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**SOCIAL MOVEMENTS,
NETWORKS AND
COUNTERPOWER**

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Abstract: This is a bibliographic research, through which we intend to approach the concept of social movements in a network, as well as to address their role as an expression of counterpower in contemporary society (informational or networked). It is proposed to carry out a brief theoretical reconstruction on the subject, using the sociological perspective developed by Manuel Castells. It starts from the hypothesis that this new kind of social movements, in their demands for rights triggered by the negative emotion of fear, can make use of the internet and its tools to mobilize their actions and maximize their effectiveness, reaching a greater number of people in a shorter period of time. Cyberspace, therefore, can be used as a favorable field for real conquests (from the virtual to the real).

Keywords: Social movements. Network Society. counterpower.

INTRODUCTION

This article, the result of bibliographic research, has as the object the study of social movements and their demands for rights in a specific environment: cyberspace. As a primary theoretical framework, the sociological perspective developed by Manuel Castells, in the Information Age trilogy (1996; 1997; 2000) and in his work on the subject, *Redes de Indignação e Esperança* (2012) is used.

It is assumed that cyberspace provides new possibilities for social engagement, as it offers a field for the expression of political views, civil action and mobilization for the recognition of rights, in addition to facilitating the emergence of new debates, which often find no support in the formal political process. In this context, activists of any cause can use the information technologies of the online environment to press for an agenda that encounters difficulties or resistance offline.

It is proposed, through a very unpretentious approach, based on the reading of Manuel Castells' work, reflections on concepts such as the network formation, collective action, social movements and occupation of space, understood as forms of expression of counterpower against power. instituted. For the purpose of presenting its results, this text is divided into two sections:

In the first section, a brief reconstruction of Castells' perspective on contemporary society is carried out, in order to contextualize and introduce the approach to social movements adopted here, as well as the role in the face of the oppression of power networks in the informational society. In the second section, the process of formation of networked social movements and their distinctive characteristics is examined. We work with the hypothesis that fear, understood as a negative emotion, can eventually be overcome by the collective expression of indignation, which takes place by sharing and identifying with each other in a process of communicative action in a network, triggering the hope of the possibility of change.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND COUNTERPOWER

This first topic deals, very briefly, with the role of social movements in the face of power relations constituted in contemporary society, in order to build an overview to present the main argument of this article, namely, the importance of building and using networks for social movements and their rights-related demands. It starts from the premise that power relations are constitutive of society because those who hold it build and act in social institutions according to their own values and interests.

Initially, the very concept of society is discussed, from the perspective offered by Manuel Castells in *A Sociedade em Rede*, and

then approaches the contesting role of social movements in times of “network society”.

THE INFORMATION SOCIETY: THE TRANSFORMATION OF SPACE AND TIME

According to Manuel Castells (2016, p. 61), at the end of the 20th century, the social scenario of human life underwent an intense remodeling, whose core of transformations took place through the technological revolution, concentrated in information and communication technologies. A new digital communication system and the exponential growth of computer networks frame a new material basis of society.

Due to its ability to infiltrate practically all spheres of human activity, the information technology revolution is the starting point for Castells to analyze the complexity of the new society, which he calls the Information Society, replacing the industrial society. The term informational indicates a form of organization in which the generation, processing and transmission of information are fundamental sources of productivity and power (CASTELLS, 2016, p. 77).

According to Castells (2016, p. 88), what characterizes the current technological revolution is not the centrality of knowledge and information, but the application of this knowledge and information to generate knowledge and information processing/communication devices, in a cumulative feedback loop between the innovation and its use.

Considering the rapidity of the feedback loop between the introduction of a new technology, its uses and its development in new domains, the diffusion of technology amplifies its power as users appropriate and redefine it.

The emergence of the network society results from the interaction of these two relatively autonomous forces: development of new technologies and society’s attempt to re-equip itself with the use of the power of technology (CASTELLS, 2016, p. 115). There is, therefore, the formation of a new social paradigm, identified by Castells as the information technology paradigm. Comprehensiveness, complexity and arrangement in the form of a network are its main attributes. The attributes of this new paradigm represent the material basis of the information society.¹

In this context, the internet is, in the words of Castells (2016, p. 430), the backbone of global communication. Its formation and diffusion process definitively shaped the communicational structure of the networks. According to the author, what characterizes the new communication system is its ability to include and encompass all cultural expressions.

This new “communication system” radically transforms space and time, the two fundamental dimensions of human life. Localities are stripped of their cultural, historical and geographical meaning, and are reintegrated into functional networks that create a space of flows that replaces the space of places. Time is also transformed, as past, present and future can be programmed to interact with each other in the same message. “The space of flows and timeless time are the main bases of a new culture” (CASTELLS, 2016, p. 458).

Castells (2016, p. 463) observes that both space and time are being transformed under the combined effect of the information technology paradigm and the social forms and processes induced by the current process of historical transformation.

1. For a more detailed analysis of the characteristics of the information technology paradigm, see Manuel Castells (2016, pp. 123-128).

In each country, argues Castells, the architecture of network formation is reproduced in local and regional centers, so that the entire system is interconnected in global terms, ultimately engendering a process called by the author as a space for flows, conceptualized as “the material organization of time-sharing social practices that work through flows” (2016, p. 494). Capital flows, information flows, technology flows, etc., flows that represent the expression of the processes that dominate human life. Even if people live in certain places, in the face of the reconfiguration in flux, the meaning and dynamics of places are profoundly altered in the network society.

Time, in turn, is radically transformed under the information technology paradigm, irremediably related to the emergence of the space of flows. According to Castells (2016, pp. 515-516), contemporary societies are still largely dominated by the concept of chronological time, but this linear, irreversible, measurable and predictable time is being fragmented in the network society, in which the time is perceived as a source of value, processed and managed as a resource.

Castells (2016, p. 543) proposes the idea of timeless time, which “occurs when the characteristics of a given context, that is, the informational paradigm and the network society, cause systemic confusion in the sequential order of the phenomena that occur in that context”. The author exemplifies: financial transactions carried out in fractions of a second, flexible working hours, instantaneous wars and virtual culture, all are characteristic phenomena of the network society, which systematically mixes the occurrence of times.

The author concludes that timeless time, belonging to the space of flows, materially structures and de-structures our society.

Furthermore, all the dominant functions and processes in the information age are increasingly organized around networks: “networks constitute the new social morphology of our societies, and the logical diffusion of networks substantially modifies the operation and results of productive processes and experience, power and culture” (CASTELLS, 2016, p. 553).

The new paradigm of information technology therefore provides the material basis for the expansion of the networked form of organization, penetrating the entire social structure. The presence in the network or the absence of it and the dynamics of each network in relation to the others are crucial sources of domination and transformation of society: a society aptly called a network society (CASTELLS, 2016, p. 553)

The entire process of transforming the network society, however, is not neutral. For Castells (2016, p. 560), the social construction of the new dominant forms of space and time develops a meta-network that ignores so-called non-essential functions, subordinated social groups and devalued territories. As a result, a distance is created between the meta-network and countless people, activities and places in the world.

This “number” of people, often marginalized or ignored by social institutions, can nevertheless organize and engage in collective action to defend their demands and even change the rules that shape their lives. These collective expressions of counter-power and their relationship to established power are further explored in the next topic.

POWER AND COUNTERPOWER: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

In the perspectiva adopted as a reference for this article, extracted from the work of Castells entitled *Redes de Indignation and Hope*², power

2. No original, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, de 2012, publicado no Brasil em 2013.

is understood as the multidimensional and is organized around networks programmed in each domain of human activity, according to the interests and values of qualified actors. There are networks of *finanças, da mídia, da política*, of science etc. These networks are conceptually autonomous (they do not merge), but engage in partnership and competition strategies around specific projects.

The power network built around the state plays a key role in establishing a general power network. This is because, first, the stable operation of the system ultimately depends on the coordination and regulation functions of the State. It is through the State that the various forms of power exercise are related to the monopoly of violence as the ability to ultimately impose power. Thus, while communication networks process the construction of meaning on which power is based, the State constitutes the standard network for the proper functioning of all other power networks (CASTELLS, 2013, p. 17).

According to Castells (2013, p. 14), power can be exercised through coercion (state monopoly of violence) or through mechanisms of symbolic manipulation. Power relations are embedded in social institutions, particularly those of the state. The legal system, for example, reflects these power relations and defines their limits, as negotiated by an endless historical process of conflict and bargaining. Since societies are contradictory and conflictive, where there is power there is also counterpower – considered as the ability of social actors to challenge the power embedded in institutions in order to claim the representation of their own values and interests. The configuration of the State and its regulatory institutions, such as those of law, depends on this constant interaction between power and counterpower.

According to the author (CASTELLS, 2013, p. 15), the way people think determines

the fate of institutions, norms and values on which society is organized. When most people think contradictory about the values and norms institutionalized in laws and regulations enforced by the state, the system may change, although not necessarily to fulfill the hopes of agents of social change such as the social movements.

From this perspective, social movements are often triggered by emotions derived from some significant event, which helps protesters overcome fear and challenge the powers that be, despite the danger inherent in their actions (CASTELLS, 2013, pp. 161-162). This is risky behavior, as the maintenance of social order and the stability of political institutions express power relations exercised, if necessary, by intimidation and, as a last resort, by the use of force.

Para For Castells (2013, p. 18), social movements are producers of new values and goals around which society's institutions have been transformed in order to represent these values by creating new norms to organize social life. They exercise counterpower, especially through an autonomous communication process, free from the control of those who hold institutional power, since the institutional public space – constitutionally designated for deliberation – is occupied by the interests of the dominant elites. Thus, social movements are able to exert influence using mechanisms of construction of counter-power.

Those who hold power in the network society are capable of designing each of the main networks on which people's lives depend (finance, media, law, science) and of operating the connections between different networks. Power is exercised by programming and changing networks. Counterpower, on the other hand, is performed through the reprogramming of networks around other interests and values, in a deliberate attempt

to alter power relations (CASTELLS, 2013, pp. 17-18).

All this theoretical reconstruction, albeit brief, is important to understand the role of social movements in today's society. In the perspective adopted here, social movements have the function of opposing formally established power relations, in order to defend and propose new demands. It remains to investigate how these counter-power networks are formed and how they are used by social movements.

NETWORKS AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

So far, the role of social movements in times of a network society has been discussed. For social movements nothing is immutable. The democratic process itself is often questioned by collective action, due to the crisis of representativeness observed in many regimes. Time and time again, contemporary social movements, on a global scale, have fought for a new form of democratic exercise, in which it is possible to deliberate on issues that, in general, are neglected by the established power. This second section examines the very process of creation/consolidation of these social movements, in the context of today's society, and also discusses the importance of the formation of networks for the movements, allied to the use of resources from information and communication technologies. This analysis is theoretically based on the formulations presented by Manuel Castells in the book *The Power of Communication*³. Finally, we propose a kind of approximation of the concept of networked social movements to what Arjun Appadurai (2009) considers as root activism, which indicates ways of using transnational networks to demand rights, in a global context.

3. Book published for the first time in 2009, in which the author revisits and relates concepts developed in the "The Information Age" trilogy, such as technology, power and communication.

THE FORMATION OF NETWORKED SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: THE IMPORTANCE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES

According to Castells (2013, p. 22), social movements are made up of individuals who form a network, connecting to other individuals, in a communication process that ultimately leads to collective action.

For the author, human beings create meaning by interacting with their environment, connecting their neural networks with the networks of nature and with social networks. The act of communication operates the constitution of networks. For society at large, the primary source of social production of meaning is the process of socialized communication. The continuous and progressive transformation of communication technology has extended the reach of the media to practically all domains of social life, in a network that is, at the same time, local and global, in a constant pattern of change (CASTELLS, 2013, p. 15). The internet offers a fertile space for the construction and constitution of social networks of counterpower. Cyberspace enables deliberation and coordination of actions in a much more unimpeded way than spaces institutionally designated for deliberation, as the latter are often taken over by the interests of dominant elites and their own power networks.

The roots of networked social movements are not very different from the traditional ones: they usually relate to issues of injustice, which vary in each specific context: inequality, exploitation, repression, racism, xenophobia, censorship, violence, religious fanaticism, degradation of the environment, violation of personal freedoms, sexism, homophobia and other dimensions of social domination. They

are formed from the network connection between individuals, and through this connection they begin to direct their interests towards a set of common goals.

Castells (2017, pp. 200-204) draws attention to the fact that, on an individual level, social movements are driven by emotion. At first, emotion is negative, represented by fear, in the most essential sense of self-preservation. It is necessary for individuals to overcome the negative emotion of fear. This happens through a kind of emotional activation in which individuals connect their personal emotions to other individuals, through a process that communicates the individual experience to others (empathy). Empathy is determined by experiences similar to those that prompted the initial emotional access.

Fear is overcome by the expression of indignation, which occurs through sharing and identification with others in a process of communicative action in a network. When the process of communicative action that induces collective action and change is triggered, enthusiasm prevails, which reinforces intentional societal mobilization. Enthusiastic, networked individuals overcome fear and become a conscious collective actor. Another emotion that plays an important role in the process of a social movement is hope. Hope involves behavior oriented towards the future, a fundamental ingredient for motivating behavior oriented towards achieving well-being in the future as a consequence of an action in the present.

Thus, social change results from the communicative action that involves the connection between networks of the neural networks of human brains stimulated by signals from a communicational environment formed by communication networks.

“The technology and morphology of these communication networks shape the process of mobilization and, thus, of social change, both as a process and as a result” (CASTELLS, 2013, p. 162).

In the information age, there is an intrinsic relationship between communicational speed and action effectiveness: the faster and more interactive the communication process, the greater the probability of forming an efficient process of collective action.

According to Castells (2017, p. 467), communication technology has important consequences for the process of social transformation itself. The greater the autonomy of the communicative environment, the greater the chances for the introduction of messages that question the dominant values in society. The emergence of mass self-communication through the internet allows “new opportunities for social change, in all spheres of activity, around a meta-network of electronic communication networks.”

The new technologies therefore allow citizens to engage and organize their resistance in an almost instantaneous insurgent community, forming new networks of democratic representation, which take place through the use of the potential of these new modes of information and communication.

According to the author (CASTELLS, 2017, p. 468), these new mass communication networks can leverage processes of social change, including exerting influence even over the most traditional channels of communication. The mass media, for example, put in check by the multiple new channels of communication that surround it, can find itself cornered to the point of changing the focus of its messages.⁴

Thus, information and communication

4. The coverage of the June 2013 demonstrations in Brazil exemplifies this process well: the initial discourse of the mainstream media was unanimous in discrediting the Movimento Passe Livre and its agendas. Contradicted by media activists, who acted within the protests, with amateur cell phone cameras, the criminalization discourse gave way to a narrative of legitimization of the protests.

technologies reinforce opportunities for new messages and new messengers, in order to populate the communication networks of society as a whole, in order to reprogram these networks around new values, interests and projects.

It is important to emphasize that this does not mean that technology, by itself, produces the changes desired by social movements, or that these collectives need, in some way, to refound themselves in order to absorb digital practices in their daily lives. On the contrary: the technological potential only provides means and tools for action, in a virtual space not yet dominated by traditional power networks. Ideally, social networks, powered by the virtual environment, create and cultivate their links with spaces and practices of material life.

A KIND OF A GENRE: THE CHARACTERISTICS OF NETWORKED SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND THEIR POTENTIAL FOR GLOBAL ACTION

After contextualizing the role and formation of social movements in the network society, it remains to deal with their peculiar characteristics, which place them as a new species (in network) of a genre (social movements). In Castells' words:

The characteristics of the communication processes between individuals engaged in social movements determine the organizational characteristics of the movement itself: the more interactive and self-configuring the communication, the less hierarchical the organization and the more participatory the movement. This is why the networked social movements of the digital age represent a new species in their genre. (CASTELLS, 2013, pp. 24-25).

It is in this new context of digital and interactive communication on the internet that the social movements in the network are constituted. Each movement will certainly present some particularities and specific differences related to its way of acting. There are, however, some features that constitute a common pattern of social movements in the internet age.⁵

Multimodal connection: Internet communication networks are essential for movements, but the form of connection is multimodal, including online and offline networks, as well as pre-existing networks and others formed during the movement's performances, which can even connect to other networks movements, using digital platforms and applications for this purpose. This multimodality of connection brings with it two other characteristics, which involve the notion of space and time in the information age, as mentioned in the first section of this article.

Local/global space: movements, in general, start in a specific local context, for their own reasons, but at the same time they are global, as they are globally connected through the internet. Local debates can be reproduced at global levels, generating simultaneous participation in global manifestations through networks of local spaces.

Timeless time: at the same time that the social movements in the network live and feel time chronologically, according to the practical experience of everyday life, they also organize their actions oriented towards an unlimited horizon of possibilities, projecting, in advance, their time in the future of the historical construction process.

Spontaneity: Network social movements are originally triggered by a specific event of

5. Castells (2013) he does not summarize the characteristics in that order, but presents them in a non-systematized way in his book (chapter 6). This article reorganizes these characteristics and presents them in a summarized way, privileging the didactic practicality of the exposition to the detriment of a more refined theoretical treatment, which would require a more in-depth study and with eventual empirical support.

indignation, with a call-to-action aspect, in order to create an instantaneous community of insurgent practice, in which the impact of the message is more relevant than the source itself. appeal.

Virality: collective network action intends to make its action viral, in the logic of internet networks. Mobilization is inspired and potentiated through the sharing of acts and protests, even if distant or in other contexts, because it triggers the hope of the possibility of change.

Autonomy and self-reflexivity: network movements ideally occur without defined leadership. Decision-making is horizontal and necessarily involves deliberation coletiva, based on the principle of companionship. Movements frequently question and reflect on themselves in an open process of deliberation shared on social networks.

Non-programmatic: social movements that arise in the context of the network society rarely have well-defined objectives. Its guidelines are usually multiple and porous to other claims. This characteristic can be seen both as a strength, due to the broad power of attraction of a movement, and as a weakness, due to the difficulty of achieving something concrete from undefined goals.

These characteristics, so briefly listed here, show the specialty of the type of networked social movements, which can be understood as a species of the genre of social movements in the broadest sense.

It is also important to point out, at this point in the presentation, the need for these social movements to adopt a final characteristic, capable of permeating all the others, with a decisive potential for the success of the demands for real social changes: the characteristic of *multidimensionality*. Even if they are organized in a predominantly virtual

way, in cyberspace, the horizon of change of a network movement must not ignore the practical and concrete reality of human life. It is desirable that the action of the movement be hybrid, in a kind of symbiosis between virtual and real.

Still in relation to this last characteristic, it is suggested, in a certainly unpretentious way, an approximation of the idea of movements organized in a multidimensional network to what Arjun Appadurai approaches about globalization from its roots, in *Fear of the Small Number*⁶.

Appadurai's central argument (2009, pp. 13-14) involves the understanding that the effects of the so-called "high globalization" of late capitalism are not always positive. The author argues that, in this period of economic freedom, flow of capital between nations and market integration, violence against minorities was also established on a large scale, in a wide range of societies and different political regimes (and not only in totalitarian states), as one could intuit until then).

Numerical majorities, according to Appadurai (2009, p. 17), they can become predatory and ethnocidal in relation to small numbers, "precisely when some minorities remind those majorities of the small gap that exists between their condition of majority and the horizon of an immaculate national whole". This feeling of incompleteness is capable of leading majorities to paroxysms of violence against minorities, driven by the deforming aspect of the globalization process.

In this process of globalization, the author observes, entire codifications of international legislation emerged, technological information protocols used almost exclusively to regulate complex forms of global economic trafficking. (APPADURAI, 2009, p. 27).

The same scenario, however, also enabled

6. Dated 2006, edited and published in Brazil in 2009. There is, at least initially, no link between the works of Appadurai and Castells. Such approximation is exclusively due to the proposed relationship between the syllabus of the discipline and the student's personal research.

the birth of cybercommunities (which work across national boundaries). The highly rapid information and communication technologies, indispensable for new financial instruments, allow the emergence of grassroots coalitions for change and equity on a global basis, with a view to discussing citizenship, justice, political participation and equality. (APPADURAI, 2009, pp. 39, 54).

This perception of globalization from below, from the roots, reveals the effort of activists of social movements, all over the world, to apprehend and shape the global agenda in matters related to human rights. Appadurai (2009, p. 100) draws attention to the fact that these movements are coordinated without massive centralization, and reproduce themselves without a determined mandate, leveraging resources for their own ends and pursuing visions of equity and accessibility, which do not fit into formal models of institutional democracy. It is therefore possible to make the global networks of these social movements work for those who need it most and who derive the least benefit from it: the poor, the weak, the homeless and the world's marginal populations. In this utopian horizon, in particular, the perspectives of Castells and Appadurai converge.

CONCLUSION

In summary, it was said that information and communication technologies are of fundamental importance for life in society. In times of a network society, the internet was able to substantially change the forms of personal relationships between people. Its use also impacts on the social needs of citizens, on their demands for rights and on the ways to fight

The use of technological tools and interconnection makes it possible to process

and share information almost automatically, very quickly and on a large quantitative scale. Technological advances have provoked a real restructuring of physical and spatial time in the forms of organization of social movements. Cyberspace favors social relationships that are independent of defined geographical places and established times.

Information and communication technologies can be used by collectives and global social movements. The use of these new technologies as a possibility to expand the exercise of citizenship and as a space for the claim for rights is the horizon of action of network activism, which can function as a true exercise of counter-power, in the face of injustices and inequities perpetrated by institutions permeated by the formally constituted power.

Network communicative action can provide means to overcome the negative emotion of fear and its consequent expression in indignation, guided by the positive feeling of hope for change. The formation of networks, however, must not be limited to virtual space. Important to point to a performance *multidimensional*, that is virtual, but also focused on real impacts on the demands for rights of social movements.

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