Abstract

This paper draws on social systems theory to explore a key phenomenon in social movements: organizations. The Frente Popular Francisco Villa (PFFV) - an organization related to the Urban Popular Movement in Mexico - is used as a case study. The research focuses on the internal dynamics that have steered this organization and propelled internal changes in some of its key aspects, especially media diffusion and propaganda strategy. Indeed, the media strategy employed by the organization have changed during the 30-year-history of the PFFV, not only on the basis of the programmatic goals and objectives of the organization, but also as a consequence of internal and external dynamics beyond the control of members and leaders. The main objectives of this analysis are threefold. First, I intend to uncover the main processes and structures that regulate the PFFV’s internal dynamic and changes over time. Second, I aim to analyze the relationships between these changes and the requirements of several organizations and actors in the environment of the PFFV. Finally, I aim to explore the impact of broader processes (such as the political system or the culture) on the organization’s internal changes.

Keywords
social systems, protest organisation, diffusion media

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For the last three decades, ‘Popular organizations’ have been key ‘actors’ in the democratization process of the political system in Mexico. Early in their history, most of these organizations displayed a strong capacity for organizing community groups. Their conduct was characterized by numerous attempts to influence the government and political institutions in order to meet specific demands of their memberships. When these strategy of negotiation failed, some organizations pressured decision-makers through the organization of public demonstrations, street marches or sit-ins. Notably, the increasing openness of political channels from the mid 1990s on, and the unfolding of the democratic scenario in the last decade, provided political opportunities that several of these different organizations exploited to get involved in politics. By becoming members of political parties, these organizations were able to participate in electoral competitions and, in some cases, to prompt a wide set of legal and political reforms (Haber, 2009; Leyva, 2007).

The Popular Front Francisco Villa (henceforth PFFV) is one of these organizations. Formed in 1983 in Mexico City, the PFFV is characterized by an interesting and complex history. The PFFV directed its activities towards the achievement of both a long term goal and a middle-term goal. PFFV’s long term goal was based on an ideological and political program grounded in Marxist-Leninist doctrines, and consisted in leading the country towards socialism. The middle-term goal consisted in finding solutions to a wider set of immediate social and urban problems for its membership, such as the housing shortage in the city.

To accomplish these goals, the PFFV used different means. PFFV members established several community groups and built many squats and slums in the periphery of the city, organizing the unorganized. They developed new leadership where none existed, educating its membership through teaching programs; They contributed to the development of strong ties among participants. Finally, they established a reputation as a “radical” organization and as a “source of conflict” (R. Martínez, personal interview, September, 2009).

Although the PFFV may be included into the broader set of organizations and social movements that belong to the Urban Popular Movement (and indeed strong similarities may be observed between those two entities), it has developed a very specific set of characteristics. These characteristics make the PFFV an interesting case study in its own right. However, despite the potential sociological and political richness of this analysis, there is little research that has specifically investigated PFFV’s role as a popular organization in contentious politics.

1 For the last thirty years, Mexico has been involved in a process of political change. This process regards the autonomy and independence of political institutions, and the relationships between the political system and society. These political changes have been triggered by events of political conflict, and have involved the participation of civil society. These changes in the political system have been conceptualized as a “transition towards democracy” (Bizberg & Frybes, 2000; Krauze, 1990; Lujambio, 2000; Molinar Horcasitas, 1989; Silva-Hertzog Márquez, 1999).

2 The Urban Popular Movement (MUP) is a group of popular organizations characterized by similar institutional and ideological features. MUP's aims consist in providing an answer, in terms of public policies, to the housing problem and to the lack of urban services. MUP was created in the last years of the 1970s, but it acquired a strong capacity for organizing and mobilizing during the first half of the 1980s. For a deep analysis of the MUP see Haber, 2006; Núñez González, 1990; Ramírez Sáiz, 1986, 1987).
Research has generally focused on describing the role of the PFFV in the organization of popular classes and in its effects in the general process of transition towards democracy (Alceda Cruz, 2009; Álvarez Enríquez, 2004; Sánchez Ríos, 2007). This line of work however has yet to offer any thick, historical description of the specific features of the PFFV, the key elements of its organizational culture, or its methods and strategies of protest and contention. Nor have these studies provided a sociological account of the internal mechanisms implied in the dynamics and changes of this organization, and in its recent inclusion as a political actor within the institutional framework of politics.

In a recent study, I have begun to explore the main processes and structures implied in the functioning of the PFFV in contentious politics. I have offered a historical description of the concrete episodes that have framed the evolution of the PFFV in three different phases, namely, as a popular organization, as a protest organization, and more recently, as a political organization (Guerra Blanco, 2012). Nonetheless, there are still some dimensions of the PFFV that require further research.

The present paper explores the internal dynamics of this organization that have prompted internal changes in two key aspects, that is its media diffusion and propaganda strategy. The media strategy employed by the PFFV has changed throughout the 30-year of its history, not only on the basis of its programmatic goals and objectives, but also as a consequence of internal and external dynamics beyond the control of members and leaders. Hence, the main objectives of this analysis are i) to uncover the main processes and structures that regulate the PFFV’s internal dynamics and changes over time; ii) to analyze the relationships between these changes and requirements of several organizations and actors in the environment of the PFFV; and iii) to explore to what extent broader processes (such as the political system or the culture) have had an impact on these internal changes. The first section of this manuscript outlines a conceptual framework for the analysis of the PFFV as a ‘protest organization’. The second section described the methodology employed for this analysis. Finally, findings are presented and discussed.

Analytical Framework

Since this article explores the analytical potential of a social systems approach in the study of social movement’s organizations by focussing on a specific unit of analysis – the media diffusion and propaganda strategy of the PFFV – the PFFV is conceptualized as a “protest organization”, or as a network of communications, rather than a cluster of actions or institutional procedures and structures (cf. Davis, McAdam, Scott, & Zald, 2005; McCarthy & Zald, 1990). The rationale for this shift is twofold. On the one hand,
shifting the focus of analysis from action towards communication may contribute to avoid the sharp separation between organization studies and social movement studies, a separation that restricts the scope and significance of empirical research on social movements’ organizations (Davis et al., 2005). The social systems approach offers a broad framework for conducting empirical comparisons and promoting conceptual cross-fertilization between social movements and organizations (Luhmann, 1996, 2000, 2012).

On the other hand, the emphasis on communication is in line with the critique of the “single-actor framework embodied in the classic social movement agenda” (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001, p. 50). This recent critique suggests an alternative to the notion of ‘actor’. It proposes to no longer considering the actor as a being or entity that shares a history, an identity, a consciousness, goals and strategies, but as a “contingent construction” (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 34). In keeping with this proposition, the social systems approach builds on the "communicative turn" in social sciences (Hellmann, 1996) and examines protest and organization as "emergent orders" that transcend individual minds. Protest and organizations are conceptualizes as "communicative constructions" with special functions in society (Hutter & Teubner, 1994).

This shift in emphasis from actor to communication implies a movement into a research field yet to be fully explored. However, insofar as social systems’ analysis of social movements has moved from obscure metaphysics to applied systems, this shift allows the researcher to observe social movements' internal processes of differentiation and its structural relationships with other organizations and social movements in their environment. Moreover, the analysis of specialized communications such as political, economical, legal, or protest communication that this approach proposes offers an interesting analytical framework to examine the PFFV’s internal dynamics and its relationships with the political, cultural and economic fields. Therefore, this approach offers the opportunity to take into exam both the internal and external dynamics related to the PFFV. It may indeed contribute to reveal how the internal elements of the organization are interrelated and how they affect the selection and functioning of media diffusion and propaganda strategy of the organization.

Methods

Because the focus of this research is on the structure of the organization, the analysis aims to reveal which structures the organization utilized throughout its history, especially with regad to media diffusion and propaganda strategy. From a social systems approach, these organizational structures are meaning structures (Luhmann, 1995). Meaning structures acquire different forms such as values, identities and operative programs and their function is to provide a framework for interpretation of the social world, and guidelines for social action. Moreover, because the internal decision making

critical analytical and theoretical implications( see Fuchs, 2006; Rucht & Roth, 1992).

5 Social movements (‘protest movements’ as Luhmann calls them) have gradually became a topic of interest in Luhmann’s work. However, protest movements are there analyzed only at a theoretical level, as Luhmann offers no empirical study. Further theoretical developments on the topic of protest from a social systems perspective are present in the wok of Klaus Japp (1984, 1986a, 1986b, 1993), Kai-Uwe Hellmann (1996) and Heinrich W. Ahlemeyer (1995).

6 Organizational structures as meaning structures that provide frames for interpretation and action can be understood through Goffman’s (1974) concept of “schemata of interpretation”, which allows actors
processes in organizations like the PFFV are stabilized through the constitution of these meaning structures, this research aims to analyze decision making processes (i.e., roles in a hierarchy, values and identities) that are shaped by the organizational culture (Besio & Pronzini, 2010).

Methodologically, the operations of an organization may be reconstructed as chains of decisions by observing their meaning structures. This is an analytical technique called “observing chains of decisions” (Besio & Pronzini, 2010). In this paper, in order to reveal those meaning structures that trigger social action, the network of organizational communications was analyzed (Vogd & Saake, 2007). In other words, I observed how meaning structures acquire "meaning" in specific connectors or are internalized by participants in the social space under investigation (the PFFV).

Specifically, I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with members of the PFFV, which enabled me to grasp the meanings that inform the processes of interpretation of reality of the interviewees in specific topics. The questions were designed to cover different issues, such as the mechanisms of decision making or the specific activities of the membership during protest episodes. The specific analytical dimensions considered were media diffusion and propaganda strategy. Questions included the type of media diffusion the PFFV has used throughout its history; how and when the PFFV has changed its technical tools; how the PFFV used these tools, etc.

The lack of qualitative information about the internal operations of the PFFV made it difficult to develop an adequate standardized questionnaire. Thus, first I conducted a qualitative pilot study in Mexico City in July 2009. This first questionnaire included questions about media diffusion and propaganda strategy. The elements which emerged from these initial data were included in a second questionnaire. Next, I conducted a series of interviews in August and September 2009 and February and March 2011.

Contact with the interviewees was made with the support of some scholars who had previously worked in the region. I then expanded the network of informants through information provided by the interviewees themselves (snowball sampling). The selection of the interviewees followed different criteria such as gender, age, positions in the hierarchy of the organization, and length of their membership in the organization. Moreover, the selection also took into account the three main different periods in the history of the organization, namely popular organization, protest organization and political organization. Finally, face-to-face interviews were also conducted with ex-members of the PFFV and members of other popular organizations that have relations and frequent contact with the activities of the PFFV.

The interviews were conducted in Spanish. The average length of each interview was about 55 minutes. Twenty-eight were individual interviews and two were collective interviews involving a group of two or three interviewees. Nine respondents were female and 21 were male. Fourteen were members of the PFFV, three were former members and 13 were members of similar popular organizations and political parties -three were members of different popular organizations (the Unión Popular Revolucionaria Emiliano Zapata and the Frente Popular Francisco Villa - Independiente) and 10 of political parties (the Party of the Democratic Revolution).

“to locate, perceive, identify, and label” occurrences within their life space and the world at large (see also Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 621). Note also Benford's and Snow's definition of frames: “frames help to render events or occurrences meaningful and thereby function to organize experience and guide action” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 614).
The members of the PFFV had different positions and responsibilities in the structure of the organization: members, coordinators, middle-range leaders, “historic leaders” or founding leaders. Ten of the interviewees were conducted with founding members of the organization and four with the new generation. Ten members had a position of management in the organization at the time of the interviews, and four were regular members. Two interviews were conducted with the so-called “historic leaders” of the organization.

The data were analyzed by applying the “documentary method”. This method allows to reconstruct meaning structures (or linguistic types, according to Bohnsacks) as they appear in daily conversations or through interviews, and then to reconstruct the chaining of communications in systemic contexts (Orientierungsrahmen) (Bohnsack, 2007; Werner, 2010).

The Popular Front Francisco Villa’s Media diffusion and its Press and Propaganda Strategy

The first step of this project consisted in elaborating a historical description of the PFFV. This procedure, based on document sources and interviews, was necessary not only to trace the history of the PFFV back to the mid-30s, but also to follow the pathway of the main changes in the internal dynamic of the organization, with special focus on its media diffusion and propaganda strategy. Analyses of the interviews, manuscripts and printed material showed that one of the most singular features of the PFFV is its predisposition for both organization and contention. Indeed, from its early years, till its politicization, the PFFV implemented a plan of occupation of abandoned areas of the outskirts of the city, establishing squats and slums (this was done to accomplish its middle term objective of offering solutions to the housing shortage).

The implementation of the plan of occupation was actually the first communicative artifact offered by the organization. This was strongly tied to the middle and long term general objectives of the PFFV: financial and administrative communication, on the one hand, and political communication, on the other hand. Financial communication was an important tool for increasing the number of new members, who were attracted to the PFFV because of the offers of long-term loans and financial credits supplied. Moreover, the PFFV developed a complex financial machinery in order to increase the amount of funding opportunities – first and foremost for housing problems. As the PFFV diversified its economic scope and the soundness of its financial operations, it became gradually involved in other activities, such as informal street trading, grocery shops, and labor unions.

The analysis of the program and of documents of the organization show that the PFFV had a quite clear, political objective: to trigger deep changes in the political system.
through a mass mobilization strategy. Indeed, a part from describing the basic goals regarding housing and improvement of living conditions, PFFV’s founding documents were embedded in a Marxist framework. These documents presented a perspective on society that highlighted the deep structural inequalities that shape people’s living conditions. The PFFV criticized the “capitalist form of production”, the “authoritarian and repressive political system” and also the “unequal structure of classes” in Mexico. Moreover, in most of the documentary sources that constitute the PFFV’s program, the configuration and functioning of the political system was described as the result of a “historical process of exploitation of men by men” and as an “apparatus of repression” that responded to the interests of the “bourgeoisie” (see, for instance, the documents of the organisation: Declaración de Principios [Declaration of Principles], manuscript, undated; Nuestros primeros pasos [Our First Steps], manuscript, undated; Programa Estratégico [Program and Strategy], manuscript, undated). In general terms, the “diagnosis” of the “crisis of the society” was grounded in two key dimensions, the “unequal economic structure” and the “repressive political regime”. For the PFFV’s membership, the solution towards such historical conjuncture had as its main goal the “radical transformation of the country” that would eventually lead to the “establishment of socialism.”

The program of the PFFV characterized also by a prognostic dimension, offering an answer to the question “what is to be done?” Indeed, the program included a practical and “Leninist” understanding of “popular organization” that complemented the “theoretical” and “critical” diagnosis of society. The answer to the question “what is to be done?” was not formulated in terms of an easy and short-term solution, but as an ambitious plan of mobilization at different levels – local, regional, national and even international – including several targets – politics, legal system, economy – and recommending the deployment of diverse strategies and tactics - educative programs, politicizing popular classes, mass mobilization.

In general terms, the PFFV formulated a plan for working on the organization of “popular classes”, to enable the formation of “class consciousness” among all the members. This was done in order to improve members’ living conditions, and, at the same time, to make them aware of their "condition of poverty". Indeed, the PFFV’s program aimed to make explicit that individuals’ living conditions were related to social structural conditions, to the economy and authoritarian political system, in order to make members aware of the possibilities of transformation through organization and mobilization” (R. Martínez, personal interview, September, 2009).

When the PFFV set up its squats and slums, it displayed a specific strategy of media diffusion of its main activities and goals. This strategy consisted of two main points. Firstly, they considered necessary to campaign about the middle-term goals, to diffuse what by the time was the most important service that the PFFV was providing, namely the possibility of obtaining a place to live. This wide diffusion campaign of the housing opportunities offered by the PFFV was aimed at increasing the number of members, and thus (from members' dues) and mobilization. Secondly, in order to accomplish its long-term goal, the PFFV pursued the objective of forging alliances with other relevant social actors, such as similar popular organizations and social movements, particularly those with similar aims.

The selection of the strategy of media diffusion and the implementation of a diffusion campaign were constrained by specific political and social conditions. The political regime
and institutions in Mexico City had reconfigured the nature of their relationships with popular organizations and social movements. Indeed, a wave of social mobilization which started in 1985 increased the number of opportunities of direct/indirect participation in and collaborations with political institutions (Álvarez Enríquez, 2004; Álvarez Enríquez & Bolos, 2003). Although at the time the PFFV avoided direct involvement in political activities, it benefited from this climate of tolerance towards social actors.

During the first years, the PFFV selected media sources, such as brochures, books, regular collective assemblies and the monthly publication of an internal newspaper, named after Lenin’s famous book “What is to be done?”. Initially, the main goal of this newspaper was to spread the objectives of the PFFV, its program and the strategies among similar organizations. However, according to some respondents to the interviews, the newspaper started as a “very modest” project and then gained success. Thus, it became also a mean through which expressing stories of daily life and reports about PFFV’s collective activities, such as demonstrations or meetings. The newspaper became a cause of collective pride. As an informant puts it:

That process was quite interesting, the process of the newspaper, [because] we used to publish all those things that used to happen in the slums, and we did it all alone, Hugo and José, they were in charge of publishing the newspaper, they used to ask us ‘hey, comrade!, do you have any article to publish?’ or ‘comrades, we need an article regarding that or that other camp, what do we do [who can write it up?], we have heard that something important is happening there’ or ‘who can express an opinion on this or that issue?’ and we already knew that if we wanted to express an opinion or say something, the newspaper was the way

E. Ángeles, personal communication, August 15, 2009.

The newspaper made possible to diffuse an attractive set of goals regarding housing opportunities, but also discourses about political change, democratization of society, organization of popular classes and mobilization of marginalized social sectors. At the same time, along with facilitating the establishment of the School of Cadres (an internal educational project conducted by the leaders of the PFFV), the newspaper contributed to shape PFFV’s identity by politicizing the membership and propelling a process of self-reflection about the programmatic goals of the organization.

The PFFV enacted a broad strategy of politicization of its membership diffusing theoretical knowledge through reports in the newspaper. These reports were written for a broad audience without specialized vocabulary. They also described the concrete living conditions of the “comrades” in the squats and slums.

Moreover, for the membership, the reports were a unique opportunity to recognize themselves as “social strugglers” and as “activists” who contribute to “changing things” through their commitment to the PFFV. At the same time, they allowed members to reflect on the outcomes of the wider project and on the meanings of their fight. Therefore, as an activist puts it, the newspaper implied a desire to “generate debate and reflection about our essence as organization, the mysticism of the Popular Front, and ask ourselves where we were heading” (G. Salazar, personal communication, July 23, 2009).

The relative success of the media diffusion created, however, a new set of demands that triggered a spiral of changes in the organization. The propaganda enabled the PFFV to build alliances and to attract more members. In addition, it contributed to increase
the size of its housing projects, and its capacity for organization and mobilization. In turn, these circumstances made it necessary to strengthen the PFFV’s propaganda strategy. Another division was set up in the organization. This new division increased the internal complexity of the organization and produced a more differentiated and complex propaganda and diffusion strategy.

Specifically, the PFFV created the "Press and Propaganda Commission". This commission aimed at reaching a broader audience. Moreover, this commission was in charge of providing a set of guidelines for the members of the organization in charge of the Press and Propaganda Commission’s tasks. These guidelines specified topics and issues to prioritize in the media diffusion, and the type of propaganda and advertisements to produce. As a consequence, internal changes occurred also in the organizational culture. It became necessary to acquire specialized knowledge about media diffusion and to incorporate it in programs and guidelines.

Creating the Press and Propaganda Commission was one of a broader set of changes. Along with the success of the protest events and the expansion of its membership, the PFFV started to gain sympathy and support from other sectors of the society, particularly from similar popular organizations and social movements. The PFFV was acknowledged as a key social actor due to its capability for mobilization and protest. To some extent, the PFFV gained and consolidated a position of political power within the Popular Urban Movement.

These circumstances promoted further changes in the PFFV’s strategy of press and propaganda. As a member puts it:

Soon after, we started to be aware that the commission [the Press and Propaganda Commission] was giving results, in terms of [...] I mean that many comrades [many potential new members] began to hear about the Popular Front and began to be familiar with the PFFV and all the comrades [the leadership staff] realized that it could be better if we combined the work that we were doing in the Press and Propaganda Commission with conducting ‘regional congresses’ to inform the people about the work we were doing here

E. Ángeles, personal communication, August 15, 2009.

The leaders of the PFFV promoted participation to the regional congresses:

In very concrete and simple terms, the idea was that the PFFV could be a kind of motor, I mean a motor, because the main goal was that through mobilization we could generate a national reference point, a left-wing political reference point and thereby gain some influence in the transformation of the country, according to the goals that had been agreed upon in the regional congresses

E. Ángeles, personal communication, August 15, 2009

The regional congresses were an already known strategy of propaganda and media diffusion. Therefore, their incorporation into the PFFV’s strategy was not surprising. The regional congresses had relevant effects in terms of alliances and relationships with peasant’s organizations, labor unions and even guerrilla groups. In turn, these alliances contributed to (re)frame, amplify and extend the program of the PFFV. Thus, it was

The PFFV built a wide ‘ideological umbrella’ that made it possible to support a variety of
a process of (re)framing from general issues to specific problems, and resulted in the
construction of shared programs and a general strategy of contention among different
organizations. The particular structure of the congresses made it possible for different
"protest organizations" to find “coincidences” and common problems in their respective
social environments.

As a member of the PFFV describes the dynamic of one of these congresses:

The congress in ‘Ciudad del Valle’ had around seventy or perhaps eighty assistants,
but of course it was a first attempt in the strategy of organizing congresses [...] First
and foremost, in the congress, one [as delegate of the PFFV] speaks about the main
goals and the general objectives; later on, one organizes the assistants into different
‘panel discussions’ that tackle different problems regarding the communities or
their main needs...on the basis of the results of each ‘panel discussions’ we set
up a general discussion that, in logical terms, get started discussing particular
points, and after that, we try to reach a consensus about the way of working [in
the strategy of organization and mobilization] on a specific problem or a concrete
need; and once we have discussed concrete needs, we discuss the whole issue in a
plenary meeting session; and once it is sufficiently discussed and we have already
reached a guideline that is also feasible, we vote on it to approve it


The ongoing discussions regarding the program of the organizations participating
in the regional congresses, the search for programmatic coincidences and collective
strategies brought about internal processes of self-reflection in the PFFV. The
ideological doctrine, goals and strategy of the PFFV had to be shared and re-elaborated
with very different organizations. Thus, the early steps towards the consolidation of a
wide campaign of diffusion and propaganda turned into a mechanism for building up
operative alliances.

The congresses accomplished two major objectives. First, they contributed to
expanding the influence of the PFFV and strengthen its capacity for contention and
mobilization beyond Mexico City. Second, the encounters with other organizations that
had different “projects of transformation of the society” triggered internal processes
of self-reflection about the ideological project of the PFFV and its identity as a protest
organization. As a member reasons:

we ‘realized that although we [all the people attending the congresses] had a
common basis, common problems that referred to social justice, at the same time,
we saw that the Front [The PFFV] began to consolidate its own character as a
popular organization, and not all the organizations had the mysticism that our
different organizations and protest movements including the EZLN ‘guerrillas’ and the social mobilizations
in Atenco, the student movement in the National Autonomous University of Mexico in 2000, and the post-
elections mobilizations in Mexico City in 2006. Although there were similarities among these entities at the
level of broad objectives, interests, values and goals, there were also differences regarding the strategy of
contention. Thus, some actors such as the Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR) chose armed conflict as a
main strategy, while the Popular Front Francisco Villa chose the political formation of its members and mass
mobilization as its main means of transforming the society.
organization had by then'


Over time, the strategy of press and propaganda of the PFFV became more and more complex. Furthermore, this trend continued during the whole history of the PFFV. In 1997, the organization joined institutional politics with the left-wing political party (the Party of the Democratic Revolution), and turned into a political organization. This latest shift implied the introduction and use of electronic media aimed at producing propaganda for political and electoral competitions. Time in television, national radio and newspapers became available to the PFFV and the organization increased its range of potential supporters. In this new phase of the history of the PFFV, mass media and institutional politics had a strong influence on the organizational rules, and on aspects of its culture and relations among members.

Interestingly, PFFV lost part of its identity, which was absorbed by the propaganda of other political parties. Although the PFFV eventually obtained some benefits, especially when the political party won electoral competitions, its program and identity were excluded from the propaganda. Thus, the organization was not presented in those media as PFFV, but as a member of the political elite. The same political elite the PFFV used to oppose before.

Conclusions

In this paper I have analyzed the internal changes in the PFFV’s media diffusion and propaganda strategy. The media strategy employed by this popular organization to diffuse its programmatic guidelines to a wider public changed throughout its 30-year history as a consequence of internal and external dynamics beyond the control of members and leaders. Moreover, these internal dynamics are framed by wider social, political, cultural, technological and financial conditions.

Therefore, in order to understand the media diffusion strategy employed by the PFFV, it was necessary to observe not only the internal conditions of the organization, but also its historical and social context. Particularly, the processes of functional differentiation (i.e., the functional differentiation of the political system and of the conditions of political participation) and the presence of other actors in the social context in which the PFFV operated contributed to shape objectives and strategy of the organization.

Interestingly, the strategy adopted had several unintended consequences. The use of the newspaper and the contact in the regional congresses triggered internal processes of self reflection. The organization started questioning the scope of its own guidelines, its ideological background, identity, and even the legitimacy of its methods of mobilization.

In this paper, I have advocated a communication-based theoretical approach - Social Systems Theory- that offers a wider set of analytical tools for the observation and description of social and political protest. This perspective provides a framework which take into account three dimensions of protest events: changes in social and political system, cultures, and internal dynamics of the social movements and their organizations. In this sense, the social systems approach allows the researcher to obtain a more complex account of social protest, of its emergence, operations, functions and evolution over time and within a specific environment.


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