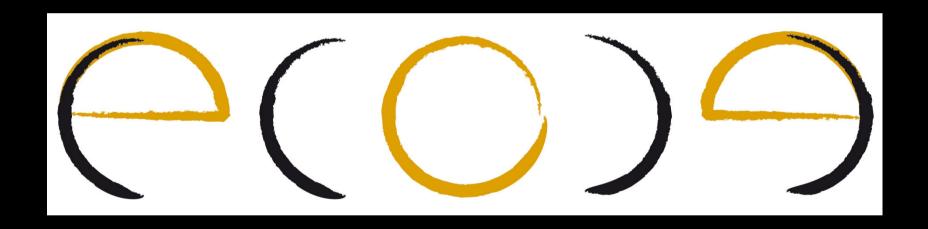
Militant Direct Action and Trabalho de Base, the experience of Rio de Janeiro



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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



Aimed to:

- refrain police from violence
- self-defence
- inspire combactividade
- denounce capitalism
- 1. popular support
- 2. fully-cognizant political decision part of the movements' own strategy

Link with favela's resistance practices

Sparks the popular imagination

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Beyond the criminology approach and the right to resistance: emancipatory collective 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.

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