


# **Militant Direct Action and Trabalho de Base, the experience of Rio de Janeiro**



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 COMPREENDER  
AS ESTRUTURAS SOCIAIS  
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SE NÃO INTERFERIR



**Introducing direct action**





**“Direct action is a form of political action that takes place outside the electoral system. [It] takes place when a social movement puts in practice on its own its politics [and its] actions of fight against the domination and exploration”**

**(Universidade Popular and Movimento dos Trabalhadores Desempregados-RJ 2010: 77)**

- **Prefigurative (Graeber 2009)**
- **Empowering people (Bookchin 2004; Bookchin 1988)**
- **Beyond civil disobedience (Graeber 2009; Best 2012)**
- **Infectious transformative experience (Graeber 2009)**



***trabalho de base* - grassroots work**

**community work in neighbourhoods, workplaces,  
schools/universities, etc.**

***pra rua* - taking the streets**

**Static demonstrations, going to the streets, marching, etc**

***combatividade* - combactivity**

**“not to obey [the] capitalist system’s law” (Universidade**

**Popular and Movimento dos Trabalhadores Desempregados-  
RJ 2010: 76)**

**→ militant direct action**

**Militant direct action**

**“The police cannot think of a pattern to handle the situation. They fail to think and they uncontrollably rebuke and this is clear to everyone. They cannot longer hide how they act when they are affronted, when their power is threatened.”**

**“what is destroying? Since you live in a State in which you demonstrate and you are not heard...”**



**Militant direct action was effective**

**State felt threaten → police repression**

**“Sem violencia” - “Without violence” →**

**“Sem moralismo” - “Without moralism”**

**Militant direct action to expose the role of the State**

**Militant direct actions = ‘propaganda of the deed’,  
able to dialogue**

# **The Black Bloc experience in Rio de Janeiro**

**Aimed to:**

- refrain police from violence**
- self-defence**
- inspire *combatividade***
- denounce capitalism**

**1. popular support**

**2. fully-cognizant political decision - part of the movements'  
own strategy**

**Link with favela's resistance practices**

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**Beyond the criminology approach and the  
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counter-violence**

**Militant direct action as criminal act** (Freilich, Almanzar and Rivera 1999; Lindblom and Jacobsson 2014; Gohn 2015)

“Criminology is particularly comfortable when studying marginalized communities and powerless individuals, who are perceived as needy of its missionary zeal and philanthropic support. [...]. Political violence, when exercised from above as well as from below, takes salvation and redemption in its own hands, thus making philanthropic efforts redundant”  
(Ruggiero 2005: 304)

**Militant direct action is part of a repertoire of political actions that social movements use in response to state violence and repression, in the desperate need to build social change.**



**Militant direct action as right to resistance (Locke 1988)**

**Nilo Batista, ex-governor of the State of Rio de Janeiro, affirmed: “if I am the target of an illegal imprisonment, I have the right to resist. If the police are acting illegally against me, I have the right to resist” (Jornal A Nova Democracia 2013)**

**Limiting concept as rights, justice, legal/illegal are framed by the power**

# **Emancipatory collective counter-violence**

- 1. a result of a collective and coordinated act**
  - 2. aimed at liberation and emancipation**
  - 3. uses counter-violence against a system of domination**
- 
- performed through militant direct action**
  - aimed at building popular power**
  - militant direct action is prefigurative in a weak form**

**The importance of *trabalho de base***

**Social revolution “[is] the kind of thing we see  
in play writing; the first act introduces the  
characters and the plot, in the second act the  
plot and characters are developed as the play  
strives to hold the audience’s attention. In the  
final act good and evil have their dramatic  
confrontation and resolution”**

**(Alinsky 1971: xx)**

- constructive direct action (Gordon 2008), cracks in the system (Holloway 2010b), power to create (Bookchin 1988)**
- links with liberation theology**
- construction of consciousness through the combination of action and reflection, in a dialectic of praxis and theory (Freire 1983)**
- in specific communities (low-income neighbourhoods, work places, and study-places)**
- prolonged temporal dimension and require a long-term commitment by activists to the community**

**Some conclusions**

**“A politics of protest is not a politics at all. It occurs within parameters set by the prevailing social system and merely responds to remediable ills, often mere symptoms, instead of challenging the social order as such”**

**(Bookchin 2015: 171)**



**In core countries “violent tactics are often ignored, as most protestors prefer to embrace nonviolence: mainstream observers hesitate to remind young generations of activists that violence is a possibility, and often a successful tactic”**

**(Jasper 2014: 182-183)**

**“The debate around ‘violence’ and  
‘nonviolence’ may itself be constricting our  
thinking” (Starhawk 2001: np)**

**“The more confrontational the tactics, the  
more clear the message needs to be, and the  
more we need to be sure we have a base of  
support for the tactics we employ”  
(Starhawk 2001: np)**

## ***Trabalho de base***

**A bridge between the militants and other players whose aspirations, dilemmas and enemies are similar. Activists chose their allies, building solidarity links.**

## ***Militant directs action***

**Reinforce the existence of a class struggle:  
showing violence towards symbols of capital  
and gaining more and more attention in the  
corporate media is a strategy to  
inconvenience those living comfortably over  
the exploitation of the poor.**



A BARRICADA FECHA

A RUA PARA ABRIR

NOVOS CAMINHOS