

# Arepas, tortillas and *beijús*: Heterogeneity of communicative struggles in Latin America

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## Abstract

In the 21st century, the fronts and coalitions defending community media and media pluralism have been revealed as the newest political agent in the public and legal debate on media regulation from Argentina to Mexico. Nevertheless these groups presented differing and sometimes conflicting conceptions of how to achieve media pluralism. This article seeks to explicate this apparent heterogeneity, from the view that the intrinsic diversity of “media activism” reflects distinct experiences, political projects and philosophical bases. At the same time, these multiple actors articulate from similar positions of marginality and a common history of political exclusion regarding the media. This article serves as an invitation to investigate the concepts and practices of the main media struggles in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with a view to proposing a typology capable of elucidating these experiences. . The hypothesis is that these plural origins are at the base of the internal disputes, interaction dynamics and barriers to the creation of a Latin American movement in defense of “another communication” in the face of the power asymmetries of the State and the Market.

**Keywords:** Civil Society, Political Communication, Community Media

Submission date: 2010-12-30

Acceptance date: 2011-02-03

## Introduction

Arepas, tortillas and *beijús* were inherited from the original inhabitants of this region and became a part of the contemporary diet of several countries in Latin America. The struggle for reforms in the Continent’s communication policies also originated in historically excluded groups that are now trying to consolidate slogans of participation, pluralism and media rights in the daily life menu. Like their gastronomic dishes, they have similar characteristics, but they differ substantially in their flavors, forms and modes of preparation.

Coalitions, commissions and democratic fronts, activists and militants of communication, journalistic *advocacy*, civil society or communication movements

and guerrillas are some of the terms used in reference to groups trying to ensure media pluralism. They reflect the heterogeneity of the various efforts to demand transformations to policies, contents and media practices. More than different names, this multiplicity hides a diversity of flours with which some want to make arepas, others prefer beijús and many others cannot live without tortillas.

The starting point of this work is the emergence and attainment of political relevance in the last decade by these previously invisible groups, who were relegated to the sidelines of the media regulation debate. They were present in the struggles for new regulation in Venezuela (2001), Uruguay (2007), Argentina (2009) and also in the discussions in Mexico (2001-2004) and Brazil (2009) and they continue in the undefined debate of Bolivia, Ecuador and Paraguay, among others<sup>1</sup>.

All of these countries faced the great conglomerates of media concentration<sup>2</sup>; the new correlation dynamics in media regulation<sup>3</sup> and worked to increase capacities for political participation in the construction of more plural frames. But in each of these contexts proposals, terms and distinct projects were elicited. For some, the normative frames of community media are necessary and urgent and they demand legal disputes to ensure this reality. Some prefer to continue underground, claiming that institutional action bureaucratizes the movement and enforces restrictions; others defend wider articulations including alliances with media enterprises in order to achieve proposed changes.

All this variety barely scratches the surface of the internal complexity of this group. In spite of the common marginal position and the desires for restructuring of the sector, we cannot yet talk about an articulated and homogeneous Latin American movement. Those defending community media and media pluralism differ in the aims, motivations, models and strategies for the achievement of that other “possible communication”.

This article seeks to revisit the paths taken by the concepts and practices of this wide anti-hegemonic communication of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with emphasis on the topic of community media. Research in this area is justified as the demand for fair access to media at the community level is one of the oldest and most expressive and it is still a pending subject in most Latin American countries. In organizational terms the entities related with this area acquired prominence in the debates and made clear that the need for recognition and support to these media is one of the few points of programmatic consensus. Their conceptual and organizational construction is one of the most

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1 Venezuela started this favorable wave with the approval of the Rules of non-profit Sound Broadcasting and Open Communitarian Television of Public Service, decree, 1.521/01. In Uruguay Law 18.232/07 ruled the Broadcasting of Communitarian Television. In Argentina, was the Law of Audiovisual Communitarian Services 26.522/09. Between 2001 and 2004, México lived a struggle at the Dialogue Tables for a new regulatory frame which ended up with the approval of the non-favorable law “Televisa”, and Brazil started a public discussion convoked by the Executive in the 1st National Conference of Communication at the end of 2009.

2 Clarín in Argentina, Cisneros in Venezuela, Globo in Brasil and Televisa in México are some of the giants and they alone control about, 60% of the media production in the region (Mastrini y Becerra, 2009).

3 Historically, in the region prevailed pacts of mutual convenience between the State and the media business which remained after dictatorships and democracies and they were legitimized in the norms as well as in implicit agreements (Capriles, 1980; Sinclair, 1999) for the conformation of a little regulated and highly controlled sector (Fox y Waisbord, 2002).

complex, relevant and representative of the multiplicity of the communicative struggle.

Far from pretending that this effort can generate a matrix covering all the diversity of the anti-system discourses the idea is that, starting from articulated struggles concerning community media, the origins of some of its main conceptual variations, their points of agreement and rupture, as well as their dynamics of alliances can be identified. Research methods employed in this study include, document analysis and bibliographic revision, interviews with leaders and researchers in the field of communication, visits to entities and broadcasting offices, as well as participant observation during the past three years in assemblies and debate forums in Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, México and Venezuela. We also conducted a content analysis of the web pages, documents, products and discussion lists of some of the entities linked to this sector.<sup>4</sup>

The objective is to generate an embryonic typological proposal that will allow the location of the philosophical origins of contemporary agents, to tone down divergences and in that way, to contribute to a greater reflection on the efforts for organizational unity. Nevertheless, being conscious of the limitations of this writing, it is necessary to point out that this classification process is still embryonic and is part of the draft of the doctoral thesis *The ants from Macondo*<sup>5</sup>. For this article, the challenge of historic reconstruction tries to avoid reductionisms which would try to classify all the arepas, tortillas and *beijús* of the communicative struggle as flours belonging to the same sack. The idea is to avoid definitive and closed conclusions regarding a supposedly “authentic” communicative movement and to open the doors for discussion and research on the topic in a wider way.

## **The multiple possibilities of communicative flour**

Arepas, tortillas and *beijús* are made from corn flour; just as all the groups under struggle for media restructuration are made of the desire to improve media pluralism and the role of communication in society. The first defenses of the communicative flour as a necessary ingredient for more profound social changes take us to the liberal ideals of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Revolutionary processes such as the French Revolution allowed the understanding and affirmation of the need for freedom of expression and opinion as an inherent part of the bread of the individual rights of the Modern State (Lima, 2010).

On the one hand, the development of communication media beyond the graphic press and increasing social and political complexity resulted in theoretical defense of the communicative potential assuming its own *corpus* in mass societies. Lasswell (1958), Mc Luhan (1964) and Lévy (2000) are some of the representatives of a belief in the

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4 Of diverse character, types and objectives, they were selected as reference in the main debates of the new media laws. Among them are AMARC (América Latina y Caribe), ANMCLA (Venezuela), ABRACO (Brasil), Aporrea (Venezuela), Coalición para una Radiodifusión Democrática (Argentina), Colectivo de Medios Independientes – IndyMedia (Argentina y Bolivia); Comisión Pró-Conferencia (Brasil), Escuela Radiofónica de Bolivia (ERBOL), Federación Argentina de Medios Comunitarios – FARCO (Argentina), la Red Fe y Alegría (Venezuela), la Red Nacional de Medios Alternativos – RNMA (Argentina) and the RNMA (Venezuela), among others.

5 The ants from Macondo: Anti-hegemony and media laws in Argentina, Brazil and Venezuela, has defense prevision in July 2011 Doctorate program in research in Social Sciences in Flacso-México.

diffusionist potential of the technological communications themselves as part of the inclusion and development of advanced societies.

On the other hand, anti-hegemonic groups and theorists tried to relocate the idea of the communicative potential as a transformation mechanism. From the theories of Dependence (Dorfman y Matterlart, 1972), through the debates of the New World Order of Information and Communication (NOMIC)<sup>6</sup>, the dialogic frames (Freire, 1996), Folk Communication (Beltrán, 1980) cultural mediations (Barbero, 2002) to Marxist and anarchist appropriations, the idea of communication as a potential source of struggle, change and resistance is present. In the Habermasian version (2002)<sup>7</sup> this potential is imminently political-argumentative and the construction of the proclaimed democratic and pluralistic public sphere is essential.

All this discussion takes us to *ambivalent potentialities* which allow the location of the communicative technologies and their possibilities as historical constructions and a product of the contradiction of capitalism (Sodré, 1999; Bolaño 1998). The technocratic prophecies of assignation of innate quality to the media would just be abstract non feasible possibilities due to the absence of necessary conditions for their development (Mészáros, 2004). Inserted in the process of capital accumulation, the new information and communication technologies (ICTs) struggle between the open liberating possibilities for technical progress and the obstacles for its realization can be the same forces responsible for their implementation (Bolaño, 2000; 2005).

In what could be called a paradigm of systemic integration the communicative possibilities refer to the technical informative diffusion and an inclusion potential whose function is the widening, legitimating and improvement of the socio-technical hegemonic model. But the permanent tension generated by that excluding process and its internal contradictions allow the opening of advantages and opportunities for the emergence of a transformation paradigm associated to the overcoming, resistance and imperative confrontation of the dominant ways and organized under a humanist flag.

The ambiguous character of communication tells that the media that could serve as an emancipator tool are the same that also serve as control, manipulation and invalidation mechanisms of human perception becoming spokesmen and valuers of the hegemonic models. In this sense, communication media express the paradoxes and contradictions of their double condition: on the one hand legitimating and renewal of the *statu quo*, and on the other hand, the deconstruction and confrontation of the given order.

So, the defense of communication as a potentiality in the Digital Era has very different philosophical origins. The similar appearance may generate some mixtures and ambiguities, but a careful observer can clearly perceive that the flour from arepas is not the same as the one from tortillas because one can use wheat instead of corn and

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<sup>6</sup> This debate led by the NOAL countries that put pressure against North American information and cultural hegemony. It had a space mainly in the UNESCO forums and it was generated by the polemic Mac Bride Report which ended up with the abandonment of the entity by the United States in the 1980s.

<sup>7</sup> In the concept of public sphere and in the theory of Communicative Action, Habermas defends the idea of communication as a bridge for establishing dialogue, argumentation and collective construction mechanisms of the public. Its theoretical corpus states the contemporary concepts of public policy as participation and inter-sector processes.

it may not be even near the preparation of the *beijú*, which derives from a very particular texture made of cassava.

## **Turning the tortilla over: actors and dynamics in the anti-hegemonic communication**

Besides the question of the flour, our selections of the menu have two sides in common. Tortilla, arepas or *beijús* can only be considered ready after turning them over in the pan. Also, this dynamic preparation seems to be part of the historical action of those promoting the paradigm of communicative transformation. To understand this, it is necessary to look at both sides.

In the invention of Guttenberg's press, the emergent bourgeoisie was identified with the revolutionary flour which defended the rebellious potential of communication and the freedom of speech. The press was seen as a liberal flag confronting the conservative power of religion and the old aristocracy (Lima, 2010)

In subaltern conditions they constituted confronting agents in a given situation of political, economical and social confrontation. But as soon as they achieved a new hegemony, their rebellious defense of communication was left to the defense of a freedom of expression restricted to mercantile freedom (Lima. 2010). In its preparation the quality of the revolutionary arepa mutated to a kind of conservative bread.

In Latin America, this dynamic of communicative struggle and resistance was constituted initially in colonial domination. The proclamation of the liberating potential of the press was led by incipient local elites, who incorporated the use of the freedom of speech to their struggles for independence. Names such as Simon Bolívar, José de San Martín and Bernardo O'Higgins were responsible for a series of communicative disobediences such as *Correo de Orinoco* (Venezuela) or *El Oficial de Perú*. The Patriotic Press from the Gran Colombia printed the first version of the *Men's Rights* in 1793. This cost Antonio Nariño his exile, the loss of all his assets and goods and imprisonment.

During the movement for the liberation of the territories in the 18th and 19th century, critical and satiric journals took their position in support of the anti-colonialists and republican revolutionaries. But during the post-revolutionary periods, when tensions eased, the topic became again the objective of sanctions and prohibitions. This dialectic of affirmation-restriction reveals revolutions "form up down" which implemented hierarchical advances where most of the population remained neglected and marginalized from communicative freedom.

The reactions against these conditions started during the 20th century with the growth of the working class in urban centers. The industrialization and modernization processes which came along with the policy of imports substitution and the emergence of a mass of wage-earning workers with labor union organization gave origin to the constitution to an incipient and more plural civil society apart from and sometimes contradicting old elite agreements (Coutinho, 2003).

Along with the industrialization of the bases came the first workers' newspapers. The Marxist and anarchist inspiration were fundamental in these processes. Combative labor unions, operators' parties and revolutionary movements took part in the emergence of new *proletarian media* formed by newspapers subversive against the dominant model.

Most of them stood by the Leninist orientations of instrumentalization of the Communist Party from the Soviet Union for revolutionary propaganda. Communication was understood as an ideological apparatus of the party Press System (Rubim, 1995; Momesso, 2008). Radio and Television were absent of the first subversive communicative challenges.

## **Radio electric tortillas**

The appropriation of radio as a strategy connected to the revolutionary transformation paradigm was made possible through mining workers from Bolivia. From the 1930's, an increased politicized atmosphere started to ferment and this stressed the conflicts and promoted the transmission of the first confronting sound waves in Latin America (Alfaro, 1999; Cogo, 1998; Peruzzo, 1998).

In 1948 in San Luis Potosí the loudspeakers of the exploited miners were inspired by the Marxist union struggles and generated a reference model for the use of media which was based on the social and public struggle which serves as the beginning of the experience of radio production. They were self-developing and libertarian. In 1952 the miners' radio formed a network of 25 stations.

In some scenarios the emergent communication struggles connected with popular-nationalists states in their struggle to affirm alternative transmissions as part of the new political dynamics. As an example, in Argentina Peron (1947, 1956 and 1973-1976) expropriated radio stations and rendered them under the administration of press labor unions; in Chile the Frentes Culturales from Salvador Allende (1970-1973) tried to generate anti-information mechanisms and in Peru, the Revolutionary Government of the Armed Forces (1968-1980) absorbed the sector. But due to the precocious frustration of these decrees or because they did not offer models that went beyond the state centralism, these experiences did not consolidate as an alternative project (Aguirre, 2005).

The Bolivian miners' radios as well as the Argentinean self-developed unions and in general all the rebellious communicative expressions linked to workers, anarchist, communist and socialists movements suffered similar repression persecution, extermination or cooptation processes.

These practices went through different political moments such as dictatorships and democracies and they were established as the state communicative policy in relation with the subaltern communicative appropriations all though the last century. Added to the political proscription of their parties and the crisis of the Soviet socialism, proletarian media disappeared. Only in the 1990s we can register new attempts for the re-elaborations of the socialist arepas.

Nevertheless, the use of the radio by the dispossessed did not stop. On the contrary, since the 1970s the radio was established as the main medium of expression and cohesion for reinvented anti-hegemonic practices. The end of the 1940s saw the first use of educational radio as a Christian evangelizing literacy proposal. Radio Sutatenza in Colombia was the first reference.

In the 1970s the alternative communication models developed by Antonio Pascuali (1963), Paulo Freire (1966) and Mario Kaplun (1993) were disseminated throughout the continent. These initiatives were developed mainly in the Andean countries and they were thought as allies of alphabetization, formation and mobilization of the excluded; they also had a classist component influenced by the Liberation Theology<sup>8</sup>. In general they were identified as “base communication”. Nevertheless, the property and the management were mainly exclusive of the Church. The model was promoted by the Latin American Association of Radio Education (ALER), which was created in 1972 and inspired the Radio School of Bolivia (ERBOL), the Fe y Alegría Net in Venezuela and so on (Vigil, 2004).

At the same time groups of intellectuals, reformist and planning governments opposed the North American communicational hegemony. These resistance energies formed around the Non Aligned Countries developed their anti-hegemony in spaces such as the UNESCO, through proposals of national communication policies related with the NOMIC (Beltrán, 2005; Exeni, 1999; Fox, 1988; Matterlart, 2005).

With emphasis on the public media of alternative programming and state production of national contents of public interest their demands were reflected in the polemic Mac Bride Report which generated a reactionary process of virulent opposition to the associations of media owners. Organizations of the social entrepreneurial society such as the Press Radio Association (AIR) and the Interamerican Press Association (SIP) accused them of having Marxist and fascist aspiration and they vindicated the conservative freedom of expression. In alliance with the United State they were able to abolish the debates for the last 30 years (Beltrán, 2005; Exeni, 1999; Fox, 1988; Matterlart, 2005). As a heritage of these struggles this debate fixed key concepts such as participation, public service and right to communication.

It is important to say that the countries that signaled their opposition to the asymmetric flow of information in the international system were the same that repeated and deepened the information control in their internal scenario, especially in dictatorship contexts. Therefore, in Latin America the initiatives of communicative rebellion of the 70s were mostly unrelated with the incipient anti-hegemony proposed by the national states in front of the world order of information.

In those years marginal appropriations found the European inspiration for free radio coming from the rebellious transmission of young people who questioned the monopoly of public media during the post war times. The idea of *free media* referred to the occupation of the radio dial without permission, to listen to music, experiment with new formats or only to sell used jeans. Its climax happened in Italy between 1976 and 1977 when they were liberated by the Italian Constitutional Tribunal. One

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8 A theological catholic current of Marxist inspiration which based its option on the poor and excluded and the religion as the base of political struggle. It disseminated in Latin America through the ecclesiastic communities of bases. (CEBs).

example is Radio Alice in Bologna which, after having supported a popular uprising of more than 15.000 was invaded and suspended, but this model served as an example and was reproduced in several countries of Latin America during the student's movements (Souza, 1996).

In 1983 the World Association of Communist Radios (AMARC) institutionalized the radio rebellion and incorporated cultural and educative purposes. To reflect this more social than free distinction of use, they adopted the term community which was used by radio stations inspired in multicultural liberalism<sup>9</sup> from the United States and Canada (Cogo, 1998; Paiva y Sodr , 2002; Peruzzo, 1998; Vigil 2004).

The term *community media* found strong support in the Latin American neighborhood radio stations. They multiplied as an expression of the social demands of the periphery of large centers and since then, the term free and community radio became synonymous. The idea of geographically localized media, technically limited, marginal in the use of the dial and linked to poverty and scarcity prevailed (Alfaro, 1999; Cogo, 1998; Paiva y Sodr , 2002; Peruzzo, 1998; Rolim, 2008; Urribarri, 2009, Vigil 2003 and 2004).

In the 1990s there was a boom of community radio stations linked to the demands of political and social democratization emerging from the reappearance of the civil society confronting dictatorships (Lima, 2009). The groups defending communication were trying to unite their demands to the process and widen it from the idea of *democratization of the communication media* by associating community with participation and plurality. The term synthesized a heterogeneous movement as a reflection of the demands for the redistribution of the dial. In general it ended up designating a wide variety of actors and formats although it was always associated with a prescriptive model for the development of values of participation, pluralism and democracy.

Another attempt to associate the experiences of community media with ideal concepts was with the notion of citizenship in order to affirm the commitment of alternative production with collective objectives for the transformation of their realities (Alfaro, 1999). But little by little this notion became operational because it was mistaken with citizens' concepts linked to mass media without an anti-establishment content.

Community radio stations also expressed the resistance of the new social movements and their communicative claims, such as feminists, homosexuals, indigenous populations and blacks, among others and for whom the notion of media pluralism forces the expansion of the term community beyond the geography such as Way  and Mayan radio stations, which do not recognize conventional borders (Vigil, 2005).

Since the beginning of the 21st century it was evident that an important part of these radio stations was an expression of subaltern individual demands that were not necessarily linked to the collective struggles (Lopes, 2005; Lima y Lopes, 2008). They shared the increase of poverty, unemployment and living in marginal communities; but their objective was to exploit the informal market of communications.

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<sup>9</sup> To see more about multicultural liberalism and communitarism see: Kymlicka, W (1996). Multicultural citizenship. Barcelona: Paid s. Taylor, C. (2009). Multiculturalismo. M xico: Fondo de Cultura Econ mica.

The small and micro communication enterprises (PYME) are part of the new phenomenon since they reconstruct the opposition to hegemony from the idea of commercial struggle for the audience. Despite not being included in a paradigm of communicative transformation in the practice they end up by getting confused and confront repression problems very similar to the “authentic communitarian” generating an operative difficulty of distinction (Lopes, 2005).

The confusion extends with the digitalization phenomena and the closing of concurrency in the sector where other commercial mass media linked to emergent economic groups search for support of their commercial struggles in anti-hegemonic arguments, changes in structures, discussing the oligopoly appropriations and demanding a reordering of the barriers and rules. But their adhesion to media struggles is still limited by their search for mercantile use of the communicative potential.

The notion of *non-profit private media* seeks to frame the concept in a nominally differentiated dimension of the mercantile and the non-state. This concept, still in development incorporates the union, proletarian, free and communitarian media among others, but also the religious and political ones which are part of the phenomenon and are still entangled under the generalized idea of “communitarian media”.

The universe becomes even more complex with the expansion of the term communitarian media to other languages as are, audiovisual (films, videos, photography) especially with the appearance of communitarian television, taken from cine forums, software production, telematic nets as the groups of free software and the virtual communities which use Internet in the configuration of *a digital media activism*.

The significant decrease of the cost and the technological tools of Access, production and distribution have allowed new and greater anti-hegemonic uses via telematic and media nets, generating resistance identities and global nets and making ICTs powerful allies in concrete struggles of information guerrillas (Castells, 2006).

The communicative rebellion movements and media activism incorporated new topics, languages and struggles such as free software movements, independent films or cyberspace occupation by resistance. The anti-information agencies also emerge such as the phenomenon of promotion of the right to access to information of *Wikileaks*<sup>10</sup>, or the collective of independent media with anarchist inspiration *Indymedia*, organization networks and virtual citizens’ protests such as *Avaaz*, which organizes mobilization from the web or communication observatories for social control and defense of human rights.

This type of action became evident since the World Summits of the Information Society (2003 and 2005) led by the International Telecommunication Union (UIT) with an unquestionable entrepreneurial hegemony. In this scenario, marginal groups such as *Communications Rights for Information Society* (CRIS), tried to construct a political activism and to be acknowledged as relevant actors in the definition of ICTs policies (Selaime y Lima, 2004).

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10 International media organization of liberal inspiration which defends the free access of citizens to public and governmental information which affect their lives.

Since then, the frontiers of action have expanded from the alternative production to political dispute to defining the sense and distribution of media (Wisbord, 2010). This boom of media resistance includes new strategies and struggles, actualizes the debate, promotes more visibility of the topic and renews the opportunity of incidence of these actors. But it also dilutes the resistances, multiplies the actors and strategies and questions a single conceptual definition of the transformation agent.

These ambiguities of our tortillas are present in Latin America where militancy headed to open Windows of political opportunities in leftist democratic turnovers. The bet is to take advantage of possible ruptures in the media political dynamics and entrepreneurial alliances in order to advance in regulatory frames which favor progressive communicative struggles (Moraes, 2009). Nevertheless, the possibilities of links with institutionalized power generate new ways of interaction and accommodation and a series of questions and dilemmas within the movement. Additionally, the attempts to turn over the media concentration tortilla produced a reaction from conservative civil society which, under the argument of the defense of the freedom of speech, made possible the appearance of organizations such as the Millenium Institute in Brazil or Televisa Foundation in Mexico, both of entrepreneurial origin which legitimate as non-profit civil society to interfere in the topic of media from another social position.

The historical turns transform the scenario of the struggles in defense of the potential of communication into a highly dynamic polysemic universe with contradiction in some cases where it is necessary to go beyond the apparent side. Therefore, the question is, is there a single legitimate tortilla in defense of the paradigm of communicative transformation? Or, is it an arepa or a beijú?

## **Conceptual recipes**

Some theoretical efforts have tried to decrease the ambiguities and confusion in the way to prepare arepas, beijús and tortillas. The problem of defining the social actor of communication emerged since the 1970s.. When the specialists advised participation in the design of the Communication National Policies (PNC) beyond the ministries and governmental agencies, it was necessary to describe who participated. Some evoked the representatives of the class conflict such as parties and unions (Schiller, 1976). But the most common was to exclude that “other” unnamed or understood actor even in referent documents such as the MacBride Report (1980).

As the polarized scenario of the Cold War started to melt while free neo-liberalism began to advance, *civil society* was made visible as a political actor, still marginal, in the media participation in relation with the State and the Market.

In countries that suffered dictatorial moments such as Brazil and Argentina or those which experienced long authoritarian governments such as Mexico, the idea of civil society was created first in dichotomy with the military or state society. In the re-democratization processes the new actor was linked as representatives of “the good”. Combative and transformative, they would become porters of the values necessary for the Democratic State. In the communicative struggles it reflected in the organization of the first forums and fronts demanding media democratization (Olvera, 2001; Ramos, 2007; De la Selva, 2009).

As part of the tradition of the Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci, this vision understood civil society as an extension of the State and therefore, as part of the struggles for hegemony, the process by which a social class achieves the ideological unification which maintains a non-hegemonic block united. The Gramscian vision was fundamental in identification of communication as a permanent battle for the political-ideological leadership and a space for mediation forces (Brittos, 2009; Coutinho, 2003; Moraes, 2009).

As neoliberal policies consolidated in the sector during the 90s, the concept incorporated notions such as the Third Sector. Of a more liberal and fragmented acting vision this perspective was framed in a more conciliatory tone, as an organic complement between the sectors for the construction of social and political agreements. The character of the civil society rebellion was transmuted to an institutionalized dimension with emphasis in negotiation strategies (Cohen and Arato, 2002). Even more liberalized meanings were promoted through conveying a generalization and dispersion of its combative content in the atomized individuals (Alexander, 1993 and 1998). Other theoretical constructions incorporate new terms, such as Social capital to design the confidence nets (Putnam, 1993) and this way the task of defining a single recipe to make tortillas, arepas or beijús becomes more complex. To differentiate from those ambiguities, some authors chose terms more linked to the resistance and protest as are the social movements as evidenced by the literature (Maya, 2005; McAdam, 1996; Tilly, 2009).

While some link the new media organizations with the Gramscian civil society (Brittos, 2009; Moraes, 2009; Peruzzo, 2008; Ramos, 2007), others decide to vindicate the citizen's pluralism expanded to the communicative rights evoking Bobbio and the Habermasian notion of public space (Bisbal, 2009; Canizales, 2007; Waisbord, 2010). And if the new non-governmental communicative organizations are the portrait of non-critical and de-ideologized depolitization of the neoliberal third sector (Ramos, 2007), they can also reveal the topic of communication becoming part of that of citizenship incorporated to the democratic civilian culture.

Other names are evoked to designate rebellious struggles such as *communicational guerrillas* (Castells, 2006) or *radical alternative media* (Downing, 2002). There are also others who prefer a new organized communicational social movement which has the communicational spaces and its new technologies as a specific flag (Gohn, 2009; Sasel, 2010) and also articulate around a *media activism* (Waisbord, 2010).

In the attempt to understand this phenomenon in a contemporary way the vision of Cohen and Arato (2002) seems important. They updated the concept of Civil Society from two dimensions: one self-creative and the other institutionalized. The first would be related to the self-creation of social networks which articulate around a radical utopia and the civil disobedience which approaches the idea of social movements as opposition groups. The institutionalized dimension refers to institutional answers and forms of these groups in mediating and negotiating political participation with the state and the market. The tensions between these two dimensions would be essential for understanding identity, practical and theoretical conflicts in the constitution and definition of anti-hegemonic blocks. The term admits an institutionalized civil society and it also tries to preserve the idea of the movements as the element which activates

confrontation. This civil society understood as heterogeneous and dynamic and with more than a single objective, this plural civil society keeps maintaining a promise of critical relation with the political and economic systems and continues to be a referent of democratic ideals (Olvera, 2001).

If there is not a unique recipe, this theoretical solution can be complemented with the proposal of Castells (2006) of understanding the reactions and answers starting with the terms they use to refer to themselves and that their practices and speeches are their self-definition (Castells, 2006). This author proposes an analysis which characterizes the actors from their own interaction dynamics and processes. The identification would be given from the speeches in terms of how they refer to those considered their adversaries and as well as their societal goal.

In this model the alliances between the different groups which create and legitimize a social demand such as communication reveal a latent tension between non-homogenous actors which come together from their common position of exclusion and frustration of their demands, isolated in front of the institutional policies (Laclau, 2006). The nearer their goals the more they establish benefit relations and common struggle.

In the attempt to construct an operational concept which articulates these proposals without losing the vision of the political economy of communication one takes the anti-hegemonic struggle as a discursive construction which articulates and differentiates from other struggles from the class position. In the specific case of communication we can distinguish the spokesmen actors of the transformation paradigm from their subaltern condition and their exclusion from the communicative resources from which they interact to generate collective identities and resistance energies.

Communicative militancy is like the practical operation of reactions of those excluded from the production, distribution and regulation of media contents. Therefore they are social plural identities which articulate from a marginal position in relation to the property of the media. The concept is updated when exclusion is related to other non-hegemonic social positions such as gender and ethnicity. (Mosco, 1996)

The political actors that operationalize defense of the communicative transformation would be the marginal actors of media production ways which in response to different contexts and scenarios can be called civil society, social movements, communicative guerrillas, and so on.

The notion of class struggle aims at highlighting that defense of the transformation paradigm is not an *a priori* election of values. It is established as a function of their excluded position and therefore, of a common need for re-structuring of the media sector. Nevertheless this does not mean that they agree about how different it should be and neither do they necessarily defend the same model of change nor identify themselves as allies.

The connection to transforming communicative potential allows for an aggregation of contemporary historical models of tortillas of liberal pluralist inspiration, as well as socialist arepas and maybe some types of reformist bejús. But all of them have a

sense of change and establish very different action dynamics. These differences vary according to their understanding of the depth of the desired change but all of them allow subversion of the uses, senses and meanings of the communicative potentials beyond the technological vision. So we can say that the transformation paradigm has an *idealist* and a *structural* dimension which guides, differentiates and articulates them in a dynamic way.

The idealist dimension heads to universal values associating possibilities of humanization and horizontality of mediations with ideals such as freedom, justice and equity. Its proposal of change would be more focused on a re-signification of the mercantile communicative production relating it to the state of law, human rights and democracy. Its proposal seeks political and cultural horizons along with more humanized, participant and emancipating uses.

The structural notion digs criticism deep into the matrixes which are the foundations upon of technical production. Its effort are focused on the construction of other models of society and communication is understood as inserted in other social struggles. Under the transformation paradigm these dimensions articulate a common identity among actors with a variety of projects for change.

In a general way, the capacity to engender change depends on the ability to mutate their particular demands and projects into a collective action by widening their chain of alliances from dynamic and complex articulation processes and internal negotiation (Diani y McAdam, 2003).

This epistemic position intends to assess the conceptions that determine an idealized, utopian sense of the communicative struggles. They are products of historical, social, political and economic concrete contexts. Whichever name is used, the proposal is to start an analysis that respects the perspective of the actor and acknowledges that each practice expresses symptoms of dissatisfaction and significant clues of new social conflicts. But they are the results of different contextual configurations. The struggle models are defined in complex and dynamic processes between pairs with convergent and heterogeneous interests that operate internal articulation games of their subaltern demands. The rescue of the class struggle perspective intends to emphasize the basic unit, although not all those answers are part of the same struggles, nor are they social resistance and transformation embryos. While one person may prefer arepas or *beijús*, it is important to understand that all represent regional diversity.

## **Differences between arepas, tortillas and beijús**

The possible combinations of our foods are almost endless. They depend on the quality of the base flour, the processes and the preparation times and the selected stuffing. And without a unique recipe it is not simple to establish precise definitions. So, the construction of this historical menu is a rather limited attempt, but it is necessary to typify and categorize so many varieties and ambiguities of the communicative struggle.

From re-reading the history of these experiences and concepts, eight observation dimensions were built: the beginnings of the model, its political-philosophical inspirations, the self-reference names, their public enemies, the societal goal, the

intensity of the desired change, social localization and the prioritized strategies. From the combination of these ingredients we could try a menu of identified types: simple revolutionary arepas or with integrated revolutionary stuffing, educational and democratic-liberal tortillas (with traditional, multicultural or human rights flavor), and liberal-integrated or self-interested bejús.

## **Revolutionaries**

These are communicative appropriations which emphasize structural change and are part of wider social struggles. The first media were created to strengthen the revolutionary struggles at the beginning of the last century. It includes a wide variety of groups of anarchist, socialist and communist inspiration, heirs to the experiences of the traditional workers movements. Historically they were strongly repressed and exterminated. Now, they face the challenge to coming to life again.

They insist on calling themselves collectives, guerillas or communes and they prioritize self-management. They evoke subversive struggles and radical opposition to the dominant order. Their enemies are the capitalistic system and those political regimes that support it. The intensity of change in this opposition is radical. It would not be an exaggeration to say that experiences such as ANMCLA and IndyMedia are not too far from this type.

This group is subdivided into the integrated revolutionaries who decide to link their struggles to overthrowing the state. In general they mix so much to the state action that their criteria of autonomy and Independence is put under doubt as differential of the communitarian media. These days they can serve as a reading key to understand more radical and sectarian groups.

## **Educational**

This refers to the alternative uses of communication as a popular formation and mobilization proposal. They are linked mostly to the idealist dimension of the transformation paradigm although they also aim at the need of structural changes. They were born with the emancipator experiences inserted in the Theology of Liberation in Latin America. The enemy, which was the authoritarian state at first, was replaced with the notion of a war against social inequities, sometimes personified as North American imperialism. Their identity is very linked to the idea of popular, base or communitarian movements which brings them close to the revolutionary workers struggles. But their internal management practices tend to choose private property and an institutionalized and hierarchical directive control. They are nearer to negotiation mechanisms than to protest. They are subaltern and their societal goal affirms ideals of justice, equity and rights. We could link these media with initiatives such as ALER, the Red Fe y Alegría as well as with many radio stations which inspired the FARCO and the ERBOL.

## **Democratic-pluralists**

They are also linked to the transformation paradigm from its idealist dimension. They try to correlate subaltern appropriation with the values that support the State of Law

and democracy. Philosophically they approach the renewed theories of egalitarian and democratic radicalization liberalism going for democratic values as a social goal. But we suspect that this line divides into two generations. The first one which was constituted during the re-democratization processes in countries such as Brazil, Argentina and Mexico; they try to evoke the values of militancy and articulation of wide fronts against the diffuse and phantom enemy: the dictatorship. They affirm values such as participation and democracy and they tend to choose institutionalized practices of negotiation and incidence of public policies which emphasize the possible pragmatic conquests, the “Guerra de guerrillas”, strategic alliances with punctual external actors and they aim at looking at the future. They also occupy a subaltern but not antagonistic social localization and they are nearer the spheres of power than to the resistance movements.

A new generation, already established during the times of institutionalized democracy searches for legitimacy in the legal frames. But its reference to legality aims at affirming the promotion, guarantee and widening of rights and especially the human right to communication as a specific demand. In general, they refer to notions of citizenship and public sphere and they differentiate from the Market and from the State assuming they represent the Civil Society. Its enemy tends to be identified with the neoliberal model and the media concentration. The radio stations linked to AMARC, *Wikileaks*, and the Observatories of the Right to Communication are some of examples of this group.

### **Integrated- liberals**

They are also linked to the egalitarian liberals in defense of rights and freedom of speech and the social use of new technologies. But they stay apart from the transformation paradigm in its idealistic and structural dimensions since its societal goal is limited to the conservation and improvement of the established order. So they would be better located as defendants of the paradigm of systemic integration. Nevertheless they tend to be confused with the other actors, especially those who use the term Civil Society. They are present under the form of NGOs,, foundations, institutes, civil associations and others and in general, they represent the interests of hegemonic power groups. Their capacity to respond to the private hegemonic model is limited or almost non-existent and prone to a conservative and reactionary defense. Their enemies are those who promote changes in the *statu quo* and their defense of freedom of expression tends to legitimate and strengthen dominant practices and they do not identify themselves in a subaltern position. But in their discourse appealing to rights they tend to mimic or blend with the democratic-pluralist representations and struggles. The Millennium Institute in Brazil, the Televisa Foundation in Mexico and initiatives of Digital Inclusion of UIT are some of the expressions of this type.

### **Self interested**

They recognize that part of the subaltern appropriations of communication vindicate a limited libertarian potential to the segmented interests of specific groups or individual actors. They also tend to evoke the principles of an economic liberalism but seen from the non-hegemonic sectors. They generally act in peripheral sectors, such as the neighborhood community radio stations of commercial use. These uses promote a great demanding base of transformation in the distribution of the media property,

while attacking the axis of media business because they struggle for audiences. To a great extent they promote more pluralism in the operation of the spectrum and they suffer mechanisms of repression which link them to the other actors of the structural dimension of the transformation paradigm. But that nearness does not mean a wider relation with the idealist dimension of change nor collective or social objectives. They have difficulties generating an articulated collective identity and they react in a fragmented way or try to establish points of contact or agreement with other matrix with which they mix, mimic and blend. Those which call themselves small or micro communicative enterprises are a few and recent but there are specific associations of “entrepreneurial communitarian media in Brazil and Argentina.

As a synthesis of this embryonic construction please consult the following chart:

### Typology of actors in the communicative struggle

<b>Matrix</b>	<b>Revolutionary</b>	<b>Educational</b>	<b>Democratic-pluralist</b>	<b>Liberal-integrated</b>	<b>Self interested</b>
<b>Beginnings</b>	1920-1960	1960-1970	1980-2000	First decade of the 21st century	First decade of the 21st century
<b>Political Inspiration</b>	Anarchism, communism, socialist	CEBS, Theology of liberation	Democratic radicalization, egalitarian liberalism multiculturalist	Economic liberalism	Economic liberalism
<b>Self-reference</b>	Social movement or guerrillas and communes	Popular, social or alternative movement	Organized society, democratic, activist fronts	Civil society, third sector, citizens	Civil society
<b>Enemies</b>	Capitalism and/or imperialism	Inequities and imperialism	and Neo-liberalism and imperialism	Systemic failure Access structural change	Oligopoly of concentration and n
<b>Societal goal</b>	Radical re-foundation	Justice, reform equity	Public democratic sphere reform	Maintenance of order	Economic solvency
<b>Change</b>	Radical	Reform	Reform	Inexistent (Conservatism)	Re-accommodation
<b>Social localization</b>	Antagonistic	Peripheral	Peripheral	Hegemonic	Peripheral
<b>Tactics and strategies</b>	Conflict	Negotiation	Negotiation	Conservatism imposition	Negotiation

Figure 1. Source: Elaborated by the author

## **Still undefined flavors**

Even though recipes try to establish rules and procedures aiming at a unity in the communicative struggle in practice, the varied forms and tastes establishing their own combination dynamics and sometimes very creative conclusions.

For example, the communitarian radios of Argentina succeeded in forming the Coalition for Democratic Radio diffusion in Argentina. Overcoming internal differences, they generated 21 points of programmatic consensus, the reservation of one third of the spectrum for “non-profit private media” and defending it they confronted the mercantile sector.

In Brazil, the topic of the regulation of communitarian media continues to be a paralyzed legal debate while the leadership position is disputed by internal political groups within the Brazilian Association of Communitarian Radios (Abraço) which groups flours of all kinds; by the Amarc-Brazil with 50 affiliates along with other entities such as the Association of Catholic Communitarian Radios (ARCARC) or the National Union of Communitarian Radio Enterprises (SINERC). Lacking a movement able to express the force of the 20 thousand communitarian radio stations existing in the country, the communitarian media sector lives with one of the most limited and repressive legislation about this topic (Amar, 2009: OEA. 2009). More than seven thousand communitarian communicators must respond to legal sentences for broadcasting without permission and in the eight years of Lula’s progressive administration more than 5000 radio stations were closed and their transmitters confiscated. This happened despite efforts by this heterogeneous and little cohesive “civil society” to convene a Commission Pro-Conference to put pressure on the State to convene a public consultancy for mediation with the entrepreneurs with a view to ensuring political reforms in the sector. One year later, the 600 proposals and recommendations produced during the debate, remained written on the paper and the society could not get together again.

In Venezuela the fragmentation and the absence of a wide and inter-sector network is even more evident. While the National Association of Free and Alternative Communitarian Media (ANMCLA) defends the critical reinforcement of the “revolutionary process” with the aim of getting 100% of the spectrum for the collectives, communes and communicational guerrillas; the World Association of Communitarian Radios (AMARC-ALC) and NGOs such as Provea denounce threats against freedom of expression in the country. Furthermore, the Net Fe y Alegría tries to live critically with both sides. From Bolivia, the nearness of the state to indigenous broadcasts also opposes new and old communicative groups struggling for the legitimate and authentic dispute for the “other communication”.

The Mexican case accumulates one defeat after the other and even harsher ruptures. From the convocation of the government to the “Dialogue Tables” to construct a new Media Law which resulted in the “Televisa Law” (2006), part of the movement is still trying to generate political-institutional fronts and negotiations and others confront the task of counting the assassinated communicators and denouncing the violence suffered through cases in international courts. The most discredited operate underground and approach rebellious groups such as the Zapatistas in Chiapas.

This diversity of combinations illustrates the varied organizational and programmatic compositions that seem to indicate the fact that although all these communitarian media are excluded from mainstream media property, it is not enough to achieve an organic, strategic unity. It seems that philosophical heritage and the experience and learning of these actors are still significant for the conformation of their mechanisms and alliance dynamics and internal articulations. They are the ones that define the possibilities for interactions, the establishment of common objectives and the definitions of strategies for collective representations.

In their struggle for statutory significant changes these groups need to negotiate internally their convergence points, define their adversaries and allies and establish collective goals. But for this, they need to establish closeness dynamics. Even in these processes other factors may interfere, such as leadership, organizational structures; and internal alliances only seem to be possible when there are more similarities than differences in challenges and objectives.

In the interpretation of the types exposed in the synthesis chart we can infer that it is more possible that the type of pluralist-democratic tortillas identify with one another and maybe are able to establish Alliance mechanisms with the educational ones which due to their moderate vision tend to establish wider articulations with varied segments. Both share the philosophical bases, the social position, they have common enemies and close societal projects. The revolutionary arepas, depending on the type, can establish transitory links with those groups. But their widest project of social change will require more committed behavior.

The separation from other closer social pairs seems to be more radical in the integrated revolutionary arepas. Their option to connect with the project of overthrowing the state produces mixings which make their relations with other groups difficult. This would explain some more isolated behavior, such as revolutionary sectors in Venezuela gathered as cooptation cases.

Due to their adhesion and commitment with order, the *beijús* of systemic integration cannot widen their links beyond similar actors. The self-interested groups form alliances which allow them to achieve their objectives at the lowest cost, independent of their allies' ideological positions.

It is therefore apparent that there is not an *a priori* or innate commitment to defending the "other communication". Under this supposedly same cause, strategic and conceptual differences emerge. It is important to catalog the history, self-definition and practices of these groups in order to understand these distinctions which support the main struggles in the continent. The hypothesis is that these differentiated origins are the bases for internal disputes and barriers for the generation of a unified Latin American movement.

What we can see is the contemporary need to construct a complete communicative potential evoking and vindicating conscious strategic unity for the construction of an integral and radical transformation paradigm. Integral, because it incorporates distant ideological horizons which approximate alternative communicative uses and products to values constructed in social struggles and which represent conquests of humanity and the structural needs of change as a *sine qua non* condition for development of the

change project. And radical, because it would be deeply committed to the search of communication and society projects radically supported in established utopian values. But the composition of which prioritized values would be defined in the agreements and alliances articulated by marginal actors.

In short, if we are going to have tortillas, arepas or *beijús* it will depend on the game the actors are willing to play. The problem is that while we do not reach a definition, the craving for “another communication” is still there. And if those hungry actors are really willing to participate in the distribution of the cake of digital convergence, they must hurry in overcoming differences, jealousy and internal divergences. On the other side of the table, the hunger of the market and the State seem to be uncontrolled.

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