Fig. 15 Video Activists in Rio de Janeiro

5. The Protagonists Behind the Cameras

Having outlined the conditions enabling bottom-up video production in Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro, this chapter now focuses on the individuals behind the cameras. As in the previous chapter, Cape Town is discussed first, followed by an exploration of media landscapes, internet access, and social movement media production in Rio. The chapter introduces key actors who have significantly shaped video activist practices in both cities.

5.1 Fragmented Media Practices and Intermediaries in Cape Town

Cape Town's digital video activism emerged in a context of stark urban segregation and lacked the broad-based mobilization seen in Rio. Two key factors shaped its development: a somewhat responsive but uneven media landscape, and limited, costly internet access. As a result, video activism in Cape Town remained fragmented, driven more by individual initiative than collective organization.

Mainstream Media Landscapes in Cape Town

The South African media landscape – and local media outlets in Cape Town in particular – cannot be fully explored in all their depth and complexity within the scope of a few pages. Notably, the role of radio,[1]

1   Privately owned websites such as Eyewitness News, which brings together stakeholders such as the CapeTalk radio station, have become a popular

which remains a highly influential medium in South Africa, is not sufficiently addressed in the brief overview that follows. The South African media landscape as well as the local media outlets in Cape Town cannot be treated in its depth and complexity on a few pages.

Overall, South Africa has been described as a country where »[p]ress freedom [is] guaranteed but fragile,«[2] as reflected in its relatively high ranking of thirty-first in the 2017 World Press Freedom Index – placing it ahead of the United Kingdom, France, and the United States.[3] While South Africa's media landscape is relatively multi-vocal and free, offering broad coverage of domestic issues, it is not without its flaws, as the controversies surrounding the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) illustrate.

South Africa's public broadcaster, the SABC, competes with eTV – a privately owned channel – in the free-to-air market.[4] Under Hlaudi Motsoeneng, who led the SABC with an iron grip from various positions between 2011 and 2015, and again from 2016 to 2017, the broadcaster faced repeated accusations of censorship and politically biased reporting in favor of the ruling ANC and then-president Jacob Zuma, who held office from 2009 to 2018.[5] Motsoeneng was eventually removed following investigations by the Public Protector, parliamentary inquiries into his conduct, and a series of adverse court rulings. One of the earliest and most prominent examples of censorship under his leadership was the SABC's long-standing refusal to air the documentary *Miners Shot Down* (2014),[6] which recounts the killing of 34 miners at the Lonmin mine near Marikana in August 2012.[7] On 24 November 2015, the online newspaper *Daily Maverick* criticized this decision, stating:

domestic source of news in recent years. Besides the audio-visual news services on which my research focused, there is a rich plethora of radio stations and newspapers that provide news coverage in Cape Town.

2   Reporters without Borders, »South Africa: Press Freedom Guaranteed but Fragile.«

3   Reporters without Borders, »World Press Freedom Index 2017.«

4   Pay television satellite options are also available via their subscription to the DSTV network.

5   Madonsela, »When Governance and Ethics Fail. Report No 23 of 2013/2014«.

6   Rehad Desai's documentary, which won a number of awards including an International Emmy in 2015, claims to »weav[e] together the central point-of-view of three strike leaders, Mambush, Tholakele and Mzoxolo, with compelling police footage, TV archive and interviews with lawyers representing the miners in the ensuing commission of inquiry into the massacre«. Miners Shot Down, »Website.«

7   The Marikana massacre is a historical rupture in post-Apartheid South Africa. The downplaying of the mass killing by authorities and media has been criticized by social movements all over South Africa, including the Rhodes Must Fall movement.

»[d]espite public screenings, in South Africa, Miners Shot Down has been reserved for the rich. Although [director Rehad] Desai and his team have tried, it has not been screened on any of SABC's three [free-to-air television] channels, nor e.tv or its news sibling, eNCA. The latter reaches around 80% of the population and around 70% of its audience is black.«[8]

After public pressure built and social justice organizations such as Amandla.mobi handed over a petition to both the SABC and eTV,[9] the SABC finally forced to air the documentary.[10]

A second example of the SABC actively using its power as the public broadcaster to suppress criticism became known under the hashtag #SABC8.[11] In 2016, the SABC dismissed eight of its employees for publicly criticizing its »policy of not broadcasting footage of violent protests«,[12] a policy which Motsoeneng had put in place in the lead-up to the crucial August 2016 local government elections. Commentators saw the ANC's fear of losing control of key municipalities as the driving force behind this controversial decision. Throughout their campaign to get their jobs back, the eight journalists received significant public support. Seven were ultimately reinstated to their former positions at the SABC after a Labour Court ruling.[13]

The SABC's policy of not broadcasting »violent« protests significantly affected the representation of service delivery protests, which frequently involved or were met with police violence. »The only time you hear about a service delivery strike is on radio in the traffic news. They will be like ›The N2 to the airport is blocked, because of a service delivery

8   Daily Maverick Staff Reporter, »Editorial: SABC & e.Tv Must Air Miners Shot Down.«

9   amandla.mobi, »South African TV Breaks Promise to Marikana Widows.«

10 Nevertheless, the SABC decided in a sudden change of schedule to broadcast the documentary earlier than originally announced on 6 August 2015. This provoked further criticism and raised the question of whether the close connections between the SABC, the ruling ANC and Lonmin Mines – of which the country's then deputy president, Cyril Ramaphosa, was a shareholder – was behind an effort to divert attention away from the documentary's explosive content (Head, »Miners Shot Down: SABC Accused of Trying to ›Cover-Up‹ Marikana Doccie«).

11 For a good overview of this controversy, see Milton, »@SOS_ZA_#SABC: Civic Discourse and the Negotiation of PSB Principles«; Foeta, *The SABC8*.

12 Areff, »#SABC8 ›Targeted‹ Because Journalistic Ethics at Odds with SABC Policy, Court Hears.«

13 Suna Venter – often depicted as leader of the group of eight – had received numerous death threats and has been targeted by opponent more than once. In the age of 32 she died of stress induced cardiomyopathy in her home. An insightful report on the background of her death was published by Christopher Clark. »Intimidating Journalists: The death of Suna Clark.«

strike‹, «[14] one interviewee remarked, expressing frustration at how such protests are routinely ignored by mainstream news media. No mention of the reason for the mobilization and treating the protest as minor disturbance like a weather event, as he explained.

This stands in stark contrast to the coverage of the RMF movement, which, although controversial, received extensive media attention. The personal views of senior journalists,[15] reporting by UCT alumni sympathetic to the students' cause, and the media's general willingness to engage with student voices all contributed to RMF gaining both national and international visibility. As one RMF activist acknowledged, there are »huge class issues obviously in terms of students occupying so much space in the media.«[16]

Examples such as the resistance against the airing of *Miners Shot Down* and the case of the SABC8 have raised concerns among activists. A journalist and video activist from Cape Town, who works closely with marginalized communities, argues that reporting in the city is, overall, decidedly anti-poor:

> »The stereotypes and the demonization of poor people that happen in middle-class circles is something that gets reinforced by [the] media. Reporters don't report from within communities that protest. They report from behind police lines. They report in terms of number of arrests, and they report in terms of information that the police feed them about a particular protest. As soon as you start flipping that narrative and start reporting on a struggle and a protest from the point of view of a working class protagonist, [...] you start humanizing an entity that is generally stereotyped within mainstream, kind of middle- and upper-class circles and the readers of newspapers and the target audience. And also remember that journalists are often middle- and upper-class people and editors themselves. So their worldviews get filtered into reporting. And their assumptions and their reinforcement of one another and how [the] media operates in relation to poor and subaltern people [...] reflects both their own positionality [and] the readership which they are trying to appease[.]«[17]

The »reinforcement of power and exclusion« through media reporting is a major concern for this insider, who has himself worked for one of Cape Town's major newspapers. What he describes as the »perpetuation of the status quo« refers to journalism's tendency to reiterate

14 Int. 19, RMF Activist, Cape Town, 27 July 2016.

15 For example, according to one RMF activist, the editor-in-chief of the Cape Times newspaper had personal disagreements with the UCT vice-chancellor, Max Price, and was consequently more open to supporting the students' cause (Int. 19, RMF Activist, Cape Town, 27 July 2016).

16 Int. 19, RMF Activist, Cape Town, 27 July 2016.

17 Int. 28, Video Activist, Cape Town, 12 August 2016.

middle- and upper-class perspectives, thereby reproducing the city's entrenched race and class divisions.[18] Certainly, excpetions confirming the rule, certain more critical journalists and platforms – such as the online publications *GroundUp* and *Daily Maverick* – actively challenge this status quo.

A brief comparison between the journalistic representation of service delivery protests and the coverage of the Rhodes Must Fall movement appears to confirm suspicions of an implicit anti-poor bias. Unsurprisingly, these tendencies mirror the divisions described in Cape Town's urban morphology, where service delivery protests are marginalized as emerging from the periphery – the ›belt‹ to which people were historically resettled. In contrast, the student movement at UCT received not only more media attention, but also more empathetic and nuanced coverage, as the deeper analysis in the empirical chapters will reveal. This disparity in media representation reinforces the harms imposed by neoliberal urbanism and widens the gap experienced by urban social movements, which have vastly different resources available for their mobilization.

But did the rise of social media and new communication channels manage to challenge this imbalance? An analysis of internet accessibility in the city suggests otherwise.

Internet Access in Cape Town

These differences in the audio-visual representation of service delivery protests and the Rhodes Must Fall movement are further exacerbated by disparities in access to online resources. The combination of limited internet infrastructure and the high cost of connectivity deepens existing socio-economic divisions in South Africa. As one activist put it, »[t]he service and the cost [of accessing the internet] is one of the worst in the world.«[19] Interviewees frequently highlighted their regular inability to access the internet. During my research in Cape Town, I observed that ›uncapped Wi-Fi‹ was treated as a rare luxury, often accessible only to a limited segment of the urban population.[20] For example, two activists working in marginalized communities emphasized:

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18 Int. 28, Video Activist, Cape Town, 12 August 2016.
19 Int. 20, Documentary Filmmaker, Cape Town, 29 July 2016.
20 In South Africa, ›uncapped‹ Wi-Fi packages are those with no limits on the amount of data a user can upload and download, while ›capped‹ packages limit the quantity of up- and downloads.

»You don't have electricity first of all. So, you definitely don't have the web. Or Wi-Fi [...] in a shack. So, there isn't an opportunity to sort of induce people into that culture of sharing information.«[21]

»We can't assume that everybody has access to internet.«[22]

Indeed, South Africa ranks among the countries with the highest mobile data costs globally. According to Research ICT Africa, users in the »lower income category [were] spending significant portions of their income, around 20 percent, on relatively small amounts of data (1GB)« as early as 2016.[23] A report by Deutsche Bank further highlighted the severity of the issue, ranking Cape Town as the seventh most expensive city for an 8Mbps internet connection – behind Dubai, Johannesburg, Wellington, Auckland, San Francisco, and Dublin, but far ahead of cities like Zürich, Toronto, Paris, or Rio de Janeiro. Moreover, »the report also showed that Cape Town's residents shelled out the highest share of their disposable income getting online, while Johannesburg came in second in a sample of 50 cities.«[24] The results of this study are even more devastating when corrected for income, especially considering the massive pre-existing socio-economic divisions within Cape Town.

Since mobile phones are the primary means by which most South Africans access the internet, the exorbitant cost of mobile data presents a major barrier to online engagement, particularly for activities such as video production and dissemination. South Africa's mobile internet market is dominated by MTN and Vodacom, the two leading service providers, who have been able to raise their rates with little effective regulatory challenge, despite ongoing public criticism.[25]

National government initiatives such as the 2013 e-Strategy have made impressive-sounding promises, including: »Universal access: all South Africans should have access to affordable user devices and high-quality services irrespective of geography and social status.«[26] At

21 Int. 29, RMF Activist, Cape Town, 13 August 2016.
22 Int. 41, NGO Activist, Cape Town, 8 February 2018.
23 Forbes, »#DataMustFall«. If this applied in Switzerland, users on minimum wage would spend up to CHF 500 – roughly equal to USD 500 – per month on limited internet access.
24 Chutel, »Connecting to the Internet Costs More in Johannesburg and Cape Town than It Does in New York and Zurich«.
25 The »duopoly« formed by MTN and Vodacom as the sole providers of mobile internet services has been widely criticized, including by the statutory Competition Commission, which found in an official inquiry that the two companies represented an obstacle to affordable internet access in South Africa (Omarjee, »MTN, Vodacom to Slash Data Prices or Face Prosecution«).
26 Telecommunication and Postal Services of the Republic of South Africa, »Digital Society South Africa: South Africa's National e-Strategy Towards a Thriving and Inclusive Digital Future«, 7.

the local level, the City of Cape Town's Smart Cape program is an initiative to make the internet freely available across the city. A 50Mb[27] »free daily data quota« is offered »with which you can surf the Internet, check your emails and browse social media« in specially established Wi-Fi zones.[28] There are also 104 public libraries, all of which promise free computer and internet access.[29] Although valuable, such initiatives appear to have had a limited effect on internet access during the period of 2010 to 2016.

This lack of accessible and affordable internet access has undoubtedly played a key role in limiting the self-representation of participants in service delivery protests as well as their capacity to share information online. In contrast, this was decidedly not the case for the RMF activists at UCT, who had access to uncapped Wi-Fi on campus. »We had access, yeah!«[30] one RMF activist celebrated the privilege of having unlimited internet access in Cape Town. This disparity in internet access directly shaped capacities for self-representation, as illustrated by the contrasting cases of service delivery protests and the Rhodes Must Fall movement.

Service Delivery Protests and Videographers at the Urban Margins

Audio-visual self-representation is often out of reach for organizers and participants in service delivery protests. As one Cape Town video activist explained, urban movements on the city's margins have far fewer resources than student activists.

> »People living in shacks in the township, most of them, they don't have access to proper cell phone[s] with camera and data. And, on the other hand, the students who were demonstrating: most of them, they have a smartphone and they have enough data – not all of them, but much more than on the other side. […] They [marginalized urban residents] don't have access to data, because it is expensive here [in South Africa] and the cell phones also – maybe they have a smartphone, but it is not that great and it costs money to upload the video.«[31]

This lack of access to basic video tools had a significant impact between 2010 and 2016, limiting how protests on Cape Town's urban margins were documented. Journalist-produced videos dominated YouTube,

27   For streaming videos, 50Mb are usually insufficient.
28   City of Cape Town, »Public Internet Access in the City«.
29   City of Cape Town, »Libraries«.
30   Int. 30, RMF Activist, Cape Town, 14 August 2016.
31   Int. 20, Documentary Filmmaker, Cape Town, 29 July 2016.

while bottom-up protest footage[32] – beyond journalistic coverage – remained rare, with only a few examples discussed in Chapter Six. [33]

An important exception was political campaigns for the right to the city on Cape Town's margins, supported by engaged individuals – critical journalists, independent documentary filmmakers, and NGO workers from groups like Reclaim the Streets. These intermediaries accompanied urban movements, filmed protests, and gathered video evidence from residents in peripheral areas, such as during the Marikana land occupation.[34] The documentation of this occupation in Philippi, a low-income neighborhood in south-eastern Cape Town, offers valuable insight into the role of such intermediaries.

In 2013, urban residents occupied a stretch of land they named the Marikana land occupation. A broad coalition – including Abahlali baseMjondolo activists – joined community members seeking to claim unoccupied land for housing. In response, the City of Cape Town repeatedly deployed Anti-Land Invasion Units to demolish these homes and police to arrest peaceful activists.[35] Documenting these events fell largely to external intermediaries. Sizwe,[36] who later joined the RMF student movement, highlighted the stark contrast in capacity between himself and the residents:

> »If you think about the scenario where I get a SMS to go to Marikana and I have the privilege to call my friends – who are journalists – and drive through. Whereas someone else, whose home might be getting demolished, has to stay at work.«[37]

Marginalization often makes activism – especially video activism – impractical.[38] Yet, as the Marikana occupation shows, intermediaries can

32   My research focused on YouTube, since this platform is a ›publicly‹ accessible resource, whereas videos posted by individual users on Facebook are not necessarily accessible due to privacy settings.

33   One hindrance that is difficult to account for until now is my lack of language skills in Afrikaans and Xhosa – I may have missed videos named in the two languages.

34   The Marikana settlement received its name in commemoration of the 34 striking workers who were killed at the Marikana platinum mine in North West province in August 2012 in what became known as the Marikana massacre. The settlement has been cleared seven times by Cape Town's so-called Anti-Land Invasion Unit. In 2013 an insightful portrayal of these urban citizens' struggle to find a place to live was published by journalist and activists Jared Sacks in the Daily Maverick (Sacks »Welcome to Marikana, Cape Town«).

35   Abahlali baseMjondolo, »Police Shooting at Marikana Land Occupation.«

36   The name is an invention – as throughout the work – to protect the identity of my respondent.

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

38   Claire Bénit-Gbaffou and Sophie Oldfield's very thoughtful discussion of struggles for a right to the city on the urban margins of four African cities

make audio-visual production a powerful tool for marginalized communities. Filmmaker Pablo Pinedo, for example, produced a feature-length documentary about the occupation. In *Noma – What Does It Take to Have a Home?*,[39] he follows a single mother of two as she attempts to relocate to the Marikana settlement. In one striking scene, Noma, working at a KFC, receives news that her home is being demolished. Unable to risk losing her job, she has no choice but to stay put and continue frying chicken. Through the lens of an intermediary, the film captures the everyday struggles of Cape Town's marginalized residents.

Intermediaries like Pinedo or activist Sizwe make a difference. Their empathetic audio-visual portrayals highlight citizens' struggles and expose how marginalization is reinforced through state violence. While they often come from outside the communities they document, their solidarity is vital in capturing and amplifying urban struggles on the margins.

The Rhodes Must Fall Media Team and Allied Journalists

RMF activists benefited not only from sympathetic journalists but also from the resources to form their own media team. With the knowledge that events at »UCT will always be covered«,[40] the student activists able to amplify their voices through both independent channels and mainstream media.

The RMF media team was a rotating group of student volunteers who covered events and coordinated communication via Facebook and Twitter during protests like #Shackville.[41] Their videos – typically short, unedited clips – were designed to quickly attract attention for marches, sit-ins, and rallies.[42] However, audiovisuals played a secondary role

points out that in such context visibility can quickly turn into vulnerability. As they argue by employing Chatterjee's distinction between ›civil‹ and ›political‹ society (Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed*), marginalized urban citizens adopt a finely nuanced approach when vocalizing their demands and striking deals with the authorities. An analysis of these nuances requires a deeper understanding of context and a serious consideration of what constitutes ›political society‹ (Bénit-Gbaffou and Oldfield, »Claiming ›Rights‹ in the African City: Popular Mobilisation and the Politics of Informality in Nairobi, Rabat, Johannesburg and Cape Town«). The term urban citizens directly leans into ›right to the city‹ discourses and explicitly affirms the basic rights of ›political society‹ members.

39   Pinedo Bóveda, Noma.
40   Int. 19, RMF Activist, Cape Town, 27 July 2016.
41   Int. 29, RMF Activist, Cape Town, 13 August 2016.
42   A number of examples of videos produced by the RMF media team are discussed in Chapters Six and Seven.

to text and photographs in their communication strategy. Sizwe, an active team member, described the team's fast-paced workflow, favoring quick posts over time-consuming video editing. »Instant editing,« he explained, involved pausing the smartphone recording to create cuts on the fly.[43] Most videos were uploaded immediately to the movement's social media accounts to rally participation.

The student activists' second strategy was to collaborate with sympathetic journalists. Unlike coverage of service delivery protests, media representation of the student movement was less biased.[44] For instance, the RMF Facebook page shared videos by journalist Thomas Holder.[45] Another example of their media influence was their collaboration with the *Cape Argus*, which responded directly to student demands. In October 2015, activists posted a series of critiques on Facebook and Twitter, challenging how the *Fees Must Fall* movement was being portrayed:

> »We collectively call into scrutiny the handling of the student protests by the media thus far and we urge the relevant parties to reach out to young people with the intention of listening instead of re-creating harmful ill-disguised colonial stereotypes of masses of young Black people who are painted as violent and unthinking but in reality are making a resolute stand for justice.«[46]

In response, *Cape Argus* editor Gasant Abarder invited student activists to produce all content for the first five pages of the 22 October 2015 print edition.[47] Co-editing with eight students the editor praised the students and pledged future support to student activists.[48] Such responsiveness from corporate media would have been far less likely for service delivery protesters.

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43 The login information to the Facebook account of UCT: Rhodes Must Fall was regularly changed due to security concerns. When protest actions such as #Shackville were planned, the group of students who constituted the RMF media team shared the login data to ensure they could upload content directly (Int. 29, RMF Activist, Cape Town, 14 August 2016).

44 Examples of these biases are discussed in more depth throughout the analysis.

45 An example of an Eyewitness News video about #Shackville is discussed in Chapter Seven.

46 Statement by student co-editors cited by Witten, »#Feesmustfall Students Edit Cape Argus.«

47 Witten, »#Feesmustfall Students Edit Cape Argus.«

48 He worked with the students Ameera Conrad, Dela Gwala, Leila Khan, Brian Kamanzi, Mbali Matandela, Amanda Xulu, Busisiwe Nxumalo, and Simon Rakei. Abarder, »Students Co-Edit Cape Argus.«

Intermediaries and Sympathetic Journalists

Clear differences emerged in how service delivery protesters and student activists approached self-representation and public communication. Marginalized urban movements relied heavily on external intermediaries for bottom-up video production, while UCT student activists could draw on their own ranks. With access to free, uncapped Wi-Fi, students faced no data limitations when uploading or sharing content.[49] As a member of the legal NGO Ndifuna Ukwazi noted in 2018, video activism in Cape Town was still an »emerging practice,« largely inaccessible to most marginalized citizens.[50] The NGO's own attempts to integrate video into its campaigns struggled – not only due to production challenges, but also because many lacked the internet access needed to stream data-heavy video content.[51]

A former journalist turned activist with Reclaim the City[52] echoed these concerns, highlighting the deep social divides among Cape Town's left. Activists, he argued, faced a difficult choice: either produce professional videos aimed at privileged, mostly white audiences – excluding black, lower-class residents from the process – or work inclusively with marginalized communities, which slowed production due to limited technical skills and equipment. Even when inclusive approaches were used, poor internet access further limited video reach and viewership. These were challenges the Rhodes Must Fall movement faced to a far lesser extent. For student activists, video production offered a viable way to present protests ›from within.‹ However, unlike in Rio de Janeiro, Cape Town lacked a cohesive, engaged video activist scene. Instead, video production typically depended on the involvement of individual, committed intermediaries within each mobilization.[53]

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49 It would certainly be worth to compare in more detail the importance of the ›generational divide‹ in the use of online video as it appears reasonable to assume that service delivery protesters belong to a wider range of age groups than the young ›digital natives‹ of the student movement.

50 Int. 41, NGO Activist, Cape Town, 8 February 2018.

51 In 2018, the NGO Ndifuni Ukwazi engaged in a project supporting homeless people, particularly in the neighborhoods of Woodstock and Salt River. Providing important resources – such as a guide about tenants' rights and duties (personal archives) – to people in danger of eviction at community meetings was at the core of the activity.

52 Reclaim the City is a campaign to build an »inclusive spatially just city«. Reclaim the City started using videos for campaigning in July 2016 and has especially since 2018 increasingly used videos for campaigning (Reclaim the City, »Website«).

53 The online newspaper GroundUp is particularly engaged in covering protests and instances of police violence in Cape Town.

Fig. 16 Journalists and Video Activists Filming a Protest

A second key difference lies in how urban movements engage with public and corporate media. Marginalized communities often face a double barrier: they are misrepresented in mainstream coverage and lack the means to produce their own video content. While media coverage in South Africa may be less biased than in Brazil, significant issues persist.[54] In contrast, UCT student activists leveraged their strong online presence to shape media narratives around the RMF movement. They set trends through hashtags, used their viral Facebook page to counter misinformation, and demanded visibility – exemplified by their co-editing of a *Cape Argus* edition.

The next subchapter portrays corporate media coverage of protests, internet access, and movement media in Rio de Janeiro, before contrasting these dynamics with those in Cape Town.

5.2 Corporate Media Power and Collective Media Activism in Rio de Janeiro

Constrained Journalism but Open Internet in Rio de Janeiro

As Beatrice Jaguaribe notes, »Rio is characterized by the prevalence of an audio-visual culture» that has replaced the »lettered city.«[55] Television

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54   See the discussion on the South African and Brazilian media landscapes in Chapter Four.

55   Jaguaribe, *Rio de Janeiro*, 10.

has thus become the dominant medium. In Brazil, the broadcast market is almost entirely controlled by corporate media enterprises, each owned by a different family. The free-to-air networks – Globo, RecordTV, SBT, Band, and RedeTV! – dominate the landscape.

Globo, in particular, is Latin America's most-watched broadcaster, reaching a larger audience than all its competitors combined.[56] It has also established media dominance across multiple formats. Grupo Globo dominates all major media sectors in Brazil. It leads in free and pay TV, owns the largest online news portal (Globo.com), operates top radio networks, and publishes major newspapers and magazines. It also runs one of the country's main news agencies and is active in film, music, and publishing.[57]

Founded in 1925, Rio de Janeiro-based Rede Globo became a media powerhouse after launching its first television channel in 1965 with support from Brazil's military junta.[58] Its former owner, Roberto Marinho (1904–2003), bequeathed the company to his three sons, who still run it today. Globo's dominance rests on three pillars: telenovelas, comedy shows, and *Jornal Nacional*, the country's most-watched nightly news program since 1969.[59] In recent years, RecordTV! has emerged as a challenger. Owned by Bishop Edir Macedo, head of the evangelical Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus (IURD), RecordTV!'s rise reflects the growing political power of evangelical churches in Brazil.[60] This influence aligns with the radical right-wing coalition often described as »beef, bibles, and bullets« – a bloc strongly supported by Bolsonaro.

Media concentration in Brazil, largely unchecked by legislation or enforcement, has enabled an oligopoly of politically connected corporate media owners.[61] Reporters Without Borders describes this as »the worst

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56 Media Ownership Monitor Brazil, »The World of Globo: Hegemony of Limitless Concentration.«

57 Media Ownership Monitor Brazil, »The World of Globo: Hegemony of Limitless Concentration.«

58 For a historical account of Rede Globo's road to dominance, see Wilkin, »Global Communication and Political Culture in the Semi-Periphery: The Rise of the Globo Corporation«. For an account by an investigative journalist of the company's various crimes and transgressions, see also Daniel Herz, *A História Secreta Da Rede Globo*.

59 Jornal Nacional has since its first broadcast been a central pillar of Globo's schedule and has significantly shaped public perceptions of politics in Brazil with a power that is »impressive« (Eakin, Becoming Brazilians: Race and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Brazil, 137–146).

60 Media Ownership Monitor Brazil, »Fill the Airwaves and Subdue Them: Brazilian Churches as Media Owners.«

61 Fonsêca, »Regulatory Framework of the Brazilian Media System«.

scenario,« with audience monopolization and rising violence against journalists.[62] »With threats, physical attacks during demonstrations and murders, Brazil continues to be one of Latin America's most violent countries for the media.«[63] This suppression of dissent, combined with concentrated ownership, has further eroded press freedom – from »dark prospects« in 2017 to a »climate of hate and suspicion fed by [President] Bolsonaro« in 2019.[64]

Online Access in Rio

A popular saying goes: »There are two things that are always for free in Rio: one is a kiss on your lips and the other one is the password for Wi-Fi.«[65] In April 2014, the *Marco Civil da Internet* »made access to the Internet a legal right for all Brazilians.«[66] Prior to this, 4G infrastructure had been expanded across the 12 FIFA World Cup host cities, especially benefiting urban centers like Rio in southern Brazil. Mobile companies invested around USD 1.5 billion[67] in exchange for major tax breaks from the federal government.[68]

According to video activists, the improved infrastructure already in place by the 2013 FIFA Confederations Cup laid the groundwork for the rise of video activism during the Jornadas.[69] As one activist put it: »The difference that 4G made was phenomenal!«[70] Interviewees also noted that connectivity costs posed little barrier: »Our internet is free. You don't buy data packages, but when you buy internet it is usually unlimited.«[71] In

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62 Media Ownership Monitor Brazil, »Fill the Airwaves and Subdue Them: Brazilian Churches as Media Owners.«

63 Reporters without Borders, »Brazil: Climate of Hate and Suspicion Fed by Bolsonaro.«

64 Reporters without Borders, »Brazil: Climate of Hate and Suspicion Fed by Bolsonaro.«

65 Rossini, »Affordable Internet Access Brazil«, 2.

66 Rossini, »Affordable Internet Access Brazil«, 2.

67 Rossini, »Affordable Internet Access Brazil«, 17.

68 Rossini, »Affordable Internet Access Brazil«, 12.

69 Alex Banks observed a 42 percent increase in time spent online in May and June 2013, which reflects the importance of online communication during the Jornadas de Junho, especially considering that this indicator sank as rapidly in July as it had increased during the previous month (Banks, »2014 Brazil Digital Future in Focus«, 20; see also Diniz, Muggah, and Glenny, »Deconstructing Cyber Security in Brazil: Threats and Responses«, 5).

70 Int. 38, Researcher, Rio de Janeiro, 8 September 2016.

71 »[A] nossa internet é livre, você não compra um pacote de dados, geralmente quem compra internet os dados são ilimitados, mas isso que eu to falando, agora eles vendo o poder que tem a internet já estão com planos de

2013, Brazil ranked third globally on the Alliance for Affordable Internet's Affordability Index.[72]

For those unable to afford mobile internet, schools and public libraries offer alternative access points. The Prefeitura do Rio de Janeiro also runs public internet programs. One example is their *NAVE do conhecimento* project, which provides IT training and access to tablets, computers, and the internet at nine centers in Rio's North and West zones. Its goal is »democratizing access to the digital universe in collaborative and creative environments.«[73]

Brazil's widespread internet access has made it one of the world's largest social media markets and accelerated digitalization. The combination of the FIFA World Cup's digital infrastructure boost and a major wave of public protests helps explain the rapid growth and strong presence of the media activist movement in cities like Rio.[74] The next sections describe this movement from the angle of comunicação comunitária and video activist collectives.

Comunicação Comunitária

Comunicação comunitária (community communication) have their origins in the 1960s, when social movements and trade unions organized in the favelas with the aim of finding a united oppositional voice against the military dictatorship, censorship, and the perceived bias and ignorance of corporate media representations of favela communities.[75] The goal

restringir, pacote de dados, não ser mais tão ilimitado assim« (Int. 37, Video Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 2 September 2016).

72   Alliance for Affordable Internet, »The Affordability Report 2013«, 13.

73   Nave de Conhecimento, »Website«.

74   In this book, I usually refer to ›video activist‹ collectives due to my focus on video production. However, it is important to emphasize that most video activist collectives in Brazil use two labels to describe their work – ›mídia ativismo‹ (media activism) and ›video ativismo‹ (video activism). The former indicates the broad spectrum of media forms which these activists utilize. Prado uses the notion of cyberactivism, which I avoided throughout my research, beause it tends to reinforce the notion of online versus offline activism as separated spheres. For Prado's work on the evolution of digital tools in Brazilian activism see: Prado, Ciberativismo e Noticiário.

75   A detailed insight into the experiences and traditions of comunicação comunitária is provided by Santiago Giannotti, *Experiências Em Comunicação Popular No Rio de Janeiro Ontem e Hoje*. For a collection of essays on popular communication, see also Granja Coutinho, *Comunicação e Contra-Hegemonia*. For a useful description of the everyday practices of »favela media activism« and examples thereof, see Cusodio, »Favela Media

of »serving the community«[76] is the driving force behind the efforts of community-based reporters who provide coverage of local news through newspapers, radio, and later television. At the grassroots level, they have challenged Brazil's dominant media and offered alternative channels information channels.[77] *Comunicação comunitária* are defined by Cecila M. Krohling Peruzzo as practices that position journalism as an ethical endeavor with the objective to serve the people it aims to inform:

> »[…] communication based on public principles, namely not-for-profit, promoting the active participation of the population, with – preferably – collective ownership and involving the dissemination of content that aims to develop education and culture as well as expand citizenship.«[78]

Also known as *comunicação popular*,[79] the various *comunicação comunitária* collectives were quick to seize upon the new opportunities that arrived with the emergence of online distribution and social media platforms from 2005 onwards. Organizations such as Agência de Notícias das Favelas,[80] Voz da Favela,[81] and Papo Reto[82] use their social media channels to reach their audiences. With a few exceptions – such as Rio on Watch[83] publishing information bilingual – *comunicação comunitária* collectives broadcast exclusively in Portuguese. In line with Rio's »prevalence of an audio-visual culture,« many make extensive use of video.[84]

An intern from TV Rocinha, a community media project in the *comunicação comunitária* tradition in Rocinha, emphasized the importance of local journalism for a coverage that is speaks to residents:

> »People are very fond of TV ROC because they know that TV ROC is not Globo. Globo only comes here once or twice when the news has to do with trafficking, when there is a shot-out and someone dies. Not

Activism and Its Legacy for Civic Engagement in the Olympic City of Rio de Janeiro.«

76   »Servir à comunidade« (Santos, »A Comunicação Comunitária«).

77   Santos, »A Comunicação Comunitária.«

78   »[…] comunicação baseados em princípios públicos, tais como não ter fins lucrativos, propiciar a participação ativa da população, ter – preferencialmente – propriedade coletiva e difundir conteúdos com a finalidade de desenvolver a educação, a cultura e ampliar a cidadania« (Peruzzo, »Conceitos de Comunicação Popular, Alternativa e Comunitária Revisitados e as Reelaborações No Setor,« 56).

79   For a critical discussion of the term comunicação popular see Peruzzo, »Conceitos de Comunicação Popular, Alternativa e Comunitária Revisitados e as Reelaborações No Setor,« 44-47.

80   Agêncía de Notícias das Favelas (ANF), »Website.«

81   A Voz da Favela, »Facebook Site.«

82   Coletivo Papo Reto, »Facebook Site.«

83   RioOnWatch, »Website.«

84   Jaguaribe, Rio de Janeiro. Urban Life Through the Eyes of the City, 10.

> ROC TV. It's here every day, it's here to cover events that are from the community and that would never attract the attention of the newspapers or TV.«[85]

This oppositional stance towards the corporate media clearly resembles the roots of contemporary media activism. Principles of non-profit, collective or no ownership, and an educational and inclusive approach to journalism embedded in the notion of truth as the experience of ›being there‹ characterize both *comunicação comunitária* and media activist groups.[86]

Media Activist Collectives

Since 2013, media activism has flourished in Rio de Janeiro. Activists have formed numerous collectives, professionalizing video production despite limited financial resources. As one activist recalled:[87]

> »[…] when we had the 2013 protests, a lot of people saw the huge potential for creating images, so a lot of people already started filming professionally. There are a lot of documentaries that were produced, and lots of people thought of producing professional material. So there was nice footage, lots of professional footage, not just amateurs with cell phones, even if there was lots of cell phone footage that was collected spontaneously. It was a mix.«[88]

Video as a medium remains central to these collectives. Today, most protests in Rio are filmed by video activists, and over time, the scene has grown more collaborative, strengthened by trust and shared experience.

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85 Rocinha.org, »Favela Antenada: TV Roc, a TV a Cabo Da Rocinha.«
86 A highly relevant and important work about media activism and its commitment to ›truth‹ was written by Raffaela Fryer-Moreira. She worked with and studied the MIC collective and defines the media activist approach to truth as one that embraces partiality with respect to facts, while questioning the ontological universality of truth as a position of power that does not reflect on the positionality of the observer. Her work is highly recommended: Fryer-Moreira, »›A Gente Tava Ali‹: Rethinking Truth with Midiativistas in Rio de Janeiro«.
87 This challenge of a lack of financial resources is discussed in more detail in Chapter Eight.
88 »[…] quando tiveram os protestos de 2013 muita gente viu o potencial muito grande de criar imagens, então tinha muita gente profissional filmando já, tem vários documentários que saíram dali, tinha muita gente pensando no conteúdo profissional, então tem muita filmagem boa, muita filmagem profissional, não só as amadoras de celular mas tem muita imagem de celular que pega fatos espontâneos. Foi um misto« (Int. 14, Video Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 8 December 2015).

»We brought all the guys together. Mariachi, MIC, the guys from Linha da Frente, Linha de Fuga. Everybody's here. Nova Democracia as well,« long practicing a video activist declares during a media activist meeting in Rio de Janeiro in June 2016.[89] Playing in the background of this scene, which is captured in the documentary *#DesdeJunho*, the jingle from a video by *A Nova Democracia* echoes from a makeshift projection screen on the wall of a backyard. Since 2013 an ›inner circle‹ of media activist collectives has developed in Rio de Janeiro. A group of circa 50 activists – the number is very fluid since there is no official membership – constitute this inner circle of video activists and media activists.

Many of them have a professional background in journalism, film making, art or researchers, but what really defines them is their engagement in activism. Over years they have been active in mobilizing for and participating in protests from the bottom-up. Their backgrounds in terms of race, gender and class tends to privilege people from middle- and upper-class echelons, whites and males. A problem that has been identified by the media activists themselves is demographic makeup of many colectives – predominantly white, male, and from middle- or upper-class backgrounds. The discussion how to achieve goals of increasing are controversial, but the goal itself is unanimously shared by all media activists I interviewed.

Class-based exclusion poses a particular challenge, as illustrated by Fernando, often referred to as the »father of the media activists.« He left his journalism career due to frustration with corporate media bias and now dedicates himself full-time to media activism – maintaining networks, fact-checking, and producing reports and videos – without earning an income. At times, he couldn't afford bus fare to attend meetings or protests. Similar stories emerged throughout my research. As Brazil's economic crisis deepened, informal solidarity networks – such as income-sharing among activists – have come under increasing pressure, threatening the sustainability of video activist collectives.

At the opening of the project *Favela Transmission* in the Babilonia favela,[90] many media activists from the inner circle had come together.

89 Vid. 04, Mariano, Desde Junho 2 0:20–0:26
90 The Favela Transmission project screened oral histories by local residents on projectors installed in the narrow streets and projecting on walls of houses. As the initiator of Favela Transmission, Raffaela Fryer-Moreira, argued in her speech at the event: »One doesn't learn about the history of favelas in books, it is narrated in critically important oral histories and audio-visual recordings.« (»O audiovisual é uma feramenta muito importante pra resgata as historias, que não são contandos numa forma escrito.«) Observation note and video recording in personal archive, 25 August 2020; see also the online presentation of the project: Fryer-Moreira, »Favela Transmission.«

The public event took place two months after the meeting portrayed in *#DesdeJunho* on 25 August 2016. Fernando had invited me, signaling my acceptance[91] into the scene after months of attending protests, engaging with participants, and spending time in spaces like *Casa Nuvem*.

During the event, activists discussed future agendas, ongoing challenges, and the continued need to make bottom-up video production more inclusive. One of the most contentious and unresolved issues was resource allocation – specifically, whether to accept external funding. At the heart of this debate lies a dilemma: the strong desire to remain independent – central to video activism in Rio – versus the need to increase inclusivity and sustain the time-intensive work of collective media production. I refer to this tension as the independence-inexistence nexus.

The following section introduces four video activist collectives to illustrate the complexity of organizing bottom-up video production in Rio and the different ways they navigated the independence-inexistence dilemma. While Rio's video activist scene is rich and diverse – with numerous individuals and collectives producing videos of protests and police violence[92] – this overview focuses on groups I was able to research directly and who played a central role in shaping Rio's video activist practices. The collectives presented are: MIC/Mariachi, CMI, AND, and Mídia Ninja.

The first two collectives are Mídia Independente Coletiva (MIC) and Mariachi, among the most influential in Rio and central to my research. A founding member of MIC, recalls the moment in September 2013 when he and his peers realized they needed to take audiovisual production into their own hands to counter perceived media bias:

> »We had to respond to the lies spread by Globo, SBT, Record, Band, O Dia. So how did we do that? After the protest finished, everybody was drinking their Red Bulls, we sat down and started editing. It was online the morning [there]after, and it went viral. What the alternative media

91   When a media activist with whom I worked closely asked me to document the event, he emphasized a simple rule: »Never film the guys over there.« He pointed towards three young men standing at the bottom of some steps leading deeper into the neighborhood. While filming the build-up to the event, I was not sufficiently careful and mistakenly captured the three guys with their arms entered in the background. It took less than two minutes before the media activist who had earlier warned me not to film the three men came to me to report that they had told him that they were aware that I had filmed them. Together, we went over to the three young men. In front of them, I was left with no choice but to delete the scene that I had just filmed.

92   Examples include Linha da Frente, Linha de Fuga, Coletivo Carranca (CC), Rio 40 Graus (R40G), Multidão Web, Voz das Ruas, Agência de Notícias das Favelas (ANF), and Projectação.

does is neither classical journalism nor cinema […]. It's accepting that truth is a point of view.«[93]

The perspective of Rio's video activists as *engaged insiders* sets them apart from corporate media journalists. Raffaella Fryer-Moreira, who first joined MIC as a participant observer before becoming a media activist herself, highlights this engaged positionality in her study of Rio's media activist movement:

> »The appeal [by media activists] to partiality can be understood as an appeal to a situated knowledge legitimized by relations of proximity to the event and to their act of ›being there‹, while their reports were seen as ›un-manipulated‹ as their lack of political or corporate sponsorship maintained their content free from external intervention. The audiovisual documents midiativistas [media activists] produced, together with [the] digital communications networks they mobilised, permitted midiativistas to articulate an engaged encounter with the protest space that extended its affective capacity to reach a significant audience, rendering the protest space visible and augmenting its capacity to act.«[94]

The mediated extension of protests by collectives such as MIC and Mariachi continued in space and time beyond the 2013 Jornadas de Junho demonstrations in the center of Rio. Close collaboration soon followed between various collectives, including a lasting partnership between MIC and Mariachi. As one activist explained: »During protests we always worked together, one protecting the other. Only that we posted our video, our posts, our material, and Mariachi posted their material, their video and their posts.«[95] In 2016, Mariachi – using similar tactics – formally joined forces with MIC to launch the website *midiacoletiva.org*.[96]

The launch of *midiacoletiva.org* revived the independence-inexistence dilemma. MIC and Mariachi had long refused external funding, a stance that earned them strong credibility among allied activists[97] and media

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93   Vid. 03, Mariano, Desde Junho 1 6:23–6:53

94   Fryer-Moreira, »›A Gente Tava Ali‹«, 2.

95   »Sim, a gente sempre trabalhou em conjunto na manifestaçã , um protegendo o outro, só que a gente postava o nosso vídeo, o nosso post, a nossa matéria, o Mariachi postava a matéria dele, o vídeo dele e o post deles« (Int. 8, Video Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 28 October 2015).

96   In my research I employ the abbreviation MIC collective and MIC videos in a number of cases, where the Mariachi collective was involved as well. This imprecision has been used throughout the text to simplify the argument and by no means aims at diminishing the engagement of Mariachi activists.

97   Venues such as Casa Nuvem (later renamed Casa Nem) that function as centers for alternative culture play a crucial role in providing sites for exchange for media activists, feminists, the LGBTQ+ community, anarchists, Marxists

activist around the country[98] and allowed them to receive and footage from *comunicação comunitária* collectives and residents in favelas.[99] This insistence was expressed by a MIC member in our interview: »If I earn 10 Reais to take a picture, it's no longer activism, […] then it's already a profession.«[100]

The second collective central to my Rio research is Centro de Mídia Independente (CMI). Formed mainly by activists from UFRJ and UERJ, CMI-Rio emerged from the global Indymedia network, rooted in the 1999 Battle of Seattle.[101] Embracing the slogan »don't hate the media, be the media,« CMI brought this ethos to Rio. Like MIC and Mariachi, it has no formal membership or fees, relying instead on informal inclusion. CMI flourished in 2013, producing numerous videos, and is known for its tech-savviness and critical stance toward corporate social media – maintaining its own independent website.[102]

As one of the most important sources of videos documenting protests and police violence in Rio, *Jornal A Nova Democracia* (AND) represents a third key example. Although not strictly a video activist collective, AND's journalists often employ practices identical to those of video activists.[103] Patrick Granja, was a prominent figure at AND, who played a central role in using video to amplify the voices of favela residents and to

> and many others. After meeting Carlos, who would become a friend and key informant, for the first time at a protest rally, he introduced me to Casa Nuvem. It was here where I encountered many of my interviewees. Likewise, such public spaces that provide opportunities for exchange have been crucial for connecting (media-)activists with one another. In Cape Town I have not encountered a similar space.

98   There have even been repeated exchanges with activists from other states such as Matto Grosso do Sul to report on human rights violations and police violence targeting indigenous communities.

99   For example, a video showing the crime scene in Morro da Lagartixa where five teenagers had been killed by the police. See Chapter Seven for more details.

100 »Se eu ganhar 10 reais pra fazer uma foto já não é mais ativismo, já deixou de ser ativismo e aí já virou profissão« (Int. 37, Video Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 2 September 2016).

101 For a discussion of Indymedia and its political philosophy and reporting style, see Downing, »Digital Deconstruction. The Independent Media Center and the Anarchist Socialist Tradition«. It should be noted that Indymedia Centers worldwide have become less and less active with the advance of corporate social media, as discussed in an insightful article by Giraud, »Has Radical Participatory Online Media Really ›Failed‹? Indymedia and Its Legacies«.

102 See Chapter Six for more details.

103 Founded in 2002 AND is openly Marxist–Maoist in orientation and publishes a monthly print newspaper. Despite its print focus, the outlet has been

document police violence via the outlets social media channels. His work has earned him considerable respect within Rio's video activist scene.[104]

AND defines itself as a »democratic, popular, national and anti-imperialist enterprise,«[105] a stance that has led Granja and other AND videographers to adopt filming tactics closely aligned with those of collectives like MIC, Mariachi, and CMI. The key distinction, however, lies in funding: while the latter groups strictly reject external financial support, AND journalists receive salaries funded by subscribers and private donors. This divergence reflects a longstanding tactical divide between anarchist and Marxist traditions. Nonetheless, all of Rio's video activist collectives share a commitment to popular emancipation and remain united in their opposition to Globo and the broader corporate media establishment, as well as to what they view as a repressive and discriminatory state.

The fourth group of videographers deviates significantly from the previous examples and is rejected by many in Rio's video activist scene as a genuine video activist collective.[106] Despite its initial appeal as a counter-hegemonic and grassroots collective, MN's internal structure was later described by media scholar André Azevedo da Fonseca as »hierarchical, authoritarian and messianic.«[107] Allegations of symbolic violence, internal exploitation, and state co-optation further undermined its credibility.[108] One videographer from *Coletivo Caranca* recounted in an interview

recording and sharing videos on YouTube since 26 May 2008 – predating nearly all other video activist collectives in Rio.

104 Int. 22, Focus Group, 25 November 2015.

105 »imprensa democrática, popular, nacional e antiimperialista« (Jornal A Nova Democracia, »Sobre o Jornal A Nova Democracia (Linha Editorial)«).

106 Mídia Ninja (MN), once popular during the 2013 Jornadas de Junho for its live protest coverage via TwitCasting, has since fallen out of favor. In July 2013, MN collaborated with other activists to cover the Ocupa Cabral protest camp. Ocupa Cabral was a protest camp that was erected in front of the official residence of the governor of Rio de Janeiro, Sérgio Cabral, from the center-right PMDB party. The occupation, which followed the height of the mass protests in June 2013, demonstrated the continued engagement of activists that would help to rebuild momentum towards the teachers' strikes in September and October 2013. However, a rupture occurred in August when a MIC member revealed that MN was funded by Fora do Eixo, a cultural organization itself financed by Brazil's Ministry of Culture and Education. This revelation sparked widespread criticism, leading most activists to distance themselves from MN.

107 Azevedo da Fonseca, »O Valor Do ›Egocard‹: Afetividade e Violência Simbólica Na Rede Fora Do Eixo«, 96.

108 Rodrigues and Baroni, »Journalism Ethos: Mídia Ninja and a Contested Field«, 586. It is important to recognize that MN's role in São Paulo or other major cities in Brazil differed from the situation in Rio de Janeiro. What

Fig. 17 Logos of Video Activist Collectives

how, while livestreaming a protest for MN, a colleague was pressured by MN's Rio headquarters to stop criticizing the ruling Workers' Party.[109] Such instances of internal censorship contradicted the democratic and participatory values central to Rio's media activism. For many activists – who had invested time and effort in building non-hierarchical, unpaid networks – MN's actions amounted to dishonest co-optation.

Mídia Ninja's lack of funding transparency must be understood within the specific context of Rio de Janeiro, where the co-optation of social movements, activists, and media by powerful elites has a long and well-documented history – extending beyond the dictatorship era. In this light, the value placed on independence by Rio's media activists becomes especially significant. MN Rio's willingness to exploit, appropriate, market, and profit from grassroots political movements and cultural products was widely seen as unacceptable in the inner circles of media activism. By indirectly accepting funds from the Ministry of Culture and

> Shannon Garland observed, prior to its involvement with Mídia Ninja, as Fora do Eixo's appropriation of digital music production technologies offers an example of the mechanisms of exploitation that anarcho-capitalist social media networks promote. Garland shows how these mechanisms have also been embraced by organizations such as Fora do Eixo and Mídia Ninja (Garland, »›The Space, the Gear, and Two Big Cans of Beer‹: Fora do Eixo and the Debate over Circulation, Remuneration, and Aesthetics in the Brazilian Alternative Market«). For an extended critique of the exploitative mechanisms that mark most corporate digital technologies and their foundations in libertarian and anarcho-capitalist ideologies, see Taplin, *Move Fast and Break Things*.

109 Int. 34, Video Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 31 August 2016

Education through its partnership with *Fora do Eixo* – and later collaborating with institutions like Banco do Brasil, the Ford Foundation, and Open Society – MN lost its ›street credibility‹ and violated the unwritten rules upheld by most media activists in Rio. Given my informants' strong reluctance to recognize Mídia Ninja in Rio as a media activist collective – due to its disregard for their core value of independence – and the fact that MN Rio never responded to my inquiries, I chose to exclude the collective entirely from my research.[110]

There are numerous other initiatives and collectives that have produced videos of protests and police violence in Rio. Examples include Linha da Frente, Linha de Fuga, Coletivo Carranca (CC), Rio 40 Graus (R40G), Multidão Web, Voz das Ruas, Agência de Notícias das Favelas (ANF) and Projectação. When the countless active individual videographers are also considered, the richness and diversity of the video activist scene in Rio de Janeiro becomes even clearer.

Video Activists Collectives and Research Focus

> »[…] we are not going to be impartial. Rather [we are going to have] a partisanship that highlights the voices of the excluded, with the impartiality of making transparent what moves us. This is neither money nor ideology.«[111]

My research in Rio primarily focuses on video activist collectives. This focus is shaped by three main factors: first, the specific field access I was able to gain in Rio de Janeiro; second, a research interest in radical practices of video activism; and third, the collectives' efforts to document protests and police violence across the entire city (and beyond), as well as their outreach to national and international audiences.

My research in Rio primarily focuses on video activist collectives. The reasons for this focus on video activist collectives is related to the specific field access gained in Rio de Janeiro; second, due to the Based on

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110 It is open to speculation whether the Ninjas knew of my involvement with MIC, a collective which has been among the fiercest critics of MN Rio. Undoubtedly, my lack of interpersonal connections with any of its members meant that MN Rio had no reason to trust me and thus grant me an interview. This experience of ›doing research‹ illustrates how politically sensitive my topic is and how I could not have avoided positioning myself.

111 »[…] a gente não vai fazer uma mídia imparcial, mas é uma parcialidade que vai mostrar a voz dos excluídos, mas com a imparcialidade de onde vem o que nos move, não é dinheiro é ideologia« (Int. 37, Video Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 2 September 2016).

the examples discussed, these collectives can be characterized by the following core aspects:

(1) Focus on protest and police violence: Media activists document protests and police violence to amplify the voices of marginalized urban citizens and provide visual evidence of state repression.
(2) Collective organization: They build solidarity networks that enable regular dissemination of freely accessible content, reducing reliance on individual videographers.[112]
(3) Commitment to independence: Their credibility depends on rejecting external funding or at least making it transparent.[113] As one MIC member put it, »activism that is sold is not activism.«[114] At the same time, it highlights the broader independence-inexistence dilemma faced by video activists.
(4) Emancipatory politics: Media activists explicitly resist racism, classism, and patriarchy, and share a broadly aligned emancipatory perspective.
(5) Unpaid engagement: Media activism in Rio is largely unremunerated. Activists dedicate their time and resources voluntarily, reinforcing their credibility and autonomy.

In Rio de Janeiro, three major differences are cited to distinguish between media activist and *comunicação comunitária* collectives. First, media activists cover protests and police violence across the whole city – although with a certain bias towards incidents in downtown Rio – whereas *comunicação comunitária* usually report from within the defined boundaries of their favela neighborhoods. Second, while *comunicação comunitária* thus first and foremost address favela residents, media activists often target a national – and increasingly international – audience.[115] Finally, the third key difference concerns access to resources. Financial support for *comunicação comunitária* is regarded as much more acceptable due to the lack of resources available in the favelas.[116]

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112 Int. 38, Researcher, Rio de Janeiro, 8 September 2016.
113 Transparency is demanded most vehemently when the funders are directly linked to the state – such as in the case of Fora do Eixo – or to foreign governments or organizations from countries with a troubled history of imperialist interventions, such as the Ford Foundation from the USA.
114 Int. 37, Video Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 2 September 2016.
115 Particularly collaborations with media activists from other countries in South and Latin America were strongly advocated and lead to joint projects.
116 Int. 38, Researcher, Rio de Janeiro, 8 September 2016.

5.3 From Traditional Media to Digital Video Activism

> »What happens in media activism is also a reflection of what happens in society.«[117]

This final section draws together insights from Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro to examine how traditional and digital media landscapes have shaped the emergence of video activism in both cities. It highlights the contrasting conditions of their respective media environments, variations in internet access, and the differing political dynamics that have influenced the development of digital video activism specifically, and bottom-up media practices more broadly. While both cities are marked by deep socio-economic divides, the trajectories of video activism diverged significantly.

The more nuanced and pluralistic reporting in South Africa's public and corporate media has made the construction of counter-hegemonic media vehicles less urgent in Cape Town than in Rio. In Brazil, by contrast, the dominance of politically aligned corporate media – especially Rede Globo – has long fueled distrust among activists. During the 2013 *Jornadas de Junho*, this distrust reached a tipping point. Protesters were repeatedly portrayed as »vandals« and »bandits,« prompting a unified response from activists who turned to autonomous media production to reclaim the narrative.[118] The historical complicity of Brazil's major broadcasters with the military regime further intensified the push for independent grassroots media. In this context, video activism in Rio emerged not only as a tool of documentation but as a form of resistance.

The second key aspect is access to digital infrastructure and its role in deepening socio-economic inequality. Internet access has decisively shaped the possibilities for video activism. In Cape Town, the high cost and limited availability of connectivity – especially in marginalized areas – posed a major barrier to the adoption of data-intensive video technologies. As a result, bottom-up initiatives often struggled to circulate their content widely. In contrast, Rio benefited from expanded 4G infrastructure ahead of the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Olympics, alongside public internet programs that improved accessibility. This broader digital access enabled activists to livestream protests, upload videos, and build online networks of solidarity. Yet, in both cities, the ability to communicate demands via video remains closely tied to socio-economic status, reinforcing existing inequalities rather than alleviating them.

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117 »o que acontece no midiativismo é também um reflexo do que acontece na sociedade« (Int. 33, Focus Group Video Activists, Rio de Janeiro, 25 August 2016).

118 See Chapter Six for more details.

A third key difference can be found in the forms through which video activist practices have emerged. In Cape Town, video activism has remained fragmented and largely reliant on individual intermediaries – typically white, middle-class journalists, filmmakers, or NGO workers. The notable exception was the Rhodes Must Fall (RMF) media team, which came closest to a collectively organized model. In contrast, Rio's video activism has flourished through tightly knit collectives such as MIC, Mariachi, and CMI. These groups operate through shared practices, mutual protection, and a strong sense of political commitment. While this collective model has enabled sustained engagement, it also reflects the broader divide between the ›formal‹ and ›informal‹ city: *comunicação comunitária* collectives, rooted in favelas, often operate alongside – but separately from – media activist groups.

However, the strong reluctance to accept external funding has created a particular challenge for video activism in Rio de Janeiro: the independence-inexistence dilemma. A defining feature of Rio's media activist scene is its insistence on financial independence. Collectives reject external funding to preserve their credibility and autonomy, often encapsulated in the phrase: »activism that is sold is not activism.« The case of Mídia Ninja illustrates the risks of compromising this principle. Once celebrated for its innovative livestreaming during the *Jornadas de Junho*, MN lost legitimacy after revelations of opaque funding ties to state-linked organizations. This controversy exposed a deeper tension: while financial autonomy safeguards credibility, it also limits inclusivity and sustainability – particularly for activists from marginalized backgrounds who cannot afford to work without compensation. The dilemma remains unresolved and continues to shape the evolution of video activism in Rio, raising difficult questions about how to sustain radical media practices without sacrificing core values of inclusivity.

In sum, while both Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro are shaped by stark inequalities, the conditions for video activism have diverged sharply. In Cape Town, video activism remains an emerging and fragmented practice, constrained by infrastructural barriers and a less antagonistic media environment. In Rio, by contrast, collective and organized video activism has taken root – driven by political urgency, digital access, and a strong culture of mutual support. These differences underscore that media activism is not merely a product of technology or access, but of the broader political, social, and historical contexts in which it unfolds. The protagonists behind the cameras – whether individual intermediaries or collective actors – embody these dynamics, shaping how urban struggles are seen, heard, and remembered.