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ORGANIZING RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS: THE CONTRIBUTION OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE THEORY

Organizando movimentos de resistência: contribuição da teoria política do discurso

Organizando movimientos de resistencia: contribución de la teoría política del discurso

ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this paper is to explore the possibility of articulating Political Discourse Theory (PDT) together with Organizational Studies (OS), while using the opportunity to introduce PDT to those OS scholars who have not yet come across it. The bulk of this paper introduces the main concepts of PDT, discussing how they have been applied to concrete, empirical studies of resistance movements. In recent years, PDT has been increasingly appropriated by OS scholars to problematize and analyze resistances and other forms of social antagonisms within organizational settings, taking the relational and contingent aspects of struggles into consideration. While the paper supports the idea of a joint articulation of PDT and OS, it raises a number of critical questions of how PDT concepts have been empirically used to explain the organization of resistance movements. The paper sets out a research agenda for how both PDT and OS can together contribute to our understanding of new, emerging organizational forms of resistance movements.

KEYWORDS | Political Discourse Theory, Organization Studies, social movements, resistance, hegemony.

RESUMO

O principal objetivo deste artigo é explorar a possibilidade de articular a Teoria do Discurso Político (TDP) juntamente com os Estudos Organizacionais (EO), aproveitando a oportunidade de introduzir a TDP para pesquisadores dos EO que ainda não a conheçam a fundo. O grosso deste artigo envolve introduzir a TDP focando, ao mesmo tempo, em como ela tem sido usada em estudos empíricos concretos sobre movimentos de resistência. Nos últimos anos, a TDP tem sido cada vez mais usada e apropriada pelos acadêmicos de EO para problematizar e analisar resistências e outras formas de antagonismo social nos contextos organizacionais, levando em conta aspectos relacionais e contingenciais das lutas. Enquanto o artigo apoia a ideia desta articulação conjunta do PDT e OS, levanta uma série de questões críticas de como os conceitos PDT foram empiricamente usados para explicar a organização dos movimentos de resistência. Este trabalho estabelece uma agenda de pesquisa para saber como ambos, PDT e OS, podem contribuir para a nossa compreensão das novas formas de organização, emergentes dos movimentos de resistência.

PALAVRAS CHAVE | Teoria do Discurso Político, Estudos Organizacionais, movimentos sociais, resistência, hegemonia.

RESUMEN

El principal objetivo de este artículo es explorar la posibilidad de articular la Teoría del Discurso Político (TDP) junto con los Estudios Organizacionales (EO), aprovechando la oportunidad de introducir la TDP en investigadores de los EO que aún no la conocen a fondo. El grueso de este artículo involucra introducir la TDP focalizando, al mismo tiempo, en cómo ha sido usada en estudios empíricos concretos sobre movimientos de resistencia. En los últimos años, la TDP ha sido cada vez más usada y apropiada por los académicos de EO para problematizar y analizar resistencias y otras formas de antagonismo social en los contextos organizacionales, teniendo en cuenta aspectos relacionales y contingenciales de las luchas. Mientras el artículo apoya la idea de esta articulación conjunta del PDT y OS, crea una serie de cuestiones críticas de cómo los conceptos PDT fueron empíricamente usados para explicar la organización de los movimientos de resistencia. Este trabajo establece una agenda de investigación para saber cómo ambos, PDT y OS, pueden contribuir con nuestra comprensión de las nuevas formas de organización, emergentes de los movimientos de resistencia.

PALABRAS-CLAVE | Teoría del Discurso Político, Estudios Organizacionales, movimientos sociales, resistencia, hegemonía.

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INTRODUCTION

Recently, we have seen the Arab Spring mobilizations, large-scale protest movements in Spain and other parts of Europe, the Occupy Wall Street movement and its offshoots across the world. In Brazil, we have witnessed the mobilizations of homosexuals against homophobia, movements for the decriminalization of marijuana and, very recently, in 2013, the wave of discontent that erupted in Porto Alegre, São Paulo and many other big cities around the country. These recent protests started in response to the rise in public transport fares, but then quickly connected to other grievances, such as corruption and spiraling costs of the World Cup, unifying, almost precariously, different demands and social groups (Avritzer, 2013; Iglecias, 2013). The seemingly ephemeral nature of these mobilizations should not, however, be confused with an organizational void; as [Sassen \(2011\)](#) reports, “these and other occupations require work and strategy”, which connect a global political mode with local specificities.

While most organization scholars still focus on the study of organizational processes inside the formal boundaries of organizations and institutions ([Parker, 2002](#); [Böhm, 2006](#)), many now increasingly point to the need to expand the notion of organization, better understanding ‘organization’ as a basic social process ([Cooper & Burrell, 1988](#)). For us, and a growing number of organizational scholars, this broader understanding of organization includes the study of resistance movements ([Misoczky & Vecchio, 2006](#); [Misoczky, 2010](#); [Hoffmann, Silva, & Dellagnello, 2009](#); [Fontenelle, 2010](#); [Spicer & Böhm, 2007](#); [Böhm, Dinerstein, & Spicer, 2010](#)).

This paper discusses the possibilities and limits of a joint articulation of organization studies (OS) and, what has been called, political discourse theory (PDT), which is a body of literature that has been analyzing social resistance movements for some time. That is, in this paper we are interested in exploring the contribution PDT can potentially make to understand and analyze processes of organization in social resistance movements. We are hence interested in the possibilities of a dialogue between two academic disciplines, which hitherto have not often been articulated together.

Since the early writings of [Laclau and Mouffe \(1985\)](#), PDT has produced an extensive theoretical apparatus and, according to [Howarth and Stavrakakis \(2000\)](#), “issues of identity formation, the production of novel ideologies, the logics of social movements, the structuring of societies by a plurality of social imaginaries are central objects of investigation of discourse theory” (2000, p.2). In this sense, “political discourse theorists are not just concerned with the way in which social actors understand

their particular worlds, but attention is focused more on the creation, disruption and transformation of the structures that *organize social life*” (2000, p. 6, our emphasis). Emphasizing the production and process of the construction of political ideologies, PDT scholars therefore directly acknowledge the organizational complexities involved in forging hegemonic relations.

In recent years, PDT has received increasing attention from OS scholars, as the latter field has searched for non-essentialist and post-structural ways of understanding processes of organization and social identity formation. These studies have focused their debates on: resistance in the workplace ([Contu, 2008](#); [Contu, Palpacuer, & Balas, 2013](#); [Mumby, 2005](#); [Willmott, 2005](#)); PDT’s implications for organization theory ([Böhm, 2006](#)); organizational identity ([Brown and Coupland, 2005](#)), organizational change ([Spicer & Sewell, 2010](#)), learning in organizations and communities of practice ([Contu & Willmott, 2003](#); [Contu, Palpacuer & Balas, 2013](#)); entrepreneurship ([Jones & Spicer, 2005](#)); and the use of PDT for an understanding of organizational discourse and narrative analysis ([Mumby, 1997](#); [Boje, 1995](#); [Cederström & Spicer, 2013](#)). There is also a set of debates that focus on the relationship between Laclau and the psychoanalytic readings of Lacan ([Müller, 2013](#); [Fontenelle, 2010](#); [Böhm and Batta, 2010](#); [Contu, 2008](#); [Contu, Driver & Jones, 2010](#)).

The appropriation of PDT by OS scholars has allowed them to problematize and analyze resistance and other forms of social antagonisms in organizational settings, taking into consideration the relational and contingent aspects of these struggles, connecting them to different processes of organization and identify formation. While there have been many other post-structural conceptions of organization (for an overview, see, for example, [Jones & ten Bos, 2007](#)), it has particularly been the PDT approach that has allowed OS scholars to conceptualize organization as a broad process of power and politics, which is embedded in wider social antagonisms and struggles for hegemony ([Böhm, 2006](#)).

[Laclau and Mouffe’s \(1985\)](#) contribution has been invaluable in arguing for such a notion of hegemony, at the heart of which has been the broadening of the conception of politics beyond traditional economic categories. Their understanding of hegemonic politics maintains that antagonist frontiers emerge through a discursive struggle on the construction of symbolic orders, which can only be understood within specific historical and cultural contexts. It is important to note that, for Laclau and Mouffe, a discourse is never fixed or stable, as processes of contestation sustain and continuously change it. According to [Cederström and Spicer \(2013\)](#), discourses are also ‘real’, in the sense that they are not only texts and meanings, but also material practices, involving structural aspects.

As we will see, however, such a material understanding of organization is often not articulated in concrete, empirical applications of PDT. That is, when reading PDT empirical studies of resistance movements, the material aspects of organization are often under-analyzed. In our view, there is hence a need for jointly articulating PDT and OS.

To explore the possibilities of such a joint articulation, we have read and engaged with a number of empirical studies that explicitly have used a PDT framework. Specifically, we have engaged with a number of PDT publications by the ‘Essex-school’ – a range of studies produced by University of Essex-based scholars who have used and reframed the original works by Ernesto Laclau (Howarth, 1994, 1997, 2000; Griggs and Howarth, 2000, 2004, 2008) – as well as works produced by OS scholars (Böhm, Dinerstein & Spicer, 2010, Otto & Böhm, 2006, Levy, 2008, Levy & Scully, 2007, Fontenelle, 2010, van Bommel & Spicer, 2011; Contu, Palpacuer & Balas, 2013). We have read and analyzed these studies closely by identifying: (1) the main theoretical categories used; (2) the way these categories were applied to the empirical studies; (3) the main analytical outcomes that were put forward; and (4) the gaps or non-answered questions that we see in connection to the way resistance is organized in these empirical settings.

This paper then debates the limits and possibilities for an interdisciplinary dialogue between PDT and OS. As Jones (2006) rightly points out, however, such an articulation cannot be simply about incorporating the work of Laclau and other PDT writers into the disciplinary discourse of OS. Jones (2006) highlights a number of shortcomings of how PDT has been read in OS, and we see this paper as contributing to a project of critical reading of PDT and its articulation within OS.

This joint articulation can clearly be only a starting point. Many questions will remain unanswered and hence we have framed this paper as a research agenda. That is, we see this paper not as an end-point but, rather, as a starting point for the further exploration of discursive approaches to studying the organization of resistance movements and, specifically, the further articulation of PDT and OS.

POLITICAL DISCOURSE THEORY (PDT)

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) argue that their discourse theory challenges the class reductionism and economic determinism of classical Marxism. By radicalizing Gramsci’s and Althusser’s reworking of Marxist conceptions of politics and ideology and drawing upon post-structuralist critiques of language, the authors aim to deconstruct the Marxist ontology, introducing a re-

lational conception of discourse. In so doing, they argue that discourse theory conceives of society as a symbolic order in which social antagonisms and structural crises cannot be reduced to essential class cores determined by economic processes and relations (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000). In this sense, “discourse theorists are not just concerned with the way in which social actors understand their particular worlds, but attention is focused more on the creation, disruption and transformation of the structures that organize social life” (2000, p. 6). Discourse theorists also reject rationalist approaches to political analysis and instead stress the historical contingency and structural impossibility of social systems, refusing to posit essentialist conceptions of social agency. For Laclau and Mouffe, this impossibility or undecidability of society is structural (Laclau, 1995, p. 93.) This ‘structural undecidability’ of the social points to an understanding of structure as discourse, which, for Laclau and Mouffe (1985, pp. 109–11), highlights that society can never be fixed in an all-encompassing, centralized place. Instead, society should be seen as a social interaction that occurs within a discursive context.

There are a number of important concepts and categories of analysis that are central to political discourse theory, including: hegemony, antagonism, empty signifier, dislocation, identity, articulation, nodal points, and logics of equivalence and difference. We will briefly introduce them as they will be of importance later on in our discussion.

According to Laclau and Mouffe (1985), identity emerges from the articulation and re-articulation of signifying elements. This articulation can be seen as a practice that establishes a relationship among elements in such a way that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice. Discourse is thus considered the structured totality resulting from this articulatory practice. Nodal points in political discourse theory are privileged signifiers or reference points in a discourse that unites a particular system of meaning or ‘chain of signification.’ The articulation of a political discourse can therefore only take place around an empty signifier that functions as a nodal point. In other words, emptiness is “revealed as an essential quality of the nodal point, as an important condition of possibility for its hegemonic success” (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000, p. 9). Nodal points are those privileged signifiers or reference points through which the rest of the elements of a discourse acquire their meaning, even if this is a partial fixation. It is also important to consider that this partial fixation will always involve a political struggle. Discourses compete for the construction and stabilization of meaning by articulating as many elements as possible around certain privileged points. In this way, the resulting meaning will be always a ‘political’ fixation that will involve ‘winners’ and ‘losers’.

The construction and experience of social antagonisms are central to political discourse theory. Antagonisms are evidence of the frontiers of a social formation. What these antagonisms point to is an inherent fragility of social organization; it can only be something partial and precarious (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 125). This is why Laclau and Mouffe maintain: “Society never fully manages to be society, because everything in it is penetrated by its limits, which prevent it from constituting itself as an objective reality” (1985, p. 127). As Howarth and Stavrakakis (2000) express it, antagonisms show the points where identity is no longer fixed in a differential system but is contested by forces that stand outside or at the very limit of that order. Social antagonisms occur because social agents are unable to fully achieve their identity. Every antagonism exposes the limits of the movement’s discourse through the presence of other possibilities (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 125). In this sense, the task of the discourse analyst is to explore the different forms of this impossibility and the mechanisms by which the obstruction of identity is constructed by social agents in antagonistic terms. It is through the constitutions of antagonisms and the drawing up of political frontiers, by extending all social and political identities, that the production of discursive formations may take place.

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) introduce the concept of the ‘logic of equivalence’ in order to theorize the idea that an identity cannot be integrated into an existing system of differences. The logic of equivalence functions by creating equivalent identities that express a negation of a discursive system. In Howarth and Stavrakakis’ words, “it functions by splitting a system of differences and instituting a political frontier between two opposed camps” (2000, p. 11). Equivalence operates by dissolving the differential character of identities within a system and by creating a negative identity that is perceived as threatening them. “If the logic of equivalence functions by splitting a system of differences and instituting a political frontier between two opposed camps, the logic of difference does exactly the opposite. It consists in the expansion of a given system of differences by dissolving existing chains of equivalence and incorporating those disarticulated elements into an expanding order” (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000, p.1). The category of dislocation refers to the process by which the contingency of discursive structures is made visible. According to Laclau and Mouffe (1985), on the one hand, dislocation events threaten identities, while on the other hand, they are the foundation on which new identities are constituted. In other words, if dislocations disturb identities and discourses they also create a lack at the level of meaning that stimulates new discursive constructions, which attempt to ‘fix’ the dislocated structure. In short, it is the failure

of the structure – and, as we have seen, of those subject positions that are part of such a structure – that compels the subject to act, to assert anew its subjectivity (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000, p.13).

PDT and the way it has been received in OS have not been without criticism. First, one should note that within the Marxist tradition, there has been a long-running debate about Laclau’s and PDT’s particular reading of Marx as well as other Marxist writers, such as Gramsci and Althusser. Geras (1990), for example, put forward an early critique of Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) influential book, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, arguing, amongst other points, that Laclau and Mouffe’s post-Marxism has neglected the material realities of social struggle, as they refuse to make a distinction between the discursive and non-discursive fields of reality.

In addition, there has been a long running, and sometimes heated, debate between Laclau (e.g. 2006) and Žižek (e.g. 2006). Žižek has argued that Laclau’s conceptions of the subject and the category of antagonism is too fixed, not taking Lacanian psychoanalysis enough into account. While there is not enough space to engage with this exchange in detail, it is important to point out that Laclau’s work has not been unchallenged.

We will come back to some of these critiques of Laclau and PDT in our discussion and conclusion sections below, but for the moment it is important to reiterate Jones’ (2006) critique of the reception of Laclau in OS, which, according to him, has failed to critically engage with PDT. Jones (2006) calls on OS scholars to read Laclau in a more nuanced and critical way, acknowledging the difficulties of simply merging PDT into the ontological and epistemological traditions of OS. He warns of the danger of introducing Laclau into OS uncritically, without acknowledging Laclau’s particular readings, or perhaps misreadings, of the Marxist tradition.

While it is not the purpose of this paper to provide a full, theoretical critique of Laclau’s work and the oeuvre of PDT, we nevertheless think it is important to bear in mind the possible limitations of incorporating Laclau into OS. Given our main objective of this paper – to assess the contribution PDT can make for the empirical study of resistance movements – let us now discuss a range of empirical studies that have used PDT concepts in the analysis of social movement struggles.

EMPIRICAL STUDIES USING PDT

Laclau’s *oeuvre* is notoriously abstract and somewhat removed from the realities of social movements and their concrete resistance struggles against hegemonic orders. It has therefore been

down to his successors at Essex to apply PDT's theoretical constructs to the analysis of specific political events and empirical moments.

Resistance against UK airport expansion

In a significant and longstanding empirical research project, Griggs and Howarth, for example, have analyzed resistance movements against airport expansion in the UK. In their paper 'New environmental movements and direct action protest: The campaign against Manchester Airport's second runway', the authors (2000) argue that, for the first time in Britain, two very different groups came together to fight a common struggle: on the one hand, fairly conservative local residents, and, on the other, more radical, direct action, pro-environment protesters.

The anti-airport expansion campaign began on July 29, 1997, when Manchester Airport announced plans to build a second runway, and then continued in three phases. The first phase occurred when KAMJAG (Knutsford and Mobberley Joint Action Group) and MAJAC (an umbrella organization – Manchester Airport Joint Action Group) took the lead in the public consultation, preparing local residents' submissions to the public inquiry. The second phase started with the public inquiry in June 1994 and lasted until January 1997, when the inspector decided in favor of the new runway. The third phase was then initiated with the final campaign of direct action, when green activists established camps on the proposed construction site less than ten days after the pro-runway decision.

In the article 'A transformative political campaign? The new rhetoric of protest against airport expansion in the UK', Griggs and Howarth (2004) are interested in explaining how and why, in the face of persistent defeats, the anti-airport expansion movement continued to renew itself in this precise ideological and organizational form. They therefore present an analysis of HACAN (Heathrow Association for control of Aircraft Noise) ClearSkies, a local airport protest group that has challenged the dominant ideology governing British aviation policy by articulating a new rhetoric of environmental protest.

According to the authors, one can discern two basic periods in the organization's activities: a first phase in which the group adopted the strategies and tactics associated with a typical NIMBY organization, consonant with its members' identities and interests; and a second, qualitatively different, stage in which there was an attempt to construct a broad-based 'anti-airport expansion' coalition built around the signifier 'demand management'. For Griggs and Howarth (2004), this case manifests the emergence of a transformative campaign strategy that extends the particular struggles of HACAN ClearSkies, in

attempting to halt the expansion of Heathrow Airport, to a more universal struggle aimed at countering airport expansion in the Southeast of England and across the UK and Europe.

In 'Populism, Localism and Environmental Politics: The Logic and Rhetoric of the Stop Stansted Expansion Campaign', Griggs and Howarth (2008) explore the different ways in which physical planning issues become sites of political struggle and negotiation. The paper is specifically concerned with the relationship between what is called the paradox of political engagement, which emanates from a tension between particularity and universality in political campaigning. The struggle they analyze emerged in 2002 in response to New Labour government's consultation exercise to determine the future of aviation in the UK. Their analysis focuses on the publicly articulated discourse, especially the rhetorical strategy, employed by the Stop Stansted Expansion (SSE) leadership in its campaign statements and documents. Building particularly on Laclau's work (2005a, 2005b) on populism, they develop a grammar of concepts and logics with which to understand the dynamics of political mobilization and their relationships with specific policy outcomes. The paper examines the difficulties of constructing a populist form of politics in order to advance environmental demands and interests.

In recent years, PDT has received increasing attention from OS scholars. We highlight here what we think to be three representative OS publications that have used PDT for the analysis of social resistance movements.

The Slow Food movement

In van Bommel and Spicer (2011), PDT is used to explain the emergence and expansion of new fields, looking at the case of the Slow Food movement in Europe, which was founded in Italy in 1989 as a resistance against the hegemony of the fast food culture and economy. Its activities are focused on defending diversity in food supply, connecting producers through a range of events and initiatives and providing culinary education for the general public, following the premises of local *convivial* and slowness, artisanal forms of gastronomy and the defense of local/traditional values.

For the authors, this movement challenges an existing hegemony in ways that cannot be explained using traditional social movement theories, such as resource mobilization, political opportunities and frames analysis. PDT, they argue, helps to understand how new social movement actors are mobilized, and how this expansion leads to a transformation of the collective language and identity. Methodologically, such PDT approach needs to understand how social movements expand their tradition-

al actors and supporter base by forging new links, sometimes to groups with opposing political and ideological identities.

Van Bommel and Spicer (2011) track the emergence and expansion of the Slow Food movement in Europe, drawing on a 10 year study of articles that appeared in UK newspapers. The authors use two main PDT concepts to analyze their data: floating signifiers and the articulation of nodal points. Floating signifiers are words overflowed with meaning that can be articulated in different ways in different discourses. The process of articulation produces nodal points, or empty signifiers, capable to fix the meaning of several floating signifiers. The articulation of nodal points creates chains of equivalence integrating different demands from potentially antagonistic actors.

The main floating signifiers found were: taste, artisanal, local/traditional, slowness/pleasure/conviviality. The movement was decentralized into a number of local groups and *convivial* centers or chapters, which have spread beyond Italy to other European countries. Since 2000, a change has taken place in the movement's strategy whereby it has started to connect up with other issues beyond gastronomy, new floating signifiers appeared: biodiversity, social justice, and sustainability. In a shift away from a gastronomic movement, it has begun to be regarded as an eco-gastronomic movement and Slow Food has become an umbrella organization. The *convivium* initiatives and informal political activities remain, but have gained global reach. In 2010, the *convivial* groups had already extended into more than 150 countries, with more than 100,000 members, and new specialist organizations had emerged. In this way, PDT has helped the authors to explain the expansion of the movement beyond its traditional core identity, now incorporating a significantly larger base and new signifiers.

Resistance against MNC's plant shutdowns

In a recent paper, Contu, Palpacuer, & Balas (2013) analyze the resistance against organizational restructuring and plant shutdowns by Multinational Corporations (MNCs) in the South of France, examining the cases of IBM in Montpellier and Nestlé in St. Menet, Marseille. The authors aim to understand concretely the role of different stakeholders in the process of articulating the resistance against the plant shutdowns.

First, they traced the history of practices and discourses of MNCs within the French context. They then identified organizational and cultural, symbolic and ideological forces influencing the process. For the authors, PDT's contribution to the study was to link different levels of analysis and chains of signification, particularly showing *how* actors engage in organizing so-

cial antagonism and *how* the unity of social formation is maintained and contested.

The IBM case highlighted resistance strategies that articulated chains of difference against the drastic layoff policies. The struggle was set up as a traditional industrial relation conflict, focusing on legal requirements. Unions did not question the layoffs per se, but argued for more transparency in the process. IBM used more flexible forms to implement its policy, such as retirement programs, compulsory transfers and subcontracting. The resistance strategy did not go far beyond the walls of the IBM plant, not being able to make broader connections.

In contrast, the Nestlé employees were able to set up a coalition around the signifier 'no closure'. They used legal processes, but also went beyond union politics and the plant walls, articulating more universal demands, such as the right to work and the right for a better future. Two main processes were involved: 1) the mobilization of different social groups, raising awareness, sympathy and active support for the struggle; and 2) pluralization and diversification of actions and demands, making broader connections with republican French values and the resistance against the efficiency discourse articulated by MNCs.

These cases show how resistance movements are able or not able to articulate different actors' interests and identities, forging them into chains of equivalence and setting up a frontier. The paper is able to show how these chains were articulated by different actors who went beyond their established identities, connecting to broader political discourses.

The 'water war' in Bolivia

Otto and Böhm (2006) analyze the organization process of the 'water war' in Cochabamba, Bolivia. The authors use PDT to analyze the organization of resistance to the country's privatization of water. The resistance movement was established through various horizontal and vertical methods of organization that managed to unify discourse around the issue of water in that location. The movement passed through three moments. The first immediately followed the 1985 imposition of a range of structural adjustment programs in the country. The second moment was in 1994, when a political platform, called the *Plan de Todos*, was launched, aimed at extending the previous period's reforms and initiating an intense privatization process. This resulted in severe social fragmentation and the weakening of several traditional resistance organizations, such as unions. In 1999 the third moment took place, with the privatization of SEMPA, the Cochabamba water company, which was acquired by an international consortium that immediately initiated a process of tariff increases, justified by international practices.

Bolivia has always experienced conflicts about water and these now started to intensify. Farmer and urban consumer organizations (together with environmentalists) united against a tariff increase of more than 35%. The group managed to mobilize other organizations that did not, in principle, have agendas aligned to the issue of water, such as *Fabriles*, an established NGO linked to the defense of decent working conditions. This coalition of organizations set up the *Coordinadora* (*Coordinadora de Defensa del Agua y de La Vida*), which had an agenda related to two highly specific points: to cancel the concession contract and to modify the legislation that allowed such a contract to be drawn up. The *Coordinadora's* practices involved traditional forms of organization, such as assemblies and other forums for direct coordination and legal action, with protests and other informal mobilizations open to whoever wished to join them, as well as open meetings in squares, graffiti, demonstrations at popular festivals and other symbolic activities, such as burning water bills. This combination of vertical and horizontal forms of organization included frequent inclusions and exclusions.

This case shows again that, according to PDT, it is important for resistance movements to create hegemonic frontiers: the 'us' versus 'them'. This particular resistance movement was successful as it was able to temporarily unify a range of competing discourses around, what can be called, the empty signifier 'water'.

A PDT ANALYSIS OF THE CASES: IMPORTANT DIMENSIONS OF RESISTANCE

Having introduced a range of empirical cases that have used PDT to analyze resistance movements, let us now turn to a more detailed discussion of the main categories and concepts used by authors. In this section, we will focus on discussing three key PDT concepts, which we briefly introduced above: dislocation, identity, and chains of equivalence:

Dislocation

As outlined above, dislocation can be considered a key concept in PDT, naming events or crises that cannot be represented within an established discourse. Dislocation functions to disrupt and disestablish discursive orders. This is a central notion for an understanding of the emergence of movements or moments of change in their discourse and practices.

In the case of Manchester Airport's second runway, *Griggs and Howarth (2000)* discuss two dislocation moments: the first occurred in 1991 with the announcement of the building of the second runway; the second, probably more important, dislocation moment happened in 1997 when the inspector decided in favor of the new runway. As the authors put it, with the second 'disappointment', the campaign shifted away from the traditional lobbying politics of local residents to the language of technical expertise and knowledge required by the public inquiry. But "it was the failure of the Inquiry to endorse the claims of local residents that finally dislocated the group identity of local residents and initiated the final campaign of direct action" (*Griggs & Howarth, 2000, p.56*).

In the case of the Slow Food movement (*van Bommel & Spicer, 2011*), one can also observe two dislocation moments: the first was the reaction of gourmet and other food producers against the fast food culture emerging in Europe; the other moment occurred when the movement realized that it had to expand its political activities, challenging, for example, a planned ban on the use of non-pasteurized milk, the basis of many traditional cheeses. The dislocation moment of Bolivia's movement for water justice (*Otto & Böhm, 2006*) occurred at three most significant moments: the structural reforms of 1985, the launch of the government's new political platform in 1994 and, finally, the privatization of SEMPA.

What is interesting in Contu, *Palpacuer, & Balas's (2013)* paper is that the announcements of the closures of the two MNC plants could be seen as the moments of dislocation. However, in the IBM case, this disruption was not a real moment of politics, in the PDT sense, as the unions dealt with the plant closure in non-confrontational ways. That is, the established discursive field was not challenged, and hence a moment of dislocation did not take place. In contrast, in the Nestlé case, the established political field was disrupted by way of connecting disparate actors to unite the 'no closure' demand. A real dislocation hence took place, challenging the orthodoxy of 'politics'.

In each of these cases we can see that an important event, or a series of events or moments, was needed to dislocate existing discursive orders. According to PDT, without such a dislocation, no politics can take place and no new social movement can emerge. Hence, it is crucial to be able to locate and engender such moments of dislocation, theoretically and practically.

Identity

The concept of *identity* and its role in building, an at least temporary, cohesion amongst disparate social movement actors

and groups, thus creating conditions for a strong counter-hegemonic bloc, is emphasized in many of the empirical papers we have discussed.

In the airport case, [Griggs and Howarth \(2000\)](#) very clearly identify as a key issue the exogenous and endogenous identity of both groups involved in the campaign. According to them, local residents had an exogenously defined identity, insofar as they were all affected by disruption, pollution, concerns about their community's quality of life, and the lack of consultation engendered by the new construction project. For them, this identity facilitated the group leaders' initial tasks to mobilize local support, since organizers and political entrepreneurs from the potential groups could target their campaign at those most directly affected by the airport's decision.

In contrast, the 'green', direct action, activists had an endogenous group identity, which meant that their collective action problems had to be overcome by soft incentives, such as expressive and participatory benefits. The reproduction of their identity required constant campaigning and the production of 'enemies' to reinforce their militant values and lifestyle. In this sense, the building of the second runway enabled direct action protesters to reproduce and reconstruct this identity through new protests.

Crucially, though, these two disparate identities were forged together during the anti-airport expansion campaign. Both eco-warriors and local residents were presented as equally threatening to the airport and its interests, creating a degree of identity between the two groups. They were perceived by pro-airport spokespeople as 'anti-airport' and 'anti-progress', which labeled them as enemies.

The endogenous identity of the Slow Food movement ([van Bommel & Spicer, 2011](#)) was described by its founders in the manifesto, in which the movement defines its objectives as the protection of regional and artisan food, the traditions related to the production and preparation of food and the pleasure and entertainment these provide. The exogenous identity emerged when new coalitions were made to include issues of social justice, biodiversity and sustainability. Discursively, new 'floating signifiers' have been added, leading to the attainment of articulatory processes with a range of other issues that went far beyond the original identity of the movement. This strategy deliberately separated the nodal points, making them ambiguous, allowing a large number of 'floating signifiers' to connect to them. According to [van Bommel and Spicer \(2011\)](#), this discursive expansion may have contributed to a weakening of the identity of the movement as a whole.

The way existing identities are dislocated and new identities are forged through the political process becomes also visible in the cases discussed by Contu, [Palpacuer & Balas \(2013\)](#)

and [Otto and Böhm \(2006\)](#). The workers in Marseille, for example, were able to connect their contemporary struggle with the anti-Nazi struggle during the Second World War, when workers had run local industrial production for a period after the owners, having collaborated with the Nazis, fled the country in 1944. In Bolivia, a range of different actors – workers, peasant farmers, environmentalists, amongst others – were able to unite behind a single demand, transforming their identities in the process.

Chains of equivalence

According to [Howarth and Stravarakakis \(2000\)](#), the logic of equivalence functions by creating equivalential identities that express a clear negation of a discourse system. It functions by splitting a system of differences and instituting a political frontier between two opposed camps. In this sense, it is possible to recognize the importance of social networks or coalitions described in the articles.

In the airport cases analyzed by [Griggs and Howarth \(2000, 2004\)](#), the variety of links between local residents, green activists, the media, local authorities and other groups were highlighted. In the Manchester Airport case ([Griggs & Howarth, 2000](#)), the leaders of local associations were instrumental in the formation of the umbrella organization that represented all ten local villages at the public inquiry. Local councilors and prominent members of the village communities were able to call upon the support not only of politicians and local authorities, but also of professionals who committed substantial expertise and resources to the campaign. Similarly, the green activists were rapidly bringing together different cultures and strategies of "Manchester Friends of the Earth and the environmental activities of Earth First, the Green Party and Manchester Wildlife, as well as the Manchester Airport environment Network" ([Griggs & Howarth, 2000, p. 59](#)).

A major chain of equivalence was established in 2002 when Airport Watch was launched to bring together a wide-ranging coalition to act as a counter-balance to the pro-airport lobby. According to Griggs and Howarth, this new coalition was initiated by the new leader of HACAN ClearSkies who saw the strategic potential and need to opposing airport expansion across the UK, bringing together local airport protest groups with national environmental and conservation lobbies, such as the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England, Friends of the Earth, Transport 2000 and many other important organizations in the field.

In the Bolivia case ([Otto & Böhm, 2006](#)), groups and organizations that joined together in the *Coordinadora* coalition came from different social sectors, with different economic conditions and with relatively few points in common prior to the 'water war'. What had previously represented different demands

made by different groups (mainly city dwellers and rural irrigation farmers) became a common demand, at the same time as it represented a source of identification for all. 'Water' became an empty signifier that expressed a range of frustrations with the long past of colonial exploitation, marginalization, and poverty. These discursive constructions included different formal, centralized but also de-centralized organizational processes.

In the Slow Food case (van Bommel & Spicer, 2011), we can see how the local *convivia* chapters have enabled the movement to bring a range of different actors together that oppose the fast food culture and economy. More recently, it has engaged in discursive alliances with powerful political actors, such as the UN. Similarly, in the MNC shutdown case, Contu, Palpacuer & Balas (2013) show how a range of disparate actors, from civil society, local and regional government and political parties, connected their particular values to oppose the discourse of MNCs in pursuing profit maximization.

Overall, we can see how the PDT categories – dislocation, identity construction and chains of equivalence – work together to analyze and explain the emergence and maintenance of resistance movements. While we think such PDT empirical analyses have been very useful and helped to bring Laclau's often abstract theoretical constructs 'to life', testing them in concrete political moments, there are, in our view, a range of shortcomings with these analyses and open questions, which we highlight and discuss in the next section.

The organization of resistance: Open questions and a possible research agenda

PDT has been usefully utilized in empirical analyses of resistance movements, providing analytical tools in order to understand their organizational processes, demonstrating how hegemonic discourses are discursively contested and what their impacts are on organizational processes. However, we see important gaps in the organizational analyses of the empirical cases we discussed above. Let us discuss three key organizational issues – leadership, resources, communication and decision making – that we see under-represented and even misunderstood by existing PDT analyses of resistance movements. As there is limited space to engage with the OS literatures in any detail, we see the following points as a starting point of a research agenda that we hope other PDT and OS researchers will take up and develop further.

Leadership

Many of the cases discussed above highlight the role of leaders and political entrepreneurs who were identified during dislocation moments in order to build new identities and equivalential

chains between antagonistic groups. In the Manchester Airport case (Griggs & Howarth, 2000), local political entrepreneurs were considered important policy negotiators and had central roles throughout the campaign of direct action, as they provided logistical support from Manchester Friends of the Earth's office and were a focal point for dealing with press inquiries, holding meetings and coordinating responses to the actions of the pro-airport lobby. The emergence of Airport Watch was attributed to an important leader who is portrayed by Griggs and Howarth (2000) to almost single-handedly change the direction of anti-airport expansion resistance in the UK. The Slow Food movement also relied on its most visible leader, the Italian journalist Carlo Petrini (van Bommel & Spicer, 2011).

In our view, there is a mismatch between the post-structural framework of PDT and the quite traditional understandings of leadership used in these analyses. In OS, there have recently been a number of critical engagements with leadership, which has often been focused on specific individual characteristics and traits, which can, for example, be mobilized to organize work more efficiently or to reduce resistance in the workplace. Collinson (2005, 2006), for example, points to the need to end the analytical separation between leaders and followers, which privileges the first. Instead, a truly relational perspective is needed that studies leadership as a dialectical phenomenon. Social movement scholars (Barker, Johnson & Lavalette 2001) show that leadership is often an informal process, which includes peripheral leaders – those individuals that do not occupy formal central positions but exert influence as 'backdoor strategists'. The study by Sutherland, Land, & Böhm (2013) shows how social movement leadership should be understood as a relational, socially constructed phenomenon.

Leadership is an important dimension in our understanding of movement dynamics. Yet, the PDT analyses discussed above do not seem to take this organizational category seriously, using fairly conventional, perhaps outdated, conceptions of leadership, which have been challenged in the OS literature. For us, it thus seems logical and urgent to problematize this category in a more direct fashion, developing appropriate post-structuralist conceptions of leadership that should be incorporated into the PDT framework of analysis.

Resources

Funding and other resources are also often neglected by PDT analyses of resistance movements. Van Bommel and Spicer (2011) suggest in some ways that when movement organizations receive large amounts of funding this may influence their further development. Yet, while they do mention the resource mo-

bilization view of social movement analysis (McCarthy & Zald, 1987; Canel, 1992; Morris, 1984) in their paper, what they do not achieve is the integration of the PDT with such a resource perspective. That is, Van Bommel and Spicer (2011) point out the tensions funding can bring to the movement's autonomy, yet they do not tackle directly the question of how the Slow Food movement's resource base might influence their political and organizational actions.

There is a literature that suggests how resource dependency can lead to de-legitimation, co-optation, professionalization and bureaucratization, with negative effects for movements' capacity for social change (Petras, 1997; Pearce, 1997). We suggest that this can usefully be incorporated into a PDT analysis of social movements. In addition, one can note that many resistance campaigns – particularly those using non-hierarchical, informal methods – often rely extensively on voluntary work (Böhm, Dinerstein & Spicer, 2010). Again, this is a terrain where OS should be able to contribute usefully to PDT. Issues of work organization as well as organizational forms and structures appear to be discussed very vaguely, if at all, in the cases introduced above. From an organizational perspective we ask ourselves how these resistance activities, as part of formal or informal work processes, were organized. We suggest that OS scholars in work sociology (e.g. Glucksmann, 2005) and labor process analysis (e.g. Warhurst & Nickson, 2007) could provide useful insights.

Here we should note that organizational scholars have, for a long time, been producing analyses of labor relations and resistance in the workplace, although they have often concentrated their studies on more or less formal forms of opposition (Spicer & Böhm, 2007). In recent years, however, an increasing amount of attention has been paid to more subtle forms of subversion, looking at cynicism, foot-dragging, disidentification and alternative articulations of selfhood, drawing particularly on Marxist and neo-Foucauldian approaches (Fleming & Spicer, 2008). Such analyses could usefully be applied to the study of resistance movements, uncovering their internal struggles and making visible the heterogeneities of their constitution. We hence suggest that PDT can learn from labor process studies in understanding the work involved in organizing social movements.

Communication

In order to establish chains of equivalences amongst disparate actors, communication plays a key role. We could say that without communication there is no identity construction. Yet, it is often difficult to identify the modes and processes of internal

and external communication within the empirical cases we analyzed. Some authors say that the media plays an important role in the resistance campaigns they looked at, but we learn almost nothing about the way contacts with the media took place. For example, in the anti-airport expansion case, who made decisions about involvement with the mainstream media? Given that many direct action campaigners are very weary of using the mainstream and corporate media, how was a consensus reached on this issue?

Whenever we talk about the national or even international media, there are power issues involved, which, in our view, are important to discuss if we want to understand the success or failure of a resistance movement. Communication processes are often conceived in OS as expressions of democracy that compete in the marketplace of ideas (Mumby, 1997). Communication is thus analyzed in terms of its effectiveness in the achievement of organizational goals, or as a neutral means for maintaining or increasing established political relations. This is often dependent on clear boundaries drawn up around organizational boundaries, which stand in stark contrast to the discursive networks that are of key importance to PDT. However, more critical, post-structuralist approaches to understanding organizational communication have emerged in recent years, emphasizing the relations of power and resistance in changing organizational landscapes (Holtzhausen & Voto, 2002; Spicer & Sewell, 2010). That is, through the ongoing communicative activities by their members, organizations produce structures of meaning mediated by power relationships. Mumby (2001) presents several studies that address the meaning, identity and power produced, maintained and reproduced through ongoing communicative practices, which take different forms: stories; metaphors; corporate advertisements; public announcements; conversational interaction; work songs; humor; and organizational texts. We think that such organizational communication studies might add a significant dimension to PDT's understanding of resistance movements.

Decision making

Amongst the organizational practices and issues we have highlighted so far, decision making is perhaps the most important process about which the cases do not deliver much insight. It is clear that many decisions were made in each movement and struggle, but we do not have any information about the dynamics, controversies or even spatial arrangements that were involved in reaching these decisions. In the anti-airport expansion case, for example, how was the decision made to enter into a campaign of

direct action that involved not only the ‘eco-warriors’ but also ‘respectable’ citizens? What, for example, were the struggles that took place during the meetings? Or in the MNC shutdown case, how exactly did the decision emerge to connect to a broader set of values and groups, challenging existing workers and union identities? The Bolivian water case (Otto & Böhm, 2006) was the only one which tracked these issues directly, showing how decisions were made at the different levels up to the *cabildos abiertos*. But even in this case, we do not learn enough detail about the struggles involved in specific decision making processes.

As already discussed above, the role leadership played in the various cases is often reaffirmed by the authors, but it is often unclear how people participated in any decisions made by those leaders. Given that many groups involved in these struggles are grassroots movements, were they not concerned to implement a consensus decision making process? And if so, why did the authors emphasize again and again the ‘magical’ role of leaders without showing the struggles involved in making complex organizational decisions? Recent publications by Haug (2013) and Sutherland, Land & Böhm (2013) give us some glimpses of how collective decision making processes develop and affect other organizational aspects, such as leadership.

OS scholars could usefully complement a PDT perspective by shedding light on questions concerning participation and representation, as well as the governance structures that support decision making processes. In addition, we suggest that the rational, non-rational and ethical dimensions of decisions, as highlighted by Clegg, Kornberger & Rhodes (2007), need to be problematized by PDT. By not discussing decision making in any great detail, PDT runs the risk of relying on models that imply the notion of a self-contained subject capable of taking independent action in the world. As Clegg, Kornberger & Rhodes (2007) show, decisions are made through a subjective relationship of I-Other, implying an act of identification, rather than that of someone being a conscious chooser.

CONCLUSIONS

According to Laclau (2000), PDT is an alternative approach to an understanding of the structuration of socio-political spaces by articulating a new conception of discourse and elaborating a theory of hegemony as the main framework of political analysis. In this sense, it is important to understand how different discursive formations and the identities produced by them emerge and how they become hegemonic. For us, this question of how hegemony is established, maintained and resisted cannot be answered without examining the organizational dimension.

In our view, all of the empirical cases we have looked at provide a very insightful and interesting account of the emergence and functioning of resistance movements in different political, social, economic and cultural contexts. In this sense, we agree with the authors of these cases that PDT offers a very useful theoretical and methodological perspective in order to understand social resistance failures and successes.

The main PDT categories we have discussed – dislocation, identity and chains of equivalence – are of great explanatory value for OS scholars, which is manifested by the fact that we see an increasing number of empirical studies of resistance movements using the PDT framework in OS. We suggest there are many other possibilities for fruitful applications of PDT in OS, in order to better understand hegemonic struggles within organizational settings.

However, we have emphasized throughout this paper that what is needed is a joint articulation of OS and PDT, not an importation or appropriation of PDT by OS scholars. In line with Jones’ (2006) argument, we have outlined a number of limitations of the way PDT has been read and used in OS. We hope that the research agenda we have discussed in this paper will enable OS and PDT scholars to critically engage with each other’s fields, challenging existing ontological and epistemological assumptions. In particular, we have highlighted open questions about how the resistance groups studied in the papers we examined make decisions, how they are lead, how they are funded, how they organize internal and external communications and what their internal power struggles might be. For us, these questions points to a need for a more in-depth understanding of how these groups and organizations function, or, more precisely, how they often do not function ‘properly’ when they fail to achieve their campaign goals.

We realize that this can only be a starting point for the joint articulation of PDT and OS. Due to space restrictions in this paper, we have not been able to discuss a number of literatures in more detail. For example, we suggest that our argument needs to be much closer linked to existing social movement and OS literatures. While we have outlined a research agenda of how OS can contribute more directly to PDT – by studying organizational processes of leadership, resource allocation, communication, and decision making – we realize that there might be other organizational issues that might be equally of importance.

Another open issue that we invite researchers to explore in more detail has to do with the way PDT links to other discursive approaches in OS and other related fields. For example, critical discourse analysis, championed for example by Fairclough and Fairclough (2012), needs to be contrasted with the PDT framework, outlining their convergences and differences.

Foucauldian discourse analysis, which has been of particular popularity in OS, also needs to be compared with PDT.

Besides these theoretical needs, it is important to emphasize again that our overall political and ethical purpose with this paper is to understand better, and contribute to, the struggles of contemporary social movements that resist oppressions, injustices and marginalization around the world. As the Occupy Movement, the Arab Spring events and the recent protests in Brazil have shown, ever new organizational forms and processes are used by these resistance movements, ranging from social media networking, developing decentralized structures and holding together diverse social actor with different demands. Both PDT and OS are well placed to contribute to our understanding of these emerging social movements and their organizational forms.

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