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Brazilians in Spain: communication and transnational activism in a context of economic- political crisis

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to analyze the communication and transnational activism of Brazilian immigrants in Barcelona, Spain, which can be linked to the current context of economic and political crisis in Brazil, focusing on the collective actions of these immigrants against the impeachment of former President Dilma Rousseff. Based on the theoretical interface between communication, migration, transnationalism and activism, the article uses a qualitative approach that includes semi-structured interviews with seven Brazilian activists in Barcelona and the collection of communication materials produced and shared by activists in digital spaces. The results highlight the complementarity of street spaces and digital social networks in the exercise of an activism in which immigrants re-establish links, participate and intervene in the politics of the country of origin, articulate with the Brazilian diaspora in the world and give visibility to the context of economic-political crisis in Brazil in social and media spaces in Spain and other European countries. We highlight the relevance of gender relations, recognizing that most of the activists are women immigrants, and the preponderance of mobilizations guided by a feminist agenda that demarcates actions related to the impeachment in Brazil.

Keywords

Communication, Brazilian immigration, activism, politics, transnationality, social networks.

1. Introduction

This article presents the results of a study that analyzed the communications and transnational activism of Brazilian immigrants in Barcelona, Spain, related to the current context of economic and political crisis in Brazil. The central focus is the collective actions of immigrants that were triggered by the impeachment of former President Dilma Rousseff in 2016 and the resulting political developments.¹ Based on the theoretical interface between communication, migration, transnationalism and activism, the article is based on a qualitative methodology with two procedures – semi-direct interviews with seven Brazilian activists in

¹ Article with results of a research developed between October 2018 and February 2019, during the research term that took place in the Institut de la Comunicació (InCom) at Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona (UAB), with a grant from FAPESP - The São Paulo Research Foundation, under the number 2018/02581-4.

Barcelona (five women and two men) and the collection of materials produced or shared by these activists in digital communication spaces such as social networks, portals and websites.

In the first part of the article, we contextualize Brazilian emigration in the world, in Spain and in Barcelona and undertake some theoretical incursions around the concepts of migration, transnationalism, networks and communication technologies. In the second part, we systematize and analyze empirical data related to the dynamics of transnational activism of Brazilians in the context of the impeachment of former President Dilma Rousseff.

Rousseff's (from the Workers' Party, PT) impeachment was a legal-political process, sparked after she won the 2014 presidential elections. Her opponent,² from the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB), requested an audit of electronic ballot boxes and electoral data, alleging voting irregularities. Although the audit did not find fraud, a legal proceeding was initiated to interrupt Rousseff's mandate based on charges that she failed to comply with her administrative responsibilities. The opening of the impeachment process was accepted on December 2, 2015, by president of the Brazilian congress Eduardo Cunha and concluded, after several institutional and parliamentary procedures, on August 31, 2016, with a vote to annul Rousseff's presidency.³

The impeachment intensified the political and partisan polarization rattling Brazil since the pre-electoral period, and began to be narrated and denounced nationally and internationally –by institutional and civil sectors, such as the Workers' Party (PT), other opposition parties, and social and trade union movements– as a juridical-parliamentary and media coup. These sectors characterized Rousseff's removal as a coup because it was approved –despite no legal evidence of her wrongdoing– by political and economic agents linked to corruption by the so-called Operation Lava Jato investigations.

2. Brazilian emigration in the world and in Spain

The 1980s marked a significant reversal in the direction of international migration flows in Brazil with the growth of Brazilian emigration to destinations such as the United States, Japan, Portugal and Paraguay (Masanet, Baeninger & Mateo, 2012; Silva, 2008). Back in the 1960s and 1970s, there had been migratory flows of Brazilians, either as temporary workers to the United States or as political exiles of the dictatorship in different countries. Assis (2017) also points out that, at that time, Brazil did not have an emigration tradition. This, coupled with the low numerical relevance of these migratory flows, largely explains the lack of attention that this new phenomenon received from Brazilian authorities and scholars.

The economic crisis of the 1980s is understood to be one of the main drivers of Brazilian emigration, as well as the frustrations associated with the political context of the first years of the country's re-democratization, which contributed to increasing these flows (Masanet, Baeninger & Mateo, 2012). In addition, the reduction of social mobility for some population sectors, high rates of unemployment and job insecurity (high informal employment, instability and low wages) are also recognized as factors that have driven the displacement of Brazilians to other countries.

Researchers have also been concerned with understanding the mobility of Brazilians within the new dynamics of capitalism and globalization, as an expression of growing socioeconomic inequalities between nations and the labor needs of the so-called rich countries (Patarra, 2005). These new dynamics promoted the flexibility of financial flows and of labor markets as well as of products and consumption patterns, collaborating in the globalization of consumption habits and lifestyles of developed countries. Mass media aspirations “that could not be met in the countries of origin, which translates into migratory potential” (Masanet, Baeninger & Mateo, 2012, p. 8) were also triggered.

² Aécio Neves.

³ Dilma Rousseff was the second president to be impeached in Brazil. The first was Fernando Collor in 1992.

Assis (2017) examines the intensification of Brazilian emigration throughout the 1990s, which was articulated and nourished by social networks that were constituted through migratory process, favoring the connections of goods, resources, information and the conformation of transnational communities that link immigrants' countries of origin and destination. North, Dias and Martins Junior (2018) recognize in these networks important dynamics in the global mobility of Brazilians, and raise another structural argument: the current increase and diversification of class, gender, and regions of origin of Brazilian emigration flows can be related to the socioeconomic policies implemented in Brazil since the late 1990s. In a study of Brazilians in London and returnees in Brazil, the authors distinguish aspects of these policies –such as Brazil's economic opening to international capital flows, the implementation of social programs and the expansion of the internal market– which were responsible for promoting the structural conditions that facilitated the creation of social networks and increasing Brazilian emigration to the United Kingdom.

In 2015, the last year with available information from the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, 3,083,255 Brazilians were living outside the country (Bogus & Baeninger 2018, p. 8). In 2015, Brazilian migrants were present in 138 countries, compared to 112 in 2008. The ten countries with the largest number of Brazilian residents are the United States, Paraguay, Japan, the United Kingdom, Portugal, Spain, Germany, Switzerland, Italy and France (Bogus & Baeninger, 2018, p. 8).

Spain is one of the European countries that in recent decades has received a significant and growing number of Brazilians.⁴ Although Brazilian emigration to Spain cannot be considered a recent phenomenon, if we consider Brazilians seeking Spanish citizenship, the increase in the migratory flow of Brazilians, numerically imperceptible in Spanish statistics until the mid-1990s, intensified in the 2000s, and is associated mainly with two factors. One is difficulty to obtain a US visa and Mexico's requirement of a visa for Brazilians, which impeded migration of Brazilians to the United States across the Mexican border. The second is the dynamic growth of the Spanish economy that began in 2000, linked to a real estate boom and employment opportunities in the civil construction sector, as highlighted by Assis (2018) and Massanet and Baeninger (2011).

Other factors that attracted Brazilians to Spain were its more flexible immigration policy in relation to other European countries, higher wages than in Portugal, and the greater dynamism of the Spanish economy and labor market before the crisis of 2008, which attracted Brazilians who had been living in Portugal (Massanet & Baeninger, 2011).

Recent data from the Spanish National Institute of Statistics (INE) indicate that on January 1, 2018, 130,975 Brazilians were living in Spain, 83,405 of whom were women and 47,390 men. Among Spain's regions, the Autonomous Community of Catalonia, where Barcelona is located, had the service sectors, particularly as domestic workers and as care providers, but also in other activities, including the sex market (Assis, 2018) highest number of registered Brazilians, a total of 29,475, 22,234 of whom resided in the city of Barcelona. Among the migratory groups in Spain, Brazilians stand out for the greater predominance of female immigration than other Latin American countries. Brazilian immigrants of different Regional origins and bonds with class, gender and race, are concentrated in service sectors, particularly as domestic workers and care providers, but also in other activities, including the sex market (Assis, 2018).

Considering these links between Brazil and Spain, engendered by migratory flows, in this article we propose to analyze the transnational communication and activism of Brazilian immigrants in Barcelona, related to Brazil's current economic and political crisis, focusing on the collective actions of these immigrants against the impeachment of former President Dilma

⁴ Data from July 1, 2018, by INE (the Spanish National Institute of Statistics) show that of the total population of 46,733,038, Spain has 4,663,760 foreigners. Available at: www.ine.es.

Rousseff. Initially, we develop some conceptual reflections, and then present the methodology and results of the study.

3. Transnationalism, migrant activism, technologies and social networks

Retis (2018) recalls that theoretical approaches to transnationalism emerged in the 1990s, forming a field of reflection and criticism on methodological nationalism and the need to integrate, in analyses of migration, the spaces and conditions of origin and destination of migrants, which would make it possible to understand how they don't become separated from their country of origin, while they simultaneously constitute a transnational social field. Glick-Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc (1992) use the term "transmigrant" to reflect on the daily life of migrants, especially in Europe and North America, which is characterized by multiple and constant interconnections between international borders and public identities, configured by multiple and simultaneous relationships with more than one nation-state.

Guarnizo (2004) uses the expression "transnational living" to postulate that the dynamics of migrant transnationalism are not reduced to the economic impact of North-South monetary remittances to localities of origin, but are also composed of an intense flow of ideas, behaviors, identities and social capital that connect communities in host countries with those in countries of origin. Mezzadra (2005) points out, however, that much of the research that emphasizes the constitution of new transnational spaces does not suggest that migrants produce organized spaces with unidirectional connections between their places of settlement and places of origin, but rather spaces of continuous and contradictory movements of deterritorialization and reterritorialisation that derive from globalization processes and reconfigure the very notion of space and belonging.

In this respect, Portes (2004) warns that the practice of transnationalism is not always universal or regular among migrants. Still, he recognizes that the macroeconomic and social impacts migrants have on communities and nations cannot be evaluated solely by the numerical dimension of those involved but must also consider the sum of the transnational actions, those that are common among activists, and more isolated among other migrants. Tarrow (2010) points out that transnational actions of immigrants can range from monetary remittances and/or regular visits by activists to countries of origin to invest in companies, philanthropic projects and cultural organizations, to intervention and direct participation in political and electoral processes in those countries. However, Tarrow also highlights that this participation does not exclude nationalist immigrants who mobilize diasporic discourses to destabilize or overthrow governments in their countries of origin, such as Croatians in Canada, Irish in Boston, and Kurds in Germany.

Sassen (2003) sees in the confluence between economic globalization and social digitization the emergence of citizenship and political dynamics that unfold in the context of global cities, such as Barcelona, London, São Paulo and many others. Cities emerge as strategic places for a series of new political, economic, cultural, and subjective forms of action that create new power structures, according to Sassen, as do narratives and opportunities for action for new types of actors (Sassen, 2003, p. 113). In a perspective similar to that of Lefbvre, who found in the working class of Paris of the twentieth century the active force of the city, Sassen locates this active force in two actors in global cities: corporate global capital and immigration.

Escaping from formal systems, the possibilities of these new forms of political and citizen action depend on concrete projects and practices of different communities, insofar as the sense of belonging to these communities is not subsumed to the national, and may "reveal the possibility for political action that, despite being transnational, is centered on the reality of concrete locations" (Sassen, 2003, p. 113). Sassen interprets these forms of political action as a movement for the exercise of citizenship that revolves around claims for new rights, ranging

from protests against police brutality and globalization to policies of sexual orientation and occupation of real estate by anarchist groups.

In this context of global cities defined by Sassen (2003, p. 91) as “progressively privatized, globalized and slippery,” technological development, which has led to both lowering transport costs and expanding access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), is the main trigger of transnational political actions, according to authors such as Sassen (2003), Portes (2004) and Retis (2018). Portes (2004, p. 74) adds that, while there are examples of transnationalism in all migratory history, “compared to the past, migrants now have many more technological resources to maintain economic, political or cultural links with their respective countries of origin.”

Navarro García (2014, p. 80) also analyzes the emergence of collective voices of migrants and the renewal of political participation and mobilization through the use of ICTs in the production of what she calls “new transnational public spheres.” In these spaces, she says, “migrant and non-migrant populations can meet again, share common interests and values; and they can mobilize together to defend causes in new spaces of collective action.” Navarro García also maintains that the understanding of the political action that involves the uses of the communication technologies should not be based on a binary conception between traditional media spaces and spaces created and produced by the immigrants. These spaces cannot be considered intrinsically subversive, merely because they involve questions of ethnic identity.

Martín-Barbero (2014) sees in the contradiction of the processes of globalization centered on digital technology and communication, spaces and gaps that can enhance association, democratic participation and defense of sociopolitical and cultural rights, while activating experiences of expressiveness and creation. Without disregarding globalization as a source of inequalities between social, cultural and national sectors, Martín-Barbero understands global dynamics as those marked by a networked, interactive and connective model of communicability. In this perspective, the notion of networks, understood as instances or heterogeneous social organizations that have a predominantly informal character, has allowed migration researchers to trace and understand the gaps mentioned by Martín-Barbero in the concrete communicational practices of migrants in transnational spaces, in which dynamics of coexistence, connectivity, links and exchanges are produced (Cogo, 2018).⁵

The new organizational forms, based on decentralized and horizontal networks and on the collective work supported by the Internet, as well as the relevance of communication in processes of social and political activism, are considered by Lago Martínez (2008) to be two central characteristics of the new forms of political intervention and collective action, using Internet and digital technologies, which have been adopted since the late 1990s by global resistance movements worldwide and by social and cultural collectives involved in the struggles of social movements. To these two aspects, Martínez adds the globalization of protest and the simultaneity of actions of resistance, new strategies for collective action and new aesthetics of protest, and the integration of communication and image into written, visual, audiovisual and gestural expressions.

Thus, studying the dynamics of network communications requires thinking about technology not only as new devices, but as new modes of language and perception, new sensibilities and writings capable of producing diverse and not always predictable appropriations of ICTs around which activism emerges “as a possibility for social participation, transnational experimentation and, in some cases, social transformation based on citizen practices” (Brignol, 2018, p. 127).

⁵ The social networks preexist and, in many times, help the migratory networks. Therefore, the notions of social networks and digital social networks are not equivalent (Cogo, 2018).

4. Research methodology

The qualitative research included three procedures: (a) exploratory and non-participant observation of Brazilian groups in Barcelona and other places in Spain on the social network platform Facebook; (b) semi-structured interviews with seven Brazilian activists in Barcelona; and (c) the collection of digital communication materials produced and shared by these activists in digital communication spaces, such as Facebook, the messaging application WhatsApp, websites, blogs and other platforms.

The research began with an exploratory mapping to observe the interaction and collection of postings about the impeachment of President Rousseff in eight groups of Brazilians in Barcelona, Catalonia and Spain on Facebook.⁶ This initial observation had a non-participant character, and helped identify the existence of mobilizations and debates among Brazilian immigrants in Barcelona around impeachment, mainly on two Facebook groups – Brazilians in Barcelona and Brazilians in Spain – official group. The interactions of Brazilians in these groups, were marked by polarization for and against impeachment and its characterization as a “coup.” The two groups also became spaces for the sharing of information and media materials on the subject and the dissemination of calls for demonstrations, for or against impeachment, held in Barcelona and other Spanish cities. This mapping helped to locate immigrants to be interviewed, and these interviews revealed that some of the Facebook groups that we chose to observe were not the most used by immigrants engaged in impeachment activism. The manager of one of the groups – *Brasileiros na Espanha-Oficial*⁷ – was one of the activists interviewed for this study.

A second research procedure consisted of seven semi-structured interviews with Brazilian immigrants in Barcelona that resulted from the observation of the Facebook groups, but mainly from my later personal contact with members of migratory networks of Brazilians who live in the city. Beyond this exploratory observation of Brazilian groups on Facebook, the selection of activists to be interviewed was based on references obtained from a researcher of this subject in Barcelona.⁸ Afterwards, a snowball strategy located other Brazilian migrants and activists, indicated by the first interviewees.⁹

As a third and complementary methodological procedure, we collected, in spaces such as social network platforms, websites and message applications, digital materials related to activism of Brazilians in Barcelona. I asked the interviewees to add their personal profiles to my Facebook and to a WhatsApp group,¹⁰ Friends of Democracy, which allowed me to follow their posts and messages, to interact with some of them, and to receive information about events in the city in which these activists participated.¹¹ I also followed the websites mentioned by the interviewees and collected material in the media and social networks in which Brazilian immigrants appear as sources in interviews or as authors of opinion pieces about impeachment. Finally, I gathered images of demonstrations related to the impeachment that were promoted by immigrants in public spaces in Barcelona.¹² This last methodological procedure allowed me to reconstruct, based on the interviews, how Brazilian migrants

⁶ The groups can be accessed at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/brasileirosembcn/>; <https://www.facebook.com/groups/5664956854/>; <https://www.facebook.com/groups/neibcn/>; <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2054116884909867/>; <https://www.facebook.com/groups/conexionbrasil/>; <https://www.facebook.com/groups/542353699258629/>; <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1898942280351278>.

⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/brasileirosespanha/>.

⁸ I am especially grateful to Brazilian researcher Maria Badet for guiding me on the profile of Brazilians in Barcelona, sharing her contacts and introducing me to some of the interviewees.

⁹ Considering that the research project was limited to a four-month period, it was not possible to conduct more interviewees or reach a more diversified profile of activists.

¹⁰ I also used WhatsApp to find individuals to be interviewed and to schedule interviews.

¹¹ I watched, for example, the documentary film *Processo*, about Rousseff's impeachment, which was exhibited in an alternative movie theater in Barcelona.

¹² The images, some used in this article, were provided by one of the interviewees, who had produced them.

appropriated and constructed different spaces and digital technologies in their dynamics of transnational activism against impeachment.

5. Brazilians' communication and activism: between the streets and social networks

The analysis of the communication and activism of Brazilian immigrants in Barcelona requires us to first understand these mobilizations against the impeachment, as a development of broader global struggles for the rights of Brazilian migrants initiated in the 1990s. In the construction of a memory about these struggles, Feldmann-Bianco (2016) recalls that the formation of a Brazilian community abroad was driven mainly by two episodes: the deportation of a group of Brazilian migrants in Lisbon in 1993 and, subsequently, the restrictive immigration policies implemented in the Schengen area. Feldmann-Bianco points out that, in the context of these episodes, the mobilizations initiated in Portugal by Brazilian migrants and other citizens of former Portuguese colonies against the restrictive policies of the Portuguese post-colonial state, were decisive to the formation of a social movement of Brazilian migrants based on claims of rights and citizenship, and contributed to the formulation by the Brazilian state of policies directed to this diaspora, especially during the Lula government between 2003 and 2010. From the first articulations of Brazilians in Portugal and the foundation in 1992 of the 'Casa do Brasil' in Lisbon, Feldman-Bianco identifies various protagonists who collaborated in the globalization of the Brazilian diaspora social movement: immigrants, the Catholic Church, scholars and activists of the migratory issue, the Workers' Party group abroad and government authorities. In addition, she lists a series of events and documents organized and disseminated by the Brazilian community abroad that, in different periods, became part of the agenda of various ministries of the Brazilian state and influenced the formulation of public policies for those who identified themselves as Brazilians abroad.

Considering this scenario, we analyzed data about Brazilian immigrant activism in Barcelona, and initially proposed a characterization of the activists interviewed in this research. Of the seven Brazilians interviewed in Barcelona, five women and two men, two are Afro-descendants.¹³ The interviewees were between 35 and 64 years old, come from cities in the South, Southeast and Northeast of Brazil and have been residents in Barcelona for between 2 and 25 years, as summarized in the table below:

Table 1: Characterization of the people interviewed.

Name	Age	Professional activity	City/State of origin	Time of residence in Barcelona
Anna	55	Lecturer of Portuguese and music. Artist.	Belo Horizonte (Minas Gerais)	10 years
Daiana-Sombra ¹⁴	35	Bookstore owner and capoeira player	Rio de Janeiro (Rio de Janeiro)	17 years
Edi	61	Musician	Rio de Janeiro (Rio de Janeiro)	22 years
Flavio	46	Administrator in the Brazilian Consulate	Olinda (Pernambuco)	13 years
Ivonete	52	Lawyer	Salto de Lontra (Paraná)	11 years
Juracy	64	Retired psychologist	Curitiba (Paraná)	2 years
Maria	49	Financial department of a private company	Aracajú (Sergipe)	25 years

Source: Own elaboration.

¹³ Both (Edi and Daiana-Sombra) identify themselves as Afro-descendants.

¹⁴ The interviewee requests the use of the name 'Sombra' in memory of capoeira players, who, in 1890, when capoeira was included as a crime in the Brazilian penal code, used the co-identity 'Sombra' to make it more difficult to recognize them or to detain them for identification.

Six of the interviewees live or have lived what can be described as experiences of migratory circularity, especially in relation to the binational axis Brazil-Spain, but also in movements through other European countries, such as France, Germany and Portugal, spending only a short time, whether to work or to visit. Juracy, a retired woman, spends parts of each year in Spain and Brazil, Daiana-Sombra lived in Brazil between 2014 and 2017 and Ana has also split her time between the two countries in recent years. This suggests that in these movements of coming and going, often sporadic, transnational practices are also constructed, migration networks are articulated and links with the country of origin are re-established.

All of the interviewees reported experiences with activism prior to the episodes of the impeachment in Brazil, with the exception of Ivonete. In addition, especially among those who visit Brazil more frequently, impeachment-related activism is experienced simultaneously in Brazil and Spain, with different levels of involvement. Of the seven Brazilian interviewees, several are participants in the same migratory networks and digital communication spaces, and in Barcelona, some have participated in the same experiences of activism, related or not to the impeachment.¹⁵

Tarrow (2010, XII) defines transnational activism as the constitution of a subset of people and groups that are rooted in specific national contexts, but who engage in political struggle activities that lead them to participate in transnational contact networks and conflicts. Under the name of “rooted cosmopolitans,” Tarrow postulates that what is new about these activists is their connection to both current dynamics of globalization and changing international political structures.

Lago Martínez highlights, among the experiences of contemporary activism, the new cycle of protests that, starting in 2009 and 2010,¹⁶ followed a period of struggles by global resistance movements, and points out that “in the transformations that occurred in a little more than a decade, the technological leap (equipment, infrastructure and capacity for use) is very important, above all the appropriation of digital technologies for political activity” (Lago Martínez, 2015, p. 121). The author also affirms that, in these struggles, the urban public space of face-to-face interaction is tinged with the mediated dimension of digital networks, noting that the boundaries between the so-called online and offline worlds become diffuse in the new modes of political intervention.

Based on these reflections, we observe that the transnational activism of Brazilian immigrants in Barcelona, related to the impeachment, is developed from a set of collective actions that reveal the complementarity between two spaces of communication interaction occupied by these immigrants –the street and digital social networks. With the initial aim of giving visibility to the episode of impeachment, activists articulated political and communicational practices that stimulated the networks and the streets, but that also sought to occupy other social and media spaces, especially the Spanish and European media, and to seek out institutional alliances with sectors such as the Barcelona city government and the European Parliament. Moreover, after Rousseff’s impeachment and removal, the actions of the Brazilian immigrants in Barcelona unfolded in another set of movements and acts of protest that were also being held in Brazil, such as the denunciation of the impeachment as a state coup; the #ForaTemer campaign, which sought the resignation of President Michel Temer¹⁷ and new direct elections; the struggle for the release from prison of former President Lula (#LulaLivre); Marielle Franco, present!,” in solidarity with the assassinated Rio de Janeiro

¹⁵ Among others, in the Citizenship Council of the Brazilian Consulate and in The Council of Representatives of Brazilian Abroad.

¹⁶ Like those from the 15-M group, in Spain; Occupy Wall Street, in the USA; or movements in Iceland, Greece, Portugal, Russia, Italy, Turkey; the Arab Spring, in Egypt, Iran, Libya, Tunisia, Yemen, Morocco, Syria. And, in Latin America, the protests in Mexico, Chile, Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela.

¹⁷ The former vice-president who became president of Brazil after Rousseff’s impeachment.

city councilwoman; and #EleNÃO (#NotHim”) –a women’s movement against the election of now president Jair Bolsonaro.

Six of the seven Brazilians interviewed participated in protests against the impeachment in public spaces in Barcelona,¹⁸ resorting to street demonstrations as a repertoire already enshrined in collective action which, according to Fillieule and Tartakowsky (2015), was consolidated in the mid-nineteenth century in a market society resulting from the triumph of the industrial revolution. “Local actions, demarcated by the traditional elites, hitherto prevalent, give way to national and autonomous actions; the demonstration, therefore, is guaranteed, once revolts and revolutions are left behind” (Fillieule & Tartakowsky, 2015, p. 24).

Thus, public demonstrations became an essentially urban phenomenon linked to the invention of the street as a public and concrete space of political protest, as indicated by statements by Brazilians about the demonstrations in Barcelona against the impeachment.

I remember the date exactly, April 17, 2016 [...] Then I saw that everyone was demonstrating in various parts of the world and I thought, we could do the same in Barcelona. I thought of Luiza who is in the group and Edi. Edi has left the group, but he is with us. He left Facebook and WhatsApp because he is now living in France. Then I thought we’ll go to the square, Luisa, Edi and I, we’ll go with three posters. [...]. That was what I thought at first, and I had John too. So I said, ‘Let’s go at four o’clock, no, let’s have a Facebook event.’ So I went there and made the event. Do you know how many people have attended? 300. It simply set things on fire. Because everyone was already so concerned and anxious and wanted to do something, and the thing spread like that. Then we set up the “Friends of Democracy” group on Facebook and also I think on WhatsApp. (Anna).

The impeachment in Brazil was a before and after in the life of all Brazilians here, the Brazilian community here is very polarized since the time of the impeachment, which for me was a coup, right? No matter how much PT has stolen [...] there was no legal configuration for Dilma’s impeachment, that is, no and no and no [...] she may even have stolen, which has not yet been proven, but not for a constitutional impeachment [...] it was really a political, media and administrative coup in Brazil. During the process, [...] the International Committee against the Impeachment was created at an international level and here we formed what is called the International Committee against Impeachment Catalonia, and we have created something apart, a group called Friends of Democracy, we made many demonstrations, here in the Plaza Sant Jaume, actions and pamphlets. (Maria).

There in Brazil, whenever I was there, I went to any demonstration against the impeachment. And I’ve been here too. Here we held one in the Plaza Sant Jaume [...] I went to many demonstrations before the coup, to prevent the coup, but it was not possible unfortunately [...] The question is: it doesn’t matter if it is there or here. I am still Brazilian and am fighting for causes. (Juraci).

The following images illustrate some of the demonstrations convened by collectives of Brazilians in different public spaces in Barcelona and attended by some of the activists who were interviewed.

¹⁸ Demonstrations that took place in the same spaces as those in favor of the impeachment, promoted by other Brazilians in Barcelona.

Figure 1: Come to Democracy – Demonstration in the Cataluña Square on March 31, 2016.



Figure 2: May 1 – Via Layetana, on January 1, 2016.



Source: Images provided by Edi Barcelo, 2019.

Digital social networks, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and messaging applications such as WhatsApp, as well as websites and blogs, have been widely used to organize and mobilize demonstrators, and to disseminate and articulate actions by Brazilian immigrants in Barcelona. Among some of the spaces created and/or used, the interviewees mentioned Friends of Democracy,¹⁹ FIBRA –the International Front of Brazilians against the Coup,²⁰ the International Committee to Annul the Impeachment, the Lula Livre BCN Committee²¹; United against Lawfare,²² Brazilians abroad pro-PT 2018,²³ and Brazilian Women against Fascism BCN.²⁴

Network activism enables Brazilians to articulate not only in the local space of the city of Barcelona, but also with groups of Brazilians from other countries and cities in Europe, North America and Latin America engaged in mobilizations against the impeachment. One of these articulations is related to the International Front of Brazilians against the Coup (FIBRA), which includes groups, collectives and associations of Brazilians, and friends of Brazil, in several cities of the world.²⁵ It defines itself as “supra-partisan,” with a common goal of “struggle for democracy and against the coup in Brazil, the defense of Lula Livre [Free Lula] and the fight against fascism.”²⁶

Anna remembers the constitution of the Front that was organized in a face-to-face event in Amsterdam broadcast via digital networks.

There was a girl named Márcia, from Amsterdam, and she began to contact all the people from outside Brazil, Brazilians who live abroad [...] for us to get together, to fight together. So we began to do coordinated actions. When we had an important date, we organized in several cities at the same time [...], so we have a group that calls international articulators and I am in that group. Now there is the FIBRA, the International Front of Brazilians, before it had a different name [...] Parallel to this, they were fighting against the coup, but when Dilma left definitively, on August 31, after the vote in the Senate, on that same day

¹⁹ WhatsApp group.

²⁰ <https://fibrabrasil.wordpress.com/> and <https://www.facebook.com/groups/BrasileirosnoMundoContraGolpe/>.

²¹ <https://www.facebook.com/ComiteDeLutaContraOGolpeLulaLivreBCN/>.

²² <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1722348404453592/about/>.

²³ <https://www.facebook.com/brasileirosnoexteriorproptcomiteinternacional/>.

²⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/BrasileirasxFascismobcn/>.

²⁵ In the year 2018, the group contained 56 collectives distributed in 24 countries: <https://fibrabrasil.wordpress.com/coletivos/>.

²⁶ <https://fibrabrasil.wordpress.com/>

PT, PSOL, PCdoB, everyone was already there in the truck for the event, to say: Direct elections now. I said: People, but the body is not even cold, what do you mean? (Anna).

Another transnational action that stems from the struggles of Brazilians against impeachment in Barcelona was articulated around the “United against Lawfare,” a movement that, in addition to being present on digital social networks,²⁷ was stimulated by mobilizations of Brazilians in city spaces and events such as “Modern State Coups: Lawfare in the World,” with the participation of representatives from Latin American countries, such as Brazil and Ecuador, as well as Catalonia,²⁸ which, according to the interviewees, are undergoing the same use of legal processes for political offensives –known as lawfare.

Figure 3: Committee for the annulment of the impeachment and United People against LawFare – Against Lula’s jailing – Cataluña Square on April 8th, 2018.



Source: Image granted by Edi Barcelo, 2019.

On Facebook, the “United Against Lawfare” movement presents itself as a group that

was born with the intention of uniting citizens and representatives or members of collectives and political parties from different countries, to fight against LAWFARE (Legal War), a new form of war used to overthrow democratic and progressive governments. With LAWFARE, the judiciary, which should be impartial, begins to act with political, military and economic interests, and counts on the valuable help of the media. It is the Condor plan of the 21st century.

This is happening in Latin America and in Catalonia, and this is why we think that the time has come to unite to denounce, to make people aware, to occupy public spaces, to organize debates, to look for strategies to struggle and confront this nefarious and destructive practice.²⁹

In an interlinking of street spaces and digital social networks, Brazilian immigrants have also developed communication strategies that seek to give public visibility to Rousseff’s impeachment in Spanish and European media, showing that the visibility of the conflict is as important as its confrontation. Moreover, they are affirming that the aesthetic and communicative dimension of contemporary political action is essential and intertwines with the field of representation both in the context of digital social networks and major media organizations (Lago Martínez, 2008).

²⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1722348404453592/about/>.

²⁸ A reference to charges that resulted in the jailing of politicians who participated in the referendum for Catalan autonomy in October 2017.

²⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1722348404453592/about/>.

The occupation of spaces in Spanish and other European media sought to construct other versions of the narrative about impeachment that reached the region, through news agencies and Brazilian media, according to Edi, one of the Brazilian activists interviewed.

more or less the staff followed the guidelines of Brazil, which I personally did not agree with very much, because people here are limited to a certain extent [...] so what we can do is show people what is going on there. We cannot do much more than that. [...] but I think that in any case this movement that we made, through Maria Dantas and other people who were journalists, this information was arriving here in the European newspapers and had connections with groups in France, Germany and various places. [...] I think that this little group of people, without bragging or anything, made this news come out and spread in Europe. [...] Until then what happened in Brazil was not known or publicized [...] I think that people and newspapers were always reading material from the news agencies, which come from Globo and the major media. So they already had other direct information from people who were here and knew some politicians here, and then this information had another character. (Edi).

Maria recalls: “we participated in several television programs, radio, newspaper articles, we organized roundtables.”³⁰ In 2016, Flavio participated, among others, in a debate at the Committee of Journalists and the College of Journalists of Catalonia, entitled “The power of the media?,” to discuss the role of the media in the Brazilian crisis and impeachment. Edi also pointed out that some of these initiatives involved alternative Brazilian media, collectives like Media Ninja, by sending images and other records of acts against the impeachment in Barcelona.

And finally, a more recent development of the anti-impeachment activism was suggested by our first respondent, Flavio, who noted that “there is no collective as feminized as the Brazilian one, at least here in Catalonia,” emphasizing the strong female presence among Brazilian immigrants in Spain. In its relation with Brazil, this activism is linked to the “Marielle Franco, present! Movement,” in response to the assassination of the Rio de Janeiro city councilwoman, and #EleNãO, the women’s movement against the election of Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro. From the perspective of gender issues, both collaborated to the emergence of the collective Brazilian Women against Fascism BCN,³¹ according to two interviewees from the movement.

This collective began with the murder of Marielle. Maria, together with other girls, organized an act and we went, and from this moment we had a meeting of women with the same thinking, perhaps from different party lines, but with supra-party thinking, then little- by-little the project grew [...] we had this expectation at the beginning, but with all this happening we thought it would be important to have a position, because I think that Brazil is in a political position today where standing out is impossible. We are all so aware of everything that happens that you cannot keep quiet, right? [...] From people who have lived here for 30 years to those who have just arrived, we believe that everyone has something to contribute, fresh thoughts from Brazil to thoughts that were consolidated here. (Daiana-Sombra).

After I saw that the thing really was PT, PT, PT, I began to fade away. Hey, I said, I’ll look for another line [...] And that line was when I went to Brazil last year [...] and it was precisely when they killed Marielle, and I arrived here two days later and organized a concentration here for Marielle in the Plaza Sant Jaume with 200, 300 people, and, from that day on, some women began to organize. But women who I did not even recognize, Brazilians who lived here. The # EleNãO began at that time ... it was not called that, because at that time Bolsonaro was not [...] And then we started to make a movement here, right?

³⁰ Among others, see: [http://www.dretsdelpobles.org/mm/file/Revista%20Papers/Papers-64-online\(1\).pdf](http://www.dretsdelpobles.org/mm/file/Revista%20Papers/Papers-64-online(1).pdf) and <https://www.periodistes.cat/actualitat/noticies/debat-crisi-politica-al-brasil-i-la-auge-de-la-violencia-contra-els-moviments>.

³¹ <https://www.facebook.com/BrasileirasxFascismobcn/>.

And then, when the candidates began to be presented, which was after #EleNã, we really got organized. In fact, the woman who organized #EleNã was Cacá de Gaspari, who is a Brazilian actress who has lived here for a long time. She is wonderful, and sent me a message and said “Maria, let’s do it.” And then a few women and I organized ourselves and formed what is now the Platform of Brazilian Women against Fascism in Barcelona. We had the meetings on the 28th, the same day as in Brazil and we were together [...]. Last week, we did an action, a pamphleting about “# EleNã” and “Marielle Presente” we did a mobilization on the day of the inauguration on the Rambla do Raval, [...]. We try not to post too much, we try not to be sensationalist, we try to be quite objective, do you understand? Right now we are 44 supra-party women, there are a lot of artists in the group, a lot of journalists [...]. It is also a very nice group [...] heterogeneous, diverse women [...] Yes, we build an agenda, we appear in the media, the last time was the day before yesterday, on the SER station with Josep Cunil [...] and, whoever is available will be interviewed on the 23rd. (Maria)

Figure 4: Act Marielle Franco.



Source: www.facebook.com/flavio.carvalho.3785.

We understand that these mobilizations of Brazilian women around gender issues have also triggered the configuration of transnational political activism of a supra-party character and with a cultural emphasis that is materialized in movements such as the Brazilian Women against Fascism BCN. Connected to the actions related to the impeachment, but also to other previous interests of immigrants, it is an activism that coexists, contests and negotiates with an activism that is more markedly partisan and related to guidelines such as #Lulalivre. On January 1, 2019, in a public event entitled “Possession of the Brazilian Presidency - #MarielleFranco Presente!,”³² convened by the collective Brazilian Women against Fascism BCN, a protest was held in the same region of Barcelona, organized by the Free Lula Committee Barcelona.³³

The narratives of the Brazilians interviewed, to hear the perspectives of activist women, reveal that the collective action of Brazilian immigrants is not circumstantial and is not limited to mobilizations against the impeachment, but organized around various collective and political actions in the field of Brazilian culture in Barcelona and in other contexts of Catalonia. Daiana-Sombra is one of the interviewees who discussed both professional and militant experiences, realized through capoeira and Brazilian cultural dances, in which gender is articulated to racial issues.

³² <https://www.facebook.com/events/215121062770568/>.

³³ <https://www.facebook.com/ComiteDeLutaContraOGolpeLulaLivreBCN/>.

There is another collective that I am also part of, we are five women who met in Mujeres Contra el Fascismo and then, when talking, we decided to create another one, called Artivismo. One of the women is already part of Artivismo in Rio de Janeiro. She was one of the founders and she is here. She was missing that kind of art in her life, and then, since she met me, and knew that I did capoeira, cultural dances, she called the other who is a theater actress, and another, and we decided to come together and continue Artivismo in Barcelona, which is very connected with #EleNão as well. We work in theatrical forms, poems, reflections [...]. It is a project that is beginning. But the idea is that through art we can make any kind of demand and raise the awareness of people? (Daiana-Shadow).

Finally, we understand that the activism of Brazilian women in Barcelona, visible in actions against impeachment, must be analyzed from the broader context of the trajectory of mobilizations in various parts of the world by Brazilian emigrants in recent decades, whose main aspects we mentioned earlier in this article from research by Feldman-Bianco (2016). The reflections she proposed indicate that, at the outset, the struggles for rights by Brazilians abroad were strongly marked by a strategic use of the imaginary of national belonging, which helped unify the experiences of a heterogeneous diasporic population. However, since the Brussels (2007) and Barcelona (2009) Meetings, promoted by the Brazilian community, Feldman-Bianco identified a movement in this homogeneous construction, especially with the inclusion, in 2010, of a gender perspective in the list of demands of Brazilian emigrants. "This agenda included suggestions to promote institutional campaigns that sought to deconstruct historical stereotypes about the presumed sensuality and permissiveness of Brazilian women," Feldman Bianco points out (2016, p. 58-59), to recall that these stereotypes had been triggered during the diplomatic conflicts of 1993 between Brazil and Portugal, when Brazilians deported from Lisbon were referred to as "mini-skirts," "vagabonds" and "transvestites."

If, in the Portuguese context, the re-signification of these stereotypes was linked to the colonial relations between Brazil and Portugal, in other European countries the distinction between civilized whites and racialized and exotic former colonial subjects also appears to have been revised. Thus, 17 years after the first deportations of Brazilians from the newly established European Union, the transnational activism of the Brazilian diaspora reveals, as we saw in mobilizations for citizen rights among Brazilian immigrants in Barcelona, the strength of "the connections between gender, work and racialization -including in reference to gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transsexuals and transgenders- bringing to light the agency of women and LGBT leaders" (Feldman Bianco, 2016, p. 59).

6. Conclusions

The reflections gathered in this text about the communication and activism against the impeachment by Brazilians in Barcelona show the complementarity of street spaces and digital social networks in the exercise of a transnational activism through which immigrants renew their ties, participate and intervene in politics in the country of origin, articulate with the global Brazilian diaspora. This activism also gives visibility to Brazil's economic and political crisis in Spanish and European social, institutional and media spaces.

Based on specificities of contemporary activisms (Lago Martínez, 2015; Castells, 2012), we understand that in the intersections between migratory networks and digital social networks, Brazilians used and created multiple nodes in the mobilizations around impeachment to articulate, mobilize and amplify the impact of their actions in various local and national spaces. This has made these actions more diffuse and at times ephemeral and transient, requiring a methodological effort by the researcher to reconstitute these nodes through both the memories of the interviewees and the variety of materials in digital spaces created and occupied by activists.

It was also possible to observe that the movement against impeachment, in the context of Brazilian immigration, followed patterns similar to those in the country of origin, in terms of dissent that marked an activism strained by party polarization and also by tensions between those with strong partisan affiliations and non-partisan individuals. However, the reinvention of unique forms of interaction, cooperation, language and aesthetics is also observed in the exercise of an activism that required immigrants to translate a specific episode from the Brazilian economic and political crisis into another national context. This was especially necessary to gain visibility for this Brazilian episode in Spanish and European media, and in other social and institutional spaces. In line with the changing structures of international politics defined by Tarrow (2010), this re-creation seems to have led activist immigrants to confront the current centralization of legal processes in politics -through the “United Against Lawfare” movement, which highlights convergences between the Brazilian impeachment, the Catalan independence movement and similar processes in Latin American countries such as Ecuador.

Finally, it should be mentioned that this study raised two issues that deserve further research. The first alludes to the relevance of the generational markers of immigrants interviewed who were engaged in political activism against impeachment. Between the ages of 35 and 64, some of these activists recalled their militancy, especially in the country of origin, linked to social movements during the period of Brazilian democratization and/or in the context of the emergence and consolidation of the Workers’ Party (PT) as a political force with a progressive profile that took center stage in Brazilian political and institutional life. A second issue refers to the dominant presence in Barcelona of Brazilian activist women, which also crosses the generational question. Gender-based activism, intersected with issues such as race, seems to mobilize both older and younger generations of Brazilian immigrants, including many new arrivals to Barcelona, motivating, according to Daiana-Sombra’s account, a variety of groups, such as Brazilian Women against Fascism BCN, or the recently created female activist group Artivismo. In them the women find proximity to similar recent movements in which they participated in Brazil.

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