

Autonomist political culture in Brazil and the Peoples' Global Action Oral History Project

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Abstract

This article presents preliminary results of the Peoples' Global Action Oral History Project in Brazil and shows how Peoples' Global Action (PGA) contributed to the renewal and development of an autonomist political culture within the Brazilian left. Strong at the beginning of the 20th century, autonomist political culture entered in a crisis in Brazil in the 1930s and almost disappeared, until it began to re-emerge in the late 1970s. Despite still being a small minority within the Brazilian left today, autonomist political culture has been gaining ground in the country in the last decades and gained national visibility in the wave of street protests that swept Brazil in June, 2013. Based on interviews carried out with activists involved with actions inspired by PGA in Brazil, the authors intend to show how PGA contributed to the development of an autonomist political culture in the country.

Keywords: Peoples' Global Action; June 2013; autonomism; MPL; anti-globalization movement; Brazilian left; political culture; oral history.

This article has two objectives. The first one is to present some preliminary results of the Peoples' Global Action Oral History Project in Brazil. The second one is to show how Peoples' Global Action (PGA) contributed to the renewal and further development of a specific political culture within the Brazilian left, which we call an autonomist political culture. This was the most important political culture in the very beginning of the Brazilian left, when the nascent Brazilian labour movement was dominated by anarchism and revolutionary syndicalism in early 20th century (Toledo 2004), but it entered in a serious crisis in the 1930s and almost disappeared between the 1940s and the 1960s, until it began to re-emerge at the end of the 1970s. Despite never regaining the strength it had in the beginning of the 20th century, and still being a small minority within the Brazilian left today, autonomist political culture has been gaining ground in the country in the last decades and finally gained national visibility in the wave of massive street protests that swept Brazil in June, 2013. Based on interviews carried out with activists involved with actions inspired by PGA in Brazil at the beginning of 21st century, we intend to show how PGA contributed to this renewal and strengthening of autonomist political culture in the country.

By autonomist political culture – or simply “autonomism” – we mean a group of representations and practices of political action inscribed in the tradition of the so-called anti-authoritarian/libertarian socialisms. This political culture, like all others, is made up of a series of elements that are basically organized around 1)

a particular philosophical substratum; 2) the construction of a discourse about the past, therefore a memory of its own; and 3) the register of its existence in the present (Berstein 2009). Thus, for the purpose of our argument, “autonomism” here does not refer to a specific historical experience, but to a series of elements that periodically emerge or submerge in the political scene as results of numerous conjunctural determinations. These determinations are not restricted to the configurations of social and economic relations at a given moment – although they are also grounded on these instances. Therefore, we are talking about a long-term political culture which has elements present in different political traditions throughout 19th and 20th centuries but is not restricted to any particular historical experience. It’s possible to identify elements of this autonomist political culture, for example, in classical anarchism and revolutionary syndicalism in Europe and the Americas in late 19th century and early 20th century; in council communism in Europe in the beginning of the 20th century; in the European autonomist movements of the 1970s and 1980s; and in neozapatismo throughout the world in the 1990s and beginning of 21st century.

Based on a qualitative analyzes of seven of the twelve interviews we conducted with activists and former activists who were directly involved with actions inspired by PGA in Brazil in the beginning of the 21st century, we were able to identify a connection between these actions and the renewal and development of an autonomist political culture in Brazil, which remains restricted to a small minority within the Brazilian left. As a shared philosophical substratum and reconstituted past, it’s possible to see in the testimonies we collected the presence of an anarchism renewed by political and intellectual traditions coming from the post-May 68 context – post-structuralism, ecology, indigenism, minorities, etc. – as well as references to heterodox and libertarian Marxisms. These references to older political traditions are renewed and reinterpreted in the context of the restructuring of capitalism from the 1970s onwards, the process of globalization intensified by the new communication technologies, as well as the crisis of the great narratives that make room for the so-called “underground memories” (Pollack 1989, 1992) or “frozen memories”, according to Assmann (2006).

In this sense, such a description is in line with other studies that also verify the contemporary (re)emergence of movements with an autonomist content, such as what Manfredonia (1999) calls “libertarian movements in the broad sense”, or what Tomás Ibáñez (2016) investigates based on the notions of “neoanarchism”, “post-anarchism” and “anarchism outside its own walls”.

In our research, we identify the following elements as central to the constitution of both discourses and practices of what we call an autonomist political culture: horizontalism, prefiguration, anti-capitalism and direct action. There are other, less general, elements, such as anti-hegemonism and anti-progressionism (in the sense of the regime of temporality), as well as a rich imagetic culture which, however, will not be addressed in this article.

The article is structured in five parts and a conclusion. In the first part, we will present the Peoples' Global Action Oral History Project (PGA Oral History), a

brief history of PGA and will describe the methodology used to collect the testimonies in Brazil.

In the second part, we will present and discuss the concept of political culture (Berstein 2003; Cefai 2001; Dutra 2002; Lichterman and Cefai 2006; Motta 2009, 2018; Rémond 1996). We see this concept as an interesting analytical tool to think about the reorganization of the Brazilian left at the end of the civil-military dictatorship that governed Brazil between 1964 and 1985, and the re-emergence of an autonomist political culture which will gain national visibility with the mass street protests in hundreds of Brazilian cities in June 2013, known as ‘the June 2013 Days’, which was the largest and most important cycle of protests in Brazil’s recent history. In June 2013, millions of people took to the streets in Brazil, in demonstrations that took place in hundreds of cities in all regions of the country. The detonator of the cycle of protests were the demonstrations organized in early June 2013 by the Free Fare Movement (MPL in the Portuguese acronym for “Movimento Passe Livre”) to fight against the increase in public transport fares in the city of São Paulo. The demonstrations were similar to those that occurred in a number of other countries at the beginning of the decade of 2010, such as Turkey, Spain, USA and Egypt. This international cycle of protests was marked by its contradictions, focus on the occupation of public spaces and practices of direct action and strong presence of social networks in organizational processes. It is estimated that in Brazil about 12% of the population participated in street protests (Ortellado 2017). In order to historically situate this reorganization of the Brazilian left at the end of the civil-military dictatorship, which opened space for the re-emergence of an autonomist political culture in Brazil, in the third part of the article we will present a panoramic overview of the history of the Brazilian left.

In the fourth part, we will present a brief history of PGA in Brazil, and in the fifth part, we will present some testimonies that support our claim that PGA contributed to the renewal and development of an autonomist political culture in Brazil.

1. The Peoples' Global Action Oral History Project in Brazil

The Peoples' Global Action Oral History Project is an initiative of activists and former activists linked to PGA, and proposes the constitution of a collection of testimonies of activists and former activists from movements around the world who have been in some way involved with PGA (Cox & Wood 2017)¹. The intention is that this collection can contribute to reflection about the struggles of the so-called “anti-globalization movement”, which emerged as an important political, social and cultural force from the mid-1990s onwards, inspired by the neozapatista uprising in Chiapas, Mexico, in 1994, and other struggles against

¹ The PGA Oral History Project was presented in a "Research Note" published by Laurence Cox and Lesley Wood in *Interface: a journal for and about social movements* in 2017. <http://www.interfacejournal.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Interface-9-1-Cox-and-Wood.pdf>. Last accessed on 4/16/2020.

neoliberal globalization throughout the world. The teams responsible for conducting the Project are composed of individuals belonging to academic and/or activist circles, and the Project is aimed primarily at an activist audience, instead of an academic one². The Project has volunteers working in several countries. The authors of this article are the ones working in Brazil, who carried out interviews between 2018 and 2019.

However, before we devote ourselves to the proposed objectives of this article, it's necessary to present a brief history of PGA.

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PGA was a worldwide network of social movements founded in 1998 which contributed to the renewal of anti-capitalist discourse and forms of protest through transnational campaigns and mobilizations³. The most visible face of these mobilizations were the Global Days of Action, when simultaneous protests were organized in several cities around the world in support of demonstrations against summit meetings of multilateral institutions responsible for driving the process of neoliberal globalization, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the group of the seven most industrialized countries in the world plus Russia (G8).

The foundation of PGA in 1998 was a direct consequence of the process of building a worldwide network of struggles against neoliberalism that began to be articulated by the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) from Mexico. In 1996, the Zapatistas invited their supporters and all those fighting against neoliberalism around the world to meet at the First Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and against Neoliberalism, held from July 27 to August 3 in five Zapatista communities in the state of Chiapas, Mexico. At the end of the meeting it was proposed the creation of a worldwide network of struggles against neoliberalism, which gained a more concrete shape during the Second Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and against Neoliberalism, held in Spain exactly one year later.

At the end of the Second Intercontinental Encounter, representatives of ten movements launched a call to discuss the creation of a coordination instrument to plan joint actions against the WTO, which would hold its second ministerial conference in May 1998 in Geneva. In response to the call, 300 delegates from 71 countries from all continents met in Geneva between February 23 and 25, 1998, to participate in PGA's founding conference.

² The Project also maintains a website: <http://pgaoralhistory.net>. Last accessed on 4/16/2020.

³ The history of PGA presented here is all based on Fiuza 2017, pp. 15-18. For visual records of PGA, see these two brief documentaries: <https://vimeo.com/173037314> and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=taJ2bszEi7M&fbclid=IwAR1AAiqwFttYlJ5N13o_ZcFRFSOQcmOvJW6PegkHTl5fvjB54X6nDBgue8Y. The first one produced by the German movement Degrowth about the international history of PGA; the second one produced by volunteers of Indymedia Brazil about the demonstration organized in São Paulo in response to PGA's call for a Global Day of Action on April 20, 2001.

From then on, PGA began to launch calls for simultaneous protest actions in various parts of the world against the institutions that promoted the advance of neoliberal globalization. The biggest and most famous Global Days of Action were June 18, 1999 (J18), when simultaneous actions were taken in 40 countries against the G8 meeting held in Cologne, Germany; November 30, 1999 (N30), when activists shut down the opening conference of the third WTO Ministerial Conference in Seattle, United States; September 26, 2000 (S26), when thousands of protesters surrounded the IMF and World Bank meeting in Prague, Czech Republic, accompanied by actions in 110 cities around the world; April 20, 2001 (A20), when activists protested against the creation of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) surrounding the Summit of the Americas in Quebec, Canada, while simultaneous protests were taking place in several countries across the continent; and July 20, 2001 (J20), when 300,000 activists gathered in the largest of all these demonstrations to protest against the G8 summit in Genoa, Italy.

Genoa, however, marked both the peak and the beginning of the decline of the major street demonstrations against neoliberal globalization. The September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the subsequent witch-hunt launched by the United States government put the most radical groups that opposed neoliberal globalization on the defensive and several of them demobilized.

It's important to note that PGA was not a political organization with its own activists, but rather a network designed to serve as a communication tool to coordinate actions carried out by local social movements in different parts of the world with similar goals (PGA 1997). So, it doesn't make sense to speak of PGA's actions in a given country, but rather of actions carried out by local activists inspired by global calls to action launched by PGA.

Given the very nature of PGA, it's also difficult to analyze its history in the same way as it's done with traditional social movements. PGA certainly has a date of birth (February, 1998), but it doesn't have a date of death. Many accounts coincide in affirming that the network entered a crisis after the September 11, 2001 attacks, but PGA meetings were organized in Europe as late as 2006 (PGA 2006), and a call for a Global Day of Action against the G8 meeting in Heiligendamm, Germany, was still issued in the name of PGA in 2007 (PGA 2007), even though the participation of movements from other parts of the world was scarce or even non-existent. Anyway, it's relatively safe to say that PGA ceased to exist after 2007, since there are no registers of activities of the network after this year.

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Given the profile of the PGA Oral History Project, concerns regarding technical aspects of research have not taken a central and/or systematic position. Basically, a call was made to collect testimonies from veterans who in some way had a connection with PGA. If interest arose in representing the Project in a country, the volunteer was sent a model script to conduct the interviews as well

as a model of informed consent form to be signed by the interviewees. Both documents could be adapted to local contexts.

We decided on oral history as a starting point for carrying out this project for a number of reasons. First, oral history is a very easy to use and low-cost method. Oral history can open up research fields and possibilities where traditional archival methods are more limited. Finally, oral history fits perfectly with the objectives of this activist research, since the pioneers of this methodology employed it as an instrument that extends beyond the university, precisely because it is not a tool that is only directed at the production of scientific knowledge (Thompson 1998, Portelli 1997, Alberti 1990, Amado and Ferreira 2006).

Throughout 2018 and 2019, the Project in Brazil has carried out a total of twelve interviews, each lasting an average of two hours. The transcriptions are still in progress, and we also intend to translate them before depositing the contribution in the PGA Oral History collection. The interviews were carried out with activists and former activists who acted/act and live in different regions of the country – Northeast, South, Southeast – and also with a person who was in Canada in the period when PGA was more active.

As a mechanism for selecting and building a non-probabilistic sampling of interviewees, partial snowball sampling was adopted as a method to reach the subjects and as a thermometer on what was the correct moment to stop the collection of testimonies. The ‘partial’, in this case, refers to the fact that the authors of the text have a certain insertion in activist circles and, as far as possible, we tried to contemplate representatives of the various matrices that make up the Brazilian autonomist political culture.

Between 2018 and 2019, we contacted activists and former activists from different “fronts”, so to speak, who participated in actions inspired by PGA in Brazil and, based on their suggestions, we carried out further interviews within that subgroup. Our selection criterion was guided by efforts to be inclusive of diversity of gender and race/ethnicity, although in practice we found it difficult not only to find women, but also to find female activists willing to participate in the Project. It is also worth mentioning that, although most of the time the invitation was well received by the activists we contacted, some men also refused to participate or didn’t answer our invitations.

The standard interview script was adapted to the Brazilian context, keeping the core questions, removing those that did not fit the local context, and including others that made more sense in the Brazilian context.

2. Political Culture: History of a Concept

As we wish to investigate the recent history of a certain political field, bearer of a certain imaginary (Baczko 1985; Castoriadis 1995), the concept of political culture is evident as a timely path. This is because, depending on the approach, it can show the imbrications between culture and material conditions of a social

movement or, more broadly, of a political tradition at a given historical moment. Using the concept of political culture while working with oral sources is particularly fruitful (Berstein 2009). The oral source, given its dynamism and simultaneity, demonstrates quite clearly the processes of constitution of political identities, the reasons for the engagements and the shared values, beyond the contradictions and points of tension always present, but better disguised or silenced in traditional sources.

The term 'political culture' appears as a category of analysis in the 1960s, gaining wide repercussion with the publication of the book *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Almond and Verba 1964), whose first edition dates from 1963. The authors, American political scientists, wanted to verify the extent to which cultural behavior and habits influenced the political systems of each country. The categorization they made was reductionist, as demonstrated by the strong criticism they received (Motta 2009). The authors established a hierarchical relationship between the different political cultures, so that the liberal democratic arrangement was placed as an ideal parameter for the others, which ended up attesting to an ethnocentric background to the concept of political culture as presented by Almond and Verba.

In the 1970s, with the crisis of the totalizing approaches, we see profound impacts in the field of social sciences. In history, as a reflex, we see the so-called “culturalist turn” (Motta 2009) which, together with the return of political history, opens up space for the recovery of the concept of political culture. But it does this in a completely renewed sense, broadly based on the anthropological debate on the concept of culture (Dutra 2002).

In the important book *Pour une Histoire Politique* (Rémond 1996), whose first edition dates back to 1988, several historians present new proposals for understanding not only political history, but the political field in general. Until then restricted to the dimensions of powers, leaders, institutional spaces, legislative bodies and the forms and regimes of government, the absorption of the notion of political culture allows a revolution in the way of thinking and writing history. If in the first generation of the concept, with Almond and Verba, the typologies of political cultures closed themselves at the borders of the nation-state, now they refer to ideological traditions: monarchist, republican, socialist, liberal, anarchist, plebeian, nationalist, Jacobin, fascist (Dutra 2002, p. 27 apud Berstein 1999, p. 29).

In this article, however, we want to make clear two important dimensions of the concept. First, the role played by political traditions and political history as a heritage that comes from the past and acts on the present, that is, the “weight of memory” (Assmann 2006). Thus, political culture is explained by the set of values, imaginary, discourses, utopias and practices of political action shared by a given group that is taken as a coherent unit (Motta 2009). But it is also necessary to perceive temporal dialectics in its dynamicity, since politics is also always action in the immediate present. So that

[...] political culture refers to operations of alignment of the ways of perceiving, acting and judging, the articulation of the arrangements of coexistence in the representations of the collective, the justification or denunciation of the interventions in the public space, the legitimization or criticism of the procedures and uses of the law, the changes in the arguments that sustain the sense of events, the decisions or actions and the production of common goods and public goods. Political cultures appear inseparable from their pragmatic and strategic uses. (Cefaï 2001, p. 99)⁴

In other words, a good analysis in the realm of political cultures is the one attentive both to the traditions and trends that remain and are reproduced in the memories of those who make politics, as well as to the pragmatic perspectives, to the availability of resources and to the material and social bases over which the subjects stand. It is because they are always subject to this dialectic of temporalities that political cultures are constantly changing. They “are born” and they “die”, depending on their ability to provide answers and meaning to political life.

3. Left-Wing and Autonomism in Brazil

Before analyzing the changes in the Brazilian left based on the concept of political culture, let's first take a panoramic view at the history of the Brazilian left since its beginning, at the end of the 19th century, to better situate these changes chronologically.

Until 1888, Brazil was a monarchy with the bulk of its labor force formed by enslaved Africans or afro-descendants. Slavery was only abolished in Brazil in 1888, and the country only became a republic in the following year, 1889. Since wage labor and republican politics only became a reality in the country in the 1890s, it's very hard to speak of left-wing politics in its modern sense in Brazil before the last decade of the 19th century.

Taking 1889 as its point of departure, the history of the Brazilian left can be divided into three major historical cycles (Aarão Reis Filho 2005): the first one runs through the so-called Brazilian “First Republic”, which starts with the proclamation of the Republic in 1889 and ends with the Revolution of 1930, in which a civil-military movement led by Getúlio Vargas overthrew the civilian president Washington Luís; the second one starts with the Revolution of 1930 and ends after the defeat of the armed struggle against the civil-military dictatorship of 1964-1985, and the foundation of the Worker's Party (PT – “Partido dos Trabalhadores”) in 1980; finally, the third cycle starts with the foundation of PT in 1980 and comes until the present.

⁴ All quotations were translated by the authors of this article from the original language to English unless where stated otherwise.

The first historical cycle of the Brazilian left (1889-1930) was dominated by anarchism and revolutionary syndicalism imported from Europe by the Italian immigrants who began to arrive in Brazil at the end of the 19th century and shaped much of the nascent Brazilian labor movement. These workers of the country's first industries organized revolutionary trade unions in the city of São Paulo. The political tradition generated by these pioneers of the Brazilian labor movement was heavily influenced by elements of what we call an autonomist political culture, with a special focus on workers' autonomy and a belief in the workers' ability to manage their own affairs through autonomous trade unions that were independent of any external political authority (Toledo 2004).

The hegemony of anarchists and revolutionary syndicalists in the Brazilian left, however, started to decline in 1922, when a group of former anarchists and revolutionary syndicalists inspired by the Russian Revolution of 1917 embraced communism and founded the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB – “Partido Comunista Brasileiro”) (Gorender 2005). This decline became an almost terminal crisis after the Revolution of 1930, when anarchism and revolutionary syndicalism were virtually exterminated by the repression unleashed by the Getúlio Vargas government against all autonomous workers' organizations, including anarchists, revolutionary syndicalists and communists.

The final decline of anarchism and revolutionary syndicalism in the 1930s opened a new historical cycle to the Brazilian left, with both the PCB and a new political tradition created by Getúlio Vargas, called “labourism”, becoming the two new hegemonic forces within the Brazilian left until the civil-military coup of 1964 (Gorender 2005; Aarão Reis Filho 2005). Despite having been initially persecuted in the first years of the Getúlio Vargas governments in the 1930s, the PCB ended up allying with left wing sectors of Vargas' Brazilian Labor Party (PTB – “Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro”) to form a nationalist and developmentalist front which dominated the Brazilian left in the 1950s and early 1960s (Aarão Reis Filho, 2005). This front was based on a highly centralized political culture, dominated by both the PCB, which was a typical Stalinist party (Gorender 2005)⁵, and the PTB, which was dominated by a nationalist-statist ideology (Aarão Reis Filho 2005).

The communist/labour hegemony over the Brazilian left started to fall apart with the civil-military coup of 1964, which overthrew president João Goulart, elected by PTB, and launched a cruel persecution against communists. The 1964 coup marked the beginning of the decline of the PCB (Gorender 2005), and the crisis of the Stalinist political culture introduced by the Communist Party in the Brazilian left.

⁵ It's important to note, however, that Stalinism has never been the only branch within the Marxist-Leninist tradition in Brazil. Small Trotskyist organizations existed in the country since the late 1920s (Marques Neto 1993), and, in the 1960s, Maoism was embraced by the Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB, in the Portuguese acronym for “Partido Comunista do Brasil”), a dissident communist party created in 1962 by a group of former members of PCB (Gorender 2005; Sales 2017).

The void left by the decline of PCB opened up space for a renewal of the Brazilian left, which reflected the wider transformations the left was going through all over the world in the aftermath of the revolts that shook the world from May 68 onwards, which affected indiscriminately countries of the so-called “Free World” and of the Soviet Bloc. On the one hand, the State-Market-Trade Unions consortium became increasingly unable to deal with demands which were both new and quite important to the radical left. Meanwhile, in the countries of the actually existing socialism, what Castoriadis (1955) calls the “bureaucratic society” had structured forms of domination and restriction of freedoms imposed by a party elite over the rest of the population that had been creating a situation of growing dissatisfaction.

This New Left born in the 1960s politicized dimensions of social life until then considered 'non-political', and this caused decisive transformations in the field of political cultures of the left. Everyday life, subjectivities, bodies, micro-scales of social structures, among other elements, invaded the traditional space of politics. This process of constitution of heterodoxies on the left begins with a wave of dissidences within communist parties all over the world, and over time these dissidences have become structured as movements and organizations of alternative profiles, agendas and political cultures.

In the United States the New Left emerged; in France, *Gauche Proletarienne*; in Italy, *Il Manifesto* and *Lotta Continua* – groups that made a virulent criticism of the communist parties from which they originated. In the same period Brazil saw the birth of a large number of dissident organizations (initially as a product of successive divisions of the Brazilian Communist Party) and independent groups. And in the course of the 1970s, movements of a new kind – those specific and of political minorities, the “movements of difference” – were present in the political scene in Brazil and around the world. (Araújo 2000)

These dissident groups and movements were formed by individuals and tendencies that were historically neglected by the hegemonic left-wing organizations. With the crisis of the PCB in Brazil, many smaller tendencies within the Brazilian left became more active and visible in the struggle against the civil-military dictatorship, many of them taking up armed struggle against the regime.

The Marxist Leninist People's Action [APML – “*Ação Popular Marxista Leninista*”] had its origin linked to groups of the Catholic left; the Workers' Politics [Polop – “*Política Operária*”], later designated only as PO, emerged as a group of independent intellectuals with some Trotskyist influence. Both were born in the 1960s. The Movement for the Emancipation of the Proletariat [MEP – “*Movimento pela Emancipação do Proletariado*”], on the other hand, represented a dissension of the Polop in the early 1970s. Freedom and Struggle [Libelu – “*Liberdade e Luta*”] was a Trotskyist organization. During the 1970s, these organizations formed, together with the specific and minority movements, an

alternative left-wing field in Brazil, participating in the resistance to the military dictatorship and developing an idea of politics marked by a sense of dissent and heterodoxy. Despite criticizing the more traditional left-wing parties (such as the PCB and the PCdoB), such organizations and movements sought to articulate themselves with more recognized social movements – such as the church-based movements, the student movement, the trade union movement and the neighborhood movements. (Araújo 2000)

The armed struggle against the civil-military dictatorship, from the second half of the 1970s onwards, gives way to an emphasis on the agendas of minorities – particularly the feminist and black agendas – and also to the strengthening of ecological and pacifist agendas. The form of organization becomes a central concern, and not only an instrumental one, given the focus on the prefigurative aspects of the movements. In this context, differences and fragmentation are praised as opposed to the old totalizing paradigms (Araújo 2000).

A decisive step was taken when the new movements, coming from dissidences of organizations rooted in Marxist-Leninist⁶ political culture began to distance themselves from the Marxist-Leninist tradition, starting to incorporate new – as well as some old, but revamped – theoretical references. Positioning themselves contrary to Marxist-Leninist culture, the new social movements flirted with other traditions.

These new leftists began questioning assumptions of the political struggle itself and how it was carried out. The new left-wing groups were not simply seeking some kind of “right to inclusion” (although for a considerable part of it this was also the case). What new leftist groups, such as the Italian and German autonomous movements of the 1970s analyzed by Katsiaficas (1997) were seeking, was to create new spaces of political autonomy not subjected to external political authorities. In other words, in this emerging multiplicity we see the (re)emergence of an anti-hegemonic field, bearer of an anti-politics attitude (Augusto 2014; Day 2005) which questioned political mediation.

In short, criticism has focused on the very definition of both “politics” and on the functioning of power. Based on the contributions of Foucault, Deleuze, and Guattari (Araújo 2000), the new movements understood that power does not act in an unidirectional way, but it inhabits all relations and operates in a radial and not only vertical logic. The result was the expansion of social struggles to all spheres of life. It’s not a coincidence that the element of prefiguration appears so strongly in these groups of the new left. In other words, it is not enough to

⁶ In this article we use the term “Marxist-Leninist” to refer to the specific political culture created by the Bolshevik Party based on Lenin’s theories and transformed into the universal model for all communist parties affiliated to the Communist International after 1919. In its more authoritarian version, it gave birth to Stalinism, but it has also generated other political traditions within the Marxist field, such as Trotskyism and Maoism. By no means we intend to reduce the whole Marxist tradition to Marxism-Leninism. Marxism goes well beyond Leninism and encompasses libertarian traditions which are integral parts of what we call autonomist political culture, such as Autonomist Marxism (Cleaver 2000).

define how we will make the revolution, it is now necessary to think what will be done after it, who and how will they take part in this discussion, and even what is revolution, and if this is what is desired.

These global trends of transformation which were affecting the left all over the world materialized in the emergence or reemergence of two different political traditions which marked the third historical cycle of the Brazilian left from the 1980s onwards. On the one hand, the critique of the authoritarian tradition within the left represented by Stalinism gave birth to a more institutional response which took the form of what Aarão Reis Filho (2005) calls a democratic socialist tradition represented by the foundation of PT in 1980, which brought together activists from different social movements such as the new trade unionism of the ABC region⁷, the grassroots ecclesial communities (CEBs – “Comunidades Eclesiais de Base”) and the pastorals of the Catholic Church rooted in liberation theology and the students movement that served as a meeting place for the clandestine left and that came from armed struggle.

From its foundation, in 1980, PT became the axis of a new hegemonic field in the Brazilian left which would call itself “popular-democratic”. This new political field was formed not only by PT itself, but by a plethora of social movements which emerged from the 1970s and institutionalized themselves throughout the 1980s, such as the new ABC trade unionism, which in 1983 gave birth to the Unified Workers’ Central (CUT – “Central Única dos Trabalhadores”); the students movement which rebuilt the Students’ National Union (UNE – “União Nacional dos Estudantes”), made illegal by the 1964 coup; and a new rural workers’ movement which in 1984 gave birth to the Landless Workers Movement (MST “Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra”).

At the same time as these big mass social movements were articulating themselves to form the new hegemonic field of the Brazilian left, another tradition re-emerged: anarchism. Little connected to social struggles since the mid-1940s, anarchist political culture, until then anachronistic, began to find fertile soil in a context of fragmentation, systematic criticism of powers, as well as induced by cultural experimentation and alternative lifestyles that gained space since May 68. In Brazil, anarchism began to re-emerge at the end of the 1970s as the bearer of the autonomist political culture in the country and became a reference to some fringes of the Brazilian left from the 1980s onwards, especially among urban, countercultural youth, such as teenagers who got involved with the punk/anarcho-punk movement, which, if at first was more a form of aesthetical expression and cultural rebellion, in some contexts started to politicize itself.

Particularly in the city of São Paulo, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Anarcho-punk Movement (MAP – “Movimento Anarcopunk”) approached the Social Culture Center (CCS – “Centro de Cultura Social”), which had been

⁷ The ABC region comprises the main industrial cities in the metropolitan area of São Paulo: Santo André, São Bernardo and São Caetano.

rearticulating itself since the political reopening process, after the end of the civil-military dictatorship in 1985. CCS was created in 1933 by anarchist activists and shut down by the Vargas government in 1937. Reopened in 1947, it was closed again by the civic-military dictatorship in 1969. Reopened for the second time in 1985, it became a meeting place for the old anarchists of the 1940s and the adolescent punks from the outskirts of São Paulo (Ribeiro 2018).

MAP and CCS were the best-known groups, but throughout the metropolitan region of São Paulo, the Baixada Santista region⁸ and other surrounding cities, we see an explosion of collectives and micro collectives of similar profiles. In a more dispersed way, this phenomenon is also seen in other urban centers in the South, Northeast and Center-West regions of the country. These collectives have revived the anarchist tradition, whether revamped by anarcho-punk culture or by other themes dear to the new left: ecology, permaculture, veganism/vegetarianism, cycling activism, LGBT issues, occupation of public spaces and struggle for housing, etc.

4. Peoples' Global Action and its Legacy in Brazil

The different aspects of the renewal of the Brazilian left in the post-civil-military dictatorship period are present in the early days of the participation of militants from the country in activities linked to PGA. Representatives of the popular-democratic field had the first contacts with the process that led to the creation of PGA. Representatives of PT, CUT and MST participated in the first Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and against Neoliberalism held in Chiapas, Mexico, in 1996 (Fiuza 2017). The following year, MST sent a representative to the second Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and against Neoliberalism, held in Spain, and at the end of that meeting MST was one of the ten movements that became part of the conveners committee of PGA's founding conference (PGA 1997). The following year, MST sent a representative to take part in the protests against the WTO in Geneva on the first Global Day of Action, May 16, 1998, at the same time that the movement organized a march in Brazil that took 50,000 people to the country's capital, Brasília, to demand agrarian reform (PGA, 1998).

Despite this strong initial presence, the participation of the popular-democratic field in the activities of PGA practically disappeared after 1998, according to testimonies and documents to which we had access. PT and CUT only participated in the encounter in Chiapas in 1996. And MST took part only sporadically in the activities of PGA after 1998. MST did not participate, for example, in any action carried out in Brazil in response to the calls for global action launched by PGA in 1999. The only record of any action taken in Brazil during the second Global Day of Action, June 18, 1999 (J18), is a small isolated

⁸ Baixada Santista is the name of the region around the city of Santos, where is located the Port of Santos, the busiest container port of both Brazil and Latin America.

action of graffiti on a Rede Globo⁹ clock in the city of Florianopolis. And in what would become the most famous of all Global Days of Action, the Battle of Seattle, on November 30, 1999 (N30), the only record of action carried out in Brazil is of an artistic intervention and pamphleteering carried out in the city of Santos by two groups linked to the libertarian/anarchist tradition: the Green Alternative Collective (CAVE – “Coletivo Alternativa Verde”) and the Baixada Santista Libertarian Network (RLBS – “Rede Libertária da Baixada Santista”) (Liberato 2006).

Curiously, although Brazil had a strong representative among the movements that founded PGA, the group that would in fact become responsible for carrying out the most important activities related to the network in the country apparently did not get in touch with the initiative through the Brazilian founder. This contact was through the news that began to reach the country throughout 1999 of the great acts carried out in other countries during the Global Days of Action convened by PGA, especially the demonstrations organized by British direct action groups in London at the J18 and the spectacular Battle of Seattle on the N30.

Pablo Ortellado, one of the main organizers of the actions carried out in Brazil in response to the calls for global action launched by PGA, says that it was under the impact of the Battle of Seattle that a group of activists in the city of São Paulo began to meet in May 2000 to reproduce actions like that in Brazil:

It was under the political impact of the effective blockade of the WTO "millennium round" that groups and individuals in São Paulo and other cities around the world began to think about reproducing and generalizing the events of Seattle. This is more or less how the coalition of groups and individuals inspired by Peoples' Global Action was formed in São Paulo in May 2000, five months after Seattle. (Ryioiki and Ortellado 2004, p. 10)¹⁰

According to Ortellado, these groups and individuals who would be the most active organizers of actions linked to PGA in São Paulo were part precisely of the other political field involved in the renewal of the Brazilian left from the 1980s onwards: the anarchist or libertarian field.

⁹ Rede Globo is the biggest television broadcast company in Brazil, which holds a virtual monopoly of media discourse in Brazilian TV.

¹⁰ Ortellado's quotations included in this article were taken from a written account published in book form in 2004 (Ryioiki and Ortellado 2004). The historical reconstitution of the actions carried out in Brazil in response to PGA's global calls to action is essentially based on two written sources: Ortellado's book and the doctoral thesis of another Brazilian activist who played an important role in disseminating information about PGA in the country: Leo Vinícius Liberato (Liberato 2006).

In São Paulo, this movement was born from the convergence of two other movements that emerged or re-emerged in the 1980s: the independent, self-managed students movement and the anarchist movement itself. The anarchist movement, of course, is very old in Brazil and dates back at least to the last two decades of the 19th century. After the great crisis of the 1930s, it seems that the 1980s saw its renaissance, very gradual, as a result of the "democratic" opening, the political legacy of the movements of the 1960s and 1970s and the consolidation of the political orientation of the punk movement. The independent and self-managed student movement is part of this same scenario, but often has not claimed the anarchist heritage, despite sharing the same principles and values. (...) These two strands of the libertarian social movement have converged, in some degree by chance, attracted by the fascinating events of Seattle. (Ryioki and Ortellado 2004, p. 9)

This coalition of groups and individuals inspired by PGA that was formed in São Paulo began to work on organizing a local demonstration as part of the Global Day of Action called by PGA to September 26, 2000 (S26), in support of the protests against the IMF and World Bank meeting scheduled to take place on that date in Prague, Czech Republic.

The collective that led the initiative was the Local Action for Global Justice (ALJG – “Ação Local por Justiça Global”). It was a group formed by students from the University of São Paulo (USP), among them Ortellado, which was created that same year to study and raise awareness about the negative effects of neoliberal globalization. The preparatory meetings for S26 were held at the headquarters of Popular Consultation (“Consulta Popular”), a Marxist political organization created in 1997 with the initial aim of being the political branch of MST. These meetings were attended by collectives linked both to the libertarian tradition – such as CCS, CAVE, RLBS and ALJG itself – as well as groups more linked to the popular-democratic field – such as the Popular Consultation and the Unified Black Movement (MNU – “Movimento Negro Unificado”) (Liberato 2006).

S26 was the first Global Day of Action convened by PGA that counted with simultaneous demonstrations in several Brazilian cities. In São Paulo, a thousand people protested in front of the city's Stock Exchange. Besides the group inspired by PGA in São Paulo, activists also organized actions for the Global Day of Action in the following cities: Belo Horizonte, Fortaleza, Salvador, Rio de Janeiro, Bauru, Campinas and Santa Maria (Ryioki and Ortellado 2004; Liberato 2006).

After S26, the coalition of groups and individuals inspired by PGA in São Paulo began to prepare to organize its next major action: the local demonstration that would take place as part of the mobilizations scheduled for April 20, 2001 (A20) in several countries throughout the Americas to protest against the Summit of the Americas, a meeting of representatives of governments from across the region scheduled to take place on that date in Quebec, Canada, to discuss the creation of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).

At that time, activities related to PGA in São Paulo were already fully linked to the libertarian and anarchist field. The preparatory meetings for the A20 in São Paulo were held at CCS, marking a direct connection of the global resistance movement with the anarchist tradition in the city, and among the participants the libertarian field predominated:

Both the venue – CCS headquarters – and the profile of the participants already showed a difference from the preparatory meetings for S26, and a greater homogenization: young libertarians and members of anarchist collectives prevailed widely. Anarcho-punks, straight edges, and members of groups such as CCS, CAVE, MAR, RLBS, Revolutionary Strategy (a Trotskyist group), ALJG, CMI and Comitê Avante Zapatista¹¹. (Liberato 2006, p, 183)

The preparatory meetings for the A20 began in January 2001, the month in which Brazil would enter the map of the international movement of resistance against neoliberal globalization by holding the first World Social Forum in Porto Alegre¹². At the forum, members of the coalition of groups and individuals inspired by PGA in São Paulo had the opportunity to get in touch with groups and individuals who participated in the mobilizations called by PGA in other parts of the world, opening the way for exchanges of experiences between Brazilian activists and those from other countries.

The A20 in São Paulo gathered more than two thousand demonstrators on Avenida Paulista, the most important avenue of the city, and ended with a brutal police repression that resulted in 79 prisoners, 10 tortured and more than 100 wounded (Ryioki and Ortellado 2004). The size of the demonstration and the police repression gave visibility to Brazilian "anti-globalization" activists, putting them in the headlines of the country's newspapers. So much visibility that the demonstration organized in São Paulo on 20 July 2001 in support of the protests against the G8 meeting in Genoa, Italy, brought together around five thousand people, including both groups and individuals inspired by PGA, organized in a large autonomous bloc (Ryioki and Ortellado 2004), and militants from other sectors of the Brazilian left.

The advance of PGA-inspired mobilizations in Brazil, however, was suddenly halted by the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in New

¹¹ Comitê Avante Zapatista was the São Paulo-based international solidarity committee with the Zapatistas in Mexico.

¹² The World Social Forum was one of the spaces where tensions arose between autonomist groups and the hegemonic organizations of the Brazilian left. The governments of the state of Rio Grande do Sul and of the city of Porto Alegre, both ran by PT at the beginning of the 2000s, were directly involved and provided strong support for the creation of the World Social Forum (Whitaker 2000), but after Lula was elected president, in 2002, some autonomist groups started to openly criticize PT. This tension became explicit in the third edition of the Forum, when an activist from the group Bakers Without Borders threw a pie on the face of PT's then president, José Genoino (Godoy 2003).

York. Following a global trend, the activities of the groups and individuals inspired by PGA began to decline in the country. The last major mobilization in Brazil linked to a call from PGA was the protests against the meeting of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) in the city of Fortaleza in March 2002, when five thousand people tried to march towards the meeting and were harshly repressed by the police. Simultaneous protests also took place in São Paulo, Belo Horizonte and other cities of the American continent (Ryioki and Ortellado 2004). Street demonstrations and meetings of activists somehow linked to PGA continued to take place in Brazil until 2004 (Ryioki and Ortellado 2004), but never again had an impact equivalent to that of the A20 in São Paulo. As for the global network, it's hard to say when exactly PGA "died" in Brazil. Based on the testimonies we collected, we would say that activities related to PGA in Brazil ceased to exist after 2004. So, for the purposes of this article, we contend that PGA was a source of inspiration for a portion of the Brazilian left between 2000 and 2004.

PGA's influence over the Brazilian left was largely limited to a small fringe of autonomist collectives, but the whole culture stew created around the PGA-inspired mobilizations produced a lasting legacy in the development of an autonomist political culture in Brazil. As Ortellado says, one of the most important concrete results of the global resistance movement in Brazil was the creation of the local collective linked to the Indymedia network and its most visible product: the website of the Brazilian Independent Media Center (CMI – "Centro de Mídia Independente") (Ryioki and Ortellado 2004). Launched in December 2000, the site became a reference point for a new generation of activists involved in social struggles.

Unlike the collectives linked to the Indymedia network in other parts of the world, in Brazil there were no regional sites, but a single national site, nurtured and managed by volunteers from across different regions of Brazil. This allowed CMI Brazil to function as an instrument for disseminating information about local struggles to other regions of the country. This was the case when, in August 2003, thousands of students took to the streets of Salvador for three weeks to fight against the increase in bus fares in the city and used CMI to publish reports of what became known as the Buzu Uprising ("Revolta do Buzu"). The movement was organized and managed by students from Salvador independently of the official organizations of the student movement, such as UNE (Nascimento 2008).

The reports published on CMI Brazil helped spread the news of the demonstrations in Salvador to the rest of Brazil, and it thus served as an inspiration for students and young people already campaigning for free public transport for students in Florianópolis to organize the Turnstile Revolt ("Revolta da Catraca"), a wave of intense protests in the city in June 2004 that not only blocked the increase in public transport fares but also contributed to the approval of the bill that sanctioned free travel for students in the city.

Taking advantage of this moment and foreseeing the presence of many young activists at the 5th World Social Forum, scheduled to take place in January

2005 in Porto Alegre, the activists of the Florianópolis Free Fare Campaign decided to call a plenary session during the Forum to discuss the creation of a nationwide free fare campaign, which became the Free Fare Movement (MPL – “Movimento Passe Livre”).

The report and analysis of MPL’s founding plenary session made by Leo Vinícius Liberato, who participated in the network to disseminate information about PGA in Brazil since the beginning, and also took part in the Turnstile Revolt in Florianópolis, clearly shows the connections between MPL and the “anti-globalization” movement:

The Plenary Session was organized by the Florianópolis Free Fare Campaign with the support and help of CMI members from Florianópolis and other cities, who articulated the space to hold the Plenary Session. The *Caracol Intergaláctica* was the name of the space, a double mention to the Zapatistas, managed by the more autonomous and libertarian strand of the youth participating in the WSF – those who more than anyone else gave face to the anti-globalization movement years before. (Liberato 2006, p. 227)

From the Porto Alegre plenary session onwards, MPL was nationally organized with local collectives spread throughout the country, and the partnership with CMI helped to spread the struggle against the fare increase and for a free student fare to be implemented throughout Brazil. In 2005, Florianópolis was once again the stage of a major protest against the fare increase, and from then on similar mobilizations began to take place in other cities of the country too.

Liberato draws clear lines of continuity between the group that founded the MPL collective in São Paulo in 2005 and the groups involved in the mobilizations inspired by PGA in the early 2000s:

The victories won in Florianópolis, and especially the form of organization and the autonomous spirit of these struggles, were an important factor for the free fare struggle and for the issue of urban transport to be embraced by many of these young libertarians from São Paulo and other cities, to a greater or lesser extent. For some activists, it occupied the place on their political activity which was once occupied by the anti-globalization movement. (...) The relationship between the MPL – its diffusion and constitution – and the CMI corroborates this perception. Other elements also reinforce it. In 2005 the MPL-São Paulo formed a drum set to animate the demonstrations: the first song that the MPL’s drum set played was a nostalgic beat played at the A20, declared one of its members. It was the beat that Greyg, from Infernal Noise Brigade, had taught during his time in Brazil in early 2001. The formation of the drum set of the MPL-São Paulo had the didactic and material support (instruments) of former members of the extinct *Batucação*. Direct action workshops, along the lines that US activist Starhawk had organized in early 2001 for Brazilian anti-globalization activists, were also sought out by MPL-São Paulo along with former activists. (Liberato 2006, pp. 233-234)

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The episodes described above attest to PGA's important legacy for the Brazilian autonomist left. The experience of involvement in PGA is something that crosses the memories of all our interviewees in a particularly striking way, both in terms of a political formation dimension itself and from a subjective perspective. PGA constituted communities, important potentialities, and this marked the trajectory of the activists and former activists who participated in the research.

In these narratives and the interviewees' political biographies we can see the diversity that makes up autonomist political culture in Brazil. Their different matrices range from the first dissident groups that began the renewal of left-wing political culture in Brazil in the 1970s to MPL and the June 2013 Days. And finally, we flag the importance of the recent memory of this political culture for guiding the ongoing search for classics of anarchism and heterodox Marxisms, as is reflected in the cited literature and other resources produced by these collectives and movements.

As is typical for working with oral sources, the wealth of information and the possibilities for methodological approaches are manifold. There is a lot to explore from the collected narratives. Our focus in this article is on the native definitions of autonomism and how, despite the variants of understanding, we can identify a convergence in terms of general principles that allows us to speak of a consolidated autonomist political culture.

5. Oral Testimonies of Activists Involved with PGA in Brazil

E.V.¹³ began his political militancy in the final years of the civic-military dictatorship, in the students movement, as a militant of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Proletariat (MEP), a dissident Marxist group which was part of the renewal of left-wing political cultures in the post-armed struggle period. The Marxist militancy, however, lasted little. When he began to study Social Sciences at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC-SP) in the early 1980s, he got in contact with anarchism and participated both in the establishment of a self-managed regime at the Academic Centre of Social Sciences of PUC-SP and in the reopening of CCS, becoming a reference in anarchist circles in São Paulo. Not by chance, he actively participated in the coalition of groups and individuals inspired by PGA in São Paulo and was one of the founders of the Institute of Libertarian Culture and Action (ICAL – "Instituto de Cultura e Ação Libertária"), a self-managed space where the "PGA meetings" were held in São Paulo during the 12 months of ICAL's existence, between August 2001 and August 2002.

E.V. defines PGA as a school for the Brazilian libertarian left of the 21st century:

[PGA] was a great political school. And that's why it deserves to be remembered. (...) It taught many people to think about politics in a non-traditional way. And

¹³ E.V., 61 years old, male. Interview granted on 02/14/2019

that is a huge contribution. It recovers previous struggles, recovers previous experiences, but it has something innovative in the late 1990s, early 2000s. So that's what it brought out of it: it's possible to think of another way of doing politics. It is possible to think of a new way of questioning traditional structures that is born after PGA.

According to E.V., this other way of doing politics brought about by PGA is based on direct action, internationalism and the ideas of horizontality, self-management and autonomous organization.

V.T.¹⁴, in turn, comes from the more traditional spectrum of the left, linked to the peasant movements and grassroots ecclesial communities of the Catholic Church (CEB's) in the state of Ceará, to the CUT groups that were at the genesis of the Workers' Party (PT). He was expelled from the Party in 1988 because the group he belonged to refused to support the candidacy of Luis Inácio Lula da Silva for the upcoming presidential elections of 1989 arguing that Lula was making too much concessions to the Brazilian elite. After he left PT, V.T. began to work directly with grassroots peasants from an "independent" perspective. At this stage he mentions important readings such as Rosa Luxemburg, Gramsci and Mariátegui, which contributed to a critique of Stalinist and Trotskyist traditions. In this period, too, he establishes contacts with the MST, but criticizes the organization for its "bureaucratism" and "*dirigismo*"¹⁵ of the movement. V.T. makes clear his growing dissatisfaction with these limits of the traditional left, so that on the occasion of the Zapatista uprising, he became deeply interested in the notion of autonomy, which was indeed already present in his political practice:

People were already tired of being dragged down by this authoritarian, bureaucratic and supremacist left. If they want to throw shadows into the light that we are bringing, which is the struggle of the Zapatistas... no way. Let's break it up here now. And we broke it up. (...) [At the Second American Encounter for Humanity against Neoliberalism] more than a thousand anti-capitalist comrades, with a vision of autonomy [broke up with the hegemonic left] (...) [PGA] was something new, which was not seen before. Finally we have, even if it is like a small rehearsal of what could be further ahead, a really international, globalized, unified struggle. I am sure that the springs that happened in Greece, Occupy Wall Street, in Egypt, in Spain (...) there is a little inspiration of what PGA is. (...) [PGA] was born under a lot of pressure [from the hegemonic left], but the most important thing is that they are people who already put the need to criticize the idea of representativeness, of leadership; to seek autonomy, a horizontality in our daily relationships.

¹⁴ V.T., 52 years old, male. Interview granted on 1/28/2018.

¹⁵ "*Dirigismo*" is an expression in Portuguese that means the tendency of an organization to direct the actions of its militants towards goals defined by the leadership without consulting the rank and file members.

Another important space for the development and dissemination of this new left-wing political culture from the 1980s onwards in Brazil was the punk counterculture. Four of the selected interviewees had their first contact with politics through punk music and culture in general.

A.A.¹⁶ played in a punk band in the 1990's in São Paulo and got in contact with PGA by attending meetings at the CCS together with comrades from the anarcho-punk movement. At the same time, F.C.¹⁷ was playing in a straight edge band in São Paulo and participated in a talk about PGA organized during a “Verdurada”, the main event of the straight edge scene in the city in the late 1990s and early 2000s. A student at the University of São Paulo (USP), F.C. became a militant of ALJG and was one of the main members of Batukação.

A.A. sees PGA as a bridge between the old anarchist tradition and the new forms of struggle which developed within the autonomist political culture in Brazil, such as MPL.

On the one hand, [PGA] reactivated this history and updated this memory of anarchism, for those who were already sympathetic to anarchism; and on the other, brought to several people this possibility of a left-wing militancy that was not linked to this bureaucratic left. (...) What PGA offered to everyone, to those who actually got involved, participated in the demonstrations, was an experience not mediated with power; a direct experience. (...) I think there was an important lesson, which in Brazil will be translated as MPL, which is ‘instead of us looking for global agendas, which concern everyone, we will start with local agendas, which will produce something interesting’. Then, the generation which is, more or less, a second generation of anti-globalization – which, in fact, is a generation younger than me –, (...) they will produce something much cooler than us, I think, which is the MPL, which is June 2013.

Reflecting about this political culture which permeated the coalition of groups and individuals inspired by PGA in São Paulo, F.C. presents his own definition of autonomism:

I tend to work with those movements that are less hierarchical, that fight against inequality, that at the same time they are fighting inequality, they are also to some extent libertarian movements. I like to label them libertarian movements. So I would define autonomism as this current, or this practice, that is formed both in the field of thought and in the field of action, of groups and individuals with a perspective that I situate in this libertarian left, of egalitarian practices, of practices that were not aimed at suppressing freedom in favor of equality, of anti-bureaucratic struggle, of anti-authoritarian struggle, which is formed with various influences. So, within this PGA stew, I would situate [a range of influences including] more formal things coming from Marxism, which sometimes

¹⁶ A.A., 44 years old, male. Interview granted on 6/24/2018.

¹⁷ F.C., 40 years old, male. Interview granted on 5/23/2019.

appeared; things that sometimes appeared here and there, for example Foucault and perhaps more post-modern things. (...) In my view the MPL is the most legitimate son of PGA (...) The beginning of June [2013] certainly [has to do with] PGA.

O.S.¹⁸ and G.F.¹⁹ participated in the punk movement in the ABC region of São Paulo at different times: the first in the 1980s; the second in the 1990s. G.F. got in contact with PGA directly through the punk movement, at a time when he participated in the creation of the collective ABC Activism, a group very active in the coalition of groups and individuals inspired by PGA in São Paulo. About the PGA in its relationship with autonomism, G.F. says:

It was a great renewal of the street protests (...) I see PGA as an inspiration to the MPL (...) I see autonomism as a type of movement that can also be anarchist, but there were Marxist groups (...) aimed at self-management, mutual support, the creation of communities that seek to be self-sustaining and anti-capitalist (...) I would also say that various anarchist tendencies – classical, autonomist, primitivist, specifist – got more strength in Brazil after PGA. This strength was great until 2013, which was the peak of a certain confederative moment of Brazilian anarchism in contact with the international one, especially in the organization of the Anarchist Fair in São Paulo.

O.S. came to know PGA long after he got away from the punk movement. He ended up getting in touch with the activities of the network that involved the discussion of the use of bicycle as a means of transportation in São Paulo. O.S. was one of the founders of “Bicicletada”, a movement that emerged in 2001 that followed the same principles of Critical Mass in cities like New York and San Francisco. In his view, the flow of information disseminated by PGA was crucial for Brazilian cyclists to get in contact with similar initiatives in the Global North:

Without PGA and without this flow of information from North to South, we would never (...) know what was happening in San Francisco (...) in New York. (...) When we were starting the Bicicletada here in São Paulo, [we discover that] there is bicicletada in San Francisco, in New York (...) Bicicletada is Critical Mass. For me it's a synonym, because it has always been a synonym.

And, again, elements such as horizontality, non-bureaucratic organization, direct action, intense use of electronic communication and rejection of the principle of representation emerge as determining elements of political identity:

¹⁸ O.S., 49 years old, male. Interview granted on 1/25/2019.

¹⁹ G.F., 43 years old, male. Interview granted on 1/26/2020.

[The Zapatistas] were building from the bottom up. We started to do this in the cycling circles, the cycling activism, as a good part, of what (...) George Woodcock calls an anarchist with a lower case 'a'. So, you have a lot of people who use a tiny lower case 'a'. (...) Bike mirrored this a lot. The community workshops, the hands on the wheels (...) Autonomism is not "The" anarchism. It is a child of anarchism. It also looks back and says, "Dude, Bakunin got it right here. This criticism he makes of Marxists is genius, but this bomb thing isn't going to work out very well [laughs].

Finally, and following the chronological line of the generations of the heterodox left in Brazil's recent political history, there is L.L.'s experience.²⁰ L.L. is the youngest of those interviewed in the Project, having had a large part of his political education still in school, where he participated in the movement that implemented a self-managed regime in the students' union of his school. This was when he had his first contact with PGA, after Pablo Ortellado – already mentioned earlier – visited the school to inform the students movement about the network. He participated in the II World Social Forum and, after graduating, joins the CMI and is present at the foundation of MPL in 2005. A member of MPL until 2015, L.L. was one of the main figures of the June 2013 Days in São Paulo at the state and municipal levels.

The interesting thing about L.L.'s trajectory is that it gives concrete form to our interviewees' testimonies, as his political biography is inserted in its entirety within a well-defined and active political culture. L.L. is a student of the 'PGA school' in Brazil.

There was a part of the people [in the MPL] that had come from this tradition of Peoples' Global Action. There was a part of the people who had come from CMI, who thought that the CMI's experience of only covering movements (...) was no longer enough. We needed to have a movement that was in line with our own organizational principles. In part, this is why we were so deeply involved in the Free Fare Movement. (...) The aesthetic of the MPL demonstration is the same aesthetic of a PGA demonstration. It is the idea of a demonstration in which people can speak without a sound truck, which is democratic, in which people feel included, in which people can make cultural interventions. (...) Objectively, Batukação gives all the instruments to MPL drums. So, the instruments of the MPL drums are the instruments of the Batukação. We founded the MPL drums with the Batukação instruments and the Batukação beats. (...) We had a desire to break with the [old] left. We wanted to do it differently. MPL was very clear on that. And so was Peoples' Global Action. In that sense, no doubt we were heirs. And the very idea of doing it yourself, of people being able to do everything themselves, it comes from Peoples' Global Action. It comes from the alter-globalization movement's stew of discussions. And MPL drinks a lot from it. (...) Yes, [it was an autonomist culture], without a doubt. There was even an

²⁰ L.L., 34 years old, male. Interview granted on 2/7/2019.

autonomist identity. (...) There were the anarchists, there were some heterodox Marxists, there were people who didn't want to define themselves politically. I think that autonomism was this broad culture stew. (...) I have no doubt [that PGA influenced later mobilizations in Brazil]. The Free Fare Movement, the 2013 movement and those that come after it, such as the high school students' movement, who are the children of PGA.

6. Conclusion

The objective of this article was to evidence the contribution of PGA to the renewal and further development of what we call an autonomist political culture in Brazil's recent history based on the analysis of a sample of oral testimonies collected in the context of the Peoples' Global Action Oral History Project.

One of the basic principles of autonomism is the non-bureaucratization of organizational processes and the internal diversity of political processes. We highlight these two elements because they contribute to hinder the work of the scholar who intends to understand it. The fluidity of political identity, the value of diversity, the heterogeneous class backgrounds, and the digitalization of communications are all aspects that pose challenges for thinking about the nature of politics in the contemporaneity. Autonomism is in search of answers to remain relevant in the world in which we live. As a dynamic political culture, the struggle is against anachronism.

As we have shown here, the recent history of the Brazilian left, guided by the memories of people who have been part of important chapters of these processes, confirm this observation. But, as tends to be the case with political cultures, and autonomism in particular, the dynamism is a determining factor of the autonomist political culture that forces us to revisit our conversations and reflections in order to better understand this political phenomenon and its challenges.

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