upon which the organisation is built and maintained. Narratives are the stories that circulate among militants and, in their essence, justify the existence of the movement and tell its history. Historicity is an aspect that sets the MST apart from many contemporary social movements that can be characterised as ephemeral. There is, within the movement, a deliberate effort to document the present, circulate narratives, and remember and recount the past. The practice of mística, which will be analysed later, is crucial in materialising and objectifying the movement’s history.
As discussed in Chapter 4, communication is also a constitutive element in the process of conscientisation (Freire, 1967/1982) because it is through interaction with others that militants engage in this process. Within the MST, the political role of communication has been known and explored since the movement’s creation. One of the ways to explore the political role of communication is to employ it in the education of militants – the newspaper, the radio programmes, theatre workshops serve not only to inform and construct shared meanings but also to educate militants. This can be noticed clearly in the school radio, where music and programme choices are made with a view to raising consciousness among the students. The fact that there is this conscious political ethos in the MST’s communication modifies the neutral and naturalistic character of social construction as theorised by Berger and Luckman.

Since its foundation in 1984, the MST has become an organisation that has united landless rural workers defending their right to land and rights to basic infrastructure, healthcare, education, and culture in rural areas. The movement then became a bargaining organisation, representing rural workers as a collective in negotiations with the state and regional and local governments. In order to gain bargaining power, they needed to mobilise large numbers of workers and create a structure with the resources to maintain militants in a latent state of mobilisation.

One way to understand such processes is through Resource Mobilisation Theory (RMT), which explains that the process of constructing a collective capable of direct action is the result, on the one hand, of conjunctures that exclude certain groups and, on the other hand, of the ability of these groups to mobilise the necessary resources to generate action. The RMT is helpful in explaining the macro-aspects that led to the formation of rural workers movements in many Latin American countries (see Escobar and Alvarez, 1992) beginning in the second half of the 20th century. Concentration of land ownership, development models that favoured urban areas to the detriment of rural ones, and a production matrix that favoured rapid industrialisation are some of the underlying factors that provoked rural workers to revolt. On the other hand, the work of Catholic Church organisations such as the
Pastoral Lands Commission during the post-dictatorship period in Brazil created material and structural conditions for the organisation of rural workers.

Alongside the conjuncture and structural aspects that elicit mobilisation, there are also symbolic elements to collective organisation and mobilisation that cannot be explained by the RMT. In addition to material and structural resources, a social movement is a symbolic construct that builds on individual identification with a cause or with a group, a process explained in general by the New Social Movements Theory (NSM)\(^6\). The NSM uses identity as the overarching framework within which a collective is formed and claims are advanced. Following the NSM, the affirmation of certain aspects of identity, the acceptance of shared goals and objectives, and the construction of a ‘we’ in opposition to a common ‘they’ make up the symbolic texture that permeates a social movement. Such symbolic texture, materialised and objectified in texts, images, and narratives, is very prevalent within the MST. Such texts, images, and narratives contribute to the construction of a world-reading (cf. Freire, 2001), which will be the centre of a militant’ssocialisation process.

**We are the ‘Sem Terra’: the emergence of the collective subject**

The construction of a shared collective identity can sometimes lead to the strengthening of solidarity relations among members and has a central role in supporting both mobilisation and cohesion among MST militants. Cultural manifestations such as music, folklore, poetry, and the recognition of peasant knowledge and ways of living are usually given a prominent place in the movement’s communicative processes. Politically, communicative processes aim to raise consciousness among workers about their rights to land, healthcare, transport, and education, stressing the importance of collective organisation. Communication strategies also aim to create a dialogue with local communities and society at large about agricultural production, farming, and

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\(^6\) The NSM was originally used to explain social movements that demanded identity-based rights in Europe, as opposed to the redistribution of material resources.
sustainability, as well as issues such as health and environmental concerns related to the expansion of agribusiness. The MST’s website is an example of these strategies, functioning as a depository of information about the effects of agribusiness, health concerns related to agricultural production, and the use of fertilizers and pesticides, as well as the concentration and distribution of land in Brazil.

All these communication strategies and tactics constitute the processes of identity construction, in other words, this is how collective identity is shaped and constructed through communication. They also constitute what Freire (1967/1982) calls search praxis, through which the oppressed recognise the need to fight for liberation. Through these processes, a symbolic substance is constructed, the collective subject that militants know as the MST. So, who is the ‘we’ that the MST has been constructing during their 30 years of activity? What are the defining characteristics of this collective? The MST can be defined as a collective of organised rural workers acting directly through occupation of land and subsequent formation of communities in which rural workers can produce and support themselves and their families. There are two constitutive elements in the identity of the movement as a collective subject: it is formed by workers, and it is a rural movement. The other formative element of the identity is the status of these rural workers as landless and thus subject to dire conditions working on someone else’s land. Being landless is, in the MST’s ethos, a temporary status since the condition of landless worker is to be overcome through collective struggle, while the two constitutive elements are permanent, i.e., when the landless conquer the right to land, they will remain rural workers. The landless condition is the element of discontentment that originates action. Overcoming the landless condition is the MST’s driving force and, together with the rural worker class identity, forms the basis on which all symbolic production rests. This is represented visually on the MST’s flag, which portrays a man and a woman raising tools used by rural workers, in songs that describe the struggle of rural workers, and enacted regularly in the mística. Being open and flexible, this symbolic basis allows for a variety of forms and content – from cinema produced by rural workers, highlighting different aspects of their lives, to the reports about the advancement of agribusiness available on the website. In this sense, it is possible to say that
movement media is where the immaterial aspects of the movement’s identity are materialised and circulated. Such dynamics of identity construction that extrapolate the material dimension of claims that characterised most Brazilian social movements in the 20th century (Gohn, 2003) mean that an in-depth analysis of communicative processes within the MST must account for collectively shared culture and identity. In short, if material conditions are crucial in originating action and mobilisation – for Freire (1967/1982, p. 29), reflection about their own particular conditions leads the oppressed to practice – symbolic processes are crucial to the maintenance of a social movement as a social actor.

The first step to mobilisation is the move from individual discontentment to practical action that is performed collectively. Such a process epitomises what Freire (1967/1982) called conscientisation – recognising oneself as the subject of exploitation and acting to change the exploitative structures. ‘From this debate in the community we started to get acquainted wit other communities and organise meetings to debate our main problems’, I am told by Carlos, one of the most experienced militants at the settlement in São Paulo. The effort to harness individual discontentment into collective claims, constructing a shared collective identity is evident. Through these discussions, they concluded their biggest problem was the lack of land: ‘we worked on the land but we didn’t own it, it was someone else’s land, so we couldn’t grow many crops’, he explains. The group later found out about an MST settlement close by, where it would be possible to obtain more land through expropriation and joined MST in 1986.

Carlos’s recollection also illustrates the communicative and dialogic dimension of conscientisation: they become aware of their problems through dialogue and discussion with others in a similar situation. He emphasises community debate as a crucial element leading to action. Through this debate, common problems are unveiled: in this case, it was that they did not own the land where they worked. As potential MST militants became aware that others had succeeded in claiming land, they also decided to mobilise. This is a subjectification process that creates and, at the same time, is created by the sociability constructed in the movement. In this account, the process of
conscientisation is implicit: if the group decided to start a debate and interact with other communities with a view to joining the MST, it means that they already saw themselves as bearers of rights and understood their role in changing the oppressive situation in which they found themselves. The process of the subjectification of their struggle is explicit in the description of the formation of a group and their decision to occupy land and join the MST.

In the words of Paulo, who contributed to the construction of the communication sector in the MST and now works at one of the movement’s schools, we can see the connection between discursive practices and social strategies.

One way we can perceive the movement’s history and understand the strategy that the movement [has] for each period is the congresses that happen every fifth year. So the congress’s slogan will define the movement’s strategy for the next period. The third congress in ’95 defined [its slogan as] ‘Agrarian reform – everyone’s cause’. Precisely with this understanding that the struggle of rural workers alone wouldn’t achieve agrarian reform, we needed an alliance with the cities, city workers needed to understand that agrarian reform would also bring benefits to the cities.

This statement denotes different levels in which the collective subject is constructed through communication. At first, the historicity of the movement’s struggle is brought up through the communication strategy of defining a slogan for the congress. Second is the fact that the slogan, which is carefully crafted, sets the tone for the political activity during the coming period – to the extent that the understanding spelled out in the slogan led to the strategy of forming an alliance with the cities. The slogan denotes an effort to enlarge the ‘we’ of the movement: even if people in the cities will not join the MST, they are made aware that agrarian reform also has an effect on their lives, being also ‘their cause’. By enlarging the constituency of discontentment, the movement can symbolically weaken antagonists, as they become a small and insular, albeit powerful, group.

‘If we have the communication duties and speak about the movement’s organisational principles in the school, but in our practice we circulate news that [has] nothing to do with this intentionality, songs that have nothing to do with our trajectory, we are going against our principles, aren’t we?’, ponders Victor, one of the students in charge of the school
radio at the IEJC. His question also showing a preoccupation with coherence and symbolic cohesion.

In his statement, Victor, who studied at the IEJC and was in charge of the radio during one of my visits, is making a connection between the movement’s principles that are part of the symbolic universe and the objectification of these principles in his programming choices at the radio. Once more, we notice the effort to recount and remember the history of the organisation as a way to construct a shared past. When he relates the programming on the radio to the movement’s objectives – fight for land and agrarian reform – he reveals a commitment to what could be called permanent mobilisation. Communicative processes will then be permeated by this principle: that communication should support or encourage mobilisation. It is possible to notice here the way in which conscientisation constitutes itself into a communicative process: the choice of content is strongly and deliberately connected to the movement’s objectives.

The concern with the intentionality of communication was voiced many times (more on commonly used words later in this chapter) in this particular interview and in other moments during my observations. Intentionality here can be related to Williams’ (1980) idea of intention present in the production and use of media. The constant reference to intentionality of what is being produced and circulated evidences the understanding of both the role of communication for mobilisation and of the movement’s identity as a collective subject (and how these two elements relate and mutually influence each other). The fact that there is such a widespread concern with intentionality also denotes an awareness of legitimation processes. There is an understanding that it is necessary to set forth the practices that lead to the second and third level of legitimation – rudimentary theoretical propositions and theories that legitimate the institution as a body of knowledge (Berger and Luckman, 1967, p. 94) – which is objectified in the idea of intentionality.

The collective landless *we* is also constructed through the reinforcement of values connected to rural life and the importance of rural production for society. Rural workers are seen and represented not as a subservient
subaltern class but as the protagonists of their own destinies, capable of demanding their rights. Narratives constructed through communication are clearly informed by Marxist theory and class categorisations, and emphasise rural workers as members of the working class struggling against the bourgeoisie. In the interviews, informants constantly used Marxist (mostly Gramscian) terms such as worker class, bourgeoisie, and political bloc. This can be seen in Paulo’s analysis of the MST’s relations with the press:

knowing that the interests of [these] large communication conglomerates correspond to class interests and to the maintenance of land ownership concentration, we don’t have the illusion that [the] MST, being more or less radical [...] is going to gain more space. [The] MST will be more accepted by the press as long as we deny ourselves as a social movement and abandon our flag, [which] is agrarian reform.

*Picture 2: militants perform a mística at the opening of the 6th National Congress. The panel at the centre was designed by militants during an art course and represents the MST’s struggle.*

In the document sent to the press during the MST’s congress in February 2014, the situation faced by the MST was formulated as follows:
The agrarian model focused on exports has expanded, dividing our territory into monoculture areas for the cultivation of soybeans, sugarcane, corn and eucalyptus as well as extensive husbandry. Acquisition of land by foreigners has also reached unprecedented levels. [Since] Dilma took power this logic has not changed. With government incentives, agribusiness has as its logic exploitation of natural resources and work through public financing. It does not produce food for the Brazilian people, harms the environment, generates few jobs and utilises large extensions of land to grow export commodities, based on low wages, intensive use of fertilisers and genetically modified seeds.64

The language of the press release is obviously less politically charged than declarations given directly to me in interviews by informants. There is a noticeable and justifiable change of tone in material that goes out to the press. Still, it is clear in the above text who the MST’s antagonists are. The conflict between agribusiness and rural workers is of such a magnitude that these two groups cannot be seen as agonists (cf. Mouffe). The way the conflict is described in the press release shows that the agribusiness model can only exist at the expense of the elimination of familiar agriculture. This conflict is better characterised by Freire (1967/1982) as the conflict between oppressors and oppressed for which the only solution is a structural change that repositions the oppressed.

Another telling example is that many informants referred to Brazilian media corporations as mídia burguesa, bourgeois media or bourgeois press. During the interviews, I also had to adopt this vocabulary instead of using mainstream media, or big media corporations, so as to make sure that the informants understood what I was asking them and ensuring we had the same framework of reference.

Considering the identity element discussed above, would it be possible to say that there is one overarching collective ethos in an organisation with over a million members spread through a geographically, socially, and culturally diverse country like Brazil? In other words, how inclusive is the we that was and is constantly being constructed by the movement? For a start, there are two sides to this question: the encoding of messages by those who work with communication in the movement and are responsible for disseminating messages, and the decoding of these messages by members who read the newspaper, listen

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64 Documento de subsídio à imprensa. Extended press release distributed to the press during the MST’s sixth National Congress in Brasilia, February 2014. Collected by the author during the congress.
to radio programmes, access the website, and interact via the MST’s social media profiles. Even though creativity and self-expression are stimulated within the MST – in schools, meetings, conferences, and through the production of culture such as music, poetry, theatre, and visual arts – there are those people in the movement who have communication as their task. These people are responsible for implementing coherent practices that construct an inclusive and flexible landless identity. This identity is inclusive and flexible because it is anchored on social-collective elements – being a rural worker, participating in the process to reclaim land – and not on individual elements like gender, sexual orientation, age, or race.

Empirically, it is possible to observe how the collective identity is constructed and reinforced through different communicative processes, as described above. Some aspects of the landless worker identity can be found throughout the MST’s content production and were repeated in the interviews (see following examples). One of the strengths of the movement is that they have succeeded in creating a strong collective subject while remaining open for the multiplicity of individual identities. The landless as a collective identity is inclusive in the sense that it does not impose itself over individual identities. The exclusion that the movement makes is at the collective level of class, where it is opposed to the dominant classes personified by agribusiness corporations, a sector of the political elite, and landowners. The coherence and cohesion of narratives owes much credit to a well-functioning communication system that has been built and developed since the foundation of the movement in a process of reflexive discussion.
Radio and the place-based community

As introduced earlier in the ‘Media Biography’ (Chapter 2), with an increasing number of occupations during the 1990s and consequent increased membership, the MST needed to speak to a large number of militants in the limited area that is the settlement or the occupation. The *Jornal Sem-Terra* newspaper had the role of uniting landless workers in the country, but it did not fulfil the time- and space-specific needs of the settlement and occupation as locally based communities.

Furthermore, the *Sem-Terra* newspaper emerged from the education sector in the movement and had a strong formative character. Its purpose was to unite the national membership and generate a dialogical process that would include MST militants in the whole country. The dialogical process was materialised in the figure of the *zelador*, the newspaper housekeeper who was in charge of collecting news, distributing the paper, and organising discussions in each settlement. The purpose of the newspaper can be compared to that of public service television in some European countries: to unite under one collective
identity the geographically disperse and culturally diverse landless masses, while being attentive to regional differences and celebrating cultural variety.

However, considering the social setting of an MST campsite or settlement, in which many families are strangers to each other prior to the occupation and have to do many of the daily tasks collectively, it was important to construct channels that promoted the sense of community among MST members locally. In this respect, radio complemented the newspaper with its locally based characteristics coupled with the advantage of fitting into the rural workers’ oral tradition and adapting to low literacy skills. The excerpts below denote how radio became an important medium in the settlements. At first, as Paulo explains, radio contributed to social reproduction (Couldry, 2012):

For me the classical example of radio’s function in the movement is here in Rio Grande do Sul, in Hulha Negra. There are about 1000 families settled there, it is a region that historically belonged to big landowners, so you had in a region of thousands of kilometres, without exaggeration, I don’t know... 100 houses. You had the owner’s house, the worker’s house and the rest was field for the cattle. Now, instead of these 100 houses you have 1000 houses [...] This is the typical case in Hulha Negra and many other settlements, the roads are absolutely precarious. What [did] these families [realise] 15 years ago? That they needed a [movement] radio there to be able to communicate, because they were 1000 families spread around many settlements, 10 distant settlements.

Julia, a radio presenter at the MST settlement in Itapeva, state of São Paulo, also connects the implementation of the radio in the settlement to a necessity to ‘bring settlements together’:

[...] so during these years [we felt] the need to have [our] own MST radio, a radio of MST, with the face of MST, following our lines [...] in order to bring together the settlers, a bit about history and information [...]  

In addition to connecting and contributing to creating a sense of community, radio also reproduces cultural forms connected to the ways of living in rural communities, as Marcelo, an MST press officer, points out:

[...] radio as a communication instrument [is] strongly related to peasant culture, which is an oral culture, of stories, so it is a form of communication that always had much acceptance among the movement’s social base.
At the same time, it is possible to see how the collective identity of the movement materialises in mediated communication. In the view of these informants, it is the movement that shapes the medium and not the other way around. The creation of a settlement radio is a collective process, as will be discussed further in this and the next session. Debate and participation in the media (cf. Carpentier, 2008) are constitutive elements of settlement radios and encouraged by the movement at the national level through radio workshops and courses. Gustavo, communication coordinator at the Itapeva settlement, explains how a settlement radio comes to life:

We always give priority to start with a debate before we implement [a radio station], before we arrive with the equipment and [assemble] everything. We start with a debate with the regional leadership so that there is an understanding of what radio is, what it is for and whom it is for [...] after that we start the debate with the communities so that they will feel part of the radio because if the leadership [installs] a radio and the community [does] not feel part of it we end up having difficulties later.

Claudia, from a settlement in the state of Paraná, has been involved in the implementation of radio stations since 2012. She also highlights the importance of debate and community engagement in a settlement radio:

When we are able to really respond to the needs of the families with the radio programming, it is very well received. [...] Twice during our radio workshops the participants visited all families [in the settlement] to find out who really listened to the radio, what time they listened and if they had suggestions.

It was evident in the interviews that radio is a crucial medium for the MST’s social base – campsites and settlements. Regardless of all the difficulties faced in running and implementing a radio – lack of resources, lack of human capacity, legal impediments – MST militants at different instances still put significant effort into the creation and maintenance of radio stations through the production of material at the national level that can be used by the radios and through the organisation of workshops and courses. At a more structural level, the MST campaigns together with other social movements for changes in Brazilian radio broadcasting law that will facilitate the functioning of community radios in rural areas.

During the National Congress, a local radio was implemented, with intermittent transmission, and radio communicators from the whole
country were called to contribute to the congress radio. In the
settlements, the radio is a way of creating a sense of collective that
cannot be achieved with other media. A radio programme conveys the
collective experience of the knowledge that others are listening to that
programme at that same time. It provides the possibility for
identification as presenters come from the settlements and are known
by the local community. The connection with the settlement and the
militants does not stop there: the radio station is also a physical place
that can be visited and used as a communication centre for the
settlement.

Among the students at the movement’s school, radio is also seen as an
important medium for creating a sense of collectiveness. It is run by
students and broadcasts at times when there are no pedagogical
activities: usually two hours in the morning, one hour during lunchtime,
and another two hours in the afternoon. Programming is filled with
music to a great extent, while the remaining time is used for
announcements regarding the school and the movement and news
summaries. Radio programming is the responsibility of the students
who occupy the communication post in the school. The selection of
music and news is done in accordance with the MST’s principles, with
an eye to questions of gender and avoiding strictly commercial music.
The structure of the school radio is more modest than that of other
radios visited, but it does serve the needs of the school and is seen as an
important element in the school’s structure to the extent that running
the radio is one of the activities to which students are assigned. Work in
the radio is also seen as a pedagogical opportunity, since many students
who have been in charge of the radio left the school to do the same type
of work in their settlements or communities.

As an educational experience, the radio responds to the need to create a
sense of community among the students, who come from different parts
of a large and culturally diverse country and need to live together for
periods of 10 weeks. The intention is that, by listening to the radio, they
will share a communicational and symbolic space, as well as the
physical space that is the school. Inserted in the routine and social
ecology of the school – and in the organisational structure of the MST –
the social significance of the school radio is greater than the process of
production and the texts it produces. The radio serves also to reinforce the principles and identity of the movement through the choice of music and commentary on news and current events.

As opposed to the school radio at the IEJC, *Rádio Camponesa* in Itaberá and *Rádio Terra Livre* in Hulha Negra are fully functioning radio stations broadcasting to larger areas. If their physical and technological structures differ, they have in common the fact that they were created and function within the scope of the larger social formation that is the movement. This means that the radio, as well as other media used by the MST, must be analysed both as a communication technology and as a symbolic production within the context of a particular social group. The settlement radios are, of course, more porous than the school radio, which only broadcasts internally to the school, and need to dialogue with local communities that are not necessarily connected to the MST. In these cases, radio communicators need to find a balance between nurturing the interest-based community that is the movement and speaking to the local geographic community. The informants saw their relationship with the local community through the radio as a positive aspect of their work and of the radio station in general. By supporting local artists and promoting leisure activities in which the local community could participate, the radio station, as an institution, contributed to mutual understanding between the MST and neighbouring communities.

*The collective character of communicative processes*

There are principles such as collectiveness, dialogue, and democratic decision-making that permeate the movement in many instances. All informants mentioned these processes, which are encompassed by the idea of ‘organicity’ (*organicidade*). This means that even though there are national and regional leadership committees, spokespersons, and coordinators, decisions are only taken after debate and discussion and should reflect the will of the collective. It was stressed many times during the interviews that debate and discussion are constitutive of decision-making processes in the movement. Processes such as the
creation of a radio, new courses that will be offered in the school, themes to be addressed in the national congress, and possible topics for the newspaper are all ‘organically’ discussed in different instances of the movement.\(^6\)

For a long period, landless workers struggled against landowners who owned large and unproductive extensions of land. Recently, conjuncture changes and the expansion of agribusiness and monocultures of soybeans, corn, and eucalyptus, financed in part by international capital, have resulted in a change of discourse by the MST. It was necessary then to reconfigure the symbolic elements of the struggle and prepare members to counteract the new antagonist (as seen in the picture below). In doing so, the MST is also laying the foundation for their communication with society at large, which aims to raise awareness of the environmental and human consequences of large-scale agribusiness driven by the international commodities market.

![Picture](image)

*Picture 4: Propaganda in the MST youth newspaper, ‘The enemy no longer drives a Jeep or has a moustache’.\(^6\)

\(^6\) MST campsites and settlements are organised in nuclear groups (*núcleos de base*) and in sectors such as education, production, communication, and culture.
The construction of a landless we, materialised through communicative processes can be located at a crossroads between mobilisation of resources and the symbolic construction of a shared but at times porous identity (Melucci, 1996). In this sense, movement media and the practices related to these media both produce and reproduce the social. The distinction between these two processes might not be apparent at first sight but becomes more so upon a closer look. The argument that media produce the social implies acknowledging the material and social relations that are reinforced and sometimes enabled through media. It is not a media-centric position, but a media-centred one in that it claims that media play a role (in conjunction with other actors) in weaving the social fabric. Conversely, when media reproduce the social, they relay social and cultural manifestations and symbologies, detaching these manifestations and symbologies from the space and time when and where they occur. Through the process of social reproduction, individuals are exposed to the modes of sociability shared by a certain group.

The MST has created certain movement-specific spaces of sociability where social relations are produced and reproduced within the movement. The movement schools are examples of these spaces of sociability. In line with MST principles of defending rural workers’ and their families’ right to education at all levels, catering to the specific needs of rural populations, the movement has, throughout its 30 years of existence, founded a number of schools. The Instituto de Educação Josué de Castro (IEJC), described in Chapter 6, in the southern town of Veranópolis is one of these schools.
Picture 5: ‘Class boards’ at the IEJC. Each class chooses a name and creates a board that is hung on the walls of the school. In this picture, we see Class Emiliano Zapata and Class Salvador Allende.

In the school environment, the identity and principles of the MST are also reinforced and strengthened through other, non-mediated activities, strategies, and routines. Known quotes by Rosa Luxembourg, Berthold Brecht, and Che Guevara are painted on the walls of the canteen, as are socialist symbols like the hammer and sickle. On one of the walls in the canteen, there is a shelf with pet bottles filled with native seeds that represent the MST’s stand against genetically modified organisms commercialised by companies such as the transnational corporations Monsanto and Syngenta. Along the corridors, there are boards that represent each class that graduated from the school. The classes choose a representative figure, usually a known character who, according to the students, shares the same values with the class in particular and with the MST as a whole. Some of the choices have been Salvador Allende, Emiliano Zapata, Paulo Freire, and famous MST militants (some of them murdered by the police or private militia-like groups hired by landowners or companies). Outside the school, the walls are painted with MST symbols and mottos against agribusiness, fertilisers, and genetically modified foods.
The symbols are not just static visual references or objects; they also become part of an embodied practice through an activity called *mística*, a ritual enacted by MST members on many different occasions. At the IEJC in Veranópolis, the *mística* is performed every morning before activities start with the participation of students and staff. The students are divided into groups (*núcleos*), and each day a group is in charge of preparing the ceremony, which involves both scenery and performance. The scenery comprises objects such as books, flags, pictures, and tools, and the performance can entail music, and poetry. According to information gathered during my interviews and fieldwork, the *mística* is a constitutive moment in events, school activities, and meetings.

The role of the *mística* in processes of meaning-making and in establishing symbolic cohesion is clearly related to Berger and Luckman’s description of the legitimation process. The authors explain that ‘second level legitimation contains propositions in a rudimentary form’ (1967, p. 94) and attribute a ludic character to second-level legitimation schemes, which can be objectified in proverbs, poems and moral maxims that are ‘highly pragmatic’. The repeated use of different symbolic elements in ritualised performances thus contributes to creating a sense of collective and a shared symbolic repertoire. This is, of course, not the only manifestation of second-level legitimation within the movement, but it crystallises, in one enacted ceremony, many different objectified truth claims that circulate among the members.

These more rudimentary explanations and abstractions can be placed within the framework of third-level legitimation theories. According to Berger and Luckman, these theories create a referential framework ‘for the respective sectors of institutionalised conduct’ (1967, p. 94). Thus, the pragmatically oriented songs, poetry, and images have this referential framework that, in the MST’s case, is materialised in the history of the movement as a collective entity defending rural workers, and in all the intellectual constructs that explain and justify the existence of rural workers (*campesinos*) as a class. These are theoretically grounded and sophisticated explanations drawing on formal disciplines such as economics, history, anthropology, and human geography. They compose a distinct body of knowledge that contributes to the construction of the MST as an institution.
The *mística* also incorporates many elements from Freire’s theoretical framework in both its form and its content. The preparation of the *mística* is an educational process in which militants discuss and give concrete meaning to their collective subjectivity, connecting present experience to the movement’s history. The widespread ritual of planning, sometimes rehearsing, and performing the *mística* is a dialogical process that leads to the objectification of the militants’ struggle. Such objectification is very important in many instances of the movement and can be observed in the militants’ preoccupation in what they define as ‘creating a *mística*’ around something, meaning to signify a situation, fact, or event. Consequently, the content of the *mística* will aim to promote conscientisation and reflection. During the MST’s National Congress, for example, the *mística* that was performed first thing every morning addressed in a theatrical way themes such as marketisation of education and welfare, the spread of agribusiness, and violence against rural workers. These theatrical performances invited militants to reflect on and analyse their own situation, avoiding what Freire (1967/1982) defined as activism, which for him is action without reflection.

*Picture 6: Students at IEJC Veranópolis perform the mística before daily activities start.*

Apart from the creation of the movement’s newspaper in 1980, the institution of settlement radios in the 1980s and 1990s is seen as an
important landmark in the establishment of structures of communication within the MST. The spatial structure of a rural settlement, with scattered properties, and the difficulties of circulating information coupled with rural communities’ oral traditions, as well as the popularity of radio in Brazil (Bordenave, 1977; Otriwano, 2012), were decisive factors for the institution of the first settlement radios. As discussed above, the role of radio in the construction of a sense of collectiveness among rural workers is both material and symbolic. It is material because radio provides the necessary structure for the dissemination of information that is relevant for the MST as a collective, being it news about a local government resolution or music from the region where the settlement is located. The radio station provides an open forum where MST militants can speak and discuss issues with almost no filtering. The symbolic role of the radio is that of constructing common referents among the settlers as a space-based community and among MST militants as an interest-based collective.

So, the significance and functions of radio for the MST - and of other media such as the movement newspaper, website, or profiles in social media networks - can be analysed through different theoretical lenses. Radio offers certain affordances that shape the practices (Williams, 1980; Couldry, 2003) that will be enacted around it. In interplay with the social conditions in which it is used, the affordances of the medium will contribute to the emergence of forms of sociability. As a technology, radio broadcasting is considered adequate for the school environment and for the intentions of this particular group. In this sense, Williams (1980, p. 7) stresses the importance of intention to the analysis of media practice in order to avoid a technological determinist approach that understands social processes as directly derived or generated by the features of certain technologies. In this socially based view, Williams argues, ‘purposes and practices would be seen as direct: as known social needs, purposes and practices to which the technology is not marginal but central’ (ibid.) (emphasis in the original), characterising a media-centred, as opposed to media-centric, look at technology. Following Williams, Couldry (2003) proposes a paradigm of media studies that understands media as elements of practices, as opposed to texts or structures of production.
A second dimension of analysis looks at these media as part of the MST’s communicative process. Being part of a communicative process, they will be used to achieve certain goals set and agreed upon by the members of the movement. In Latin America, the experience of alternative media is closely linked with that of media used by social movements, its role being not only to offer an alternative to other established actors but also to unite and strengthen certain groups such as trade unions and rural workers. Peruzzo (2006) notes that similar processes and experiences have been called community communication, popular communication, participatory communication, horizontal communication, dialogic communication, and alternative communication, but, despite the different names, they constitute a form of communication enacted by excluded or marginal groups that are mobilised in order to claim their rights. In this sense, media used by social movements are placed against the political background, functioning as a way to challenge the hegemony of an antagonist class (cf. Gramsci, 1936/1971).

Finally, a third dimension of the analysis points to the significance of social movement media in the process of the construction of a collective identity that the members can relate to and identify with. Both functionalist and culturalist analyses of social movements acknowledge that a shared sense of collectiveness and purpose is crucial to the maintenance of social movements in their capacity as organisations. Here, we go back to the idea of practice related to communication and to media. As the channels through which symbolic cohesion is achieved, media become part of certain rituals that are repeated and transmitted across different areas and periods.

The creation and development of radios is an example of a communicative process that allows these three dimensions of analysis to be carried out. Starting as a group-specific medium and fulfilling internal organisational and identity construction functions, the radios visited ended up extrapolating these primary functions of the settlement radio and became a medium for the communities surrounding the settlement. When the audience becomes more diverse and starts to include people from outside the movement, those in charge of programming are forced to recalibrate and find a balance between
speaking to the MST as a collective and speaking to the community in which they are located.

It also happens that when an occupation or campsite becomes a settlement, there is a natural process of demobilisation (noted by some informants) because the goal of owning the land has been achieved. In a settlement, MST militants gradually fall into daily life routines and may lose interest in certain types of political activities. The outcome of this process is that more space in the programming is dedicated to music, partly because there are not enough people interested in contributing to the radio but also because music can engage the public outside the movement. Another outcome is that the focus is shifted to public service information (when seeds are going to be distributed, vaccination times in the local healthcare centre, etc.), as this kind of content also maintains an interested public and in many cases is not provided by local commercial media. Even though the radios need to adapt their programming, they try to keep it within the MST ideological framework by broadcasting music from the region where they are located, giving space to local artists, and maintaining strong ties with the community.

Similar to what happened to the radios, the website as an open platform on the Internet ended up reaching audiences outside of the movement. One informant who worked as a press officer pointed out that the website had an important role as a source of information – alternative to the mainstream media – about the movement for the population in general. In two of the interviews, it was mentioned that, through the website, militants have become aware of sympathisers and supporters they did not know they had.

It should be noted that the radio and the website – as different media as they might be – went through a similar process of breaking through the limits of the movement. However, the ways in which the people in control of these media dealt with the fact that they were speaking to an audience broader than the MST’s base are different. While the radios toned down openly political content, focusing instead on music and information that is considered relevant to the communities, the website remains faithful to the MST’s political identity. This can be explained using Carpentier’s (2010) approaches to the study of alternative media,
particularly when in regard to the difference between community and society. According to this typology, a higher level of participation and stronger ties to the community characterise alternative media that serve the community, which is a closely bound group (geographically or through a common interest). Conversely, alternative media that serve the society are less participatory and speak to a not so closely bound group, i.e., the society. Less participatory in this case means that there is a bigger distance between producer and audience.

Another aspect to consider is the territoriality of the radio as a medium compared to the non-territorial features of the Internet. Being closely rooted in the region where the audience is located, the radio as an institution needs to create bonds with this audience in order to guarantee its survival. In other words, a local or community radio will not survive if the distance between producers and the audience/community is too great. Community members must be able to access the radio, give opinions, and participate in and through the media (cf. Carpentier, 2010). A website, in turn, has no territorial base and does not necessarily have a place-based community that it addresses. This relationship explains, in part, why MST radio stations, being the medium of local communities, need to sustain a close bond with these communities while the website that is directed towards a somewhat faceless society has not needed, so far, to compromise.

The processes through which the movement adapted its media practices to both its audience and to its organisational needs can be taken to problematise the definitions of broadcasting and narrowcasting. Recent commentary on digital media and social networking platforms maintains that such platforms allow for narrowcasting to interest communities or personal networks as opposed to mass media, which broadcast to vast audiences. However, communicative processes enacted within the MST show the contrary: radio, considered a mass medium, is used for narrowcasting to local communities, while the

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66 In 2014, the MST started cooperating with a software development company in order to redesign their website. In an interview with the software developer in charge of the project, I learned that the changes would turn the website into an information portal about the issues that the MST works with and about relevant achievement areas such as agricultural production and education. These changes would make the site more appealing to the general public and to sympathisers. The new website was launched in February 2015, when I was in the final stages of writing this thesis and hence it is not discussed further here.
website and even the MST’s Facebook profile are used to broadcast messages to a broader public. One of the press officers recognised, when asked, that those responsible for the website did not have much knowledge about its audiences, whereas the radio communicators are from the area where they work and consequently familiar with the community they are addressing.

The radios and the website are parts of a communication structure that also includes a newspaper, social media profiles, and an e-mail newsletter. Within this structure, the press offices in São Paulo and Brasília are crucial to set the communicative processes in motion. Using the movement’s website as an interface, the press officers gather and distribute information among members. The content of the website is used by the communicators in the radios, who also send information to the press officers. In this way, events like the annual conference on agro-ecological production and the occupation of the area in front of the ministries in Brasília are broadcast to the membership on the website and re-laid as content by the radios. Even though the press offices are located in those two cities, there is a network of press officers working locally in various states. During certain events, this network can be transformed into a communication task force in charge of coordinating different forms of communication (content production, audiovisual production, press contacts).

Overall, it is possible to note a high degree of specialisation and self-reflection in the communicative processes taking place within the movement. Constant self-reflection, analysis, and internal debate sometimes delay and slow down the appropriation of new media, while, at the same time, ensuring that these processes are well grounded within the organisation.

**Words, meanings and ideas**

Berger and Luckman (1967, p. 35) suggest that social life is only possible thanks to objectivations. It is through objectivations that we
are able to communicate and externalise our subjectivities. According to the authors, the production of signs – signification, the attribution of meaning to signs – is an important case of objectivation. The authors consider language the most important system of signs (ibid., p. 37), which leads to the conclusion that signification occurs through the deliberate use of language. Signification through language is a core process for social movements as communities based on a series of shared understandings. Language can also have an emancipatory power when its usage follows critically oriented rationales, which is the case analysed here. By giving names to processes, a social movement objectifies and signifies its actions. The construction of shared vocabularies can be seen as a proto-repertoire, if we are to use Tilly’s (2005) categories. It is a proto-repertoire because it will serve in the articulation of action as underlying ideas that substantiate it. For these reasons, a discussion of commonly used and shared language is an important element in the analysis of communicative processes in a social movement. The aim here is not to perform in-depth semiotic or discourse analyses – as this is not the focus of the study – but to provide a brief insight into how terminologies are utilised in order to objectify certain aspects of communicative processes.

The terms below were frequently and coherently – when different people used the term, they meant the same thing – used by informants. In order to extract frequency and related concepts, I ran searches on NVivo, software used for categorisation and analysis of qualitative data. The software allows textual searches and word frequency searches. When possible, so-called word trees were generated showing the term that was searched for in connection with the most frequent surrounding words in order to facilitate the analysis. These contextual searches have shown a high level of coherence in the way these terms are used by different informants. There were no noticeable discrepancies in the use of the terms, but it is necessary to bear in mind that all informants worked with communication in the movement and had attended similar meetings, education, and training courses. Therefore, even though there is a high level of coherence among militants in the communication sector, it is not possible to say that this is true for the whole organisation.
Luta – translated literally, luta means ‘fight’, but its meaning here is closer to struggle in the sense that it is not a physical fight but an ideological and political struggle. The word was mentioned by all informants, appearing in individual interviews from one to 25 times. It reveals the nature of the MST as a combative movement, not in a violent sense of combat, but in a symbolic-ideological sense closer to that of resistance. It also has a material dimension when the word luta is used to refer to protests, demonstrations, and other kinds of direct action. At a more structural level, luta is used to refer to the ethos of the MST: everything a person does as a militant is part of their struggle for land, be it working at a radio station or cooking food at a congress or meeting. The practices related to media are oftentimes seen as directly connected with this struggle. For instance, when informants say that they ‘need a communication policy for the struggle’, or that media must be tools for publicising the struggle. The idea of luta as the force that propels the movement forward is thus objectified and materialised in the daily practices of militants, forming a strong connection between abstract ideas and concrete, mundane activities. In this context, the word has both the abstract sense of the MST’s struggle and a specific meaning when it is used to refer to events and activities organised by the MST. This kind of conscious and permanent struggle can be contrasted with the more immediate nature of contemporary social protests, which focus on pragmatic demands and are rooted in discontentment with the surface symptoms of neo-liberalism, not as much with the causes of such symptoms.

Organicidade – English does not have an exact term for organicidade, which is a noun that denotes organic properties. Among the informants, the term was used to refer to the MST’s internal dynamics, emphasising the importance of internal communicative processes. The term also relates to the lack of a top-down hierarchy in the organisation, despite its being a well-structured organisation. Even if there are national and regional leaderships, settlement leaders, and sector representatives, decisions are reached through consultative dialogical processes. In fact, two of the MST’s principles are ‘collective direction’ and ‘contact with the base’, which can only be put in practice if there is an organic structure. Organicidade and related words (orgânico, orgânica) appeared in 10 of the 22 interviews from one to four times. The term
was used in relation to internal communication dynamics, to explain how sectors, groups, and collectives in the organisation should function, emphasising that these dynamics should be inclusive with a view to promoting the participation of militants in all processes. *Organicidade* was referred to as a process constructed throughout the MST’s history and something to be preserved. Some informants voiced concerns that their organic processes would be under threat from certain technologies and platforms, namely social media networks. The individual character of digital social networks could delegitimise organic processes in the sense that, instead of collectively discussing and taking decisions, such platforms incentivise individual self-expression and leave little space for reflexivity.

*Intencionalidade* – relates to a reflexive process that leads to understanding why individuals engage in action, why decisions are made, and why a course of action is taken. Three informants used the term *intencionalidade*. In one of these interviews, the word appeared 27 times. Apart from the interviews, I came across the term many times during fieldwork particularly when militants articulated the rationales behind using different media. In this sense ‘intention’, in the sense employed by Williams (1980), is an aspect of reasoning about the use of media. When informants referred to intentionality, they explained that there needed to be a purpose for using a certain medium, or for communicating in a certain way, and that this purpose needed to be in accordance with the movement’s principles. They were not interested, most of the time, in using a certain medium just because it was new and modern if it did not answer to the needs of the movement. For instance, the implementation of a radio station in a settlement is preceded by a discussion with the families from the settlement and the creation of social media profiles is subject to debate and discussion.

*Apropriação, apropiar* – appropriation and the verb to appropriate mean ‘to make one’s own’. These terms appeared in five interviews from one to 13 times. This is a term that was often used in relation to media (appropriation as a practice will be discussed in the next chapter) and is connected with intentionality. Whereas intentionality is a reflexive effort, appropriation is a kind of practice. It follows that it is possible to say that the practice of appropriation is performed according to
intentionality. When using the term appropriation, informants wanted to stress that they (and the movement) were active subjects in the process of engaging with media. In other words, it is not sufficient to ‘use’ media (without reflecting on why and how), it is necessary to appropriate media. The word tree generated with the noun *apropriação* and the verb *apropriar* show that they are used most frequently in relation to the Portuguese word for tools but also in relation to techniques, languages, and means of communication. Appropriation is seen as a collective process. The most used subjects of the verb *apropriar* are ‘we’ and ‘the movement’. This process can be linked to the view that the militants have of the MST as an organic organisation. In such a context, new practices or new media are not imposed upon militants by leaders, but are appropriated in a collective process.

*Período* – a period is considered to be a referential time framework to evaluate the political action of the movement and its relationship with other sectors. The word appeared in 18 of 22 interviews. The most frequent and coherent usage referred to how Brazilian mainstream press cover the MST. In the understanding of the press officers and other militants more involved with press relations, there was a period of criminalisation in the early 2000s followed by the current period in which the press is making the movement invisible and irrelevant in the country’s political scenario. Other periods were related to the MST’s national congresses that happen every fifth year. The time in between congresses is considered a period in which the directives and challenges devised in the last congress should be dealt with. The ‘periodisation’ of time can be seen as an attempt to actively historicise the movement. The movement’s history is actively constructed and recounted by the militants themselves, who are the subjects of this history.

*Pertença* – noun derived from the verb *pertencer* - to belong. Although *pertença* appeared in only three interviews, it was a term constantly used by militants in conversations, discussions, and panels and plenaries during the congress. *Pertença* is closely related to *organicidade* and refers to an ideal condition for members in the movement: they should belong not only formally to the movement but be participants in its processes and activities. The term is also used in reference to the participation of militants in a sector or area in the
movement. Sometimes when I asked a question, I would be referred to another militant who had more *pertença* in that specific area and would thus be able to speak with more authority. Another use is to refer to those militants who are politically active in the movement and who participate in a particular sector or collective.67

*Inserção-Inserir* – the literal translation in English is ‘insertion’, as a noun, and ‘to insert’, as a verb, but in this case a closer match would be a hybrid of inclusion/to include (oneself) and introduce/to introduce (oneself). It is possible to say that *inserção* is the process through which militants achieve *pertença*. The term appeared in seven interviews once or twice. It was usually used when informants described their activities and how they became involved in communication work. It is used when a militant joins a new area or starts a new activity in the movement, so when I wanted to interview the students at the IEJC in charge of the school radio in March 2014, at the beginning of the term, I was made aware that they were new and thus still in the ‘insertion’ process. *Inserção* is seen as a process in which militants learn and become acquainted with routines and practices. It is not immediate and happens with the help of other militants who already have experience in the sector or activity. Such a process fits in the dialogical ethos of general practices among MST militants. There is very little immediacy; all practices unfold continuously.

*Contribuição-contribuir* – meaning ‘contribution’, as a noun, and ‘to contribute’, as a verb. The term appeared in 14 interviews and was commonly used as a substitute for ‘work’. Informants never said that they were working in an activity but that they were contributing to something. Another area of usage is regarding work with communications, particularly in the radios. Some informants said, for instance, that it was difficult to find people to contribute to the radio. With the exception of those press officers who were hired outside the movement, other informants never referred to their activities as work but as a contribution to the movement. The substitution of the term ‘work’ for ‘contribution’ can be seen as an objectification of alternative

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67 As mentioned in Chapter 2, not all 1.5 million MST members are active militants who participate in the diverse instances of the organisation – sectors, collectives, brigades or local, regional, and national memberships. The MST’s leadership estimates that around there are around 300,000 active militants in the movement.
forms of sociability performed in social movements (not only the MST) in which individuals engage in activities to express solidarity and obtain existential gains instead of material ones. The fact that this aspect of sociability is objectified in the use of language shows that there is a conscious effort to legitimate the practice among militants.

As formations that aim to promote alternative framings of reality (Melucci, 1996), social movements constantly engage in the construction and propagation of ideas and knowledge. Such a process of symbolic construction that takes place in discourse is an integral part of the activities of a social movement. It is developed and refined as long as the social movement is active and mobilised (even in stages of latent mobilisation). The process of framing is usually analysed and referred to as an exogenous process – from the movement to the society with the view of changing public opinion (Gitlin, 1980; Melucci, 1996). Similar processes happen, however, internally in social movements, as this brief discussion about ideas and words indicates. The development of a shared vocabulary and the adoption of this vocabulary by new members is an important part of socialisation in the movement, as it transmits ideas. Taken together as part of a system of shared meanings, the terms above serve to objectify the MST as a collective subject and as a dialogical structure. All these terms can be connected to the MST’s organisational principles of discipline and study, collective direction, and contact with its bases. In conjunction, they highlight the importance of promoting action as opposed to activism (cf. Freire, 1967/1982, discussed earlier in this chapter). Action is promoted through collectively performed reflection and enabled by an organic structure. Militants’ involvement in the movement as a life-changing endeavour is reflected in the use of terms that denote belonging and personal commitment such as inserção, pertença, and contribuição.
9 Media practices

This chapter addresses media in their materiality as technologies, focusing on the social practices that are related to media. The discussion of media practices within the MST aims to problematise technological determinist views that see media as causes of processes, behaviours, and, ultimately, social change. The practices discussed here are enacted within the framework of a social movement and are thus collective. Similarly to the previous chapter, here I discuss how practices related to media can be enacted to foster and strengthen the collective ethos of a social movement. In this chapter, I highlight and discuss the concerns that arise when new media are introduced in the routines of the movement, particularly when it comes to the tension between collective and individual values. Furthermore, I also argue for a socially situated understanding of media anchored in the analysis of different practices that relate to media as technologies.

Collective action practices

The concept of media practice, used as an analytical tool for assessing the material produced during fieldwork, was originally employed by Couldry (2010 and 2012), who drew on practice theory (cf. Bourdieu, 1990 and Schatzki. 1999) to direct the agenda of media research towards social practices related to media. As employed by Couldry (ibid.), research based on practice is a development of reception studies in which the public or user of media assumes an open-ended role. Couldry argues that there are a range of practices that can be related to media beyond just reading, interpreting, and producing. Furthermore, these practices are embedded in social relations and should not be bracketed off when analysed. Such an understanding gains support with the emergence of communication technologies that allow a diverse range of actions related to media. Many of these actions generate new forms of sociability at the same time that they alter the way lived experience is understood. While much of practice theory is based on empirical work that puts the individual at the centre of social practice, this study is concerned with media practices within a collective.
When the study’s empirical object is a collective formation such as a social movement, the use of an open-ended analytical concept such as practice allows for the analysis of a complex range of activities beyond reception, interpretation, production, and circulation. By using the concept in the analysis of a collective, I am consciously moving away from its original use, in which the term is employed to the individual’s relation to media. An organisation is nevertheless formed by individuals who engage in different practices while acting as members of a collective. The difference here from the original use of the term is that the organisation works as a framework or context for certain practices (see the discussion in Chapter 4). The promotion and strengthening of collectiveness is a constitutive element of media practices among MST militants. The effort to act collectively and to reinforce the collective ethos of the organisation can be noticed in militants’ explanations of how and why they use media and how and why they developed different media channels in the movement. An example is when Sandra, who had taken courses in video production, tells me how her individual knowledge became collective knowledge

[...] I shared the whole education process with my community, during shooting and when we had to discuss and think about the script. We would sit in a plenary and discuss together, how to develop the script, what we needed to be able to form a production team. [...] I appropriated this process and involved the community in the process from the start.

Press officers Marcelo and Marina also recognise the importance of developing collaboration within the movement in order to facilitate their work of circulating information

[...] we try to coordinate this effort, in a way we work through networks, we have communicators in most states or people with this specific task. The movement has the guideline that in each settlement there have to be companheiros and companheiras in charge of the communication policies, in the cooperatives, in the schools.

Marcelo, press officer, São Paulo

We were able to create this rotation system among spokespersons, which is something we do in order not to centralise in only one person; we have many spokespersons so that we can speak to all media outlets that arrive simultaneously [at demonstrations]. If we had only one spokesperson, besides the personification, we would not be able to speak to all media outlets.

Marina, press officer, Brasilia
And finally, Rita, an MST militant since 1986, explains how communication contributes to the collective development of the movement:

[...] the movement as a social, political organisation is, let’s say, like a big orchestra where everything composes what the movement is. So the important thing is that communication is not disconnected, as though it were something outside the movement. No, communication is part of the movement. From the start [with the newspaper] until today, this is reflected in all the communication tools that were developed. They are tools for the struggle, they contribute to the organisation, they strengthen our mistica, our culture, our identity [...] and are made by militants.

Such an effort to strengthen the collective through communication is a general orientation of media practices; they can also be categorised according to content and overall aims. Within the MST, there are two different sets of media practices: (1) those enacted as ways to reclaim, rescue, and value popular culture and knowledge, also constituting what Martín-Barbero calls ‘popular memory’; and (2) those enacted with the aim of organising and positioning the movement as a collective subject in the political landscape.

Picture 7: During the 6th National Congress, militants gather to check the press clippings prepared every day by the communication task force. The spot outside the press office was very popular during the event.
The first set of practices is backed by a strong organisational support for cultural production and self-expression through the audiovisual and culture brigades and the communication and education sectors. Video production has been carried out through different projects, for instance *Cinema da Terra* (loosely translated rural cinema), which aimed to encourage MST members to produce video narratives about, or inspired by, their biographies, daily lives, and experiences. It is this kind of video production that Sandra refers to in her interview when she talks about the documentaries on growing and harvesting banana trees. As a practice, audiovisual production can also be performed with an orientation towards political positioning, as is the case of documentation of events, protests, and demonstrations. Such documentation has been used to counter narratives disseminated by the mainstream news media.

*Picture 8: Students and teachers at the school in Veranópolis discuss changes in the radio programming when a new group of students starts their process of 'insertion' in the radio.*

Dissemination of popular culture manifestations through militants’ cultural production is also encouraged through the radios, the newspaper, and, to a lesser extent, through the website. The few working radios make a point in playing music produced by MST.
militants\textsuperscript{68} and regional music from the areas where they operate. In one of the radio stations visited, \textit{Rádio Terra Livre}, there is even a Sunday programme broadcast live, where local musicians can come and play their music. Creative production in literature and poetry is encouraged in courses and workshops and published in the movement’s newspaper and on its website. Art courses are also promoted for militants, and the works produced are circulated through the movement’s media. One example is the panel that was made for the National Congress, created by visual arts students from the MST. The artwork had a prominent place, hanging above the stage during the congress and was used in its digital form on the website and social media during and after the congress.

The second set of practices is centred in the communication sector and is shaped by the relationship between this sector and the movement’s political leadership. These kinds of politically oriented media practices are elicited by the institutional relations between the movement and the media. There is, as Marcelo emphasised in his interview, an effort to involve militants in the political positioning of the organisation. However, these practices are more controlled by press officers and national and regional leaderships. A level of control is justified in this case because political positioning is considered strategic by the organisation.

The controlling efforts could be seen during the national congress, when press officers and others among the communication task force had an action plan that included controlled access for journalists, designation of spokespersons who were prepared to give interviews, and orientations for militants to always refer journalists to the press office and to not give interviews. The press officers justified this rather strict position towards journalists with the argument that they were responding to the treatment that the Brazilian mainstream press has historically given the MST. In an interview after the congress, Fernanda explained that:

\textsuperscript{68} Among MST militants, there are rap duos, guitar players, singer-songwriters, rock bands, and a samba school (\textit{Unidos da Lona Preta}, Black Tent United, a reference to the black tents that characterise MST settlements) that performs in São Paulo’s carnival.
someone must be always with them [militants] because, as much as our bases go through training processes, you cannot abandon them to the malicious questions that the journalists ask.

Eliane, who also worked as a press officer, but was at the time of the interview representing the communication sector in the MST’s national leadership, also criticised journalists for trying to bypass the press officers

They [journalists] go directly to the settlements, when they can go around the press office's orientations they are happy, that is their dream, to [get] a scoop. And our work is very difficult because of that; because we have to [...] not control [...] but we must work with the journalist and try to establish a dialogue, show him that he needs to respect our organisational process. He is writing about us, but he needs to respect us.

This contentious relationship with journalists, who need be free and autonomous to perform their work, is the outcome of the way the press as an institution is seen among militants. An individual journalist is thus seen as the representative of an institution that is hostile to the movement who, as a consequence, needs to be treated with caution. This situation can be related to the process of mediatisation in the sense that media act as a force\(^6\) that shapes the practices in the movement, because, at the same time that the press officers are aware of the risks of letting journalists wander unattended among militants, they recognise the value of media exposure.

The same control and precaution is exerted when it comes to using social media, particularly Facebook. These are considered strategic spaces for the movement to be seen by, and interact with, a wider public. The MST’s press officers and communication leadership have not bought into the novelty aspect and the advantages that are attributed to digital social networks (more on that at the end of this chapter).

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\(^6\) Hepp (2011) refers to the moulding forces of media as the pressure to communicate that can be exerted by media in certain cases.
Rationales: how media practices emerge

In the interviews, media practices were usually addressed in questions related to rationales in which informants described what kind of media they use, explained why they used these media and their importance to the MST. In this way, the interviews can assess reflections about, and interpretations of, media practices and not the practices themselves. However, these reflections and explanations are based on the empirical practices that they refer to and have an analytical value of their own as long as they are taken for what they are: interpretations and analyses. As such, they reflect how MST militants reason about the collective use of media and how media can strengthen or pose a threat to the collective ethos of the movement.

Based on the interview guide, one of the topics addressed in the interviews was the rationale for using different media. Implicit in the question was the view of media as means for communication or as communication artefacts. The discussion presented here is based on sub-coding of the interview theme ‘rationales and practices’ with the purpose of identifying recurrent explanations and rationalisations related to media practices, as well as descriptions of such practices. Depending on the informant’s position in the movement, the answers differed in their focus: the press officers usually had a holistic and instrumental view of media, while the radio presenters would understandably focus on radio but also reflect on how other technologies, particularly the Internet and telephones, relate to and influence radio broadcasting.

From the outset, one aspect that differentiates individual media practices from practices enacted by a collective is the rationally strategised ways in which most practices are enacted. A clear cue to such strategies is the constant use of the term ‘appropriation’ by the informants (discussed in the previous chapter). The emphasis on collective discussion and reflection about how media will be adopted by the collective evidences the efforts to rationalise the use of media within the movement.
Media are not seen as independent entities but usually referred to in a relational manner: a media artefact is usually an aspect within a complex web of relations and actors. This view is present in the excerpts below, where informants explain the processes that organise communication flows through the materiality of media. Paulo, a former press officer who has been active in the movement since the mid-1990s, explains how the interplay between the movement, society at large, and predetermined material conditions shape media practices.

I think that in the first place we always work with the idea, always analyse, look back and understand, that communication within [the] MST is an unfolding, a translation of the movement’s own strategy. Therefore, according to the historic period, with the phase the movement went through, the challenges faced, [our] communication will try to respond and will obviously adapt to the material conditions.

What Paulo is also suggesting in his reasoning is that the medium is not the generative force behind media practices. Instead, social and material conditions in conjunction with the collective internal reading of the situation will generate media practices. What is at the centre of the practices is thus not the medium but the shared understanding of the need to communicate and establish dialogues.

In internal organisational processes, communication emerges at first almost naturally as a sector in its own right, denoting the importance lent by the movement to this area of action, as Carlos, an integrant of the initial group who occupied land that is today a settlement in the state of São Paulo, recounts:

[...] this issue of the community radio came up when we divided tasks among MST militants. When the movement is organised in sectors, collectives, [we started to have] this organisation, this organic action, we didn’t have in the beginning, when we started here we already formed a discussion group, first as small groups, then collectives and then we said, ‘we need to divide the militants into sectors’ [...] and communication was one of these groups, [it] wasn’t a sector then, but we needed to work on our visual material and the radio came in this same wave.

Just like Carlos, Marcelo, a press officer in São Paulo, describes how the organic need for communication in order to create and maintain the collective as a social organisation is materialised with the institution of media:

[The] MST’s first communication instrument was Boletim Sem Terra, which later became the Jornal Sem Terra. This newsletter was launched in 1981 in the campsite at Encreuzilhada Natalino [...]. This was a campsite formed at the end of 1980 with 700
families, a very big campsite and there was a need for a communication instrument for the families in that campsite.

He continues describing how the idea that the movement should communicate with those outside emerged and was translated into media practices:

[...] the goal of these communication instruments was essentially to engage in communication with friends and supporters and with society in general. In accordance with [the MST’s] political deliberation that agrarian reform was everyone’s struggle it was necessary to have these instruments. At the end of the 1900s and beginning of the 2000s, the community radio and free radio movement started in the country and gained strength within the MST, so radio stations were built in many settlements to start this dialogue with our basis.

Continuing along the same rationale, Rodrigo, a youth leader, points out what should be the functions of a settlement radio:

In the community, in the settlement it [the radio] should help [announce] when there are meetings, what is happening in the world and it should help spread [information] and strengthen [the movement] and be an element of resistance [...]

All informants discussed the importance of different media within the movement, as instruments to achieve cohesion among the membership and to keep the base of the movement informed of what was happening in the movement, but also to disseminate political and economic news of interest to the members. It is noticeable in the excerpts above that the first practice connected to media was the establishment of a common platform for communication among occupiers and settlers. As social, material, and political conditions change, the practices connected with media will also change. Examples of this interplay (already discussed in the previous chapter) are the fact that some radio stations became not only a medium of the movement but also a medium of the community. This means that radio programming moves from focusing on the interests and needs of the movement as an organisation and militants as members of the organisation, to cater also to the surrounding community, formed by people who are not connected with the MST. A direct implication of this development, according to the radio presenters, is a change to ‘less political’ programming, focusing on music and basic information for the community.
The impact of material constraints on media practices

The availability of resources also structures the MST’s media practices and will play an important role (as noted by one of the informants above) in how the collective relate to different media. The first media used by the movement (even before it became the MST and was constituted by independent rural workers associations) was a mimeographed newsletter, the predecessor of the *Jornal Sem-Terra* at the beginning of the 1980s. As the technology to broadcast radio – legally or illegally by way of what is known in Brazil as pirate radio – became more easily available in the 1990s, settlement radios started to emerge. Radio was also welcomed within the MST due to the fact that literacy levels among members were not high and also because it allowed different formats such as radio theatre and the broadcasting of music. It was noted above that the communicative processes within the MST are closely connected with the promotion of education and culture. In this sense, radio is not only used as an exclusively news or entertainment medium but also as an instructional medium.

Access to the Internet in Brazil was very expensive and sparse until recently. Data from the National Telecommunications Agency shows that around 37 per cent of Brazilian households have access to broadband connection in April 2015. The north region of the country is where access is the lowest, reaching just below 16 per cent of households. Access to the Internet in the settlements visited is still unreliable. In addition, connection and subscription costs in Brazil are high in comparison to the national minimum wage, and broadband connections are still a privilege of large cities. The high costs and low standard structure are part of the reason why the Internet is not a widespread medium internally in the movement. There are also other structural reasons that will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

At the press offices, however, digital communications (website and social media) are widely used. Much of the content produced by the press officers and communicators around Brazil ends up on the website

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Data available at the National Telecommunications Agency (ANATEL) website: http://www.anatel.gov.br/dados/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=269
and is (re)posted on the organisation’s Facebook profile, as press officer Marcelo explains.

[...] we try to coordinate this [communication] effort but we work in a way in networks, we have communicators in most states or people with this specific task. The movement has as [a] guideline that in each settlement we have companheiros in charge of the communication policy in cooperatives and schools. So in a way we are [a] reference for this group of communicators spread throughout the country and this effort in building a [relationship] with society.

At the time of my fieldwork, the organisation was redesigning its website, and there were ongoing discussions about how to benefit from Facebook and adapt to the social network’s language.

The first attempt to create an MST website was made in 1996-7. According to two of the interviewees, this website was static, seldom updated, and had too much text. The experience can be related to Anastasia Kavada’s (2005) study of NGO websites. Kavada concluded that the NGO websites (Amnesty, Oxfam, and World Development Movement) were used as an ‘extension of the offline media rather than as an autonomous medium with [their] own strategy and techniques’.

The platform was gradually changed and became the portal that it is today, gathering information, news, and documents, after the creation of the press office in 2004. From the interviews, it was possible to infer that there are many practices associated with the website. Communication flows in different directions: local press officers at the state level send information to the website, and radio presenters use the website as a source for programming. The two press officers in São Paulo and one former press officer who worked in São Paulo and Brasília explained that the website was also used to communicate with society at large and as a source for journalists.

The informants consider the website to be an interface for both movement members and people in general who are interested in knowing more about the MST. Contrary to other so-called alternative news websites such as Indymedia.org or Global.News.org, however, the website is not a fully participatory medium because militants do not have free access to publish whatever they wish. On the contrary, there is an editor who curates news and pictures. The editing and filtering for the website is carried out particularly due to safety concerns and legal
issues but also to maintain the quality level of texts and relevance of information. Considering that varied accusations have been raised against the MST and that the movement has been the target of much violence throughout the years, it is understandable that the website editor will exercise caution when publishing videos and pictures or when writing about demonstrations. As a rule, planned actions are never publicised on any of the movement’s media before they happen.

Practices of audiovisual communication constitute a particular case, different from media based on writing and audio. None of the interviewees referred to television as a movement medium, though it is mentioned as an institution (usually as Globo TV, Brazil’s largest media company), and not as a technology or as content. The low level of TV appropriation may be rooted in the elevated costs of production and difficulties in creating distribution networks. Television production requires costly resources and the distribution or broadcasting of television content requires a licence. For these reasons, it has never been a prominent movement medium (see Atton, 2001 on the difficulties of producing alternative television).

Nevertheless, the MST has a history of promoting and producing video documentaries and other audiovisual formats. After the communications sector was established in the movement, the audiovisual brigade developed as an arm of this sector, performing audiovisual production and education, organising events such as festivals and screenings at settlements. Audiovisual communication is thus seen primarily as a form of self-expression and documentation and secondarily as means to communicate with the rest of society outside the MST.

Another important aspect that came up in the interviews was the symbiotic relationship between the MST’s action as a movement, usually referred to in the interviews as the mobilisation itself, and media practices. Two of the informants said, for instance, that the movement’s most important communication instrument was their struggle, their constant mobilisation. Seven informants stressed the importance of remaining mobilised, organising occupations, protests, and other forms of direct action in order to both maintain cohesion
within the movement and create opportunities for a dialogue with wider audiences. This stresses the importance of the material world and experience before and above mediation\(^71\) in the view of the informants. For them, mobilisation and all it entails – direct action, protests, and constant confrontation with landowners, corporations, and politicians – is in itself a communicative process. The struggle is thus the essence of communication: without solid demands and concrete actions, it would be impossible to engage in any form of communication, mediated or otherwise.

As a process, communication comprises a series of difficulties, negotiations, and adaptations.\(^72\) At the same time, the use of media as means of communication adds a material level that needs to be dealt with. In an organisation such as the MST, where communication is valued and given an important role, challenges and difficulties in communicating and using media do not go unnoticed. In their interviews, militants assessed and analysed the difficulties in using media as structural or material problems external to the movement – informants never mentioned organisational flaws or individual problems with militants as challenges (apart from low educational and literacy levels for which individual militants cannot be blamed). The structural challenges refer to the media landscape in Brazil, usually regarding broadcasting laws that regulate community and non-commercial radios.

Material difficulties refer to the lack of material (particularly technological) resources, which are mostly felt in the settlements, whereas the press offices have the necessary resources to function. Even though there have been initiatives to build community Internet centres (telecentros) in rural, indigenous, and quilombola\(^73\) communities, the

\(^71\) Used here in the sense of coming in between (Couldry, 2011).

\(^72\) In their Transmission Model of Communication, Shannon and Weaver acknowledge the existence of ‘noise’, which can cause disturbance in the flow of messages between sender and receiver. Jansson (2009) points out that communication is not always something good, and that even what seems good communication at first sight can have unexpected consequences. He discusses a series of conflict fields in communication, e.g., discrepancies between intention and utterance, the conflictual character of communication between different groups, cultural distinctions, and isolation that can be caused by contemporary media, among others.

\(^73\) Quilombola communities are those formed in old quilombos, the refugee community formed by slaves when they managed to run away from the places where they were held captive. According to Fundação Cultural Palmares, an organisation that promotes and preserves Afro-Brazilian culture, there are 3,524 quilombola communities in Brazil.
MST’s newer settlements and campsites are still lagging behind when it comes to Internet accesses, as Sandra told me:

It seems absurd, can you imagine that people in settlements do not have access to the Internet and had to wait eight years for an antenna! So we have very big difficulties, now we are starting again a discussion to see if we can bring new telecentros to these areas. [...] In Unaí we could not even establish a telecentro, in the end the computers went to the [municipal] secretaries [...] because no one could be in charge of the centre.

Another very tangible material difficulty has to do with structuring and maintaining a settlement radio. As discussed in the previous chapter, radio is a highly valued medium in the movement. The establishment of settlement radios has been historically encouraged by the organisation through courses, seminars and workshops, and through the creation of a radio news agency that can feed settlement radios with programmes, news, and promotional material. However, maintaining a settlement radio is costly, and only the better-structured (usually older) settlements manage to keep a working radio. When a licence as community radio is granted the radio cannot have paid advertising, which requires much creativity and involvement of both militants and the community maintain the radio station. Gustavo, a coordinator and former presenter in the radio at Fazenda Pirituba, explains some of the difficulties in maintaining a settlement radio:

It is very difficult to maintain a steady number of people contributing in the radio station, which is our big difficulty, this economic question of how we are going to maintain the radio. And we don’t want to have a commercial radio, a radio that advertises Itapeva’s agricultural supplies store, or the store that sells agricultural machines and fertilisers. Because [the] MST is against fertilisers, so that would be contradictory.

Julia, a presenter at the same radio stresses the difficulty in keeping quality programming, which is more difficult and demanding to produce:

[...] we wanted to complete the programme schedule, from five in the morning to ten in the evening, with only two slots without a programme. But unfortunately we are not able to do that yet, but we try to make quality programmes. We don’t have a permanent informative programme at the radio, but everyone who contributes here are militants in the movement.

Related to the economic difficulties is the difficulty in finding contributors (see the word contribuir in the previous chapter) for the radios. As Julia points out, the aim is that the radio presenters always
be militants in the movement, which was the case in the radios I visited. However, in one of the pilot interviews, I was told that there have been occasions when settlement radios had to sell slots to third parties such as churches.74

At the moment, the movement seems to be at a crossroads between the socio-politico-economic difficulties of maintaining settlement radios and the lack of access that prevents the use of the Internet for this kind of internal and local communication, as Alex explains below. Alex is a young militant in his twenties in the state of Bahia who works in the communication sector with close contact with settlements. He was living at the settlement Ernesto Che Guevara with his mother at the time of the interview.

Besides the blog, we have a great fragility in constructing community radios. We have one here, in the whole state. In the whole state there are two community radios that are inactive. So we have this deficiency that we were not able to establish functioning community radios. [Communication with the settlements] is a limitation that we have to overcome, but this comes also from [a] lack of access to [the] Internet in our localities, because we have settlements that are very distant from the towns and this complicates the access.

It is clear from these interviews that militants working in communication are acutely aware of the limitations that they face and of the structural reasons behind such limitations. The settlements are in a situation of communicative marginality that is understood by the militants, and centrally by the movement, who are trying to overcome this situation using creativity and the little resources that they have.

74 Interview with Raquel Casiraghi, former MST press officer in the state of Rio Grande do Sul.
Approximation, appropriation, collectiveness, and historicity

Couldry (2010) suggests that media practices are open-ended actions, oriented towards media, which are rooted in social relations. Moving away from technological determinist views, he defends the notion that it is not the medium that dictates how it is going to be used but that, instead, it is people engaged in social processes who use media according to its affordances and to their social contexts. Although Couldry does not say much about the eventual rational processes that lie behind media practices, it is fair to say that up to a certain extent, decisions and actions related to media are performed consciously. Within an organised group like a social movement – particularly one with lengthy experience in using media – it is possible to access the social processes in which media is a crucial element, as well as practices that are primarily oriented towards media. Within the MST, media are crucial for creating and strengthening a sense of proximity – physical or symbolical. Media can also materialise collectiveness both when people come together to discuss and construct channels for communication and when discussion and dialogue are promoted through media.

Furthermore, media are artefacts that document and materialise the collective history of the movement. Appropriation, discussed in the previous chapter, is a process through which the movement as a collective actor takes ownership of media practices. In this context, it is possible to say that approximation, appropriation, collectiveness, and historicity are collectively shaped rationales that guide media practices. Because they do not arise individually, but from collective processes within the movement, rationales cannot be seen as static entities, they have instead a processual character and represent the collective understandings of how and why media practices should unfold.

 Appropriation is a process that is currently very present in practice and discussions because the advent of digital media requires collective discussion and analysis so that accepted practices oriented to new media will be negotiated (the Internet in general and digital social media in particular and, to a lesser extent, the devices that enable these
media). Maria, who worked as a press officer in São Paulo and participated in such a process, explained that:

In relation to the networks, it was something that took longer for the movement to adopt. The site was on for a while, and we noticed that we had more access in a short period of time. The question of the networks was consolidated across a long period of time, I don’t know how long. This is a discussion that needs to mature a lot, about why we needed Twitter or Facebook [...] and I participated in the discussions at the time. We discussed how we could use these networks, from a professional point of view. What is the purpose of these networks? We were careful so that we would not have a sterile instrument [...] that would only repeat the content from the website, especially because there were just a few of us, so how could we increase the potential of these networks if it was a fad [...] that was another preoccupation, this suspicion, if it was a passing fad, was it worth to invest in the creation of another instrument?

Eliane, who represents the communication sector in the national leadership, reflects on the dilemmas of adopting new media:

We tried to work these last years in terms of exploring the potential of social networks to start a debate about issues that are relevant for the movement. However, for us the social networks are important, even if they are individualistic we try to give them a more collective and organisational dynamic.

Picture 9: Facilities for processing cocoa beans at a campsite in the south of Bahia state.

Approximation relates to physical and symbolic proximity. Physical proximity is usually mentioned in relation to media, as there is a belief that media can approximate people who are distant from each other physically and can create a sense of collectiveness in a settlement, approximating people symbolically. It is worth reminding that a settlement is not an organically constructed community. It is formed by families who may not know each other and who decide to occupy land. Even if it takes years for a campsite to become a settlement, it still is a community that is conjured up (as opposed to organically formed), where collectiveness needs to be equally constructed. In such a context,
provided that there are well-established narratives and a socially grounded understanding of the movement’s purpose, media can facilitate these kinds of proximity. Media such as the movement’s newspaper and the radio stations can be placed at the centre of collective processes such as discussion and dialogue and in this way create proximity among militants. The first medium to be used for approximation was the _Sem-Terra_ newspaper, as Paulo recollects:

> The first medium of communication is _Sem-Terra_ newspaper, which emerged as a newsletter here in Rio Grande do Sul. It emerged during a very specific situation, which was the campsite at _Encruzilhada Natalino_. This campsite was considered a national security area by the military regime at the time. No one could leave it and the occupiers, from the little contact that they had with the outside through supporters, realised that they needed to break this physical encroachment and also send information to the outside society about the resistance and the struggle for land, and against the military dictatorship. They then started to print the newsletter with a carbon printer, which were the conditions they had then, in 1981.

He continues explaining how radio was used as a way to diminish the distance between families at a settlement:

> What these families [at the Hulha Negra settlement] realised 15 years ago was that they needed a movement radio there, to communicate among themselves, because there were 1,000 families spread around several settlements, ten distant settlements. [...] So the radio was fundamental for the existence of that community of 1,000 families. It served as much to broadcast the announcements from the Evangelical Church, the Catholic Church, from the football team, the youth party as it did to broadcast MST news. The [regional] newspapers _Zero Hora_ and _Correio do Povo_ never got there, and they only got the signal of one local radio station.

Gustavo, from _Rádio Camponesa_ at _Fazenda Pirituba_, stresses the importance of radio for symbolical proximity and identification among rural workers:

> We try to prioritise the region because it is important that the settlers hear their voices in an interview, listen to news from their settlement, news about things that they won’t hear on commercial radios.

When informants talk about the proximity that may be facilitated by media, they cite the newspaper and radio as ‘approximation media’. Although some of them have said that email sometimes speeds up internal communication, they do not consider digital media and digital social networks media that foster proximity. Nevertheless, among youth there is a trend towards the creation of blogs and audiovisual production and circulation that seem to follow the path of radio and newspapers, as Rodrigo, a youth leader, explains:
[...] we are trying now to construct a youth blog, connected to the site, but with a certain autonomy to communicate the activities that are happening and that the website cannot report with much detail [...]. The blog should have certain autonomy so we can experiment with new forms, which we cannot do on the official site, besides being an important space for documentation of our activities.

This empirical understanding of media is more in line with the early work of Martín-Barbero and of Couldry, who share similar views of the mediation process, according to which media is in between actors or individuals. The views expressed about the roles of the radio and of the newspaper do not regard them as environments, as in the mediatisation concept – either individually or in combination. One telling aspect that reveals such a view among MST militants is that the informants usually refer to media as instruments for communication. This can be related to the process of appropriation: for the MST, media are instruments to be appropriated and put in use according to the movement’s needs. At first sight, the understanding that media are capable of approximating people seems technological determinist and functionalist; however, the importance given to the construction of a conscious collective and the reflexive process of appropriation point to socially grounded processes in which militants analyse and act according to the affordances of media.

Connected to approximation is the idea that media are important elements in the construction of a collective. This is an idea that had not been much explored in Euro-American scholarship until the advent of the Internet and the emergence of the concept of virtual communities and later digitally based networks, which have been analysed and discussed by many during this and recent decades. Although Williams (1980) and Silverstone (2007) have discussed the connection between media and the construction of national identities and of nations and societies as collectives, their analysis was limited to the macro-level of society.

Latin American scholars, on the other hand, have, since the 1970s, been paying attention to the ways in which media are embedded in the construction of collectives that do not necessarily configure themselves
as a society\textsuperscript{75} (Bordenave, 1977; Gumucio-Dragon, 2005; Peruzzo, 2007). Such a scholarly endeavour is strongly connected to the politically situated research traditions in communication studies that aim at intervention in social realities that became popular in Latin America during the second half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. According to these analyses, production, participation, and consumption of media that happens within a group contributes to social cohesion. When people are able to exert their agency over communication and representation, even at the local level, they will consider themselves as part of a collective. When, for instance, families at a campsite are able to participate in the creation of a radio station, its chances of being successful are higher, as Ana, who was involved in the creation of a radio at the \textit{Eli Vive} campsite, in the state of Paraná, told me:

\textit{At Eli [campsite] we did it like this, a group of communicators from the radio went out to each and every house, each and every family in the campsite asking ‘What do you like on the radio?’ ‘What do you want to listen to on the radio?’ [...] So this was a way for them to construct collective programming and the reception is much better [...]}. People receive the radio very well because they constructed it collectively. Can you imagine us going to each and every one of the 500 houses asking, ‘What do you want to listen to on the radio?’ And based on that you construct the programme schedule. It is more work, but it is much more beautiful, much more collective, the reception is better. If the police go there to inspect and close the radio, people are going to defend it, because they helped construct it, they feel part of this process.

Alex, who is based in Bahia state, where the communication sector is not yet well established, also stresses the importance of militant participation in the movement as a collective:

\textit{Today we are trying to construct a communication alliance here in the state so that people in the regions can send information about what is happening directly to my email. Those who feel uncomfortable writing a short text because they think they cannot write properly can call me. I ask some five basic questions that give me the context and we construct the text, they send me pictures and we try to construct this collectively. I think that this collective construction is more than just transmission of information; it is a learning process as well.}

In this context, communication is sometimes highlighted as the important element, above media, because media are temporal and communication needs to happen and be fostered regardless of what media are available at a particular time, as Rita, a militant since the 1980s, explains:

\textsuperscript{75} According to Carpentier’s (2010) differentiation between community and society.
We maintain our principles to the extent that we strengthen our collective instances, if you weaken the collective spaces, the direction instances, the debate collectives, [then individualism] is strengthened. But our movement is very radical with this issue. So the principle of collective direction is applied to the extent that you create the collective spaces for decision making, for construction of political guidelines, and maintaining these dynamics in our movement - of meetings, national meetings, collective meetings, formative processes. We never neglect this in our movement, because it would be much cheaper and easier, considering our dimensions, to do everything online.

Rita’s statement reveals her view that communication strengthens collectiveness – collective direction can only be achieved through communicative processes and practices such as meetings and discussions. Furthermore, well-functioning communicative processes are both the desired result of the collective direction and a crucial element of its practice. In the last sentence, we find out that she does not think that new media strengthen or facilitate this collective process, even if it could be easier to use digital media as the main means of communication in an organisation the size of the MST.

Eliane, who is younger and started as a militant in the MST more than 10 years after Rita, shares the same view on digital media and collectiveness:

[... ] our organisation is run through other elements, the meeting, which is a more local space, than through the Internet. The Internet helps but it is not the main instrument for mobilisation in our movement. It helps, it contributes, including the emails, our organisation through emails has increased a lot; however, when we need to decide an action, a national activity, we always need a collective space, a meeting, the physical presence. The physical space is very important for us because we are a movement that needs to have local materiality.

Collectiveness is thus something that is connected to communication and, according to these informants, not necessarily facilitated by media. They all seem to be aware that the speed and practicality allowed by the Internet, emails, and digital social networks can be harmful for the movement’s collective organisation and decision-making processes. The benefits and advantages that many have ascribed to digital media are not taken at face value within the MST, as Eliane puts it:

Another very important thing that we have been discussing in relation to social networks is that for us they have to be part of a project, a project of change, there is no point in only using them. There is no point in communicating in social networks and not communicating in practice. So we need to organise ourselves in the communication sector, we need to form militants, we need concrete communication because if we don't have this concrete character as a sector, in the organisation of our communication
there is no point in making memes, there is no point in posting on Facebook because it is not going to solve our problem as an organisation.

Once again, the disbelief in digital media as a communicative solution is stressed, revealing the level of rationalisation and awareness about media and about organisational dynamics. Such disbelief is rooted in a historical understanding of the movement as inserted in the socio-politico-economic conditions that are given at a certain time. As a rationale for relating to media, historicity will mean that the present conditions are intrinsic both to a particular point in time and to the outcome of past events and developments. As Paulo puts it:

I think that in the first place we always work with the idea, always analyse, look back and understand that communication in the MST is an evolving process, a translation of the movement's own strategy. [...] according to the historical period, to the phase that the movement experienced, the challenges that we face, communication is going to respond and obviously adapt itself to the material conditions.

This explanation shows an exogenous relation between the movement and other sectors of society of which the communication strategies are a result. Thus, the ways the movement as a collective relate to media are the outcome of complex processes that reach far beyond media as material artefacts or institutions and their affordances. It would be possible to infer that media are included in the ‘adaptation to the material conditions’, but, even so, in this case media are not just technologies, they are an element of the material conditions.

Historicity is also invoked in an endogenous way, guiding the construction of a shared history with common references to rituals, people, places, and practices that are remembered collectively by militants. This collective memory is crucial for a movement like the MST if we consider that they want to promote and preserve practices and ways of living that are being swept away by modernisation processes. For a social movement that congregates rural workers, who are otherwise seen as primitive and backward people, the connection with the materiality of place and the practices linked to it are fundamental in the strengthening of internal cohesion. In this context, media allow documentation and registering of practices and rituals that compose the essence of what it is to be a rural worker. It is not only the mediated recorded document that is important but also the act of recording and telling something to a camera or recorder or writing
about it. The fact that a certain practice is going to be recorded, edited, and circulated among others, thus extrapolating the ephemeral present, conveys immediate importance to it. For instance, when harvesting practices are recorded, as Sandra tells me:

> When we choose the banana tree, cut it down and start working, this must be documented, because when you see the bananas or something made with the trunk of the banana tree, you do not think about the tree. But if you have access, if you can watch it on the Internet or a blog, you see it and you can educate yourself.

Julia also stresses the formative aspect of constructing and remembering a shared history (and the evident role played by media in it):

> [In the congress, there were] 15,000 people and we knew that half of them were women, even better, our leadership is composed of half women and half men, this is a big advance, it is very important, and the recordings of such moments, the programmes we produced will help us to keep and use it. They will serve to form our bases, it is our history, the history of the MST’s struggle, and it helps to raise our consciousness, educate us as militants.

The interviews show that, within the movement, media are used following a kind of reflexive rationality that is constantly being assessed. Militants – and the movement as a collective actor – not only think, plan, and assess their use of media, but they also have an awareness of how the practices related to media can serve different purposes.

**Individuality versus collectiveness**

From the first interviews, one aspect of the MST’s media practices that became salient was the preoccupation with the conflict between the individualistic ethos of digital media – particularly social networks – and the collective identity of the movement. Particularly those strategically involved in planning and operationalising communication and media strategies were concerned about this conflict. Because of their responsibilities and experience, these informants were able to assess and relate the needs and objectives of the movement and the affordances of the media. In their views, the ability to produce and circulate their own messages and interact with others allowed by digital
social networks is overshadowed by their tendency to become channels for individual expression, as Rita tells me:

The movement is collective, it is a collective subject and the communication processes today are very individual. If on the one hand this massification is important, everyone has the Internet on their mobile [phone] [...] All that is good, but as an organisation we have to be careful because we are not an organisation of individual persons, we are a social organisation with an organic structure, with collectives, with collective principles that guide our decision-making.

She admits later that the technologies facilitate organisational processes but at the same time they ‘challenge us to not individualise and not lose the collective structure of the organisation’.

These views challenge widely accepted understandings that digital media facilitate connective action (Bennet and Segerberg, 2013), assembly (Gerbaudo, 2012), and the formation of networks and communities (Castells, 2001 and 2009). Other authors (Bakardjieva, 2005 and 2009) acknowledge that digital media might be offer a forum to express and exercise citizenship, but that doing so occurs in an individual fashion, around perceived common issues. MST militants contend that collectiveness is a property that they have constructed themselves and not something that can be achieved through the use of media. Even though (as discussed earlier in this chapter) production and circulation of media can be enacted with a view to strengthening the collective, they are seen as mere instruments. So much so that militants working with communication believe that only certain media, used in certain ways, can strengthen the movement’s collectiveness.

What the informants generally meant when they argued that social networks were essentially individual media channels was that content was usually produced by an individual. Furthermore, the speed at which content is circulated does not allow collective construction, evaluation, editing, and subsequent publishing. Even when different organisations have an institutional profile on social networks, they cannot escape the risk of faux pas by individuals who might hastily post something harmful for the organisation as a whole. Within the MST, as communication and media are subject to constant planning and discussion, the fear is exactly that the constant pressure to communicate exerted by new media will risk the consistency of the
movement’s image and threaten its organic processes. This thought is apparent in Eliane’s explanation of how the movement has been trying to use social networks:

We discussed for a while, internally, what we would do with Facebook, because we had this preoccupation that Facebook is a very individualistic media and we, in our movement, we fight individualism, so we try to think [about] things together, collectively, think [about] the process together, because any individual action [...] can delegitimise our organic character.

Nevertheless, there are, within the movement, concrete initiatives and discussions about how the potential of social networks can be used to their benefit. During the National Congress, the Brazilian group *Mídia Ninja*, which became known nationally during the demonstrations of June 2013 for their live and unedited broadcasting of different events, produced independent coverage of the congress. *Mídia Ninja* also helped the communication task force in devising social media strategies during the congress. Here, Fernanda, one of the press officers, evaluates the partnership:

They [*Mídia Ninja*] helped us with questions regarding the social networks that for us are still a new experience, and this is something I bring forward to the national leadership, which is to try to make collective something that is individual by nature. And they treat it in an even more individual manner, but with their help we could bring our collective experience and the technological support that they have.

At first sight, this persistence in controlling communication can seem authoritarian, but when the communicative processes are analysed in contrast to what informants say, it is possible to realise that they are characterised by dialogue and discussion. What we need to question here is what kind of dialogue, if any, can be achieved through social networks, particularly when the subject of action is a collective organisation. The MST has, during their trajectory, created many different spaces for exchange, dialogue, and discussion, both among militants and with those outside the movement. These are events, workshops, regional and local meetings, courses in partnership with universities, and the National Congress. At present, it is clear that those holding strategic communication positions in the movement consider these spaces as the most suited for collective processes of mobilising militants, organising the movement, and defining political guidelines.
Media environments: dealing with differentiation and complexity

The term ‘new media’ refers to Internet-based media platforms and, in the particular case of the MST, to its website and digital social media platforms. As discussed above, the MST started using social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook within the last four to five years (around 2010-2011). Different from so-called old media, which are now organically integrated into the movement, new media – digital social networks and mobile devices in particular – have been subject to plenty of internal discussion. Some informants have stated that the movement is undergoing a process of appropriation of social networks so that they can be utilised for the benefit of the movement as a collective. Digital social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube seem to be considered more problematic than a website, possibly because a website allows its creators to exercise greater power over the content and interactions with it. Unlike digital social networks, publication on a website allows a collective process of production in which information is sent from settlements and campsites or regional press offices to the national press office in São Paulo. Writing and publishing on a website also complies with more traditional rules of journalistic coverage – interviews and data collection, fact checking, and writing of a final text.

The interviews point to two different dispositions regarding the use of new media by the MST as a collective: ambivalence and disagreement. The press officers, who have a broader knowledge of communication in the movement and who work with different aspects of communication on a daily basis, are ambivalent about the potential of digital communication in general and social media platforms in particular. At first, they display a certain scepticism towards the a priori democratic potential of the Internet. They do not believe that, through their activity on social media or the website, the movement will be able to achieve any sort of political representation. Such mistrust is revealed when an informant tells me that ‘the movement’s time is not Facebook time’, meaning that the logic of constant and rapid flow that characterises the platform does not synchronise well with the logic of the MST in which decisions are reached through a deliberation process that includes collective discussion. Alberto, a regional leader in the state of Rio
Grande do Sul, explains that the ‘political time of an organisation’ is not compatible with Facebook time:

[...] at this moment [when we are stressing the] importance of the settlements for the political struggle [...] it is an idea that has been discussed over the last two years [...] but it is now that the leadership, the militants, people in the basis are assimilating it. [This process] has a time, which is the time of a political organisation, it is not Facebook time. [...] of course sometimes you have to use these tools as an important element, as a means of spreading information. But it is the time of a social organisation, a political organisation [...] [social networks, the Internet] cannot be used in this way. Of course, they have an important animation role, but from the organisational point of view of constructing consolidated processes, it is not via the Internet, it is not via telephone, it is sitting around a table, discussing, talking, and deciding.

The organisation of a settlement and articulation of political guidelines, as Alberto explains, are organic processes and, as such, are not something that can be done virtually. In his view, the movement does not have anything to gain from speeding up this process by using digital

Picture 10: A screenshot of the MST’s on 20 December 2014, highlighting the MST’s celebrations after the last five Cuban political prisoners in the US were freed. There is also news about the prohibition of fertilizers and pesticides in Brazil.
social networks. Of course, they are not averse to using the Internet to facilitate communication, as Rita argues:

All that [Internet, email, digital social networks] is very important, it has facilitated communication, given us more agility. Now, what is the preoccupation and the challenge? We are in a period in which everything happens at the speed of light, the speed of communication, and a social movement does not have the speed of a click, of pressing enter on a keyboard.

I interviewed Rita during the National Congress, and she recognised the important role played by technologies – operated by the ‘numerous and well-organised communication task force’, she added – for the socialisation of discussions and experiences among those who were not present at the congress. Real-time updates to the website and the possibility to keep those who were not able to travel to the congress updated were, in Rita’s view, some of the main advantages of technologies. Nevertheless, what technologies offer is a potential that can only be fully realised through the efforts and work of the communication sector, as many informants stressed in their interviews.

Younger militants, however, are more positive towards the potential of the Internet and digital social networks for the MST’s communicative processes even if they are used for communicating within the movement. They are more likely to use their personal profiles to post calls for events and pictures of certain activities, which I could follow because I added some informants as friends on Facebook. Still, these are activities to which the general public is invited such as seminars, open lectures, markets where the MST’s produce is sold, and other events organised by the movement and open to the community. Protests, demonstrations, and occupations, in turn, are only publicised as they happen or after they have already started. As Rodrigo, a youth leader, reasons, there is a fine balance between sharing and sharing too much:

[…] it is possible to make an evaluation that we are more flexible in [our] communication than before. I have Facebook, I have Twitter, I talk about the activities that are happening […] of course I do it with caution, but I post pictures of the activities as they happen, me personally, because this helps to advertise, it is a two-way street […]. I think we need to be careful, however, at this moment we don’t have an in-depth evaluation about these surveillance services.
Digital social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and, more recently, Instagram have significantly facilitated the act of sharing information. Moreover, they are free to use for personal users and easy to operate. The development of mobile phones into a multiplatform, multitasking device also simplifies the act of sharing content (text, audio, images, and video). On the flipside, there are many ways in which the corporations that own digital social media platforms benefit from individual users sharing all sorts of content and thus creating a flow on these platforms. In a critique of the sharing and content-creating logic of social networks, Dean (2009) coined the term communicative capitalism,76 arguing that what she calls contributions (information and content shared by individuals and organisations) has a bulk value for the companies that provide the platforms for sharing. Sharing is therefore encouraged and made easier, or frictionless77 in techno jargon. It therefore takes a certain level of self-awareness and self-censorship – as acknowledged by Rodrigo – to constantly avoid oversharing. As sharing and being present online becomes the norm, avoiding sharing demands self-control on the part of the individual and the socialisation of accepted rules and behaviours within the organisation. Once again, mediatisation as a process in which changes in media catalyse social change is noticeable. The normalisation of sharing as a form of sociability has consequences for individuals. They then need to adapt and constantly negotiate their relationship with the normal and socially accepted form of acting that is sharing content.

When the use of social networks is connected to one’s activities in a collective like the MST, in addition to self-awareness, individuals must be able to understand the consequences of oversharing that are linked to their commitment to the organisation. The main concerns regarding sharing and posting information on digital social networks are jeopardising organised mobilisation; identification of militants who might be tracked by the police, private militia, and security companies; and the use of images and other shared content against the movement. Despite these concerns being voiced by many informants, none of them

76 Dean defines ‘communicative capitalism’ as ‘the materialization of ideas of inclusion and participation in information, entertainment, and communication technology in ways that capture resistance and intensify global capitalism’ (2009).
mentioned concrete cases – apart from footage made by militants being used to identify protesters in a police investigation. Due to this kind of previous experience, the safety of militants in the case of information about planned actions being made readily available is a significant concern among the leadership and in the communication sector.

Informants also pointed out the need to educate the movement’s social basis about the potential and dangers of using social networks. This would be a way to socialise the militancy into the accepted – because they are safe – ways of using digital social networks, as Fernanda, a press officer in Brasília, argues:

[…] we need guidelines [...] security guidelines and such because whether you want to or not you expose militants and many of them are persecuted in a way or another where they live, because of the daily struggle for land, so security procedures are necessary.

Adriano, a member of the audiovisual brigade, echoes this view, emphasising the disruptive nature of direct action, which is at risk when information about planned activities is leaked prior to their actual performance:

[...] when [we] think [about] actions, and thinking about the logic of real-time coverage, because I think this is the example we are taking here [...] the movement thinks in a logic of guaranteeing that the action is performed, this is very clear for the movement. In these actions, we are already careful with these tools, in how these mobile phones, this coverage can disclose us, tell [people] where we are and so on. But of course there is this generational shock in the sense that there is a generation who grew up with more access [to Internet] and usually comes from urban areas. [They] post everything on Facebook and this may cause problems in the future [...] we’ll come to know this later, today we don’t have this knowledge [of] possible criminalisation that may occur, for example, by identifying who took part in the actions and later these people are penalised. We do not have any response to this yet but I wouldn’t be surprised if there is already an investigation.

Following this attitude of cautious curiosity, the movement started using digital social networks mainly as channels to expand their audiences. Twitter started to be used as a way to broaden the reach of the website by linking to articles originally published on the website, immediately reaching important audiences such as journalists, other social organisations, and intellectuals. In this way, the platform offered some sort of narrowcasting, as the MST could follow journalists, politicians, and other relevant people and organisations. Even journalists from outlets that the movement would not communicate
with directly could use information from digital social networks in their reports. The MST started using Facebook in the same way, but, at the moment, the platform is used for live coverage of events and other actions, as well as for sharing content from ‘friendly’ producers. In interviews with the press officers, it was revealed that the MST’s page on Facebook was first created by people outside the movement who later contacted São Paulo’s press office and offered to turn the page over to the MST.

**Reflecting on the affordances and potential of media**

At the time the fieldwork was carried out, there was a process of debate and discussion within the organisation on the potential of Facebook and how it could be used to their benefit. Contrary to recent research on the use of social networks by contemporary social movements (see, for instance, Gerbaudo, 2012 and Bennet and Segerberg, 2013) these platforms do not serve to organise or connect militants; instead, they are seen as ways to reach out to potential supporters. This does not disqualify the findings of such research projects, reveals the differences between established and new social movements. The most marked difference is how the MST, an established social movement, differentiates between communication as a process and media as technologies, artefacts, or institutions. While, for contemporary direct action formations, communication cannot be separated from the media in which activists and protesters are constantly immersed.

Even though internal guidelines and policies to govern the use of digital social networks by the movement are still to be established, there is an intention to utilise the movement’s media as instruments for uniting working classes in Brazil. For this purpose, Internet-based platforms such as the MST’s website, YouTube channel, and digital social networks could amplify the efforts already directed at the production of content for other channels. Informants revealed an acute understanding that their goal is not to dialogue with what they consider the dominant class. What they hope is to build support among working classes in cities and rural areas, a kind of contemporary counter-hegemonic,
critical media system that will configure itself into a concrete alternative to dominant media.

Such is not the current situation and, in the view of the informants, the strengthening of this counter-hegemonic alternative does not depend on the evolution and spread of new technologies but on the configuration of a favourable political scenario. Aware of the specific conditions faced by alternative and independent actors in the media sector in Brazil, the MST also acts as a media activist organisation through its participation in the National Forum for Democratisation of Communication (FNDC). One of the goals of the FNDC is to push for policies that break up media monopolies and facilitate access to communication and information in Brazil.

Digital social networks are therefore not instruments to be employed for organisation and mobilisation but for broadcasting to audiences that would not normally be reached by the channels that the movement traditionally uses, as Marcelo, a press officer in São Paulo, tells me:

[...] for us they [social networks] essentially have the functions of supporting [our] ideological struggle and spreading information. Internally the movement has other forms of organisational consolidation that are the instances, the collectives, the brigades, the sectors. These are the essential instruments to strengthen the organisation, where the schedule of actions, priorities for each period, challenges in the areas of production and education will be discussed. So there is a live body around the movement constituted by the collectives, and the sectors, spaces that support the organisational issues.

He also draws a distinction between digital social networks and the movement’s own network, which he sees as two separate entities. It is possible to see a clear differentiation from contemporary social movements that are at times amalgamated with the digital networks they construct. The ‘live body’ that Marcelo refers to is the social system that performs communicative processes and the organisation of the movement. In this system, the social relations constructed by people will determine how media is used.

Since media are not considered part of the movement but instruments and tools to be used, it is understandable that the inception of a new technology or instrument will be a motive for suspicion and reorganisation of social processes. Ambivalent opinions regarding
digital social media networks, particularly Facebook were fairly common in the interviews conducted. Ambivalent opinions were commonly expressed in connection with the newness of social networks and with the uncertainty about how they can be used in a way that is beneficial to the movement. As Fernanda and Marina, press officers in Brasília, argue:

[...] we didn’t really know how to deal with this question of the movement as a mass institution and the need to deal with an individualised network, because at the end of the day that is what Twitter and Facebook are. You have your profile. How would the profile of a large social movement like MST be able to dialogue with an upper-middle-class [person] who had access to broadband Internet at the time? Because if you have dial-up Internet [access], you can’t be connected to this stuff all the time.

Fernanda, press officer, Brasília

[...] it is an important instrument for us, especially at events, and we have already evaluated that we manage to have a good visibility, in the sense of disseminating information and all that, we have made these evaluations. We understand that the instrument is important and the debate is about how to use it in a way that does not harm our internal organicity and all that, but we have felt the strength of the instrument as a means of communication and it is important and necessary, so much that we have been using it. We have been using it in a way that has produced significant results.

Marina, press officer, Brasília

In the settlements, beyond the strategic functions of the press office, the views on new media and digital social networks are more positive. Informants in this situation see digital media as a possibility of self-representation. Digital media give them the possibility to document their own lives and experiences and construct their history. The informants also commented on the use of social networks individually by MST militants and the importance that this may have for the movement:

It [the Internet] is indispensable because communication today is really cool, you hear an older guy saying, ‘Look, I’ll post it on Facebook’, with a pumpkin this big, a beautiful thing! ‘Take a picture and I’ll post it on Facebook.’ So this is great, because that is how it is now, our communication today is like that, totally virtual, and it ends up being very exclusive because those who don’t have this knowledge are disadvantaged in communication, are excluded, this is a reality.

Sandra, Brasília

It is clear in this statement that Sandra does not see Facebook as a tool for organising militants or even as a medium to be collectively utilised. She sees it as a channel for self-expression where rural workers can show their produce. This idea resonates with contemporary analyses of
digital networks – supported by ever more individualised devices – as channels for construction and expression of the self as an individual project (Turkle, 2011). But as told by Sandra, this kind of individual self-expression is not always negative, nor does it lead to self-centred individuals who are constantly editing their lives online so that they will appear appealing to their peers. In the account above, posting a picture of an unusually large pumpkin is a way to attribute value to an otherwise marginalised activity, i.e., agricultural work.

Digital social networks are seen more positively at the individual level or even as an alternative to landline telephones when these are not available in rural areas. At the radios, for instance, the Facebook page of the radio or the personal profile of the presenter are used to communicate with the audience, who send in information, requests songs, etc. The social network platform is also used to search for content and news to be broadcast during radio programmes. At one of the radios visited, the closest telephone was located in a different building, about 50 metres away, and the mobile phone signal was not reliable, which made Facebook the only way for the radio presenter to communicate with the audience during a broadcast. In sum, as Gustavo, the communication coordinator in Itapeva, São Paulo, explains, the Internet and digital social networks are instruments that can change or facilitate communication:

Facebook [...] has this role now of [enabling] this faster communication. We tried for a while with MSN, but MSN never [...] it is not a social network, [it] did not catch up like Facebook, with this boom of Facebook, this explosion of the social network, everyone has it now [...]. Everyone has Facebook, so this way of dialogue is very fast and easy. Everyone has a simple mobile so it becomes easier. Then the Internet for us is starting to become a kind of instrument. Because in the past we only used the Internet to look for news, to carry out studies, look for information on different topics, get deeper knowledge about certain themes, but now the Internet gives us this as well. With technological development we cannot keep ourselves to the archaic, we need to keep up with evolution and use technology as a tool to help us, and the Internet contributes to that today, for us here, it’s quite positive.

The existence of a conflict between the collective ethos of a mass social movement and the individualistic character of a digital social media network is also evident here. However, militants outside the press office do not find it so problematic. In fact, as the interview excerpts above show, they do not use digital networks as a substitute for other organisational practices such as meetings, collective discussions, and
deliberation. For them as individuals, Facebook, which is the platform they named most often, is a ‘local’ medium, serving to connect them with the local community of friends and establish a local audience.

While previously the dynamics of analogue media allowed for collective debate and production of content in an organic way, digital social networks facilitate immediate individual publishing. The practices connected with radio and print media combined mediated and face-to-face actions. The production of the movement’s newspaper is discussed in the settlements, which then send suggestions to the press office in São Paulo. After publication, the newspaper becomes a catalyst for discussions locally in settlements. Video production works in the same way, with participatory production and editing processes and the use of some videos for local discussion. Lastly, the establishment of a settlement radio is also a process of debate. The radio station has the role of being a collective arena primarily for militants to share and discuss information but also to disseminate local culture through music, theatre, and literature.

Up until the advent of digital social networks, digital communication was used as a way to facilitate communication through email, for instance, strengthening extraterritorial networks with other social movements and supporters around the world. As already noted, the website was first to mark the movement’s digital territory, to state its presence online and publicise basic information. Through social and technological change, digital social networks and social media themselves became structures that were potentially capable of enabling the debate and discussion processes that were previously unmediated (in the sense that they occurred through face-to-face communication). Moreover, digital social networks enable individual and immediate publishing of content without any discussion, debate, or editing. Together with surveillance concerns, the fact that content that refers to the collective can be published individually is one of the main reasons for discomfort and mistrust on social media networks. At the same time, informants were positive concerning the propaganda potential of these networks when used in a collective capacity. At the time of writing, the MST’s Facebook page had over 38,000 followers (likes) and was being used to publicise the movement’s activities. Posts on the
profile include both self-produced content and content produced by others on topics of interest for the MST.

Another facet of the MST’s media practices that emerged from the interviews is the scepticism about the organisational potential of digital social networks as substitutes or complements to existing organisational processes. Recent research and commentary have underscored the network properties of digital communications (see, for instance, Castells 2000, 2009 and 2013; Constanza-Chook 2006). These authors ascribe digital networks a nearly neutral status, which would allow them to function in a centre-less and non-authoritarian fashion, with rapid communication between different nodes in the network. However, as Gitlin (2012, p. 218) rightly points out, ‘[t]he sluggishness of the past is an illusion’. In the case of the MST, the movement was able to construct an organic network of communication (with a number of hubs but no clear centre) without the help of digital social networks. At the same time, contrary to contemporary protest movements that emerged in recent years, the MST has a history of persecution, which justifies its reluctance in organising actions via these platforms.

The gap that is found between the organic non-digital social network constructed by the MST throughout its 30 years of existence and the digital networking activities of the movement resonate with Couldry’s (2013) critique of Castells’ work on networks. Castells sees the Internet as a ‘network of networks’ (2000) through which power flows and in which those who hold power can act as ‘switches’, turning chains of actions and reactions (performed in the network) on and off. Couldry (2013), in turn, argues that Castells ‘remains largely silent on how the content of media might be put to work in social life’. It can be added that Castells does not say much either about the ways in which digital and non-digital networks are interweaved and relate to each other. Many places, societies, and communities are currently undergoing a transitional phase between analogue and digital communication, which means that there are still clear boundaries between the two.

The observations and discussions of media practices among MST militants reveal that, although the digital and non-digital networks are
related and sometimes work in tandem, those in such networks do not see them as a unity. There was a tendency among the informants to see the movement itself as a network in which those inside hold relative control and are able to switch, to use Castells’ term, chains of action and reaction. The fact that the informants are less confident about the networking potential of social media can be linked to the acknowledgement that they do not exercise the same power in the virtual world. This kind of concern is illustrated by the preoccupation, voiced by two informants, that using social networks in inappropriate ways can be harmful to the organic character of the movement. It has become clear that there is a will to transfer the collective organisational characteristics of the movement to its media production processes, which, in the view of the informants, can be achieved through radio, print media, and audiovisual production.

The interviews and observations have shown that the media practices within the MST have the purpose of strengthening the collective ethos of the movement, or, in the words of its members, the internal ‘organicity’. For this to be achieved, it is necessary that the MST as an organisation be able to exercise a certain level of control over the media and over the processes that guide the practices related to these media. It is also necessary that the collective processes of debate, discussion, and reflection that permeate the movement be reproduced in and through media practices. Such control can only be achieved through the deliberate separation of communication and media. By claiming ownership of communicative processes and creating their own arenas of communication that have become established through time, MST militants are able to choose not to use digital social networks as organisational tools. Over three decades, the MST has been shaping their media and constructing processes that guide media practices mostly in a time when mass media technologies dominated communication. The changes that individualistic and network-like media technologies impose on the MST’s communicative processes are starting to be felt and addressed by the movement. It is noticeable, however, that many of those in charge of leading the construction of communication processes are aware of the structural conflicts between digital social networks and the MST’s communicative ethos.
10 Facing the antagonists and building support: the counter-hegemonic potential of social movement media

The previous two chapters essentially focused on the symbolic and material dimensions of communication within the MST. Chapter 8 dealt with the construction of narratives and discussed communicative processes as forms of building a sense of collectiveness. Chapter 9 addressed the materiality of media and the intersections and disconnections between media and communication, looking into the practices that are related to media and to how they are constructed and rationalised within the movement. While these two chapters discussed internal communication, this chapter presents an analysis of the political aspects of communication. It addresses the ways in which the MST’s communicative processes contribute to strengthening the counter-hegemonic and counter-dominant position of the movement in Brazil’s contemporary political scenario.

A topography of the struggle

As a social movement acting in defence of rural workers’ rights, the MST is ideologically opposed to land ownership concentration and commodification of land and of its produce. In practice, this means that, during the 1980s and 1990s, the movement’s main antagonists were landowners who were mostly private individuals (see Chapter 3, ‘A very short history of land distribution in Brazil’). With the expansion of agribusiness (particularly cattle rearing for the meat industry) and technology-intensive cultures such as soybeans and sugarcane, as well as the emergence of large biotechnology conglomerates such as Monsanto, Syngenta, Stora-Enso, and Bünge, the power dynamics changed, and the MST had to adapt its communications to those changes. Developments in the structure of land ownership in Brazil and in the nature of agriculture as an economic activity meant that the MST’s antagonist changed from the figure of the all-powerful landowner (the coronel, fazendeiro, or estancieiro, who occupies a special place in Latin
American imaginary and popular culture) to the faceless corporation. These developments prompted the MST to reposition itself in the national and transnational political scenarios – considering that agribusiness corporations are transnational and affect the lives of rural and native communities in many countries – as well as to reassess its communication strategies. A concrete outcome for the MST was a shift from the tactic of occupation of unused land – common in large properties that were being kept for speculative purposes, but less so in single-crop corporate-owned land that is used for the cultivation of export cultures or cattle rearing – to occupations and the establishment of campsites in significant places close to government or corporate buildings, demonstrations in laboratories, and blocking of roads as forms of protest.

One particularity in Brazil is that certain media companies also have or have had interests in the agribusiness sector, which understandably complicates the MST’s situation as a marginal actor trying to gain visibility. RBS, one of Brazil’s largest media conglomerates, also own Canal Rural, a television channel and online portal specialising in agribusiness and rural economics. The second-biggest newspaper in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul, Correio do Povo, was until 2001 owned by a family who also owned large rice plantations and processing and storage facilities. In the northern state of Pará, the same family that owns one regional TV station also owns large extensions of land used for cattle rearing. The holding that owns Globo television (Globo Comunicação e Participações) is a member of the Brazilian Agribusiness Association.

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78 The figure of the powerful landowner has been portrayed in many Brazilian soap operas such as O Rei do Gado, Renascer, and Roque Santeiro, as well as in novels such as Jorge Amado’s Gabriela, Cravo e Canela (published in English as Gabriela, Clove and Cinnamon).
Thus, the political-economic configuration of the Brazilian media landscape results on unequal representation (cf. Fraser, 2009) and on the colonisation of political discourse by economic interests (cf. Habermas, 1962/1991). The MST’s marginal position will thus be a strong structuring element in the movement’s communicative processes. The awareness and understanding of the movement’s position in the Brazilian political landscape was constantly in evidence in interviews and observations. This position is seen more as a marginal than a counter-hegemonic one, in the sense that a counter-hegemonic position would mean that the ideas and projects proposed by the MST would be accepted as a valid alternative by a significant and representative portion of society. In other words, the MST as a social movement aims to be, and is working towards becoming, a part of a counter-hegemonic formation – including their media production – but, according to the informants, it has not reached this status yet, as Paulo observes:

“It is not possible to share this ingenuity, ‘we are constructing another communication’. We are constructing an alternative, and it has content, it has a counter-hegemonic intention, but it does not possess material or subjective strength to be counter-hegemonic today.”
The marginal status of the MST is related to rural workers’ position as a subaltern class in relation to dominant classes that were composed in the past primarily by large landowners and are composed at present by transnational agribusiness conglomerates. It is also related to their position as a challenger (cf. Wolfsfeld, 2005) in symbolic arenas. What started as a national conflict has now – as a consequence of neo-liberal globalisation – expanded beyond national borders, taking on a transnational shape. In order to gain legitimacy, the MST needs to reframe (cf. Fraser, 2009, p. 143). Considering this social scenario, my goal has been to understand the mechanisms constructed by the MST to further negotiate its counter-hegemonic status through communicative processes. How are they able to establish networks of solidarity and reposition themselves against a rapidly evolving political scenario?

I have addressed this research aim by asking people who are involved in the communicative processes about their expectations, experiences, and appreciation of the counter-hegemonic potential of media practices and by discussing the potential of media as channels for countering dominance. The counter-hegemonic potential of media practices refers to the ability of the movement to attract media attention and coverage to its demands and to the issues that it is working with. Such practices refer to the traditional understanding of media space as constitutive of the national public sphere. It follows that some of the MST’s practices will be aimed at securing coverage and thus space in the mainstream media – mostly television and newspapers. Conversely, the potential of media as channels for countering dominance refers to the experiences in building the movement’s own media channels and communication networks. The excerpt above illustrates this kind of potential, the fulfilment of which has become a project for the MST.

The interviews revealed a strong and clear discontentment with mainstream media in Brazil. All six informants who were working, or had worked, as press officers at the time of their interviews saw mainstream media conglomerates as representatives of an antagonistic class with interests that were incompatible and irreconcilable with the MST’s project. Nevertheless, they understood the importance of establishing a dialogue with journalists and said they would actively seek
coverage by deploying different strategies. A considerable amount of a press officer’s time is dedicated to writing and circulating press releases, responding to journalists’ enquiries, and monitoring media coverage. The time spent on these activities varies depending on external factors such as the current political scenario and internal factors such as events and activities organised by the MST or that it is taking part in. One important activity carried out by press officers is writing a document called a ‘thermometer’, which is a discourse-analysis-informed mapping of press coverage. During the National Congress, two of the press officers were responsible for preparing and circulating such a document among the national leadership every day.

The analysis of media coverage after the first day of congress started as follows:

The first day of the MST’s Congress did not have any repercussions in the bourgeois press. Not a line was written on the activity in the big newspapers. However, the prognosis is that the coverage by the hegemonic media will start today, when 12,000 Sem-Terra [militants] will meet in Brasilia. Among the alternative/counter-hegemonic press, the magazine *Carta Capital* started a series of texts [...] discussing the advances of the organisation, evaluations of the government and current challenges faced in the struggle for agrarian reform.79

This shows that the movement draws a clear distinction between the bourgeois hegemonic press and the alternative, friendly, and counter-hegemonic press outlets. It is also possible to note that, here, the movement is moving away from its role as content producer (which was discussed in the previous two chapters) and is assuming the position of content provider for the press. This position is particularly evident in the statement that the coverage will start when 12,000 militants are gathered for the event.

The thermometer circulated during the last day of the congress also stated that the two activities led by the MST had ample repercussions in newspapers: the meeting with President Dilma Rousseff and the public act for agrarian reform, a demonstration/artistic intervention organised by the movement. Overall, the coverage from two of Brazil’s main

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79 Termômetro Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra, distributed on 10 February 2014 among movement leaders and made available to me by the MST’s press office in Brasilia.
national newspapers, Folha de São Paulo and O Globo,\textsuperscript{80} was considered negative: ‘they clearly disapprove of the president’s inviting the MST for a meeting’. The headlines frame the MST as an organisation defending obsolete ideas that cannot lead to development (as opposed to agribusiness, which is equated with modernisation), as well as being anti-democratic due to the preference for protests and direct action, insinuating involvement with the Black Blocks, an insurgent movement that became famous for carrying out violent actions during the June 2013 protests in Brazil.

Even though there might be journalists who are more sympathetic to the movement, the coverage during the MST congress shows that traditional media institutions do not consider the MST a relevant political actor. According to the evaluations of press officers, in certain cases there might be some agreement with the causes that the movement defends such as the redistribution of land and raising education standards in rural areas; however, the MST is seldom recognised as a social actor capable of promoting change in these areas.

The production of factual and decontextualised press coverage of the agrarian question in Brazil was seen clearly at the National Congress during a press conference attended by around 20 journalists from Brasília’s national and local press. The conference was hosted by two MST leaders – a woman and a man, following the movement’s policy for equal gender representation – who started by contextualising the congress within the history of the movement and by giving a brief outline of the issues they were discussing during the event and would like to discuss in the press. Among these issues were the production and activities in the settlements, the importance of education for rural populations and as an agenda item for the movement, highlighting successful partnerships with state universities, efforts to foster women’s participation in leadership and political roles in the movement and communities with which the movement is involved, and the importance of the congress as a meeting point for social movements in Brazil and Latin America. Another important issue that the movement wanted to

\textsuperscript{80} Folha de São Paulo and O Globo were originally published in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, respectively, but they are distributed throughout the entire country, and they also provide national coverage to a larger extent than other regional newspapers.
bring to public discussion was their proposal of ‘popular agrarian reform’ as a project to redistribute land and restructure the productive matrix in Brazil. When the time came for journalists’ questions, most of the journalists kept themselves to fact checking, such as the discrepancy between the extension of land that the government claimed was expropriated and that the movement said was expropriated, as well as the volume of production and revenue generated by it. Other questions included whether a wealth distribution programme (*Bolsa Família*) and social policies implemented by the PT government had contributed to demobilisation, how the MST evaluated the current government, and whether the occupation (historically the main tactic of protest and mobilisation used by the MST) was on a downturn. In this press conference journalists were able to dominate the exchange by imposing their agendas, whereas the topics that were of interest to the MST were ignored.

*Exploring the fissures of the hegemonic press*

The professionalisation of press relations within the MST occurred through a gradual process in which movement leaders and militants developed an awareness of the social topography where they found themselves at the same time that journalism students were starting to get closer to the movement. In one way, as the movement was also becoming an organisation with defined goals, a structure, rules, and accepted procedures, press relations were also becoming a specific activity within the organisational system. Since the creation of the press office in São Paulo in the mid-2000s, the MST has made efforts to build relationships and monitor the mainstream media, acting both proactively and reactively. The press office in Brasília was established shortly after São Paulo’s press office, as many media outlets have an office in Brasília. In order to deal with press demands, the movement developed a number of strategies, such as selecting spokespersons who are prepared to give interviews and speak to journalists, opting for live interviews as much as possible in order to avoid unfavourable editing, and establishing routines to register and accompany journalists during occupations, protests, and demonstrations.
The examples below from the interviews with press officers illustrate how MST militants reflect upon the relationship between the movement and the Brazilian press. It is possible to perceive a deep reflexivity about the MST’s position in relation to Brazil’s mainstream press:

[...] The Brazilian press enters people’s houses daily as though they were something neutral, instead of recognising: ‘we have our place, we belong to the Marinho family, we are Globo TV and we are from Globo TV, from Bandeirantes TV are members of the Brazilian Agribusiness Association’. So how do you perceive a news feature defending the interests of agribusiness companies without knowing that Globo and Bandeirantes are members of the Brazilian Agribusiness Association? [...] The *Sem-Terra* magazine or MST website are obviously the organisation’s media but you are not going to find there a false impartiality statement, as is the case with the Brazilian press. Well, having said that, despite this massacre, knowing that the interests of these large media conglomerates correspond to class interests and the maintenance of land ownership concentration, we don’t have any illusion that the MST, by being more or less radical, will gain more space [in the press]. The MST will attract more attention from the press to the extent that the movement [...] is prepared to abandon its flagship issue – agrarian reform. But as long as the movement, regardless of our method – occupation of land or distribution of lollipops to children – defends agrarian reform, democratization, and distribution of property in Brazil, it will always be antagonistic to the large communication groups because they are rooted in or are themselves big landowners. [...] So it is in this sense that I say that we learned very early not to create illusions that through the media we would win hearts and minds, but of course we are not sectarian to the point of saying that we will ignore [mainstream media].

Paulo, former press officer, Veranópolis

[...] the hegemonic press or bourgeois press still determine much of public opinion in Brazil. I say that they still determine because this credibility has been questioned for a while by the movements for the democratisation of communication. We denounce this process of information manipulation.[...] today the MST does not dialogue with Veja. This is a political determination after years of manipulation, since many years ago we understood that it’s not worth it. So we don’t dialogue with Veja, but we give interviews to *Folha de São Paulo*, they determine public opinion. It is better to have your statement there, even if your issue is not there, than not to have the space to make your statement because of this specific situation that these big media still determine much of the public opinion in Brazil. With the advent of the Internet, social networks, blogs, the probability that manipulated information will be refuted improved a lot. Do we manage to be counter-hegemonic? Sometimes, it’s not a general rule, that’s a fact. But we manage in certain moments, but it [the Internet] helped us a lot. [...] but counter-information that is spread through the Internet does not mean that the Internet is now a salvation, do you understand? But it means that it [the Internet] is a potential tool for you to be able to exercise counter-hegemony in a way that is less mediated by the bourgeois press. I am telling you that it is not yet a salvation because unfortunately access to the Internet, the bulk of Internet access, still belongs to these same corporations we are criticising in their diffusion of content, like Globo, Terra, UOL and so on.

Fernanda, press officer, Brasília

These excerpts reveal an understanding of the Brazilian press that is common within the movement, as an arena where the MST can appear
(cf. Silverstone, 2007) to a wider public, but also as institutions representing class interests opposed to those of the movement. The idea that being counter-hegemonic is not the movement’s natural status but is achieved only by opposing dominant political projects appears again. This assessment reinstates the original (cf. Gramsci, 1936/1971) meaning of counter-hegemony as an unstable and dialectical status that needs to be conquered. In other words, being oppositional or insurgent does not necessarily mean being counter-hegemonic. Furthermore, this view reflects the complexity of contemporary media, which are at the same time symbolic spaces of appearance (cf. Silverstone, 2007) and institutions with political and economic interests. A closer look into these conflicts shows that embodied reality defies the normative ideal of the media as the symbolic arenas of the public sphere, where diverse and conflicting worldviews meet because, if these arenas are controlled by dominant groups that hinder the access of those representing conflicting worldviews, they cannot be considered public.

Picture 12: TV cameras gather when militants confront the police near the US Embassy in Brasília during a demonstration. February 2014.

As the MST’s relationship with the press developed and the communication sector became more professionalised, press officers gained knowledge about journalistic values and routines. This
knowledge will be an important guide in the movement’s relationship with the press, as can be seen in statements below.

[...] in the last period we had a less intense relationship with the press, which only increases when we are in a mobilisation period, the demonstrations in March and April, for example. These are periods of recurrent demonstrations when we have a more intense relationship [with the press]. But we have always had a very difficult relationship with the press. In the first place, because the press – the media – have their political agenda against the MST and against agrarian reform. Second, because the journalists working in the mainstream press are deeply ignorant about issues concerning rural areas and agriculture. They simply don’t know, don’t have much knowledge about these questions and also don’t have much knowledge about the MST’s way of organisation and action [...]. A third element is the lack of interest among the mainstream press in addressing essential issues such as the agrarian question, concentration of land, violence in rural areas, contamination by pesticides, and slave labour. Such issues are only covered in an episodic way, when there is a scandal.

Marcelo, press officer, São Paulo

Sometimes we go through a phase when the press is completely silent about our actions, they don’t say a word. Like [...] they don’t criminalise us, they just don’t say anything. And when this happens it becomes complicated. And sometimes they don’t criminalise us but the way the frame it [...] they use terms we don’t agree with. Instead of ‘occupy’ they write ‘invade’, but they are covering [us] without beating us up too much. But sometimes this is complicated because we don’t manage to achieve our goal, we have our media but we don’t have the reach that the mainstream press have. So we try to work on this relationship so that we can ensure that they will not apply their biases to our issues. Sometimes we succeed, sometimes we don’t [...] we work like little ants.

Marina, press officer, Brasília

[We did not speak to] Veja and RBS because we knew that they were going to criminalise us, and this was how we could show that we did not think that a dialogue with them was possible. We knew what to expect from them. With others we adopted a standard practice, if we got a request we followed it accordingly: an interview, a short note and so on [...] whatever was requested of us [...] We always knew what kind of framing these media would apply in relation to the movement, we were never naïve in relation to that.

Maria, former press officer in Brasília and São Paulo

These testimonies show concretely the internal dilemmas faced by the movement in their relationship with the press. This relationship cannot be seen as linear, and the positions are not static. The MST works towards a horizon of promoting systemic change in the Brazilian landscape, however the road towards this change is clearly not straight, but winding and full of intersections. For the MST – as well as for innumerable groups, communities, and popular social movements in Brazil – the ideal situation would be a different media landscape that is not dominated by a few companies that have strong ties and interests in other strategic areas (agribusiness, construction, security, telecommunications, pharmaceuticals). Nevertheless, they have
understood the necessity of working with the given structural conditions in order to change them.

The press officers recognise that it is important for the organisation to have a working relationship with certain media outlets. The main reason to maintain this relationship is the ability to reach a greater public while at the same time using alternative media outlets to circulate their unfiltered views. The fact that the national newspapers and television channels choose to cover the MST corroborates (to the outside public) that they exist as a social actor, that the demonstration they organised calls attention to an important issue, and that they deserve the attention of the general public. Nevertheless, as the following excerpts illustrate, this relationship is always contentious. The answer to the question of why it is important for the MST to maintain a dialogue with mainstream press reveals that the press officers are aware that, as a hegemonic institution, it has fissures that can be used to establish dialectical positions:

[...] there is always a small opening in these spaces, there is always a journalist who is less compliant with the company’s ideologies, maybe he or she has better conditions to be more professional [...] So this is a space that we considered and still consider that needs to be covered, we need to make ourselves heard including via the mainstream press.

Maria, former press officer in Brasília and São Paulo

Considering the way press officers see the relationship between the movement and the press, it is not possible to characterise the MST’s relationship with the press as antagonistic only. Even if corporations are seen as antagonists by the movement, the press as institution has a more dialectical position. There are many aspects to the process that is permeated by constant evaluation and negotiation: press outlets are seen as representatives of an antagonistic class, but individual journalists can be more sympathetic to the MST’s causes. There might be occasions when the political scenario allows more favourable coverage, for instance, when the MST criticized the PT government, fuelling TV Globo with an argument that led to an unexpectedly favourable report in the national evening news broadcast during the National Congress. At the same time, the press as an institution is regarded as highly relevant even if the movement as an organisation is opposed to the ownership and distribution structure of Brazilian media.
It can be argued that the MST’s engagement with media has both compliant and resistant elements. They comply with mainstream media power when they establish press offices to handle media relations, monitor the press, and respond when they judge it necessary, and when they agree to play according to journalistic rules. They resist when they attempt to build their own (alternative) media, refuse to speak to certain outlets, and try to change the Brazilian media landscape at a structural level. This mode of operation conforms to the MST’s two-sided ethos as a social movement and as an organisation (Chaves, 2000) in the sense that they need to be pragmatic about their actions and use the mainstream press to their advantage, but they are also seeking long-term changes in the media landscape.

The critical view towards mainstream media is well ingrained in the movement and something that is carried through among the MST’s membership. Since the movement is also active in the area of education, with its own schools and programmes, this means that a critical outlook towards media is included in the socialisation process of militants. At the Veranópolis school, for instance, students organise discussions about current affairs. Below, one of the students in charge of moderating these discussions explains how this works:

[…], the TV news upstairs […] is an organised thing, we come up there, watch the news, because everyone thinks that the TV news is one thing but if you look at it with a critical eye, a sharper look, you see that it is not what everyone thinks. […] the TV news has this intentionality, and we have to be able to see this, this alienation. So we have this space to debate, not only about that specific TV broadcast but even news you read on the Internet and you find suitable to bring to that space.

Ernesto, MST member and student at the IEJC Veranópolis

It is also important to note that the MST’s relationship to press coverage has two different aspects: coverage of the movement itself (what happens in occupations and settlements, demonstrations, protests, and events) and coverage of the issues and areas in which the MST acts (farming, agricultural production, GMOs, agrarian reform, education in rural areas, among others). From the interviews, it is possible to infer that it is relatively easier for the MST to attract episodic press coverage

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81 The MST is a member organisation of the National Forum for Democratisation of Communication (FNDC), a pressure group created in 1991 composed of diverse civil society organisations. The FNDC acts at the level of policymaking and aims to improve access to media among citizens and prevent concentration of ownership in the communications sector.
than to influence the agenda-setting process in relation to the issues the movement judges to be important, as the following statement shows:

This farming is a problem, when it was the landowner of unproductive land society wasn’t against [us]. This farming model that we have today has many adepts, media, universities, elected politicians, so it is much more difficult for us to challenge this model. [...] Because you have to be able to show ‘look, we want this, we don’t want that’ and for this to happen you need to be able to show in practice how it works. That’s why they don’t show our side of the story [...] they end up not giving visibility to the rice harvest opening, because this has a political meaning in the agrarian reform debate, like the occupation had in other historic periods, it is an ideological fight.

Alberto, regional coordinator, Porto Alegre

In highlighting this unwillingness to see the MST not only as a social movement but also as an economic actor in the agricultural sector, the MST’s coordinator calls attention to the common interests of media institutions and agribusiness, as mentioned in the previous section. At a plenary during the National Congress in 2014, the MST’s national leader and founder, João Pedro Stédile, criticised agribusiness’s ideological apparatus. This apparatus is constituted by high-cost PR and advertising campaigns, lobbyists, and resources used to finance the campaigns of allied congressmen.82 Added to this is Brazilian media corporations’ alliance with the agribusiness sector, which has the potential to gather enough power to push the MST to the margins of public debate. Such a disposition of political and economic resources results in a media sphere that cannot be considered a public sphere, as it does not reflect the plurality of political positions and interests in Brazilian society.

Despite this unfavourable scenario, press officers recognise that there might be possibilities to break through the cracks of the hegemonic system: ‘there is always a journalist that is less compliant with the outlet, who is willing to give us space’, says Maria, a former press officer. Consequently, the MST needs to constantly negotiate the contention between needing mainstream media as spaces of appearance (cf. Silverstone, 2007) and opposing mainstream media as antagonistic institutions. The movement could, hypothetically, circumvent this barrier by creating and developing its own media channels, thus erasing class antagonism, which is part of the optimistic argument sustained by

82 In Brazil, the so-called rural bench (bancada ruralista) is a group formed by 162 (of 565) deputies and 11 (of 82) senators with connections to agribusiness. They have historically proposed laws and projects that benefit agribusiness and commercial exploitation of natural resources.
those who see an intrinsic democratic potential in digital media. This possibility is, however, limited again by the political and economic constraints that have been addressed in previous chapters. It is exactly the contention between the need for visibility that can, so far, only be achieved through the mainstream press and the need for self-representation granted by movement’s own media, which are the root of what could be called proto counter-hegemonic communication in the movement.

Nevertheless, the steady decline in the audiences of popular television programmes, particularly experienced by TV Globo, such as the evening news broadcast and soap operas, as well as the migration of the public to digital media, may represent an opportunity for organisations like the MST to appear to a wider public on their own terms. The examples above show that there is a willingness to take advantage of this potential of new media for self-representation. At the same time, the informants acknowledge that this potential is limited because existing patterns of accumulation and concentration are transferred to digital media:

[...] we know that the Internet also reflects the media monopolies, the concentration of public resources and the power of these large corporations hinder our action. We cannot understand the Internet as something separated from the culture industry. It will reflect the conditions of the established media in the country, but at the same time will allow us possibilities of articulation with this network of partners and supporters in a much easier way than within the [traditional] media.

Adriano, audiovisual brigade, Brasília

Having worked with audiovisual production within the MST for seven years and being cognizant of the political economy of media, Adriano noted that ownership and dominance patterns are replicated in digital media. Still, he acknowledged the technical characteristics of the Internet and digital media that afford militants ‘possibilities of articulation’ that were not afforded by traditional media. In his

83 In Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age (2012), Castells states that ‘at the fringe of a world that had come to the brink of its capacity for humans to live together and to share life with nature, individuals did come together again to find new forms of being us, the people. There were first a few, who were joined by hundreds, then networked by thousands, then supported by millions with their voices and their internal quest for hope, as muddled as it was, that cut across ideology and hype, to connect with the real concerns of real people in the real human experience that had been reclaimed. It began on the Internet social networks, as these are spaces of autonomy, largely beyond the control of governments and corporations that had monopolized the channels of communication as the foundation of their power, throughout history.’

84 In 2013, Ibope, a Brazilian-based public opinion research institute reported TV Globo’s ‘systematic loss of audience’, based on an analysis of the channel’s permanent programmes. See http://www.pragmatismopolitico.com.br/2013/03/ibope-da-rede-globo-sofre-declinio-historico.html.
reasoning, he situated media as technologies in the socio-political realm of institutions, advancing an argument that technologies were always subject to the structuring of political-economic relations. If digital media allows ‘possibilities of articulation’, it must be noted that the locus of articulation is not digital media but the communicative capacity of social movements. As Fraser (2009, p. 153) puts it, referring to the World Social Forum, social movements are able to create ‘a shared context and practice of political communication that generates a communicatively based solidarity’. Such a network that is politically situated is the root of counter-hegemonic communication.

**Constructing a counter-hegemonic alternative**

Having addressed the MST’s relationship to the mainstream press in Brazil, I now turn to analysing the movement’s views about their own created and produced media. As explained above, the view that Brazilian media companies represent the antagonistic class is unanimous among all informants and spread collectively in meetings and events. In order to address this situation, the movement is attempting to create a counter-hegemonic alternative, trying to construct their own media arenas and channels. These are not considered exclusive to the MST, but are, rather, spaces to unite progressive views and serve the working classes in Brazil. The media developed by the MST fulfil two main functions identified by the movement: 1) to constitute spaces for communication among members and for the construction of the MST’s shared identity as an organisation representing rural workers, peasants, and the working class in general; and 2) to communicate with local communities and society outside the movement.

As a social movement, the MST needs to fight on different but related fronts in order to become a counter-hegemonic actor capable of exploring the fissures of hegemonic ideas and groups and advance their demands. In the first place are the kind of agriculture, modes of production, and relationship with the environment that the movement advocates. In a scenario where the desired agricultural production is
highly technological, requires a low degree of labour input, and produces export commodities on a large scale, defending ecologically small- or medium-scale production of primarily food cultures is seen as a backward and primitive idea. This is what Fraser (2009) would call a struggle for recognition. Rural workers, the organisations they form, and the ideas they defend need to be accepted by other sectors as valid. In this sense, the struggle for recognition is a struggle to make the mode of production advocated by the MST acceptable as an alternative to agribusiness. The second front is the space and representation that the MST has in the mainstream mass media. And here is precisely where these two fronts connect with on another: the economic and political elites whose interests include advancing agribusiness and making it more successful are the same as, or at least connected to, those cultural elites that own and appear in the mainstream media. Faced with this situation, it is extremely difficult for the MST, as a single actor, to become the counter-hegemonic voice of the causes they defend.

Challenges notwithstanding, the movement has been, since the creation of its first newsletter, in a constant process of constructing media alternatives and establishing media outlets. An example is the establishment of radio stations in the settlements, as Sandra observes:

[Radio is of fundamental importance] in this issue of the communication between the communities, because they can be far from each other and transport is not easy or reliable. It is also important to strengthen popular culture and a very valuable instrument of education, I mean political education, because everyone has the right to know their rights.

In her view, media in rural communities must serve a social – as opposed to commercial – role, providing listeners with relevant information and information them of their rights. Since rural communities are not of interest to commercial radios, it is left to organisations such as the MST to create the fragile structure that supports this medium.

In some cases, as Gustavo from Itapeva relates, a settlement radio is not only a medium for the community but also an alternative to commercial radios:
In fact, Rádio Camponesa here in Itapeva has a particularity, a differentiation in the sense that we are exactly in a place where we reach both rural communities, our settlements, and people in the towns. This gives us more strength to keep improving, but also brings with it certain processes – how are we going to construct a radio not only for the countryside but also for the city? This causes us big challenges in the sense that we need to learn every day, differentiate, change the form, improve the form. [Commercial radios in the region] are always trying to take away the focus from our radio. But despite the difficulties that we have in carrying out political education in the radio, we manage to do it a little.

These two informants highlighted the role of media as an educative instrument in the sense that media channels are used to educate and promote awareness among those who use them. This can be seen as the work to construct a counter-public and a counter-public sphere, compared to the working class press (Thompson, 1995).

As seen in the previous section, the MST has been making a significant effort to manage their relationship with the mainstream press. Despite these efforts, they do not always manage to ensure satisfactory coverage. Movement media function then as a way to counterbalance the unfavourable or non-existent coverage by the mainstream media. In periods of more intense coverage by the mainstream press, movement media are seen as channels where there can be an unfiltered flow of information steered by the movement. Press officers can produce texts, choose pictures, and give nearly unlimited space to spokespersons and other relevant people. On the part of the MST as a producer of information, the website represents, on these occasions, an opportunity to circulate their own views of reality.

 [...] during mobilisation periods our website is the main form of communication[...] in fact it is the only way we have to dialogue with society and therefore we have to ensure this production [of information] about what is happening not only in Brasília but also in the states because usually we have national mobilisation and roll out many actions in the states and then the role of our sector is to make sure that this information comes to us and is posted on our site, so people know, ‘look, this is happening in Maranhão, they occupied a farm in Mato Grosso’. We need to make it [information] circulate so it doesn’t remain only inside the state.

Marina, press officer, Brasília

All media created by the MST interconnect at some point in what can be called a movement media system. This kind of organisation cannot be achieved just by using technology alone: skilled professionals, a focus on education and professionalisation, and an organisational culture that values the circulation of information are also necessary. The
construction of the media system thus required the construction of a communication culture within the movement. In this so-called system, material from the newspaper is commented on on the radio, texts from the newspaper are reproduced on the website, which is also used to announce when the newspaper is published and distributed; texts and news from the website feed into radio programmes, and there are also texts in the newspaper and website about MST-related video production. Constant production and circulation of content allows the movement to achieve the status of information provider among other emerging social movements in Brazil and Latin America.

None of the informants expressed dissatisfaction with the way communication circulates within the movement. The main problem that arose in the interviews was the lack of financial and technical resources. In the case of radio, Brazilian legislation is rather unfavourable to community radios, particularly those in rural areas because, in order to be classified as community radio, a radio station must broadcast within a 1 kilometre radius, which is a very short distance in rural areas. These material difficulties are countered by consistent efforts to educate militants to work with communication so that, with the appropriate set of skills, they will be able to circumvent this lack of resources.

There are, within the movement, people trained and educated to work with communication and media thanks to many short courses organised by the MST, a secondary-level programme in communication offered twice by the MST school in Veranópolis and, recently, a degree in journalism offered in partnership with a state university. Overall, the informants expressed a positive attitude towards constructing and maintaining communication processes within the movement. The same cannot be said about their belief in the counter-hegemonic potential of their media channels. As they experience a backlash from the state, government, the media, and sometimes from civil society, militants in the movement become aware of the limitations of the alternative communication they are trying to construct. As Rodrigo, the youth leader from Bahia observes, the MST alone cannot construct a counter-hegemonic alternative:
[...] we have not been able to have a more concrete dialogue and establish the construction of free TV, because this is not a sole effort of the MST: this would have to be a joint effort of the Brazilian left, which so far hasn’t moved forward to pick this fight. We don’t even have sites of reference. The magazines we have are small, I mean, the communication of the left in general has little challenging power; it doesn’t reach the whole population.

He points out here the gap between speaking and being heard, which is also discussed by Deane (2007), who draws attention to the lurking risk of fragmentation that arises when mass media are substituted by potentially more inclusive and diverse small-scale media that, in turn, do not have the same reach.

Scholars have recently regarded digital communications as potentially beneficial for the exercise of citizenship. Individually, citizen rights can be exercised through digital communication by way of exposing wrongdoing, demanding rights, forming networks with others who share the same situation, and raising awareness of certain issues (see for instance Rodríguez, 2011). According to recent commentary (Castells, 2009, among others), digital communications also facilitate the formation of non-territorial communities of interest. When it comes to group communication (cf. Peruzzo, 2009), the relatively low barriers to online publication and the fact that anyone with access to the Internet potentially has access to anything that is published represent an advantage to marginal groups who would otherwise depend on institutionalised media to get their message past the limits of the group itself. Such potential is certainly noted within the MST with an understanding of the political and economic aspects and the limitations that they bring, as Adriano from the audiovisual brigade in Brasília tells me:

Through Internet distribution, we have been able to reach a much bigger public than we first thought we would be able to. There is one case – I think it was one of the first occupations in the Finance Ministry – [where] we edited a video during the occupation. It wasn’t real-time but it was [...] I don’t know [...] one hour after we started the occupation. We had a 3G modem, a bit shaky, this was in 2009 I think [...] and this video went viral immediately because it had the particularity of being very fast at a time when this wasn’t common.

Placing the MST’s media practices in a historical perspective, it is possible to say that new media go through a process of appropriation, which includes the institutionalisation (cf. Berger and Luckman) of practices related to the medium and the incorporation of the new
medium into the MST’s communicative processes. The process of appropriation supports Krotz’s (2007) claim that communication is a ‘man-made’ process. Human agency is particularly visible when the process of appropriation of new technologies occurs within the structure of an organisation that works systematically with communication. This process has so far been carried out organically, allowing for discussion and debate among all instances and levels. The result is that the MST’s media – its newspaper, radios stations, website – are well grounded on the organisation’s principles.

Interviews with militants revealed that political opposition is something that the MST does materially through practices such as meetings, interventions, and demonstrations, and symbolically through the construction of an alternative that is ideologically grounded. Media are considered to be entities outside the movement. Even when they might be considered a patrimony of the MST, as is the Jornal Sem-Terra newspaper, they are reluctant to admit that they ‘live in the media’ or are dominated by media. There is here a clear separation between communication as a process and media as the material channels that enable this process. This indicates that there is a difference in the levels of control over media – or agency – exerted by collectives and that exerted by individuals. But the focus of the mediatisation discussions has so far been the individual and the institutions, while groups and collectives such as social movements have been overlooked. These findings point to the need to explore how the conflicted relationship between social movements and media develops historically with the differentiation of media technologies and institutions.

The belief that alternatives to dominant media can only be constructed through cooperation with ideologically aligned movements has led the MST to include media activism in its set of demands. Aware of its own position as a collective subject in the media landscape, the MST has become active in the campaigns for democratisation of communication in Brazil. The MST’s participation in the FNDC can be seen as recognition of movement’s media weakness and failure in configuring a counter-hegemonic alternative.

[...] what the movement proposes, to some sectors in the field of democratisation of communication, is that we understand that palliative measures are not enough for the
communication sector in Brazil; what we need are deeper structural reforms in the communication sector. So there is no point in – this is a critique we make – increasing the allowed transmission reach for community radios. We support it, of course, especially in rural areas, this limit of one kilometre is ridiculous, it is the distance between two neighbours. Very well, but we cannot consider ourselves satisfied just with that. We cannot accept that there should be a Globo TV and Zé radio with a reach of more than one kilometre. These are unequal conditions. We think that it is not enough that Zé radio has a wider reach, we want to discuss the communication system in Brazil, we want to discuss the monopoly, and we want to discuss concentration.

Paulo, former press officer, Veranópolis

As noted above, regardless of how well the movement’s own media system may work internally and externally, it does not change structural conditions. I have suggested that Brazilian media do not reflect the plurality of the society and that, in this sense, they cannot be considered part of the public sphere. They are a space for presentation, not of representation. At the same time that the MST is struggling to enter this space, going to great lengths to control how the mainstream press presents the movement, there is an understanding that it does not change their marginal position.

Considering that many new media organisations and collectives\textsuperscript{85} aligned with leftist and progressive views have been emerging in Brazil recently, which tend to frame the MST in a different way than the dominant media corporations, there might be possibilities on the horizon for the movement. Coupled with this phenomenon is the emergence of civil society groups that work to promote media democratisation, such as the FNDC, cited earlier. This dynamic scenario makes a timely analysis of the counter-hegemonic potential of the MST’s communication and media an almost impossible task. Any analysis runs the risk of being obsolete by the time of publication, and must be read as a snapshot of a particular moment in time. Aware of this risk, I present my analysis (based on the views of MST militants) of the situation at the time the fieldwork was carried out, which is that the MST alone does not have the strength to construct a counter-hegemonic media alternative. Nevertheless, by collaborating, and at times aligning themselves, with the conjunction of media initiatives that challenge dominant organisations, there is a possibility to construct counter-hegemonic

\textsuperscript{85} The weekly Carta Capital and monthly magazines Caros Amigos and Forum were founded in the 1990s with a clearly stated leftist political position in opposition to the big media conglomerates in Brazil. The companies that back these publications have no interests outside the media sector. In the last five years, Internet-based journalistic websites such as Pragmatismo Político, Outras Palavras, Agência Pública and the collective Mídia Ninja have grown through crowd-sourcing practices.
media in Brazil. The crux for the MST is that they are not a media-activist organisation and, as much as they carry out active and well-grounded work with media, the movement cannot deviate from its essential causes.

This takes us to the discussion of whether the MST is in a position to represent a counter-hegemonic alternative for the causes that it is working on. At the root of the matter is the question of whether representation in public debate can lead to political representation. It seems to be a shared belief in the movement that the dominant media corporations in Brazil play an important role in framing the image of the MST for society in general. Informants working as press officers argue that the way hegemonic media have been ignoring the MST during the last five years makes dialogue with a broader public – especially the middle classes in urban centres – more difficult. A recurrent complaint is that mainstream media outlets constantly overlook positive outcomes achieved by the movement in education and agricultural production. The focus of coverage is instead on protests, occupations, and the disruption caused by the MST’s actions. There is no hope, however, that these outlets are going to change the way they cover and represent the MST, except for the goodwill of friendly journalists.

Thus, it is not possible to say that there is a strong connection between representation in the public debate and political representation. Instead, I can cautiously suggest that a negative relationship should be considered. The conjunction of forces opposed to the MST’s project constrain the movement’s chances of political representation and representation in the public debate because they dominate both. In consequence, different from other scenarios where mainstream media are more independent of other interests and pressure groups are able to advance their issues, here the only solution would be a reconfiguration of power.

This would be a rather straightforward and one-dimensional answer were it not for the fact that reconfiguration of power is a dialectical process. Consequently, if the media created by the movement or produced in collaboration with their allies do not represent a counter-hegemonic alternative at the national level today, they are a crucial
element in the process of power reconfiguration. In this sense, the media system created by the movement has double roles of discursively constructing the movement’s project and giving a material dimension to the shared identity of its members, as well as paving the way for structural changes in the national media landscape. In short, the practices that have as a goal power reconfiguration can be called counter-hegemony-building because their purpose is to construct a counter-hegemonic social project and a counter-hegemonic media system. Some of the media projects put in practice by the MST reveal that the movement does not see media practices and communicative processes only as ways to strengthen the movement internally and mobilise militants. Projects such as the Brazil de Fato newspaper, championed by the MST and whose newsroom is located at the MST’s national office in São Paulo, and the movement’s own website, which has the purpose of providing news of interest for the working classes, are essentially counter-hegemony-building projects.

Although there is among militants an instrumentalist view of media, communication is seen as a much more multifaceted process, or processes. It extrapolates the materiality of media and is a cultural and political process that the movement attempts to control and that contributes to the concretisation of their social imaginaries. Consequently, the construction of a counter-hegemonic alternative by the MST will utilise and relate to media according to historically situated material conditions – what is available at what cost. Media practices will be a part of overarching communicative processes that, as informants stressed, cannot leave aside the concrete dimensions of direct action, education, and, most important, the MST’s own agricultural production. As Ana, a young communication coordinator in the state of Paraná, argues, production is a concrete way of showing a side of the MST that is hardly present in the mainstream press:

It causes indignation to see that the movement does everything, all the actions that we carried out during these thirty years, and the media manipulate and distort, show the movement as troublemakers, a movement of people who do nothing, do not work, do not produce [anything] [...] a violent movement. [...] Today, we are trying to deal with this in a very different way, we need to show what we have, we have our production, and we need to show our production. So we are trying in every way possible, not only producing texts and video, but more direct action showing our production. If there is a market, we try to show our products, show that this is the MST [...] these are other ways of communicating, beyond the press and media.
This statement corroborates the ideas that social movements and activist organisations have little control over the representations that media will construct of them (Gitlin, 1980) and that, in their position as challengers, they have to create spectacular events in order to attract the attention of the media (Wolfsfeld, 1997). An example is that in a 2010 assessment of press coverage carried out by the media watchdog organisation Intervozes, including 301 news pieces, the theme Abril Vermelho (red April) – the term used by the Brazilian press for the activities the MST organises every April to celebrate the memory of 17 militants killed in a conflict with the police in 1997 – comes in second place among the most frequently cited terms, only trailing the presidential elections. Following this reasoning, the fact that many MST settlements are productive, that they may provide neighbouring municipalities with their produce, does not comply with the framework that the MST is usually reported in, which is that of a protest and direct action organisation. According to Alberto, the regional leader in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, the MST only becomes an item of interest for the mainstream press when militants are on the streets protesting:

You only manage to place news on the radio [...] but only when we are mobilised on the streets. In April, when we have mobilisations, demonstrations, we end up gaining some space. Otherwise, in the periods when we are more focused on daily activities, we have more difficulty. Of course, some of us manage to have space in local radio programmes in the towns. Now, when it comes to publicising some things we are doing, it only happens when there is a mobilisation; otherwise, we don’t manage it. We organised many activities that we consider important, we tried to get the press to report on them and did not manage. For instance, when we opened the harvest of organic rice, it was a big event, even the governor came and the newspapers did not write a single line, this boycott is difficult. When there is a contradiction and a conflict, you manage to set the agenda, but otherwise it is very difficult.

In the face of this symbolic disadvantage, local action where settlements can showcase their production and strengthen their ties with local communities is seen as way to counteract more strict framings by the mainstream press. During recent years, many of the actions, interventions, and demonstrations organised by the MST have also included a market where militants can sell their produce. Such practices challenge the views of media as the only, or more efficient, channels of

86 The report Vozes Silenciadas was published in 2011 by Intervozes – Coletivo Brasil de Comunicação Social. Available at http://www.intervozes.org.br/arquivos/interliv003vozsmst.

87 This is not a value judgement on the positive or negative nature of press coverage, but an observation that the MST is usually framed as an organisation that promotes protest and occupations in order to call attention to its social demands (see Berger, 1996 and Ferreira, 2012).
communication. Although mediated communication is sometimes automatically equalled to dialogue, or to promoting mediation in the sense of being in between (Couldry, 2010) different parts, in this case the power asymmetry carried through mediated communication makes it difficult for the MST to enter and participate in dialogue. On these occasions, face-to-face communication using agricultural produce as a concrete argument for the legitimacy of the MST and its causes can lead to a direct dialogue with society outside the movement. On the other hand, direct communication has a small scale of reach. The benefits and gains that can be obtained by locally staged practices at the national level are small and difficult to gauge.

*Can media promote social change, plurality, or democracy?*

The democratic potential of media is now a widely accepted idea, supported by international organisations and government bodies. There are, however, different conceptions as to where exactly the democratic agency lies. According to what could be called a systemic view, a democratic society is a condition for a democratic and plural media system. It follows that unequal societies dominated by a small political and economic elite such as Brazil will not foster the emergence of democratic and plural media. A more technological determinist position holds that technologies such as media have a kind of agency over human behaviour. In consequence, the diffusion and use of such technologies by minorities would lead to a more diverse and democratic public sphere. These are two deliberately reductionist descriptions of two conflicting sets of ideas about the relationship between media and democracy. The middle ground is a socio-culturalist view that acknowledges the affordances of technology by understanding that it is only due to social action connected with cultural contexts that these affordances will be realised. The problem with the systemic view is that it overlooks changes that are not the fruit of macro-level political-economic action. Conversely, the problem with a technological determinist view is that it overlooks the macro-level political-economic context in which the relationship between people and media unfolds.
The discussion in the previous section emphasised the importance of the socio-political structure for the plurality and diversity of the national public debate. However, the question of whether certain media can promote the plurality of voices and dialogue in public debate has not yet been addressed. Also, do new digital media and digital social networks bring benefits to marginal social movement such as the MST? By now, it should be clear that there is a belief within the MST about the potential of media for the propagation of the movement’s projects and ideas, and for promoting internal cohesion and constructing a shared identity. This has been the case since the creation of the movement’s first newspaper and the establishment of low-frequency radio stations. Against this background, this section will focus on a discussion of the changes caused by the use of digital media. The aim here is to critically explore what kinds of changes and rearrangements can be related to the introduction of new technologies.

In previous sections, I have argued that MST militants have an ambivalent relationship to the Internet and digital social networks. So far, I have presented and discussed concerns regarding safety, surveillance, and the individualism that digital social networks foster. But an ambivalent relationship also includes positive assessments, which are connected with the possibility to reach new audiences and activate networks of supporters. Such networks do not have the permanent and omnipresent status envisaged by Castells (2012) but are circumstantial networks that can be activated when needed in order to bring an issue to the public eye. One example is the use of the hashtag #marchamst (MST march) on the day of the demonstration during the National Congress. With the help of the collective Mídia Ninja, which used their contacts to spread the hashtag, it was a trending topic on Twitter. As a result, visits to the MST’s website escalated to the extent that the website crashed. As press officer Fernanda explained, the action was decided on the same day and did not require much effort, other than issuing a call to use the hashtag, which was then used by sympathisers and followers of the MST, including other social movements and organisations. The circumstantiality of this network resides in its momentary and ephemeral span of action. On the day after the demonstration, the network was disbanded, and the movement was back to its ordinary routine of internal meetings and deliberations.
This event – the website crash aside – was seen positively by the press task force at the National Congress, who considered it an opportunity for visibility that would never be achieved through traditional media. We should not, however, rush to the conclusion that visibility leads automatically to political influence, or that symbolic representation leads to political representation (cf. Fraser 2009). It is true that on the day after the demonstration, President Dilma Rousseff agreed to meet with a group of representatives from the MST, but it is not possible to say that this was due to their online visibility as opposed to the material visibility of 12,000 people dressed in red marching down Brasília’s main avenue.

Even though digital social networks are treated with suspicion and used with caution – to a great extent due to the fact that they are new – the website is seen as a platform to publicise the MST’s actions and ideas, as press officer Marcelo explains:

> On our website, we try to follow a guideline that is a reference for discussion of the agrarian question in Brazil, all topics related to the agrarian question. The audience is [made up of] our militants and supporters, researchers and people like you who want to study the MST and the agrarian question and have the website as reference. But also society as a whole, supporters and people who want to know the MST better and find information about the movement.

In the opinion of the press officers interviewed, the advantages and benefits offered by the website are greater than those offered by other non-digital media such as radio and printed press when it comes to reaching audiences outside the movement. Fernanda, a press officer from Brasília, does not see the website as a solution for every problem, as she recognises that large corporations still dominate accesses but also acknowledges the important role of the website coupled with social networks:

> The social networks allow you to put the MST’s website forward as an option. Before you would have to know about the MST to know that we had a website. Or you know the MST from TV but would never imagine that we had a website. On social networks, this thing of sharing here and there, it somehow reaches some people at least. [...] There is a higher probability that the content will reach someone who never heard about the movement, or [who] sees the movement in a very distorted way [...]. On the other hand, it is not possible to consider that through social networks alone you will be able to mobilise society. No one is seated by their red keyboard, as I usually say, and will make a revolution from their red keyboard. We exert social pressure on the streets, when we knock on doors that need to be knocked on. [...] Because the virtual world is the virtual
world, the concrete dialectical reality of life demands that people show their social issues in reality, not in the virtual world.

Fernanda’s statement illustrates the view that media in general, and digital media in particular, are seen as discursive spaces, not as tools for organisation. As discursive spaces, their advantage compared to older media is their potential for spreadability (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013). This is a relational advantage in comparison to other media, but it does not diminish the need for concrete social mobilisation and political action. This view is clearly rooted in the character and history of the MST as a movement with a concrete and ideologically based platform of change whose demands took shape before media practices started to be performed.

Also related to the nature of the MST as a ‘pre-media’ organisation are the kinds of practices associated with emergent digital media. As opposed to contemporary protest and recent ‘square movements’, which use digital social networks as tools to organise street demonstrations and protests, the MST uses digital social networks to broadcast content. It is against this background that the possibilities and potential for a more plural and diverse public debate should be analysed.

While recent analyses of the relationship between media and social change have focused on how technologies foster new ways of organising and voicing demands (Gerbaudo, 2012; Bennet & Segerberg, 2013; Tufecki & Wilson, 2012), an alternative approach to analyse this relationship might be needed in order to account for the different ways in which this relationship takes shape. When analysing the MST’s participation in the public debate in Brazil, a strong focus on social networks as tools for mobilisation and performance of connective action (cf. Bennet & Segerberg, 2013) will not lead the analysis much further ahead.

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88 According to the authors, ‘spreadability’ ‘refers to the potential – both technical and cultural – for audiences to share content for their own purposes, sometimes with permission of rights holders, sometimes against their wishes’ (2013, p. 3).
89 By ‘pre-media’, I do not mean that the movement was formed in a time prior to the existence of communication media, but that the organisation of rural workers around certain ideologies, principles, and social demands precedes the use of media to relay content.
90 Such as the Spanish Indignados, the transnational Occupy movement, the so-called Arab Spring protests, and the protests in Brazil in June 2013.
As the interviews point out, for the movement as a collective, the Internet is considered a space to be conquered. This is the main difference from mass media that were previously used by the movement: they were not connected to a symbolic space in the same way that digital media are. When the press officers say that the movement’s website should be a reference for the agrarian question in Brazil, or when a group in charge of revamping the website wants it to be a news reference for the working class in Brazil, they are trying to build and conquer a symbolic space. In this sense, the process of appropriation of digital media is different from that of analogue media, because it also entails the appropriation of virtual space. It is still a subtle difference and something that those in charge of communication and media strategies, such as the press officers, are starting to realise. Such a process of appropriation is a statement against technological determinist views, pointing instead to the idea that media have affordances. For the MST, these non-determinist affordances mean that they see digital media as a possibility to occupy a new space with a higher potential reach and the opportunity to broadcast unfiltered content. Because they have developed mechanisms and routines for organisation and mobilisation, they do not need to use digital social networks for such purposes.

The idea that digital media connected to the Internet are a space to be explored emerges gradually in interviews and through the observation of meetings. During the evaluation meeting on the last day of the National Congress, for instance, the MST thanked the Mídia Ninja collective for their help with digital social networks and their Internet coverage of the congress. The communication task force also evaluated the use of social networks positively, highlighting the ‘massification’ of social networks. This understanding is particularly interesting because it invites us to see the interplay between social movements and media as a relational process. Since the MST cannot resort to traditional mass media to broadcast their views, they see digital social networks as mass media. Another clue that digital media are seen as spaces of communication is the discussion at the evaluation meeting about the participation of militants on Facebook. This was the first time when a less-cautious position was expressed, and a participant at the meeting suggested that the use of Facebook could be amplified by militants, particularly the participation of young people who normally ‘do not share MST news’.
Of course, there are shortcomings in this position, not least the well-documented arguments that digital media replicate the structures of older media (see, for instance, Hindman, 2005). Yet, this shortcoming is acknowledged by the MST, as shown in the interviews. Therefore, in order to understand the potential of digital media as a space for the promotion of ideas, it is necessary to put it in the perspective of: a) the MST’s view of communicative processes as deeply rooted in their particular struggle; and b) the current media landscape in Brazil, with emergent new actors and the loss of the credibility of traditional institutions. In this context, digital media alone cannot promote diversity and plurality, but their affordances allow groups such as the MST – with a well-organised grass-roots base and a specific set of demands – to occupy the space that is available online. But it is important to note that this can only be achieved if there is already a well-established system of content production in place. The fact – already mentioned above – that the media landscape in Brazil is currently very dynamic should also be added to the equation.

On the one hand, traditional institutions that are still very powerful economically are starting to lose their audience and their credibility.\(^91\) On the other hand, a number of individuals and organisations have been able to take advantage of the Internet to gather audiences and offer alternative points of view. The MST is, at the moment, in a position to benefit from current conditions. It is part of material networks – including individuals and other organisations – that can, together, occupy the virtual space on certain occasions, as was the case with the hashtag \#marchamst. Their accumulated experience in producing content and their constant efforts in the education of militants ensure that there will be relevant content on a daily basis to be made available online. Although research on journalistic consumption and Internet usage among youth in Brazil is still in its early stages, it is possible to say, mainly based on the experiences of MST militants, that as youth abandon mainstream news outlets as a point of reference, there is a chance for organisations like the MST to win new audiences through their online platforms.

These claims seem at first to contradict the most techno-sceptical arguments such as Dean’s (2012), but in a deeper analysis they can develop and refine such arguments. In her commentary about US politics, Dean argued that online communications are devoid of any sort of political character. In her view, the fact that the Internet is dominated by private corporations that profit from the activities of individual users makes it impossible to hold a political debate with a view to promoting societal change. It is exactly here that a refinement of this argument is possible if we differentiate between individual and collective usage of digital media, and between what Bakardjieva (2009) calls subactivism92 and conscious political activism. If, at the individual level, we are subject to the impositions and structures of domination present both in the material and virtual spheres, when a collective is formed around specific demands and projects, the potential to occupy virtual spaces becomes a possibility. Running the conscious risk of reductionism, I argue that it is necessary to empirically differentiate between the media space configured by traditional media (television, newspapers, radio) and that configured by digital media in order to understand the potential that the latter represent for the MST and similar organisations. Whereas traditional media, dominated by corporations, have posed clear and well-known barriers for the MST as a social actor to be fairly represented, digital media are more permissive and the barriers more subtle, as Dean (2012) observes.

At this point, it is possible to return to Gramsci and say that even if new and emerging media technologies and platforms offer an illusion of participation (while hegemonic groups maintain their dominance), specific and material struggles that unite individuals in a collective are the root of a conscious use of technology. In the case of the MST, digital media – and any other kind of media – were never seen as instruments for the promotion of change but as symbolical tools with which to offer an alternative worldview. Therefore, both epistemological and societal aspects that make up the context in which the MST’s relationship with media is analysed are of crucial importance to the understanding of the

92 In Bakardjieva’s (2009, p. 92) definition, ‘subactivism is a kind of politics that unfolds at the level of subjective experience and is submerged in the flow of everyday life. It is constituted by small-scale, often individual, decisions and actions that have either a political or ethical frame of reference (or both) [...]. Subactivism is a refraction of the public political arena in the private and personal world.’
alleged potential of digital media. Understanding media as arenas or spaces where different interpretations of reality and worldviews can be exposed, and considering the dynamic social conjuncture of which the MST is a part, it is possible to say that militants find digital media easier to occupy than other forms of media. This does not mean that they have given up on demanding a more democratic and inclusive distribution of resources and resort solely on digital communication to dialogue with society at large.

In sum, the fragile inclusion of the MST in the dynamic discursive space performed through digital media is a function of the affordances offered by digital media and the preparedness of the movement to set forth its communicative processes.
11 Final discussion and conclusions

I set off for this study aiming to provide a view of the interplay between social movements and media from the point of view of a subaltern, organised, and long-standing social movement in a peripheral country. I have argued that such experiences are relevant in a scholarly discussion that is marked by the insularity of the North\(^93\) and the failures by Euro-American scholarship to acknowledge, epistemologically and ontologically, the experiences of the other. The Western bias of globalisation equates Western ways of living to modernity and development, making it a universal ideal. This bias is explained when we look at how media and communication emerged as a field of study in the social sciences. From the start, it has dealt with problems and questions typical of Western-Northern societies at a particular period.\(^94\) It is becoming more obvious now that these questions and the theories constructed to answer them cannot simply be transferred to realities and peoples outside the Western-Northern world. So the first step to understanding the significance of media for a subaltern social movement in a peripheral post-colonial country is to accept the limitations of certain types of universalising Western-Northern scholarship.

In practice, the bias towards Western-Northern modes of knowledge means that at times when political activism and its intersection with media at different levels are being profusely studied in the West, the practices of insurgent movements and groups in the peripheries are ignored or delegitimised. Poor, marginalised, and ‘primitive’ communities are more usually seen as research subjects when they are the recipients of aid or the object of modernisation initiatives. Aiming to tackle this misframing\(^95\) (to use Fraser’s terminology), I wanted to explore the ways in which these people organise, mobilise, and constitute their voice in different discursive spaces. As the process of

\(^93\) Here I refer to Santos’ (2007) definition of North and South not only as geographical areas but also as ways to highlight social and cognitive inequalities.

\(^94\) According to Waisbord and Mellado (2014, p. 361), ‘The field [of communication studies] was born under the influence of disciplinary traditions and theories that emerged in the United States and some Western European countries. Its canon […] is unmistakably Western, and only recently “de-westernization” became a central theme in communication studies.”

\(^95\) Santos, Nunes and Meneses (2007, p. xix) also argue that ‘there is no global social justice without global cognitive justice’.
analysis reaches its end, two sets of conclusions can be devised. The first one relates to the internal questions that the study was set to answer, and will ideally expand the concepts that I have engaged with, contributing to debates and discussions about the interplay between media and political mobilisation, action, and representation. The second set of conclusions addresses scholarship in media and communication at a meta-level and problematises the Western-Northern bias that dominates the field. The Western bias is applied when we try to make a range of realities and experiences fit into conceptualisations considered universal but that emerge and are developed in connection with problems that are in fact situated in a certain place and time. The outcome is that the different is treated as an exception at best and as an anomaly at worst, when it should ideally contribute to a multifaceted view and a broader understanding of reality. I will come to this discussion in due course, but I will start with the first set of conclusions.

*Can media be the bridge from the margins to the centre?*

When we empirically analyse conceptual abstractions such as ‘voice’ and ‘discursive space’, we are, by default, led to consider media as crucial elements in the analysis due to the communicative aspect of these conceptual abstractions. However, voice and discursive space are not neutral; quite the opposite, dominance and subordination are exerted through communication in contested discursive spaces. As I hope to have shown throughout the analysis, media should not be seen as the starting point of political action but as elements that may enable the materialisation and objectification of political action. That does not diminish the importance of media but requires a reformulation of the kind of questions we ask about media and their role in society. At a conceptual level, we need to acknowledge the connections between globalisation, neo-liberalisation, and mediatisation: geopolitical and market meta-processes have an impact on the relationship between technological development and societal change. These changes will be lived and felt differently depending on a determined actor’s geopolitical and economic position.
In Chapter 9, I demonstrate how, among MST militants and within the movement as a social actor, media are seen as external to the movement, whereas communication is where their struggle is objectified. I thus argue that if we look into media as something people interact with, we will have a detailed account of communicative processes. These findings support the argument that media modify communication in a human-led process (Krotz, 2007). In a social movement – as in other organisations – communicative processes are of crucial importance and likely to guide media practices. It follows that communication, as a social process, includes much more than media. A hypothesis that could be explored is whether self-reflexivity and awareness among members in a social movement can lead to a higher level of control over media (circumventing the power of agency that is sometimes attributed to media, as the media logics or the moulding forces of media). This would require an increased focus on how collectives experience mediatisation and acceptance that social positions play a role in how different groups experience media networks (Krotz, 2007).

Among MST militants, communication is a social process that is deeply embedded in the collective practices enacted by them. Communication is strategically and deliberately planned so that it is a part of the socialisation process in the movement. It involves the educative processes, rituals and routines, and strengthens the narratives and symbols that are the backbone of collective identity as a militant rural worker. In Chapter 8, I discussed the mobilising aspect of communication, the discussion evidences the crucial role of the MST’s political ethos for its communicative processes. It is this political ethos materialised in the process of conscientisation (cf. Freire, 1967/1982) that gives a mobilising power to communication. It makes it possible for militants to construct political imaginaries and to represent themselves beyond images.96

Conscientisation is thus an overarching rationale that will lay the foundation for the communicative processes within the MST. The

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96 In a lecture for a Colloquium of Doctoral Students at CES Coimbra University, Boaventura de Sousa Santos argued that political imagination is in decline in the Eurocentric world, where people are represented by images but cannot represent themselves beyond images. See Lecture at the V International Colloquium of Doctoral Students, CES, available online at http://alice.ces.uc.pt/en/index.php/alice-info/v-international-colloquium-of-doctoral-students-ces/, accessed on 25 March 2015.
essential purpose of conscientisation, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 8, is to mobilise subjects for social transformation, which gives conscientisation its political character. These are abstract ideas that need to be objectified, embodied, and performed in daily practice so that they will constitute a symbolic universe and contribute to cohesion among militants, forming the collective subject that is the social movement. The ritual of *mística* epitomises the process of objectification of abstract ideas such as struggle, conscientisation, and collectiveness into an embodied performance. The *mística* is then a kind of praxis, an amalgamation of the theoretical and abstract aspects that guide the MST as a social movement and the practicality and concreteness of daily life as a militant. The same principle will be present in the practices related to media, i.e., the practices related to a given medium will be constructed according to rationales anchored in the ethos of the MST as a social movement.

Communicative processes are also aimed at constructing among militants common understandings of place, territoriality, and community. Such processes are enacted at different levels, locally in the settlements, in the regions, and nationally. An example is the important role played by settlement radios in uniting local communities and by the movement’s newspaper in constructing the national unity of the MST, discussed in Chapter 8. The greater the distance between militants, the more the presence of media and the process of mediation (cf. Martín-Barbero, 1987/2003) will be noticed (see the analysis of how media are used to approximate militants in Chapter 9). While, in the settlement, a sense of community and belonging to the place families have occupied must be constructed, at the national level militants who may never get to see each other need to recognise themselves as part of a collective. A community is constructed in the settlement through a set of practices that may or may not involve media: regular performances of *mística*, the establishment of a school and community centre, and, sometimes, the establishment of a radio station. Regionally and nationally, the mediation of a common culture and understandings is done much more through media. Even though face-to-face encounters do occur, it is the newspaper and now the website and even the profile on Facebook that make possible the recognition of geographically distant people as being together in the same struggle.
The fragile and tenuous character of the unity that is formed (at least at the beginning) led to the constant effort to control communicative processes, so that practices remain faithful to the principles of the movement. This will to control materialises in the practice of appropriation, which is the collective adoption of media practices that are in accordance with the principles of the movement. This is not, however, an authoritarian kind of control, but rather one that has strong analytical and reflexive elements. As interviews discussed in Chapter 9 demonstrate, beyond maintaining control over media, militants want to analyse, understand, and reflect upon how media may benefit or harm communication in the movement as a collective subject. Compared to contemporary protest organisations that are quick to adopt new technologies to serve their own needs and facilitate mobilisation, the appropriation process within the MST is significantly slower. This can be explained by the fact that, even though there is a hierarchy in the movement with a national leadership, regional committees, and settlement leaders, there is a culture of democratic and collective decision-making. This is expressed in two of the movement principles: ‘collective direction’ and ‘contact with the base’. The collective decision-making process shows again the importance attributed to communicative processes.

At the conceptual level, it reveals that socialisation processes that include the construction of symbolic universes and legitimation of rules and routines (cf. Berger and Luckman, 1967) are in essence communicative processes that can, in some cases, materialise into purposeful media practices. In this case, the socialisation process that forms the militant subject aims to support mobilisation and to achieve a sense of shared identity and cohesion around collective goals.

As the movement is understood as a collective subject working towards societal changes that will improve the life of rural workers and communities as a class, individual demands on the state as a service provider that characterise many contemporary protest organisations are downplayed. Again, this can be related to an absence of political imagination in Western and Eurocentric thought, pointed out by Santos. Once there is no imaginary of social transformation, the only social demands possible become those that can be granted by a service state.
In contrast, communicative processes within MST are deliberately thought to construct and foster imaginaries of social transformation.

The view of the movement by its militants as a collective subject will reflect on their understanding of media as collective or individual media. Collective media are those that can be constructed collectively and in which the collective input is seen in practice. Thus, the newspaper, the radio, and the audiovisual production are collective because the final result – the printed newspaper, radio programme or the establishment of a radio station, a film – are fruits of the work of groups of militants. This view explains the ambivalence and cautiousness with media that stimulate individual engagement and production such as digital social networks and personal devices. The gradual and slow adoption of practices related to digital social networks such as Twitter and Facebook, discussed in Chapter 9, shows that these are not seen as organic collective media. The practices are still very centralised – as opposed to other media – with some of the press officers controlling and filtering the profiles on these networks.

Considering that the MST, being a collective subject, values collectiveness and organically run processes, their understanding of digital social networks as individualistic and even as a threat to the collective ethos of the movement challenges well-established arguments maintaining that digital social networks create collaborative collectives. This does not mean that we need to completely abandon the idea of the network as a model for connection and action but that we must accept the material, place-based, and politically situated aspects that also play a role in social mobilisation. It is necessary to recognise the wide array of possibilities for mobilisation and collective action and the practices thereof that do not involve virtual connections or the formation of digital networks. In other words, the experience and practices of the MST are a little reminder that communication is in essence a social process involving individuals, technologies, and institutions as opposed to a technology-led process.

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97 For a discussion of the ways in which certain technologies and platforms nurture individualism and escapism, see Turkle, 2011.
98 See, for instance, Castells, 2013.
The understanding of communication as a social process allows us to view the MST as a social actor whose activities unfold in a political scenario in which media institutions are of crucial importance (see the discussion in Chapter 10). In the context of my analysis, media institutions – particularly traditional media corporations in Brazil – have a dual nature. They are at the same time social actors representing the interests of certain groups and spaces of appearance (cf. Silverstone, 2005) where reality appears to those who do not have direct contact with it. For social movements and insurgent groups like the MST, this dual nature represents a problem when their antagonists form the groups that are in control of media institutions. It means that, even though they might appear in the media, they will not appear on their own terms, as the interviews with all the press officers illustrate. The strategies they adopt in order to circumvent this power asymmetry are of two different kinds: the construction of a potential counter-hegemonic media alternative and action in collaboration with other organisations in advocacy of structural changes in the media sector in Brazil. Such strategies bring to the discussion the idea of the public sphere as a normative ideal of the organisation of public debate. From the analysis of ways in which the MST attempt to change their role as a marginal actor in the public debate, presented in Chapter 10, it is possible to conclude that: a) they do not consider the public debate that is taking place in traditional media fair because either there is a bias against the movement or the movement is not represented; b) they believe that this imbalance can be solved through structural changes and policymaking; and c) media production by the movement is used as an alternative to the current situation but is not seen as a long-term transformative solution.

What they are aiming for, in other words, is the construction of a public discursive space that is not controlled by the interests of the elites, with a fairer distribution of resources, and where conflicting views can meet (not necessarily to reach a consensus). They see the reconfiguration of the media landscape in Brazil as a necessary condition for broader social

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99 I use the word ‘potential’ as a qualifier because, as has been shown in previous sections, some of the informants do not believe that the media produced and controlled by the MST are an actual counter-hegemonic alternative, even though they have the objective of becoming counter-hegemonic.

100 By ‘represented’, I mean not only being covered when they organise actions but also being heard as a source in areas in which the movement is a stakeholder.
transformation. Instead of adopting an autonomous position and trying to construct an alternative on their own, the MST chooses the traditional means of parliamentary politics and legislation to promote changes in the media sector by participating in a pressure group (FNDC). Although the discussion of the relationship between the state and activist organisations is beyond the scope of my analysis, it is impossible not to observe this somewhat traditionalist position adopted by the MST. Whether this position results from a lack of imagined alternatives for media democratisation beyond the state or, on the contrary, from a pragmatic view of the historic opportunities for change is something that requires further research. It is without doubt another possibility for expanding on current analyses of the relationship between changes in the media and social transformation beyond the Western-Northern understandings where this relation is seen in a more individualistic and autonomist way.

Because the Brazilian press have always been enterprises of the white or creole elites who still remain in power in the country, the working classes in cities and rural areas and native populations are not usually addressed as citizens and bearers of rights by the media. This situation, coupled with a strong popular culture that includes varied manifestations creates the conditions for autonomous media initiatives (discussed in Chapter 10). Such conditions, as well as the support of progressive sectors of the Catholic Church, have fostered the MST’s media production. This background is common to many other so-called community media in Latin America, which, even if they are created and maintained by resource-poor and marginalised communities, are not supported by an aid organisation or fruit of projects designed by Western-Northern organisations. Such media initiatives tend to have a community scope in the sense that they serve the needs of the community, but a societal horizon (cf. Carpentier 2008), in the sense that they challenge the position of these groups in society and sometimes seek to establish a dialogue beyond the limits of the community. This is the case of the MST’s radios, which go beyond the limits of the settlement. As the movement gradually moves to digital platforms, with the expansion of the website that went from being a static platform for transferring information to a dynamic portal, the
difference between its being a medium for the community and for society is becoming more blurred.

*Another discipline is possible (and necessary)*

The discussion has so far addressed the relationships between the object studied and the concepts and theories that I have engaged with. Now I move to a discussion at the meta-level, addressing the way in which the field of media and communication is currently structured with particular attention to how universalism, marginality, and invisibility are constructed. I acknowledge from the outset that this is a very superficial and tentative discussion, but, at the same time, I hope to sow the seed that will lead to deeper and more grounded discussions.

The roots of the field of media and communication studies in Euro-American research traditions can be easily traced just by surveying the indexes of broadly used textbooks.101 This means that research in the field has historically addressed phenomena and problems that affect these geographical areas: for instance, the effects of media in post-industrial societies, the formation and political roles of the press and journalism, and the relationship between media and individualisation processes, to name a few. Moreover, this bias means that concepts that today are common currency in the field (media effects, agenda setting, mediatisation) have been developed based on the realities of these societies. Some of the concepts that I have used as a theoretical framework – for instance, the press, alternative media, popular communication, community, and social movement – are understood in a certain way in Euro-American scholarship that differs from the ways they are applied in Latin America (and possibly in other peripheral areas as well). There are two possible ways of dealing with this inadequacy: trying to forcibly fit realities and experiences into concepts that cannot originally be applied to them or arguing for the diversification of these

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contexts by making these realities and experiences visible in their own terms. I have chosen the latter.

I start by challenging the accepted and widespread theories of social movements, with their North American (RMT) and European (NSM) traditions. While they work well to explain formations such as trade unions and labour movements in the case of RMT, and 20th-century identity-based social movements in the case of NSM, they fail to provide an explanation for the hybrid social movements that sometimes arise in post-colonial countries. In Latin America, the idea of social struggle (\textit{luta social}) and the movements that emerge from this struggle cannot fit into the Western idea of politics, in which social demands lead to the formation of political parties that represent class interests. Many social movements such as the MST and others that have emerged in Latin America and other regions outside the North-Western axis cannot be described only as identity-based groupings. Instead, they represent the class-based interest of a new and global subaltern class (cf. Spivak, 1985) that is bearing the burden of globalised neo-liberalism. These people are what Qiu (2009) calls the ‘have-less’, and even though they have to adapt to changes in media, theories and analytical concepts based on phenomena characteristic of post-industrial and highly technology-oriented societies cannot fully explain this kind of social change. As Santos (2009, p. 55) puts it ‘the oppressed have unpronounceable aspirations, because they were considered unpronounceable after centuries of oppression’. We thus need theories and concepts to address social problems that have been historically caused by colonisation, dependency, and more recently by neocolonialism and that are absent in North-Western communication studies. Such phenomena are crucial elements in any analysis of the interplay between changes in the media and social change and thus need to occupy a central place in transcultural media studies.

Acknowledging the role of the discipline of media and communication studies in processes of social transformation – which has been a well-established idea in Latin American communication studies – resonates with Couldry’s (2012) argument for the need of normative theories that analyse ‘how we live with media’. It means that we need to also recognise and account for the different ways of living with media that
extrapolate North-Western experience. In this sense, an analysis of the MST’s communicative processes can contribute to a more nuanced view of the process of mediatisisation, which, so far, has been regarded as a phenomenon typical of societies located in the developed world. The ways in which the MST appropriates different media can help to define mediatisisation in hybrid societies such as Brazil, where a significant part of the population does not live in the media. The ambivalence of MST militants towards the pressure to communicate and their reluctance to accept the omnipresence of media should not be dismissed as primitive and backwards but should instead be discussed in light of processes that make societies ever more connected and ever more unequal. I am however aware of the small scale and particularity of this study but hope that it serves as testimony of the need for more plurality in the field of media and communication studies.
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13 Appendices

Appendix 1: Statement of Consent

O conteúdo desta entrevista será usado na tese de doutorado “Voices from the Margins – People and the Media in the Struggle for Land in Brazil”, financiada pela Universidade de Karlstad, Suécia e em artigos para apresentação em conferências e publicação em revistas acadêmicas. Caso preferir, seu nome não será utilizado no trabalho. Entretanto não é possível evitar que através de outras informações (localização, instituição, cargo) você seja identificado/a como participante na pesquisa.

Após a entrevista, que será gravada, você terá a oportunidade de revisar a transcrição da mesma se assim desejar.

Sinta-se à vontade para interromper a gravação ou a entrevista a qualquer momento. Caso você decida interromper a entrevista, todo o material gravado será destruído.

Obrigada por sua colaboração.

Paola Sartoretto

☐ Autorizo a publicação do meu nome em trabalhos relacionados ao projeto de doutorado.

Li e concordo com os termos acima.

Nome:  
Assinatura:  
Data:
Translation:

The content of this interview will be used in the doctoral thesis ‘Voices from the Margins – People and Media in the Struggle for land in Brazil’, financed by Karlstad University – Sweden, and in articles for presentations in conferences and publication in scientific journals. If you wish so, your name will not be used in texts. However, it is not possible to ensure that, by means of information such as location, institution, and position, you will not be identified as a participant in the project.

After the interview, which will be recorded, you will have the opportunity to review the transcription should you wish to do so. Feel free to stop the recording or the interview at any time. If you decide to stop the interview, the recording will be deleted.

Thank you for your collaboration

I authorise the publication of my name in any work related to this doctoral thesis

I have read and agree with the terms above.

Name:
Signature:
Date
### Appendix 2: List of interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NR</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Informant</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>07/08/2013</td>
<td>Press officers 1 and 2 (2)</td>
<td>Press Office São Paulo</td>
<td>51min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>07/08/2013</td>
<td>Youth leader</td>
<td>National Secretariat São Paulo</td>
<td>1h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>09/08/2013</td>
<td>Radio presenter</td>
<td>Settlement Itapeva</td>
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<tr>
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<td>09/08/2013</td>
<td>Communication coordinator</td>
<td>Settlement Itapeva</td>
<td>56m50s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>10/08/2013</td>
<td>Former radio presenter</td>
<td>Settlement Itapeva</td>
<td>35m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>20/08/2013</td>
<td>Presenters school radio (2)</td>
<td>IEJC (School) Veranópolis</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>20/08/2013</td>
<td>Former press officer</td>
<td>IEJC (School) Veranópolis</td>
<td>1h48m45s</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>Member Audiovisual Brigade</td>
<td>Press office Brasília</td>
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<td>28/08/2013</td>
<td>Press officer 3</td>
<td>Press office Brasilia</td>
<td>53m52s</td>
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<tr>
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<td>29/08/2013</td>
<td>Press officer 4</td>
<td>Press office Brasilia</td>
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<tr>
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<td>12</td>
<td>30/08/2013</td>
<td>Member audiovisual brigade and education sector</td>
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<td>18</td>
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<td>20/03/2014</td>
<td>Press officer*</td>
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<td>71m</td>
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</table>

*Second interview with the informant
Fieldwork Guide – Doctoral dissertation project Voices from the margins – people and the media in the struggle for land in Brazil
Paola Sartoretto

1. Introduction

This fieldwork guide contains the plans for interviews, observations and possible focus groups to be carried out during the data collection for the doctoral dissertation project "Voices from the margins – people and the media in the struggle for land in Brazil". It will be used as a foundation for the collection of different data and serves the purpose of orienting the researcher during the fieldtrip so that the empirical work will remain as close as possible to the research questions.

The guide is divided into two sections of which the first is intended to give an overview of the research questions and respective methods for data collections. The next section will focus on each specific methodology connecting it to the conceptual framework and describing the practical steps that will be taken in order to produce data for analysis.

Although this guide is supposed to lay the basis for the fieldwork, providing guidance as possible, the fieldwork is open to unforeseen events, which may require changes in the guidelines stated in this document. Some of the methodologies will be more open to change and adaptations.

2. Research questions and methodologies

The diagram below illustrates the relational character of the research questions, which will direct the research strategies and subsequent analysis. Although the questions are presented in numerical order, this is not a representation of any ordering between the questions. They are better represented in a relational fashion.
1) In which ways are communicative processes enacted in order to mobilize rural workers and achieve symbolic cohesion among movement members?

This question looks into communicative processes, as they constitute the mobilization and the construction of symbolic cohesion. It is an intrinsically analytical question in the sense that it can only by pursued by observing these processes as they take place. The data production process departs from the presupposition that there is a reality in the empirical material world that can be observed by the researcher and interpreted with basis on theories, categorizations and typologies. Thus the role of theory in this project is to aid the interpretation and understanding of data produced during the fieldwork. In this sense, communicative process is a category used by the researcher to define a series of actions that are enacted in order to mobilize activist-subjects and create a shared sense purpose.

Because communicative processes are constituted by a range of actions, practices and symbols, the overarching question needs to be broken down so that the constitutive elements of communicative processes can be addressed at the empirical level. Communicative processes are thus analysed through the symbols, narratives and communicative practices that constitute them seeking both to describe and to establish connections between these symbols, narratives and practices and the militant action taking place in the movement. The analytical process is inspired by Clifford Geertz' (1973/2000) thick description in which manifest elements of a phenomenon are connected to a structural analysis.

Thus, at the empirical level the question will be operationalized as follows:

a) What are the prominent symbols and narrative circulating in the movement?
b) In which ways are these symbols and narratives objectified through communicative practices?
c) In which ways do communicative practices legitimate mobilization and action?

Sub-question a is of a descriptive nature and is complemented by sub-questions b and c which fulfil an analytical role of identifying the structures (objectification and mobilization) that underpin the manifest symbols and narratives.

As mentioned above, this question will be addressed mainly through observations of different areas in the movement during different periods. The observation of both normal daily practices and activities connected with special events (occupations, manifestations, general meeting) will provide a diverse and rich material, which will serve as basis to approach the connections between symbols and narratives and objectification and mobilization.

The data produced through this methodology will mainly be fieldwork notes with occasional audio-visual data in the form of pictures and footage. Such material will aid the analytical move from empirical reality to theory.

Audio-visual data (cds received at the press office) – Archive, Jornal Sem-Terra (and other publications), graphic and editorial material specially produced for meetings and congresses.

2) What media practices can be identified and how are they organized in the processes of mobilization, collective identity formation
If the first question is concerned with manifest content and the structures that underpin it, this question is concerned with experiences, rationales and practices connected to the use of media as material artefacts. Both questions are complementary in the sense that they look into different aspects of the same communicative processes. The previous question looks into the symbolic aspects of communicative processes and this question looks into the material aspects of the same processes.

This is an empirical question in the sense that it focuses on the experiences of people with different media and the rationales for using certain media to communicate as a collective. Due to the empirical nature of the overarching question, the analysis will primarily be based on interviews supported by observation of activities connected to media production.

People’s material relations with media are captured in the concept of media practices which (for analytical purposes) puts media at the centre of a range of social relations. In the data production process this question is operationalized as follows:

a) What are the rationales for using and producing different media?

b) Who is active in the production of media?

c) In which ways are identity and image rendered into media content?

Sub-question a and b are of a descriptive and empirical nature and sub-question c seeks to unveil the relation between the symbolic entities of identity and image and the materiality of media content. By connecting media practices to immaterial cognitive categories such as identity and image it will be possible to reach an understanding of media’s roles and significances for this particular kind of collective.

3) In which conditions, in the view of movement members, can the media practices they enact challenge or reinforce the hegemony of dominant actors in society in general and in the media sector in particular?

This question differs from the two first questions in the sense that it seeks to illuminate the connections between communicative processes and the actions of the movement as a political actor in a broader arena. It is operationalized in three specific sub-questions:

a) How do movement members at different levels see the communicative processes in relation to the counter-hegemonic ethos of MST?

b) What, in the view of members at different levels, is accomplished through communicative processes in terms of challenging the existing relations of dominance?

c) What, in the view of members at different levels, are the potential and possibilities offered by different media to challenge existing relations of dominance?

These three sub-questions look into member’s perceptions of communicative processes and their role and significance in a broader political scenario. Sub-question a is of a more general nature and opens up for personal opinions and evaluations as well as historical accounts of
the movement’s experience with communications and media. This question will be explored using semi-structured interview and, if possible, group interviews. The two methodologies complement each other as this question is not posed with the purpose to find one overarching view of the relation between communicative processes and the counter-hegemonic ethos of MST but to unveil a myriad of views and attempt to make sense of them against the social background in which they are formed.

Sub-questions b and c focus more specifically on the ideas of accomplishment, potentials and possibilities connected to communicative processes and media practices.

Overview of MSTs structure with methodologies applied to each area of the movement

3. Guides for interviews, focus-groups and observations

The interviews will be divided into two groups, informants from MST and expert informants who do not active in the movement but who possess relevant knowledge about it (Bisaillon and Runkin, 2012). Informants from inside the movement will be selected according to a purposive sampling process (Flick 209:122) among those who have first hand experience with communicative practices by either producing content or planning and performing different media practices. Prospective expert informants will be selected among people who engage professionally with MST at the level of communication processes and media practices, such as journalists and media developers.

In order to ensure that the fieldwork is carried out according to ethical standards of research in social sciences, the informants will receive letters introducing the researcher and the research project and asked to sign an agreement that will state the conditions for using the
interview. Efforts will be taken in order to protect the identity of the informants by avoiding the use of names. All informants will be offered the possibility to read the transcripts of the interviews for comments and clarifications.

The interviews with MST members are supposed to serve as material to an analytical appreciation of the phenomenology of media practices and communicative processes (research questions 2 and 3) and will follow a dialogic method rather than a strict question and answer exchange. In this sense the guides will translate the analytical concepts in the research questions to thematic clusters that will be addressed during the interviews (see table below).

All interviews will be carried out in Portuguese, transcribed and translated to English. Depending on the opportunities, settings and overall atmosphere of the interview, textual documents (produced by MST or about MST) might be brought to the interviews for discussion with the informant. The model chart below will be used as a guide for both interviews and possible focus groups with MST members.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analytical concept</th>
<th>Interview thematic cue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rationales - connected to media practices</td>
<td>• Ask informants to describe what kinds of media they use in their capacity as movement members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ask informants to explain why they use the media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify - connected to media practices</td>
<td>• Discuss group communication (cf. Peruzzo 1998 and 2011, Henriques 2007) with a view to learning about its cohesive properties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ask about motivations to engage with group communication strategies/media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Discuss about how media facilitate/enable communication in the movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image - connected to media practices</td>
<td>• Discuss the differences between self-produced texts and texts about MST produced by others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Discuss outward communication strategies – purposes, planning, text/visual choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counter-hegemonic potential of media practices</td>
<td>• Discuss expectations, experiences and appreciation of the outcomes of different communicative processes and media practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Learn about members’ evaluation of movement’s communicative processes in their potential to challenge hegemony.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential of media - as channels for countering dominance</td>
<td>• Discuss possibilities and hindrances associated to different media channels</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Ask informants to describe their experiences with different media channels</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Discuss the ways in which movement members experience participation in the public sphere.</td>
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</table>
Informant (expert interviews):

The focus of the interviews with informants will vary according to their area of expertise; the interest in these interviews is the accumulated knowledge of this group of people (cf. Flick 2005:165). The most interesting group of expert informants is journalists as they provide an outside view on the media practices of MST that are directed to mainstream media. Since journalists are, many times, the target public of many communication strategies, exploring their experiences addresses a further link in the chain of communication. To date very little research has been exploring the relationship between journalists and social movements from the point of view of the journalists and their experiences with social movements. One honourable exception is Todd Gitlin’s (1980) decade long research in which he interviewed and followed a number of journalists. It is important to stress that this is not and does not aim to be a study in sociology of journalism – the interviews with journalists will fulfill the secondary role of providing a more encompassing view of the communicative processes within MST.

The interviews will be semi-structured, it is anticipated that due to the more closed character of the interviews, these will be focused on the journalist’s interaction with MST.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analytical concept</th>
<th>Question</th>
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</table>
| Introductory questions | • Do you regularly cover MST?  
• How long have you been covering MST?  
• How often are your texts about MST or including MST published? |
| Media relations | • How did you make the first contact with the movement?  
• Who are your contacts at MST?  
• What do you see as the difficulties in dealing with MST as a journalist?  
• How do you compare MST with other of your usual sources within the same area (agribusiness, development, agriculture)?  
• How do you usually find the information you are looking for about MST?  
• Do you follow MST on social networks?  
• Do you find useful information in the movement’s social network sites and website?  
• If the journalist has been covering MST for more than ten years:  
  • Do you see changes in the way MST deals with journalists over the time you have been following the movement?  
  • Do you consider MST an organization that is open to the journalists? (eg: are you able to contact people, search documents and visit settlements on your own initiative as opposed to being directed and guided by the press-office) |
| Image | • How do you see the political role of MST in issues concerning land-reform, agribusiness and family agriculture?  
• How do you see the role of MST representing the interests of rural workers?  
• What are the most frequent reasons for you to report on MST?  
• How do you place MST in the political spectrum?  
• Do you think you, as journalist, can affect the image of MST that is conveyed to the general public? |
| Communicative process | • If the journalist has been covering MST for more than ten years: Can you see any changes in the way MST has been dealing with the press over the years?  
• How do you evaluate your interactions with MST’s spokespersons?  
• Do you rely on sources other than interviews when in need to write about MST? If so which sources? |
Communicative process

- If the journalist has been covering MST for more than ten years: Can you see any changes in the way MST has been dealing with the press over the years?
- How do you evaluate your interactions with MST’s spokespersons?
- Do you rely on sources other than interviews when in need to write about MST? If so which sources?
- Discuss the coverage of events (demonstrations, protests, occupations of public buildings)
- Discuss movement’s social media as source of information and form of interaction with the movement
- Discuss movement’s hostility to mainstream media – does that affect the informant in particular?

Group discussions

To the extent that this project seeks to gain an understanding of the cohesive potential and properties of media which are anchored in intersubjective relations, it is important to obtain data that is generated through the interaction between informants. In this case, the focus groups will serve to produce data that will serve to analyse the attitudes and opinions regarding the communicative processes and their relation to the construction of a shared narrative, legitimation, political participation and counter-hegemonic action.

The focus groups will be composed of MST members who are active in producing media and interacting with an eye for diversity with regards to gender, age and time in the movement. The composition of the groups will depend of the willingness of MST’s members to participate in the research project. The principle is that the group will be a natural group (cf. Flick 2005:197) in the sense that the participants are all members in the same organization and might be working together and know each other.

Observations

The observations serve the purpose of gaining assess the actual communicative processes and media practices as they are enacted. Observing different events and settings will provide a realist, material side to the subjective, experience-based data that is generated through the interviews. While it is practically unviable to script an observation, being it the most uncontrolled research setting, a guiding framework consisting on the empirical manifestation of analytical concepts can be useful. It is expected that the guide will be especially helpful in organizing observation notes. If the guide fulfills its purpose it will provide a conceptual framework for the observation without limiting the possibilities represented by unexpected turns of events that can be of relevance for the project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analytical Concept</th>
<th>Observation strategy/action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question 1</td>
<td>Symbolic Cohesion</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Symbolic Cohesion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mobilization</td>
<td>Observe how different media are used in order to encourage and organize action.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conscientization</td>
<td>Look out for ways in which a critical outlook towards one's position in the social system is constructed through the movement’s media.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legitimation</td>
<td>Look out for the ways in which movement members are encouraged to use media in different ways in order to construct and enact their political subjectivity.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observe the how actions are justified and explained.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Observe how opposing views (particularly those articulated in the mainstream media) are treated and what kinds of reactions they elicit.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Question 2</th>
<th>Media Practice</th>
<th>Observe the concrete media practices with attention to - who is active in producing content, how production is organized.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mobilization</td>
<td>Observe decision-making processes – what medium is to be used, when and for what purpose.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collective Identity</td>
<td>Observe the mechanisms through which media facilitates mobilization.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Look out for strategies and mechanisms for using media in order to foster a collective &quot;we&quot;.</td>
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| Question 3 | Counter-hegemonic action connected to media | Observe media practices that aim to destabilize hegemonic forces in the fields of politics and media. |
4. References


Voices from the margins

This study looks into communicative processes and media practices among members of a subaltern social movement. The aim is to gain an understanding of how these processes and practices contribute to symbolic cohesion in the movement, how they develop and are socialized into practices, and how these processes and practices help challenge hegemonic groups in society. These questions are explored through a qualitative study, based on fieldwork and interviews, of a subaltern social movement. The empirical object of the study is the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement (MST), which was founded in 1984 to promote agrarian reform and defend the rights of rural workers in Brazil. The results show that communicative processes are crucial to reinforcing values and symbologies associated with the rural worker identity. There is also a high level of reflexivity about media practices and an understanding that they must serve the principles of the collective. As a consequence, the movement seeks to maintain control over media, routinely discussing and evaluating the adoption and use of media. The interviews show ambivalence towards the alleged dialogic and organisational potential of digital media and to the adaptability of these media to the MST’s organisational processes.