

Jacob Geuder

Between Streets and Screens



Digital Video Activism
and the Right to the City

v. Hase & Koehler

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V E R L A G

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Preface

»Peace without a voice is not peace, it is fear,« read one of the posters held aloft during a protest in Rio de Janeiro. Rarely has this statement resonated more deeply than in the times we are witnessing in 2025.

The book *Between Streets and Screens* traces a moment in the 2010s when the use of social media and smartphones as tools of communication and repertoires of contention began to transform bottom-up politics – opening new channels to amplify marginalized voices, document protests, and expose violence on an unprecedented scale. This book turns to two specific urban contexts – Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro – where digital video activism has emerged as a powerful tool of resistance.

The book offers a grounded analysis of these practices, their challenges, and their transformative potential. It is the result of revising my dissertation »Visualizing Urban Struggles – Video Activism as Utopian Practice« for a Dr. phil. in Urban Studies at the University of Basel, supervised by Sophie Oldfield and Christian Schmid. Since beginning this research in 2015, completing it as a dissertation in 2020, and revising it into an open access book, the media landscapes and ongoing struggles over visibility continued to change. The preface first presents the context of this research, then discusses events since 2020 and finally points out the relevance of witnessing as an act of defiance.

Digital video activism emerged in the 2010s as a new practice of witnessing and speaking truth to power – building on decades of movement media practices.

Urban space both produces and is (re)produced through the lenses of cameras. Urban spaces provide the terrain on which struggles for a right to the city are visualized, debated, and enacted. Today, practices of digital video activism are inherently interwoven in urban fabrics. While this book focuses on a specific historical period and set of localities, some of its analytical conclusions extend beyond their immediate context – for example, the challenges posed by the independence-inexistence nexus for video activist collectives, or the powerful role of algorithmic governance in shaping public perception.

The independence-inexistence nexus that many video activist collectives – and the individuals within them – have continually faced is a case described in detail in this work. It is about the possibility of remaining independent as videographer, while managing to continue doing the work. For example, one Afro-Brazilian video activist, who contributed greatly to this research, has witnessed the rise and ebb of video activism. His political stance – insisting on independence – has come at

a high cost: prolonged material poverty repeatedly resulting in food insecurity and no electricity at home due to unpaid bills. Another Indigenous video activist from Rio saw her home burned down and continues to struggle to make ends meet for her three kids and herself, all while sustaining a media activist collective.

These are just two examples of the remarkable people I met along this research journey. As a white male with a middle-class background, living in one of the richest countries in the world – Switzerland – it is important to acknowledge the difference in lived experience. Through this research, I came closer to understanding the mechanisms of racial oppression, patriarchal structures, and class-based discrimination in Brazil, South Africa, and beyond by developing bonds with those who created the stories this book is about. However, the privileges afforded me the choice to deal with such forms of oppression and discrimination, a choice many people in harsher condition simply don't have. The stories of the videographers and videos are not fiction – they are realities video activists and victims of violence continue to live.

Videos are a form of bottom-up city making and it is critical to grasp how struggles over visibility and claims to truth are negotiated on local and on global scales simultaneously. Hence, it is urgent to carefully examine the specific urban environments in which video activist practices emerge on the one side. On the other side, the book shows how social media as distribution channels operated on a global scale, and how they started reshaping local topographies of visibility. Violence oftentimes appears at the center of these struggles. The research shows that violence does not only ignite audiovisual recording but may also put videographers on the ground at severe risk. The ethnographic study links video making, its distribution, and the complex theme of violence to present a fuller picture of whose voices are elevated and silenced. The aim is for readers to understand better the production happening behind cameras, which produce the videos livestreamed and uploaded from the streets to our screens.

Of all videos discussed in this book, more than one in five have already disappeared from YouTube. The importance of preserving activist and witness videos as historical documents is only becoming more urgent and should be built around trustful relationships and rigorous research. In the past five years, I spent significant time and energy on developing the Urban Video Archive project. With the help of Hamidreza Nassiri and many others, I sought to preserve some of the audiovisual recordings of historical significance in a publicly accessible archive. Princeton University will host a first collection of more than one hundred videos by the Rio-based collective Mídia Independente Coletiva. On our independent website for the Urban Video Archive (<https://urbanvideoarchive.vercel.app>) project, we are developing new tools for searching the video

collection. The archive aims to preserve these videos and contextualize them, with the goal of amplifying the ›truths from the ground‹ as documented in the footage.

The drastic changes of the past five years are far from over – and many of them are not yet captured in this book. It is therefore worth reading this work for what it is: a historical document, closely observing the practices of digital video activism as they emerged in Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro during the 2010s. Grasping the particularities of this period offers a deeper understanding of how video activism is not only a global phenomenon, but also deeply rooted in local networks, histories, and practices. The emergence of digital video activism was driven by urban movements in the Global South – in Tunis, Cairo, Istanbul, Cape Town, Ouagadougou, Rio de Janeiro, and Manila to name a few.

The goal here is to offer a nuanced analysis grounded in concrete experiences as described by (video) activists. It presents the tensions and contradictions inherent in digital video activism – particularly as a form of witnessing. Above all, it seeks to highlight the value of listening carefully to the experiences of (video) activists in the Global South.

Before delving into the details of the research about video activism from South Africa and Brazil, the preface invites a broader reflection on the political context and its changes over the past five years. To put the writing itself in context, the next pages reflect on the transformation of (media) landscapes for bottom-up video making around the time when the research was concluded in 2020 and the Covid-19 pandemic brought public life to a halt on a global scale.

The bottom-up appropriation of digital technologies by popular movements that have reverberated since the »Arab Spring« throughout the 2010s in cities around the world. Following the pandemic in early 2020, we are witnessing a radicalized conservative push-back and significant power shifts.

While Covid-19 paralyzed public life, and in particular people in lower-paying jobs suffered massive drops in income while being exposed to enormous health risks, tech-billionaires multiplied their net worth. With the newly amassed riches, some of the tech billionaires decided to use their political leverage of ownership of social media channels to interfere more strongly in politics.

In 2022 Elon Musk acquired Twitter and rebranded it as X, radically transforming one of the most important digital communication channels. While claiming to defend »free speech«, mass layoffs at X, new policies and regulations, and the political interventions in foreign affairs by Elon Musk led to repeated criticism. Studies repeatedly found an increase in hate speech, a rapid growth of disinformation, and a growth of antisemitic posts. Elon Musk publicly interfered in foreign affairs

– prominently in the case of Brazil, when publicly calling for the arrest of Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes.

Elon Musk repeatedly criticized the Brazilian justice system for prosecuting former Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro after a failed coup d’Etat attempt. In Brasília on January 8, 2022, the sites of state power were attacked by supporters of Jair Bolsonaro. Now, in September 2025, Bolsonaro was sentenced to 27 years in prison for an attempted coup, criminal organization, the abolition of democratic law and other charges. In contrast, Donald Trump – who talked about a ›witch hunt‹ in Brazil – was not sentenced for involvement in the January 6 riots at the Capitol in Washington.

Elon Musk as well as other tech billionaires heavily invested in the election campaign of Donald Trump. Since Trump became president in the US for a second term in 2025, systematic attacks on press freedom, independent academic research, law firms, and court justices have been recorded by independent observers. Bottom-up and independent media production is soaring in resistance to Trump’s second presidency, and significant numbers of users canceled their accounts on X, formerly known as Twitter.

At the same time, TikTok emerged as a new player in the field of video distribution, demonstrating that global leaders in social media can also emerge outside the United States, notably in China. The power of social media platforms becomes apparent in the attempt by US government to control TikTok. What these examples all have in common, is how they show how deeply social media became part of struggles over geostrategic control as well as the power of algorithmic governance in disseminating narratives.

Finally, technological change itself continued to critically influence video production and dissemination. The new capacities to manipulate audiovisuals with AI call into question videos as reliable sources of untethered documentation. Technologies to manipulate audiovisuals are increasing at a rapid pace with AI, while chances to distinguish between AI manipulated videos and authentic footage fade.

These challenges are further heightened by violent conflicts, leading to polarized information wars across the world. The illegal incursion of Russia into Ukraine immediately unleashed a weaponization of traditional media and social media. Disinformation campaigns with the use of bots, fake accounts, and questioning of legacy media’s impartiality are destabilizing the formation of public opinions far beyond Russia and Ukraine itself. The Russian war against Ukraine seems to have set a precedence and normalized attempts to curate public opinion by interference and influence campaigns on traditional media and especially on social media.

It is important to recognize, that the intense attention to the Russian-Ukrainian war contrasts starkly to the airtime given to conflicts and

human rights violations in Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Despite the staggering numbers of displaced people and the atrocious crimes committed in Sudan, attention to the war remains marginalized in the Western media, reiterating racialized hierarchies of what appears to matter in media coverage.

The ongoing conflicts around mining, human rights violations, and sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo further underlines the racialized hierarchies of media reporting. At the same time, the lack of media coverage manages to silence a brutal contradiction: the material from Congolese mines is literally built into devices such as smartphones and the infrastructures of digital communication. The contradiction of using devices for emancipatory struggles on the one hand and financially supporting the exploitation and human rights abuses in Congolese mines by buying these devices on the other hand, is a contradiction hard to manage for individuals. Corporations directly involved, however, point to their limited liability.

The live-streamed attack by Hamas on Israel as well as the war against Gaza will impact the role of video as evidence for years to come. The use of audiovisuals by IDF soldiers and Hamas, citizens in Palestine, Israel, and around the world, as well as activists on the Global Sumud Flotilla and beyond, created fractured media landscapes. Media landscapes characterized by competing claims, harsh separations, and polarized opinions obliterating a shared understanding of what constitutes facts and evidence.

After two years of war and a currently unstable ceasefire, more than 200 journalists were murdered in Palestine, making it the deadliest conflict for media workers since recording. According to the UN and NGOs such as Reporters without Borders, the Israeli government has repeatedly defamed local journalists in Gaza as supporters of terrorism or terrorists (oftentimes without providing sufficient evidence) before conducting targeted assassinations. Local journalists and citizens who survived until today, and continue to report, are the few sources of information left on the ground in Gaza. Since 2023, the Israeli government blocked independent foreign journalists from freely entering and reporting from the occupied territory.

While legacy media in the West were repeatedly accused of biased reporting, large parts of younger generations have turned to social media such as TikTok to receive information directly from Gaza. Live-streamed videos and audiovisual recordings transmitted directly from the war zone, play a critical role in struggles over power and visibility.

These examples from Ukraine, Sudan, Congo, and Palestine all illustrate how media production and violent conflicts transform each other. The distinction between witness, activist, and journalist videos described in detail in this work, appears to become more and more blurry

with every violent conflict increasing the weaponization of traditional and social media from all sides.

The challenges discussed – violent conflicts producing information wars, powerful platforms for media distribution controlled by a few, technological changes putting into question digital media as untethered testimony, and political leaders declaring war on facts and evidence – create critical challenges for digital video activism and journalism as such. New practices of resistance and recording will inevitably emerge. But who and how can citizens worldwide decide which sources they trust and what can count as fact?

»Nada deve ser impossível de mudar« (»Nothing is impossible to change«, a quote of Bertold Brecht) read a banner held by a music group accompanying a protest march along Copacabana beach in 2016. On that day, I was taking photos – only later realizing that Marielle Franco was among the chanting activists. Marielle, a Rio de Janeiro city councilwoman, was assassinated in cold blood in 2018 after publicly criticizing police violence in favelas. Former president and today's prison inmate Jair Bolsonaro did not offer public condolences to Marielle's family and has repeatedly been linked to the suspected assailants of Marielle, although no conclusive evidence was presented that would prove beyond a reasonable doubt his involvement. The protests that followed her killing expressed widespread anger and deep sadness, while also carrying a promise: to continue the struggle for basic human rights for all.

The resilience of hope – even in the face of murder and loss – reflects a strength that cannot be overestimated. Like the mothers of teenagers in Rio's favelas, who demand accountability and justice. It is hope that things can change which sustains the utopias of a right to the city for all, the struggle for basic urban citizenship rights, and the many movements fighting for justice.

Bearing witness brings with it profound ethical challenges, as James Baldwin so poetically describes in Raoul Peck's *I Am Not Your Negro*: »I was to discover that the line which separates a witness from an actor is a very thin line, indeed; nevertheless, the line is real... I had to accept, as time wore on, that part of my responsibility – as a witness – was to move as largely and freely as possible, to write the story, and to get it out.«

Silent peace – a life without a voice – is not peace, it is fear. This foreword can only conclude with an expression of deep respect and gratitude to those who risk their safety by taking cameras into their own hands to bear witness. Whether in Rio de Janeiro, Cape Town, Cairo, Washington, Istanbul, Hong Kong, Khartoum, or Rafah – we owe them for their struggle to make marginalized voices heard and for standing up against the dehumanization practiced by some and suffered by many.

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The openness of (video) activists to welcome me into their world and share their valuable time is the foundation on which this research is built, and I am deeply grateful to each and every one of my informants. In Rio de Janeiro, Carlos Augusto Lima França has been a tireless supporter of my work in every possible way. Without him, this research would never have achieved its scope or depth. Lívia Alcântara – my temporary flatmate and longtime friend – enriched my research stays in Rio immensely. Collaborating with her during these visits was a priceless experience.

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Fig. 1 *Favela Aktion Basel*

1. Video Activism as Bottom-Up City Making

Videos of Protests and Police Violence

The images are blurry and unfocused, since the scene the videographer was about to record came as a surprise.¹ When the visuals come back into focus the video shows a phalanx of police officers, who storm to the DJ's hut to unplug the turntables, punch the DJ to the ground, pepper-spray a woman in her face, and fire rubber bullets at the dissipating crowd. On Friday afternoon of 14 June 2013, a group of activists and artists had constructed an ›illegal‹ twin to the art installation of Kawamata's Favela Café.² They criticized the »comfortable poverty porn of ›Favela Café«,«³ where visitors to the world's biggest art fair were served cappuccino and champagne at Swiss prices, while appropriating ›Favela culture‹ in a displaced simulation. The video recording – with its blurry images at the start – captured the police aggression against the peaceful party, and it went viral. In Basel, Switzerland, the creative protest questioning the Art Basel's Favela Café appeared as unacceptable to authorities and was violently repressed by police. When I saw my friends knocked to the ground and peppersprayed for no reason I first had an emotional reaction and then started to reflect on the power of audio-visual recordings. The story of my research began with the phalanx of police officers storming into the crowd of peaceful protesters.

- 1 Vid. 01, Bajour, *Polizei räumt Favelabesetzung auf dem Messeplatz*, 0:25-0:33.
- 2 The artist Tadashi Kawamata had installed his »Favela Café« for the *Art Basel* fair, which was used to sell cappuccino and champagne at Swiss prices.
- 3 Jordana, »The Indicator. Favela Café and the End of Irony.«

Eventually, it brought me to investigate video activism in Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro. The scenes of protests and police violence captured in videos from Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro are often stark and present another level of police violence. Graphic images of police beating down elderly protesters, firing teargas into crowds, pepperspraying people into their faces. Protesters who lost one eye due to rubber bullets fired at them. A 14-year old spitting blood into white sand after a police assault. Tanks rolling into favela neighborhoods. Police officers shooting with lethal ammunition at unarmed civilians. A man stopped on the street, forced to strip naked in public and then humiliated by heavy police boots hit into his genitals. Five teenagers killed with 111 bullets. These are only some of the many stories this research follows. To see the tragedies captured in the videos is challenging and readers need to be warned of the graphic content they will inevitably encounter when reading this book.

The question driving this research was to understand how video activism as practice can unfold its emancipatory power as a form of bottom-up city making. More precisely, it asks: How do grassroots practices of video activism contribute to visualizing and shaping urban struggles – and what emancipatory potential do they hold as forms of bottom-up city making? This overarching interest can further be broken down in a conceptual question, which asks how video activism contributes to digitalizing the right to the city. A question that should not remain abstract but instead follows the action. To examine practices of video activism meant to look what is happening behind the cameras. This led to my empirical questions in trying to understand the concrete practices of ›doing video activism‹ between the streets and the screens. Who are the people recording protests and police violence? What motivates them, and why do they believe in video as a tool of communication? And most of all, how do they organize, record, edit, and disseminate their audiovisuals?

Movements and their Media

Today, smartphones and single-lens reflex cameras (SLR cameras) on the one hand, and social media accounts on the other, make video production ubiquitous. These circumstances starkly contrast with the situation that the first generations of video activists in the 1970s faced. To film they had to carry heavy equipment, find a way to access expensive cameras, and organize public screenings for their videos.⁴ With the explosion

4 A good overview on the early community video movement in the 1970s and 1980s is offered in Nigg, *Rebel Video. Die Videobewegung Der 1970er Und 1980er-Jahre*.

of production and distribution possibilities since the early 2010s, the ›digital revolution‹ dramatically increased the ease and speed with which videos are disseminated. Digital video activism based on smartphones and social media blossomed and transformed the relationship between movements and their media.

Simultaneously to the technological leap in video production a new ›cycle of contestation«⁵ began with a wave of protests in 2010/2011. The Arab Spring, the Spanish 15-M Movement as well as other anti-austerity movements in Southern Europe, and the worldwide Occupy! camps are only a some of the examples from this first wave in this cycle of contestation. Two years later major upheavals in Brazil, Turkey,⁶ Ukraine and Hong Kong erupted and were broadcasted live from the streets by non-professionals. In 2019/2020 widespread protests in Sudan, Lebanon, Haiti, Ecuador, Venezuela, Bolivia and Chile peaked. Today in early June 2020, the Black Lives Matters marches are in their third week. The video of the brutal murder of George Floyd by police officer Derek Chauvin played a decisive role in sparking outrage. Despite all differences in claims, contexts and constituencies mobilized, two defining features characterize this cycle of contestation: the body politics of occupying public squares and the use of social media for communication.

In this research I look at the beginning of the tumultuous decade of 2010s. The period of 2010 to 2016 marks the period in which Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro attracted global attention as hosts of the sport mega events of the FIFA Worldcup and Olympic Games. This period is equally characterized by major urban movements in both cities and the emergence of digital video activism. With a critical and multi-sited ethnography of protests and police violence, this research aims to capture the nuances involved in the process of video making and distribution. It is based on in-depth conversations and participatory observations in both cities, although the case of Rio de Janeiro has been researched in greater depth due to practical constraints. During this time, new practices of covering protests and police violence emerged. The examination of the South African

5 Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 144.

6 The Turkish collective bak.ma has been a critical source in providing video testimonies from the Gezi park uprising in Istanbul 2013 and beyond. Over time the collective has managed to develop new forms of autonomous archiving, which show the remarkable breadth and depth of digital video activism emerging from Turkey. (Çelikaslan, Archiving the Commons; Çelikaslan et al., eds., *Autonomous Archiving*; Erensoy, »From Activist to Demonstrator. The Evolution of Video Activism in Turkey.«) In 2022 we organized a panel discussion at the Re/Assembling Conference in Berlin 2022, which brought to light striking similarities especially between video activist practices in Turkey and Brazil.

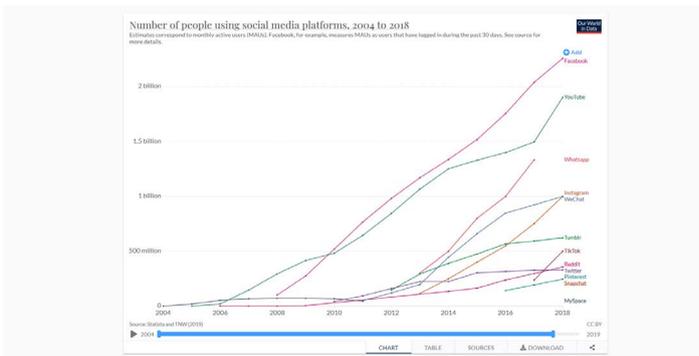
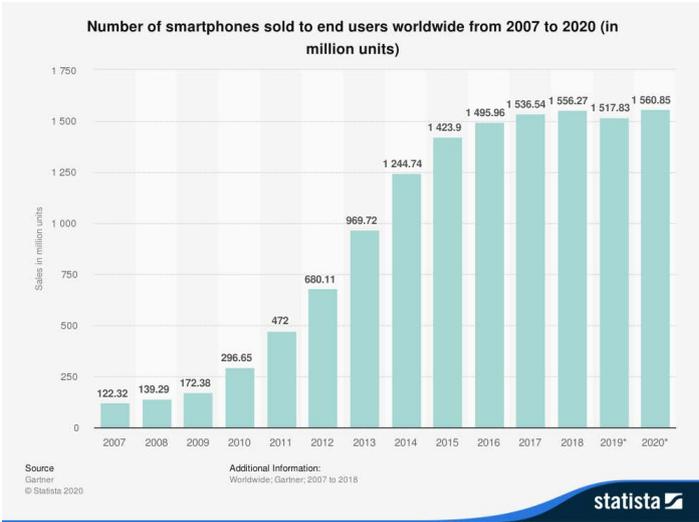


Fig. 2 Smartphones and Social Media

and Brazilian contexts illustrates how videos of protests and police violence circulating online have increasingly become a normalized »reperoire of contention«.⁷

7 Tilly, *Regimes and Repertoires*. The fact that video as technology shifted patterns of communications globally, was on display in the exhibition »Signal. How video transformed the world« at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. I visited the exhibition twice to closely look at the rich materials ranging from Argentinian video art experiments to the documentation of the fall of Ceaușescu in Romania – every piece underlining the myriad ways that video technologies shaped art and politics (Comer and Cuo, *SIGNALS. How Video Transformed the World*.)

The optimism expressed by the »evangelist of social media«⁸ – overwhelmingly white scholars in the USA – initially celebrated technological innovation as the driver of sociopolitical change around the early 2010s. Corporate social media from Silicon Valley were branded as »liberation technologies«⁹. Authors such as Clay Shirky in 2008 saw digital technologies as enabling force for the »power of group action«.¹⁰ Andrew Sullivan interpreted the 2009 protests in Iran as evidence for his claim that »The revolution will be tweeted«.¹¹ In a similar vein, Jared Cohen¹² described the relation of movements and their media in a simple formula: »One Egyptian says: ›facebook [is] used to set the date, twitter [is] used to share logistics, youtube to show the world, all to connect people‹ #Jan25«. ¹³ In opposition to this Wael Ghonim, the founder of the Facebook page ›We are all Khaled Said‹ and influential activist from Cairo has become highly skeptical of the political effectiveness of corporate social media.¹⁴ He argues that

»...social media experiences are designed in a way that favours broadcasting over engagement, posts over discussions, shallow comments over deep conversation [...] talk[ing] at each other instead of talking to each other.«¹⁵

The explosion of available smartphone cameras and the new opportunities to distribute videos online certainly has effects on political communication, but technology does not determine socio-political processes as I argue in my research. For social movement scholar Paulo Gerbaudo, techno-determinism – whether optimist or pessimist – falls into the trap

8 Gladwell, »Small Change. Why the Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted.«

9 Diamond and Plattner, *Liberation Technology: Social Media and the Struggle for Democracy*.

10 Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody. The Power of Organizing Without Organizations*, 7.

11 Sullivan, »The Revolution Will Be Twittered«.

12 Jared Cohen, an influential figure in Silicon Valley, is the CEO of Jigsaw, a subsidiary of Google's parent company, Alphabet. With Eric Schmidt he co-authored a book that lays out their visions of digitalization (Schmidt and Cohen, *The New Digital Age: Reshaping the Future of People, Nations and Business*).

13 Cohen, »Tweet: One Egyptian Says.«

14 Khaled Said was a victim of police brutality in Alexandria, Egypt. He was supposedly beaten to death by police officers and the images of his corpse ignited anger and unrest in Egypt in 2010. Wael Ghonim consequently started the Facebook site »We are all Khaled Said«. Kara Alaimo argues in her case study about the Facebook page »We are all Khaled Said«, that the »grievances and ideas shared on this page were remarkably substantive and that the movement was not a network but rather a hierarchy, led by Ghonim until his imprisonment« (Alaimo, »How the Facebook Arabic Page ›We are All Khaled Said‹ Helped Promote the Egyptian Revolution,« 1).

15 Ghonim, »Let's Design Social Media That Drives Real Change.«

of simplifying political struggles to a point where »media are endowed with mystical qualities that only obscure the work of the groups and organizers using them«¹⁶ and thus reflecting a »neoliberal ideology, incapable of understanding collective action«.¹⁷

In my work, I argue that not only the relations of movements and their media, but also their embeddedness in urban spaces demands careful consideration. The comparison of video activism in Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro illustrates how bottom-up video production is grounded in the specific urban spaces¹⁸ from which it emanates and which it simultaneously transforms.

Video Activism and the Right to the City

To disentangle the relations of urban space, social media and protests in video production my work draws on French philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre. Lefebvre argues that »the *right to the city* cannot be conceived of as a simple visiting right or as a return to traditional cities. It can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed *right to urban life*.«¹⁹ Drawing on the right to the city as a concept my research analyzes how urban movements' and urban citizens' claims and demands are amplified from the streets into the net by video activist practices. Henri Lefebvre's writing offers key theoretical entry points as to conceptually grasp the mutual infiltration of the streets and the net that make up video activism. At the same time the right to the city as »concrete utopia« offers an emancipatory vision resonating with core claims of most urban movements discussed in this work.

My research applies these conceptual concerns to an empirical study of grassroots video production in Rio and Cape Town in the period from 2010 to 2016, developing an explorative ethnography of video activist practices conducted between 2014 and 2018. As critical ethnography²⁰ my research is positioned and privileges the perspectives, positions and practical circumstance of grassroots video activists to understand their practices. The objective is to narrate from a perspective ›from within‹ activism and hence the inner logics of policing practices or the practices of conservative traditional media for example are not being explained in this work. It would certainly be relevant to study those in detail, but

16 Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism*, 8.

17 Gerbaudo, 9.

18 Diener et al., *The Inevitable Specificity of Cities*.

19 Lefebvre, »Right to the City,« 158.

20 Madison, *Critical Ethnography. Methods, Ethics, and Performance*; Thomas, *Doing Critical Ethnography*.

this is beyond the scope of this research. The extensive sample of interviews builds on more than forty semi-structured interviews with film producers, artists, academics, people without homes, campaigners and community organizers, journalists and politicians from Rio and Cape Town. These interviews were systematically transcribed and carefully interpreted, adding to the innumerable informal conversations and many months of participatory observations in Rio de Janeiro and Cape Town. Practical limitations in the time to conduct fieldwork, however, have led to privileging the depth of study in Rio de Janeiro over Cape Town, which in certain parts may reflect in the writing.

The selection of Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro as sites for research intentionally contrasts two cities that share relevant commonalities and significant differences at the same time. Cape Town and Rio are dominated by a neoliberal urban planning agenda further incentivized by the hosting of sport mega events; harsh socio-economic inequalities and high levels of violence; a legacy of an oppressive regime of military dictatorship in Rio and Apartheid in Cape Town. However, the intense socio-economic divisions formed two distinctive urban topographies layered on the geographic conditions of the two cities. In Cape Town geographical and social distance converge, whereas in Rio de Janeiro geographical and social distance diverge. This means that while in Rio de Janeiro marginalized neighborhoods border some of the wealthiest neighborhoods of Brazil, shootings in Favelas can sometimes still be heard by those who can afford to sit in their roof terrace swimming pools. In contrast, Cape Town is marked not only by deep racialized segregation, which reflects decades of separate urban planning. Another contrast can be found with the effects of sporting mega events held by both cities. The sport mega events of the FIFA World Cup in 2010 in Cape Town had a limited impact on urban transformation, whereas the FIFA World Cup 2014 and the Olympic Games 2016 in Rio pronounced and reshaped urban development drastically. In Rio the two events catalyzed a top-down remodeling of the city at a rapid pace, which in turn provoked widespread protests and outrage in 2013. Rio de Janeiro witnessed an explosive growth of video activism during the Jornadas de Junho²¹ in 2013 – a wave of protests during the FIFA Confederations

- 21 For an overview about the Jornadas de Junho see for example: Frechette, *Copa Pra Quem? Olimpíadas Pra Quem? Arte e Megaeventos Esportivos No Rio de Janeiro – Contranarrativas Na Cidade Turística*; Souza and Rodrigues, *Planejamento Urbano e Ativismos Sociais*; Bringel and Pleyers, «Les Mobilisations de 2013 Au Brésil: Vers Une Reconfiguration de La Contestation.»; Glória Gohn, *Manifestações de Junho 2013 No Brasil. E Praças Dos Indignados No Mundo*; Marciato, *Cidades Rebeldes. Passe Livre e as Manifestações Que Tomaram as Ruas Do Brasil*; Moraes et al., *Junho*; Pinheiro, «Nada é Impossível de Mudar»»; Ruediger et al., «June Journeys in Brazil»»; Segurado, «Os Movimentos Sociais e a Internet: A Apropriação Política Do

Cup that swept all over Brazil and mobilized a multitude of citizens from different strata of society. The power of these protests and the biased reporting by corporate media turned the city into a global hub for establishing contemporary forms of video activism. Cape Town presents the contrasting case. Here the student movement RhodesMustFall (RMF)²² had the strongest impact on practices of video activism in 2016/2016, whereas the widespread ›Service Delivery Protests‹ (SDP)²³ struggled to establish video production about their movements, not least due to a lack of internet accessibility. Social movements, hence, reflect social and geographical proximities and distances in both cities.

The core of my argument is that video activist practices have become an essential part in struggles for the concrete utopia of the right to the city. They shape the cities from which they emerge and they are being formed by the sites of their emergence. The new ubiquity of smartphones and SLR cameras as well as social media accounts enables more urban movements and urban citizens than ever to audio-visually document their struggles for emancipation and capture moments of power abuse and oppression by authorities on camera. The evidencing of police violence, creation of counter-hegemonic narratives and amplifying of voices through videos, however, needs to be grasped by embedding the concrete video activist practices in their specific urban situatedness. In fact, as the case of Rio shows convincingly, it matters to grasp the cathartic moment of popular protests during the Jornadas and the importance to confront biased media reporting to trigger a collective video activist organization. With the availability of smartphones and social media the occupation of squares and other central urban spaces is increasingly being complemented by movements' digital media production. Even though, the new tools augmented the possibilities for communicative ›autogestion‹²⁴ – self-governance – for urban social movements and

Facebook Durante as Jornadas de Junho«; Teixeira, »As Manifestações de Junho e a Política No Brasil Contemporâneo: Um Convite Ao Debate.«

- 22 For studies about the RhodesMustFall and the related FeesMustFall movement see for example: Boersema, »Re-Racing South Africa: Rhodes Must Fall as Antiracist Movement«; Bosch, »Twitter Activism and Youth in South Africa: The Case of #RhodesMustFall«; Duncan and Frassinelli, »The Right to Protest? An Account of Human Rights Violations during #FeesMustFall, #OccupyUJ and #EndOutsourcing Protests at the University of Johannesburg«; Dawson, »Protest, Performance and Politics: The Use of ›nano Media‹ in Social Movement Activism in South Africa«; Ahmed, »The Rise of Fallism: #RhodesMustFall and the Movement to Decolonize the University.«
- 23 Bringel and Domingues, *Global Modernity and Social Contestation*.
- 24 The notion of autogestion is one of the central elements in Lefebvre's thinking about concrete utopias, which nevertheless presents itself as a difficult and conflictual claim (Lefebvre, »Theoretical Problems of Autogestion«).

urban citizens, the role of corporate social media channels – YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter and others – should not be underestimated in designing the newly emerging topographies of visibility. The video activism that my empirical investigation describes finds video activists confronting challenging contradictions. For example, they aim at amplifying the »cry and demand«²⁵ for the right to the city while at the same time depending on corporate social media that colonialize and exploit user data. Video activism practically has to deal with this contradiction while working towards a horizon of emancipation. By applying the concept of the right to the city to the video activist movements, I develop the notion of *utopian practices of video activism* in my work to describe how filming protests and police violence has become a form of bottom-up city making in the early twenty-first century.

Structure of the Book

The writing is organized into four parts. The first part presents the framework for my analysis by discussing the conceptual and methodological approaches. The second part contextualizes bottom-up video production and its protagonists in Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro, while the third develops my analysis of video production. The fourth and final part concludes the book by proposing to conceptualize bottom-up video making as a form of utopian practices.

Chapter Two outlines the theoretical framework. My analysis approaches video activist practices as tools in a struggle for the right to the city, situating video activism within a digital-urban nexus that plays out simultaneously on the »streets« and in the »net«. Chapter Three translates this framework into a research design with corresponding methodologies for data collection and analysis. The second part explores the context in which video activist practices in Cape Town and Rio developed. Chapter Four therefore examines the specificities of the urban spaces and urban movements in both cities, while Chapter Five introduces the protagonists behind the cameras and analyzes the media landscapes in which they operate.

The third part (Chapter Six to Eight) turns to an analysis of video activism itself by exploring the experiences of bottom-up video production.

Mark Purcell describes autogestion as utopian horizon of the right to the city: »Autogestion and democracy are always constituted by a movement toward a horizon, an ongoing project for people to increasingly manage their affairs for themselves« (Purcell, »The Right to the City: The Struggle for Democracy in the Urban Public Realm,« 318)«.

25 Lefebvre, *Right to the City*, 158.

Concrete examples of videos are employed here to illuminate certain aspects of practicing video activism. Chapter Six investigates the practices of recording videos. By systematizing the wide range of videos of protests and police violence into a heuristic typology of activist, witness, and journalist videos, a vocabulary for the ensuing analysis is introduced. This typology allows for a more nuanced understanding of how videographers relate to events – as involved insiders (activist videos), unpredictable spectators (witness videos), or professional outsiders (journalist videos) – and enables a categorization of three forms of video making in relation to their potential for bottom-up city making through emancipatory audio-visual production.

Chapter Seven shifts attention from video production on the ground to the dissemination of videos online. It analyzes the emerging topographies of visibility and the unequal distribution of attention in the digital sphere. While a few videos go viral, the vast majority remain unseen – especially videos of peaceful protest marches. The chapter explores how activist, witness, and journalist videos circulate differently, and how their visibility is shaped by platform algorithms, media gatekeepers, and the graphic nature of their content. It also examines the tactics and strategies employed by video activist collectives to navigate or resist the constraints of corporate social media, including opaque moderation mechanisms and the dominance of commercial content. These dynamics reveal the contradictions of relying on platforms that simultaneously enable and limit bottom-up communication.

Chapter Eight focuses on violence as video activism's overarching and most dominant theme.²⁶ It begins by examining hegemonic understandings of violence – often used to delegitimize urban movements – and shows how video activist practices seek to counter these narratives. The chapter explores how witness videos help to gather evidence of police violence and how activist videos frame such incidents not as isolated events, but as expressions of systemic, racialized, and class-based oppression. It also reflects on the risks faced by those who record violence, the emotional toll of watching such footage, and the power of audiovisuals to expose everyday repression. The two strategies – creating counter-narratives and documenting evidence – remain central to how bottom-up video production makes repression visible and contributes to struggles for the right to the city.

The final chapter of the book reconnects the dots by linking the research question and theoretical framework to the analysis of the

26 Other works on the use of videos in political struggles likewise emphasize the prevalence of violence as a topic and theme in audio-visual production. See for example: Askanius, »Protest Movements and Spectacles of Death: From Urban Places to Video Spaces«; Razsa, »Beyond ›Riot Porn‹: Protest Video and the Production of Unruly Subjects«.

ethnographic study. The appropriation of new technological tools in the early 2010s opened space for radically democratized, emancipatory forms of communication. This shift enabled urban movements and citizens – especially in Brazil – to circumvent the dominance of ›traditional‹ media hegemony and create new channels for bottom-up communication. Yet, as traditional mass media lost influence, new hegemony such as Google and Facebook emerged. The new gatekeepers' opaque algorithmic calculations, their profit-oriented platform designs, and their global concentration of ownership pose genuine problems for the bottom-up organization of video activism.

The experiments and experiences of video activism in Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro constitute a form of bottom-up knowledge production with critical potential to inform scholars in urban studies, as well as urban planners and practitioners willing to ›listen‹. Through the notion of utopian practices of video activism, this work conceptualizes the recording of protests and police violence as steps toward realizing the concrete utopia of a right to the city. At the end of the book the videography presents key facts about the videos and a list of interviews.²⁷

Today, video activist practices have become increasingly institutionalized and consolidated as a repertoire of contention.²⁸ One decade later, journalism has effectively integrated witness video footage as a source of information; the majority of radically autonomous video activist collectives have either disintegrated or professionalized, giving up some of their radical independence; and new forms of online journalism – as well as the figure of the YouTuber or influencer – have emerged. The institutionalization²⁹ of video activism is an ongoing process, and new technologies

27 While the list of interviews is ordered chronologically, the videography followed the sequence of the videos mentioned, although this chronologically is not strict after text revisions.

28 The New York based NGO Witness is a key player in the field of institutionalizing video activist practices globally. With more than a decade of engagement in the field and a significant budget, they played a crucial role in connecting local video activist initiatives. Sandra Ristovska has closely examined the role of NGOs and their mediating position between international law institutions, journalism, and grassroots video activism. What she describes as a proxy profession, is the increasing push to adapt to institutionalized logics. The NGOization as it can partially be seen in the South African context has its own ambivalences. For Ristovska's book and a review see: Ristovska, *Seeing Human Rights*; Geuder, ›Review: Seeing Human Rights‹.

29 In a sociological sense, the notion of institutionalization designates the development of routinized practices that reiterate shared meanings and roles. The resulting patterns of interpretation and ›rules‹ are implicitly taken for granted and hardly formalized in video activist practices, since ›a sense

– especially the capacity of AI to cheaply produce deepfakes – as well as new urban movements, may further transform it. By examining the period from 2010 to 2018 in both Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro, we can witness the roots of digital video activism and how it has (re-)shaped the relationship between movements and their media, as well as influenced the use of social media as a channel for political communication from the bottom up. Videos of protests and police violence show how emancipatory urban movements may multiply the cries and demands for a right to the city when audio-visually pointing to their repression. In doing so, videographers constantly oscillate between here and there, between the streets and the net, between power and vulnerability, when documenting the struggles over the right to the city.

emerges and is sustained that there is a right way of doing things« (Nicolini, »Practice Theory as a Package of Theory, Method and Vocabulary: Affordances and Limitations,« 318).



Fig. 3 Cine na Rua [Cinema on the Street]

2. Conceptualizing the Simultaneity of the ›Streets‹ and the ›Net‹

›Only groups, social classes and class fractions capable of revolutionary initiative can take over and realize to fruition solutions to urban problems. [...] The first thing to do is to defeat currently dominant strategies and ideologies.«¹

Social movements are agents of change that trigger social transformations. Throughout history, social movements have challenged ›conventional wisdom‹ and proven their power to pave the way for alternatives – even when power-holders have argued that there is no alternative (TINA).² For Robin D.G. Kelley, ›[c]ollective social movements are incubators of new knowledge‹.³ But knowledge production inspired by revolutionary movements transcends these social movements themselves. Stephen Shukaitis and David Graeber argue that scholars who have aimed to explain the functioning – or, more often, their ›failure‹ – of revolutionary attempts have created some of the most innovative works, such as Karl Marx’s post-1848 writings.⁴

1 Lefebvre, *The Right to the City*, 154.

2 The slogan that ›there is no alternative‹ can be traced back to the government of Margret Thatcher in the UK in the 1980s and has been a consistent argument of neoliberal politics. However, David Graeber emphasized that the massively increased share of ›guard labour‹ to sustain the unsustainable levels of inequality is coming to a breaking point (Graeber, ›A Practical Utopian’s Guide to the Coming Collapse,‹ 29).

3 Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Back Radical Imagination*, 8.

4 Shukaitis and Graeber, *Constituent Imagination*, 17.

Henri Lefebvre and Manuel Castells are two scholars whose work likewise bears the traces of their experiences of revolutionary movements in Paris in 1968 and their subsequent attempts to explain their experiences of the upheavals. Both Lefebvre and Castells focus on the relationship between urban social movements and the media, a relationship which I aim to disentangle conceptually in presenting the theoretical framework for my research. While I argue that Castells' recent works illustrate the problems that can arise from a lack of conceptualization, Lefebvre's oeuvre is well-suited to constructing a conceptual framework for understanding the emancipatory potential of the practices of video activism.

The social contestations examined in my research formed part of the wave of protests that erupted at the beginning of the 2010s, through which digital communication and the occupation of central squares became »the trademarks of contemporary protest culture«.⁵ The »repertoires of contention«⁶ employed by social movements do not strictly distinguish between the ›streets‹ and the ›net‹ since both overlap in practices such as video activism. Consequently, this chapter proposes a conceptual framework that is capable of addressing the simultaneity of the ›streets‹ and the ›net‹.

While the empirical investigation presented in Chapters Four to Eight places activist practices at the center of knowledge production, this chapter builds on the production of academic knowledge. The importance of developing a conceptual framework for examining audio-visual »repertoires of contention« by urban social movements is first illustrated by showing how the »dominant strategies and ideologies«⁷ of knowledge production hamper an understanding of video activism and negatively affect urban movements by misrepresenting their practices. Second, I introduce Lefebvre's *the right to the city*, a concept which forms the lens through which this research places practices of visualizing urban struggles for emancipation at the heart of my analysis. The third section provides a critical conceptualization of digitalization with reference to the work of Christian Fuchs, Jodi Dean, Nick Couldry and Ulises Mejias. Finally, I will turn to the question how my theoretical assumptions aid the understanding of contemporary video activist practices.

5 Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism*, 12.

6 Tilly, *Regimes and Repertoires*.

7 Lefebvre, *The Right to the City*, 154.

2.1 Manuel Castells and Liberal Narratives of Progress through Technology

»It began on the Internet social networks, as these are spaces of autonomy, largely beyond the control of governments and corporations that had monopolized the channels of communication as the foundation of their power, throughout history. [...] From the safety of cyberspace, people from all ages and conditions move toward occupying urban space, on a blind date with each other and with the destiny they wanted to forge [...] The movements spread by contagion in a world networked by the wireless Internet and marked by fast, viral diffusion of images and ideas.«⁸

Andy Merrifield describes Castells' journey from a Marxist scholar to a social movement scholar to one of the »ablest and most eloquent commissar[s]« of Silicon Valley's »gospel« by tracing the epistemological shifts in Castells' writing.⁹ As a student of Henri Lefebvre, Castells had shaken up urban studies in the 1970s through his analysis of his experiences from Paris in 1968. In *The Urban Question*,¹⁰ he drew on the structuralist Marxist Louis Althusser to insist on the primacy of the economic contradictions and consequently class relations that should determine the analysis of the urban. Castells earned great respect through his first book and became one of the key figures in the field of urban studies.¹¹

An epistemological shift occurred when he turned to the study of »urban social movements« in the early 1980s, first in *City, Class and Power*¹² and then in *The City and the Grassroots*.¹³ During this phase, Castells positioned urban social movements as agents of change, which meant swinging the pendulum, by turning away from arguing for structural changes and instead emphasizing the agency of actors.¹⁴ Castells' notion of urban social movements enjoyed a widespread but mostly uncritical adoption by authors who identified with radical political approaches. As Pickvance argues, this was not unproblematic: »The term urban social movement thus entered that subgroup of social science

8 Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, 2.

9 Merrifield, *Metromarxism. A Marxist Tale of the City*, 132.

10 Castells, *The Urban Question: A Marxist Approach*.

11 Merrifield, *Metromarxism. A Marxist Tale of the City*, 114–22.

12 Castells, *City, Class and Power*.

13 Castells, *The City and the Grassroots. A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Movements*.

14 Merrifield, *Metromarxism. A Marxist Tale of the City*, 123–28.

terms which are too easily applied and appear to provide a ready-made analysis but which in fact serve as substitute for thought.«¹⁵ In fact, it is difficult to define urban movements precisely. In this study I approached new social movements that are based in urban spaces and whose claims and demands can be reconciled – or even explicitly reference – emancipatory calls for a right to the city as a concrete utopia.¹⁶

The third epistemological rupture in Castells' work is that which most concerns my research the most and is emblematically inscribed in the thesis of *Networks of Outrage and Hope*: his techno-deterministic description of social media as liberation technologies. Castells, who had become a professor in California at Berkley University in 1979, began to reject his earlier adherence to Althusser, and with it all forms of Marxist theorizing, replacing this with a positivist empiricism. In Castells' trilogy *The Information Age*,¹⁷ which he published from 1996 to 1998, Merrifield argues that ›technology became the new structure, the new God‹ which »now sets terms, puts everything in place, and all else follows, including peoples' identities and political passions.«¹⁸ As such, Castells has transformed himself from a critical Marxist to a proponent of the »gospel« which uncritically praises the Silicon Valley giants. An academic transformation that in the view of Shukaitis and Graeber is a critical feature of the way academic knowledge production tames radical thinking and distances academics from activists.¹⁹ Given that Manuel Castells

- 15 Pickvance, »From Urban Social Movements to Urban Movements: A Review and Introduction to a Symposium on Urban Movements,« 103.
- 16 The openness of the concrete utopia of the right to the city enables a rich set of specific appropriation from the bottom-up as the discussion later in this chapter illustrates. A useful overview of the links between urban movements and the right to the city is provided by Domaradzka, »Urban Social Movements and the Right to the City«. The Rhodes Must Fall student campaign is arguably the furthest removed from the immediate demands typically associated with the right to the city. However, I would argue that its call for decolonization constitutes a clearly emancipatory claim, one that is literally expressed in the demand to transform urban space – specifically, through the removal of the statue of Cecil Rhodes at the University of Cape Town. Stefan Kipfer and Kanisha Goonewardena offer an interesting discussion on the possibility and problems when aiming to combine Lefebvre's work with decolonial writings such as Frantz Fanon or Aimé Césaire (Kipfer and Goonewardena, »Henri Lefebvre and ›Colonization‹: From Reinterpretation to Research«).
- 17 Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society: The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*.
- 18 Merrifield, *Metromarxism. A Marxist Tale of the City*, 131.
- 19 Graeber and Shukaitis draw on a comparison of Jean Baudrillard and Guy Debord to argue that authors like Baudrillards who retreat in theoretical debates are warmly welcomed in liberal academic contexts in the USA and

is one of the most cited authors²⁰ in the social sciences and has consequently had a critical influence on discourses in the three most important fields for my research – urban studies, social movement studies and digital media studies – his research deserves attention as it exemplifies potential pitfalls in studying video activist practices.

Castells' impressive empirical study *Networks of Outrage and Hope* draws on all three fields of expertise to discuss in detail »the new forms of social movements and protests that are erupting in the world today, from the Arab Spring to the *indignadas* movement in Spain, from Occupy Wall Street movement to the social protests in Turkey, Brazil and elsewhere«. ²¹ Castells recent study and reading of the revolutionary moments in at the beginning of the 2010s is problematic in three ways, as I will argue. At first its empirical grounds are shaky, secondly it reiterates a liberal narrative of progress through technology and thirdly implicitly re-imposes the binary of online and offline.

Castells claims that the contemporary wave of protests »began on the Internet«. ²² Although the breadth of empirical evidence that Castells offers is impressive, Christian Fuchs argues that his »formulated hypotheses are highly speculative«. ²³ For Fuchs, »empirical results deconstruct the myth that the Arab Spring was a social media revolution, a Twitter revolution, a Facebook revolution or a revolution 2.0«. ²⁴ To counter Castells Fuchs presents evidence of the over-exaggeration of social media's role in social mobilization. For example, only just over a quarter of Egyptians (26.4%) had internet access in December 2011. ²⁵ A quantitative study from the Tahrir Project found that 93% of respondents cited face-to-face as the most important form of communication, in contrast to only 42% who did so for Facebook. ²⁶ This is not to say that social

elsewhere, while scholars that demand radical change and make »calls to action« are seen with suspicion. (Shukaitis and Graeber, *Constituent Imagination*, 23). An argument that seems to apply to Manuel Castells' later works too.

20 Social Science Citation Index, »Relative Ranking of a Selected Pool of Leading Scholars in Communication by Number of Citations in the Social Science Citation Index, 2000-2017.«

21 Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, Book cover.

22 Castells, 2

23 Fuchs, »Some Reflections on Manuel Castells' Book ›Networks of Outrage and Hope. Social Movements in the Internet Age,« 795.

24 Fuchs, 790.

25 Fuchs, 782.

26 This study by Wilson and Dunn offered respondents the possibility to tick multiple options in the survey. The quantitative study concluded that although social media mattered, they are insufficient to explain the mobilization of organized social movements (Wilson and Dunn, »Digital Media in the Egyptian Revolution: Descriptive Analysis from the Tahrir Data Sets«).

media does not matter, but it might not have been there on the internet where social movements began.

This leads to a second problem that confronts Manuel Castells, who envisions the internet as a sphere of public debate. His liberal narrative of the internet as an »autonomous space«²⁷ that promotes democratization and freedom has gained enormous traction in academia, but it has failed to question the hegemony of social media corporations. Instead of critically reflecting on the vested interests and ownership structures of the corporate social media, Castells becomes another »evangelist of social media«.²⁸ Castells' lack of theoretical depth in conceptualizations lends itself to misinterpretations of events like the Arab Spring and runs the danger of naturalizing the dominant positions of corporate social media by reiterating liberal narratives of progress through technology.²⁹ Fuchs sees Manuel Castells use of social theory as deeply problematic.³⁰ Rather than a »weak spot« in his work, Castells' neglect of social theory in *Networks of Outrage and Hope* appears to be a »blind spot«.³¹ This has been a problem since his third epistemological shift, which promoted conceptual notions such as »network society« or of »communication power« without a sufficiently clarified theoretical framing as Andy Merrifield argues.³² Media scholar Christian Fuchs criticizes the empiricism of Castells more harshly, when he argues that Castells' »approach is neither a social theory nor adequately theoretically grounded, but rather an arbitrary and unsystematic form of conceptualizing and a collection of observations«.³³

However, I argue that the major conceptual limitation of Castells' arguments lies deeper, namely in his theoretical positioning of the ›online‹ or the ›internet‹ in the »space of flows« that is opposed to the physical »space of places«. In the *Information Age*, Castells develops a binary distinction reverberating with divisions such as digital/analog, virtual/real and online/offline.³⁴ Dichotomies such as these constituted the

27 Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, 2.

28 Gladwell 2010, »Small Change. Why the Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted.«

29 Fuchs, *Social Media*, 787–88.

30 Fuchs, »Some Reflections on Manuel Castells' Book ›Networks of Outrage and Hope. Social Movements in the Internet Age.« For a broader critique of Castells' concepts of communication power and mass self-communication, see also Fuchs, *Social Media*, 72–85.

31 Fuchs, »Some Reflections on Manuel Castells' Book ›Networks of Outrage and Hope. Social Movements in the Internet Age,« 782–85.

32 Merrifield, *Metromarxism*. 123–28.

33 Fuchs, *Social Media*, 72.

34 See, for example, Laer and Aelst, »Internet and Social Movement Action Repertoires.«; Langman, »From virtual public spheres to global justice: a critical theory of internetworked social movements«; Ogan, Giglou and

»dominant strategies and ideologies« which Lefebvre questioned.³⁵ Dichotomous thinking relies heavily on value-laden binaries. For instance, examples of binaries popularized during colonial times include culture/nature, mind/body, modern/traditional, civilized/savage and urban/rural. » As James and Manda contend, the problem with the »deployment of binary logic both as an epistemological device and as an ontology« is that it is always in danger of re-imposing a divide between the »civilized« and »uncivilized«, with the former label reserved for the »self« and the latter attached to the »other«.³⁶ Ulises Mejias sees in »these kinds of arguments [that] essentialize [...] the online and offline worlds as two distinct realms of reality, with no intersection between the two social realms«, a major flaw in efforts to theorize digitalization.³⁷

Having long researched the city, urban movements and digitalization, Castells would seem like a perfect guide for me in my attempts to approach my field of study from a conceptual perspective; however, this is not the case. First, Castells' techno-determinism, which uncritically celebrates the »Internet social networks as [...] spaces of autonomy«, runs the risk of repeating modernization narratives and ending in a simplistic »technological utopia«.³⁸ Second, the empiricism that Castells promotes serves the neo-capitalist political interests of social media corporates.

There is a need for theory to explain the use of audio-visual tools by contemporary urban social movements. The next two sections aim to establish this conceptual ground for my empirical study into the emancipatory potentials of video activism. Here, Lefebvre's writings will provide the foundation to develop a theorization of video activist practices that enables their grounding within his theory of the »production of space« to avoid falling into the trap of dichotomous and fragmented conceptions of space. Furthermore, Lefebvre offers the emancipatory claim of a right to the city, a concept which since its initial publication in 1968 has been effectively tested by social movements and theoretically developed by scholars. However, Lefebvre, who died in 1991, was not in a position to provide a conceptualization of digitalization. The next section therefore presents first Lefebvre's contributions to theorize urban spaces and the right to the city as a concrete utopia in section 2.2, before looking at current theories on digitalization in section 2.3, and how to interweave these two threads of theorizing urbanization and digitalization in section 2.4.

d'Haenens, »The Relationship between Online and Offline Participation in a Social Movement: Gezi Park Protests in the Diaspora.«

35 Lefebvre, *The Right to the City*, 154.

36 Jones and Manda, »Violence and »Othering« in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa,« 198.

37 Mejias, *Off the Network*, 57.

38 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 8–9.

2.2 Henri Lefebvre Theorizing Space

»Capitalism and neocapitalism have produced abstract space, which includes the ›world of commodities‹, its ›logic‹ and its worldwide strategies, as well as the power of money and that of the political state. [...] Within this space the town [...] has disintegrated.«³⁹

»If space is a product, our knowledge of it must be expected to reproduce and expound the process of production.«⁴⁰

»A revolution that does not produce a new space has not realized its full potential; indeed it has failed in that it has not changed life itself;«⁴¹

In the following sections, I introduce the oeuvre of the French sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre. A »utopian intellectual *engagé*«, Lefebvre »moved with the times yet helped shape and defy these times.«⁴² He intensively struggled with the French Communist Party – from which he was expelled in 1956 – mingled with the Situationist International movement in the 1960s,⁴³ was involved in the May 1968 movements⁴⁴ and had fought as a partisan during the Second World War in the Pyrenees. Lefebvre sought to permanently confront theory with practice and vice versa.⁴⁵ As humanist Marxist, he wrote over 60 books touching on philosophy, sociology, geography and history and

39 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 53.

40 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 36.

41 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 54.

42 Merrifield, *Henri Lefebvre: A Critical Introduction*, XXIV.

43 In 1957, Lefebvre lectured a course at Nanterre University in which his then teaching assistant Jean Baudrillard. During this time, he also met the much younger Guy Debord and Raul Vaneigem, who became key figures of the International Situationists art movement. A close friendship between the four men developed (Shukaitis and Graeber 2007, *Constituent Imagination*, 21–22).

44 Lefebvre wrote an interesting but often neglected discussion about the ›moments‹ of contestation and their spontaneity shaping protests in Paris in May 1968 in his book *The Explosion. Marxism and the French Upheaval*. This epochal moment impacted his further thinking during the phase of 1968 to 1974 when he focused attention on urban space.

45 Having grown up in the small town of Navarrenx, close to the Pyrenees – before moving to Paris in the late 1960s – Lefebvre fought a bitter struggle with the French Communist Party over its dogmatism, which led to his expulsion from the party. The debates and close relationship that he had with Debord and other members of the Situationist International artistic

offering »brilliant analyses on dialectics and alienation, everydaylife and urbanism.«⁴⁶

The reception of Lefebvre's oeuvre can be divided into three waves.⁴⁷ First, Lefebvre's writings were interpreted within a French context as unorthodox Marxist social analysis while being sidelined in English-language academic debates by the influence of Manuel Castells.⁴⁸ Thanks to translations of Lefebvre's major works into English in the 1990s,⁴⁹ his ideas then spread into the Anglophone academic community, where they were first received as post-modern and post-structuralist. This type of reading was inclined to displaying a »reductionist tendency« in its interpretations, such as in the writings of the post-structuralist Edward Soja.⁵⁰ The third wave of responses to Lefebvre has been to engage his theories in an »independent and open debate«,⁵¹ which has produced numerous insightful applications of his ideas to empirical contexts. My conceptual approach to research is based on Lefebvre and aims to be positioned in the third wave of Lefebvre interpretations.

My goal is to use the theoretical foundations of Lefebvre's work and transpose them to my empirical study of video activism. The next three sections thus elaborate on Lefebvre's theorizing and how this is translated into my conceptual approach by focusing on his writing during the period from 1968 to 1974, when Lefebvre focused his attention on questions of urbanization and space. I start with a discussion of *The Production of Space* (1974), before turning to *The Urban Revolution* (1970) and the essay *The Right to the City* (1968). This reverse reading of Lefebvre's publications allows me to proceed from the theoretical and abstract claims in the *Production of Space* to the more concrete and political propositions found in his earlier works and their interpretations.

revolutionary movement significantly influenced his ideas, such as those on the importance of the »moment« and »fête«.

46 Merrifield, *Henri Lefebvre: A Critical Introduction*, XXI.

47 Schmid, »The Trouble with Henri,«, 28.

48 Schmid, »The Trouble with Henri,« 28.

49 The translation of the right to the city from French to English by Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebos, which was only completed in 1996, was predated by the translation of *The Production of Space* in 1991. The urban revolution was only translated in 2003. The response to these publications in the Anglophone world has been criticized for taking a much narrower view of Lefebvre's work than its reception in German-, Italian-, Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking contexts: Elden, *Understanding Lefebvre*. Theory and the possible.

50 Schmid, »The Trouble with Henri,« 28.

51 Schmid, »The Trouble with Henri,« 28.

From the Science of Space to the Production of Space

»(Social) space is a (social) product.«⁵²

If, as Lefebvre posits, we avoid a »simplistic model of one-to-one or ›punctual‹ correspondence between social actions and social locations«, then »social space works [...] as a tool for analysis of society«. ⁵³ That promise builds on his fundamental claim that »space is a (social) product«, a key assertion with five implications that require closer examination: (1) a rejection of dichotomies and fragmentations of space; (2) an emphasis on recognizing specificity; (3) the importance assigned to practice; (4) methodological considerations of dialectical transduction; and (5) his call to replace the production of abstract spaces with the utopia of differential spaces.

1. Rejecting dichotomies and fragmentations of space implies moving beyond Cartesian models of space as an a priori given, ahistorical three dimensional container, on the one hand, or as interpretations of a multiplicity of spaces that lack theoretical coherence, on the other.⁵⁴ To approach space as a social product means that it becomes possible to analyze spaces as the products of particular modes of production, such as feudalism or capitalism. However, this is a dialectical claim which insists that space is not only the outcome of a mode of production, but also the setting in which a mode of production is formed. As such, a revolution that fails to have a spatial impact remains irrelevant. Moreover, it does not make sense to speak of ›digital spaces‹ nor to make a binary distinction between online and offline spaces. Instead, digitalization as a process must be analyzed in relation to how it affects the production of space and how it is being affected by the spaces in which it is taking place.
2. For Lefebvre, a »second implication is that every society [...] produces a space, its own space«. ⁵⁵ As such, a universal logic which explains the production of all (social) spaces loses its intelligibility; each individual space should instead be examined in its own specificity and in relation to its own history. By recognizing the specificity of (urban) spaces, it becomes possible to explain why the technological innovations that have enabled contemporary video activism produced different different repertoires of audio-visual contention in Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro respectively. Although the tools used for digitalization – fiber-optic cables, computers and

52 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 26.

53 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 34.

54 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 3.

55 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 31.

smartphones, social media platforms – are technically similar in both contexts, they have different effects in the specificity of the contexts in which they are inserted.

3. Lefebvre's third implication is that »social space ›incorporates‹ social action«,⁵⁶ implying that space shapes social practices and vice versa. Space is »both a field of action [...] and a basis of action«.⁵⁷ For Lefebvre, practice must be at the heart of any meaningful analysis. »Au commencement fut l'action«⁵⁸ is a call to oppose static views and for a »praxis« that is always »a venir«, becoming more than being. Practice is the changing of nature, production and creation as well as imaginaries and thought.⁵⁹ My research thus examines the ›doing of video activism‹ rather than merely analyzing the content of videos. My goal is to understand how the practices of filming and watching videos shape political mobilization.
4. Lefebvre's methodological approach builds on transduction and dialectics. With the method of »dialectical transduction« Lefebvre intended to produce a »critique of the concepts through practice; and a critique of practice through concepts.«⁶⁰ In this sense, my research aims to analyze the practices of video activism with concepts which explain how space has been abstracted through neoliberal urbanism and communicative capitalism. And vice versa, the practices of video activism can be employed to expand theories and enrich conceptualizations by examining practices. As Lefebvre contends, »[i]f space is a product, our knowledge of it must be expected to reproduce and expound the process of production.«⁶¹ There is a need for theory in order to avoid Castells' error of re-imposing neoliberal politics through the backdoor of knowledge production.
5. Lefebvre distinguishes between absolute, abstract and differential space as the results of three different modes of production. From a historical perspective, he examines how up until the end of feudalism absolute spaces dominated, before accounting for the transformation from absolute to abstract spaces with reference to the rising

56 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 33.

57 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 191.

58 Lefebvre in: Schmid 2010, *Stadt, Raum und Gesellschaft: Henri Lefebvre und die Theorie der Produktion des Raumes*, 80. Merrifield sees Cartesian thought as static in contrast to the dynamic reasoning of dialectics, which »emphasize[s] process, movement, flow, relations and, more particularly, contradiction« (Merrifield, »Place and Space: A Lefebvrian Reconciliation,« 517).

59 Schmid, *Stadt, Raum und Gesellschaft: Henri Lefebvre und die Theorie der Produktion des Raumes*, 80.

60 Schmid, *Stadt, Raum und Gesellschaft*, 36.

61 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 36.

hegemony of capitalism. Abstract spaces are based on the ideology of exchange value, with the implication that in capitalism »space itself has begun to be bought and sold.«⁶² For Lefebvre, the production of abstract spaces entails a process of »homogenization« and »fragmentation«. Homogenization reduces the quality of a particular place into an abstracted exchange value, while fragmentation produces encapsulated space divided into fenced-off parcels of private property. However, in contrast to the production of abstract spaces the production of differential spaces promises a utopian vision in which the use value of space is prioritized. Those who occupy, inhabit, work and live in a certain space, produce differential spaces, in acts of autogestion – self-management – in which use value is privileged of exchange value. To examine video activism as an emancipatory practice entails a search in contemporary abstract spaces for residues that enable »practicing, or practiced, utopia« to produce differential spaces.⁶³

To read video activist practices as part of the production of urban space is to argue that videos can actually influence political mobilizations and thus transform urban spaces. To analyze both Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro requires that close attention be paid to the particular ways in which video activism is being produced in specific spaces and in turn how these specific spaces produce particular repertoires of audio-visual contention.

The City, the Urban and Urbanization

»Urban space gathers crowds, products in the markets, acts and symbols. It concentrates all these, and accumulates them. To say ›urban space‹ is to say centre and centrality, and it does not matter whether these are actual or merely possible, saturated, broken up or under fire. For we are speaking here of a dialectical centrality.«⁶⁴

After having introduced into Lefebvre's conceptualization of space, this section examines his conceptualization of the urban and proposes a way to integrate digitalization in discourses on urbanization. The book *The Urban Revolution* starts with a strategic hypothesis: »Society has been completely urbanized. [...] This urbanization is virtual today, but will become

62 Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, 154.

63 Lefebvre, »Theoretical Problems of Autogestion,« 151.

64 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 101.

real in the future.«⁶⁵ Lefebvre then goes on to dissolve the city and call attention to the process of urbanization. This hypothesis, which he formulated in 1970, gained traction in contemporary debates. But if, as Lefebvre envisioned, the city is being superseded, what is taking its place? His answer was a sprawling urban fabric. »This term ›urban fabric‹ [does not] narrowly define the built environment of cities, but all manifestations of the dominance of the city over the countryside,« as Lefebvre argued.⁶⁶

Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid observe how »...the erstwhile boundaries of the city – along those with larger, metropolitan units of agglomeration – are being exploded and reconstituted as new forms of urbanization reshape inherited patterns of territorial organization, and increasingly crosscut the urban/non-urban divide itself.«⁶⁷ The city as an entity conscribed by the medieval stonewalls has become a historical and ideological object.⁶⁸ The dismantlement of the city through the long 1980s has led to its implosion and explosion of the city as an object to study. In their concept of »planetary urbanization«, Brenner and Schmid consequently demand »a radical rethinking of inherited epistemological assumptions regarding the urban and urbanization.«⁶⁹

Lefebvre's metaphor of the urban ›tissue‹ or ›fabric‹ is useful for grasping where to position digitalization in the process of planetary urbanization. I argue that digitalization forms a thread of the urban tissue. It is interwoven into the urban fabric, which it in turn helps to weave. Social media is consequently neither outside of space, as the online/offline dichotomy implies, nor is it a fragment of space. Instead, social media and all other manifestations of digitalization plays into the production of space.

The experience of digitalization has shown that urban centers have not disappeared. Indeed, they have become ever more central nodes of decision-making. This means that even if the ›city‹ has been dissolved as an entity, urbanization continues to produce centralities. In fact, as the nodes of global economic, political and cultural networks have increasingly been knight together ever closer, »global cities« concentrate enormous

65 Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, 1.

66 Lefebvre in: Merrifield, *Henri Lefebvre: A Critical Introduction*, 82.

67 Brenner, *Implosions / Explosions. Towards a Study of Planetary Urbanization*.

68 Wachsmuth argues that Merrifield's end of the city thesis goes too far – since the city remains a major lens through which the urban is perceived – but concedes that it does point to the ideologies that underpin discourses about the city. Wachsmuth identifies the urban-rural divide, the city as coherent entity, and the city as ideal type as three enduring discursive frameworks that may blind studies on urbanization (Wachsmuth, »City as Ideology: Reconciling the Explosion of the City Form with the Tenacity of the City Concept«).

69 Brenner and Schmid, »Towards a New Epistemology of the Urban?«, 151.

power with global effects.⁷⁰ Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro are two such nodes in global networks. To occupy, appropriate and politicize these centers of decision-making thus carries with it the potential for wielding significant power. If digitalization has become an important thread in weaving the contemporary urban fabric, then video activism can play a crucial role in attempts to democratize the centers of decision-making from the bottom-up. The right to the city is a »cry and demand«⁷¹ for access to differential centralities⁷² that as slogan, concept and concrete utopia has inspired experiments in bottom-up city making worldwide.



Fig. 4 *Land for profit, not for people*

The Slogan, Concept and Utopia of the Right to the City

»The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization.«⁷³

In my research, however, I have insisted on taking the right to the city seriously. As a slogan, the right to the city has a unifying capacity that

70 Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*.

71 Lefebvre, *The Right to the City*, 158.

72 Differential centralities are produced in differential space as opposed to the centralities which are produced abstract space.

73 Harvey, »The Right to the City,« 23.

has promoted effective political mobilization since the late 1960s demanding »cities for people, not for profit«.74 Second, the right to the city as a concept offers a profound theoretical framework when integrated with Lefebvre's theories and their continuous development. Finally, the concrete utopia of the right to the city can successfully move us beyond ephemeral moments of encounter by pointing towards an emancipatory vision in which differential spaces are produced. This is particularly crucial, because a »revolution that does not produce a new space has not realized its full potential«.75 To discuss the innumerable interpretations76 of the right to the city since the publication of the essay in 1968, the next looks at its use as a slogan, concept and utopia.

From an institutional perspective, the right to the city has served the purpose of agenda-setting. In 2001, it was incorporated into the Brazilian constitution via the »City Statute«,77 while during the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in 2005 a »World Charter on the Right to the City« was adopted.78 However, attempts to institutionalize the right to the city have received considerable criticism. One major critique has been that, by mainstreaming and institutionalizing the right to the city, the

74 The edited volume by Brenner, Marcuse, and Mayer, *Cities for People, Not for Profit*, brings together leading scholars in critical urban theory to discuss the ongoing relevance of the right to the city.

75 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 53.

76 For example: Brenner, Marcuse, and Mayer, *Cities for People, Not for Profit. Critical Urban Theory and The Right to the City*; Fernandes, »Constructing the ›Right to the City‹ in Brazil«; Harvey, »The Right to the City,«; Huchzermeyer, »The Legal Meaning of Lefebvre's the Right to the City: Addressing the Gap between Global Campaign and Scholarly Debate«; Lopes de Souza, »Which Right to Which City? In Defense of Political-Strategic Clarity: Response to Harvey«; Marcuse, »Rights in Cities and the Right to the City?«; Mitchell, *The Right to the City*; Merrifield, »The Right to the City and Beyond«; Morange and Spire, »A Right to the City in the Global South?«; Parnell and Pieterse, »The ›Right to the City‹: Institutional Imperatives of a Developmental State«; Purcell, »The Right to the City: The Struggle for Democracy in the Urban Public Realm«; Samara, He, and Chen, »Locating Right to the City in the Global South«; Schmid, »Henri Lefebvre, the Right to the City, and the New Metropolitan Mainstream; Sugranyes and Mathivet, *Ciudades para tod@s*; Shaw and Graham, »An Informational Right to the City? Code, Content, Control, and the Urbanization of Information«; Mullis, *Recht Auf Die Stadt: Von Selbstverwaltung Und Radikaler Demokratie*; Uitermark, Nicholls, and Loopmans, »Cities and Social Movements: Theorizing beyond the Right to the City.«

77 Cities Alliance, »The City Statute of Brazil. A Commentary.«

78 Brown and Kristiansen, »Urban Policies and the Right to the City: Rights, Responsibilities and Citizenship.«

idea has been co-opted. As such, the »vulgarization and domestication« of Lefebvre's concept is easily turned into a catchy »umbrella phrase« as Lopes de Souza argues.⁷⁹ Without questioning the logic of capitalism, Margit Mayer adds, the right to the city runs the risk of becoming a slogan for »neoliberalism with a human touch«.⁸⁰

However, before the right to the city was incorporated into institutional settings, social movements all over the world had repeatedly appropriated it as a slogan and a number of right to the city activist networks have emerged.⁸¹ These include, for example, the Right to the City Alliance in the USA,⁸² the Recht auf Stadt Netzwerk in Hamburg⁸³ or Basel⁸⁴ or Abahlali baseMjondolo in South Africa.⁸⁵ Many of these organizations explicitly relate their political struggles to Lefebvre's radical proposition. At the same time, given its widespread adoption as a slogan, the right to the city has given rise to a diversity of demands.⁸⁶ These range from issues relating to housing and public transport to the basic rights of migrants and the marginalized as urban citizens. Instead of seeing this multiplicity of claims to a right to the city as a weakness or sign of the idea's incoherence,⁸⁷ the manner in which it has been appropriated in a wide variety of contexts can equally be read as a strength of a unifying but flexible call to action.

The enduring relevance of the demand for a right to the city in political struggles in the Global South is particularly noteworthy. For example, there have been interesting attempts to connect the right to the city to questions of decolonization,⁸⁸ although Lefebvre's writings are

79 Lopes de Souza, Marcelo, »Which Right to Which City?«, 316.

80 Mayer, »The ›Right to the City‹ in Urban Social Movements,« 75.

81 Uitermark and Loopmans focus their criticism on the »militant particularism« of much of right to the city activism, speaking to the difficulty of integrating single bottom-up initiatives into networks across cities (Uitermark, Nicholls, and Loopmans, »Cities and Social Movements: Theorizing Beyond the Right to the City«, 2548).

82 Right to the City, Website.

83 Recht auf Stadt, Website.

84 Stadt fuer Alle, Website.

85 Abahlali baseMjondolo, Website.

86 Margit Mayer concludes in her assessment of the appropriation of the right to the city concept by NGOs, IOs and various political movements that »there are worlds of distance lying between the struggles in the global North and South« (Mayer, »The ›Right to the City‹ in Urban Social Movements,« 80).

87 For Merrifield, Lefebvre's vision of a right to the city is »too vast and at the same time too narrow« (Merrifield, »The Right to the City and Beyond,« 478). Instead, he proposes to replace the right to the city with his concept of *The Politics of the Encounter*.

88 Kipfer and Goonewardena, »Henri Lefebvre and ›Colonization‹: From Re-interpretation to Research.«

undoubtedly characterized by a strong Eurocentric bias. Nevertheless, the richness of debates about the right to the city illustrate the relevance of the slogan to Brazilian and South African contexts.⁸⁹

The right to the city as a concept has provoked a number of responses and promising conceptual proposals. These include a »right to rights«,⁹⁰ a »right to visibility«,⁹¹ a »right to centrality«,⁹² a »right to space« itself,⁹³ and a »right to difference«. ⁹⁴ To capture the essence of the right to the city as a concept, I will highlight three lines of argument: urban citizenship, commons, and autogestion.

(1) Urban citizenship demands a »right to rights«, namely the recognition of all urban residents as citizens.⁹⁵ This is a form of citizenship independent of nationality, granted to an individual on the basis of living in any particular place.⁹⁶ While in the Global North this debate has mostly arisen in relation to migration and sanctuary cities,⁹⁷ in urban areas in the Global South it is closely related to calls for a basic »dignity«. For example, Branch and Mampilly see calls for dignity and the existential recognition of marginalized urban citizens – whom they label »political society« in reference to

- 89 Fernandes, »Constructing the ›Right to the City‹ in Brazil«; Lopes de Souza, »Together with the State, despite the State, against the State. Social Movements as ›Critical Urban Planning‹ Agents«; Lopes de Souza, »Which Right to Which City?«; Sugranyes and Mathivet, *Ciudades para tod@s*; Huchzermeyer, »Humanism, Creativity and Rights: Invoking Henri Lefebvre's Right to the City in the Tension Presented by Informal Settlements in South Africa Today«; Parnell and Pieterse, »The ›Right to the City‹: Institutional Imperatives of a Developmental State.«
- 90 Holston, »Insurgent Citizenship in an Era of Global Urban Peripheries.«
- 91 Jaguaribe, *Rio de Janeiro. Urban Life through the Eyes of the City*, 225.
- 92 Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, 194.
- 93 Schmid, »Henri Lefebvre, the Right to the City, and the New Metropolitan Mainstream,« 49.
- 94 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 64.
- 95 Plyustehva offers a nuanced discussion of the relationship between urban citizenship and Lefebvre's right to the city. Particularly helpful are the differences which she identifies between the respective interpretations by Mark Purcell, David Harvey and James Holston (Plyushteva, »The Right to the City and Struggles over Urban Citizenship: Exploring the Links«).
- 96 Chris Butler sees in the right to the city »the basis for asserting new forms of spatial citizenship« legitimized by residents' presence in urban areas (Butler, *Henri Lefebvre: Spatial Politics, Everyday Life and the Right to the City*).
- 97 In some cities in Europe and the USA, urban citizenship cards function as a bottom-up approach to redefining citizenship in the face of repressive national legislation.

Chatterjee⁹⁸ – as a defining characteristic of a cycle of contestation in sub-Saharan Africa since the mid-2000s.⁹⁹ Whether labeled as »insurgent citizenship«¹⁰⁰ or urban citizenship, its promised guarantee of a ›right to rights‹ to everyone and de facto has become a defining property of the right to the city.¹⁰¹

- (2) The right to the city is a struggle against the production of the city as an abstract space as well as an insistence on the primacy of use value over exchange value. Current urban development policies, however, seek to promote abstract space as the dominant mode of production by prioritizing, for example, capital investment strategies over the needs of urban dwellers; the re-modelling of city centers for the benefit of tourists and in the interest of marketing strategies; the construction of expensive flagship architectural projects; the cutting of funding for social expenditure; the eviction of settlements; the construction of gated communities; gentrification; discriminatory migration regimes; the privatization of public space; and/or the militarization and securitization of cities. Such developments are opposed by right to the city movements worldwide since they impose commodification instead of allowing a bottom-up production of commons.¹⁰²
- (3) As a collective right, the right to the city demands that urban citizens be able to participate in and appropriate the urban spaces in which they live. As such, the right to the city is not an individual or juridical right,¹⁰³ but »an ongoing and collective struggle by urban inhabitants to manage the city for themselves, without the state and without capitalism«.¹⁰⁴ According to this vision, urban citizens should occupy the centers of decision-making and develop their own forms of radical democracy from the bottom-up.¹⁰⁵ Such acts

98 Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed*; Chatterjee, *Displacement, Revolution, and the New Urban Condition*.

99 Branch and Mampilly, *Africa Uprising*.

100 Holston, *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil*.

101 Mayer, »The ›Right to the City‹ in Urban Social Movements,« 71; Purcell, »Excavating Lefebvre: The Right to the City and Its Urban Politics of the Inhabitant,« 102.

102 Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to Urban Revolution*.

103 Fernandes explores the practical possibilities and experiences with translating the right to the city into juridical law in Brazil (Fernandes, »Constructing the ›Right to the City‹ in Brazil«).

104 Purcell, »The Right to the City: The Struggle for Democracy in the Urban Public Realm,« 311.

105 Daniel Mullis wrote his dissertation on how the right to the city as a concept can be compared to and effectively combined with the appeals for

of autogestion or self-governance would help to create an »opening towards the possible«. ¹⁰⁶ It is in this sense that Lefebvre's right to the city is a »right to centrality« ¹⁰⁷ and a »right to space« itself. ¹⁰⁸

Under the premise that use value should guide the production of (urban) space, the right to the city challenges capitalist and neo-liberal developments in urban planning with the aim of »fundamentally shifting control away from capital and the state and toward urban inhabitants.« ¹⁰⁹ The urban commons can play a potentially significant role as a series of experimental sites for producing differential (urban) space, in which urban citizens and use value are privileged over the abstraction of space and an emphasis on exchange value. ¹¹⁰ Acts of autogestion give »primacy to use value« ¹¹¹ and can be seen as a meaningful strategy towards realizing the utopian goal of producing differential rather than abstract spaces.

The right to the city is a concrete utopia. It presents a radical vision of emancipation ¹¹² in the form of a multifaceted »cry and demand« ¹¹³ that has already been tested in a variety of contexts worldwide. Ultimately, the right to the city is understood in this work as a utopian appeal for all urban citizens to have access to a differential centrality. This means, above all, that all urban citizens – regardless of their race, class or gender – should be able to access urban centralities. However, the claim to a right to the city does not end here, but goes on to demand a transformation of urban centralities themselves from abstract spaces, in which access to centers of decision-making are reserved for a few in the global system, to differential centralities, in which urban inhabitants have the autonomy and power to decide over the (production of) the spaces that they use.

The utopian vision of a right to the city breaks with two main traditions in utopian thought: the portrayal of utopia as an island and the fantasy of technological utopias. In 1516, Thomas More depicted the

radical democracy made by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemonie Und Radikale Demokratie: Zur Dekonstruktion Des Marxismus*).

106 Lefebvre, »Theoretical Problems of Autogestion,« 150.

107 Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, 194.

108 Schmid, »Henri Lefebvre, the Right to the City, and the New Metropolitan Mainstream,« 2012, 49.

109 Purcell, »Excavating Lefebvre: The Right to the City and Its Urban Politics of the Inhabitant,« 101 f.

110 David Harvey provides a detailed discussion of the role of the commons and the »scale question« (Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to Urban Revolution*.)

111 Lefebvre, »Theoretical Problems of Autogestion,« 148.

112 Lopes de Souza, »Which Right to Which City?«, 318 ff.

113 Lefebvre, *The Right to the City*, 158.

classical utopia as an island of perfection far removed from any known place. The term is derived from the Greek »ou-topos«, which literally means »no-place« or »nowhere«, raising the question of whether such a »perfect world [can] be realized?«¹¹⁴ The second common utopian representation involves »technological utopias«, in which technological innovations are seen as the means of creating a supposedly better world. This strand of utopian thought is historically connected to modernization narratives which claim that better tools and technologies will ultimately lead to a better life and society for all. Manuel Castells, who proclaims the internet as the driver of progress in his *Networks of Outrage and Hope*,¹¹⁵ thus reiterates this technological utopian philosophy.

For Henri Lefebvre, like for many other Marxist scholars, utopian thinking is important.¹¹⁶ However, his utopian vision of a right to the city is neither insular nor technological. Instead, Lefebvre follows in Ernst Bloch's tradition of »concrete utopias«.¹¹⁷ Initially, this appears to be a contradiction in terms, not only because it goes against the old Greek meaning of the term but also because it presents utopias as tangible and material rather than idealistic. However, Lefebvre knowingly embraced these contradictions. As Eric Olin Wright explains his seminal work *Real Utopias* that utopian thinking matters, because practices are »grounded in the belief that what is pragmatically possible is not fixed independently of our imaginations, but is itself shaped by our visions«.¹¹⁸ I thus argue that the right to the city as concrete utopia has the potential to function as a ›guidebook for emancipation‹ offering important clues in developing the emancipatory potential of video activism in the early twenty-first century.

2.3 Interweaving the Digital Thread into the Urban Fabric

To design a conceptual framework that is able to describe the use of audio-visual repertoires of contention by urban social movements is the overall goal of this chapter. The previous section framed video activism

114 British Library. »Utopia«.

115 Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*.

116 Examining the methodologies of three »proto-typical urban theorists« – Walter Benjamin, Manfred Tafuri and Lefebvre – Cunningham argues that Lefebvre sees in utopias an experimental framework which can be employed to practice »transduction« (Cunningham, 2010, »Triangulating Utopia: Benjamin, Lefebvre, Tafuri,« 270).

117 Bloch, *Geist der Utopie*. 16.

118 Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias*, 6.

as a practice in urban space. The next section turns to digitalization as the second key dimension defining video activist practices in the current cycle of contestation. I will first introduce to the visions of techno-utopianism, before looking at three approaches critically questioning digitalization in its current form producing abstract space.

Techno-Utopianism and Techno-Determinism

»Born from the marriage of counterculture idealism and Defense Department funding in the 1960s, the Internet had by 2002 morphed into a vast commercial and government surveillance platform. The goal of Tim Berners-Lee and Stewart Brand – to construct a new platform for democratic communication – had been co-opted by a new cadre of libertarian übermenschen, a group of men who believed that they had both the brilliance and the moral fortitude to operate outside the normal strictures of law and taxes.«¹¹⁹

Researchers repeatedly emphasized how »algorithmic ideologies« reproduce perspectives of Silicon Valley geeks and investors.¹²⁰ Racism, anti-poor policies, fragmentation of public opinion making, the creative destruction of journalism and tax evasion by corporate social media companies are some of its effects.¹²¹ To discuss the role of Silicon Valley ideologies, the next section returns to the techno-utopian visions driving influential actors in the business. Techno-utopianism puts technological progress as the driver of social and political change. This means to disenfranchise political subjectivities and communities and ensure that individual man and their machineries gain control as Peter Thiel – a key figure in the digital tech world of Silicon Valley – puts it:

»We are in a deadly race between politics and technology... The fate of our world may depend on the effort of a single person who builds or propagates the machinery of freedom that makes the world safe for capitalism.«¹²²

119 Taplin, *Move Fast and Break Things. How Facebook, Google, and Amazon Cornered Culture and Undermined Democracy*, 85.

120 Mager, »Algorithmic Ideology.«

121 For example, Ruha Benjamin, describes vividly the various forms in which forms of structural racism are reiterated and in some cases intensified through contemporary forms of digitalization dominated by powerful corporations and their technologies (Benjamin, *Race after Technology*).

122 Peter Thiel in: Taplin, *Move Fast and Break Things. How Facebook, Google, and Amazon Cornered Culture and Undermined Democracy*, 75.

The »freedom« that Thiel dreams of is embedded in libertarian thought with Ayn Rand at the forefront of envisioning and her philosophy of Objectivism. Rand has been described by the Ayn Rand Institute as a writer who »spearhead a cultural renaissance that will reverse the anti-reason, anti-individualism, anti-freedom, anti-capitalist trends in today's culture.«¹²³ Rand's ideology had a »significant impact on politics and on business in the latter twentieth and early twenty-first centuries« particularly on leaders in the Silicon Valley such as Tesla's Eon Musk, Facebook's Marck Zuckerberg or Google's Eric Schmidt.¹²⁴ Ayn Rand ideas matter in Silicon Valley. As Jodi Dean observed as early as 2009, the ideological neoliberal visions – based on techno-utopianism and libertarian thinking – provide the frame to legitimize the concentration of power and wealth in the hands of a few:

»Rhetoric of access, participation, and democracy work ideologically to secure the technological infrastructure of neoliberalism, an invidious and predatory politico-economic project that concentrates assets and power in the hands of the very, very rich, devastating the planet and destroying the lives of billions of people.«¹²⁵

This global concentration poses major challenge for bottom-up video activism and emancipatory struggles. The utopian visions that key actors like Peter Thiel drive are not only disseminated by funding the Ayn Rand Institute, but are very practically being developed. Silicon Valley elites are in fact working on exclusive utopias – technologized and artificial islands – that appear as today's version of a five-hundred-year-old utopian vision: Thomas More's island of utopia.¹²⁶ In fact the Seasteading Institute actively plans and designs high-tech islands for the superfluous.¹²⁷

Exploitation and Commodification in Digital Capitalism

The internet – or, more specifically, Web 2.0 – has yet to be sufficiently theorized, as Daniel Trotter and Christian Fuchs contend: »Thus far, social theory foundations of social media activity have been underrepresented

123 Homepage of Ayn Rand Institute in: Katz, »Reimagining a Cultural Labor Movement through Education,« 31.

124 Murname, *Ayn Rand and the Posthuman. The Mind-Made Future*, 82.

125 Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies*, 23.

126 At the beginning of the sixteenth century, Thomas More, published an essay that describes a ›perfect‹ island where his ideals of justice, peace and the ›good life‹ were realized (More, *Utopia*).

127 The visions inscribed into Seasteading appear as a technologized and depoliticized version of Moro's original ideas (Seasteading Institute, »Website«).

in scholarly literature. «¹²⁸ Building a conceptualization of digital capitalism through a Marxist perspective, Fuchs aims to decipher the functioning of social media corporations. For him, theories about Web 2.0¹²⁹ that reduce social media functions to a purely cultural dimension are blind to the political and economic impact of social media corporations.

Whereas Henry Jenkins characterizes Web 2.0 as a site for unlimited connection and participation as part of a new »convergence culture«, Fuchs and Trottier argue that social media networks offer only a »pseudo-voice« and »pseudo-participation«. ¹³⁰ In fact, the privatization of the internet through social media corporations commodifies personal data and exploits user participation as a form of free labor:¹³¹

»An Internet that is dominated by corporations that accumulate capital by exploiting and commodifying users can never, in the theory of participatory democracy, be participatory and the cultural expressions of it cannot be expressions of participation.«¹³²

Fuchs identifies the dominant operations of social media as commodification and exploitation, which stand in direct contrast to the bottom-up politics demanded by the right to the city. With this critical reading, he positions himself in opposition to the »evangelist[s] of social media«, ¹³³ who propagate the idea that social media is a site of participation, democratization and freedom without mentioning how digital networks reproduce capitalist relations and corresponding socio-economic asymmetries.

128 Fuchs and Trottier, *Social Media, Politics and the State. Protests, Revolutions, Riots, Crime and Policing in the Age of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube*, 48.

129 For a critique of the term Web 2.0 – coined by Tim O’Reilly in 2005 – and the discourses about participation of the Web 2.0, see: Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*, 4–6; Webster, *The Marketplace of Attention*, 152–53.).

130 Fuchs and Trottier, *Social Media, Politics and the State. Protests, Revolutions, Riots, Crime and Policing in the Age of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube*, 27.

131 The »innovative ways« of internet exploitation have consequences beyond the realm of online activity. For example, the internet-driven »gig economy« has impacted entire economic sectors, as witnessed for instance in Uber’s challenge to the taxi industry (Graham and Shaw, »Towards Another World of Gig Work«).

132 Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*, 65.

133 Gladwell, »Small Change. Why the Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted.«

Communicative Capitalism

Jodi Dean agrees with Fuchs on »the necessity of analysing digital media in terms of capitalism and its categories of labour, production, and value rather than, say, bourgeois categories of information«. ¹³⁴ However, her concept of communicative capitalism takes the critique of digital networks a step further. Dean posits that communicative capitalism, through its »inclusion and participation in information, entertainment and communication technologies«, absorbs its critics and strengthens neoliberal hegemonies. ¹³⁵

Drawing on Giorgio Agamben's »alienation of language« and Slavoj Žižek's »post-politics«, Dean identifies a »strange merging of democracy and capitalism«. ¹³⁶ Communicative capitalism »prevents politicization« as »real antagonism or dissent is foreclosed«. ¹³⁷ The digitalized network functions as a system of communication which places the exchange value of messages over their use value; content thus becomes irrelevant in communicative capitalism. What matters is that circulation flows and messages are being exchanged, although they do not necessarily need to attract a response. In this virtual environment, communication serves no goal other than the act of communication itself. The result is an inevitable move towards depoliticization.

In Dean's »psychoanalytic Marxism«, ¹³⁸ participation does not only produce expropriated surplus value for social media corporations, but it is also driven by a fantasy of participation. To articulate political opinions online nurtures our »underlying fantasy wherein technology functions as a fetish covering over our impotence and helping us understand ourselves as active«. ¹³⁹ Joseph Schwartz's criticism of Dean's communicative capitalism model as overly theoretical ¹⁴⁰ inspired her to respond by exploring potentially revolutionary subjects in times of communicative capitalism. ¹⁴¹ Dean is not trapped in a techno-determinism that would lead her to assume that resistance is entirely

134 »Critique or Collectivity? Communicative Capitalism and the Subject of Politics,« 172.

135 Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies*, 2.

136 Dean, »Communicative Capitalism: Circulation and the Foreclosure of Politics,« 55.

137 Dean, »Communicative Capitalism: Circulation and the Foreclosure of Politics,« 56–57.

138 Schwartz, »Review: Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies.«

139 Dean, »Communicative Capitalism: Circulation and the Foreclosure of Politics,« 62.

140 Schwartz, »Review: Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies.«

141 Dean, »Critique or Collectivity? Communicative Capitalism and the Subject of Politics.«

impossible, but she sees the potential for ruptures in the agency of collectives rather than through the acts of individuals. In contrast to the dominant narrative promoted by communicative capitalism, she argues that politicization cannot be an individual act but »requires political organization.«¹⁴² To sustain contestation beyond the moment when crowds start to dissolve and »people go home«¹⁴³ has become an increasingly urgent challenge that must be achieved while resisting the mechanisms of communicative capitalism.¹⁴⁴ Dean shows how social media, as capitalist media, co-opt resistance, instead of rejecting it, by trapping it in exploitative relations. Corporate social media's promised participation in effect preempts emancipatory visions as Jodi Dean argues.

Digital Colonialism

Nick Couldry and Ulises Mejias argue that we are currently witnessing a large-scale dispossession of individuals through a process they call »data colonialism.«¹⁴⁵ For the authors, who consider colonialism and capitalism to have always been complementary movements, data colonialism is not a metaphor:¹⁴⁶

»That frame is colonialism, used here not as a mere metaphor, nor as an echo or simple continuation of historic forms of territorial colonialism, but to refer to a new form of colonialism distinctive of the 21st century: data colonialism. Data colonialism combines the predatory extractive practices of historical colonialism with the abstract quantification methods of computing.«¹⁴⁷

- 142 Dean, »Critique or Collectivity? Communicative Capitalism and the Subject of Politics,« 182.
- 143 Dean, »Critique or Collectivity? Communicative Capitalism and the Subject of Politics,« 176.
- 144 Dean strongly rejects Hardt and Negri's proposition of the multitude as a revolutionary subject, because »[c]omplex networks are not the horizontal, cooperative and autonomous forms that Hardt and Negri imagine.« (Dean, »Critique or Collectivity? Communicative Capitalism and the Subject of Politics,« 181.)
- 145 Couldry and Mejias, *The Costs of Connection: How Data Is Colonizing Human Life and Appropriating It for Capitalism*.
- 146 Data colonialism as a metaphor is discussed by Thatcher, O'Sullivan and Mahmoudi, »Data Colonialism through Accumulation by Dispossession: New Metaphors for Daily Data.«
- 147 Couldry and Mejias, »Data Colonialism: Rethinking Big Data's Relation to the Contemporary Subject,« 1.

Data colonialism naturalizes the extraction of personal data and redefines social relations.¹⁴⁸ Building on a »large amount of ideological work«, data has been defined as »the new oil« at events such as the World Economic Forum. Discursively constructing personal data as a resource that is »just there« in a »terra nullis« legitimizes its extraction in the form of data mining. The human, social and political costs of this extraction are depoliticized via the naturalization of dispossession and thus escape critical debate.¹⁴⁹ To the authors, data colonialism presents itself as »a new phase of colonialism that is deeply intertwined with the long-term development of capitalism«.¹⁵⁰

At the heart of this process is »the abstracting force of the commodity«, which enables the transformation of »life processes into ›things‹ with value«.¹⁵¹ All actions and relations are turned into data points that can be collected, compared and exchanged. Consequently, the commodification of »the whole domain of social life and individual life too«¹⁵² strengthens the power of global capitalism. The imposition of exchange value into all spheres of social life points to the unrestricted expansion and legitimation of these ›colonial‹ endeavors.¹⁵³ Data colonialism is characterized as invasive:

»In the hollowed out social world of data colonialism, data practices invade the space of the self by making tracking a permanent feature of life, expanding and deepening the basis on which human beings can exploit each other.«¹⁵⁴

Drawing on the work of the sociologist Aníbal Quijano, Couldry and Mejias go on to suggest that »epistemological decolonization« presents a potential path out of data colonialist regimes, namely at the point when citizens start rejecting the idea that the translation of their everyday lives into data and the subsequent expropriation of their data traces is a »normal« or »rational« process and instead name it for what it is: »data colonialism«.¹⁵⁵

148 Couldry and Mejias, »Data Colonialism,« 5.

149 Couldry and Mejias, »Data Colonialism,« 6.

150 Couldry and Mejias, »Data Colonialism,« 4.

151 Couldry and Mejias, »Data Colonialism,« 11.

152 Couldry and Mejias, »Data Colonialism,« 10.

153 The use of the historically loaded term ›colonialism‹ as a conceptual category is undoubtedly controversial. Invoking ›colonialism‹ as more than an analogy or metaphor requires further discussion, which differentiates specific historical experiences of European colonial rule on the one side, and the colonization as a concept – see for example Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa. Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*.

154 Couldry and Mejias, »Data Colonialism,« 15.

155 Couldry and Mejias, »Data Colonialism,« 18.



Fig. 5 *The Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted*

Weaving Abstractions and Sharpening Asymmetries

The three approaches to characterizing the digital thread that I have presented above stand in stark contrast to the celebration of the internet as a tool for participation, democracy and liberation. Fuchs, Dean, and Coudry and Mejias write of digital exploitation and commodification, communicative capitalism, and data colonialism respectively to demonstrate the political and economic relations that these processes (re-)produce. For example, participation through social media becomes a form of »pseudo-participation« that precludes users from genuine participation in decision-making processes as well as from ownership of the platforms. As content is abstracted into an exchange value, participation is reduced to delivering raw material in the form of data to the major tech corporations.¹⁵⁶

These methods of dispossessing users of their personal data and integrating this into exchange markets is what Lefebvre called the production of abstract space. Whereas Lefebvre referred to urban planners as the drivers of the abstraction of space, Shaw and Graham see

156 These critical perspectives should not obscure the potential for resistance to forms of digitalization driven by private corporations embedded in capitalist structures. Wikipedia and a number of other online projects have proven that digitalization has great potential to grow the digital commons. Particularly as information is not being consumed in the process of digital dissemination, there is a great capacity to multiply information and consequently making them accessible to vast audiences at low costs.

information and communication technologies (ICTs) as fundamental to these new means of abstracting urban space:

»[T]oday there is a newly dominant source and mediation of such abstract space that permeates the city: the flows of representations produced and mediated through digital information which now contribute to a densely digitally layered urban environment.«¹⁵⁷

Facebook, Google, Apple and other tech corporations have secured dominant positions in the global digitalization race, which they use to drive digitalization towards the production of abstract space. Instead of fostering emancipatory opportunities, they entrench exploitation, impede real participation, and increase socio-economic asymmetries. This is not to say, however, that the digital thread could not be woven differently. The final section of this chapter thus asks what it could mean to ›digitalize the right to the city?‹ Conceptually identifying the fractures in the system enables us to understand where resistance, residues and the rest can be injected to promote disruption and how video activist practices can potentially aid the development of ›concrete utopias‹.

2.4 Digitalizing the Right to the City?

Shaw and Graham argue for a merging of Lefebvre's ›right to Information‹ with his right to the city to establish an ›informational Right to the City‹. They write of a ›densely digitally layered urban environment‹,¹⁵⁸ a concept which is similar to what I have labeled as ›threads of digitalization woven into the urban fabric‹. Reflecting on their short case study of Google, Shaw and Graham insist that ›further developing the concept of an informational right to the city is imperative in order to understand exactly how power is reproduced through code, content, control and the urbanization of information‹.¹⁵⁹ In the final section of this chapter, I will ask what it means to digitalize the right to the city in relation to video activism.

The aim of the chapter was to conceptualize how urban movements ›occupy‹ the ›streets‹ and the ›net‹ simultaneously and to position video activism in this theoretical framework. After arguing that we can interpret protests by urban social movements as resistance to the production of abstract space, the question remains as to what role video activist practices play in these struggles.

157 Shaw and Graham, ›An Informational Right to the City? Code, Content, Control, and the Urbanization of Information,‹ 908.

158 Shaw and Graham, ›An Informational Right to the City?‹, 908.

159 Shaw and Graham, ›An Informational Right to the City?‹, 922.

»Repertoires of contention« is a phrase coined by Charles Tilly to explain the historical shift in the tools and forms of contestation in Great Britain in the period from 1758 until 1834:

»[T]he word repertoire identifies a limited set of routines that are learned, shared, and acted out through a relatively deliberate process of choice. Repertoires are learned cultural creations, but they do not descend from abstract philosophy or take shape as an act of political propaganda; they emerge from struggle.«¹⁶⁰

I contend that video activist practices are audio-visual repertoires of contention employed by urban social movements in their struggles for differential centralities online as well as offline. Tilly compares repertoires of contention to jazz improvisations: both rely on learned crafts but they are both employed in ways which differ according to the circumstances and without following a predefined script.¹⁶¹ As with music, repertoires »always belong to sets of contending actors, not single actors«.¹⁶² As a repertoire of contention, video activism has its historical roots in 1970s community video experiments and thus predates Web 2.0 and the era of digitalization. Nevertheless, its development does correspond closely with earlier technological innovations, such as the first portopak cameras in the late 1960s.

A number of scholars borrow Tilly's concept to identify »digital repertoire[s] of contention«¹⁶³. However, as Laer and Aelst observe, »a wide digital action repertoire will not, and probably never will, be able to replace traditional forms of activism and face-to-face communication«.¹⁶⁴ Street protests and direct action continue to matter; rather than replacing existing repertoires of contention, online tools usually complement practices of resistance, apart from a few exceptions such as hacktivism.¹⁶⁵ As such, my strategy is to approach the practices of video activism as audio-visual repertoires of contention which, in their current form, are strongly shaped by processes of digitalization.

Three properties of video as audio-visual medium – whether it is being distributed digitally or not – are particularly relevant for urban social movements: accessibility, affects and authenticity. Accessibility refers to the phenomenological quality of videos as a medium. In contrast to texts, videos do not require literacy; moreover, they outperform textual sources in their capacity to attract attention. Second, videos have a

160 Tilly, »Contentious Repertoires in Great Britain, 1758–1834,« 264.

161 Tilly, »Contentious Repertoires in Great Britain, 1758–1834,« 265.

162 Tilly, »Contentious Repertoires in Great Britain, 1758–1834,« 268.

163 Rolfe, »Building an Electronic Repertoire of Contention«; Earl and Kimport, *Digitally Enabled Social Change. Activism in the Internet Age*.

164 Laer and Aelst, »Internet and Social Movement Action Repertoires,« 1164.

165 For example: Rucht, »Protest Movements and Their Media Usages«; Laer and Aelst, »Internet and Social Movement Action Repertoires.«

powerful affective dimension, meaning that their audio-visual elements evoke strong emotions. This is a particularly relevant characteristic in the context of political mobilization, since anger, outrage and hope are important catalysts for political action. Finally, as Rasza asserts, there is often a high degree of public trust that videos will provide an authentic account of the events which they document: »Many appropriations of the technology, including those by human rights advocates, rest on the theory that ›seeing is believing‹ and understand video to be uniquely suited to forms of truth telling such as witnessing, documenting and reporting.«¹⁶⁶

The major advantage as well as chief paradox of video activism is how it oscillates between resistance to and acceptance of the hegemonies of neoliberal urbanization and communicative capitalism. While social media platforms such as Facebook drive processes of abstraction, they can also – at least temporarily – be appropriated as tools for bottom-up political mobilization. Although this contradiction between video activists' emancipatory visions and their dependence on capitalist social media corporations does not disappear when they appropriate the abstract spaces of social media, it may help to create moments of rupture such as in Rio de Janeiro in 2013. The polysemy of audio-visual media gives videos a particular power. However, in the long-term interests of emancipation, the struggle against neoliberal urbanization will need to incorporate a struggle against digital capitalism, communicative capitalism and data colonialism.

Does it make sense to write of ›digitalizing the right to the city‹ for a study that examines video activism? Not if ›digitalizing the right to the city‹ means thinking of video activism as an online practice ›out of space‹; when Manuel Castells describes »the Internet social networks as [...] spaces of autonomy, largely beyond the control of governments and corporations«, this is neither an empirically nor conceptually convincing proposition. The practices of video activism show how the ›streets‹ and the ›net‹ are mutually infiltrating each other in a dialectical movement. The process of weaving this digital-urban fabric is driven on the one side by dominant tech corporations and on the other side by bottom-up videographers appropriating the newly available audio-visual repertoires.

The right to the city does offer a profound conceptual framework for interpreting video activism as an emancipatory practice as I argue: first, it spatializes video activism; second, it offers tools for empirical analysis; and, third, it presents an emancipatory vision that can guide the practices of video activism.

- (1) To interpret video activism through a conceptual framework that builds on Henri Lefebvre and the right to the city literature means reading video activism both in the spaces which it produces and

166 Rasza, »Beyond ›Riot Porn‹: Protest Video and the Production of Unruly Subjects,« 496.

in those in which it is produced in order to spatialize video activist practices. This offers a rich theoretical grounding from which to consider the simultaneity of two key repertoires of contemporary movements: their occupation of physical spaces and their use of social media communication channels. To spatialize video activist practices enables to embed them in the specific contexts in which they emerge without losing sight of the globally acting corporate social media networks.

- (2) Methodologically, the right to the city encourages the use of spatialized video activist practices as »tool[s] for the analysis of society«. ¹⁶⁷ As with Lefebvre's oeuvre as a whole, the right to the city offers two signposts towards a methodological analysis of video activism: its focus on practices and its dialectical transduction between theory and practice. The first entails going beyond a discourse analysis of activist videos to examine how the contexts in which videos are produced shape their outcomes. Second, the permanent tension between theory and practice is tackled in this work by bringing the empirical observations about video activist practices in conversation with the wider conceptual debates on notions such as urban citizenship, commons and autogestion.
- (3) The right to the city offers an emancipatory vision that can give direction to video activist practices. Emancipatory struggles for a right to the city, as manifested in the last wave of protests faced the two-fold challenge of having to overcome the constraints of neoliberal urbanism and communicative capitalism. Neoliberal urbanism works towards the production of abstract spaces through land speculation, gentrification and the militarization of whole neighborhoods as well as by setting cities off against each other in competition for ›world-class‹ status or hosting rights to mega-events. Communicative capitalism abstracts spaces by mining all social relations as points of data to be exploited and commodified. It is striking how both urbanization and digitalization are dominated by processes of abstraction, in which exchange values invariably trump use values. As a model to counter abstraction, the right to the city presents a horizon of an emancipatory concrete utopia grounded in a profound theorization as well as practical experimentations by urban movements worldwide.

Video activism is not a ›concrete utopia‹ itself, but it may be a major tool in struggles for the right of the city as a radically democratized form of bottom-up city making. Visualizing urban struggles, video activism has the potential to become a utopian practice reconnecting the streets and the net in a more democratic, just and solidary manner.

167 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 34.

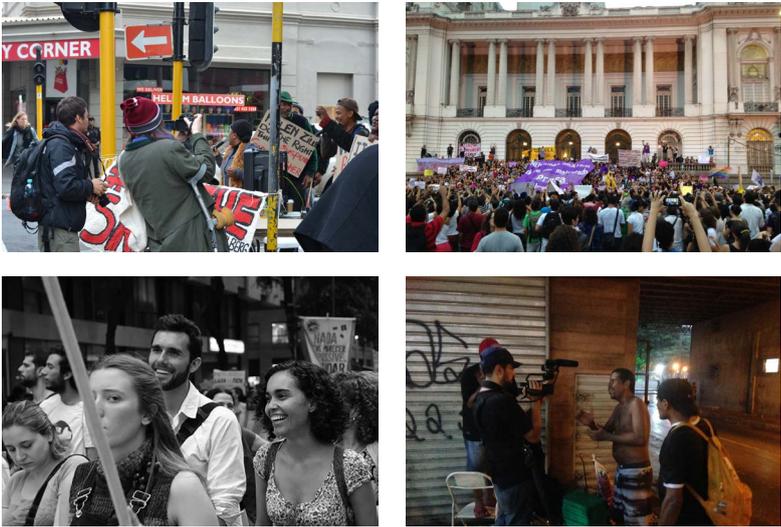


Fig. 6 *Doing Ethnography*

3. Research Design and Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Field Access

To »think with Lefebvre« presents three challenges that Christian Schmid signposted: first, Lefebvre’s »theory must be taken seriously«; second, to appropriate Lefebvre means to further develop his ideas to match these to the contemporary; third, »confronting theory with concrete experience« is at the core of a meaningful application of his theories.¹ Chapter Two aimed to lay the groundwork for meeting the first of these challenges, while the analytical section (Chapter Four to Eight) tackles the second. The third challenge – how to produce a working toolkit for empirical investigation – is the subject of this chapter. My goal will be to clarify how I managed to apply theory to concrete experiences and how my perception of the latter was in turn shaped by the theory that I brought to the field. As such, I aim to make my methodological steps as transparent as possible in order to enable the critical assessment of the results that my research yielded. This chapter begins with an overview of the research design of my study and then moves on to questions of field access, data collection and data analysis. The final

1 Schmid, »The Trouble with Henri,« 43.

section offers a general reflection on the strengths and limitations of my empirical approach.

3.2 Conducting a Critical, Multi-Sited Ethnography

»[...] ethnography is an art of the possible, and then it may be better to have some of it than none at all.«²

This study adopts a critical, multi-sited ethnographic approach to investigating video-activist practices. It is therefore essential to reflect on the implications of this methodological choice. Choosing a qualitative social sciences framework led to a prioritization of exploring relationships, describing processes, and interpreting discourse, with an emphasis on *understanding* practices. This approach aligns with the exploratory nature of a newly emerging research field focused on digital practices and stands in contrast to quantitative methodologies that *test* predefined hypotheses using statistical data.³

However, the field of qualitative social science research is vast and encompasses a range of both contradictory and complementary approaches. Creswell identifies five major qualitative research traditions, each of which could have helped to more precisely position my study: narrative research, phenomenological research, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study research.⁴ While all of these approaches are suitable for studying video activism, each would yield different insights. For instance, had my focus been exclusively on the videos themselves – without considering the practices surrounding their production – a narrative approach in the form of discourse analysis would have been most appropriate. However, because my aim from the outset was to understand the process of video production holistically – rather than focusing solely on the final audiovisual product – my research questions and interests naturally guided me toward an ethnographic approach.

My decision to adopt an ethnographic research approach is grounded in three defining features of ethnographic inquiry. First, it enabled me to understand the practices of video activism *from within*. This meant taking the perspectives of video activists seriously and placing their

- 2 Hannerz, »Being There... and There... and There! Reflections on Multi-Site Ethnography,« 213.
- 3 Creswell identifies a key difference between qualitative and quantitative social science research, with the former privileging »understanding« and the latter »testing« (Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design. Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 201–3.
- 4 Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design*.

understandings of their values, goals, and actions at the center of the analysis. This aligns with the theoretical framing of exploring the emancipatory potential of video activism.

Second, a key strength of ethnographic research lies in its ability to account for non-verbal dimensions of practice, such as artifacts, spatial embeddedness, and affect. It recognizes that video activism is not solely driven by intentional decisions that can be articulated in interviews; rather, practices are more complex and are best understood through observation, which enriched the depth of insight in this study.

Third, ethnography allows for a nuanced description of the ›cultures‹ of video activism, making visible the diverse values and situational considerations that shape actors' agency.

My decision to undertake a qualitative study through an ethnographic approach narrowed the range of methodological tools available to me, though a variety of options still remained. For instance, Jim Thomas distinguishes between ›conventional ethnography‹ and ›critical ethnography‹. While this may appear to be a simple distinction, it highlights crucial differences in how empirical research is approached. According to Thomas, »[c]onventional ethnography describes what is; critical ethnography asks what could be.«⁵ Critical ethnographers assume »that all cultural members experience unnecessary repression to some extent.«⁶ As a result, by »digging below the mundane surface experience of the cultural basis of violence,«⁷ they confront forms of »[u]nnecessary social domination.«⁸ In doing so, they not only recognize but »celebrate their normative and political positions.«⁹ As Madison elaborates, the critical ethnographer,

»...[t]he ethnographer also takes us beneath the surface appearances, disrupts the status quo, and unsettles both neutrality and taken for granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and control.«¹⁰

For Thomas, critical ethnographers must thus apprehend a »profound, but not complicated« lesson: »We let data speak to us, we do not privilege or impose our own preferred meanings, and we make sure that we do not say *is* when we mean *ought*.«¹¹ The objective of critical ethnography – to produce »emancipatory knowledge« – does not diminish the need for empirical rigor. On the contrary, adopting a critical approach

5 Thomas, *Doing Critical Ethnography*, 4.

6 Thomas, *Doing Critical Ethnography*, 4.

7 Thomas, *Doing Critical Ethnography*, 4.

8 Thomas, *Doing Critical Ethnography*, 5.

9 Thomas, *Doing Critical Ethnography*, 4.

10 Madison, *Critical Ethnography. Methods, Ethics, and Performance*, 5.

11 Thomas, *Doing Critical Ethnography*, 22.

proved to be a necessary precondition for studying video activist practices *from within* with methodological precision.

This was particularly important in a highly politicized field such as activism, where the distinction between what *is* taking place and how activists frame what *ought* to be is often blurred. For example, while the claim to emancipatory politics assumed that everyone – regardless of race, class, or gender – could participate in video activist practices, the reality was often marked by a strong overrepresentation of white, upper-middle-class men at the core of activist groups. Uncovering such divergences between expressed ideals and lived realities is precisely what critical ethnography, when practiced with the necessary rigor, is equipped to do.

The second qualifier is that this study is not only a critical ethnography, but also a multi-sited ethnography. In the 1980s and 1990s, George Marcus coined the term *multi-sited ethnography* to describe a new trend in interdisciplinary research that combined anthropology with other fields¹² and involved conducting fieldwork across multiple locations.¹³ The growing number of such studies reflects a broader shift toward what Marcus describes as the »theoretically rethinking of space and place in ethnographic research« – an approach influenced by developments in geography and the social sciences.¹⁴

The mix of practical limitations and opportunities in conducting multi-sited ethnographies is what Hannerz refers to as the »art of the possible«¹⁵ – a recognition that ethnographic research is shaped not only by intellectual considerations but also by practical constraints. Drawing on his own research on foreign correspondents in Jerusalem, Johannesburg, and Tokyo – conducted while he was more or less permanently based in Stockholm – Hannerz identifies four challenges associated with multi-sited ethnography.

First, he argues that researchers should not attempt to study an »entire culture and social life,«¹⁶ as classical social anthropology once aspired

12 As examples, Marcus cites »media studies, feminist studies, science and technology studies, various strands of cultural studies and the theory, culture and society group« as well as more traditional approaches with Marxist and political economy underpinnings (Marcus, »Ethnography in/of the World System. The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography,« 97).

13 For a classical reflection on doing ethnography in multiple locations see the classical account »Ethnography in/of the World System. The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography« by George E. Marcus and »Being There... and There... and There! Reflections on Multi-Site Ethnography« by Ulf Hannerz for a more recent example.

14 Marcus, »Ethnography in/of the World System,« 104.

15 Hannerz, »Being There... and There... and There!«, 213.

16 Hannerz, »Being There... and There... and There!«, 202.

to do. Instead, they must define focused research questions, which in turn requires more selective and strategic approaches across multiple sites. In my case, this meant focusing on the work of video-activists supporting emancipatory urban movements. Second, multi-sited ethnographies are often conducted in a lingua franca by researchers who may lack fluency in local vernaculars. In my case, I conducted all interviews and fieldwork in Brazilian Portuguese in Rio de Janeiro and in English in Cape Town.¹⁷ This approach worked well with my video activist informants and imposed few limitations on the research process. Third, Hannerz notes that »pure observation, or participant observation, has a more limited part« in multi-sited research, with interviews becoming a more central source of data.¹⁸ This closely reflects my experience in Cape Town, where I was only able to attend a few protest marches and spent limited time with video activists. In contrast, in Rio de Janeiro, I participated in over a dozen marches and spent extended periods with activists in various settings – at protests, in their homes, and at events such as discussion rounds and public screenings. Finally, Hannerz highlights the challenge of »fitting fieldwork into lives.«¹⁹ Without a permanent doctoral scholarship, I worked as an academic assistant at the University of Basel, while conducting my research. This meant teaching every semester and conducting administrative tasks such as organizing international conferences and student administration. My position allowed me to carry out fieldwork during university holidays, but it limited my ability to organize extended research stays from 2016 to 2018 – particularly in Cape Town, where this constraint most significantly affected the depth of my fieldwork.

While Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro are the primary sites examined in this study, my experiences in other locations also significantly shaped my understanding of the events I describe and influenced my research practices.²⁰ For example, the anti-austerity protests in Lisbon in 2012, during an extended stay, and the mobilizations for the right to the city in Basel – organized by local activist groups in which I was involved – contributed to my broader learning about urban social movements and

17 Not speaking any other South African language other than English did not appear to limit my research, given that informants are multi-lingual or speak English as mother tongue. The level of my Brazilian Portuguese skills improved significantly over the course of research and imposing negligible limitations to conducting research.

18 Hannerz, »Being There... and There... and There!«, 211.

19 Hannerz, »Being There... and There... and There!«, 212.

20 Experiences in Basel certainly exerted most influence since I lived there during the research. However, additional travels to Barcelona, Berlin, Paris, Bangkok, Toronto, New York and Shanghai further underscored in anecdotal evidence the relevance of video activism as a global phenomenon.

their repertoires. As George Marcus argues, rather than taking »refuge in being a detached anthropological scholar,« contemporary researchers should embrace the challenges of being drawn into the field and become »ethnographer-activists.«²¹ Hence, activities outside the formal scope of my PhD research nonetheless informed my perspective.

Fortunately, I was able to establish contact with key informants in Brazil and South Africa early in the research process, in 2015 and 2016. These initial connections, combined with the availability of on-line communication tools, enabled me to remain in regular contact with my informants and stay informed about developments in both cities, even when I was physically absent. This potential for continuous exchange blurred the boundaries between absence and presence and, as anthropologist Mirjam DeBruijn argues, facilitated the »real co-production« of knowledge.²² Cunliffe and Karunanayake describe the process of how researchers »wrestle with choices about positionality, identity, and the nature of these relationships«²³ as building »hyphen-spaces« in which »relatedness rather than distinctive boundaries« becomes central.²⁴ In a world in which the online and offline spheres are inextricably linked – a world in which the absent is permanently present – such hyphen-spaces become increasingly relevant. The tensions between »insiderness-outsiderness, sameness-difference, engaged-distant, active-neutral«²⁵ positionings repeatedly posed challenges for conducting research in a field that was both geographically dispersed across three continents and highly politicized. For me, the experience of »[b]eing there... and there... and there...« became a constant condition as I worked on my ethnographies of Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro while living in Basel.²⁶

The following section aims to capture key experiences from the field and illustrate how I gained access to video activists.

21 Marcus, »Ethnography in/of the World System,« 113.

22 DeBruijn, »Digitalization and the Field of African Studies,« 3.

23 Cunliffe and Karunanayake, »Working within Hyphen-Spaces in Ethnographic Research: Implications for Research Identities and Practices,« 365.

24 Cunliffe and Karunanayake, »Working within Hyphen-Spaces in Ethnographic Research,« 368.

25 Cunliffe and Karunanayake, »Working within Hyphen-Spaces in Ethnographic Research,« 386.

26 Hannerz, »Being There... and There... and There!«.

3.3 Field Access and Ethnographic Practice on the Ground

»It was the night of Tuesday, 15 September 2015 when my airplane slowly descended towards Rio de Janeiro, which appeared as a sea of flickering lights dissected by highways of travelling cars and shaped by the shores of the Atlantic Ocean and the slopes of the hills. I remember that moment vividly, aware that the structure and clarity afforded by my bird's-eye perspective would vanish the moment I arrived – marking the beginning of my immersion into a myriad of unfamiliar lifeworlds. To inhabit, experience, and move through everyday urban spaces is fundamentally different from observing them from afar. To gain a perspective on video activism ›from within‹, I had to descend to street level. As I did so, my detached view quickly faded.

One night later, I sat upright in bed – my descent into the city had turned into a plunge into the unexpected. In my room was nothing to see apart from the darkness of the walls, but I could hear something clearly: gun shots echoing. Volleys of shots rang out from a conflict between rival factions in the neighboring favelas of Corõa and Fallette. I went to the entrance of the shared apartment in which I had rented a room, but there was no door to lock because there was no door.

The next morning, I asked my housemate about the missing door. She replied, »This is not a problem,« and explained that the apartment was safe: ›It takes more than a hundred steps to climb the stairs to reach it [...] for example, I don't pay electricity, because the service personnel never come up here to read out the voltmeter.‹

Being woken by gunfire prompted reflection on three issues that shaped my access to the field. First, I was immediately confronted with my own privilege; hearing gunshots was not part of my everyday experience prior to arriving in Rio de Janeiro. Second, I was now palpably aware of the subjective luggage that I brought with me into the field which would shape my perceptions and actions.²⁷ Third, my expectations were quickly unsettled. I searched the news for reports of the shooting, expecting to find coverage, but there was none. It appeared that the event was not considered sufficiently abnormal or newsworthy to merit reporting.²⁸

- 27 The gunshots transported me back to my research stay in Mali in March 2012. I had been in the capital, Bamako, when a military-led coup toppled the government and sent the country into an enduring period of political turmoil. An experience which likely left a traumatic memory, triggered again by the sound of gunshots in Rio.
- 28 That description draws on the observation notes annotated in German in my research diary and has been slightly adapted in the process of translation (Observation note 17. September 2015, Rio de Janeiro).

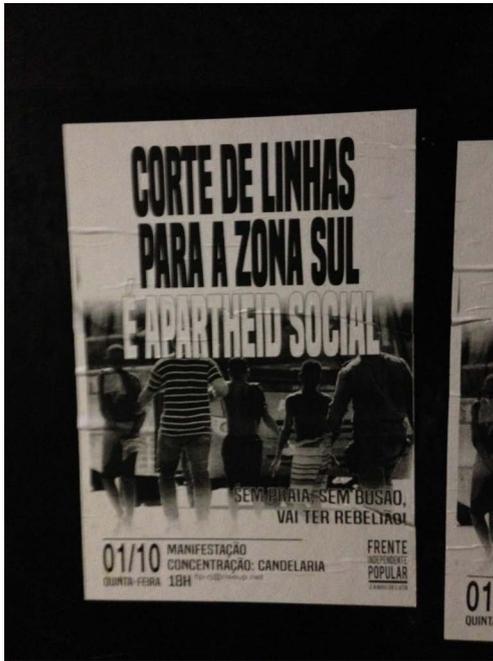


Fig. 7 Poster *Corte de Linhas e Apartheid Social*

Above all, field access is shaped by where a researcher stays and spends most of their time. during my periods of fieldwork, I was accommodated in private homes, youth hostels, guesthouses, occupied houses, or friends' apartments in various parts of Rio de Janeiro and Cape Town. These living arrangements significantly influenced the aspects of urban life I was able to observe and engage with. A common feature of all the areas in which I stayed was their relatively central location. They were also typically middle-class neighborhoods; I never resided in informal settlements such as those on the Cape Flats or in Rio de Janeiro's favelas. This shaped my perspective and reinforced my earlier decision to focus on what I refer to as ›central video activism.‹²⁹

The following section explores the challenges faced by researchers studying this fluid and evolving field of video activism – one that lacks

29 In Rio de Janeiro, there is a clear division between ›central‹ and ›local‹ video activist collectives in the favelas. The former call themselves media activist collectives, whereas the latter are known as *comunicação comunitária*. In Cape Town, I did not find a similar distinction. Chapter Five provides a more detailed overview of the different video activist groups on which I focused.

clear boundaries of membership, formal registries, or standardized procedures. Hence, it was a poster glued to a wall, which facilitated my first encounter with video activists.³⁰

A poster by Frente Independente Popular (FIP)³¹ had announced a march for the evening of Thursday, 1 October 2015 to resist urban transport reforms.³² Under the slogan »cutting the lines to the South Zone is social apartheid«,³³ a group of approximately fifty activists gathered at the Candelária Church in the center of Rio de Janeiro. A few of the protesters were drumming on metal canisters, a sound which would later lead the chanting during the march. Besides the protesters, there was a considerable crowd of activists equipped with cameras and audio-recording devices, two or three *camelôs* (street vendors) selling drinks and chips from their pushcarts. Most participants appeared to know one another, which led to a degree of suspicion toward me – particularly when I began approaching individuals with cameras and asking questions. My naïve attempt to establish contacts led to four short conversations and the exchange of a few phone numbers.

It was when I was approached, however, that I made my most valuable contact. A man in his fifties had come up to me and asked who I was and what I was doing. By initiating the interaction himself – rather than me approaching him – he subtly subverted the typical power dynamics

30 When I decided to attend the protest, I reached out to fellow researchers from the social movement research cluster at UERJ. However, they were unavailable – they needed to study social movement theory. A statement not without a certain irony. Nevertheless, my placement at the Institute of Social and Political Studies at the Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UERJ) proved highly productive, and the institute's research on urban social movements stands out for its analytical depth and intellectual rigor.

31 Frente Independente Popular (Popular Independent Front) is an informal group of activists that played a substantive role in mobilizing urban struggles during the Jornadas de Junho 2013 in Rio.

32 I had heard about this march through a colleague from the Institute of Social and Political Studies at the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ), where I was based as a guest researcher. I am grateful to Breno Bringel for inviting me to be a part of the institute's inspiring atmosphere and the invitation to join its study group on social movements. The study group became an important source for understanding the dynamics of political mobilization in Brazil and beyond throughout my research.

33 On the use of the social apartheid or carioca apartheid metaphor, see also a statement by a Walmyr Junior from Complexo Maré, who linked the cutting of bus lines to a wider critique: »choosing to stigmatize favela youth as criminals reaffirms the position of the white, heteronormative middle class in Rio's South Zone for the cutting of ties between the North and South Zones, which reveals the existence of a carioca apartheid« (Omari, »Democracy Through Technology: Digital Inclusion vs. Social Exclusion«).

of ethnographic research.³⁴ The man, whom I will refer to as Fernando,³⁵ knew everyone at the protest and introduced himself as the »father of the media activist movement«. ³⁶ Having previously worked for major media conglomerates such as Globo and *Folha de São Paulo*, Fernando had grown increasingly disillusioned with corporate media in Brazil. This frustration ultimately led him to abandon his career as a journalist and become an independent media activist. Since then, he has worked exclusively on producing independent media content, despite the financial precarity this decision created for him. His personal story of turning away from corporate media is emblematic of similar decisions made by other media activists in Rio.

That same night, following the protest march, Fernando took me to the occupied house *Casa Nuvem* (House of Clouds), a gathering space for activists, the LGBTQIA+ community, and local residents. *Casa Nuvem* functioned as a venue for discussion rounds, film screenings, parties, and informal social gatherings. It was not the last evening I spent there; indeed, it became a key site where I met many of my interview partners.

Before conducting our first recorded interview, I had six informal meetings and conversations with Fernando. Throughout this process, it was important that I presented myself not merely as a researcher, but as a person with a personal and political history. By sharing my experiences of activism in Basel, engaging in political discussions, and even laughing together about my limited Portuguese skills, I gradually earned Fernando's trust. This relationship-building phase proved crucial: once trust was established, Fernando began introducing me to a diverse range of interviewees. He would say things like, »If you want to speak to a representative of the journalists' union, we can arrange that; [...] You should meet this feminist video activist; [...] Next week we'll set up a meeting with an activist from the favela neighborhood Maré, so you can understand video activism in marginalized communities.« These introductions ensured that interviewees were willing to speak openly with me, confident in Fernando's endorsement of my trustworthiness.

This key encounter in Rio de Janeiro stands in contrast to my experience of establishing field access in Cape Town. In Cape Town, I relied on contacts facilitated by colleagues at the University of Cape Town and

34 The relation to video activists in Rio de Janeiro and Cape Town has overall been one of mutual respect with little power asymmetries – for more details see the section on conducting interviews.

35 All names in this work are my own invention and bear no relation to the actual names of my informants. In light of the often-sensitive nature of the political circumstances in South Africa and, in particular, in Brazil as well as the impossibility of controlling information flows online, I granted anonymity to every informant from the outset of my research.

36 »Pai dos mídiativistas«.

the University of the Western Cape (UWC), as well as through acquaintances and extended social networks. However, unlike in Rio, I did not meet anyone comparable to Fernando – a gatekeeper who provided access to a broad and interconnected (video-)activist scene. While I interviewed several individuals who served as central nodes within distinct (video-)activist networks, the overall landscape in Cape Town appeared significantly more fragmented. It consisted of small, loosely connected groups with limited interaction, which made the field more challenging to navigate. This fragmentation, combined with the time constraints of my research stays, significantly complicated field access in South Africa.

In total, I conducted ten months of fieldwork – three in Cape Town and four in Rio de Janeiro. Preliminary visits to both cities in 2014 helped assess the project's feasibility. My first and longest stay, from September 2015 to January 2016 in Rio, had a lasting influence on the study's direction. I returned to both cities in July–August 2016, coinciding with the Rio Summer Olympics, to collect the core data for the book. A final round of fieldwork in early 2018 allowed me to share preliminary findings with video activists and establish a feedback loop.

After February 2016, my position at the Centre for African Studies at the University of Basel limited the duration of further fieldwork, resulting in a certain imbalance between the two sites. Rio emerged as the primary case, with Cape Town serving as a contrasting, secondary site. Accordingly, this multi-sited ethnography should not be read as a symmetrical comparison between two equally developed case studies, but rather as a complex, relational ethnographic inquiry – conducted in greater depth in Brazil and shaped by experiences that extended beyond both field sites.

A meaningful reflection on research is incomplete without acknowledging the positionalities into which one is born – particularly race, class, and gender. In cities like Rio de Janeiro and Cape Town, where inequalities are deeply structured along these lines,³⁷ my identity as a white, male, middle-class researcher inevitably shaped my fieldwork: from where I stayed and whom I met, to the spaces I could access and the questions I asked.

To counterbalance this hegemonic perspective, I collaborated with researchers such as Lívia Alcântara³⁸ and activist-journalists like Fernando, whose different positionalities enriched the research. For instance, during a focus group in Rio, despite Lívia's expertise, participants

37 Huchzermeyer provides a useful overview of these differences and how they have formed over time (Huchzermeyer, »Informal Settlements: Production and Intervention in Twentieth Century Brazil and South Africa«).

38 Our collaboration in researching media activism resulted in a publication, which we co-authored and that offered crucial moments of reflection (Alcântara and Geuder, »(Urban) Space, Media and Protests: Digitalizing the Right to the City?«).

consistently directed their responses to me and interrupted her more frequently – subtle but telling dynamics that unfairly privileged my presence as a white, male foreigner. Undoubtedly, my privileged position influenced what I could and could not learn. However, as Spivak argues,³⁹ silence is not an appropriate response to privilege – nor is ignorance. I have sought to remain critically aware of these dynamics throughout the research process.

Three elements proved crucial in my efforts to establish access to the (video-)activist fields and conducting research in both Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro: gaining trust, building networks, and remaining flexible. Conducting a critical, multi-sited ethnography within the fluid and dynamic spaces of political activism required extended periods of immersion. This included attending events such as a residents' meeting in an occupied former hospital in Cape Town, where strategies to resist eviction threats were discussed. Although my research focused on video activist practices, it became clear that a broader understanding of local activism was a necessary precondition for building trusted networks – networks willing to share sensitive insights into activism and its audio-visual representations. Gaining field access, therefore, depended on what could be described as »[b]eing there... and there... and there...« – a continuous presence across multiple sites that enabled the realization of a critical, multi-sited ethnography.

3.4 Data Collection

»What does it mean for the critical ethnographer to ›resist domestication? It means that she will use the resources, skills, and privileges available to her to make accessible [...] the voices and experiences of subjects whose stories are otherwise restrained and out of reach. This means the critical ethnographer contributes to emancipatory knowledge and discourses of social justice.«⁴⁰

The goal of my data collection was to assemble a rich, multi-faceted body of empirical material to support a detailed analysis of video activist practices. Ultimately, I gathered a substantial dataset comprising 42 recorded semi-structured interviews (resulting in over 450 pages of transcripts)⁴¹ and innumerable unrecorded conversations and interviews,

39 Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*.

40 Madison, *Critical Ethnography*, 5.

41 The 42 recorded interviews generated approximately 36 hours of audio and resulted in 450 pages of transcripts. Over 80 percent of these interviews were fully transcribed, while a smaller portion – primarily those less

178 videos,⁴² more than 300 pages of observation notes, over 2,000 photographs and video recordings, as well as protest materials such as flyers, pamphlets, and newspapers. Approximately two-thirds of the material stems from fieldwork in Rio de Janeiro, with the remaining third from Cape Town – reflecting the asymmetry in field access discussed earlier. The following section describes my sampling decisions and the ways in which I collected my data.

During data collection, I generated three primary sources of empirical material: interviews, a curated sample of videos, and observation notes. The following section outlines how each of these data sources was assembled and provides a brief characterization of their content and relevance to the study.

To plan the semi-structured interviews, I employed the method of *theoretical sampling* as outlined by Glaser and Strauss.⁴³ This approach involved identifying key actors shaping video activist practices and ensuring representation across different strands of activism. My interviewees included activists, filmmakers, journalists, artists, academics, union representatives, NGO workers, politicians, and unhoused individuals. These included, for example, individual students involved in major political mobilizations – such as the Rhodes Must Fall (RMF) movement – as well as journalists working for Brazilian media outlets like *A Nova Democracia*. Despite their varied backgrounds, most shared a strong political engagement, often expressed through organizing, participating in, or documenting protests. While their political views differed on specific issues, a common thread was a critical stance toward capitalist, racist, and patriarchal structures.

Overall, I aimed to balance the sample in terms of race, class, and gender. Most interviewees were between 20 and 40 years old, many came from middle-class backgrounds, and the sample reflected a mixed racial composition – with white participants forming a slight majority – and an even gender distribution.

directly relevant to my research questions, such as accounts of living without a home in Cape Town – were transcribed only partially. This selective approach enabled me to focus transcription efforts on the most analytically significant material. The English-language interviews from Cape Town were transcribed by myself. I am especially grateful to Mariane Silva Reghim for her excellent transcription work on the Brazilian Portuguese interviews.

42 The videography in the annex does not include all of the 178 videos that I have downloaded and catalogued for this research, but only those videos discussed in the work. The videography is following the chronological order in which videos are mentioned throughout the text.

43 Glaser and Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*.

Most of my interviews took place in informal settings such as cafés, bars, restaurants, or at the homes, studios, or offices of the interviewees. I intentionally left the choice of location to the interviewees to ensure their comfort and to foster open, candid conversations – particularly important given that many interviews touched on experiences of violence and other emotionally charged topics. A trade-off of these settings was the impact on audio quality, as background noise from construction, music, or street activity was often present in the recordings.⁴⁴

In both Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro, different informants frequently referred to the same individuals as potential interview partners. These repeated recommendations – often pointing to people I had already interviewed – served as confirmation that the sampling process was effective and that the research had reached a point of »theoretical saturation«.⁴⁵ The use of theoretical sampling was closely aligned with the methodological and conceptual foundations of my research design. Unlike approaches such as statistical or selective sampling, which aim for representativeness, theoretical sampling seeks to identify *types* of actors in order to construct a sample that reflects a range of complementary perspectives.⁴⁶ This approach was well-suited to the objectives of the study, which prioritized depth, diversity of viewpoints, and the mapping of relational dynamics within activist networks.

The qualitative interviews were semi-structured, guided by an interview protocol that recommended beginning with an introduction and covering three main areas of interest. Each interview began with me explaining the context and objectives of the research, as well as my personal role within it. From there, I followed the guidelines flexibly, allowing the conversation to flow naturally while ensuring that the core themes were addressed. The three overarching questions that structured the interviews were:

- (1) »How is Cape Town's/Rio de Janeiro's urban space structured?«
- (2) »What have been the major local protest events and movements in recent years?«
- (3) »What role have social media and, in particular, videos played in mobilizing and documenting protest marches?«

44 All respondents were asked for their consent to record the interviews using my cellphone, a request that was never declined. As a discreet device placed on the table, the cellphone proved ideal for minimizing disruption to the conversational flow. Anonymity was granted to every participant, ensuring the protection of their identities throughout the research process.

45 Theoretical saturation is the point at which no additional cases can be found that would either alter the identified types or lead to the identification of new types (Rosenthal, *Interpretative Sozialforschung. Eine Einführung*, 89–92).

46 Rosenthal, *Interpretative Sozialforschung*, 86.

These three broad questions were supplemented in each interview by tailored sub-questions, which were prepared in advance based on the interviewee's biography, positionality, and role within the local video activist scene. I also improvised during interviews, adapting the abstract research questions into more concrete inquiries that responded to the specific examples and narratives that emerged.⁴⁷

In the »inter-personal drama« of the interview, I positioned myself in the role of an active listener.⁴⁸ Open questions were asked to allow the interviewee to co-determine the direction of the interview.⁴⁹ By conducting interviews in this way, however, potential biases did arise from my position as an engaged researcher. For example, I did not question or ask for further explanation from interviewees who criticized capitalism as an unjust system, since this was a widely held position that reflected the »culture« of most of my interview partners. On a few occasions, an interview would temporarily turn into a heated conversation in which I clearly expressed my own ideas and opinions. Statements made during such moments were excluded from the data used for quotation or analysis.

In contrast to the planned semi-structured interviews, spontaneous short interviews⁵⁰ were considerably briefer – ranging from two to twenty minutes – and more thematically focused. These interviews emerged organically from situations in which a person's expert knowledge or lived experience drew my attention and prompted direct questioning. Examples include conversations with individuals who had lived on the streets in Cape Town or with those who had experienced state censorship while filming protests in 1970s Brazil. These spontaneous encounters provided valuable, focused insights that complemented the broader narratives captured in the semi-structured interviews.

Overall, the combination of semi-structured interviews – selected through theoretical sampling – and spontaneous short interviews resulted in a qualitatively and quantitatively rich dataset. Together, these two types of interviews offered an in-depth, insider perspective on the communities engaged in video activism and became the most important

47 Flick, Kardorff, and Steinke, *Qualitative Forschung: Ein Handbuch*, 368.

48 Flick, Kardorff, and Steinke, *Qualitative Forschung*, 360.

49 By conducting more interviews in context comfortable to interviewees, I was usually able to avoid some typical interview challenges caused by interviewee anxiety (Flick, Kardorff, & Steinke, 2008, 359). However, in a few interviews, I observed some of downsides of my interview approach. For example, I sometimes did not listen patiently enough and interrupted my interviewee too quickly. On other occasions, I would push an interviewee in a particular direction by asking leading questions or offering too many comments in response to their answers.

50 I did not adhere to my interview guidelines in these interviews.

source for my data analysis. The sampling strategy and interview-based data collection reflect what Hannerz has observed about multi-sited ethnographies: first, that interviews tend to gain prominence in such research designs, particularly as opportunities for sustained participant observation become more limited; and second, that they require a clear focus on a well-defined research question.⁵¹

My second major source of audio-visual data was a curated collection of 178 online videos, assembled in two consecutive phases. The first phase involved conducting online searches from Switzerland prior to my initial field trip. Using keyword searches⁵² and YouTube's recommendation algorithm, I compiled an initial sample of 42 videos. The results varied significantly depending on browser and IP settings: searches conducted via a Tor browser with simulated IP addresses from South Africa and Brazil produced markedly different outcomes compared to those using a standard Mozilla browser with Swiss IP settings and default cookies.⁵³ These discrepancies initially led me to explore YouTube as a *dispositive* – a structured system of power and knowledge. However, I ultimately abandoned this line of inquiry to maintain focus on the situated practices of *doing* video activism.⁵⁴

The second sample comprised 136 videos and formed the core database for my analysis. This collection was assembled through various methods beginning in September 2016. These included retrieving videos from the websites and YouTube channels of video activist collectives, searching for footage of protests or police violence mentioned in interviews, viewing videos recommended by activists, and discovering content incidentally while browsing online. Unlike the first sample, this

51 Hannerz, »Being There... and There... and There!«

52 Keyword searches were conducted by using a mix of location and topical search items such as »Cape Town protests« or »manifestação no Rio«.

53 As Eli Pariser has explained, there is no single version of the internet due to the personalization mechanisms which ensure that each user has a different online experience (Pariser, *The Filter Bubble*). The dispositive that emerges from such forms of such opaque algorithmic governance mechanisms deserves further scrutinizing and has increasingly drawn attention in academic research and public debate.

54 My own extensive inquiry of YouTube as a dispositive was presented at academic conferences in Zagreb and Paris in 2015. To analyze YouTube as a dispositive that enables and limits certain discourses in a Foucauldian sense is promising. This would fall into the category of approaches to video activism that Tina Askanius identifies with research looking at video activism as technology (Askanius. »Video Activism as Technology, Text, Testimony – or Practices?«). However, given my research interest into the practices of video activism on the ground, I decided to drop this line of inquiry following my research stay in Rio de Janeiro in 2016.

phase of collection was informed by my initial fieldwork, which had sharpened my understanding of the types of videos most relevant to my research.

In a research memo dated 12 June 2016 – written after compiling the first sample and during the early stages of the second – I outlined three key criteria guiding my selection process and documenting the evolving nature of criteria employed between the first and the second round of sampling. The three criteria identified were: (1) a video's popularity, (2) its origin, and (3) its content.

- (1) Popularity: Initially, I prioritized videos with high view counts as an indicator of relevance. However, this criterion proved problematic and was eventually discarded. First, alternative forms of circulation – such as Bluetooth sharing – and the removal of view counts from blocked or deleted videos rendered this metric unreliable. Second, understanding *why* certain videos gain visibility required contrasting highly viewed content with videos that received little attention on platforms like YouTube or Facebook.⁵⁵
- (2) Origin: Videos had to originate from Cape Town or Rio de Janeiro. While I also viewed videos from protests in other cities – such as Istanbul, Barcelona, or Hong Kong – these were excluded from the sample to maintain a clear geographic focus.
- (3) Content: Initially, I focused on videos depicting »right to the city« protests. However, this criterion evolved in two important ways. First, although many protest marches explicitly referenced the »right to the city,« others addressed broader themes of social justice and urban inequality. As a result, I expanded the thematic scope to include a wider range of emancipatory politics. Second, through the process of viewing and analyzing the material, it became clear that representations of violence – particularly police violence – were central to the work of video activists. Consequently, videos documenting such violence were also included in the sample.

As with the interviews, the selection process followed the principles of theoretical sampling, prioritizing analytical relevance over representativeness.⁵⁶

55 For details see Chapter Seven »Producing Visibility«.

56 Constructing a representative sample was a challenge in itself and would have required a different more quantitative approach, inconsistent with my focus on finding idealtypes. Innovative approaches tailored to the challenge of dealing with visual data can be found for example with Lev Manovich and his team. They experimented with new digital methods to visualize of big data retrieved from social media (Manovich Lev, »100 Billion Data Rows per Second: Media Analytics in the Early 21st Century«).

The practical handling of videos identified as relevant followed a systematic process. First, I downloaded each video in MP4 format and took screenshots to document key metadata, including the video's URL, title, upload date, number of views, and other relevant details. This information was stored locally and entered into an Excel spreadsheet to provide an overview of quantitative indicators. Next, I developed an analytical grid in the form of a »video code file,« specifically tailored to the needs of my research. Each entry in this file included a unique video code (e.g., CT150322), the video's title (as presented online), URL, upload date, location, publisher, duration, and view count. It also contained a brief content description, notes on production techniques (e.g., editing), notable features, user comments on social media platforms, the sample source (first or second), and the date of analysis. This extensive process of sampling, metadata collection, and memo writing through the video code file proved essential for developing a detailed understanding of the audio-visual language used to document protests and police violence.⁵⁷

The third source of data in this study consists of observation notes. These notes encompassed a broad range of material, including personal experiences in Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro, conceptual reflections, emerging analytical ideas, transcripts of unrecorded conversations, and detailed descriptions of protest marches and interview settings. They also included reflections on the research process itself, relevant news items, and other contextual information encountered during fieldwork. This body of notes served not only as a record of events and interactions but also as a space for ongoing theoretical engagement and reflexive analysis.

The approximately 300 pages of observation notes were mostly handwritten in research diaries. I typically set aside time in the evenings to record daily reflections, though I also took notes immediately following noteworthy events or conversations. In addition to these daily entries, I wrote weekly *reflection memos* and more comprehensive *extended memos* toward the end of each research stay. These notes summarized my impressions, identified deficiencies and biases in my data collection, and defined steps for further research, thereby critically shaping the theoretical sampling process. I also made a small number of observation notes when I was not on a research stay, such as when news, posts or videos caught my attention online or after telephone conversations with video activists

57 The first sample, which was described in the 27-page video log, was not considered for the video code file but was a critical step in developing its methodology. For the second sample I transcribed 40 out of 136 videos completely, and others partially. Theoretical saturation, on the one hand, and practical time constraints, on the other, guided me to a more fine-grained analysis of key sequences of videos reflected in the analysis.

provided important insights. Although my observation notes were not an attempt to provide systematic analysis, they played an important role in guarding the process of data collection and provided a valuable resource to ensure the accuracy of the accounts presented in this book.

Other methods of data collection during my field research included making my own videos, taking photographs and collecting objects. Filming and photographing, on the one hand, generated additional material that has been referred to for illustrative purposes throughout this study.⁵⁸ The collected objects consisted of protest flyers, newspapers, maps, advertising leaflets and similar artifacts. A collection of 18 editions of the newspaper *Jornal A Nova Democracia* dating from June 2014 to October 2015 proved especially useful for contextual information in relation to particular protest marches and police violence. This additional material played a major role in enriching and exemplifying the discussions presented in this work, but it was not analyzed systematically.

3.5 Data Analysis

»[A]nalysis is likely to occur in a nonlinear fashion«⁵⁹

Based on Robert Yin's approach to qualitative data analysis, I structured my data analysis into five distinct steps: compiling, disassembling, reassembling and interpreting my data and then drawing conclusions from it.⁶⁰ Although these steps were carried out independently, the analytical process was inherently iterative, involving repeated returns to the material to re-order, re-interpret, and refine specific sections. This circularity – typical of qualitative research – enabled the development of an increasingly nuanced understanding of my object of study. The following section chronologically describes the respective steps of analysis as proposed by Yin.

I began my analysis by focusing on the material collected in Cape Town before turning to the data from Rio de Janeiro. This decision was informed by three main considerations. First, the Cape Town dataset was smaller and therefore more manageable while I was still developing my analytical framework. Second, I was emotionally less involved in the South African context, which allowed for greater analytical distance and reflexivity. Third, since my fieldwork in Cape Town followed my initial research trip to Rio, reversing the chronological order in the

58 In a few instances, I passed on photos and audio-visuials that I had produced to video activists.

59 Yin, *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*, 177.

60 Yin, *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*.

Code	Line Number
Violence	1
Violence	42
Violence	12
Violence	1
Violence	87
Violence	36
Violence	33
Violence	7
Violence	4
Violence	8
Violence	7
Violence	8
Violence	2
Violence	29
Violence	2
Violence	8
Violence	7
Violence	87
Violence	36
Violence	66
Violence	9
Violence	56
Violence	10
Violence	22
Violence	71
Violence	53
Violence	101
Violence	36
Violence	44
Violence	14
Violence	1
Violence	7
Violence	72
Violence	6
Violence	3
Violence	2
Violence	2
Violence	1
Violence	78
Violence	15
Violence	9
Violence	7

Fig. 8 Interview Coding

analysis helped ensure that both datasets could inform and enrich one another. This approach proved effective in generating inductive categorizations and contributed to a more nuanced comparative understanding of video activism across the two sites.

As Yin argues, the »objective [of compiling data] is to organize your qualitative data in a systematic fashion before formal analysis starts«, since »[m]ore orderly data will lead to stronger analyses and ultimately to more rigorous qualitative research«. ⁶¹ To structure the large amounts of data that I had gathered proved to be a challenge given the different formats in which my raw data came, ranging from audio recordings and video files to handwritten observation notes. However, the time-consuming endeavor of organizing this raw data into chunks of data that were of a more appropriate size for analysis turned out to be a crucial step, ultimately enabling a clearer understanding of its nature.

During the data compilation process, I developed a scale to weight the relevance of the sources for my analysis. Interviews came to be my richest source of first-hand information, followed by the video sample and my observation, reflecting the process of data collection. Moreover, triangulation of these different sources of data enriched my findings considerably. ⁶²

The second step in my analysis was to disassemble my material by breaking down »the compiled data into smaller fragments or pieces«. ⁶³ To do so, I assigned initial codes to the transcribed interviews and observation notes with the help of MaxQDA software. At first, non-exclusive

61 Yin, *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*, 182.

62 Flick, »Triangulation in Der Qualitativen Forschung.«

63 Yin, *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*, 178.

»open« codes were assigned to the texts as an »exploratory problem-solving technique« and »heuristic« tool for engaging with the material.⁶⁴ Out of this process, a more precise system of codes evolved. Nine codes – appropriation, historical events and structures, actors, media coverage, urban space, producing and distributing videos, protest and resistance, positionality and my research, and video analysis – and multiple sub-codes helped to provisionally order the material. In addition to these »open codes«, I applied in-vivo codes to expressions which seemed to capture important tensions or which raised new questions.⁶⁵ As non-textual sources, the videos required a distinct analytical approach. To process them, I used video coding files to break down the hours of audiovisual material into concrete segments, which in turn helped me develop a structured grid for interpreting the content. This first round of labeling left me with an extensive code tree, allowing key themes to arise from the material in an inductive manner instead of being superimposed by me as the researcher.

Simultaneous to this first round of coding, I wrote extensive analytical memos, a tool which Saldaña describes as »a place to ›dump your brain‹ about the participants, phenomenon, or process under investigation by thinking and thus writing and thus thinking even more about them«. These analytical memos generated new ideas, linked disparate statements and events, and illuminated emerging patterns. In total, I produced 250 pages of memos in an effort to make sense of my data.

After disassembling the material, I began the process of reassembling the data through a second round of analysis. This phase involved drawing on my memo writing, engaging with relevant literature, and interacting with the data over an extended period – often in an exploratory manner – in the hope that an abductive »flash« of insight would emerge.⁶⁶ This was indeed the case when I discovered three major analytical dimensions running through all of my data. I named them *access*, *visibility*, and *violence*, which eventually formed the basis of the three analytical chapters: Making Videos, Producing Visibility, and Exposing Violence.

After identifying these three analytical dimensions, I defined each one by providing a clear definition, a rule of application, and an anchor example. I then recoded all textual sources – interview transcripts and observation notes – according to these newly developed analytical categories. As Yin argues:

64 Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 8.

65 The in-vivo codes were named after summarized direct quotations.

66 The »guessing instinct«, which transcends the strict logic of reason, is compared to a detective story by one of the most important proponents of abduction, Charles Sanders Peirce (Peirce, »Guessing.«).

»Unfortunately, some use the terms code and category interchangeably and even in combination when they are, in fact, two separate components of data analysis. I advocate that qualitative codes are essence-capturing and essential elements of the research story that, when clustered together according to similarity and regularity – a pattern – they actively facilitate the development of categories and thus analysis of their connections. Ultimately, I like one of Charmaz’s (2006) metaphors for the process when she states that coding ›generates the bones of your analysis.... [I]ntegration will assemble those bones into a working skeleton.«⁶⁷

To construct my ›bones‹ into a ›working skeleton‹, I employed Dey’s approach of ›splitting and splicing« the data.⁶⁸ As defined by him, ›[s]plitting refers to the task of refining categories by subcategorizing data. Splicing refers to combining categories to provide a more integrated conceptualization.«⁶⁹ In other words, splitting allows for a more nuanced analysis, while splicing helps to link the sub-categories with the analytical dimensions. This process thus enabled me to integrate my empirical material into a functioning analytical framework.

In contrast to the disassembling phase, my next step was to make the analytical categories mutually exclusive, ensuring that no piece of text could be assigned to more than one category at a time. Throughout the reassembling phase, I aimed to reduce the number of assigned codes in order to focus on key aspects of my research. Unlike with inductive disassembling, the reassembling process was guided by my research question and interests and was performed in conversation with my conceptual considerations.

While the coding process helped me gain an overview of my written sources, the same procedure could not be directly applied to the audiovisual material. During the disassembling phase, video coding files had sharpened my interpretation and analysis of the footage. In the subsequent reassembling phase, I built on the expertise developed over several years and selected a few videos as anchor examples. These were subjected to closer scrutiny by experimenting with and comparing individual scenes, techniques, and narratives across different videos. Using the simple yet functional iMovie application to montage video sequences, I was able to disaggregate specific features – for instance, by comparing different depictions of violence.

This process led to a major breakthrough: the development of a heuristic for distinguishing between three ideal types of videos – *activist videos*, *witness videos*, and *journalist videos*. Additionally, this extensive

67 Yin, *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*, 8.

68 Dey, *Qualitative Data Analysis*.

69 Dey, *Qualitative Data Analysis*, 139.

engagement with the material helped me select the individual video cases presented in detail in the analytical chapters, each representing the themes, forms, and content revealed through my analysis.

By following a systematic approach to engage with the vast collection of data I had gathered, I laid the groundwork for the writing process, during which I combined Yin's final steps of »interpreting« and »concluding«. ⁷⁰ Given my research design and methods of data collection and analysis, my goal was to produce what Clifford Geertz terms a »thick description«. ⁷¹ However, unlike Geertz's extrapolation of broader cultural interpretations from a single event – such as his analysis of the Indonesian cockfight – my intention was not to generalize from a single video, but rather from a multiplicity of video publications and the complex sequence of actions that lead from a concrete situation to its audiovisual recording, through editing, and ultimately to its online publication and dissemination.

3.6 Reflections on Position, Perspectives and Practices

»How we write is a reflection of our own interpretation based on cultural, social, gender, class, and personal politics that we bring to research. All writing is ›positioned‹ and within a stance.« ⁷²

To operationalize my research design, I positioned the study as a critical and multi-sited ethnography. This approach led me to focus on the practices of *doing video activism*, thereby excluding other possible avenues such as discourse analysis of specific videos or an examination of YouTube as a dispositive. Adopting an ethnographic perspective enabled me to closely investigate the everyday practices of video activism and the mundane factors that shape what ultimately becomes visible in videos. For instance, an individual's ability to afford a bus ticket to attend a protest can determine whether they are able to document and share footage of the event.

My decision to focus exclusively on the perspective of video activism *from within* was driven by my interest in its emancipatory potential. This choice privileges the voices of video activists, based on the assumption that they are best positioned to define what emancipation means on their own terms. Actively participating in protest marches and political events, as well as broadly sharing their political views – despite occasional differences of opinion – proved essential for gaining access to

70 Yin, *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*.

71 Geertz, »Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture.«

72 Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design*, 179.

their networks. Given the highly politicized nature of my research sites, maintaining an outsider position would not have allowed me to achieve the same depth or quality of data.

Henri Lefebvre's concept of *dialectical transduction*, which emphasizes the confrontation between theory and practice, serves as a pathway in the construction of concrete utopias.⁷³ Motivated by a deep interest in the emancipatory potential of video activism, I designed a multi-sited ethnography that oscillated between close-up, intense engagement in the field and more distanced phases of reflection and conceptual deliberation. My focus on video activism as both a practice and a process situated in specific contexts – and best explored through ethnographic methods – reflects this approach. Although the limited time available for on-site data collection prevented me from conducting participatory action research or militant investigation, it fostered a productive oscillation between proximity and distance.⁷⁴ This physical separation, particularly given the emotionally charged nature of the topic, enabled a necessary analytical distance for critical reflection and temporal defamiliarization with the data.

Through the data collection process, I built up a rich body of material for the subsequent analysis. To account for the quality of my empirical research, I drew on Creswell's suggestion of eight measures that ensure the validity of a research project. These are »prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer review, negative case analysis, clarifying researcher bias, member checking, rich and thick descriptions, and external audits«. ⁷⁵ Out of the eight proposals by Creswell, I employed six strategies to ensure quality:

- (1) Repeat visits to my research sites and continued online communication ensured that I had *prolonged engagement* with my topic.
- (2) *Triangulation* was practiced through the mix of methods that I employed during data collection and the different types of primary material that this process produced.
- (3) Attending doctoral courses and conversing with colleagues and experts enabled a continuous process of *peer review*.

73 Cunningham, »Triangulating utopia: Benjamin, Lefebvre, Tafuri«.

74 »Activism tourism«, when practiced as a form of fleeting participation in multiple engaged communities, often seems to do more harm than good. Such forms of participation may seriously hamper the sustainability of activist efforts and can cause disillusionment among those who promise to engage seriously but struggle to sustain the effort across multiple locations. My project of archiving digital video activism in collaboration with Princeton University and Mídia Independente Coletiva aims to overcome such extractive practices and help preservation efforts within my role as researcher.

75 Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design*, 207–9.

- (4) My practice of writing regular memos to ›defamiliarize‹ myself from my data and reflect on possible faults in my interpretation targeted potential *researcher biases*.
- (5) Feedback loops in Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro in early 2018 enabled me to fill in the remaining gaps in my research and check preliminary interpretations with video activists.
- (6) Finally, my attempt to write a *thick description* of the research material and the practices of video activists was designed to guarantee the validity of the research.

After rendering my research process transparent, I hope that readers are equipped with sufficient information to independently judge the empirical rigor and quality of the data that is presented in my research. After the introduction into my methodological approach to studying the practices of video activism, the next chapter introduces into the contexts of Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro.



Fig. 9 Cities and Satellites

4. Contextualizing Bottom-Up Video Production in Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro

Chapter Four situates the emergence of video activist practices within the specific contexts of Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro. Rather than attempting an exhaustive portrayal of each city's urban dynamics and social movements – which would risk oversimplification – this chapter outlines the key contextual conditions shaping bottom-up video production. It begins with Cape Town, examining the spatial legacies of apartheid, neoliberal urbanization, and violence, before turning to contemporary urban movements. The same structure is then applied to the case of Rio de Janeiro. A final section draws out key similarities and differences between the two cities and their urban movements, setting the stage for a comparative understanding of media representation and video activism in the divided cities of Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro.

4.1 Cape Town, the »mother city«

»The colonial world is a world divided into compartments. [...] if we examine closely this system of compartments, we will at least be able to reveal the lines of force it implies.«¹

»In Brazil, the dominant instrument of social division was the encouragement of class formation. In South Africa it was racial control.«²

Legacies of Apartheid in Cape Town's Urban Morphology (1948–1994)

Approximately four million inhabitants reside in Cape Town, populating an area characterized by both its natural beauty and its massive wealth disparities. From the noble villas overlooking Camps Bay to rickety tin shacks shaking on the windy Cape Flats plane in Khayelitsha, the inequalities in living standards across Cape Town are enormous. Sussann Parnell and Edgar Pieterse describe Cape Town as »flawed beauty, marked by extreme, enduring and highly concentrated poverty.«³

These inequalities, deeply inscribed into the city's urban spaces, are the result of meticulous state planning during the apartheid era (1948–1994). Although racial segregation predated 1948 – already being codified in passports and laws – apartheid's policies of racial exclusion further intensified the city's segregation.⁴ Apartheid ideology produced

- 1 Fanon, »The Wretched of the Earth«, 103–104.
- 2 Huchzermeyer, »Informal Settlements: Production and Intervention in Twentieth-Century Brazil and South Africa«, 96.
- 3 Parnell and Pieterse, »The »Right to the City: Institutional Imperatives of a Developmental State«, 151.
- 4 For example: 1913 Native Land Act to not allow blacks to own land outside rural reserves; 1918 Native in Urban Areas Bill; 1923 Urban Areas Act: introduced racial segregation in urban planning; 1926 Colour Bar Act, denying skilled jobs to black Africans; 1934 Slum Act, employed to clear and evict people living in urban centers. With the apartheid government ascending to power, further discriminatory policies were enacted such as the 1950 Population Registration Act that formalized identity cards and racial classification; the 1950 Group Areas Act leading to forced evictions and segregation; the 1951 Bantu Authorities Act to create separate structures for black African governance; the 1953 Reservation of Separate Amenities Act to create segregated access in buses, beaches, universities and other public facilities (Turok, »South Africa's Tortured Urbanisation and the Complications of Reconstruction,« 150–153).



Fig. 10 Cape Town

»profound effects on spatial development,«⁵ shaping both the built environment and urban imaginaries. During this period, »slums were represented as places where ›devils lurk,«⁶ a narrative that provided the state with justification to forcibly remove ›colored‹ and ›black‹ residents from city centers and relocate them to urban peripheries and Bantustans. The destruction of District Six is perhaps the most emblematic and traumatic act of dispossession committed in the name of apartheid's »brutal policy of resettlement«.⁷ Between the 1960s and 1980s, an estimated two to three million South Africans were forcibly displaced.⁸

Cape Town's distinctive topography provided the blueprint for enforcing strict racial segregation. To the north of Table Mountain lies an area known as the City Bowl and a series of wealthy and middle-class ›suburbs‹ surrounding the Central Business District (CBD) and clustered along the mountain ranges.⁹ On the lower lands to the side of Table

5 Turok, »South Africa's Tortured Urbanisation and the Complications of Reconstruction,« 150.

6 Coetzer, *Building Apartheid. On Architecture and Order in Imperial Cape Town*, 214.

7 Turok, »South Africa's Tortured Urbanisation and the Complications of Reconstruction,« 154.

8 Turok, »South Africa's Tortured Urbanisation and the Complications of Reconstruction,« 154.

9 As Vivian Bickford-Smith argues, popular cultural productions played an important role in upholding the racist discourse that black Africans were

Mountain the vast plane of the Cape Flats stretches out until False Bay. This sandy, windy plane was designated as the place where residents labelled as ›coloured‹ and ›black‹ would be resettled during apartheid. The settlements in the Cape Flats have ever since expanded rapidly in size and population.¹⁰ It is in the resettlement areas and ›informal‹ settlements of the Cape Flats where poverty and crime concentrate. The huge socio-economic differences between the predominantly white urban center with its affluent residents and tourists as well as its surrounding suburbs are segregated by a dividing line separating it from the Cape Flats inhabited almost exclusively by black and colored marginalized urban citizens.

Cape Town's geographical compartmentalization was used by urban planners, law- and policymakers, and architects alike to impose racial and ethnic segregation.¹¹ Whereas the city center and its adjacent suburbs enjoyed the benefits of a concentration of social, economic and cultural capital, the majority of the city's population were moved to the Cape Flats, an area with little infrastructure and demeaning living conditions.

*Marketing Cape Town as the ›Mother City‹ of the ›Rainbow Nation‹
(1994–today)*

The legacies of racial segregation and built inequalities marked Cape Town and South Africa, when Nelson Mandela's African National Congress (ANC) won South Africa's first democratic election in 1994. Hopes were high. Unfortunately, however, Cape Town's historical inequalities have not simply vanished.

The transition from apartheid to a democratic Republic of South Africa largely failed to transform ownership structures due to South African and international pressure to preserve ›white privilege‹. The existing

essentially rural, making their presence in marginalized neighborhoods in the inner cities unacceptable for white elites: ›By drawing attention to the existence of slums and condemning that existence in prose or celluloid, popular disseminators of South African ›Bitter Cries‹ helped politicians in central and local governments justify policies that led to actual slum condemnation and destruction« (Bickford-Smith, *The Emergence of the South African Metropolis. Cities and Identities in the Twentieth Century*, 15).

- 10 Tony Samara describes this division as akin to one between two different cities: one with a high standard of living aspiring to world-class status and the other marked by vast swathes of marginalization and high crime rates (Samara, *Cape Town after Apartheid: Crime and Governance in the Divided City*).
- 11 With twelve officially recognized languages – English, Afrikaans and Xhosa being the most commonly spoken in Cape Town – South Africa has a rich linguistic heritage. However, language barriers have further heightened the racial segregation imposed onto South African urban space.

inequalities were maintained and further deepened due to the adoption of neoliberal urban governance strategies.¹² The ANC government's embrace of policies promoting neoliberal urbanization was most evident in its replacement of its initial Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) in 1996 with the Growth, Employment, and Redistribution (GEAR) plan.¹³ Even though the RDP was certainly not without its critics, it contained a »strong social welfarist element« that was dismantled through GEAR.

GEAR functioned as a self-imposed structural adjustment program »depended almost exclusively on market mechanisms, particularly privatization, fiscal ›discipline‹, and foreign direct investment, and had little appeal beyond an increasingly multiracial national elite and their foreign partners«. ¹⁴ In Cape Town, these neoliberal capitalist mechanisms such as privatization of public land,¹⁵ have continued to push urban residents into more precarious living conditions on the city's periphery, deepening rather than alleviating poverty and marginalization.¹⁶

In contrast to the gentrification and displacement affecting many parts of the city, Cape Town's natural attractions – such as Table Mountain, Lion's Head, Devil's Peak, and its many beaches – alongside historical sites like the Castle of Good Hope, the District Six Museum, and Robben Island, as well as Africa's most visited tourist destination, the V&A Waterfront, have made the city a hub for international travel and tourism. Beyond short-term visitors, Cape Town has long attracted wealthy pensioners from other parts of South Africa and expatriate retirees who settle in its affluent suburbs.

The City of Cape Town's efforts to position itself as a global capital for tourism and design were further advanced by South Africa's hosting of the 2010 FIFA World Cup.¹⁷ Like a magnifying glass, this

12 Marie Huchzermeyer provides a detailed account explaining contemporary struggles for a right to the city in Cape Town and other South African cities and the deeply ingrained inequalities that such struggles must overcome (Huchzermeyer, *Cities with »Slums«*).

13 Samara, *Cape Town after Apartheid*, 27.

14 Samara, *Cape Town after Apartheid*, 27.

15 The struggle of the Tafelberg Site in Seapoint is a good example to illustrate current struggles over land and housing in central Cape Town. The Reclaim the City Campaign, the NGO Ndfuni Ukwazi and local residents have joined forces to challenge the city council's decision to privatize a plot of land by selling it to a private school. For more information on this political controversy see: Reclaim the City, »Social Housing«.

16 Parnell and Pieterse, »The ›Right to the City‹: Institutional Imperatives of a Developmental State«, 154.

17 Cape Town was awarded the title of World Design Capital in 2014. Laura Nkula-Wenz explores the »aspirational« and »fragile« attempts made

sporting mega-event exposed the contradictions and challenges of neoliberal urbanization in South Africa. The ANC's national embrace of the World Cup was built on the promise of »making economic gains, realizing identity-building benefits and overcoming global marginality,« as Shaheeb Tayob argues.¹⁸ The 2010 FIFA World Cup privatized public money to pay for the investment in sporting infrastructure,¹⁹ offered tax exemptions for FIFA and its sponsors, and led to the eviction of marginalized citizens from around the stadium precinct in Greenpoint, all while promoting an image Cape Town that was ripe for tourist consumption. This decision fortified the compartmentalization of the city by focusing all attention on an already affluent neighborhood and »reinforc[ing] the power and interest of a select and privileged group.«²⁰ The narrative to represent Cape Town as the prosperous ›Mother City‹ of a united ›Rainbow Nation‹ intentionally glossing over the deep socio-economic disparities through marketing. With promotional campaigns such as ›Fly the Flag‹ and ›Football Fridays,‹ the dream of presenting South Africa as a unified nation gained significant public support.

Violence as a Structural Feature of Cape Town's Margins

Neoliberal urbanization, as a mode of governance, is closely tied to strategies of militarization and the securitization of specific urban spaces.²¹ Tony Samara argues that the area-specific approaches adopted by police and private security companies reflect Cape Town's spatial divisions, enforcing policing policies that disproportionately target marginalized urban residents.

In the city center, a »moral panic« scapegoats persons living on the streets as well as informal traders as a threat to »making tourist and commercial areas clean and safe so that they will attract investment, middle-class consumers, and tourists.«²² The City of Cape Town's public-private partnership was established to create the Central City Improvement

by the City of Cape Town to use design as a way of affirming Cape Town's status as a world city (Nkula-Wenz, »Worlding Cape Town by Design: Encounters with Creative Cityness«).

18 Tayob, »The 2010 World Cup in South Africa: A Millennial Capitalist Moment«, 722.

19 Schonbee and Brümmer, »Public Loss, FIFA's Gain: How Cape Town Got Its ›White Elephant‹«.

20 Tayob, »The 2010 World Cup in South Africa: A Millennial Capitalist Moment«, 717.

21 Samara, *Cape Town after Apartheid*.

22 Samara, *Cape Town after Apartheid*, 52.

District (CCID) that lead to intensified policing tactics and an increased presence of private security in the CBD to secure tourist, shoppers and restaurant visitors while pushing out those who cannot afford the expensive consumption services offered in the CBD.²³ Laws regulating public behavior – such as bans on public intoxication – are strictly enforced against marginalized individuals living on the streets, yet are rarely applied to affluent visitors.

On the Cape Flats, gangs have blossomed that engage in profitable activities such as »alcohol and drug trade, prostitution, trafficking in stolen cars, and large-scale theft«. ²⁴ The post-apartheid government's attempts to establish police control over the Cape Flats resulted in a de facto declaration of war on gangs. In 1999, the Minister for Safety and Security, Steve Tshwete, argued that »criminals are animals« and thus »we must show them no mercy«. ²⁵ These assumptions by high-ranking police officers and politicians such as Tshwete depicted gangs as a »tumour« that needed to be eradicated with all necessary force, resulting in a series of police and military counter-insurgency interventions aimed at restoring state control over the Cape Flats. ²⁶ The result was a further exacerbation of already high crime rates as well as police violence that brought into question the citizenship rights of marginalized residents. ²⁷ As Rashied Omar highlighted in 2019: »There are people living outside of these war zones who may feel safe and sufficiently removed to be unaffected by this conflict. But theirs is a false sense of security.« ²⁸

A leader of The Americans gang from Athlone on the Cape Flats derides this approach: »[A]s long as Cape Town [city center and suburbs] is safe, they don't care about the townships.« ²⁹ In 2005, David Bruce found that there was »significant evidence of a problem of illegal killings by police« in South Africa, with an especially high rate of »bystanders who are presumably shot by error«, without corresponding to a significant rise of killings of police killings. ³⁰ Despite a surge in reports of police misconduct, only 1 percent of assault allegations resulted in convictions. ³¹

23 Samara, *Cape Town after Apartheid*.

24 Samara, *Cape Town after Apartheid*, 97.

25 Tshwete in: Jensen, »The Security and Development Nexus in Cape Town: War on Gangs, Counterinsurgency and Citizenship«, 83.

26 Tshwete in: Jensen, »The Security and Development Nexus in Cape Town«, 83.

27 Jensen, »The Security and Development Nexus in Cape Town«.

28 Omar, »Time to End This Civil War on the Cape Flats.«

29 Samara, *Cape Town after Apartheid*, 137.

30 Bruce, »Interpreting the Body Count. South African Statistics on Lethal Police Violence«.

31 Smith, »South Africa Reports of Police Brutality More than Tripled in the Last Decade.«

Police violence directed at urban citizens, the general levels of violence amongst South Africans are worrying. As Anine Kriegler argues, high levels of violence are a »structural feature« of inequalities:

»Murder levels nationally have been at about this level or higher (above 30 per 100,000, which is considered very high by global standards) since at least the 1970s. High levels of violence are not a matter of police resources. They are a structural feature of this society.«³²

South Africa's murder rate of over 30 victims per 100,000 residents is similar to that of Brazil.³³ In Cape Town, however, this rate is nearly double the South African average at 59.4 murders per 100,000 inhabitants, which for the period of March 2017 to February 2018 amounted to 3,974 murders. In terms of its murder rate, the Western Cape is among the most lethal provinces in South Africa.³⁴ Within Cape Town, the prevalence of violent crime is strongly concentrated in marginalized parts of the city such as on the Cape Flats.³⁵

Extraordinary levels of violence are often legitimized by »troubling naturalizations of [the] inequalities« that produce such violence, as Samara concludes in his extensive study of crime and governance in Cape Town.³⁶ While these inequalities and high levels of violence cannot be attributed solely to contemporary forms of »neoliberal urban governance« or to the legacies of colonialism and apartheid, Cape Town's history of division and inequality reflects a more complex interplay of causes and effects.³⁷ Nevertheless, »the mutually reinforcing discourses of market rationality, liberal democracy, and security« that define neoliberal urban governance appear to deepen, rather than reduce, violence and crime at the city's margins.³⁸ The »reconciliation of formal democracy with segregation, inclusion in principle with exclusion in practice« in post-apartheid Cape Town has failed to reverse patterns of fragmentation – often with lethal consequences for the marginalized.

The result is a deeply fragmented urban landscape marked by racial segregation and stark wealth inequalities. In the urban center and its affluent suburbs, predominantly white and wealthy populations are

32 Kriegler, »South Africa Won't Become Less Violent until It's More Equal.«

33 World Population Review, »Murder Rate by Country 2020.«

34 Africa Check, »Factsheet: South Africa's Crime Statistics for 2018/19.«

35 An insider's view from a social worker who has been engaged in Cape Flats communities for decades is provided by Don Pinnock. He emphasizes the structural entanglements of gang activities within the biographies of young members of marginalized communities and the impossibility of breaking this cycle of violence through military force and police tactics (Pinnock, *Gang Town*).

36 Samara, *Cape Town after Apartheid*, 182.

37 Samara, *Cape Town after Apartheid*, 180–181.

38 Samara, *Cape Town after Apartheid*, 181.

concentrated and protected by both privatized security and public police forces. These areas offer privileged access to tourist attractions, historical monuments, government buildings, and corporate headquarters. Surrounding these central zones, vast and sprawling settlements – home to formerly displaced urban citizens and low-income newcomers – struggle to secure basic infrastructure, safety, and adequate housing.

Following the characterization of Cape Town's urban morphologies and the historically entrenched divides that have developed over the past century, the next sections examine how these dynamics are reflected in the mobilization of urban movements. The discussion first highlights the role of Service Delivery Protests, which have emerged predominantly from the urban margins, before turning to the student-led RhodesMust-Fall movement.

Cape Town's Service Delivery Protests

Service delivery protests (SDPs) is an umbrella term for »local political protests« that have »emanated from poorer neighborhoods« in South Africa since the early 2000s.³⁹ The demands voiced during these protests are as diverse as the communities they mobilize – they include calls for the fulfillment of basic citizenship rights, housing rights, land tenure, and access to water, sanitation, electricity, and reliable public transport. The tactics employed during SDPs draw from a broad repertoire of resistance: »mass meetings, drafting of memoranda, petitions, toy-toying, processions, stay-aways, election boycotts, blockading of roads, construction of barricades, burning of tires, looting, destruction of buildings, chasing unpopular individuals out of townships, confrontations with the police, and forced resignation of elected officials.«⁴⁰ For urban citizens in marginalized neighborhoods, the massive inequalities exacerbated by »neoliberalism« have »added to feelings of injustice« and fueled a »rebellion of the poor.«⁴¹

In Cape Town, the Cape Flats are a hotspot for service delivery protests. Local political actions often target major roads – such as the N2 highway, which connects the central business district with Cape Town International Airport – in an effort to draw attention to their causes.

39 Alexander, »Rebellion of the Poor: South Africa's Service Delivery Protests – a Preliminary Analysis«, 26.

40 Alexander, »Rebellion of the Poor: South Africa's Service Delivery Protests – a Preliminary Analysis«, 26. A concise overview of social movement organization in post-Apartheid South Africa is also presented in Wendy Williams. »Social Movement Media, Post-Apartheid (South Africa).«

41 Alexander, »Rebellion of the Poor: South Africa's Service Delivery Protests – a Preliminary Analysis«, 37.

In other instances discussed in this work, SDPs have taken the form of marches to the city center, bringing together different communities.⁴² One of the most striking and widely recognized strategies used in Cape Town's SDPs is what Colin McFarlane and Jonathan Silver have termed »poolitical tactics,« in which human feces are dumped in public spaces.⁴³ These »poo protests« have literally involved »the throwing of shit by residents of informal settlements into targeted sites of the city, including the airport, a main arterial road, the Provincial Legislature, and the Mayor's car.«⁴⁴ *Ses'khona* – meaning »We're Here« – was one of the grassroots organizations that played a vital role in these »toilet wars«, which were often suppressed in draconian style. For example police violently broke up protest marches on the N2, and the judiciary imposed long-term prison sentences on activists.

Since the start of the 2000s, grassroots organizing has resulted in city-wide alliances being established across South Africa, among the most well-known of which are the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign in Cape Town,⁴⁵ the shack dwellers' movement *Abahlali baseMjondolo* in Durban,⁴⁶ and the Anti-Privatisation Forum in Johannesburg.⁴⁷ These new »new social movements' disrupted old partnerships from the anti-apartheid struggle that had seen social movements working hand in hand with the ANC and its alliance partner, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). As Marcel Paret argues, »[O]bservers emphasised the distance between organised labour and community protests«, reflecting a break between workers and residents.⁴⁸ The tension between the militant grassroots protest campaigns of local communities and COSATU's bureaucratic procedures – and its close alignment with the ruling ANC – was starkly revealed through service delivery protests

42 For an example thereof, see Chapter Six.

43 McFarlane and Silver, »The Poolitical City: »Seeing Sanitation« and Making the Urban Political in Cape Town«.

44 McFarlane and Silver, »Rebellion of the Poor: South Africa's Service Delivery Protests – a Preliminary Analysis,« 131.

45 Sophie Oldfield and Kristian Stokke highlight the tension between pluralist approaches and interests, on the one hand, and the necessity for unity in community-based political struggles like that of the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign (Oldfield and Stokke, »Building Unity in Diversity: Social Movement Activism in the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign«).

46 Selmeczi, »Abahlali's Vocal Politics of Proximity: Speaking, Suffering and Political Subjectivization«.

47 Paret, »Labour and Community Struggles 1994–2014«.

48 Marcel Paret's discussion of how the interests of workers and the unemployed have increasingly diverged in post-apartheid South Africa offers important insights into the new institutional arrangements and their implications for resistance (Paret, 41).

across the country,⁴⁹ especially in the aftermath of the 2012 Marikana massacre.

Service delivery protests in Cape Town exhibit distinct dynamics in the South African context. They are shaped by the political landscape in which the City of Cape Town and the Western Cape Province have been governed by the ANC's main national rival, the Democratic Alliance (DA), since 2006 and 2009 respectively. For example, the dual role of Andile Lili, a key figure in the ›poo protests‹ as a member of Ses'khona as well as an ANC councilor in the City of Cape Town, was immediately seized upon by the DA as evidence that SDPs in Cape Town were being fermented by the ANC leadership at the Western Cape. This ongoing power struggle between the two parties found little resonance among poor Capetonians. As one activist declared: »People are suffering because of these [sic.] political point scoring and grandstanding«. ⁵⁰ The frustration of popular demands going unheard amid the background noise of party politics further encouraged the use of disruption as a political tactic. ⁵¹

M'du Hlongwa, an activist with Abahlali, captured the fury of many impoverished South Africans who feel that top-down representation serves only to silence them:

»We are supposed to suffer silently so that some rich people can get rich from our work and others can get rich having conferences about having more conferences about our suffering. [. . .] I want to say clearly that I am a Professor of my suffering. We are all Professors of our suffering. But in this South Africa the poor must always be invisible.« ⁵²

This silencing of the poor is what Partha Chatterjee captures with his notion of a »political society«, which involves populations being governed as mere objects of »administrative policy,« with little regard for the individual or collective voices of citizens. Sophie Oldfield and Claire Benit-Gbaffou invoke Chatterjee's heuristic distinction between ›civil

49 Paret, »Labour and Community Struggles 1994–2014«, 41.

50 Activist quoted in: McFarlane and Silver, »The Poolitical City: ›Seeing Sanitation‹ and Making the Urban Political in Cape Town«, 132.

51 Julian Brown reads the practices and forms of service delivery protests as disruption in the sense implied by Jacques Rancière. However, the trouble with Brown's account is that despite his detailed description of these practices, his interpretations are explicitly drawn from the perspective of a distant observer. Without ever participating in any protests or speaking to activists directly, Brown ignores their demands that researchers speak to them and not just about them (Brown, South Africa's Insurgent Citizens).

52 Selmeczi, »Abahlali's Vocal Politics of Proximity: Speaking, Suffering and Political Subjectivization«, 511.



Fig. 11 *Seats Not Statues*

society« and »political society« to emphasize the importance of paying attention to the local practices and circumstances that drive mobilization rather than imposing universal concepts such as the Right to the City without paying sufficient heed to the specificities of localized struggles.⁵³

The marginalization of service delivery protests and their demands closely mirrors the urban morphology described earlier, a connection that becomes even more apparent in the examination of media representations. However, before turning to how urban movements are portrayed in the media, it is worth considering a second and contrasting case: the Rhodes Must Fall student movement. Unlike SDPs, this movement emerged to a significant extent from the prestigious University of Cape Town, situated on lush hillslopes near the city center.

Rhodes Must Fall and the Quest for Decolonization

The Rhodes Must Fall (RMF)⁵⁴ student movement was born on 9 March 2015, when Chumani Maxwele blew a whistle and emptied the contents

53 Bénéit-Gbaffou and Oldfield, »Claiming »Rights« in the African City: Popular Mobilisation and the Politics of Informality in Nairobi, Rabat, Johannesburg and Cape Town«, 292.

54 In my book, I refer to this student movement as the Rhodes Must Fall (RMF) movement to emphasize the specific context of the early 2015 UCT

of a portable toilet onto the statue of Cecil John Rhodes on the University of Cape Town's (UCT) Upper Campus. This act directly referenced the earlier ›poo protests‹ by symbolically transposing feces from Khayelitsha to the affluent university setting. Maxwele described the act as a deliberate use of disruptive tactics::

»We knew that the moment we do anything that is violent, or damaging [to] the statue, we will be deemed with the stereotype of Black violence. We sat down and thought through this thing and – because of our lived experiences – we knew that we had to use our psychological pain, our trauma, that the statue gives to us as Black students and Black staff. I am deeply traumatized by that statue. We thought: let's take the pain of our parents, the pain of our brothers and sisters in Khayelitsha, who will be using porta-potty toilets for the rest of their lives. That is my pain. Let me take that porta-potty with feces back to where it belongs. So that the powerful people – the elite – can feel how it feels to be Black. How it feels to be on the ground and [using] those toilets as your way of relieving yourself. The dehumanization of Black people in this country has gone on for too long.«⁵⁵

To transpose »Black pain« to »the elite« at the University of Cape Town proved to be an effective symbolic intervention by kick-starting the RMF movement, which according to Abdul Kayum Ahmed became »a radical student movement centered on decolonizing the university by confronting questions of institutional racism, access to education, and reforming the Eurocentric university curriculum.«⁵⁶ The movement's »radical« nature meant that it did not aim for the »transformation« of a »violent system of power« targeting Africans, but for the very destruction of this »system«.⁵⁷ Building on the three pillars of »Pan-Africanism, Black Consciousness, and Black radical feminism«, the students' fight for decolonization gave

student protests, which I have examined most closely and which were most public in the Western Cape. Eventually the Rhodes Must Fall movement turned into the nationwide Fees Must Fall movement in September and October 2016, with Wits University in Johannesburg as its epicenter. The October 2016 protests in Cape Town picked up the new Hashtag #Fees Must Fall. However, since the Rhodes Must Fall protests were the origins of the students' movement in Cape Town, I have chosen to consistently name the student activism in Cape Town Rhodes Must Fall rather than Fees Must Fall. The documentary movie »Everything Must Fall« (2019) by Rehad Desai offers a more pronounced insight into the causes and drivers of the movement.

- 55 Maxwele in: Boersema, »Re-Racing South Africa: Rhodes Must Fall as Antiracist Movement«, 4.
- 56 Ahmed, »The Rise of Fallism: #RhodesMustFall and the Movement to Decolonize the University«, 1.
- 57 Ahmed, »The Rise of Fallism«, 3.

rise to one of the most important social movements in post-apartheid South Africa.⁵⁸

Ahmed identifies five crucial moments in the history of the RMF movement. The first occurred in April 2015 when, after the Rhodes statue had been removed by the university following further protests, students occupied the Bremner Building on the UCT campus and renamed it Azania House.⁵⁹ RMF's second campaign, which became famous under the hashtag #EndOutsourcing, was an act of solidarity with outsourced UCT staff that culminated with a series of strikes in October 2015.⁶⁰ Emerging immediately out of these strikes in early October 2015 was the spread of student protests to other universities across the country under the banner of the Fees Must Fall movement.⁶¹ The fourth key moment occurred on 15 February 2016, when #Shackville was erected on the UCT Upper Campus in protest against a lack of student housing.⁶² The final phase of the RMF movement was marked by its »splintering and unravelling,«⁶³ most visibly during the opening of an exhibition titled *Echoing Voices from Within*, held exactly one year after Maxwele's symbolic act at the Rhodes statue. A transgender collective disrupted the vernissage, prompting intense internal debates that exposed and deepened existing fractures among RMF activists. Despite these tensions, student strikes continued to spread across the country under the broader banner of the hashtag #FeesMustFall.

The tactics, demands, and modes of mobilization of these two movements form the basis for understanding how they have been portrayed in mainstream media. The following sections provide an overview of the broader media landscape in South Africa, as well as the role of internet access in disseminating conflicting narratives emerging »from within« the movements themselves.

4.2 Rio de Janeiro, the »marvelous city«

After outlining the urban context for video activism in Cape Town, the following chapter turns to the development of Rio de Janeiro, offering

58 Ahmed, »The Rise of Fallism,« 2.

59 Ahmed, »The Rise of Fallism,« 24–31.

60 The #EndOutsourcing campaign gave rise to a documentary film that is discussed in Chapter Six.

61 The protest on 21 October 2015 in Cape Town during which demonstrators broke through the gates of the Legislative Assembly in Cape Town is discussed in Chapter Six.

62 This is discussed in Chapter Seven.

63 Ahmed, »The Rise of Fallism«, 49.

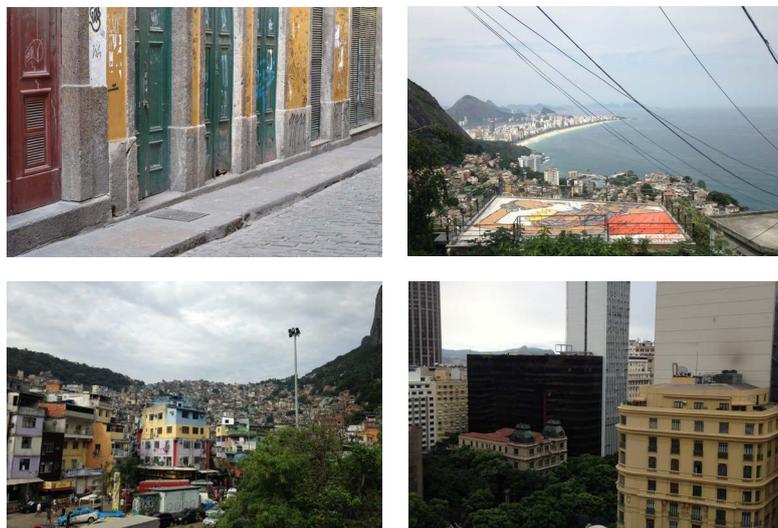


Fig. 12 Rio de Janeiro

an overview of Rio de Janeiro's urban development and its key urban social movements.

*The Making of the ›Paris of the Tropics‹ by Colonizers,
Authoritarian Rulers and Elites*

Rio de Janeiro is a city with a population of approximately eight million inhabitants within the municipality and a total of circa twelve million residents in the wider metropolitan area. The area's history of European settlement began with a small outpost that was established by Portuguese sailors.⁶⁴ In 1763, Rio de Janeiro replaced Salvador de Bahia as the capital of Portugal's Brazilian colony. In 1808, the Portuguese crown and its entourage fled Lisbon to settle in Rio de Janeiro, which made Rio the capital of the entire Portuguese colonial empire.⁶⁵ In this role, Rio de

- 64 The naming of their settlement after a river that did not exist is a »misapprehension typical of the colonial enterprise in the Americas« but this name has lived on in that of the city of Rio de Janeiro: »Saturday, 30 April, early morning we arrived at the mouth of the River of January,« noted Pero Lopes de Sousa as the Portuguese ships entered Guanabara Bay in 1531 (Williams, Chazkel, and Knauss, *The Rio de Janeiro Reader*, 9). There they founded the settlement that was to become São Sebastião do Rio de Janeiro.
- 65 The Portuguese crown left Lisbon with an armada of ships just before the armies of Napoleon conquered the Portuguese capital.

Janeiro functioned as one of the biggest slave ports worldwide and as the seat of the Portuguese royal family before becoming the seat of government of the newly independent Brazilian state in 1822.

In the early twentieth century, Rio de Janeiro underwent large-scale urban redevelopment in preparation for the Brazilian National Exhibition of 1908. Francisco Pereira Passos, the city's mayor from 1902 to 1906 and an admirer of Baron Haussmann, sought to ›civilize‹ and ›Europeanize‹ the city. His overhaul of the city center included the construction of wide avenues such as Avenida Central – later renamed Avenida Rio Branco – as well as central squares like Cinelândia and surrounding landmarks including the Municipal Theatre, the National Library, and the Museum of Fine Arts. The installation of electric power lines further contributed to Rio's nickname as the ›Paris of the Tropics‹.⁶⁶ At the same time, Passos's reforms discriminated against poor and Afro-Brazilian residents, approximately twenty thousand of whom were forcefully evicted from the city center.⁶⁷ Resistance to this top-down urban restructuring culminated in 1904 in the *Revolta Contra Vacina*.⁶⁸

The ›formal‹ city of Rio de Janeiro developed from its center at Guanabara Bay southwards into the neighborhoods of Flamengo, Laranjeiras and Botafogo. After the construction of the first tunnel to today's South Zone with the city center in the early twentieth century, the Copacabana and later the Ipanema neighborhoods developed rapidly.⁶⁹ Soon Copacabana attracted worldwide fame as a cultural hub in Rio's strictly class-stratified society of the 1950s and 1960s.⁷⁰ Simultaneously, the U.S.-inspired model of car-centered urban growth drove expansion toward the southwest with the planned neighborhood of Barra da Tijuca, as well as sprawl into the present-day North Zone and the neighboring city of Niterói.

66 Williams, Chazkel, and Knauss, *The Rio de Janeiro Reader*, 139.

67 Skidmore, *Brazil: Five Centuries of Change*.

68 A comparison between this early twentieth-century mass movement and the twenty-first-century *Jornadas de Junho* in terms of their organizing, demands and support bases highlights a number of interesting similarities. In both cases, there was a perceived intrusion of the state into the life of ordinary citizens – manifesting itself in 1904 in the form of forced vaccinations and in 2013 through an increase in public transport ticket prices that threatened to further curtail mobility – as well as subsequent heavy suppression of dissent by the authorities (Santoro, »Um Estudo Da Política Criminal de Controle Dos Protestos Populares Na História Do Rio de Janeiro.«).

69 Cultural productions such as the Hollywood film *Flying Down to Rio*, which is set at Copacabana Palace, augmented the myth of Copacabana (Jaguaribe, *Rio de Janeiro. Urban Life Through the Eyes of the City*).

70 Beatriz Jaguaribe's account of the development and representation of the Copacabana neighborhood and its iconic sites, such as the Copacabana Palace hotel, and new practices like swimming in Chapter Five of her book is highly recommended (Jaguaribe, *Rio de Janeiro*, 133–170).

Today, while the North and West Zones are home to more industrial activity and lower- to middle-income neighborhoods, the South Zone – with its iconic landmarks such as Pão de Açúcar (Sugarloaf) and Cristo Redentor (Christ the Redeemer), and famous neighborhoods like Copacabana and Ipanema – attracts the majority of tourists and is predominantly inhabited by middle- and upper-class residents. Although Rio’s Central Zone remains the city’s cultural, economic, and political core, the city lost some of its symbolic and political prominence when Brasília became Brazil’s capital in 1967.

Favelas and the ›informal‹ growth of the city

Simultaneous to the development of the ›formal‹ city, significant ›informal‹ development accompanied Rio’s expansion throughout the twentieth century. In 1897, after the end of the War of Canudos in north-eastern Brazil, returning soldiers occupied Providência hill in the city center to demand their unpaid wages.⁷¹ Although these payments were never settled,⁷² their occupation camp turned into a permanent settlement that was to become the first favela in Rio and Brazil.⁷³ Ever since, favelas have spread out all across Rio’s fractured urban landscape of hills, lush forests and islands, providing a home to an estimated one-third of the city’s population. While favelas are scattered throughout the city,

71 The word ›Favela‹ goes back to the 19th century, when a group of unemployed soldiers returned from the Canudos war to Rio de Janeiro and settled on the hill of Providência that came to be the first ›favela‹. The Term ›favela‹ is used with some caution in this work as it is often associated with discourses that criminalize its inhabitants. For example João H. Costa Vargas describes how the Jacarezinho Favela in Rio de Janeiro was portrayed in corporate media as a space that is »likely to produce future generations of dangerous blacks« which presents one of the many ways of stereotypical discussions driving an overall discourse of criminalizing specific groups of urban citizens in Rio de Janeiro (Costa Vargas, »When a Favela Dares to Become a Gated Condominium: The Politics of Race and Urban Space in Rio de Janeiro,« 49). In my work I use the term ›communities‹ (Portuguese comunidades) and ›favela‹ synonymously. However, it is important here that the use of the word favela by no means wants to reproduce the negative and stereotyped discourses that unfortunately are often connotated to the term.

72 Jaguaribe, *Rio de Janeiro*, 175.

73 The construction of favelas on hills – a typical characteristic of these neighborhoods – makes the word ›morro‹ (Portuguese for ›hill‹) almost synonymous with the term ›favela‹ and places it in contrast with the ›asphalt‹ (›asphalt‹) of the paved streets of the ›formal‹ city below (McGuirk, *Radical Cities. Across Latin America in Search of a New Architecture*, 169).

they are typically built on geographically undesirable sites, such as steep hillsides or swampy terrain. Nearly one thousand self-constructed favela neighborhoods – often inhabited by migrants from northeastern Brazil – have become an iconic feature of the *Cidade Maravilhosa* (Marvelous City). Housing in these dense settlements, which often overlook the formal city's upmarket neighborhoods below, is typically built with red brick walls that allow for vertical expansion as residents can afford it. While some favelas, like Santa Marta, are relatively small with only a few thousand inhabitants, larger complexes such as Rocinha or Complexo do Alemão are home to over 100,000 residents.

Whether under democratic rule or during the military dictatorship (1964–1985), the Brazilian state has rarely exercised effective governance over favelas. The development of most of Rio's favela neighborhoods occurred without state planning or oversight. As self-constructed communities beyond formal control, favelas often lack basic infrastructure and, since the rise of organized crime in the 1980s, many have come under the influence of gangs. Evictions during the dictatorship⁷⁴ as well as forced evictions under the auspices of government housing programs in more recent times point to the deep levels of mistrust and tension that exist between favela communities and the state.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, despite infrastructural shortcomings and high levels of violence, residents often maintain strong attachments to their communities.⁷⁶

A discourse inherited from Brazil's history as part of the Portuguese Empire that remains deeply embedded in its national identity is the »myth of *mestiçagem*« – the idea of racial harmony among the ›three races‹ that downplays the dominance of the white upper classes.⁷⁷ As Naomi Wood observes, »[n]arratives of racial harmony are seen imploding in

74 The eviction of an estimated 175,000 residents from favelas in the period from 1960 to 1975 captures the dictatorship's hostility towards favelados (McGuirk, *Radical Cities*, 189).

75 While the *Mora Carioca* housing program aimed to upgrade existing built environments in the 1990s, the follow-up *Minha Vida*, *Minha Casa* program privileged the construction of new settlements on the outskirts of the city as resettlement sites (McGuirk, *Radical Cities*). In this regard, the *Minha Casa*, *Minha Vida* program resembles South Africa's transition from the more socially oriented RDP and to the more neoliberal GEAR program for social housing.

76 Community solidarity and a rich cultural heritage, among other reasons, make many favelados deeply attached to the communities in which they live, thus providing them with little incentive to move to other neighborhoods (Alves and Evanson, *Living in the Crossfire*, 21).

77 Marshall Eakin's study offers a valuable historical overview of how the myth of ›mixture‹ has been translated into Brazilian popular culture and been used to construct an imaginary national identity (Eakin, *Becoming Brazilians: Race and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Brazil*).

the face of growing economic disparities and diminishing opportunities for Brazil's mostly darker-skinned poorer classes. «⁷⁸ While there are genuine elements of shared nationhood – such as a common language and a legal code that formally guarantees equal rights – citizenship in Brazil remains contested. Leslie Bethell characterizes the country as a »[d]emocracy without [c]itizenship,«⁷⁹ highlighting the gap between formal recognition and the actual guarantee of rights.⁸⁰

This tension between de jure and de facto rights manifests in many ways and results in what James Holston terms »differentiated citizenship,« where »most rights are available only to particular kinds of citizens and exercised as the privilege of particular social categories.«⁸¹ Despite some progress toward more equitable urban planning, Rio de Janeiro remains a deeply class-segregated city, with race and class privileges closely intertwined.⁸²

Catalyzing Urban Transformation through Mega-Events?

In 1960, Rio de Janeiro lost its status as Brazil's capital. During the turbulent 1980s, drug cartels increasingly asserted control over the city's favelas, fueling a surge in crime and violence. Brazil's successful bid in 2007 to host the 2014 FIFA World Cup, followed by Rio's selection in 2009 as the host of the 2016 Summer Olympic Games – making it the first South American city to do so – was widely seen as a chance to restore Rio's former grandeur.⁸³

78 Wood, *Brazil in Twenty-First Century Popular Media*, 6.

79 Bethell's political history of Brazil assesses the long durée of social and political transformation in the country as such: »Throughout modern Brazilian history every change of political regime [...] has demonstrated the extraordinary capacity of the Brazilian elites to defend the status quo and their own interests [...].« (Bethell, »Politics in Brazil: From Elections Without Democracy to Democracy Without Citizenship«, 16)

80 For a nuanced understanding of the historical roots and current practices of citizenship, James Holston's comparison of the notion of citizenship in the USA, France and Brazil is highly insightful (Holston, *Insurgent Citizenship*).

81 Holston, »Insurgent Citizenship in an Era of Global Urban Peripheries«, 255.

82 A useful ethnographic case study of the Jacarezinho favela illustrates how »race and urban space intersect«, leaving »favela activists [with] no choice but to confront their continued dehumanization« (Costa Vargas, »When a Favela Dares to Become a Gated Condominium: The Politics of Race and Urban Space in Rio de Janeiro«, 49).

83 A good overview of the hopes and dreams that were initially associated with the staging of these world events, their supposedly strong catalytic effects, and the subsequent disappointment they engendered is well captured in Barbassa, »Brazil's Olympic Rollercoaster«. For a collection of essays

These mega-events were envisioned as catalysts for sweeping urban transformation. Yet, while the global spotlight fed the ambitions of local and national elites, the preparations also reignited long-standing tensions. The promise of renewal exposed deep social divides, causing old fractures in the city's fabric to resurface.⁸⁴

The top-down urban renewal plans launched to fulfill the promises of the two mega-event bids targeted three key areas of Rio de Janeiro. The first was the area surrounding the iconic Maracanã Stadium, slated to host the World Cup final as well as the Olympic opening and closing ceremonies. The second focus was Barra da Tijuca, an affluent neighborhood in Rio's southwest, which received the bulk of investments. This area was designated for the construction of the Olympic Village and major transport infrastructure. However, these developments came at a high social cost: they led to the violent eviction of Vila Autódromo, a neighboring favela. The forced removal of its residents turned Vila Autódromo into a powerful symbol of the mega-events' negative impact on Rio's lower-income communities.⁸⁵

The third target was the Zona Portuária, the city's historic port district north of the center. Here, the city sought to attract large-scale private investment and pushed for sweeping gentrification.⁸⁶ In this process, housing for predominantly Black and low-income residents was replaced with upscale, loft-style apartments. The area was also rebranded with high-profile attractions such as the futuristic Museu do Amanhã (Museum of Tomorrow) and a cable car designed to transport tourists to Morro da Providência, Rio's oldest favela.

that reflect citizens' perspectives on whom the World Cup and the Olympics are staged see: Frechette, *Copa Pra Quem? Olimpíadas Pra Quem? Arte e Megaeventos Esportivos No Rio de Janeiro – Contranarrativas Na Cidade Turística*.

- 84 Barbassa, »Brazil's Olympic Rollercoaster«; Vannuchi, *Transforming Cities for Sports Mega-Events: Another Path to Accumulation by Dispossession?*; Raspaud, »Méga-événement sportif et situation d'exception«; Frechette, *Copa Pra Quem? Olimpíadas Pra Quem? Arte e Megaeventos Esportivos No Rio de Janeiro – Contranarrativas Na Cidade Turística*; Gaffney, »The Mega-Event City as Neo-Liberal Laboratory: The Case of Rio de Janeiro«; Pereira, »Transport Legacy of Mega-Events and the Redistribution of Accessibility to Urban Destinations«.
- 85 Attempts of authorities to evict the community are documented with rich resources and links by RioOnWatch. »Timeline: Vila Autódromo, Story of Resistance«
- 86 The private public partnership to renovate Porto Maravilha in port stimulated massive real estate speculation that benefited Brazilian and international elites and construction firms but had few positive effects for local residents (Vanucchi, »Transforming Cities for Sports Mega-Events«).

The World Cup and the Olympics did leave lasting legacies in Rio de Janeiro. One of the most notable was the significant investment in urban transport infrastructure. However, with the introduction of a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system and a third Metro line – linking the upper-class neighborhood of Barra da Tijuca with the South Zone and city center – most of these developments were concentrated in privileged areas. This further »exacerbated socio-spatial inequalities,« particularly for »low-income transit-dependent groups.«⁸⁷

Another major consequence was the investment in sporting facilities such as the Maracanã Stadium and the Olympic Village, along with the broader upgrade of transport infrastructure. These projects triggered an unprecedented wave of evictions in lower-income neighborhoods and favelas, carried out in the name of expanding the »entrepreneurial city« or »event city« for the tourist market.⁸⁸ The social cost of these transformations was disproportionately borne by Black and lower-class residents.

Despite the promises of progress, the aftermath was marked by crisis. In 2017, the federal state of Rio de Janeiro declared bankruptcy, and police and military interventions had happened. Yet perhaps the most significant legacy of the two mega-events was the wave of protests they sparked. These popular demonstrations challenged the official narrative of urban renewal and exposed the deep contradictions underlying Rio's transformation.

Before turning to these protests, however, it is important to examine the military and police interventions that were also central to the preparations for both events and the successive protest movements.

Violence in the »Pacification« of Favelas

The intervention by the Unidade de Polícia Pacificadora (UPP), the so-called Pacifying Police Unit, in Rio de Janeiro's favelas began in 2009 and has evolved into an overwhelmingly militarized campaign targeting lower-income neighborhoods deemed most ripe for real estate development.⁸⁹ The UPP established its first base in 2009 in Santa Marta, a favela

87 Pereira measured access here empirically by calculating the time that Rio residents have to spend on public transport in order to reach their nearest healthcare facilities. This sound empirical study illustrates that a net growth in public transport infrastructure has not benefited all residents and neighborhoods equally (Pereira, »Transport Legacy of Mega-Events and the Redistribution of Accessibility to Urban Destinations«, 29).

88 Aguiar, »Manifestações: Democratição Contra Capital e Estado«, 57.

89 Aguiar, »Manifestações: Democratição Contra Capital e Estado«, 57; Sabório, »The Pacification of the Favelas: Mega Events, Global Competitiveness, and the Neutralization of Marginality«.

overlooking the South Zone neighborhood of Botafogo,⁹⁰ and has since expanded its operations drastically across the city. This military intervention in the affairs of what were effectively self-governing neighborhoods provoked clashes with the ruling drug cartels, leading to shifts in power both within individual cartels and among them.⁹¹ Despite favela residents having mixed views on the ›pacification‹ of their neighbourhoods,⁹² the ongoing intervention by UPP and Military Police has undoubtedly sustained Brazil's culture of violence rather than eliminated it. As Julio Jacobo Waiselfisz documented for the IGARAPÉ Institute: »The overall statistics on violence and more specifically police violence in Brazil are devastating. Between 1980 and 2014, 218,580 children and adolescents were murdered in Brazil.«⁹³

Since 2014–2015, the rate of violence has skyrocketed even further.⁹⁴ In 2017, the total number of homicides in Brazil reached a record high

- 90 Jaguaribe describes Santa Marta as the »global pop favela«, since it became famous through its appearance in music videos by popstars such as Michael Jackson and Madonna (Jaguaribe, *Rio De Janeiro*, 193).
- 91 Cartels such as Comando Vermelho (the Red Command) started their own turf wars against each other, resulting in heavy casualties among favela residents. At the same time, there have been innumerable reports of local UPP units and cartels collaborating or forming alliances.
- 92 On the empirical basis of an ethnographic study in Cidade do Deus, Anjuli Fahlberg argues that the heterogeneity of favela inhabitants is reflected in their diverse responses to the UPP occupation, with light-skinned women more likely to be much less critical of the UPP than black men (Fahlberg, »It Was Totally Different Than What We Had Before: Perceptions of Urban Militarism Under Rio de Janeiro's Pacifying Policing Units«). Conor Foley looks at pacification from a humanitarian perspective and offers a detailed account of the military interventions (Foley, »Pelo Telefone: Rumors, Truths and Myths in the ›Pacification‹ of the Favelas of Rio de Janeiro«). Rodrigues presents the UPP perspective through the eyes of one of its officers (Rodrigues, »The Dilemmas of Pacification: News of War and Peace in the ›Marvelous City‹«).
- 93 Waiselfisz, »Homicides of Children and Adolescents in Brazil«, 2.
- 94 Serious caution is necessary when viewing the official homicide statistics, since the actual numbers might in fact be significantly higher than those presented in the official figures. The reason for this is legislation that does not make provision for the counting of various forms of homicide committed by the police. For example, when the police bring a wounded victim to hospital and that person dies of his or her injuries, this is not counted as a lethal police assault. Furthermore, victims who had engaged in so-called acts of resistance (see the discussion of the assassination of Eduardo in Providência in Chapter Six) and victims whose bodies disappear after their death also do not appear in the statistics (Alves and Evanson, *Living in the Crossfire*, 115).

of 63,880 victims.⁹⁵ The fact that the majority of those killed were young Black males living in favelas reaffirms the intimate link between race and class – one that quite literally determines life chances, including the chance of survival.⁹⁶ The number of reported rapes in the country was equally horrifying, with 60,018 victims recorded in 2017.⁹⁷

While the overall picture of police violence against citizens in Brazil is grim, that in the state of Rio de Janeiro does not look any better. Amnesty International has openly questioned police tactics as well as official rhetoric in Rio de Janeiro:

»In the context of the so-called »war on drugs«, military police forces have unnecessarily and excessively used lethal force, resulting in the deaths of thousands of people over the past decade. The authorities often use the legal term of »resistance followed by death« [...] as a smoke-screen to cover up killings committed by the police officers.«⁹⁸

Between January and November 2017, 1,035 killings by police were recorded in the state of Rio de Janeiro.⁹⁹ For the same period in 2018, this number rose to 1,444,¹⁰⁰ and in 2019, police officers killed 1,810 people.¹⁰¹ The trend of young Black males being the most frequent victims of police violence in Brazil is even more pronounced in Rio de Janeiro. Of all officially registered cases of lethal police assaults between 2010 and 2013, 99.5 percent of victims were male, 79 percent were Black, and 75 percent were between 15 and 29 years old.¹⁰² There is little hope that the situation in Brazil – particularly in Rio de Janeiro – will improve, especially in light of legislation passed in 2017:

»Law 13.491/2017, signed by President Temer on 13 October [2017], provided that human rights violations, including murder or attempted murder, committed by military personnel against civilians would be tried by military courts. The Law violated the right to a fair trial, as military courts in Brazil did not guarantee judicial independence.«¹⁰³

President Jair Bolsonaro, in office from 2019 to 2023, effectively gave carte blanche to the police by openly advocating for police to employ

95 Phillips, »A Devastating Scenario: Brazil Sets New Record for Homicides at 63,880 Deaths«.

96 Amnesty International, »Amnesty International Report 2017/18 – Brazil«.

97 Phillips, »A Devastating Scenario«.

98 Amnesty International, »You Killed My Son! Homicides by Military Police in the City of Rio de Janeiro«, 6.

99 Amnesty International, »Amnesty International Report 2017/18 – Brazil«.

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

101 Associated Press, »Rio de Janeiro 2019 Homicides Fall as Police Killings Surge.«

102 Amnesty International, »You Killed My Son! Homicides by Military Police in the City of Rio de Janeiro«.

103 Amnesty International, »Amnesty International Report 2017/18 – Brazil«.



Fig. 13 Protest Against Rising Public Transport Cost

lethal force: »If he [a police officer] kills 10, 15 or 20 [*bandidos* or gangsters] with 10 or 30 bullets each, he needs to get a medal and not be prosecuted.«¹⁰⁴ Rio de Janeiro's evangelical governor, Wilson Witzel, also called on the police to use »shoot to kill« tactics.¹⁰⁵ Violence within favela communities – already shaped by the rule of drug cartels – was thus further exacerbated by the actions of the UPP and Military Police.¹⁰⁶

*Protest Movements in Rio de Janeiro:
From the Jornadas de Junho to Fora Dilma!*

The Jornadas de Junho¹⁰⁷ was a wave of protests across Brazil in 2013 that was of historic dimensions. Rauquel Rolink describes the Jornadas as

104 Jair Bolsonaro in: VOA News, Brazil Presidential Candidate: Let Police Kill Criminals, <https://www.voanews.com/a/brazil-presidential-candidate-let-police-kill-criminals/4550275.html> (accessed 22 October 2018).

105 Human Rights Watch, »Brazil: Police Killings at Record High in Rio«. South Africa's Minister of Police has made statements that echo the call for lethal police violence by politicians in Brazil.

106 Through their extensive and insightful qualitative longitudinal study that has stretched for over four decades, Janyce Perlman and her research team have produced a detailed record of the voices and experiences of favela residents and the complex stew of violence in which they often boil (Perlman, *Favela. Four Decades of Living on the Edge in Rio de Janeiro*).

107 »Jornadas de Junho« – or, in short, »Jornadas« – is the term for the wave of protests that swept across Brazil in 2013. Its literal meaning is »June Journeys«, but I refer to the protests by their local name.

an »earthquake«¹⁰⁸ that made visible the ruptures of »unsolved agendas, contradictions and paradoxes«¹⁰⁹ within Brazilian cities.¹¹⁰ The Movimento Passa Livre (MPL), which first made a name for itself at demonstrations in Salvador de Bahia in 2003 and in Florianópolis in 2005, played an important role in organizing protests in various cities during the Jornadas.¹¹¹ MPL demanded a complete elimination of all public transport tariffs – or, at the very least, a ban on all price increases.¹¹² However, the protests were not simply ›about 25 cents,‹ the amount of the 2013 fare hike. Protesters also denounced Brazil’s crumbling public infrastructure in contrast to the billions of reais invested in stadiums, the corruption and tax evasion linked to FIFA, the police’s excessive use of force against demonstrators, the violent evictions of communities to make way for elite spectacles, and the biased reporting on protest by Brazil’s corporate media – particularly Globo.

Rio de Janeiro was an epicenter of the June demonstrations, experiencing the largest and most sustained wave of unrest.¹¹³ Protesters’ anger had been building well before the peak of the protests in June 2013. The most significant event predating the *Jornadas* was the attempted

- 108 The demands of the Jornadas de Junho protesters and the significance of urban agendas – such as the demand for free public transport – for the protests is discussed in a collection of essays by influential critical thinkers: Marciato, *Cidades Rebeldes. Passe Livre e as Manifestações Que Tomaram as Ruas Do Brasil*.
- 109 Raqule Rolink in: Marciato, »Cidades Rebeldes«.
- 110 A useful source on the development of this wave of protests across Brazil is Moraes et al., *Junho*.
- 111 Pablo Ortellado, who examined MPL’s non-hierarchical organization prior to the 2013 protests, posited that the movement’s experiences in Salvador de Bahia in 2003 and in Florianópolis in 2005 taught it crucial lessons about its organizational structures (Ortellado, »L’antiparti«).
- 112 Ironically, there was a fleeting moment in Rio when MPL involuntarily achieved its goal of free public transport. When an estimated 300,000 protesters descended on the Maracanã Stadium during the FIFA Confederations Cup match between Spain and Haiti on 20 June 2013, the authorities decided to temporarily stop requiring metro passengers to buy tickets in the hope of getting the approximately 70,000 spectators away from the venue before the police clashed with demonstrators (Eisenberg, »A Crise Da Mobilidade Social Brasileira«, 13).
- 113 Idelber Avelar and Juliette Simont offer an interesting perspective on the Jornadas by discussing how the brutality with which the 2013 movement was met in Brazil’s urban centers resembles the suppression of indigenous movements in the Amazonas. Both examples reflect the »shadows« of the military dictatorship, whose legacy continues to live on long after its fall in Brazil’s largely unchanged power structures (Avelar and Simont, »L’ombre de la dictature«).

destruction of Aldeia Maracanã¹¹⁴ – a religious and residential site housing Indigenous citizens next to Maracanã Stadium – to make way for the new Museum of the Olympic City.¹¹⁵ The violent eviction attempts in March 2013, during which the *Polícia Militar* (PM) used massive amounts of tear gas and rubber bullets against unarmed citizens, sparked widespread outrage and solidarity campaigns. These experiences became a crucial reference point for activists, fostering unity and motivating further mobilization in the months that followed.

The climax of the *Jornadas de Junho* demonstrations came swiftly in June, as public anger reached a boiling point. In Rio de Janeiro, 17 June 2013 lives on in the city's collective memory as a defining moment. On that day, approximately one hundred thousand protesters marched from Cinelândia Square in central Rio to the *Assembleia Legislativa do Rio de Janeiro* (ALERJ),¹¹⁶ the state legislature.¹¹⁷ Outside the ALERJ, demonstrators attempted to storm the building, triggering violent clashes with the police.¹¹⁸ Just three days later, on 20 June, Rio hosted the largest street march of the *Jornadas*, with an estimated one million participants.¹¹⁹ Once again, protesters were met with heavy-handed police tactics, including mounted officers beating their way through the crowd.

In July 2013, a new wave of mobilization emerged from the Rocinha favela in response to the ›disappearance‹ of Amarildo de Souza. As *BBC News* reported: ›Critics say [this] is symptomatic of a large number of disappearances in Rio and the lack of investigation into them.«¹²⁰

114 The ruling by the council of the Rio de Janeiro municipality to destroy the building which housed Aldeia Maracanã – a museum for indigenous culture that was to be replaced by the FIFA sport museum – demonstrated to many observers the Rio elite's complete ignorance of local culture, disrespect for marginalized communities, and willful collaboration with allegedly corrupt international organizations such as FIFA (Raspaud, ›Méga-événement sportif et situation d'exception‹).

115 Pinheiro, ›Nada é Impossível de Mudar‹.

116 The ALERJ is the Legislative Assembly of the state of Rio de Janeiro. It is in the Palácio Tiradentes building, which was constructed in 1922 and was home to Brazil's Chamber of Deputies until 1960.

117 The confrontations which occurred on both dates are discussed in more detail in Chapter Six.

118 This 2013 protest is interpreted by Aguiar as historically parallel to the 1968 demonstrations in which protesters demanded formal democratic rights from the military junta. For their part, the 2013 protesters demanded that their formal democratic rights have an effect on political decision-making (Aguiar, ›Manifestações: Democratização Contra Capital e Estado,« 62).

119 Simultaneous demonstrations were held in all of Brazil's other major cities.

120 BBC news, ›Brazil Police Charged with Rio Murder over Amarildo Case.‹



Fig. 14 *Nao Vai Ter Golpel Fora Cunha!*

Indeed, the disappearance of the 43-year-old Amarildo was not an isolated case. However, in this instance, public outrage over the *Unidades de Polícia Pacificadora*'s (UPP) use of torture and extrajudicial killings – followed by claims that victims had simply »disappeared« – sparked widespread protests. These culminated in the *Onde é Amarildo?* (Where is Amarildo?) campaign. At the same time, activists occupied the square in front of state governor Sérgio Cabral's residence, launching the *Ocupa Cabral* (Occupy Cabral) campaign. This occupation played a vital role in reuniting the local activist scene after the upheaval of June. During this period, media activists made significant strides in developing counter-hegemonic media production techniques.

In September, a teachers' strike triggered another wave of mobilization.¹²¹ A brutal police assault on teachers occupying Cinelândia Square – who were demanding better working conditions and higher salaries – sparked the emergence of the so-called *Black Profs* movement.¹²² Then, in January 2014, when the state once again attempted to raise public transport fares in Rio, unrest flared up once more. During a protest against the proposed fare hikes on 6 February 2014, Santiago Andrade, a cameraman for TV Bandeirantes, was killed.¹²³ For many activists, Andrade's death was like a »cold shower«, finally putting an end to the

121 This is discussed in detail in Chapter Seven.

122 The teachers received this nickname after learning from their students how to protect themselves from the police using black bloc tactics. A more detailed account of these events is to be found in Chapter Seven.

123 The death was caused by an accident in which fireworks shot by two teenagers participating in the protest march hit Santiago Andrade at his head. For more details see Chapter Eight.

nearly year-long cycle of contestation in Rio and leaving them with a »hangover«¹²⁴

In 2015 and 2016, a new wave of protests emerged demanding the ouster of then-president Dilma Rousseff. Protesters accused Rousseff and her *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Workers' Party) of involvement in the *Lava Jato* (Operation Car Wash) corruption scandal – an accusation that, in Rousseff's case, remains unproven to this day.¹²⁵ Although these protests attempted to replicate some of the tactics seen during the *Jornadas de Junho*, they differed in several significant ways.

First, the *Fora Dilma!* protests were launched in Rio's South Zone – a predominantly white, middle- to upper-class area – whereas the *Jornadas* had been staged in the city center, a more accessible location for residents from across socioeconomic backgrounds. In fact, most of the *Jornadas de Junho* protests, as well as later mobilizations by emancipatory urban movements, were staged in central Rio along key roads and at sites of historical significance. These included routes from Cinelândia Square to the Candelária Church¹²⁶ via Avenida Rio Branco, as well as locations such as the *Assembleia Legislativa do Rio de Janeiro* (ALERJ), Avenida Presidente Vargas, and the Central do Brasil train station.

Second, while activists during the *Jornadas* were pepper-sprayed, tear-gassed, arrested, and prosecuted, *Fora Dilma!* protesters applauded the police, took selfies with officers, and even violently attacked bystanders wearing red T-shirts – assuming they were supporters of Rousseff or the PT – while police stood by.¹²⁷ A third major difference was the media coverage: Globo and other corporate outlets made little effort to conceal their vested interest in Rousseff's impeachment, offering extensive and favorable coverage of the *Fora Dilma!* demonstrations.¹²⁸

The movement achieved its goal in August 2016, shortly after the Olympic Games concluded – at a time when global media attention on

124 Int. 37, Rio de Janeiro, 2 September 2016.

125 Michel Temer, who became president after Rousseff's impeachment for the remainder of her original term, was jailed for corruption after leaving office.

126 Candelária Church is of historical significance as the site of the infamous Candelária massacre in 1993, in which police officers killed dozens of homeless children who were sleeping on the stairs of the church. Candelária Church also hosted the mass service for Edson Luís de Lima Souto, who was murdered by police officers on 28 March 1968, which triggered mass protests against the military regime (Amnesty International, »Rio de Janeiro 2003: Candelária and Vigário Geral 10 Years On«).

127 Police officers did not intervene in most of these attacks on other citizens.

128 When the killing of Souto and the dissatisfaction in Brazil spiked dramatically, 1968 turned into a year of major protests across the country. Globo decided to air news reports about the protests instead of ignoring them. However, in Globo news, the protest in São Paulo were presented as a

Brazil had already faded. Rousseff was impeached and replaced by her vice president, Michel Temer, who had never been elected to parliament. As the culmination of a successful conservative and right-leaning mobilization, the *Fora Dilma!* protests cannot meaningfully be linked to the campaign for a Right to the City or other emancipatory demands. As such, they have been largely ignored – or outright dismissed – by media activists in Rio de Janeiro. For this reason, *Fora Dilma!* is not the subject of further discussion here.

4.3 Situating Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro in Comparison

Two Divided Cities

The respective histories of urban space in Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro tell a tale of two ›divided cities,‹ both marked by extreme inequality and violence.¹²⁹ However, there is a striking contrast in how socio-spatial inequalities are inscribed into their urban landscapes. Cape Town remains a largely racially segregated city, still grappling with the legacy of apartheid. The controlled marginalization of poor, predominantly Black and Coloured residents has produced a ›belt model,‹ in which a mostly white and privileged urban core is encircled by rising levels of socio-economic exclusion that intensify with distance from the city center.¹³⁰ As Samara argues, »[s]patially and socially, Cape Town is perhaps the most segregated city in the world.«¹³¹

In contrast, segregation in Rio developed with little to no state planning and followed strongly class-based patterns, underpinned by racialized

peaceful music festival without any political content – the intentional misapprehension is discussed in AlJazeera English, »Brazil: Media, Monopolies and Political Manipulations«, The Listening Post.

129 Despite my own observations, my reading of the two cities is influenced amongst others by Perlman, *Favela*; Vainer, »Cidade de Execução: Reflexões a Partir Do Rio de Janeiro«; Santiago Giannotti, *Experiências Em Comunicação Popular No Rio de Janeiro Ontem e Hoje: Uma História de Resistência Nas Favelas Cariocas*; Enders, *Histoire de Rio de Janeiro*; Jaguaribe, *Rio De Janeiro*; Williams, Chazkel, and Knauss, *The Rio de Janeiro Reader*; Coetzer, *Building Apartheid*; Samara, *Cape Town after Apartheid*; Bickford-Smith, *The Emergence of the South African Metropolis*; Morange, »Right to the City, Neoliberalism and the Developmental State in Cape Town.«

130 This model does not preclude exceptions in the form of traditionally wealthy neighborhoods such as Constantia, which stretch out along the mountain ranges of the Cape Flats.

131 Samara, *Cape Town after Apartheid*, 42.

dynamics.¹³² Rio's self-constructed favelas are scattered across the city like a mosaic, often bordering middle- and upper-class neighborhoods. This pattern of social and physical proximity generates complex dynamics. As McGuirk contends: »This is not the standard centre-versus-periphery dialectic; here, those living on the margins can be right in the centre.«¹³³ Thus, while both Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro are deeply divided cities whose divisions perpetuate inequality and violence, geographical and social marginality converge in Cape Town but diverge in Rio.

Second, I have argued that neoliberal urbanization¹³⁴ is a driving force in the production of urban space in both Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro,¹³⁵ privileging a few while disregarding the majority of urban residents.¹³⁶ However, as the examples of the 2010 and 2014 FIFA World Cups demonstrate, similar mechanisms of neoliberal urbanization can be enacted with varying levels of intensity and differing outcomes. In South Africa, the 2010 World Cup involved an estimated \$3.6 billion in public spending. In contrast, the 2014 tournament in Brazil cost the state an estimated \$15 billion – before even accounting for the additional expenses of hosting the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio.¹³⁷

While South Africa's hosting of the soccer spectacle, despite some criticism, generated a moment of genuine national pride and unity, Brazil's 2014 tournament was met with widespread outrage. In both cases, the event's supposed catalytic effects for urban transformation largely

132 Property rights guided the allocation of land in Rio, thereby strengthening class differences more than race differences (Huchzermeyer, »Informal Settlements: Production and Intervention in Twentieth-Century Brazil and South Africa«).

133 McGuirk, *Radical Cities*, 164.

134 Neil Brenner emphasizes that there is a dialectical movement between neoliberal urbanization and urbanizing neoliberalism (Brogan, »Neoliberalization and the Matrix of Action: In Conversation with Neil Brenner, Jamie Peck, and Nik Theodore«).

135 »In Brazil there is a strong intellectual awareness that the main cause of deprivation and impoverishment is tolerated exploitation of the working class through low wages, lack of efficient and affordable transportation, and negligence in the provision of housing [...] The existence of class differences and their relevance to informal-settlement intervention [in South Africa] were consciously played down by the neoliberal orientation of the Urban Foundation's position, which in turn was legitimized by denouncing racism« (Huchzermeyer, »Informal Settlements: Production and Intervention in Twentieth-Century Brazil and South Africa«, 97).

136 Theresa Caldeira and James Holston argue that citizenship rights are too often ignored in »uncivil political democracies« such as Brazil, where »violence, injustice and impunity are often the norms« (Caldeira and Holston, »Democracy and Violence in Brazil«, 692).

137 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economics_of_the_FIFA_World_Cup

benefited domestic and international elites. However, the impact in Rio de Janeiro was significantly greater than in Cape Town – both in terms of the scale of urban transformations and the degree of mobilization it provoked among urban social movements.

Finally, neoliberal urban governance – aimed at marketing cities as tourist hubs – is characterized by a paradoxical combination of aggressive security regimes and the militarization of marginalized urban spaces, a pattern clearly visible in both Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro. As Loïc Wacquant asserts, neoliberalization demands »more state« [be deployed] in the realm of the police, criminal courts, and prisons to remedy the generalized rise of objective and subjective insecurity which is itself caused by »less state« on the economic and social front.¹³⁸ In both cities, violence is concentrated in marginalized communities: on the Cape Flats in Cape Town and in the favelas of Rio.

In Cape Town, this violence is largely confined to distant »townships« that remain spatially and socially separated from the city and its suburbs. In contrast, the geographical proximity of Rio's favelas to tourist zones and affluent neighborhoods has incentivized state-led efforts to »pacify« these areas – ostensibly to enhance tourist safety and protect investor interests. These contrasting spatial configurations – Cape Town's »belt« model versus Rio's »mosaic« morphology – also manifest phenomenologically. While the sound of gunfire is a routine part of daily life across much of Rio, it is rarely heard in Cape Town's privileged neighborhoods.

The emerging spatial pattern of race and class segregation in Rio de Janeiro does not follow an organized, belt-like model as seen in Cape Town. Instead, it resembles a mosaic, where some of the city's poorest and wealthiest neighborhoods exist side by side. This contrast between a belt and a mosaic structure – where radical differences in socio-economic status are either spatially separated or closely juxtaposed – produces two very distinct forms of »divided cities.« These differing urban morphologies have significant implications for how urban social movements emerge, organize, and operate in each context.

Compartmentalized Urban Movements and Cathartic Explosions

Urban movements in Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro differ significantly in the constituencies they mobilize, the scale of street protests, the

138 Wacquant first formulates this hypothesis in relation to the USA, but he then applies it to Brazil, which he contends has been used as a »living laboratory« for the »punitive containment« strategy described above (Wacquant, 56-58).

nature of their claims and demands, their tactical approaches, and their choice of protest sites.

In Cape Town, both service delivery protests (SDPs) and the *Rhodes Must Fall* (RMF) movement mobilized clearly defined constituencies. In the case of SDPs, local communities demanded urgent improvements to basic services in their neighborhoods – most visibly expressed through the so-called »poo protests.« Meanwhile, students at the University of Cape Town – later joined by peers from other universities – launched their campaign with concrete demands, such as the removal of the Rhodes statue. Despite a few shared tactics, notably the symbolic use of human feces to draw attention, there was little overlap between the two movements. Street demonstrations in the city center were rare, and mobilization largely remained confined to the constituencies themselves: various communities across the Cape Flats or the University of Cape Town campus. This fragmentation of protest action appears to mirror the compartmentalized nature of Cape Town’s urban space.

In Brazil, the *Jornadas de Junho* marked a »new cycle of protests« that reconfigured civil society, political subjectivities, and the very conception of democracy in the country.¹³⁹ In Rio de Janeiro, this mass upheaval represented a cathartic moment – an explosion of public unrest that brought together diverse segments of the population across lines of race, class, and gender. During the four pivotal days from 17 to 20 June 2013, the city center was effectively taken over by protesters, creating a rare moment of collective occupation and resistance. At the same time, the FIFA Confederations Cup¹⁴⁰ served as a global stage, amplifying the visibility of the protests and intensifying opposition to the top-down, catalytic urban transformations being imposed in preparation for the upcoming cycle of sporting mega-events.

In Brazil, the *Jornadas de Junho* were a »new cycle of protests« that reconfigured civil society, political subjectivities, and the very conception of democracy in the country. In Rio, this mass upheaval represented a cathartic moment, an explosion of public unrest that brought together diverse segments of the city’s population that cut across lines of race, class and gender. This mass coming together resulted in the center of Rio effectively being collectively taken over by protesters during the four ›hey-days‹ of 17 to 20 June 2013. At this time the FIFA Confederations Cup served as a stage of worldwide attention, which amplified the resistance to the catalytic top-down transformation of the city for the

139 Bringel and Pleyers, »Les Mobilisations de 2013 au Brésil: Vers une Reconfiguration de la Contestation«, 11.

140 The FIFA Confederations Cup is a preparation event that is organized and played out one year prior to the FIFA World Cup.

series of sporting mega-events that were due to be held in Rio over the course of the next three years.

The way urban movements are perceived depends not only on their ability to mobilize people in public spaces but also on how they are represented. Media coverage plays a crucial role in shaping public understanding of protest campaigns, often influencing their legitimacy and reach. The following chapter therefore turns to an analysis of how different protest movements were portrayed in mainstream media, while also exploring how urban movements have used the internet as a tool for self-representation and narrative control.



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, exceptions confirming the rule, certain more critical journalists and platforms – such as the on-line 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:

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 50Mb²⁷ »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 footage³² – 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 B nit-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‹ (Bénil-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.

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 City⁵² 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

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

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

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 billion⁶⁷ 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

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 Glenn, »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, because 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 Cecilia 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 Reto⁸² use their social media channels to reach their audiences. With a few exceptions – such as Rio on Watch⁸³ 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 Agência 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.

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 Raffaella 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 Mídiaativistas 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 collectives – 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*, Raffaella 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 ferramenta muito importante pra rescata 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 acceptance⁹¹ 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 violence⁹² – 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 activists⁹⁷ and media

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 manifestação , 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 country⁹⁸ 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

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

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.

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.



Fig. 18 Filming Protest

6. Making Videos

Presenting a Close-Up of Video Activism

After laying out the conceptual and methodological framing of the research (Chapters Two and Three), and providing an introduction to the contextual conditions (Chapter Four) as well as the key actors involved in audiovisual production (Chapter Five) in Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro, the next three chapters turn to a close reading of video activist practices. The guiding question is how audiovisuals documenting protests and police violence are produced, disseminated, and discussed.

To structure this analysis, Chapter Six begins with a detailed examination of the process of recording videos in the streets. As the analysis will show, three distinct types of videos can be identified – journalist, witness, and activist videos. Despite overlaps, each type is associated with a specific group of actors and distinct recording practices. However, video production is only one part of the process of using audiovisuals to draw attention to protests and police violence; the second key element is dissemination. Chapter Seven therefore explores the emerging topographies of visibility as videos circulate online. It examines the factors that determine a video's popularity, the role of traditional and new gatekeepers, and the strategies and tactics used to circumvent manipulation and censorship.

Finally, Chapter Eight focuses on violence as an initiator, process, and outcome within a politics of encounter that challenges hegemonic forms of exclusion and racism. Narratives of violence are frequently used to delegitimize urban movements – an approach countered by bottom-up video productions that document police violence against

protesters. As this chapter shows, audiovisual documentation, as a new practice of evidencing (lethal) violence, can play a critical role in exposing the racialized, everyday oppression faced by marginalized urban citizens. Throughout these chapters, individual videos are analyzed in depth to illustrate the fine-grained mechanics at play in bottom-up video making.

A typology of Video Production on the Ground

Making videos involves a range of practices, including selecting a recording device, choosing a filming position, handling the camera, editing audiovisual material, and disseminating the final product. This chapter analyzes different forms of video production on the ›streets‹ by examining the actors involved, their recording practices, and their relationship to the urban movements they represent.

Based on my analysis of the research material, I developed a heuristic typology that distinguishes between three types of videos: journalist videos, witness videos, and activist videos. Each type is defined by the videographer's relationship to the events they depict. I argue that journalist videos are typically produced by professional outsiders; activist videos by engaged insiders; and witness videos by unpredictable spectators. These subject positions directly shape how protests and police violence are represented.

For example, journalist videos are often filmed from behind police lines – literally from outside the protest – and are expected to meet higher standards of audiovisual quality, editing, and narrative coherence. As a result, they frequently reproduce narratives by police and authorities, often culminating in portrayals of protesters as violent.

This chapter begins by examining journalist videos, followed by witness and activist video production. The final section compares these three types of video making in terms of their accessibility for bottom-up production and their emancipatory potential. The capacity for self-representation – an autogestion in audiovisual representation – varies significantly depending on the economic, social, and cultural resources that urban movements are able to mobilize.

6.1 Journalists Videos – Reporting behind Police Lines

As discussed in Chapter Five, the media landscapes in Brazil and South Africa differ significantly. To illustrate these differences, this section analyzes how protests are depicted in journalist-produced videos. The examples

discussed here – all uploaded to YouTube¹ – have been selected to highlight key characteristics of journalist video production in both cities.

The analysis begins with a video by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) covering a service delivery protest in Cape Town, followed by a report from News24 on a protest in Hout Bay. It then turns to Brazilian examples, including a Globo news segment on a protest in Rio de Janeiro and a video by TV Bandeirantes documenting a fatal incident during a demonstration. These examples serve to illustrate how journalist videos are typically produced from behind police lines, how they frame protesters and police, and how they contribute to dominant narratives about urban unrest.

*Journalist videos framing Service Delivery Protests
in Cape Town's Center*

» We want a land that is very closer to town.«²

On 30 October 2013, thousands of residents from the Cape Flats marched into Cape Town's Central Business District to make their voices heard. Their destination was the Western Cape Provincial Parliament. »We are marching to demand land for housing development, decent sanitation and negotiated bus rapid transport and Cape Town integrated rapid transit system processes,« read an SMS sent by protest organizers to media outlets.³ »We want Zille [premier of the Western Cape provincial government] to give us land and houses. I have five children to feed,« explained Celine Mtyingaza, a resident of Khayelitsha. »We have no electricity and we cannot survive any longer.«⁴

In the media, Andile Lili was presented as a central figure behind the protest.⁵ Lili, a controversial leader of the Ses'khona People's Rights

1 I do not differentiate between journalist videos according to the user who uploaded content on social media platforms. In Brazil, major news outlets have typically developed their own platforms for disseminating their content online, such as Globo's Globo Play (Globo, »Globo Play.«). In South Africa, the public broadcaster, the SABC, generally disseminates its content on its SABC Digital News YouTube channel (SABC Digital News, »YouTube Channel.«), while privately owned media houses such as Eyewitness News also operate their own social media channels.

2 Andile Lili in Vid. 13, SABC, Service delivery protest 0:46

3 Davis, »The Man behind Cape Town's Poo Protests – but Who Does Andile Lili Represent?«

4 Davis, »The Man behind Cape Town's Poo Protests.«

5 Andile Lili, the co-founder of the Ses'khona People's Rights Movement and an ANC ward councilor in the City of Cape Town Council has been a

Movement, had previously been involved in Cape Town's so-called »poo protests,« which aimed to draw attention to land evictions and the living conditions of marginalized urban residents.⁶ However, the protest was widely interpreted through the lens of party politics, with accusations that the ANC was using service delivery protests to destabilize the DA-led Western Cape government. In response to this framing, the Mail & Guardian countered: »It's not about politics but delivery.«⁷

On the day of the protest, three videos were uploaded to YouTube documenting the event. This section focuses on two journalist videos – one published by SABC Digital News, the public broadcaster's YouTube channel, and the other by the privately owned digital news network News24.⁸ The third video, which is called »Looting after Cape Town protest«,⁹ was uploaded by a private user, will be discussed later.

The first video, titled »Service delivery protest in Cape Town degenerated into thievery and looting,«¹⁰ was published by SABC. The second, »Cape Town protests turn violent,« was released by News24.¹¹ Both videos are under two minutes long. The SABC video includes a voice-over, while the News24 clip offers no contextual narration. The SABC footage shows broken shop windows, an interview with a woman expressing outrage at the destruction, and scenes of »angry residents gathered outside the provincial legislature.«¹² The report then cuts to Andile Lili reading a list of demands:

»Our communities are saying: we want a land that is very closer to town, so that our people have access to housing and development, so

controversial figure (Fisher, »ANC Official Faces Charges for Inciting Violence.«).

6 Lili also proposed using the land of the Mowbray Golf Club to build 100,000 much-needed houses. The incongruity of having golf courses for affluent citizens only a few kilometers away from an area where state authorities regularly destroy informal housing epitomizes some of the contradictions inherent to Cape Town's segregated urban structure. See: Davis, »The Man behind Cape Town's Poo Protests«; Lali, »Ward Councillor Andile Lili Calls for Residents to Rebuild Demolished Shacks.«; Sesant, »ANC Is »Addressing« Ses'khona Movement's Demands for Land, Jobs.«

7 Mail & Guardian Staff Reporter, »Cape Town Protesters: It's Not About Politics but Delivery.«

8 The reference here is to the YouTube video, which was not only uploaded on the channel's YouTube page but also shown on SABC Television.

9 Vid. 15, Buchanan, Looting after Cape Town protest

10 Vid. 13, SABC, Service delivery protest.

11 Vid. 14, News24, Cape Town protests turn violent

12 Vid. 13, SABC, Service delivery protest 0:30-0:37.



Fig. 19 *We Want Land*

that our people have access to the economy of the City of Cape Town. That is all that our people are looking for.«¹³

Lili’s statement is juxtaposed with an interview with Zakhele Mbhele, a provincial government spokesperson, who argues that the government cannot consider the protesters’ demands until they return with a more »detailed memorandum« specifying »their request for land and other amenities.«¹⁴

In the News24 video, three bystanders are interviewed. The first says, »I don’t know what they [the protesters] want,« adding, »they came to strike, not to steal.«¹⁵ The second expresses outrage, suggesting the protesters should be »minding their own business« rather than coming to the city center to »loot.«¹⁶ The third laments that his »normal day at the mall« was disrupted by the protest.¹⁷ These interviews are interspersed with short clips of the demonstration.

Both videos convey the impression of a chaotic, out-of-control mob. Their sensationalist focus on violence and looting in the city center leaves little room for exploring the protest’s underlying causes of neglect in the urban peripheries. As a result, although the march succeeded in bringing the demands of marginalized residents from the periphery into the city center, the protesters were unable to shape how their actions were portrayed. Instead, the emotionally charged coverage left

13 Andile Lili in Vid. 13, SABC, Service delivery protest 0:46

14 Vid. 13, SABC, Service delivery protest 1:25-1:35

15 Vid. 14, News24, Cape Town protests turn violent 0:10-0:14

16 Vid. 14, News24, Cape Town protests turn violent 0:23-0:28

17 Vid. 14, News24, Cape Town protests turn violent 0:32-0:36



Fig. 20 *Fees Must Fall*

viewers with the impression of disorder and threat, reinforcing dominant narratives uncontrolled crowds imperiling the order and safety of central Cape Town.

Depicting Rhodes Must Fall Protests

»For our rights, for our rights, for our rights!«¹⁸

Two years later, on 21 October 2015, students from the University of Cape Town (UCT), the University of the Western Cape (UWC), and the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) organized a protest march to the national Houses of Parliament in Cape Town. The demonstration was part of a national mobilization against tuition fee increases, marking what Abdul Kayum Ahmed (as discussed in the previous chapter) describes as the third moment of mobilization: the transformation of Rhodes Must Fall into the broader Fees Must Fall movement.¹⁹

While protesters gathered outside, inside the National Assembly, Minister of Finance Nhlamhla Nene was delivering his annual Medium Term Budget Policy Statement, which included the proposed tuition fee increases. Members of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), the third-largest party in Parliament, interrupted Nene's speech by chanting »Fees Must Fall.« They were subsequently removed by parliamentary

18 Student being arrested in: Vid. 16, trouble media, student protests

19 Ahmed, »The Rise of Fallism.«

security and banned from the session. Outside, student protesters broke through the gates in front of the legislature.

Three journalist-produced videos offer insight into how this protest was represented. The first is a live broadcast by SABC, recorded before the clashes began.²⁰ Reporter Nomawethu Solwandle stands in front of a cordoned-off area where students are singing in protest. While Solwandle explains that »students are saying no« to the proposed fee increases and outlines the conflict between student demands and government policy, other videographers can be seen filming the protest in the background.²¹

The second video, published by Euronews' No Comment TV,²² begins with a short clip of Nene's speech and its interruption by EFF MPs. It then cuts to a reporter standing in front of a crowd, breathlessly describing the clashes between police and students at the gates before retreating behind the police line. As objects are thrown by protesters, the reporter says, »I ask my cameraman, Neil, to maybe move a bit back here.«²³ The final images – after a cut indicating a change of location – show police officers lined up to secure the street. The reporter and the unseen cameraman guide the viewer through the unfolding events. The editing constructs a narrative of escalating confrontation.²⁴

The third video, produced by Ruptly TV,²⁵ is a montage of edited footage focusing on the arrest of student protesters, as reflected in its title: »South Africa: Multiple arrests as student protesters swamp Cape Town.«²⁶ The video shows protesters being chased by riot police and at least four arrests. In one striking moment, a young woman walks among police officers in riot gear, shouting into the camera: »Apartheid round two, welcome!« before spreading her arms wide in an inviting gesture.²⁷

These videos present the students as subjects with a voice and a cause. The presence of other videographers filming the protest underscores the heightened attention the event received – particularly from international media outlets like Euronews and Ruptly. The student march to

20 Vid. 17, SABC, Students protest outside parliament

21 Vid. 17, SABC, Students protest outside parliament 1:14

22 Euronews was founded in France in 1993 with the mission of developing a pan-European news network. The Egyptian billionaire Naguib Sawiris has owned a majority stake in Media Globe Networks, Euronews' majority shareholder, since 2015. Vid. 18, No Comment TV, Tear gas fired

23 Vid. 18, No Comment TV, Tear gas fired 1:46-1:48.

24 Vid. 18, No Comment TV, Tear gas fired

25 Ruptly TV belongs to the RT network, which is funded by the Russian state and has consequently often been criticized by »Western« media for its supposed bias.

26 Vid. 19, Ruptly, Multiple arrests

27 Vid. 19, Ruptly, Multiple arrests 1:14-1:17.

Parliament was broadcast live by both national and international media.²⁸ The protesters' demands were articulated, and the repression they faced was documented through footage of arrests.

This coverage stands in stark contrast to the portrayal of the 2013 service delivery protest. Overall, the depiction of the student protests appears more sympathetic and nuanced. While the service delivery protest was framed as chaotic and threatening, the student movement was presented as politically engaged and articulate, with its grievances taken seriously by the media – even though the clashes between protesters and police were significantly more violent. The differential treatment of urban movements in Cape Town is particularly striking when contrasted with the wholesale rejection of protests in journalist videos from Brazil, as the next section will show.

*Rio de Janeiro, 17 June 2013:
The Storm on the Legislative Assembly*

When protesters briefly occupied the Legislative Assembly of the State of Rio de Janeiro (ALERJ) on 17 June 2013, it felt like a symbolic victory for them – a reclaiming of a center of political power by the people.²⁹ One activist described the moment as cathartic: »Above all I felt that this movement was a cathartic expression of a massive dissatisfaction.«³⁰ The occupation of ALERJ transcended a simple demand for policy change; it was a collective assertion of presence in the heart of Rio's political establishment.

That Monday marked the third day of the 2013 FIFA Confederations Cup, just one day after Rio had hosted its opening match. A massive protest of approximately 150,000 people marched down Avenida Rio Branco, culminating in a violent confrontation at ALERJ. According to *Jornal A Nova Democracia*, the site had »functioned as a refuge for the biggest protests in Rio de Janeiro over the course of 50 years of mass struggle.«³¹ When protesters clashed with the *Polícia Militar*, a street

28 In the videos from the student march in 2015 numerous scenes depict videographers filming in the background, which does not appear in any of the impressions from the Service Delivery Protest in 2013. A difference that is cannot only be attributed to the attention raised, but equally to the increased prevalence of practices to film protest that grew significantly between 2013 and 2015.

29 Int. 1, Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 16 September 2015.

30 »mais do que tudo eu sentia que era um movimento de catarse de expressão de uma insatisfação muito grande« (Int. 1, Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 16 September 2015).

31 Vid. 08, AND, Veja com exclusividade.



Fig. 21 Globo and Vandalism

battle erupted that the newspaper described as »[a]s rarely seen in the history of the country«³²:

»A rain of rocks, sticks, mortars and Molotov cocktails forced the troops of repression to retreat. The PMs [military police] remained inside the building for hours, surrounded by the fury of thousands of people in struggle, not only against the increase of public transport fees, but against all the famine and oppression imposed on the masses by the ruling classes and by imperialism.«

»To rebel is just.«³³

A live broadcast by GloboNews offers insight into how Brazil’s most influential news network covered the events.³⁴ The footage combines aerial shots from a helicopter with ground-level images in front of ALERJ, narrated by a studio anchor in conversation with commentators. While

32 Vid. 08, AND, Veja com exclusividade.

33 »Uma chuva de pedras, paus, morteiros e coquetéis molotov forçou as tropas de repressão a recuarem. Os PMs permaneceram por horas no interior do prédio cercado pela fúria de milhares de pessoas em luta, não apenas contra o aumento das passagens, mas contra toda a carestia e a opressão imposta pelas classes dominantes e pelo imperialismo às massas. Rebelar-se é justo.« Vid. 08, AND, Veja com exclusividade

34 The video was uploaded by MrMrPreta, a user who has uploaded significant amounts of GloboNews footage of protests (Vid. 09, Globo, Manifestação contra aumento). The fact that this video has received very few views on YouTube is not particularly relevant here, since Globo typically runs in bars throughout the city and the country and it is safe to assume that the program was watched in television all over the country.

protest scenes unfold on screen, the studio guests repeatedly emphasize the distinction between »peaceful« and »violent« protesters and discuss ALERJ's symbolic importance. The broadcast then cuts to a reporter on the ground: »I am just in front of ALERJ. It is a scene of war [...] there is destruction [...] complete disorder.«³⁵ The live report leaves viewers with an impression of chaos and devastation – »scenes of war« captured from above and narrated by a journalist adopting the tone of a war correspondent.³⁶

This framing is emblematic of Brazilian mainstream media's coverage of the Jornadas de Junho, which overwhelmingly portrayed the protests as dangerous and anarchic. A mash-up video circulating online captures this discourse of delegitimization.³⁷ It features rapid-fire clips of prominent news anchors, then-president Dilma Rousseff, and various citizens repeating the same refrain: »vandalism.« The video highlights the repetition of terms used by corporate media to describe the protests: »vandalism,« »vandals,« »destruction,« »violence,« »terrorism,« »chaos,« and »rebels without a cause.«³⁸ The audiovisual loop underscores the dominant narrative in Brazilian media, which pathologized and criminalized the movement. As Theodossopoulos argues, such discourses serve to delegitimize social movements by framing them as irrational or dangerous.³⁹

The mash-up video ends with a reminder of journalistic ethics, quoting Article 1 of the IFJ Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists: »The respect for the truth and for the right to truth for the public is the first obligation of a journalist.«⁴⁰ In Brazil, many activists have accused Globo of violating this principle and have regularly expelled its reporters from protest marches. One such instance, which I personally observed on the ground, illustrates how deeply this mistrust runs.

35 »Eu sou exatamente em frente ALERJ. É um placó da guerra [...] um nova quebra-quebra [...] uma completa desordem«. Vid. 09, Globo, Manifestação contra aumento

36 For a critical discussion of the Brazilian corporate media's representation of protests and politics, see e.g. an edition of *The Listening Post*, Al Jazeera English's media analysis show, from September 2017: AlJazeera English, »Brazil: Media, Monopolies and Political Manipulations«, *The Listening Post*.

37 The video »vandalismo, vandalismo, vandalismo...« is 4-minutes-25-seconds long and has gathered an impressive 180.000 viewers since its upload by the user MarcosJacksonCarvalh. Vid. 11, Marcos, Vandalismo

38 Vid. 11, Marcos, Vandalismo

39 Theodossopoulos, »On De-Pathologizing Resistance.«

40 The declaration was signed in 1954 in Bordeaux – also known as the Bordeaux Declaration – and constitutes basic principles. The last update of the Declaration took place in Tunis in 2019 (International Federation of Journalists, »Global Charter of Ethics for Journalists«).

Positioning to decry vandalism

One such incident occurred on 16 November 2015 during a protest against the mining company Vale, held in response to the catastrophic collapse of a river dam.⁴¹ On that day, I had the opportunity to film and photograph the protest preparations from inside as well as from the eleventh floor of a nearby high-rise.⁴² The resulting image offers a bird’s-eye view of the scene.

Figure 22 shows the marked photo, which allows for a spatial analysis of how the protest set-up and the position of the Globo camera crew. In the yellow circle, protesters gathering for the march are visible. The blue rectangle marks a group of activists preparing a performance using a cloth covered in dirt and mud to symbolize the pollution of the Rio Doce. The red circle within the yellow one shows video activists filming the event,⁴³ while another red circle in the lower right corner marks the Globo camera crew. The Globo journalists first remained at a distance.



Fig. 22 Bird's Eye View of Protest Preparations

- 41 The breaking of the dam at the Mariana mining site was one of the biggest disasters in the destruction of the environment in Brazil. Over 12 people have died when the dam broke, and hundreds of kilometers of the river were polluted with highly toxic iron ore. The disaster may have been prevented by the owners of the Samarco – Vale and BHP Billiton (Phillips, »Brazil’s Mining Tragedy: Was It a Preventable Disaster?«). Three year’s later the Brumadinho disaster – a facility equally owned by Vale – happened in which 270 people were killed.
- 42 The building housed a publicly accessible library with a direct view on the gathering of the protest. This presented me with the rare opportunity to photograph and film a protest march from an entirely different perspective.
- 43 For example, Vid. 12, MIC, Manifestantes fazem escracho



Fig. 23 Globo Reporter at »Vale Nada« Protest

When the protest march started and reached the headquarters of Vale, the Globo journalists attempted to enter the crowd to film. Upon being recognized, they were surrounded by demonstrators shouting »get out!«⁴⁴ and were eventually escorted away by private security – smeared with dirt on their faces.⁴⁵

This expulsion of Globo journalists in 2015 did not occur in a vacuum. It came two years after the Jornadas de Junho had swept through the streets of Rio de Janeiro. The biased journalism during the 2013 protests – described above – had severely damaged public trust in corporate media. By 2015, the positioning of corporate journalists outside of protest crowds was no longer merely voluntary; it was increasingly enforced by the animosity they faced from activists. This hostility stood in stark contrast to the treatment Globo received when covering the »Fora Dilma« protests, organized by the conservative group »Vem Pra Rua« and supported by elite donors, conservatives, and right wing politicians.

44 Recording during the protest my personal archive contains videos – IMG_0810.m4v and IMG_0811.m4v – and photos from the expulsion of the journalists. See also Vid. 12, MIC, Manifestantes fazem escracho 2:18 – 2:28.

45 The historical Barão de Mauá Building was designed by architect Oscar Niemeyer and has been the seat of the Vale corporation until 2017.

Professional Outsiders Producing Videos from Behind Police Lines

In my proposition of the heuristic typology journalist videos are characterized by being produced by professional outsiders. Often presenting protests from a distance with relatively little empathy for the grievances of protesters – especially when protesters are marginalized urban citizens – journalist videos tend to identify and re-iterate perspectives of police, which are presented as ›objective‹ sources and not as party to the conflict.

Interviews with government officials figure prominently in journalist videos, as do interviews with eyewitnesses. Interviews with protesters are less common in journalist videos, especially in Brazil.⁴⁶ While often repeating the ›official‹ government narrative, journalist videos typically depict protests as acts of violence and destruction. In the Brazilian context in particular, social movements and their concerns are thereby ›reduced‹ and ›simplified‹ at the same time as activists are portrayed as ›vandals‹ and ›extremists‹.⁴⁷ The exception to this in Brazil has been the reporting on Fora Dilma! protests. However, it needs be emphasized that as a type, numerous individual exceptions of remarkable journalists who work as engaged reporters are not fairly represented in the generalized claim. Especially, in South Africa media organizations such as GroundUp, Eyewitness News or the Chronicle,⁴⁸ have succeeded in establishing themselves in the Cape Town media landscape and balance biased reporting to some degree. Overall, the media representation of social movements in Cape Town still appears to depend on the movements' resources and connections.

Journalists are occasionally unable or reluctant to cross-check the ready-made narratives presented by the police and governing authorities against the accounts of individual protesters or activist organizations. Social distance presents a particular hurdle for reporters when it comes to finding potential interview partners, especially in the case of protests that happen in marginalized urban settings such as on the Cape Flats or in the favelas. In Brazil, activists' typically strong distrust of journalists makes capturing protesters' views even more difficult,⁴⁹ as

46 A major exception to this rule of thumb in Brazil was the portrayal of the 2015 and 2016 demonstrations that led to the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff, where Globo was supporting the protesters.

47 Int. 1, Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 16 September 2015.

48 Chronicle, ›Website.‹

49 There are several exceptions to this general claim. For example, one member of the Papo Reto collective still works at Globo (Int. 38, Researcher, Rio de Janeiro, 8 September 2016). In contrast, one of my interviewees explained to me how she had left her job as a photographer at Globo (Int. 37, Video

regularly demonstrated by the expulsion of Globo journalists from protest marches in Rio.

Journalists intentionally seek out noteworthy events, which they cover with well-equipped camera and production teams. Whether live coverage or edited news reports, their footage is usually of high audio-visuals quality. The techniques used in journalist videos adhere to defined news production standards and narrative structures. Video reports are usually between two to five minutes in length. Viewers are often guided by a narrator who presents a coherent news story. Cuts are often short – occurring every two to five seconds – to keep the attention of the audience. Videos are distributed via TV channels, the websites of media companies and their social media accounts. In contrast to witness and activist videos, journalist videos require the authorization of editors further up the internal hierarchy of media organizations, who may have no choice but to bear in mind the interests of sponsors, shareholders and funders when deciding whether to broadcast a particular report.

Consequently, the typology presents journalists as detached from the events which they cover.⁵⁰ This professional detachment is reinforced by a journalistic codex that demands impartial and objective reporting. In practice, however, this ideal often amounts to ›perpetuating the status quo‹ through the repetition of middle- and upper-class perspectives. Moreover, the economic pressures being experienced within the media industry supports sensationalized reporting that attracts maximum attention and, with it, maximum revenue.

Most journalist videos take the side of the state and the police in opposing activists – particularly in Brazil – and are often critical of or openly hostile towards the protests that they depict. The role of journalists as *professional outsiders* is reflected in their physical positioning: journalist videos of protests typically zoom in on the demonstrating crowd from afar – sometimes even from a helicopter – in a manner which can be characterized as symbolic of how journalist videos speak *about* rather than *with* protesters.

Especially in Rio de Janeiro, the conflicts between activists and journalists became a driving force to develop audio-visual and counter-hegemonic

Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 2 September 2016), as had many other media activists who had previously worked in the media industry.

- 50 As one interviewee who was studying at one of the most prestigious film and journalism schools in Johannesburg, said: the director of the same school strongly advised against filming protests because they can »easily get out of hand« and turn violent, »which is dangerous«. This warning expressed by the Dean of the film school represents the generalized skepticism towards marginalized urban citizens that is institutionally reinforced in at least some journalist education institutions (Int. 24, Journalist Student, Johannesburg, 8 August 2016).

representation ›from within‹. The representation of protests in corporate media and in particular by Globo infuriated people. In the end, this inspired urban movements and urban citizens to take filming into their own hands and start producing activist videos.

6.2 Witness Videos – The Explosion of Audio-Visual Documentation

»Anywhere, where something is happening in the world, there is a cellphone. Almost everywhere, there is 3G, so you can upload it immediately...«⁵¹

Witness videos are typically unplanned and often filmed by chance. The increasing ubiquity of smartphones and mobile internet has played a significant role in popularizing this form of video production, enabling a wide range of people to document events as they unfold and to disseminate their footage almost instantly. Unlike journalist videos, which are produced by professional outsiders, witness videos are created by bystanders whose relationship to the events they capture is inherently unpredictable. In contrast to journalist-produced footage, the following three examples of witness videos from Cape Town demonstrate the diversity of perspectives and narrative framings that shape the perception of seemingly ›authentic‹ video documentation.

Witness Videos Documenting Protests in Cape Town

Audio-visual documentation of the 30 October 2013 service delivery protest – discussed earlier in relation to SABC and News24 coverage – was not limited to professional journalists. It also included footage captured by observers who ›happened to be there.«⁵² One such example is a 48-second video uploaded by user Stuart Buchanan, showing unedited, low-resolution footage filmed from a balcony on Shortmarket Street.⁵³

Buchanan's shaky camera captures a moment in which protesters run past a storefront and appear to scuffle over a cardboard box left on the pavement. A voice in the background exclaims, ›Oh my God,‹ expressing the shock of those watching from above.⁵⁴ Titled ›Looting after Cape Town protest,‹ the video has been viewed more times on YouTube

51 Int. 20, Documentary Filmmaker, Cape Town, 29 July 2016.

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

53 Vid. 15, Buchanan, Looting after Cape Town protest

54 Vid. 15, Buchanan, Looting after Cape Town protest

than the SABC and News24 videos combined. Its wide circulation provoked strong criticism of the protesters, including openly racist comments. One such comment read:

»...a Land closer to town he said.... Hahaha, we will give them a land closer to Nigeria and Zimbabwe. We don't want them in Cape Town. The bastards are tot [sic] wanted in a clean white and brown city like Cape Town. Hellen [sic] must do something very fast !!! The black bastards are a destructive species and will destroy our city !!!«⁵⁵

While the video itself cannot be held responsible for the hate speech it provoked – and the comment section has since been disabled – the shakiness of the camera, the audible reactions of shocked bystanders, and the absence of narration or contextual information contribute to the perception of the video as ›authentic‹ and unmanipulated. As a witness video, it appears to offer unfiltered, ›real‹ evidence, even though it captures only a fragment of the protest and lacks any explanation of the broader context in which the events occurred.

A second video, titled ›service delivery protest cape town,«⁵⁶ offers another distant perspective. Filmed from inside a building, the camera pans slowly from right to left, capturing a crowd running down the street while a siren wails in the background. Inside the foyer, an escalator carries people who appear indifferent to the events unfolding outside. The 42-second unedited clip is accompanied by a brief description: ›ANC members protesting in Cape Town, South Africa who were in town to support an ANC councilor that was being prosecuted in court for [a] series of cases involving dumping of faeces.«⁵⁷ This description provides the context that the video itself cannot convey due to its lack of editing. It frames the protest not as a spontaneous act of public dissent, but as a partisan demonstration in support of an ANC figure – thereby shaping the viewer's interpretation of the otherwise ambiguous footage.

A third video, titled ›Service delivery protest in Cape Town...at the Civic Centre 05.02.14,« offers a more immersive perspective.⁵⁸ Posted by YouTube user Kenny Nagel on the same day as the protest, the 7-minute video was filmed from within the demonstration. It captures

55 Vid. 13, SABC, Service delivery protest

56 Vid. 29, Galaga, service delivery protest

57 This protest took place in solidarity with the nine citizens, among them Andile Lili, who were facing charges for their involvement in the so-called poo protest at Cape Town International Airport on 25 June 2013. They were ultimately ›sentenced to three years imprisonment, suspended for five years« by the Bellville Magistrates' Court in August 2015 (Petersen, ›Suspended Sentences for Cape Town Airport Poo Protesters.«).

58 Vid. 30, Nagel, Service delivery protest

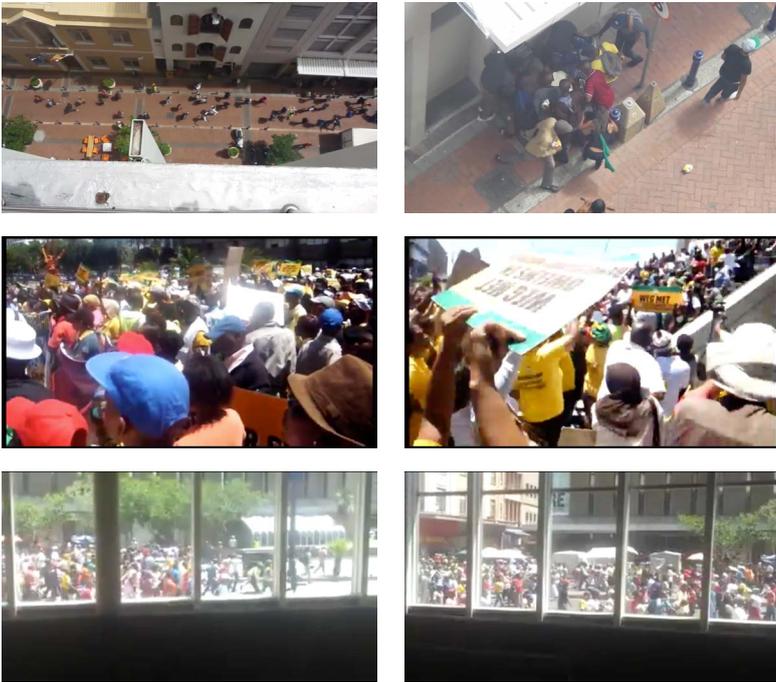


Fig. 24 *Witness Videos, Cape Town*

protesters toy-toying, singing, and listening to a speech by one of the organizers. The camera pans across the crowd, and while the visuals are low-resolution and the wind distorts the audio, the footage conveys a sense of presence. The video includes a few simple cuts, likely made using the pause function on a smartphone – a technique one RMF media team member described as »instant editing.«⁵⁹

Witnesses filming in Rio de Janeiro

In Rio de Janeiro, protests are often documented simultaneously by both activist and witness videos. The potential for these two forms of video-making to complement each other is powerfully illustrated by an incident that occurred on 10 October 2015.⁶⁰ On that day, an activist named Bruno was arrested by police and charged with attacking officers

59 Int. 29, RMF Activist, Cape Town, 14 August 2016

60 The story is explained in detail in the third episode of the documentary #DesdeJunho (Vid. 05, Mariano, Desde Junho 3 21:46 – 25:11).



Fig. 25 *Witness Video of a Lethal Police Attack*

using a Molotov cocktail – an accusation that could have resulted in a lengthy prison sentence.

Following his arrest, Bruno posted a video appealing for help in proving his innocence. *Mídia Ninja* responded immediately, calling on witnesses who had filmed the protest to submit their footage. Over the course of a long night, a group of ›Ninjas‹ reviewed and compiled dozens of witness videos documenting the confrontation. By marking Bruno’s position in each clip and arranging the footage chronologically, they were able to reconstruct the sequence of events.

The final edited video revealed that a plainclothes civil police officer had infiltrated the crowd and thrown the Molotov cocktail at his own colleagues. The same officer then identified Bruno, who was pulled behind police lines and arrested. The video exposed the staged nature of the accusation and the police’s strategy of escalation. As Bruno Tortura from *Mídia Ninja* São Paulo later recounted, the evidence was so compelling that »the main newscast was forced to broadcast the video.«⁶¹

This case demonstrates how bottom-up video production – combining the immediacy of witness footage with the strategic editing and framing of activist media – can serve emancipatory goals. Another instance where witness videos play a key role is in the raw documentation of violence, as the next example illustrates.

Execution-style killings by police, which occur with alarming regularity in Rio de Janeiro, are often captured in witness videos. One such video, just 32 seconds long, was published by the collective *Mídia*

61 Vid. 05, Mariano, *Desde Junho* 3 22:19

Independente Coletiva (MIC) to protect the identity of the videographer.⁶² It contains graphic footage of the killing of two young men. Filmed on a smartphone from behind a window – presumably in the videographer’s apartment – the footage shows a small street near the Daniel Piza Municipal School for Journalism in Rio’s North Zone, partially obscured by trees and a canal.

At first, the low-resolution video makes it difficult to identify what it lies in the side of the road. Then, a police officer with a machine gun enters the frame from the right, followed by a second officer. While the second police officer enters the image from the right, a gunshot is audible. Followed by the echo of a second gunshot. The videographer realizes what he is seeing and with a suppressed shock says »Fuck! They are killing them!«⁶³ At this point the viewer of the video is left with no doubt that it is actually two human bodies on the ground. One officer moves to the second victim and fires again at close range – it is an execution that is being filmed.

In the background, the videographer can be heard telling his child to leave the room. The description of the video distributed on the YouTube channel of MIC claims that there was a third victim:

»In the same operation, Maria Eduarda, 13, was taking a physical education class at the Daniel Piza Municipal School in Pavuna when she was hit by a bullet during the police action and died in front of her schoolmates.«⁶⁴

Unpredictable Spectators Producing Shaky Footage

The second type of videos about protests and police violence are ›witness videos‹. Witness videos, which are also known as amateur videos or citizenship journalism. While the expansion of capacities for such a form of bottom-up video production is unquestioned, the techno-determinist narrative by ›evangelists of social media«⁶⁵ that equates the expansion of opportunities to film with media democratization should be treated with caution.

Witness videos are typically filmed by individuals who happen to be present at the scene of an unpredictable event. These videos are

62 Vid. 02, MIC, PMs executam jovens

63 Vid. 02, MIC, PMs executam jovens 0:11

64 »Na mesma operação Maria Eduarda, de 13 anos, estava fazendo aula de educação física na Escola Municipal Daniel Piza, na Pavuna, quando foi atingida por uma bala durante a ação da polícia, vindo a falecer diante de seus colegas de escola.« Vid. 02, MIC, PMs executam jovens

65 Gladwell, »Small Change. Why the Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted.«

usually captured with handheld devices, most often smartphones, and are shared through personal networks such as WhatsApp or posted on social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, or Twitter. The person responsible for the filming is most often someone who does not have an immediate connection to the events being filmed.⁶⁶ As Renata, a researcher and video activist from Rio de Janeiro, explains, a witness videographer is an »amateur [...] who didn't predispose himself to being there. He happened to be there.«⁶⁷ Because of this coincidental presence, witness videos are rarely guided by a specific agenda. The range of subjects they capture is vast, but those that go viral often depict sensational content – especially violence.⁶⁸

Witness videos are often of low audio-visual quality. This is partially related to the technical specifications of the devices used for filming – typically smartphones with low-quality cameras and no microphone – as well as to circumstantial challenges, such as poor light, or to the videographer's limited know-how in camera handling. Rushed camera panning, the muffled sound of the wind, or the videographer's own audible exclamations are common features of witness videos. Most witness footage documents events in the form of relatively short, unedited videos with no contextualization or narrative structure. Often, they are not even disseminated by the person who filmed them, but rather by activists or journalists.⁶⁹ These features of ›raw‹ footage, paradoxically, often functions as a marker of their ›authenticity‹. The unpolished nature of witness videos lends them an ›aura of authenticity‹ that can make them appear more trustworthy and less biased than journalist or activist videos.

During protest marches in Rio, filming with smartphones has become a common practice, and innumerable unedited witness videos circulate online after demonstrations. Activists as well as passers-by pull out their smartphones, film short segments, and share them. However, given the engaged scene of video activism that posts live-streams and video reports about protests, witness videos play a minor role in covering protests in Rio. The audio-visuals produced by video activist collectives provide sufficient materials for interested audiences, and witness videos therefore rarely reach high numbers of views, have strong effects on public opinion, or provide counter-narratives. In Cape Town, this role of reporting

66 See the discussion of witness video about the »looting« in CBD in this section, which exemplifies the ambivalence in how witnesses relate to the events they capture.

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

68 Chapter Seven looks at the topographies of visibility and the role witness videos play in it.

69 Witness videos often circulate in closed communication channels, such as WhatsApp chats, before being made public.

on major protests largely remained with journalists and individual intermediaries, some of them acting as witness videographers as examples from above illustrate.

The occurrence of dramatic events – especially incidents of lethal police violence – is by its nature unpredictable. The coverage of such attacks has not been sufficiently discussed in this chapter but plays a major role in the next two chapters. Focusing on the depiction of protests aimed at differentiating the three types of videos and does hardly work for instances of police violence in marginalized urban areas since there is hardly any other recorded audio-visual than witness materials. Graphic footage filmed with smartphones and shaky camera handling is often a ›game changer‹ in providing evidence of lethal and illegal police attacks and rebutting flawed official accounts.⁷⁰ The dissemination of such witness videos, however, may have serious repercussions for the individuals who filmed them.⁷¹ Videographers thus often pass on their videos to intermediaries to ensure an additional layer of anonymity. These intermediaries can be either trusted media activists or local comunicação comunitária collectives.

The perspective of the eyewitness videographer in witness videos is, both literarily and metaphorically, that of an *unpredictable spectator*. In practical terms, this means that witness videos are shot from a variety of positions – be they from rooftop terraces, balconies, bridges or sidewalks, out of car windows, or simply from street level. Metaphorically, this unpredictability reflects the spectator's ambivalent relation to the events she is recording.

6.3 Activist Videos – Autogestion in Representation

This section turns to the practices of making activist videos by examining the depictions of three protest marches. The goal is to illustrate how activist videos are filmed and what they typically document. The first example shows how coverage of the storm on ALERJ on 17 June 2013 differed in activist videos in comparison to journalist videos. The second example highlights the challenges and complexities of making activist videos in Rio de Janeiro's favelas. In the final example, I show how an activist video covering a student march to the Parliament of South Africa in Cape Town differs in several respects from journalist videos of the same event.

70 Chapter Seven and Eight present a number of such video examples.

71 See the discussion in the Chapter Seven.

Emerging Practices of Video Activism in Cape Town

The RMF media team recorded and uploaded six videos on 21 October 2015, when student activists marched to Parliament in Cape Town. These videos, shared on the movement's Facebook page, offer a kaleidoscopic view of the day's events through a series of short clips – each ranging from 10 to 68 seconds in length.⁷²

The first video shows a group of protesters addressing a UCT spokesperson;⁷³ the second captures the same spokesperson responding to the crowd with a megaphone.⁷⁴ The third follows a group of students entering a UCT building, proclaiming that »workers and students storm Security outsourcing company G4S offices« and »SHUT the university down.«⁷⁵ The fourth video shows students on a bus, allegedly en route to the march at Parliament.⁷⁶ The fifth depicts students marching with banners and chanting »fees must fall!«⁷⁷ The final video documents an urgent plenary meeting where the arrests of fellow students and the outcomes of court cases are discussed.⁷⁸

Produced and uploaded by the RMF media team, these videos offer brief but rich impressions of the unfolding protest. They were clearly intended to inform and mobilize fellow students. The videographers, as engaged insiders within the movement, identified as activists rather than neutral observers. While the short duration, low audiovisual quality, and lack of editing might suggest they are witness videos, I have prioritized the relationship between videographer and event over the technical properties of the footage and hence labelled them as activist videos. During periods of mobilization, the RMF movement regularly published such short videos on its Facebook page – many of which received astonishingly high view counts.⁷⁹

The coverage of the RMF protest on 21 October 2015 differs in nuance between the activist-produced videos and the video titled »student protests in cape town turn violent. police and students clash« by Eric Miller.⁸⁰ Miller, an acclaimed freelance photographer who was

72 Vid. 22, RMF, Protests continue; Vid. 23, RMF, We are holding hostage; Vid. 24, RMF, We have shut university down; Vid. 25, RMF, Azania will rise; Vid. 26, RMF, [untitled]; Vid. 27, RMF, Urgently plenary

73 Vid. 22, RMF, Protests continue

74 Vid. 23, RMF, We are holding hostage

75 Vid. 24, RMF, We have shut university down

76 Vid. 25, RMF, Azania will rise

77 Vid. 26, RMF, [untitled]

78 Vid. 27, RMF, Urgently plenary

79 See the discussion about the topographies of visibility in Chapter Eight for a more detailed explanation.

80 Vid. 16, trouble media, student protests



Fig. 26 RMF Videos

active in the anti-apartheid struggle in the 1980s, has expressed his »frustrat[ion] with the [post-apartheid] media’s misuse of power.«⁸¹ He presents the student protest from a perspective critical of both media coverage and police intervention, as reflected in the description of his video:

»Arrived late today at parliament, it felt like I was watching, photographing my children, and I was proud of their commitment and restraint in the face of harsh police action. The ebb and flow was not dissimilar to protests in 1980’s and then the mainstream media supported a narrative which almost always disingenuously had police simply ‘reacting to protestor violence’. The police actions were same now as then, and the narrative is false now as then.«⁸²

Miller compares student protests during apartheid with those in 2015. His perception of »mainstream media« offering a biased portrayal of the movement and of »harsh police action« motivated him to produce a skillfully edited video of high audio-visual quality.⁸³ The video itself is a compilation of impressions from the protest march. It presents police forces as aggressors confronting peaceful students, without any voice-over or subtitling.

81 South African History Online, »Biographies – Eric Miller.«

82 Vid. 16, trouble media, student protests

83 The video in lower resolution was uploaded first on 22 October 2015 and received considerably more views than the same video uploaded on 26 October 2015 in high resolution. The difference in the audio-visual quality is related to converting the files to lower quality due to the challenges with the availability and affordability of fast internet connections. Vid. 16, trouble media, student protests

Repeated scenes of police charging at students – many of whom have raised their hands to signal peaceful intent – convey a sense of repression against those raising their voices. The parallel audio track, recorded during the protest, captures student singing and intensifies the emotional impact of the edited scenes. The video ends with the tumult of a third arrest. »For our rights! For our rights!« echoes the voice of an arrestee from the back of a police car, his fist raised before the doors close and the video ends.

*Rio's Video Activist Scene: From the Storm on ALERJ
to the March for Life*

»Don't hate the media – be the media!«⁸⁴

Alongside the violent repression through heavy-handed police action during the *Jornadas de Junho* and beyond, the hostility of corporate media toward emancipatory protests significantly contributed to the flourishing of media activist video production in Rio de Janeiro. The biased, top-down reporting by Brazilian journalists provoked acts of *autogestão* in audiovisual production and spurred the rapid rise of bottom-up video making. The Indymedia slogan – »Don't hate the media, be the media!« – became a common practice, popularized by numerous individuals and collectives. This section presents two examples of activist videos portraying the temporary occupation of ALERJ on 17 June 2013.

Activist and photographer Matias Maxx was watching TV coverage of escalating protests in São Paulo when he heard about the mobilization on 17 June in Rio de Janeiro. »Man, I have to record this,« he told himself, and went out to film a few days later.⁸⁵ The video »The battle

84 Indymedia popularized this slogan following the »Battle of Seattle« in 1999. The massive demonstrations staged to criticize the World Trade Organization at its summit in Seattle were met with heavy repression by police. The reporting from the protests was coordinated in a makeshift media center in Seattle during the events. Indymedia is a decentralized initiative for grassroots media production that »combines journalism and activism« (Fremlin, »Agenda Setting: Independent vs. Corporate Media,« 55) and opened up a space for counter-hegemonic narratives focusing on bottom-up media production (Giraud, »Has Radical Participatory Online Media Really »Failed«? Indymedia and Its Legacies«; Hamm, »Indymedia – Concatenations of Physical and Virtual Spaces.«). For a review of 20 years indymedia see also interviews with founding members on Democracy Now!, »Don't Hate the Media, Be the Media: Reflections on 20 Years of Indymedia, a Radical Media Movement.«

85 Vid. 03, Mariano, Desde Junho 1 19:28 – 19:32

of ALERJ, 17 June 2013, «⁸⁶ which he produced that day, captured the violent clashes at the protest and became one of the emblematic memories of that moment.

The video begins with a small crowd in a side street attacking police by shooting slingshots and throwing stones, coconut shells, and other available objects before eventually erecting barricades. A cut at 1:40 minutes introduces a montage of impressions: fires lit on the steps of the legislature and a crowd dancing around the flames; protesters breaking into a branch of Itaú bank and destroying its ATMs; a burned car turned upside down and sprayed with slogans such as »2,95 R\$« in reference to the old public transport fares; two activists breaking into the legislature building through a window; and Polícia Militar officers – the choque units trained for urban warfare – in riot gear, fighting back with dogs.⁸⁷ Matias Maxx left the raw footage at a friend's house that night when he went home – »the next morning the [edited] video was published,« he recounts.⁸⁸ A week later, the video appeared in English on Vice News, alongside an extensive article referenced in the description of the original video.⁸⁹

A second account that deserves attention is a video produced by *Jornal A Nova Democracia*. It recorded the moment when protesters broke through police lines and stormed the Palácio Tiradentes of ALERJ.⁹⁰ This unedited video, shot by Patrick Granja – equipped with a gas mask and a single-lens reflex camera – shows the historic events of 17 June through the eyes of the protesters gathered in front of the steps leading to the legislature's entrance. The video provides a chronological account of how protesters took control of the stairs. At first, demonstrators confront about two dozen police officers positioned in two lines on the steps. Then the police fire rubber bullets and tear gas into the crowd. In the video, which includes no commentary, the sound of tear gas canisters and rubber bullets being fired is audible, along with people screaming »no violence« and »stop.«⁹¹ Nevertheless, the shots continue to echo until a group of protesters begins breaking through the fencing that separates the police from the crowd. From this moment on, events accelerate: the police retreat toward the building's entrance, a small fire is ignited on the stairway by a Molotov cocktail, and more protesters climb the steps, causing the metal fences to collapse. The police flee into the building. When the camera turns around, the huge crowd cheering the occupation of ALERJ becomes visible.

86 Vid. 10, Maxx, *A Batalha da Alerj*

87 Vid. 10, Maxx, *A Batalha da Alerj*

88 Vid. 03, Mariano, *Desde Junho 1 19:45 – 19:50*

89 https://www.vice.com/pt_br/article/pgezpy/a-tomada-da-alerj

90 Vid. 08, AND, *Veja com exclusividade*

91 Vid. 08, AND, *Veja com exclusividade 1:55-2:30.*

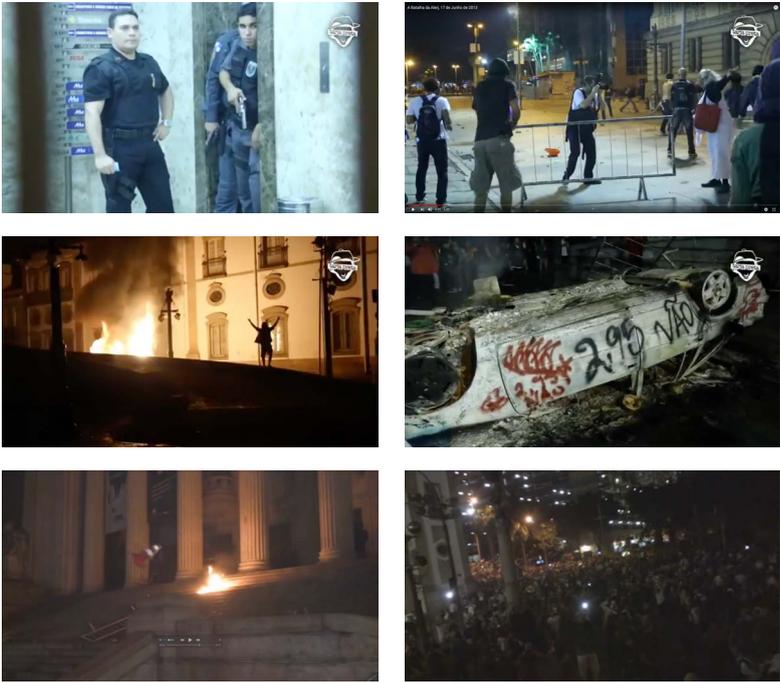


Fig. 27 Protest on 17 June 2013

These two early examples of activist video production inspired more people to pick up cameras and document protest events, eventually leading to the formation of the media activist collectives discussed in the previous chapter. What characterizes activist videos about protests in Rio de Janeiro is that they are filmed from a perspective ›from within‹ – the videographers see themselves as activists, too. These videos aim to amplify the claims and demands of the protests they cover – often by filming visual artefacts such as banners and conducting short interviews with protesters – and they extensively document police aggression.

While the ALERJ occupation marked a symbolic reclaiming of political space in the city center, protests in Rio's favelas unfold under far more precarious and dangerous conditions. This shapes the strategies and tactics employed by video activists on the ground. The following example details some of these practices and how they respond to heightened risks.

Activists Filming in Favelas

»Peace without a voice is not peace, it is fear.«⁹²

The »March in Favor of Life«⁹³ was a street demonstration staged on 25 February 2015 in Rio de Janeiro, at the Maré favela complex in the city's North Zone. It was organized in response to the killing of several urban residents by the police, as a video explains:

»On 12/02, five friends were shot by the military in Salsa and Merengue while on their way home from a party. One of the occupants of the vehicle, besides having lost his leg, is still in a serious condition. [...] On 20/02, a mason was murdered while working in Vila do João, »mistaken for a trafficker«. [...] On 21/02, five more people were shot inside a fully loaded Kombi between Maré and Bonsucesso in Vila do Pinheiro.«⁹⁴

As Chapter Four pointed out, living in a favela in Rio is closely associated with an increased risk of lethal violence. Police and *Polícia Militar* attacks can occur at any moment. The following video case study shows how this everyday violence translates into the repression of protest marches. While protesters in the city center regularly encounter repressive police tactics involving tear gas and batons, those in the favelas risk being targeted with live ammunition. According to an activist and researcher working in the nearby Complexo do Alemão community, »demonstrations are usually deserted, with few people, because people are afraid.«⁹⁵

Activists in the favelas face threats such as »We know who you are« and »we know where you live,« issued by police and drug cartels – often working in collaboration to suppress dissent.⁹⁶ These threats instill fear but also deepen activists' »commitment« to voicing their concerns when they choose to take to the streets.⁹⁷ As a result, street

92 Banner from the march and displayed in Vid. 20, MIC, *Rebelião no Complexo da Maré*

93 »Marcha em favor da vida«

94 »No dia 12/02 cinco amigos tiveram o caro fuzilado pelos militares no Salsa e Merengue quando voltavam de uma festa. Um dos ocupantes de veículo além de perdida a perna, continua internado em estado grave. [...] Dia 20/02 um pedreiro foi assassinado enquanto fazia o seu trabalho na Vila do João, »confundido com traficante«. [...] No dia 21/02, mais cinco pessoas foram alvejadas dentro de uma Kombi, que fazia lotada Maré x Bonsucesso, na Vila do Pinheiro.« Vid. 20, MIC, *Rebelião no Complexo da Maré*

95 Int. 16, Community Organizer, Rio de Janeiro, 11 January 2016.

96 Int. 16, Community Organizer, Rio de Janeiro, 11 January 2016.

97 Int. 17, Video Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 14 January 2016.

demonstrations are typically staged outside the favelas, along major roads, because »you can not protest in favelas.«⁹⁸ In the case of the March for Life, the demonstration took place on the Linha Amarela city highway.⁹⁹

The MIC¹⁰⁰ and AND¹⁰¹ videos documenting the protest differ systematically in two key aspects of editing: first, in how they present contextual information (text vs. voice-over), and second, in their use of visual emphasis (e.g., slow motion, framing of interviews). The MIC video begins with a black screen displaying text that states eleven favela residents had been shot by police in the preceding ten days. The AND video conveys the same information through graphic photographs of the crime scenes, narrated by a voice-over.

In both videos, expositing shots of the crowd of protesters marching along the Linha Amarela highway follow. The MIC video interviews an elder woman who lives in Maré. She accuses the »pacifying« police UPP of being a »hoax« which constantly kills »innocent people«.¹⁰² A second interviewee complains equally vehemently about the violence and high number of deaths at the hands of the UPP. The video shows only the interviewee's torso to obscure the identity of the man, who does not want to be recognized for fear of retaliation.¹⁰³

Both videos then jump from the peaceful demonstration to a sudden eruption of violence, which is caused by the arrival of police choc-troops. A stand-off develops at the entrance to the Maré favela: police officers fire tear gas and flash bombs in the direction of the residents who retreated inside the favela and respond by throwing stones, bottles and other objects. The MIC video then catches a police officer shooting a live gun towards protesters. As this act is difficult to discern in the audio-visuals, the MIC video repeats the scene in slow motion accompanied by the following caption: »Police officer firing a pistol.«¹⁰⁴

98 »Você não pode fazer manifestação em favela« (Int. 16, Community Organizer, Rio de Janeiro, 11 January 2016).

99 Linha Amarela is a privatized highway that is of crucial importance for connecting traffic between the airport and the city's South Zone. In an interview, a media activist who filmed the protest told me that residents of Maré claim that the LAMSA consortium, which owns the highway, also funds the corporate media. Maré residents thus see media reports as being biased towards their protests, especially when unrest negatively affects traffic flow on Linha Amarela and, with it, the income of LAMSA (Int. 17, Video Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 14 January 2016).

100 Vid. 20, MIC, *Rebelião no Complexo da Maré*

101 Vid. 21, AND, *Moradores do Complexo da Maré*

102 Vid. 20, MIC, *Rebelião no Complexo da Maré* 0:50-1:30.

103 Vid. 20, MIC, *Rebelião no Complexo da Maré* 1:55

104 »Policial atira com pistola.« Vid. 20, MIC, *Rebelião no Complexo da Maré*

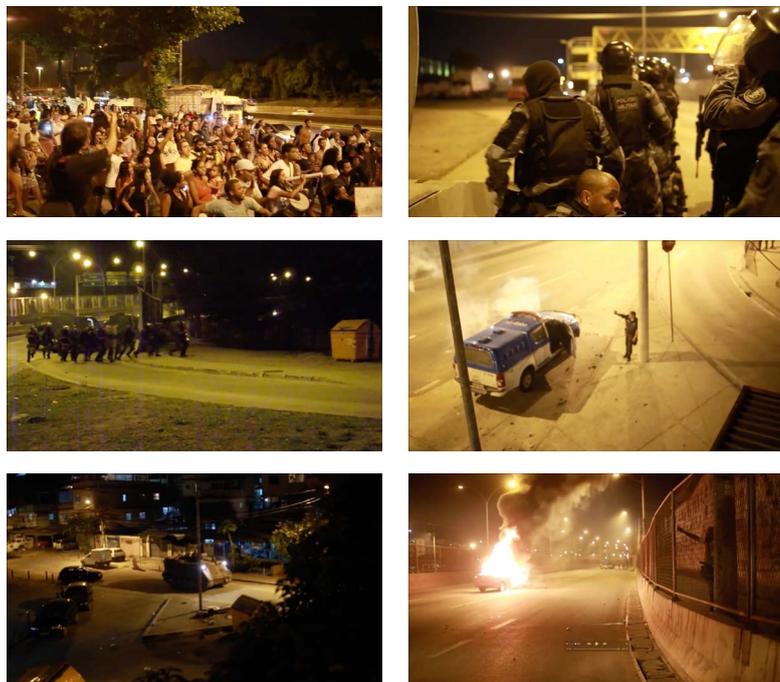


Fig. 28 *Rebellion in Maré*

The chaos and open confrontation ends when the police officers are »forced to retreat«, as the voice-over in the AND video explains.¹⁰⁵ This allows the protesters to reoccupy the Linha Amarela highway. Both videos again show similar footage, in this instance of video activists running up onto a pedestrian viaduct over the highway in order to get into a better position from which to film the »reoccupation«. Remarkable about this scene are the tactics adopted by the media activists to remain close together. By intentionally taking advantage of their collective movement in triangular positions, the video activists make it easier to defend themselves from any attacks by the police and ensure in case of attacks to have record evidence. Whereas an isolated cameraperson could easily be detained and have his or her audio-visual material confiscated, the video activists provide each other with mutual protection.

The reason for the video activists' rush over the viaduct becomes clear in the following scene presented in both videos. Two police officers are standing next to a police vehicle on the other side of a fence on

105 Vid. 21, AND, *Moradores do Complexo da Maré* 5:43–5:45.

the side of the highway; there is no sign of any immediate threat. One of the officers then targets his gun at the protesters and pulls the trigger, at which the second officer drives off while firing additional shots towards the crowd from his vehicle. In the AND video, Patrick Granja's voice-over reports that, according to local residents, at least one person has been wounded in the police attack.¹⁰⁶ This footage of police officers intentionally shooting at protesters has become an emblematic moment that has been reproduced in numerous other audio-visual productions, thus becoming part of collective memory. At the end of the MIC video, five army tanks roll under the pedestrian viaduct in the direction of Complexo Maré, while a car that has been turned upside down and set on fire by local residents burns on Linha Amarela. The deployment of army tanks against urban citizens symbolizes the state's incapacity to respond to the demand of the protesters to stop police killings in favelas and instead answers to these demands with more violent suppression.

Despite slight differences between the MIC and AND videos, both offer a similar account of the March in Favor of Life, often using nearly identical visuals. Together, they demonstrate that audiovisual production in favelas differs significantly from filming in the middle- and upper-class neighborhoods of Rio's Central or South zones. The media activists documenting the Maré protest have built close relationships with the local community, earning its trust. However, filming chaotic events – especially clashes with police – affects the footage itself: activists who stay close together for protection often produce similar material under conditions that are rarely conducive to high-quality filming. The result is frequently out-of-focus or poorly lit visuals.¹⁰⁷ Nonetheless, these two videos fill a critical gap left by corporate media by documenting police violence and amplifying the voices of residents marginalized in corporate media narratives.

106 Vid. 21, AND, *Moradores do Complexo da Maré* 7:27.

107 Smartphone cameras would not have been able to pick up police officer firing lethal ammunition at the entrance of the favela as the MIC video did. The semi-professional equipment to make videos employed guarantees a higher audio-visual quality. A quality that serves not merely aesthetic purposes but also the practical purpose of ensuring evidence.

Engaged Insiders Filming ›From Within‹

»We are not journalists, [...] and we are not filmmakers either, we are media activists. We have a position.«¹⁰⁸

Building on the previous examples, this section explores the practices and perspectives of video activists who document protests and police violence – what I refer to as activist videos produced by engaged insiders. While terms such as ›alternative media‹, ›radical media‹, ›citizen journalism‹, and even ›riot porn‹ are sometimes used, I use the term ›activist videos‹ to emphasize the political commitment and embeddedness of the videographers.

Activist videos are made by engaged insiders. These videographers follow local political developments closely and draw on extensive social networks for information.¹⁰⁹ In Rio, media activists often collaborate on the ground – as illustrated by the filming of the March in Favor of Life by the Maré community and the use of a shared ›editing island‹ for post-production.

Video activists apply similar techniques in their depiction of protests. Establishing shots – used to set the scene – typically show protesters gathering, preparing banners, or police forces taking position. These are often followed by footage from the march, enriched with interview clips that capture participants' voices and articulate their motivations. When clashes occur, violence frequently becomes the dramatic climax of the video. This may include scenes of activists destroying objects such as ATMs or resisting police aggression. Such images – often graphic – are usually edited to depict the police as the aggressor. Video activists claim collective authorship by inserting the logo of their collective – and, in some cases adding individual names – at the beginning or mostly at the end of a video.

It is difficult for video activists to anticipate when and where incidents of police violence will occur. To document threats, attacks, or extra-judicial killings by the police, video activists – especially those in Rio de Janeiro – often rely on footage filmed by witnesses and sent via messenger services like WhatsApp or Telegram. These videos are either disseminated in their original form or edited into reports that contextualize the footage and often include interviews with victims' relatives.¹¹⁰

108 »Nós não somos jornalistas, [nós afirmamos isso o tempo todo,] e também não somos cineastas, nós somos midiativistas. A gente tem uma posição.« (Int. 13, MIC and Mariachi Focus Group, Rio de Janeiro, 25 November 2015).

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

110 A good example for activist videos incorporating footage from witnesses is the video about the assassination of Jhonata by police in Rio, which is

In their audiovisual accounts of protests, activist videos defend the right to protest and condemn police violence. References to forms of structural violence are often provided in combination with contextualizing information. This may include, for example, statistics relating to evictions or lethal police assaults or the historicization of contemporary events.

Video activists use semi-professional equipment such as SLR cameras or livestream via smartphones. Their »armament«¹¹¹ typically includes one or more cameras, additional lenses, extra batteries, and backup SSD storage cards. Activist videos – usually of semi-professional or professional standard – employ editing techniques such as fast cutting, black screens with text between clips, subtitles, and, in fewer cases, voice-overs. Music and other audio elements are often added to heighten emotional impact. During editing, the footage is typically condensed to a standard length of three to seven minutes – similar to news reports.

To disseminate their videos, video activists rely on established online channels such as a collective's YouTube channel or Facebook account or even its own website.¹¹² Video activists adopt an involved perspective, intentionally siding with protesters and urban citizens in their battles against the governing authorities and the police – reflected in the »view from within« that their videos provide.

Video activists take the perspective of *engaged insiders*. They identify with the justifications for protests and show empathy for the victims of police violence. In our interview¹¹³ members of MIC and Mariachi video activist collectives described their role as media activists as someone who »knows that he is in the conflict zone; he is not naively participating in this environment, but really proposing himself as a democratic reporter.«¹¹⁴

discussed in detail in Chapter Eight. In the case that police attacks are not lethal – for example on protests and in situations of forced evictions – victims themselves are interviewed as long as becoming publicly visible does not threaten them.

111 Int. 13, MIC and Mariachi Focus Group, Rio de Janeiro, 25 November 2015.

112 The reasons why most Rio video activist websites closed after various attempts to make themselves independent of corporate social media networks such as Facebook and YouTube is discussed in the Chapter Seven. In Cape Town, the social media channels of the movements themselves – for example Rhodes Must Fall – or journalist sites are employed as major channels for video distribution.

113 The focus group interview was conducted with five members from the two collectives and in collaboration with my colleague Lívia Alcântara from UERJ.

114 »ele ta na área de conflito, eles sabe que ele ta na área de conflito, ele não ta ali ingenuamente participando daquele ambiente, ele realmente se propõe

Being in the position of an *engaged insider* translates literally into shooting videos from within protest marches. Metaphorically, this perspective corresponds to the political positionalities of video activists who align themselves with the causes and demands of an emancipatory politics that defends human rights and aims to amplify voices of urban citizens in struggles against patriarchal, colonial and capitalist structures. Activist and witness video making function in a symbiotic relationship.

6.4 Emancipatory and Bottom-Up Video Productions

This chapter introduced a heuristic typology of journalist, activist, and witness videos to enable a more nuanced discussion of how different forms of video production visualize urban struggles and their emancipatory potential.

Journalist videos by professional outsiders are hardly a form of bottom-up city making. Economic pressures, hierarchical internal organization and concentration of ownership structures make up the own logics in which journalism has to function. This is not to say that journalism is incapable of embracing bottom-up practices of filming, but by integrating them into their logic of reporting the audio-visual products are inserted in a different logic. Individual journalists and independent outlets such as *GroundUp* or *Jornal A Nova Democracia* have challenged dominant narratives and exposed injustice. However, they remain exceptions, often reliant on external funding, and are constrained by the broader media ecosystem. In Brazil especially, mainstream journalism frequently reproduces conservative, top-down perspectives that stand in opposition to emancipatory urban movements.

Witness videos are most inclusive form of video making in terms of accessibility. Witness video potentiated the opportunities of bottom-up audio-visual representation on an unprecedented scale. The emancipatory potential of witness videos is however ambivalent. The position of being an unpredictable spectator can have a significant role for capturing video with an enormous mobilizing effect for urban movements at times. At the same time, witness videos can re-enforce stereotypes since the often short and unedited videos are credited with a high level of authenticity, which can be misleading. A single scene of looting as depicted by a user can be an effective form of delegitimizing a protest march without ever having discussed the cause of mobilization. Being a very inclusive and bottom-up practice of filming with unpredictable effects

a ser um repórter democrático» (Int. 13, MIC and Mariachi Focus Group, Rio de Janeiro, 25 November 2015).

for emancipatory right to the city struggles, witness videos together with activist videos pose a challenge to journalist reporting.

Finally, activist video productions aim at amplifying voices from the bottom-up. Given the fact that video activists as engaged insiders emanated from urban movements struggling for emancipation, their goals to use videos for emancipation by creating structures for radically transforming reporting from the bottom-up is unquestioned. Video activist collectives organized themselves in independent and non-hierarchical networks to amplify the voices of urban movements and citizens. However, the bottom-up organization is often built on the precondition of having certain levels of privilege, which enable individuals to effectively participate in the work intensive collective work.¹¹⁵ For marginalized urban citizens it is often impossible to permanently engage in the inner circles of (media-)activism in Brazil, while individualized attempts of activist-video production that are more prominent in Cape Town struggle with other challenges that are highlighted in the next chapter.

Building on the typology and its implications, the next chapter shifts focus from the practices of video production to the question of visibility. It explores how activist and witness videos circulate online, and how digital platforms shape what becomes seen, shared, and remembered in the struggle for urban justice.

115 See the discussion about privileges in media activist collectives in Rio in Chapter Five.



Fig. 29 *Peace without a voice is not peace, it is fear*

7. Producing Visibility

After examining video production as it unfolds ›in the streets‹ in the previous chapter, this chapter shifts focus to the digital sphere – specifically, social media platforms as key networks for distributing online video content and their role as ›new‹ gatekeepers. It analyzes how visibility is produced through the dissemination strategies employed by bottom-up video makers in Rio de Janeiro and Cape Town, highlighting the tactics and strategies at play.¹

The first section investigates what I term *topographies of visibility*, tracing the peaks and troughs that define the »attention economy« of online video distribution.² It reviews key factors that influence a video's visibility – such as duration, audio-visual quality, editing, and distribution channels. The second section examines the shift in gatekeeping power from local and national mass media to global social media corporations. While this transition has opened new avenues for video dissemination, it has also introduced new rules, regulations, and opaque control mechanisms. By analyzing cases of videos disabled by social media platforms, the chapter shows how video activists in Rio de Janeiro have grown increasingly disillusioned with corporate platforms. These experiences prompted efforts to establish autonomous websites, yet most attempts to bypass the social media oligopsony³ have faltered due to limited

- 1 Journalist videos are discussed to a lesser extent, given the limitations of their emancipatory potential for bottom-up video making as discussed in the prior chapter.
- 2 Webster, *The Marketplace of Attention: How Audiences Take Shape in a Digital Age*.
- 3 Mejias, *Off the Network*, 33.

economic resources and the overwhelming influence of platforms like Facebook and YouTube.⁴

The third section looks at the tactics and strategies developed to distribute content and circumvent censorship by corporate social media. While these platforms have significantly expanded opportunities for audiovisual dissemination, they have also imposed a logic of commodification. Grass-roots efforts to resist this commodification and promote *autogestion* in audiovisual representation – by producing and freely distributing videos as commons – have encountered substantial structural barriers. In the chapter's conclusion, the typology of journalist, witness, and activist videos is revisited to assess how new gatekeepers and their opaque mechanisms re-shape bottom-up video production. Without a doubt, the landscape for visualizing urban struggles has changed dramatically over the past decade, with for-profit social media emerging as dominant and powerful actors in this field.

7.1 Producing Visibility: Factors and Forms

Formative Factors Shaping the Topographies of Visibility

Several factors influence the number of viewers an online video attracts, including its upload date, duration, audio-visual and editing quality, distribution channel, content, and contextual relevance. While a systematic, quantitative evaluation of the extent to which each of these elements contributes to a video's visibility lies beyond the scope of this research, qualitative observations nonetheless support the formulation of preliminary hypotheses.

Whereas the immediate dissemination of a video increases its visibility, delayed uploads tend to have a markedly negative impact on viewership. Media activists in Rio de Janeiro repeatedly emphasized the urgency of sharing their material as quickly as possible. Immediacy is a defining characteristic of the fast-paced digital communication landscape.

A second general principle influencing viewership relates to video duration: the shorter the video, the greater its potential to attract a large audience. Another practical reason for to »[k]eep it short« is more surprising: the costs to stream lengthy videos.⁵ In Cape Town, this constraint by high cost of mobile data mattered practically in the creation of visibility.⁶

4 Rohmann et al., »The Brave Blue World: Facebook Flow and Facebook Addiction Disorder (FAD)«.

5 Int. 27, Videographers, Cape Town, 9 August 2016

6 Strikingly, the most-viewed videos from my Cape Town sample are rarely longer than two minutes, with the exception of the documentary film *Luister and #Outsourced* (Vid. 28, Contraband, Luister; Vid. 44, RME, #Outsourced)

Audio-visual and editing quality also play a role in enhancing a video's visibility, though their importance varies depending on the video type. While witness videos often feature low production quality – contributing to their perceived authenticity – activist videos longer than two minutes benefit significantly from high-quality visuals and editing.⁷ As the examples in this chapter demonstrate, poor audio-visual quality or editing can substantially reduce the likelihood of such videos gaining widespread attention.

Another key aspect are the distribution channel, which significantly influences a video's reach. Video activist collectives in Rio or the Facebook page of the Rhodes Must Fall movement, for instance, could rely on an established audience that regularly engaged with their content. In contrast, videos uploaded by individual users often receive far less attention.

Beyond distribution, content and context are among the most critical variables shaping visibility. A notable trend is that videos depicting violence tend to attract the most viewers, whereas footage of peaceful protests rarely garners comparable attention.

In sum, numerous factors – each necessary but not sufficient on its own – contribute to the fluctuations in video visibility. The following examples from Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro illustrate how visibility emerges from the interplay of production choices, distribution networks, and the socio-political context of protest events. These include videos of the 2016 Women's March and service delivery protests in Cape Town, student demonstrations in Rio, and three videos recording the exact same incidence of a police threat during the 2014 World Cup. To trace the topographies of visibility, I first turn to Cape Town before looking to Rio de Janeiro.

Cape Town: The Asymmetries in Attracting Attention

» We want people to take note.«⁸

The reception of videos of protest marches in Cape Town clearly depends on the urban movement and the power of their communication channel established on social media as the following comparison illustrates. None of the first set of videos received more than one hundred views on YouTube; as such, these videos represent the floor of visibility in my sample of videos from Cape Town.⁹ This contrast starkly with Stuart Buchanan's

7 The two-minute boundary is based on the observations from my sample. Short videos that are less than two minutes in lengths could be interpreted as the pendant to 140-character messages on Twitter – short and pointed communications to keep the audience attention.

8 Int. 26, NGO Activist, Cape Town, 9 August 2016.

9 For a detailed discussion of sampling techniques for videos, see Chapter Three on methodology.

video »Looting after Cape Town protest« and the thousands of views recorded for videos posted on the UCT:RhodesMustFall Facebook page.

A video¹⁰ that presents impressions from the annual Women's March in Cape Town held on 9 August 2016.¹¹ It was uploaded to the Terrestrial One YouTube channel almost fifty days later on 27 September 2016. The edited video includes interviews with participants of the protest march as well as an intro and outro featuring the channel's logo: »Earth Huub. Re-inventing the Wheel«. ¹² Accompanied by the sort of music that is commonly used in commercials, the video's production is of rather high audio-visual and editing quality and with its duration of 2:23 minutes well-suited to catch attention. However, the video has remained almost unwatched as it has received no more than nine views since being posted on 27 September 2016.¹³ During the interview with the two videographers, recording the video described, both of them expressed their unanimous frustration with the lack of media attention to peaceful protest actions.

During an interview at the Women's March, two videographers voiced their frustration about the lack of media attention to peaceful protest actions. As one explained, »[b]ecause [corporate] media won't share this peace. They say it is a boring topic. So when we do call media, it is very few times that they actually want to cover our story.« ¹⁴ This perception – that peaceful protests and topics such as women's rights rarely receive coverage unless they involve spectacular forms of resistance¹⁵ – appears to be confirmed by two further examples.

10 Vid. 31, Fire Jungle, Women's Day

11 In South Africa, National Women's Day is a public holiday that is celebrated annually on 9 August. It deviates from International Women's Day, which is celebrated every year on 8 March, as it commemorates the Women's March that took place in Pretoria on 9 August 1956, when women took to the streets to protest the apartheid regime's introduction of the so-called pass laws (Cape Town Magazine, »Women's Day In SA and Why We Celebrate Differently From The Rest of The World«).

12 The name of the YouTube account was changed in 2018 from »Earth Huub« to »Fire Jungle« for reasons unknown.

13 At least three to four of these views must have been counted by me returning to the video on YouTube repeatedly. This relative effect of my research on view counts is small for most videos as it my clicks make up only a small share of the views, except videos that have such a low view count like this example.

14 The NGO representatives for International Women's Peace Group were equally filming during the demonstration on Woman's Day on 9 August 2016 but I was not able to find their own video (Int. 26, NGO Activist, Cape Town, 9 August 2016).

15 Protests tactics that transgress supposed socio-cultural boundaries – for example the naked protests by Ukrainian and French FEMEN activists – are effective in attracting attention. In Cape Town, the RMF Trans Collective that interrupted the opening of the exhibition »Echoing Voices from Within«



Fig. 30 Women's Day

The video »service delivery protest cape town« by Galaga – discussed in the previous chapter as a witness video – received only 13 views on YouTube.¹⁶ It was posted on a personal channel that also features low-traffic videos of children, cats, and video games. Similarly, Kenny Nagel's witness video of another peaceful service delivery protest at Cape Town's Civic Center attracted little attention, with just 91 views.¹⁷

However, some witness videos do achieve high visibility on YouTube. Stuart Buchanan's video, for instance, recorded an impressive 38,115 views.¹⁸ It captures a dramatic scene of a small group of people »looting,«¹⁹ as the video describes it, and received more views than comparable footage from SABC and News24 combined.

How can the relatively high view counts of the RhodesMustFall (RMF) videos be explained, given their minimal editing and low audio-visual quality? Despite these limitations, the RMF Facebook page consistently attracted the highest engagement in my Cape Town sample, with videos from the 21 October 2015 protest and the #Shackville

on 9 March 2016 by blocking it with their exposed bodies covered in red paint. For an account of events and the manifesto by the Trans Collective see: The Journalist, »Disrupting the Silencing of Voices.«

16 Vid. 29, Galaga, service delivery protest

17 Vid. 30, Nagel, Service delivery protest

18 Video 15, Buchanan, Looting after Cape Town protest

19 The videos about violence in Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro – discussed in the next chapter – have all received more several thousands and in some case ten thousand of views (see videography).

protest in early 2016 reaching thousands²⁰ – and in some cases tens of thousands²¹ – of views.

These examples highlight the importance of distribution channels. The RMF student movement built a strong network on Facebook, where their videos consistently reached large audiences, while their YouTube channel remained largely inactive. Free internet access on campus facilitated both uploading and viewing, and the movement benefited from a built-in audience and near-guaranteed media attention – »UCT will always be covered,« as one student activist put it.²² In contrast, organizers of the Civic Centre service delivery protest and the 2016 Women's March struggled to build such networks.²³

Filming Protests in Rio de Janeiro: Individual and Organized Video Making

The following examples from Rio de Janeiro, where video activism is more active and diverse, offer a nuanced view of the factors shaping visibility. Unlike in Cape Town, protest coverage in Rio does not rely on urban movements organizing documentation. Instead, a vibrant bottom-up video production scene ensures that most demonstrations are filmed by both collectives and individuals. Comparing videos of the same protest event by independent videographer Thiago Oliveira and the collective AND highlights two key factors in video production: editing and, more importantly, distribution channels.

The day after a student protest on 28 March 2014 in central Rio, independent videographer Thiago Oliveira uploaded two videos to YouTube.²⁴ The first shows students in white school uniforms marching peacefully near the ALERJ building, chanting and drumming.²⁵ The second, filmed shortly afterward, captures a shift in atmosphere as *Polícia Militar* officers enter the crowd, search bags, and arrest a Black teenager. The situation escalates, and a second student is pushed to the ground,

20 Vid. 22, RMF, Protests continue; Vid. 23, RMF, We are holding hostage; Vid. 24, RMF, We have shut university down; Vid. 25, RMF, Azania will rise; Vid. 26, RMF, [untitled]; Vid. 27, RMF, Urgently plenary

21 Vid. 32, RMF, we will protect; Vid. 33, RMF, UCT right now; Vid. 34, RMF, as we demonstrate;

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

23 Certainly, the comparison between videos posted on Facebook and YouTube is not without its own problems. For example, that Facebook counts a video as viewed after it has been automatically played for two seconds, whereas YouTube videos counts a view only after five seconds.

24 Thiago Oliveira, »YouTube Channel«.

25 Vid. 35, Oliveira, manifestação pacífica

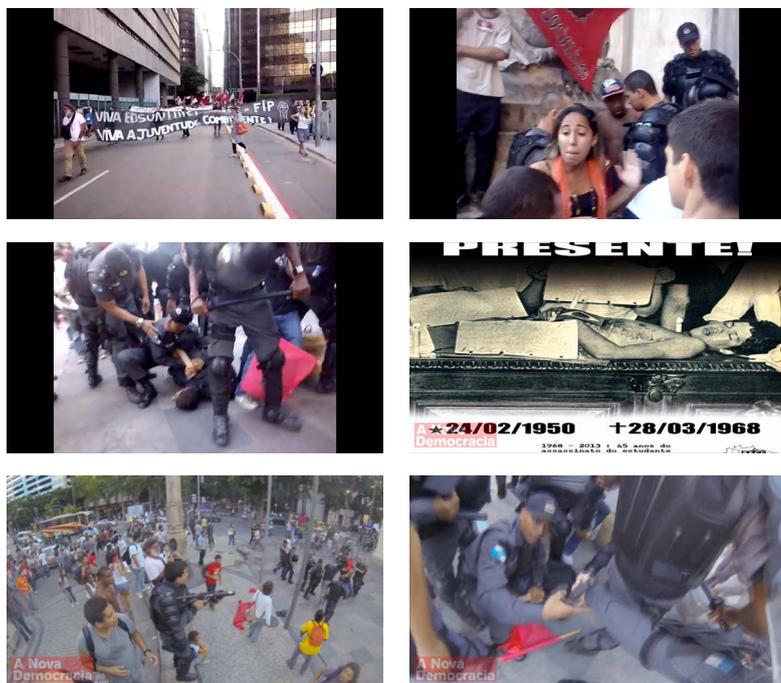


Fig. 31 Day of the Students

screaming, » You are killing me!«²⁶ Both videos are unedited, of low audio-visual quality, and presented without credits. Their descriptive titles – »peaceful demonstration on 28 March at the Central Station«²⁷ and »cowardly and arbitrary arrest of STUDENTS by the *Polícia Militar*«²⁸ – signal their content. Despite their relevance and emotional intensity, the videos received only 121 and 158 views, respectively.

A video of the same protest, published by *Jornal A Nova Democracia* (AND), received over 4,600 views – more than thirty times the views of Oliveira’s uploads.²⁹ Before showing the 2014 footage, the video opens with a one-minute narrated segment explaining the historical significance of the protest date. On 28 March 1968, student Edson Luís

26 Vid. 36, Oliveira, covardia e prisões arbitrarías

27 »manifestação pacífica no dia 28 de março na Central do Brasil« Vid. 35, Oliveira, manifestação pacífica

28 »covardia e prisões arbitrarías da PM com os ESTUDANTES na manifestação do dia 28 de março de 2014« Vid. 36, Oliveira, covardia e prisões arbitrarías

29 In 2014, this was a significant number of views. Vid. 37, AND, Dia do Estudante Combativo

de Lima Soto was killed by the *Polícia Militar* at the Calabouço restaurant in Rio. Fearing the regime would conceal the body, fellow students carried it to the steps of the ALERJ, the same location as the 2014 protest. The AND video uses archival photographs and narration by Patrick Granja to connect past and present, before transitioning to edited footage that closely resembles Oliveira's second video.

A comparison of the two videos highlights the importance of audio-visual quality and presentation. Oliveira's footage, recorded with a lower-resolution camera and shaky handling, includes disorienting shots and lacks editing, which makes it harder to follow. In contrast, the AND video features steady camerawork, higher visual quality, and a well-edited narrative. It also includes contextual information in the video description, enhancing its clarity and appeal to viewers.³⁰

A second reason – discussed earlier – for the AND video's broader reach lies in its distribution. While Thiago Oliveira's channel³¹ had limited visibility and a fragmented audience, *Jornal A Nova Democracia* is a well-established platform for activist media in Rio, with a large subscriber base and millions of views. Its credibility and reach ensured that the video gained significantly more traction than Oliveira's uploads.

The second factor determining the videos' visibility are their respective distribution channels. It presents videos on a variety of topics ranging from computer tricks and private hikes to videos of airplanes landing at Rio de Janeiro-Santos Dumont Airport. While Oliveira is not a regular creator of activist videos depicting protests, *Jornal A Nova Democracia* is a key player in bottom-up communication on protests and police violence in Rio.³²

30 While a detailed description is typical for AND's videos, Oliveira's second video supplies only a short description: »...the PM [military police] dropped a bomb, blamed the demonstrators [for the escalation] and began to shoot rubber bullets and arbitrarily arrest the STUDENTS...« »...a PM soltou uma bomba e pôs a culpa nos manifestantes e começou a dar tiros de borracha e prender arbitrariamente os ESTUDANTES... « Vid. 36, Oliveira, covardia e prisões arbitrárias

31 As of 15 May 2020, Thiago Oliveira's YouTube channel had attained a total of 97,000 views and attracted 248 subscribers. Thiago Oliveira, »YouTube Channel.«

32 With 56,700 subscribers and 17.9 million total views, the AND YouTube channel is certainly among the most viewed YouTube channels for counter-hegemonic information and critical debate in Rio de Janeiro. *Jornal A Nova Democracia*, »YouTube Channel.«

Three Videos, One Scene: Creating Viral Videos

On 15 June 2014, during the first World Cup match at Rio's Maracanã Stadium, a protest unfolded nearby and was captured in three videos by different collectives. Although all three depict the same dramatic scene³³ – a plainclothes police officer pulling a gun and hijacking a car – their visibility varied widely. The CMI video received just 172 views,³⁴ the AND video 78,686,³⁵ and the MIC/Mariachi video 1.35 million.³⁶ This stark contrast offers valuable insights and allows to discuss the most popular video of all videos in my sample.

The CMI video opens with over four minutes of loosely edited footage showing clashes between protesters and police, including tear gas and stun grenades. Only at 4:43 minutes does the central scene appear: a plainclothes officer, identified by a blue circle and caption, pulls a gun and fires four shots. The cameraperson, positioned at a distance, ducks behind a car and captures the officer entering a vehicle and firing again before driving off. The video then returns to general protest footage. Its long runtime, lack of narrative structure, and delayed focus on the key moment likely contributed to its low visibility – just 172 views.

The CMI video opens with over four minutes of uncut footage showing protesters clashing with police, who respond with stun grenades and tear gas. At 4:43, a man appears between two lines of cars. A blue circle and caption identify him as an undercover officer: »Armed undercover policeman threatens protesters and fires four shots with a lethal weapon.«³⁷

As the police officer in plain clothes fires the first shot, the CMI cameraperson ducks behind a car, about ten meters away. From there, the video captures activists confronting the officer. The camera briefly pans away, and when it returns, the officer has moved forward.³⁸ Still images are then inserted: one of him holding a gun, a portrait, and a bullet casing in someone's palm.

The officer enters a car and fires three more shots into the air before driving off. The video then returns to the clashes, with rapid pans and

33 The scene as filmed by MIC/Mariachi, was reproduced in numerous documentaries and videos. For example: Vid. 05, Mariano, Desde Junho 3; Vid. 70, MIC, Cidade Maravilhosa

34 Vid. 38, CMI, Copa dos Protestos

35 Vid. 39, AND, Policiais disparam tiros

36 Vid. 40, MIC, Civil saca arma de fogo

37 »Policial à paisana armado ameaça manifestantes e efetua quatro disparos de arma letal« Vid. 38, CMI, Copa dos Protestos 4:43

38 The manner in which the camera pans backwards must be attributed to a camera being affixed to the cameraperson's helmet. The way in which he/she looks towards the other side of the street is presumably to check for any further danger.



Fig. 32 *Armed Officer in Plainclothes*

long, shaky shots, and a lack of a narrative arc makes it harder to follow – a style seen in other CMI videos.³⁹ Despite being posted just two days after the event, the video received only 172 views, failing to gain traction on social media.

The AND video as second recording presents two key scenes. First, a uniformed police officer on a motorcycle is shown firing his pistol toward a crowd of protesters.⁴⁰ After a cut, the video shifts to the plainclothes officer standing among parked cars. In this version, the cameraman can be heard demanding to see the officer's ID. Another cut follows, revealing the getaway car from the side, with a clear shot of its license plate which offers evidence for potential journalistic or criminal prosecution.

39 Two other examples of CMI videos, both from April 2015, are a 17-minute video documenting the police's eviction of residents from the CEDAE residential building in Flamengo and a 21-minute video about the resistance at Aldeia Maracãna, both of which have received less than 200 views. Vid. 41, CMI, Mobilização Internacional Indígena; Vid. 42, CMI, Mobilização Internacional Indígena

40 A scene that does not appear in the two other videos.

Unlike the CMI video,⁴¹ the AND video uses its description section to contextualize the protest, highlighting earlier clashes and further instances of police violence.

»On Avenida 28 de Setembro, a policeman from the Tropa de Choque approached a group of demonstrators on a motorcycle, pulled out his gun and fired in their direction, without any fear of the camera. Moments later, a protester approached our team saying that he had been hit in the ankle by the shrapnel. Soon thereafter, an undercover policeman pulled out his gun and threatened a group of protesters. Then he got out in a car driven by another man, who aimed the vehicle at the crowd, while [the policeman was] firing shots from his gun.«⁴²

The MIC video, the most-viewed of the three, focuses exclusively on the plainclothes police officer. It opens with a stark caption: »[Police officer dressed as] Civilian pulls out a gun, threatens journalists and discharges [his weapon] against protesters.«⁴³ The footage shows the MIC cameraman approaching the AND filmmaker, who is arguing with the officer. As in the Maré rebellion video (see Chapter Six), the AND and MIC teams stay close for mutual protection.

The officer is seen holding a pistol, while a man in a striped shirt approaches and appears to receive instructions. The officer then pushes the MIC videographer and threatens them with his gun before entering a car, where the striped-shirt man has taken the driver's seat.⁴⁴ As the car drives off – crossing a red light – the officer fires three shots into the air. The MIC cameraman runs after the vehicle, capturing shaky footage that heightens the sense of urgency. During this sequence, the audio fades into silence. Then, after a few seconds, a black screen is enlightened by the logos of the MIC and Mariachi.

While the audio-visual quality of the three videos is comparable, the camerapersons' positions differ significantly. In the CMI video, the videographer keeps a safe distance, ducking behind a car as shots are fired. The AND videographer confronts the officer directly, demanding identification and filming the getaway car. The MIC activist moves in even closer, capturing the pistol at close range while shouting at the officer. These differing angles are more than stylistic choices – if one of the videographers had been harmed, the multiple perspectives could serve as crucial evidence, as often demonstrated by investigative groups like Forensic Architecture.

41 The CMI video's YouTube description proclaims with a few lines in Portuguese and English that the »Cup of Protests« has started, but it does mention the incident with the civil police officer. Vid. 38, CMI, Copa dos Protestos

42 Vid. 39, AND, Policiais disparam tiros

43 Vid. 40, MIC, Civil saca arma de fogo

44 »sair daqui!« Vid. 40, MIC, Civil saca arma de fogo, 1:02

The differing levels of attention each video received offer valuable insight into how visibility is produced within digital networks. MIC's video – released immediately, focused on a single dramatic incident, and featuring unedited, close-up footage of the officer's pistol – garnered by far the most views. Its raw authenticity, the danger of filming in real time, and the activists' success in exposing and confronting armed police violence made it especially compelling. The video's same-night release on YouTube helped it go viral. Remarkably, it accounted for over half of the 1.95 million total views on MIC's channel, which hosted 122 other videos⁴⁵ – illustrating the »winner takes all« logic of social media. Ultimately, the video's affective immediacy produced one of the most significant peaks in visibility in the history of Brazilian video activism.⁴⁶

7.2 Gatekeepers in Video Distribution

This section shifts focus from the factors determining a video's visibility to the infrastructural and institutional forces that govern its circulation. In particular, it examines how for-profit social media platforms have emerged as powerful new gatekeepers, shaping not only what becomes visible but also how the architecture of visibility itself.

Since 2004,⁴⁷ social media corporations have increasingly challenged the dominance of the »old« gatekeepers of mass media across the globe, including in Brazil and South Africa. What Dal Yong Jin terms »platform imperialism« describes a situation in which the »hegemonic power of American-based platforms« such as Google, Facebook, iPhone and Android – and subsidiary services like Facebook-owned WhatsApp and

45 These numbers refer to an analysis of the MIC YouTube channel on 13 January 2020.

46 It is important to keep in mind here that video activism is still a niche movement when its viewing figures are compared to those attained by popular entertainment and sports videos on social media platforms such as YouTube. For example, the official highlights of the World Cup match between Argentina and Bosnia-Herzegovina that took place in Rio's Maracanã Stadium on the day of the protest had received more than two million views. That means despite the video of the match only being posted three years after the event, it has attained more visibility than the most viewed video by the MIC collective. Vid. 43, FIFA TV, Argentina vs. Bosnia; Vid. 40, MIC, Civil saca arma de fogo

47 Facebook went online in February 2004, YouTube in February 2005, and Twitter in July 2006. This period, which followed the dot-com crash in 2001, was characterized by a remodeling of the internet into what became known as Web 2.0, a less static and more participatory form of online communication. For a definition and critique of Web 2.0, see: Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*.

Instagram and Google's YouTube – have come to dominate online communication by occupying the strategically powerful role of »digital intermediaries« for a variety of functions and services.⁴⁸ Since »intellectual property and commercial values are embedded in platforms«,⁴⁹ the hegemonic position that these US-based corporate social media giants have secured for themselves in audio-visual distribution has a direct effect on video activist practices.⁵⁰ As Yong Jin argues, intellectual property rights are »the most significant form of capital accumulation in the digital age«.⁵¹

Organized video activist collectives in Rio de Janeiro⁵² have consistently criticized the for-profit logic of social media and expressed skepticism toward dominant U.S.-based platforms. This section examines how platforms like YouTube and Facebook have censored activist content through mechanisms such as copyright enforcement and politically motivated takedowns. One video critical of Globo was removed under copyright claims, while another by Rafucko was similarly taken down after pressure from the broadcaster. The disabling of the Mariachi Facebook page shortly before the 2016 Olympics further suggests possible collaboration between corporate platforms and the state. In response to these experiences, activists began developing their own websites to regain control over distribution.

*The Intertwining Histories of the Corporate Media
and Political Power in Brazil: »Brizola x Globo«*

The video »Brizola x Globo« recounts the long-standing conflict between Brazilian politician Leonel de Moura Brizola (1922–2004) and the

- 48 Yon Jin, »The Construction of Platform Imperialism in the Globalization Era«, 145.
- 49 Yon Jin, »The Construction of Platform Imperialism in the Globalization Era«, 153.
- 50 In the »Top 100 Sites on the Web« ranking referenced by Yong Jin, Google, Facebook and YouTube occupy the top three positions (Yon Jin, 155–157). In 2020, the »Top 500 Sites on the Web« ranking released by Alexa – the latest version of the ranking to which Yon Jin referred – is still dominated by Google and YouTube but now includes an increasing number of Chinese competitors (Alexa, »The Top 500 Sites on the Web«).
- 51 Yon Jin, »The Construction of Platform Imperialism in the Globalization Era«, 145.
- 52 Empirical cases of Cape Town are not discussed in this section, because the collected data offers an insufficient basis to draw analytical conclusions. In Cape Town, neither concerted efforts to question the hegemony of corporate social media nor experiences of having their online content disabled was brought to my attention in interviews with activists.

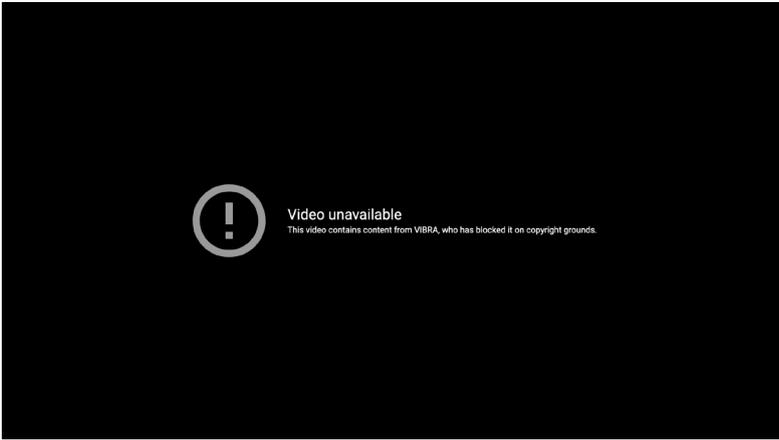


Fig. 33 *Video not Available*

media conglomerate Rede Globo. Produced by the MIC collective, the video highlights the continuity of Globo's media practices from the dictatorship era into the democratic period. It illustrates how traditional mass media gatekeepers like Globo have historically used their broadcasting power to shape political outcomes. At the same time, it shows how newer gatekeepers – such as YouTube and Facebook – have become entangled in these power struggles by siding with Globo against bottom-up video activism. Both platforms ultimately removed the video after a request by Globo. I first describe the video's content and narrative before turning to the circumstances of its deletion.

»There must be some kind of way outta here, said the joker to the thief,« sings Jimi Hendrix over the opening of the video, as white text on a black background introduces the intertwined histories of Brazil's military dictatorship and Rede Globo.⁵³ A photographic collage follows, showing protesting youths, mounted police, officers attacking students, the front page of Globo's newspaper after the 1964 dissolution of the National Congress, scenes of torture, and the murdered journalist Vladimir

53 The Globo television network was founded in 1965, one year after the military had seized control of the Brazilian state with external support from the USA. Thereafter, Globo came to function as a crucial mouthpiece for the military dictatorship. As the »usurpers« found television to be one of their strongest »arms«, the ruling generals struck a partnership with Roberto Marinho, the owner of the Globo Group from 1925 to 2003, and the US-based Time-Life Corporation to provide the technology to expand the country's television network in the late 1960s. This ultimately allowed Marinho to establish a privileged position as the head of what remains the biggest media conglomerate in Brazil.

Herzog.⁵⁴ The next two minutes feature an interview with Brizola, in which he accuses Globo of manipulating public opinion and operating as a cartel.⁵⁵ After serving as governor of Rio Grande do Sul until 1963, Brizola became a prominent opponent of the military regime. He resisted the 1964 coup and denounced the repression that followed – repression supported internally by Globo and externally by the United States. These political alignments repeatedly brought Brizola into conflict with Globo, which had become a powerful media ally of the dictatorship.

To illustrate Globo's history of political intervention, the video shifts to Brazil's first televised presidential debate in 1989. Roberto Marinho, a close ally of Fernando Collor,⁵⁶ used the Globo network to »smear Lula's candidacy, accusing him and his party of being communists working for the Soviet Union.«⁵⁷ The debate between Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Fernando Collor de Mello marked Brazil's first democratic election after the end of the dictatorship.⁵⁸ Globo's edited broadcast of the debate portrayed the conservative Collor in a significantly more favorable light than the left-wing Lula.⁵⁹ As Wilkin argues, faced with »the threat of a newly revived left in Brazil,« Globo's intervention marked the moment it »moved to the position of gatekeeper in Brazilian politics.«⁶⁰

As Jimi Hendrix's guitar riffs return, white text on a black background introduces the 1982 Proconsult scandal. Brizola, having reentered politics, won the 1982 vote for governor in Rio de Janeiro – the state's first free election since 1964.⁶¹ His victory came despite efforts by Proconsult,

54 Vladimir Herzog was a public intellectual who was active in the resistance to the military junta before being tortured to death in 1975.

55 Vid. 45, MIC, Brizola X Globo 1:07 to 3:04

56 Globo's staged edited footage of the 1989 presidential debate has been the subject of major criticism. Channel 4's 1993 documentary film *Beyond Citizen Kane*, which uncovered the background to this story, was suppressed from public broadcast in Brazil for over two decades (Hartog, *Beyond Citizen Kane*).

57 Wilkin, »Global Communication and Political Culture in the Semi-Periphery: The Rise of the Globo Corporation«, 105. See also: Lima, »Brazilian Television in the 1989 Presidential Election: Constructing a President.«

58 Leslie Bethell presents an overview of the history of elections in Brazil, arguing that »the influence of the media, especially television« has mattered more for electoral success than the candidates themselves and the parties which they represent. Bethell, »Politics in Brazil: From Elections Without Democracy to Democracy Without Citizenship,« 23.

59 Miguel, »A Eleição Visível: A ede Globo Descobre a Política Em 2002«, 290.

60 Wilkin, »Global Communication and Political Culture in the Semi-Periphery: The Rise of the Globo Corporation,« 105.

61 As governor of the state of Rio de Janeiro from 1983 to 1989, Brizola invested in the building of public schools in favela areas. He also brought



Fig. 34 Brizola X Globo

the company responsible for vote counting, to manipulate the outcome.⁶² In a talk show clip featured in the MIC video, Brizola holds up a copy of the Globo-owned newspaper and declares: »Globo has been a pillar of the dictatorship [...] They have helped to establish the dictatorship and maintain it.«⁶³

The MIC video continues in black and white, jumping forward to the 2013 protests. A crowd of activists marches toward Globo's headquarters in São Paulo. A montage from the *Jornadas de Junho* shows police forcing a man to the ground by striking his face, indiscriminately spraying bystanders with pepper spray, beating protesters with batons, and a

about the transfer of land rights to favela residents as well as an end to forced evictions in favelas. In effect, Brizola attempted to translate Darci Ribeiro's slogan that »shanty towns are not part of the problem, but part of the solution« into concrete policies (Riberio, *O Povo Brasileiro: A Formação e o Sentido Do Brasil*).

- 62 Globo's *Jornal da Tarde* reported live results from districts where Brizola had performed poorly, aiming to discourage his supporters from voting. These results had been selectively passed on by Proconsult to Globo.
- 63 Vid. 45, MIC, Brizola X Globo 3:28

Globo-owned newspaper front page labeling individuals as provocateurs and blaming them for the violence. The protest footage echoes scenes from demonstrations against the military dictatorship in the 1960s and 1970s. Subtitles highlight Globo's role in downplaying police violence – both past and present – and in delegitimizing the *Jornadas de Junho* movement. The video closes with Brizola's voice, urging Brazilians to form their own autonomous views about Globo and its ties to the country's political and economic elites.

The video was published on YouTube on 9 September 2015 but was quickly removed due to copyright complaints.⁶⁴ After complaint it was reinstated and has received only 222 additional views since then, allowing algorithms to push it down in searches due to a lack of popularity, which is a key factor in determining search results.

The video effectively demonstrates how media power is deeply intertwined with political and economic power. Globo, with its long-standing hostility toward urban movements and its role as a »gatekeeper« to power, continues to wield significant influence over Brazilian politics. While the »old« gatekeepers like Globo operated nationally and were overtly invested in shaping local, regional, and national politics – as the MIC video illustrates – the »new« gatekeepers of corporate social media, based in Silicon Valley, regulate public communication on a global scale. Although they may have less direct interest in local political affairs, their operations are driven by a strong profit motive. Today, Globo and other traditional media actors must appeal to these new gatekeepers – such as YouTube – to suppress criticism, often by invoking the economic logic of copyright infringement, as both the current and following examples show.

64 When I accessed it from my computer in Switzerland in 2016, YouTube displayed the following message on 12 March: »This video contains content from SME, who has blocked it in your country on copyright grounds. Sorry about that.« Today, YouTube states that the video is unavailable because it »contains contents from TV Bandeirantes (Brazil).« The last time that I was able to access this video was on 9 September 2015, the same day on which it was uploaded. According to one of the creators of the video, it was deleted within 24 hours. This, he argued, may indicate that there is close co-operation between Rede Globo and YouTube (Int. 4, Video Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 14 October 2015).

»[Mirrored Copy] [Original Censored] William Bonner is being reviewed in a live broadcast«⁶⁵

»Professional journalism always looks for the essence and what is at the heart of what is happening,« declares renowned Globo newsreader William Bonner in a commentary broadcast on *Jornal Nacional* on 10 February 2014.⁶⁶ Reflecting on the death of cameraman Santiago Andrade during a protest, Bonner's editorial is met with a sharp response in a parody video by Rafucko, who critiques what he sees as the »hypocrisy« of Bonner's remarks.⁶⁷ Mimicking Bonner's co-presenter Patrícia Poeta, Rafucko delivers a live commentary from in front of a blue screen set up in his living room, attempting to insert himself into the *Jornal Nacional* newsroom and disrupt Globo's narrative.

The mockery video by popular video artists Rafucko, continues with Bonner's assertions that democracy depends on professional, impartial, and informative journalism. Rafucko in his role as poeta replies: »It might be for this reason that Rede Globo is not very informative. Because you guys love dictatorship.«⁶⁸ When Bonner claims that Globo offers »[p]rofessional journalism [that] is going to be there without taking a position for any side,«⁶⁹ Rafucko as Poeta, reminds him that Globo is funded by BRADESCO.⁷⁰ Toward the end of the video, Rafucko mocks Bonner's distinction between »peaceful« and »violent« protests – a central theme of the editorial – by swinging a pendulum from left to right and repeating, »Minorities of vandals, minorities of vandals, minorities of vandals,« in an attempt to hypnotize the audience. The video concludes with hyperlinks to four related videos exploring Globo's history, two of which appear to be disabled.⁷¹

65 This refers to the title of a repost of Rafucko's video by Eli Vieira: [*Espelho*] [*Original Censurado*] *William Bonner é Corrigido Ao Vivo [via @Rafucko]*. The bracketed terms »Espelho« and »Original Censurado« indicate that this is a »mirror« of Rafucko's video due to the »original [having been] censored«. Vid. 46, Viera (Rafucko), [*Espelho*] [*Original censurado*]

66 For a detailed discussion on the death of Santiago Andrade and its consequences for (video-)activism in Brazil, see Chapter Eight.

67 Int. 14, Video Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 8 December 2015.

68 »[D]eve ser por isso que a rede Globo não informa tão bem, porque a gente adora a ditadura.« Vid. 46, Viera (Rafucko), [*Espelho*] [*Original censurado*] 0:52.

69 »E jornalismo profissional vai estar lá sem tomar posição de lado nenhum« Vid. 46, Viera (Rafucko), [*Espelho*] [*Original censurado*]

70 BRADESCO is one of the third biggest bank operating in Brazil and has been linked with corruption and tax evasion allegations as part of the »Operation Zealot« investigations.

71 The links to the video »A prisão de Arthur Couto: o que realmente aconteceu« does not function without further explanation than »video not



Fig. 35 Rafucko and William Bonner

Rafucko's parody was also removed from YouTube due to copyright claims, although mirrored versions were quickly reposted by numerous users.⁷² In one copy uploaded to YouTube and Vimeo, the video description includes a statement from Rafucko responding to apparent censorship:

»Last week we saw the channel [Globo] dedicating extensive reports and commentaries to the topic of freedom of expression. Since the beginning of the demonstrations, Rede Globo has systematically used images from independent media collectives without giving credit or asking for prior authorization. However, my video satirizing Jornal Nacional was taken off air less than 12 hours after its publication.«⁷³

Eli Vieira, who uploaded one of the mirrored versions, voiced strong opposition to the use of copyright as a tool for censorship: »I play this

available«, whereas the account to the linked video »Rede Globo mente sobre protesto« has been deleted. The other two video links function. One goes to a documentary from 1975 while the fourth link directs to the montaged video »Vandalismo, Vandalsimo, Vandalismo«. See videography: Vid. 47, A prisão de Arthur Couto; Vid. 48, Rede Globo mente; Vid. 49, Gomes, Exaltação e propaganda; Vid. 11, Marcos, Vandalismo

72 Vid. 46, Viera (Rafucko), [Espelho] [Original censurado]

73 »Na última semana vimos a emissora dedicar extensas reportagens e editoriais para versar sobre a liberdade de expressão. Desde o início das manifestações, a Rede Globo utiliza sistematicamente imagens de coletivos de mídia independente sem dar créditos ou pedir prévia autorização. Entretanto, meu vídeo satirizando o Jornal Nacional foi retirado do ar menos de 12h após sua publicação.«
Monalisa Moreira in Vid. 46, Viera (Rafucko), [Espelho] [Original censurado]

video in solidarity with Rafucko. To use copyright to censor him is ridiculous, as his video fits ›fair use.«⁷⁴ In my interview with Rafucko, he argued that Globo is highly sensitive to criticism and uses »whatever reason it finds« to request the removal of videos from YouTube.⁷⁵ This second example of censorship reinforces the pattern: traditional gatekeepers like Globo continue to suppress criticism, while new gatekeepers such as YouTube and Facebook appear to support these efforts by swiftly invoking copyright claims to remove critical content. Yet, as Rafucko's case illustrates, user communities have developed ways to resist such censorship – most notably by reposting mirrored versions of videos that have been taken down.

Facebook's removal of Mariachi in the run-up to the Olympic Games

When I asked Rafucko about the differences between YouTube and Facebook as major gatekeepers of video content, he responded that censorship is more common on Facebook. As a result, he prefers to upload his videos to YouTube.⁷⁶ A video activist and documentary filmmaker echoed this view, noting that YouTube is not only less associated with censorship but also serves as a more effective archive and repository. In contrast, Facebook privileges recently posted videos that gain rapid traction, making it less reliable for long-term access.⁷⁷ Rafucko explained in the interview that Facebook's flagging system has become a tool for silencing dissent.⁷⁸ Religious groups, right-wing activists, and Globo supporters, he claimed, have used it to target his content.

This experience is shared by an artist and activist from Cape Town, who told me that her friends' Facebook pages were regularly disabled.⁷⁹

74 »Reproduzo este vídeo em solidariedade ao Rafucko. Usar de copyright para censurá-lo é ridículo, pois o vídeo dele se encaixa em ›uso justo‹ (›fair use‹).« Vid. 46, Viera (Rafucko), [Espelho] [Original censurado]

75 The silencing of critiques appears to go beyond attempts to block content on the base of copyright allegations. One example includes an respondent, detailing experiencing exceptional difficulties in finding a job in the media industry, with more than one company telling him that they would not offer him any work for fear of losing their contracts with Globo if they hired him (Int. 14, Video Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 8 December 2015).

76 Int. 14, Video Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 8 December 2015.

77 Interview with Vladimir Seixas on 23 August 2016 after the screening of his films about forced evictions and the militarization of Rio de Janeiro in a cinema in the Botafogo neighborhood of the city.

78 Int. 14, Video Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 8 December 2015.

79 Int. 19, RMF Activist, Cape Town, 27 July 2016; Int. 7, Video Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 24 October 2015.

She described how systematic flagging by organized right-wing groups has led to the removal of activist pages in both Cape Town and Rio – while fascist and racist content often remains untouched. »Ja, the internet... I keep realizing how fucked up it is!« she laughed away her frustration.⁸⁰ While my research can only offer anecdotal evidence⁸¹ for claims about systematic censorship. However, the following story of the take-down of the Mariachi Facebook page in Rio de Janeiro warrants closer attention and raises concerns for the potential power of manipulation by corporate social media as ›new‹ gatekeepers.

One act of censorship that sparked particular outrage within Rio's video activist scene occurred when the Coletivo Mariachi Facebook page was deactivated three weeks before the start of the 2016 Olympic Games. Mariachi had been a key source of critical reporting on protests and police violence since 2013:

»The videos produced [by Mariachi] have been watched by over 8 million (youtube) and 50 million (facebook) users respectively and have been the subject of articles by the main media outlets across the country and the world, including major newspapers such as HuffPost Brazil, El País, The New York Times and The Guardian.«⁸²

The suspension followed the sharing of a meme criticizing the homophobic stance of the Catholic and Evangelical churches (see screenshotted meme). On 15 July 2016, the account was disabled for over a week until a wave of online protest and criticism, forced Facebook to stop its censorship measures. The meme that triggered the ban depicted Jesus alongside a caption condemning Christian »homophobia« toward the LGBTIQ+ community. As Neo Baudrillard wrote in an article published on the website of Mídia Coletiva:

»This is Zuckerberg's good boy version, different from his portrayal in the movie *The Social Network* (in Brazil: *A Rede Social*), in which he steals the ideas of others and tramples over God and the world to get where he is.

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

81 Out of all videos listed in the videography, more than every fifth video is not available on YouTube on 17 August 2025. The sample size can only indicate the levels of videos disappearing. Anecdotal evidence by video activist – generally critical of the tech giants from the USA – points to numerous incidents of censorship.

82 »Os vídeos produzidos já foram assistidos por mais de 8 milhões de pessoas (youtube) e 50 milhões (facebook) sendo tema de matérias dos principais veículos de comunicação do país e do mundo, incluindo grandes jornais como *HuffPost Brasil*, *El País*, *The New York Times* e *The Guardian*.« <https://web.archive.org/web/20170403214422/http://midiacoletiva.org/voltamariachi-pelo-fim-da-censura-praticada-pelo-facebook/>

Well, this second version is already well-known among the media activist movement. Almost all pages and members of this community who use Facebook to expose a narrative different to the one conveyed by the mainstream media are already used to censorship.

This time, one of the main pages of the Carioca media activist movement, the page of the Mariachi Collective, with 122,000 followers, was taken down because of a meme that defended the maxim of Jesus: »love one another«. The moralism of Zuckerberg's social network accepts many things, but it does not accept that Jesus's maxim should also be directed towards the LGBT community.«⁸³

The reinstatement of videos or entire channels following public backlash, along with tactics like mirroring content across platforms, demonstrates the potential for resisting censorship on corporate social media. However, these forms of resistance should not obscure the deeper structural power imbalances that shape content distribution on these platforms. Ultimately, proprietary social media companies control the underlying technology and infrastructure, and their accountability lies primarily with investors and executives. Those most invested in advertising revenue – typically based in the Global North – are the ones who benefit most from this system and who in the end have an outsize influence. Consequently, Rio's video activists attempted to find alternative channels to disseminate their video contents.

The shift from the old media gatekeepers such as Globo to new gatekeepers in the form of corporate social media platforms has had significant effects on the production of visibility. Organized video activist

83 »Esse é o Zuckerberg versão bom moço, diferente da versão do filme »The Social Network« (no Brasil: A Rede Social) em que ele rouba a ideia alheia e atropela Deus e o mundo pra chegar onde chegou.

Pois bem, essa segunda versão já é bem conhecida pelo movimento midiativista, quase todas as páginas e membros desta comunidade, que utilizam o Facebook para expor uma narrativa diferente da veiculada pela grande mídia, já estão acostumados com a censura. Desta vez, uma das principais páginas do movimento midiativista carioca, a página do Coletivo Mariachi, com 122 mil seguidores foi retirada do ar por conta de um meme que defendia a máxima de Jesus, »amai-vos uns aos outros«. O moralismo da rede social de Zuckerberg aceita muita coisa, mas pelo jeito não aceita que a máxima dita por Jesus seja dirigida também para a comunidade LGBT.« This quotation is from the article »For Facebook »Love Each Other« is not for Gays« on the independent website mdiaindependente.org, which itself had to be closed down after running out of sufficient funds to maintain its URL. An archived version can be accessed through <https://web.archive.org/web/20170402033458/http://midia coletiva.org/para-facebook-amai-vos-uns-aos-outros-nao-serve-para-os-gays/> (accessed on 21 March 2020).

collectives initially blossomed by appropriating for-profit social media platforms and using them as distribution channels for their videos.

However, new gatekeepers like Facebook and YouTube have shown that they are open to disable contents under the banner of presumed copyrights violations. The disabling of their content fueled suspicion among video activists in Rio de Janeiro that Globo has a ›hot wire‹ to Facebook and YouTube. Indeed, critical videos about Globo on both platforms were repeatedly removed on the basis of copyright infringement.⁸⁴ Mirroring videos by uploading them again has been one effective counter-tactic used by video activists, as the example of Rafucko's video showed. However, organized video activist collectives like MIC and CMI ultimately decided to opt out of what they saw as »imperialistic and capitalist«⁸⁵ corporate social media by establishing their own websites. Sustaining these websites and regularly generating new content, however, proved to be an impossible task for most video activists. The decision by collectives such as MIC and CMI not to accept external funding so as to maintain their independence meant that video activists had to generate an income for themselves outside of video activism. This drained their capacity to commit to the levels of engagement necessary to support independent websites.

At the same time, the revenues of social media corporations have skyrocketed as much as the private fortunes of shareholders of these corporations. For example, Facebook's annual revenue exploded from USD 17.9 billion in 2015 to USD 70.7 billion in 2019.⁸⁶ Google, the parent company of YouTube, saw its annual revenue and profit shoot up from USD 29.3 billion in 2010 to USD 160.74 billion in 2019.⁸⁷ In contrast, Globo has seen a slight but steady decline in annual revenue from BRL 16.24 in 2014 to BRL 14.68 billion (USD 3.78 billion) in 2020.⁸⁸ In 2020 video activist Fernando was literally having no money to for basic grocery shopping during the Corona crisis, while CEOs of the corporate social media such as Facebook's Marck Zuckerberg gained up to USD 30 billion within three months.⁸⁹

84 All my interviewees claimed that they had never received a response from YouTube or Facebook when they requested further explanation as to why their videos had been deleted.

85 Unrecorded focus group discussion with members of the CMI-Rio collective on 17 October 2015.

86 Clement, »Facebook's Revenue and Net Income from 2007 to 2019.«

87 Clement, »Annual Revenue of Google from 2002 to 2019.«

88 Statista Research Department, »Revenue Generated by Globo from 2005 to 2019.«

89 Leskin, »Zuckerberg Is Now the 3rd-Richest Person in the World.«



Fig. 36 Meme by Mariachi

*Establishing Independence:
Collective Attempts to Bypass Social Media*

For Rio's media activist community, the censorship of Mariachi confirmed long-held suspicions about the new gatekeepers – YouTube and Facebook. No longer willing to rely solely on corporate platforms to distribute their content, activists began pursuing the most radical form of resistance: escape.

Several Rio-based collectives responded by creating their own websites as autonomous distribution channels, aiming to break free from the political unaccountability and exploitative economic models of corporate social media. For example, the tech-savvy members of the CMI collective chose to host their site via Tokelau, a small Pacific island territory with around 1,500 inhabitants that generates a significant portion of its GDP by offering one of the world's most sought-after country code top-level domains.⁹⁰ The site, *cmirio.tk*, was online from December 2014 to December 2016.⁹¹

90 In 2012, Tokelau was the third biggest host of websites worldwide, ahead of countries such as China, India and France. Its business model, which was designed by Joost Zuurbier from Amsterdam, was to offer free registration of website URLs (Andres, »The Tiny Island with a Huge Web Presence«).

91 <https://web.archive.org/web/20141231200247/http://cmirio.tk/> (accessed 21 March 2020). According to the regulations in place for URLs registered in Tokelau, these are automatically disabled when there is no traffic detected, which appears to have been the case for the CMI-Rio website.

In 2016, CMI-Rio contributed to building the new CMI-Brazil website⁹² – an overhauled successor to the early 2000s Brazilian Indymedia site. This redesigned platform launched under a new URL, *midia independente.org*, in November 2016, replacing the old CMI-Rio site and continuing the effort to establish independent media infrastructure.⁹³

The MIC and Mariachi sister collectives joined forces to launch their own website, registered under the URL *midia coletiva.org*.⁹⁴ This platform, which went online in October 2015⁹⁵ and remained active until December 2017,⁹⁶ featured in-depth critical articles and videos. Both collectives downgraded their Facebook pages to serve primarily as link repositories directing users to the new site.

In an effort to maintain independence and street credibility, the MIC-Mariachi collective declined external funding from organizations such as the Ford Foundation. However, the challenges of sustaining an independent platform soon became apparent. The collective's non-hierarchical structure, the significant time investment required, and the difficulty of competing with the addictive design and reach of corporate social media ultimately led to the decision to discontinue the site. These experiences proved disillusioning for organized video activism, revealing the limits of bypassing corporate platforms through autonomous infrastructure alone. The independence-inexistence dilemma finally resulted in the inexistence of the independent website.

7.3 Tactics and Strategies in the Production of Visibility

So far, this chapter has examined two intertwined dimensions of visibility in bottom-up video production: the factors shaping *topographies of*

92 <http://web.archive.org/web/20160817233055/http://www.midiaindependente.org/> (accessed 21 March 2020).

93 <http://web.archive.org/web/20161202140345/https://midiaindependente.org/> (accessed 21 March 2020).

94 The similarity in the naming of the CMI and MIC websites is no coincidence. It reflects the history of two groups that split to form separate collectives, maintaining only partial collaboration. As a result, both their names and websites closely resemble one another, each claiming lineage from the Indymedia movement that emerged after the Battle of Seattle in the early 2000s.

95 <https://web.archive.org/web/20151029234641/http://www.midia coletiva.org/> (accessed 21 March 2020).

96 In late 2017, one of the editors called me and informed me that the website was about to go offline again after previous attempts by the collective to keep it going had failed. For the last available snapshot about of the website see: <https://web.archive.org/web/20171224113519/http://midia coletiva.org/> (accessed 21 March 2020).

visibility and the mechanisms of *visibility suppression*. A brief review of the tactics and strategies used to disseminate marginalized voices and document police violence reveals a clear imbalance. While certain practices can enhance visibility or circumvent censorship tactically on a case-by-case basis, the broader strategic landscape is increasingly dominated by powerful actors. The shift from ›old‹ gatekeepers like Globo to the ›new‹ gatekeepers like Facebook is likely to deeply reshape digital video activism.

Tactics to gain visibility

There are two common tactics employed by videographers in both Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro to increase the visibility of their content. This tactic is typically used by individual users and independent videographers, who often feel compelled to produce sensational content that provokes strong emotional reactions. Given the overwhelming volume of videos uploaded to social media platforms, only a tiny fraction go viral – most remain in the long tail, barely seen by users. The algorithmic design of corporate social media reinforces this ›winner-takes-all‹ logic: videos that quickly gain views are more likely to be recommended to others or included in automated playlists.

The second tactic involves building a strong distribution network – typically through regularly updated social media channels and/or dedicated websites – that can reliably reach a solid audience. Examples include the *UCT:RhodesMustFall* Facebook page or the YouTube and Facebook channels of video activist collectives in Rio de Janeiro. These established platforms help ensure a baseline level of visibility, even for videos that are less sensational. This is particularly important for content documenting non-violent protests or videos lacking provocative elements – such as nudity – which rarely attract more than a few hundred views on their own.

While this dynamic may not be solely the result of profit-driven platform design, it raises important questions about how algorithms shape video popularity and, by extension, political mobilization. In my discussion of visibility, I have relied heavily on view counts. However, using YouTube and Facebook view metrics as indicators of visibility comes with significant limitations. First, the two platforms apply different criteria for what constitutes a ›view,‹ making direct comparisons problematic.⁹⁷ Second, view counts are imprecise and tend to exclude marginalized viewers on the

97 YouTube counts a view when a video has been played for at least five seconds, while Facebook registers a view after three seconds. A second major difference is that Facebook's default function is for videos to be played automatically, unlike the YouTube default setting, which requires users to click on a video to start playing it.

»wrong« side of the digital divide.⁹⁸ For instance, they do not account for collective viewing – such as groups of friends watching together on a single device or public screenings – which are more common among urban populations who cannot afford personal data plans or devices. This suggests a systematic undercount of viewership among marginalized communities.⁹⁹ Finally, the view count employs a »technology of distance«¹⁰⁰ that abstracts subjective experiences of watching a video into quantifiable numbers ready to be traded in the attention economy.¹⁰¹ Despite these limitations, view counts remain the most accessible and widely recognized indicator for analyzing *topographies of visibility* in bottom-up video production.

Video activists themselves frequently reference view counts in their discussions, indicating a clear awareness of which videos gain traction. Whether they intentionally tailor their content to align with the rules, algorithms, and incentives of for-profit social media platforms cannot be definitively answered. However, the role of corporate platforms as architects of *topographies of visibility* should not be underestimated. These platforms create feedback loops that videographers learn from and adapt to. As a result, the mechanisms of corporate social media tend to privilege the *spectacle of resistance* over the careful contextualization of complex struggles and claims.

Strategies to manage the ›new‹ gatekeepers

As new gatekeepers, for-profit social media platforms have transformed public communication – not only by shaping what becomes publicly

98 Warf, *Global Geographies of the Internet*.

99 This is of particular relevance to South Africa, a country with extremely high mobile data rates. For example, viewers who watch videos on shared screens or using improvised methods such as video sharing via Bluetooth – a means of avoiding paying for video streaming or the downloading of data – are systematically overlooked. Videos shared via private messenger applications such as Telegram or WhatsApp are also not counted (Int. 27, Videographers, Cape Town, 9 August 2016).

100 Porter, *Trust in Numbers. The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life*, ix.

101 Viewer perceptions of the same content are influenced by attitudes and past experiences. For example, a viewer who is acquainted with activists who are being attacked by the police in a video will react differently to a viewer who has never been to a protest march and is generally skeptical towards bottom-up forms of organizing. For studies on perceptions of videos of violence, see: Razsa, »Beyond ›Riot Porn‹: Protest Video and the Production of Unruly Subjects«; Friis, »›Beyond Anything We Have Ever Seen‹: Behanding Videos and the Visibility of Violence in the War Against ISIS«; Askanius, »DIY Dying: Video Activism as Archive, Commemoration and Evidence«.

visible, but also by redefining the very notion of »the public.« The strategy of escaping corporate platforms to avoid turning resistance into a spectacle for consumption and profit-making, has shown limited success for video activist collectives.

Social media companies have found effective ways to monetize all forms of video content, including those produced by emancipatory urban movements and documenting police violence. This commodification of video activism reinforces Jodi Dean's argument that even anti-capitalist struggles have been absorbed into the neoliberal capitalist economy.¹⁰² As one activist and campaign organizer put it: »In order to be successful, protest has to become capitalist itself.«¹⁰³

In response, collectives like CMI and MIC/Mariachi attempted to resist platform dependency by reviving the ethos of Indymedia and creating their own autonomous websites. While this strategy offered protection from censorship by both ›old‹ and ›new‹ gatekeepers, it did not resolve the *independence-inexistence dilemma*. The lack of financial resources soon made it unsustainable to maintain and update these sites. Moreover, while independent websites offer a degree of autonomy, they are poorly suited to the dynamics of Web 2.0. Although such sites were central to Web 1.0 and some still serve as important nodes in digital communication, the rise of a corporate media oligopoly has shifted most public attention to proprietary platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. This push for establishing a small group of platforms owned by few corporations is a critical element of »data colonialism« and »platform imperialism«.¹⁰⁴ Centralized control of the corporations from the US and increasingly China has sidelined radically independent and autonomous projects such as Indymedia as decentralized, global network.

Having outlined key tactics and strategies for distributing videos of protests and police violence online, this final section examines how the emerging *topographies of visibility* shape the visibility of journalist, witness, and activist videos.

102 Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies*.

103 Pariser, *The Filter Bubble*, 9–10. Personalized algorithms undoubtedly affect perceptions of video activism. However, given the research design of my study, there is insufficient evidence for me to further investigate the effects of filter bubbles, although my interviewees did confirm that they struggled to reach audiences with political opinions that differed from their own. Filter bubbles and their implications for video activism would be a fruitful topic for future research.

104 Couldry and Mejias, »Data Colonialism: Rethinking Big Data's Relation to the Contemporary Subject«; Yon Jin, »The Construction of Platform Imperialism in the Globalization Era.«

7.4 The Politics of Visibility

Creating visibility to counter hegemonic narratives lies at the core of video activism. As this chapter has shown, while the act of recording by activists and witnesses is essential, it is the distribution of these audiovisuals that determines their impact – whether in amplifying marginalized voices, documenting protests, or exposing police violence. Little surprisingly viral videos receive outsize attention, but they require a long tail of video production as I argue first. Secondly, I provide a brief reflection that connects back to the previous chapter by asking: how does video distribution – and the generation of visibility – function differently for journalist, activist, and witness videos?

Viral Videos and the Long Tail of Video Production

To fully grasp the topographies of visibility, we need to look beyond single videos and instead take into consideration the emerging media landscape in which video activist dissemination aims to find a place.

Bottom-up video production about protests and police violence is in general a niche phenomenon. In my sample of 140 videos, their numbers of views are almost negligible compared to the attention received by videos from the world of entertainment, sports or other commercial offers. Yet even among videos of protests and police violence, there is a huge range in the number of views that different videos attain.

The difference between videos that barely receive more than one hundred views and those that cross the threshold of 10,000 or even 100,000 views can be explained by the ›long tail‹ model popularized by communication and media studies. In the digital economy of corporate social media, the majority of videos receive very little attention, while a few attract the bulk of views. One of the most prominent claims of the long tail model is the so-called 80:20 ratio, according to which 80 percent of videos receive only 20 percent of all views, whereas the remaining 20 percent of videos account for the other 80 percent of views.¹⁰⁵ In consequence it would be short-sighted to discard videos that do not receive significant attention. Instead, a sustained and critical volume of video production around protest and police violence increases the likelihood that a few will break through, go viral, and enter broader public discourse.

105 Hai-Jew, »Exploring ›User,‹ ›Video,‹ and (Pseudo) Multi-Mode Networks on YouTube with NodeXL«, 244.

The Visibility of Journalist, Witness, and Activist Videos

The videos discussed least in this chapter are journalist videos circulating on social media. Nevertheless, they constitute a significant portion of on-line content, reiterating that ›old‹ and ›new‹ gatekeepers are not simply replacing one another. In contrast, traditional mass media has effectively adapted to the new media environment, and its reporting on protest and police violence has successfully integrated the use of witness videos. Thanks to professional editing and the networking effects of channels with broader viewership, traditional journalist videos have established strong distribution networks on social media. In doing so, they continue to reinforce dominant narratives – especially in the case of Brazil. As some examples of censorship have highlighted, their reach extends beyond the dissemination of their own narratives; they also manage to silence critical counter-narratives by invoking copyright infringements. Nevertheless, the tax avoidance strategies¹⁰⁶ employed by social media corporations play a significant role in reducing funding for public services such as journalism and have contributed to the overall decline in journalism revenue.

Second, the distribution of witness videos is significantly more unpredictable. However, their dissemination follows certain recognizable patterns. The majority of witness videos – especially those portraying peaceful protests – tend to receive little attention.

One type of video presents a notable exception to this rule: videos of graphic police brutality. Filmed by eyewitnesses who simply ›happened to be there,«¹⁰⁷ such videos are either directly uploaded to private social media pages or passed on to journalists or media activist collectives. Especially in the latter case, these videos may rapidly gain traction and go viral, not least due to their ›aura of authenticity‹ and the absence of alternative evidence. Algorithmic governance, which emphasizes spectacle over content, enables the rapid spread of such audiovisual recordings. However, these very recordings pose a serious threat of retaliation for the witnesses themselves, as the next chapter will show.

Finally, activist video distribution is significantly more systematic than the individualized efforts of witnesses. When video activist collectives – to some extent, the RMF movement in Cape Town, or more significantly, collectives like Midi Ninja, MIC/Mariachi, or AND – manage to build a base of followers, their chances of reaching wider audiences increase significantly. Videos uploaded by such organized video activist collectives

¹⁰⁶ For a detailed analysis of the tax avoidance strategies employed by Google and Facebook, see: Fuchs, »Google and Facebook's Tax Avoidance Strategies«.

¹⁰⁷ Int. 38, Researcher, Rio de Janeiro, 8 September 2016.

or urban movements allow for the presentation of more complex narratives that move beyond the spectacle of violence, questioning the fundamental causes of violent outbreaks and pointing to forms of structural violence.¹⁰⁸

The advent of corporate social media platforms initially offered activist videographers entirely new opportunities to make their audiovisuals publicly accessible.¹⁰⁹ With just a few clicks, videos could be uploaded, circumventing the monopoly on public communication once held by the old gatekeepers – mass media. However, the new gatekeepers have implemented their own control mechanisms, imposing an economic logic on public communication. Especially in Rio de Janeiro, there have been several instances where videos were disabled due to presumed copyright violations. Tactics and strategies to remain independent of corporate social media and circumvent censorship have shown momentary success but appear unsustainable in the long term. Growing discontent with for-profit social media has motivated media activist collectives in Rio to establish independent websites. However, these efforts to create autonomous distribution networks have largely ended in disillusionment.

Overall, the emerging topographies of visibility are shaped by distribution systems that are heavily influenced by corporate social media as »new« gatekeepers. Visibility is political, and its creation is only partially in the hands of urban movements and their videographers. Re-examining the topographies of visibility through the lens of the video typology introduced in the previous chapter reveals nuanced and complex mechanisms that determine video distribution. What is seen, by whom, and to what end depends significantly on powerful actors such as corporate media entities and the opaque mechanisms they can deploy. The »illusion of transparency,« as Lefebvre examines it in *The Production of Space*, and the »illusion of opacity« appear to merge and complement each other in the creation of a digital representational sphere – one in which everyone is told they can access everything (transparency), while at the same time, algorithmic governance by corporate social media remains privatized and opaque.

108 Besides videos, such online channels typically also publish photographs, short written posts, longer critical analyses, and other forms of content, but analysis thereof is beyond the scope of my research.

109 Video activists no longer had to depend on organizing public screenings in independent cinemas or elsewhere, which massively broadened their potential audiences. Nevertheless, video activists still organize public film screenings, such as at *Cinema na Rua in Rio de Janeiro*. As such, the new distribution channels have expanded rather than replaced older audio-visual distribution repertoires.



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«.

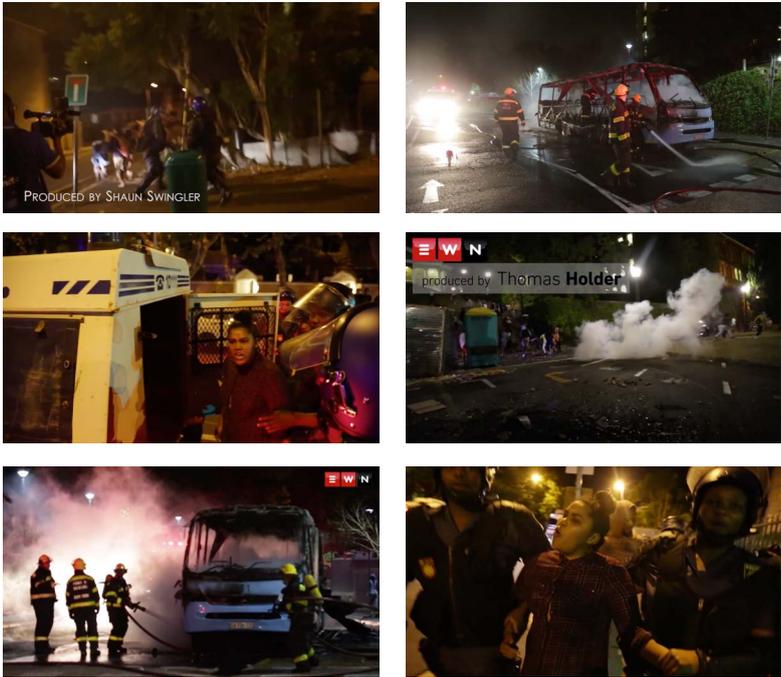


Fig. 3 8 #Shackville

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 video¹³ for the online magazine *Chronicle Digital* as well as a video¹⁴ 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 #Shackville 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 page²³ 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

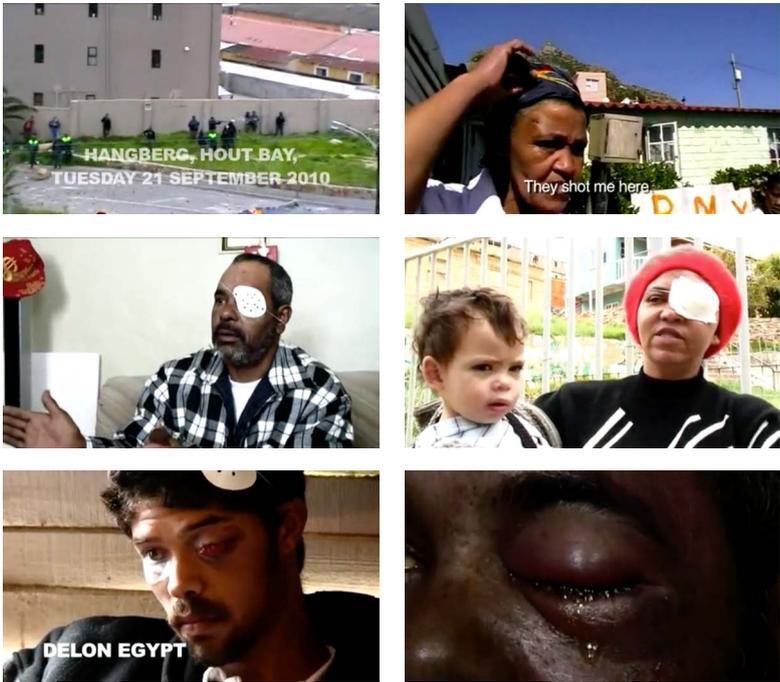


Fig. 39 Hangberg Uprising

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 documentary³⁵ 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 protest 2:38

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 Organizer, 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, journalists⁵⁰ 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, *Professores à 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

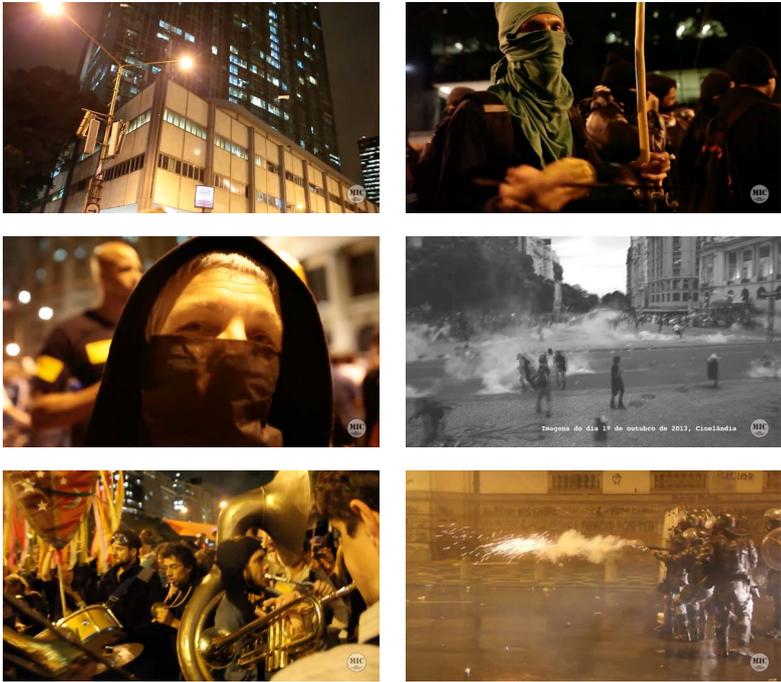


Fig. 41 *Revolution Doesn't Fall from the Sky*

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 activist 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 3.00⁶⁴ – was re-introduced 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 Andrade⁶⁶ 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 war-like 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.«

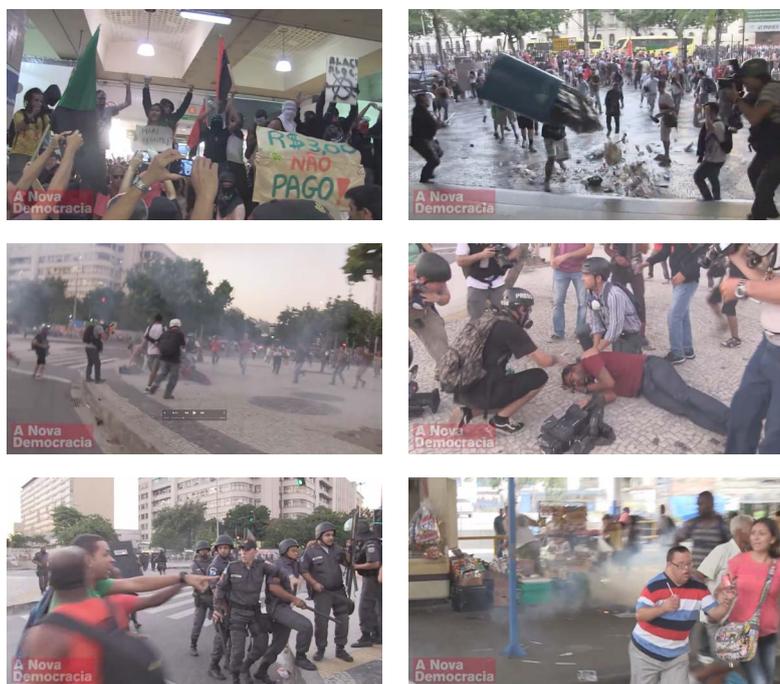


Fig. 42 *Death of a cameraman*

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 officers⁸³ violently arresting a resident of the bohemian suburb of Observatory. The video⁸⁴ 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, »Cape town Police Brutality Captured on Video«).

93 Vid. 51, Grantzak, 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 banded 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 colleague [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 video⁹⁹ 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 Providência*

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. 4.6 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 comunitária* 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 day¹²⁰ – 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](http://www.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:

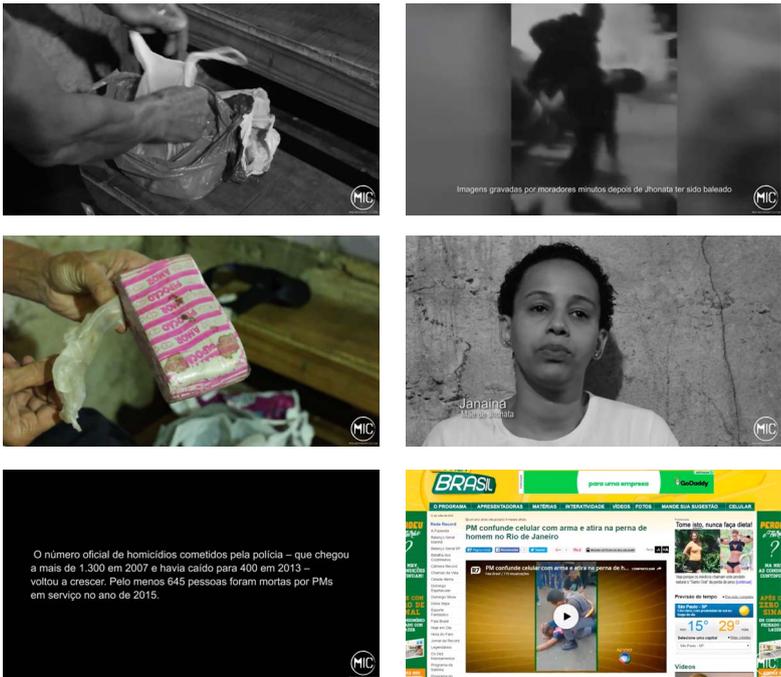


Fig. 48 *In Leblon the Police is not confused*

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 killings 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 tornou 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 artificially 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 is 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 innumerable 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 dirirjam 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*.



Fig. 49 *Nothing is impossible to Change*

9. Utopian Practices of Video-Activism

»Nada deve ser impossivel de mudar«¹

This research started with the description of a video about police violence in Switzerland during Art Basel. Three years earlier, on 17 December 2010, Tarek el-Tayeb Mohamed Bouazizi set himself alight in the Tunisian city of Sidi Bouzid. Seventeen days later, Bouazizi died from his injuries. His death is remembered for sparking the Arab Spring – a wave of contestations characterized by the occupation of central urban sites and the global dissemination of audiovisuals via social networks. Videos became a crucial repertoire of contention, spreading scenes of violent oppression of activists around the world. Almost a decade later, on 25 May 2020, George Floyd was pushed to the ground and choked to death by a police officer in the city of Minneapolis. Darnella Frazier filmed this violent scene on her smartphone. Her video evidence ignited largescale protests against police brutality and structural racism in the US and beyond.² A list that could be extended infinitely.

- 1 »Nothing is impossible to change« is a quote of theater producer Bertolt-Brecht, which stands in contrast to Margrit Thatcher's ›There is no Alternative‹ principle, when imposing anti-poor austerity measures.
- 2 Seventeen-year-old Frazier, who happened to be present when the police officer Derek Chauvin killed George Floyd, is reportedly traumatized by witnessing the police brutality. Ramsey Orta, the videographer who filmed the killing of Eric Garner in New York City in 2014, was sentenced to four years in prison after filming the NYPD officer choking Garner to death. Officially

A local protest in Switzerland, Arab Spring revolts across the MENA region and the Black Lives Matter protests in the USA span over a decade and three continents, but they have one thing in common. Audio-visual recordings shaped not only how we memorize these events, but the course of events itself by creating real-time feedback loops. Especially videos of violence often played a crucial role in sparking explosions of outrage and bringing people to the streets. Therefore it is little surprising that this research about the emerging practices of video activism in Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro ended with descriptions of the sometimes deadly violence that the cameras of activists and witnesses capture.

The power that new technologies in the form of smartphones and social media brought to urban movements unfolded in the early 2010s in full force and with complex effects. Today in 2025, we find ourselves on the edge of another new digital era being kickstarted by the rapid advance of A.I. technologies. The final chapter presents first, a reflection on the methodological approach and how it shaped the findings of the study of video activism. Second, a brief comparison between the two sites of research – Rio de Janeiro and Cape Town – draws attention to the required context sensitivity when studying globalized technologies such as smartphones and social media. Third, the conclusion describes how video activist practices constantly oscillate between the streets and the net, between a here and there, and power and vulnerability. The notion of utopian practices of video activism reconnects the empirical investigations with conceptual questions, pointing a way forward in how we can think digitalizing the right to the city through the prism of video activism.

9.1 Studying Bottom-Up Video Activism

In the early 2010s, discourses that described the Arab Spring as being facilitated by the ›new liberation technologies‹ dominated, popularizing techno-utopian visions in which narratives of modernization and technological progress that were replete with colonial stereotypes reverberated. Although these debates inspired my research,³ I approached such

the charges brought against Orta were not related to his documentation of police brutality. Dennis Flores expresses strong doubts to the claim that the prosecution of Orta was unrelated to his courage to film the killing of Eric Garner. The dangers in which eyewitnesses place themselves when filming acts of police aggression is described in detail in: Nevet, »George Floyd: The Personal Cost of Filming Police Brutality.«

3 Looking back, my visit to this exhibition »Kairo. Neue Bilder einer Andauernden Revolution« (Cairo. New Images of an Ongoing Revolution) left a



Fig. 50 Street Art

grand narratives with great skepticism, since they wrote the inhabitants and particularities of the places that they described out of the histories they told. Dichotomies that are rooted in techno-determinist modernization theories are incapable of understanding the nuances of bottom-up video production on the ground. Simplified accounts written from a distance by journalists and academics following social media debates alone, run the risk of failing to recognize the simultaneous power and vulnerability of videographers who risk their personal safety to film protests and police violence. Video activism is made by people in particular places, not by technologies in empty spaces.

The multi-sited ethnographic study presented here, attempted to describe the practices of video activists as ›doing video activism‹. Five features from a critical, multi-sited ethnographic approach are relevant to this study: my focus on a perspective ›from within‹; my positionality in relation to my field of research; my emphasis on specific contexts; my approach to video activism as a practice; and my rejection of Cartesian binaries. By adopting such an approach, I contextualized video making – combining traditional media analysis of the videos with investigations of practices happening in the process of their production. By positioning video activism as an urban phenomenon, as a practice of bottom-up city making, the research examined audiovisuals not merely as technology,

strong impression on me and inspired me down the path that led to the research presented in this book. The exhibition about the 2011 revolution in Egypt was presented at the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe in Hamburg in 2013. It presented artists' , activists' and citizens' documentations alongside a rich collection of videos. In the confined space of the exhibition hall, these documents evoked an intense and disturbing sense of immediacy.

text, or testimony,⁴ but as a process combining a range of practices. However, the methodological decisions carry critical consequences to position the findings, which created an account of positioned knowledge.

First, as producer of ethnographic knowledge, I am writing from a particular position the same way a cameraperson films from a particular angle. The angle chosen is »from within« the video activist movements rather than looking down on them – therefore more often than not, sharing their perspectives. Hence, I have privileged perspectives of (video-)activists over those of other actors such as police officers, politicians, urban planners or business elites. My method of empirical data collection allowed me to take the knowledge of video activists seriously and recognize their expertise in urban politics and bottom-up city making, while more top-down perspectives – for example by police officers or government agencies – are not systematically reflected in my accounts.

Secondly, employing claims to objectivity to create authoritarian and universal statements written from a fictional distance is not what this research attempts to do. Instead of denying subjectivity, I have attempted to make my positionality transparent and reflect on the effects throughout the research and writing. I avoided speculations – which can be a challenging task when faced with opaque organizations such as social media corporations – and clearly based the writing on the accounts of respondents, triangulated with solid evidence wherever possible. Given the highly politicized topic and the strong emotions that audiovisuals can stir up, I aimed at remaining reflexive which required numerous re-writings and extra-time from research to publication. However, certain political decisions – for example the ludicrous claim of some to position fascism as emancipatory or libertarians calling egoism a moral duty – are wholeheartedly rejected.

Every video has a story. Videos of protests and police violence do not simply appear online, they are produced in specific contexts. By examining video activism as practiced in Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro I aimed at emphasizing the specificity of localized media production vis-à-vis the worldwide availability of new communication technologies and their capacity to disseminate audiovisuals on a global scale. Since the time of conducting this research, the technological, social, political, and economic landscapes changed significantly. Therefore, it is important not to hastily transpose these findings to different spatial or temporal contexts.

These three positionings should be considered for the findings presented from Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro.

4 Askanius, »Video Activism as Technology, Text, Testimony – or Practices?,« 178.

9.2 Video Activism in Rio and Cape Town

»There is no way of studying the protest without studying the web. The web and the streets are two sides of the same coin.«⁵

Examining the period from 2010 to 2018 – the time when smartphones and social media accounts became ubiquitous – the work shows how the digital thread became interwoven into the urban fabrics of Cape Town and Rio. The practices of video activism in Cape Town and Rio demonstrate that these technologies were not simply inserted into an empty space,⁶ but became embedded in the very specificities that characterize these two divided cities and their various urban movements.

Digital video activism hence reflects urban structures and morphologies as well as media landscapes and evolving digital architectures. Bottom-up video production at times challenges and at other times reproduces the existing fault lines in the streets and on the net, especially when inserted in context of deeply divided cities.

Cape Town is marked by a decades-long history of strict racial segregation during which marginalized urban citizens were banished from the center to the city's peripheries. This socio-geographical compartmentalization reflects in a spatialized belt model of marginalization. Rich and white people being overrepresented in the city center and along the shorelines and economically disadvantaged people of color concentrating in far outstretched Cape Flats and the urban peripheries. A fragmentation reflected in the city's urban movements and how certain urban citizens in practice enjoy more rights than others. Political mobilization at the urban margins – often summed up under the umbrella term ›service delivery protests‹ – struggled to establish broad coalitions without the assistance of external allies and intermediaries. The segregation in urban spaces is mirrored online, where participants in Service Delivery Protests and members of marginalized communities experienced

5 See (Vid.04, Mariano, Desde Junho 1) for a description by Esther Solano, Professor of Media Studies, of the inextricable connections between the ›streets‹ and the ›net‹ during the Jornadas de Junho in Brazil in 2013.

6 A model of time separated from space as a three-dimensional container, as proposed in Cartesian philosophy, enabled colonialists to assert that their occupation of territories constituted the filling of empty spaces, thus allowing them to completely disregard the existence and histories of local populations. A deeper analysis of how corporate social media reiterates such discourses on space deserves careful conceptual consideration. The works of Nick Couldry and Ulises Mejias on data colonialism offer promising entry points to this discussion, see: Couldry and Mejias, »Data Colonialism: Rethinking Big Data's Relation to the Contemporary Subject«.

diminished control over the audiovisual representations used to portray them. Unlike the RMF student movement, their protests were often ignored or labeled as violent.

The RMF student activist movement had the capacity to establish its own successful Facebook distribution channel, on which it shared self-produced activist videos⁷ thereby being able to make more extensive and effective use of audio-visuals.⁸ Overall, bottom-up video production in Cape Town played a minor role during the examined period, as a journalist and video activist from Cape Town confirms: »In reality, video is something that requires expertise and time. It is something that probably hasn't featured as effectively as it could have. It is happening in an ad hoc way [in Cape Town].«⁹

The role of journalist videos remained dominant in covering protests, providing more or less sympathetic views about urban movements and their cries and demands. Here the relatively free but somewhat biased media landscape and the massive challenges of internet access played a significant role. Second, witness video production for protests as a form of bottom-up recording is present in Cape Town, but struggles to capture much attention. However, witness videos played a significant role in documenting acts of violence in Cape Town, although exposing videographers to significant threats. Finally, activist video production in Cape Town appears as »emerging practice«,¹⁰ driven strongly by few engaged individuals and journalists aligned with certain movements such as the students RMF movement or single political interventions such as the Marikana settlement.

Although Rio de Janeiro is as divided as Cape Town, its socio-spatial divisions differ significantly in that they are reminiscent of a mosaic: favelas dotted all over the hilly terrain bordering on pockets of wealth right across the city.¹¹ Rio's hosting of the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Olympic

- 7 Furthermore, the student activists could at least partially rely on sympathetic journalists to provide them with a media platform on which to express their views.
- 8 In general, urban social movements in Cape Town have placed more emphasis on setting agendas via »hashtags« than through audio-visual production due to the lack of accessible and affordable internet in South Africa.
- 9 Int. 28, Video Activist, Cape Town, 12 August 2016.
- 10 In the past years video production has increased significantly and the use of video by the Black Lives Matter movement is likely to further strengthen bottom-up video production. For example, a coalition of NGOs has started a campaign to gather documented police violence against poor and black residents during the Covid-19 lockdown (Harrisberg, »Critical for Accountability: South Africans Go Online to Document Police Brutality«).
- 11 Socio-economic marginalization is deeply entrenched and sustained for certain population groups in Rio, but marginalization does not equate with living on the geographical peripheries of the city.

Games, both of which were envisaged as catalysts for urban transformation, in reality pushed an agenda of neoliberal urbanization.¹² In resistance to this, the intense grassroots mobilization that constituted the Jornadas de Junho temporarily brought together a diverse multitude of citizens in a series of protest marches in June 2013. With more than a million people taking to the streets in June of 2013, the Jornadas de Junho turned into a collective experience of protest. The cathartic moment offered by the Jornadas de Junho protests – as well as the violent repression and misrepresentation in mass media – fostered the development of a more unified scene of video activist collectives, which now cover most protests in the city center as well as some in marginalized areas such as the Maré favela. To grasp the emerging landscape of bottom-up video production it is worth returning once more the typology of journalist, witness, and activist videos.

Journalist video production and their reporting on protests as well as acts of police violence in Rio de Janeiro can be described overall as strongly biased and sensationalists from a perspective of urban protesters and victims of (lethal) police attacks in city's favelas. This perceived one-sidedness is rooted in the legacies of Brazil's dictatorship, reflects the deep race and class divisions in Brazil, and most of all, triggered a powerful movement to collectively organize video activism.

Witness video making plays a minor role in amplifying voices of protesters – with exceptions such as the crowd sourcing of information to uncover the false allegations by police against Bruno in 2015 – but is crucially important in documenting violence. Coverage of unpredictable acts of (lethal) police violence in the favelas largely depends on the presence of eyewitness videographers. But bottom-up video production should not be constrained to examining only the recording of videos but equally look at responsibility in the act of disseminating such dangerous evidence. The examples of thinking about videographers' safety first, before releasing any material, was powerfully illustrated by the case of the police killing of Eduardo in Morro da Providencia. Why witness video production is important for recording police violence, it does depend to a certain extent on activist networks offering responsible distribution channels.

In Rio de Janeiro, the 2013 Jornadas fostered a unifying moment and cathartic experience, out of which numerous collectively organized video activist groups emerged. These collectives in tendency still overrepresented white and middle-class Cariocas, but over the years aimed to

12 Elites – such as representatives of the city and state governments of Rio de Janeiro, the Brazilian government, construction companies, and FIFA and the IOC – aimed to create a world-class image of the city that would attract investors and tourists at the same time as it further marginalized the already marginalized. Relocation programs, the violent ›pacification‹ of favelas by the UPP, and the heavy-handed suppression of emancipatory urban movements were the results of this top-down process of neoliberal urbanization.

diversify themselves and continuously attempted to broaden their coverage beyond protests in the urban center.¹³ Those collectives practicing video activism on an unprecedented scale, turning Rio de Janeiro into hub of video activism with global significance.

To transcend these locally specificities describing how witness and activist video making emerged as a form of bottom-up city making, the next section presents three productive tensions before moving to a conceptual proposal to respond to the initial question about how video activism contributed to the digitalization of the right to the city.

9.3 Video Activist Practices In-Between

»But for now the only existing transparency is that of the users, who become more and more machine readable. Transparency applies to the masses, not to the systems of power, governments included.«¹⁴

Doing video activism on the ground is often messy and complicated, since video activism cannot operate outside the contradictions that the system of neoliberal capitalism simultaneously imposes on the in-betweens of the ›streets‹ and the ›net‹, between the ›here‹ and ›there‹ and between ›power‹ and ›vulnerability‹. This presents three productive tensions, between which my research continuously oscillated and that reflect the challenges that utopian practices of video activism face in the phase of digitalizing the right to the city. The mutual infiltrations taking place in the evolving digital-urban nexus show how simplified dichotomies of digitalization such as »online/ offline, digital/ analog, old/new«¹⁵ should be given up. Instead, the starting point is to adopt »an analytical approach anchored in practice theory [that] puts us [researchers of video activism] in position to ask holistic questions.«¹⁶

With the task of ›spatializing‹ bottom-up politics with Henri Lefebvre and the attempt of moving beyond the legacies of Cartesian dualism as expressed by Manuel Castells, the first step of the analysis is to show how urban inequalities on ›the streets‹ are reproduced ›in the net‹ of digital communication.

- 13 A more detailed analysis of this process is emblematically captured in an interview with video activists from Mídia Independente Coeltiva in: Geuder, »From Expansion to Empowerment«, 2023.
- 14 Ippolita, 10.
- 15 Askanius, »Video Activism as Technology, Text, Testimony – or Practices?«, 137.
- 16 Askanius, »Video Activism as Technology, Text, Testimony – or Practices?«, 137.

Between the Streets & the Net

Oscillating between the streets and the net is part and parcel of the practices of video activism. What I described as the digital-urban nexus in this work, is the fact that the build environments of concrete streets and corners overlap, interact, and mutually infiltrate digitalized spheres that are often conceptualized as placeless. When video activists capture protests and police violence with their cameras and post these testimonies online, they tinker with notions of being place-bound by making evidence globally accessible. However, video activist practices cannot be reduced to either the offline or online realm but are inherently based in both.

Oscillating between the streets and the net signifies a playful connection, where time and space are reconnected through audiovisual representations – literally producing space itself. The counter-hegemonic video production has the capacity to recenter attention to otherwise marginalized areas when for example documenting police violence in Favelas. And beyond the geography it has the potential to store historical moments in audiovisual form, making it accessible to generations of viewers who may not have been born yet at the time of a protest. In this sense video activist practices play a crucial role in transcending time and space without ever leaving their boundedness to place itself. In contrast, video activists as well eyewitnesses often have an intricate knowledge of the places and situations they film. They often carry intricate knowledge of the street corners where they film a protest march, which viewers of their footage not necessarily possess.

In this sense, the oscillation between the streets and the net produces its own dynamics not least in respect to social movement organizing and mobilization. While for some audiences the videos of protest and police violence are only creating »weak ties« to social movements and their causes, for other audiences – often living in the area and potentially being involved with activism already – these videos have the function of reaffirming their activism and fostering ideas of belonging. Seeing that a protest march gathered attention not only on the streets, but online as well, has become a quintessential part of signifying it as relevant. Especially since the beginnings of digital video activism in the 2010s, this mirrored digital audiovisual presence is a core element in making claims heard and seen.

Over and over, it has been shown how single videos can play a major role in sparking outrage, leading to mobilizations that bring people to the streets. The video showing the beating of Rodney King in 1992 in Los Angeles is one of the most famous examples globally. While this footage was distributed via old gatekeepers of TV channels, today's new digital video activism depends on entirely different gatekeepers who reshape the existing topographies of visibility. Viral videos stand at the end of a long tail of

video production and only few of them have a lasting impact, but some do break filter bubbles and enter public discourse here and there.

Between Here & There

The ›here and there‹ of making and distributing videos poses its specific challenges, especially since many of key rules for creation of online attention are tightly controlled and surveilled by opaque actors like privatized social media corporates, while hyper-visibility of violent acts poses its own challenges for victims and their families.

For-profit social media companies, the new gatekeepers of public communication, have taken on an ambivalent role in the process of bottom-up video production. On the one hand, they offer new avenues for urban movements and citizens to disseminate content that amplifies their cries and demands for a right to the city on a global scale. On the other hand, these online platforms enable urban citizens to circumvent the traditional gatekeepers of journalism, as the long struggle between Globo and video activists in Rio illustrates. However, bottom-up video production has also been incorporated into the commercial logic that drives the corporate social media. My interviewees repeatedly expressed their frustration with social media companies for not being politically accountable for their decisions¹⁷ and for failing to offer an economically sustainable model for bottom-up video production.

In contrast to audiovisuals of peaceful protests, which rarely receive significant numbers of views, violence generates attention. My analysis of topographies of visibility showed two types of video typically attracting high levels of attention: witness videos documenting scenes of particularly graphic violence; and videos that are distributed via the established channels of media activist collectives or traditional media outlets. In Cape Town, critical media organizations such as GroundUp fulfil a key role in organizing the dissemination of video materials, whereas in Rio de Janeiro video activist collectives established their own independent distribution channels.

Urban movements in cities in the Global South write themselves into history by appropriating smartphones and social media within their specific spaces. In Cape Town, witness and journalist videos dominate in the display of protests and police violence. The successful appropriation of social media platforms by video activist collectives during the Jornadas and by the student activists of the RMF movement prove that it is possible to

17 A criticism that applies particularly strong to questions of disabling content but touches as well on the opacity of algorithmic decision making for example by using personalization mechanisms.

harness the corporate social media for emancipatory purposes and collectively produce commons. Nevertheless, few repertoires of contention are as dependent on corporate social media platforms as video activism.¹⁸

To bypass social media corporations and their commodification of digital communication will require resources and organization to provide alternative platforms for video activism. Challenging the resource-rich social media giants and their strategies of commodifying everything for the attention economies they run – which includes profiting of videos documenting violence – requires grassroots organization to stretch beyond their capacities. Especially, when media activist collectives keep low operational budgets to remain independent.

The production of public opinion has unquestionably been fundamentally transformed by corporate social media platforms as well as by the increasingly online consumption of journalism. The potential benefits and dangers brought by the emergence of corporate social media has sparked heated political, scholarly and public debate over the last decade. For its proponents, social media represents a set of ›liberation technologies‹ with the potential to democratize the world. For its opponents, social media creates ›filter bubbles‹ that destroy any sense of common ground, facilitate the proliferation of ›fake news‹, and aid the manipulation of elections. In any case, we can clearly observe a shift from a ›here‹ to a ›there‹ of controlling whose voices can be heard and whose images ought to be seen. As new gatekeepers, corporate social media play a deeply ambivalent role for emancipatory urban movements and their video activists. On the one hand, they allowed to question biased mass media narratives and develop independent media productions by the movement for the movement. On the other hand, corporate social media corporations introduced a new form of algorithmic governance. A control of communication channel that is automatized, invisible, and extremely powerful.

For (video) activists a greater degree of autogestion could only be created by controlling the means of online video distribution itself. It would require to either establish alternative platforms to the corporate giants of Facebook, Google, Twitter and others or to democratize the existing tech giants themselves by forcing them to at least make their algorithms transparent in open access code.¹⁹ Especially the latter option appears as hard-ly realistic. On the other side the former option to create independent, non-profit websites and repositories by video activists for video activist is

- 18 The large data requirements for circulating videos online has restricted attempts to build independent networks. The collapse of the global Indymedia movement illustrates how bottom-up initiatives struggle to compete with the convenient services offered by corporate social media platforms.
- 19 Tech advocacy organizations such as the New York City-based NGOs Witness and Data & Society Institute are attempting to raise awareness of the political impact of decisions made by the Silicon Valley tech industry.

more promising. The goal from a perspective of emancipatory bottom-up video production has to be to have decision making closer to the »here« of democratically run collectives than the distant »there« of profit-driven social media corporates run by a hand full of oligarchs in Silicon Valley.

Between Power and & Vulnerability

Video-activism is a form of bottom-up city making, which means that video activists do not only oscillate between the streets and the net or between a here and there, but equally between power and vulnerability in their practices on the ground. Videographers' audio-visual testimonies transpose evidence of violence beyond the constraints of space and time, but the videographers themselves remain embedded in the situations that they document. Being in a position between power and vulnerability can be existential for videographers. They are the ones behind the cameras, whose fate hardly becomes visible. A danger when exposing violence beyond protest marches.

The heuristic typology of videography helps to add nuance to our understanding of power and vulnerability. Journalist videos are produced by professional outsiders, who tend to be least vulnerable due to protection of the media outlet they work for and the international standards that developed to protect the freedoms of the press. For activist videos created by engaged insiders the situation differs. They can rely on a certain level of mutual protection, especially when filming together. However, when states turn to tactics of repression as seen in Brazil under the Bolsonaro presidency, dissidents can become targets of state-led violence. The most vulnerable group of videographers are eyewitnesses filming scenes of violence in the everyday of marginalized communities. While anyone can become a unpredictable spectator – an amateur eyewitness – the levels of protections depend heavily on the training, resources at the hands of videographers. The example of the eyewitness from Providência who had to hide after their video was published or the Cape Town police knocking at the door of eyewitnesses are only some of many possible examples to point to.

The number of videos documenting how marginalized urban citizens are injured or lethally attacked by police officers has exploded in the last decade. The capacity to record such evidence is a powerful tool. Often captured in witness videos by individuals who simply »happened to be there,«²⁰ this act of recording simultaneously places eyewitnesses in a position of vulnerability, exposing them to the risk of retaliation. Videos have the power to expose violence, but doing so is itself a vulnerable act.

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

9.4 Utopian Practices of Video Activism



Fig. 51 Protest at Candalaria

»Utopia is on the horizon: I walk two steps, it takes two steps back. I walk ten steps and it is ten steps further away. What is utopia for? It is for this, for walking.«²¹

The notion of utopian practices highlights the tensions between the utopian ideal of emancipation and the concrete actions and practices required to work towards the ideal.²² Derived from the right to the city as »concrete utopia«,²³ utopian practices contain an inherent productive contradiction. My research suggests reimagining the concrete utopia of the right to the city by transposing it from its origins in Paris in 1968 to the experiences of bottom-up video production in two cities in the Global South in times of Web 2.0 digitalization. By reasserting the right to the city as a cry and demand into an urban fabric in which digital threads are increasingly interwoven, video activism proposes an alternative to the techno-utopian visions propagated by Silicon Valley's social media corporations.

- 21 Galeano in: Shukaitis and Graeber, *Constituent Imagination*, 33.
- 22 In contrast to thinking in dichotomies such as the ›material‹ and the ›ideal‹, dialectical thinking embraces the tension of oscillating between two – or, in Lefebvre's case, usually three – poles. As Cunningham argues in a comparison of three ›proto-typical urban theorists‹ – Walter Benjamin, Manfred Tafuri and Lefebvre – Lefebvre sees in utopias an experimental framework that can be invoked to practice transduction as a particular form of dialectical thinking (Cunningham, »Triangulating Utopia: Benjamin, Lefebvre, Tafuri«, 270).
- 23 The notion of concrete utopias is credited to German philosopher Ernst Bloch (Bloch, *Geist der Utopie*, 16).

Grounded in an epistemological critique of Cartesian thinking, which separates the online and offline realms into two distinct spheres of reality, I argued that we need to find ways to conceptualize the mutual infiltrations of the ›streets‹ and the ›net‹. By applying the emancipatory claims of the right to the city to video activist practices, I highlighted the multiple interconnections between the making of videos, the production of visibility, and the exposing of violence without having to fall back on dichotomous Cartesian conceptualizations. This conceptual framing grounded in Henri Lefebvre's work leads me to a conceptual proposal of thinking video activism as part and parcel of a broader process of digitalizing the right to the city as utopian practice.

Following the conceptualization of the right to the city earlier in this work, three core challenges drive the utopian practices of video activism – these are, the quest for urban citizenship for all, de-commodifying digital communication and widening autogestion as guiding principles.

Urban Citizenship

»Use rather than attendance is crucial, because democracy is not a form of intellectual tourism, but a concrete practice.«²⁴

Urban citizenship demands that all inhabitants have a »right to rights«.²⁵ Urban citizenship guarantees basic rights of personal sovereignty and integrity and provides the unquestioned foundation for any struggle for the right to the city and consequently has to be extended to the sphere of a radically democratized emancipatory communication. Social media corporations, as private enterprises, do not address their users as citizens with inalienable rights but instead as customers with use rights that can be arbitrarily granted and denied by the corporation. For the corporations operating in the model of »surveillance capitalism«, users are primarily a resource whose personal data can be mined.²⁶

Ideally, organizing bottom-up video production is a collective endeavor. Forming groups of activists that collectively establish and build up a

24 Ippolita, *The Facebook Aquarium: The Resistible Rise of Anarcho-Capitalism*, 8.

25 Holston, »*Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil*.«

26 Surveillance of users, the impossibility of questioning platforms' decisions to disable content, and lack of transparency in algorithmic governance are characteristics that illustrate how corporate social media does not approach its users as ›citizens‹ endowed with rights. (Geuder, 2023; Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, 2019)

channel on social media or, even better, their own website has proven to be the best path for guaranteeing that videos emerging from the bottom up become widely visible. For David Harvey, the right to the city is a »common rather than individual right since this transformation [towards a right to the city] inevitably depends on the exercise of a collective power to reshape the process of urbanization.«²⁷ To challenge communicative capitalism online, Jodi Dean argues, efforts of collective organization are necessary. Collective organizing in solidarity amongst media activist collectives has thus far proven as the most efficient strategy to level inequalities, find a voice to speak out against discrimination and violent repressions and work towards an »urban citizenship« that guarantees everyone rights to rights. While urban citizenship has made major progress in attempts to practically secure basic rights for irregularized migrants in cities, it is going to be key to extend these struggles to digital spheres, where the corporatization of the internet undermined basic rights and produces surveilled subjects more than empowered citizens.

Commodification

»The recent revival of emphasis upon the supposed loss of urban commonalities reflects the seemingly profound impacts of the recent wave of privatizations, enclosures, spatial controls, policing and the surveillance upon the qualities of urban life in general[.]«²⁸

Video activism aims to create digital commons instead of commodification through digitalization. Videos that document protests and police violence are shared with no commercial intent. In its early days, the internet had provided a space for the free sharing of information.²⁹ However, the distribution networks provided by corporate social media platforms insert video activism into a for-profit context. Video activists' videos are thus commodified even as their practices actively defy this process. Attempts to bypass the corporate social media are difficult due to the asymmetry in resources available to bottom-up organizations, on the one hand, and the global tech giants, on the other. This monopolizing of financial resources by a handful of global actors such as Facebook and Google work to the detriment of not only professional journalism but also independent bottom-up initiatives.

27 Harvey, »The Right to the City,« 2008, 23.

28 Harvey, *Rebel Cities*, 67.

29 In fact, the digital replicability of information is ideally suited to create commons, since the consumption of digitalized data does reduce it.

What my book has strived to show is that we must not stop at a discussion of what is seen emerging on social media; instead, we must delve deeper to investigate the conditions in which this visibility is produced. Thus far, the commodification of public communication by social media corporations has had mostly negative effects in terms of socio-economic inequality. Corporate social media has consistently increased its share of advertising revenue and thus contributed directly to the increasing financial hardships facing independent high-quality journalism. Furthermore, a few powerful social media corporations have concentrated and privatized financial resources on an unprecedented global scale. A redistribution towards bottom-up video activism that aids the establishment of independent websites, revives initiatives such as the Indymedia network,³⁰ and creates archives that preserve the work of video activists are desperately needed to enable radically democratized forms of communication.

Autogestion

»There is a need for separate and dedicated places, where the rules are created by the users themselves.«³¹

At the core of this debate is the question of how the autogestion or self-management of urban movements can best be organized. Video activist collectives tread a fine line between independence and inexistence, as my examples from Rio illustrate. External funding threatens the independence of video activist collectives and can open the door to co-optation and a loss of autogestion. However, a strict emphasis on autonomy can ultimately lead to inexistence, which can occur when video activist collectives with insufficient resources refuse to accept any external funding. Such dilemmas are familiar for grassroots political activists, but they are of particular relevance in the context of video activism when regular content production is required to keep established distribution channels functional. Genuine autogestion means that video activist collectives not only control the making of videos but also their distribution. Above all, the independence-inexistence dilemma raises the question of whether it is possible to sustain independent and critical video activist practices while navigating between the twin existential threats of co-optation, on the one hand, and collapse, on the other.

30 Corporate social media negatively affected the decentralized Independent Media Center network (Giraud, »Has Radical Participatory Online Media Really ›Failed‹? Indymedia and Its Legacies«).

31 Ippolita, *The Facebook Aquarium: The Resistible Rise of Anarcho-Capitalism*, 8.

The algorithmic governance imposed by social media corporations creates a set of opaque, top-down rules – for example the use of personalization algorithms³² – that are decided upon by the shareholders and management of these conglomerates.

As Henri Lefebvre argued, the production of »abstract space carries within itself the seeds of a new kind of space. I shall call that new space ›differential space‹.«³³ The production of differential spaces accessible by all, is what the concrete utopia of the right to the city aims at. This vision is what drives many of the emancipatory practices of digital video activism described and stands in opposition to the abstract space of a privatized digital sphere as corporate social media produces it.

Utopian practices of video activism put people before profit. The utopian practices of video activism are defined by the goal to radically democratize communication from the bottom-up. Using audio-visual repertoires of contention changes »ways of Knowing the City«³⁴ and thus gives way to the »right to change ourselves by changing the city.«³⁵

Bottom-Up learning

The experiences of videographers from Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro contain important lessons when discussing the digitalization of the right to the city in the early 21st century. The Examples from Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro illustrate the importance to take into account the specific urban settings and the histories of their social movements, before assuming generalized impacts of globalized technologies such as smartphones and social media. Second, the practices developed on the ground show a complex web of practices which videographers navigate when recording protests and audio-visually evidencing police violence. The newly available tools of social media and smartphones have shaped and affected urban struggles by providing new ways of amplifying voices on the one side but increased the dangers of surveillance and commodification of resistance on the other side. Tensions which cannot be brushed off easily. Finally, the research shows how video activism as practice

32 Filter bubbles and echo chambers – which serve commodification but not the common good – preclude a politics of encounter, the precondition for coming to terms with and learning from difference. In contrast, personalization algorithms foster a culture built on mutual ignorance and violent confrontation. It is thus particularly at the level of video distribution where autogestion has become essential if the aims of bottom-up video production are to be realized.

33 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 52.

34 Kurgan and Brawley, *Ways of Knowing Cities*.

35 Harvey, »The Right to the City,« 2008, 23.

navigates tensions between the streets and the net, between here and there, between power and vulnerability. The inventiveness and risk-taking of individuals and collectives allow crucial tactical wins for emancipatory struggles for radically democratizing communication. However, the strategic balance is tilted towards the new gatekeepers of corporate social movements and against the autogestion of independent social movements.³⁶ While single videos and messages may break through the tightly controlled system of algorithmic governance by corporate social media from Silicon Valley, in the long term these corporations possess enormous and mostly unchecked power. Most recent reporting by New York Times suggests for example how Elon Musk appears to effectively use his power as owner of the messenger app X, formerly known as Twitter, to silence critics of him, even when they share the right-wing background.³⁷ More systemically on a large-scale the rising accusations of silencing any form of critic of Israel's conduct of war in Gaza, Lebanon and Syria emerged in the past months.³⁸

With the rapid advance of A.I. technologies, the effects on video activism are hard to predict precisely today. The possibilities for control and censorship are likely to increase, which would further tilt the control of representation towards corporate social media and their owners. A second concern is the now widespread possibilities of A.I. to manipulate all sorts of information, including audio-visuals. When viewers lose the capacity to differentiate between original video recordings and manipulated materials, the trust of audiovisuals as evidence erodes. The erosion of trust is likely to have major impacts on discourses of social movements and their capacity to represent their struggles. These shifts in power deserve attention, but as this work has shown, techno-determinism would be misplaced here.

The creative appropriation of technologies by social movements is what has created the form of digital video activism as a form of bottom-up city making in the early 2010s. Despite technological transformations, context specificity and the uniqueness of each struggle, the »cry and demand« for a right to the city appears to be alive and echoes in the hundreds of videos produced to amplify voices from the urban margins, document protest marches, and evidence police violence.

Utopian practices of video activism have become a key repertoire of contention in struggles for a right to the city, one which is both utopian

36 The difference between tactics and strategies as employed by Michel de Certeau helps to understand how digital architectures shape movements in a similar way that built environments strategically suggest the movements through urban space (DeCerteau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*).

37 Thompson, »They Criticized Musk on X. Then Their Reach Collapsed.«

38 Human Right Watch, »Meta's Broken Promises.«

in its visions and practical in its actions. In the poetic words of Eduardo Galeano, the utopian practices of video activism are steps towards an emancipatory horizon: »Utopia is on the horizon: I walk two steps, it takes two steps back. I walk ten steps and it is ten steps further away. What is utopia for? It is for this, for walking.«³⁹

39 Galeano in: Shukaitis and Graeber, *Constituent Imagination*, 33.

List of Abbreviations

ALERJ	Assembleia Legislativa do Estado do Rio de Janeiro
AND	Jornal A Nova Democracia
ANF	Agência de Notícias das Favelas
BRT	Bus Rapid Transport System
CCID	Central City Improvement District
CMI	Centro da Mídia Independente
CPUT	Cape Peninsula University of Technology
FIP	Frente Independente Popular
FMF	Fees Must Fall
MIC	Mídia Independente Coletiva
MN	Mídia Ninja
MPL	Movimento Passa Livre
PM	Polícia Militar
PT	Partido dos Trabalhadores
R40G	Rio 40 Graus
RMF	Rhodes Must Fall
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SDP	Service Delivery Protest
UCT	University of Cape Town
UERJ	Universidade do Estado do Rio De Janeiro
UFRJ	Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro
UPP	Unidade de Polícia Pacificadora
UWC	University of the Western Cape

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Photograph: Hossam Lel-Hamalawy, »The Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted«. Flickr, Creative Commons License, 29 November 2011, accessed 23 July 2020. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/elhamalawy/6427062135>.

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Photograph: Jacob Geuder, Rio de Janeiro, 15 November 2015.

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Photograph: Jacob Geuder, Rio de Janeiro, 8 January 2016.

10. Annex

10.1 Videography



Video01 Bajour, Polizei räumt Favelabesetzung

Title: Polizei räumt Favelabesetzung auf dem Messeplatz

User: Verein Bajour, formerly Tageswoche (YT 1,180 subscribers)

Upload Date: 14 June 2013

Location and Date of Event: Messeplatz, Basel, Switzerland; 13 June 2013

Number of Views: YT 100,248

Duration: 3:10 minutes

Type of Video: Journalist

Technical Features: High audio-visual quality, edited

Description: Filmed from the upper floor of a nearby building, the video shows Swiss police officers dispersing a protest party using pepper spray and rubber bullets. A phalanx of officers runs toward the DJ's hut, where they beat him to the ground forcefully and pepper-spray the partygoers. The crowd then begins insulting the police and throwing objects at them.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJkhVEyfhQY&t=33s>



Video02 MIC, PMs executam jovens

Title: PMs executam jovens à queima roupa no Rio de Janeiro

User: Mídia Independente Coletiva (YT 7,960 subscribers; FB 131,170 followers)

Upload Date: 30 March 2017

Location and Date of Event: Escola Municipal Daniel Piza, Zona Norte, Rio de Janeiro; 30 March 2017

Number of Views: YT 3,344; FB 9,600

Duration: 0:33 minutes

Type of Video: Witness

Technical Features: Low audio-visual quality, unedited

Description: The video shows two police officers approaching two motionless individuals lying on the ground. Although it is unclear whether the victims are still alive, the officers fire shots at them from close range. In the background, the videographer reacts with audible shock and instructs his child to leave the room.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_meDgbCmmAw



Video03 Mariano, Desde Junho 1

Title: Desde Junho: Caixa de Pandora (EP1)

User: Julia Mariano (YT 45 subscribers)

Upload Date: 13 June 2018

Location and Date of Event: Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo; 2013–2016

Number of Views: YT 931

Duration: 26:38 minutes

Type of Video: Documentary series

Technical Features: High audio-visual quality, edited, no voice-over

Description: The first episode of the documentary series #Desde Junho traces the rapid emergence of media activism as part of the political movement in 2013.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HxPRhe_J-gk



Video04 Mariano, Desde Junho 2

Title: Desde Junho: Mídia Livre! (Ep 2)

User: Julia Mariano (YT 45 subscribers)

Upload Date: 13 June 2018

Location and Date of Event: Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo; 2013–2016

Number of Views: YT 410

Duration: 27:06 minutes

Type of Video: Documentary series

Technical Features: High audio-visual quality, edited, no voice-over

Description: The second episode of this five-part documentary about media activism in Brazil focuses on the work and organization of media activists in Rio de Janeiro.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9eQ2SdcA2_8&t=978s



Video05 Mariano, Desde Junho 3

Title: Desde Junho: Violências (Ep 3)

User: Julia Mariano (YT 45 subscribers)

Upload Date: 13 June 2018

Location and Date of Event: Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo; 2013–2016

Number of Views: YT 661

Duration: 26:33 minutes

Type of Video: Documentary series

Technical Features: High audio-visual quality, edited, no voice-over

Description: The third episode of the documentary series chronicles military police violence against protesters – particularly striking teachers in September and October 2013 – as well as the criminal prosecution of activists. It also examines how politicians and corporate media in Brazil publicly portrayed protesters as »vandals« and »terrorists.«

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tGjAUzRfLqI>



Video06 Mariano, Desde Junho 4

Title: Desde Junho: Intervenções (Ep 4)

User: Julia Mariano (YT 45 subscribers)

Location and Date of Event: Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo; 2013–2016

Number of Views: YT 208

Duration: 26:19 minutes

Type of Video: Documentary series

Technical Features: High audio-visual quality, edited, no voice-over

Description: The fourth episode of the documentary series highlights creative interventions and the experimentation with new forms of protest. It features Rafucko's satirical »vandalism fitness« videos, the work of Papo Reto in Complexo do Alemão, and the organization of an alternative carnival parade initiated at Casa Nuvem – illustrating the diversity of creative practices and the role of media activists in amplifying these actions.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LXuAD6Sg178&t=1039s>



Video07 Mariano, Desde Junho 5

Title: Desde Junho: Utopias (Ep 5)

User: Julia Mariano (YT 45 subscribers)

Upload Date: 13 June 2018

Location and Date of Event: Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo; 2013–2016

Number of Views: YT 218

Duration: 26:04 minutes

Type of Video: Documentary series

Technical Features: High audio-visual quality, edited, no voice-over

Description: The final episode of the documentary series raises questions about utopias for urban social movements and their media. It »discusses freedom of the press, the manipulation of social networks, the media awareness that last year brought to the common citizen and questions the limits of the freedom of production and consumption of information on the Internet.«

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ftuqk32cL38&t=407s>



Video08 AND, Veja com exclusividade

Title: RJ: Veja com exclusividade os cinco minutos em que manifestantes tomaram a Alerj (17/06/2013)

User: Jornal A Nova Democracia (YT 56,700 subscribers)

Upload Date: 25 June 2013

Location and Date of Event: Legislative Assembly of the State of Rio de Janeiro (ALERJ); 17 June 2013

Number of Views: YT 204,170

Duration: 6:13 minutes

Type of Video: Activist

Technical Features: Medium audio-visual quality, unedited

Description: The video captures the moment when protesters start throwing Molotov cocktails, toppling police barricades, and seizing control of the entrance to ALERJ following the retreat of police officers. Presented in unedited form, it stands as one of the most significant visual records of the Jornadas in Rio.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHyfFeUT1-s&t=61s>



Video09 Globo, Manifestação contra aumento

Title: Manifestação contra aumento da pass/onibus Manifestantes depredam a Alerj RIO 17/06/2013

User: MrMrpreta (93 subscribers, 14 May 2020)

Upload Date: 17 June 2013

Location and Date of Event: ALERJ; 17 June 2013

Number of Views: YT 325

Duration: 9:07 minutes

Type of Video: Journalist

Technical Features: Upload of low audio-visual quality (original of high audio-visual quality), edited, filmed from a helicopter, the studio, and street level

Description: This video comes from GloboNews' live coverage of 17 June 2013 street battles outside ALERJ. The broadcast features footage captured both from a helicopter, from the street, and from the studio.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vsvf_bKhRteI



Video10 Maxx, A Batalha da Alerj

Title: A Batalha da Alerj, 17 de Junho de 2013

User: Matias Maxx (YT 1,420 subscribers)

Upload Date: 25 June 2013

Location and Date of Event: ALERJ; 17 June 2013

Number of Views: YT 22,405

Duration: 6:20 minutes

Type of Video: Activist

Technical Features: High audio-visual quality, edited

Description: The video captures vivid impressions of the street battles outside ALERJ on 17 June 2013. It documents the violent clashes in detail – showing damaged ATMs, burning cars, flaming barricades, and the arrival of military police with dogs. Portions of this footage have been featured in other contexts, including the documentary series #Desde Junho.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5MAg4mq7Zq8>



Video11 Marcos, Vandalismo

Title: Vandalismo, vandalismo, vandalismo...

User: MarcosJacksonCarvalh (YT 447 subscribers)

Upload Date: 24 August 2013

Location and Date of Event: Brazil; 2013

Number of Views: YT 181,865

Duration: 4:25 minutes

Type of Video: Montage

Technical Features: High audio-visual quality, edited

Description: This skillfully edited video montage summarizes the June 2013 protests through the lens of corporate media coverage. News presenters and interviewees echo the same characterizations again and again, using terms like »vandalism,« »breaking of things,« »destruction,« »violence,« »terrorism,« and »chaos.«

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=04XYSEl2ln4&t=7s>



Video12 MIC, Manifestantes fazem escracho

Title: Manifestantes fazem escracho na sede da Vale no Rio

User: Mídia Independente Coletiva (YT 7,960 subscribers; FB 131,170 followers)

Upload Date: 17 November 2015

Location and Date of Event: Center of Rio de Janeiro; 16 November 2015

Number of Views: YT 976; FB 8,500

Duration: 2:59 minutes

Type of Video: Activist

Technical Features: High audio-visual quality, edited, in-video text

Description: The video documents the »não vale nada!« protest – a wordplay suggesting that the company Vale is worthless, echoing the popular Portuguese saying »não vale nada.« Organized in response to the devastating collapse of the Brumadinho dam, operated and owned by Vale, the protest captures public outrage. During the demonstration, protesters encountered a team of Globo journalists and drove them away.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=31zcNjEyOh4>



Video13 SABC, Service delivery protest

Title: Service delivery protest in Cape Town degenerated into thievery and looting.

User: SABC News (YT 947,000 subscribers)

Upload Date: 30 October 2013

Location and Date of Event: Central Business District, Cape Town; 30 October 2013

Number of Views: YT 4,870

Duration: 1:43 minutes

Type of Video: Journalist

Technical Features: Medium audio-visual quality, edited, voice over and translator for persons with visual impairment

Description: This SABC news report opens with footage of looting during a service delivery protest on 30 October 2013, showing broken shop windows and burning trash cans, and alleging that protesters threw feces. The report reconstructs the day's events through interviews with eyewitnesses – including one who speaks out angrily – as well as with protest organizer Andile Lili and Western Cape provincial government spokesperson Zhakele Mbhele.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xDFB1Nvyjc4&t=6s>



Video14 News24, Cape Town protests turn violent

Title: Cape Town protests turn violent

User: News24 (YT 408,000 subscribers)

Upload Date: 30 October 2013

Location and Date of Event: Central Business District, Cape Town; 30 October 2013

Number of Views: YT 14,395

Duration: 1:01 minutes

Type of Video: Journalist

Technical Features: High audio-visual quality, edited

Description: The video documents the 30 October 2013 protest for land and improved housing conditions. The short report features interviews with a street vendor and an eyewitness whose shop was attacked. »They came to strike, not to steal,« remarks a frustrated shop owner. YouTube comments on the video describe the protesters as »barbaric« (Kefi), with many containing overtly racist statements – for instance: »This is the African way. Protest, loot, destroy, attack, injure and kill. Welcome to the New South Africa!!!«.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rrE-B38IYP0>

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Video 15 Buchanan, Looting after Cape Town protest

Title: Looting after Cape Town protest

User: Stuart Buchanan (YT 94 subscribers)

Upload Date: 30 October 2013

Location and Date of Event: Shortmarket Street, CBD, Cape Town, 30 October 2013

Number of Views: YT 39,115

Duration: 0:48 minutes

Type of Video: Witness

Technical Features: Medium audio-visual quality, unedited

Description: Filmed from a balcony, this short witness video captures a moment following the 30 October 2013 march, as a group of protesters run down a street and scramble over goods – reportedly packets of potato chips – in a cardboard box outside a closed store. The videographer, audibly shocked, exclaims: »Oh my God!« The video's comment section has been disabled due to an overwhelming number of racist remarks.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Quzc6U6Pe5M>



Video 16 trouble media, student protests

Title: #feesmustfall 21 October 2015 by Eric Miller (Open Society Foundation South Africa)

User: Open Society Foundation for South Africa (YT 23 subscribers)

Upload Date: 26 October 2015 (Open Society Foundation South Africa)

Location and Date of Event: Central Business District, Cape Town, 21 October 2015

Number of Views: YT 127 (Open Society Foundation South Africa)

Duration: 3:04 minutes

Type of Video: Activist

Technical Features: Medium audio-visual quality, edited; Open Society Foundation South Africa uploaded the identical video in higher resolution four days later.

Description: This video by video activist Eric Miller documents clashes between police officers and student protesters, with a focus on the police as the aggressors. The audio overlay includes recorded singing by students, referencing the importance of so-called struggle songs during South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zujYCwMhAc> (trouble media)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-6LvYa4tUPg> (Open Society Foundation for South Africa)



Video17 SABC, Students protest outside parliament

Title: Students protest outside parliament ahead of mid-term budget

User: SABC News (YT 947,000 subscribers)

Upload Date: 21 October 2015

Location and Date of Event: Houses of Parliament, Cape Town; 21 October 2015

Number of Views: YT 3,040

Duration: 3:03 minutes

Type of Video: Journalist

Technical Features: High audio-visual quality, edited, narrated by a reporter

Description: This SABC News video features a live report from outside Parliament in Cape Town. Reporter Nomawethu Solwandle provides a detailed account of the students' demands, placing them in the broader context of the anticipated increase in university fees.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G5QPFFRkT6k&feature=youtu.be>



Video18 No Comment TV, Tear gas fired

Title: Tear gas fired as students protest over tuition fees hike – no comment

User: No Comment TV (YT 377'000 subscribers)

Upload Date: 22 October 2015

Location and Date of Event: Houses of Parliament, Cape Town; 21 October 2015

Number of Views: YT 3,949

Duration: 1:49 minutes

Type of Video: Journalist

Technical Features: Medium audio-visual quality, edited

Description: After showing footage of Minister of Finance Nhlanhla Nene presenting his mid-term budget in the National Assembly, the video turns to a reporter covering the demonstration outside. Clearly out of breath, he describes how the protesting students are attempting to break through the gates of the Houses of Parliament. As they retreat behind the gates and the police line, he warns his cameraman, Neil, to be careful.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DMW37-CP4L4>

VIDEOGRAPHY



Video19 Ruptly, Multiple arrests

Title: South Africa: Multiple arrests as student protesters swamp Cape Town

User: Ruptly (YT 1,320,000 subscribers)

Upload Date: 21 October 2015

Location and Date of Event: Houses of Parliament and Central Business District, Cape Town, 21 October 2015

Number of Views: YT 172,479

Duration: 1:35 minutes

Type of Video: Journalist

Technical Features: High audio-visual quality, edited

Description: This journalist-produced video presents a series of scenes from the student protest in the central business district. The footage centers on police actions, highlighting moments of aggression and arrests targeting student demonstrators.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SNmKOKrauKs>



Video20, MIC, Rebelião no Complexo da Maré

Title: Rebelião no Complexo da Maré – RJ

User: Mídia Independente Coletiva (YT 7,960 subscribers; FB 131,170 followers)

Upload Date: 25 February 2015

Location and Date of Event: Complexo da Maré, North Zone, Rio de Janeiro; 23 February 2015

Number of Views: YT 10'860; FB 59'000

Duration: 7:35 minutes

Type of Video: Activist

Technical Features: High audio-visual quality, edited

Description: This video documents the March for Life in the Maré favela, located in Rio's North Zone. It opens by contextualizing the protest, highlighting recent deadly police operations and including interviews with local residents taking part in the demonstration. The situation escalates when police officers attack the protesters with tear gas and live ammunition. In two scenes, officers are filmed firing lethal munition at demonstrators.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vHor46003_c&t=1s

<https://www.facebook.com/163678980488219/videos/390452527810862/>



Video21 Moradores do Complexo da Maré se insurgem contra a PM e o Exército

Title: Moradores do Complexo da Maré se insurgem contra a PM e o Exército
User: Jornal A Nova Democracia (YT 56,700 subscribers)
Upload Date: 24 February 2015
Location and Date of Event: Complexo da Maré, North Zone, Rio de Janeiro; 23 February 2015
Number of Views: YT 33,976
Duration: 9:48 minutes
Type of Video: Activist
Technical Features: High audio-visual quality, edited, voice-over
Description: his video documents the March for Life in the Maré favela, located in Rio's North Zone, and shares many scenes with the MIC production »Rebelião no Complexo da Maré – RJ« (vid. 16). It opens with graphic footage of prior police violence in the favelas, accompanied by statistics. Compared to the MIC video, this version includes fewer interviews with protesters participating in the march.
Last Accessed: 11 July 2020
URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dw4PpP5hhAQ>



Video22 Protest continue at UCT despite heavy police presence. #endoutsourcing #feesmustfall

User: UCT: Rhodes Must Fall (FB 17,057 followers)
Upload Date: 21 October 2015
Location and Date of Event: UCT campus, Cape Town; 21 October 2015
Number of Views: FB 1,800
Duration: 0:25 minutes
Type of Video: Activist
Technical Features: Low audio-visual quality, unedited
Description: Produced by the RMF media team, this video captures a tense stand-off between protesters and a senior manager from G4S, the private security firm contracted by UCT. The protesters criticize the university's reliance on outsourcing security services, while highlighting broader concerns around privatization and labor conditions.
Last Accessed: 11 July 2020
URL: <https://www.facebook.com/1554073211534838/videos/1638330303109128/>

VIDEOGRAPHY



Video 23, We are holding

Title: We are holding senior management of security outsourcing company G4S hostage

User: UCT: Rhodes Must Fall (FB 17,057 followers)

Upload Date: 21 October 2015

Location and Date of Event: UCT campus, Cape Town; 21 October 2015

Number of Views: FB 3,300

Duration: 0:40 minutes

Type of Video: Activist

Technical Features: Low audio-visual quality, unnot edited

Description: The video captures senior G4S staff addressing a crowd of protesters in response to demands raised during the #EndOutsourcing campaign. The exchange reflects tensions around the university's use of outsourced security services and the broader labor concerns voiced by the demonstrators.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.facebook.com/1554073211534838/videos/1638333063108852/>



Video24 We have SHUT the university down. ##endoutsourcing

Title: We have SHUT the university down. ##endoutsourcing

User: UCT: Rhodes Must Fall (FB 17,057 followers)

Upload Date: 21 October 2015

Location and Date of Event: UCT campus, Cape Town; 21 October 2015

Number of Views: FB 1,800

Duration: 1:08 minutes

Type of Video: Activist

Technical Features: Low audio-visual quality, unedited

Description: The video shows how students and workers occupy a G4S building on the UCT campus to demand an end to the outsourcing of staff.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.facebook.com/1554073211534838/videos/1638334746442017/>



Video25 Azania will rise ##endoutsourcing

Title: Azania will rise ##endoutsourcing
User: UCT: Rhodes Must Fall (FB 17,057 followers)
Upload Date: 21 October 2015
Location and Date of Event: On a bus, Cape Town; 21 October 2015
Number of Views: FB 2,400
Duration: 0:13 minutes
Type of Video: Activist
Technical Features: Low audio-visual quality, not edited
Description: The video captures student protesters chanting aboard a bus heading to a protest march.
Last Accessed: 11 July 2020
URL: <https://www.facebook.com/1554073211534838/videos/1638346009774224/>



Video26 [untitled]

Title: [untitled]
User: UCT: Rhodes Must Fall (FB 17,057 followers)
Upload Date: 21 October 2015
Location and Date of Event: Center, Cape Town; 21 October 2020
Number of Views: FB 2,900
Duration: 0:10 minutes
Type of Video: Activist
Technical Features: Low audio-visual quality, not edited
Description: The video shows a protest march where activists chant the slogan »Fees Must Fall!« It depicts the same protest as in videos 16, 17, 18, and 19.
Last Accessed: 11 July 2020
URL: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1638354266440065>

VIDEOGRAPHY



Video27 Urgently plenary to discuss the arrests of our comrades

Title: Urgently plenary to discuss the arrests of our comrades

User: UCT: Rhodes Must Fall (FB 17,057 followers)

Upload Date: 21 October

Location and Date of Event: UCT campus, Cape Town; 21 October 2015

Number of Views: FB 2,100

Duration: 0:11 minutes

Type of Video: Activist

Technical Features: Low audio-visual quality, not edited

Description: The video shows the plenary meeting of student activists that followed the protest outside the Houses of Parliament. The goal of the assembly was to reach a collective decision on how to respond to the arrest of students during the march.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.facebook.com/RhodesMustFall/videos/1638469733095185>



Video28 Luister

Title: Luister

User: Contraband Cape Town (YT 966 subscribers)

Upload Date: 20 August 2015

Location and Date of Event: Stellenbosch University, Western Cape; 2015

Number of Views: YT 409,204

Duration: 34:50 minutes

Type of Video: Documentary film

Technical Features: High audio-visual quality, edited, no voice-over

Description: The documentary presents interviews with students from Stellenbosch University in the Western Cape. As stated in its YouTube description: »Luister is a film about Afrikaans as a language and a culture. It is a film about the continuing racism that exists within a divided society. It is a film about a group of students whose stories have been ignored. Luister is the Afrikaans word for »Listen.« The documentary has received a significantly higher number of views, setting it apart from most other videos in the Cape Town video sample.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sF3rTBQTQk4&t=44s>



Video29 service delivery protest cape town

Title: service delivery protest cape town

User: Galaga (YT 0 subscribers)

Upload Date: 24 June 2015

Location and Date of Event: Central Business District, Cape Town; date unknown

Number of Views: YT 13

Duration: 0:41 minutes

Type of Video: Witness

Technical Features: Low audio-visual quality, unedited

Description: A short video by an eyewitness shows a group of protesters running down a street. The video's description on YouTube summarizes the footage: »ANC members protesting in Cape Town, South Africa, who were in town to support an ANC councillor that [sic] was being prosecuted in court for [a] series of cases involving the dumping of faeces.«

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jKaHolUvh_8



Video30 Service delivery protest in Cape Town...at the Civic Centre 05.02.14

Title: Service delivery protest in Cape Town...at the Civic Centre 05.02.14

User: Kenny Nagel (YT 22 subscribers)

Upload Date: 5 February 2014

Location and Date of Event: Civic Centre, Central Business District, Cape Town; 5 February 2014

Number of Views: YT 91

Duration: 7:04 minutes

Type of Video: Witness

Technical Features: Low audio-visual quality, unedited

Description: The video is filmed from the steps outside the Civic Centre, the municipal headquarters of the City of Cape Town. It documents a protest demanding improved service delivery in the city's marginalized neighborhoods. The camera pans from one side to the other, showing a large crowd of singing protesters.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WKcJ-RWeCck&t=190s>

VIDEOGRAPHY



Video31 Women's Day

Title: Women's Day

User: Fire Jungle, formerly Earth Huub (YT 21 subscribers)

Upload Date: 27 September 2016

Location and Date of Event: Central Business District, Cape Town; 9 August 2016

Number of Views: YT 9

Duration: 2:23 minutes

Type of Video: Activist

Technical Features: Medium audio-visual quality, edited

Description: The video shows the annual women's march in central Cape Town. It includes short interviews, highlights from a speech, and impressions from the protest in a montage.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LqWRkBcmHVE>



Video32 we will protect the only home we have

Title: » We Will Protect the Only Home We Have at This Institution by ANY MEANS NECESSARY. MAKULIWE 🙌 «

User: UCT: Rhodes Must Fall (FB 17,057 followers)

Upload Date: 16 February 2016

Location and Date of Event: #Shackville, UCT Upper Campus, Cape Town; 15 February 2016

Number of Views: FB 3,000

Duration: 0:22 minutes

Type of Video: Activist

Technical Features: Low audio-visual quality, unedited

Description: This short video shows student activists toy-toying at a protest rally at #Shackville.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1676586512616840>



Video33 UCT right now

Title: »Right Now There Will Be No Forced Removals This Time Izwe Lethu«

User: UCT: Rhodes Must Fall (FB 17,057 followers)

Upload Date: 16 February 2016

Location and Date of Event: #Shackville, UCT Upper Campus, Cape Town; 15 February 2016

Number of Views: FB 12,000

Duration: 0:10 minutes

Type of Video: Activist

Technical Features: Low audio-visual quality, unedited

Description: A short video pans across activists assembled around a fire at a #Shackville protest.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1676589625949862>



Video34 as we demonstrate, we welcome

Title: »as we demonstrate, we welcome any and all black students to #Shackville. dumela, molweni, san'bonani, ma'Afrika 🙌«

User: UCT: Rhodes Must Fall (FB 17,057 followers)

Upload Date: 16 February 2016

Location and Date of Event: #Shackville, UCT Upper Campus, Cape Town; 15 February 2016

Number of Views: FB 25,000

Duration: 0:36 minutes

Type of Video: Activist

Technical Features: Low audio-visual quality, unedited

Description: This video shows toy-toying at a #Shackville protest.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1676150165993808>

VIDEOGRAPHY



Video35 manifestação pacífica no dia 28 de março na Central do Brasil

Title: manifestação pacífica no dia 28 de março na Central do Brasil

User: Thiago Oliveira (YT 248 subscribers)

Upload Date: 29 March 2014

Location and Date of Event: Center of Rio de Janeiro; 28 March 2014

Number of Views: YT 121

Duration: 1:12 minutes

Type of Video: Witness

Technical Features: Medium audio-visual quality, unedited

Description: The video shows school pupils marching towards Rio de Janeiro's Legislative Assembly (ALERJ) to commemorate the killing of Edson Luís in 1968 and to demand greater investment in public education.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=re2j69JfzKE>



Video36 covardia e prisões arbitrárias da PM com os ESTUDANTES na manifestação do dia 28 de março de 2014

Title: covardia e prisões arbitrárias da PM com os ESTUDANTES na manifestação do dia 28 de março de 2014

User: Thiago Oliveira (YT 248 subscribers)

Upload Date: 29 March 2014

Location and Date of Event: Legislative Assembly of the State of Rio de Janeiro (ALERJ); 28 March 2014

Number of Views: YT 158

Duration: 4:37 minutes

Type of Video: Witness

Technical Features: Medium audio-visual quality, unedited

Description: The video, which shows a protest on the steps outside ALERJ, documents the arrest of an activist that causes an escalation of tensions at the previously peaceful march.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EgF8-o6UWOY>



Video37 Ato do Dia do Estudante Combativo termina com cenas de violência policial no Rio

Title: Ato do Dia do Estudante Combativo termina com cenas de violência policial no Rio

User: Jornal A Nova Democracia (YT 56,700 subscribers)

Upload Date: 29 March 2014

Location and Date of Event: Legislative Assembly of the State of Rio de Janeiro (ALERJ), 28 March 2014

Number of Views: YT 4,653

Duration: 4:16 minutes

Type of Video: Activist

Technical Features: High audio-visual quality, edited, voice-over

Description: The video contextualizes a 2014 protest march by first recounting the story of the death of the student Edson Luís, who was assassinated by police officers on 28 March 1968 during the military dictatorship. His killing in a restaurant in the Leblon neighborhood in Rio sparked outrage and mass protests. The rest of the video, which documents the arrest of activists at the 2014 protest, is very similar to the footage in Thiago Oliveira's video (Vid. 36).

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JE1LZAeocEA>



Video38 Ato de inauguração do Maracanã

Title: Ato de inauguração do Maracanã na Copa dos Protestos – 15/06/2014

User: Centro de Mídia Independente – CMI-Rio (YT 1,840 subscribers)

Upload Date: 17 June 2014

Location and Date of Event: Central train station and surrounding streets, Rio de Janeiro; 15 June 2014

Number of Views: YT 172

Duration: 8:25 minutes

Type of Video: Activist

Technical Features: High audio-visual quality, unstable camera handling, edited

Description: The video of the protest march against the start of the FIFA World Cup documents how tensions escalate during the course of the day. Protesters explain their reasons for taking to the streets in interview clips.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QKEfWcOQ13c>

VIDEOGRAPHY



Video39 Policiais tiram arma

Title: Policiais disparam tiros de munição letal contra protesto no Rio de Janeiro

User: Jornal A Nova Democracia (YT 56,700 subscribers)

Upload Date: 15 June 2014

Location and Date of Event: Center of Rio de Janeiro; 15 June 2014

Number of Views: YT 78,686

Duration: 1:33 minutes

Type of Video: Activist

Technical Features: Medium audio-visual quality, edited

Description: This short video records how a police officer on a motorbike fires his pistol at protesters. The video then cuts to a scene in which another police officer in plain clothes threatens activists with a pistol after being exposed as a police officer. The officer's escape is documented in such a way so as to compile evidence for a potential court case: for example, the videographer captures the license plate of the escape car.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVoxW5uw4og>



Video40 Civil saca arma

Title: Civil saca arma de fogo e atira durante Argentina X Bósnia (Maracanã, RJ)

User: Mídia Independente Coletiva (YT 7,960 subscribers; FB 131,170 followers)

Upload Date: 15 June 2014

Location and Date of Event: Center of Rio de Janeiro; 15 June 2014

Number of Views: YT 1,355,497; FB 656

Duration: 1:21 minutes

Type of Video: Activist

Technical Features: High audio-visual quality, edited

Description: The short video shows a verbal confrontation between the videographer and an armed plainclothes police officer. This footage is among the most well-known from the protests in Rio de Janeiro against the 2014 FIFA World Cup and has become the most viewed of all the videos posted by the MIC-Mariachi collective.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HX4uj15TsCY>

<https://www.facebook.com/midiaindependentecoletiva/videos/369368316585950>



Video41 Mobilização Internacional Indígena

Title: Rio de Janeiro-RJ: Mobilização Internacional Indígena: Dia da Resistência
User: Centro de Mídia Independente – CMI-Rio (YT 1,840 subscribers)
Upload Date: 21 April 2015
Location and Date of Event: Aldeia Maracá' nã (Maracanã), Rio de Janeiro ; 19 April 2015
Number of Views: YT 126
Duration: 20:53 minutes
Type of Video: Activist
Technical Features: High audio-visual quality, unedited
Description: The video shows a protest marking the International Day of Indigenous Resistance. It includes extended clips from interviews with participating activists and speeches held at the protest.
Last Accessed: 11 July 2020
URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bkUjAOIEyUI>



Video42 (des)ocupação dos ex-moradores

Title: Rio de Janeiro-RJ: (des)ocupação dos ex-moradores da CEDAE
User: Centro de Mídia Independente – CMI-Rio (YT 1,840 subscribers)
Upload Date: 15 April 2015
Location and Date of Event: Avenida Rui Barbosa nº 170, Flamengo, Rio de Janeiro; 14 April 2015
Number of Views: YT 197
Duration: 16:27 minutes
Type of Video: Activist
Technical Features: High-audio visual quality, edited
Description: The video documents the eviction of residents from the CEDAE building in Rio de Janeiro's South Zone. It seeks to prove, through visuals and explanatory text, that a police officer threw a stone at protesters. The same officer and his colleagues later attempted to justify the arrest of activists by claiming that the protesters had attacked them by throwing objects.
Last Accessed: 11 July 2020
URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bdzpvOih1Cw>

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Video43 ARGENTINA v BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Title: ARGENTINA v BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA (2:1) – 2014 FIFA World Cup™

User: FIFATV (YT 8,810,000 subscribers)

Upload Date: 18 April 2018

Location and Date of Event: Maracanã stadium, Rio de Janeiro ; 15 June 2014

Number of Views: YT 2,095,446

Duration: 2:09 minutes

Type of Video: Other

Technical Features: High audio-visual quality, edited

Description: The match summary of the FIFA World Cup soccer match between Argentina and Bosnia-Herzegovina attracted more views than any other video discussed in this dissertation. The match took place at the same time that police were firing rubber bullets and live ammunition at protesters (see Vids. 38, 39, and 40).

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hYXjfHE-_Ow



Video44 #Outsourced

Title: #Outsourced

User: Rhodes Must Fall (YT 284 subscribers)

Upload Date: 7 October 2015

Location and Date of Event: Cape Town; 2015

Number of Views: YT 10,352

Duration: 42:10 minutes

Type of Video: Documentary

Technical Features: High audio-visual quality, edited

Description: The documentary film #Outsourced was part of the RMF movement's campaign against the outsourcing of staff at UCT – particularly those in low-paid positions – and their resulting lack of social security benefits.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-pu_pm5g3Ao



Video45 Brizola X Globo

Title: Brizola X Globo

User: Mídia Independente Coletiva (YT 7,960 subscribers; FB 131,170 followers)

Upload Date: 9 September 2015

Location and Date of Event: Rio de Janeiro; 1960–2013

Number of Views: -

Duration: 7:04 minutes

Type of Video: Activist

Technical Features: Montage of audio-visuals

Description: The short video documentary recounts the history of the conflict between politician Leonel Brizola and Roberto Marinho's Globo network. It explores several scandals—the Proconsult case in 1992 and the NEC case in 1986—to show how Globo actively participated in manipulating public opinion against Brizola. The video was repeatedly blocked on YouTube and Facebook.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oG6AKcAANVM>

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=472102082979239>



Video46 [Espelho] [Original censurado]

Title: [Espelho] [Original censurado] William Bonner é corrigido ao vivo [via @Rafucko]

User: Eli Vieira, original by Rafucko (YT 12,900 subscribers)

Upload Date: 18 February 2014

Location and Date of Event: Brazil; 2014

Number of Views: YT 781,869

Duration: 5:08 minutes

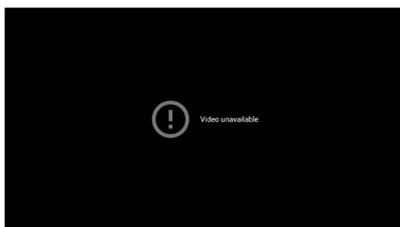
Type of Video: Satire

Technical Features: High audio-visual quality, edited

Description: The satirical video by Rafucko mocks Globo news presenter William Bonner. After being blocked on YouTube, mirrored copies were subsequently posted by Eli Vieira and Monalisa Moreira on YouTube, and by Rafael P on Vimeo.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z63YmBCZnkU>



Video47 A prisão de Arthur Couto

Title: A prisão de Arthur Couto : o que realmente aconteceu

User: -

Upload Date: -

Location and Date of Event: -

Number of Views: -

Duration: -

Type of Video: -

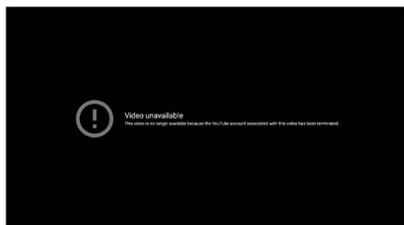
Technical Features: -

Description: The video has been blocked. A mirrored version of the video is available:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=euDsSDVeIU>

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <http://youtu.be/duAYD3N4mm4>



Video48 Rede Globo mente sobre protesto

Title: Rede Globo mente sobre protesto

User: -

Upload Date: -

Location and Date of Event: -

Number of Views: -

Duration: -

Type of Video: -

Technical Features: -

Description: The video has been blocked.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <http://youtu.be/8FZM5mLvsOc>



Video49 Exaltação e propaganda

Title: Exaltação e propaganda da Ditadura Militar na Rede Globo (1975)

User: Fabrício Augusto Souza Gomes (YT 1,510 subscribers)

Upload Date: 7 July 2011

Location and Date of Event: Brazil; 1963–1975

Number of Views: YT 455,083

Duration: 49:27 minutes

Type of Video: Documentary

Technical Features: Medium audio-visual quality, black-and-white footage, edited

Description: The Globo special program *Amaral Netto, o repórter* (1975) »praises the political and social events in Brazil from 1963 to 1975 and the actions of each president after the 1964 coup,« as stated in the YouTube description contextualizing the upload.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YGiQXNfozeQ>



Video50 The video that Woodstock cops arrested me over

Title: The video that Woodstock cops arrested me over

User: Eduard Grebe (YT 0 subscribers)

Upload Date: 23 February 2016

Location and Date of Event: Woodstock, Cape Town; 3 January 2016

Number of Views: YT 153

Duration: 0:28 minutes

Type of Video: Witness

Technical Features: Low audio-visual quality, not edited

Description: The video shows, in the words of its YouTube description, how police officers were »choking and brutalizing someone they were arresting.« The videographer was arrested after filming the footage. Both the video and his YouTube channel were later deleted.

Last Accessed: 17 November 2017

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BjOm6w63gvM&app=desktop>

VIDEOGRAPHY



Video51 More cape town police brutality

Title: More cape town police brutality – March 07, 2014

User: Grantzax (YT 2,660 subscribers)

Upload Date: 6 March 2014

Location and Date of Event: Cape Town; 6 March 2014

Number of Views: YT 208,064

Duration: 2:02 minutes

Type of Video: Witness

Technical Features: Low audio-visual quality, unedited

Description: The video shows police abusing their power by forcing a Black man to strip in public. He is then brutally beaten before being arrested. Mirrored copies of the video were posted by users such as Life with George and BBC news on YouTube.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ntdXgRcC9SY>



Video52 Police brutality

Title: Police brutality – Immigrant dies at the hands of police

User: eNCA (YT 669,000 subscribers)

Upload Date: 27 February 2013

Location and Date of Event: Daveyton, Gauteng Province, South Africa; 26 February 2013

Number of Views: YT 285,825

Duration: 7:05 minutes

Type of Video: Witness / Journalist

Technical Features: Mixed audio-visual quality, edited

Description: The television news report by eNCA features original »cellphone video footage« of the killing of Mido Macia, who was dragged to his death by a police vehicle that pulled him over the asphalt en route to the next police station. Other videos showing the original eyewitness footage include Multimedia LIVE on YouTube and The Telegraph on YouTube.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aikwhsk1HZE>



Video53 Polícia Carioca forja

Title: Polícia Carioca forja novamente mais um tiroteio e mata jovem no Morro da Providência.

User: Revolta Impopular (YT 140 subscribers)

Upload Date: 29 September 2015

Location and Date of Event: Morro da Providência, Rio de Janeiro; 22 September 2015

Number of Views: YT 10,360

Duration: 2:34 minutes

Type of Video: Witness

Technical Features: Low audi-visual quality, unedited

Description: The video shows how UPP military police officers staged a crime scene. After killing 17-year-old Eduardo Felipe Santos Victor, the officers placed a pistol in the hands of the deceased and fired it, intending to later claim that they had been attacked by Eduardo. Another version of the video was uploaded by the newspaper O Dia on YouTube.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=erNMIws3OUY>



Video54 Revolução não cai do céu

Title: REVOLUÇÃO NÃO CAI DO CÉU

User: Mídia Independente Coletiva (YT 7,960 subscribers; FB 131,170 followers)

Upload Date: 14 October 2013

Location and Date of Event: Cinelândia, Rio de Janeiro; 7 October 2013

Number of Views: YT 11,086

Duration: 12:26 minutes

Type of Video: Activist

Technical Features: High audio-visual quality, edited

Description: The video shows a protest by the Black Profs movement, which followed violent police attacks on striking teachers at another protest held a few days earlier. It connects the two protests in its narrative by arguing that »there would be no vandalism if people didn't feel vandalized.«

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8M8v7jVNP&t=3s>



Video55 Professores à Palmatória

Title: PROFESSORES À PALMATÓRIA »Aquilo que a televisão não mostrou«
User: Mídia Independente Coletiva (YT 7,960 subscribers; FB 131,170 followers)
Upload Date: 3 October 2013
Location and Date of Event: Cinelândia, Rio de Janeiro; 30 September and 1 October 2013
Number of Views: YT 101,687
Duration: 17:40 minutes
Type of Video: Activist
Technical Features: High audio-visual quality, edited
Description: The video documents violent clashes between protesters and the police. Pupils and teachers, who had been demonstrating for several days, were met with a heavy-handed police response. A bystander repeatedly remarks, »Even during the dictatorship we didn't have this [level of violent policing of protests]« (15:44) – a claim echoed throughout the interviews in the video.
Last Accessed: 11 July 2020
URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MUtkigfZY0&t=547s>



Video56 Ato contra o aumento das passagens

Title: Ato contra o aumento das passagens - 06_02_2014
User: Centro de Mídia Independente – CMI-Rio (YT 1,840 subscribers)
Upload Date: 11 February 2014
Location and Date of Event: Central train station and Lapa, Rio de Janeiro; 6 February 2014
Number of Views: YT 579
Duration: 9:46 minutes
Type of Video: Activist
Technical Features: High audio-visual quality, edited
Description: The video documents a protest at the Central train station in Rio de Janeiro, where demonstrators occupied the turnstiles in an effort to make public transport 'free'. Police responded by violently clearing the station. The video focuses on the victims who were injured during the operation.
Last Accessed: 11 July 2020
URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GhkAf9PCYXE>



Video57 Violência policial e resistência

Title: Violência policial e resistência popular no 5º ato contra o aumento das passagens no Rio

User: Jornal A Nova Democracia (YT 56,700 subscribers)

Upload Date: 6 February 2014

Location and Date of Event: Central train station and Lapa, Rio de Janeiro; 6 February 2014

Number of Views: YT 53,744

Duration: 5:37 minutes

Type of Video: Activist

Technical Features: High audio-visual quality, edited

Description: The video documents the protest against the increase in public transport fares on 6 February 2014. After police cleared the Central train station (see Video 56), cameraman Santiago Andrade was struck by fireworks set off by protesters and sustained fatal head injuries. The video captures the moments immediately following the incident. It also documents other acts of violence, such as police firing tear gas at a person with disabilities (3:14–3:22).

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SwwP078UF-Q>



Video58 Segment of Rhodes Must Fall press conference

Title: Segment of Rhodes Must Fall press conference currently taking place.

User: UCT: Rhodes Must Fall (FB 17,057 followers)

Upload Date: 18 February 2016

Location and Date of Event: UCT Upper Campus, Cape Town; 18 February 2016

Number of Views: FB 2,400

Duration: 1:31 minutes

Type of Video: Activist

Technical Features: Low audio-visual quality, unedited

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

Description: The video records part of a press conference organized by RMF activists on the UCT campus. A student reads a statement addressing common conceptions of violence and how these are strategically used to delegitimize the movement and its members, while reinforcing »white privilege.«

URL: <https://www.facebook.com/RhodesMustFall/videos/1677265105882314/?v=1677265105882314>

VIDEOGRAPHY



Video59 Student protests have flared up again at UCT

Title: Student protests have flared up again at UCT

User: eNCA (YT 669,000 subscribers)

Upload Date: 15 February 2016

Location and Date of Event: UCT Upper Campus, Cape Town; 15 February 2016

Number of Views: YT 4,071

Duration: 1:38 minutes

Type of Video: Journalist

Technical Features: High audio-visual quality, edited, voice-over narration by reporter

Description: This television news report shows RMF activists protesting the shortage of accommodation for UCT students. It outlines the students' demands and features interviews with RMF activists Zola Shokane and Pat Dlamini.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rcilb8b7RDQ>



Video60 Police disperse #RhodesMust-Fall protesters

Title: Police disperse #RhodesMustFall protesters with stun grenades and rubber bullets

User: Eyewitness News (YT 229,000 subscribers)

Upload Date: 16 February 2016

Location and Date of Event: UCT Upper Campus and Rondebosch, Cape Town, 16 February 2016

Number of Views: YT 19,504

Duration: 2:51 minutes

Type of Video: Journalist

Technical Features: High audio-visual quality, edited, voice-over narration by reporter

Description: This news report by Eyewitness News journalist Thomas Holder documents the protest surrounding the demolition of #Shackville on UCT's Upper Campus, as well as the subsequent demonstrations in Rondebosch and at student residences. The video closely resembles the Chronicle report by Shaun Swingler (see Video 61), with the key difference being that Holder appears to have arrived on the scene earlier. His footage was shared on the UCT: Rhodes Must Fall Facebook page.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e_tCxO-Pfao&t=1s



Video61 Stun grenades and rubber bullets

Title: Stun grenades and rubber bullets fired on UCT student protesters

User: Chronicle Digital (1,700 subscribers)

Upload Date: 16 February 2016

Location and Date of Event: UCT Upper Campus and Rondebosch, Cape Town; 16 February 2016

Number of Views: YT 21,520

Duration: 2:34 minutes

Type of Video: Journalist

Technical Features: High audio-visual quality, edited, voice-over narration by reporter

Description: This video, produced by Shaun Swingler for the Chronicle, documents the protests surrounding the demolition of #Shackville at UCT. It recounts how police and university security first »demolished a shack« on campus, after which a UCT vehicle and a Jammie Shuttle »were set alight, allegedly by protesters.« The protest then continued on Rondebosch Main Road. These events are narrated and contextualized by reporter Shaun Swingler.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i8RE9ZKTHGM&t=52s>



Video62 Uprising of Hangberg

Title: Uprising of Hangberg

User: Hangberg2010 (7 subscribers)

Upload Date: 26 October 2010

Location and Date of Event: Hangberg, Hout Bay, Cape Town; 21 September 2010

Number of Views: YT 4,109

Duration: 6:00 minutes

Type of Video: Activist (trailer for documentary film)

Technical Features: High audio-visual quality, edited

Description: This is the trailer for the documentary film The Uprising of Hangberg (see Video 63). The Uprising portrays a local campaign against the demolition of houses allegedly built »illegally« above a firebreak. The trailer opens with the story of three victims of police violence, all of whom were blinded by rubber bullets fired directly at them during a protest against the demolitions. This narrative connects to a second storyline – the cause of the protest – namely, claims by then Western Cape Premier Helen Zille that only »unoccupied structures« would be destroyed. Interviewees challenge this narrative by pointing to their demolished homes.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bRjMB3znA2E>

VIDEOGRAPHY



Video63 The uprising of Hangberg

Title: THE UPRISING OF HANGBERG [full documentary]

User: African Noise Foundation (Vimeo 749 followers)

Upload Date: 17 October 2014

Location and Date of Event: Hangberg, Hout Bay, Cape Town; 2010

Number of Views: Not stated

Duration: 86:48 minutes

Type of Video: Documentary film

Technical Features: High audio-visual quality, edited

Description: This documentary film traces the history of the grassroots campaign against evictions in the Hangberg community. It has been publicly available on Vimeo since 2014.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://vimeo.com/109263953>



Video64 Hout Bay protest

Title: Hout Bay protest

User: Peter Michaels (YT 377 subscribers)

Upload Date: 13 September 2017

Location and Date of Event: Hangberg, Hout Bay, Cape Town; 10 September 2017

Number of Views: YT 13,927

Duration: 2:46 minutes

Type of Video: Activist

Technical Features: High audio-visual quality, little editing

Description: This video documents, in graphic detail, the police attack on 14-year-old Ona Dubula, who was shot at close range with rubber bullets during a protest in Hangberg. It captures the moment he is struck, tumbling to the side of the road, spitting blood, and attempting to remove a rubber bullet lodged inside his mouth.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wxd9udyH2RY&bpctr=1589464278>



Video65 Service Delivery for HB

Title: Service Delivery for HB

User: Peter Michaels (YT 377 subscribers)

Upload Date: 13 September 2017

Location and Date of Event: Hangberg, Hout Bay, Cape Town; 2017

Number of Views: YT 188

Duration: 1:31 minutes

Type of Video: Activist

Technical Features: High audio-visual quality, edited, background music

Description: The video shows an elderly woman standing in front of a burning barricade. As children play in the background, she voices her frustration over the lack of services provided to the Hangberg community.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QTVs9qLYVqM>



Video66 hout bay police brutality

Title: hout bay police brutality

User: Peter Michaels (YT 377 subscribers)

Upload Date: 12 August 2018

Location and Date of Event: Hout Bay, Cape Town; 2018

Number of Views: YT 1,347

Duration: 1:49 minutes

Type of Video: Activist

Technical Features: High audio-visual quality, edited, background music

Description: The video shows footage of burning industrial buildings, accompanied by a rap song about Hout Bay in Afrikaans. It concludes with a montage of further scenes of destruction. The final image features flames from a fire, over which the text »Stop police brutality« is superimposed.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=01gShzxrZ_s



Video67 IY Imizamo Yethu Protest 2017

Title: IY Imizamo Yethu Protest 2017

User: Peter Michaels (YT 377 subscribers)

Upload Date: 5 July 2017

Location and Date of Event: Imizamo Yethu, Hout Bay, Cape Town; 2017

Number of Views: YT 1,588

Duration: 2:33 minutes

Type of Video: Activist

Technical Features: High audio-visual quality, edited

Description: The video shows clashes between protesters and police in Imizamo Yethu, a marginalized area of Hout Bay.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_8ScvDPR9IE&list=PLO08jA_pnRfMqb-UHDUGXvrVtrQhEHyDe&index=3&t=os



Video68 Policiais executam 5 jovens

Title: Policiais executam 5 jovens e tentam forjar auto de resistência

User: Mídia Independente Coletiva (YT 7,960 subscribers; FB 131,170 followers)

Upload Date: 30 November 2015

Location and Date of Event: Morro da Lagartixa, Rio de Janeiro; 28 November 2015

Number of Views: YT 60,763; FB 2,000

Duration: 0:44 minutes

Type of Video: Witness

Technical Features: Low audio-visual quality, unedited

Description: This witness video, reportedly filmed by a local resident, shows a crime scene where five teenagers were killed in their car by police officers, who fired 111 bullets at them. The video was sent to the MIC collective, which uploaded it and reported in detail on the incident on its website.

Last Accessed: 11 July 2020

URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJxotrcHLZY>

<https://www.facebook.com/midiaindependentecoletiva/videos/502210569968390>

10.2 List of Interviews

The list of interviews includes only those interviews that have been recorded. The short description of the interviews characterizes the interviewees superficially to safeguard their anonymity.

Int. 1, Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 16 September 2015

Narrative Interview with activist and artist actively participating in Jornadas de Junho protests.

Int. 2, Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 30 September 2015

Interview with researcher and activist of the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ).

Int. 3, Video Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 13 October 2015

Narrative Interview with video activist of MIC and independent journalist, who is a key figure in the media activist movement in Rio de Janeiro since 2013.

Int. 4, Video Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 14 October 2015

Second narrative interview with video activist of MIC and independent journalist.

Int. 5, Journalist, Rio de Janeiro, 16 October 2015

Semi-structured interview with editor-in chief and journalist of the *Jornal A Nova Democracia*.

Int. 6, Video Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 23 October 2015

Third narrative with video activist of MIC and independent journalist.

Int. 7, Video Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 24 October 2015

Semi-structured interview with video activist of CMI who is closely connected to the inner circle of media activists in Rio de Janeiro.

Int. 8, Video Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 28 October 2015

Fourth recorded narrative Interview with video activist of MIC and independent journalist.

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

Semi-structured interview with the speaker for the Union of Journalists at the office of the *Sindicato dos Jornalistas Profissionais do Município do Rio de Janeiro*.

Int. 10, Video Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 15 November 2015

Short interview with video activist, who has been active as media activist for four decades in Rio de Janeiro. Recorded at the »Marcha das Vadias« protest.

Int. 11, Video Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 15 November 2015

Short interview with independent video activist at the »Marcha das Vadias« protest.

Int. 12, Union Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 24 November 2015

Short interview with speaker of the Unions of Public Workers at their protest in Flamengo, Rio de Janeiro.

Int. 13, MIC and Mariachi Focus Group, Rio de Janeiro, 25 November 2015

Focus group interview with five members of the video activist collectives of MIC and Mariachi.

Int. 14, Video Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 8 December 2015

Semi-structured interview with video artist and public figure from media activist scene in Rio de Janeiro.

Int. 15, Video Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 8 January 2016

Short interview with members of small video activist collective. Recorded during a protest march against the price hike of public transport fees.

Int. 16, Community Organizer, Rio de Janeiro, 11 January 2016

Semi-structured interview with ethnographic researcher and community organizer from a favela in Rio de Janeiro's North Zone.

Int. 17, Video Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 14 January 2016

Semi-structured interview with a journalist of *Jornal A Nova Democracia* and key figure in Rio de Janeiro's video activist scene.

Int. 18, Community Organizer, Cape Town, 15 July 2016

Narrative interview with a local community organizer in Woodstock, Cape Town.

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

Narrative interview with artist and activist engaged in the Rhodes Must Fall movement.

Int. 20, Documentary Filmmaker, Cape Town, 29 July 2016

Semi-structured interview with activist and independent documentary filmmaker, collaborating with communities in the Cape Flats.

Int. 21, RMF-Activist, Cape Town, 2 August 2016

Semi-structured interview with artist and activist engaged in the Rhodes Must Fall movement. Second recorded interview.

Int. 22, Community Organizer, Cape Town, 3 August 2016

Semi-structured interview with researcher and activist at the University in Cape Town, who engages amongst others in building audio-visual community archives in the Cape Flats.

Int. 23, Person Without Home, Cape Town, 4 August 2016

Unplanned interview with a person without a home, residing around Station Deck public transport hub in the center of Cape Town.

Int. 24, Journalist Student, Johannesburg, 8 August 2016

Unplanned interview with student at the film school and employee at SABC.

Int. 25, Videographer, Cape Town, 9 August 2016

Short interview with independent videographer at the Women's March in Cape Town.

Int. 26, NGO Activist, Cape Town, 9 August 2016

Interview with videographer for an NGO at the Women's March in Cape Town.

Int. 27, Videographers, Cape Town, 9 August 2016

Semi-structured interview with two independent videographers after their work of filming at the Women's March in Cape Town.

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

Semi-structured interview with Reclaim the City activist and videographer.

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

Semi-structured interview with activist and organizer of the Rhodes Must Fall media team.

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

Second semi-structured interview with activist and organizer of the Rhodes Must Fall media team.

Int. 31, Video Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 22 August 2016

Semi-structured interview with independent female video activist about experiences of working individually and ›macho‹ cultures within media activist scene.

Int. 32, Video Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 25 August 2016

Semi-structured interview video activist associated with MIC, closely connected to other media activists and actively filming in Rio de Janeiro over four decades.

Int. 33, Focus Group Video Activists, Rio de Janeiro, 25 August 2016

Focus-group interview with two young, and female video activist of MIC, lining in and reporting from favelas.

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

Semi-structured interview video activist of the media activist collective Carranca about his experiences of experiences of collaborating with Mídia Ninja.

Int. 35, School Teacher, Rio de Janeiro, 31 August 2016

Semi-structured interview with public school teacher organizing strikes in collaboration with her pupils.

Int. 36, Hactivist, Rio de Janeiro, 31 August 2016

Semi-structured interview digital activist present at an information event about media activism at the occupied public school in Rio de Janeiro's North Zone.

Int. 37, Video Activist, Rio de Janeiro, 2 September 2016

Semi-structured interview with professional photojournalist and member of MIC.

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

Semi-structured interview with ethnographic researcher and member of MIC about media activism in Rio de Janeiro.

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

Semi-structured interview with a community organizer and video activist from a prominent favela in Rio de Janeiro's North Zone.

Int. 40, Documentary Filmmaker, Cape Town, 8 February 2018

Semi-structured interview with independent documentary filmmaker from Cape Town.

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

Semi-structured interview with member of NGO Ndifuni Ukwazi, who has been active in anti-eviction campaigns in Cape Town.

Int. 42, NGO Video Activist, New York, 31 July 2018

Semi-structured interview with senior member of the NGO Witness at their office in Brooklyn.

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