Indigenous and Emancipatory Entrepreneurship in Brazil: Constructing Slab-laying Festivities Based on Popular Culture

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ABSTRACT: The main goal of the research is to challenge the conventional understanding of entrepreneurship through the concept of popular culture. Empirically, we focus on the experience of building house rooftops in marginal neighborhoods in Bahia, Brazil. Because of the lack of monetary resources, the construction experience involves neighbors in a collective, solidary, and festive ('slab-laying party') dynamic, requiring cultural strategies and innovations for to ensure intense involvement. Methodologically, the research is based on an audiovisual ethnography, from multiples sites and sources (photos, videos, interviews, observations, and digital documents). The concept of 'popular micro-entrepreneurship' gives visibility and recognition to several practices, rooted in popular culture, that are disregarded and often unthinkable as entrepreneurial.

Keywords: Cultural micro-entrepreneurship. Audiovisual ethnography. Popular culture.

Slab-laying party. Cultural entrepreneurship.

The field of entrepreneurship research is plural in its theorizations, approaches, ontologies, themes, concepts, ideologies, and fields of practice. The history of the field is impregnated by conservative and unidimensional approaches, but fresh and complex understandings of entrepreneurship are emerging. They involve a conceptualization of entrepreneurship from many perspectives (discursive, emotional, aesthetic, etc.), such as the critical (Tedmanson et al., 2012; Spicer, 2012), feminist (Calas et al., 2009; Essers & Benschop, 2007; Essers & Tedmanson, 2014), cynical (Jones & Spicer, 2009), ideological (Armstrong, 2005; Costa & Saraiva, 2012; Verduyn & Essers, 2013), indigenous (Dana, 2015; Pearson & Helms, 2013; Peredo et al., 2004), and emancipatory (Verduijn et al., 2014; Goss et al., 2011; Rindova et al., 2009) perspectives.

In this research, we join these critical perspectives and add new ingredients: the concept of popular culture and the empirical context of festivities in marginalized communities. The main goal of the research is to challenge the conventional understanding of entrepreneurship through the concept of popular culture. Theoretically, we mobilize knowledge of popular culture and entrepreneurship as emancipation and sociocultural processes.

Empirically, we focus on the experience of building house rooftops in peripheral neighborhoods in Bahia, Brazil. Because of the lack of monetary resources, the construction experience involves family, neighbors, and friends in a collective, solidary, and festive ('slab-laying party') effort, requiring cultural strategies and innovations to ensure intense involvement. Several micro-cultural innovations are constantly created and practiced to engage people in the construction process. The slab-laying party is a strategy created, perpetuated, and transmitted within the universe of popular culture.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP DRIVEN BY THE EMANCIPATORY PRACTICE OF POPULAR CULTURE

Entrepreneurship is about processes (Lindgren & Packendorff, 2009; Steyaert, 2007) and practices (Johannisson, 2011; Clercq & Voronov, 2009), involving cultural (Davel & Corà, 2016), temporal (Lindgren & Packendorff, 2003; 2011) and emancipatory (Goss et al., 2011; Rindova et al., 2009; Verdujin et al., 2014) issues. Entrepreneurship unfolds in a flow, and not necessarily in an intentional or planned order, even though the flow can be temporally predefined (for the logic behind project-based entrepreneurship or series of entrepreneurial acts, see: Lindgren & Packendorff, 2003; 2011). Thus, it intervenes actively in the spatiotemporal rhythms of everyday life (Verduyn, 2015).

For some time, process-based and practice-based perspectives of entrepreneurship have been challenging mainstream conceptualizations of entrepreneurship, dominated by assumptions of determinism, centered on economic rationality and new venture creation, involving profitable market opportunity-spotting, understood as an intentionally planned (sequences of stages or steps) and linear activity, and considered as the intrinsic property of an individual. These perspectives invite us to perceive the complexities and subtleties of entrepreneurship, as we also include a non-linear logic (Johannisson, 2011; Sorenson, 2006; Steyaert, 2007; Verduyn, 2015; Wright and Marlow, 2011), the flow of actions in everyday life (Boutaiba, 2004), and a plural set of social activities and processes (Calás et al, 2009). Indeed, entrepreneurship as an ongoing and creative process implies the disruption of a status quo (Goss et al., 2011; Johannisson, 2011), altering daily practices (Hjorth and Steyaert, 2004), and creating space for the new to emerge (Hjorth, 2013).

Practicing entrepreneurship is a matter of emancipation. Entrepreneurship is a social change activity (Calás et al., 2009), based on emancipatory actions as people seek to achieve autonomy, express personal values, and make a difference in the world (Rindova et al., 2009). Entrepreneurship as emancipation is a question of pursuit of freedom and autonomy relative

to an existing status quo, including both the factors causing individuals to seek to disrupt the status quo and the ways they undertake to change them. Through the lens of emancipation, entrepreneurship is used to overcome existent relations of exploitation, domination, and oppression, creating new firms, products, and services as they represent liberating forms of individual and collective existence (Verduijn et al., 2014). Nevertheless, what represents emancipatory activity to some people may be considered as oppression to others. Thus, it is wise to view both emancipation and oppression as potential outcomes of entrepreneurship, which exist in a relationship of constant tension (Verduijn et al., 2014). The emancipation process is inseparable from a cultural process of interpreting and making sense of what oppressions and innovations exist in the context.

Cultural issues of entrepreneurial practice relate to the role of culture as symbolic discourse (a rhetoric resource), as a symbolic process of creation, and as symbolic consumption (Davel & Corà, 2016). Entrepreneuring requires the ability to tell persuasive stories that are composed using cultural and symbolic sources. In this sense, culture is a repertoire, a context (stories make sense within a context), and means for people to achieve their entrepreneurial purposes (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001). Entrepreneuring involves a process of creation that occurs thanks to cultural anchoring, although new cultural creations have to go beyond this anchorage, to be able to renew it, in some imprecise or unusual way. This occurs especially in the context of creative work that intensifies value in symbolic and cultural meanings (e.g. Banks et al., 2000; Hagoort et al., 2011; Ravasi & Rindova, 2013).

Entrepreneuring also relates to the cultural dimension of consumption: the diverse processes of reception, appropriation, and use of goods and services based on their cultural value and meaning (Ravasi & Rinddoa, 2013).

The importance of culture for entrepreneurship has being widely considered in entrepreneurship research. But, the concept of popular culture is absent. We argue that

popular culture may open up new trends for rethinking entrepreneurship practices and processes because it draws attention to the cultural struggles and ingeniousness of people who are on the margins of society. The idea of popular culture is often a way of categorizing and dismissing the cultural practices of 'ordinary' people (Storey, 2003), especially the cultural life and struggles of people (Bakhtin, 1984). Although the term popular culture can be articulated to carry a range of different meanings, what all these have in common is the idea of 'popularis' – belonging to the people. Radically, it refers to a sphere in which people keep struggling over reality and their place in it; a sphere in which people are continuously working with and within to make sense of and improve their lives (Grossberg, 1997).

The concept of popular culture emerges in the late eighteenth century in intellectual accounts of 'folk' culture (Chartier, 1993), but it can be defined in different ways: as folk culture, as mass culture, as the 'other' of high culture, as an arena of hegemony, as postmodern culture, as 'roots' and 'routes' for cultural identities, as mass art, and as global culture (Storey, 2003). It is important to distinguish between mass culture (the cultural 'products' produced by an industrialized, capitalist society) and popular culture (the ways in which people use, abuse, and subvert these products to create their own meanings and messages). Rather than focusing on mass culture's attempts to dominate and homogenize, we prefer to focus on popular culture's dynamics, involving evasions and manipulations of these attempts (Fiske, 2010).

Popular culture is a dynamic force in political struggles, in which we may find a structured distribution of practices, codes, and effects, constantly rearticulating itself by incorporating pieces at the center and excorporating pieces of itself at the margins (Ayala & Ayala, 2002). The dynamics of popular culture are a mix of consent and resistance: it is neither an imposed mass culture (the sum product of the media and entertainment industries) nor a culture emerging from below. Rather, it is a place of exchange and negotiation between both, marked

by resistance and incorporation (Bennett, 1986). Indeed, it is useless to want to identify popular culture using the supposedly specific distribution of certain cultural objects or models. What in fact matters as much as its distribution, and which is always more complex than it seems, is its inventive and subversive appropriations by groups or individuals (Chartier, 1993).

We may also understand popular culture as the productions of those without cultural capital (those lacking access to the approved means of symbolic and cultural production), involving products that require little cultural capital either to produce or to consume (Parker, 2011). As popular art is not authorized by the artworld, popular culture is a kind of unauthorized culture (Parker, 2011), recalling, for example, the 'unofficial' culture of comic and carnivalesque forms of medieval life in Bakhtin's research (Bakhtin, 1984). Popular culture defines certain formations of practices as the possible sites of individual investments, sites at which subjects and identities are constructed (Grossberg, 1997; Magnani, 1984).

Popular culture takes place and emerges from the everyday experiences, practices, and expressions of the people. It is saturated in the mundane actions of people and is rooted in commonplace rituals, which are informed by habits, routines, and sociocultural performances. It is intimately interwoven into our private life; it percolates through our mundane existence so deeply that our entire way of life could not be imagined, lived, and practiced without it (Waskul & Vannini, 2016). The everydayness of popular culture can be associated with the everydayness-driven understanding of entrepreneurship (Stewaert, 2004), in which entrepreneurship unfolds in a variety of interactions in many segments of the population through a diverse, continuous, and everyday logic (Certeau, 1984). A great example is Pardo's ethnographic research about the daily life of Naples. He explains the entrepreneurial practices of the citizens to cope with the mishaps of their existence in the everyday life of the city,

seeking to create new possibilities of living in the city, through an informal and personalized way (Pardo, 1996).

SLAB-LAYING PARTIES AS AN ENTREPRENEURIAL PRACTICE OF POPULAR CULTURE IN BAHIA,
BRAZIL

Research methods

As I was an outsider of the culture of slab-laying parties, the research is based on an audiovisual ethnography, involving multiple sites (Marcus, 1995) and sources of information. One of the principles of digital ethnography is multiplicity, that is, the existence of a variety of ways of engaging with the digital world (Pink et al., 2016). Although the ethnography does not focus on the classical objects of digital ethnography (Boellstorff et al., 2012; Gatson, 2011; Hine, 2015), the research considers audiovisual material as a rich source for ethnographic narratives (Banks, 2007; Cortai, 2001; Mengis et al., 2018). It also considers ethnography to be a valuable method for advancing entrepreneurship research (Johnstone, 2007).

The audiovisual dimension of our ethnographic study includes digital sources (Pink et al., 2016) and field experience (Davel et al., 2019; Shrum & Scott, 2017). I observed 7 slab-laying parties by accessing detailed and public videos available on the internet. I also studied 3 slab-laying parties by analyzing videos, photos, and interviews with the participants (actively engaged in the party). I participated in and observed one slab-laying party. All 11 parties took place in different communities and neighborhoods of the State of Bahia, Brazil.

The main sources of information comprise a set of videos, photos, in-depth interviews, and observations. Some videos were selected from YouTube and other digital platforms (public sources). Other videos were produced by me (at the slab-laying party where I conducted participant observation) and my participants (at the slab-laying parties where they

participated in their respective communities). The participants are people of different ages and genders that study at the University. They were approached in the campus during class and invited to participate in the research. The public-based videos were filmed by different individuals (owners of the house, family members of the owner, neighbors participating in the party, visitors from outside the community), ensuring plural views on the same practice. This totaled 17 hours of video. In a complementary effort, I also collected photos available on the internet and taken by the participants during their parties. After the parties, I also conducted several interviews with 9 participants. Each interview lasted between 1 and 2 hours, but some interviews were repeated twice. During the party I participated in and observed, I produced 20 pages of field notes.

The production of videos, photos, interviews, and field notes, involving four slab-laying parties, was guided by a number of issues: the organizing process, the innovative activities in relation to the traditions of local popular culture, the meanings expressed during the process, the technical knowledge associated with the construction process, the motivations, the symbols, the representations, the socialization protocols, the communicational practices, the materialities and spatialities, and the manifestations of the festivity within the process. I analyzed and interpreted the empirical material as narratives (Czarniawska, 2004; Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Kim, 2016; Maitlis, 2012; Riessman, 2008; Gubrium & Holstein, 2009; Heywood & Sandywell, 1999) about entrepreneurial practices based on popular culture.

Slab-laying parties as entrepreneurial emancipation

Slab-laying parties originate from the oppressive situation faced by a majority of individuals living in marginal and peripheral neighborhoods: people can construct their home little by little as they succeed in saving money. As they do not earn much in a month, saving money is in itself an entrepreneurial activity. During the slow process of building one's home,

there comes a point when this can no longer be undertaken by the owner and his/her family alone. This is the moment of constructing the roof with concrete slabs. It takes, necessarily, a group of individuals in a joint and collective effort to be able to prepare the grout mixture and transport it to the roof. Normally, it takes some amount of money to employ a contractor or a professional team, which is unpractical for lots of people. The walls, beams, and pillars can be done by the owners of the house. But when it comes to the slabs, many hands are needed. The laying down of the slabs has to be done all at once, that is, it cannot be done in parts. In fact, the popular culture orients people to buy a small piece of land and construct a small building, step by step, so the whole family can live together. Therefore, many concrete roofs are constructed throughout a lifetime.

The slab-laying party is an emancipatory way of dealing with this socioeconomic oppression. It has been created and practiced through time and it incorporates the traditions of local and popular culture in peripheral communities. The owner of the roof leads the organizing process, with members of her/his family (sons, daughter, uncles, aunts, cousins, etc.) and close friends. The organizing process involves: preparing the roof structure (placing the steel joists and the concrete slabs, inserting full-length reinforcing bars into the unit), measuring the size of the roof, calculating the construction materials needed, buying and transporting those materials, inviting neighbors and friends to the party (making sure they will be present on the day and at the time required: very often on a Sunday, between 4AM and 5AM), calculating the materials needed for the feast (drinks, ingredients, food, accessories), buying and transporting those materials, advancing the food preparations (planned for 20 to 70 people), welcoming everybody at the beginning of the work, preparing the feast (food and drinks), making sure communications flow well, creating a joyful atmosphere with musical and enjoys the party.

The first activity is the construction of the roof. Usually on Sundays, the master builder and some assistants arrive between 4AM and 5AM to start manually preparing the grout mixture (sand, gravel, cement, and water). The owner of the roof welcomes them with coffee and some bread with butter. From 5AM, other people arrive and help to prepare the mixture and to transport it to the roof, using plastic buckets. People transport the buckets in a cultural way: they form a line, in which each person waits. The line goes from the place where a group of people are preparing the mixture until the top of the roof, where people are pouring the grout into spaces between the rows of concrete slabs, in order to cover the joists completely. A section of the line goes up and down a ladder. Though people are stationary in the line, the buckets full of the mixture are in constant movement. They go from hand to hand through the line to the top to be poured properly onto the structure. The men on the roof spread and even the mixture. This process may last 3 or 5 hours, depending on the size of the roof.

Many people arrive at different moments in the process and help in several ways. Some will pass the buckets, others will help in the cooking, in serving, and in cleaning, etc. Then the next phase is the feast. People are served cachaça (sugarcane liquor), beer, juice, water, and feijoada, which is a stew of beans cooked with a variety of salted pork or beef products, such as pork trimmings (ears, tail, feet), bacon, smoked pork ribs, and at least two types of smoked sausage and jerked beef (loin and tongue). It is served with white rice, salad, and manioc flour. The feast may incorporate other elements, depending on the will of the cook to innovate or impress his/her guests.

The party can take place in any space: inside the house, in the backyard, on the sidewalk, in a mixture of these, or somewhere else. The party emerges from the common interaction between people that live in the same neighborhood or have close (family, friends) or indirect (friends of friends, friends of family) ties. It is a mix of get-together and celebration. Eating the feijoada and drinking constitute the party, as well as the process of working on the

construction. There is not a rigid protocol for the sequences of activities during the festivities. Sometimes people share their artistic abilities, bringing musical instruments, playing, improvising with ordinary objects to produce a rhythm, singing, and dancing. Everybody enjoys the festive and fun atmosphere on a Sunday afternoon.

The ability to mobilize friends and neighbors is linked to the ability of the organizer of the event to innovate in the attractions that the party will offer to its participants. Those who invite must, in some way, produce cultural micro-innovations to ensure social conviction and, with this, the commitment of everyone on the day of the party. Those who take their efforts to the activity also look for leisure on their day off, social-affective bonds, the fun of the melodies, the free food and drink, etc. Micro-innovations that support the popular entrepreneurship of the slab-laying party represent efforts to distinguish the party's organizers. They are micro-innovations related to the atmosphere of joking, musicality, and gastronomy that can mark some celebrations as unforgettable.

The micro-innovation of playfulness and enjoyment

The emancipatory practice of entrepreneuring slab-laying parties in Bahia suggests playfulness as a cultural micro-innovation. Interaction and laughing are cherished by people, and need to be socially constructed during and after the slab laying. Thus, slab-laying parties where playfulness becomes predominant are appreciated as distinctive. Playfulness and fun are the fuel of entrepreneurial practice based on popular culture. At least two practices of playfulness may be viewed as singular and cultural micro-innovations: the bucket theft and the provocation ('fuxico') club.

The provocation club is a term used to convey all the interactions in a group of people involving from making others laugh and having fun from ongoing provocations, clownery, and

jokes. People may call each other by funny nicknames. They can joke a lot about the rivalry of soccer teams. However, storytelling is the most prized ability. The funny, crazy, and refined (culturally anchored) ways of telling stories, mobilizing local expressions, funny metaphors, and images, amuse people a lot. During the construction time, the tone of the jokes helps to relieve tensions, to socialize, and to lose track of time. People joke, play, and work hard all together.

The bucket theft took place in one specific roof construction. At one point, many guests start to hide the buckets at the end of the process of transporting the grout mixture. In fact, each person steals one bucked to take home as a souvenir of the party and as a trophy of the conquest (working hard on a Sunday morning). The bucket acts as a symbolic artefact that is impregnated with affective memories of fun, solidarity, and playfulness. Stealing the bucket is not about the simple process of hiding it. Rather, it represents a funny way of acting, interacting, and narrating the scene. It needs to make others laugh, participate, and have fun. It is a process instead of an isolated moment, unfolding through many situations, interactions, and laughs.

Other cultural micro-innovations in the emancipatory practice of slab-laying parties are related to the activities of food and music. Together and combined in playfulness, these innovations produce a sensation of enjoyment that is shared and experienced by participants. In terms of food, delicious feijoada is like a cultural brand ascribed to some people in the community. Thus, people are motivated to go to a slab-laying effort because the special seasoning, flavoring, dressing, and spices of the cook. The same may occur in the context of music. When people know that the music will be distinctive and vibrant, they consider the occasion to be authentic in relation to others. Music involves the choice of electronic music, but also neighbors and friends that are musicians playing during the party and engaging with their other musician friends. The samba circle ('samba de roda') makes a difference in some

slab-laying parties, because of its capacity to involve people in a local, popular, interactive, and aesthetic experience.

DISCUSSION

Many other practices of popular culture may exist and reveal insightful experiences of entrepreneurial practice and emancipation. Marginality may provide a fertile source for learning on indigenous entrepreneurship, as it provides us with creative practices, discourses, and skills. As in our research, Imas et al. (2012) investigated the entrepreneurial practices and narratives of individuals who live in marginal and excluding contexts. They developed interesting entrepreneurial activities and skills to maintain communal, organizational, family, and personal wellbeing. I propose the concept of 'popular micro-entrepreneurship' as a heuristic path for giving centrality to the concept of popular culture in the context of entrepreneurship research and for shedding light on many marginal entrepreneurial practices that are hidden by mainstream entrepreneurship theories.

The concept of popular micro-entrepreneurship is fed by four dimensions, according to the popular culture's practices: emancipation, everydayness, festivity, and solidarity. The emancipatory practices of popular culture reveal a flow of inventive and creative activities, in which the collective and solidary efforts take place, radically. As a dynamic concept, emancipation is always open to new searches for freedom, autonomy, and wellbeing. Emancipatory entrepreneurship emerging from popular culture is a field of innovation (Leonard & Swap, 2005) inscribed in people's everyday life. With regular practice, it may become a potent form of expertise based on first-hand life experiences, providing insights drawn from tacit knowledge, and shaped by beliefs and socio-affective forces. It helps people to develop the ability to comprehend complex, interactive relationship and make swift, expert decisions based on that system-level comprehension.

Another dimension is the everydayness of popular culture and entrepreneurship practice. The term 'micro' attached to entrepreneurship and to innovative practices conveys the idea that entrepreneurship and innovation may be perceived as a process, which takes place in the everyday life of ordinary people. Innovation can unfold in a cultural activity on a mundane scale, instead of being about objects on an extraordinary scale. Everydayness means that there is not a predefined time and place for entrepreneurial practice to emerge. Popular culture is a relational and everyday source for cultural capital, feeding practices that contain a plethora of meaning, values, and connections. These practices are embedded and experienced in the everydayness of popular and marginal culture, contradictorily within an economic system that promotes a discourse of entrepreneurship associated with capitalist economic development. Thus, popular micro-entrepreneurship refers to the everyday generous production and handing over of things that creates in others and producers alike a widened and richer sense of possibility.

Popular micro-entrepreneurship is about the festive practices of popular culture.

Festivities are understood as an arena of popular organization, artistic expression, and social action that expresses cultural identity (Amaral, 1998). The festivity mediates between utopian and transformative actions, because, motivated by the desire to hold a party, many groups experience organizing, creating, and entrepreneuring processes. Furthermore, the festive dimension of entrepreneurship helps to promote subversive experiences through the temporary suspension of reality (Bakhtin, 1984); in order to invigorate people to later continue their routines and regenerate the existing social order (Duvignaud, 1973). Festive practices of popular culture are a dimension of entrepreneurship that calls for future research.

The fourth dimension of practicing popular culture is solidarity. Popular culture is an ongoing invitation to address constraints and open up new possibilities, which is inherently

social as it involves entrepreneurs in having sensitivity to belonging to a collective community and relating to a shared recognition of its concerns. Thus, it directs entrepreneurs towards a disposition to find in these constraints a way of doing things differently. People practice entrepreneurship when they are intensely and solidarily involved in changing the taken-forgranted, everyday practices in some domain of their culture (Spinosa et al., 1997). Popular culture invites an understanding of entrepreneurship that is similar to the formulation of Hjorth and Holt (2016): as inherently social and collective (the social nature of creativity), an expression of generosity of action (the action of opening up possibility without known ends). Solidarity is enlightened by the notion of gift (Godbout, 1999; Carvalho & Dizimara, 2000; Eckstein, 2001; Godelier, 1996; Mauss, 1967; Simmel, 1950), a way to explain the strength of reciprocity and the spirit of generosity that encourages people to help each other. The energy of the gift is a path for weaving and strengthening the ties of sociability, solidarity, and friendship in the scope of social relations within the community. The exchanges build trust, and over time they provide communitarian 'glue' (Eckstein, 2001).

CONCLUSION

This study makes a contribution to challenging and revitalizing entrepreneurship research by showing how 'popular micro-entrepreneurship' – a connection of popular culture with entrepreneurship – is enlightening in its capacity to enhance people's possibilities for creating, relating, and living better lives. The notion of 'popular micro-entrepreneurship' appears as a heuristic alternative to expand and refine entrepreneurship theories. It conveys a discourse about the richness of popular culture that, consequently, may empower marginal groups and indigenous practices. It also highlights some ideas that help explore how the world of popular culture may be applied in the context of entrepreneurship (such as through solidarity, everydayness, festivity, and cultural micro-innovations).

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