Fig. 37 Protest at Cinelândia

8. Exposing Violence

Documenting violence lies at the core of bottom-up video production. Audiovisuals are a source of evidence and amplify the voices of urban movements and urban citizens. Once distributed online, footage of violence transcends the time and space of a single incident, entering broader public discourse. As the previous chapter demonstrated, including a depiction of violence increases the likelihood that a video will gain high levels of visibility. This chapter investigates the strategies used to expose violence through video, as well as the dangers faced by those who record it.

The videos discussed span over a wide range of violence and its effects: tear gas and rubber bullets fired at the Black Profs movement in Rio de Janeiro; students' fury over the symbols and structures that continue to violate their everyday lives at South African universities; the brutality of the images of eyes and mouths destroyed by rubber bullets in Hangberg; police officers threatening videographers with retaliation, when their crimes are documented; the assassination of five teenagers by police officers in Morro da Lagartixa and the despair of the parents; the tragic fate of Jhonata killed for carrying a bag of popcorn.

This chapter proceeds in three steps. The first section examines struggles over the definition of violence and how it has shaped the mobilization of urban movements. The second section looks at the consequences of recording police violence. The second explores the consequences of recording police violence, highlighting both the risks of retaliation and the power of video to expose abuse. The third section focuses on the importance of framing: how activist videos contextualize acts of violence not as isolated incidents or individual failures, but as expressions of systemic, racialized, and class-based oppression – often targeting young, Black, and lower-income urban citizens.

Although watching such footage can be deeply traumatizing, audiovisuals remain a vivid and effective tool for denouncing the violation of basic rights. The stories these videos tell are both powerful and disturbing. They stand as testimony to the repression of urban struggles for emancipation and to the (lethal) violence repeatedly inflicted on people dwelling at the urban margins.

8.1 Violence and Urban Movements

Who defines what violence is? Urban movements frequently challenge hegemonic definitions of violence and use video as a tool to contest dominant narratives. In South Africa, the Rhodes Must Fall (RMF) movement demonstrated how symbolic acts – such as the #Shackville protest in February 2016 – can expose deeper structures of violence. The destruction of #Shackville on the University of Cape Town's Upper Campus by police and security forces was captured on video, providing evidence of the very repression the protest sought to highlight. As student activists argued, the widespread condemnation of »protests which whiteness sees as violence« reflects the unacceptable policing of Black pain.[1] Their actions symbolically disrupted the narrative of the »violent protester,« while examples from Hangberg, on Cape Town's urban margins, revealed the impacts of police brutality. Comparing the depiction of violence in Hangberg in 2010 and 2017 offers insight into how the ubiquity of recording devices has transformed the visibility of violent state repression.

Video activists in Rio de Janeiro actively challenged the widespread portrayal of protesters as vandals and instead drew attention to the violence committed by police officers. The mass protests of 2013 were marked by intense repression, which both ignited and ultimately ended the broader wave of mobilization. While the police assault on the indigenous occupation at Maracanã is often seen as the symbolic beginning of the Jornadas de Junho, the violent death of cameraman Santiago Andrade during a protest in February 2014 marked its tragic end. Andrade's death, caused by a firework launched during a demonstration, paralyzed the movement and was experienced by many activists as a »cold shower« – a moment of shock and disillusionment that brought the protest cycle to a close.

1 UCT:RhodesMustFall.

#Shackville on Campus

> »Of course! We use the media because of activism. […] We had people who are very creative there. So we decided, let's have a shack. Let's put a shack up on campus [...] and then we got to see the horror of the university management coming out and nyalas [...] that thing [the nyala] was on campus in front of students. It drove over the shack. Can you imagine? We were very sophisticated [in] creating news [...] so, let someone go and cover this.«[2]

On Monday, 15 February 2016, student activists at the University of Cape Town erected #Shackville – a simple house-like structure that resembled the ›shacks‹ built in Cape Town's marginalized neighborhoods – on the university's Upper Campus.[3] With this symbolic act of disruption, the protesters transposed the living conditions of marginalized Capetonians to the heart of the prestigious University of Cape Town.

A video produced by the RMF media team recorded fellow students during a »Rhodes Must Fall press conference« addressing what they called the »sentiments of violence on #Shackville«.[4] In their statement, the activists challenged the positivist, colonial conceptualization of violence:

> »[The university management] respects our right to protest, but not when [our protests] result in criminal acts, intimidation and the [restriction of the] rights of others. We understand that these arguments are part of a particular colonial mythology, which hides present structural violence and instead falsely construes [a] response to the system as a greater [act of] violence. The burning of colonial artefacts of white heritage is seen as a violent act, while the psychological effects these inflict on black bodies at the university is never considered. […] It is clear that white feelings and private property are elevated over black lives. […] [T]o condemn protests which whiteness sees as violence is the unacceptable policing of black pain[.]«[5]

This line of argument reverberated through what ultimately evolved into the nationwide FeesMustFall movement. As an activist from the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg articulated, »[t]he definition of violence we work with in this country is profoundly anti-black and anti-poor«.[6]

The RMF movement claimed that privileged students – including exchange students from the USA and Europe – were readily given

2 Int. 29, RMF Activist, Cape Town, 13 August 2016.
3 For a detailed account of this protest, see e.g. a GroundUp report: Furlong, »Rhodes Must Fall Protesters Burn UCT Art«.
4 Vid. 58, RMF, Rhodes Must Fall press conference
5 Vid. 58, RMF, Rhodes Must Fall press conference
6 Godsell, »#WitsFeesMustFall Op-Ed: On Violent Protest and Solidarity«.

comfortable accommodation by UCT, while disadvantaged black students often had to stay in overcrowded temporary residences.[7] In an interview with eNCA, the student activist Zola Shokane explained her reasons for engaging in the FMF cause: »I want to get an education, and the only way that the school listens to me is if I make a spectacle of myself. So, unfortunately, no one will study if I don't get a chance to study.«[8]

The provocative #Shackville protest forced the university leadership to »fall[] into our trap«,[9] as another activist explained to me. After UCT's 5 p.m. ultimatum for the protesters to clear the shack had passed unheeded on Tuesday, 16 February 2016, university management called in security and the police, who together resorted to a heavy-handed response. This intervention only served to translate the inherent structures of violence to which the activists had so often drawn attention into an overt example of violence that was captured on camera. Student activists could now point to audio-visual evidence of »the horror of the university management coming out [with] *nyalas*« on campus. Particularly impressive about the #Shackville mobilization was how effectively the student activists managed to transpose symbols of structural violence that usually remain hidden in the segregated urban spaces of Cape Town. By demolishing the shack on its Upper Campus, UCT provided a real-time example of how ›black pain‹ is erased from wherever it does not fit the hegemonic narrative. With much of the movement inspired by the writings of Frantz Fanon, the RMF activist Wanelisa Albert argued from a Fanonian perspective in an opinion piece published in the *City Press* newspaper:

> »Unsurprisingly, today UCT opens its doors to Black students with two conditions: assimilate into whiteness and actively participate in anti-Blackness, or die. Many Black students leave the university in body bags due to high rates of suicide because of a racist institutional culture, unreasonable academic demands and the alienating environment. […] Decolonisation is violent. It messes with the colonial order that maintains Black bodies as subservient beings over a violent, white supremacist superstructure.«[10]

In a response in the same newspaper, UCT's then deputy vice-chancellor, Francis Petersen, reaffirmed the university's position on violence: »UCT

7 The university management responded by admitting that it could only offer accommodation to about one-quarter of its students, with UCT having a maximum capacity of 6,680 beds for its approximately 27,000 students. Nevertheless, management also blamed the previous year's protests for delayed exams, constrained financial resources due to cuts in fees, and a limited administrative capacity after the occupation of university buildings by protesters (Dano and Siyabonga, »#Shackville Highlights UCT Housing Issue«).

8 Vid. 59, eNCA, Student protests have flare up again

9 Int. 29, RMF Activist, Cape Town, 13 August 2016.

10 City Press, »How Shackville Started a War«.

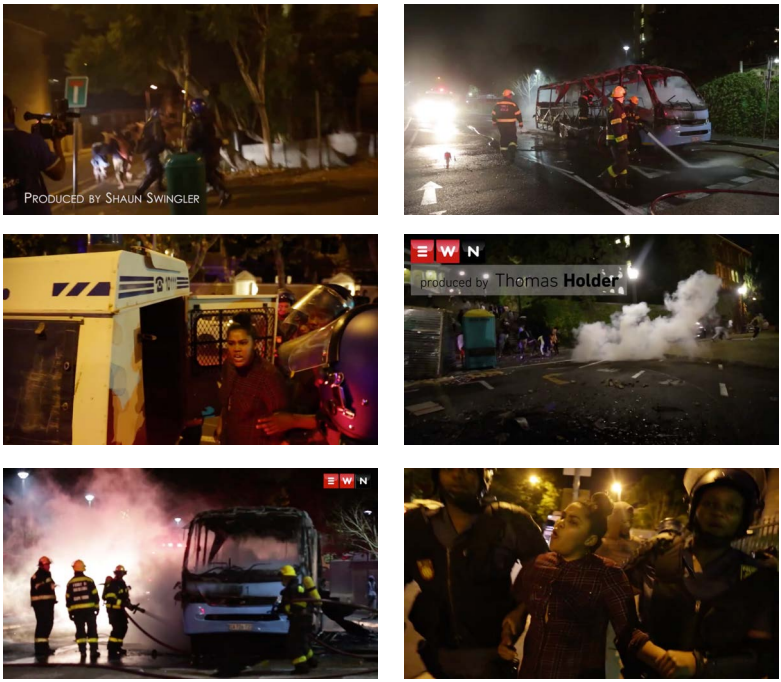

Fig. 38 #Shackville

agrees on the challenges of transformation that RMF has raised. […] But we cannot engage with violence.«[11]

Two part-journalist, part-activist videos published by the *Daily Chronicle* and Eyewitness News (EWN) respectively show that violence is a more complex phenomenon than the deputy vice-chancellor of UCT was prepared to acknowledge.[12] Shaun Swingler's video[13] for the online magazine *Chronicle Digital* as well as a video[14] by Thomas Holder for EWN documented the demolition of #Shackville and its aftermath. Both videos present the day of the destruction of #shackville and the ensuing clashes between students and police at a protest on nearby Main Road, Rondebosch. #Shackville served as a symbol of underlying structures of violence, which through its emblematic presence provoked concrete violence that was recorded on camera.

11 City Press, »How Shackville Started a War«.
12 Smartphone videos produced and uploaded by the RMF media-team were also posted on the Facebook account of UCT:RhodesMustFall. The three videos that show the toy-toying of student protesters at #Shackvile are discussed in Chapter Seven.
13 Vid. 61, Chronicle, Stun grenades and rubber bullets
14 Vid.60, EWN, Police disperse protesters

Holder's EWN video makes use of a voice-over to narrate these events. The opening 50 seconds of the video involve a sequence of rapid cuts between various impressions from the destruction of #Shackville, including the tearing down of the shack, the exchange of stun grenades and stones between the police and the protesters, the arrest of two students, and the burning service vehicle and Jammie Shuttle.[15] Swingler's *Daily Chronicle* video was shot slightly later and thus only shows the wake of the destruction: the demolished shack and the two burning vehicles.[16] Despite this temporal divergence, the two videos are very similar in both visuals and narrative.

Both videos turn to the Main Road protest following the destruction of #Shackville. »This is an illegal gathering. We will disperse you. You have two minutes, less than two minutes left!« shouts a police officer at the protesting students.[17] Chaos then breaks out after a stun grenade is fired. In one scene, Swingler runs behind a policeman who is dragging a male student by one of his arms.[18] The two videos then depict the arrest of a female student,[19] who shouts: »From whom must I run? From whom must I run?«[20] Swingler follows the outspoken student and captures her voice just before she is bundled into the back of a police vehicle: »Why are you brutalizing me? Why are you being so violent?« A policeman responds: »This is an illegal gathering, and you are under arrest. Be quiet now!«[21]

The third part of the two videos plays out in front of a nearby set of student residences, where students had constructed a burning street barricade. The two videos show protesters *toy-toying* around the flames before police officers arrive and enter the residences to arrest a number of students. Both videos capture the violent clashes between the protesters and the police, which they embed in a narrative of escalation triggered by the violent destruction of #Shackville.

The *Daily Chronicle* and EWN videos – with a duration of 2:34 and 2:51 minutes respectively – are almost identical in style and structure. They depict the same events – despite the EWN-video also covering the destruction of the shack since Holder arrived earlier to record – focus heavily on instances of violence, often show exactly the same images, and

15 Jammie Shuttles are the buses that offer free transport to UCT students. Vid.60, EWN, Police disperse protesters 0:00-0:51.
16 Vid. 61, Chronicle, Stun grenades and rubber bullets 0:13-0:31.
17 Vid. 61, Chronicle, Stun grenades and rubber bullets 1:00.
18 Vid. 61, Chronicle, Stun grenades and rubber bullets_1:10-1:16.
19 While the footage of this student being dragged away by the police is identical in the two videos, the footage of the arrested students in the back of the police vehicle differs slightly.
20 Vid.60, EWN, Police disperse protesters 1:42; Vid. 61, Chronicle, Stun grenades and rubber bullets 1:24
21 Vid. 61, Chronicle, Stun grenades and rubber bullets

are narrated in a very similar manner.[22] The journalist-videos provide a perspective that was sympathetic to the student movement. In fact, the Rhodes Must Fall Facebook page[23] posted Holder's EWN video. Secondly, the two videographers protected students by not showing individual protesters involved in acts such as setting the UCT vehicles alight, while at the same time recording police officers arresting students. As one RMF video activist explained, most students were reluctant to be seen on videos as they feared punishment by the state and university authorities unless they were victims to police attacks. Student activists »want the footage up« when it documents »cops brutalizing students or cops being fascist«,[24] as one RMF video activist said and as the videos by Swingler and Holder did.

The #Shackville protest at UCT made powerful use of symbolism to expose underlying structures of violence. It challenged dominant definitions of violence by highlighting the blind spots in a conception that is, as one activist put it, »profoundly anti-poor and anti-black.«[25] Drawing on Johan Galtung's notion of structural violence as »the difference between the potential and the actual,«[26] the protest underscored how racist discrimination operates as a central mechanism of structural harm – one that (neo)liberal frameworks often suppress or deny. As critics have noted, »neoliberalism discursively assigns violence to particular peoples and cultures«[27] while refusing to acknowledge structural violence itself. This logic underpins the repeated assertion by those in power – such as UCT's Francis Petersen. Their claim that protest is acceptable, but it must not be »violent«, denies any form of structural violence, delegitimizes those who are speaking out against structural violence such as racism, and ignores acts of violence committed by police forces and security personnel.

In this respect, the #Shackville protest offered a direct challenge. The journalist-activist videos documenting the events on UCT's campus provide audiovisual evidence of violence directed at those who dared to expose structural injustice. The depth of this violence – inscribed into both subjectivities and urban geographies – becomes even more apparent in the two examples that will follow: the Hangberg Uprising and a video showing police shooting a 14-year-old boy with rubber bullets until he

22 For example, Swingler narrates how »after the demolition of the shack, a UCT vehicle and Jammie Shuttle were set alight, allegedly by protesters«, whereas Holder reports in his voice-over that »shortly thereafter a conservation vehicle belonging to UCT as well as a Jammie shuttle are set ablaze«. Vid. 61, Chronicle, Stun grenades and rubber bullets 0:20-0:25; Vid.60, EWN, Police disperse protesters 0:39-0:47

23 RhodesMustFall, »Facebook Account«.

24 Int. 30, RMF Activist, Cape Town, 14 August 2016.

25 Godsell, »#WitsFeesMustFall Op-Ed: On Violent Protest and Solidarity«.

26 Galtung, »Violence, Peace, and Peace Research,« 168.

27 Springer, »Violence Sits in Places,?« 91.

spits blood. In these cases, symbolic silencing gives way to literal attacks on people's eyes and mouths.

The 2010 Hangberg Uprising

> »[…] the apparent lawlessness of those who came to uphold the law.«[28]

The Hangberg neighborhood, which lies at the edge of the affluent Hout Bay suburb, has risen to media prominence as a result of a series of violent clashes between residents and the police following evictions ordered by the City of Cape Town.[29] An audio-visual record of this violence is well-suited to illustrate how emerging forms of audio-visual production affect the representation of violence. As such, this section compares a 2010 documentary film – *The Uprising of Hangberg* – and its trailer with an online video from 2017.

The 2010 video trailer starts with a wide shot of a T-junction in front of an apartment block as the sound of tumult echoes in the background. The camera zooms in towards the apartments, where police officers are firing rubber bullets at residents. The video then cuts to a close-up of a senior woman, Anna Strauss, with blood running down her forehead. Another cut switches to a television in a sparsely furnished room, from which a reporter can be heard announcing: »We have reports of clashes that have broken out in the community of Hangberg in Hout Bay«. Text then appears introducing »eyewitness reports detailing human rights violations during the uprising of Hangberg« as the background visuals show a burning barricade to the sound of reggae music.[30]

The trailer continues with excerpts from an interview with a Hangberg resident, Ikram ›Lammies‹ Halim. He recounts how he had stepped out of his house with his early morning cup of coffee. A fisherman, Halim was getting ready to go to work when he saw police officers arriving at the Hangberg community. In between the interview excerpts, video snippets of police chasing residents on a path uphill provide visual evidence of the video's claims about police aggression. »Then I just had a ›pop‹ inside my head, and I couldn't see. Everything went blind,« Halim continues his account. This was the moment when he was hit by a rubber bullet shot from close range. »I was shot round about ten to ten in the morning, later,« says a woman holding a child and wearing the same type of white eyepatch as Halim; both victims had lost an eye

28 Vid. 62, Hangberg2010, Uprising of Hangberg 4:43
29 South African History Online, »Hangberg, Hout Bay.«
30 Vid. 62, Hangberg2010, Uprising of Hangberg

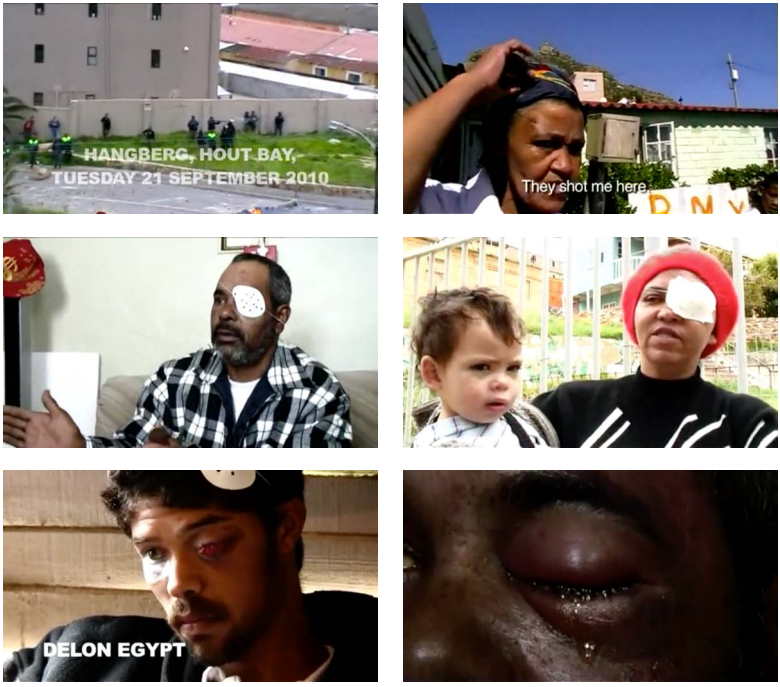

Fig. 39 Hangberg Uprising

in the police raid. »He caught a bullet, a rubber bullet, in his head. We can't remove it. It is going to be dangerous,« Egypt Moses describes the fate of his son, the third person that morning who had been blinded by rubber bullets fired by the police.

The next scene shows in graphic detail how an eyelash is lifted to expose a rubber bullet covered by skin where the eye of Moses' son should be. A close-up shot of Halim's eye also reveals his wound as he explains that he has been told that he is likely to be permanently blind in his injured eye. The video trailer then jumps to an interview with the then Western Cape premier, Helen Zille:

> »Yes, we did expect violence from the residents, we have had it before. But I must add that it is not violence by the residents as a whole. It is violence from a very small group, primarily known as the Rastas. They are both drug users and often – I am afraid – drug peddlers. And the drug lords in that community have really subjugated the community, who live in fear.«[31]

31 Vid. 62, Hangberg2010, Uprising of Hangberg

»They are not drug lords!« shouts an angry woman into the camera. She and other residents reject Zille's media narrative. The trailer returns to Helen Zille, who is arguing in the Western Cape Provincial Parliament that the destroyed »structures« were »unoccupied«; tellingly, she speaks of »structures« not use the word ›house‹. The word ›unoccupied‹ is repeated three times on a loop as footage is shown of residents cooking among the ruins of a destroyed house. »We shall not be moved« can be read on signs held up by singing protesters just before the credits roll.[32]

The Uprising of Hangberg trailer uses two narrative techniques to contextualize the depicted violence. First, it is presented without any subtitles or voice-overs; second, the accounts of eyewitnesses who ›were there‹ are juxtaposed with political discourse uttered from a distance. By capturing the voices of the community members and letting them speak for themselves, filmmakers Aryan Kaganof and Dylan Valley demonstrate the potential of grassroots actors to generate counter-hegemonic narratives.[33] With their mix of footage collected from local eyewitnesses and activists as well as from television news reports, Kaganof and Valley succeed in bringing these visuals into conversation with the residents' own perspectives. However, creating a documentary demands technical equipment, professional know-how, and a source of funding, which both successful documentary filmmakers could access. The video trailer shows the potential of videos to depict violence in counter-hegemonic ways.

The Uprising of Hangberg trailer was released on YouTube a month after the events it shows, which unfolded on 21 and 22 September 2010,[34] and a few months before the full documentary[35] premiered in early 2011 at various public screenings.[36] Four years later, it was released on the freely accessible video-sharing website Vimeo. The 87-minute documentary offers an in-depth insight into the events described above.

The documentary has been widely endorsed by key stakeholders, such as the shack dwellers' movement Abahlali baseMjondolo:

32 As of 11 May 2020, the website is offline. Its URL was hangberg.co.za.

33 Valley, who studied film at the University of Cape Town, has made among others the documentary film *Afrikaaps* and has worked for Al Jazeera and other global news outlets. Kaganof is an independent filmmaker, novelist and poet »who explores provocative and politically charged subject matter« (The Heyman Center, Columbia University, »Profile Filmmakers – Aryan Kaganof«).

34 IOL, »Here's Why #HoutBay Residents Are Protesting«.

35 Vid. 63, African Noise Foundation, The Uprising

36 Public screenings of the documentary followed by discussion sessions were held to mobilize in solidarity with Hangberg residents. Admission was free of charge. Venues included the Cape Town Democracy Centre in the CBD (Idasa, »Documentary Screening: The Uprising of Hangberg«).

Fig. 40 Hout Bay Protest

> »At once a disturbing document and a powerful rallying call for citizen activism, it is the story of a people on a pivot point between existence and non-existence. Marginalised by society, attacked by the very system they voted into power, maligned in the media, there is only one thing for them to control: the telling of their own story.«[37]

The Uprising of Hangberg clearly positions itself in support of local residents, who question the official narrative that the provincial government is acting out of concern for public security when it is in fact destroying their houses. The documentary does so by following in the tradition of engaged documentary filmmaking.

Ona Dubula: Shot in the Mouth

In 2017, another video called »Hout Bay protest«[38] from Hangberg appeared online and provoked widespread anger. The activist video

37 Abahlali baseMjondolo, »The Uprising of Hangberg«.
38 Vid. 64, Michaels, Hout Bay protest

differs significantly from the video trailer and documentary from 2010 in the way it presents violence. Comparing the depiction of police repression in 2010 and 2017 highlight major changes in bottom-up video production. The expansion of potential videographers due to the new ubiquity of smartphone cameras has drastically increased the opportunities to provide audio-visual evidence of attacks. While the 2010 documentary relied mostly on footage recorded in the aftermath of attacks, the video discussed in this section captured police violence on the spot. The video shows how 14-year-old Ona Dubula was shot with rubber bullets from close range during a protest on Friday, 10 September 2017.[39]

Michaels' video of the Ona Dubula shooting begins by showing nine policemen equipped with rubber bullet guns and dressed in heavy riot gear. They position themselves in formation around a police truck before marching along a street towards a barricade. As they move, they shoot rubber bullets and what appears to be a tear gas canister. When they arrive at the barricade, a policeman shouts, »Open the barricade!« A voice from the off shouts, »There is [a] cameraman, Sir!« At this point, the coughing of the videographer Michaels, who has inhaled some of the smoke and tear gas, can be heard.[40]

Behind the burning barricade a table turned upside is placed in the middle of an otherwise empty street. On a gravel stretch on the other side of the road, a second person who is filming can be seen among a number of spectators. After the camera pans to the smoke rising from the burning barricade, the visuals switch back to the table. A policeman holds up his rifle and shoots from a range of less than three meters at three people taking cover behind the table. The officer aggressively pulls up a woman with his left hand as a second person, Ona Dubula, climbs out from behind the table. In a state of shock, Dubula can barely walk and stumbles towards the side of the road in the direction of Michaels.

»Why are you here?« a police officer barks at Dubula.[41] The 14-year-old turns around and bends over while spitting blood and crying out in pain. The same policeman grabs him by his left arm as if to prevent him from running away, but Dubula is obviously in no fit state to run. He sits down and then falls onto the ground, breathing heavily as blood still pours out of his mouth and forms a red puddle on the white gravel. Another voice behind the cameras asks, »Is anyone helping this guy?« The policeman, who has let go of Dubula's arm, ignores the injured teenager

39 Hangberg residents had taken to the streets to demand higher fishing quotas. During violent clashes between the protesters and the police, tear gas, barricades, petrol bombs, stones and rubber bullets were all employed. For visual impressions of this fierce confrontation, see: Hendricks, »In Photos: Hangberg Erupts over Fishing Rights«.

40 Vid. 64, Michaels, Hout Bay protest 0:58-1:10

41 Vid. 64, Michaels, Hout Bay protest 1:35

and continues to shout orders at the other officers about removing the barricade.[42] At this point, Dubula starts spitting out something thicker than blood. »They shot him in the mouth,« a voice behind the camera declares.[43] Blood continues to fall onto the ground as Dubula looks helplessly at the onlookers gathering around him. A third person arrives on the side of the road, swears at the police, and shouts for medical assistance for Dubula. A man sits down next to Dubula and puts his right arm around the boy's back while holding a phone with a camera in his left hand.[44] As the man peers into Dubula's injured mouth, the video ends abruptly. Ona Dubula survived the act with serious injuries.[45] Dubula, a bystander, was shot intentionally by the police as the GroundUp reported:

> »But Ona was not taking part in any of this when he was shot. He was not attacking or threatening anyone. Nor was he yet another unfortunate child ›caught in the crossfire‹ when adults fight each other. His serious injuries were inflicted when a police officer or officers deliberately shot at three people [including Dubula] seeking cover behind a table. Two rubber bullets hit Ona in the mouth and two in the ribs.«[46]

Three days after the attack, a 2:46-minute video of the incident was uploaded on YouTube. Michaels' footage of the Ona Dubula shooting »widely circulated« online.[47] Local resident Peter Parker Michaels,[48] filmed audiovisuals and only slightly edited them.[49] Valley and Kaganof's 2010 video trailer and documentary film differs in one key respect from the video filmed by peter Michaels: instead of reconstructing the use of rubber bullets against urban citizens in the aftermath, Peter Michael's video provides audio-visual evidence of police violence in situ. Documentary films making has become neither irrelevant nor obsolete.

42 Vid. 64, Michaels, Hout Bay protest 2:02
43 Vid. 64, Michaels, Hout Bay protest 2:18
44 Vid. 64, Michaels, Hout Bay protest2:38
45 Brandt, »Hout Bay Mom: I Want to See the Police Officer Who Shot My Child.«
46 GroundUp Editors, »Hout Bay Shows How Desperately We Need Good Police Leadership«.
47 Macherez, »Hout Bay Residents Call for Solidarity with Hangberg«. On YouTube the video by Michaels has been watched by 13'927 times. Vid. 64, Michaels, Hout Bay protest
48 Michaels describes himself as: »Multi-talented, Rapper, MC, Event Organiser, Tour Guide, Photographer, Filmmaker, MMA Fighter, Life Coach, Motivational Speaker« (Peter Parker Michaels, »Instagram Profile«).
49 There are two barely noticeable cuts in the video at 0:27 and 2:01. Other activist videos by Michaels include for example Vid. 65, Michaels, Service Delivery for HB; Vid. 66, Michaels, hout bay police brutality; Vid. 67, Michaels, Imizamo Yethu Protest 2017.

However, what the example of the two depictions of police violence emphasizes is how a whole new set of actors – video activists as well as eyewitnesses with smartphones – entered the sphere of audio-visual production, which is then distributed on corporate social media. This explosion of ›raw materials‹ is then further distributed by media activists, journalists[50] or documentary filmmakers.

Contrasting the violence experienced by urban citizens protesting at the University of Cape Town (UCT) with that in Hangberg reveals the starkly unequal levels at which state violence is enacted. At UCT, protests are often portrayed as disruptive but still situated within a framework of political contestation. In Hangberg, by contrast, the very act of being present in a protest space can endanger one's physical integrity. The police officer's question to a teenager – »Why are you here?« – encapsulates the state's unrelenting willingness to use force against marginalized citizens. Here, structural violence that is »anti-poor and anti-black« materializes in concrete acts of bodily harm. Urban citizens literally risk losing their sight or their ability to speak when they are ›in the way.‹

The power of video recording lies in its capacity to document these moments – not merely as isolated incidents, but as visual evidence of broader structures of oppression. Yet this power is double-edged: while such footage can expose injustice, it also risks being consumed as spectacle, stripped of its political urgency and reduced to voyeuristic consumption. The challenge, then, is to ensure that these recordings serve as tools for accountability and transformation, rather than as fleeting images for ready-made distraction.

The next two examples from Rio de Janeiro illustrate how violence was discursively constructed during the Jornadas de Junho. They reveal how the state's framing of protests as violent served to delegitimize dissent, while protesters and media activists sought to expose the violence inflicted upon them. The first example shows how students and teachers joined forces in response to police repression, challenging dominant narratives about who enacts violence and who suffers from it. Their alliance underscores the contested nature of what constitutes violence in public discourse. The second example examines the death of a cameraman during a protest at Rio's Central do Brasil station – a tragedy that not only ended the life of a videographer but also symbolically marked the decline of the Jornadas de Junho movement.

50 Especially in Cape Town, journalist accounts of platforms such as GroundUp or EWN play an important role in contextualizing of videos like Parker's recording of the attack on Ona Dubula. For journalist reports on the case, see: Macherez, »Hout Bay Residents Call for Solidarity with Hangberg«; GroundUp Editors, »Hout Bay Shows How Desperately We Need Good Police Leadership«; Brandt, »Hout Bay Mom: I Want to See the Police Officer Who Shot My Child.«

»*The Revolution Does Not Fall from the Sky*«[51]

From 30 September to 15 October 2013, public school teachers went on strike in Rio de Janeiro to become the Black Profs.[52] Their protests were staged inside and in front the Municipal Chamber of Rio de Janeiro that houses the city's legislative council, on Cinelândia Square in the city center.[53] The public school teachers, who were demanding better working conditions and improvements in public education,[54] were met with a heavy-handed police response.[55] Members of the MIC and Mariachi collectives were very active in documenting these police assaults.

The video »The Revolution Does Not Fall from the Sky«[56] is exemplary in how it harnesses both message and audiovisual style to redirect the hegemonic gaze and establish counter-hegemonic narratives. The

51 Translation of the video's title Vid. 54, MIC, Revolução não cai do céu

52 The days of the Black Profs are the story of teachers going on strike and being protected by their students against attacks (Interview, Rio de Janeiro, 24. October 2015). A more detailed examination of the use of black bloc tactics and the coalition formed between teachers and students in September and October 2013 is presented by Corrêa dos Santos, Pedrosa, and Nunes, »Corps en mouvement«.

53 The clearing of the Municipal Chamber, which proved to be particularly violent, fueled outrage. A small group of teachers demonstrating inside the building had found themselves encircled by police officers, who were blocking both exits. Trapped inside, the peacefully protesting teachers were attacked with stun grenades and pepper spray and pushed down the stairs, with some being arrested. A few days later at another demonstration on Cinelândia Square, a speech by one of the teachers thanking the students who had come to their assistance was interrupted by tear gas being shot into the crowd once again.
Vid. 05, Mariano, Desde Junho 3 10:03–15:00

54 The envisioned cuts in public spending in the state of Rio de Janeiro, which stood in stark contrast to the state government's enormous spending on the FIFA World Cup and the Olympic Games, ignited a wave of furious protests. In fact, despite these cuts, the state's deficit had grown to such a level by June 2016 that it had to request financial assistance from the federal government. Rapoza, »Rio De Janeiro, Brazil Is A Complete Mess«.

55 A story from the protest march that took place on 9 October 2013 illustrates how the violent suppression of the teacher protests forged an unlikely coalition against the police between teachers and their students. As police officers were pulling elderly female teachers by the hair, a group of students arrived on the scene and asked how they could help. As a result, the students began protecting the teachers at the marches by using black bloc tactics. Thereafter, as an interviewee explained, the demonstrations became known as the Black Prof protests (Interview, Rio de Janeiro, 24. October 2015).

56 Vid. 54, MIC, Revolução não cai do céu

twelve-minute video encapsulates the typical narrative style of various MIC productions portraying protests. The opening shots show a shower of pamphlets falling from a nearby skyscraper onto a crowd of protesters, into which the video's title – »The Revolution Does Not Fall from the Sky« – is blended. A man with his face covered by a green scarf plays the berimbau, a traditional capoeira instrument, as more text announces the date and location of the protest: »7 October 2013, Rio de Janeiro.«

This is followed by a series of interviews with protesters: a member of the Indigenous community; a middle-aged woman with white hair hidden behind a black bandana; a teacher with large red tears painted on her cheeks; a younger woman holding up a banner; and an elderly woman shouting her anger into the camera. »Even during the dictatorship, I never saw such events. And I have been an advocate for 33 years,«[57] another interviewee declares, referring to unarmed, elderly teachers being attacked with rubber bullets, tear gas, and batons.

After seven minutes, the video shifts to a retrospective of a protest that took place on 1 October. This footage, presented in black and white to signal a flashback, shows dozens of tear gas canisters raining down on protesters in Cinelândia Square, engulfing them in a cloud of gas. Text on screen reads: »Although it differs in the ways in which it manifests itself, the cry of the people is unanimous.«[58] This message directly responds to a claim repeated by politicians and corporate media since the Jornadas de Junho: that any form of violence during a protest delegitimizes the demands of all protesters. This line of argument, however, ignores the violence committed by police against demonstrators. The use of black bloc tactics by students was welcomed after dozens of teachers had been injured by police, as documented in footage from 1 October 2013.[59] The flashback text underscores this point: »There would be no vandalism if the population did not feel vandalized.«[60]

Returning to the events of 7 October, the MIC video documents the violent clashes between protesters and police. Fast-cut footage shows

57 Vid. 54, MIC, Revolução não cai do céu 5:53

58 »Embora divirjam nas formas de manifestar-se, o grito do povo é unânime. Não haveria vandalismo se a população não se sentisse vandalizada.« Vid. 54, MIC, Revolução não cai do céu 7:58

59 The scenes in the flashback are taken from a video that MIC filmed on 1 October 2013. This video, entitled »PROFESSORES À PALMATÓRIA ›Aquilo que a televisão não mostrou‹«, documents numerous police assaults (Vid. 55, MIC, Proffessores á Palmatória). As is commonly the case in Rio, the police violence against female protesters created particular outrage. This video undoubtedly inspired the video from 7 October 2013.

60 »Embora divirjam nas formas de manifestar-se, o grito do povo é unânime. Não haveria vandalismo se a população não se sentisse vandalizada.« Vid. 54, MIC, Revolução não cai do céu 7:58

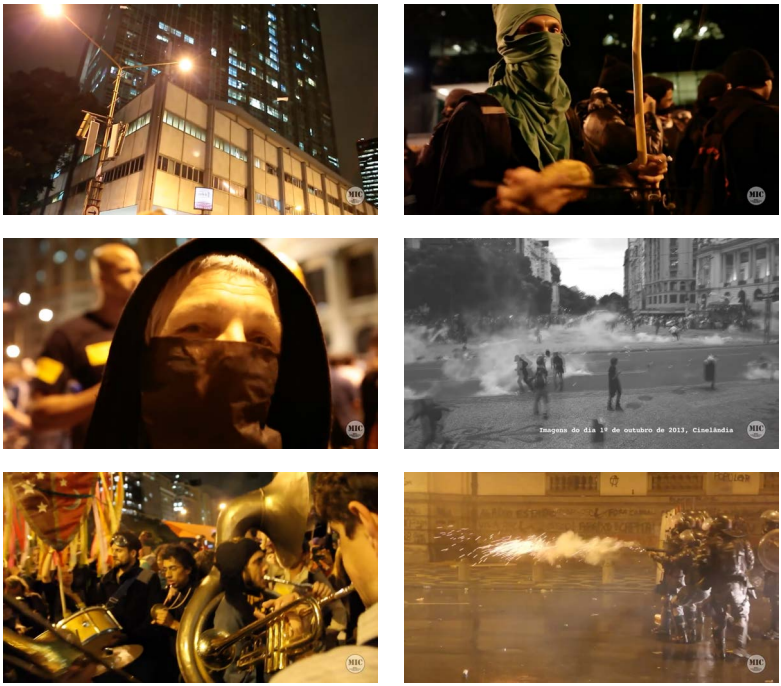

Fig. 41 Revolution Doesn't Fall from the Sky

a brass band playing among the protesters,[61] police firing tear gas and rubber bullets, officers striking demonstrators with batons, barricades burning in the streets, and ATMs and a bus being set alight by activists. The video was viewed by over 11,000 users on YouTube and was publicly screened on 31 March 2017 at the Que Legado documentary film festival in Rio de Janeiro.[62]

The Death of a Cameraman and a »Cold Shower«[63]

A few months after the Black Profs had taken to the streets in September and October 2013, unrest began to boil over again in early 2014. In

61 While the first section of the video is accompanied by live berimbau music, another activst music band's trumpets accompany the rest of the footage. A closer examination of the role of music in the presentation of activist videos about protests would certainly be a revealing exercise, but this goes beyond the scope of my research.
62 Vid. 54, MIC, Revolução não cai do céu
63 Int. 6, Video Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 23 October 2015.

2013, the previous attempt to increase transport tariffs had been withdrawn due to the massive resistance during the Jornadas de Junho. However, in February the increase – from BRL 2.75 to BRL 3.00[64] – was reintroduced and took effect on 8 February.

The wave of mobilization against the previewed hike in public transport costs ended abruptly, when Santiago Andrade died after being lethally injured at a protest march. On 6 February 2014, the Movimento Passa Livre (MPL) had called for the »fifth act against the increase in transport tariffs in Rio«.[65] After activists occupied the entrance hall of the Central train station, the police used violence to clear and temporarily shut down this major transport hub. The clashes between the police and the protesters subsequently spilled out onto the streets.

At dusk, the television cameraman Santiago Andrade[66] was wounded in front of Central Station by fireworks that were presumably shot by two young protesters. After spending three days in a coma due to his severe head injuries, Andrade died in hospital on 10 February. Corporate journalism blamed the activists for the violence and re-iterated the ›vandalism‹ narrative.[67] According to video activist Fernando, Andrade's death was like a »cold shower«[68] that left activists stunned into inaction.

After months of being depicted as violent »vandals« and facing heavy-handed police repression, Andrade's death marked the final ebbing of the protest wave that had begun with the Jornadas de Junho. I remember helicopters circling over the city center and police and ambulance sirens howling through the night. At the time, I was visiting Rio as a tourist, sitting on the terrace of a hostel overlooking the city. The next morning, I asked a young man working at the hostel what had happened the night before. He turned his computer screen toward me and played the following AND video.

The five-minute video, titled »Police Violence and Popular Resistance in the 5th Act Against the Increase in Transport Tariffs in Rio,«[69] shows footage from the previous night's protests, including visuals of an injured Andrade.

For the first one-and-a-half minutes, the video sets the scene: the protest march approaching Central Station, the police assault inside the

64 This is the price for a single journey ticket with a bus.
65 Vid. 56, CMI, Ato contra o aumento das passagens
66 Santiago Ilídio Andrade, who was 49 years old when he died, worked for TV Bandeirantes. He had previously won awards for his reporting on the everyday difficulties facing commuters in Rio before this became a major theme of the Jornadas de Junho, on which he also reported.
67 See also the discussion in the previous chapter about the editorial of Globo that Rafucko ridiculed.
68 Int. 6, Video Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 23 October 2015.
69 Vid. 57, AND, Violência policial e resistência popular

entrance hall, and the clashes during the clearing of the station. At 1:23, the video jumps to the square in front of the station. The videographer follows another cameraman running through clouds of tear gas.

On the cobblestones lies a motionless man – Santiago Andrade – with blood pouring from his head. In front of him is a professional video camera. People are screaming, but their shouts are interrupted by the explosion of another stun grenade, which produces a moment of silence.[70] A group of five policemen approaches the center of the frame in a warlike ducked run, followed by more officers moving toward the injured Andrade. This entire scene, lasting nearly one minute, is presented with only one cut.[71]

The remainder of the AND video documents the ongoing clashes as they spill into adjacent streets. Police fire tear gas toward a bus stop, where a woman is trying to guide a young man with a disability to safety.[72] More tear gas follows, and a policeman warns, »Don't film!«[73] as he and his colleagues chase a protester down the street. Later, a group of young men tear down a locked gate outside Central Station. More tear gas and rubber bullets follow.[74] In a provocative gesture, a young woman inspected by police empties her backpack onto the cobblestones. She angrily declares that she has no weapons – unlike the police, who have been using stun grenades, tear gas, and batons excessively.[75] The video ends with three policemen fleeing toward the entrance of Central Station after being attacked with stones by protesters.

On 7 February, the Professional Journalists' Union of Rio de Janeiro published a statement in response to Andrade's death: »Today, journalists suffer from a lack of basic personal protective equipment, such as gas masks and helmets, which should be provided by their employers.«[76] A report by medical examiner Ricardo Molina concluded that Andrade's death was caused by the impact of the projectile to his head, not by the explosion that occurred seconds later. »This tragedy could have been avoided had he been provided with a helmet by his employer.«[77]

70 Vid. 57, AND, Violência policial e resistência popular 1:49
71 Vid. 57, AND, Violência policial e resistência popular 1:22–2:17
72 Vid. 57, AND, Violência policial e resistência popular_3:15
73 Vid. 57, AND, Violência policial e resistência popular_4:02
74 Vid. 57, AND, Violência policial e resistência popular 4:10–4:35
75 According to the video's description, 31 people had been arrested by the time the video was released on YouTube. Vid. 57, AND, Violência policial e resistência popular 4:46
76 »Os trabalhadores da imprensa sofrem hoje com a falta de equipamentos básicos de proteção individual, como máscara antigases e capacete, que deveriam ser fornecidos pelas empresas« (Sindicato dos Jornalistas Rio de Janeiro, »Nota Pública Sobre o Caso Do Repórter Cinematográfico Santiago Andrade«).
77 Sindicato dos Jornalistas Rio de Janeiro, »Caso Santiago Andrade.«

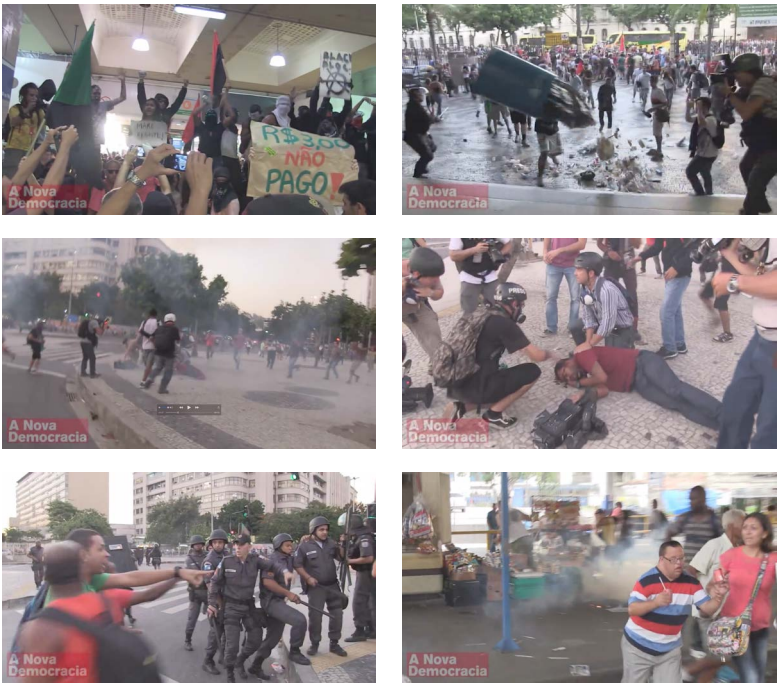

Fig. 42 Death of a cameraman

In an interview I conducted, a representative from the Union of Journalists emphasized that over 80 percent of attacks against the press in Rio were committed by police.[78] This was not the case, however, with Andrade, who died after being struck by a firework rocket accidentally fired in his direction by twenty-two year olds, Fábio Raposo and Caio Silva de Souza.[79] As the Syndicate of Journalists declared: »This moment of pain demands […] an end to the violence against journalists and all other workers working in conflict situations.«[80]

Violence increases the visibility and attention given to protest events and the videos that document them, as the previous chapter

78 Int. 9, Speaker Union of Journalism, Rio de Janeiro, 6 November 2015.

79 Both spent 18 months in prison before a judge ruled by writ of habeas corpus that Andrade's death was a tragic accident and not a murder (Sindicato dos Jornalistas Rio de Janeiro, »Caso Santiago Andrade.«)

80 »Esse momento de dor exige a união da nossa categoria [sindicato de jornalistas] – e da sociedade, de forma ampla – pelo fim da violência contra os jornalistas e todos os demais trabalhadores que atuam em situações de conflito« (Sindicato dos Jornalistas Rio de Janeiro, »Nota de Pesar Pela Morte Do Repórter Cinematográfico Santiago Andrade«).

demonstrated. However, as this analysis has shown, the relationship between violence and protest is complex. At its core lies a fundamental question: what do we mean when we speak of violence? A traditional view – reflected in many legal frameworks – defines violence narrowly as physical harm inflicted by one individual upon another. Yet such a conception often overlooks structural forms of violence, such as racism or environmental injustice, where harm is systemic and the causal links are diffuse rather than individualized.

This struggle over the definition of violence becomes particularly charged in the context of protest. While state actors – such as police and security forces – are legally and practically permitted to use force, protesters are swiftly condemned for any act deemed violent. This asymmetry results not only in the legal prosecution of individual activists but also in the discursive delegitimization of entire urban movements and their demands.

Video recordings can play a crucial role in challenging these narratives. In rare but significant cases, they have helped hold individual police officers accountable, as some of the examples in the next section illustrate. Yet documenting such violence comes at a cost. Videographers often face direct threats and unpredictable repercussions for exposing state brutality – risks that the following section explores in greater depth.

8.2 Documenting Police Violence and the Threat for Videographers

The 2010 video about the Hangberg Uprising focuses on the stories of three people blinded by police officers, as well as the discourse of the provincial government, which defended the violent evictions that had caused the attack. In contrast, a video from 2017 captures, live and on the spot, how rubber bullets were used against a 14-year-old teenager. This comparison illustrates how the growing availability of cameras has transformed the representation of violence at protests. Rather than reconstructing scenes of violence after the fact, videographers today increasingly capture acts of violence as they unfold. However, this immediacy comes at a cost: eyewitnesses who document police violence often expose themselves to direct threats and retaliation.

The following sections present examples of how videographers in Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro face such risks. Individuals filming in unexpected, everyday situations – while walking down the street or even sitting at home – can suddenly find themselves drawn into moments of serious, sometimes lethal, violence. They become witnesses.

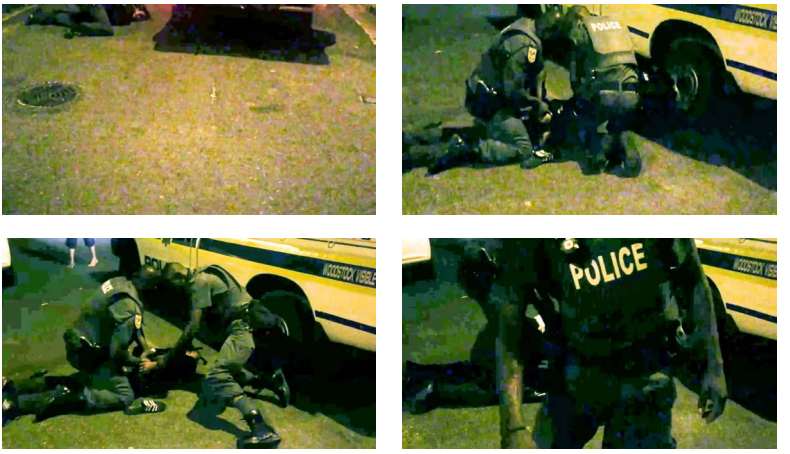

Fig. 43 Under Arrest for Filming

With the widespread availability of recording tools, the decision to document these events is becoming more common – but certainly no less dangerous. First, two examples from Cape Town illustrate the arrest of an individual videographer and the threats directed at eyewitnesses. Second, the dramatic story of a witness who recorded police staging an attack after assassinating a urban citizen in a Favela in Rio reveals both the volatility of such moments and the tactics used to protect those who film them.

»Video Woodstock cops arrested me over«

> »In a few short hours the police had taught me to put my principles aside and keep my head down while the powerful brutalised the weak.«[81]

The only video from my Cape Town sample that appears to have permanently disappeared from YouTube is titled »Video Woodstock Cops Arrested Me Over.«[82] The story recorded in this video underscores the dangers involved in recording and disseminating footage of police violence.

81 Grebe, »I Was Jailed for Filming a Police Assault« (unavailable)

82 Vid. 50, Grebe, The video that Woodstock cops arrested me over. The user account that posted the video has been deleted. I have a saved version of this video in MP4 format.

Fig. 44 Horror Drag

Equipped with a smartphone, an eyewitness filmed Woodstock police officers[83] violently arresting a resident of the bohemian suburb of Observatory. The video[84] documented how two officers punched the man in the face and choked him, before arresting him. When the eyewitness, Grebe, intervened and began filming, the same officers charged him with »riotous behaviour« and placed him in custody.[85] Fortunately, he managed to send the footage to a friend before his phone was confiscated. This raises the question: how many similar incidents have gone unrecorded – or were filmed but later deleted under police pressure?

Grebe later published an article on the news site *GroundUp* in January 2016, detailing the violent behavior of the police. In one section, he reflects on his night in custody:

> »There was not enough floor space for all of us to lie down, but some were even able to sleep on the hard floor. My companions seemed

83 Observatory falls under the jurisdiction of the police station in the nearby suburb of Woodstock.

84 Vid. 50, Grebe, The video that Woodstock cops arrested me over

85 Grebe, »I Was Jailed for Filming a Police Assault«.

Fig. 45 Man stripped naked

> resigned to their fate and reasonably comfortable. I reflected on how luxurious my daily life probably was compared to those of my cellmates. Also that my burning sense of injustice and anger reflected my privileged position, in which being treated unjustly was unusual.«[86]

The eyewitness Grebe emphasizes how the police attempted to instill a sense of fear into the detainees. Grebe recounts how one of the episodes of conflicts he observed during his arrest. The police had returned the confiscated ZAR 3,000 to one detainee in a police vehicle, in cash. Fellow detainees in the same van observed the open cash from police to one detainee. Then they attacked him violently. Finally, Constable Khoza intervened, as Grebe recounts. But instead of apologizing for creating such a tension amongst detainees locked together in a back of a police van, he brutally assaulted the detainee who had supposedly stolen the money:

> »He kicked him many times, on the arms and legs, on the chest and abdomen, with his heavy police boots. The man was screaming in pain and started sobbing loudly, crying for his mother. Constable Khoza did

86 Grebe, »I Was Jailed for Filming a Police Assault«.

> not stop, instead the man's wails seemed to inspire him to put greater and greater effort into his kicks. He stomped on the man's genitals in a moment of particular cruelty.«[87]

The blatant abuse of power by the police officer was never recorded. Such forms of violence – especially those occurring in and around police stations or detention facilities – rarely become visible. It is thanks to the witness, Grebe, who had the courage to first record the arrest in Observatory and later publicly recount his experience, that the public gains insight into what often remains hidden. Being arrested for filming the police is a serious threat, and depending on the witness's positionalities in respect to race, class, and gender, it can have lasting consequences. In a critical self-reflection, Grebe himself points out the role his privileged positionalities:

> »There was not enough floor space for all of us to lie down, but some were even able to sleep on the hard floor. My companions seemed resigned to their fate and reasonably comfortable. I reflected on how luxurious my daily life probably was compared to those of my cellmates. Also that my burning sense of injustice and anger reflected my privileged position, in which being treated unjustly was unusual.«[88]

Police Humiliating a Man in the Open Street before Threatening Eyewitnesses

A scandal of police violence in Gauteng Province preceded a video recording of police brutality in Cape Town. To provide context, both incidents are recounted chronologically. The first, from 2013, documents the death of Mido Macia, a Mozambican immigrant who was handcuffed to a police vehicle and dragged through the streets – an act that sparked national and international outrage. The second, recorded in 2014 in Cape Town, captures police officers publicly humiliating and assaulting a man in broad daylight.

On 26 February 2013 at a mini taxi rank in Daveyton, Gauteng Province, a man was handcuffed to a police vehicle and then dragged behind it to his death. The victim, who died in police custody of his injuries, was the 27-year-old Mozambican immigrant Mido Macia.[89] The footage of

87 Grebe, »I Was Jailed for Filming a Police Assault«.

88 Grebe, »I Was Jailed for Filming a Police Assault«.

89 The fact that Macia was an immigrant from Mozambique – despite living with his relatives in the country since 17 years – is significant in the South African context. In an old study, a staggering 87 percent of Johannesburg police officers responded in the affirmative to the question of whether they think that »most undocumented migrants in Johannesburg are involved

this incident – which was filmed with a smartphone, presumably by one of the many onlookers – soon ›went viral‹, its shaky and shocking audio-visuals spreading like wildfire in different formats across various domestic and international media outlets.[90] In this case, the videographers decided to pass on the video material to journalists and remain anonymous.[91] While the exact reason for their anonymity is speculative, fear of police retaliation would be a plausible explanation.

The second video, which appeared almost exactly one year later – on 6 March 2014 – was recorded in Cape Town and documents another particularly gratuitous abuse of police power. In an unedited video that lasts for 2:02 minutes, a group of five police officers are shown humiliating a man in public while arresting him. This video »More cape town police brutality« presents the most-viewed video from Cape Town, which my work discusses.[92]

The video documents a graphically violent scene filmed from the first or second floor of a nearby office building. A white police officer holds a black man against the open trunk of his car. »Record it!« shouts an off-screen voice.[93] The three police officers then force the man away from the car, pulling him into the open street. »Why is the guy with the white T-Shirt not doing anything?« asks the same off-screen voice, referring to one of three onlookers who are observing this scene from the sidewalk. At the same time, the man being targeted by the police is stripped

in crime«. Xenophobia within the South African Police Service as well as across South African society as a whole has long been a serious issue. Masuku, »Targeting Foreigners. Xenophobia Among Johannesburg's Police«.

90 The original witness footage has been edited into a news report that is introduced by a newsreader and which includes an interview with Moses Dlamini, the spokesperson for the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID). This video has been accessed 285,825 times (Vid. 52, eNCA, Police brutality). Other version of the video – see links in videography – have equally assembled significant attention online.

91 The *Daily Sun* newspaper was the first to receive the cellphone footage.

92 This witness video had recorded 207,888 views on the channel of the YouTube user grantzak, who uploaded it on 6 March 2014. It had attained 80,782 views on George Wyngaardt's channel (later renamed as Life with George), where it was posted on 7 March 2014. Another copy of the video appeared on 11 March 2014 on the BBC News YouTube channel, where it had reached 189,268 views, before quickly spreading to other media outlets. This multiplication across various channels is typical for videos that are ›going viral‹, making it difficult to assess the exact number of viewers across all the different channels and platforms on which a video is being watched. According to one report, the video first received attention after being mentioned in a Facebook post and on the CapeTalk radio station (Jeralyn, »Capetown Police Brutality Captured on Video«).

93 Vid. 51, Grantzax, More cape town police brutality 0:20.

naked as the officers pull down his shorts. Three off-screen voices express their shock at what they are witnessing – »This is fucked up!«; »Jesus!«; »Someone must do something!« – to which another person responds, »She is taking a video, don't worry.«

Down on the street, the white police officer, who is wearing yellow gloves, attempts to choke the man around the throat. Thereafter, two other police officers hold the naked victim as the white officer first punches his fist and thereafter his heavy boots with full power into the naked man's genitals.[94] Suddenly, the images become shaky as the videographer moves from one window to the next in an effort to follow the police officers down on the street, who are taking the man to their vehicle. From the window, the videographer shouts at the officers: »Police brutality! That's not how you treat a person!«[95] Upon hearing this, the white officer turns his head to identify the source of this exclamation and then walks off towards the eyewitnesses' office building,[96] at which point the video ends as abruptly as it started.

What the video does not show but what was later revealed in a Facebook post by Ms. Sper,[97] in which she identified herself as the eyewitness who filmed the video, is how the white police officer came looking for her in her office:

> »Yes he came upstairs banged on our door he came to arrest me for screaming out the window but all of us asked him why did he do that to the man so he said he was just trying to get him in the van and he arrested my collogue [sic] for police interference and the charges was later dropped.«[98]

As in the previous case, the police retaliated by making an arrest – in this instance, of Sper's colleague, who was subsequently released after all charges were dropped. YouTube user comments beneath the video[99] show that two contrasting sets of opinions emerged as the most vocal. The first comment by user SeSSION celebrates the police: »Good Job, Finally The Police Do Their Job«. The hate speech by SeSSION and

94 Vid. 51, Grantzax, More cape town police brutality_0:58.
95 Vid. 51, Grantzax, More cape town police brutality 1:42.
96 According to an article published about the incident, the video was filmed from an office building rather than from an apartment building in an area of Cape Town that I could not identify (Jeralyn, »Capetown Police Brutality Captured on Video«).
97 Name changed to not expose witness
98 Jeralyn, »Capetown Police Brutality Captured on Video.«
99 These comments are taken from the original version of the video uploaded on YouTube. Most of the discussants appear to be from Cape Town or elsewhere in South Africa, unlike the more international audience attracted by the BBC video. Vid. 51, Grantzax, More cape town police brutality

other users is countered in comments that express the shock and fury at the police's flagrant abuse of its powers. Users who were of this opinion also tended to praise the courage of the eyewitness in their comments to the video; as one user wrote: »Well done to the woman who actually said something. Its not enough to just record. A person will be beaten to death while we're just recording.«[100]

However, as the South African examples indicate, recording police violence carries significant risks. While no videographer is entirely protected, the level of risk appears to vary depending on their positionality. Those filming in marginalized urban settings often face the greatest danger – making it likely that many incidents of police violence go undocumented. The fear of retaliation, especially among those already vulnerable, contributes to a potentially significant underrepresentation of such footage. An example from Rio de Janeiro illustrates just how serious these risks can be when filming in favelas.

Filming a Staged Assassination out of the Window: Eduardo from Providencîa

The first video from Rio's oldest favela, Morro da Providência, shows that the dangers of filming police violence in Brazil are no less severe than in South Africa. However, the networks in place to protect eyewitness videographers differ significantly.

On Tuesday, 29 September 2015, the 17-year-old Eduardo Felipe Santos Victor was assassinated. As the newspaper *El País* reported:

> »The death of Eduardo Felipe Santos Victor, 17, in Morro da Providência in downtown Rio de Janeiro, which was reported as the death of a narcotics trafficker who had clashed with policemen from the Pacifying Police Unit (UPP), could have been just another statistic in a state where, as of June this year, police had killed an average of almost two people per day. But two videos recorded by residents, which documented all the steps taken by police officers to tamper with the crime scene, cast doubt on the police version, according to which there had been an exchange of fire before a radio transmitter, ammunition and a pistol had been found on the teenager.«[101]

100 Vid. 51, Grantzax, More cape town police brutality

101 »A morte de Eduardo Felipe Santos Victor, de 17 anos, no morro da Providência, no centro do Rio, noticiada como a de um narcotraficante que entrou em confronto com os policiais da Unidade de Polícia Pacificadora (UPP), poderia ter sido mais uma em um Estado onde, até junho deste ano, a polícia matou em média quase duas pessoas por dia. Mas dois vídeos gravados por moradores, onde ficaram registrados todos os passos dos agentes ao adulterar a cena do crime, põe em dúvida a versão policial, que afirmou

Fig. 46 Faking an Attack

Eduardo was one of the many victims of the UPP that had been deployed in Providência since 2010. On the same day, one video was uploaded on various channels on YouTube.[102] The video gained media attention for the fact that police officers were caught on camera attempting to tamper with the crime scene, a tactic regularly employed by police to present killings by the police as acts of self-defense.

The video shows the police interference with the crime scene through an open window of a nearby house. One of the videographers, who remains unseen behind her smartphone camera, expresses her fear: »My legs are trembling!«[103] The visuals show Eduardo – the killed teenager – in a white shirt lying on the ground and being surrounded by four UPP officers. When the officer on the left takes a step backwards, Eduardo's lifeless body becomes entirely visible. Blood is running from his corpse onto the grey concrete. One of the officers rolls Eduardo's body onto its side to free his right arm.[104] Another officer then arrives to the scene with a pistol, which he places in Eduardo's right hand and fires two shots into the air.[105] »It was the UPP!«[106] the shocked eyewitnesses exclaim into the camera before repeating a shocked »aiaiaiai« over and over

que houve troca de tiros e que encontrou com o adolescente um radiotransmissor, munições e uma pistola« (Martín, »Polícia Do Rio Forja Cena de Crime Para Esconder Assassinato de Jovem«).

102 Vid. 53, Revolta Impopular, Polícia Carioca forja

103 Jornal O Dia in Vid. 53, Revolta Impopular, Polícia Carioca forja_0:35.

104 Jornal O Dia in Vid. 53, Revolta Impopular, Polícia Carioca forja_1:44

105 Jornal O Dia in Vid. 53, Revolta Impopular, Polícia Carioca forja_2:55

106 Jornal O Dia in Vid. 53, Revolta Impopular, Polícia Carioca forja_4:22

again. Later, the officers would claim that they had been the target of two shots and that they had found a pistol with Eduardo's fingerprints at the crime scene. The video ends with credits referencing the source of the audio-visuals: »Footage: Sent via WhatsApp to O Dia (987628248).«[107]

The bravery displayed by the eyewitnesses in choosing to film in such circumstances has earned them much respect, as expressed in YouTube comments. The courage of the videographers earned the respect: »Congratulations to those who filmed [...] regardless of whether the boy was evil this affair was forged«.[108] Producing footage of such incidents is a life-threatening exercise for videographers – not only while filming but also during dissemination and after publication, when the source of the footage is at risk of being identified and retaliation by the police and allied drug gangs can be expected. This video posed a particular danger in this regard, since the angle from which it was shot in combination with the recorded voices could have facilitated the relatively easy identification of the eyewitnesses.

The video was sent to the newspaper *O Dia*, which published it on its YouTube channel. In order to protect the eyewitnesses, *O Dia* employed trimming distortion to distort the voices of the videographers. In contrast, the version of the video posted by Revolta Impopular[109] presents this footage without distorting their voices, illustrating how it becomes almost impossible to control the circulation of a video once it goes online.

When the MIC-Mariachi media activist collective received the footage, it reacted differently. Instead of publishing it, MIC-Mariachi gave careful thought to security measures that would be needed by the eyewitnesses. It immediately used its network to contact lawyers and community members, who rushed to offer the eyewitnesses advice and refuge. This treatment of sensitive video recordings – some of which are not published in order to protect the videographers – earned a high level of trust and respect in favela communities for numerous individuals from the media activist scene in Rio. Where there is no local *comunicação comunitaría* collective in a favela to do this work, residents share audio-visual evidence via WhatsApp and Telegram with trusted individuals, who can then pass it on to collectives such as AND and MIC-Mariachi.

107 »Imagens: Enviado pela WhatsApp do DIA (987628248)« Jornal O Dia in Vid. 53, Revolta Impopular, Polícia Carioca forja

108 The notion of the deceased »boy« being »evil« references a discourse that is widespread in the Brazilian corporate media, politics and wider society which argues that people from favelas who are involved in drug trafficking are »evil«. This is a form of racism, often used in dehumanizing especially young black *favelados*. See the comment section on YouTube in: Jornal O Dia in Vid. 53, Revolta Impopular, Polícia Carioca forja

109 Vid. 53, Revolta Impopular, Polícia Carioca forja

Filming police violence can equate to a »death sentence«,[110] but it remains an essential means of revealing evidence of police abuses as well as the manipulation of crime scenes, as this video once more showed. The video activist collectives are closely connected to grassroots communities and act as engaged insiders – not only when recording, but also when receiving and handling footage that could endanger the safety of those who filmed it. While they play a smaller role in capturing spontaneous or drastic scenes of violence outside of organized protests, they are crucial in distributing such material and protecting vulnerable witnesses. Yet in most cases, it is still eyewitnesses – those who happen to be present during lethal police assaults – who bear the greatest risk when choosing to film. This case underscores how collective, bottom-up organization can offer some degree of protection, even if it cannot eliminate the dangers entirely.

8.3 Shooting-back with Videos not Bullets

The final section presents two cases of videos documenting lethal police violence in Rio de Janeiro. The first is a witness video capturing the assassination of five teenagers in the city's North Zone. The second is an activist video by MIC, which combines original eyewitness footage with interviews and a broader analysis that situates police violence within the structural marginalization of favela residents. Both examples reveal not only the brutality of trigger-happy police officers but also the critical role of video activist collectives in reporting on such killings. By contextualizing and reframing these acts of violence, they challenge the oversimplified narratives often promoted by corporate media – narratives that frequently silence such incidents, frame them as acts of police self-defense, or uncritically repeat official claims that victims were armed or involved in drug trafficking.

Five Teenagers Killed by 111 Bullets

At around 9 p.m. on Saturday, 28 November 2015, four Polícia Militar officers stopped a white car carrying five Black teenagers near their home favela, Morro da Lagartixa, in Rio de Janeiro's North Zone. The group had been out celebrating – one of them, Roberto, had just received his first paycheck from a new job at a supermarket. But the night ended in tragedy: none of the five – Roberto, Carlos Eduardo, Cleiton, Wilton, and Wesley – survived the encounter. Eyewitnesses testified that

110 Int. 39, Community Organizer, Rio de Janeiro, 9 September 2016

Fig. 47 Five Teenagers Killed

although all five had followed the officers' instructions, they were killed execution-style, with 111 bullets fired at them. Two other friends at the scene, Louvrial and Wilkerson (Wilton's brother), who had been riding motorbikes, managed to escape.[111]

Two days later, a video showing the murder scene appeared on the MIC YouTube channel, entitled »Police Execute Five Youths and Try to Fake It as Self-Defense.«[112] A note added by MIC in the YouTube comment section – »*Video by a local resident«[113] – preserved the anonymity of the videographer for safety.

Shaky footage of low audiovisual quality takes the viewer on a walk around the bullet-ridden car. Through a side window, bloodied corpses are visible for a split second. In the background, the voices of onlookers arriving at the scene decry what they see. Midway through the video, the walk around the car is interrupted by a zoom-in on a pistol lying on the ground. The videographer comments that the gun was planted after

111 Bovo, »3 Anos Da Chacina de Costa Barros: 5 Jovens Mortos, 111 Tiros«.
112 Vid. 68, MIC, Policiais executam 5 jovens
113 »* Vídeo de morador.« Vid. 68, MIC, Policiais executam 5 jovens

the shootings to create the false impression that the officers had acted in self-defense.[114] After 44 seconds, the video ends as abruptly as it begins.

This witness video of the immediate aftermath gained widespread media attention, triggering a criminal investigation into the killings. Forensic analysis found that the bullets had entered through the back, roof, and right-hand side of the car. The four Polícia Militar officers responsible later claimed the killings were acts of self-defense, despite the fact that all victims were unarmed and none had attempted to leave the vehicle.[115]

In response to the media attention, government authorities promised compensation and support to the victims' families – though this did not reach them for over three months.[116] The officers were arrested the day after the massacre, released on 22 June 2016, and later detained again after the Public Ministry overturned the previous habeas corpus. Eventually, in April 2018, they were convicted by a civilian court.[117]

For the victims' families, however, the aftermath was devastating. One mother died at age 44 from post-traumatic stress. Wilton, who had escaped the scene where his brother Wilkerson was executed, also died.[118] Eduardo's father attempted suicide, and Claiton's mother was reportedly left scarcely able to leave her house.[119] While five young Black men were killed in this massacre on 28 November 2015, the average number of police killings in Brazil in 2017 exceeded 14 deaths per day[120] – most of which were not captured in ›viral‹ videos and barely registered in the media.

The dissemination history of the witness video is particularly significant. Filmed on a smartphone, the footage was first published by the MIC collective, which had received it directly from the videographer. MIC shared the video across its Facebook page, website,[121] and You-

114 Vid. 68, MIC, Policiais executam 5 jovens 0:19–0:23

115 Bovo, »3 Anos Da Chacina de Costa Barros: 5 Jovens Mortos, 111 Tiros«.

116 Bovo.

117 In October 2016, shortly after the unelected interim president Michel Temer officially came to power following Dilma Rousseff's impeachment, the National Congress passed a law declaring that cases against soldiers and *Polícia Militar* officers must be heard in military courts rather than in civilian courts. Criticism by Human Rights Watch and other advocacy groups quickly followed. Human Rights Watch, »Brazil: Country Summary 2017«.

118 Bovo, »3 Anos Da Chacina de Costa Barros: 5 Jovens Mortos, 111 Tiros«.

119 Bovo, »3 Anos Da Chacina de Costa Barros: 5 Jovens Mortos, 111 Tiros«.

120 Phillips, »›A Devastating Scenario‹«.

121 The website midiacoletiva.org was taken down because the MIC collective had insufficient funds to pay for domain hosting and the number of views recorded on the website is unknown to me. An archived version of the original article is available at: http://web.archive.org/web/20160624042822/

Tube channel.[122] An accompanying article on the collective's website provided crucial contextual information, including how key evidence had been manipulated to frame the killings as acts of self-defense by the police. The article included reactions from the victims' families and local residents, who described the incident as »yet another slaughter« directed at their neighbors and loved ones.[123] Widely circulated on social media, the article was subsequently picked up by corporate media outlets.

This case underscores the importance of trust-based collaboration between urban residents and media activists.[124] Without the platforms and support offered by a collective like MIC, the videographer may have been unwilling to release the footage due to fear of police retaliation. Moreover, the contextualization and investigative framing provided by the collective added critical information that helped prompt a formal investigation and broader public attention. Without the engagement of MIC and the courage of the witness videographer, the unwarranted assassination of the teenagers might have passed unnoticed in a city already saturated with daily killings.

Jhonata and the Fateful Bag of Popcorn

»I just want justice.«[125]

In contrast to the witness videos discussed above, the short video documentary *In Leblon the Military Police Is Not Getting Confused*[126] offers a deeper analysis that goes beyond the immediate depiction of violence. Produced by the MIC collective, this seven-minute video demonstrates that extrajudicial killings by the police are not merely the result of individual misconduct but stem from systemic failures that disproportionately affect favela communities. The documentary recounts the killing of Jhonata

http://midiacoletiva.org/mais-uma-chacina-cometida-por-pms-policiais-fuzilam-5-jovens-no-rj/

122 The video had been viewed over 60,000 times on YouTube and 2,000 times on Facebook. Vid. 68, MIC, Policiais executam 5 jovens

123 »Mais uma chacina« http://web.archive.org/web/20160624042822/http://midiacoletiva.org/mais-uma-chacina-cometida-por-pms-policiais-fuzilam-5-jovens-no-rj/

124 Telephone interview on 5 June 2019 with a member of the MIC collective.

125 »Eu só queria que agora governador, presidente e prefeito; quero saber que eles tem a me dizer ... porque foram eles que convidar isso pra meu filho. Essa polícia que esta aí só pra matar, pro acabar com a vida de inocente, de jovens, de tudo mundo. Eu só quero justiça.« Vid. 69, MIC, No Leblon a PM não se confunde_5:40–6:04.

126 Vid. 69, MIC, No Leblon a PM não se confunde

Dalber Mattos Alves, a 16-year-old who was fatally shot in the head on 30 June 2016 while returning home with a bag of popcorn for his mother. Following the killing, police claimed that the responsible officers had confused the bag of popcorn with drugs and had thus acted in self-defense.[127]

The video starts with black-and-white footage of a hand searching through plastic bags. A small black baseball cap is pulled out and held in front of the camera. The video then cuts to blurry visuals from a witness video that show police officers carrying away a motionless body and the sound of bystanders screaming in outrage.[128] Next, the video returns to the black cap from the opening scene, which is now shown with a hole in the middle where the bullet that killed Jhonata had entered. The video offers some context by summarizing the incident using white text on a black background:

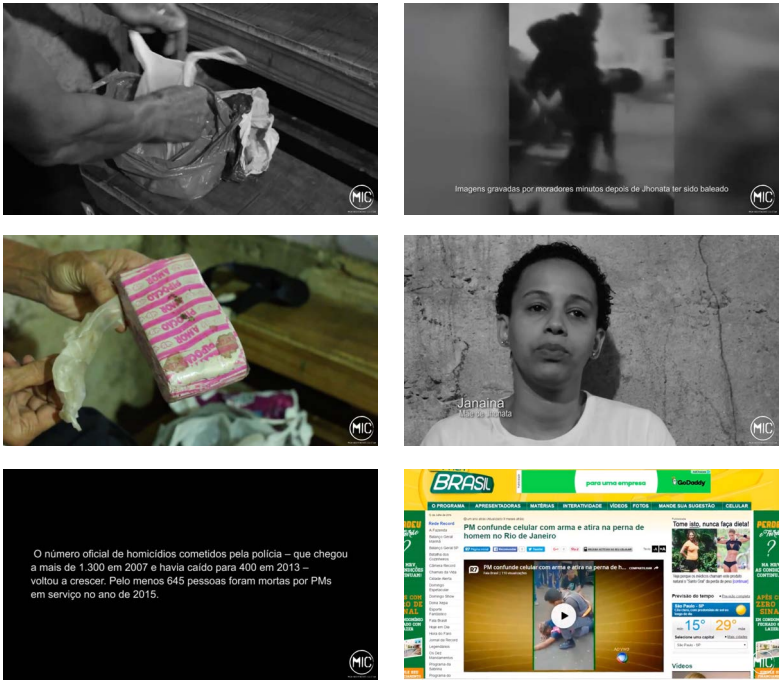

Fig. 48 In Leblon the Police is not confused

127 Possession of drugs cannot be used as a legal justification for the killing of a suspect in Brazil. Practically and in public discourse, however, the labeling of a victim as a ›bad guy‹ often serves to legitimize killings committed by police officers.

128 Vid. 69, MIC, No Leblon a PM não se confunde 0:09

»On 30 June 2016, the student Jhonata Dalves Mattos Alves, 16, an inhabitant of Morro de Catrumbi, became another victim of the UPPs. Jhonata was shot in the head by police officers and was taken to the Andaraí Federal Hospital, but succumbed [to his injuries]. According to local residents, PMs [Military Police] confused a pack of popcorn with a package of drugs.«[129]

The bloodied popcorn bag is presented to the camera. This is followed by an interview with Jhonata's mother, Janaina, who bows her head against the wall in sadness as she speaks about her son.[130] Enrolled in a medical school, he was »the happiness of my house […] [now] the happiness in my house has gone«.[131] Photographs of Jhonata and his mother fill the screen. Another black background with white text then places the killing in its wider context:

»According to data from Human Rights Watch, the RJ [Rio de Janeiro] police killed more than 8,000 people in the last decade. The official number of homicides committed by the police – which had reached more than 1,300 in 2007 before falling to 400 in 2013 – has increased again. At least 645 people were killed by on-duty police officers in 2015. In 2016, according to NGO data, 322 homicides committed by military police officers were recorded in the period from January to May.«[132]

In 2018, the official number of killingy by on-duty police officers climbed to 1,444 for the period from January to November.[133]

With tears in her eyes, Janaina details the events of the night on which Jhonata was killed. She had sent him to her sister-in-law to fetch a bag of popcorn in preparation for a family party. When she heard the sound

129 »No dia 30 junho de 2016, o estudante Jhonata Dalves Mattos Alves, de 16 anos, morador do Morro de Catrumbi, se tourna mais uma vítima das UPPs. Jhonata foi baleado com um tiro na cabeça por policiais e chegou a ser levado para o Hospital Federal do Andaraí, mas não resistiu. Segundo relato de moradores os PMs confundiram uma embalagem de sacos de pipoca com um pacote de drogas.« Vid. 69, MIC, No Leblon a PM não se confunde_0:41

130 Vid. 69, MIC, No Leblon a PM não se confunde 1:12

131 »[E]le era alegria da minha casa [...] alegria de minha casa acabou« Vid. 69, MIC, No Leblon a PM não se confunde 1:12

132 »Segundo dados do relatório da Human Rights Watch, a Polícia do RJ matou mais de 8 mil pessoas na última década. O número oficial de homicídios cometidos pela polícia – que chegou a mais de 1.300 em 2007 e havia caído para 400 em 2013 – voltou a crescer. Pelo menos 645 pessoas foram mortas por PMs em serviço no ano de 2015. Em 2016, segundo os dados da ONG, foram registrados 322 homicídios cometidos por policiais militares entre janeiro e maio.« Vid. 69, MIC, No Leblon a PM não se confunde 1:38

133 Human Rights Watch, »Brazil: Police Killings at Record High in Rio«.

of gunfire, Janaina called her sister-in-law, who confirmed that Jhonata had already left her house and was on his way home. Janaina became nervous and waited for her son's arrival, but he »never arrived«.[134] Footage from the witness video shows Jhonata's body being pushed into the back seat of a police car.[135] Cuts between footage from the witness video and the interview with Janaina speed up the rhythm of the narrative. Janaina recounts her memories of going to the hospital, only to find that her son was already dead. She tells how Jhonata had suffered in the last months of his life after one of his friends had been killed.[136] The video returns to the smartphone footage: an officer with a gun stands next to the police car and slams the back door, which does not close because Jhonata's feet are hanging out.

The video then switches from Jhonata's tragic story to the wider phenomenon of killings by the police. More text declares: »The Carioca Military Police is an expert in ›confusing‹ and killing in the city's favelas. Cases like that of Jhonata are commonplace.«[137] A series of newspaper identifies other objects that the police has »confused« in more cases of extrajudicial killings: a skateboard, a hydraulic pump, a drill, a cellphone, the sound of a bursting tire.[138] The video delivers its final blow in a short statement: »We found no records or news of cases of this type of ›confusion‹ occurring in the city's affluent neighborhoods. In Leblon, the PM [Military Police] is not confused.«[139]

The last words of the video belong to Janaina, who demands »justice« for her son. Not only does she want to see the police officers who killed Jhonata behind bars, she also expects justice for those giving orders from the highest ranks:

134 Vid. 69, MIC, No Leblon a PM não se confunde

135 When police officers bring a wounded victim to hospital who then dies there of his or her injuries, this is not counted as a lethal police assault. As a result, the police in Rio de Janeiro rush to hospitals after shooting civilians in order to of keeping official numbers of police killings committed artifially low, especially if there were witnesses and the victim cannot simply be made to disappear (Alves and Evanson, *Living in the Crossfire*, 115).

136 The exact circumstances of Jhonata's friend who had been killed short time before are not explicated in the interview. Vid. 69, MIC, No Leblon a PM não se confunde 3:58-4:18

137 »PM Carioca é especialista em »confundir« e matar nas favelas da cidade. Casos como o de Jhonata são corriqueiros.« Vid. 69, MIC, No Leblon a PM não se confunde 4:35

138 Vid. 69, MIC, No Leblon a PM não se confunde 4:45

139 »Não encontramos nenhum registro ou notícia de casos deste tipo de ›confusão‹ ocorrido em bairros nobres da cidade. No Leblon a PM não se confunde.« The second sentence appears only in the description, not in the text that appears in the video. Vid. 69, MIC, No Leblon a PM não se confunde

> »I just wanted the governor, president and mayor; I want to know what they have to say to me [...] because they asked for this [fate] for my son. This police that is there just to kill, to end the lives of innocent people, of young people, of everyone. I just want justice.«[140]

Her statement underscores the systemic nature of the violence, implicating not only the officers who pulled the trigger but also the broader structures of governance that enable and perpetuate such brutality. This video in only one example of how skillful narrations by activist videos is capable of denouncing police violence and the structures that sustain it.

8.4 Exposing Injustice by Documenting Violence

The final empirical chapter examined the critical role of documenting violence. For urban movements and marginalized citizens in Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro, the threat of police violence is a constant presence. The likelihood of experiencing such violence – and its severity – is closely tied to levels of privilege, particularly racialized privilege. Those with fewer social and economic protections are disproportionately exposed to state repression.

Originally, my study was not designed to include videos of police violence. I had planned to focus solely on videos of protests. However, the practices of video activism on the ground – and conversations with those engaged in (video) activism in both Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro – made it clear that this had to become a study of both protest and police violence. The examples presented are not fictional stories of violence, but real experiences with traumatic consequences. Friends and family, who lost their loved ones in such instances of violence must live with the consequences until today. The pain of loss may change, but it does never fully go away. Physical violence is the most blatant form of repressing such calls for justice. Due to the innumerous attempts of repression, videos documenting violence became a core part of this research.

Defining violence is itself a contested and complex task, as the first section of this chapter highlighted. In the context of protest, the struggle over what counts as violence is central to the (de)legitimization of urban movements. This is particularly evident in the case of the student movement in Cape Town, where definitions of violence are inseparable from broader historical and socioeconomic legacies – most notably

140 »Eu só queria que agora governador, presidente e prefeito; quero saber que eles tem a me dizer ... porque foram eles que convidar isso pra meu filho. Essa polícia que esta aí só pra matar, pro acabar com a vida de inocente, de jovens, de tudo mundo. Eu só quero justiça.« Vid. 69, MIC, No Leblon a PM não se confunde_5:40–6:04.

colonialism, apartheid, and institutionalized racism. In Rio de Janeiro, the Black Profs and their students, who faced intense police repression, directly challenged the dominant narrative that framed them as vandals. As they put it: »There would be no vandalism if the population did not feel vandalized.«[141] The question of whose actions are labeled as violent – and whose are not – is part of an ongoing, politicized struggle over meaning and power.

Those exposing the violence walk a tight rope – while filming violent attacks gives some power back to people to expose injustice, it simultaneously puts videographers at risk for retaliation. The examples discussed throughout this chapter illustrate these dangers vividly: a witness in Cape Town taken into custody for filming police officers; a knock at the door of an eyewitness who recorded the public humiliation of a Black man on a South African highway; and the life-threatening consequences faced by favela residents who exposed how »pacifying police« staged an attack to justify their extrajudicial killing of a teenager. The less privilege a videographer holds – especially in terms of race, class, and geographic location – the greater their vulnerability to state violence and repression.

As the third section illustrates, the violence directed at specific groups – primarily Black, young men in underprivileged neighborhoods – should not be dismissed as coincidental. It must be recognized as structural. These forms of violence, targeting particular urban citizens, often operate out of public view. In the past, narratives and audiovisual evidence of such violence were rarely accessible beyond the affected communities. This changed dramatically with the widespread availability of smartphones and mobile internet. Eyewitness video production has made it possible for footage of state violence to circulate widely, challenging official accounts that typically align with the perpetrators. The new possibilities for manipulating audiovisuals with AI is likely to pose serious challenges in this respect.[142]

So, how has bottom-up video production changed the depiction of violence over the past decade? In some cases – such as the Rhodes Must Fall movement in Cape Town – journalist videos have played a critical role in exposing the violent suppression of protesters and citizens.

141 »Embora divirjam nas formas de manifestar-se, o grito do povo é unânime. Não haveria vandalismo se a população não se sentisse vandalizada.« Vid. 54, MIC, Revolução não cai do céu 7:58

142 Sam Gregory, director of the NGO Witness, discussed the dangers of deepfakes at the conference »Bearing Witness, Seeking Justice« at MIT in 2022. The presentation later became a TED-talk, asking »When AI Can Fake Reality, Who Can You Trust?« At the core of the argument here is that the erosion of trust into videos authenticity fundamentally undermines *video as evidence*.

Individual reporters may highlight police violence, but they often operate within hierarchical media structures shaped by editorial oversight, ownership interests, and economic pressures. These constraints rarely allow for a fundamental questioning of who is labeled violent and why. While there are notable exceptions, journalistic portrayals of protest – especially in Brazil – tend to reproduce dominant narratives that favor state authorities. When it comes to documenting (lethal) police violence against marginalized urban citizens, journalism can play an important role in distributing witness videos. Yet this raises another key issue: how is such footage framed, and whose perspective is privileged?[143]

Exposing violence lies at the very heart of witnessing with a camera. While nearly anyone can record a scene of brutality with a smartphone, this act – though necessary – is not sufficient to confront the structural injustices that underpin violence against low-income and Black urban residents in marginalized neighborhoods. What matters just as much is what happens next. The networks built by video activists play a crucial role in disseminating such footage – especially in contexts where corporate media may exploit these recordings for sensationalist coverage, often disregarding the rights of victims, the structural conditions behind the violence, and, most critically, the safety of the videographer. Witness videographers are without a doubt, those who are most at risk when recording police violence.

Finally, while activist videos play an important role in documenting violence during protests, they are less central when it comes to capturing (lethal) police violence in everyday situations. However, their networks remain vital. As the example from Rio de Janeiro showed, activist collectives can help protect witnesses and assist in the secure distribution of footage – ensuring that evidence reaches the public without compromising the safety of those who filmed it. Organized and collective video activism plays a crucial role not only in exposing violence but also in constructing counter-narratives that reveal the racialized and systemic injustices behind it.

Violence extends far beyond the act of recording or distributing videos. It manifests in multiple forms – whether as discourse used to delegitimize protest, as physical harm inflicted on bodies, or as a tool to suppress those who document it. It operates at varying intensities, from verbal insults to beatings and killings, and in different formations: as

143 As discussed in Chapter Six, interviewees in Cape Town articulated these challenges with striking clarity. Few journalists themselves experience the structural violence of »anti-poor and anti-Black« policing, largely due to the privileges they hold – privileges shaped by where they grew up, where they studied, and where they live today. These social and spatial distances often limit their ability to fully grasp or represent the lived realities of those most affected by state violence.

immediate and observable acts, as structural violence embedded in institutions, or as symbolic violence that shapes perception and meaning. Violence matters – and video is a particularly powerful medium for conveying its often-traumatizing effects.

Drastic images have sparked public outrage, ignited debate, and fueled mobilization – not only in Brazil and South Africa, but globally, and long before the emergence of current forms of digital video activism and witnessing. One of the most iconic examples is the 1991 video filmed by George Holliday from his balcony in Los Angeles, capturing the brutal beating of Rodney King by LAPD officers. That footage played a pivotal role in shifting public narratives around police violence. Yet, as Alissa V. Richardson (2020) reminds us, such images of Black bodies being mutilated can also re-traumatize viewers and evoke the long history of public lynchings.[144] The visibility of violence does not necessarily deter it. In fact, the saturation of the internet with graphic content risks desensitizing audiences, normalizing cruelty, and reducing suffering to spectacle.

The widespread availability of cameras has undoubtedly multiplied the number of audiovisual records of violence over the past decade. But have these images of repression strengthened or weakened urban movements? Both arguments can be made. And do such images advance or undermine the cause of human rights? Again, there is no simple answer. What is clear, however, is that recording violence is never just a technical act – it holds the power to become a political intervention, a form of resistance, and a demand for justice.

144 Richardson, *Bearing Witness While Black. African Americans, Smartphones, & the New Protest #Journalism*.