

ARTICLE

# THE OCCUPY ESTELITA MOVEMENT AND SILENCING IN PERNAMBUCO JOURNALISM



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**ABSTRACT** – This paper investigates the press in the state of Pernambuco and its silencing of the Occupy Estelita movement by analyzing journalistic coverage on the occupation of the José Estelita pier. An examination was conducted between May and June of 2014 on how the voices for the Occupy Estelita movement were silenced in the journalistic coverage from the three main journals in Pernambuco: *Folha de Pernambuco*, *Diario de Pernambuco* and *Jornal do Commercio*. At a time when traditional media are experiencing a crisis in their business model and information is increasingly horizontal, we reflect on the silencing of the Occupy Estelita movement in the Pernambuco press.

**Key words:** Journalism. Occupy Estelita. Silence. Silencing. Content analysis.

## O CASO OCUPA ESTELITA E O SILENCIAMENTO NO JORNALISMO PERNAMBUCANO

**RESUMO** – Este artigo se propõe a investigar o silenciamento da imprensa pernambucana no caso do Movimento Ocupe Estelita, a partir da análise da cobertura jornalística realizada durante a ocupação do terreno do Cais José Estelita. Entre maio e junho de 2014, diagnosticou-se como a voz do Movimento Ocupe Estelita foi silenciada na cobertura jornalística dos três principais jornais pernambucanos: *Folha de Pernambuco*, *Diario de Pernambuco* e *Jornal do Commercio*. Em um momento em que os meios tradicionais de comunicação vivem uma crise de modelo do negócio e no qual a informação é cada vez mais horizontal, avalia-se aqui os reflexos do silenciamento do tema Ocupe Estelita na pauta da imprensa pernambucana.

**Palavras-chave:** Jornalismo. Ocupe Estelita. Silêncio. Silenciamento. Análise de conteúdo.

## EL CASO OCUPÉ ESTELITA Y LO SILENCIAMIENTO EN EL PERIODISMO PERNAMBUCANO

**RESUMEN** – Este trabajo propone investigar lo silenciamiento realizado por la prensa del estado de Pernambuco en el que se refiere a el caso del Movimiento Ocupé Estelita, tomando como referencia el análisis de la cobertura periodística realizada durante la ocupación del terreno del Cais José Estelita. Entre mayo y junio de 2014, fue realizado un diagnóstico de cómo la voz de Movimiento Ocupé Estelita fue silenciada en la cobertura periodística de los tres principales periódicos de Pernambuco: *Folha de Pernambuco*, *Diário de Pernambuco* y *Jornal do Commercio*. En un momento en que los medios tradicionales experimentan una crisis de modelo de negocio y en que la información es más horizontal, evaluamos los reflejos de lo silenciamiento del caso Ocupé Estelita en la prensa de Pernambuco.

**Palabras clave:** Periodismo. Ocupé Estelita. Silencio. Silenciamiento. Análisis de contenido.

### 1 Introduction

Journalism is facing a crisis, advanced particularly by the change to how people read, access and share information. The main thought process behind this change points to the decrease in circulation of newspapers and magazines. Independent portals, blogs, and especially social networks have become the main sources of information.

Texts, videos and images are produced and uploaded onto platforms for sharing and producing information (*Facebook*, *Twitter*, *WhatsApp*, *YouTube*, *Snapchat*, *Instagram*), thus bypassing the mass media. Hyperlocal journalism (Borges, 2015), which refers to coverage of subjects or events on a very small, local scale (opposite to the hegemonic mass media model of the second half of the twentieth century) has made it so that content is now even closer to consumers. According to Carvalho and Lourenço (2013), hyperlocal journalism is a phenomenon capable of diversifying and rejuvenating digital content production in the public sphere. In the face of this kind of innovation, traditional media often end up covering the issues that

garner the most attention on social networks. They do this either to corroborate with social networks or to call mass information into question. This issue has gained such importance nowadays that there are already sections in press portals and digital media dedicated to fact checking and refuting fake news.

The 2013 protests and the 2018 presidential elections in Brazil are examples of times when traditional media competed with channels such as *Mídia Ninja*, *A Voz da Comunidade*, *Movimento Brasil Livre* (MBL), and with blog writers like Paulo Henrique Amorim, Luis Nassif or Olavo de Carvalho, whose points of view tend to differ from the editorial points of view of major vehicles. There are also less far-reaching mediums, the so-called alternative media and *WhatsApp* networks. These alternative media are attractive to the public either because of their independence or because of their ideological or geographical proximity (hyperlocal journalism, for example) (Barcelos, 2013). This has led to competition which in turn might suggest an end to the monopoly that corporate media has had on news production and media information.

In Recife, this situation (traditional media facing competition from social media) can be exemplified by the Occupy Estelita movement and its relationship with corporate media. Created in 2012 in response to a local development issue planned by a group of construction companies (Moura Dubeux, Queiroz Galvão, Ara Empreendimentos and GL Empreendimentos) for a 101.7 thousand square meter stretch of land between the neighborhood of Santo Antônio and the South Zone of the city, the Occupy Estelita movement took to online social networks to make civil society aware of the development.

The area was bought for R\$55 million with the intent to build thirteen 30-storey residential towers. The development project is called 'Novo Recife' and construction is planned to begin on the site of the former Federal Railway SA (RFFSA), which is also the location of the José Estelita Pier. Disputes over the fate of the region involve economic interests, urban development, and the notions of public and private space.

In addition to the legal dispute in the courts and the public participation bodies of Recife, such as the City Urban Development Council, another battle was being quietly fought: the dispute over the sale of the land and the different proposals offered by organized civil society, the real estate sector, and the municipal and state government for the best destination for the José Estelita Pier area.

Local newspaper coverage on the issue, and the lack of representation in that coverage of one of the main voices in the debate (the Occupy Estelita Movement), shows a narrative decision to silence one of the stakeholders interested in the fate of the region and instead focus on a supposed clash between “development and delay”, “utility and withdrawal”, “progress and stagnation”. The development narratives were mostly in relation to the ‘Novo Recife’ real estate project while progress and stagnation was attributed mostly to the Occupy Estelita Movement, impeding the development of the city.

Virtually ignored by local media, Occupy Estelita used forms of private mobilization and dissemination (hyperlocal) to circumvent its exclusion from the media vehicles and building contractors invested in the project. The coverage bias in the press created the need to understand exactly how the Occupy Estelita protesters are excluded from the main newspapers in Pernambuco. In a city with a history of disputes over urban occupation and the development of several projects that have, over time, pushed out the poorer populations from central areas, it is important to understand the press’ position on a movement that openly opposed a multi-million dollar venture and that, in fact, managed to halt development of that venture for a few years. It is also important to understand the mechanisms of corporate media.

## 2 Theoretical framework

To silence is to construct meaning and, contradictorily, to give voice to themes deemed “more interesting” by producers and sponsors of news publications. Only by devising strategies to circumvent this silencing was the Occupy Estelita movement able to achieve the mobilization needed to make their struggle more public. This articulation explains how international newspapers in 2014 such as *El País*, *The Guardian*, *Al Jazeera*, and BBC covered the protestors and their almost 30-day occupation of the land where the project was to be built, while local newspaper coverage did not. Orlandi (1995) pays special attention to the issue of silence and silencing in the media:

Our social imagination has designated a subordinate place for silence. There is an ideology of communication, of erasing silence, which is very pronounced in contemporary societies. This is expressed by the urgency of speech and the multitude of languages to which we are subjected in daily life. At the same time, I expected

them to be producing visible (audible) signs all the time. The illusion of control by what “appears”: we have to constantly emit signs (communicative, visible). (Orlandi, 1995, p. 35).

The silencing of Occupy Estelita by local media can be seen as an economic and ideological force imposed on that media, one which ignores hyperlocal journalism and its possibilities (Borges, 2015). This gives credence to arguments from Carvalho and Lourenço (2013) and Barcelos (2013) on the penetration of hyperlocal journalism nowadays. It also shows that if journalism does not do its job as mediator, citizens will find other ways to communicate their demands, as turned out to be the case. According to Borges (2015) and Barcelos (2013), the role of subject-reporter as it pertains to hyperlocal journalism was utilized during the Estelita movement in order to circumvent silencing. It was a group of individuals with an important local agenda and no mediation from corporate media that ended up breaking the silence (Orlandi, 1995).

Looking at it from the perspective of news value and journalistic commitment to the reproduction and analysis of social reality, the corporate press and its silencing of one of the key voices in the debate prevented society from understanding what was going on in the city; it also undermined the motivation and legitimacy of the Occupy Estelita protest, so much so that it was up to alternative media, through the subjects, to cover the events. Kuncinski (1991) explains that alternative media was born out of the difficult access to traditional media journalists and information producers (cartoonists, for example) and the censorship they produced. Orlandi (1995) refers to censorship as a fundamental problem in silencing, and alternative media is seen here as an alternative to the silence and silencing that corporate media produces.

Yet silencing did not mean that corporate media did not cover the Estelita movement. What happened though was that the demands of the Occupy Estelita Movement went unreported and the protesters’ voices were silenced; they were rarely interviewed, identified, or even had space in the various publications analyzed for this paper.

At least a hundred people camped out on a large plot of land in the center of the Pernambuco capital for 28 days during the World Cup. These people mobilized debates, held protests that interrupted traffic, and held cultural activities with national artists. This mobilization went largely unnoticed by local journalistic coverage, and the national and international press was covering the events of the José Estelita Pier events. This makes one think about journalism’s role in legitimizing

discourse or silencing debates. How is it that not a single line was written in the pages of the *Folha de Pernambuco* newspaper on how the Estelita movement unfolded, yet that same newspaper published a full page notice on the project investors and their view of the events?

The subject meets (at least in theory) the criteria of newsworthiness which are, according to Traquina (2002, pp. 186–208): proximity, relevance, news, time, notability, unexpected and conflictual. It also meets the criteria of news coverage by addressing issues such as availability, equality, visibility, and competition. It could also be framed as an exceptional local news event which is ongoing and under development. Correia (2005) reminds us how journalists' relevance system is constructed:

(...) it is built in the context of the social interactions that take place within the world of life, which is its own interpretive community, and at the intersection with other systems of relevance, namely other sections of the newspaper (such as Administration and Advertising) as well as the community (regional, national, ethnic) to which they belong. (Correia, 2005, p. 128).

This definition is important as it reminds us that determining the relevance of what will or will not be published goes beyond the choice and work of professional journalists; it involves other sectors of society. Van Dijk (2017) discusses how discourse control and its reproduction are important for controlling social power. In the media, this control can be exercised by choosing what to report on and what is “relevant”, it can also occur through the language used to narrate/explain the facts. Bardin's content analysis was used as a reference to help understand the use of these terms. It recommends the analysis of a given fragment, taking its characteristics and classifying them according to the meaning and possible characteristics of the message (Bardin, 2011). An example of this can be seen in the use of the words “occupation” and “invasion”, commonly used in the same context but with very different meanings in the transmitted message.

Power in this sense should not be defined as the power of a person, but rather as the power of a social position, one which is organized as a constituent part of the power of an organization. Therefore, we need to conduct a much more in-depth social analysis in order to accurately indicate who controls public discourse and how. (Bardin, 2011, p. 286).

Minimizing or silencing an issue in alternative media, social media, and other media outlets may call the basic foundation of journalism into question and the notion of reality for those who

described as “informed”: credibility. Amorim (2017, pp. 38–39) also points out that “the silencing routines within a newsroom will hardly be perceived by a communication vehicle’s reading public”.

Perhaps, at most, they are commented on by professionals who cover a particular theme or work in the same company. But it is to be assumed that the boundaries between what is censorship and what is silenced can hardly be made explicit. I believe that the two fields of silence politics are difficult to separate, at least in Brazilian journalism, since understanding implicit censorship in an extremely competitive market is often a requirement for those commercial vehicles that wish to continue in the market. (Amorim, 2017, pp. 38–39).

Moreira (2007, pp. 319–342) emphasizes that silencing journalistic discourse was common and widely used during the military dictatorship. Only by devising strategies to circumvent this silencing did the Occupy Estelita achieve the mobilization they needed to give a voice to their struggle. Field research showed us that events directly related to the occupation were present in the pages of local newspapers – cited as cultural events (local and national artist performances) – and that the debate in Pernambuco newspapers around what was going to happen (the continuity of the ‘Novo Recife’ Project, changes to the work plan, debates about the legality and allocation of the space, as well as the vacancy of the space) did not include the voices of the Occupy Estelita Movement and the Urban Rights Group.

This does not mean that the subject was removed from newspaper agendas during the 61 days of publications analyzed in this paper. It does show, however, that the protesters were not given a voice in the journalistic coverage of said events, despite the fact they were the protagonists who interrupted the construction of ‘Novo Recife’. They were silenced. The ‘Novo Recife’ Project was the protagonist in Pernambuco newspaper narratives, while the Occupy Estelita Movement was only given a supporting role.

### 3 Material and method

This study starts on the theoretical-methodological assumption that every narrative construct in written language is also discursive. Discourse analysis is a theoretical instrument used to treat the collected data, as proposed by Bardin (2011). This instrument allowed us to organize the analytic corpus into newspaper records

(notes, articles, reports, columns, etc.). This organization is referred to as units of record, as suggested by Bardin (2011), which not only organizes the *corpus*, but also extracts qualitative data from it. During this organization process, a collection period was determined for the Occupy Estelita Movement and Urban Rights protests, as well as for the actions of the construction consortium that makes up the 'Novo Recife' Project. This made it possible to investigate, in light of the notion of silencing and Content Analysis, coverage from the three main daily newspapers in circulation in the state of Pernambuco.

The objective was to understand how coverage took place and if the voices of all parties involved in the debate on the disputed area were represented in corporate journalism. In this case, we use the news criteria as a guide for evaluating the facts as events of journalistic interest.

Based on these principles, a survey was conducted of content published on the Occupy Estelita Movement members and their occupation of the land on which the José Estelita Pier was to be built. Their goal was to prevent the construction groups from demolishing sugar warehouses, something they needed to do in order to begin construction on the 'Novo Recife' gated complex. The occupation began on May 21, 2014 and ended on June 17 of the same year (after a court order was issued for the repossession of the land by the Pernambuco Military Police).

After determining the analysis period, the need arose to check, for comparison purposes, whether the daily newspapers in Pernambuco used to cover subjects related to urbanism, construction and urban occupation, and whether they also reported on issues related to the José Estelita Pier in the period leading up to the occupation of the land and, likewise, if they continued to report on the subject and the themes related to the urbanization of the city in the period immediately after the repossession. This ended up expanding the analysis sample in the *Folha de Pernambuco*, *Diário de Pernambuco* and *Jornal do Commercio* newspapers from May 1 to June 30, 2014.

It is important to point out that the analysis sample was for the printed editions of these newspapers. This analysis was also used to see if the newspapers provided equal coverage of the voices and of the points of view of those parties interested in the issue based on the economic power of advertising in the space shared with informative materials.



The research was carried out in the Pernambuco Public Archive, the State Public Library, and also by accessing PDF files of published printed pages made available by the Pernambuco Diary Documentation Center (CEDOC).

#### 4 Data analysis

The occupation of the land by Occupy Estelita and Urban Rights protesters began on May 21, 2014 after a member of the Urban Rights group passed in front of the José Estelita Pier ground and realized that the demolition of the former sugar warehouses of RFFSA was already underway. This group member went on *Facebook* and alerted other people, which led to the mobilization and, ultimately, the occupation of the land.

The occupation lasted until June 17, almost a month after it started. On this day, the Military Police's Shock Battalion was prepared to repossess the land as per by the court order issued on May 30, but that court order was delayed due to an injunction filed by the Pernambuco Public Prosecutor's Office which was declined on June 15th.

We considered the various events organized and carried out by the Occupy Estelita Movement, which included parties, film screenings, children's entertainment, as well as debates on urban planning, democracy, city formation, and other issues regarding occupation members.

Batista (2015, p. 55), while researching the Urban Rights group's interactions and communication on *Facebook*, listed at least seven days of activities organized by the Occupy Estelita Movement and the Urban Rights group on the occupied ground. Events were held between May 21 and June 17 on the occupation grounds and between June 18 and July 5 outside the occupation grounds under the Captain Temudo Viaduct in Cabanga. The events were attended by up to 10,000 people, according to organizers.

In addition to the events in the occupied territory, the group actively participated in forums and negotiations on the fate of the region, and did so alongside representatives from the Novo Recife Consortium, the municipal government, the courts, the public prosecutor, and other entities of organized civil society.

Batista (2015, p. 36) draws a profile of the members and action of the Urban Rights Group – the main coordinator of the Occupy Estelita Movement – showing that the group was active in

the “offline” world, formed by organized people who are capable of coordinating, including gaining the “right to participate in the commission established in July 2013 with the aim of drafting the municipal bill that created the Council of Recife (ConCidade)”.

However, what we saw in coverage from the three main Pernambuco newspapers contradicts the movement’s effective participation as an organized group. Out of the 85 reports found on the occupation in the three newspapers (this included a number of journalistic styles – notes, reports, columns, articles, cartoons, etc.), the Occupy Estelita Movement was cited 40 times. Out of these 40 citations, only 18 contained statements by, members or representatives of the movement. Reports on events starting with the demolition of the sugar warehouses and the lead up to the occupation continued until June 30, 2014 – making for a total of 61 days of analysis. These reports are detailed below.

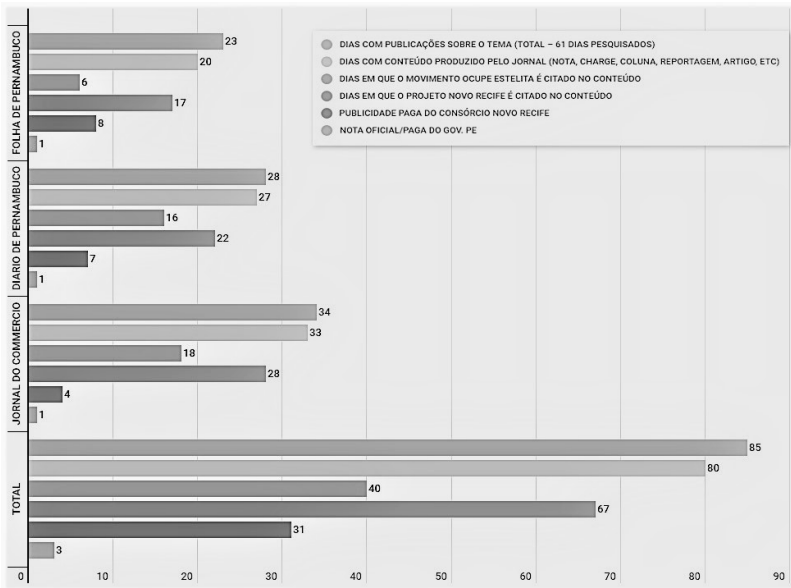
*Folha de Pernambuco* had 23 days of reports on the topic. The newspaper produced reports in 20 of these 23 days (in the form of notes, articles, reports, columns, etc.), the Occupy Estelita Movement being cited in just six of them (three of these six days included statements). On three occasions the *Folha de Pernambuco* only published the Novo Recife Consortium advertising on the issue. In one of the days, the only publication on the subject was an Official Note from the Government of Pernambuco about land repossession. In all, *Folha de Pernambuco* received eight advertisements (seven from the Novo Recife Consortium and one from the State Government), totaling 11 pages with advertising content.

The *Diario de Pernambuco* had 28 reports the subject. Its newsroom produced 27 days of material. Sixteen of these days cited the Occupy Estelita Movement, appearing with voice (“quotes”) on six occasions; two of which were identified as Urban Rights. In the *Diario*, there were 7 days of advertising on the theme, totaling 12 pages of paid content, 11 with advertising from the Novo Recife Consortium and an official note of support from business entities in the construction sector, signed by Sinduscon, Ademi, Secovi and Fiepe.

The *Jornal do Comercio* was the print vehicle which covered the issue the most during our analysis period. In total, there were 34 days of reports on the subject, 33 of which had content produced by the newspaper. The Occupy Estelita Movement was cited as an organized movement/group in 18 of these 34 days. Of these 18 days, nine included statements by movement representatives, one of which identified the Urban Rights group. The newspaper also registered an

official note from the Government of Pernambuco and there were four days with advertising from the Novo Recife Consortium; a total of eight pages of ads/announcements paid for by the business group. The statistics are better laid out in Figure 1.

**Figure 1** – Publication statistics on the José Estelita Pier occupation between May 1, 2014 and June 30, 2014 in the *Folha de Pernambuco*, *Diario de Pernambuco* and *Jornal do Comercio* newspapers.



Source: prepared by author.

With these issues, we realized that the early days of the “occupation” (when demolition of the warehouse commenced and construction on the ‘Novo Recife’ project was suspended) went unreported by the analyzed newspapers. While the *Folha de Pernambuco* ignored the demolition and highlighted Recife City Hall’s suspension of construction work, the *Diario de Pernambuco* and *Jornal do Comercio* reported on the event, but did not allude to the mobilization of protesters or to how the occupation got its start. The *Jornal do Comercio* reported on the Urban Rights group’s Facebook page that activists had said they would occupy the land, although the newspaper did not actually address the occupation itself. It is important to note that the *Folha de Pernambuco* reported on the demonstrations against the ‘Novo Recife’ project, but

waited until May 30, 2014 to do so, and even then it was in a note about the court granting repossession of the land. The movement was then referred to as the “anti-construction movement”.

The first reports on people in opposition to the real estate project appeared in the *Diario* and the *Jornal do Commercio* the day after the occupation had begun, both newspapers used the same kind of generic textual heading (“people opposed to the project”). The first time the name Occupy Estelita Movement appeared in the *Jornal do Commercio* was on May 29, 2014, in a note about actress Leandra Leal and her support of the movement. The first time the movement and its members were mentioned in the *Diario de Pernambuco* was on May 30, 2014. Even though she had not been identified as a member of the Occupy Estelita movement, Liana Cirne, a lawyer, was interviewed for the article, while the term Occupy Estelita had been mentioned in a note in one of the city’s cultural information guides.

It is interesting to note that the protesters and their organized movement were silenced, yet they were cited in the newspapers’ informative content on many occasions. Reports on the activists were worded in a generalized context and pigeonholed them into a single position: in opposition to the ‘Novo Recife’ project. The Occupy Estelita movement was mostly referred to as a group of people who were opposed to the venture. The newspapers assigned the verbs protest, occupy, be against when referring to Occupy Estelita actions.

Analyzing the way the activists were described in journalistic coverage also shed light on how the other protagonist in the events was described: the Novo Recife Consortium. We noticed a dichotomy in the words used to refer to the two sides of the debate. From the beginning, the Novo Recife Consortium was given an active voice in the events. This voice was reflected in headlines, titles and subtitles, and endowed the business group with an active persona. These action words (receives, has, will have, means, benefits from, creates, states, is open to dialogue, shows concern, will generate jobs, among others) placed the Novo Recife Consortium/Project at the center of the narrative.

‘Novo Recife’ appeared in 67 of the 85 reports (this number represents the amount of days the topic was covered), while the Occupy Estelita Movement appeared in 40 of the 85 reports. Only 18 of these 40 reports actually spoke with members of the Occupy Estelita movement, their statements surrounded by quotation marks. Of interest is the fact that the protesters’ statements were mostly published a few days before the land was to be reposessed, with

most of the reports (10) published in the three days immediately following the Military Police action.

In these cases, the statements were mainly complaints about police violence, about a lack of dialogue with protesters, and about the occupiers who were arrested. As a result, the arguments from members of the Occupy Estelita Movement were described as being in opposition to State Government, to the Military Police and to Recife City Hall. The Novo Recife Consortium, however, was described as being “open to dialogue”.

Another object of observation was the advertising for the Novo Recife Consortium during the occupation period, and how those ads often dialogued with the news coverage and debates that took place on social networks. The press releases and paid pages on the project gave the Novo Recife Consortium additional prominence in newspapers and highlighted how the economic power of the construction groups allowed them to write their own narratives on the facts in the newspapers, told in parallel to reports on the events.

Mostly published in the newspapers’ politics pages, advertising for the ‘Novo Recife’ project exceeded the number of times the Occupy Estelita Movement had its voice recorded in news coverage. We observed a total of 19 published advertisements and press releases for the Novo Recife Consortium in the three newspapers during our analysis period, while statements given by Occupy Estelita Movement members appeared 18 times over the same time period.

## 5 Final considerations

Investigating the Pernambuco newspaper coverage of the Occupy Estelita Movement’s occupation of the José Estelita Pier in 2014 explains not only how the newspaper companies’ commercial interests often overlap with the journalistic interests, but also how it is possible for a subject or a whole segment of society to be silenced, regardless of the newsworthiness of the events.

Understanding how the newspapers went from not reporting on the issue to almost daily coverage of it, and observing that the Occupy Estelita Movement – the driving force behind the debate on urban planning in Recife – was not given a proper voice in the newspapers may help towards reflecting on how power relations are more common in newsrooms than the supposed impartiality.

One cannot forget that most of the newspapers’ revenue does

not come from single copy sales. It comes from advertisers in public power and private enterprise – and construction companies have an important role in this revenue. Even today, Pernambuco newspapers release a weekly pamphlet on real estate properties and the construction industry, including building listings and a classifieds section for selling and leasing real estate. It is also impossible to ignore the fact that some newspaper owners are civil construction developers, landowners and entrepreneurs from other sectors of the economy whose interests do not go beyond those of the editorial lines in media.

Even with these conditions, finding the silence means identifying how a discourse (which should have social interest as its main goal, something the press is supposed to provide) is used to reaffirm a narrative that privileges the ruling classes. As Van Dijk (2017) reminds us, in order to control discourse one needs to control contexts, and that was exactly what we observed in the local newspaper coverage of the occupation.

Readers may not notice the silencing that occurs in narratives and debates in the *Folha de Pernambuco*, *Diário de Pernambuco* and *Jornal do Commercio*. After all, according to our numbers, silencing was present in the pages of the Pernambuco press to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the newspaper company. However, it is important to realize that using quotation marks does not mean a voice has been given and actually may be a way of hiding what Orlandi (1995) defines as a policy of silence.

This silencing can be perceived in two parts of the journalistic coverage. The first part was an attempt to silence the issue of the warehouse demolitions and the occupation by excluding the protesters and any statement given on the Occupy Estelita Movement. The second part was when the sequence of facts on the issue (suspension of works, public hearings, court injunctions). Thus, silencing was employed not because of a lack of statements on the Occupy Estelita Movement and the Urban Rights Group, but because of the omission of their demands and the voices of their representatives.

What we noticed is that the journalistic coverage of the Pernambuco press went back and forth, shifting the focus between the 'Novo Recife' project and the Novo Recife Consortium and portraying the protesters, initially excluded from the agenda, as supporting actors in a debate which they had no voice in, until they were removed from the land they were occupying. It was at that moment that their voice began to be heard – but it wasn't their concern over

the city's urban occupation model (which was their main interest) that was heard, instead, it was their defense against the police violence which either portrayed them as victims or as instigators.

The Occupy Estelita was characterized as a movement “against” the ‘Novo Recife’ project, but the notes, articles and reports on the issue did not shed light on the reasons behind the movement or what the ultimate goal was, it only stated that the protestors did not want the real estate project to be built. This silence from the three most widely circulated newspapers in Pernambuco only brought the interests of the Novo Recife Consortium to light, interests that would eventually be realized.

Even when the Public Prosecution, Recife City Hall and other civil society entities spoke on the issue, the focus was shifted toward removing the protesters from the occupied land and toward the debate about whether or not the Novo Recife Consortium was following legislation; a bias that was not concerned with who the cities are designed and built for, or with the quality of life of citizens in large urban groupings.

After the land had been repossessed, this back-and-forth in journalistic coverage once again focused its narrative on the Novo Recife Project and portrayed protestors as being against the project, against modernization, against developing, and against law and order.

The debate over what the quality of life in big cities is was restricted to the view of real estate developers who, in addition to dominating newspaper content, advertised the Novo Recife Project and forced their views of the events on the public. This view of urban life is addressed by Harvey (2014) and how he speaks of a “new urbanism”; something similar to what we can see in the Novo Recife Project.

Images of the warehouse area and the José Estelita Pier published in newspaper advertisements and the planned designs for the central region of the city of Recife did not include the old warehouses, the graffitied walls, or the abandoned and rusty railways, wagons and trains. They were replaced with tall, mirrored buildings overlooking the river, the sea, and the historic center of Recife which they were supposedly preserving.

The modern, clean and beautiful replaced the old and outdated. Arguments from members of the Occupy Estelita movement persistently ask: who is this modernity for? Who will benefit from this renovated and new space? Does the city need this project? The fact that these questions echo across social networks yet do not appear in Pernambuco newspaper articles is telling.

What we identified in the major Pernambuco newspapers and in the advertisements is a predisposition for the construction consortium's vision of how the city should be, 'Novo Recife' being that ideal solution. Reports on the occupation frequently portrayed representatives of the Recife City Hall and the 'Novo Recife' project as mediators and entrepreneurs, while protesters appeared only as individuals wanting to prevent the real estate project from being realized, but without a voice to explain what their ideas for the future of the city are. Knowing that the consortium of construction companies paid to advertise the project in newspapers, on radio, and on TV, and that it also invested in social media to oppose the Occupy Estelita discourse – a space where the protesters got support and greater mobilization – shows how the dispute over narrative is important and takes place on many levels.

A similar silencing strategy was used by investors and the government – with the consent of media – regarding construction for the 2014 World Cup, where the expropriation of land occurred in various communities in Recife and other capital cities in Brazil. This expropriation was systematic and, over time, was revealed as a scheme in which builders agreed amongst themselves on who would win the million-dollar bids, and they also overpriced their operations – ultimately diverting public money (Amorim, 2017).

What we can take from all this is that, even in the face of all these silencing strategies, and after so many years of small struggles, the Occupy Estelita movement managed to position itself, albeit marginally, in the narrative on the modernization of central Recife and to raise questions about whether the 'Novo Recife' project was necessary. Even after an investigation had been launched around the legality of the land auction, the *João Alberto Blog*, on the *Diário de Pernambuco* website, recently published that Recife City Hall and the Novo Recife Consortium had reached a peaceful accord on the area, also cleared by City Hall. 2019 has seen the suspension on construction lifted and entrepreneurs have already advertised the first residential building for sale.

Even though newspapers are unlikely to be so relevant in the future, due to new forms of database searching and the likely migration of media outlets to the Internet, it is interesting to think that, as information and communication companies, Pernambuco newspapers did not satisfactorily fulfill their role of informing readers. The silencing of the Occupy Estelita Movement reveals the newspaper companies' commitment to economic and symbolic power figures and



is a sign of why “alternative” informational media as well as fake news sites and information shared on WhatsApp have now gained relevance. If one cannot believe what traditional media say, it might be easier to believe the “news” that talks about what “I” want to read.

If we consider that silencing, or the politics of silencing, is likely to occur in other areas of interest to society beyond urban planning (maybe even presidential elections), we may also assume that the press, as an institution, sometimes relinquishes its social role by trying to maintain the *status quo*, something that seriously affects the credibility of journalism and journalistic companies.

In a scenario where funding for traditional communication systems is decreasing, the long-term view may lead to something we have already witnessed to a certain degree nowadays: the public’s distrust of what the press publishes. In this scenario, the side effect of silencing could mean that rather than the power of corporate media concentrating on reducing readers it might imply additional risks to doing journalism, something that should be further investigated.

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