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**AN ALTERNATIVE PRESS?
NEW FORMS OF NEWS REPORTING IN BRAZIL**

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the emergence of alternative forms of news production in Brazil within the context of an increasingly unstable democracy. It focuses on different genres of not-for-profit journalism to understand the roles of alternative news producers, their relationships with traditional journalistic practices, such as the norm of objectivity, and their approach to financial sustainability. Drawing on alternative media studies, this thesis combines semi-structured interviews with independent news producers and qualitative content analysis. Interviewees include both citizen journalists and professional journalists with experience in legacy newsrooms who are now engaged with small-scale alternative news outlets. Content analysis examines the production of four cases: an independent investigative outlet that covers human rights violations; a journalism agency covering the Amazon region; a community media collective from one of Rio de Janeiro's largest favelas; and a feminist outlet from São Paulo focused on women from peripheral areas.

In exploring what kinds of stories they convey, how they are organised, and to what extent their production enables a better understanding of the issues afflicting a country in crisis, this study sheds light on the relevance of alternative journalism and reflects on changing journalistic boundaries. Although their practices are very heterogeneous, the research demonstrates that alternative journalists are challenging the agenda-setting process of commercial media by tackling misrepresentation, stereotypes and discrimination against particular communities with a nuanced adaptation of fundamental journalistic norms. Alternative news sites also reject the traditional business model of mainstream media and seek diversification of revenue-generating activities. This research highlights the emergence of new players in the Brazilian news media ecosystem and points to their significance in the diversification of the news agenda in a country where a few private groups own mass media corporations. Their attempts to be more than a temporary presence in the media landscape create counter-hegemonic spaces to enhance debates on issues such as racism, state repression and social and gender inequality in Brazil.

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I hereby declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

Claudia Sarmento

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In June 2013, more than one million people gathered in the streets of different Brazilian cities to protest against widespread corruption and lack of investments in crucial areas such as public health and education. The massive popular movement started in São Paulo, driven by discontent with the rise of public transportation fares. The 20 cents increase was just the initial focus of what became known as “*Jornadas de Junho*” (June Journeys). As Porto and Brant (2015) narrate, at the peak of the movement more than 1.4 million protesters took the streets of at least 140 cities, demanding a complex set of agendas, from cheaper public transportation fares, which in Brazil are the responsibility of municipal and state governments, to more transparency in regards to the use of public funds in construction works for the 2014 FIFA World Cup. After many decades of political apathy, Brazilians seemed to have awakened, pushed by disillusion with power institutions. Social media was used to facilitate social mobilisation and the dissemination of information, leading to comparisons with the Arab Spring. In a rejection of traditional political parties, *Jornadas de Junho* combined different social classes and political-ideological tendencies (Peruzzo, 2013; Stalcup, 2016).

Living abroad, I followed the dramatic chain of events on news websites and through social media. As a journalist, I heard from my colleagues working in some of the largest Brazilian newsrooms how hard it was to cover such a movement, which did

not have a clear leadership. In the first weeks of the demonstrations, mainstream media presented a negative coverage, focusing mainly on acts of vandalism by the protesters (Peruzzo, 2013; Porto and Brant, 2015; Savazoni, 2014; Stalcup, 2016). However, when the police increased the crackdown on demonstrators, also attacking journalists who were covering the events, the country's main newspapers and TV channels adopted a much less negative stance towards the movement and condemned the violence of the state agents against civilians. An activist group called *Mídia Ninja* (Portuguese acronym for Independent Journalism and Action Narratives) contributed to change this perspective. Since the beginning of the protests, participants denounced what they considered a biased coverage by traditional media. Using little more than 3G smartphones to disseminate news from the frontlines of the protests, the collective of activists with no formal journalistic training challenged the dominant narrative, relying on open wifi signals and a supermarket cart to carry equipment such as an old generator and two video cameras (Torturra, 2013). Through TwitCasting, a live streaming application, they were able to publicize the arrest of a protester who was falsely accused of violent acts. Cell phone footage proved he was innocent. The country's most influential TV, *Rede Globo*, and others disseminated the video (Stalcup, 2016).

The *Ninjas* were at the same time participants and reporters of a historic moment. Their decentralised network fuelled by new technologies mixed activism and reporting, very explicitly rejecting the supposed objectivity of traditional journalism. For Stalcup, *Mídia Ninja* "aimed to engender a change in subjectivity" (2016, p.151). For Bentes (2013), the network used social media to produce a state of commotion and mobilisation. Lorenzotti (2013) defined the group as media of the future. Although social media alone cannot explain the causes and consequences of the 2013 popular movement in Brazil (Porto and Brant, 2015), the prominence of non-

mainstream journalism in a critical moment opened up a debate on the values of alternative news channels.

My initial thoughts on *Mídia Ninja* were confused. Accustomed to certain standards of news coverage, I was not sure if the collective's content should be defined as journalistic. After all, it was formed by activists who were directly involved in the news stories, mixing verifiable facts with advocacy, something that, theoretically, is not what is expected from professional practices of journalism. Nonetheless, *Ninjas* were acknowledged as relevant sources of information both by international and national mainstream media. The ombudsman of *Folha de S.Paulo*, one of the leading publications in the country, criticized the way professional reporters gave little emphasis to the arrest of demonstrators and pointed out that the "old fashioned way" to cover protests, anchoring the narrative only on the police's version and on images from big broadcasters, was no longer enough. It was time to take into account new sources of information (Singer, 2013).

Much was written about *Mídia Ninja* during and after the 2013 demonstrations. The scholarly view of the paradigm shift represented by the collective will be explored in Chapter 2. In this Introduction, I aim to emphasize that the example of the *Ninjas* helped to change my perception of how new technologies were transforming the way news could be gathered and disseminated. If they were activists, could they be considered journalists? Or just those who carry a badge of large media companies can be classified as such? On the one hand, mainstream media incorporated their content and recognized their relevance. On the other, these citizen journalists were part of a deconstruction of journalism's rules, or what Anderson, Bell and Shirky define as "the erosion of the old way of doing things" (2012, p.22). Does this erosion of traditional journalism mean the democratisation of media? How?

This thesis was born from these questionings initially elaborated in a simple form, and later transformed into academic research with the purpose of examining the emergence of alternative forms of online news production in Brazil.

1.1 DEFINING THE RESEARCH: A FIELD IN TRANSFORMATION

The novelty that *Mídia Ninja* represented for those who follow the development of the media system in Brazil was the starting point of my questioning as a researcher. The collective, however, is not the focus of this study. When this research effectively began, Brazil had already undergone a new series of perplexing political transformations. In addition, new forms of non-commercial journalism were consolidating, some of them without a direct link to social movements or the political polarisation that increased in the country since the impeachment of president Dilma Rousseff, in 2016. Therefore, what concerns this investigation is what came after the 2013 wave of mass protests. In this context of an increasingly unstable democracy, the present study examines the emergence of alternative forms of news production with a specific focus on progressive not-for-profit initiatives, combining both the practices of professional journalists and amateurs.

A broad range of scholarly work explores relevant aspects of journalism transformation in the digital age, from the impact of the blogosphere (Rettberg, 2008) and the rise of citizen journalism (Gillmor, 2008; Allan, 2013) to social media usage in newsgathering routines (Deuze, 2009; Alejandro, 2010; Hermida, 2012). Recent research has addressed the future of journalism, usually with a focus on mainstream media (Anderson, Bell and Shirky, 2012; Haak, Parks and Castells,

2012). In turn, the study of alternative media also increasingly arouses the interest of researchers exploring concepts such as the “ecology of participation” (Barnes, 2014) and online counter-publics (Leung and Francis, 2014), as well as the central role of mediated communications for activism and contemporary social movements (Lievrouw, 2011; Gerbaudo, 2012; Meikle, 2018). At the heart of this present research is the combination of journalism and alternative media studies.

As Calcutt and Hammond argue, “the study of news and journalism often seems stuck with ideas and debates which have lost much of their critical purchase” (2011, p.10). With the arrival of new actors in the media landscape, the boundaries of journalism are becoming more blurred. Those seeking to investigate the digital environment in which information is now gathered and disseminated have to look into distinct cultural practices and contexts to find answers in a field that is constantly shifting and demanding broader definitions (Haak, Parks and Castells, 2012; Carlson and Lewis, 2015). Following this line of argument, this thesis investigates: (1) a variety of non-profit alternative media practices in Brazil that contest a highly concentrated and homogeneous way of disseminating news; (b) to what extent alternative online outlets or/and collectives are breaking journalistic boundaries and reconfiguring the very notion of journalism.

As will be detailed in the following literature review, there is not one unified way to frame alternative media. Drawing from theorists such as Downing (2001), Rodriguez (2001), Couldry and Curran (2003) and, mainly, Atton (2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2004, 2009, 2015), this research offers an empirical examination of challenges to the dominant ways of doing journalism. More particularly, academic analyses of alternative journalism (Atton and Hamilton, 2008; Forde, 2011; Kenix, 2011;

Harcup, 2013) have contributed to shaping this study to further understanding the potentials and limitations of web-based alternative projects in a country whose media system is highly concentrated in the hands of a small group of corporations.

Accordingly, this research advocates for the relevance of alternative media for the study of journalism, and not only for the investigation of activism and social movements. As Atton states, alternative media practices present “a critique in action that can encourage educators, students and journalists to think epistemologically about journalism” (2009, p.284).

Among the identified types of alternative journalism’s practices, this research includes, for instance: collectives acting inside the *favelas*, which are unincorporated and diverse low income neighbourhoods that occupy vast areas of Brazilian major urban centres; feminist digital magazines that construct counter-narratives to confront gender inequalities and stereotypes; groups that are exclusively interested in the social issues and cultural aspects of the peripheries, and online investigative outlets covering human rights violations or specific excluded communities. Although these networks may appear marginal in comparison to the audience of large media corporations, I argue that their growing visibility and productivity deserves academic attention. By studying their goals, modus operandi and sustainability models, this thesis is addressing the expansion of digital forms of news reporting that go beyond sporadic acts of citizen journalism or highly opinionated blogs that disregard the verification of facts.

1.1.1 The Research Questions

In examining Brazil's specific context of news production outside mainstream media corporations, with a qualitative approach, the following chapters explore whether emerging news producers currently contribute to: a) a new form of journalism, and b) the expansion of the public sphere, challenging the establishment and promoting new discourses and audiences' participation. Putting into question the boundaries of journalism, the present research looks into the practices of both professional journalists and amateurs who are expanding, in a self-organised and non-commercial way, the flow of information through independent online production. As the economic survival of alternative media is a topic often addressed with scepticism, the issue of sustainability will also be discussed. Here I should point out a dilemma that is crucial to understanding the practical nature of alternative journalism: these critical projects that defy dominant journalistic practices need resources to maintain a steady operation, "but those crucial resources are present only in the very society that they seek to change or dissolve" (Atton and Hamilton, 2008, p.26). Consequently, I have decided not to focus on citizen journalism that thrives only in times of crisis. Rather, the focus of this research is on organised and continuous practices of alternative reporting in order to discuss the economic pressures on alternative journalism in the digital age and to what extent producers have found solutions to the financial precariousness of alternative experiments.

The main research questions are:

- 1) What are the contemporary roles played by alternative media producers in Brazil?

- 2) How are these alternative media projects seeking to overcome the lack of resources and funds, which has so far been a defining characteristic of non-mainstream practices?
- 3) To what extent are alternative practices breaking journalistic boundaries and reconfiguring the epistemology of news?

In investigating news production that pursue a longer-term engagement with communities (geographic communities or communities of interest) to allow an active counter-public, this thesis goes beyond the assessment of groups of that quickly disperse after a particular event. The research questions consider what encourages alternative media activity, the economic challenges practitioners face, and what kind of voices and media diversity they represent. To address these questions, a mixed-method design (Creswell, 2014), based on interviews with twenty alternative media producers and qualitative content analysis of four case studies, was applied, as will be detailed in Chapter 4. Instead of looking for a new term to define diverse forms of journalism being practiced independently from large media corporations, this study prefers the term “alternative media” and, accordingly, “alternative journalism”.

1.2 THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE IN BRAZIL

The decision to focus on Brazil came from the fact that there is a lack of academic studies on the development of alternative media in the country after the re-democratization in 1985. The so-called alternative press played an important role as a form of resistance during the military dictatorship (1964-1984), but rapidly dispersed after the return of democracy (Kucinski, 1991). Chapter 3 will address that history, but here I offer a brief overview of the current media landscape to further the understanding of the Brazilian context.

Brazil is the largest economy in Latin America, with a population of 202.5 million people. According to official data, 58% of the population have access to the internet (Secom, 2016). As technology became more affordable and broadband services expanded, Brazil saw the rise of an increasingly connected nation, with 75.6 million Facebook users (Statista, 2018). With the multiplication of information sources, many of them free, the audiences' willingness to pay for news content declined, while advertising also turned to digital platforms, following a global trend. The disruption for the news business resulted in negative headlines on the on going struggles of media corporations in the country. Although it is difficult to pinpoint a precise number of layoffs because there is no national record of employability in the media industry, counts made independently by an agency of data journalism state that between 2012 and August 2018 mass redundancies affected 7,817 workers in the sector (Voltdata, 2018).

Nonetheless, as Haack, Parks and Castells (2012) observe, the crisis is not necessarily one of journalism, but rather a crisis of the business model that prevailed during the 20th century. In his analysis of the Brazilian media system, Albuquerque (2012) points out some definitive elements: newspapers have a low circulation rate and are mainly addressed to an urban elite; television plays a central role; and media corporations are almost totally private, mostly family-owned. It is not the aim of this study to discuss the state of mainstream media. However, understanding this context of the political economy of the news industry helps to better understand the critiques and the potential of the alternative media ecosystem. For instance, while the emergence of independent blogs were initially celebrated in Brazil for disseminating news beyond the mainstream viewpoints, these spaces were actually colonised by large corporations (Bailey and Marques, 2012). Simply put, "the technology does not necessarily change the social function of journalism, although there is a change in the

way news is produced and consumed” (ibid, 2012, p.399). This argument reinforces the importance of analysing the current diversification of voices involved with the production of different forms of journalism in Brazil to assess whether they generate plurality in the public sphere.

1.2.1 Why study Brazil?

It is worth noting that during the course of this research Brazil was facing one of its most turbulent times since the end of the military regime. President Dilma Rousseff was deposed in 2016, accused of fiscal wrongdoings, and her Vice-President, conservative Michel Temer, ascended to power, ending 12 years of the Worker’s Party rule. Temer’s government was marked by more political turmoil and corruption allegations, besides an on-going economic crisis. Former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the main left-wing political figure in the country, was arrested in 2018 as part of an operation against corruption, being prevented from running for the presidential elections. Lula’s controversial conviction accelerated the political polarisation. In October 2018, far-right candidate Jair Bolsonaro was elected, initiating a new era of populism in Brazil.

The issue to be highlighted is that the combination of rising extremism, political instability and widespread use of social media deeply affects the way journalists work. Political polarisation encourages partisan agendas and, consequently, may lead to misinformation (Newman et al., 2019). It is beyond the scope of this study to examine how social media has influenced the election of Bolsonaro, but I argue that journalism currently faces considerable challenges in the country. If on the one hand,

this background of instability reinforces the need for journalists to hold power into account, on the other media corporations are under pressure to survive in an environment of information overload. As a consequence, business considerations also shape the news production. Carlson describes how “despite the normative rigidity of editorial independence, in practice the forces of commercialism have always compromised journalistic autonomy” (2015, p.851).

Thereby, this research aims to contribute to the understanding of media practices that persist in being non-commercial and not driven by the same news coverage that have overtaken mainstream media. As media scholars and non-scholars have been seeking to examine the impact of the digital disruption on large media corporations, this study looks into “the other side”, contributing to existing literature on alternative media and alternative journalism. In centring the analysis on different Brazilian cases, this thesis also intends to bridge the gap in a field dominated by an Anglo-American perspective.

Additionally, although there is a lot of academic interest on the rise of alternative journalism as a form of civic resistance in countries where dissent is treated as criminality, such as China and Iran (Allan and Thorsen, 2014), fewer studies provide insights into the practices of new media producers in Brazil, where in spite of the recent rise of authoritarianism, the media system is currently not under state control, contrary to what happened at other times in the country’s history, as will be discussed in Chapter 3.

1.3 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

This study comprises seven sections, following this Introduction. At the centre of the discussion is not a homogeneous form of alternative journalism, as previously noted. Rather, different types of alternative journalism are analysed, being that the most basic common point between them is generally the will to “break to the informational blockage” (Liewrouv, 2011, p. 119).

Chapter 2 covers the literature review, introducing theoretical discussions on the definition of alternative media and, more specifically, alternative journalism. In reviewing key contributions of authors such as John Downing, Clemencia Rodriguez, Nick Couldry and James Curran, this chapter provides a framework to understand what are the defining elements of alternative media. Chris Atton’s various studies, from *Alternative Media* (2002) to the edited collection *The Routledge Companion to Alternative and Community Media* (2015), were crucial to the development of the argument. Chris Atton and James Hamilton’s research on alternative journalism (2008) helped to shape the scope of this study since they include different forms of doing media that are not necessarily politically radical. Their focus is on media that represents “the interests, views and needs of under-represented groups in society” (2008, p.2). Based on this discussion of definitions, the chapter reviews the seminal case of Indymedia and applies the concepts of participatory journalism to examples recorded in Brazil, such as the aforementioned *Midia Ninja*.

Chapter 3 presents some key aspects of alternative media's history in Brazil, from the colonial times to the resumption of democracy after the military dictatorship (1964-1985). This brief overview shows that the concept of alternative media is not new. Fragmented attempts to challenge hegemonic discourse, usually with a focus on social justice, have always occurred, although the political and historical contexts have changed over time. In looking at past experiences, we have more tools to understand to what extent new models of alternative journalism are replicating the ideals of the alternative press of other times. This chapter gives special attention to the alternative press that developed during the military dictatorship, the so-called *imprensa nanica* (nano press).

Chapter 4 details how this qualitative research was designed and developed. It explains how twenty semi-structured interviews with alternative media producers were conducted and how data was coded and analysed. This section includes a description of the outlets and groups represented by the interviewees. It then discusses the qualitative content analysis applied to four case studies. My preoccupation was one of choosing diverse examples of how news can be challenged by different players. The chosen examples are: *Agência Pública* (investigative news outlet focused on human rights); *Amazônia Real* (investigative news outlet covering the Amazon region); *Coletivo Papo Reto* (collective of citizen journalists from Complexo do Alemão, one of the largest favelas in Rio de Janeiro) and *Nós, Mulheres da Periferia* (collective of women journalists from the periphery of São Paulo). In total, 120 articles/posts from these projects were analysed.

To discuss the role of alternative media producers, Chapter 5, the first of the empirical chapters of this study, examines goals and viewpoints of different practitioners in relation to journalism's practices. This chapter investigates distinctive possibilities for these new players to show their dissatisfaction with the dominant forms of journalism. The focus here is thus on how alternative producers, both professional and amateur, position themselves within the contemporary Brazilian media landscape. The empirical evidence comes mainly from the interviews with active participants of alternative organisations. Data confirms the heterogeneity of the field and reinforces the concern of alternative journalism in giving voice to counter-public spheres.

Chapter 6 considers the themes that emerged from the interviews in relation to the economic pressures over alternative projects and solutions to achieve a viable funding model without replicating the traditional business model of mainstream media in digital environments. A central point of the argument is that alternative producers are trying to defy the ephemerality that has always marked initiatives in the field of alternative media. They are interested in going beyond short-lived campaigns, but for this to happen they have to overcome limited resources and small audiences. This section deepens the discussion on issues such as whether or not partnerships with mainstream media are viable and what types of organisational structures are needed to gain access to international funding, avoiding at the same time the hierarchical structures of large media corporations.

In Chapter 7, I present the findings of the qualitative content analysis related to four case studies. The chapter makes an attempt to validate the discourses of producers

presented in the previous chapters. The aim is to expand the discussion on their role in the contemporary media landscape and challenges to traditional journalistic codes. And, finally, in Chapter 8, this study concludes with the argumentation on the overall findings.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE, PART 1: ALTERNATIVE MEDIA AND HOW DOMINANT NARRATIVES ARE CONTESTED

Various scholars have addressed the question of what alternative media is and, yet, to speak of the term is inevitably to come across a lack of consensus on what it means. As Downing observes, “everything at some point is alternative to something else” (2001, p.xx). It is hard not to agree: “alternative” could be a vague label, especially if we disregard contextual factors. The main focus of this research is alternative journalism, which is only one facet of alternative media, but similarly it is not possible to point out a single formula of what alternative journalists do, as other authors have previously shown (Atton, 2002a; Atton and Hamilton, 2008; Forde, 2011; Harcup, 2013). This chapter does not attempt to find a solution for this lack of consensus on definitions of alternative media and assumes that looking for a pure set of fixed elements is not helpful (Atton, 2002a). Instead, it provides an outline of key studies on the field to situate this research within the broad range of academic literature addressing hybrid forms of investigating challenges to traditional forms of doing journalism.

First of all, to examine the emergence of autonomous digital native media in the Brazilian media landscape, the present study applies Atton’s (2002a) understanding of alternative media as a practice that is not limited to “the media of radical politics, of publications with minority audiences, of amateur writing and production” (ibid, 2002a, p.29). Rather, this research is concerned with hybrid

manifestations of alternative media, more specifically within the frame of news gathering. The notion of counter-hegemonic publics is introduced in the following sections to discuss the emergence of new digital media practices to fill the gap in particular coverages. Indymedia is explored as a seminal case of radical deployment of new technologies to create a global network, but academic references from Brazil, mainly on the phenomenon of *midialivrismo*, and subsequently *Mídia Ninja*, were incorporated to add more context to this literature review. One of the main limitations of alternative media, which is the lack of funding, is also discussed here.

Firstly, the chapter examines multiple perspectives of alternative media and the different labels that can be used to describe non-mainstream experiments, from radical media (Downing, 2001) to peripheral media (Levy, 2018). In doing so, it provides a framework to analyse more particularly how dissatisfaction with established media may create new interactions that affect the boundaries of journalism. It suggests that the rise of more participatory forms of doing journalism should not be studied simply as opposition to particular mainstream media news coverage but as relevant practices to question the very way in which journalism is traditionally done.

2.1 CHALLENGING MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS FROM THE MARGINS

According to Atton (2002a), critical characteristics of alternative media are: content that is politically, culturally or socially radical; varied visual language; use

of technology to reproduce/innovate/adapt; alternative distribution methods; anti-copyright ethos; de-professionalised social roles and collective organisations; and unconventional communication systems, such as “horizontal linkages and networks” (ibid, 2002a, p.27). Although it is very unlikely to find all these elements in every media, the model helps to situate alternative media within the scenario of digital disruption that has been transforming the way we produce and consume media. Moreover, alternative media is invariably connected to a decentralised form of media production that considers “how the world might be represented differently” (Atton, 2015, p.1). Drawing on Bourdieu’s (1991) concept of symbolic power, Atton notes that “alternative media construct a reality that opposes the conventions and representations of the mass media” (2008, p.216). This thesis grounds its analysis on how these conventions and representations might be challenged by alternative media producers, both trained journalists and amateur ones.

In a more focused delineation, Atton and Hamilton (2008) take a step further for the theorising of alternative journalism providing an essential framework upon which this thesis builds a broad understanding of alternative journalism:

Alternative journalism proceeds from dissatisfaction not only with the mainstream coverage of certain issues and topics, but also with the epistemology of news. Its critique emphasizes alternatives to, *inter alia*, conventions of news sources and representation; the inverted pyramid of news texts; the hierarchical and capitalized economy of commercial journalism; the professional, elite basis of journalism as a practice; the professional norm of objectivity; and the subordinate role of audience as receiver. (Atton and Hamilton, 2008, p.1)

This approach follows Couldry and Curran's (2003) thoughts on alternative media as a challenge to concentrations of media power. They argue that media power, or the direct control of media production, is itself an emergent theme of social conflict, adding that "media's representational power is one of society's main forces in its own right" (ibid, 2003, p.4). Accordingly, alternative media "challenge, at least implicitly, actual concentrations of media power, whatever those concentrations may take in different locations" (ibid, 2003, p.7). In line with this broader angle for the understanding of alternative media, this thesis considers independent forms of doing media that "may or may not be politically radical" (Couldry and Curran, 2003, p.7). In an increasingly complex media landscape that involves distinct social actors fighting over media power, Forde (2011) takes a similar stance to examine a diverse set of contesting media practices. Yet, for her, these practices are essentially connected to democratic purposes and social responsibility. In giving voice to the unrepresented, alternative journalism "is itself a political act" (Forde, 2011, p.173). Coyer, Dowmunt and Fountain (2007) agree. For them, "the political nature of alternative media is often present irrespective of content, located in the mere act of producing" (ibid, 2007, p.4).

Viewed this way, the term "alternative" is changeable and may cover a variety of alternative practices that place the power of producing media in the hands of networks situated in the margins, in other words, communities who do not feel represented on the mainstream media. There is, thus, an element of resistance in the alternative realm, which in the Brazilian context, for instance, may include citizen journalists who use digital platforms to portray the reality of the *favelas* (Baroni, Aguiar and Rodrigues, 2011; Davis, 2015; Levy, 2018); online

investigative outlets providing a public service that defy the commercialised practices of mainstream media (Requejo-Alemán and Lugo-Ocando, 2014); and feminist media projects to cover gender-related issues, whose audience has been growing exponentially since 2016 (Costa, 2018). Building on this understanding of challenges to media power, one question asked by Couldry served as an inspiration for this study: “Why believe that certain institutions have a special status in narrating the social world, privileged above individuals’ accounts of living in that world?” (2003, p.42).

A similar question might be asked having in mind the role of alternative journalism: is it possible to offer alternative ways of covering the news using sources that are not, in general, the predominant voices in mainstream media? For Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier, alternative mediated communications are relevant “not only in relation to the mainstream but also in their potential to voice ideas which are important and distinctive in their own right” (2007, p.xii). Levy’s (2018) study contributes to this discussion by reducing the gap in the alternative media research in contemporary Brazil. Basing his analysis on the grounds of alternative media contributions to politicizing inequality from the margins of Brazilian society, Levy introduces the concept of “peripheral media” and stresses the relevance of small-scale outlets that employ digital media for the dissemination of demands for social justice. These visions of the periphery will be resumed in the empirical chapters of this thesis.

Given that the present research deals with heterogeneous voices that challenge hegemonic representations of society, the following section addresses other

relevant theories that help to reduce the apparent imprecision of alternative media's nature. As mentioned, what interests this chapter is to discuss how past research could be useful to capture defining tendencies of alternative journalism.

2.1.1 Radical, critical and citizens' media: different labels to define the alternative

This research adopts the term "alternative" for its flexibility and comparative aspect, but for a better understanding of the nature of alternative media a look into other specific definitions is needed. Downing (2001) coined the label "radical media" to theorize a diverse range of experiences such as graffiti, dance and political cartooning in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Britain.

Nevertheless, new social movements are the manifestations that better encompass the organisational and radical features of alternative media according to his framework. Radical media's mission is to encourage the public to seek social change "against policies or even against the very survival of the power structure" (Downing, 2001, p.xi). Downing emphasizes the collective non-hierarchical way dissident groups are organised. This theory is focused on alternative media dealing with radical politics, thus the term "radical" would be reductive for the scope of this study, which is also interested in projects that do not define themselves through their ties with political movements.

Although Rodriguez (2001) also analyses alternative media in terms of social empowerment, she adopts a different and relevant perspective. The scholar introduces the term "citizens' media" (2001) since her focus is on media that serve

communities. For Rodriguez, more important than the actual output is what the process of citizen media's production can do to communities excluded from the mainstream media's discourses. Drawing on the theory of radical democracy developed by Mouffe and McClure, Rodriguez's (2001) emphasis, hence, is centered on the self-expression and self-representation of marginalized citizens. Therefore, the concept of citizen's media alone cannot sustain this thesis's theoretical approach, since I do not restrict my analysis to media produced by non-professionals. Solely considering community media based on self-representation might not be enough to understand current practices of non-mainstream modes of doing journalism in Brazil.

In the context of this thesis, Harcup's (2011; 2013) study on the role of alternative media through the lens of active citizenship, with particular attention to the journalistic methods of such media, is fruitful. Referring to "oppositional reporting", he considers "ideologically-informed but evidence-based critique of dominant ideas within society" (ibid, 2013, p.14). Harcup does not place his study exclusively in the terrain of amateur producers, also including forms of oppositional reporting practiced by local newspapers, for instance. One can easily argue that oppositional reporting may also be found on mainstream press, and examples abound both in Brazilian journalism and in journalism practiced by media with global impact. This research agrees with studies that do not view alternative and mainstream media as exclusive binaries practices (Downing, 2001; Atton, 2004; Kenix, 2011). However, as McQuail reminds us (2013), large media organisations are driven by the goal of selling their products, which inevitably presents limitations for journalistic work. To maintain high audience levels media

corporations generally include in their newscasts some entertainment-oriented coverage (Thussu, 2007; Calcutt and Hammond, 2011; Harcup and O’Neill, 2017), for instance. Consequently, alternative forms of media, which are usually produced in a non-commercial way, have more opportunities to freely articulate oppositional reporting.

In that context, Fuchs (2010) introduces the notion of “critical media” or “mass media that challenge the dominant capitalist forms of media production, media structures, content, distribution, and reception” (2010, p.178). Drawing from a Marxist perspective, he criticizes approaches of alternative media theories that are process-oriented and maintains that such a focus emphasizes productions that are self-organised and small-scale, dismissing media that publish a very critical content but are organised in a professional way, such as the publications *New Internationalist* and *Le Monde Diplomatique*. His main concern is that small-scale community media are not able to reach a larger public sphere or promote political or social change as they “tend to produce fragmented unconnected publics” or to remain “ghettos” (Fuchs, 2010, p.177). Fuchs observes that a media landscape in which consumers can become media producers “is not automatically a media democracy” (2010, p128). Even though a Marxist approach is not suited for this thesis because the alternative groups analysed here are not necessarily concerned with the contradictions of the capitalist system, Fuchs’s perspective points out an issue that is of primary interest for this study: how do alternative projects remain viable and visible in the digital age? On the other hand, Rodriguez (2001) argues against labelling alternative media as simply chaotic and doomed to failure because of their ephemerality. She stresses that multiple small forces that “surface

and burst like bubbles in a swamp” make democratic communication a live creature “with its very own vital rhythms” (2001, p.22).

Accordingly, this study resonates with the understanding of alternative media and, subsequently, alternative journalism, as a source of opposition to hegemonic forces. However, to understand the extent to which alternative producers defy dominant journalistic paradigms and conventions, we should also look into their working practices. As suggested by Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier, the identity of alternative media is related to “the contexts of production, distribution and consumption” (2008, pxii). Atton (2004) too puts emphasis not only on the content but also on how alternative media are organised.

The next section explores theories on counter-publics and their relation to hybrid forms of alternative media.

2.2 REFLECTIONS ON THE PUBLIC SPHERE

The definition of counter-public sphere is a critical concept for this research. It is important to determine whether digital technologies create alternative publics. As Papacharissi clarifies, there is a difference between “virtual space” and “virtual sphere”: while the former enhances discussions, the latter promotes democracy (2002, p.11). But firstly, when talking about public sphere, it is central to go back to Habermas’ (1989) idealized concept of a domain of social life to promote rational public debate and, as a consequence, national accord.

Briefly, Habermas traces the emergence of the notion of public sphere during the seventeenth century in Britain when a new social order was being shaped by early capitalists. The growth in commodities' traffic demanded an increase in the circulation of news and thus, in Habermas' view journalism had a crucial role as a forum for rational-critical debate. However, "the press itself became manipulable to the extent that it became commercialized" (Habermas, 1989, p.185).

Considering this critique to the commodification of mass media mainly throughout the twentieth century, could radical shifts in doing journalism present a renewed form of public sphere? To answer this, we must look into the critiques to Habermas' romanticized view of a single great public.

From a feminist perspective, Fraser (1992) points out that women and lower classes were excluded from this notion of public sphere and proposes a post-industrial model of layered counter-publics formed by minorities. The concept explains why subordinated social groups, that is minorities excluded from the bourgeois public sphere, such as women, non-white communities, gays and lesbians, have come to constitute alternative publics in America. Fraser refers to them as "subaltern counter-publics" (1992, p. 123) or, in other words, groups that do not have the same opportunities to disseminate their collective identities (Papacharissi, 2002).

In spite of paying little attention to how alternative media are produced, Fraser's argument against the idea of a single public sphere helps to shape the comprehension of counter-narratives that are central to theorizing alternative journalism. Subaltern counter-publics are "parallel discursive arenas where

members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (Fraser, 1992, p.123). She mentions as an example, the US feminist subaltern counter-public of the late-twentieth century, when feminists came up with new terms, including “sexism”, “the double shift”, “sexual harassment”, and “marital, date, and acquaintance rape” (1992, p. 123). Similarly, Benhabib (1992) contests Habermas’ notion of a single public sphere where the private sphere was excluded from the realm of justice. She argues that while in the bourgeois public sphere men were looking for democracy against the absolutist state, in the household women were subjected to non-egalitarian power relations, oppression and exploitation.

In the midst of declining levels of trust from civil society in established institutions, including traditional media, counter-public spheres offer a gateway to a broader political engagement (Fuchs, 2010). The argument for a plurality of more inclusive public arenas is, thus, directly linked to alternative media as a space for counter-publics to raise their voices, to build social identities and to fight experiences of prejudice or oppression. Fraser argues that “public life in egalitarian, multicultural societies cannot consist exclusively in a single, comprehensive public sphere” (1992, p.126). With the widespread use of new technologies, the concept of multiple public spheres seems even more relevant.

2.2.1 Counter-public spheres in a network society

Castells defines virtual community as “a self-defined electronic network of interactive communication organised around a shared interest or purpose, although

sometimes communication becomes the goal in itself” (2000, p. 352). It is true that the internet and related digital technologies have allowed citizens to create virtual communities with shared interests that can interact beyond geographical boundaries, thus enlarging avenues for public participation in political and social debates. However, going back to Papacharissi (2002), public space is not automatically a public sphere.

In that sense, it is useful to think of alternative media as a rhizome. Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier (2008) borrow from Deleuze and Guattari the metaphor of the rhizome to stress the heterogeneity of interconnections between technologies and people as opposed to the homogeneity and rigidity of the state and the market. Accordingly, alternative media use local communities as a starting point, but may result in translocal networks. The focus of this theory is the fluidity and the dialectics between the local and the global, a connection that can be expanded through new technologies. Twitter, for example, changed news distribution as well as the traditional format of news, besides providing a new platform for the demands of different social actors (Gerbaudo, 2012; Hermida, 2012; Papacharissi, 2015). Poell and Borra (2011) suggest that Twitter facilitates alternative journalistic efforts. When examining the protests against the 2010 G20 summit in Toronto, they found that Twitter was the most useful platform for crowd-sourcing alternative reporting in comparison to YouTube and Flickr.

However, simply celebrating the potentials of new technologies to give voice to the voiceless, or to allow anyone to become a journalist with global reach (Gillmor, 2008), means succumbing to an optimistic discourse that has been

largely contested by recent studies. While the internet increases the visibility of alternative media projects and allows alternative journalists to expand the size of subaltern counter-publics' audience (Atton and Hamilton, 2008), Fenton warns of the risk of fetishization of technology, reminding us that “networks are not inherently liberatory; network openness does not lead us directly to democracy” (2016, p.166). Activists with different interests have benefited from the internet to strengthen their networks, but enhancing activism is not the same of revitalising democracy (Curran, Fenton and Freedman, 2016). Also, independent news outlets still have to deal with limited funds and audiences (Requejo-Alemán and Lugo-Ocando, 2014; Konieczna and Robinson; Hunter and Bartolomeo, 2018) as discussed in Chapter 6. Simply put, the internet is “a global capitalist project” (Atton, 2004, p.10), thus any study on online resistance practices has to take into account this context of dominant economic ideologies.

To what concerns this chapter, a relevant question could be raised here: If alternative media give voice to the excluded, how does this ethos translate in disruptions of journalistic practices in the current media landscape?

2.3 ALTERNATIVE NOTIONS OF JOURNALISM

Before any in-depth discussion on new boundaries of journalism can take place, it is important to address views on the fundamental role of journalism. Briefly, journalism's mission is “linking citizens to political life” (Dahlgren, 2009, p.150) or, in other words, providing citizens the information they need for the common good of democracy (Papacharissi, 2009; Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2014). Schudson

(2008) synthesizes six primary functions that news has served in democratic societies: 1) information; 2) investigation; 3) analysis; 4) social empathy; 5) public forum; 6) mobilization and publicizing representative democracy. It is not the intention of this research to review the history of journalism in Western societies. However, it is relevant to keep in mind that journalism's development as a profession happened alongside industrialism and, therefore, journalistic practices were and continue to be affected by technology.

Allan (2010) argues that news-reporting practices enhance the idea of journalism as a profession and points out elements such as “speed, accuracy and the ability to work under pressure as essential characteristics of the ‘respectable’ journalist” (2010, p.41). Amid rising power of mass-circulation newspapers, which demanded a division of labour and a hierarchical organisation (Witsche and Nygren, 2009), journalism began to be seen as a profession by mid nineteenth century (Allan, 2010). The emergence of the doctrine of journalistic objectivity and neutral point of view, breaking from a partisanship approach, is linked to this development, especially after the First World War, as different scholars have observed (Kaplan, 2009; Allan, 2010; Brock, 2013).

Deuze (2005) prefers to explore journalism as an occupational ideology, an activity that shares common characteristics and values in a daily routine and which reinforces the self-perception of professional journalists as “watchdogs of society” (ibid, 2005:449). Singer (2003) adds that journalistic codes are not mandatory but agrees that journalists usually see themselves as abiding by ethical guidelines in the name of their public service duties. Furthermore, “the provision of reliable,

factual information by impartial watchdogs is seen almost universally as a central journalistic function” (Singer, 2015, p.22). Past research has already highlighted how the commercialisation of mass media, and consequently the growing concentration of media ownership, undermine the ideal of journalism’s independence and the notion of the press as a Fourth Estate (Curran, 2002; Hampton, 2009). For Thussu (2007), the rise of global media conglomerates and their concern with maximizing profitability have produced the current trend of infotainment or news with the aim of entertaining.

Despite the need to critique the assumption that the internet equally empowers citizens, it is undeniable that it created more conditions for audiences to express their disillusionment with the way news is framed, facilitating participatory forms of journalism outside the realm of corporate newsrooms. For example, in Rio de Janeiro citizen journalists are helping to document the residents’ routine in the *favelas* through their own channels of communication. Some of these groups, such as *Viva Favela*, not only offer a digital sphere for individual contributions but also serve as a hub for the development of smaller media projects (Davis, 2015). In April 2015, a collective of citizen journalists from Complexo do Alemão, one of Rio largest *favelas*, reported on the killing of a 10-year-old boy who was shot by policemen. Equipped with smartphones, members of the collective *Papo Reto* filmed the crime scene, the family’s despair and the community’s revolt against the police brutality. By posting the video on YouTube¹, they prevented the police of accusing drug traffickers for the death of an innocent child. Later, mainstream media used these community journalists as a source to report the crime.

¹ Video is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OdBSLcjwtIE>

Such mediated involvement with their own reality of social exclusion can be linked to the expansion of the concept of citizenship described by Rodriguez (2001), who pointed out three fundamental elements of citizens' media: 1) a collective activating the notion of citizenship to change the media landscape; 2) contestation of social codes and relations; 3) practices that empower the community. The example coming from the *favelas* can certainly be interpreted in the light of Rodriguez's theories, and strongly resonates with the challenges to the dominant practices of journalism.

In acknowledging new conditions for enhancing audiences' participation in the process of newsgathering, journalism demands a reevaluation of its core concepts. Here we might consider what Atton (2002b) conceptualizes as "native reporting":

Native reporters use their role as activists in order to represent from the insides the motives, experiences, feelings, needs and desires of the wider social movements they thus come to represent. Dealing with events and actions, their contributions superficially resemble eyewitness reports in mainstream media. Native reporting can usefully define the activities of radical journalists working within communities of interest to present news that is relevant to those communities, presented in a manner that is meaningful to them and with their collaboration and support. (Atton, 200b, p.495)

Hence, alternative journalism represents a shift in conventional notions of doing journalism by replacing objectivity with advocacy (Atton, 2004; Atton and Hamilton, 2008). In addition, alternative journalism is usually based on collective and anti-hierarchical forms of organisation, suggesting more inclusive practices. Campbell (2004) argues that, instead of speaking of alternative journalism, we

should adopt the notion of “alternative journalisms” since there are different examples of alternatives to traditional journalism, such as literary journalism, participatory journalism and public journalism (2004, p.183).

Nevertheless, what concerns this thesis are alternative forms of digital reporting that go beyond aesthetic challenges and that seek alternative practices that confront not only the content disseminated by big news organisations but also the structures and professional norms that surround such production.

From this viewpoint, public journalism, for instance, is not alternative. Proposed in the last decade of the twentieth century and mainly adopted by American newspapers, public journalism was a movement concerned with the disconnection between news organisations and citizens, urging journalists to cover issues that were really important to communities (Nip, 2006). It moved away from the ideal of detachment, encouraging community action. However, it operated in a similar way as traditional journalism, that is, within big corporate and professionalized structures, without giving citizens the power to tell their own stories (Atton, 2003). For some of public journalism’s critics it was merely a marketing strategy for media companies (Rosenberry and St. Jonh III, 2010), instead of a genuine effort to connect media and communities.

2.3.1 Citizen journalists

The rise of citizen journalism adds complexity to this discussion on what is alternative and what is not. Although the term citizen journalism lacks a clear

definition, it can be generally understood as participatory communication that includes amateurs in the process of newsgathering and distribution. Therefore, citizen journalists are relevant participants of the digital news ecology in which online audiences disrupt the hegemony of traditional gatekeepers. Bowman and Willis adopt the term participatory journalism to define “the act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and disseminating news and information” (2003, p.9). Blogs, collaborative publishing, group chats and posts on social media can be a form of citizens’ engagement in journalism. More specifically, Allan (2013) notes that citizen journalism often thrives during a time of crisis, when ordinary citizens happen to be present on the scene and can join the news making process.

Contemporary news coverage is replete with examples that illustrate the phenomenon. Recent news events with global impact have highlighted this practice, such as the tsunami in Southeast Asia (2004), the London bombings (2005), the Mumbai terror attacks (2008) and the terrorist attacks in Paris (2015). According to Wall, non-professionals distributed “words and images of death and survival, destruction and renewal, hope and despair; in sum, some of the essential moments of life on earth” (2015:797). In turn, Couldry (2010) prefers to call these news-source actors as “writer-gatherers”. He refers to citizens who are regularly engaged in writing and gathering information outside mainstream media. While recognizing that the sustainability of these activities is still a problem, Couldry’s analysis of the values and aims of writer-gatherers outside mainstream media in the UK points out two positive aspects: improved communications within

professional and campaigning groups and the emergence of new types of source-actors acting independently from the market.

According to Palacios and Munhoz (2007), when citizens from different social classes adopt new technologies to report or confront official discourse, they attest the advancement of citizen empowerment. Citizen journalists are increasingly essential to complement _ and sometimes counterpoint _ the narratives of professional journalists. On the other hand, it would be an exaggeration to define citizen journalism as a complete break with the practices adopted by large media companies. In their attempt to provide news 24 hours a day, news corporations have learned to incorporate content produced by amateurs. During the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, big media outlets, such as CNN and BBC, were firstly reluctant to trust reports about the day to day life in Baghdad that were published by bloggers on the ground. However, they ended up incorporating those contributions, consolidating an alliance between ordinary citizens and professional journalists, which today is seen as a routine during a crisis coverage (Thorsen and Allan, 2014).

Moreover, citizen journalism does not replace the work of professional journalists.

Meikle (2014) explains:

Professional journalists - acting professionally - can analyse and sift raw material, can test evidence and redact details that may endanger named individuals, can offer context to help the reader interpret the material, can access high-status sources of official information, and can shape the data into stories, reports and commentaries that make sense of the material for audiences who lack, of course, the time and

expertise to process specialised documents and intelligence for themselves. (Meikle, 2014, p.181)

Papacharissi (2009) presents a similar reflection regarding blogs. She argues that bloggers do not replace journalists, rather they engage in a different type of information gathering, blending public and private agendas. The analysis of the participatory journalism proposed by the Korean website *OhmyNews* helps to illustrate the discussion. The outlet was launched in 2004 by a professional journalist and was open to popular contributions from citizen journalists. On the one hand, the initial manifesto promised a revolution in Korean media culture (Moretzsohn, 2014). On the other, employees needed to follow a code of ethics that was based on deontological codes of the traditional press. Furthermore, it was a for-profit business funded mainly by advertisement (Atton and Hamilton, 2008; Moretzsohn, 2014). This convergence of practices shows how it is increasingly difficult to establish clear demarcations of differences between mainstream and alternative methods (Kenix, 2011).

What would be, then, the role of citizen journalists when we are not talking about times of crisis, the capture of a historical moment or the expression of personal opinions? Rodriguez (2014) provides an important distinction: based on her fieldwork in Colombia, she concludes that there are the non-professional reporters whom, with access to digital technology, have the capacity to bear witness to news events, and there is what she defines as a Latin American approach to citizen journalism, that is “a practice of resistance” moved by social responsibility and public interest (2014, p.201). Rodriguez, once again, emphasizes a citizen journalism that is driven by the needs of communities.

However, the assumption that there is a Latin American approach is questionable, since a broad range of economic, social and political differences shapes the news production in such a large and diverse region. Nevertheless, Rodriguez's (2001, 2014) emphasis on an alternative journalism that is concerned with communities to nourish democracy is a valuable theoretical approach to explore, for instance, the work of citizen journalists from the *favelas* in Brazil.

The next section discusses the example of Indymedia, which remains a powerful global case study to understand the contestation of media power in the digital age.

2.3.2 The example of Indymedia

Atton states that what appears imbalanced or partisan in alternative media “is to be considered not as a set of absolute truths; instead it comprises a set of accounts told from different perspectives” (2004, p.39). This framework serves as an introduction to the radical experiment of Indymedia, still a relevant example of what happens when audiences become producers and the role of traditional gatekeepers is challenged. The Independent Media Centre (IMC), or Indymedia, was formed during the protests against the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Seattle in 1999, though the software that the sites used was created in Sydney (Meikle, 2002). Acting as a coalition of anti-globalization movements, activists created their own digital media to contest the coverage of protests by traditional media. Without the need of prior approval, anyone could distribute a report, a photo, a video or an audio through the use of open publishing software. After

Seattle, many local IMCs spread around the globe, reaching a peak of more than 170 regional centres in the mid 2000s (Giraud, 2014).

Indymedia defines itself as “a network of collectively run media outlets for the creation of radical, accurate and passionate tellings of the truth”, according to the “about us” page of its website, which adds: “We work out of a love and inspiration for people who continue to work for a better world, despite corporate media’s distortions and unwillingness to cover the efforts to save humanity” (Independent Media Center, no date). As Pickard (2006) notes, Indymedia’s uniqueness did not rely only on its radical content, but mainly on how it negotiated power relationships. Giraud (2014) echoes this distinct structural form by emphasizing the non-hierarchical political principles that encouraged citizen’s participation in media production.

Although editors of each Indymedia centre could exert control over unsuitable contributions, the platform was open to all, which was the defining feature of Indymedia (Meikle, 2002). The decision-making process was based on open collective meetings in which decisions were taken through consensus after discussions and debates, both online and offline (Pickard, 2006; Giraud, 2014). Atton (2004) stresses that, although a small collective ran each IMC, such groups should not be seen as an elitist leadership. In Downing’s (2003) words:

The IMCs are not heaven-sent. They are ours, us at work, to act as best we can to make them empowering agencies and fora _ not uniquely so, but as part of the tapestry. (Downing, 2003, p. 254)

Using the Seattle IMC as a case study, Pickard (2006) describes a set of tensions within the networks, among them the conflict between members who supported an unlimited radical democratic attitude and those who advocated a pragmatic approach to control, for instance, abuses committed by hate groups such as neo-nazis. Nonetheless, Pickard's analysis is mostly positive, examining how the internet unleashed new opportunities for the radical democracy practiced by Indymedia's activists. There was some editorial control (Atton, 2004), but the collectively-run nodes largely allowed participants to produce content without the same level of centralization that occur in the mainstream media. Even though some of the dilemmas faced by Indymedia editors regarding what to publish were not so different of those that mainstream media professionals have to deal with, ideologically the horizontal IMC model "assumes a close and non-hierarchical relationship between reader and content" (Platon and Deuze, 2003, p.350). By putting the power of the storytelling in the hands of those within the movements, Indymedia challenged the vertical form of decision on what is and what is not considered news (Meikle, 2009).

In Brazil, the regional Indymedia, or Centro de Mídia Independente Brasil (in Portuguese), was created in the year 2000, first in São Paulo and later expanding to other states, with its own identity, as the country is marked by strong economic and social differences. The regional centres, though, followed the precepts of what was created in Seattle. It is interesting to note that the national IMC produced projects that went beyond the website, such as a radio program disseminated by community radios and small newspapers (Targino, 2009) in order to reach audiences who did not have access to the internet. The most important point here,

therefore, is to highlight how these centres of horizontal content production have paved the way for new forms of audience participation in the distribution of news stories. The evolution of digital media expanded the possibilities for non-mainstream producers “to exercise symbolic power in new ways” (Meikle, 2009, p.194).

At this point, it should be clear that Indymedia producers were activists writing with explicit engagement as grassroots reporters from within the movements. As Atton (2004) emphasizes, first-person narratives are central to alternative media, while at mainstream media this is more common among senior reporters, columnists and op-ed writers. Hence, alternative journalism is also a direct challenge to the professional doctrine of objectivity previously discussed in this chapter. While professionalized journalism is based on the assumption that it is possible to report news from a neutral perspective, alternative journalists do not separate facts from values (Atton and Hamilton, 2008; Forde, 2011).

Bunz (2016) adds a helpful approach by comparing the open journalism produced by Indymedia with the current use of social media platforms. The difference, as she points out, is related to the question of ownership. Indymedia’s platform does not have an owner, whereas Facebook, Twitter and others belong to new digital empires that could hardly be understood as independent media. However, despite its contribution to the creation of counter-publics without the pressure of economic interests, Indymedia’s centres declined in the midst of rapid transformations brought by Web 2.0 since the early 2000’s.

Today, social networks and mobile communications support different types of social mobilization and freedom of expression, although Indymedia's legacy should not be underestimated. Its core practices were appropriated by contemporary movements that anchored their actions on Twitter and Facebook, whereas Gerbaudo (2012) warns against an overestimation of the power of social media in the promotion of movements such as the Arab Spring, the Indignados and Occupy Wall Street. Nevertheless, Downing (2018) argues that among the major differences between past forms of alternative media and current digital forms are the growing access to making media, transnational distribution, portability and rapid mobilization. These features combined with the "Be the media" message of Indymedia (Giraud, 2014) explain the emergence of a movement called *midialivrisimo* in Brazil, which can be translated as "activists of free media".

2.3.3 Brazil: Mídia Ninja and *midialivrisimo*

Practitioners of *midialivrisimo* in Brazil are, according to Malini and Antoun, representatives of different social movements seeking to expand the media public sphere "to feed new tastes, new informative agendas and new publics" in opposition to the discourses from large media conglomerates (2013, p.22). Born in Brazil in the 80's as a part of the hacker culture, this movement was driven by the critique to the commodification of mass media and found on cyber-activism an avenue to contest dominant narratives. The growth of activists' practices facilitated by Web 2.0 coincides with the increasing challenges faced by traditional media corporations as well as the weakening of neoliberal ideals in the country

(Almeida e Evangelista, 2013). In sum, *Midialivristas* can be defined as “hackers of narratives” (Malini and Antoun, 2013, p.12).

The media activist group *Mídia Ninja* is an example of *midialivrisimo*, although the movement is not limited to news production. Rather, *midialivrisimo* also involves different forms of alternative art and resistance strategies. It is important to note that in Brazil, the movement for the democratization of the media is intrinsically linked to the cultural policies of the leftist government that was in power between 2003 and 2016 (Maciel, 2015). *Mídia Ninja* was born within the cultural collective *Fora do Eixo* (in English, *Off-axis*), which raised federal funds to sustain its projects, among them a network of collective housing in which residents leave, share “almost everything” and have their costs financed by a collective fund (Savazoni, 2014, p. 28). *Ninjas* do not have a salary. In addition, they alternate responsibilities and functions both in the network and in the house (ibid, 2014). What is of primary interest of this chapter is not the controversial working practices of *Fora do Eixo*, but the impact of *Mídia Ninja* in the Brazilian media landscape.

As explained in Chapter 1, *Mídia Ninja* rose to prominence in 2013, when a wave of mass protests took the Brazilian streets against widespread corruption and lack of official investments in public services. The group aimed at making audiences “the new narrators of their chosen causes” (Stalcup, 2016, p.151), providing a counter-narrative to that of mainstream media, which initially described the protesters as “rioters”. *Mídia Ninja* privileges a decentralised mode of content production that combines professional journalists and amateurs to promote social

transformation. According to *Ninja*'s website, activists explain what they do as journalism “to strengthen narratives that have no visibility in conventional channels of communication”; they advocate “partiality as a principle”, in accordance with the opposition to the ideal of objectivity of traditional media (Mídia Ninja, no date). The number of members vary, but at the height of the 2013 demonstrations there were 1500 people registered to perform different functions, which were not fixed either, in a completely different arrangement from the traditional mode of content production (Torturra, 2013).

Technology is key to understanding the *ninjas* as “agents of change in the networked society” (Castells, 2012, p.234). As the 2013 protests escalated and spread across Brazil's major urban centres, more activists joined the effort to report from the frontlines of the demonstrations, often equipped only with their mobile phones to publish videos on live streaming applications. Poor quality and non-edited content were part of their political aesthetic (Stalcup, 2016). Their documentation of police violence ended up influencing the mainstream coverage of the 2013 events and helped to hold authorities to account, in a clear mix of activism, journalism and cyberculture (Paz et al, 2016). Thus, *ninjas* could be interpreted both as product of the network society as well as descendants of the anti-globalisation movements (Rodrigues and Baroni, 2018). However, Porto and Brant (2015) argue that social media alone cannot explain the wave of political mobilization in Brazil. Furthermore, different digital networks favoured the influence of tech-savvy groups, fragmenting the original agenda of the protests (ibid, 2015).

Nonetheless, the collaborative functioning of the *ninjas* made them a symbol of a radical route adopted by activists who are more concerned with creating new forms of communication than with necessarily reforming mainstream media (Coyer, Dowmunt and Fountain, 2007). Scholars in Brazil celebrated the emergence of *Mídia Ninja* as a paradigm shift for breaking up with the monopoly of the mainstream narrative in an historical moment. Bentes (2009) highlights the educational dimension of *ninjas*' narratives, which helped changing the editorial line of the traditional press in relation to the protests. Indeed, as police brutality against protesters increased, as shown by *Mídia Ninja* on YouTube, mainstream media changed the tone and adopted a much less critical stance towards the protesters. For Savazoni (2014), *ninjas* were the architects of this bottom up transformation. Both national and international press discussed the relevance of *Mídia Ninja*, as seen below in the examples from the websites of *Folha de S.Paulo* and *The Guardian* (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1: *Mídia Ninja* at *Folha de S.Paulo* and *The Guardian* (screenshot)



Brazil

Brazil's ninja reporters spread stories from the streets

Band of volunteer citizen journalists are setting the news agenda with their 'no-cuts, no censorship' approach

Jonathan Watts in Rio de Janeiro
Thu 29 Aug 2013 15.09 BST

2,979

This article is over 5 years old



▲ A protest in Brazil: Midia Ninja uses mobile phones to report from the streets. Photograph: Gustavo Basso/NurPhoto/Corbis

Without underestimating the significance of *ninjas*' activism, central to this thesis is reflecting on the type of journalism they propose. In that context, Rodrigues and Baroni (2018), in their empirical analysis on *Midia Ninja*'s journalistic ethos, come closer to the aim of this research. Their conclusion is that *Midia Ninja* is mainly engaged in an effort to dispute discourses by the mainstream media. According to them, the selection of news by the collective is determined by its political agenda, thus its counter-hegemonic ethos, based on sources from the left-wing social movements, has more emphasis than the news production itself (ibid, 2018). This analysis matters because it informs the level of partisanship adopted by *Midia Ninja* after the 2013 protests, when it became closer to left-wing government of president Dilma Rousseff (Levy, 2018). This reflection of political partisanship will reappear in Chapter 5.

Furthermore, the voluntary unpaid work limits the profile of the participants and raises doubts about the sustainability of such digital experiences. Going deeper in the funding of some projects of *midialivrisimo* during the left-wing government (2003-2016), Levy (2018) argues that state-sponsored incentives failed to enhance

the reach of alternative media beyond the spheres of the government's supporters. More than that, he observes, explicit links between activists and the state made groups such as *Fora do Eixo* look suspicious in terms of the veracity of their coverage. The organisations included in this research, thus, adopt different strategies in regard to sustainability, given that the purpose is to explore heterogeneous approaches to alternative journalism.

2.4 ALTERNATIVE MEDIA AND THE ECONOMIC PRESSURES

Academic scholarship has given a great deal of attention to the challenges and transformations faced by big media corporations in an era of fragmented audiences and economic disruption brought by the digital era (Anderson, Bell and Shirky, 2012; Liewrouw, 2015; Deuze and Witschge, 2018). However, less consideration is given to independent, not-for-profit media. What are the dilemmas alternative producers still face to have visibility and avoid ephemerality? Coming to terms with the imperatives of a capitalist market-place is a problematisation within the alternative media studies that has been posed by the British research group Comedia in times as distant as 1984. At the end of the second decade of the 21st century there are no definitive answers to the question of how alternative media can overcome the fate of being an “alternative ghetto” (Comedia, 1984, p.95). After all, many factors of the mass media economy are still central aspects of the digital era, such as monopolisation, commodification and accumulation (Curran, Fenton and Freedman, 2016).

When referring to sustainability, this research is addressing the “maintenance of the capital” (Khalili, 2011, p.7). Skinners’ (2012) definition of sustainable media resonates with the inquiry that informs the empirical chapters:

Sustainability is defined as facilitating media organisations’ ongoing operation, improving their abilities to report on events and circumstances salient to public life and engage in public discussion and debate. More specifically, sustainability is about having the resources to acquire staff, technologies of production, and avenues of distribution, and to develop audiences. (Skinner, 2012, p.26)

In the digital era, to be sustainable media projects have to be visible, but the fact that the internet provides more tools to facilitate production does not mean that alternative and mainstream content will be equally consumed (Sandoval and Fuchs, 2010). For Comedia (1984), the solution to overcome the lack of financial efficiency would be the adoption of economic and organisational practices of the mainstream media. The problem with this argument is the belief that alternative media must compete with the mainstream in terms of visibility. The dilemma that alternative journalists face is that they need to find ways to survive financially in a society that works according to rules they criticize (Atton and Hamilton, 2008).

Sandoval and Fuchs (2010) argue that it is difficult but not impossible for alternative media to ensure independence from economic interests at least in regard to the content. A good example of blend between commercialism and critique can be found in alternative publications from the US, such as *The San Francisco Bay Guardian*, which combined advertisement with a very critical content with links to social movements (Benson, 2003). For Benson, under certain circumstances, it is possible to disseminate politically contentious voices within

large marketplaces. However, in the digital era, the advertising-editorial division is even more complex (Carlson and Lewis, 2015), not to mention that the whole advertising business was deeply disrupted by the internet. Cited as an iconic example of publication that was born in the underground scene and ended up having an impact on left-leaning urban consumers (Benson, 2003), *The Village Voice* was an alternative weekly paper that depended heavily on advertising and had to end its operation on August 2018, after 63 years, due to plummeting print circulation.

Understanding alternative journalism as a part of a pervasive commercial media system is important to examine the extent to which non-profit-oriented initiatives can operate in a truly independent and lasting manner. Kenix (2011) argues that as the commercialisation of media is intensified, there is a growing convergence of economic arrangements between mainstream and alternative:

Alternative media have responded to this structural shift largely by promoting mainstream conventions, thereby limiting open-access participation and embracing commercial models of communication. There is a certain level of irony in this circuitous equation. As alternative media adopt more corporate organisation models, this requires more professionalized modes of production, which implicitly locks out voices that were part of what made alternative media ‘alternative’ (Kennix, 2011, p.164)

This tension between the goal for economic sustainability and the non-hegemonic narrative is one of the points of interest in this study, as explored in Chapter 6.

2.4.1 Digitally native non-profit journalism: a new collective force?

Going back to the legacy of Indymedia, the premise of the platform was its fundamental independence from commercial and corporate interests (Platon and Deuze, 2003). Nevertheless, even within the principle of openness that characterizes the Indymedia movement, one cannot speak of total independence as Platon and Deuze (2003) have shown in their study of how editorial decisions and news selections took place in the regional centres. Moreover, there were imbalances in the level of resources and funding between different IMCs, resulting in tensions (Giraud, 2014).

In Brazil the left-wing government of President Dilma Roussef (2011-2016) promoted policies to encourage the use of public funds by alternative media producers (Levy, 2018). If on the one hand this rejection of the business model of corporate media allows the expansion of content production without commercial concerns, on the other it raises doubts about the ability of collectives supported by funds from the federal government to critique the state. This discussion of the concept of political independence reflects the complexity of the issue of alternative media sustainability. Unlike their commercial media counterparts, alternative journalists usually work in small-scale organisations, which are often dependent on volunteering. Even so, and despite the affordances of new technologies, finding a financial solution that does not affect the essential character of the alternative mission is perceived as a problem.

As Skinner (2012) explains, literature on alternative media has three different approaches to sustainability: 1) such media are viewed as marginal and doomed to be ephemeral; 2) alternative media are so engrained in particular political circumstances or movements that they are always going to change according to the development of these issues; 3) creative responses of alternative media depend on the development of social infrastructure to maintain independent media projects, such as policy measures or public educational programmes. This study addresses how Brazilian initiatives in the field of alternative journalism fit into these possible perspectives.

Overall, previous research has pointed out that emerging non-profit news outlets have not yet found a sustainable business model in the long term (Koniczna and Robinson, 2014). Nevertheless, there are suggestions to be followed. Scott, Bunce and Wright (2019) mention that 60% of non-profit news organisations in the US are funded by private foundations. Hunter and Di Bartolomeo (2018) show how crowdfunding campaigns have been used in North America to fund feminist media content, while Salaverría et al (2019) point out an increasing number of independent digital native outlets in Latin America that were founded by laid-off journalists or non-trained citizen journalists interested in covering their communities. While these perspectives are relevant, empirical work is needed to analyse the specific context of Brazil, as Chapter 6 discusses.

2.5 CONCLUSION: SUMMARISING WHAT IS ALTERNATIVE

This chapter has revisited different definitions of alternative media and introduced the theoretical framework that informs this thesis on alternative journalism. A broad range of concepts in the field has been discussed, as well as the link between digital forms of alternative media and new journalistic practices. Although this chapter could not possibly cover all the different academic views on alternative media, the studies analysed here have in common the fact that they explore the field as an essential form of communication aimed at nurturing counter-public spheres and, consequently, counter-narratives to that of the mainstream media. Hence, echoing Coyer, Downmunt and Fountain “there is nothing secondary about alternative media” (2007, p.10).

More specifically, drawing mainly on Atton and Hamilton’s (2008) view of alternative journalism, this study contributes to the academic discourse on alternative media by examining new forms of doing journalism in Brazil that challenge the use of traditional news sources, the economic model of corporate media and professional journalistic codes to represent communities that fell unrepresented. If we take the example of media created in the *favelas* to inform marginalised communities, they are not intrinsically linked to specific social movements. Rather citizen journalists from the *favelas* are concerned with the construction of a reality that challenges the portrait of these communities as it is routinely presented by big news organisations. For alternative producers, recurrent images and narratives of violence in the *favelas* in mainstream news help to stigmatise these poor neighbourhoods (Levy, 2018). This tension between

different perspectives of social realities can be seen, therefore, as a contest over media power (Couldry and Curran, 2003).

Despite a variety of forms, alternative media, and, consequently alternative journalism, dismiss the ideal of impartiality, according to previous studies. Their bias openly contradicts the assumption of objectivity preached by traditional journalism. Practitioners take sides, but on the other hand they defend their journalism as legitimate (Atton, 2004; Atton and Hamilton, 2008). Although alternative media projects could hardly be interpreted as a replacement of conventional journalism, their potential is expanded by digital technologies. As a consequence, the lines between professional and amateur journalism are becoming increasingly blurred.

The literature on citizen journalism phenomena praises the fact that news is no longer an exclusivity of professional journalism. The effects of these changes on traditional newsrooms, which are attached to values and routines, have been extensively analysed, but new modes to produce a sustainable non-commercial journalism need to be further studied beyond the Anglophone world.

Besides that, the production of these alternative forms of media is affected by social and political contexts. This thesis is concerned with social actors, or ‘writer-gatherers’, to employ a term coined by Couldry (2010), who are engaged in non-traditional, but regular practices of newsgathering to sustain counter-public spheres, rather than on the accidental amateur journalists who act in times of crisis. Indymedia’s horizontal model of communication helps to look at journalistic

practices from a non-conventional perspective in a context of changing media culture. However, with the growing power of social platforms, a broad range of heterogeneous networks and media projects have created new discursive arenas and led to new ways of thinking about journalism.

In Brazil, *Mídia Ninja* was influenced by the same non-hierarchical values of Indymedia. *Ninjas* rose to prominence during a time of great political unrest, when they were engaged in an effort to dispute narratives by the mainstream media. The contribution from this thesis can help to shed light on the journalistic practices of alternative producers that came after the *ninjas*. Not just amateurs, but also trained journalists who are equally driven by dissatisfaction with the conventional ways of covering certain issues and communities.

Rather than seeing alternative media in Brazil as a new phenomenon, the present research goes back to past examples of challenges to media power to offer a deeper comprehension of alternative practices in the context of a developing country. The next chapter explores the history of alternative media in Brazil.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW, PART 2: THE ROOTS OF ALTERNATIVE MEDIA IN BRAZIL

This chapter presents a chronological overview of the development of the Brazilian media system with a focus on alternative experiences. Over time, groups that have sought to disseminate non-hegemonic content were invariably persecuted, repressed or simply seen as irrelevant in Brazil's history. Due to the fact that academic studies on Brazilian communication and journalism are dominated by research on mass media institutions or "*grande mídia*" (Chagas Amorim, 2007), non-mainstream journalism has had limited visibility so far, with the exception of oppositional forms of communication that challenged authoritarianism mainly during the military dictatorship, from 1964 to 1985 (Abramo, 1988; Kucinsky, 1991; Woitowicz, 2009).

It would not be feasible to discuss here the details of the history of the Brazilian media since its birth, in the nineteenth century. Rather, to better understand the potential capabilities and limitations of alternative media within the national context, this chapter considers the political interests of the state and the conditions under which the Brazilian media system, and consequently its journalism, have developed. In Brazil, mediated spaces for dissenting voices have often been part of temporary, semi-artisanal experiments that did not survive market pressures or, in specific moments, state repression, as this chapter discusses. Forde (2011) argues that alternative journalism is not entirely dependent on the environment in which it is constructed, but local contexts will often affect its responses. Thus, this research

departs from the vision that “alternative journalism is not an unchanging, universal type of journalism, but is an ever-changing effort to respond critically to dominant conceptions of journalism” (Atton and Hamilton, 2008, p.9). What was the motivation of small publications that resisted the views of dominant sources, even in a fragmented and temporary way? Understanding this historical trajectory can shed light on the roots and on the continuities of alternative journalism in a country still strongly shaped by social and economic inequalities. The examination of past practices is relevant for discussing to what degree current practices of alternative journalism are revitalising old values of the alternative press or have found a new way to go beyond reactions to what mainstream media publish.

Thus, considering the goal of this research, the focus here is twofold. Based on secondary academic sources, this chapter (1) briefly reviews the overall history of the Brazilian media system; and (2) examines how alternative media differentiate themselves from the mainstream throughout the development of the Brazilian media landscape. In spite of a lack of documentation as well as critical examination of the culture, routines and dynamics of alternative journalism in Brazil, this chapter reviews relevant academic sources to trace the purposes of alternative journalists in Brazil. These studies help to show that alternative media, and more specifically alternative journalism, should not only be valued when democracy is under siege, although the term “alternative press” (*imprensa alternativa*) is widely identified by the Brazilian society as the oppositional print press from the 70’s that condemned the military regime (Festa, 1986).

Firstly, then, I examine the birth of the media in Brazil during the colonial times. Crucial for this overview is the extensive work written by Nelson Werneck Sodré, *The History of the Brazilian Press* (1966). In contrast to most studies that neglected the importance of the so-called “small press”, Sodré emphasized the significance of the *pasquines* from the nineteenth century, whose democratic, popular and satirical content challenged the conservatism of the era. Next, the chapter reflects on the development of media during the first republican decades, a time marked by huge economic changes and political turmoil. It further explores the rise of the broadcast media and the consequent influence of American journalism, to then discuss the defining moment of the military dictatorship, when alternative media, more specifically underground newspapers, played a crucial role. One of the most comprehensive accounts on how small publications challenged the dictatorship comes from Bernardo Kucinski (1991), himself an active member of the alternative press. The chapter concludes with the changes on the socio-political function of alternative media after the democratization.

3.1 THE BIRTH OF THE BRAZILIAN PRESS

The Brazilian press was born under censorship, 300 hundred years after the discovery of Brazil. Its first newspaper was launched in 1808, when the Regent of Portugal Dom João VI and the royal family, who had escaped the Napoleonic invasion, arrived in Brazil. This first newspaper, *Gazeta do Rio de Janeiro*, was only concerned with the state of the European monarchy and official information about the royal family. To escape the censorship imposed by Portugal, in the same year another newspaper, *Correio Braziliense*, was founded in London by Hipolito da

Costa, who was born in Brazil and educated in Portugal, where he was persecuted for his connections with the freemasonry (Marques de Melo, 2009). The publication was shipped regularly to Brazil. As it was not printed in the colony, it was initially tolerated by the Royal Press Office, an administrative office that had to consent to any publication (Candiani, 2009).

As a monthly newspaper, *Correio Braziliense* was intended for the still insipient public sphere in Brazil. It was a critical publication, attacking authorities in the colony, questioning religious beliefs and spreading European liberal ideals, such as the doctrine of freedom of the press. Interestingly, it did not support the independence from Portugal at that time (Sodré, 1966; Martins, 2008; Marques de Melo, 2009). Still, some contemporary scholars defined it as “alternative” (Aguiar, 2008). More critically, Sodré highlights the fact that *Correio Braziliense* was moralizing and ethical, although not radical (1966). As Uribe-Uran notes, “individual freedoms and liberties that today we take for granted were foreign to the colonial world” (2000, p.428). We can, therefore, point out an early articulation of resistance in an environment largely dominated by oppression, but newspapers such as *Correio Braziliense* were not yet concerned with the struggle to empower ordinary citizens. Only later, when a series of small and short-lived newspapers were launched in the wake of liberal revolts in Europe, they would adopt a more critical approach against the Portuguese rulers (Lustosa, 2003). In a society with low rates of literacy, it was under the influence of the Enlightenment that the first Brazilian journalists were identified as intellectuals, often exposed to the European education or to the humanist ideology of the Catholic Church (Candiani, 2009). Consequently, a public opinion that was able to challenge the power of Lisbon was emerging, shaped by the

thoughts of leading bourgeois segments of society. According to Candiani (2009), these new intellectuals found in the newspapers a space to disseminate public debate in the colony and to show their erudition.

In that context, some argue that media in Brazil was alternative from the start. Indeed, newspapers that proliferated at that time offered an alternative view to the official sources of the Royal Court. They helped to spread a nationalistic sentiment among Brazilians, and some celebrated the nature of the tropics and the miscegenation of races to counterbalance the Portuguese discourse that classified Brazilians as “savages” (Lustosa, 2003). Still, the debate was not open to all. Brazil was a land of illiterate majority, with half of the population being slaves or their descendants (Skidmore and Smith, 2005), completely excluded from the public debate. The influential *Correio Braziliense*, for instance, was concerned with discussions of colonial issues with an analytical point of view. It fought for the Brazilian interests with a moralizing and ethical purpose but not with revolutionary ideals (Sodré, 1966). Hence, the publication ceased to exist when the Brazilian Independence was declared.

When in 1822 Brazil became independent from Portugal, the printed circulation was already uncontrollable and censorship had been abolished (Morel, 2008). To understand the birth of the Brazilian press, Albuquerque (2005) notes that it is essential to differentiate the Brazilian colonization process from that of the colonization of the United States. While the ideal of “building a new world” enabled the early American settlers to enjoy a considerable freedom of thought, the Brazilian society was controlled by Portugal on the economic and political realms

(Albuquerque, 2005, p.488). Besides that, the American independence required a violent rupture with the British Crown, while Brazilian independence process “was an elite-level arrangement” that maintained the monarchy till 1889 (Albuquerque, 2005, p.489), as well as the social structures of an agricultural economy supported by two tiers: the aristocracy (landowners) and their slave labour force (Skidmore and Smith, 2005).

3.1.1 The pasquins

In sum, in its early days, the Brazilian printed media was essentially an alternative to the colonizers but faced limits to challenge the establishment. Still, an interesting radical-popular element existed. It is Sodré (1966) who provides a rare account of these early forms of popular publications in Brazil. According to him, the first half of the nineteenth century saw the birth and the death of dozens of small opinionated newspapers – the so-called *pasquins* – in the former colony, especially during the Regency Period (1831-1840). These handicraft publications were characterized by a broad range of political ideologies. Their pages, sometimes no more than a pamphlet, were made by one man or by small groups representing what we would call today the civil society in formation. *Pasquins* were extremely ephemeral, and used virulent language and satires to advocate their causes, mocked individuals or institutions and share their political ideologies. According to Barbosa (2013), it was as if all the literate Brazilians have suddenly decided to print and distribute their opinion. They could represent both left views in some cases and right in others, often reflecting the brutal division between liberals and conservatives (Lopes, 2008). Historically, though, they were judged merely by their radical aesthetics.

Interestingly when analysing the birth of the Brazilian media, scholars have condemned these publications as “spurious, meaningless and marginal manifestations” (Sodré, 1966, p. 200). This tendency seems to persist today (Chagas Amorim, 2007). Instead, Sodré argues that those old satirical newspapers represented a democratic content that should not be dismissed:

Its plebeian form, naturally, awakens the dislikes of the aristocratic intelligence that judges and condemns it. However, its forms translate with exemplary fidelity the best of the time, what was more expressive, most genuine, most popular, most democratic. It corresponds, on the other hand, to the artisan period when it was possible to produce a newspaper alone. (Sodré, 1966, p.207 – my translation)

Although these publications were not defined by previous studies as “radical” or “alternative”, it is possible to place them within the sphere of alternative media studies. The more, *pasquins* can be related to the radical underground publications from the eighteenth and nineteenth century that offered a revolutionary platform for certain minorities both in Britain and the United States (Downing, 2001). Downing (2001) describes abolitionist news pamphlets, minority ethnic newspapers and the first women’s suffrage publications as early examples of how print media has embraced different forms of radical communication in the western world:

Its counterhegemonic impact has varied from the imperceptible—especially out of context—and the long-term, to the instantaneous shock of humor and outrage. Radical print media have overflowed borders, clothed themselves in the external pieties of patriarchy and religion, and still repeatedly brought down retribution on the heads of the activists who produced and distributed them—and even on the heads of those who were merely found reading them (Downing, 2001, p.156)

A counter-hegemonic impact, as Downing describes here, can also be claimed for the *pasquins*. Sodré emphasizes the creativity and authenticity of those publications, and even claim that the period from 1830 to 1850 constituted “the greatest moment of the Brazilian press” (1966, p. 206). After this brief time of unprecedented freedom that led to an increase of publications in Brazil, a wave of technological developments transformed the media landscape in the second half of the nineteenth century. Newspapers began to be treated as a business, following an earlier trend of Europe and America.

To put this historical account into perspective, one should note that by the end of the seventeenth century the general European public was already receiving a regular supply of news, a dynamic that played a crucial role in the creation of public opinion (Allan, 2010). According to Habermas (1989), as early as in 1814 *The Times* was being published on a high-speed printing machine, and around the middle of the nineteenth century a number of newspapers were already large commercial enterprises. In turn, in Brazil education was limited and printing facilities were only allowed after 1808; economic activities were restricted; censorship silenced dissident voices and illiteracy; inequalities and lack of urbanization also limited public access to information. Due to those historical reasons, the process of keeping the public informed had a late development in Brazil (Targino, 2009; Albuquerque, 2012).

The following section examines how the Brazilian media system developed after the end of the monarchy, setting the stage for rapid commercialisation of the media industry.

3.1.2 The modern press

On November 15th 1889, Brazil was officially declared a Republic. News publications, reflecting the ideals of the new political order, fervently supported the modernization and the accelerated urban transformations, while conservative and aristocratic values of the Court still prevailed (Martins, 2008). Media conglomerates had begun to consolidate in those years, sustained by political propaganda and advertising. The artisanal period of the press was over. A new era, dominated by profound technological and economic changes, was beginning, along with the rise of the bourgeois. “The newspaper as individual enterprise, as an isolated adventure, disappeared in big urban centres”, states Sodré (1966, p.315).

Scholars who have studied the industrialisation of the press emphasize that the early journalism practiced by the first Brazilian news corporations was not driven by commercial interests but by partisan interests. The so-called First Republic (1889-1930), a presidential regime dominated by oligarchs from the rich and powerful states of São Paulo and Minas Gerais, constantly interfered in the newspapers’ editorial line. Nevertheless, this period saw the emergence of the political cartoons as a vehicle of criticism, a feature that would remain strong in all the major Brazilian newspapers to this day (Lustosa, 1989).

It was only from the late years of the nineteenth century on that the news production began to emerge as an industry. *O Estado de São Paulo*, for instance, is one example. Still one of the largest newspapers in Brazil and owned by the Mesquita Family, it was founded in 1875. De Luca (2008) describes this expansion of the news industry

as a key moment for the Brazilian media system, in which innovations demanded larger and more professionalised staffs, including writers, critics, reporters, designers and photographers. In this context, advertisement and paid subscriptions became essential to guarantee the survival of newspapers and magazines, a business model that remained vital throughout the whole twentieth century.

Special interests allowed magazines to show their expertise in social issues, sports or religion, or to focus on women or children's publications (Cohen, 2008). They also served as a means of communication for the greatest writers and intellectuals of the country to express their ideas, often mixing journalism and literature. But if on the one hand the press was experiencing a growing financial independence, on the other republican authorities cracked down on freedom of expression. Different governments put the urban centres under state of siege (Eleutério, 2008).

3.1.3 Small publications from the margins

In that atmosphere of commercial expansion on one side and political pressure on the other, small publications had few chances to survive. The academic literature on media that challenged the discourse of dominant groups and sought to represent minorities in Brazil at that time is not vast. In *History of the press in Brazil (História da Imprensa no Brasil, 2008)*, edited by Ana Luiza Martins e Tania Regina de Luca, the development of national media is analysed by different authors. The emergence of printed publications aimed towards specific communities is mentioned Cohen (2008) as an example of oppositional press. Stern refers to workers, anarchists and community-based printed media that, in the first half of the twentieth century,

fiercely fought to raise their voices and confront elites and the government. And not only workers, also other groups from social margins, such as former slaves and their descendants, produced small-circulation papers. They addressed racial discrimination and offered a rare space to share information coming from Afro-Brazilian communities, e.g. *O Menelick*, *A Chibata*, *Quilombo*. Small and ephemeral, these efforts to represent ordinary people could rarely out-live the idealism of their founders (Cohen, 2008).

Greater scholarly attention was given to the proletarian movement (Sodré, 1966; Prado, 2008; Escudero and Teixeira, 2009), which produced independent publications to mobilize workers against the oppressive conditions inside the factories and to strengthen the workers' unions that began to spread in the first decade of the twentieth century, many of them led by immigrants. They were influenced by the anarchist ideals disseminated by European citizens who moved to Brazil in search of work. The anarcho-syndicalism movement, which aimed to form self-governing collectives based on trade unions to replace state organizations (Williams, 1983), produced small newspapers to discuss poor working conditions (Lopes, 2008).

Workers' media point of view was the opposite of the romanticised image of the progress provided by commercial publications. Produced by and aimed at immigrants (mainly Italians, Spanish and Portuguese who used their mother tongue to disseminate their views), workers' papers were a rare space of contestation and critical thinking. They had an impact on major strikes in São Paulo, where most part of the immigrants was placed in the first decades of the twentieth century (Escudero

and Teixeira, 2009). Publications dedicated to workers' causes, such as *La Bataglia* (published between 1904 and 1913 in Italian) and *Terra Libre* (published 1905-1906 in Spanish) provided a social, political and cultural network to break through the immigrants' isolation in a foreign country (ibid, 2009). Examples like these can surely be linked to Rodriguez's theory on citizens' media (2001) discussed in the previous chapter. They incorporated resistant community strategies to reshape their social environment and to democratize the media space.

However, they faced brutal repression. The government did not tolerate anarchist and socialist political agitation (Sodré, 1966; Cohen, 2008). It is beyond the scope of this research to focus on this specific period of the Brazilian history. Instead, this brief outline of historical studies supports the argument that there was always a radical-popular mediated effort to oppose the establishment in Brazil, albeit fragmented and impermanent.

While small publications dedicated to marginal causes struggled to remain relevant, the mainstream also did not stand still. A government news agency, *Departamento de Imprensa e Propaganda* (Press and Advertisement Department), would soon dictate the official version of the news when the first republican era of Brazil came to an end in 1930, with a revolution led by Getúlio Vargas. Supported by military leaders, Vargas became a dictator after a coup in 1937. The *Estado Novo* (New State), "Brazil's milder version of Europe's fascist mode" (Skidmore, 2007, p.31), lasted till 1945. Under Vargas' authoritarian rule, all media were under censorship and had to reinforce a nationalistic identity of a unified country (Bailey and Barbosa, 2008). Vargas used financial incentives to explore cultural production as a

propaganda tool (ibid). These historical circumstances deepened the steadily intertwined of the interests of the state with the commercial conveniences of private businesses, which would mark the Brazilian media system until the Second World War.

Controlled by outside actors, such as political parties, Brazil fall into what Hallin and Mancini (2004) describe as media instrumentalization. This theory sustains that journalists rarely control media organisations, but they have autonomy; they follow journalistic norms and they claim the ethic of public service. Such independence, though, is affected when there is political intervention, as we have seen so far in different moments of the Brazilian media's history. Then, according to Hallin and Mancini, the practice of journalism and media "serve particular interests rather than functioning as a public trust" (2004, p.37)

Hallin and Mancini's influential model to compare media systems will be addressed later in this chapter to better understand the contours of journalism's development in Brazil. But before that, the following section will turn to broadcast. Journalistic corporate norms were embraced after the Second World War, while the rise of the television industry consolidated the power of large media organizations. In looking into the media developments of the second half of the twentieth century, we review the relationship between media and power in Brazil and question the place of an alternative form of journalism.

3.2 THE EMERGENCE OF THE BROADCAST INDUSTRY

Different studies stress the role of the broadcast media in the expansion of private and/or state interests in Brazil (Straubhaar, 1996; Waisbord, 1999; Bailey and Barbosa, 2008). The first radio station in the country, Radio Sociedade do Rio de Janeiro, was founded in 1923 with equipment bought by the government (Bailey and Barbosa, 2008). The most powerful Brazilian radio station, Radio Nacional, was founded in 1936, combining public funds and advertisement. It pioneered the launch of radio soap operas in the 1940s and started to broadcast to all of Brazil in 1942. The station was considered a Brazilian Hollywood, producing soap operas that were not only enormous commercial successes but also helped to shape behaviours and attitudes (Azevedo, 2003). Radio Nacional became state owned under the first Vargas' regime (1937-1945). And even though there were private broadcasters, they were also dependent from the state as they needed an official licence to operate. Only after the end of Estado Novo and the Second World War, Brazil approved a new Constitution, ending the tight control over mass media. However, the state kept the prerogative of granting radio licenses (Bailey and Barbosa, 2008). The rise of the television industry reinforced this media-state interdependence, especially during the military dictatorship (1964-1985).

According to Albuquerque (2012), especially in the democratic period from 1946 to 1964, Brazilian newspapers supported particular political groups. Partisanship was the rule. For instance, the aforementioned *O Estado de S.Paulo* supported Vargas since the 1930's; while *O Globo*, owned by the Marinho family, represented the opposition (Azevedo, 2006). And *Última Hora*, another relevant newspaper,

defended Vargas legacy even after his suicide, in 1954. Diários Associados, the country's largest media group up to the military regime, consisting of 90 companies (among them newspapers, magazines, radio and TV stations), also supported Vargas's return to power in the 1950's. Its owner, Assis Chateaubriand, was elected senator and later nominated ambassador (Laurenza, 2008).

Albuquerque (2005) points out an apparent inconsistency: During and after the Second World War, the influence of an American type of journalism, that is a journalism theoretically driven by facts and not by opinions, became more evident in Brazil. But, at the same time, the Brazilian media system did not develop under the same solid market conditions as the American system, and private groups maintained an undeniable link with the official power. Still, Brazilian journalists adopted professional norms that came from the liberal model, such as the informative style text and the ideal of objectivity.

Interestingly, Albuquerque notes that the development of professional journalism in Brazil established “an unspoken alliance” between owners of conservative papers and a large number of leftist journalists (2012, p.82). On the one hand, publishers needed journalists who could innovate the news production with a style that was less literary and more fact-centred. On the other, leftist journalists, including members of the Communist Party, were in need of jobs and political protection.

By providing some stability to the newsrooms, communist journalists helped ensure that the conditions for the transformation of Brazilian journalism were met. The language of professionalism was convenient for both owners and journalists. It allowed them to communicate, notwithstanding their different beliefs and objectives. (Albuquerque, 2012, p.83)

In parallel with this transformation, the rise of the television industry has reinforced the role of a corporate and non-diverse commercial media system in the country. Different authors have discussed how the military regime (1964-1985) invested in the telecommunication infrastructure, benefiting the interests of Brazilian large media organizations, in particular TV Globo, the most important medium owned by the Marinho family, also one of the world's largest television networks (Straubhaar, 1996; Bailey and Barbosa, 2008). Hence, on the one hand the military government placed media under a strict censorship, but on the other supported the communication industry through investment on infrastructure and advertisement, allowing the expansion of private oligopolies.

3.2.1 A concentrated media system

TV Globo was founded in 1962 and by 1971 was already the most popular station in the country producing high quality entertainment programs (Straubhaar, 1989). The corporation understood the consolidation of the Brazilian consumer market from the 70's and established a new television standard, distributing content with high international quality (Nassif, 2003), largely driven by an entertainment focus exemplified by the *telenovelas*. Globo defeated the competition and became the largest media company in Brazil, a title that it holds until today. Accordingly, Martín-Barbero defines the 70's as a time when "the economic apparatus took possession of the media" (2016, p.456). For Waisbord (1999), a concentrated media system driven by the interests of the political and the business left a legacy of power inequalities in terms of access to the means of public expression. Azevedo (2006)

adds that it was only with the expansion of the television market that Brazil really entered the era of mass communication.

Within this landscape, news sources that differed from the hegemonic ones had scarce chances to penetrate the mainstream thinking. Since this chapter is primarily concerned in identifying alternative forms of journalism throughout the Brazilian history, the next section focuses in the brutal period of the military regime, which used repression and censorship to stay in power for 21 years.

3.3 THE ALTERNATIVE PRESS VERSUS THE DICTATORSHIP

It is not the aim of this chapter to detail the role played by established media corporations in supporting the overthrow of the leftist president João Goulart in 1964. Rather, we discuss here how the opposition to the military dictatorship that followed the coup led to a unique multiplication of alternative publications in Brazil. Between 1964 and 1980, in a moment of unprecedented political repression, and while media oligopolies consolidated their influence, Brazil saw the rise and decline of 150 news periodicals that opposed the dictatorship, according to Kucinski (1991). These publications were sold at newsstands, by subscription or, in some cases, were distributed for free and clandestinely. A broad range of them lasted only for a very brief period, but some had a significant political and journalistic impact as spaces for the articulation of a “resistance communication” (Festa, 1986, p.10). Furthermore, they managed to register and tell the trajectory of different social movements throughout the 70’s in spite of all the limitations and pressures they had to face

(Festa, 1986). These small newspapers and magazines were called “alternative press” or, more specifically, “*imprensa nanica*” (tiny press).

For Kucinski (1991), alternative publications were the result of the articulation of two social forces: leftist groups who were fighting for the end of the military regime and journalists who were prevented from telling their own version of the news in the mainstream media. In its political and ideological combat to the dictatorship, the alternative press also represented different groups and social movements, such as feminists, students’ movements, workers, gay movements and environmentalists (Woitowicz, 2009). It is not possible, therefore, to point out one single approach to news reporting in a time of widespread violations of human rights, including massive arrests of opponents of the regime, torture, censorship and murder. Still, one can claim that these groups have represented the “voiceless” in an era known as “*Anos de Chumbo*” (“Years of Lead”). In contrast, Bailey and Barbosa (2008) describe how mass media, under the control of the military government, helped to support the state’s ideology:

The psychosocial control of the population was exercised through massive use of the media, particularly television, use of an extensive network of intelligence services, widespread censorship, the reduction of civil rights, and the control of labor and political organizations. Despite this, the structural changes introduced by the military government in the telecommunications sector, particularly the building up of a modern infrastructure for national and international telecommunication services, constituted a decisive factor in the development of the broadcasting industry in Brazil. (Bailey and Barbosa, 2008, p.55).

Different authors have described how censors were put inside the newsrooms to veto anything that could be seen as a challenge to the military. Repression and censorship increased after December 13th 1968, when Institutional Act Number 5, known as AI-5, was enacted, and the Congress was shut down. Words such as “communism” and “torture” could not be published (Aguiar, 2008), for instance. Forbidden to leave a blank in place of censored material, newspapers had to fill their pages with harmless texts such as cooking recipes. In turn, the official discourse was deconstructed by small underground publications, which openly demanded a return to democracy and criticised the military development policy (Kucinski, 1991).

The first alternative publication to raise the voice against the military regime embraced humor as the language of resistance. Launched just one month after the military coup, the magazine *Pif-Paf* was produced in Rio de Janeiro by writer, cartoonist and humorist Millôr Fernandes. It lasted merely three months, but its cartoons and political satires influenced the alternative way of doing journalism under the dictatorship (Kucinski, 1991; Kushnir, 2004). Kucinski claims that financial vulnerability was one of most common traces of the alternative press:

It had as a basic component the repudiation of profit and, in some newspapers, there was even contempt for administrative, organizational and commercial issues. Paradoxically, the insistence on an uneconomical national distribution, the inability to form large bases of subscriber-readers, a certain triumphalism over the effects of censorship, all contributed to making the alternative press not a permanent formation, but a temporary, fragile and vulnerable thing. (Kucinski, 1991, p.13 _ my translation)

This point confirms a consistent element of alternative media, in that it is common to see self-managed, short-lived, underfunded initiatives, as discussed in Chapter 2.

3.3.1 An iconic symbol of the alternative press

Indeed, *O Pasquim*, launched in 1969 and to this day a symbol of counterculture in Brazil, disregarded basic rules of business administration (Kucinski, 1991), even though the weekly newspaper reached an impressive circulation of 250,000 copies (Gaspari, 2002). Although this circulation was phenomenal for an alternative publication, its founders preferred not to see themselves as managers but as a group of bohemian friends from Rio de Janeiro (Kushnir, 2004). Such arrangement reflected a concern with challenging the hierarchical corporate model of mainstream media. Thus, besides the critical tone of their content, these non-mainstream publications were also alternative in their search for a democracy within the structure of their newsrooms (Pereira, 1986).

The alternative press never had the financial and material resources to actually compete with the traditional media (Abramo, 1988). Entrepreneurialism was not part of their vocabulary. Furthermore, the political repression made the survival of alternative media almost impossible. Every content was subject to prior censorship. Additionally, non-mainstream publications could not count on any form of official advertisement. Still, these obstacles did not prevent some publications from having an impact on the history of journalism in Brazil. Through political and social satire and unconventional modes of production, which exempted, for instance, the figure of a chief-editor (Silva, 2013), *O Pasquim* was an important milestone of political

humour and journalistic experimentation that mocked not only the dictatorship, but also the conservatism of the middle class. It was influenced by the American Counterculture of the 1960s and by Existentialism. Produced in Rio de Janeiro by renowned journalists and cartoonists, some of whom had lost their jobs in traditional media, *O Pasquim* faced censorship and the arrest of its team by the military, in 1970. Still, through a colloquial language, this weekly newspaper had an influence on the journalistic and advertising narrative. Letters to the editors, often replied by the writers through mockery or irony, created “a direct communication, of the horizontal type, so often proposed by alternative projects and rarely achieved” (Kucinski, 1991, p. 109). Controversial themes portrayed in the newspaper’s pages, such as women’s emancipation, sex and drugs, made *O Pasquim* one of the greatest national references of the 1960s counter-culture (Barros, 2003).

One particular interview was a milestone that should be looked into here in more detail, as its impact would lead to the introduction of prior censorship in the country. On December 15th, 1969, *O Pasquim* published an interview with Leila Diniz, a young and famous actress known as a libertarian woman who despised the conservative behavioural patterns of the time. In the interview, Leila widely supported liberal attitudes towards sex and women’s rights, giving voice to a free and critical thinking that was exactly what the military regime was trying to repress. In the interview, the actress said 71 dirty words, which were not published to avoid problems with the censors (Ferreira dos Santos, 2014). Instead, they were replaced by asterisks, an irreverent way of provoking the military regime. This very significant interview was attacked by both leftist activists, who considered a discussion about sex a banality in the midst of widespread political repression, and

suffered several censorship cuts. Its editorial line, in defence of democracy, was aimed at reaching more popular sectors of the Brazilian society, specifically the working class, opting for a less intellectualized tone than other representatives of the alternative press of the time (Kucinski, 1991; Miani, 2009).

Figure 3.2: Cover of the alternative newspaper *O Movimento* (reproduction)



Miani points out how *O Movimento* employed cartoons to construct a counter-hegemonic discourse, exploring humour to attack the authoritarian regime and pervasive social injustices (2009). Illustrations and texts vetoed by the military government were published with a black stripe, making the censorship explicit. One interesting aspect of the project was its heavy aesthetics, as Aguiar (2008) describes:

One of the goals of the newspaper was to denounce the existence of a real, suffering, indebted, tortured, plundered Brazil, against the Brazil of the government and of the traditional press, which at that time had the television as its flagship, happy, full of achievements (...). It then systematically opted for heavy illustrations, ruled by the grotesque, a style that denounced what words could not say (Aguiar, 2008, part III, chapter 4 – my translation).

In line with Couldry and Curran's notion of alternative media (2003), we can argue that non-mainstream media of the dictatorial times were challenging the concentrations of media resources. Accordingly, under repressive regimes, Downing observes that the counter-information model of alternative media could "try to disrupt the silence, to counter the lies, to provide the truth" (2001, pp. 15-16).

It is interesting to note how oppositional publications such as *O Pasquim* and *O Movimento* adopted professionalised or semi-professionalised modes of production, but never tried to embrace a corporate traditional model. These newspapers, thus, acted as agents for political change, but also subverted the hierarchical organisation of corporate media, an aspect that guides contemporary alternative outlets, as it will be discussed later in this research. Editorial decisions, based on political conditions, were taken by editorial boards that included the participation of social movements' representatives (Festa, 1986). This does not mean, however, that there was a complete democracy among the internal structures of alternative media. Woitowicz avoids the trap of over celebrating alternative media by pointing out that feminist groups, for instance, were considered too individualistic by leftist sectors engaged in the critical content production (2009). Although small publications paved the way for discussions related to the feminist movement that spread throughout the western world in the 1960's and 1970's, in general leftist groups treated women's claims as "petty bourgeois issues" (Woitowicz, 2009, p.45). Therefore, to address matters related to specific minorities, more niche-oriented alternative publications had to be created. That was the goal of *Beijo* (1977), the first alternative newspaper for the gay community in Brazil, and later *Lampião* (1978), which dedicated a large space for readers' letters (Lima, 2009).

The emergence of specific social discourses, which went beyond the political struggle against dictatorship, took place when the military government began to allow a slow movement towards democratisation. However, regardless of its ideology, alternative media could not survive the gradual transition to democracy. First of all, they paid a price for its counter-hegemonic discourse. Journalists were arrested, alternative newsrooms were bombed and newsstands that used to sell alternative publications were attacked by forces of repression. Between 1978 and 1981, agents of the military government blew newsstands in a wave of political terror to prevent the circulation of alternative publications (Pereira, 1986). Nonetheless Kucinski (1991) argues that it was not only the brutality of the regime that prevented the survival of this type of alternative press. With the political opening and the strengthening of popular and union movements in the late 1970s, another type of alternative media began to emerge defending specific interests of the entities that sponsored these newspapers, such as unions or left-wing political parties. Kucinski explains:

With the emergence of new tactical and strategic possibilities in the political field (...) the journalistic fronts were broken amid deep divergences among its participants. The formal mechanisms of internal democracy in alternative newspapers have not resisted ideological sectarianism and the ethics of party interests. As space for party re-articulations opened up, the enforced aggregation of journalistic fronts was meaningless (Kucinski, 1991, p.98 – my translation).

The gradual decline of the dictatorship, amid the economic crisis of the late 1970's, strengthened the critical role of the traditional media in Brazil. Some campaigns and

ideals that were defended only by the alternative press during the dictatorship were also taken over by the traditional media. With the return of democracy in the 1980s, a new phase of Brazilian journalism began, thus closing this unprecedented period of self-managed alternative printed journalism in the country. Pereira (1986) argues that the alternative press not only contested the repressive policies of the military, but also offered a resistance to the regime's economic development based on massive international investments and loans that favoured the elite sectors and multinational corporations and alienated the working-class. Thus, he prefers the term "democratic-popular press" rather than "alternative" to define this type of print publications (Pereira, 1986).

3.4 THE BRAZILIAN MEDIA POST-DICTATORSHIP

With the end of the military regime, the state of the Brazilian media changed profoundly. Free from the constraints of censorship and oppression, media corporations embraced the watchdog role, appropriating the American rhetoric of the "Fourth Branch" (Albuquerque, 2005). It was a gradual transformation. Weakened by economic problems and internal divisions, the military government relaxed censorship and slowly allowed a transition to a democratic regime. On January 15th, 1985, the Congress elected the first civilian president of Brazil in two decades. The election of Tancredo Neves through an indirect voting system represented the victory of the opposition against the dictatorship. The direct vote was not approved by the Congress, but Neves, leader of the opposition and a moderate politician, was chosen by an Electoral College, with widespread support from the media, including Globo Television Network, until then aligned with the armed forces (Miguel, 2001;

Albuquerque, 2005). Hours before the inauguration day, Neves was hospitalized, and died six weeks later. José Sarney, his vice, became president. With the resumption of democracy, most leading Brazilian media corporations adopted the Fourth Power discourse (Albuquerque, 2005), claiming a mediating role between the three constitutional branches (Executive, Legislative and Judiciary) and between the government and the citizens. “The echoes of Watergate were alive in the mind of every young Brazilian journalist” (Nassif, 2003, p.23).

As an example of this shift, investigative journalism helped to bring down the presidency of Fernando Collor de Mello in September 1992. In 1989 Collor de Mello won the first direct presidential election since the end of the military regime, but did not finish his term. Mainstream media exposed the corruption scandal known as *Collorgate* that led to the president’s resignation. In his analysis of *Veja* and *Istoé*, two traditional weekly news magazines that covered the case, Waisbord (1997) argues that the magazines opted to frame corruption as an isolated crime but missed to examine corruption from a broader perspective as a public problem (1997). Nonetheless, the *Collorgate* allowed news organizations to join forces in a belligerent watchdog coverage that strengthened the independence of journalists from the state, giving them the status of new adversarial political force (Hercovitz, 2004). In contrast, Moretzsohn (2002) argues that the notion of journalism as a public service in fact hides the ideological and political character that is intrinsically linked to the journalistic activity.

Matos (2012) points out another aspect of the transformation of the Brazilian journalism during the 1990’s, when democracy was strengthened. For her, “the

romantic militant journalist declined and gave rise to the market-driven journalistic model” (2012, p.106). Similarly, Nassif argues that after the investigation that led to Collor’s impeachment process, Brazilian journalism became “addicted to scandals” (2003, p.64), leaving aside, in some cases, a rigorous check of the facts in the name of sensationalism, while broadcast media kept entertainment as a priority.

Although it is possible to recognize transnational similarities in the shape of media content that follows the patterns of a global economy, Brazilian media does not easily fit into classic categories developed to study Western media systems. Hallin and Mancini (2004) developed three models to describe the relationship between media and political systems: 1) The Democratic Corporatist model, as can be found in Germany, is marked by state intervention to defend the plurality of media, a public broadcasting service and a solid mass press with strong professional associations. 2) The Polarised Pluralist model, found in countries such as Spain, France, Italy and Portugal, is dominated by the instrumentalization of the media system by political and economic interests, with a low circulation press targeting a small elite and an undeveloped professional journalistic culture. And 3) The Liberal Model, which prevails in the Anglophone countries, is characterised by an information-oriented journalism and a market driven media system with high circulation and strong professional culture. However, many of the features of the Brazilian media cannot be explained by these models, which is why Albuquerque (2012) argues that they represent an overly western perspective. Firstly, as he states, contemporary Brazilian news organisations can take explicit political positions, but their agendas are not dependent on the ideology of political parties. Secondly, professionalism is important for Brazilian journalism as pointed out earlier, although this professionalism is not a

faithful copy of the Western model. And thirdly, privately and not state-owned telecommunication networks are a crucial aspect of the Brazilian market. Regarding the role of the state, official subsidies were key for the development of large media conglomerates, but the companies are in private hands.

Summing this up before examining in depth the emergence of new forms of alternative journalism in the following chapters, we can now say the following: the democratisation of Brazil led to the expansion of the mediated public sphere, a freer press and a growing professionalisation of journalism as part of the mass media industry development. Journalism evolves according to the transformation of society and culture (Dahlgren, 2009). However, as it occurred in other countries of Latin America, the consolidation of liberal democracy coincided with growing concentration of media ownership, thus the return of democracy did not guarantee widespread access to media production. For small media it became more difficult to survive “in an environment ruled by media behemoths” (Waisbord, 1999, p.51).

3.4.1 Grassroots and community media

If during the struggle against authoritarianism alternative journalism was associated with anti-government stances (Aguilar, 2008), after the democratisation alternative media continued to contribute to different forms of counter-hegemonic spheres aimed at social interests that do not fit into the market logic.

This alternative view connects to the goals of grassroots media as a space for civic interaction. Various scholars (Couldry, 2000; Downing, 2001; Atton, 2002; Dahlgren, 2009; Harcup, 2011; McQuail, 2013) have defined alternative media for

its concern with a wider participation of ordinary citizens in media production. For Couldry (2000), alternative media allows a de-naturalization of dominant media practices. These theories resonate with the ideals of independent channels of communication that have expanded in Brazil since the end of the 1990's. Peruzzo (2008) defines them as community media or community communication, that is

(...) built in the praxis of popular movements, community associations, trade unions, progressive church sectors, grassroots NGOs and other third sector organizations. Even if it is not possible to identify them as specific communities, these actors seek to transform the conditions of oppression and suffering of segments of the Brazilian population aiming the implementation of a world in which everyone can have dignity and respected citizenship rights. They have something in common, from which one could glimpse the constitution of a "community of ideas". (Peruzzo, 2008, p.5 _ my translation)

Such emphasis on community is also highlighted by Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier (2008) on their analysis of the media and communicative strategies of the Landless Rural Workers' Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem-Terra, MST) in Brazil. MST is one of the most important grassroots organizations in Latin America. The movement was launched in 1984 to fight for land distribution. Small farmers and agricultural workers face poor living conditions, while a small elite owns large areas of cultivable land. MST managed to attract the attention of mainstream media with a series of actions that included occupations and mass demonstrations during the first mandate of liberal president Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1994-1998). When Cardoso's second mandate (1995-2003) was marked by the settlement of thousands of landless rural workers on expropriated land, MST still remained a crucial oppositional force against the government and its neo-liberal policies. Media played a crucial role in the construction of the movement's identity

as well as in its struggle for visibility. MST produced a newspaper, a magazine, radio programs and website to disseminate a broad range of critical views:

They provide an important frame, outside the views of the mainstream media, for readers and writers to make sense of the world of the landless people. The reader is invited to enter the everyday life experience of landless people as they negotiate agrarian reform in the context of neo-liberalism. This is not simply a question of publicity and public relations. (Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2008, p.117)

Although the struggle for land reform has lost importance in the political agenda in the last decade, MST's communication strategies remain a relevant example of how, in the aftermath of the totalitarian regime, alternative media could provide a vital space for contestation in a country where journalism is often undertaken within large private and commercialised media organisations. While media organisations follow a certain set of rules, procedures and norms to decide what is news (McQuail, 2013) what is outside dominant media seeks to oppose these conventions in different ways. In that sense, Pereira (1986) argues that the direct heirs of the alternative press of the dictatorial years were the publications of left-wing parties and labour unions, which were strengthened in Brazil with the gradual resumption of democracy. Ultimately, there was a dispersion of the once strong alternative press, so the concept of what was an alternative journalism became less evident for the Brazilian society (Levy, 2018).

3.5 CONCLUSION: CHANGING FORMS OF THE ALTERNATIVE

This chapter provided a brief historic overview of the Brazilian media system to describe its main characteristics and transformations over time. Without any claim to completeness, this examination presented a constantly evolving media landscape, developed within an intertwinement of authoritarianism, political oligarchy, market forces and foreign influence (Bailey and Marques, 2012). Brazilian journalism was shaped by government interventions, political instability and the imperatives of the market. However, within the activity of news gathering, reporting and publication there were always distinctive forms of doing of journalism. This chapter pointed out efforts of a non-dominant approach, from anti-colonial newspapers to spaces of resistance to dictatorship to grassroots media. Thus, the notion of “alternative” has also changed over the course of Brazil’s journalistic history.

For mainstream journalism, external influences, such as European liberal ideals and elements of the American journalism, played a role in the construction of Brazilian journalists’ identity. In the case of alternative groups, counter-hegemonic manifestations demonstrated a progressive change in different historical moments with the aim to provide a space of opposition to the commercial structures and the political discourse of established media. Although there are many gaps in the historical accounts of alternative journalism in Brazil, it is possible to identify limitations in these activities, which were invariably short-lived experiences. The precarious aspects of this type of media resonate with today’s alternative producers’ concerns, as we will see later on. Underfunded and, in some cases, unorganized

collective lines have always presented a challenge to the survival of independent and alternative media amid the consolidation of neoliberalism and within an economy of concentrated media ownership.

Despite the fact that the development of the mainstream media in Brazil has always attracted more academic interest, alternative publications managed to create relevant spheres of contestation in the struggle to challenge hegemonic discourses and representations, even though they were ephemeral and fragmented. In spite of being historically dismissed as meaningless, old satirical newspapers from the first half of the nineteenth century, for instance, may be considered pioneers of alternative media practices. In the first half of the twentieth century, marginalized social groups, such as immigrants, found space to raise their voices in small print publications. And during the military government (1964-1985), alternative press reached its peak and constituted an emblematic example of resistance as well as journalistic innovation. Newspapers such as *O Pasquim* (1969-1991) filled a gap left by mainstream media, which was unable to confront the government either due to censorship and repression or to private interests. They differed from mainstream media not only in regard to their content, but also in terms of organisational structures, characterised by principles of collectivism and horizontality.

Nevertheless, although to this day it is frequently pointed out as one of the greatest symbols of the alternative press in Brazil before the digital age, *O Pasquim* was produced by intellectuals and professional journalists from Rio de Janeiro. It offered a creative social counterpoint to conservative ideologies, but it did not necessarily seek the participation of ordinary citizens. This example suggests, thus, that the

historical trajectory of alternative journalism in Brazil should not be focused exclusively on an emphasis on media produced by non-professionals.

At any rate, alternative publications never had the necessary financial resources to be considered a real option to the traditional press (Abramo, 1988). The alternative press of that time earned recognition, triggered new narratives and shed light to social movements, but did not survive the transition to democracy. A lack of solid financial structures and internal ideological sectarianism contributed to the disappearance of this type of publication, while mainstream news organizations adopted a stronger watchdog role and reinforced its journalistic identity.

With the return of democracy (1985), Brazilian journalism appropriated the discourse of the Fourth Estate and got closer to the watchdog role of the idealized Anglo-American journalistic model. At the same time, alternative forms of journalism were maintained through the strengthening of community and grassroots media. Their goal was to promote an active citizenship while civil rights and press freedom were gradually restored. Article 220 of the Brazilian Constitution abolished censorship in 1988. Brazilian media system is not under control of the state, but its market-driven approach and the consolidation of media concentration create an environment that favours a homogeneous discourse. Outside the views of mainstream media and in a time of unparalleled access to information, alternative journalism, whose critical coverage is currently facilitated by digital technologies, can provide a plurality that objects to traditional business models and journalistic norms. The extent to which these new forms of alternative journalism are

challenging the principles of journalism in Brazil to counterbalance dominant accounts on the country's reality is the main focus of this research.

The following chapter explains how this investigation was designed and conducted.

Chapter 4

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This chapter explains the main criteria for the present research. Based in a triangulating approach, this study combines semi-structured interviews with alternative media producers and qualitative content analysis from a sample of four case studies. In their exploration of qualitative methodologies for mass communication, Jensen and Jankowski (1991) suggest four analytical levels to be followed in any investigation: (a) the theoretical framework; (b) the methodology; (c) the analytical apparatus or methods; and (d) the object of analysis. Given that Chapter 2 examined the main theories that inform the understanding of alternative media and alternative journalism, and Chapter 3 reviewed the history of alternative journalism in Brazil, this chapter explores, thus, the reasoning for choosing a qualitative methodology and the criteria to choose the participants and conduct the overall analysis.

The choices of methods for the research design started with one key question: who is producing alternative journalism in Brazil? To narrow down the focus, the participants selected for this study, or in other words, the object of study (Jensen and Jankowski, 1991), are involved with the production of online news media that are critical to dominant forms of doing journalism. The outlets whose profiles are detailed here do not repeat the traditional business model of mainstream mass media, which is based on the combination of advertisement and subscription, nor their organisational arrangements. In exploring operations that are not-profit oriented and

are focused on expanding the voices of underrepresented groups in society, this empirical investigation contributes to the understanding of emerging forms of alternative journalism in a context of increasing digital participation in Brazil. While different studies on contemporary forms of alternative journalism in the country take into account few cases or very specific types of media, for instance, investigative outlets, media from the favelas or the participatory journalism of Mídia Ninja (Bentes, 2009; Carvalho, 2014; Davis, 2015; Rodrigues and Baroni, 2018), this study aimed to fill the gaps in the literature by combining a variety of groups that critique, from different perspectives, “the epistemological basis of mainstream news production” (Atton, 2004, p.60).

This chapter narrates the research design from the beginning. It starts from the choice of a qualitative investigation. Then it explains how the participants were selected and how the interviews were conducted and analysed. The following sections also address how the case studies were chosen and which were the elements that guided the qualitative content analysis (QCA).

4.1 CHOOSING A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

The research questions introduced in Chapter 1 are concerned with the following aspects of alternative journalism in Brazil: the role played by alternative media producers (1); their approach to sustainability (2) and the extent to which these practices are breaking journalistic boundaries (3). As specific methodologies depend on the purpose and area of inquiry (Jensen and Jankowski, 1991), a qualitative

approach was chosen to reach what Ritchie and Lewis consider “an interpreted understanding of the social world of research participants” (2003, p. 3).

Considering the aim to (a) investigate a variety of new approaches sought by alternative media practitioners in Brazil and to (b) understand to what extent practitioners of alternative journalism are redefining the practice of journalism, this study can be situated in the field of qualitative scientific enquiries that are not based on hypothesis testing, but on the production of descriptive data and inductive analysis (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). Without underestimating the importance of studying the fast transformations affecting large media organisations, this thesis is more concerned with identifying which are the essential aspects of non-mainstream journalism, leaving aside a focus on critical analysis of corporate media in Brazil.

First of all, this research had to go further in the discussion of how to differentiate alternative and mainstream media. The fact that “the people formerly known as the audience” (Rosen, 2012) are now engaged in the production of media content makes this distinction even more complex. The ability of non-professionals to disseminate information, sometimes contributing to mainstream material, has changed preconceived ideas of what journalism is and who journalists are (Deuze, 2005; Deuze, 2008; Meikle and Redden, 2011; Tong, 2018). Consequently, the subject matter here is not data that could be merely quantified or measured, but something to be interpreted through questions about experiences and perspectives. As Brennen observes, “qualitative research is interdisciplinary, interpretive, political and theoretical in nature” (2013, p.4). Jensen and Jankowski (1991) add:

(...) where quantitative analysis would focus on the concrete, delimited products of the media’s meaning production, qualitative

approaches examine meaning production as a process which is contextualized and inextricably integrated with wider social and cultural practices. (Jensen and Jankowski, 1991, p.4)

While a quantitative approach would be more suitable to give a numerical overview of the state of alternative media in Brazil or identify a specific problem to be investigated, the qualitative research, as Travers suggests, “can go further by describing what people are doing on the ground” (Travers, 2001, p.180). More specifically, in the field of media studies, qualitative researchers are interested in the diversity of meanings and values (Brennen, 2013). Accordingly, the focus of this investigation is in “understanding people from their own frames” (Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault, 2015, p.7). Furthermore, qualitative research has proved that “statistical sophistication” is not the only route to data quality and collection (Bauer, Gaskell and Allum, 2000, p.8).

Moreover, in qualitative research, even the researcher’s subjectivity, in the form of reflections, impressions and observations, become data (Flick, 2009). This is not to say, however, that quantitative and qualitative designs should be treated as incompatible (Creswell, 2009; Schreier, 2012). Since this research includes content analysis, some kind of counting is involved, but the goal was to apply complex interpretations and simple ways of counting (Boréus and Bergstrom, 2017).

Therefore, on researching the content of Brazilian non-mainstream websites in the very first phase of this research, it appeared that listening to the practical experiences of their producers, through interviews, would offer a valuable perspective of how they position alternative journalism within the current increasingly fragmented media

environment. However, after the first round of interviews, it became evident that data should be complemented with a different method to assure the validity of research. Hence, qualitative content analysis of four case studies was included in the design to provide a more comprehensive account of what alternative journalists are doing. Triangulation was considered as a suitable proposition to achieve “confirmation” and “completeness” (Arksey and Knight, 1999, p.21).

Since there is a consensus among different scholars that there is not a single definition for alternative media, as discussed in Chapter 2, a social constructivist assumption guided this investigation, which also addresses historical and cultural settings of media producers in Brazil and their own perception of alternative media. Creswell (2009) explains this philosophical stance in opposition to a positivist approach:

The researcher’s intent is to make sense of (or interpret) the meanings others have about the world. Rather than starting with a theory (as in postpositivism), inquires generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meaning. (Creswell, 2009, p.8).

Consequently, starting out from the previously presented research questions and the philosophical assumptions described above, the different phases of the collection and qualitative analysis of data were designed as shown below in Figure 4.1. Each of the stages of the research process will be addressed in a reflexive manner in the following sections of this chapter.

Figure 4.1: Guide used for conducting the research



Next, I explain the function of semi-structured interviews, how the participants were selected and how the themes of the interviews were organised (stages 1, 2 and 3).

4.2 THE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Among the five methods involved in qualitative research, that is, observation, interviewing, ethnographic fieldwork, discourse analysis and textual analysis (Travers, 2001), interviews were chosen as the primary data-collection technique for investigating contemporary forms of alternative journalism in Brazil. Qualitative interviewing is found over a large number of social scientific researches for its versatility and value (Gaskell, 2000). It has been previously used in different studies on alternative media that served as a reference for this research (Atton, 2002; Forde, 2011; Harcup, 2011; Levy, 2018).

The main goal of the interviews was to provide insights into the experiences of alternative media practitioners who were trying to maintain sustainable alternative spaces for news distribution. Participants go beyond merely opinion giving blogs or social media groups that were not necessarily concerned with long term projects.

Assuming that without a degree of legitimacy new news sources will not survive in the long term (Couldry, 2010), this study sought to understand producers' descriptions of their dynamics, motivations, challenges and values through in-depth interviews, a useful approach to construct knowledge through interaction between the interviewer and the participants.

Kvale (2007) defines interviews as a structured conversation, whose purpose is determined by the interviewer to obtain knowledge through a careful questioning. Drawing on this flexible approach, interviews' questions were structured to seek meanings on a concrete level rather than on general opinions. According to Jensen and Jankowski, "in qualitative interviewing a form of interpersonal communication, language is both the tool and the object of analysis" (1991, p.32). Correspondingly, in exploring diverse types of alternative news outlets, semi-structured interviews allowed flexibility with a developed focus to attempt a precision in the interpretation of data (Gillham, 2005).

According to Kavle (1997), semi-structured interviews are not the same as an open everyday conversation, but at the same time do not result in a rigid questionnaire. Hence, the interviews were built upon a pre-established set of questions to all respondents, but the order of the questions varied and follow-up questions to clarify answers were naturally made. This flexibility was necessary primarily because the study involved different types of alternative groups, as well as interviewees with distinct backgrounds and also different functions, such as reporters, editors and columnist. Therefore some questions elicited more extensive responses from some, while others simply did not engage in certain discussions and preferred to focus on

different points. In this case, a closed questionnaire, for example, would have been a limited tool since the research aimed at obtaining descriptions of alternative media practices. Therefore, to engage with the producers' point of views and dynamics I purposely looked for the openness that derives from semi-structured interviews within a set of themes.

It is also important to clarify that the initial intention of the research proposal was to use ethnographic methods as a research strategy to observe how practitioners of alternative media work in a daily basis, and to describe and interpret their behaviour, goals and attitudes. Dawson (2009) notes that participant observation can be carried out within any community, culture or context. An “immersion” within communities to detect how alternative outlets act on the observed ground has been tried in many different media studies. Just to mention a recent study that took place in Brazil, Barsotti (2014) employed ethnography to examine to what extent online journalism maintains the role of the gatekeeper. However, since this thesis involves a broad range of outlets, with producers of different backgrounds and from different Brazilian regions, the criterion of practicability was crucial to eliminate the option of a participant observation (Rock, 2001). An immersion into the production environment of alternative journalists would not be feasible, since a great number of alternative projects, as will be discussed later, do not take place in a determined single physical space. Not all the organisations analysed here have, for instance, an office or what could be considered as an “alternative newsroom” in which a first-hand examination could take place. Besides that, participant observation would not necessarily provide a better insight into the realities of alternative media groups in different parts of Brazil. In turn, an engagement with their discourses and content

production was chosen as the most suitable method to provide a more focused investigation into their views, adding knowledge to the field of alternative media in a developing nation.

Here it is important to address too my own professional background, which also admittedly had an influence in the methodology choice. As a journalist with more than 25 years of experience in traditional newsrooms, the nature of interviewing, as an interaction between two individuals with potential benefits and drawbacks (Galletta, 2013), was not considered an approach that needed to be mastered.

Nonetheless, very early on in the process of collecting data I became aware that my assumptions of what an interview should entail ignored the scientific rigor required by academic research. Without neglecting the efficiency of an interview conducted for journalistic purposes, it was necessary to adapt my skills to a more systematic, reflexive and grounded in theory way of conducting interviews. Guidelines by Galletta (2013) for semi-structured interviews helped to put aside journalistic habits and to understand the different stages of qualitative research. Galletta discusses the idea of the researcher as an instrument:

Reflexivity requires the researcher to be vigilant, always anticipating ways in which research methods and ethics may be compromised. Interference of some kind is predictable in both quantitative and qualitative research. (Galletta, 2013, p.93)

In addition, the self-presentation of the researcher has an impact on the relationship with the participants (King and Horrocks, 2010). Thus, I considered it vital to identify myself as a journalist, emphasizing, however, that I was there as an independent researcher from a British university. At first I wondered whether the fact

that I have worked and actually continued to collaborate as a freelancer for one of the largest Brazilian newspapers, *O Globo*, could provoke some kind of resistance on the part of the interviewees. But it soon became clear that a thorough explanation about the academic research and my independent status contributed to an atmosphere of trust during the interviews (ibid).

4.2.1 Selection of participants

During the first year of the research, I gathered a list of groups that were seeking non-traditional forms of online news gathering and maintaining a constant practice of reporting, not restricted to times of crisis. The list includes a diversity of voices and purposes, but the groups have the following aspects in common: (1) interest in news events; (2) critical approach to dominant narratives; (3) organised as a collective or not-for-profit organisation.

Although there is no consensus on how to define journalism as a professional activity, here journalism is simply understood as “the concerted activity of reporting and commenting on recent human activity, disseminated in well-crafted forms for the benefit of others more often engaged in other activities” (Calcutt and Hammond, 2011, p.169). Accordingly, this investigation is concerned with news production that not only thrives in moments of crisis but pursue a longer-term engagement with communities (geographic communities and communities of interest) to allow the formation of an active counter-public sphere (Fraser, 1992).

In the internet era, digital technologies expanded the modes of media production to the point that the traditional gatekeeping role of news media organisations is now

challenged by the audiences they serve (Bowman and Willis, 2003). To some, anyone now can be a journalist (Gillmor, 2008). Nonetheless, not all content produced outside conventional newsrooms can be classified as journalism. In attempting to define the main elements of alternative journalistic practices, this study moved away from blogs or social media pages written with the only goal of giving an opinion, even if the authors call themselves “journalists”. A strong notion of social responsibility (Atton, 2003) is an element often present in alternative publications. In this sense, the present research gets closer to the concept of “writer-gatherers” proposed by Couldry (2010), as seen in Chapter 2. The term is intended to describe new “source-actors” who use digital media “to expand the news landscape, either directly or by altering the sources from which mainstream news typically draws” (Couldry, 2010, p.139). Moreover, since the definition of alternative media applied here implies the opposition to the commercialised economy of corporate journalism, as suggested by Atton and Hamilton (2008), creative arrangements to overcome obstacles such as lack of resources and visibility were also considered. By looking at not-for-profit outlets, this study aims to shed light on the possibilities and limitations of digital outlets that avoid the economic model of their corporate counterparts.

Accordingly, people selected as respondents had two main qualifications:

- 1) They were involved with alternative media practice in Brazil when this research took place;
- 2) They have recently engaged with the creation of alternative publications, although they were not part of the outlets any more when this research took place.

Outlets included in this research represent projects that have drawn the attention of academic studies, media experts or the mainstream media. They were examined, for example, by organisations such as the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas, Nieman Lab at Harvard University, and SembraMedia, who monitor innovations in the journalistic arena. Regarding the mainstream media, this research also looked at alternative outlets who were mentioned as sources for news stories, both for Brazilian and international newspapers. Another relevant source was an interactive map on new journalistic initiatives in Brazil launched by *Agência Pública*, an independent news outlet that covers mainly violations of human's rights (available at <https://apublica.org/mapa-do-jornalismo/>). This survey records, in principle, projects that produce online journalism and are not linked to major media corporations, companies or politicians (Agência Pública, 2016). However, it is not possible to confirm the source of funding of every project listed by *Agência Pública*. Besides that, the term “independent” is used to encompass a broad range of initiatives that do not necessarily challenge the mainstream viewpoint. There is a tendency among pundits in Brazil to classify as “independent” any small-scale operation that is not located within a traditional media company. The result is a confusing portrait that gathers from left-wing activists to for-profit agencies that provide services to mainstream broadcasters and publishers, as well as start ups that simply reproduce the traditional business model and hierarchical structures of corporate media. This research made an effort to avoid this confusing combination but, nonetheless, the map was a useful tool as a starting point for a deeper fieldwork.

In summary, the respondents contacted for this study were linked to heterogeneous types of autonomous organisations with a not-for-profit status. The reason for

choosing experiences that are not guided solely by the goal of profit was driven by the desire to explore alternatives to the privately owned media model that prevails in Brazil, which operates on profit through subscription and advertisement.

Nonetheless, the selected projects were concerned with economic sustainability to ensure a continued existence. This means, as we will see in Chapter 6, that some of these media are involved with commercial initiatives in order to maintain its operation. This thesis assumes that being commercially minded does not mean that profit is the main goal (Kenix, 2011).

As Requejo-Alemán and Lugo-Ocando explain, the term “non-profit” may suggest that these initiatives are “freed from the pressures of capital flows and the requirements for profitability” (2014, p.523). However, this is not the case. As the authors state, self-sustainability or simply sustainability are the key words (ibid, 2014). Investigative journalism, for instance, consumes a great amount of resources and, therefore, outlets engaged with this type of reporting need to have a financial plan for their operations, albeit in different ways from mainstream media. In selecting only non-profit media, I was able to limit the scope of this research, excluding media that are not owned by large corporations, but on the other hand is entirely driven by commercial interests. Partisan media, funded or explicitly working for a particular political party, were also excluded from the study.

A first frame employed six elements of alternative media proposed by Atton (2002a) to achieve a list of outlets to be analysed, although it does not mean that each of them possesses all of these attributes:

1. Content that is politically, socially or culturally radical;

2. Innovative aesthetic form;
3. Reliance on new technologies;
4. Alternative forms of distribution;
5. De-professionalized forms of organization;
6. Horizontal form of communication

To start with, a preliminary set of five one-to-one-face-to-face-semi-structured interviews was conducted in Rio de Janeiro in July 2016. After transcribing this first set of interviews, a closer reading of the data revealed the need for additional questions as well as a better understanding of the thematic categories of the main topics to be addressed. As Galletta observes, in the early phase of data analysis, “uncertainty is acceptable, and indeed very necessary” (2013, p.126). Furthermore, this exploratory fieldwork in the first year of the research enabled me to gain a sense of the challenges that this investigation could face in its course.

Overall, from July 2016 to August 2018, potential participants of 20 groups were approached by email or social networking sites. They were located in different parts of Brazil, so that this research was not limited only to the two largest cities of the country, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Below (Table 4.1) are the groups of which one or more participants agreed to be interviewed face-to-face or online. Although face-to-face interviews were the preferred method, time, financial constraints (travel costs) and logistic matters were taken into account to adopt online methods as a viable option to reach the ideal research sample, a procedure that has become commonplace in social science research (Deakin and Wakefield, 2014).

The fact that some of the participants needed to be interviewed over Skype, due to logistical reasons, was not considered a problem, since all of them had easy access to the software.

All participants who could not be interviewed face-to-face were offered the option to choose the time when they would have more flexibility to talk, without the constraints of a working environment, for instance. The choice for the method of interviewing over the internet draws on the assumption that online interviewing is a valid supplement or replacement to face-to-face interviews (Deakin and Wakefield, 2014).

Table 4.1: List of groups interviewed for this research (alphabetical order)

Outlet	Definition/Mission	Participants/ interview type
1. Agência Pública (apublica.org)	Investigative journalism with a focus on human rights	1 face-to-face
2. Amazônia Real (amazoniareal.com.br)	Non-profit independent news site focused on the Amazon region	2 Skype
3. Aos Fatos (aosfatos.org)	Data Driven journalism	1 face-to-face
4. AzMina (azmina.com.br)	Feminist magazine aimed at covering gender inequality	1 face-to-face
5. #Colabora (projetocolabora.com.br)	News site that proposes a broad discussion on sustainability issues	1 face-to-face
6. Capitolina (revistacapitolina.com.br)	Feminist magazine focused on teenagers and young women	1 face-to-face
7. Enraizados (enraizados.com.br)	Website aimed at portraying cultural manifestations of the periphery	1 face-to-face
8. FaveladaRocinha.com (faveladarocinha.com)	Group of citizen journalists from favela da Rocinha <i>favela</i>	1 Skype
9. Marco Zero (marcozero.org)	Network of journalists from the Northeastern region	1 Skype
10. Meu Rio (meurio.org.br)	Organization aimed at involving Rio's citizens into local activism	1 face-to-face
11. Mulheres 50+ (mulheres50mais.com.br)	Website that discusses issues related to older (over 50) women	2 face-to-face

12. Mural Blog da Periferia (agenciamural.com.br)	Citizen journalists from the peripheral communities in São Paulo	1 face-to-face
13. Nós Mulheres da Periferia (nosmulheresdaperiferia.com.br)	Group of women journalists living in the peripheral regions of São Paulo	1 Skype
14. Papo Reto (100ko.wordpress.com)	Community based activists from <i>favelas</i> of Complexo do Alemão (Rio)	1 WhatsApp video call
15. Ponte Jornalismo (ponte.cartacapital.com.br)	Collective of journalists covering public security and human rights issues	1 Skype
16. Repórter Brasil (reporterbrasil.org.br)	NGO advocating for worker's right and covering human rights violations	1 Skype
17. Uma Gota no Oceano (umagotanooceano.com.br)	NGO focused on social and environmental issues	1 face-to-face
18. Vozerio (vozerio.org.br)	Online magazine focused on Rio's social problems	1 face-to-face

The selected participants make it clear that it was not the aim of this research to point out a single genre of alternative journalism, or a “one-size-fits-all” definition (Forde, 2011, p.4). During the research process, I have constantly visited the websites of the organisations listed above to gain a better knowledge of their content and diverse interests, including their editorial policies whenever they were available in the ‘about us’ section. One may question what is the relation between an outlet of investigative journalism such as *Agência Pública* and, for instance, citizen journalists covering the daily life of a *favela* (slum) without professional training. Without dismissing the differences among the working practices of these outlets, this research is concerned with the heterogeneity of alternative media. Nonetheless, the selected groups have in common a primary concern with functioning as a counterweight to the often-homogeneous topics and perspectives of traditional media. Hence, exploring the hybridity of the outlets was key to portray a media landscape in transformation.

Furthermore, since this study is not only focused on content, but also on organisational structures and practices, the alternative media projects analysed in the

following chapters are all informed by an effort to democratise media in two ways explained by Uzelman (2012):

- a) Their aim is to distribute marginalised or critical discourses, which implies different strategies;
- b) They are concerned with the transformation of dominant relations and practices within the process of media production.

They may provide, thus, an attempt to shape a new form of journalism. The extent to which they are achieving effective ways to disseminate news accurately is what is under discussion in this study.

4.2.2 Ethical considerations

All participants were informed of the overall aim of the study and have received a consent form and an information sheet (Appendices A and B). In making a decision not to name the participants in their direct quotes, it was considered more vital to identify the nature of the alternative outlets and not necessarily their members.

Moreover, throughout this research, political polarisation in Brazil has intensified and journalists from both traditional and alternative media have been attacked by Jair Bolsonaro's supporters, as it was reported by the National Federation of Journalists (Fenaj). Although this research does not draw on the political instability in Brazil, I

opted to provide only the information considered relevant for the study. Nonetheless, a complete list of the interviewees can be found on Appendix C.

Regarding the distribution of gender of alternative journalists, it was not the focus of this investigation to address possible imbalances, more precisely because the composition of members of the outlets varies very often. However, it is relevant to note that women founded 50% of the outlets listed above. As this thesis is concerned with discussing alternative journalism from the perspective of the organisations' role, their methods of sustainability and their potential to challenge traditional concepts of journalism, I considered it more important here to discuss how the gender inequality in Brazil is portrayed by some of these groups.

4.2.3 Overview of the Research Questions

After selecting the method of interviewing (individual semi-structured interviews), designing the strategy for the recruitment of respondents and receiving positive answers, the next step was to conduct the interviews (Gaskell, 2000), but firstly a set of questions was prepared based on the goals of the research. Keeping in mind that some flexibility would be necessary to change the line of questioning as the study progressed, I prepared a list of sub-research questions. Each of them required another set of related questions, as shown below (Table 4.2). Overall, questions covered different aspects of alternative media practice, such as motivation; organisational structures; values; approach to journalistic concepts; audience's participatory features and sustainable models to maintain steady operations. They were informed

by the literature on alternative media, as discussed in Chapter 2, assuming that to suit the purpose of this study, it was necessary to question alternative producers not only about the content they publish, but also how they organise and sustain their operations.

Table 4.2: Arrangement of questions used to guide the interviews

Central Questions	Examples of sub-research questions	Examples of related questions
<p>1) What are the contemporary roles played by alternative media producers in Brazil in relation to its media landscape?</p> <p><u>Main topic: role of alternative journalists/producers and motivations</u></p>	<p>a) How does alternative journalism challenge the portrayal of social reality by the mainstream media?</p> <p>b) The internet allows a conversation with the audience that analogue media do not allow. How does this conversation take place in alternative outlets?</p> <p>c) What are the main elements that set these initiatives apart from mainstream media?</p>	<p>a) How would you describe your main goal? How would you describe the journalistic content that you publish?</p> <p>b) How do you incorporate audience's participation? Does your organization work both with professional and amateur journalists?</p> <p>c) Do you consider what you do a direct challenge to mainstream media? What is different about what you do?</p>
<p>2) How are these alternative media projects seeking to overcome the lack of resources and funds, which has so far been a defining characteristic of non-mainstream practices?</p> <p><u>Main topic: Sustainability</u></p>	<p>d) What is the main funding model?</p> <p>e) How do they try to reach broader audiences?</p> <p>f) Is there a convergence with traditional media?</p>	<p>d) Do you have a long-term plan? What are the main challenges you face to remain viable?</p> <p>e) Can you describe your social media strategy?</p> <p>f) Do you cooperate with traditional media?</p>
<p>3) To what extent is this practice breaking journalistic boundaries?</p> <p><u>Main topic: new journalistic practices and epistemology of news</u></p>	<p>g) Does alternative journalism mean activism?</p> <p>h) How do alternative journalists intersect with traditional values such as objectivity and impartiality?</p>	<p>g) What's your relationship with social movements?</p> <p>h) Does the content that you produce go through an editing process? Do you practice a partisan journalism?</p>

After deciding where potential respondents would be found, what questions would be asked and effectively starting the data gathering, it was crucial to ask how many interviews would be needed. According to Galletta (2013), the number of participants is determined by practicalities such as time and cost, but ideally a researcher should continue to recruit participants until no new thematic patterns emerge. My original intention was to conduct 20 to 25 interviews. This goal was achieved with 20 interviews (12 face-to-face; 8 online). In two of the interviews a pair of participants from the same outlet answered the questions. Interviews ranged from a minimum of 45 minutes to a maximum of 90 minutes in length.

The next section explains the qualitative process of the interviews' analysis.

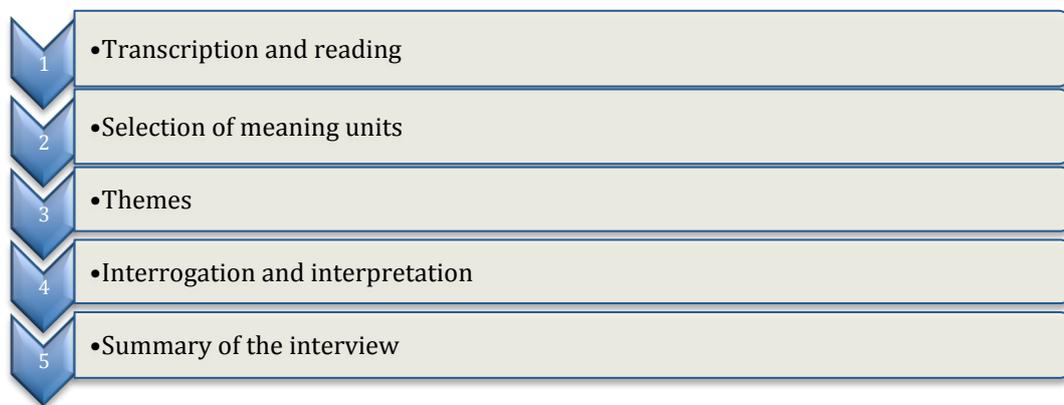
4.2.4 Analysis of the interviews

All interviews were digitally recorded with the consent of the respondents and were conducted in Portuguese. The content was, then, fully transcribed in Portuguese and the main topics were imported into spreadsheets alongside quotes from the interviews related to each category. This coding was an initial analysis in itself (Kvale, 2007), enabling a constant comparison of all the interviews.

To achieve a good level of methodological quality (Malterud, 2012,), I repeated the reading of the transcriptions following the strategy of “meaning condensation”, as suggested by Kvale (2007) on the basis of Giorgi’s (1975) phenomenological studies. The analysis followed, thus, five steps (Figure 4.2) in an effort to make results comprehensible to others and replicable (Krippendorff, 2004). After transcribing and

reading the texts (1), I selected “meaning units” (2) or text fragments related to the research questions (Malterud, 2012). The units were, then, identified by themes (3). The fourth step was the interrogation and interpretation of the meaning units and, finally, the fifth step consisted of summarising the essential content of each interview in a descriptive statement.

Figure 4.2: Strategy of meaning condensation



Flick argues that coding is simply a “combination of very fine analysis of some parts of the text and a rough classification and summary of other parts” (2009, p.330). This approach is in parallel with my understanding of qualitative interpretation of data and led me to nine main categories to guide the interviews’ coding, which are related to the research and subresearch questions: 1) Goal of the alternative outlet; 2) Identification with the term “alternative media” (as it will be discussed in Chapter 5, the term is not easily acceptable to people involved with independent media production); 3) Type of journalism practiced by the outlet; 4) Relation to traditional values of journalism; 5) Relationship with mainstream media; 6) Funding; 7) Professionalisation; 8) Audiences’ participation; 9) Organisational forms. Each of

these themes allowed me to make connections with previous studies on alternative media, as well as comparisons between the groups.

This procedure that identifies common themes emerging from the data is similar to what some scholars describe as thematic coding or thematic analysis. Braun and Clark (2006) explain:

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail. However, frequently it goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic. (Braun and Clark, 2006, p.79).

At this point, it is important to acknowledge that I agree with Braun and Clark (2006) when they argue that there is no ideal theoretical frame to conduct qualitative studies. Therefore, this research was concerned in choosing methods that match what the research questions were looking for. To this end, the transcription of the interviews were read several times to identify recurrent themes, as other media studies have done before (MacNair and Frank, 2017).

Given the large amount of data from the interviews with 20 participants, I opted to translate to English only the quotes that were relevant to the research main topics and which could be included in the final writing. To validate some of the claims of the interviewees and add different aspects to the investigation on alternative media the semi-structured interviews were followed by qualitative content analysis (QCA)

from a sample of four case studies, which were defined after the interviews were conducted.

The following section explains the use of qualitative content analysis for developing case studies.

4.3 QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF CASE STUDIES

The use of mixed methods, or a multi-method approach, to reach a more accurate analysis of a social phenomenon is a widely accepted strategy in social science (Kohlbacher, 2006). Considering the broad range of non-mainstream projects addressed through the interviews, I opted to use case studies as a purposive sampling strategy (Bryman, 2012) to provide a holistic knowledge of the field of alternative media production in Brazil.

Hartley defines case study as “a detailed investigation, often with data collected over a period of time, of phenomena, within their context” (2004, cited in Kohlbacher, 2006, p.323). The aim of the case study is to enrich the understanding of a context and theories. Yin suggests that the need for case study arises (a) when “how” and “why” research questions are being posed; (b) the researcher has little control over the events and (c) a contemporary phenomenon is investigated within its real-life context (2003, p.1). Yin challenges the common misconception that case studies as a research strategy are only valid for the exploratory phase of a research, but stresses that the selection “should be significant, must display sufficient evidence and must be composed in an engaging manner” (2003, p.163).

Accordingly, the selection of case studies for this present research was not pre-specified. It came from insights gained from the analysis of the interviews. Rather than considering this fact as a lack of rigid structure that may pose problems, it is worth noting that the qualitative design is deliberately flexible and decisions regarding data collection can be made as the actual process of the research develops (Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault, 2015). In spite of recognizing that qualitative research and case studies have weaknesses (Diefenbach, 2009), this study is aligned with the defenders of qualitative research's values, such as Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault (2015). They argue:

A qualitative study is not an impressionistic, off-the-cuff analysis based on a superficial look at a setting or people. It is a piece of systematic research conducted with demanding, though not necessarily standardized, procedures. (Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault, 2015, p.10)

The analysis of the transcripts of the verbal interactions with alternative media producers combined with a systematic analysis of the content they produce aimed to reach efficient and empirical grounding (Krippendorff, 2004) to discuss current practices of alternative journalism in Brazil. As the interviews included very heterogeneous groups, a deeper understanding of specific cases was helpful to address what is in the core of this investigation, that is, to generate evidence of how alternative journalists are acting in this specific regional context.

The replicable aspect of content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004), in contrast with a broader subjectivity involved in the interviewing process, is what led me to attempt this mixed approach. Such form of analysis has been broadly used by researchers

focused on online journalism. For example, Jane B. Singer (2005) applied the method to investigate journalism norms and practices of 20 blogs dealing with politics or civic affairs and concluded that journalists who became bloggers tend to keep the traditional role of gatekeepers of information. Joanna Redden and Tamara Witschge (2010) analysed how different online spaces, traditional and alternative, covered five types of news stories. Their findings indicate a lack of diversity within mainstream news site, while the alternative ones (Current TV; Indymedia and OpenDemocracy) did provide unique content. Andrew M. Lindner et al (2015) also conducted a content analysis of citizen journalism websites in the United States to call into question their independence from mainstream media. Helton Levy (2018), in turn, combined framing analysis with interviews to address how digital media producers are fighting for social justice in Brazil. These studies, among others, served as an inspiration for applying content analysis to make sense of what alternative journalists produce in Brazil and how they disseminate their content.

4.3.1 Characteristics of the case studies

The alternative outlets were purposively chosen (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003) for encompassing various types of departures from what traditional news corporations do, an essential criteria of this study. In addition, they had proven to have an impact on their public spheres, which could be verified through social media platforms. Firstly, they are digital native and independent, which means the outlets do not belong to large media corporations. Secondly, they have at their heart a critical content that proceeds from dissatisfaction with “conventions of news sources and representations”, as mentioned by Atton and Hamilton (2008, p.1). Thirdly, they

challenge the normalised process of gathering and distributing news. Finally, they have been publishing content in a systematic way for more than two years.

The cases were selected from the preliminary sample frame that informed the interviews. During the interview process, this investigation gained advanced knowledge of potential samples for the content analysis (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). After analysing the interviews and tracking the production of the selected groups on their homepages and social media accounts, the choice of the case studies was aimed at reaching a comprehensive understanding of alternative journalism within outlets with different editorial identities. Thus, the sampled ones were the following:

- a)** *Agência Pública (apublica.org)*: Non-profit agency that distributes investigative reports with a focus on human rights. Two female journalists, mirrored at the experience of The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), founded the agency in 2011. It has since won national and international awards. Editors are based in São Paulo, but the agency maintains a house in Rio de Janeiro that serves as a cultural centre for journalism. They promote a mentoring programme that includes microscholarships for reporting, providing resources and guidance for freelance journalists. Main source of funding: Grants from the Ford Foundation through the Advancing Media Rights and Access Program.

- b)** *Amazônia Real (amazoniareal.com.br)*: Independent news site focused on stories from the Amazon region. Founded in 2013 by two female journalists, it is produced by professional journalists. The goal is to portray the reality of a very complex and strategic region that usually makes into the mainstream, nationally and internationally only when there is a major crisis. Invisible and

stigmatized social groups gain voice in Amazônia Real, such as indigenous, immigrants, environmental activists, and the riverside population. Main source of funding: Grants from Ford Foundation through the Advancing Media Rights and Access Program.

- c) *Coletivo Papo Reto* ([Facebook.com/ColetivoPapoReto](https://www.facebook.com/ColetivoPapoReto)): Community-run media from Complexo do Alemão favela, a group of 16 different *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro. The collective, which began in 2014, is formed by non-professional journalists who were driven by the desire to counterbalance the coverage of favelas by the mainstream media. One of the main focuses is to report abuses committed by security forces. Activists rose to prominence in 2015 when they documented the death of a ten year-old boy fatally shot by a policeman. Participants work as volunteers, and are not trained journalists. Main source of funding: no regular source of funding.

- d) *Nós, Mulheres da Periferia* (nosmulheresdaperiferia.com.br): Collective of women from the outskirts of São Paulo. Dissatisfaction with the mainstream coverage of the peripheries and their female population led to the creation of the network. Founded in 2014, the group is formed by seven female journalists who live in regions often neglected by public officials. Thus, they cover the reality of the periphery and discuss gender policies from a personal perspective. They maintain a news website, produced a documentary and promote workshops on independent media production. Participants work as volunteers. Main source of funding: Funding for municipal projects.

As seen above, the case studies are illustrative of what has been produced outside traditional newsrooms in Brazil. This sampling represents a heterogeneity that is in parallel with the understanding of alternative journalists as practitioners that are not

“cut from the same cloth” (Atton and Hamilton, 2008, p.42). Though the four of them involve small digital media operations, their different approaches to news and their diverse formats reflect the growing hybridisation of the alternative media ecology, populated by professional and non-professional journalists.

Regarding their similarities, they are “not a simple expression of social movements” (Hamilton and Atton, 2001, p.125) and they make an effort to “privilege the powerless and the marginal” (Harcup, 2013, p.77). These aspects correspond to the literature on alternative media that provided the framework for this research.

Purposely, I did not choose outlets that only thrive in limit situations. Rather, I selected groups that have been able to ensure a continued existence (Kenix, 2011).

Next, I explain the process of qualitative content analysis (QCA).

4.3.2 Data collection and analysis

The QCA was applied to data published by the four selected outlets over a period of six weeks, from August to September 2018. Sample material was retrieved weekly and collected into a spreadsheet. For each site I have collected 30 articles, or six randomly chosen per week, totalling a dataset of 120 stories. The sample was retrieved from the outlet’s homepage, with the exception of *Coletivo Papo Reto*. For this particular outlet, the analysis was conducted via its Facebook page. The reason is that the group does not update its homepage on a regular basis and uses Facebook as its preferred platform for the dissemination of news. Yet, as the aim of the content analysis was to focus on the output of the alternative outlets, this thesis considered both opinion pieces and news articles. Monitoring the content of the four cases

every week, I selected the main stories from the homepages and the Facebook feed, in the case of the *Coletivo Papo Reto*. It is important to note that a few stories from the homepages were not necessarily “new”. The date of the production of the story was not considered relevant. As long as it was highlighted on the homepage, for instance through a hyperlink to another page of the website, the material was considered appropriate for the purpose of the analysis. Moreover, since *Coletivo Papo Reto* does not make daily publications, to reach the sample of 30 stories it was necessary to extend the analysis until the first days of October just for this particular case.

The data gathering took place over a period that was deliberately chosen as relevant for the aim of this study. Brazil was preparing to hold presidential elections in October 2018. Hence, it was a time of extreme political tension in the country. As previously explained, this thesis is not concerned in studying the work of traditional media. However, because mainstream media tend to cover the same stories during a particular news cycle (Boczkowski and Santos, 2007; Redden and Witschge, 2010), the examination of alternative sites could bring light to the nature of non-mainstream content when a particular event had an unmistakable impact on news coverage. Given that this research investigates the role of alternative journalists and to what extent they redefine journalistic codes and the very understanding of what news is, the period for the QCA was understood as relevant in relation to the Brazilian political context.

After collecting the data and doing a close reading of the text, I imported each article’s headline and hyperlink into an Excel spreadsheet. In the case of *Coletivo*

Papo Reto, posts were fully pasted into Excel. Considering that the coding frame of QCA is partly data-driven, I followed a flexible theoretical frame, drawing on some concepts of alternative media theories. In addition, I compared the content with the main topics identified in the interviews. Thus, the coding frame was built around the key aspects that emerged from the interviews, which in turn were analysed in line with the research questions. The retrieved stories were coded for the following “main categories” or “dimensions” to specify different meanings in the material vis-à-vis the research questions (Schreier, 2012, p.61).

- 1) News topic
- 2) Main sources
- 3) Form of news text
- 4) Audience’s participation
- 5) Level of subjectivity
- 6) Funding or campaign

Following what Schreier (2012) suggests as essential steps to make sense of data in a QCA, I identified subcategories to each of the main dimensions (Table 4.3). The articles were coded as follows:

Table 4.3: Coding frame of case studies

Categories	Examples of questions to identify subcategories
<i>Topic</i>	Hard or soft news? About public policy? Violence? Economy? Education? Environment? Human Rights? Women’s Right? Politics? Disaster?
<i>Source</i>	Government official? NGO? Ordinary citizens? Politician? Expert? Mainstream media?
<i>Form</i>	Inverted pyramid? Long-form reporting? Image based-story? List? Interview?
<i>Audience</i>	User-generated content? Tools to encourage

	discussion and involvement (e.g. polls; invitations to send contributions)?
<i>Subjectivity</i>	Opinion piece? Fact based story? Propaganda? Call for mobilization? First person essay?
<i>Funding or campaign</i>	Reference to any source of funding or particular campaigns that fit into the agenda of the organisation? (e.g. events, workshops, donation request, references to sponsorship)

Having RQ1, RQ2 and RQ3 in mind, the qualitative content analysis aimed to examine what drives the alternative media producers, how they inform their audiences and what are their commercial practices (if there was any indication of that in their stories). That said, looking closely at the content disseminated by alternative outlets is a way to determine what is news for alternative journalists and how different their production is from mainstream sites. In their study of news values within published pieces of mainstream journalism, Harcup and O’Neill (2017) found that news stories must satisfy one or more of the following requirements: exclusivity, bad news, conflict, surprise, audio-visuals, shareability, entertainment, drama, follow-up, the power elite, relevance, magnitude, celebrity, good news, news organisation’s agenda. These criteria could not be strictly followed to analyse alternative media, which certainly take different values in their selection of news. However, this taxonomy helped to understand the values that dominate the mainstream content, thus facilitating the examination of media that defies these concepts.

It is worth noting that a pilot phase was conducted for two weeks, before the actual data analysis started. As suggested by Schreier (2012), the coding frame was tried to allow adjustments to categories that proved to be difficult to apply. This trial

occurred in July 2018, therefore, the selected material for the pilot phase was not included in the QCA that came later (August-September 2018). Nonetheless, the trial coding was useful to verify if the categories and subcategories could be easily identified in the news material retrieved from the web pages of the four case studies, and mainly as a means of grasping the difficulties of a method with which I was not yet familiar with. Even after the main coding took place, I found myself returning to the coding material many times during the writing up phase of this research in order to confirm some of the interpretations. Accordingly, Ritchie and Lewis state that “the ability to move up and down the analytical hierarchy, thinking conceptually, linking and nest concepts in terms of terms of their level of generality, lies at the heart of good qualitative analysis (2003, p.215).

4.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE METHODS AND RELIABILITY

The mixed method approach of this research presents limitations as any scientific investigation. Firstly, in spite of the scientific rigour required to analyse data, semi-structured interviews cannot avoid concerns with validity and reliability. As Gillham (2005) points out, interviewers inevitably interpret the answers of interviewees and, even if it is done systematically, it means that there is always a certain level of subjectivity involved. Such subjectivity is an integral part of qualitative studies (King and Horrocks, 2010), but my hope here is that the qualitative content analysis of selected case studies served as a guard against the risk of basing this research entirely on the responses provided by alternative media producers.

Furthermore, I have assessed the reliability of the coding frames, both for the interviews and the case studies, in terms of “comparisons across points in time” (Schreier, 2012, p.167). Instead of employing a second coder to review a sample of the interviews and stories, which would have required a Portuguese-speaking researcher, I have double-checked the same units of coding in two different moments of this research to confirm the findings. Between the first and second analyses there was a time period of at least three months, employing “stability” as the underlying concept of reliability (ibid, p.167).

I have opted not to calculate a coefficient, as other qualitative studies have done before, whereas this research required a good amount of interpretation. In the belief that “reliability does not guarantee validity” (Krippendorff, 2004, p.213), I have drawn on Elo et al (2014) to argue that the quality of this analysis can be confirmed by the representativeness of the data itself, as well as by a clear description of the analysis process.

Nevertheless, this investigation does not intend to be seen as a full description of alternative journalism in Brazil. Firstly, in terms of regional diversity, achieving a complete picture would not be feasible in a country with such huge dimensions, divided into 26 states. Key regions, such as the North and the Northeast part of Brazil, were targeted with the goal to examine different socioeconomic conditions, although access to participants from groups that emerged in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo proved to be more practical and, thus, constitute the majority of the present sampling. I recognize, thus, that the selection of the participants does not completely overcome the imbalance of media concentration in the richest and biggest Brazilian

urban centres.

Secondly, although I have justified above the reason not to use ethnographic observation, without this method this thesis will not be able to advance the knowledge on the complexities of specific alternative media, such as media from the *favelas*. Here, this type of citizen's media is addressed as part of the overall phenomenon of digital alternative journalism in Brazil in contrast with previous studies that focus more deeply on the effects of media production on marginalized communities. My argument is that there is a need for empirical research into the working practices of alternative producers in Brazil, while further studies on the field of alternative media could usefully stress the characteristics of very specific media, for instance media from the *favelas* or feminist magazines.

4.5 CONCLUSION: APPLYING QUALITATIVE METHODS TO DESCRIBE EMERGENT JOURNALISTIC PRACTICES

This chapter has outlined the qualitative analytic methods employed in this study to answer the research questions. Given that the goal of this research is to build knowledge and understand new journalistic practices outside large media corporations in Brazil, a qualitative approach was deemed as the most appropriate type of investigation. Thus, this chapter explained why and how 20 semi-structured interviews were combined with QCA of four case studies to examine the values, the dynamics and economic arrangements of alternative outlets. I have described here the main steps of the investigation; the selection of not-for-profit alternative projects to be analysed and how the interviews were conducted and later coded. Then, the

chapter explained the reasoning for the selection of four case studies and the process of analysis of their content. The case studies differ between them, although they have the common goal of covering communities or issues that are outside the “radar” of the mainstream media. Therefore this methodology follows the assumption that alternative media and, more specifically, alternative journalism is a phenomenon marked by heterogeneity, as already discussed in Chapter 2.

For there to be points in common between the producers interviewed for this research and between the case studies, the initiatives listed in this chapter are all small-scale outlets concerned with news production, even if not all of them naturally identify themselves as “journalistic” groups. Also, they do not replicate the advertisement and subscription-based model that dominates the operation of big media institutions. The combination of semi-structured interviews and qualitative content analysis provides an attempt to theorise the performance of a non-commercial kind of journalism. While the semi-structured interviews allowed a flexibility that I believe was needed for this type of investigation, the content analysis aimed to corroborate the findings from the interviews, thus diminishing the subjectivity that is involved in any qualitative research.

Throughout this chapter I have reflected on the steps taken during this investigation to overcome the challenges of studying practices that actually take many different forms and which are constantly shifting. Far from idealising the *modus operandi* nor the output of alternative outlets, an empirical assessment of a core set of practices of non-mainstream journalists in Brazil may help to study attempts to establish alternative forms of news gathering that reject commercialism, assessing to what

extent they maintain or break up with the patterns of past experiences.

For the above-stated reasons, statistical inquiries were never the main motivation driving this research. Rather, I was interested in engaging with alternative forms of doing journalism in a context of intense technological transformation. Looking at the academic literature and after reviewing the history of past experiences in Brazil (Chapters 2 and 3), it was clear that little is known about what alternative journalism means for the current Brazilian media landscape. In narrating the research process in this chapter, I explained why the flexibility allowed by semi-structured interviews was appropriate to cover the diversity of alternative groups. The case studies, therefore, entered a later stage as a way of validating and extending the interpretations of the interviews.

The four outlets chosen for the qualitative content analysis (*Agência Pública*, *Amazônia Real*, *Coletivo Papo Reto* and *Nós, Mulheres da Periferia*) were considered as representative of the heterogeneity of the field that is privileged here.

Their main elements are listed below (Table 4.4):

Table 4.4: Summary of the main elements of the case studies

Outlet/Location	Profile	Participants
Agência Pública (São Paulo)	Investigative journalism Focus: human rights	Professional journalists
Amazônia Real (Manaus)	Local journalism Focus: Amazon region	Professional journalists from the region
Coletivo Papo Reto (Rio de Janeiro)	Community media Focus: Favela	Non-professional journalists
Nós, Mulheres da Periferia (São Paulo)	Community media Focus: Women in the periphery	Professional journalists from the periphery

In the next chapter, I start the empirical part of this research by looking at the roles of alternative journalists in Brazil.

Chapter 5

THE ROLES AND SELF-POSITIONING OF ALTERNATIVE JOURNALISTS IN BRAZIL

This first of the empirical chapters of this study discusses goals and viewpoints of alternative news producers in Brazil. By examining key elements of their work and the nature of their outlets, this chapter looks into distinctive possibilities for these social actors to exert their dissatisfaction with the dominant forms of journalism. The focus is on how alternative producers, both professional and amateurs, perceive themselves as new entrants to the regional media landscape. Drawing on their critique of traditional ways of doing journalism (Atton and Hamilton, 2008), this section is concerned with the motivations and ideological influences behind the practices of alternative journalists.

The self-perception of alternative producers is the starting point of this empirical discussion. The way they describe their aim sheds light on the type of newsgathering they attempt to practice and, ultimately, their role in society (Forde, 2011). This qualitative analysis is based on the semi-structured interviews detailed in Chapter 4. The first question asked in that direction was simply: How do you define the main purpose of your outlet? Then, the participants were asked to define their occupation in relation to journalism. Do they consider themselves as alternative journalists, simply journalists, activists or do they have any other self-identification? The responses, combined with insights provided by other answers throughout the

interviews, allow a critical discussion based on alternative producers' self-perceptions, which helps us to reject the simplistic binary opposition between mainstream and alternative media, as other scholars have done before (Downing, 2001; Atton, 2002; Harcup, 2005; Kenix, 2011). At the heart of this analysis is an effort to answer how and why alternative journalism can play a relevant role in the contemporary Brazilian media landscape, despite remaining vulnerable to market pressures. This enquiry is related to the first research question (RQ1) of the present dissertation: What is the role of alternative journalists in Brazil?

The chapter transitions to the discussion on how alternative outlets challenge the mainstream media representation of certain communities and issues, for instance dwellers of the *favelas*, indigenous populations and women's rights. This theme is directly linked to the role of alternative journalism and emerged as a recurrent theme on the analysis of interviews. Next, the chapter examines to what extent independent producers are challenging journalism's traditional norms. Once again I argue that this discussion is connected to the basis of alternative journalism and to the investigation of its news values.

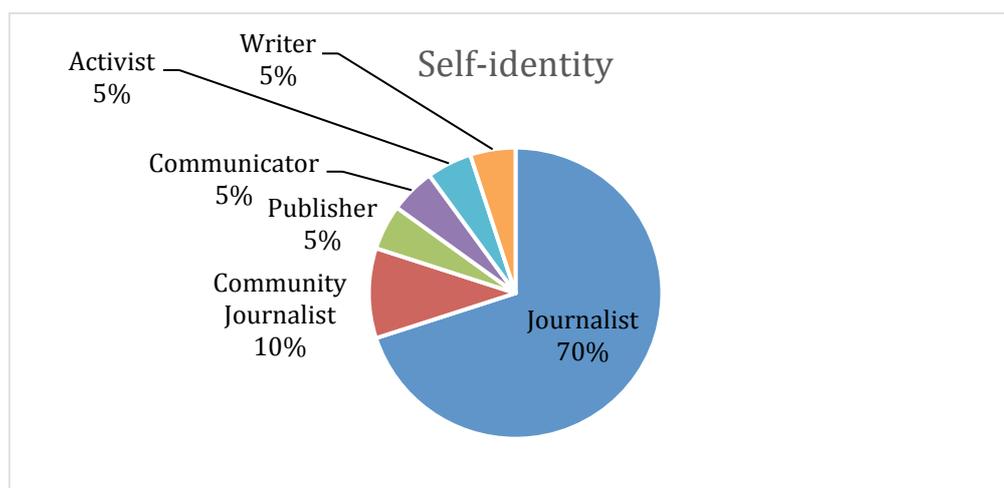
The last section reviews the assumption that alternative media is always "partisan", introducing the argument that emergent alternative outlets want to avoid looking like spokespeople of particular political parties or groups in order to be accepted as legitimate forms of public communication, although they are open in terms of their social agenda. This chapter is based on the analysis of the interviews and not on the content analysis, which will be explored later on. Even so, examples of illustrative content were added to provide a better contextualisation of alternative practices.

5.1 SELF-DEFINITION AND MOTIVATIONS

Data from the interviews show that people producing news reporting outside mainstream media in Brazil come from very different backgrounds. There are professional journalists who left large media corporations; journalists who maintain their jobs in traditional media but contribute to alternative experiments; and ordinary citizens who felt misrepresented and disempowered by mass media and decided to produce their own media without any formal training nor claim to be acknowledged as “journalists”. The 20 interviews conducted for this research confirmed a growing hybridization of alternative journalism, with very different goals, routines and outlets’ composition.

According to the data collected, when asked about how they identify themselves, the largest proportion of producers, 14 out of 20, said that they were *professional* journalists. The definition of professional refers to those who have a formal training on journalism. They emphasised the desire to be acknowledged simply as “journalists” as opposed to “alternative journalists”, although they were working full time or contributing to alternative media at the time this study was carried out. The reason behind this is that some interviewees rejected the term *alternative*. They perceive it as a label of a somewhat “marginal” type of journalism. For others, *alternative* is associated in the collective memory with the small print publications that challenged the military dictatorship, as previously discussed in Chapter 3. The image below (Figure 5.1) shows types of self-identity among practitioners interviewed for this study:

Figure 5.1: How respondents identified themselves



Although the majority of the participants have identified as journalists, there is not a consensus on how to label the type of journalism being practiced by small digital native outlets. For example, the term “independent” was problematized by this journalist from a non-profit institution focused on covering violations of fundamental rights of workers:

It is not possible to talk about a complete independence, is it? Traditional media also claims to be independent, for instance. I think that journalism is always born with this vocation of looking at the world from an independent perspective. Being independent is the basis of any form of good journalism, but this aspect is not exclusive to new digital organisations that are emerging outside the corporate system. I prefer to define these outlets simply as emergent groups that are trying to practice a good journalism based on different management models. (IN/18)

This founder of an outlet focused on issues related to sustainable economy reiterated the same idea (the italics are mine):

I do not like the term independent, since no one is totally independent. Independent from what? From a large media corporation? From a political party? From the market? If you look closely, no one is

absolutely independent. And what bothers me the most is that when you rate one part of the media as *independent*, you are saying that the other part is *dependent*. Since people tend to simplify things, they may conclude that *independent* is good and *dependent* is bad, but the reality is not like that. In spite of many problems, there is a lot of good content in traditional media and a lot of bad things being done by the so-called independent media, and vice versa. Power is in the hands of the reader, not the producer. It is up to us to select what we want to read and in what to believe (IN/6).

While producers see themselves as practitioners of a critical journalism, these respondents did not feel completely comfortable with the “alternative” label:

We note that many of the initiatives labelled as *alternative* are linked to a cause. Some people even identify us as *journalists with a cause*. In some studies, our outlet has been framed as *entrepreneurial journalism* or as the *new Brazilian journalism*. But we prefer to see ourselves simply as *investigative* and *independent* journalists. (IN/2)

I prefer to be referred to as *independent journalist* because if we use the term *alternative*, it seems that there is only one way to practice journalism, that is, the traditional hegemonic way. In that sense, we would be seen as an *alternative* to the mainstream, but actually we do not think about ourselves in that simplistic way. (IN/10)

The alternative press in Brazil arose at the time of the dictatorship, when alternative publications contested the official discourse of the traditional media. At that time it made sense to have this binary logic. The alternative media privileged information that was not disclosed by the mainstream media because of censorship. Nowadays the context is different. I do not like the term *alternative*. It assumes that one thing excludes the other, as if alternative media exists only to

publish what is excluded. Actually, we see ourselves as a complement to traditional media. (IN/4)

Trained journalists who were members of independent outlets when this study was conducted made the statements above. Their discourse had a moderate tone in regards to a critique to mainstream journalism, which can be interpreted as an attempt to reject the dichotomy of the “we” (alternative journalists) against “them” (mainstream).

5.1.1 Challenging the tag of “journalist”

In turn, producers who do not identify themselves as professional journalists (six of the 20 interviewees) presented a more critical discussion over how standard norms of journalism affect the anti-establishment nature of what they do. In dismissing the tag of “journalist”, they showed a deeper dissatisfaction with mainstream media, as seen in the following testimonials:

I do not see what we do specifically as a contraposition to the traditional media, but we know for sure that we don’t want to do what they do. (IN/8)

I don’t even know how a traditional newsroom operates. But if I were to follow the mainstream media script, I would immobilise our website with a *plaster*. Moreover, I would have to train people to follow traditional journalistic codes and we don’t want that at all. (IN/8)

I have graduated in International Relations and I describe myself more widely as a writer and more specifically as a publisher. We define our

website as an independent digital magazine for young women. We don't have any sponsorship. But I could not possibly identify myself as a journalist because I do not see the content that I publish as conventional news stories. Rather, our focus is on a very personal type of writing made by women. (IN/7)

I do not define myself as a journalist. Nowadays anyone is a content producer, and journalism has very specific principles that are not followed by all of these new content producers. I have respect for journalism, but I do not consider myself a journalist. I consider myself a political communicator because that is my field of action. (IN/11)

The attempt to be included in a “box” specifying one particular type of journalism, whether traditional or alternative, was discarded by one of the producers who covers the daily lives of one of the largest *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro as follows:

Perhaps it is more accurate to talk about a media *made by ourselves*. (IN/16).

The expression used below (“made by ourselves”, translated from Portuguese) marks a position of resistance to the mainstream media stereotype of *favela's* dwellers, often depicted as criminals or paternalistically approached as *poor people* abandoned by the state (Levy, 2018). Here I take note, once again, that the emphasis set in relation to a professional status varies according to the background of the producers: while experienced journalists working for alternative outlets wanted to be legitimised as practitioners of *good journalism*, producers who had never held professional credentials placed less emphasis on the premises of traditional journalism. Instead, they expressed a desire to be acknowledged as authoritative and credible voices in the media landscape. For instance, outlets produced by citizens who live in the *favelas* or peripheral areas want to be seen as the legitimate *experts* of their own

realities. Similarly, young women feel the need to tell stories that would not be deemed newsworthy by legacy teens' magazines, while a website founded by a rapper is concerned with serving as a reference on the cultural production of marginalised neighbourhoods.

Overall, I interpret the discourses seen so far as a challenge to the boundaries of journalistic practices. Trained journalists challenge the strict dichotomy between mainstream and alternative, whilst *amateurs* contest the assumption that only professionals can be acknowledged as society's storytellers. In addition, I see this lack of consensus in relation to the identity of alternative news producers simply as a reflection of the expansion of the media environment in Brazil, where there is a growing interaction of different media players. As previously stated, this research is not concerned with finding a unique terminology that may encompass all forms of alternative media. Rather, what matters here is to understand the purpose of alternative producers and to what extent they are breaking free from norms that result in a homogeneous flow of news. Next, I further examine the main points of their discourses that emerged from the semi-structured interviews.

5.2 TACKLING THE REPRESENTATION GAP

In explaining what they aim, the participants interviewed for this research showed a concern in exploring digital media to provide accounts that oppose a stigmatized representation of peripheral communities. Drawing on the concept as periphery both as a geographical notion and a social construction (Levy, 2018), peripheral here is mostly related to disadvantaged communities that reflect Brazil's inequalities, not

infrequently framed in a negative or unrealistic way on mainstream media. For example, this is how a veteran journalist who launched a multimedia blog produced by residents of São Paulo's poor neighbourhoods explained the aim of his project:

There is a gap in the news coverage. Traditional media doesn't cover São Paulo's outskirts. When there is news coverage, it is always stigmatised. The reporter will go to a particular peripheral area just for a brief period of time to report on a violent incident, a shooting or a murder, for example. We aim to offer something else. We may talk about young entrepreneurs or a poetry event in the periphery, for instance. Participants of this project act as *community correspondents*. In that sense, they may even speak of violence and social deprivation, but they will always provide their *own accounts* of the stories, and not an outside view from top to bottom. This is a rejection of the typical middle-class journalist who is *parachuted* into a community to report on something that he had never experienced, and, afterwards, he will never go back to this place. (IN/14).

The testimonials illustrate dissatisfaction with the way journalists from corporate media portray marginalised urban areas. The perception that poor neighbourhoods can only make headlines when there is a violent incident to report was also mentioned as one of the main reasons that led to the creation of a website to disseminate news about cultural production in the outskirts of major Brazilian cities, mainly related to the hip-hop movement. This is how the founder of the site *Enraizados*, himself a rapper from *Baixada Fluminense*, a region in the state of Rio de Janeiro with a reputation for crime, poverty and low levels of public investments, defined his project as a space to disseminate positive and cultural news about the periphery (Figure 5.2):

In a conversation with a journalist from a major newspaper from Rio, he [the journalist] challenged me to find a headline about *Baixada*

Fluminense that was not related to crime, death or robbery. He admitted that the good things that happen here are not newsworthy for his news organisation. In our portal, in turn, positive stories will always be published. Our job is also to raise the self-esteem of those who live in this region (IN/8).

Figure 5.2: News about a rap festival at Baixada Fluminense, from the website Enraizados (snapshot)



Click By: Igor Freitas Lima

Em aniversário de 2 anos RapFree Jazz apresenta a Baixada Fluminense

Although coming from a different background, an experienced journalist working for an alternative outlet that focuses on public security and human rights in peripheral neighbourhoods of São Paulo echoed a similar discontent with the agenda of mainstream media and how it prioritise an elite perspective:

In the area of public safety, race and social class is what frames mainstream media coverage. Perhaps only in lifestyle journalism there is as much social prejudice as in the crime beat. We aim to take off the *veil of invisibility* that covers the discrimination of race and lower social classes in Brazil. (...) We would like to see a society that feels outrage, for instance, when policemen kill a young black man on the outskirts of a big city. (IN/17)

The journalist was referring to the fact that black people are the main victims of violence in Brazil, according to official data (Cerqueira et al, 2018). Previous studies have shown that afro-descendants are underrepresented by the mass media, besides being portrayed in a way that reflects the social stigmas of the Brazilian society (Acevedo and Nohara, 2008). The quote above, therefore, suggests the intention of disseminating news that defies racial and social stereotypes. How can it be done?

The same journalist insisted on a counter-representation:

The violence that affects the poorest, especially the violence committed by agents of the state, is absurdly absent from the major newspapers. Being a journalist, I have the feeling that there are important news stories that people need to know about, but they are not reported, as they should. That's what we want to offer. Some of these stories are in the mainstream media, but often in a superficial way or without continuity. Mainstream media only provides a continuous coverage of crimes that affect white middle-class people. But there is no such continuous attention to the victims of violence in the poorest areas. This is what we want to do. (IN/17)

In addition to not feeling sufficiently visible in traditional media, residents of low-income neighbourhoods, such as *favelas*, express a will to be “seen” by society through narratives produced from “within”. This member of a collective from Rocinha, one of the largest favelas in Rio de Janeiro, explained:

Media cannot show only one side of things, the side of violence. People want to be shown as they really are. This is what led me to be a communicator inside the favela, to show new narratives that are created here. (IN/9)

5.2.1 Storytellers on the ground

Overall, participants of alternative outlets that provide local or hyperlocal news do not necessarily claim to speak as a community “spokesperson”. On the contrary, they demonstrated an understanding that it is not possible, for example, to report on the Amazon forest or the periphery of São Paulo as if these regions were homogeneous spaces, just to mention some of the geographical locations covered by the outlets studied here. Instead respondents showed concern to avoid the position of a “special envoy”, that is, a professional journalist who is sent by a large media group to report on a crisis or a conflict for a very short period of time. According to producers, however well meaning and well trained correspondents or “special envoys” can be, as outsiders they have a limited perception of the reality of distant communities.

This assumption is very noticeable in the case of community media as well as in the case of outlets covering specific regions outside major urban centres. As the following statements show, alternative journalists, either trained ones or amateurs, argued about the necessity of expanding the angles of the news:

Our goal is to report what traditional media do not cover, narrating with our very own look, from the viewpoint of those who are from the *favela*. The reporter who comes to cover a shooting, for instance, stays at the entrance of the favela, and does not understand what actually happens inside. (IN/9)

We understand that our place in society is that of journalists who tell stories about women from the periphery from the very viewpoint of women from the periphery. That is our difference. (IN/15)

Our coverage privileges stories from the perspective of those who live in the outskirts of São Paulo. I have always encouraged participants to use their own cultural references without trying to force or push my own prejudices on them. We have to understand that communication in today's world is horizontal. If you try a top-down or a patronising approach, it will not work. (IN/14)

We give voice to issues of the Amazon region that no one finds in the national newspapers or TV channels. And even if such topics happen to appear in those spaces, we will cover the same subject differently, through an in-depth report, always prioritising the narratives of the indigenous populations, the riverside populations and the *quilombolas*². (IN/2)

The statements above refer to local realities that producers consider invisible on mainstream media. Among the 18 groups analysed in this research, ten are dedicated to local news. However, this thesis is not focused only in the peripheries or geographical communities, but also on communities of interests. In that sense, we go back to Fraser's (1992) notion of parallel discursive arenas to create subaltern counter-publics, as discussed in Chapter 2.

5.2.2 Fighting the “impossible version” of women

Therefore, producers also weighed in on the coverage of other types of stigmas against minorities by mainstream media. The underrepresentation of women or women's issues was a topic frequently raised by members of alternative outlets. The way mainstream media frame particular discussions on human-environment

² *Quilombolas* are communities made by the descendants of Afro-Brazilian slaves.

relationships was also pointed out as an opportunity for alternative media to convey counter-hegemonic versions of realities. Independent producers have criticized even the way day-to-day politics is covered by traditional channels of communication. For them, an excessive focus on statements from politicians and on political negotiations leaves aside a deeper discussion of public policy issues that directly affect the population.

For example, an editor of an online magazine for young women said that, although she was not a professional journalist, she decided to create a digital publication to challenge the stereotyped portrait of women in the media. She explained how she was driven by dissatisfaction with sexist ideologies reproduced by commercial magazines focused at female readers, especially the younger ones:

Traditional magazines cast an impossible version of girls, an imaginary ideal of beauty that is not realistic. No teenager in the world is like the adolescents featured in a magazine such as *Capricho*³. They simply don't exist. (IN/7)

Alternative digital magazines or sites produced by women have been gaining visibility with the increase of feminist media activism in Brazil (Costa, 2019), a country wherein indexes of violence against women remain extremely high. The aim of this particular alternative digital magazine is to offer a space in which adolescents and young women could express their viewpoints free from the stereotypical body type ideal and related topics often promoted by commercial teen magazines. Similarly, a website that focuses on women over 50 challenges myths and taboos

³ Capricho was a popular commercial magazine for Brazilian adolescents, especially in the 80's and 90's. The printed version ended in 2015.

about the female ageing process. One of its founders, a veteran journalist with large experience in legacy newspapers, complained about the lack of representation of older women in Brazilian media in general. Her website aims to counter-balance the depiction of gender:

Traditional media always speak about longevity more generally. When women over 50 are mentioned, it is usually to impose the idea that a woman has to look younger, has to be beautiful, wonderful, hot, regardless of her age. Magazines are concerned with clothes or makeup for women over 50. We noticed that there was a unique formula in the media, as if every mature woman has to be beautiful like Jane Fonda. As a consumer, I don't feel represented in the media (IN/12).

The responses above demonstrate an intention to diversify the news agenda to ensure a representation of communities that fell unrepresented by traditional media.

Whereas the examples mentioned in this chapter are very distinct, they are related to contents that are relevant to specific audiences, for instance, news from the hip-hop cultural scene, or from a particular favela in Rio de Janeiro or news designed to teenagers or women over 50. However, the focus on the “niche” was seen by producers not as something to be dismissed as “insignificant” compared to the broader reach of traditional media. Rather, they stressed that their relevance lies exactly in the attention they give to fragmented and diverse voices, often unnoticed.

Since this chapter is concerned with the role of alternative journalists, I asked participants about how they engage with conventional norms of journalism, even if some of them do not identify themselves as journalists.

5.3 JOURNALISTIC PRACTICES: SETTING THEIR OWN AGENDA

The interviews conducted for this research included questions related to traditional concepts of journalism, mainly its core concept of “objectivity”, as well as questions about news values and sourcing. The majority of the interviewees (16) claimed to be committed to some of the fundamental traditions of journalistic practices. Once again, it is possible to identify a greater emphasis on certain professional codes by trained journalists, who defended that all sides of a story should be heard to ensure a truthful account of reality, for instance, thus attempting to differentiate themselves from activists or propagandists who only have one side to report on.

For example, groups that practice investigative journalism claim that their goal is to report in a balanced way, as different producers stated:

We care to provide as many facts as possible and it includes all sides of a controversial story. We have commitments, but they are the ones that every journalist should have. We always prioritise the point of view of the weakest, the unprivileged, and the minorities. (IN/17)

Listening to all sides of a story is very important and in fact I have never worked in a place that takes it so seriously. Even for the sake of legal issues. Since we investigate many corporations and we release unpublished information about how they treat their workers that can invariably result in a legal process. So we have to play by the book in terms of careful verification of information before publishing. (IN/18)

We present ourselves as a collective of investigative journalism, and within this we are very concerned with ethical issues. Objectivity is an unquestionable value of journalism. However, I will not say that objectivity is defined as impartiality. Even in the universities today we have this discussion about the myth of impartiality in journalism. But we do seek to be fair and to do a journalistic investigation in the traditional way. (IN/10)

The quotes above indicate an approach to news that reproduces the discourse of traditional journalism in terms of accuracy or a fair representation of facts. Trained journalists working for alternative media reiterate norms that are the basis of professional journalism's legitimacy, even assuming that different levels of subjectivity will always be present, as expressed by these journalists:

Some stories follow the principle of objectivity because this is our way to investigate and write a conventional news story. Other stories, however, are supposed to be subjective, such as first person narratives, points of view, and stories written from the unique perspective of women. (IN/13)

I don't believe that anything can be totally impartial. But I have a very big commitment with presenting both sides of a controversial story. For example, we published stories on the pollution of the Sepetiba Bay (Rio de Janeiro). So we heard the authorities on what they have been doing to solve this problem. However, it does not mean that I'm not going to be critical. We do a critical journalism, but we have to justify our critique with data, with information. (IN/20)

We do journalism in a very traditional way. However, as we cover human rights issues, we are not interested in delivering a rigid, dry narrative of the facts. The reporting has to be engaging and detailed. It

has to be engaging. But we do hear all sides of a story. In activist journalism there is no real commitment to do that. (IN/1).

5.3.1 Contesting the myth of neutrality

Considering that not all producers are trained professionals who have previously worked in traditional newsrooms, questions about journalistic codes have received more nuanced answers in terms of what really matters in a news account. Participants of community media, for instance, have a very specific approach towards the concept of balanced reporting, as we will see below. At the same time, all participants showed a clear concern to avoid the spread of lies or inaccurate reporting.

A citizen journalist from *Rocinha favela* explained that, having to deal very frequently with disinformation and rumours usually related to situations of violence, his collective had to adopt fact-centred techniques to avoid contributing to the spread of panic among locals. He talked about the pursuit of accuracy in their news reporting:

There are 200,000 people living in our community. There are rumours and fake news circulating all the time. Our main job is to determine what is credible and what is not. In a moment of threat to security, you can't ignore any information, but our function is to verify the facts before publication. (IN/9)

Likewise, a producer from another *favela* in Rio de Janeiro emphasized the need to double-check information before publishing it on social media, even though his collective is not run by professional journalists:

We have a *filter*. We rarely publish something that comes directly from the residents without double-checking the information. It would be pretentious to claim that we are inventing *a new form of journalism* without considering some of its traditional methods. (IN/16)

The statements demonstrate, thus, a concern to be seen as disseminators of information with credibility to establish themselves as authoritative voices on the issues they are covering. Most interviewees explicitly manifested commitment to the practices of verification of information, regardless of being open about their motivations, such as feminism, human rights advocacy and counterculture movements. It is clear that most of the outlets are concerned with social change, and therefore they are driven by a particular agenda. In this context, it can be noted that alternative producers are not interested in drawing a false moral equivalence in terms of news sources. This becomes evident when alternative journalists claim to give a fair hearing to opposing sides of a story, while acknowledging prioritising “the point of view of the weakest, the unprivileged, and the minorities” (IN/17).

The element of accuracy can at times also lead to question the understanding of what “balance” means. If mainstream media leaves a gap in the reporting of certain topics, “filling the gap” can become an issue of “balance” as some interviewees pointed out. This has been the case for a veteran journalist, who lives in the Amazon region and helped to launch *Amazônia Real*, an outlet that systematically covers the reality of the region’s populations:

To do investigative journalism, you cannot listen to only one side of a story. You have to hear everyone. But why are we interested in covering indigenous populations? Because they don’t have space in traditional media. As journalists from Amazonia, we have always

thought this way. But if you are part of a large newsroom, as I have been before, there are many limitations to report on these issues since news corporations are profit oriented. Our outlet’s priority, on the other hand, is to listen to these types of sources. If you read our stories, you will see that we give voice to everyone. Legacy media produce unequal stories, and here we have banned this inequality in terms of source representation. (IN/3)

What is explicit in this response is a criticism of the supposed neutrality of traditional media, which the respondent saw as disseminators of biased accounts in regards to the emphasis given to elite groups in society. When the above-mentioned journalist claimed to favour stories about indigenous populations (Figure 5.3), she is arguing that the way traditional media cover the Amazon region is far from impartial. Therefore, an outlet that challenges repeated sourcing formulas and offers different perspectives actually represents a counterbalance.

Figure. 5.3: Headlines about indigenous populations at Amazônia Real (screenshot)



5.3.2 Promoting non-dominant sources

The same logic applies to citizen journalists from *favelas*, who do not accept the weight given to the voice of police authorities in discussions about violence in these

marginalized areas, thus doubting the supposed objectivity of traditional journalism.

These producers defined journalism as biased:

Traditional journalism is not impartial. Because when journalists listen to residents and to the police, they write their stories in a way that there is no balance. On the contrary, in general it is to put in doubt the speech of the dwellers. Policemen will never admit that they have killed someone, and on traditional media this official discourse will always carry more weight. Citizens who will read this already tend to agree with this stance, because *favelas* are excluded not only from traditional media, but from public policies in general, from urban planning, from resource allocation policies. (IN/16)

When I watch biased news on TV, protecting certain institutions or authorities, I feel angry because it is not the reality that I live and witness on my daily life. (IN/9)

Alternative media producers argue that they stand out from the mainstream because they promote sources that are not frequently prioritised by professional reporting. This counter-representation was explained by a member of a feminist collective based on the periphery of São Paulo:

We are very careful about the sources we access. We always look for the opinion of black women. Even if we turn to specialists to check a story, for instance, we will give preference to women and mainly black women, who are underrepresented on traditional media. (IN/15)

To illustrate the focus on the journalistic output that may result from this alternative sourcing, it is worth it to mention one particular news story: according to the alternative outlet *Ponte Jornalismo*, on September 5th 2015 a 19 year-old black waiter was unjustly arrested by São Paulo's police. He was robbed while working in a restaurant. When he asked for help from the military police, he was detained and accused of armed robbery. This story would hardly be considered newsworthy for

traditional media. In turn, journalists who run *Ponte Jornalismo*, a website produced in São Paulo by a group of independent reporters who cover stories related to public security, social justice and human rights, considered the case an example of the injustices suffered by neglected citizens. Through an in-depth journalistic investigation, which required access to official sources, the outlet managed to prove that the young man was actually a victim of racism. Having been imprisoned for four months, he was released on the basis of the evidence raised by the reporters of *Ponte Jornalismo* (Figure 5.4).

Figure.5.4: Ponte Jornalismo reports on the release of a young man unjustly arrested (snapshot)



One may argue that similar examples of original investigative journalism could be easily found in traditional news media, which certainly do not refrain from exposing police brutality in Brazil. However, the focus of the alternative outlet was on an “invisible” case, that is, a story that would hardly call the attention of the mainstream media for not having happened in a noble area of São Paulo. Journalists from *Ponte* devoted their time to exposing a story that was not on the mass media’s list of priorities, thus, disregarding some typical rules of newsworthiness. They insisted on

covering a case that was not breaking news, did not involve famous people and had happened in a poor neighbourhood of São Paulo, so it was of restricted interest, but in accordance with the news values of the outlet. One of the members of Ponte explained:

Often these stories (about inequality and racism) are present in the mainstream media, but in a superficial way or at least with little continuity. They may even break the news in one day, but then they tend to forget the story. Only crimes involving white people, middle or high class, are covered continuously. The reader feels more and more empathy towards the victims of these stories. But there is no such process of continuous news coverage in relation to the crimes of the periphery. And that's what we want to do. (IN/17)

5.3.3 Alternative news values

Different respondents confirmed the rejection of news values and news routines that prioritise standard stories. Instead they often turn to stories that do not put emphasis on timeliness. The following quotes show how alternative producers emphasised the difference between what is deemed newsworthy by mainstream media and how they select their news:

The major difference in relation to the mainstream media is that we are not under the cycle of hard news' pressure. We do not have to publish a story while events are unfolding, without having enough time to reflect on it. We do not have to break a scoop. However, if we have an exclusive story, we will not risk holding it for a long time. But we will provide context and we will listen to all sides involved in the issue. There is no such a thing as a scoop just for scoop's sake. (IN/2)

The main goal of mainstream media is to report the facts and tell a good story. Our central goal, instead, is to cause a positive impact on society, and inform readers to bring about social change. (IN/18)

We want to disseminate a sustainable vision of the world. We believe that the world can be different than what we have today. We have a philosophic approach to journalism, and it is something that is not always present in legacy newspapers and even the so-called independent media. We want to look at the world with different eyes, from a perspective that is closer to people’s real lives. (IN/6)

This “alternative vision of the world” often drives alternative media content. For example, *Capitolina*, a digital magazine for teenagers and young women, produced by a female network, is driven by dissatisfaction with the way commercial magazines depict women. The theme of the edition changes monthly, thus there is no dependence on the hard news cycle. The topics of each edition would hardly have room in traditional women’s publications. Abstract themes, such as “Narratives” (June 2017 issue/*figure 5.5*), “Mystery” (April 2018 issue) and “Acceptance” (March 2018 issue), allow a philosophical approach that invariably reflects the message of women’s empowerment against sexism, racism and homophobia through personal essays, feature stories, videos and unconventional graphic design.

Fig. 5.5: Edition of Capitolina about alternative forms of narratives (snapshot)



In this case, *Capitolina*'s producers are not interested in separating facts from opinion. By favouring sources and stories that are not frequently featured on mainstream media, alternative producers contribute to expose different realities of Brazil and expand the news agenda. Since alternative publications are not under pressure to produce faster, sensationalistic or entertaining stories, news is what they decide is relevant for their audiences. As one journalist working for an alternative outlet summarised:

Traditional journalism is closely linked to industrial journalism. We see an opportunity to practice a new type of journalism, post-industrial, which entails other conditions of production, more horizontal, and other ways of thinking about the motivations of journalism. (IN/10).

Thus far, this chapter has discussed how groups examined in this research highlighted their non-elite sourcing practices to challenge dominant ideologies and over-reliance on official sources. Simultaneously, they expressed a concern in providing credible and accurate news accounts. Regardless of their background, they did indicate in the interviews an understanding of how misinformation can harm their effort to create relevant public spheres.

5.4 REFLECTIONS ON PARTISANSHIP

During the course of this research, Brazil was going through a time of extreme political uncertainty, as explained in Chapter 1. Ahead of the presidential elections in October 2018, Facebook had taken down a network of 196 pages and 87 accounts that were misleading people “to sow division and spread misinformation” (Facebook, 2018). This campaign against fake news was widely reported by the national and

international media. Although Facebook did not name the groups that were responsible for the violation, various news organisations pointed out that the target was a right-wing group called Movimento Brasil Livre (MBL, Free Brazil Movement), known for its campaign against the government of former left-wing president Dilma Rousseff, who was impeached in 2016.

In the interviews with alternative producers, the concern about the spread of misinformation was not explicitly addressed, as it became more explicit towards the end of the political campaign for the presidential elections. Instead, questions concerning this research were about how they pursue “veracity” to understand the nature of what they do. Nonetheless, in the context of the political crisis in Brazil, many interviewees ended up bringing up the discussion on political polarisation and partisanship. Their answers showed an attempt to attest their good practices, which often included emphasis on their independence from political parties. In this section, the discussion that are of interest looks at the extent to which alternative groups are attempting to assert themselves in the Brazilian media landscape as “independent”. What does independence mean to them?

Collectives such as *Mídia Ninja* politicise the news and openly take on the role of left-wing advocates, as discussed in Chapter 2. Participants of *Mídia Ninja* challenge any assumption of neutrality when they employ hashtags that make clear their side in the Brazilian political debate. An example can be seen in the coverage of the arrest of former President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in 2018, the main figure in the Brazilian left and leader of the Workers’ Party. Lula was arrested as part of the Car Wash investigation against corruption. By the time of his arrest, he was leading the poll for

the presidential elections. In that context, *Ninjas* have openly assumed their political position in favour of the Worker’s Party and its leader when publishing posts on social media platforms, mainly, Facebook with the hashtag #lulalivre (free Lula). They considered Lula a victim of a political conspiracy by conservative forces (Figure 5.6), and made this viewpoint explicit in their coverage.

Although members of *Mídia Ninja* were not interviewed for this research, the collective’s content is a relevant example of explicit political opinion within the alternative media realm. Ninjas build their counter-hegemonic narratives through a networked process in a context of radical politicisation (Paz et al, 2016).

Fig 5.6: Post from *Mídia Ninja* about protests against the arrest of Lula (snapshot)



5.4.1 “Not a place to raise any partisan flag”

In this ideological struggle between left and right, political neutrality or journalistic objectivity are not commitments of the *ninjas*. But taking sides in such an explicitly way is not the norm among the producers interviewed for this research. When asked

to reflect on their “independence”, all interviewees rejected the possibility of serving as a propaganda channel for political parties. Different respondents addressed the fact that alternative media are usually seen as linked to left-wing parties in Brazil, but some questioned this assumption. For example:

I don't see our stance as a left-wing position, but rather as a humanist position. We don't have a commitment to left-wing parties. When we are on the side of the most vulnerable people, we are simply being humanists. (IN/17)

Our agenda is to promote the periphery with its positive and negative aspects, but without slipping to partisanship or to militancy, which ends up weakening our journalistic effort. If you do that, you will end up preaching to the converted. (IN/14)

I'm not affiliated with any party. I was very disappointed with many leftist parties, although my political positions are closer to the left. I may accept contributions from right-wing people, but our web site is not a place to raise any partisan flag. (IN/8)

We do not defend any politicians. We support political-partisan impartiality, but that does not mean that we are impartial, for example, in defending the rights of indigenous peoples. Of course we make a political coverage. However, the aim is not to support a particular political party. (IN/19)

The comments highlighted here could be interpreted as a critique to a purely partisan-oriented journalism and a will to have an impact regardless of the ideological polarisation that increased in Brazil since the impeachment of president Dilma Rousseff . Furthermore, the expression “preaching to the converted” suggests

that the outlets have the goal to be heard by people who are not familiar with the realities they are trying to portrait, thus breaking up with the “alternative ghetto” pointed out by Comedia (1984).

Interviews conducted for this research showed no statement in support of a specific political party or a political figure that represents a particular ideology. Thereby, when they claimed to be non-partisan, respondents have distanced themselves both from the *ninjas*, who openly assume their commitment to the left, and from the MBL, which symbolises the rise of the far right-wing movements in Brazil and is run by a conservative politician. At the same time, they are overtly in favour of progressive agendas whose themes depend on each outlet’s interests.

Producers reiterated the importance of being clear in relation to the agendas they advocate. According to this journalist, embracing socially concerned campaigns, such as support to universal access to basic sanitation services, is something that needs to be done beyond the battlefield of political parties:

If you want to say that we are activists because we support universal access to basic sanitation services, I do not see any problem. Actually, I think it would be great to be related to this sort of campaign. Traditional media do not put the emphasis this issue deserves in Brazil. This is a very serious problem and we think it is very natural to campaign for it. This should permeate all parties’ agendas. It should not be an exclusive concern of the Workers Party or the Green Party, but of all parties. No one should be elected in this country without trying to solve basic problems such as lack of proper sanitation. (IN/4)

Another example of how to avoid political polarisation came from a journalist engaged with black women's rights and community media:

We have already discussed how to take a stand on elections. We know that social movements expect us to adhere to a certain discourse [of the left], but the discourse of the periphery is much more complex than that. There are people who have already decided which side to support in the elections, but there are also indecisive people who also need to be heard. We cannot talk about elections only from the perspective of social movements. It is important to be transparent, to make it very clear when we receive funding and who is financing us. I have learned a lot from independent media in the United States, which publish the rules for accepting financing. One thing that is very clear to me is that we are nonpartisan media. We will never receive funding from politicians. (IN/15)

While the responses above do not prove that the alternative journalists interviewed for this thesis put aside their political viewpoints to produce their stories, their discourse points towards a quest to sound more balanced than media that disseminate simple political propaganda. Thereby, according to them, trust and credibility are among the aspects that alternative journalism seeks, and that should be combined with their specific social agenda.

To summarise this discussion, respondents have overall manifested a belief in a non-partisan attitude. Hence, it can be argued that there is an attempt to find proximity with the discourse of professionalised journalism, which champions impartiality as one of its main values. This will be discussed in more depth in the following conclusion.

5.5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: REBALANCING MEDIA POWER

This chapter has examined the motivations, ethics and identity of alternative news producers to discuss the roles of alternative journalism. Interviews were conducted among a diversified group to question how alternative media producers perceive what they do. Among the participants, there were professional journalists who left large media corporations, journalists who keep their full-time jobs at commercial media but collaborate with alternative media, as well as citizens who felt misrepresented and disempowered by mass media and decided to produce their own media or to engage with independent media without any formal training nor the claim to identify themselves as journalists. Their background matters because it affects their discourse in terms of how they define what they do. Therefore it was not possible to expect here uniformed approaches on the role and practices of alternative producers.

Nonetheless, although the interviewees defined themselves and their motivations in distinctive ways, it was possible to identify commonalities within this amalgam.

When asked how they would describe the role of their outlets, interviewees pointed out a complex set of goals that goes beyond the generic aim of “filling the gaps” left by standard press coverage. Recurrent themes mentioned by the participants when asked about their role include:

(1) Challenge to mainstream media portrayals of underprivileged communities, that is, opposition to stereotypes and stigmas to break up with the “invisibility” of certain communities;

(2) Attempt to establish “independent” spaces that are free from the constraints of commercial journalism, although some fundamental elements of journalistic practices are appropriated;

(3) Rejection to news production as a propaganda tool for political parties in a context of growing political polarisation.

Thus, the answers stressed the emphasis on alternative to conventions of news sources and representations, confirming Atton and Hamilton’s (2008) definition of alternative journalism. When defining their projects, all participants reported, implicitly or explicitly, a socio-political motivation that explains what they do. They emphasised an intention to prioritise voices that are generally unheard or considered as secondary sources on the mainstream, as well as social issues that remain overlooked or simply untold. They tend to see journalism as a means to build a better society, but not as an end in itself. Thus, this research echoes Forde’s conclusion that alternative journalism “must be anchored to something of a political and democratic purpose, as moderate as that might sometimes be” (2011, p174). Responses also resonate with Atton and Hamilton’s understanding of alternative journalism as a practice “closely wedded to notions of social responsibility” (2008, p.135). The analysis suggests that the outlets examined here do not attempt to be perceived as a substitute for legacy media. What they pursue is different from the motivations that drive media corporations and, consequently, there is a will to be regarded as legitimate players in the media field, but not necessarily as substitutes.

The analysis also sheds light on the degree to which alternative practices disrupt established codes of journalism, a discussion that is central to this research.

Journalists with a professional training showed a greater concern in replicating some of the traditional values of journalism, especially in the practice of investigative journalism, an in-depth genre that requires unbiased reporting to hold power to account through a set of established practices. This is a genre that has been filling gaps left by traditional media in Latin America through non-profit outlets (Requejo-Aleman and Lugo-Ocando, 2014). On the other hand, outlets that are managed by non-trained journalists, such as media from the *favelas*, expressed a more nuanced approach to formal attributes of a news story, since they are more concerned in building their own attached narratives, from the perspective of those who live that particular reality. This distinction reinforces the perception that alternative journalism “is not an unchanging, universal type of journalism” (Atton and Hamilton, 2008, p.9).

However, the respondent’s answers allow a critical discussion based on alternative producers’ self-perceptions, which helps us to reject the simplistic binary opposition between mainstream and alternative media. The value attached to the concept of objectivity, for instance, varies. Different scholars have deconstructed the ideal of objectivity in journalism, which can be defined as the separation between fact and opinion (Curran, 2002; Dahlgren and Sparks, 2005; McQuail, 2013; Maras, 2013; Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2014). Moreover, objectivity is a shifting concept especially in times of technological changes (Calcutt and Hammond, 2011; Hacket and Gurlen, 2015). As a value, nonetheless, it is not completely rejected by alternative producers: simply assuming that balanced reporting is not the goal of alternative

journalists is not enough to provide a complex picture of how and why they act. In essence, alternative groups challenge the supposed objectivity of corporate media, but also seek narrative forms that give them legitimacy, emphasising for example the need to report verified information. Although this is not exactly synonymous with objectivity, the answers suggest a concern with fairness and accuracy, also present in traditional journalism (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2014).

Accordingly, producers interviewed for this research demonstrated a will to shy away from the notion of alternative media as explicitly “partisan”. Here it is important to emphasise the context of political polarisation in Brazil. While alternative outlets are clear about their agendas, they do not want it to be confused with political propaganda. To inform and connect to the public independently from the agendas of political parties, political leaders or corporations is at the heart of what they do, according to the accounts gathered for this study. Alternative journalists do not want to be classified as members of party press, but at the same time openly advocate practices that differ from a supposedly detached or “neutral” journalism.

Consequently, it is possible to note a profound difference when making a comparison between the alternative media of today and the one that marked the period of the struggle for democracy in Brazil, from the 60’s to the 80’s. As discussed in Chapter 3, the alternative press of the dictatorship period was defined by the political-ideological combat to the military government, to capitalism and to “imperialism” (Kucinsky, 1991). In turn, in the current panorama of digital alternative media, there is a clear hybridisation with different degrees of politicisation. Thereby, this research

reads the emphasis on non-partisanship as an attempt to reconceptualise alternative journalism in Brazil: while they have an intended bias in terms of progressive social purpose, independent outlets aim to sound “autonomous” from political organisations and leadership.

Even though there are different intentions and forms of organisation among alternative producers, this chapter pointed out some common aspects that confirm a concern with the “voices of the excluded, the oppressed, the dominated, the enslaved, the estranged, the dominated” (Fuchs, 2010, p179). These neglected voices can be represented by the very own members of the communities portrayed, as in the case of community media, but also by reporters who participate in alternative outlets to tell stories often overlooked by mainstream media. The development of large media corporations in Brazil resulted in the concentration of content production in large urban centres, while remote regions arouse much less interest from mainstream media, both from a journalistic and commercial point of view (Peruzzo, 2005). There are regional private and commercial media in almost every state, such as newspapers and TV channels, but local political ties tend to compromise media independence (ibid, 2005). Hence, a non-profit outlet that prioritises local news may provide an immersion into the realities of specific communities that mainstream media is not interested in covering. For instance, most journalistic content published by mainstream media about the Amazon region can be defined as “secondary interpretations” drawn from academic research, press releases or data from Brazilian government agencies (Corrêa, 2010, p. 319). In Chapter 7, I will analyse in more detail the coverage of the Amazon region by an alternative outlet to return to return to this comparison.

Even among online networks that are not concerned with the label of journalistic outlet, goals and organisational forms can be read as an attempt to challenge the consensus of what is news. One of the traits of alternative media producers is an

interest in local news or issues that are relevant to their target community. Some examples: (1) For a digital magazine made by young women, news is not linked to what is immediate, but to what is related to construction of identity in a country where the culture of machismo is widespread (Matos, 2017); (2) For citizen journalists from the outskirts of São Paulo, a region that usually makes headlines when it is the scene of some violent event, a festival of poetry is newsworthy; (3) For Amazonian journalists, what happens in remote indigenous villages is always newsworthy, while media from the favelas aim to deconstruct a unique narrative about these urban spaces often treated as “forbidden territories” (Felix, 2009).

In this reconfiguration of news values, some groups are more explicitly political than others, but overall it is discernible that their primary function is expand the news agenda and to extend the breath of counter-public spheres that oppose dominant discourses, which constitutes a political act per se (Forde, 2011). In sum, while the alternative press of the times of the dictatorship was a counterpoint to the traditional media, or its inverted image (Abramo, 1988), some contemporary alternative outlets seek to go beyond that, chasing media power as a force in its own right (Couldry and Curran, 2003).

In this context, defining new social actors on the news scene as “ordinary individuals who temporarily adopt the role of journalists to participate in newsmaking” (Allan, 2013, p.9) does not reflect what is becoming a more intertwined, consistent and organised practice of online news production. The content they are producing in a non-commercial way can stimulate reflection in a country marked by inequalities, despite the limitations they face. They could be

described as “radical” (Downing, 2001), since they are primarily concerned with social change, a term that refers to “transformations in norms, attitudes, socio-economic structures, policies, beliefs, information, power, and behaviors” (Waisbord, 2014, p.186). However, there are shifting boundaries in this radicalism, and it is important to study these initiatives beyond their ties to social movements and activism.

The next chapter examines the anti-commercial methods and non-hierarchical dynamics of alternative journalism to further the understanding of key elements of non-mainstream journalistic practices.

Chapter 6

UNDERSTANDING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF ALTERNATIVE

JOURNALISM: A NEGOTIATED ENTREPRENEURSHIP

This second empirical chapter addresses the second research question (RQ2) of this study: How are these alternative media projects seeking to overcome the lack of resources and funds, which has so far been a defining aspect of non-mainstream practices? The history of alternative media suggests a tale of limited life cycles that can appear and disappear without a trace; but as Rodriguez argues alternative media should be approached as a subject of study “in its historical movements” (2002, p.165). Alternative media practitioners were questioned about their attempts to defeat this “fate” of ephemerality. Looking for insights into the practices of alternative producers in the digital age, this chapter examines the political economy of alternative journalism in Brazil, a country in which the presence of large private media organisations shapes the nature of traditional journalism.

The chapter explores what has always been one of the main dilemmas of alternative media, that is, how to maintain a continued existence that does not rely solely on voluntary non-paid work? Moreover, it investigates to what extent is it possible to reconcile economic survival with the socially driven motivations of alternative journalism. The focus is on how alternative producers deal with financial pressures and their reflections on how to achieve broader audiences. In addition, the chapter addresses the organisational structures of alternative groups and their non-

hierarchical characteristics, an aspect that differentiates alternative from mainstream media.

Overall, long-term survival is undeniably one of the main concerns of the emergent outlets and collectives studied in this thesis, as the analysis of the interviews had shown. As Comedia put it, “deciding on political strategies is only the beginning of the story_ the problem is how to avoid dependence on external finance which will prevent the development of autonomy” (1984, p.96).

Once again it is necessary to emphasize that the studied organisations could not fit into one single category. They are all not-for-profit, but their operational features are different. Consequently, their structures, financial needs and funding strategies vary, as it is the norm among emergent digital native media all over Latin America (Salaverría et al, 2019). As previously explained this research follows what Skinner understands as sustainable media, that is, having “resources to acquire staff, technologies of production, and avenues of distribution, and to develop audiences” (2012, p.26). Drawing on the subresearch questions related to the theme of sustainability, interviewees were asked about their (1) concerns with economic security; (2) reflections on how to be “viable” without replicating the same approach of commercial media; (3) specific types of funding that they are looking for; (4) convergence with mainstream media and (5) organisational structures. Questions on the endeavour of sustainability were standardised, but semi-structured interviews allowed flexibility to explore different efforts to maintain editorial independence amid scarce resources. Answers were combined with data from the websites on forms of funding. The analysis allows a deeper understanding of crucial issues faced

by alternative media producers in their everyday work, such as whether or not to rely on advertising; how the relationship with the mainstream affects the counterhegemonic aspect of their narratives, and how editorial decisions are made.

It is worth explaining that interviewees were not specifically asked about the granting of public funds to alternative media projects that marked the communication policy of the 13 years of the left-wing government in Brazil. As most of this research was developed after the end of the Workers' Party government (2016), the phenomenon known as *midialivrisimo* which was relevant to explain the emergence of *Midia Ninja* (see Chapter 3) was not directly addressed by alternative producers, although it is clear that, overall, they avoid public funding, either from federal or municipal levels. Furthermore, in Brazil there are no examples of non-profit news organisations as successful as the American ProPublica, as well as no national charitable foundations interested in investing a large amount of resources in news production. There are emerging digital outlets that do not belong to large media corporations but are in the for-profit business category, and therefore were not included in this study.

Combined with the previous chapter, the discussion on economic security enables a better understanding of the nature of alternative media. As Atton and Hamilton (2008) argue, there is a need to study alternative media for both their political value and their working practices.

6.1 SEEKING FUNDING

The digital era deeply transformed the way news is produced and, consequently, the strategies of large media corporations to sustain profitable businesses. Chapter 1 has touched upon the disruption of the news industry in Brazil amid massive lay-offs and shrinking revenues. Alternative digital native media live a very different reality, since they involve small and often underfunded operations, in some cases run by volunteers. Thus, sudden harsh budgetary measures that affected mainly legacy titles in Brazil were not reproduced among non-market-driven projects that have always operated in a small-scale environment. Even the term “newsroom” itself was only explicitly employed by three of the groups analysed in this research: *Agência Pública*, *Amazônia Real* and *Repórter Brasil* (see description on Chapter 4). These investigative journalism outlets are staffed by paid reporters and editors. Despite their small size, a regular stream of grants from international charitable foundations allowed them to set up offices where professionalised dynamics occur.

However, none of the interviewees defined their projects as a direct competitor of mainstream media. Neither have they expressed the desire to rely solely on advertising revenue to survive commercially. Therefore, the incessant search for audience on digital platforms to meet the new consumer habits, in an attempt to attract advertisement and subscribers, is clearly not what drives the alternative experiments studied in this thesis. On the other hand, looking at the analysis across the interviews, all the respondents expressed a clear concern with long-term viability to provoke a real impact in the public sphere. In order to expand the reach of their content and to establish a relation of trust with their audiences, they said they are

trying to seek different funding sources, in spite of not having profits as their main goal. If on the one hand they are focused on communities and populations in the margins, on the other the idea of remaining “marginal” is not celebrated.

A minority of the respondents (7 out of 20) declared to have a stable source of resources, which came mainly from international private foundations. That support allows them to avoid unpaid work, a common trait of alternative media (Atton and Hamilton, 2008; Harcup, 2013). Of the interviewees, 11 out of 20 said they have been working as volunteers for alternative projects. Only two interviewees told me they have applied for public grants to fund their projects, although both of them expressed their reluctance in depending on this kind of support that may come from federal or municipal sources, depending on the type of project.

The analysis of the interviews showed that grants from international philanthropic foundations are the most sought form of funding for not-for-profit media. Amongst those that receive this type of support the most cited name was Ford Foundation, which funds a variety of initiatives with different criteria for grant seekers. On its website, the foundation explains that its strategy is to support media practices that “uncover stories we haven’t heard before, and elevate voices that have been marginalized, distorted, ignored, or silenced” (Ford Foundation, no date). Brazil does not have a developed philanthropic culture such as what is seen in the US. Accordingly, no national foundations were mentioned. The second most cited foundation was Open Society (US) and the third was Oak Foundation (Switzerland). Only a collective of citizen journalists that received training and equipment

mentioned the organization Witness (US). Philanthropic foundations most mentioned in the interviews and its characteristics are shown below (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1: Examples of philanthropic support for non-profit media in Brazil

Foundation	Mission (according to website)	Example of funding recipient (according to grants database)
Ford Foundation <i>Fordfoundation.org</i>	‘Reduce poverty and injustice, strengthen democratic values, promote international cooperation, and advance human achievement’.	<i>Amazônia Real</i> : investigative journalism. Based in Manaus (North). Amount (2017): US\$ 308,000
Open Society <i>Opensocietyfoundations.org</i>	‘We implement initiatives to advance justice, education, public health, and independent media’.	<i>Intervozes</i> : collective that defends communication rights. Based in São Paulo (Southeast). Amount (2016): US\$ 150,000.
Oak Foundation <i>Oakfnd.org</i>	‘Commits its resources to address issues of global, social and environmental concern, particularly those that have a major impact on the lives of the disadvantages’.	<i>Marco Zero</i> : investigative journalism. Based in Recife (Northeast). Amount (2018): US\$ 150,000

6.1.1 Inroads into media management

Predominantly, what stood out from the interviews is that only groups that already have a professionally oriented operation, with some knowledge of how to maintain sustainable structures, have a chance to successfully apply to philanthropically funded media projects from networks that operate worldwide. Recipients of international media grants reported that it was necessary to have a minimally efficient multitask organisational structure to perform the quality work expected from international donors. As different producers observed, a multitasking force with at least basic skills of management accounting was essential to articulate the capturing of financial resources distributed by large charitable foundations, for instance, the Ford Foundation. The following quotes from alternative producers that

receive financial support from international foundations illustrate this type of professional approach to make alternative outlets sustainable:

You cannot think that you are going to do only reporting if you are engaged in an alternative news project. You ought to learn how to manage your assets strategically. However, I believe journalists are a versatile type of professionals. Learning how to build a funding strategy and how to deal with accounting issues is what has allowed us to maintain our sustainability so far. (IN/18)

International institutions that distribute grants demand to understand where I want to go with my project, how I intend to get there, how I want to achieve my goal, and what are my biggest challenges. I have to submit a detailed planning of all my goals and costs. This is a new challenge for me. I came from the creative industry, so I didn't have any background in management. If I barely pay my personal bills on time, how could I possibly run a business? That's why the Ford Foundation, our first donor, was instrumental because its accountability demands served as a model of finance advice. It was painful to learn about finance and management, but it was also useful, like going to a business school. After I have learned how to do this sort of work, I felt grateful. (IN/19)

Interestingly, this journalist, who is one of the founders of a successful investigative journalism outlet (*Agência Pública*), compared the task of running a business with the administration of a household (italics are mine):

A sense of entrepreneurship is necessary if you are running an independent business. The fact that I have never had a staff job in large media corporations has helped me. I have always worked as a freelancer journalist. A freelancer has to make deals, negotiate rates and expenses. Thus, we take care of our projects as if they were a domestic economy. We are super-careful with money. We look at every single expense and we have never made a debt. (IN/1)

In the same manner, a veteran journalist highlighted how she realised the need to learn fundamental notions of organisational management to cope with the high costs of producing quality journalism focused on one particular region of Brazil: Amazônia. After spending many years working as a reporter for a major newspaper, she was dismissed amid the wave of massive cuts that hit the main Brazilian newsrooms in different regions of the country. To understand the demands of the fund raising process that could ensure the survival of her project, she invested part of the redundancy payment in a course in basic management before starting her own independent outlet:

Of the three founders of our outlet, none had any management experience. I decided to take a course to learn how to run a company, so I could start my own business. Without that knowledge, we would not have been able to make it. In the course I was the only journalist. There were people planning to open an ice cream parlour, a gym centre, or a sewing shop. In turn, I wanted a news agency. (IN/2)

Similarly, a young journalist who had never worked for a big media corporation explained that she received a scholarship to study media management abroad. The opportunity allowed her to rethink the strategy of her community media project:

It was very important to go to the US and talk to experts from SembraMedia⁴. The first question I asked them was how could we make money without jeopardizing our editorial independence. We realized that our collective was in need of a change of culture. It was necessary to stop considering our organisation as a simple

⁴ SembraMedia is a nonprofit organisation that provides business and technical training to journalists and digital media entrepreneurs to increase diversity of voices and quality content. Available at <https://www.sebamedia.org/who-we-are/> [accessed Feb 28th 2019]

“communication project” and move on to something more sustainable, with a long-term prospect. (IN/15)

Hence, although just a minority of the digital native media projects could count on stable forms of funding from international foundations to ensure, at least, a temporary secure income, one trait in common among participants was an open reflection on the need to develop elemental management skills to survive financially. Even among groups that have a minimal cost structure, there was awareness that the ability to seek and make efficient use of financial resources is important.

Such a quest, though, is not devoid of tensions since the goals, the target audience and the composition of each group was quite varied. Additionally, funding models cannot be easily replicated. While some alternative media can rely on professional journalists and also count on different staff experts, for example, accountants or digital marketing specialists, others are based on the production of collaborators who work on a voluntary basis. Therefore, some groups were more pushed to succeed in finding sources to afford costs with employees’ payroll, for instance, while others manage to operate with less-funded experiments. Nevertheless, there are common concerns and dilemmas across the initiatives, since long-term sustainability to cause a real impact is what they were looking for, according to the interviews.

6.2 NOT-FOR-PROFIT ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The analysis of the interviews showed that although the concept of entrepreneurial journalism was framed in a positive way by a major part of the producers, the requirement to accommodate financial support within the social and political purpose

of their projects constitutes a moral dilemma. The following quote from a journalist who had been working as a volunteer for three years in an alternative outlet focused on human rights coverage in São Paulo illustrates this tension:

We do not want profit for the sake of it. I think that it would be *immoral* to seek profit because of the news content that we are interested in producing. It would never make sense to allow, for instance, a paywall on our website. We want the information we share to reach as many people as possible for free. We are looking for a sustainable journalism that doesn't require charging for the news content. Talking about entrepreneurship until a while ago was almost a *dirty word*, but now we need to seek commercial solutions. (IN/17)

The producer was referring to a negative view of the entrepreneur as exploitative (Stevenson, 2006) and driven by profit gains for the sake of shareholders. However, the projects analysed here have been planned, since their inception, to achieve digital presence and development without seeking to copy the same commercial strategies of mainstream corporations. It does not mean that producers already knew what type of funding they would be able to achieve when they engaged in their projects.

Rather, they described a progressive journey of understanding the market and its challenges, especially amid the undergoing transformation of the media landscape, in which there is a multiplication of online publications but no unified form of revenue sources.

In the interviews it became evident that producers were concerned, from the beginning, to go beyond an action designed only to fill gaps left by the traditional media at a certain moment of crisis. On the other hand, to ensure a continuous existence and enable, for instance, full-time employment instead of depending on freelancers or unpaid citizen-generated content, they understood the need to

efficiently manage resources to reinvest potential revenues back into their organisations. Some called it “entrepreneurship” or “entrepreneurial side”, as shown in the following quotes:

A sense of entrepreneurship is necessary to survive. We could not keep working for free if we want a long-term project. (IN/17)

I have no doubt that an *entrepreneurial side* is needed. Usually it is missing among alternative experiments. Some people believe that seeking commercial solutions is like betraying the social aspect of alternative journalism, as if it were a contradiction of its original political motivation. But if you are not concerned with survival, the project does not go forward. It begins to disband. (IN/14)

We need to have the entrepreneurial side, and in that respect I think we, as journalists, are not prepared. As a teacher I blame the academia because we spend four years at university learning to be an employee. I have already been able to develop a module of *entrepreneurial journalism* so that undergraduate students can enter the market with this mentality. (IN/10)

Another editor regretted the lack of knowledge on how to monetize digital news content, which eventually led to the closure of the project. Without being able to expand forms of revenue, this alternative journalist had to close the website focused on Rio de Janeiro’s public policies since she did not agree to publish contributions from both professional or citizen journalists without an appropriate remuneration policy:

We had a very small team, at most four: two reporters, one trainee and me. It was pretty Spartan. We thought that more interested parties would come up with funding, but we could not move forward. I tried to think of several possibilities, for example, partnership with

newspapers to publish our original content. I even made a table for ads, but we did not have a professional focused on sales. I'm a content-focused person. This business thinking side was not for me. (IN/20)

The statements above indicate both the recognition that it is essential to build efficient funding models and the difficulty in implementing a commercial approach in alternative media. Findings suggest producers were generally concerned in making their message reach broader audiences within a media ecosystem dominated by commercial platforms. Almost all the examined groups cited Facebook as the most prominent social media platform to share their content. It was clear from the interviews that alternative media producers understand the level of control that Facebook has over what kind of content users would be able to see. As the editor of an emergent alternative outlet reported:

We have two main goals. The first is to ensure a growing readership. We want to increase the audiences, to make people share our content. Because of social media any news production is very fragmented. To stand out, you have to be relevant, you need to do something of high quality. The second challenge is to make the business model viable, to make it sustainable. I cannot tell you which of these two goals should come first. (IN/6)

Another journalist observed that, as a member of an NGO that aims at bringing attention to violations of labour rights, it would be inappropriate to count on free contributions. Thus, long-term sustainability becomes even more crucial for outlets that are staffed by paid professionals rather than unpaid volunteers:

Our priority is to pay wages and this is very heavy on our accounts because everyone is paid according to existing labour laws. We defend labour rights, and therefore we must follow them to the letter.

For multimedia projects we hire freelancers, such as cameramen, but all the other people who are involved in the daily operation are full time employees. (IN/18)

6.2.1 Attempts to be viable without jeopardising editorial independence

Indeed, most of the interviewees (12 out of 20) said they did not receive regular wages that would allow them to work full time for alternative organisations. Most worked as volunteers or freelancers: that is, they had to alternate their work in alternative media with another form of paid work. Three of them were collaborating simultaneously for mainstream media and alternative media, in spite of their discontent with some aspects of the former.

Therefore, in this scenario of scarcity of funds, management difficulties and predominantly voluntary work, people involved with alternative media, either as full time employees or as volunteers, agreed that it is necessary to seek diverse forms of revenues to maintain a consistent production and to develop sustainable business models. Once again it is important to note that the initiatives analysed here were not concerned in employing large staffs, nor reproducing corporate strategies or commercialised cultures from news organisations that are recognised as successes, either among digital innovators, such as BuzzFeed or Vice, or among legacy brands (Kung, 2015). Rather, responses from alternative journalists lay in direct contrast to an unreflective commitment to profitability and expansion. Their fundamental challenge is to find a balance between economic sustainability and resistance to homogenisation (Atton and Hamilton, 2008) as it is illustrated in the following quote from the editor of a feminist digital magazine:

I have already dreamed of turning our magazine into a profitable business. Nowadays, I don't think about it anymore because it would be very difficult to keep the magazine as it is. I don't think it would be feasible to reconcile a commercial approach and a feminist independent voice. We would lose a lot of positive things if we opt for a traditional business model. The fact that our magazine is not commercial gives us much more freedom to do what we want. If it were a for-profit business, it would result in a very different product. This lack of a profit driven strategy may one day determine the end of our magazine, but I do think that the way we choose to do things has a higher integrity value. (IN/7)

Similarly, this journalist from a favela-based collective pointed out that finding a formula for a long-term sustainability is one of the most common discussions among producers of community media:

We work as volunteers, so we need to have another job to pay our bills. Our greatest challenge is finding a funding model. It would be a dream come through if we could have a wage as community journalists, because our project gives us a lot of pleasure. But the chances are very small. Whenever we get together with other community journalists, the debate that dominates the discussions is always the same: How to sustain our operation? It is very hard to find a solution. (IN/9)

Indeed, all interviewees discussed general forms of funding, but some of them told me they were not able to disclose details in terms of the amount of donations received or how the money was invested. Nevertheless, more crucial for the purpose of this research, is not questioning the amount of the revenue flow, but to identify possible emerging models to effectively sustain alternative media operations and to problematize the general alternative approach to sustainability.

The analysis of the groups' mission statements showed a consistency with the view expressed by most non-profit news producers in terms of not accepting funds that may jeopardize their editorial integrity. These are the most common points of the funding policies stated on their websites:

- No links with political parties or politicians;
- No donations from public institutions or private companies that represent conflict of interest with their values and actions;
- Funding sources and partners are not allowed to interfere in the content.

6.3 HYBRIDISATION

It is clear from the analysis that alternative media operations examined in this study struggle to find a unified model of sustainability that could assure their longevity. For one thing, international funding is limited. Moreover, it demands a level of professionalization and structural organisation that is not achievable, or in some cases not even the desired model, for all types of alternative journalism. For another, resorting to the traditional subscriber/advertising model involves at least two types of dilemma. Firstly, alternative media are not interested in replicating this mainstream media business model. The commercialism present in the editorial decisions of large media companies is among the main criticisms of alternative journalism. Secondly, attracting paid audiences and advertisers is an increasingly complex goal in a landscape of media fragmentation and, more especially, of financial crisis, such as the one faced by Brazil during the course of this research.

Many alternative producers with whom I spoke explained why they have been trying mixed forms of funding to avoid dependence on a single business model. For them, the search for a combination of revenue streams is the only possible way to reach sustainability in a scenario of crisis and falling revenues among legacy media organisations. This founder of an independent data journalism project stated that a hybrid model based on three types of funding has been sustaining her initiative:

We have to look for various sources of income just to achieve a lasting existence. If we were to rely on advertising alone, we would need to have an extraordinary amount of readers, something that no news organisation can achieve today. No one can survive on online advertising alone. Much of the problem with digital advertising and the solvency of traditional media is that online ads make up only a third of what they used to value in the past. Thus, we have a fairly *hybrid business model*, based on three main sources: crowdfunding; publishing partnerships, although traditional media is in crisis and does not pay an amount that makes a lot of difference to us; and the third form of revenue comes from consulting services. (IN/4)

In turn, this provider of news with a focus on environmental issues works with five different models of revenue streams:

We try to work with at least five forms of funding. We have a main sponsor and we work with crowdfunding to afford particular coverages. For example, to cover the costs of a special coverage on the increasing numbers of tuberculosis in Brazil we asked for donations. We have also worked in partnership with Open Society. Besides that, we sell advertising space, but that still did not work out. And finally we produce branded content. It is a side business that helps to finance our main project, which is the coverage of environmental news. (IN/6)

6.3.1 Subsidy-driven models

Another respondent pointed out that it was necessary to experiment with different models for four years before achieving some financial stability, which came from international foundations. This outlet is focused on investigative journalism in the Amazon region, thus advertising was not a solution:

Only after four years of work, we were able to think about a viable model of sustainability. We have been seeking different funding streams from international foundations to afford the costs of investigative reporting. We work with crowdfunding, but we cannot simply count on popular contributions because we are experiencing a terrible financial crisis in Brazil. I used to say that actually we are *under construction*. We did not give up entirely on advertising yet, but so far we could not manage to attract this type of revenue. It is very difficult to attract local advertising for example. (IN/3)

According to this journalist who works for a small outlet focused on regional news from the Northeast part of Brazil, promoting courses for students is also a potential form of funding, as well as helping to train new generations of journalists:

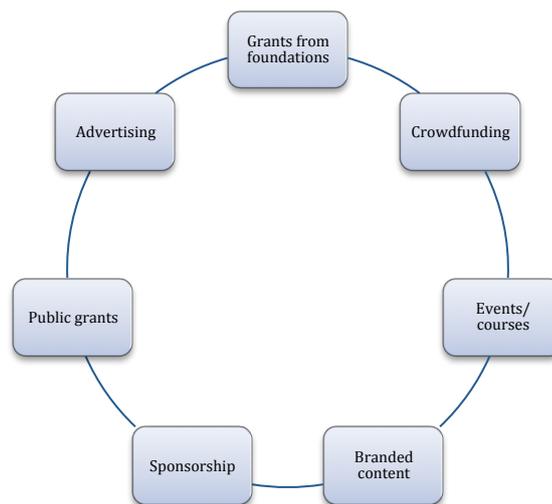
In our view, the alternative model goes a long way with various forms of revenue. Our model, for example, includes running courses for undergraduate students. We see that as an *ideological goal*, because we want to influence the training of young journalists. We also provide media consultancy and we are applying for international funding. You really need to have a financial template that is based on multiple revenue streams if you want to survive. (IN/10)

This member of an NGO that shares news stories about Rio and aims to mobilize the population to pressure on authorities for improvements stressed the relationship between alternative financing and the counter-hegemonic aspect of the initiative:

So far our main source of income comes from international foundations. Crowdfunding is a more recent attempt, and has been increasingly well accepted for raising funds for specific projects that do not want to rely on traditional income sources. These attempts at diversification are in line with the internet's potential for a wider popular participation to *challenge dominant structures of power*. When we depend entirely on powerful structures to do something we constraint our potential and everything slows down. (IN/11)

The above statements demonstrate the variety of initiatives discussed by alternative organisations to avoid replicating the subscriber/advertising-based model that sustained the largest Brazilian media corporations until the first decade of the 21st century (Figure 6.1). The alternative models are more subsidy-driven than market-driven (Kurpius, Metzgar and Rowley, 2010), although the attempt to attract advertising was not totally ruled out by the outlets analysed here.

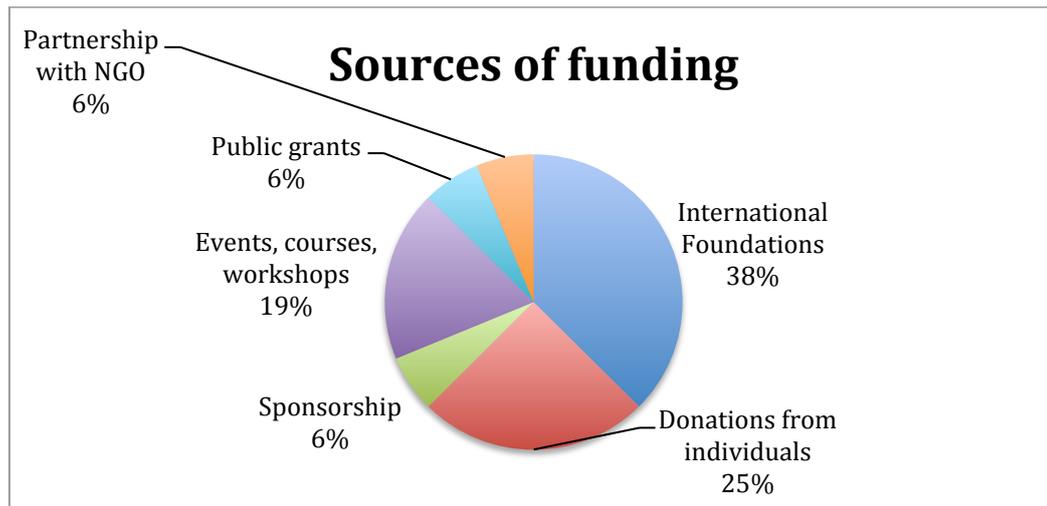
Figure 6.1: References to main forms of funding



This multiple approach does not mean, however, that all those possibilities of funding mentioned during the interviews have actually generated some revenue. Of

the websites studied, just a few publish their financial statements. Based on what interviewees have told me and on data found on their websites, it is possible to conclude that, overall, funding sources are very fragmented (Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2: Primary sources of revenues



Although foundations and individual donations seem strong, only a small number of projects (22%) declared to have a strategic plan with a mid to long-term goal (maximum of five years) insofar as they receive international grants.

6.4 MOMENTS OF CONVERGENCE

The discussion of whether to collaborate or not with mainstream media is a dilemma that concerns alternative media producers, according to the most frequent themes that emerged from the interviews. If their very own existence is driven by a critique to the way large media corporations work, why and how could they engage with legacy media without diluting their mission and values? This study suggests that although there is no consensus on the level of acceptable engagement between alternative and

traditional media, many alternative producers understand that this occasional relationship can be beneficial to their projects. None of the respondents categorically refused to interact with corporate media as long as the agendas of both sides could be aligned. Especially among groups that practice investigative journalism, reproduction of their content by traditional media is a common practice, through the use of a Creative Commons License (CC).

The rationale for possible forms of cooperation, that remain mostly sporadic, is the potential for visibility that mainstream outlets can reach. For alternative outlets the aim of possible partnerships is increasing their readership and, consequently, giving more visibility to their narratives, helping to build trust among audiences and credibility. During the interviews, different examples of occasional cooperation were mentioned. They were framed within a general understanding that access to new types of network communication alone such as social media do not guarantee “popularity”, a concept that can be easily manipulable in the online economy (van Dijck, 2013).

Drawing on what Atton (2002b) defines as moments of “coming together”, I have highlighted how mainstream and alternative may explore each other’s resources, according to what was acknowledged by alternative producers during the interviews (Table 6.2):

Table 6.2: Relationships between mainstream and alternative media

Interaction	Illustrative Example	Link
Mainstream media distribute/incorporate content from alternative network	Newspaper <i>Folha de S. Paulo</i> hosts Blog Mural, produced by citizen journalists from peripheral areas of São Paulo	https://mural.blogfolha.uol.com.br
Mainstream media refer to alternative groups as a source in a particular coverage or pick up a story from alternative media	Newspaper <i>O Globo</i> shared audio of shooting in Complexo do Alemão favela (Rio) produced by collective <i>Papo Reto</i> (citizens from the favela)	https://oglobo.globo.com/rio/guerra-no-alemao-20950916
Mainstream media invites alternative producers as special 'guests' to express their opinions	Members of groups formed by favelas dwellers describe their work on the talk show <i>Programa do Bial</i> from TV Globo	https://globoplay.globo.com/v/6182053/
Alternative media departs from original content from mainstream to discuss on going news story	Collective from Rocinha favela (Rio) shared content from BBC Brasil on yellow fever outbreak	http://faveladarocinha.com/que-grupos-nao-devem-tomar-vacina-da-febre-amarela-e-como-se-proteger/

Hence, alternative producers did not consider engagement with mainstream counterparts with the purpose to drive advertising. Interviewees did not mention any significant economic benefits in these potential bridges between alternative and mainstream media. More importantly for them is to cause an impact by amplifying their message beyond fragmented communities. The following answers shed light on their considerations:

I want our feminist content to reach as many people as possible and in a non-opportunistic way because we do not want to become famous or make money. We want our narrative to be heard. When we were invited to participate in a talk show on the most important TV channel in the country, there was some disagreement between us. Personally I don't like this particular show, but so what? Should I have considered

myself morally superior and refused the invitation? Their audience is mostly young people. So we decided to participate and allow an immense amount of young audiences, from different social classes, to hear important discussions about feminism. If I have the power to expand my reach and make an impact on much larger audiences than I could possibly achieve with my digital magazine, why not going for that? (IN/7)

We have no prejudice against collaboration with traditional media. I think we're like a "hummingbird" or a "bee". We keep flying between one thing and another to facilitate connections. Traditional media can still elicit immediate responses from society. I think it is childish to give up on possible partnerships that could spread the messages in which we are interested. (IN/19)

Among independent organisations working with investigative journalism, partnership with traditional newsrooms is seen as an important step towards broadening the reach of their content and, above all, to push discussions that are invariably focused on human rights on the mainstream news agenda. This partnership is allowed via Creative Commons License, but according to independent producers interviewed for this research there are rules that need to be followed by traditional media partners to republish content. For instance, *Agência Pública* distributes content for free; however it warns that only headlines and sub-headlines could be changed, while the text could not be reduced, edited or taken out of context. In all the republished stories, the name of *Agência Pública* and the name of author should feature clearly, in the top of the article. Thereby, in spite of welcoming commercial media as potential allies, these rules suggest an attempt by alternative media outlets to preserve the essence of their content.

Another respondent, a community journalist from a favela in Rio de Janeiro, celebrated the possibility of partnering with large media corporations:

It is a two-way path. Traditional media looks for our content when something happens in the *favela* and they can't get inside these communities. On the other hand, we want them to understand that they should not report on what happens in our community only from the angle that interests them. If they give me space to tell what is really going on in the *favela*, promoting from the residents' perspectives, this is amazing. We have even collaborated with many international media so far. (IN/9)

6.4.1 Rejecting “colonisation”

The statements above indicate that alternative producers do not consider cooperation with mainstream media to be inconsistent with their ideology, as long as they have a voice in potential partnerships. They are concerned with reaching wider audiences and seeing a validation of their work, under the right circumstances. In that sense, possible “colonisation” by mass media is resisted. For example, this editor said his outlet opted not to invest in opportunities to develop alliances with mainstream media because of the risk of being “swallowed up”:

I think larger media could swallow us up and we could lose our identity. Of course, we want to increase readership, and above all, to become economically viable. But I prefer to follow our own independent communicational path. (IN/5)

Similarly, the editor of a self-funded website from Baixada Fluminense, one of the most impoverished areas of Rio de Janeiro, said he rejected talks to produce hyperlocal news for a national cable channel:

I have attended some meetings with a cable news channel to discuss a possible partnership to cover news from *Baixada Fluminense*, but I made it clear that I wouldn't work for free. If I can work with citizen journalists, I prefer to publish their content on our own independent website. I only engage with projects that could benefit my own media. For example, we are planning to promote a local cultural festival and I would do anything to publicise it. This festival is built to deconstruct stereotypes about the neighbourhoods of *Baixada Fluminense* and about the hip-hop culture. The more it is publicised on "big media", the better. But I do not accept the concept of free labour for mainstream media. (IN/8)

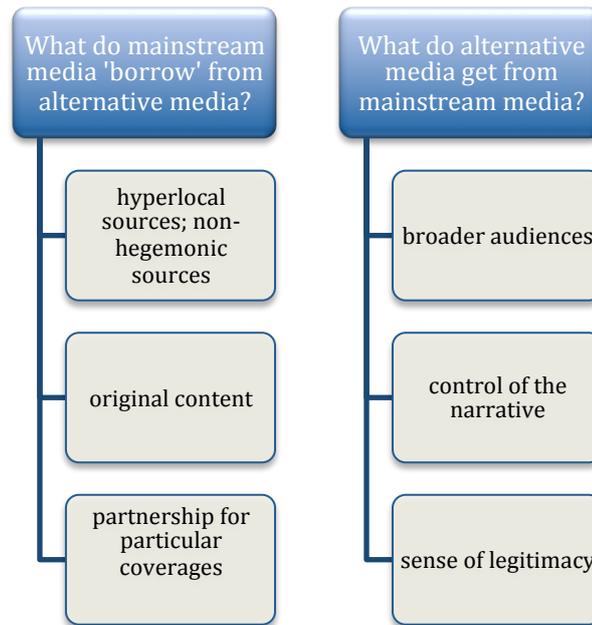
The qualitative analysis of the interviews indicates that alternative producers appear to have an understanding that new digital technologies do not render equal power to small and large media, in spite of facilitating opportunities for sharing counter-narratives. Hence, to attract larger and more heterogeneous audiences, interactions between mainstream and alternative media are generally accepted as long as alternative producers can exercise editorial control. Moreover, some emergent digital news organisations still draw upon content published by legacy media. Therefore, we can talk about different levels of intersection (Figure 6.3).

If we turn, for instance, to independent political fact-checking websites, they need to rely on what is shared by mass media in order to build possible counter-narratives or to simply hold power into account. This is what this journalist who is in charge of a small data-driven project defined as a "symbiotic relationship" between mainstream and alternative media:

Alternative media is not exclusionary. We depend, in a certain way, on traditional media to decide our agenda. In order to verify the veracity of political information, it is necessary for politicians to make

public statements. They have their social networks and fairly robust PR departments that communicate directly with the public. But we also depend on interviews they give to traditional media. In fact we have a somewhat symbiotic relationship with traditional media in that sense. (IN/4)

Figure 6.3: Connections between mainstream and alternative media



6.5 NON-HIERARCHICAL STRUCTURES

Reading the content of the interviews, it is possible to notice that people involved with alternative media frequently emphasised how their organisational practices distance them from the operation modes of corporate media. While the notion of assimilation of some mainstream media practices is accepted as discussed on Chapter 5, participants sustained that their routines remain above all anti-hierarchical, in opposition to the typical organisational structure of legacy media. Different respondents, both trained journalists and non-professional journalists, highlighted

attempts to create a system in which the decision making process is as horizontal as possible. Some illustrative examples:

We make editorial decisions *collectively*. No one has the final say. We have managed to gather journalists who were considered “rebels” within large newsrooms, so we have a natural tendency to *reject authority*. We don’t want to have a boss. I think we even cultivated the value of horizontality in an exaggerated way. For a long time it was a mess. So we had to learn to have horizontal structures without being disorganised. In other words, we have learned to be *anarchists without being anarchic* in the negative sense of the term. (IN/17)

We fight between us. We argue a lot about everything. What has to be said will be said directly, and this creates tensions. But at the same time, it brings a sense of comfort, because I know that I can always count on the opinion of all the members of the collective. We do not have a hierarchy. *Everyone has the same voice*. (IN/16)

We value *horizontal decision-making*. When we don’t agree, we work with a *voting system*. We identify all the members of the collective as “directors”, but we are learning how to consider each one’s expertise. We are exploring this process of respecting each other’s abilities and competence. We understand that it is important to define certain roles. (IN/15)

Our team has an editor, but it’s a very small staff so we talk collectively about every issue. All four reporters work together. In that aspect we do not follow a rigid hierarchical method. We are *not ruled by a handbook*. We are guided by our journalistic principles according to the values of our organisation. When you join this group, you have to be committed. (IN/18)

We have a fairly horizontal organisation. Now we need to better organise a structural chart and determine each one’s functions. But we

want to do this with the aim to organise our production flows, not to have a highly hierarchical structure like a traditional newsroom. Maybe we need to pick someone to have a final word when working with less experienced reporters. But among us, the creators of the outlet, *everything is decided collectively*. (IN/10)

There is no hierarchy in our project. Decisions are made on a *consensual basis*. We have an editorial process for content publishing, but we exchange ideas all the time. Our relationship is horizontal, different from the hierarchy system of a large newspaper, for instance. One particular opinion will not be imposed on all members. (IN/13)

The extensive mentions to the horizontal structures found in the interviews refer to a multiperspectival journalism that attempts to break up with the factors that influence the news selection in established media. As seen in the selected quotes, the top down management of large corporations is rejected. As a whole, the absence of a corporate ownership facilitates horizontal experiments. It is useful to point out the collective *Papo Reto*, composed by residents of Complexo do Alemão, one of the largest favelas in Brazil. Working as volunteers, members use social media to document mainly police abuses against the community, as well as to disseminate counter-narratives about the reality of the favela. Formed by only eight permanent members, the collective, that receives sporadic donations from international foundations, “work exclusively according to our own rules”, as one of the participants stated.

6.5.1 Maintaining editorial control

However, it would be too simplistic to assume that alternative media always adopts a radical participatory model in contrast with the hierarchical framework of

mainstream media. The analysis showed no references to an idealisation of the philosophy of open publishing represented by Indymedia. Rather, both the small-scale collectively run projects and the professionally trained ones expressed a concern to provide a coherent narrative. Preparation, revision and editing are practices embedded in the alternative production, according to the interviewees, despite differences in their publishing processes. This editor of a feminist magazine for teenagers and young women said that their content was based on decentralised sources, that is, a network of non-professional journalists who did not have necessarily the same views of the feminist discourse. Nonetheless, she pointed out that the preparation of each monthly edition demanded a careful editorial process to select the articles that would be published:

The possibility of an article being rejected is very small because we have an editorial process that begins before publication. We have editorial principles and we talk about them all the time with our network of contributors. Plurality is important. We have no problem in having controversy within the magazine, as long as all participants follow a basic guiding principle of rejection of sexism, racism, and homophobia. We do not give room for this kind of idea. (IN/7)

Understanding that crowdsourced content also needs to go through an editorial process is important because it informs on how alternative producers incorporate practices of mainstream news organisations. Collaboration with ordinary citizens is sought to generate a deeper relationship with marginalised communities or unheard voices. Nonetheless, stories are filtered in one way or another by the editors. In the case of emergent organisations with a focus on investigative journalism, even if the production process occurs in a less centralised way than that of large newsrooms, in the end editorial decisions are shaped by a small group of professionals. This process

is illustrated in the following quote from the founder of a news organisation that covers the Amazon region:

We use the networks to talk to our sources, for example indigenous people who practically live in isolation. I receive messages almost every day from these sources via Facebook. We have this open channel with our sources. They pass the information, we check it, and if we consider it newsworthy we start investigating the story. After the reporting and the editing, we have a final review, as it would happen in a traditional newsroom. (IN/2)

Similarly this co-founder of an independent fact-checking organisation described a meticulous editorial process to confirm the facts within a story or verify content sent by users. In spite of working with a minimum structure (a team of three that can be expanded by freelancers), she said she did not rely only on her reporting skills to ensure accuracy.

For example, to classify information as true or false, this has to be discussed between us. I cannot attribute alone the definition of “false” or “true” to a story. I have to share the story with my editor and hear his opinion. If he agrees with my verification, fine. If he doesn’t agree, we’ll call a third person. This is part of our method and our verification and editing process. (IN/4)

This member of an investigative outlet explained why they adopt traditional journalistic routines to select content:

We use videos sent by citizens to report cases of police violence. The information is checked and then published. But the area we cover requires specific knowledge and access to sources. It is not always easy to work with someone who is not a trained journalist. We help to train journalism students, but for a story to be published it requires careful editing. (IN/17)

As seen, these explanations on production methods serve to reject the notion of non-corporate media as practicing a pure decentralised newsgathering and selection process. Indeed, audiences can be involved in the production and rigid hierarchies are avoided. Nonetheless, when alternative producers talk about their everyday work, it is clear that their practices resemble certain characteristics of newsrooms worldwide regarding editorial decisions.

6.6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: NO SINGLE RECIPE

This chapter has discussed how alternative media outlets have been trying to sustain their operations in Brazil, bringing insights into the challenges not-for-profit organisations face to achieve economic security in an emergent economy. As Requejo-Alemán and Lugo Ocando (2014) point out the term “non-profit” does not imply that digital media seeking alternative forms of news production are free from economic pressure to be viable. However, as opposed to privately owned commercial media, not-for-profit media pursue revenue to fund operations and reinvest in improvements, instead of distributing the profit among shareholders (Shaver, 2010).

In response to the second research question (RQ2) of this study, this chapter highlighted that financial vulnerability remains a key problem faced by alternative projects as a whole. Although the analysis considered different genres of alternative journalism, it is undeniable that economic precariousness affects distinctive types of independent organisations, from the loosely structured ones to the more professionally oriented ventures. Respondents were overwhelmingly concerned with the difficulty in obtaining steady revenue streams. A significant level of voluntary

participation is the norm. Analysis of the interviews has shown three dimensions of what producers consider the main aspects of their quest for a sustainable model: they are interested not only in economic security but also in reaching broader audiences; they rely on multiple revenue streams to avoid the traditional business model of mainstream media; and their small-sized operations favour non-hierarchical structures.

Thus while the attributes of the internet have reduced production and distribution costs, the critique raised by Comedia more than 30 years ago is still relevant, that is, as media exist in a capitalist market-place, “beginning to understand how the market works, in order to survive it, is the crucial issue facing the alternative press” (1984, p.96). As Atton and Hamilton observe, a critical project needs resources that “are present only in the very society that it seeks to change or dissolve” (2008, p.26). This study has shown that alternative producers understand this dilemma. On the one hand they want to develop a sustainable model to break out of the “alternative ghetto” (Comedia, 1984), but on the other they maintain their critical stance towards mainstream journalism, and do not seek to simply replicate the business model of corporate media based on advertising and subscription. A central point of the argument is that online alternative outlets are concerned with defying the ephemerality that has marked the history of alternative media in order to have a real impact. Yet, access to funding opportunities is scarce. As Levy and Piccard (2011) note, proponents of alternative forms of media ownership usually believe in the utopian vision that non-corporate organisations can produce journalism free from financial concerns. This thought is not realistic.

In spite of their not-for-profit approach, alternative media projects are subjected to the same market pressures faced by legacy media, as previous research in developed countries had shown (Atton and Hamilton, 2008; Shaver, 2010; Kennix, 2011). Just as the hyperlocal media did not find a sustainable formula in more solid markets like the US (Shaver, 2010), in Brazil alternative journalism struggle to sustain viable arrangements. Consequently, seeking stable funding is seen as an essential activity to maintain enduring projects.

In that context, there are no evidences that advertising is key to sustain alternative journalism in Brazil. Producers are actually pursuing diversification of funding models, as emergent outlets in other Latin American countries have been attempting to do (SembraMedia, 2016). Data from the interviews showed that organisations with a more stable flow of revenue depend on grants from philanthropic foundations, which indeed can provide some protection to emergent news organisations (Levy and Picard, 2011). However, according to producers, this type of funding is not accessible to all, demanding a professionally oriented approach and some level of business training that only a small number of the groups analysed here are able to develop. Moreover, grants such as these are not permanent in times of economic adversity and are not exclusively focused on the preservation of journalism, leading to a feeling of economic insecurity among producers devoted to news projects. Multiple sources of revenue streams are seen, thus, as a possible antidote against financial dependence on one single business model.

Needless to say that increasing economic pressures also affect traditional journalism, whose practices have gone to profound shifts to adapt to the era of fragmented and

ubiquitous journalism, or what Hermida (2012) calls “ambient journalism”. Hence, once again this study rejects the binary approach to consider alternative and mainstream media. The digital transformations make more intricate the examination of differences and similarities between mainstream and alternative media. From the perspective of the legacy media, post-industrial journalism implies that news organisations are no longer in control of the gatekeeping process, having to adapt to a time in which citizens, governments and independent networks can be their own publishers (Bruns, 2011; Anderson, Bell and Shirky, 2013). Thus, established media need to incorporate, in certain circumstances, views from independent producers, especially in local news. On the other hand, alternative producers want to increase their audiences whereas they understand that social media do not guarantee an equal participation on the news making process and distribution.

Facebook, their preferred platform, allows another architecture of participation that does not need to involve legacy media institutions. However, algorithms are doing the role of gatekeepers, which brings many unresolved questions to news organisations (Meikle, 2016). Although it is beyond the scope of this research to discuss how news is shared and consumed on social media, the fact that Facebook monetizes the content published on its platforms means that the corporation explores users as unpaid workers, selling personal data for target advertising (Fuchs, 2014). Thus, if on the one hand more voices can be heard and build their own systems of “mass-self communication” (Castells, 2013), on the other social platforms are operated by large corporations that have disrupted the market, but have maintained the same level of economic domination (Curran, Fenton and Freedman, 2016).

Although interviews have not pointed out discussions on how to find solutions to avoid dependency on platforms such as Facebook, reflections on how to remain viable and visible confirm that alternative journalists “do not want to be consistently on the margins” (Forde, 2011, p138). Nonetheless, I argue that relevant ideological differences remain strong between mainstream and alternative news operations, in spite of what may look like as similar concerns related to market pressures. For example, previous research has shown that the separation between the editorial and business departments of traditional news organisations, which used to be a fundamental norm of journalism, has been renegotiated to adopt more integrated solutions in reaction to the new tensions that arose from the digital market (Cornia, Sehl and Nielsen, 2018). But while the changing relations between the editorial and commercial activities of large organisations are driven by the need to create a business-oriented newsroom (ibid, 2018), among alternative media producers the attitude is distinct. Rather than talking about “integration”, a term more suited to describe large organisations, interviewees pointed out a multi-task approach that is related to their small-size structure. Accordingly, Forde (2011) suggests that their superficial structures and multi-skilled teams should also define alternative media. Therefore, when producers mention the need of business training or entrepreneurship, their discourse is not necessarily centred on a market-driven concept. They refer to the quest of sustainability to maintain steady operations, to pay the bills, rather than a distribution of profits to founders or shareholders. Motivations, thus, are very different.

Findings indicate that cooperation with mainstream media is accepted, and may happen occasionally in different levels. Resultantly, hybrid forms of media and

overlaps are inevitable (Kennix, 2011; Rauch, 2016). Here, it is possible to refer to what Atton (2002b) describes as “movable” media practices in terms of negotiated relations. According to him, media practices “may articulate to bourgeois (mainstream) values in one instance, but become joined with radical values in another” (ibid, 2002b, p.493). In their study on emerging news non-profits in the US, Konieczna and Robinson (2014) pointed out that new relationships between mainstream and alternative media are a survival mechanism. For Kenix (2011), as alternative media are more and more concerned with economic sustainability, differences between the alternative and the mainstream spectrum are decreasing.

This research confirms that there is a growing fluidity between alternative and mainstream content and practices. Nevertheless, Brazilian alternative producers did not manifest eagerness to be more commercial whereas profit is not their main goal. Instead, they suggest a realistic approach to the prospect of cooperation with mainstream media to overcome “ghettoization”. I interpreted the ambition to reach audiences outside “bubbles” of like-minded people as a commitment to a longer-term plan of sustainability. Although this aspiration is not synonymous of subordination to power structures, Konieczna and Robinson point out “the risk of replicating the dominant – and failing – structure rather than challenging it” (2014, p.983). Regardless, the point here is that exchanges with corporate media do not automatically eliminate alternative media’s dissatisfaction with the consumer ideology that affects news criteria (McQuail, 2013).

By looking for more visibility, alternative media producers are interested in spreading their counter-hegemonic narratives, not “clickbait”. Therefore, a

differentiation between alternative journalism and entrepreneurial journalism is needed. While the former places emphasis on a critique of the market-oriented ideology of mainstream media, the latter is concerned with innovation, technology, the market and profit (Harlow, 2017). Additionally, appropriateness of practices is not new. Atton (2002b) describes how mainstream media can incorporate radical or native reporting, while Platon and Deuze (2003) point out some similarities between problems faced by editors from mainstream media and from the radical Indymedia in terms of news selection. This is not to say that core values are dissolved when occasional interactions take place. For instance, when a reporter from a *favela* collective agrees to share content with a traditional newspaper, the intention is to increase control over the narrative that will be published and to broaden the voice of a marginalized community. In the same way, investigative journalists working for independent media celebrate when mainstream media republish their articles because they consider that as an opportunity to shape the news agenda. These accommodations are far from naïve celebrations regarding the openness of mainstream media to non-hegemonic sources. Rather, alternative producers' points of view indicate a perception that distribution is still a key challenge facing alternative media in spite of the widespread access to social media in Brazil.

When answering about their organisational structures, it is clear that alternative producers favor a non-hierarchical approach. There is no interest in replicating the highly hierarchical structures of corporate media. For alternative producers, rigid production forms result in dynamics contrary to their counter-hegemonic aspects. This does not mean, however, that they operate on purely horizontal forms. Even within initiatives that are based on networks of ordinary citizens, editorial control is

exercised to avoid, for example, discriminatory opinions and to reinforce an articulated discourse. This is another point in common between alternative and mainstream media.

In the next chapter, content analysis is applied to four case studies in order to examine in depth the output of alternative media.

Chapter 7

AN EXPANSION OF NEWS TOPICS AND SOURCES: ALTERNATIVE OUTPUT EXAMINED

This last empirical chapter is focused on the online material produced by alternative journalists in Brazil. Through a qualitative content analysis, as detailed in Chapter 4, this part of the research explores four case studies selected on the grounds of their consistent coverage of socially sensitive topics, in addition to representing the views of different under-represented groups in society (Atton and Hamilton, 2008). Their news content goes beyond the coverage of crisis situations in which ordinary citizens are compelled to act as reporters (Allan and Thorsen, 2014).

The purpose of the chapter is to validate the discourses of the alternative media producers explored in the previous chapters by examining to what extent alternative news outlets expand the news landscape and how they defy journalistic conventions. In shifting the focus to four not-for-profit outlets, this investigation explores different types of news production outside mainstream newsrooms. In comparing the output of alternative groups and how they disseminate their content, the following sections illustrate their value in a changing media environment.

Each case examined here offers a diverse approach to alternative journalism. Thus, the results are presented in a way that could lay out the varying degrees of diversion from traditional journalistic patterns, which is related to the third research question (RQ3) of this study: to what extent are alternative producers breaking journalistic

boundaries and reconfiguring the epistemology of news? Accordingly, the analysis combines the newsgathering of both professional journalists and amateurs. While Chapters 5 and 6 considered multiple discourses from a broad range of alternative producers on identity, motivations and sustainability, this chapter narrows down the sample for the qualitative content analysis based on the assumption that these cases are equally concerned in contesting media power (Couldry and Curran, 2003).

The criteria for the selection of cases and the qualitative process of the content analysis are explained in depth in Chapter 4. Here I summarise their characteristics (Table 7.1):

Table 7.1: Elements of the four case studies

Outlet	Main focus of the coverage	Funding
<i>Agência Pública</i> (Public Agency)	Human rights	International Foundations
<i>Amazônia Real</i> (Real Amazon)	Amazon region	International Foundations
<i>Nós, Mulheres da Periferia</i> (We, Woman of the Periphery)	Women from the periphery	No regular funding
<i>Coletivo Papo Reto</i> (Straight Talk Collective)	Life in the favela	No regular funding

Content analysis was applied to 120 pieces (30 per case) retrieved from their websites, with the exception of *Coletivo Papo Reto*, which mainly publishes stories on its Facebook page. Coding was based on the themes that emerged from the interviews: (1) news topics; (2) sources; (3) format; (4) audience's participation; (5) objectivity; (6) information on funding.

This chapter does not claim to discuss alternative media production in Brazil as a whole. Instead, it explores different approaches to alternative journalism, each of them practiced under very different circumstances and by distinctive producers. In spite of the growing fragmentation of the media landscape in Brazil and, consequently, the increasing heterogeneity of alternative journalism, the purpose is to find more precise answers to the research questions and ultimately to trace defining traces of alternative journalism. Firstly I examine the digital content of *Agência Pública* (in English, Public Agency); then the output of Amazônia Real (Real Amazon); followed by *Coletivo Papo Reto* (Straight Talk Collective) and Nós, Mulheres da Periferia (*We, women of the Periphery*).

7.1 THE CASE OF AGÊNCIA PÚBLICA

Based in São Paulo, *Agência Pública* (AP) is Brazil's first journalism investigative news agency, founded in 2011 by three women journalists. Among the cases analysed in this research, it is the most awarded for the quality of its reporting. In 2018 alone, it received four national and international awards, including the Human Rights Journalism Award. Its values, according to the website's "about us" page, are: 1) editorial independence; 2) the promotion of human rights; 3) the right to information and the checking of democratic debate; 4) investigative and innovative journalism, with independent and balanced reporting based on primary sources; 5) gender equality; 6) a cooperative environment that cultivates ethical, skilled journalists. Funding comes from different sources, such as donations from private foundations, sponsorship of projects and crowdfunding. The main donors are the Ford Foundation (US) and the Oak Foundation (Switzerland).

7.1.1 Politics and social issues

AP presented a diverse range of reported topics (Table 7.2), with a stronger focus on politics (23%). The content analysis took place in the two months prior to the first round of the presidential elections of October 2018; thereby, the interest for national themes coincided with the focus of mainstream media. The political agenda referred to the electoral campaign as well as the political crisis that preceded it.

Table 7.2: Description of Agência Pública's content

Main story topics	Examples	Number
PUBLIC POLICY	Discussion on abortion; criminalization of drugs; fire in the National Museum	5
INTERNATIONAL	Julian Assange's case	1
CULTURE	Book launch; tackling racism through art; exhibition censored	4
VIOLENCE	Police abuse; violence against indigenous people	4
ENVIRONMENT	Widespread use of pesticides; environmental disaster	4
SOCIOECONOMICS	Crisis in traditional media corporations; poor working conditions in rural area; hunger	4
POLITICS	Checking assertions of politicians; interviews about the political crisis	7
SELF-REFERENTIAL	Call for microscholarship	1

Although the political coverage was the dominant topic, AP did not show concern in reporting the routine of the presidential campaign, nor short-format breaking news. Political articles had an in-depth critical approach and were based on original data. For example, an interview with the former head of the Federal Police during the government of President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva presented a critical view of the investigation dubbed Operation Car Wash. The investigation started in 2014 into allegations that directors of the state oil company Petrobras were involved in a corruption scandal and ended up affecting all the major political parties in Brazil. In the interview, the former police chief, who strengthened the Federal Police in the first years of the Workers' Party government, attacked the investigation for considering it a political conspiracy to condemn former president Lula. He echoed the left-wing forces' argument against the operation, which had received broad support from traditional media. The headline is a reference to a possible revenge against Lula: "With blood in the mouth". The article did not adhere to the inverted pyramid format, a very frequent hallmark of traditional journalism. Rather, before addressing Operation Car Wash, the long narrative approach allowed the author to recount the history of the modernisation of the Federal Police in Brazil, the fight against corruption and the troubled passage of the former police chief by the government. The interviewee's opinion on the alleged political persecution of former President Lula was clearly presented only in the last paragraph.

This structure does not mean, however, that AP dismisses the routines of traditional media. For instance, to hold presidential candidates accountable for what they said during the campaign, the agency employed fact-checking journalism methods to its political stories. Political fact-checking is a practice on the rise, both among large

news corporations and independent websites, to reinforce the truth-seeking tradition in journalism (Graves, 2016). Public figures' claims were verified and classified according to seven different labels: true, false, exaggerate, no context, debatable, underestimated, impossible to prove. The commitment to objectivity that is implied in this journalistic genre was combined with a critical approach to address social issues. For example, AP investigated a claim put forward by a left-wing presidential candidate on violence against the LGBT community. The politician cited Brazil as the "world's record holder of murders of LGBT people". The outlet checked the statement and concluded that it was "impossible to confirm" the claim. The verification opened up the opportunity for a long-form analytical report on the lack of global monitoring of violence against the LGBT community, thus expanding the notion of a story built around a politician's quote.

In general, most AP news articles were devoted to news stories related to social issues. A general underlying aspect prioritised the impact of abuse and inequality on unprivileged populations. Thereby, articles coded as "socioeconomics" included investigative reporting on the poverty line in low-income neighbourhoods of São Paulo, as well as on violations of worker's rights in a remote area of the Northeast of Brazil. In turn, stories coded as "environment" reported on how small communities are affected by a contaminated river in the state of Pará (North of Brazil) and irregularities committed by the foundation that should protect the rights of families affected by a dam disaster occurred on 2015 in Mariana (southeast state of Minas Gerais), for example.

Content from AP was overall presented in long-form reporting, sometimes with multimedia elements. In addition to lengthy investigative reports and fact-checking, the content included interview articles with the classic Q&A structure, videos, book excerpts and personal narratives. A concern with the visual quality of the content could also be noticed, either through videos in the form of mini-documentaries or images with an artistic aesthetic. In the article “Still Slavery”, a photographer reported, through black and white pictures and a personal testimony, on the working conditions of the sugar cane plantations in the interior of the state of Bahia, known as Recôncavo Baiano (Figure 7.1).

Figure 7.1: Story on working conditions on sugar cane plantation (snapshot)



Classified as an “essay”, the story narrated the situation of the workers from the personal impressions of the author of the text, as shown in the following paragraph:

Time has stopped in the Recôncavo. For good and bad. If, on the one hand, historical houses are preserved, on the other the methodology of work is similar to that of the period when thousands of black men were brought from Africa to force

labour in the lands of the new Portuguese colony. The workers I have just met are descendants of these slaves. (Agência Pública, 26/03/2015)

The example combined a personal view with a quality photojournalism documentation to expose the reality of misrepresented workers at the mainstream media level. However, most of the content produced by AP does not break with traditional notions of objectivity.

7.1.2 Investigative stories with a combination of voices

News articles invariably blended the testimony of ordinary people with that of experts, such as researchers or representatives of social movements and NGOs. One illustrative example was found in a news series on women's reproductive rights and health, which included the story of a single mother who was subjected to forced sterilization in a rural area of São Paulo after her eighth pregnancy. By judicial decision, she underwent tubal ligation surgery and her baby was given for adoption against her will. The headline was "I do not want this to happen to any other woman". The narrative was not based on the personal opinion of the reporter. It started with the account of the woman, identified as a homeless and drug addict. The reporting included hyperlinks to other publications that narrated the same story. Hence, it was not exclusive news. Nevertheless, AP expanded on the case employing a long form narrative. The author inserted herself in the story to narrate the process of the reporting, recounting the difficulty to find the woman and to convince her to give another interview. Different human rights experts and legal specialists were quoted condemning the prosecutor and the judge's actions against a vulnerable

woman. Under the subheading “Violated rights”, the piece explained that the federal law prohibits forced sterilizations and included hyperlinks to the jurisdiction. The misconduct of the judiciary system was checked by a careful investigation.

Hence, the concept of balance was present in the piece, as in other articles of AP. The reporter informed that both the judge and the prosecutor were contacted but refused to speak. Illustrated with drawings, instead of pictures, the story stressed the vulnerability of female bodies (Figure.7.2).

Figure 7.2: Report about women’s violated rights on Agência Pública



Another relevant example to illustrate AP’s practices came from an investigative series on police brutality in the state of Amapá (North of Brazil). The reporting was based on unpublished official data showing that the local Military Police was responsible for the highest number of deaths in the last three years across the country. Under the headline “Exclusive: Amapá’s Military Police killed the most in the last three years”, the story began with the case of a security officer killed by policemen for being mistaken for a robber. Different sources were heard to confirm the crime that remained unpunished. The reporter’s personal impressions were not

expressed in the text, which included quotes from experts on human rights as well as policemen. Thus, although the story did not offer an alternative type of news sources, the content, a scoop, was focused on a Brazilian state rarely represented in the national mainstream media.

7.1.3 Scholarships for reporters

As stated in an interview by one of the founders of AP for this research, articles are not published without a prior careful verification and edition. Hence the notion of open publishing is not an inspiration for AP, since its focus is on investigative reporting. Nonetheless, the organisation is open to journalists that are not part of its staff. Through a “Microscholarship for Reporting Competition”, independent journalists are invited to suggest news stories on broad themes. The selected ones receive funding and mentorship to cover the topic for two months. Each theme is sponsored by one NGO. The content analysis identified two themes that generated pieces produced by the winners of the competition: Police Violence and Military Intervention (partnership with the NGO Conectas Human Rights) and Hunger (partnership with Oxfam). The process of the microscholarships was explained in a story published in the website’s homepage. Names of other donors do not appear in any other stories analysed in this research.

7.2 THE CASE OF AMAZÔNIA REAL

Two women journalists who have a great deal of experience in well-known Brazilian media outlets launched *Amazônia Real* (AR) in 2013 in Manaus (state of Amazonas).

According to its “about us” page, the mission of the news agency is to make “an ethical and investigative journalism, focused on the issues of the Amazon region and its people, and in defense of the democratization of information, freedom of expression and human rights. Funding is provided by three main different sources: crowdfunding, partnership with socially responsible private companies and international foundations. The main donor is Ford Foundation (US) through the “Advancing Media Rights and Access” program and the Climate and Land Use Alliance (US). In 2019, the news agency was awarded with the King of Spain journalism prize in recognition of its coverage of indigenous populations and environmental issues.

7.2.1 News from remote areas of the world’s largest rainforest

All stories published by AR were, as expected, associated with the geographical area that composes the Amazon region, with the greatest emphasis given not to urban areas, but to distant communities. Although it would not be accurate to talk about hyperlocal journalism in such a vast area that encompasses 59% of Brazil’s territory, the focus on problems faced by marginalized communities makes clear the purpose of the organisation.

The analysis of AR website found a significant predominance of news topics related to environmental issues (26%) and violence (26%), although the coverage included a broad range of issues. Stories were not breaking news; rather they referred to a series of ongoing problems that affect the daily lives of different communities occupying the world’s largest rainforest. Among the most frequently reported topics were

socioeconomic problems faced by indigenous people, riverside populations and isolated communities due to environmental problems, economic abuse or violence. Stories about violence against unprivileged communities included cases of racism, discrimination, abuse of economic power and environmental destruction, as seen in Table 7.3.

Table 7.3: Description of Amazônia Real's content

Main story topics	Examples	Number of articles
International	Crisis on the Venezuelan border	3
Culture	New book excerpt; documentary about an indigenous transvestite	3
Violence and discrimination	Killing of environmental leader; land dispute; killing of a journalist who was investigating the actions of organised crime in the region; racism against indigenous students;	8
Environment	Environmental disaster; impact of natural disaster on local communities; conference on climate change; solar energy project	8
Socioeconomics	Impact of privatization on local communities; black women's socioeconomic vulnerability	3
Politics	Vote in the national congress against law to protect the Amazon region	3
Self-referential	Events to commemorate the 5 th anniversary of Amazônia Real	2

The selected content retrieved from the news agency website was original, with no aggregation of stories from other publications. Long-form investigative pieces, not geared by the element of timeliness, predominated. AR gave space to follow-up stories related to problems that have occurred for some time but remained unresolved for the affected communities.

For instance, the piece “Waiting for dry land” (17/07/2018) referred to a natural disaster that occurred four years ago. The story reported the struggle of the small community living far away from the state’s capital (Figure 7.3):

Figure 7.3: Snapshot of the story “Waiting for dry land”



Other examples of headlines of extensive journalistic reports about ongoing issues were (bold markups are mine):

*“Indigenous girls from São Gabriel da Cachoeira **still** under death threat”*
(20/09/2018)

*“Deaths of rural workers over agrarian conflict **remain** unpunished in Canutama”
(14/08/2018)*

*“Quilombola leader killed **three months** ago asked for protection (...)” (14/07/2018)*

In turn, pieces concerning the national government and national politics represented only 10% of the sample. Even so, political coverage was also related to the local reality of the Amazon region, such as in “Temer’s government minimizes incident with Hydro and says pollution is ‘acute’ in Barcarena” (19/07/2018). This piece referred to an environmental disaster in the refinery Hydro Alunorte, a Norwegian company in the northern state of Pará. It reported the opinion of then president Michel Temer’s government on the leaking of toxic waste, but it was not limited to the official version. The story included the testimony of experts criticizing the government’s report and showed the effects of the pollution to the local population in a long-form piece. A reporter went to the affected community and described the situation:

Gysele Brito from Espírito Santo, 28, a mother of five, says that before Hydro’s red mud, her family already lived with the pollution of the Bom Futuro community dump. She said that because of the garbage, her children take medicines for skin’s inflammation and constant allergies. “The doctor gave me these pills at the health centre. They get better, but it [the symptoms] always comes back”, she says. Gysele’s five and three-year-old children have several marks on their bodies and scratch themselves constantly (Amazônia Real, 19/07/2018).

7.2.2 Sources and Objective Language: priority for unheard voices

The excerpts mentioned so far illustrate the narration of the facts with an objective language, that is, the opinion of the reporter is not explicitly expressed. News stories were based on verifiable facts. Most of the narratives (64%) began with a character, confirming the intention to cover the region from the perspective of ordinary citizens. The formula of the inverted pyramid that places the most important information in the beginning of the reports was not strictly followed, but the stories contained the conventional elements of a journalistic text, with context and supporting data. Different sources were mentioned to show that facts have been verified.

The story “Baku and the female role in the indigenous movement” (30/07/2018) chronicled the mourning of a female leader in an indigenous community (Figure 7.4). The fact was the death of a pioneer leader who introduced unusual approaches to socioeconomic problems faced by this small community in the North of Brazil. The reporter talked to members of the community but also to researchers, such as anthropologists, to provide a complete picture of an uncommon indigenous tribe.

Figure 7.4: News on the death of a female indigenous leader (snapshot)



In another example, a story about the construction of a federal highway in an area inhabited by a particular indigenous ethnic group priority was given to the viewpoint of the community, who was concerned with the environmental impact of the paving work (“Paving of the BR-317 worries Apurinã leaders of the Purus River”/ 10/08/2018). Similarly, in a piece on allegations of racism against indigenous students at the public university of Belém (state of Pará) dominant voices were those that denounced discrimination. On the other hand, the official stance of the Federal University of Pará (UFPA) was clearly stated.

The traditional rule of presenting opposite sides of a story was respected in all the investigative pieces of AR. Corroboration of information by different sources was clear, avoiding a purely advocacy journalism. In spite of the balanced approach, what stood out in the reports was the social injustice faced by marginalised communities. While the preference for a negative coverage was evident, AR also reported on topics such as arts, however maintaining the focus on unprivileged communities. In the cultural section, indigenous art and feminist events were prioritised.

Besides the team of reporters and editors, AR has a group of columnists who produces articles for the website in which they express their opinion about themes related to the region. According to the website’s “who are we” page, “the columnists are free to choose the themes of their articles, which do not necessarily coincide with *Amazônia Real*’s opinion”. Articles based on the opinion of columnists had the authors’ profile identified at the bottom of the texts, thus offering a clear differentiation between hard news and opinionated pieces.

7.2.3 Authors from the region

AR works with a team of trained journalists and columnists, making use of professional organisation processes as it was confirmed by its founders in an interview for this research. Columnists are all identified as journalists or researchers from the region, with the exception of one columnist, who was described as a writer, educator and leader of a women's association. They were all, thereby, experts in the rainforest and its socioeconomic issues. According to the founders, texts sent by collaborators are only published after going through the editors. Consequently, the practice of open publishing that is valued in alternative media studies is not present in AR. Still, the public is invited to participate on events promoted by the organisation. To celebrate its fifth anniversary (September 2018) it promoted, and announced on its website, free events, which included a debate on socio-environmental impacts of mega-projects in the Amazon region; the launch of a book about small TV networks covering the region; and a photo exhibition focusing on threats to the biodiversity of the Rainforest and its local populations. The website highlighted that AR "assumed the exercise of journalism as a guarantee of access to quality and democratic information, with social justice". The main donor of the initiative was identified (Ford Foundation) as well as partnerships with the following institutions: United States Embassy, Cultural Institute Brazil-United States and School of Arts and Tourism (ESAT) of the State University of Amazonas (UEA).

7.3 THE CASE OF NÓS, MULHERES DA PERIFERIA

Nós, Mulheres da Periferia (NMP) was created in 2014 to talk about the social reality of women from the outskirts of São Paulo, the largest city in Latin America. When this research was conducted, six women (5 journalists and one web designer) integrated the collective in a voluntary basis. According to the collective's "about us" page, their goal is to disseminate content produced by and for women, "with the aim of contributing to the construction of more human and contextualized journalistic narratives within the tripod of class, race and territory". The main form of funding is bidding on public projects. In 2015 and 2016 the collective received funding from the municipal government of São Paulo to develop cultural projects to discuss the views and ideas of women from peripheral areas. In 2018, NMP received financial support from a group of international foundations to investigate the public health system for women. The collective also promotes workshops and lectures related to the surrounding areas of the largest Brazilian cities.

7.3.1 News agenda to enhance women's empowerment

The output of NMP covered diverse themes, such as racism, cultural events, education, violence, gender issues and public services, always related to women from peripheral areas. What stood out from the analysis was an agenda that gives visibility to the social reality of women who do not feel sufficiently represented in the mainstream media (Table 7.4):

Table 7.4: Description of Nós, Mulheres da Periferia's content

Topics	Examples of stories	Number
Courses	Free workshop for writers; finance course for “black and poor women”	4
Culture	Book fair; documentary produced by black women; interview with artist from the periphery	11
National themes	Abortion; racism; religion	5
Public policy	Public health system; public transportation	5
Sel-referential	Documentary produced by the collective	2
Socioeconomic	Domestic workers' rights	2
Violence	Gay woman killed by policemen	2

The themes registered on the above table were, in fact, intertwined. Stories about cultural events (36%) did not fit into the traditional entertainment notion of legacy media. The concern was not to recommend “what to do” or “what to watch” in the cultural scene. The emphasis was on non-mainstream activities related to women’s rights and empowerment. Thus, for example, the website recommended books written by black women writers “to inspire, learn and empower”, as well as songs by female rap and R&B singers for women who are in a relationship or “who are alone and understand the importance and power of being divine to themselves”. The list-article format, very common in commercial news websites, was used in those cases. NMP also informed about cultural events related to women or residents of the periphery, such as an alternative free literature event in São Paulo to show the independent work of authors from low-income neighbourhoods. In another example,

the collective advertised a documentary on environmental crimes in the North of Brazil, and published an interview (Q&A format) with the female director of the film, who emphasized that this type of crime affects mainly women and children.

There was also an article to promote a photo exhibition that addressed racism and violence against women (Figure.7.5), under the headline “Why don’t you flat iron your hair? They wrote in their bodies sentences that they are used to hear”. The exhibition was created to promote body positivity against beauty stereotypes as explained in the article:

The photographic exhibition CATARSE, by Lethicia Galo, 29, is composed of portraits of women who have suffered gender violence, and black women and men who are victims of racial violence. They wrote in their body sentences that were told to them by others, that is, male or female aggressors, protagonists of pain, discrimination, sexism, and racism. (Nós, Mulheres da Periferia, 28/03/2018)

Figure 7.5: NMP’s coverage of an exhibition on the female body (snapshot)



As seen, NMP engages in stories that have direct relevance to minorities, more specifically women of colour. For example, a journalist from the collective interviewed the American actor Danny Glover, who was in São Paulo to promote a movie (08/06/2018). The collective's member joined a round table with the actor, but her questions to him were strictly related to his activities and viewpoints as political activist and humanitarian. The example shows that the collective may have access to events promoted by the entertainment industry, but chose to frame the story on the grounds of the actor's involvement with the civil rights movements, instead of covering the new movie per se.

Accordingly, other news that made it into mainstream media as well as pieces on public policy were disseminated on the website from the perspective of women's interest. NMP gave space to articles on decriminalisation of abortion, lack of laws to protect women on public transportation, measures that affect freedom of African religions and a case of racism that receive wide media coverage. The collective did not engage with investigative journalism. These stories were framed to illustrate the lived experiences of women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. As an example, days before the Brazilian Supreme Court decided if abortion in the first twelve weeks of pregnancy should be decriminalised, NMP published a piece on the debate based on the viewpoint of three feminist campaigners for the legalisation of abortion (03/08/2018). They were residents and activists of peripheral areas of São Paulo. The interview was recorded on video in which the women explained why they considered abortion as "a class and racial issue" in Brazil, acknowledging that the subject is a taboo in the poor areas. The piece mentioned official data on abortion with a link to the document gathered by a fact-checking news outlet: 49% of women

who died of illegal abortions in the country were black, while white women accounted for 19% of deaths and unreported races represented 30%.

The data, thus, was not exclusive, just as the debate on the right to abortion was widely covered in the mainstream media. The focus of the NMP was to give context to a long-running story to make it more significant for women from the periphery. The talk was published in an unedited video. The quality of the image was amateur, and the conversation happened in an environment of informality.

Other examples of headlines that help to understand the content that shapes the collective's general coverage:

“Free workshop on narrative writing will analyse black women writers”
(24/07/2018)

“It is never too late for a man to be (less) chauvinistic” (05/08/2018)

“Public hospital: I feel I am simply a number” (23/04/2018)

“Being able to sit on the train is a daily dream for those on the periphery”
(02/03/2018)

None of those stories were published as long-format articles. The dominant format was concise reporting that was more concerned in presenting a story through the eyes of women than to adhere to the standard inverted pyramid storytelling structure. In

that sense, NMP showed a frequent effort to publicise content, mainly courses, that could lead to women's empowerment, such as courses to help women from low-income parts of the city to deal with their personal finances or a course that provide child care for young students with kids. The focus was clearly to promote opportunities of education for those affected by inequality.

7.3.2 A channel for dialogue between women from peripheral areas

Thereby, the sample represents a journalistic coverage with an explicit agenda to advocate women's rights. This intention is also clear in the choice of sources, who were predominantly women, be experts in some specific subject or journalists of the collective writing first person accounts. The overall result was a journalistic mix that included both fact-based stories and overtly opinionated pieces. These different types of formats were connected by the emphasis on gender, race, and social class issues, allowing a dialogue within the periphery, a term that means both a location and a social construction (Levy, 2018).

The following excerpt referred to a story on religious intolerance. The focus was a debate on a bill aimed to declare illegal the slaughter of animals in African-Brazilian religious rituals (17/8/2018). The issue made headlines in the mainstream media. Here NMP covered a protest against the bill:

On the 8th of August, we were present on a march and talked to some women to understand the importance of the religions of African origins for the construction and continuity of the history and ancestry of the black people in Brazil. According to

Bianca Santana, a university professor, African-born religions should be considered as the cultural patrimony of humanity, since the cult brings up the way black people share orixás⁵ and celebrations. 'This is an argument that needs to be made not only by people who practice the religion of African origins, but by all people, because it is our human right to exist. (Mulheres da Periferia, 17/08/2018)

The purpose of the piece was to give voice to the ones who are in favour of African-Brazilian religious rituals. The reporter covered the protest and interviewed practitioners who accused the state of racism for trying to prevent African rituals. The context⁵ was explained and the author's opinion was not expressed, but the piece did not present different viewpoints on this controversial bill.

The collective's goal to tackle the lack of representation of women is less subtle in pieces based on personal accounts. Under the headline "Machismo travels by train" (21/12/2015), a member of the collective reported on how she tried to avoid harassment in the public transport and ended up being attacked by passengers. In this piece, the line between activism and journalism is blurred:

This is how they want us to be portrayed: crazy, hysterical, and inconvenient. After all, they are already so accustomed to take all the spaces for themselves that when we show the least of discomfort we are seen as foolish, aggressive. Even more if you are a black dyke from the periphery. If my image offends them, just imagine my discourse! But I did not shut up at all; I kept my head up and said loudly to all the

⁵ Deities from the Afro-Brazilian religion *Candomblé*.

girls in the carriage that we should not shut up in the face of aggression and/or harassment. (Mulheres da Periferia, 21/12/2015)

The use of slang (*dyke*) is relevant. The term is avoided for its offensive connotation, but in the selected report it indicated a manifestation of gay pride by the author. The piece was part of a long series produced by the collective to discuss the problems on the urban mobility system. The issue, which affects the largest Brazilian cities, is also widely covered in the mainstream media. The approach of NMP, however, was on women's safety in public transportation. The purpose of the pieces was to give a platform for women to describe the daily challenges of travelling long distances in an environment where incidents of violence and harassment are frequent. One could argue that this is an agenda that could be also found on mass media. The difference, though, is that members of NMP were actually recounting their own experiences as residents of remote locations, thus assuming the role of legitimate narrators of a routine of dangerous displacement unfamiliar to the upper class.

The collective often explored stories that made headline in the mainstream media as an opportunity to echo a counter-hegemonic approach. In July 2018, the website looked at the case of a young black girl (Bella). She had her hair straightened by her stepmother who did not approve of her curly hair. The case sparked a debate about the white standards of beauty in Brazil when the child's mother published a post on Facebook saying that her daughter, who used to be proud of her afro-hair, was victim of racism. The story featured on mainstream media amid a rise of black empowerment in the country. NMP approached the case from the perspective of a black woman (a member of the collective) who struggled to embrace her own afro-

hair. The piece included a quote from the girl’s mother taken from social media, a link to her Facebook page and pictures from the child’s Instagram account. Mainly, though, the article (Figure 7.6) contextualised the case by referring to a personal experience of prejudice. The headline left little doubt that the article was written by a black woman: “The case of Bella’s hair straightening and how they want to whiten us”:

“At 7, I cut my hair, as I believed that a miracle could take place. It was such a sad quest. The more I tried to look like straight-haired girls, the less I looked like them. It was so distressing, leaving marks that still affect my self-esteem as a black woman”.
(Nós, Mulheres da Periferia, 04/07/2018)

Figure 7.6: NMP’s coverage of Bella’s case (snapshot)



7.3.3 Identity formation

The content of NMP reflects the social, cultural and political context of areas that fall outside the city centre and, thus, receive less investment from the state. The

opportunity for women from these areas to raise their voices in such a platform is what makes NMP an interesting case, as it helps to deconstruct standardising values embedded in the news agenda of mass media (Fenton, 2010). NMP invites ordinary citizens to participate, although it only publishes content that is fully revised by the editors, as it was explained by one of the collective's members. Thus, again, the open publishing model is not present. On the other hand, collective's members authored most part of the selected articles, with fewer examples of personal accounts written by non-members.

Hence, the breakdown of the barrier between audience and producers is evident, since the producers of the collective are at the same time the authors of first-person testimonies about a reality that they experience in their day to day. If on the one hand there is an editorial control of the narrative, on the other hand this control is exercised by voices that represent a different vision from that offered by the traditional headlines. There is also an element of identity formation in the choice of content related do education and cultural events. NMP consciously informs about particular courses that contribute for the specific formation of women from low-income areas. The website featured an article on a documentary made by NMP about women from São Paulo's outskirts, informing that it could be watched for free online. In that particular article, the funding of the project by São Paulo's prefecture was clearly stated, although no other information on financing was found within the news stories.

7.4 THE CASE OF COLETIVO PAPO RETO

Coletivo Papo Reto (CPR) is an independent community-based media made by and for the residents of Complexo do Alemão e Penha, one of the biggest *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro. The group, according to the “about us” page of its website, “acts as a channel that shows the favela’s reality”. It is part of a movement defined as “guerrilla media” to confront the negative stereotype of the *favela* by corporate media, according to the collective’s own words. Members of CPR are not professional journalists. They expressly self-identify as activists who pledge to disseminate information from the “*favelado* to the *favela* itself”.

To put into context, this content analysis was conducted when Rio de Janeiro was under a military intervention, requested by former president Michel Temer to guarantee law and order in the state. Security operations have led to a surge in killing by agents of the state, as it was widely reported by mainstream media. According to opinion polls, a broad majority of Rio de Janeiro’s population supported the military intervention (Londoño and Andreoni, 2018). Confrontations between drug gangs and security forces are part of the daily life of favelas, frequently framed as “abandoned” areas (Rosas-Moreno and Straubhaar, 2015).

7.4.1 Narrating different forms of oppression

Not surprisingly, the content analysis showed an emphasis on stories that involve the oppression of marginalised populations, both in the *favela* and in other peripheral areas, although a variety of issues are covered (Table 7.5).

Table 7.5: Description of the content of Coletivo Papo Reto

Topics	Examples	Number of posts
News about the community	Campaign for donation; missing child; cultural events for residents	10
Violence	Police abuse; shooting; people arrested without evidence; crime	12
National news	Killing of councilwoman; fire in the National Museum	3
Citizenship	Meeting to discuss human rights; documentary about activism in Latin America	5

As one of the producers stated in an interview for this research, the collective focuses on “disputing the narrative” of traditional media by highlighting issues that defy the conventional framings of *favelas* and their residents. This dispute involves a challenge to conventional journalistic codes, as the content analysis confirmed. For instance, facts are not separated from opinion. The following post (06/08/2018) informed about the murder of a woman by her partner, both residents of the community:

This woman is called Simone, the mother of two children. That coward is Anderson, her killer. He suffocated Simone in cold blood. They are residents of Grota in Complexo do Alemão. Femicide in the favelas happens a lot. The worst, it ends up becoming routine when we shut up. Sisters, do not shut up in the face of domestic violence. (Papo Reto, 06/08/2018)

The example is symbolic of the form of communication that drives the collective. Essential facts of the story were not reported. When did the crime take place? What was the motive? Was the suspect arrested? Instead, the story was framed within the context of a campaign against domestic violence. The language employed had an overt emotional appeal, as this passage shows:

Simone could not defend herself. Simone is not going to raise her daughters. Simone will not feature on a long TV coverage, neither on a whole newspaper's page. But here she will have all the space she needs for justice to be done. (Papo Reto, 06/08/2018)

The mix of opinion and call for mobilization was highly visible in other posts that reflected the reality of the *favelas* through the own terms of the community. Hence the critical approach is a hallmark of CPR's coverage of social injustice and violence, as see in sentences retrieved from the collective's Facebook page. Some examples to illustrate the language:

"We just want to survive, that's all we want. Is this too much to ask?"

"Your Excellency, don't be one more arm of this racist and murderous state that acts against us."

"We have the right to memory!"

Thereby, the language broke with journalistic conventions by emphasising the emotional outburst. In another similar example, a post reported on a shooting:

We wake up again with that morning alarm that many do not know what it is (...) Whoever leaves home later, could not leave today and is sheltered at home in the safest places. This family is like this, together, the grandmother protecting their two granddaughters. Who could say that we are complacent with all this and that we deserve to suffer? (Coletivo Papo Reto, 11/10/2018)

In the text above there was not a concern with contextualisation: where was the shooting taking place? Who was involved? What did the authorities say about the incident? Emotion shaped the narrative, rejecting the objective language. Symbols such as exclamation points, hashtags, emojis and upper case letters anchored the authors' statements of opinion. The picture of the family under risk was also covered with an emoji expressing sadness. It was added to protect their identity, although it is not possible to say if that edition of the picture was made by the members of the collective or by the family who provide the image (Figure 7.8).

Figure 7.8: Facebook post on shooting in the favela (snapshot)



Although the analysis confirmed the emphasis on the violence and stigmatization suffered by residents and populations in the hands of the police, CPR gave space for the unity of the community and its people, seeking for support when it is needed. For example, when a nursery stopped receiving public funding, the collective urged the community to help:

Jesus Bom Pastor nursery is in need of food donations to keep its operation, as they are not receiving funds from the City Hall! #help #share (Coletivo Papo Reto, 14/08/2018)

Thus, by providing a forum for the dissemination of local news and information, alternative producers also frame the news in terms of “community service announcements”, similarly to what community radio does (Meadows, 2013).

7.4.3 Integration and participation

The choice of events and actions announced by the collective also showed a preference for dissemination of initiatives that encourage different forms of citizenship. CPR promotes information about events such as: meetings of residents’ associations and human rights institutions to discuss “physical, psychological or material violence” during police operations; youth group meetings organised by Amnesty International; meetings with public defenders and politicians; and workshops in partnership with other media to disseminate new technologies. In sum, this type of content indicates that the site is in touch with institutions and organisations that work to benefit the community.

Interestingly, although CPR engaged in donation campaigns for community projects, there were no posts asking for funds to support the collective's activities.

7.4.4 Relation with mainstream media

To highlight cases of social injustice, CPR shared news reports from other media, unlike *Amazônia Real* and *Agência Pública*, which only publish original content. The collective showed an interest in stories that did not happen in the favela and, thus, reproduced content from other outlets whose coverage is broader. The distrust of the authorities in a country that has been constantly denounced by human rights organisations for the violence of its state's agents is very explicit in the collective's production. The collective shared original stories from traditional media whenever the mainstream socio-political agenda coincides with the collective's aim.

However, they diverted from the professional standard by adding opinionated headlines to the outbound link. For instance, they shared a story from the newspaper "Extra", part of *Grupo Globo*, on the acquittal of a 22-year-old man unjustly arrested by policemen who forged evidence to accuse him of drug possession and assault. His parents investigated the case independently and brought to justice the evidence that led to the released of the young man. The hyperlink to the mainstream story was accompanied by the headline (in capital letters):

"POLICE TESTIMONY CANNOT BE SEEN AS AN INDISPUTABLE TRUTH"

The repost clearly stressed an issue that matters to the agenda of CPR: the repressive apparatus of the Military Police in Brazil. Similarly, the collective remembered a massacre of 21 people in the neighbourhood of Vigário Geral, a low-income area in the North of Rio, in 1993. The crime became a symbol of the brutality of the Rio's police. By deploying an effort to publicise the 25th anniversary of the slaughter, CPR reproduced a quote from a survivor interviewed by Radio Globo, one of the country's most popular mainstream broadcasters, to narrate how he saw his family being killed by policemen. These examples indicate that there is not a concern with exclusive content, but rather with content that offers the opportunity to reflect on episodes of injustice and discrimination.

7.5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: NEWS BEYOND THE HEADLINES

The overall analysis of the four cases of news providers confirms the role of alternative journalism as a space to disseminate socially concerned news that challenges conventions of sources and representation (Atton and Hamilton, 2008). Although they display a large variation across covered themes, formats and, mainly, adherence to conventional journalistic norms, news about minorities or underprivileged communities are the dominant topic, be it indigenous people, black women, rural workers or residents from the *favelas*. The variations in the practices of these groups should not be seen as surprising, since this research has emphasised the heterogeneous character of alternative journalism.

However, in the search for common points between them, it is possible to conclude that they all provide, albeit in different levels, what Harcup (2013) defines as

“oppositional reporting”. What they offer is much more complex than the idea of a media that fill the gaps left by mainstream media. It is reporting that “contains within it an ideological critique of dominant ideas within society” (ibid, 2013, p.164). The level of the critique varies from one case to the other. Nonetheless, taken together, stories analysed in this chapter are linked to the democratic purpose of combating different forms of oppression through the dissemination of news that are “often about the unrepresented” (Forde, 2011, p.175).

“Shareability”, as Harcup and O’Neill (2017) argue in their interrogation of what news is, appears as a relevant news values in contemporary mainstream journalism. Media corporations often select news stories that satisfy a set of requirements, such as exclusivity, bad news, surprise, visual appealing, involvement of celebrities, entertaining aspect and drama (ibid, 2017). Besides that, large newsrooms are used to organising their reporters according to “beats”. This contributes to the homogeneity of news delivered by mainstream media, since the official locations where information is gathered are usually the same (Croteau, Hoynes and Milan, 2012). Instead, examples of news pieces mentioned above suggest an emphasis on what has a social impact to specific communities that are not typically considered as newsworthy by traditional news outlets. As a consequence, they help to expand our view of Brazil and its different forms of inequality.

The term “community” here is more concerned with common interests than with a geographical aspect. For example, *Coletivo Papo Reto* is made up of citizens from a set of favelas in Rio de Janeiro, but the content they share does not refer exclusively to what happens within those communities. Similarly, the concept of the “periphery”

adopted by *Nós, Mulheres da Periferia* is not limited to the neighbourhoods in the outskirts of São Paulo, but to female audiences who feel excluded in a more general way, either by their social condition, race or sexual orientation. Here it is worth going back to Levy's (2018) concept of "peripheral media". While mainstream media are able to reach a much broader audience, alternative media are more capable in politicising issues from and about the periphery (ibid, 2018). Both these collectives are composed of "reporters of their own realities" (Atton, 2015, p.2).

In the case of *Agência Pública* and *Amazônia Real*, the former is committed to covering human rights issues in general, while the latter is devoted to telling stories about a vast region that naturally encompasses many different communities. Both awarded digital publications have professional staffs undertaking investigative journalism. Their content can be shared under a Creative Commons License, meaning that their insights are potentially accessible to broader audiences. Although their role is not the one of community media, they also seek to raise public awareness of the realities of excluded communities. Their stories defy the concept of what is newsworthy, albeit they are presented in an engaging, but conventional way.

I am not arguing that mainstream media in Brazil ignores human rights issues, the struggles of minorities or what happens in remote regions of the country. However, economic interests, the homogeneous way news is gathered, and organisational processes shape a certain standard criteria for content production that is routinized (Curran, 2002; Croteau, Hoynes and Milan, 2012). Consequently, news sources tend to be homogeneous and often related to the elite, a trait that was kept in the internet

age (Redden and Witschge, 2010). In turn, the sample analysed here suggests that alternative news sources online can multiply these perspectives (ibid, 2010).

Taking into account the different approaches to news gathering and publishing displayed by the four cases, it is possible to discern two types of alternative journalism. Firstly, in the case of *Agência Pública* and *Amazônia Real*, both of them produced by trained journalists, it seems reasonable to argue that their methods are not entirely different from what may be produced by journalists working for corporate media. These two outlets adopt traditional journalistic practices and have a regular form of funding. Information is carefully ascertained and presented in long, contextualised reporting. Different sources are heard, including authorities and experts. The main focus of their news repertoire is the reality of marginalised communities, whether indigenous peoples, rural workers or women living on the margins of society, but the way these stories are told follows the conventional format of balanced investigative journalistic practices. I argue that this professionalisation does not make them relevant as alternative journalistic practices. What is discussed here is not the level of “alternativeness”, but oppositional practices in general.

In the case of *Agência Pública*, this criticism is clear in the choice of themes. Its investigations addressed topics that are also of interest to the mainstream media, such as urban violence, corruption, and presidential elections. Nonetheless the content is not driven by events, neither by an emphasis on speed or breaking news. Rather, the focus is on what is in the margins of society. Overall, the content showed a rejection of condensed short-format news narratives (Neveu, 2014). AP invests in a narrative journalism, in a structural opposition to the current trends of the profession. A

combination of factuality with personal impressions does not fit into the notion of journalistic neutrality, but on the other hand AP's content is far from the idea of alternative journalists acting both as reporters and activists (Atton and Hamilton, 2008).

In turn, *Amazônia Real* privileges a news repertoire that departs from a national perspective, providing a focus on a region that is isolated from the country's major urban centres. According to Côrrea (2010), most journalistic reports from the Amazon region are drawn from academic research or press releases from NGOs or federal agencies. AR's content provides an original perspective that goes beyond opinion and the mere reproduction of press releases. The samples from this outlet are also more issue driven than fact driven (Couldry, 2010), as we could see, for example, in the first-hand accounts of the struggles of remote communities such as indigenous tribes.

Nevertheless, the online content from these two outlets does not replace objectivity by overt advocacy, as is expected from alternative media (Atton, 2003; Atton and Hamilton, 2008). The style of reporting clearly draws from the practices of legacy newsrooms with the dominance of well-written stories that maintain a quality standard and are informed by multiple sources. There is no overreliance on official or elite sources, but they are present in the news narratives. The use of official sources to corroborate information shows a concern with the credibility of the journalistic process, manifested in the interviews (Chapter 5). Official sources do help to "establish authenticity" and show a concern with the credibility of the journalistic process (Johnson and John III, 2017, p.353). Whilst reproducing professional

practices of the mainstream media, both AP and AR represent a challenge to what Redden and Witschge define as the “one-dimensional picture of online news homogeneity” (2010, p.184). Their form of financial support, based mainly on donations from international foundations, enables the focus on content that does not follow the same rules of the market. The advertising and subscription model is rejected. News for them is what is in accordance with their social mission.

The other two cases constitute a different type of alternative journalism, less focused on traditional formats and practiced by a blend of amateurs and professionals. The concept of news for *Coletivo Papo Reto* embodies the elements of citizens’ media, wherein producers “express the will and agency of a human community confronting historical marginalizing and isolating forces” (Rodriguez, 2001, p.63). Using digital media for mobilization and inclusion, producers show a civic engagement, seeking to discard the framing of *favela* as a lawless space exclusively dominated by criminality (Felix, 2009). While the mainstream media used to frame *favelas* mainly as centres of violence and drug trafficking (Henriques et al, 2012), the repertoire of CPR emphasises the injustice and brutality by agents of the state. Producers, thus, “do not agonise over the problematic notion of objectivity” (Meadows, 2013, p.53).

While the topic of urban violence in Brazil can be treated with sensationalism (Porto, 2008), CPR frames this coverage from the perspective of the impact on the *favela*’s population. By sharing personal accounts and the views of favela-based authors, CPR is not a space for in-depth journalistic analysis of the problems surrounding these low-income neighbourhoods. Rather it restores the residents’ agency to tell their own stories and to challenge misconceptions and stereotypes. The routine of

violence is highlighted, but the narrative emphasises the discourse of resistance in the face of oppression. Overall, producers challenge a narrow perspective of *favela* as a homogenous space. In that context, they share their own stories through words and images as part of a “culture of resistance” (Croteau, Hoynes and Milan, 2012, p.200), but also through an interpretation of what comes from other forms of media, including mainstream, thus, producing meaning from within their cultural domains (Deuze, 2006).

Similarly, the collective *Nós, Mulheres da Periferia* stresses the perspective of a particular community: women from peripheral areas. Although producers employ journalistic techniques to gather news, their role of reporters cannot be separated from their relation with the community. They are journalists raised in the periphery of São Paulo. Thus, their critique to media misrepresentation is explicit. NMP blends traditional reporting with personal accounts to highlight historical marginalisation. Women’s personal accounts are among the main tools of the growing feminist movement in Brazil, which explores the internet as a space of articulation for the discussion of gender issues (Costa, 2018).

It can be argued that members of CPR and NMP act as facilitators of community level conversations, an aspect of participatory media cultures (Gillmore, 2004). Stories shared by the collectives showed that their “sense making” (Meadows, 2013, p.51) did not come necessarily from the delivery of exclusive news. Rather the focus is on the role of the community as narrators and interpreters of the news. The kind of content they provide does not intend to replace mainstream coverage. Their journalistic production is more modest in terms of breath of the news investigations,

and there is not a concern with a professional visual content. This is also a reflection of the economic precariousness of these groups, which do not have regular funding.

Pictures could be covered with emojis and videos are not edited, for instance.

However, instead of being dismissed as “poor” journalism, I argue that the value of these two collectives lies in the fact that their content is produced by actors who live that particular reality. Their coverage seeks to encourage active citizenship reducing the stigma of exclusion and helping to shape the interpretation of news events. Their advocacy role is in clear contrast with the professional ideology pursued by

Amazônia Real and *Agência Pública*.

In sum, this analysis showed two distinct ways of doing alternative journalism. One adopts conventional journalistic methods, while the other reinforces the role of audiences as primary sources of realities often misrepresented by mainstream media. The issues they address also concern commercial journalism, whether it be urban violence, environmental destruction or social inequalities. However their perspective is non-hegemonic. These organisations essentially challenge the discourse of the economic and political powers by multiplying the news sources and expanding the news agenda, beyond the headlines. As Carvalho and Bronosky (2017) point out, the more traditional journalism loses its capacity to represent the public interest, the more strength alternative journalism gains.

This thesis is in agreement with Forde’s (2011) view of alternative journalism as a political act. This political basis, however, is very different from partisan bias to favour political parties, candidates or ideologies. This type of bias was common in the alternative press that emerged during the dictatorship and in the early years of the

democratisation (Pereira, 1986; Kucinsky, 1991). Journalism at the service of particular political parties or labour unions with a Marxist orientation had an important role in Brazil, as seen in Chapter 3. Nonetheless, this chapter suggests the emergence of a socially concerned journalism that is independent of political party disputes and not driven by commercial interests, bringing new possibilities for a decentralised practice of digital journalism.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION: THE RENEWAL OF A TRADITION OF RESISTANCE

This exploratory study has examined the rise of alternative forms of online news production in the current media landscape in Brazil. The starting point of this research was the emergence of *Mídia Ninja*, a collective of activists that gained prominence in 2013 when millions of people took the Brazilian streets to protest against corruption. Much has been written about the *Ninja* experiment (Bentes, 2009; Lorenzotti, 2013; Rezende, 2015; Stalcup, 2016), at times with an over celebratory tone. According to the group's founders, a citizen could be a *Ninja* just for one day (Lorenzotti, 2013), epitomising the ethos of participatory media. Although *Mídia Ninjas*'s production process deserves the attention it received inside and outside the academic environment for capturing the spirit of a counter-hegemonic way of covering the news, this research was motivated by the interest in examining other types of challenges to traditional journalism that have emerged in Brazil since then. Instead of looking at groups that want to be digital producers “for one day” or in times of insurrection, this qualitative study analyses alternative forms of online journalism that intend to provide coverage over longer time frames to understand to what extent they expand the news agenda in Brazil beyond the mainstream discourse during critical events. Thus, the primary emphasis has been on independent digital native outlets that express resistance to the dominant forms of making and distributing news in a regular basis.

More specifically, the preceding chapters invested in independent small-scale not-for-profit outlets that reject the traditional business model of large media corporations, as well as their news agenda, with the aim of advancing democratic ideals. By exploring different genres of alternative news production within that frame, for example, collectives of citizen journalists from the *favelas* or investigative journalism outlets comprised of networks of professional contributors, the purpose of the present dissertation was to identify long-standing efforts to create independent news sites to cover stories outside the commercial context. While alternative media studies place an emphasis on the amateur actors, this investigation also includes experienced journalists who felt motivated to practice non-commercial journalism. Consequently, by exploring far-reaching concepts of alternative sites, this study's original contribution to the field sits at the intersection of alternative media studies and journalism studies. The research questions considered the role of alternative producers in the public sphere (RQ1); their modus operandi and their sustainability models (RQ2) and their approach on some of the fundamental norms of journalism (RQ3), such as the ideal of objectivity.

The emergence of these alternative players in the digital realm happened while legacy news media organisations were going through an unprecedented wave of disruption that shrank their revenue streams, their targeted audiences and the size of their staff. As explained in Chapter 1, large media corporations in Brazil experience this same scenario of crisis and are investing in digital platforms, however without achieving so far the same level of profits that they have obtained for decades. The result is a turbulent time for the industry, with massive layoffs and, in terms of content production, a “news bundling”, or the reuse of content for different platforms

(Ramos, 2015). As a journalist myself, one who has been closely following the radical cycle of technological transformation among traditional news providers in Brazil, I have wondered throughout this research about the cultural and social relevance of these new actors who are moved by dissatisfaction with traditional forms of journalism and media representation. What kinds of stories do they present, how are they organised, and to what extent does their production enable a better understanding of the issues afflicting a country that remains plunged into huge social and economic inequalities and, in recent years, political instability? Moving away from a technological deterministic approach, this study considered whether these emergent forms of digital native media present a new vision of journalism as a whole.

While the field of alternative media attracts increasing attention from media scholars, theories on alternative journalism and its many forms are more limited, especially if we address the context of developing nations, where economic and political turbulence pose additional obstacles to the endurance of alternative projects. This thesis did not propose a new definition for alternative media, a concept that can be studied from various perspectives. I have interpreted alternative media practices in terms of challenges to “actual concentrations of media power, whatever form those concentrations may take in different locations” (Couldry and Curran, 2003, p.7). Informed mainly by Atton’s theoretical insights, starting with *Alternative Media* (2002), this study adhered to the comparative and analytical term “alternative” because its flexibility allowed the inclusion of different forms of content production outside the corporate environment of large newsrooms, while terms such as “radical media” (Downing, 2001), “citizen’s media” (Rodriguez, 2001) or “activist new

media” (Lievrouw, 2011), just to mention some of the definitions explored in Chapter 2, would be more limited for the purpose of this work. More specifically, groups examined here fit under the umbrella of alternative journalism according to the definition of Atton and Hamilton: journalism that “proceeds from dissatisfaction not only with the mainstream coverage of certain issues and topics, but also with the epistemology of news” (2008, p.1).

As a mixed method research project, this study blended semi-structured interviews and qualitative content analysis of four case studies, which were selected for representing different forms of counter-hegemonic accounts. The interviews followed the same sequence of predetermined themes. Nonetheless, one of the main difficulties of the research was to summarise the common viewpoints of interviewees with very distinctive backgrounds, among professional and amateur journalists. Repeated reviews of the transcriptions and frequent monitoring of content produced by alternative sites contributed to enlarge the knowledge on fragmented interventions on media production throughout this research. Combined with content analysis of case studies, evidences described an emergent scenario of independent digital native sites geared towards social change, with different degrees of political activism and adherence to rules of traditional journalism. Although this research is focused on Brazilian alternative media, I argue that this exploratory investigation could be useful to study transnational contexts.

This last chapter begins with the discussion of a wider interpretation of the main findings. The following sections clarify the aims and discussions of each empirical chapter in relation to key theoretical concepts on alternative media in the context of

contemporary Brazil. Limitations of this research and the need of future inquiry are also addressed in this final chapter.

8.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: WHAT ALTERNATIVE JOURNALISTS DO AND WHY THEY MATTER

Firstly, in regard to comparisons, findings showed that even though alternative journalists' practices are very heterogeneous, common themes that emerged from their activities, motivations and self-perception tackle misrepresentation, stereotypes and discrimination. Hence this thesis argues that their contribution helps to foster a more diverse news ecosystem in Brazil, where the history of journalism is linked to the economic, political and social development of the country and the concentration of media ownership in the hands of a few private groups contributes to a lack of plurality of voices (Martins, 2008; Bailey and Marques, 2012). By providing segmented spaces of challenge to media power, alternative sites expand the concept of news. News for them is not necessarily what moves reporters from traditional newsrooms that write stories according to "beats" they have been assigned (Croteau, Hoynes and Milan, 2012). Alternative media producers interviewed for this research stressed the democratic purpose of telling underreported stories about excluded communities.

Such coverage of what is often "untold" can certainly derive from many different perspectives in a country immersed in social and economic inequalities. For instance, stories about the underrepresented may refer not only to geographical communities, but also to particular communities of interest, such as young women who do not feel

represented by mainstream media. This is the case of the website *Capitolina*, which is comprised of a network of young contributors who took control of the narratives they are interested in sharing from a feminist perspective. Articles published by *Capitolina* are often based on personal accounts, one of the characteristics of the “networked feminism” that has been gaining prominence in Brazil (Costa, 2018). The publishers of this online magazine do not define themselves as journalists. Nonetheless, their production accurately reflect important changes in society, broadening the arena of discussion on women's demands without a concern with direct activist actions.

Alternative journalism may also refer to news accounts of issues that consistently affect peripheral areas. For instance, *Coletivo Papo Reto* and *Rocinha.com* are focused on what happens in the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro, geographical spaces often portrayed as unlawful and dominated by crime (Felix, 2009). In turn, the collective *Nós, Mulheres da Periferia* stand out for engaging with a more specific audience from marginalized areas: women from the peripheries with a greater focus on black women, whose perspectives are shaped by race and class divisions.

Mentioned throughout the previous chapters, these examples are related to groups who do not necessarily have professional qualifications as journalists. Their authority, according to the interpretation of this research, does not come from their professional skills, but from the fact that they are voices that live the reality that they intend to portray. Hence, their different perspectives enable the discussion of multiple frames of the country's realities, adding plurality beyond the headlines and beyond anonymous comments on social media platforms.

Nonetheless, to illustrate the growing hybridisation of alternative journalism, this investigation also highlighted the work of non-profit independent investigative outlets produced by trained journalists. For instance, *Agência Pública* and *Ponte Jornalismo* are focused on covering human rights. *Amazônia Real*, in turn, brings together veteran journalists who live in the Amazon region and seek journalistic coverage focused on the marginalised people of that part of Brazil, where natural resources are frequently exploited without a national scrutiny. Among the manifestations of alternative journalism, this research also mentioned a fact-checking website (*Aos Fatos*), dedicated to combat misinformation by checking public statements from politicians. To hold power into account is one of the more traditional functions of journalism, but the way these small outlet work is still “alternative”: they do not accept advertising and public funds, and act independently of the mainstream media. The political coverage of these sites is not only shaped by the quotes of those involved in the political news, so often merely guided by the rhetoric of political marketing and internal disputes. Rather, they aim at a greater understanding of the meaning of public policy focused on areas such as health, education and environmental protection regulations.

All these different groups, whether professional or amateurs, openly advocate their socially concerned motivations, but claim not to be in the service of political parties, politicians or powerful institutions, thus transcending Brazil’s growing political polarisation. They are interested in building credibility as sources that are not subject to political propaganda; neither are concerned in replacing traditional news (Shaver, 2010). It is possible to relate this with what Couldry points out in terms of

legitimacy: “In the long-run, new news sources will fade away unless they secure from somewhere a degree of legitimacy and recognition” (2010, p.148).

Secondly, it is clear that economic precariousness affects alternative practices in general, and this study could not point out a solution for this problem. Alternative producers appear to understand that to be sustainable they have to diversify their revenue sources and increase their audiences. Much of the work they do is voluntary or low-paid, although groups that opted for a more professionally oriented approach have been managing to maintain paid staff mainly due to grants from international philanthropic foundations. Hence, talking about alternative media means acknowledging that financial vulnerability remains an obstacle in the digital age. Their future is uncertain, and not admitting that would mean simply to embrace the first optimistic views of web journalism without taking into account the evidences that corporate media have retained control over the digital economy (Fuchs, 2014; Curran, Fenton and Freedman, 2016).

Nonetheless, the fact that alternative outlets are not seeking to automatically replicate the old business model of mainstream media based on advertising and subscription suggests a shift on the potential types of revenue for journalism beyond a consumer culture. In addition, this analysis permitted the identification of the development of new organisational forms of gathering and sharing news that are important for the discussion on the future directions of journalism. Alternative journalistic activities are based on decentralised modes of production as opposed to the highly centralised and vertical structure of traditional newsrooms. Decentralised here does not imply that there is no editorial control. Efforts to develop critical and consistent alternative

journalism also incorporate rules and guidelines to ensure accurate information, albeit through more horizontal decision making processes. Producers once again manifested concern to be acknowledged as credible and authoritative sources. However, the lack of ownership that is crucial to alternative media makes room for radical experimentation in terms of organisational practices. This is not to say that alternative journalism is synonymous with anarchical systems. Gatekeeping practices, as stated by the interviewees, are part of alternative producers' routines.

Thirdly, this investigation stressed that online alternative journalism should not be interpreted as a "new journalism". Echoing Carvalho and Bronosky (2017), alternative journalism is not necessarily revolutionary. Groups examined here appropriate fundamental elements of traditional journalism to a greater or lesser extent, despite their critique to mainstream media. In that sense, producers' background matters. Not surprisingly, trained journalists, many with experience in large media corporations, tend to emphasise that their goal is not to perform a revolutionary journalism but simply what they understand as "good journalism", which does not yield to commercial pressures. On the other hand, producers who never received training as professional journalists attached less value to conventional journalistic principles, but their criticism is not directed at the values of journalism per se but rather at what they consider as a biased narrative of the mainstream media. These two trends may sound contradictory at times, but alternative journalism does not have a monolithic form, as other scholars have shown (Atton and Hamilton, 2008; Forde, 2011; Kenix, 2011).

Accordingly, the content analysis confirmed that the concept of alternative journalism comprises a broad range of genres and demographics that could not fit into a uniformed formula. Therefore, understanding the practices of alternative journalists in the current media landscape in Brazil requires looking beyond participatory tools and citizens' participation. Instead, a deeper analysis of their narratives and the social-political themes they communicate explain how their selection of news makes them a potential force in the democratic society.

This study argues that the essence of alternative digital native journalism has some similarities with the Brazilian alternative press of other times, such as anarchist newspapers made by immigrants in the early 20th century or publications that challenged the military dictatorship in the 1960s and 1970s. Like the contemporary digital producers, those small publications were not guided by a market-driven logic, but by their ideological motivation. Besides the fact that digital technologies changed the paradigms of content production, the difference is that throughout the dictatorial times of the 20th century, mainly during the military government (1964-1985), the Brazilian media system was under control of the state; thus the so called alternative press was based on the ethos of opposition to the regime. Currently, in spite of political instability and increasing threats to democracy, alternative outlets have more opportunities to contest narratives that privilege the status quo from different and broader perspectives. Through their coverage, they promote debate on issues such as racism, feminism, social inequality and state repression in democratic Brazil, wherefore presenting a renovation of the role of the alternative press of the past as a counter-hegemonic space, albeit fragmented. For example, if we look at websites that discuss discrimination against women, it is not possible to point out a single feminist

narrative. Rather, they present different views of women's demands. Together, they represent a new feminism, formed by infinity of political narratives (Bogado, 2018). In this context, alternative media enable a fragmentation that has an impact on a multiperspectival discussion about gender. Accordingly, different views on the reality of peripheral regions multiply the debate about the lack of social justice on the margins of society (Levy, 2018).

It is important to emphasize that alternative media's responses captured here are not only based on critiques of mass media news. Their function is much more complex than a binary opposition to mainstream media. This research confirms that alternative journalists attempt to offer alternative construction of news (Atton, 2002), usually based on the perspective of disempowered groups. In his critique of the alternative press of the dictatorial years, Abramo (1988) argues that the small newspapers that formed the basis of the alternative press of that period of time were identified as a "counterpoint" to traditional newspapers under state control. Therefore, although they were against the mainstream, they were "fed" by its content. In other words, the raw material of the alternative came from the mainstream media. Instead, this research argues that new digital players make an attempt to overcome this dependency, raising discussions and giving a 'newsworthy' character to stories that generally have no place in traditional media.

Consequently, the concept of what is newsworthy for those who propose anti-mainstream practices is different from the news values that drive journalism in large media corporations. Although this should not be treated as a surprise, the contribution of this thesis was to shed light on what motivates contemporary

alternative journalism in Brazil and how they perform their challenges on media power. What follows is a deeper discussion of the three empirical chapters.

8.1.1 Alternative journalists' roles: expansion of the news agenda

The first empirical chapter of this thesis, Chapter 5, discussed motivations and ideological influences of alternative media groups. Based on the self-perception of alternative producers, the chapter referred to the first RQ: what are the roles of alternative journalists in Brazil?

Firstly, the responses, combined with examples of content from alternative sites to add context, indicate that their role is defined by dissatisfaction with the way mainstream media portray minorities and by a socially concern approach to news selection. As one of the interviewees put it: alternative journalism aims to lift the veil of invisibility that covers certain social issues in Brazil. In the face of an increasing commercialisation and homogenisation of media, fundamental to the mission of alternative producers is to frame news events from the accounts of those who feel “invisible”, or as Forde puts it, “the unrepresented, the voiceless, the downtrodden” (2011, p.175).

It is possible to make a clear connection here between this increasing plurality and the concept of subaltern counter-publics pointed out by Fraser (1992). They constitute parallel arenas “to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (ibid, 1992, p.123). Free from business considerations, both grassroots media and media produced by professional journalists working in the

alternative realm seek stories concerned with the view of ordinary people rather than what concerns the power elites. It is helpful to return here to what Atton (2015) states on the study of alternative media:

It shows how it is possible for those who are not part of formal media structures to participate in media discourses, to become reporter of their own realities, to become experts in their own social settings. Alternative media are not simply concerned with presenting a different version of the world; taken together, they offer multiple versions of the world. (Atton, 2015, p.1-2)

The result is a growing ecosystem of new active social actors, among amateur or trained journalists, offering an extended news agenda. Because alternative producers are concerned in telling stories that to an extent are hidden in the mainstream discourse, they naturally defy the consensus of what is news. Hence factors that influence journalist's actions in a daily basis within large media corporations, such as exclusivity, power elite sources, entertainment and drama (Harcup and O'Neill, 2017), are not the elements that define what is going to be published by alternative sites. Many interviewees confirmed the rejection of news values and news routines that prioritise standard stories. Feeling free from concerns such as breaking news, alternative producers seek to provide accounts that can be a force in its own right (Couldry and Curran, 2003). An argument can be made that this is particularly important in moments of political instability, such as the one faced by Brazil. When different media are focusing on the same type of stories during a particular news cycle, what we see is a picture of news homogeneity (Redden and Witschge, 2010).

Accordingly, some groups are more explicitly political than others, but overall it is discernible that their primary function is to extend the breath of counter-public

spheres that oppose dominant discourses, which constitutes a political act per se (Forde, 2011). While they have an intended bias in terms of progressive social purpose, alternative producers emphasise their autonomy to avoid becoming a tool for propaganda. “Autonomy” and “independence” were terms very often mentioned by those involved in alternative modes of journalism.

In the midst of growing political polarisation in Brazil, respondents rejected patronage from political parties as much as they rejected the influence of commercial forces and private interests. It does not mean a support to a supposedly neutral coverage, though. They attested an open emphasis on a progressive set of values, echoing Atton and Hamilton (2008). In that sense, alternative journalism is political for stating a clear ideological motivation, but is not always partisan, either to the right or to the left. More specifically, the discourse of alternative producers stressed not an open political commitment to certain campaigns; therefore many rejected the label of activists. Evidence suggests that their democratic purpose is more focused on giving voice to underrepresented communities or drawing attention to neglected news, thereby challenging the homogenised news landscape.

This discussion helped to revisit the ideal of objectivity. Alternative producers demystify the nature of objectivity as a synonym for impartiality. But most part of them claimed to be interested in balanced reporting, which embodies the ethical concepts of fairness and accuracy. For example, a group that focuses on investigating cases of abuses committed against workers (*Repórter Brasil*) has an ethical obligation to hear what corporations accused of irregularity have to say. However, it does not mean that the opposing viewpoints will be treated equally in the name of the

journalistic balance. This transparency in support of the voiceless remains a fundamental trait of the alternative discourse. One can easily argue that it can also be found in the ethos of traditional journalism, but as one of the interviewees who moved from a corporate newsroom to an alternative media reminded us, framing the news is a more complex process when there are advertisers, owners and shareholders involved.

The findings of this chapter, thus, corroborate the idea that there are crossovers between alternative and mainstream in a continuum practice of journalism (Harcup, 2005), which does not mean that alternative outlets do not maintain their distinctiveness in relation to a market driven approach.

8.1.2 Funding and organisational structures

The second empirical chapter (Chapter 6) addressed the dilemma of sustainability, which refers to RQ2: how are these alternative media projects seeking to overcome the lack of resources and funds? When questioned about their efforts to avoid the fate of short life cycle that have always marked alternative media in Brazil, producers highlighted that economic precariousness remains one of the main challenges to non-profit alternative journalism.

As discussed in Chapter 3, Brazil has a long history of radical publications, but political and economic pressures have prevented their long-term survival. Different studies on alternative media worldwide have touched on the point of their eternal financial precariousness (Atton and Hamilton, 2008; Fuchs, 2010; Forde, 2011;

Uzelman, 2012; Harcup, 2013). Accordingly, an emergent body of research focused on America Latina has discussed the region's economic and social particularities and how they affect alternative journalism (Requejo-Alemán and Lugo Ocando, 2014; Harlow, 2017; Salaverría et al., 2019). More specifically, this chapter sheds light on how Brazilian initiatives address the issue of sustainability and the consequent contradictions between commercial needs and ideological motivations.

According to the analysis, a significant level of voluntary work represents an obstacle to sustain long-term media projects. While the internet offers unprecedented opportunities for the expansion of alternative media, it has brought pressures that affect both not-for-profit and for-profit media. For example, how to ensure that the public will access your content in the midst of an ever-increasing volume of information circulating on social networks? This is, as Fuchs (2014) put it, a political-economic dilemma. On the one hand, alternative media are self-managed and challenge the power elite; but on the other, alternative outlets have to survive in a media landscape controlled by media monopolies (ibid, 2014). This chapter allowed further clarification of the models sought by non-profit outlets. This is a worthwhile aspect to reflect on particularly because one of the problems that led to the rapid demise of the alternative press born in the years of the military dictatorship was a total lack of financial planning (Kucinski, 1991).

Firstly, the producers acknowledged the dilemma of how to achieve financial stability if they are driven by a rejection of the commercialisation of the media industry. On the one hand, they celebrate new digital technologies as facilitators of media production and content sharing. As one of the interviewees put it: "Facebook

is our newsstand". On the other, they demonstrated an understanding that social media platforms are moving closer to the same commercial ideologies of the analogue era. Therefore, having access to digital technologies does not ensure an egalitarian media system. Interviews suggested an awareness of how the market works, as well as a desire to break up with the "alternative ghetto" (Comedia, 1984). Just as legacy media struggles to identify a long-term sustainable model in the digital age, independent digital native sites did not point to a single financial solution, neither deepened the debate on how to support alternative platforms to avoid oligopolies on social media. Nonetheless, they showed no intention of approaching news as a business. There is, in turn, what can be interpreted as a pragmatic shift towards favouring mixed forms of funding in clear rejection of the advertising and subscription-based model.

Drawing on examples from the UK, US, Australia and New Zealand, Kenix (2011) argues that alternative media that are commercially minded do not have the aim to make profit, but simply to preserve a continued existence. Thus, she points to a growing convergence between norms and routines in the alternative and the mainstream media spectrum since the goal of self-sustainability is mutual. Although this thesis has pointed out some level of convergence, it argues that media situated outside the corporate universe operate in a very distinct way.

Types of revenue streams adopted by alternative outlets include grants from international foundations; crowdfunding; tailored content for private companies or NGOs; special events or courses and a few public grants. The result is a rather fragmented and generally fragile sustainability system. Only groups receiving funds

from international institutions can make longer-term plans and afford paid staff. As this form of funding is only available to those who can present a more professionally oriented approach in terms of media management, it seems therefore necessary to distinguish between digital native outlets with a consolidated editorial structure and groups founded by producers with no entrepreneurial experience. Combined, they form a dynamic and still evolving media ecosystem that has potential to change public discourse (Salaverría and all, 2019). Nevertheless, there is still a long way to go before we could point out a consolidated formula against financial vulnerability.

This part of the research may sound pessimistic, but producers' discourse on sustainability was not limited to the amount of resources they are able to raise. Themes emerged from the interviews reinforce the value of alternative projects as arenas to challenge dominant discourses. Here I argue that alternative journalism in its various forms is an emergent player of the so-called era of post-industrial journalism (Anderson, Bell and Shirky, 2013). Participants do not interpret their role as passive subordinates of a highly commercialised media system. Rather they appear motivated to find mechanisms to stay active; avoid the rapid death of their publications and form a larger counter-public sphere, even if it is necessary, for example, to work in partnership with traditional media.

Examples of cooperation include occasional interactions during particular news coverage (eg. when violence in the *favelas* erupts, mainstream media use community media as hyperlocal sources), as well as more permanent forms of joint projects. Newspapers can distribute content in collaboration with investigative outlets, for instance. Alternative producers described these possibilities as a way to increase their

reach and influence, helping to multiply their messages across communities. Viewed in this light, narratives highlighted in this chapter assume not a merger between mainstream and alternative as Kenix (2011) argues, but a positioning that reflect a distancing from the “ghettoization” pointed out by Comedia (1984). What is at stake here is not the revolutionary ideal that shaped a large part of the alternative press of the times of the military dictatorship that embedded “contempt for administration, organization and commercialization”(Kucinski, 1991, p.13). By accepting interactions with the mainstream media, alternative journalists reinforce their aim to extend the reach of peripheral voices (Levy, 2018).

Another point that this chapter stressed is how alternative organisational structures are different from what is predominant in corporate media. An emphasis on anti-hierarchical routines is one of the strong elements of alternative media. Editorial decisions are taken collectively; there is much disagreement, as the respondents reported, and even if there are certain specific roles among team members, the horizontal character of the work is much valued, as opposed to the highly hierarchical structure of large newsrooms. This emphasis on horizontal decision-making process is not to suggest that in their everyday practices of publishing alternative producers do not need some level of authority. Even the Indymedia activists who idealized a participatory process radically different from traditional journalism had to face “the emergence of informal hierarchies” (Giraud, 2014, p.6). If we look at the examples cited here of investigative outlets, in fact the editorial processes are very similar to those of large media corporations. Running even a very small collective of citizen journalists without any interest in choosing a “chief-

manager” means that in the end of the process a final decision of what is going to be published needs to be made.

Nonetheless, the economic pressures faced by traditional news organisations have led to a broad range of discussions on new forms of media ownership. In Brazil this discussion is vital since the largest media groups are concentrated in the hands of few families. Therefore, following the trajectory of emerging non-profit outlets may point to new paths, not only in relation to the adopted business model but also in terms of horizontal organisational structures. These aspects have an influence on the type of content produced by alternative producers, which, as some argue, represent a reconceptualisation of civic journalism (Konieczna and Robinson, 2014).

8.1.3 Content analysis and journalistic norms

The last empirical chapter (Chapter 7) was based on qualitative content analysis of four case studies with varied degrees of diversion from traditional journalistic practices. The cases were purposively chosen (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003) because they all present a departure from what corporate news media do, albeit with very different aims and editorial identities. The main goal of this chapter was to validate some of the claims made by the interviewees in relation to the research questions.

The content analysis was added to reach a deeper understanding of the core elements of emergent forms of digital alternative journalism investigated here, the third research question (RQ3) being the main driver of this section: to what extent are alternative producers breaking journalistic boundaries and reconfiguring the epistemology of news?

The data analysed systematically during a particular period of time (August to September 2018) came from the following cases (a more detailed description of each of them can be found at Chapter 4):

1. *Agência Pública*: investigative outlet aimed at covering human rights;
2. *Amazônia Real*: investigative outlet focused on covering the Amazon region;
3. *Coletivo Papo Reto*: collective of citizen journalists based in one of Rio de Janeiro's largest *favelas*;
4. *Nós, Mulheres da Periferia*: collective aimed at covering women's realities from peripheral areas of São Paulo.

This research was strengthened by pointing out the differences and commonalities between these groups, whose approach is in accordance with many theoretical points discussed in Chapter 2. They challenge the way certain communities are represented in traditional media, expanding the debate on human rights, police violence, racism, sexism and economic abuse, among other issues stressed by the analysis. It would not be fair to claim that traditional media ignore these topics, but the way alternative media frame them is distinct. The analysis confirmed that alternative sites represent a multiplication of news sources, which tend to be more limited and often related to power structures in the mainstream.

For example, although it is quite conventional in terms of journalistic narrative, *Amazônia Real*, with its focus on the regional issues affecting the Amazon rainforest, provides a coverage that privileges the perspective of local populations, such as

indigenous tribes. Similarly, *Agência Pública* (AP), an award winning investigative outlet, contributes to a greater diversity of content by promoting mainly original stories on social issues. Even when it disseminates stories that have already been addressed by mainstream channels, the outlet tends to present them from a different point of view. AP invests in stories that are not usually approached in depth in commercial journalism, such as the brutality of the military police in a northern state far from Brazil's major industrial centres or the extreme poverty that affects not only isolated populations, but residents of the outskirts of São Paulo, the richest state in the country. This is not to say that this pluralism eliminates the appearance of elite sources in their content, such as official authorities and experts, as also observed by Atton and Wickenden (2016) in their investigation of sourcing routines in the UK activist newspaper SchNEWS.

Both *Agência Pública* and *Amazônia Real* were founded by women, more specifically trained journalists who claimed that their experience in alternative media was motivated by dissatisfaction with the way legacy media operate. These two examples of small-scale groups employing professional journalists contain an ideological critique to dominant ideas within society, but the outlets do not necessarily critique established practices of journalism. Financed mainly by international foundations, they help to portray a country that is not limited to the big urban centers, nor to what happens to the ruling classes. The journalism they practice is quite conventional on the one hand: data are checked, several sources are heard beyond official institutions, and the narrative follows the one of the long form reporting privileged by traditional magazines. On the other hand, however, there is nothing commercial in what they provide. Their news selection is not driven by

immediacy or by other factors that characterize the routine of major newsrooms, including surprise, dramas, and the involvement of celebrities or authorities (Harcup and O'Neill, 2017). This subversion of the news agenda is facilitated by their not-for-profit status.

The other two cases require differentiation for producing a content that is closer to the concept of community media. *Coletivo Papo Reto* (CPR) and *Nós, Mulheres da Periferia* (NMP) are maintained by volunteers, without a regular form of funding. They supply local news stories, but they also appropriate content from traditional media and reframe it to challenge media representations from their subordinated perspectives and to express opposition to power structures, relating to the radical alternative media as seen by Downing (2001). These “reporters of their own realities” (Atton, 2015) are more likely to replace the ideal of objectivity by overt advocacy (Atton, 2003; Meadows, 2013). It is not for nothing that CPR defines itself as “guerrilla media”. For example, this chapter has explored stories on police brutality in which facts were not separated from opinion. Accordingly, NMP disseminates personal narratives that emphasise the relationship between social inequality and racial and gender discrimination. The relevance of these two groups to the media landscape cannot be understood without taking into account the historical context of contemporary Brazil. As Rodríguez, Ferron and Shamas remind us “media repertoires do not happen in a social vacuum” (2014, p.155).

There are, therefore, differences between these alternative producers in regards to the challenge to conventional journalistic codes. This is consistent with the heterogeneous nature of alternative journalism (Atton and Hamilton, 2008)

highlighted since the beginning of this study. To conclude, this research acknowledges the value of a consistent coverage of Brazil's multiple realities by alternative media producers who are working under totally unfavourable financial conditions. They should not be dismissed because of their relatively small audiences in comparison to mainstream media. Neither they should be celebrated for providing a revolutionary vision of journalism. Rather, alternative journalism, in its many forms, should be acknowledged for its sustained effort to reconceptualise the notion of what is newsworthy. In confronting power, alternative journalists add diversity to the media landscape and express resistance to dominant narratives.

8.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This research has not drawn on the political polarisation that has been increasing in Brazil since the 2013 massive protests and which led to the impeachment of former left wing president Dilma Rousseff and, later, to the election of far-right politician Jair Bolsonaro. The political and economic crisis in Brazil is the background of this study, as explained in the Introduction. However, my intention was not to investigate digital networks under the direct light of the political turmoil. Rather, the focus was different forms of journalism that result from the critique of dominant practices of journalism, as suggested by Atton and Hamilton (2008). Because this research has privileged groups that were not pursuing the election of one candidate or another, it misses details on the partisan politics that is certainly a crucial debate in the country.

As we have seen globally, in recent years there has been a strengthening of the far-right alternative media to promote populist movements in a direct challenge to

journalistic authority (Figenschou and Ilhlebaek, 2018). Indeed, while the alternative media evaluated in this study struggle for social justice and for the multiplication of marginalised voices, far-right news providers also stand as opponents of the elite discourse and what they consider a left-wing biased mainstream media (ibid, 2018). Hence they should also be studied as part of the alternative media realm. Brazil too witnessed the same phenomenon, especially since the presidential elections of 2014, when right-wing movements became more radical and explored platforms such as Facebook to spread their conservative ideology (Brugnago and Chaia, 2014). This study did not engage with these groups, adopting instead the frame of independent sites, and not the explicitly partisan ones.

In addition, by choosing to analyse the emergence of different genres of alternative journalism, whether practiced by professionals or amateurs, this research does not intend to absorb the full details of the impact and ethical dimensions of each of these media. As a means of grasping the understanding of new forms of providing content relevant to their audiences outside large media corporations, the hybridisation of the media landscape is certainly an important aspect to discuss. Nonetheless, this broader approach may result in limitations. More focused research is required to debate the impact of specific communication channels discussed here, such as news shared by favela-based producers, grassroots media, feminist media or investigative outlets. In this case, an ethnographic method, which was not adopted for this study, could capture insights that are beyond the scope of this investigation.

To finalize the discussion about the limitations of this dissertation, as Brazil is a country of great size and strong regional differences, it would not be realistic to aim

for a complete picture of what is produced by alternative media. My hope is that the chosen sample present a coherent set of practices that can shed light on the emergent challenges to media power in a country that is going through a profound transformation.

8.3 DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The current political situation in Brazil, where the recently elected right-wing president Jair Bolsonaro professes nostalgia for the military regime, raises doubt about the future of democracy in the country. The conservative populist politician often criticizes established media organisations and relies on social media to express his divisive thoughts. This research came to an end before Bolsonaro completed six months of government. There is no doubt that the conservative wave that elected him represents new challenges for journalists in Brazil, whether they are inside or outside large newsrooms.

To begin with, during the presidential campaign, both mainstream and alternative media presented positive initiatives to avoid misinformation and disinformation, the spread of political propaganda “disguised” as facts represented a blow to those who defend the integrity of the news and the strengthening of journalism in the digital age. In the midst of an increasingly authoritarian and conservative political climate, spaces for minorities and communities that advocate diversity tend to shrink. So researchers must continue to follow the impact of this new political moment on alternative media and on the field of participatory communication in general.

One of the issues that can be raised is whether the populist discourse of the government changes the approach of alternative outlets that had no interest in covering the same type of news that mainstream media covers. With the increase of instability and political polarisation, it will not be sufficient to follow only the impact of the emergence of populism on traditional journalistic coverage. It will be imperative to devote academic studies to watch over the answers that alternative journalism will give and if it will transcend the inevitable news about what happens in Brasilia to focus on narratives that generally do not make headlines.

APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: The emergence of alternative media in Brazil

Lead researcher: Claudia Sarmento

- | | | |
|--|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| I have been given the Participation Information Sheet and/or had its contents explained to me. | Yes
<input type="checkbox"/> | No
<input type="checkbox"/> |
| I have had an opportunity to ask any questions and I am satisfied with the answers given. | Yes
<input type="checkbox"/> | No
<input type="checkbox"/> |
| I understand I have a right to withdraw from the research at any time and I do not have to provide a reason. | Yes
<input type="checkbox"/> | No
<input type="checkbox"/> |
| I understand that if I withdraw from the research any data included in the results will be removed if that is practicable (I understand that once anonymised data has been collated into other datasets it may not be possible to remove that data). | Yes
<input type="checkbox"/> | No
<input type="checkbox"/> |
| I would like to receive information relating to the results from this study. | Yes
<input type="checkbox"/> | No
<input type="checkbox"/> |
| I wish to receive a copy of this Consent form. | Yes
<input type="checkbox"/> | No
<input type="checkbox"/> |
| I confirm I am willing to be a participant in the above research study. | Yes
<input type="checkbox"/> | No
<input type="checkbox"/> |
| I note the data collected may be retained in an archive and I am happy for my data to be reused as part of future research activities. I note my data will be fully anonymised (if applicable). | Yes
<input type="checkbox"/> | No
<input type="checkbox"/> |

Participant's Name: _____

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

This consent form will be stored separately from any data you provide so that your responses remain anonymous.

I confirm I have provided a copy of the Participant Information Sheet approved by the Research Ethics Committee to the participant and fully explained its contents. I have given the participant an opportunity to ask questions, which have been answered.

Researcher's Name: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX B: INFORMATION SHEET

Digital alternative media in Brazil

Researcher(s): Claudia Sarmento

Supervisor: Dr. Mercedes Bunz

You are being invited to take part in a research study on alternative media in Brazil, which involves an investigation on the rise of new forms of media production with a focus on independent news providers. The aim of the research is to study how alternative media is allowing a more pluralistic news environment in Brazil.

This research is being undertaken as part of the researcher's studies for PhD programme at the Faculty of Media Arts and Design of Westminster University, in London.

The study will involve you:

- 1) Participating in an interview with me, about your participation or your views on alternative media. This will take about 1 hour and will be digitally recorded. The recording will be transcribed, translated and the audio recording retained as part of the research archive.

Please note:

- Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary.
- You have the right to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.
- You have the right to ask for your data to be withdrawn as long as this is practical, and for personal information to be destroyed.
- You do not have to answer particular questions either on questionnaires or in interviews if you do not wish to do so.
- Your responses will normally be made anonymous, unless you give consent to the contrary, and will be kept confidential unless you provide explicit consent to do otherwise.
- All computer data files will be encrypted and password protected. The researcher will keep files in a secure place and will comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act.
- All hard copy documents, e.g. consent forms, completed questionnaires, etc. will be kept securely and in a locked cupboard, wherever possible on University premises. Documents may be scanned and stored electronically. This may be done to enable secure transmission of data to the university's secure computer systems.
- The researcher can be contacted during and after participation by email 1580183@my.westminster.ac.uk or by telephone (+44 7 961486679).
- If you have a complaint about this research project you can contact the project supervisor, Dr. Mercedes Bunz by e-mail (m.bunz@westminster.ac.uk) or by telephone (+44 20 7911 5000 ext. 68347)

APPENDIX C: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Name of participant	Organisation	Date of the interview
Agostinho Vieira	Projeto Colabora	July 2016
Sofia Soter	Revista Capitolina	July 2016
Ana Paula Lisboa	Azmina	July 2016
Regina Eleuterio and Angelina Nunes	Mulheres 50+	July 2016
Maria Julia Wotzik	Meu Rio	August 2016
Anabela Paiva	Vozerio	April 2017
Dudu de Morro Agudo	Enraizados	April 2017
Tai Nalon	Aos Fatos	April 2017
Elaize Farias and Katia Brasil	Amazônia Real	July 2017
Carol Monteiro	Marco Zero	July 2017
Natalia Viana	Agência Pública	July 2017
Paula Fernandes	Uma Gota no Oceano	July 2017
Fausto Salvadori	Ponte Jornalismo	November 2017
Edu Carvalho	FaveladaRocinha.com	November 2017
Thainã de Medeiros	Coletivo Papo Reto	November 2017
Bruno Garcez	Agência Mural	December 2017
Semayat Oliveira	Nós, Mulheres da Periferia	January 2018
Ana Aranha	Repórter Brasil	February 2018

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