

Movimento das Comunidades Populares: A Brazilian uchronic utopia*

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abstract

This article presents some aspects of the political action proposal of a contemporary Brazilian social movement: The *Movimento das Comunidades Populares* (People's Communities Movement), MCP. Reflecting on the utopian horizon of this collectivity, as well as on what kind of inspirations it seeks in the Brazilian past, this paper sought to understand the notion of utopia and uchronia applied to the specific case of the MCP. Consisting primarily of manual workers and focused on urban or rural peripheral areas, this social movement develops its action through the creation of what they call 'People's Communities'. Its political work consists in organizing these areas by creating schools, day care centers, health groups, economic initiatives based on a model of collective and non-hierarchical work (there are no bosses, nor employees), cultural events, parties and celebrations, among other activities. Organizing the communities is therefore considered the essential way to reach their strategic horizon. But to build these communities they also seek inspiration in other social movements of the Brazilian past. These movements serve as uchronias for the MCP as they represent interrupted pasts that the movement wishes to regain. An uchronia transformed into utopia, and this utopia, in turn, is an applied utopia: a 'concrete utopia', embodied in the political action of this movement that assumes in daily practices the creation of a Communitarian Socialism as their ultimate goal.

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Introduction

Deep inequality is a well-known characteristic of Latin American nations, founded under European conquest in modern times. The 'New World' created extremely hierarchical and violent societies, established through domination and enslavement of both native population and foreigners kidnaped from Africa (Galeano, 2012). Social conflict and the desire for change is an essential part of the continent's relatively recent history. Brazil is undoubtedly part of this social reality as its society was originally constituted to meet the demands of European trade, which, according to Caio Prado Júnior, created the "sense of its colonization" (Prado Junior, 1996). Therefore, slavery, conflict and violence shaped the countries' history. Within this reality, and beyond it, desires for change led to attempts to end or to minimize these long term tragical inheritances. Oppressed social groups faced their unfavorable situation in numerous different ways: indigenous confederation united against enslavement (Cunha and Monteiro, 2009), runaway slaved workers founded independent communities – quilombos (Reis and Gomes, 1996), messianic peasantry movements tried to end inequality and to establish the 'Lord's Fraternal Kingdom'¹ on Earth (Weinhardt, 2002; Queiroz, 1966; Queiroz, 1976), general strikes were organized by anarchist and socialist workers who dreamt about Social Revolution (Mattos, 2009). In different places and different times of the country's history, hope incarnated in practices, and some of those practices still influence nowadays social movements.

A starting point to reflect upon a broader frame in which the nowadays Brazilian social movements are spatially and temporally inserted would be the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 – an event hegemonically interpreted as the failure of socialism as a viable model of societal organization. This event spread a significant disbelief in socialism as an alternative project to capitalism. However, on the other hand, the criticism of bureaucratization and authoritarianism among the left gained new breath. In this context, in 1994 the Zapatista struggle in the Southern Mexican state of Chiapas made public the proposal to build socialism in other ways and gained wide

1 It refers to the messianic idea of stablishing heaven on Earth through a society without oppressors nor oppressed.

international support. The Zapatistas rejected the seizure of power as the main purpose of a transforming project for the society. Instead, the zapatistas sought to organize their communities in an autonomous and democratic way (Holloway, 2003).

The development of new information technologies, such as the internet, in passage of the twentieth to the twenty-first centuries, played an important role in some political behavior changes. Many social movements start to use this technological tool to boost their organization, to spread their agenda and gain supporters to their causes. Mexican zapatismo is a clear example of this (Figueiredo, 2006), followed by the intense but ephemeral 'antiglobalization movement' in the late 1990s and especially in the early 21st century that spread in many different parts of the planet, including many Latin American countries (Henning and Queluz, 2016; Ortellado, 2002; Van Der Walt, 2002). This phenomenon drew worldwide attention due to their huge demonstrations in the cities where the management agencies of global capitalism, such as IMF and WTO, had their international meetings². Protests were result of a complex network that articulated activists from many different countries. These events were at the same time originated from virtual communication networks, as well as diffusers of the same ones. Indymedia emerged during this period and served as an organization tool of various demonstrations worldwide, as well as meetings and exchange of ideas among social movements' activists (Juris, 2004; Figueiredo, 2015).

In Brazil, the influence of this international context was not insignificant, but the popular movement composed of the most impoverished classes of the population was not a vital group in this new wave of mobilizations. The urban movements analyzed by Eder Sader such as the massive factory workers' strikes, the mobilizations in the areas of housing in peripheries, among other popular struggles that shook the 1970s and especially the 1980s (Sader, 1988), have seemingly reduced since the 1990s. According to some sociologists, the autonomous underprivileged movements from the previous decades were substituted by the institutionalization and growth of non-governmental organizations (Cardoso, 1994; Doimo, 1995). Apparently, only

2 Many demonstrations occurred in different cities such as Seattle, 1999; Nice, 2000; Quebec and Gênova, 2001; Porto Alegre, 2003; Bombain, 2014.

in the countryside, with the Landless Rural Workers' Movement (MST), the winds of counter-hegemony seemed to lift the dust of apathy reigning in that decade (Maçano, 2000). The 'new subjects' that Eder Sader pointed out as 'having entered the scene' in the 1970s and especially in the 1980s, one decade later seemed like myths buried in the past.

But behind the scenes, a lot of things happened in terms of social struggles, even if, several times, without the media spotlight. The historical continuity of the movement that is the object of this research – *Movimento das Comunidades Populares, MCP*, (People's Communities' Movement) – demonstrates that some of that past still remains in this experience. In this sense, it is possible to observe that the MCP seems almost like an anachronistic movement, for carrying much of what was apparently lost after the weakening of the impoverished people's movements of the 1980s. Among these elements, I highlight the protagonist role played by the inhabitants of the periphery, by manual workers from both the countryside and cities. They correspond not only to the rank-in-file but also occupy the positions of coordination and strategic elaboration in the movement. Even the principles advocated by Liberation Theology, that as Sader highlights, spread around 80 thousand Ecclesial Base Communities³ all around Brazil in the 1980s, still animate the horizon of the MCP nowadays, manifested in its idea of a 'Liberating Religion'.

Regarding the anti-capitalist mobilizations and demonstrations in Brazil in the late 1990s and the 2000s (commonly known as 'anti-globalization movements'), even if their social composition was basically of youth movements with an expressive presence of urban middle social strata – who could access the 'new' digital technologies – the values guiding those struggles were centered in the valorization of horizontality in decision-making and the independence from governments and political parties. It was not uncommon to identify Anarchism sympathizers in those movements,

3 The Ecclesial Base Communities emerged as a proposition of living the Church experience as a community by stimulating the direct participation of ordinary people in the Catholic Church. Consequently, concrete bonds of solidarity were established, as well as the collective search for better life conditions.

who were also very fond of the EZLN's communitarian struggle in southern Mexico.

However seemingly apart from these activisms, during this period the *Movimento das Comunidades Populares*, object of the analysis further developed in this paper, walked a path guided by similar principles, such as the valorization of political autonomy, independence from official government and, mainly, the valorization of what we may call a Community based model of socialism. Even without these references that animated the global struggles that also 'popped' in Brazil: notably the influence of Zapatismo; MCP's utopian goal followed a quite similar path.

Thus, marked by reminiscences of the past from popular struggles, especially from the 1970s and 1980s, and carrying values and criticisms shared with the anti-capitalist movements of recent years, the *Movimento das Comunidades Populares*, far from being an anachronistic movement, is in line with other current social movements' tendencies. Recently the MCP has attracted the attention of some academics, and this is not incidental. This social movement for almost two decades chose to 'hide among the people' to erect communities, later it decided to slowly break the ice that separated them from other social circles. In 2006 it launched a newspaper called *Jornal Voz das Comunidades* (Communities' Voice Newspaper). Its target readers were not just their own militancy, but people outside the movement. Through this communication vehicle, little by little, the movement found sympathizers and slowly opened its history – and its archives – to a larger audience. Consequently, some researchers, most of them activists themselves, considered MCP's collective experience relevant enough to instigate analysis and reflections about it.

Most academic works developed in the recent years addresses some aspects of the MCP's experiences, which are diluted in a broader scope of investigations (Freixo, 2010; Barthol, 2016; Tramontani, 2012). The first academic research aiming to understand the historical constitution of the movement as a whole was my monograph of Specialization in Urban Sociology developed in Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro in 2013 (Penna, 2013). Later, my PhD thesis in Social History in Universidade Federal

Fluminense deepened this preliminary research, widening the investigation (Penna, 2016).

This movement will be the object of the reflections presented in this paper, which will focus on understanding its social change projects and the influences and inspirations that encourage the search for a new society, in a communitarian way. Initially, I will present in the first section of the paper a little bit about its historical formation trajectory, in order to further understand MCP in a broader conjunctural panorama, marked by political transformations and by the formation of contestatory social movements, among which the *Movimento das Comunidades Populares* emerges and changed itself during this process. I will also point out how the movement understands itself in the midst of these transformations and in what way the idea of stages as a cumulative development process aiming a better future is much more valued as a tool to comprehend their political trajectory than the idea of ruptures and deep changes (Penna, 2013). The second section of the article consists on a brief presentation of the central concepts applied for the understanding of the form of political action and strategies of social transformation advocated by MCP. Utopia and uchronia are fundamental terms for analyzing the political endeavor of the movement. By utopia I will adopt a broader conception, which encompasses every projection of a better future (Dianteil and Löwy, 2010), also, utopia can be embodied in concrete actions aiming this improved society (Manheim, 1972; Dinerstein, 2015, 2016), as it is the case of the social movement studied. If utopia implies projects and actions desiring a transformed future, these, in turn, are also enthused by influences from the past. It is by the communitarian past of the Brazilian popular movements that the *Movimento das Comunidades Populares* will get the necessary encouragement to build its own utopia. Nonetheless, as these past movements have been defeated, they become an interrupted past which is projected into the future, so that it may be rescued through the activists' efforts. Therefore, the concept of uchronia is an important tool to understand this relationship between past, present and future, essential for analyzing the political experience of MCP. By uchronia we mainly assume the conceptualization proposed by the Italian historian Alessandro Portelli (1991), who assumes the original meaning of the word, pioneered used by Charles Renouvier in his *Uchronie*, of 1857. The term implied the idea of an

alternative history, result of a change of course in the past, or a nonfactual history (Rosenfeld, 2005, Studiorum, 2013, Adam, 2016). After a brief presentation of these concepts, comes the fourth section of this paper that will reflect upon the meanings of utopia and uchronia applied to the specific case of MCP, by analyzing the data produced by the movement itself – such as newspapers, music, photos, cultural events. The perceivable conclusion is that utopias and uchronias merge in the midst of a social transformation project that has in the proposition of building and strengthening community bonds, a link that connects past, present and future plans (Penna, 2016).

Movimento das comunidades populares: Formation and political work development

Land of some of the world's largest social movements, such as the MST – Landless Workers' Movement – (Mançano, 2000), Brazil also gave birth to *Movimento das Comunidades Populares*, MCP – People's Communities' Movement. Present in 14 states of the Brazilian federation, the movement assembles approximately 15 thousand people who are engaged in organizing or benefiting from the variety of communitarian work developed in around 50 locations where the movement takes root (favelas and poor rural communities). Among the initiatives that flourish in different areas from north to south Brazil, we may identify numerous community schools, day care centers, health care groups, youth groups and economic enterprises. To generate income for the movement and the community members themselves, was created what they call 'collective economy groups'. That is how since 2000 its activists gradually developed a mini people's bank, small production workshops, small commercial ventures and service provision collective groups. All of them operate as informal cooperatives nurtured by the movement, in which there are no employers nor employees, the earnings of the work are divided among the participants according to worked hours and a part of the profits is sent to the movement's funds so as to foment and encourage new initiatives in other areas throughout Brazil.

Hence, many people commit their time, effort and energy to this project. In a society where the quest for individual financial success gives the tonic of motivation to work, such collective endeavor may seem incomprehensible.

However, for the militancy of the movement it is an investment, once they believe that it is through their actions that they will achieve an ideal society, a utopia. Through all these initiatives, especially the economic ones, the militancy of the People's Communities Movement believes to be laying the foundations of a new way of production and, consequently, of a new society. This new society would arise precisely from the communities: favelas and poor rural areas where the movement develops its political work. Once articulated among themselves through the movement, people would be able to conquer a popular government and, later, through the generalization of communitarian life, they would overcome class society, replacing it for a Communitarian Socialist Society. That would summarize MCP's political strategy. A political strategy that, as they emphasize, is in tune with other social movements developed by oppressed social groups from the past. Learning from those experiences is a prerequisite to succeed, a lesson that MCP considers other progressive movements should learn from:

The left has to do a deep self-criticism and convince itself once and for all that it is necessary that 'before teaching the people, to learn from them'. What does that mean? It means we need to search for the history of the Brazilian people, Indians, blacks, peasants and workers what is the way to their liberation. Then we will discover that the masses have always pursued the solution to their problems in community practice, their politics in direct participative democracy, and their religion in liberating faith. The best-known examples are the Guarani Republic, Quilombo dos Palmares, the Peasant Community of Canudos and the Popular and Working Community of Nova Lima.

Only then we will create the People's Power to one day conquer a People's Government starting from the bottom. A government that will modify the current economic model to a collective economy based on a community ideology. (Voz das Comunidades, 2006a)

The practice of developing communitarian work, as well as the strategy of 'collective action' as the essential means to achieve the 'People's Power', the utopia, results from a long historical trajectory, marked by changes and permanencies. The current configuration is a process of around half a century. In the various documents collected, as well as in the interviews

conducted for my doctoral research (Penna, 2016)⁴, the official memory of the MCP attributes its origin to *Juventude Agrária Católica*, JAC (Catholic Agrarian Youth), part of the Brazilian Catholic Action. The Catholic Action has its origins in the 1920s both in Italy and Brazil, being officialized in 1935 by Pope Pius XI (CEDIC, 2018). The goal of the Catholic Action, worldwide and in its Brazilian chain, was to seek the collaboration or even the direct participation of lay people in the apostolate of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, conveying Catholic principles to daily life, living and workspaces. In the midst of the Brazilian Catholic Action, I highlight the presence of youth groups, such as agrarian, worker, independent, high student and university groups (Cedic, 2018, Souza, 2004; Löwy, 1991, 1987, 1989, 1996). Since 1964, Brazilian democracy has been overthrown by a military coup supported by corporate groups associated with multinational capital (Dreyfus, 1981). Nevertheless, it was mostly at the end of 1968 that the regime's hardest aspect was established, generalizing the persecution, torture and murder of opponents based on Institutional Act No. 5. In 1969, JAC activists, motivated by the approach to Marxist thought and the changes in the Brazilian political conjuncture, marked by the expansion of repression, discussed the need to organize a movement with a clearly anticapitalist proposal. This was a similar process followed by other groups of the Catholic Youth, especially the Catholic Student Youth, the Catholic Worker Youth and the Catholic

4 Sources were obtained in two main collections: one from the direction of the movement and located at its headquarters in Feira de Santana, the other from a group of people who left or were expelled from the movement in the 1980s, preserved and shelved by one of its militants in São José dos Campos, as well as various materials made available by individual militants. Part of this documentation was digitized for the purposes of this research, constituting more than 4 thousand pages, totalizing 949 documents ranging from pamphlets, newsletters, newspapers, photographs, videos, reports and notebooks. In addition to these, there are also printed materials: 2 memoirs books, 4 political training booklets, 32 copies of the collection of *Jornal Voz das Comunidades* (2006-2017), 15 of *Jornal Voz da Juventude* (2009-2014). Among the material provided by the NGO Action Solidarité Tiers Monde (which supports the MCP) at its headquarters in Luxembourg City, I accessed various pamphlets, accounts, newsletters and a booklet on social movements supported by the institution. In addition to the printed and digitized materials, 23 interviews recorded in audio were produced with militants, in different positions of power and with different attributions and performances inside the movement, as well as three interviews with ex-militants, totaling 26 people interviewed.

University Students Youth (Ridenti, 1998). The *Movimento de Evangelização Rural*, MER (Movement for Rural Evangelization) thus emerged from *Juventude Agrária Católica*, focusing its work on the organization of *Comunidades Eclesiais de Base*, CEBs (grassroots ecclesial communities) and rural unions.

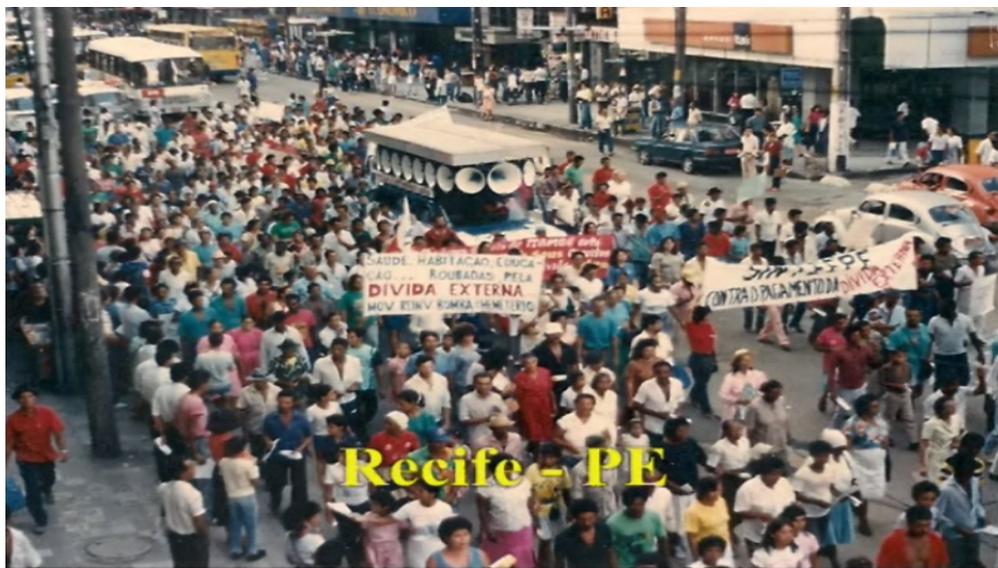
After a meeting of the National Movement Council, held in Bahia in July 1969, the movement began to change. With an assessment of people with more scientific view of reality, it was discovered that the movement used to be idealistic. It didn't have an answer to the ongoing political struggle in our country. A major decision was to turn JAC into a real peasant movement. The goal was to participate in the process of transformation that was happening among the people (Voz das Comunidades, 2009a).

The political involvement in both CEBs and unions allowed MER activists to develop various struggles related to land disputes in favor of tenure workers and landless rural workers. They also engaged in communitarian work in order to improve the lives of small landowners. MCP nowadays presents this period as the 'first stage' of its history, in an elaboration of memory that understands the collective experience as a continuous and cumulative journey towards the communitarian utopia. It is implied in the quotation from the movement's newspaper that MER marked a time in which they wanted to walk alongside with other groups of the Catholic Left in this 'process of transformation that was happening among the people.' As some scholars observe, strong mobilizations of opposition to the military regime have intensified since the 1970s, through different forms of social struggle and resistances (Scherer-Warren, 2005, 2008; Carvalho, 2004).

This 'stage' was followed by others, result of revaluations of strategy, which, in turn, are attributed by the activists to the conjunctural transformations that Brazil underwent during the trajectory of the collectivity. Thus, a decade after the foundation of MER, the movement explains the proposition of strategical change as follows:

After 1979, due to the redemocratization process that began in the country, MER militants resolved to prioritize actions in unions and associations. In order to do so, *Corrente Trabalhadores Independentes* (CTI) [Independent Workers Group] was created, and later replaced MER. Under CTI, the movement ceased to be just a peasant movement (of small producers) and

began to expand into the rural employees' areas, the peripheries of the cities and into the factories. [...] Unionist activity and in the associations was priority until 1989. (Voz das Comunidades, 2009a).



Demonstration in the 1980s against the payment of Foreign Debt in Recife, Pernambuco. Source: video commemorating the 40 years of the movement, launched in 2010.

If, in the beginning, MER was mostly involved in organizing unions and ecclesial communities (CEBs) in rural areas, from the 1980s on the labor unions became the only privileged space. At the same time, there was an expansion to urban areas. This would correspond to the 'second stage' of the movement, characterized by the gradual change of nomenclature: *Corrente Trabalhadores Independentes*, CTI, (Independent Workers Group). During this period, many militants abandoned their small farms and became rural wage earners. Others left the rural areas and went to work in factories, as a true test of bravery and dedication to the cause defended by the movement in its expansion process. Among them, former nuns and priests abandoned their religious life and became manual workers. As *boiás-frias* (informal temporary rural wage earners), factory workers, they organized trade unions, assumed control of these entities' directions, mobilized strikes and other struggles to conquest labor rights. It was a remarkable period in the history of the collectivity, marked by the organization of large mobilizations, such as the

struggle for retirement and social security rights for the rural workers, that took over the country in massive demonstrations between 1980 and 1983.

As Maria da Glória Gohn points out, ‘the social movements of the 1970s and 1980s in Brazil contributed decisively, through demands and organized pressures, to the conquest of various social rights, which were enshrined in the new Federal Constitution of 1988’ (Gohn, 2011: 23). Certainly, the movement studied was an important protagonist of these struggles. However, the disputes surrounding the Constitutional Assembly in the late 1980s, did not interest the majority of CTI’s activists, who preferred to focus their concerns in promoting campaigns to fight against the Brazilian foreign debt, as proposed the Trade Union Conference of Latin American and Caribbean Workers on Foreign Debt in Havana in July 1985⁵.

The 1980s was called the lost decade for the Brazilian economy because the collection of interest on foreign debt forced the economy to stop, generating inflation and unemployment. At the beginning of the 1990s, the situation worsened with the total opening of the market, causing a breakdown of industries and an increase in unemployment. [...]. The trade unions lost their power of mobilization, their strength. They began to form bureaucratic negotiation committees, to maintain rights already won or to negotiate fewer layoffs.

Based on the analysis of this reality, the National Assembly decided to prioritize the most suffering sectors of the people - unemployed, factory workers, residents of urban peripheries, rural wage earners and poor peasants. (Voz das Comunidades, 2006b).

It’s important to notice that the 1990s in Brazil is a time of neoliberal policies hegemony. Therefore, a high level of unemployment and the reduction of investments in public services are marks of the period (Tavares, 1999). In tune with this new social reality, the movement organized another meeting to evaluate the conjuncture. The militants opted to focus their work on the urban and rural peripheries, moving from the workspace (labor unions) to the living space. They set up ‘Commissions of Struggle’ and,

5 Minutes of the Trade Union Conference of Workers of Latin America and the Caribbean on External Debt. Havana, July 18, 1985. Available at <https://www.marxists.org/english/tematica/1985/07/18.htm> Accessed on 04 Feb 2018.

through surveys, identified the problems of poor neighborhoods and favelas. Once the problems were identified, they conducted demonstrations and requested employment, infrastructure and public services to the authorities and public agencies. Subsequently, the movement assumed a new name: *Movimento das Comissões de Luta*, MCL, (Movement of Struggle's Commissions) and in this new "stage" they were interested in what they called the 'strong fight'⁶: occupations of land and abandoned buildings, as well as street demonstrations, among others mechanisms to exert direct political pressure, targeting specific interests of the poor areas where they lived and conducted their political work.

Gradually, however, they considered it necessary to take root in the regions where they lived and worked, firstly by creating groups of sports and leisure. As these initiatives expanded, they adopted *Comunidades Populares* (People's Communities) as a locus of effective social transformation. More than demanding from the authorities, they now want to do it by their own hands. Hence, the movement became the *Movimento das Comunidades Populares* and little by little developed its features and current strategies. The new name was formalized in the National Assembly, on August 11, 2011, in Feira de Santana, Bahia, headquarter of the movement.

This is the way the movement currently presents its historical constitution and development – in successive stages characterized by the change of focus, actuation and nomenclature. And it is at the present stage that communitarian utopia assumes its greatest importance, launching the model of the desired society not only to the future, but, with eyes focused on past community experiences (uchronias), MCP builds in the everyday life a communitarian socialism, a utopia in action, a concrete utopia.

Past and future: Utopia and uchronia

Part of the current vocabulary in various social circles, utopia assumes sometimes a positive and sometimes a negative connotation. To say that

6 The idea of "strong struggle" as a strategy adopted by MCL appears in the sources from the 1990 National Activity preparation script, in which it was pioneered as the main proposition to be adopted by all militancy.

someone is a utopian person can mean both someone with strong aspirations and ideals as well as an excessively dreamy and unrealistic person. That is because utopia signifies equally a distant horizon that inspires social changes and an imaginary world, to where people who cannot fit in as it truly is, try to escape imagining, but not actually living, an alternative reality.

The origin of the term is relatively well known. Created by Thomas More in his book 'The Utopia' (2010), it consists in a criticism of the social context of the author's time – England in the passage of the fifteenth to the sixteenth century – by presenting an imaginary Kingdom of peace and social harmony. Therefore, Utopia is a dream erected in denial of the present. However, it is not only a 'non-existing place', as routinely understood, but a non-existing place to which one aspires, to which one seeks as a counter position to a concrete reality.

Associating fiction to realism, more implicitly stands for overcoming England's *status quo*. Not surprisingly, by the time of Industrial Revolution, several thinkers who criticized the cruel effects of capitalist development over the working class, such as Saint-Simon (2014), Robert Owen (1979), and Charles Fourier (1967), also elaborated proposals (or projections) of Societal models where those problems would no longer exist. They did not consider themselves utopian, but, at the end of the nineteenth century, the advances of scientific thought among the political ideas concerning the working-class struggles led Engels to diffuse an opposition between scientific socialism and utopian socialism (1880). For this author, scientific socialism could surpass utopian socialism due to its correct analysis of social reality, an idea also shared by Karl Marx. According to Engels, that would be the only route to viable proposal of a new society. As a result, his ideas propagated a negative, or at least ambiguous, interpretation of utopia in socialist thinking, relating it to unrealism. However, depending on the meaning attributed to utopia, it is possible to consider the communist horizon itself, advocated by Marx and Engels in their scientific socialism, as utopian without any intention of disqualification. That is because both socialist perspectives present projections of desired future societies as opposed to the actually existing ones. In these terms, it is possible to consider Engels'

polemic as a dispute of utopias in order to legitimate and develop the one considered by him more achievable.

In any case, side by side with the pejorative sense spread by Engels, utopia still holds a more positive meaning. Even when understood as an imaginary place, a non-existent society, it keeps within itself a will to become true. That is the most important attribute for the purposes of this paper. Therefore, I will adopt a certain positive and even broader understanding of Utopia, incorporating any projection, desire or image of an improved future society. Thus, it is possible to suppose that there is no progressive thought free of utopian elements.

Utopia might have a practical meaning as well. The sociologist Karl Mannheim considers that this concept serves only to the idea of an applied utopia, embodied in actions and motivated by the interests of oppressed classes and social groups (1972). In other words, utopia would only manifest itself as such once a social group adopted it and, as a result, it became a tool in the struggle for social transformation. According to Michael Löwy, this interpretation has some problems because implies a narrow conception of utopia, since it is unpredictable when ideas of an imagined future society can animate any social group and have a practical effect. Nonetheless, Mannheim's understanding of Utopia as applied utopia presents an interesting analytical potential for thinking about the political practice of communitarian social movements or even of social movements in general (Dianteil and Löwy, 2010: 28). Following a similar path, Ana Dinerstein reflects upon contemporary utopian thought and action. She engages with the intellectual production of Ernst Bloch to develop the idea of 'concrete utopias' (2015, 2016). I developed a parallel notion, presented in the doctoral thesis as 'utopia in action' (PENNA, 2016).⁷ Both 'concrete utopia' from Dinerstein and the 'utopia in action' notion developed in my PhD thesis refer to the political approach in which effective changes are resulted from the quotidian political work developed by social movements.

7 Rafael Augusto Vecchio also uses the expression 'utopia in action' in his master's dissertation, but to refer to an ongoing cause (2006). Therefore, it differs from the use I made of 'utopia in action' in my thesis as it refers to a social movement committed to a wider proposition of societal transformation.

Therefore, these transformations are ‘small parts’ of a broader process committed to renovate the current society as a whole.

Envisioning a renewed future – and building it through daily political practice – does not dispense searching for inspiring models in the past, though. After all, according to the historian Eric Hobsbawm: no matter how seemingly contradictory at first, the stronger the intention to innovate, the more one seeks inspiration for it in the past (2013: 36). Maria Ceci Misoczky and Rafael Kruter Flores, while reflecting upon the intellectual contributions of the Peruvian revolutionary José Mariatégui, state that:

... he is convinced that the future can only emerge from what the past has inscribed in the present in terms of unsolved problems. This process does not accept the abandonment of what once existed; at the same time it is selective of what to recover from the past, drawing only on elements in which the present is recognized. (Misoczky and Flores 2012:8)

Hence, at this point, the idea of utopia connects with another concept: that of uchronia. Both are fundamental conceptual tools for understanding the movement studied here.

Uchronia is certainly a much less popularized term than utopia. The word uchronia comes from a neologism elaborated in 1857 by Charles Renouvier that in 1876 gave title to his book *Uchronie (L'Utopie Dans L'Histoire): Esquisse Historique Apocryphe du Développement* (2013). In this book, Renouvier presents an alternative history (allohistory) within the past. This will be the predominant meaning of uchronia, as defined by Gavriel D. Rosenfeld:

At the most basic level, however, tales of alternate history – or what have been termed “allohistorical” or “uchronian” narratives – investigate the possible consequences of “what if” questions within specific historical contexts. What if Jesus had escaped crucifixion? What if Columbus had never discovered the New World? What if the South had won the American Civil War?

In posing and answering such questions, alternate histories assume a variety of different narrative forms. Those produced by historians and other scholars usually take the form of sober analytical essays, while those produced by novelists, filmmakers, and playwrights assume a more overtly fictional form through the use of such familiar narrative devices as plot development,

setting, and character portrayal. What links such “analytical” and “fictional” alternate histories is their exploration of how the alteration of some variable in the historical record would have changed the overall course of historical events. (Rosenfeld, 2005: 4)

Other possible interpretation of uchronia is presented by Alma Studiorum, who points out that uchronia can be understood not only by meaning an alternative history, but also as a time-shifted utopia (Studiorum, 2013: 320). Rather than manifesting itself in a better future, it would mean ‘a better time’, ‘corresponding to an imagined past of a time when life would be better than at the present’ (Adam, 2016: 106).

In one of the most relevant studies in Oral History, ‘The Death of Luigi Trastulli and other Stories’, Alessandro Portelli borrowed the idea of uchronia from science fiction to understand and analyze the narratives of several of his interviewees (1991: 99-116). If utopia means the non-place, uchronia would mean the ‘non-time’. As the historian explains, in science fiction it portrays a past that did not actually happen or an imaginary present, resulted from a fictional past. Stories such as: ‘What if the Nazis had won World War II, what would reality be like?’ represent well the idea of uchronia in science fiction. But Portelli stretches the concept of uchronia, broadening his understanding beyond the science fiction literature. Analyzing interviews with former rank-in-file elder militants of the Italian Communist Party, the historian specialized in Oral History observes imaginary narratives, delusions about past situations that did not really happen. However, he considered that they were not mere lies or simple senile hallucinations. It was necessary to go beyond this simplistic observation. He realized that these narratives of old people actually revealed the desire that events had followed another course, that the party had taken another path. Uchronia therefore arises out of disagreement with the course of the past. It manifests the desire for an ‘alternative history’ in which the route considered correct and in accordance with those desires and hopes prevailed. It thus corresponds to an image of what did not truly happened, but had events occurred otherwise, it could have been real. It is an exercise of imagining situations in the past that had the potential to reverse the position of historical ‘winners’ and ‘losers’: an envision of how the present would be if a given project, which was actually defeated, had, on the

contrary, prevailed. In this way, uchronia corresponds to the imaginary extension of a past that was interrupted, aborted.

Following the line of thought initiated by Alessandro Portelli, who extrapolates uchronia beyond the tales of science fiction to these imagined pasts that express, in the individual narratives, collective frustrated desires, it is also possible to extrapolate the meaning of uchronia beyond the fictional narratives about the past. This paper considers that if a certain circumstance understood as favorable in the past was aborted for some reason, frustration due to its interruption may manifest itself through imagining how it might have been but may also materialize in a project for the future. In this case, uchronia becomes utopia. In other words, this past that failed to become truth, or rather has been interrupted, the uchronia, becomes a projection for the future, the still non-existent, which is utopia. Thus, we may consider the nostalgia of past experiences as that which characterizes the uchronic thinking, whether it is manifested in actions or merely ideas.

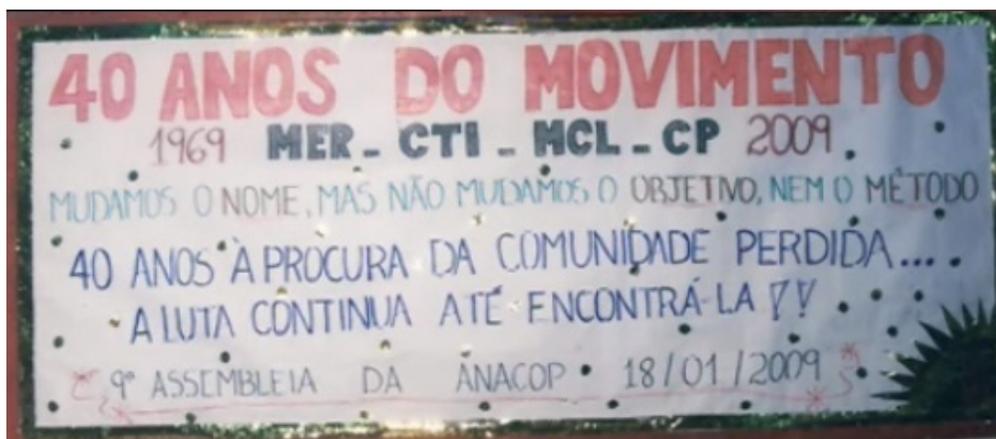
An important example of an uchronic way of relating to the past would be the cultural manifestation of Romanticism, which began in the eighteenth century and can be considered, in its revolutionary aspect, the cradle of socialist thought. Characterized by Michael Löwy as a broad cultural movement of nostalgia for pre-capitalist societies, Romanticism would manifest the frustration in the face of capitalist reality (Löwy, 2008, 2013; Dianteil and Löwy, 2005, 2010). Therefore, it took place in different ways from reactionary, such as Catholic nostalgia of medieval times, to even revolutionary ones – which, for the sociologist, constitutes the ideological matrices of contemporary socialism and, although inspired by past societies, indicate projects of a transformed future.

In order to think about the reality of Latin American social movements in the present world, it is still worth to bear in mind the considerations of Justin Paulson for whom the recent memory of a pre-capitalist past in the continent stimulates interrogations about the limits of current progress and points out alternatives referenced in previous social experiences:

Popular movements in Latin America thus draw on history and imagination differently – at least, they have a more substantial ability to do so. The participants often have a collective historical memory that is already ‘negative’; movements are able to begin by saying ‘this isn’t progress, at least not for us’, which opens a space to imagine what real progress might look like. So radical imagination might spring from a reaction to something in the present, but it is rooted in a memory of difference that offers a set of resources for imagining the future. (Paulson, 2010: 36)

Past and Future in MCP’s political action and strategy

In 2009, *Movimento das Comunidades Populares* had its 40th anniversary. Several festivities marked the ephemeris, celebrated in several headquarters of the People’s Communities spread by 14 Brazilian states. The slogan used for the occasion was: ‘In pursuit of the lost Community ... the struggle will continue until we find it!’. It is written in dark blue color in a commemorative poster prepared for the occasion:



Commemorative poster. Photo reproduced from the video commemorating the 40 years of the movement, launched in 2010 to prepare the National Meeting of 2011.

The chronological line from 1969 to 2009 representing the different names adopted during this trajectory is noteworthy. Despite the different acronyms, the idea is to highlight continuity. The period when the photo was taken was the CP (People’s Communities). Two years later, in a National Meeting, the militancy would formalize the new name: *Movimento das Comunidades Populares*. Just below this timeline we have the phrase: ‘We

changed the name, but we did not change the objective, nor the method’, reaffirming the importance of continuity. And what would this continuity consist of? Precisely in the affirmation of the pursuit for the ‘lost community’.

Let us look at another source, this time extracted from *Jornal Voz das Comunidades* published two months later:



Source: *Voz das Comunidades* (2009b)

The movement journal, *Jornal Voz das Comunidades*, JVC, regularly focus its articles on important events from the past that marked the formation of the MCP, as well as to present its strategic politics and its future projects. The cover of the commemorative edition of the movement's 40 years anniversary is quite emblematic in this rescue of the past, both the past from the movement itself and the past of other social movements that serve as reference for them. As the text reproduced next to the image and the slogan says:

The same way that the people of Moses walked for 40 years in the desert in search of the promised land, we, for 40 years, have been looking for the ‘Lost’

Communities: Indigenous, Quilombolas, Peasants, Factory Workers and Popular. (JVC, 2009)

By this statement, the movement seeks to present the reader the idea that for 40 years they have been struggling to find the community, the maximum manifestation of the utopia they wish to reach. But to do so, they need to rescue a communitarian past, the 'lost communities', a uchronia.

The reason for searching for the community both in the future and in the past is explained in another source, dated from 2004, elaborated for the internal formation of the movement's militancy (Boletim das Sobrevivências Coletiva, 2004):

- 1) WHY DO WE NEED THE COMMUNITY?
- 2) Because the individual life is against nature.
- 3) Humanity was born in collectivity: this is said by the Bible, symbolized by PARADISE (Garden of Eden), as by science (historical materialism), written by Marx, which speaks of PRIMITIVE COMMUNITIES.
- 4) In Brazil, invaded by the Portuguese in 1500, the Portuguese found the Indians living in COMMUNITIES.
- 5) The black people when they fled from slavery formed QUILOMBOS, a type of COMMUNITY.
- 6) Peasants, who are a mixture of Indians, blacks and poor immigrants, besides solving public problems through *mutirão*⁸, created independent and autonomous communities like CANUDOS in Bahia, MUCKER in Rio Grande do Sul, CALDEIRÃO in Ceará, among others. Besides the collective economy, these communities organized other aspects of life such as: Health, Religion, Art and Self-Defense, etc.

The factory workers also had a communitarian tradition, both in factories with their MUTUAL HELP FUNDS, and the MUTIRÕES to build their shacks, especially when they built the house rooftop. There were experiences like Nova Lima where workers and residents created a PROLETARIAN POWER.

8 Mutirão is a collective effort to carry out a specific work, for example to build a house.

The need of the community is attributed to nature itself, therefore, according to the movement's understanding, it is frontally opposed to the individualism of capitalism – a fundamental mark of the present times. The explanation for these conclusions relies on both religious and scientific elements. In Christianity, the main religious matrix of the movement⁹, they also find the inspiring community model as instituted by Jesus, although later distorted by the rich and power-hungry Romans:

'I came to the poor', said Jesus Christ in his preaching in Palestine. His twelve resolute followers, the apostles, were simple workers. After the death of the Master and his resurrection, the groups grew and became communities, in which all put in common the material possessions they had and "there were no needy among them" (Acts of the Apostles). The Christian religion extended to the Roman Empire, among slaves and poorer citizens, who learned to live in community, though hidden, because they were persecuted by the rich, who used them in the circus to feed the lions and serve as entertainment for the powerful. Unable to bend Christians by violence or to diminish their influence, as the number of followers always increased, the powerful, through the emperor Constantine, made Christianity an official religion. The bishops began to be treated as noble, the priests became public servants, and the rich adhered to the new religion, introducing in it their vices, their selfishness, and destroying the communities, replacing the sharing of goods, the donation to the collective, into distribution of charities. (Voz das Comunidades, 2006c)

As the quoted text demonstrates, the basis of an uchronia is at the very origin of MCP's religious belief. It shows the nostalgia for a communitarian past in which the mark of social inequality was inexistent, even though it was later disrupted by the powerful, creating the uchronia.

As a socialist movement, the MCP assimilated a lot of the cultural broth produced around romanticist thinking. Nostalgia for the pre-capitalist past is most remarkable in the political thinking and practice of the movement. But the way in which the *Movimento das Comunidades Populares* manifests its romanticism is specific, besides this primitive Christian reference: it seeks, first and foremost, in the Brazilian past communitarian movements, the models for the future society.

9 Even though it has recently opened up to other religious matrices such as Africans and Indigenous traditions.

To analyze MCP's political strategy and its specific kind of utopia, I established a parallel between Alessandro Portelli's understanding of *uchronia* and Michael Löwy's analysis of the Romanticism cultural phenomenon. That is how I recognized, in MCP's experience, a specific kind of Romanticism: a 'Brazilian Grass-roots Romanticism'. Throughout the investigation, several sources indicated that the actual utopia of MCP was not only inspired by communitarian life experiences from the past, but also that these *uchonias* took place mainly in the territory that nowadays corresponds to Brazil (Penna, 2016:271-283).

The references to the past experiences of the 'Brazilian people' is omnipresent in the official media vehicle of the MCP, *Jornal Voz das Comunidades*, published quarterly since 2006, as well as their youth periodical, *Jornal Voz da Juventude*, published quarterly between 2009 and 2014. Societies from the past that developed a communitarian way of life are presented as sources of inspiration for developing their work in the communities. As the data shows, these experiences in general englobe the community life of the indigenous and quilombola¹⁰ peoples (Reis and Gomes, 1996) as well as communitarian societies organized by messianic movements such as Canudos and Caldeirão (Weinhardt, 2002; Queiroz, 1966; Queiroz, 1976). Morro Velho's movement, in Nova Lima, Minas Gerais state, from the 1930s to the 1960s, is also considered an example of a social movement that was able to overcome the limits of 'pure' trade union activities. Their participants had a wider concept of their political involvement that embraced cultural activities, mobilizations around the residential spaces, creating commissions to make improvements for the community and many other actions that surpassed the 'world of work' in a narrow sense (Grossi, 1981).

Not only the newspapers, but also other documents accessed during the investigation as well as the observations during field work and interviews with activist, indicate that these models of society that have taken place at some point in the 'Brazilian' past are embraced as inspiration for the movement. They animate the quotidian practices and serve as themes for

10 Africans and Afro-Brazilians who escaped from slavery and formed their own communities throughout centuries of slavery in Brazil.

the parties and commemorations. Songs, dances and theater presentations animate the meetings and assemblies of MCP. They celebrate the achievements of the communitarian societies in Brazilian history, as well as the reminiscences expressed in solidarity among the people.¹¹ Therefore, their purpose is not only to entertain but to reinforce the movement's political strategy which searches for inspiration in the indigenous, quilombolas, messianic and unionists who lived before us.

Here we have a picture of an event in homage to the indigenous peoples. It was organized by MCP's youth group called *União da Juventude Popular* (People's Youth Union) in Bahia state. In general, these cultural activities (dances, plays, songs) intend to exalt the memory and teachings of the communities from the past:



Video commemorating the 40th anniversary of the movement, launched in 2010 as preparation for the National Encounter in 2011.

11 The 'June Parties' are a homage to the peasant people, the 'May Day' celebrates especially the urban workers struggles, the 'Indigenous People Day' is also an important celebration, as well as the 'Black Consciousness Day'. Beyond these commemorative dates, all national encounters and even simple meetings are marked by the use of songs and dances that refer to these experiences.

The songs used by the movement in its meetings and various events also serve as reinforcement in the construction of these references as fuel for the present actions. The communitarian past is honored and it invites the activists to transform the actual world and prepare it for a better future, for Utopia. An example is the song "Let me live" composed by Enoque Oliveira, who had been a priest in the city Monte Santo in Bahia and led the *Movimento Histórico e Popular de Canudos* (Popular and Historical Movement of Canudos, that resulted in his removal from priestly functions in 1987 by right wing Catholic authorities (Araújo Sá, 2008). The song is about the messianic movement that established a Christian community, known as *Belo Monte* (Beautiful Mountain), in the sertão¹² of Bahia between 1896 and 1897. Approximately 25,000 people lived in this community before it was smashed by the newly established Brazilian republic at the end of 1897 (Cunha, 1984). Although destroyed, the community of Canudos continues to stimulate utopias, especially among some sectors of the Catholic Left. Enoque Oliveira's song was reproduced in MCP's book of songs organized for the National Encounter in 2014. The intention of rescuing this 'lost community' was sung with enthusiasm at the 3-day gathering of approximately 300 organic participants and special guests from the movement:

Let me live

Let me live, let me speak / Let me grow, let me organize!

When I lived in the sertão / On the feet of those who ruled me

I moaned the pain in my hands / The burden was heavy to carry

Then it appeared in the sertão / A mountain that began to captivate

So beautiful that it gathered the brotherhood / no boss nor oppressor lived there.

Canudos will bloom again / Life as a branch will grow

The fight for land generates bread / Loves will start again

Canudos spread throughout the country / Although sharks want to bite it

12 A dry region in the Brazilian Northeastern countryside, not exactly a desert, also known as caatinga.

In the countryside and in the cities, they say / Organized people will win!¹³

As the song makes clear, this ‘best time’ manifested in the Canudos experience, though defeated, ‘will bloom again’ and ‘organized people will win’ in the future. Uchronia thus becomes Utopia, both in Enoque Oliveira’s song and in the strategy proclaimed by the MCP during its Second National Encounter.

The sympathy for the uchronic past is easily perceived by whoever may arrive in one of the movement’s ‘People’s Communities’. That was the case of the Uruguayan writer and activist Raúl Zibechi when he visited *Comunidade Popular Chico Mendes*, in Rio de Janeiro at the end of 2015. In his article, he highlights some aspects that called his attention, in particular the theoretical and historical references to animate the present struggle of MCP:

When it comes to theory, Gelson claims Marxism and Christianity. He does not hide his sympathy for Mao Tse-tung. The movement has four historical experiences of reference: the resistance of the Guarani people, the Quilombo of Palmares, the Canudos Movement and the struggle of the miners of Morro Velho in the 1930s. In short, the synthesis of indigenous, black, working class and popular struggles. (Zibechi, 2016: online)

This passage shows how the movement’s activists made explicit their political theory and historical references to Raul Zibechi during their conversations. Among these historical references, the Brazilian people’s communitarian experiences are presented as the movement’s source of inspiration. Their protagonists were ordinary people, underprivileged, just like the MCP activists themselves: black, indigenous, peasants and manual workers.

The inspiration in this community past is evident in the strategic elaboration of MCP, including in its conception of political and State organization, revealing the strategic elaboration of this collective. An article from JVC is emblematic to reflect upon this issue. The title is ‘The State we

13 Song ‘Let me live’ in the booklet held for the 2nd National Meeting of the MCP ‘Book of Songs’ held in Feira de Santana between August 15 and 17 (2014: 70).

have and the State we want – Fifth Brazilian Social Week. How to participate?’ and consists in a dialogue with the theme proposed for the Fifth Brazilian Social Week in 2013, promoted by the Catholic Church. It presents MCP’s understanding of the state, as well as the movement’s own utopia. According to the idea expressed in the article, the State, although inevitable in the medium term, is incompatible with the future society they want to create. The state would necessarily have to be abolished to give place to the Community. The explanation for this is in the following quotation extracted from the article:

How did the state arise?

The state, as we know, was born when social classes emerged. In primitive communities, there was no state. There was coordination to articulate the communities and to direct the decisions taken in popular assemblies.¹⁴

The extract suggests, implicitly, that the state would represent a rupture of the correct model of social organization. Therefore, the state is wrong since its origin. It broke the democratic character of the previous social organization, when the decision-making was collective, even though articulated by a ‘coordination’. The state would mean, therefore, the interruption of this primordial past, implicitly presented as an ideal (uchronia). At the same time, this past seems to be a direct reference to the way of organizing the movement nowadays (‘coordination to articulate communities’).

Further, in the same JVC article, the inspiring character of past societies that had no state becomes more explicit. However, these societal models were interrupted due to certain historical events. Nevertheless, their economic, political and ideological model of organization are noteworthy:

In Brazil, before the [Portuguese] invasion, there were experiences of collective organization of indigenous peoples. When African slaves arrived, new experiences emerged, such as the Quilombos, and later there were the peasant communities.

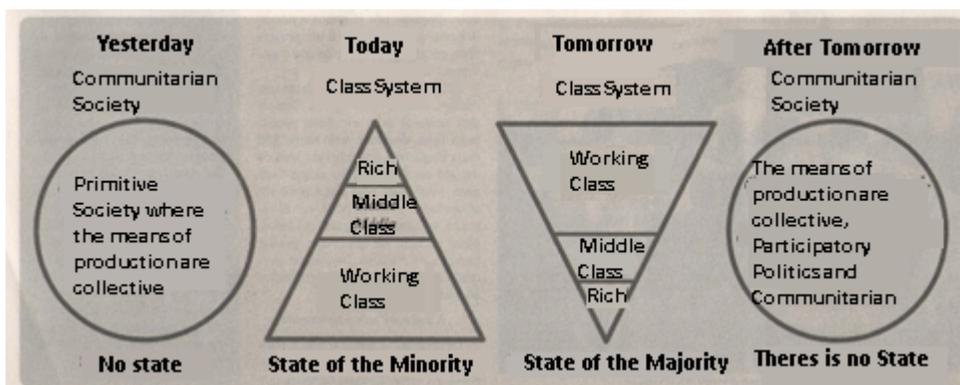
The classic examples are the Republic of Guarani, Quilombo dos Palmares and the peasant communities of Canudos and Caldeirão, among many others.

14 Jornal Voz das Comunidades, ano 8, nº 19, Brasil, abril a julho de 2013: 4.

In these communities, the economy was collective (the means of survival belonged to all). Politics was participatory (meetings and assemblies to make decisions) and ideology was religious (communitarian).¹⁵

Here they are the common and central elements of these inspiring experiences: all these communities – the primitive societies of the prehistoric past, the indigenous, quilombolas and peasants in Brazil – had their social relations established in economic equality and direct political participation. Although perhaps some members of these communities had to perform some executive functions (which the movement associates with its own ‘coordinations’). Quoting the text itself, in that societal organization the ‘means of survival belonged to everyone’, everyone could ‘make decisions’ and the reality perception (ideology) was based in a logic of communion between the components of society, which they call a ‘religious’ or ‘communitarian’ ideology.

Therefore, it is possible to identify the bases of the model of society aspired by the MCP: communitarian socialism. This kind of socialism manifests itself not in preparing the revolution and living the utopia only afterwards. Instead, trying to practice the utopia, to materialize it little by little, corresponds to the essential means to reach it indeed. The final goal is only achievable by accomplishing utopia gradually, in ‘stages’. Despite aiming for the future, this desired society is, somehow, a return to the past – or an imagined past, as we can see in the graphic representation presented in the same article:



¹⁵ Jornal Voz das Comunidades, op. cit., p. 5.

Graphical representation of the historical relationship between State and society for the MCP (original and English version for paper). Source: *Jornal Voz das Comunidades* n° 8, ano 19, de abril a junho de 2013: 4.

What is most interesting about this graphic representation is to observe that the 'After tomorrow', the utopia manifested in the 'Communitarian Society', resembles 'Yesterday', the uchronia, perceived as an interrupted past that they wish to redeem in the future. In this future 'there is no state'. In the 'Tomorrow' society, when the 'Class System' still exists, the 'State of the majority' is still a necessity, but the Community of the 'after tomorrow' will be based on the 'Participatory Politic'. The means to move from the today 'society' to 'tomorrow' society, as well as from 'tomorrow' society to 'After tomorrow' society (the final utopia) would be precisely the organization of the Communities.

In this sense, the organization of communities would be indeed the fundamental way to build 'People's Power', which, in the practice of the movement, consists in the creation of means for the underprivileged to govern themselves. Knowing how to govern, organizing economic life on an egalitarian basis and developing values and beliefs consistent with these proposals: that is the path they need to tread to achieve the communitarian utopia. However, as long as a class society is still a reality, it would be necessary for the movement's communities to conquer a 'people's government'. This would help to spread, generalize and establish definitively the Communities as a new way of life. This shows that in addition to the beginning and the end represented in the graphics, the community is also the means for the transitions. Being, therefore, the means of change, organizing it and expanding it is the motivation of the whole political practice of the MCP. The communitarian life that the activists put so much effort to implement in their daily political action can be understood as the collective live carried out to the maximum social spheres as possible. The objective is to achieve the totality of social relations, starting from what they call 'the most felt needs' of the people. These necessities might be related to economic, emotional, entertainment, and many other types of human needs. In other words, it is incarnated in quotidian practices such as celebrating Christmas together; to work and divide the profits in their cooperatives; to teach and learn in community schools; to share children

care in the community daycare. It is the collective lunch when people bring and share food every month and eat together at the community headquarters. Is to trust and deposit your money in the community bank, knowing that when you need it, you will also receive trust from your fellows to borrow. In short, the idea of Community takes place in the many concrete practices that are part of the routine of the political making of the MCP today, aiming at the goal of overcoming the individual by the collective. The following pictures may illustrate a little about the daily communitarian activities developed in the last decade by MCP:



Picture of a sewing group, where the members learn and produce the goods, there are no employees nor bosses. Source: video commemorating the 40 years of the movement, launched in 2010.



Picture of one of the several football teams organized by MCP, this is from São Paulo. They do local, regional and national tournaments. Source: video commemorating the 40 years of the movement, launched in 2010.



Photo of the sale of collective production goods at a Fair in Feira de Santana, Bahia. Source: video commemorating the 40 years of the movement, launched in 2010.



Photo of a health group in Pernambuco. Among the activities of the health groups are preventive activities of diseases such as gymnastics for the elderly, promotion of healthy eating and production of homemade medicines. Source: video commemorating the 40 years of the movement, launched in 2010.



Photo of a school for young children in Maranhão. Source: video commemorating the 40 years of the movement, launched in 2010.

To conclude: An uchronic utopia in action

Utopia [...] it is on the horizon. I come two steps closer to it, it walks away two more steps. I walk ten paces but the horizon runs ten paces beyond. No matter how much I walk, I will never reach it. So, what is utopia's purpose? There it is: to make us walk.¹⁶

As the sources presented in this article, as well as several other sources raised for the development of this research and its subsequent analysis, could attest, MCP is very concerned about knowing and studying its own past. No wonder the activists create an evolutionary interpretation of their history, and understand their different periods and nomenclatures as stages of a cumulative process towards utopia. However, utopia for them does not mean a whole and complete innovation, instead, it is a reclaim of the past: 'the pursuit of the lost communities'. The 'better past' is source of inspiration, legitimacy, and indicates the correctness of their own present actions. Therefore, producing collectively, as it is done in the movement's informal cooperatives, where there are no employees nor bosses, signifies to follow the example of the *quilombolas*, the native peoples of our America, and the communitarian social movements that took place both in the countryside or in the cities of our country. These collective actions are understood as a recover of true human nature, corrupted by the 'System of Classes'. Moving forward into a better future would necessarily mean to rescue the communalism from the past. This rescue is incorporated in a daily practice that, as described in this paper, since the end of the 1990s has given the tone of the political work developed by MCP through the creation of football groups, community markets, community schools, health groups, gymnastics groups for the elderly, community parties and celebrations, communitarian bank, craft workshops for producing simple goods for the community, among others.

The utopia, the non-place that the MCP seeks to consolidate in the 'After Tomorrow' society is muddled with non-places of the past, their uchronias.

16 'Utopía ... ella está en el horizonte. Me acerco dos pasos, ella se aleja dos pasos. Camino diez pasos y el horizonte se corre diez pasos más allá. Por mucho que yo camine, nunca la alcanzaré. Para que sirve la utopía? Para eso sirve: para caminar'. Fernando Birri, quoted by Eduardo Galeano (1994: 310).

The movement's political action is not limited to 'desiring' a different reality; their militants are actively engaged in building it through everyday communitarian works. Due to this characteristic, it is possible to distinguish a specific kind of utopia: a 'utopia in action' or a 'concrete utopia'. According to Ana Dinerstein, this would be an important form of utopian manifestation nowadays:

Clearly, today's utopia is no longer an abstract idea elaborated by the vanguard of the party to be achieved in the 'future'. Today's utopia is a concrete and daily practice of millions of people committed to creating a plural and dignified world against and beyond global neoliberalism. (2016: 352)

Dinerstein considers that today's utopia is no longer an 'abstract utopia', created by a vanguard who intends to implement it merely in a distant future. The 'present utopia' is rather 'a concrete daily practice'. In this way, it's possible to sustain that the MCP is in tune with the social movements 'against and beyond global neoliberalism' that she refers, as well as against capitalism itself. MCP may be characterized by a 'utopia in action' or 'concrete utopia', since its utopia is not stagnated in projects, neither in fiction literature nor in the post-revolutionary socialists' plans. Similarly, the communitarian movements that serve as uchronias to MCP were 'concrete utopias' themselves: Canudos, Sete Povos das Missões, Quilombo dos Palmares, the miners of Nova Lima and many other examples of struggles that inspires the *Movimento das Comunidades Populares*. All of them characterized by an active utopia as they sought to materialize the desired future in their present moments (Penna, 2016).

Although it does not have the magnitude of the ultimate goal, to which they understand to be walking to, the 'utopia in action'/'concrete utopia' has the power to concretize utopias and, even though they are necessarily partial, they constantly transform what one wishes to conquer. The utopian project in the classical sense of the 'not yet existent' changes and deepens its goals as the social movement tries to approach it. Thus, as something that did not seem possible – such as the creation of a small communitarian bank – becomes reality, new horizons, new utopias can be formulated, serving as historical engine in this search for concrete social interests.

Like the idea expressed in Galeano's quoted passage at the opening of this section, the utility of Utopia is that, even if it is unreachable, it has the potential to set us in motion. However, it is not so obvious that the movement, each step towards utopia, modifies itself. If, as the writer says, every ten steps we take towards utopia, it moves away ten more, it shows that utopia is constantly changing every time actions are carried out with the aim of realizing it. In other words, every partial realization of utopia is the creation of a new one. In this journey towards a new society, new uchronias also arise as new ways to visit the past and to seek inspiration in it. Uchronias and utopias dialogue with concrete social realities, with experiences, with specific interests of social groups. They are generated by them and at the same time they influence and feed them with new possibilities and objectives.

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