

A Panorama of Brazilian documentary film activism in the 2010s¹

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ENG Abstract. This article analyzes Brazilian documentaries from the last decade, investigating their narrative and visual strategies and relating them to emerging video activism practices. Referred to here as ‘documentary cine-activism’, this set of films belongs to the context of militant cinema, updated by contemporary social activism and new image broadcasting technologies via the internet. It is divided into two trends: the first one resulting from the events of June 2013, which street demonstrations are elaborated imagetically, questions the political disputes that occurred through these images. The second trend refers to the developments of the aforementioned event, focusing on the student strikes of 2015 and the 2016 coup d’état, in which Workers’ Party (PT) President Dilma Rousseff – in office since 2011, and reelected in 2014 – was ousted. The conclusion examines how new technologies are transforming militant cinema, emphasizing the individual perspectives and narrative approaches of political actors directly involved in the events. It explores the diverse ways in which these actors engage with and recollect archival images, contrasting their use with hegemonic media, thereby integrating them into an active political strategy.

Keywords: Brazilian documentary films; broadcasting technologies; June 2013; militant cinema; video-activism.

ESP Un panorama del cineactivismo documental brasileño en la década de 2010

ESP Resumen. Este artículo analiza documentales brasileños de la última década, investigando sus estrategias narrativas y visuales y relacionando estas últimas con prácticas emergentes de videoactivismo. Nombrado en este caso como ‘cineactivismo documental’, este conjunto de películas pertenece al contexto del cine militante, actualizado por el activismo social contemporáneo y las nuevas tecnologías de emisión de imágenes a través de internet. Se divide en dos tendencias: la primera, resultante de los eventos de junio de 2013, donde las manifestaciones callejeras se elaboraron imagéticamente, cuestionando las disputas políticas que ocurrieron a través de estas imágenes. La segunda tendencia se refiere a los desarrollos del evento mencionado, centrándose en las huelgas estudiantiles del 2015 y en el golpe de Estado que, en 2016, destituyó a Dilma Rousseff, quien gobernó Brasil desde 2011 y fue reelegida como presidenta por el Partido de los Trabajadores. La conclusión discute el modo en que las nuevas tecnologías están actualizando el cine militante, destacando perspectivas individuales y formas de narrar momentos históricos.

Palabras clave: cine militante; documentales brasileños; junio de 2013; tecnologías de emisión; videoactivismo.

Summary. 1. Introduction. 2. First trend. Beyond images: Remembrance, rewriting and resistance. 3. Second trend. Amidst events: The resonance of images. 4. Final considerations. 5. Data availability. 6. LLM Use Statement. 7. Contribution statement by authorship. 7. References.

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1. Introduction

This paper's purpose is to shed light on a panorama of Brazilian documentary films produced in the last decade by analyzing recurring thematic motifs, narrative strategies, and visual propositions of full-length motion pictures that bear correspondences with the new practices of video activists that have emerged in the country in this period. We suggest that this set of films should be understood and referred to as 'documentary film activism', a phenomenon that articulates the history of militant cinema with the actions of contemporary social activists, particularly in relation to the dialogs that these documentaries establish with the production of images by activists during street demonstrations.

The documentaries emphasize their enunciation settings and present the stance of those who film facing the world that is revealed. They bring forward political, social, and media-related aspects of the events focusing on the singular and collective aspects of the subjects involved. The perspectives created by these movies produce critical stances in the face of facts that have different degrees of reality and modes of existence (Niney, 2015). As such, they operate by organizing social memory and knowledge by witnessing events, making inferences on reality, and enabling agency over social and political action. The trajectory of militant documentaries, as a segment of a broader current of political films, evokes the history of cinema from its earliest days. The educational and emancipatory character of militant cinema engages with the political, social, and ideological struggle towards denouncing authoritarian situations (Pinel, 2009).

In Brazil, explicitly ideological and left-leaning militant documentaries were made as early as the 1940s (Bastos and Ramos, 2013). In turn, the early 1980s marked a significant period for the development of popular video in Brazil. The loosening of political restrictions imposed by the civil-military dictatorship (1964-1985) was accompanied by an increase in video communication produced by grassroots social movements. These groups were characterized by the mobilization of citizens from both urban and rural areas, engaged in the struggle for land reform and union organization. The diversity of social movements, each with its specific agendas, included neighborhood associations, mothers' clubs, and organizations promoted by various social minorities. In this context, the production of Brazilian documentaries portraying major metallurgical demonstrations during strikes in the cluster of industrial cities in the State of São Paulo, known as the ABC Paulista, became emblematic. This was a historic moment in which the working class, organized through the labor movement, fought for workers' rights resisting the civil-military dictatorship (Santoro, 1989). The 1990s were notable for the decrease in militant actions, whereas the 2000s brought films in which the political aspect overcame the intimate

perspective of the depicted subjects. In current times, political films take place simultaneously with the events depicted in order to provide agency on the critical legibility of history with the denouncing of authoritarian assumptions, in addition to making claims for concrete political action and shedding light on the dispute between images (Gutfreind, 2023).

In this sense, documentary film activism converges with the trajectory of video-activism. Since the 1990s, digital video has enabled new modes of image capturing by political militants and social activists, regarding the quicker and cheaper ways to promote audiovisual content. It is worth noting that, in general, militant action is characterized by the valuation of forms of discipline in its organization practices, whereas activism provides more horizontal methods notable for its autonomy and experimentation with mobilization initiatives (Sales, 2019). By considering the characteristics of documentaries that comprise the scope of this research, we are interested in looking upon documentary film activism in its contaminations and updates related to the historic experience of militant cinema in the face of new political, social, and audiovisual contexts. Since the dawn of this century, with new Internet-based image capturing and transmission technologies, video-activism has been notable for its «aesthetics of urgency», as noted by Marta Galán Zarzuelo (2012, p. 1127). Short videos with fast information give voice to social subjects previously silenced by the hegemonic discourse emanating from corporate media. The situations depicted are characterized by the emergence of events. With a camera in hand, video-activists film with barely any cuts to create and spread independent audiovisual accounts. As Kari Andén-Papadopoulos (2014) suggested, video-activists document violence and oppression using smartphone cameras, thus putting their bodies at risk in the construction of their testimonies. According to the author, this practice prompts a reflection on the forms of witnessing and their performative gestures mobilized to generate political empathy and disrupt media and political hegemony.

The current Brazilian setting is notable for films that reveal the «[...] emergence of new cinema subjects and new cinematic practices that give form to the struggles for visibility and justice of social segments that have historically been the main targets of oppression [...]» (Cesar, 2017, p. 102). The intertwining of politics and aesthetics enlivens this militant-inspired cinema, considering the performative aspect of the bodies depicted, as well as the narrative re-establishment of images produced in political events (Lima and Mello, 2020). Carlos Eduardo da Silva Ribeiro (2023), in turn, points out how contemporary militant films operate from a greater empowerment of the subjects involved in them, especially when considering the democratization of digital media.

We could then say that, in Brazil, documentary film activism provides contemporary contributions to the tradition of militant documentaries in the form of video-activism practices and visual forms. This type of activism currently takes place due to the possibility of live and online distribution of images with the goal of mobilizing digital social media. These very platforms become visual archives by enabling the temporal reestablishment of events by the montage of documentaries. Given this aspect, one may notice that documentary film activism suggests a reflection on the political, social, and media-related conditions for the creation of its own images.

We have found that, in the Brazilian context, a milestone of this new film movement is the demonstrations of June 2013, when acts aimed at questioning the raise in the public transportation fares in São Paulo escalated to demonstrations that took the streets in many different states and cities. One could say that it developed into 'various Junes', with different movements and agendas throughout the country (Miguel, 2022). The left-wing social movements dissatisfaction, regarding the conflict between the reality of people's living conditions in the cities and the costly works for the 2014 World Cup, shared the occupation of public spaces with new right and far-right political actors that emerged from social media to the streets.

The demands of students allied with popular social groups began to share spaces with diffuse and reactionary agendas, marked especially by an anti-political and authoritarian discourse. At the outset of the demonstrations organized by Movimento Passe Livre (MPL) against public transportation fare hikes, the violence perpetrated by political authorities began to be denounced on social media. The actions of video-activists were crucial for this process and countered the dominant narrative in the media, which claimed that the demonstrations constituted a disruption in public order. The images produced by video-activists demonstrated «[...] an immersive experience of participation and exercise of citizenship, engagement, and democratic practice» (Oliveira, 2020, p. 79).

We point out a first trend in film production that, in addition to documenting the events of June *in loco*, reestablish archival footage from video-activist practices from the time. Representative examples include full-length pictures such as: *Ressurgentes, um filme de ação direta* directed by Dácia Ibiapina (2014); *Rio em Chamas*, a film by Daniel Caetano, Vinicius Reis and Clara Linhart (2014); *Levante!* co-directed by Susanna Lira and Barney Lankester-Owen (2015); and *O que resta de Junho*, directed by Pedro Leal and a team of filmmakers (2016). For the scope of this paper, we outlined the film mapping using the full-length format as one of the criteria, though it is worth mentioning the importance and diversity of short films that could be read under the concept of documentary film activism. These documentaries are characterized by their resonance in bringing the agendas and demonstrations of popular social movements to the fore, as they provided the conditions for the emergence of the events of June. We notice that the films consistently provide a memorial-like elaboration through the dialog between characters, interviews, and archival

footage, revealing facts from the perspective of left-leaning political segments. The documentaries are concerned with writing history «against the grain» (Benjamin, 2012, p. 9) through footage, contradicting hegemonic media narratives.

The films in the first trend present themselves, to some extent, as answers to the Brazilian corporate media perspective, which sought to conceal the profound relationship between the events of June and multiple prior events of lesser proportions. These previous demonstrations called for issues such as urban housing, indigenous peoples' rights, and other social agendas, in addition to public transportation. This first trend of contemporary Brazilian documentary film activism presents films that, to varying degrees, have didactical narrative propositions on the strategies of activist action, particularly in relation to the use of images as a symbolic battleground between political views.

Though this paper does not identify films in analytical categories without cross-contamination, we are able to indicate the particularities of a second documentary trend. This refers to full-length films that notably resonate with the image production of video-activists during the events of June, given new political and social confrontations. In particular, the occupations of schools by high-school students starting in 2015, the constant police brutality against underprivileged populations and the institutional coup d'état against Dilma Rousseff in 2016. Rousseff, member of the Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores – PT) succeeded President Lula after two terms and maintained a center-left political project which he commenced. She was in office from January 2011 until August 2016, when her second term was revoked by a congressional coup, devised by segments of the right and far-right with an ample support from Brazilian media conglomerates. Some full-length productions that represent this second orientation include *Espero Tua (Re)volta*, a film by Eliza Capai (2019), *América Armada*, directed by Aline Lanari and Pedro Asbeg (2019), and *A nossa bandeira jamais será vermelha*, a film by Pablo Guelli (2019).

In the next section, we will analyze particular aspects of films that form the first trend and, in the subsequent section, the specific elements of documents that bear a stronger relation with the second trend. In our final considerations, we will bring together traits of the constellation of images that comprise this panorama of Brazilian documentary film activism from the 2010s. The analysis of the first trend of films will demonstrate that the images produced by video activists go beyond merely recording political action; they become protagonists of the events themselves. By emphasizing the central role of images in understanding various forms of protest, documentary cine-activism establishes itself as a new visual and narrative expressiveness. In Brazil, this movement gained particular momentum following the June events – a pivotal moment in the country's recent history, which reverberates in the films analyzed, as we will illustrate in the second trend examined. In this group, we will identify as central a perspective presented by the films on these events, highlighting the role of video activists in denouncing the strains suffered by Brazilian democracy in the following years, reshaping archival

images through visuals designed for social media in contrast to those produced by hegemonic media organizations.

2. First trend: Looking back and building a memoir of June

When events are visually narrated from a perspective that is extremely close to them, immersed in the developments of the facts themselves, the elaboration of the past and the understanding of the present naturally intertwine with images, as argued by Anita Leandro (2014). According to the author, within the contemporary historical context, this approach provides the creation of audiovisual materials and narratives with a political and aesthetic power that can influence the experience of history by spectators. This is particularly the case with visual manifestations that do not follow conventional paths to spread narrative content, which may encompass educational, informative, or even aspects of mediatic and spectacular nature.

Ressurgentes, um filme de ação direta is the first film we would like to discuss, given that its narrative encompasses the period between 2005 and 2013, showing the passage from images shot with cameras to smartphones with live online broadcasting capabilities. In the footage that shows police aggression in a 2009 mobilization—in which members of social movements occupied the Chamber of Representatives of the Federal District in order to call for the impeachment of its governor and vice-governor, both accused of corruption—the camera's perspective in relation to the violent acts is distanced, resorting to the optical approximation allowed by the zoom function. This changes to the extent that the live broadcast of footage produced by militants works as a shield for the movement of militant action in the space fought over with the police—we notice this trend particularly since the June 2013 movements. Although in 2009 these images of resistance against police violence were still produced from a certain distance from the action, the purpose of the footage is to bear witness and denounce the violence. Presently, the images become more intense due to the live camera of the video-activists that record the action straight from the confrontation with the police. As pointed out by Alexandre da Silva and Bruno Leites (2017), this footage is «[...] produced in a flux in which the bearer of the camera takes part in the events. The purpose is not just to record the protest, but also to produce the protest-event» (p. 11). This footage, in turn, does not require a recording and distribution team—it can be produced and then instantly shared online. As stated by Zarzuelo (2012), the militant becomes the producer, editor, and distributor of the footage. Likewise, any person in this protest-event becomes a producer of footage that will later be distributed, whether by the corporate media or by left (or right) wing militants, as well as by documentaries that reestablish these images in their narrative flows.

Rio em Chamas gathers multiple fragments of short films produced by different directors and social activists in order to assemble a mosaic of the events of 2013. In its perspective, the work focuses on the city of Rio de Janeiro, placing itself in a temporal arc

from mid-2013 to the beginning of the following year. The film emphasizes both the June demonstrations and the actions against the World Cup and the Olympic Games in the city—particularly pointing to the demonstrations of resistance against the destruction of Aldeia Maracanã, an urban indigenous area on the outskirts of the stadium under renovation for the World Cup.

There is a specific portion of the work that brings to light some of the topics we have discussed in this text. It is a sequence in an apartment that combines dramatization and documentary aspects. In this passage, the dialog between the characters produces a Performative reenactment that evokes memories of social movement demonstrations prior to the June 2013 events. As in *Ressurgentes: um filme de ação direta*, *Rio em chamas* focuses on the conditions that allowed for the events of June from the optics of a narrative to be told by left-wing social movements and their mobilizations of national repercussions, though originating from local and regional issues.

During the conversations between the characters, unlike in *Ressurgentes: um filme de ação direta*, there is no articulation of a political-militant discourse assertively reflecting the ideological perspective of the group. The narrative strategy in *Rio em chamas* sheds light on the elaboration of the memory of the events as a political gesture. This takes place to the extent that the film's editing establishes links between the dialogs of the characters about the conditions for the emergence of June and historical images of bomb strikes during World War II. The evocation of a past that is even more distant from recent events and that has a paradigmatic dimension of violence establishes *Rio em chamas* as a film that directly positions itself as a narrative built from a memorial perspective of the political event as a historical event.

In this sense, it is worth highlighting how the montage develops in order to emphasize memory as the predominant aspect of the aesthetic elaboration of the documentary. We notice, in a relatively recurring manner, the image as a fragment and collage in movements of acceleration and deceleration, in addition to the use of multiple screens that intensify the gap-like dimension of memory and its filmic construction as part of the historical event that is not fully accessed. This is rendered more intense by the multiple sound layers, in addition to the use of graphic animation together with archival footage and dramatizations of dialog between the militants in the apartment.

The footage of police brutality is blurred and slowed down, hyper-fragmented, creating an effect of intensity given the events in another temporal realm—that of the present created by the film as a recalling of the event as an elaboration of the visuality of the militant discourse. The moving pictures thus appear as a technology of social resistance, a confrontation between established imageries and the creation of new political imageries, in addition to reflecting militant action in the face of conflicts with institutional politics spaces.

In *Levante!*, in turn, the archival footage of the June demonstrations present the police brutality and independent journalism, particularly by the Mídia

Ninja network, when it comes to the production and dissemination of alternative perspectives on events broadcast by corporate media. To the activist Thiago Dezan, interviewed for the film, the current political war takes place through the dispute between imageries carried out through footage. In the documentary, the memories of June, evoked through archival footage, demonstrate the videographic action of alternative media in the face of new mobilizations, particularly those in which political structures were questioned and minority group agendas were brought to the fore. For that purpose, the film's narrative connects the Brazilian case of the Mídia Ninja network to an international context of effervescence of social mobilization strategies, presenting the agendas and image production methods in the social and political reality of, among others, Mexican students and Palestinians.

The observational situations shown by the camera in *Levante!* are often juxtaposed with interviews that explain the video-activists' practice of image production. One can understand how the Mídia Ninja members use their smartphone cameras, mobile internet routers, and the online video broadcast platform Twitcasting—which preceded the rise in popularity of live streaming on social media—as a strategy of 'copwatching' and popular support mobilization, both in the physical territory and in the virtual environment. Copwatching is the practice of making live footage in order to monitor actions by the police so as to prevent and denounce instances of abuse of authority. The phenomenon first appeared in Berkeley in the 1990s and reappeared in the reality of Brazilian demonstrations after June 2013 (Bentes, 2015).

The narratives of *Rio em chamas* and *Ressurgentes: um filme de ação direta*, on the other hand, establish a less evident connection with the international rise of a new type of video-activism, produced within social media. Both documentaries discuss local issues such as urban mobility, housing, education, indigenous peoples' rights, and police brutality as a counterpoint to the major construction works for the World Cup and the Olympics. As such, they constitute affirmative memories of the social and political conditions that led to the June events, from the perspective of left-wing social movements. They therefore frame a dispute of the origins and the legacy of June as a counterpoint to the perspective of history as it is told both by new right-wing and far-right social movements—which went from the internet to the streets and also employ video-activism strategies—, and by corporate media. Likewise, *O que resta de Junho* attempts to demonstrate aspects of the origins of June 2013, defending a left-wing militant perspective, which disputes narratives on the legacy of June. Left-wing militants like Victor Quintiliano and Mayara Viviam recall the first demonstrations of *Movimento Passe Livre* before June, in addition to demonstrations with other social agendas since 2011, without visibility in the corporate media. The characters point to the history of demonstrations of movements that, in the recent past, preceded and provided the social conditions for the June events.

O que resta de Junho establishes a narrative that, in addition to investigating the events of 2013,

highlights the new ways of relating to the struggle of minorities from these crucial events. The documentary sheds light on the agendas promoted by teachers, indigenous peoples, and garbage collectors. Similarly, the right to occupy the city is a fundamental aspect that this film shares with *Rio em Chamas*. In both documentaries, the interview subjects defend the relationship of the citizens with their cities and how these issues were crucial in 2013. Furthermore, both films point to a popular dissatisfaction with political parties, an agenda that became a source of dispute between right and left-wing sectors.

In *O que resta de junho*, just as in the film *Levante!*, the visual production of independent videographers is repeatedly presented alongside interviews with specialists and members of independent communication collectives. This reflects a characteristic of documentaries in the first trend of rememorating the social conditions of June from an explanatory, oftentimes didactic, bias, in order to oppose the reiterated narrative of the Brazilian media oligopoly, which, often in a dogmatic manner, refutes the violent actions of protestors. An example of this is the concern observed in *O que resta de junho* in explaining to the viewer that the 'Black bloc' tactics, before being reduced to mere acts of violence, enables demonstrators to resist police brutality, so that their political acts and agendas may take over the public space, in addition to defending demonstrators from assaults during attempts to disperse mobilizations.

O que resta de Junho seems to indicate, not only through its title, but also its images, that which remains of the event, the strength of segments that had been «image-less» up to that point (Leandro, 2014, p. 123), i.e. marginalized groups, silenced from journalistic agendas and deprived of any audiovisual records, which now come to the fore, not only in terms of production and authorship, but above all in the protagonism of the footage. These sectors have been reorganizing in the twenty-first century, with June 2013 being a pivotal moment, making this visual appropriation a recovery of the aesthetic and political dimension of their identities, subjectivities, and historical struggles.

3. Second trend: The legacy of June, facing new social and political challenges

From the perspective of visual witness reports and historical documents, archival footage produced during the demonstrations, as a political gesture, resist their own visibility, as discussed by Leandro (2014). In other words, when one is within experience, the «invisibility, anonymity, the insider and unique point of view, the frontal character of the frame and the tremor of the footage» (p. 130) with its urgent appeal, all operate so as to eclipse their very visual construction, primordially revealing the gesture that converted them into a record. According to the author, when re-configured in another timeframe, these images retain the traces of a gesture that is aesthetic but also, and above all, political. It is not by chance that we notice a second movement of films that have a visual resonance with 2013, while focusing on new agendas, such as the high school

student strikes of 2015 and the coup d'état against Dilma Rousseff in 2016. Furthermore, in these works the narrative construction privileges the use of archival footage alongside footage obtained during conflicts and street protests, reestablishing them in the face of different political and social disputes. In this section, we will discuss three films that seem fundamental to us in this trend: *América Armada* (Lanari and Asbeg, 2018), *Espero Tua (Re)volta* (Capai, 2019) and *Nossa bandeira jamais será vermelha* (Guelli, 2019).

In *Nossa bandeira jamais será vermelha*, journalist Laura Capriglione, a member of the Jornalistas Livres collective network, starts and ends her narrative composition with questions and reflections that will permeate the documentary regarding the media corporations responsible for a large portion of the information disseminated in Brazil. The film, using testimonials, archival footage and, above all, video-activism, exposes the polarization present in current Brazilian politics. It brings to the fore many of the social confrontations in the narrative sphere, such as how the news debated the demonstrations of June 2013 and episodes prior to the institutional coup against the administration of President Dilma Rousseff, as opposed to the way in which independent media discussed the facts. In this sense, using footage recorded by video-activists, as well as press articles produced between 2013 and 2019, the narrative structure investigates the complex media organizations underlining the power structure that supports them. Likewise, it demonstrates how their stance in relation to the facts represents a threat to democracy, contributing to the political and institutional crisis that the country experienced. To that end, the filmic composition examines the present from a set of images that can reconfigure the visibility of the event, revisiting recent political history. One can notice how the historical traces, engaged by the archival footage and graphic fragments present in the film, emphasize the moment in which the main means of communication transformed the meaning of the demonstrations, directing them against the government. From this perspective, by analyzing multiple press coverages, the film unites different temporalities into different compositions, revealing connections that allow for an interpretation against the grain (Benjamin, 2012) of the narrative claimed by corporate media.

Constituting itself as a reading that is able to interrupt the linearity of given events, *Nossa bandeira jamais será vermelha* allows for the perception of what had not been legible up until that point. For instance: when excerpts from editions of *Jornal Nacional* –the main newscast by TV Globo (the broadcaster of the largest Brazilian media conglomerate)– related to June 2013 are narrated sequentially, the film highlights the change in media discourse, which went from condemning the alleged violence of the acts to exalting the protests as examples of democracy. In this sense, the film deconstructs media discourse, reallocating images made by video-activists and by the press, because it seeks to harbor the historical object in its constitutive fragility in order to enable an understanding of aspects of the present time.

When the film opposes testimonials and footage of demonstrations on the streets, it offers another

legibility that does not offer an explanation, but rather a critical reflection. As such, it ends up exposing the very imprecision of the image as an archive and historical document, such as in the sequence in which demonstrators dressed in green and yellow raise banners and signs against communism and in favor of a dictatorship, uttering the motto that is used as the film's title. The convergence of contrasting discourses between that which is said by the interviewees and what the images reveal is heightened in this sequence.

In its documentary film activism, the film takes on a political, media-related and social discussion, revealing the unstable and often violent context in which journalists work, as well as the authoritarianism in multiple sectors. As such, by reconfiguring the forms of mediation, recording, and activism, exposing the force of the work of video-activists, while emphasizing the vulnerability of independent press in the country, the documentary restates its political commitment. As stated by Ivana Bentes (2015), video-activism establishes a new visual grammar of moving pictures, which becomes aesthetically articulated in the field of political dispute. As such, it is important to emphasize the way in which amateur footage is incorporated into the traditional journalistic narrative, even if it is often employed to delegitimize social action and the demands raised.

In this perspective, documentary film activism develops itself around new media and historical events, always acknowledging previous moments that molded and enabled it. Productions that are committed to this approach seek other ways to collect and reestablish the footage, expanding the visibility of those that have been historically excluded and marginalized. An example of this is the narrative construction of *América Armada*. This film bears a relation to the second trend under discussion, since it takes on political and social combat, bluntly investigating three experiences that illustrate the institutionalized violence and corruption of necropolitics (Mbembe, 2018) in Latin America. Achille Mbembe, in the text *Necropolitics: biopower, sovereignty, state of exception, politics of death*, explores the concept of necropolitics, revealing how the State controls those who must live or die. This concept sheds light on the intricate relationship between violence and structures that shape social dynamics. By employing this theoretical approach, one can better understand the policies that perpetuate racism and colonialism, silencing specific groups as mechanisms of domination and control, which has repercussions in the visual structures present in the films under analysis.

In this documentary, we witness the work of Colombian Teresita Gavira, who is part of the Asociación Caminos de Esperanza Madres de la Candelaria; the work of Mexican journalist and activist Heriberto Paredes, who documents the consequences of drug trafficking and the narco-state in Mexico, and the actions of Brazilian Raull Santiago, a member of the Coletivo Papo Reto group, denouncing abuse perpetrated by the Military Police against residents of the Complexo do Alemão community, in the city of Rio de Janeiro. In this paper, we will particularly examine how the movie reconstitutes the footage made by Raull.

During the film, the activist, in his militant gesture, uses a smartphone to broadcast live, recording the presence of law enforcement. With that, he reveals the violence perpetrated by the State while protecting himself and other local citizens. By exposing the conditions in which the footage was made, the narrative construction denounces the conflict, the intimidation, and the violence present in the recorded episodes; practicing cine-activism to the extent that the technical and aesthetic resources include the use of new media technologies in the production of images from social movements and media-activists.

Raull's work, in addition to operating as a shield, establishes a narrative that is alternative to the journalistic material prepared and broadcast by the hegemonic media, in which social movements, when not outright silenced, are constantly criminalized. In this perspective, according to the statement by Bentes (2013), both the activist's gesture and the images he issues operate as «[...] a safe-conduct so that a demonstrator or the videographer may not be attacked or detained» (p. 311). In this sense, Raull's transit in an openly hostile territory is ensured by his smartphone, which operates as an essential weapon, since the potentiality of the images produced allows the activist to move safely.

When Raull opposes the threats of an officer in plainclothes against local residents, in the sequence in which his participation in the documentary begins, the movie establishes a connection between the use of the smartphone and the transmission of the events through the Coletivo Papo Reto website. This correspondence reinforces the protective aspect established by the gesture that captures the footage, demonstrating how it operates as a means of defense and resistance. The activist also depicts violations perpetrated by the Military Police, such as the occupation of residencies in Complexo do Alemão, transforming these spaces into barriers with the excuse of fighting drug dealers. This denouncement grants visibility to the local residents, showing their fears and anxieties in the face of these actions. As such, similar to how Giorgio Agamben (2008) establishes a link between politics and ethics, the gesture of the activist «[...] displays a mediality, rendering a means in itself visible [...]» (p. 13). This is also similar to the definition of «media-activism» as the intersection between the medium (mediation, media record) and activism (direct action) (Braighi and Câmara, 2018, p. 28). Therefore, the media-activism produced by Raull's footage is the gesture, which is both a political and an ethical means of action.

In this context, the potentiality of the documentaries resides in the way in which they reveal perspectives of the subjects involved in the events; taking on a critical stance from the new visibilities that the amateur images allowed to establish, also contributing to the preservation of the country's social and political memory. These dynamics are clearly perceived in the film *Espero tua (Re)volta*. By discussing the high-school student occupations in the State of São Paulo, using testimonials and interviews that recall the political experience of the students in the public education system – as well as the social and media conditions that led to the June

demonstrations, the film also rewrites history against the grain, of hegemonic narratives (Benjamin, 2012).

In 2015, students took over schools in a protest against a school reorganization proposal made by the state government, in which students would be transferred arbitrarily to different institutions. Narrated by Lucas Penteado 'Koka', Nayara Sousa, and Marcela Jesus, students who were part of the occupations, the documentary establishes visual opportunities through fragments of images from the documentary *20 centavos*, by Tiago Tombelli, footage made by video maker Caio Castor, records made by Marcela Jesus and the Jornalistas Livres collective network, and materials produced by members of Mídia Ninja.

The students recall their experiences during demonstrations in which they discussed how the measure would ultimately deteriorate the quality of education and access to schools, in addition to the lack of prior discussions with the school community. They also reflect on decisive moments of Brazilian history, such as the Civil-Military Dictatorship, the June movements, the institutional coup d'état of 2016, and the rise of the far-right through the presidential election of Jair Bolsonaro. The film's montage allows memory and history to establish ties by evoking facts of the past in archival footage, updating them through conversations in the present between Nayara, Marcela, and Koka. The observations of the characters about the political events that took place between 2013 and 2018 seek to understand their actions in the 2015 occupations with a critical outlook regarding the paths of the country.

If the students recall the facts as creative and visual gestures in the film, producing inquisitive perspectives about the reality experienced by them, people next to them and a significant part of Brazilian society, one may establish a link with the notion offered by Walter Benjamin (2018) that history establishes relations with images from the unconscious, allowing for an understanding of history resulting from the effort to remember. From this perspective, knowledge of the past takes place in the temporal overlap with the present, deconstructing that which conservative history reproduces as a continuum of immutable forms. This perspective allows the footage from the opening sequence to be associated with the overlap of different spaces and temporalities, with footage obtained in June 2013, during the high-school student demonstrations of 2015, and during the student mobilizations that took place between 2017 and 2018.

What these images have in common is the expression of different agendas and mobilizations in response to which the military police employs violence. The topic of police repression appears throughout the documentary, with inquiries on the subjects of racism, sexism, and the authoritarianism of a past that manifests itself in the present. This full-length motion picture restructures the perspective of political events, dismantling dominant narratives on what happened through visual documents that reveal socially accepted forms of domination. The footage made by video-activists establishes connections with efforts to remember and archival material, highlighting relevant political issues and shedding light on the importance of mobilizations in the

formation of public opinion. As such, *Espero tua (Re)volta* aligns itself with mediatic militancy, since its narrative articulates a dual approach of political events, exposing both footage of demonstrations and conflicts and accounts of witnesses of the events. The filmic visuality allows for a reflection on the events and the expression of the subjectivity of the characters, sharing the visual dimension of politics that affects both individuals and the social context.

Although the aim of this text is not to analyze the distribution methods of the films – a topic that would require a separate article to be properly developed – it is worth emphasizing that the consumption of some of these films occurred in specific ways. *América Armada* and *Espero Tua (Re)volta*, for example, were distributed by the Taturana Platform (taturana.org), which focuses on organizing free cinema screenings in schools, communities, and film clubs. In this format, anyone can contact the platform which makes the film available for a session organized by the interested community. This model allows the films to reach peripheral areas through self-managed, free activities. During the Covid-19 pandemic, these films were also released online, accompanied by debates involving their producers, researchers, and activists. Thus, these works are positioned, from their production to their distribution, in direct dialogue with the community, prioritizing forms of debate and political engagement. Similarly, *Rio em Chamas* and *O Que Resta de Junho*, films were released directly on YouTube, prioritizing free distribution with promotion on social media. *Levante!*, in turn, was not only made available for free on YouTube but was also produced in partnership with the open-channel Futura, being broadcast on television as well.

4. Final considerations

Militant cinema has an extensive history of confrontation in Brazil, particularly in the troubled times under authoritarianism in the 20th century. After a fragile period of relative democratic stability, 2013 represents a critical point in a dispute between different segments of society. Meanwhile, video-activism, which became increasingly strong amidst the social struggles of the 21st century, surfaces as a tool for direct action. In this regard, militant cinema is also affected, transforming into what we refer to as documentary film activism. In this scenario, we indicated two trends of documentaries with narratives that denounce the historic authoritarianism that has been present and aggravating in the last few years. To that end, the aesthetic resource of archival footage and the evidence of image production strategies employed by video-activists are mobilized, revealing multiple points of view that engage with memories of the events through activist practices.

We also pointed out how video-activists mobilize the copwatching strategy, in which footage is produced in order to monitor police raids, thus curtailing and denouncing abuse of authority (Bentes, 2015). These visual fragments, when reestablished in these political narratives, filled with tensions, interrupt the discourse of hegemonic media, accepting the historical object through its traces and elements that were previously disregarded, which makes past events accessible,

from Benjamin's (2012) perspective through what remains of history in the images.

Both analyzed trends highlight the new forms of militant cinema visuality, which combines the perspectives of the subjects involved with the technological changes in the ways of producing and transmitting images. This defines documentary film activism, which contributes to the construction of other ways to perceive and remember Brazilian political events in contemporary times. In recent years, social media has emerged as a central arena in political debate, as its role has become an urgent matter with the recent, evident rapprochement between authoritarian governments and big tech owners in the pursuit of discursive hegemony. While the history of militant cinema shows us that such films can represent efforts to craft counter-hegemonic narratives that sensitively connect the individual to their community within the political sphere, documentary cine-activism emerges as a possibility for resistance and struggle through images in the virtual environment.

5. Data availability

The research data consists of the documentaries selected for qualitative analysis, all of which are listed in the article's references.

6. LLM usage statement

This article has not used any text generated by an LLM (ChatGPT or other) for its writing.

7. Authorship contribution statement

Márcio Zanetti Negrini – Conceptualization, Validation, Research, Resources, Draft Writing – original draft, Writing – revision and editing, Visualization, Supervision, Project Administration, Fundraising Acquisition.

Julianna Nogueira Ronna – Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal Analysis, Research, Data Curation, Draft Writing – original draft, Writing – revision and editing, Visualization.

Giancarlo Backes Couto – Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal Analysis, Research, Data Curation, Draft Writing – original draft, Writing – revision and editing, Visualization.

Cristiane Freitas Gutfreind – Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal Analysis, Research, Data Curation, Draft Writing – original draft, Writing – revision and editing, Visualization.

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