

Inverse Surveillance, Activist Journalism and the Brazilian Protests: The Mídia NINJA Case

RAPHAEL RAMOS MONTEIRO DE SOUZA*

The aim of this paper is to examine the role played by the independent press group Mídia NINJA—an acronym in Portuguese for ‘Independent Narratives, Journalism and Action’—in the huge and unprecedented protests in Brazil. Its live-streamed coverage on the internet that showed police misconduct, among other things, spread nationally and abroad and acted as a mechanism that fuelled social movements. More specifically, this information acted as an alternative source of information that helped to foster accountability, mobilisation and resistance. This study adopts an interdisciplinary approach, focusing on the practice of inverse surveillance in light of works by Castells on network auto-communication and counter-power. Furthermore, this research uses as key references Bauman and Lyon’s analyses of surveillance in a post-panoptical age. Subsequently, this paper investigated situations of social accountability, due to the fast diffusion of clashes and arbitrary arrest reports. It is argued that the action of horizontal players caused changes to police strategies and influenced the traditional media coverage, as well as the enforcement of surveillance over activist groups. In conclusion, it is suggested that this specific practice of watching the watchers has strengthened popular mobilisation.

* Master of Law candidate at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), National Law School. State Attorney for Brazil—member of Attorney General of the Union Office. I would like to acknowledge Mônica Costa and Heloísa Almeida for their helpful comments.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects that new media are having on Foucault's disciplinary panoptic model. Due to the popular protests that erupted in Brazil prior to the World Cup and Olympic Games, the 2013 protests acted as an ideal case study for examining this question. Indeed, over the period of several weeks, thousands of citizens staged protests in Brazil's major metropolises. According to public opinion polls, protesters received a massive amount of public support—even from those who were not directly involved.¹

As can be observed in other social movements around the globe—such as Occupy and the *Indignados*²—the Brazilian *Jornadas de Junho* (June Journeys) movements lacked formal leadership and had a diverse agenda of complaints that ranged from disapproval of corruption to discontent about excessive spending on the construction and renovation of building stadiums. Protesters were also seeking a higher quality of education, improved public transportation and new health services.

In light of these events, this paper aims to examine the role played by the independent press group Mídia NINJA—an acronym in Portuguese for Independent Narratives, Journalism and Action—within the context of the information and communication technology age. In this way, new media can be considered an ongoing process that has increased and accelerated interaction among people, as well as created new capacities for the organisation

¹ Mariana Jungmann, 'Manifestações nas ruas são aprovadas por 89% dos brasileiros' (*Agência Brasil*, 25 July 2013) <<http://agenciabrasil.abc.com.br/noticia/2013-07-25/manifestacoes-nas-ruas-sao-aprovadas-por-89-dos-brasileiros>> accessed 2 August 2014. The support came as well from Brazilians living abroad. Ricardo Calazans, 'Brasileiros de 25 cidades do mundo realizam atos de solidariedade aos protestos' *O Globo* (Rio de Janeiro, 18 June 2013) <<http://oglobo.globo.com/brasil/brasileiros-de-25-cidades-do-mundo-realizam-atos-de-solidariedade-aos-protestos-8736144>> accessed 2 August 2014.

² Manuel Castells, *Redes de indignación y esperanza: los movimientos sociales en la era de internet* (María Hernández tr, Alianza Editorial 2012) 217-218; Slavoj Žižek, 'Problemas no paraíso' in Ermínia Maricato and others (eds) *Cidades Rebeldes: Passe Livre e as manifestações que tomaram as ruas do Brasil* (Nathalia Gonzaga tr, Boitempo 2013) 102-104.

of social movements.³ In examining these protests, it is important to consider that live-streaming and uncut coverage of protests were posted on the internet. Images highlighting illegal acts such as police misconduct spread nationally and internationally. These images acted as an alternative source of information and helped to foster accountability, mobilisation and resistance.⁴

Indeed, NINJA practices a kind of engaged reporting which results in a tool for citizen evaluation and control of public security agents during mass demonstrations. Such monitoring functions as a kind of inverse surveillance, considering it allows people who are overseen to also watch their supervisors. Focusing on the inverse surveillance and activist journalism phenomena from a sociological and political perspective, this study adopts an interdisciplinary approach and was conducted in light of previous works by Manuel Castells on network auto-communication and the background provided by the technological paradigm for horizontal actors on counter-power issues.⁵ Furthermore, this research draws on studies conducted by Zygmunt Bauman and David Lyon on surveillance in a post-panoptical age.⁶ More specifically, these studies highlighted the potential for resistance and solidarity through social networks, despite the negative effects of powerful state and private mechanisms of oversight.⁷ As they emphasise, Foucault's surveillance model is

³ Manuel Castells, *A sociedade em rede*, vol 1 (Roneide Majer tr, 6th edn, Paz e Terra 2010) IX-XVII.

⁴ Jonathan Watts, 'Brazil's Ninja Reporters Spread Stories from the Streets' (*The Guardian*, 29 August 2013) <www.theguardian.com/world/2013/aug/29/brazil-ninja-reporters-stories-streets> accessed 2 August 2014; Paulo Paranagua, 'Ninja, le média social des manifestations au Brésil' (*Le Monde*, 21 July 2013) <<http://america-latina.blog.lemonde.fr/2013/07/21/ninja-le-media-social-des-manifestations-au-bresil>> accessed 3 August 2014; Lorena Chaos, 'Brazil Protests Prompts Shift in Media Landscape' (*Wall Street Journal*, 29 August 2013) <<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424127887323873904578570244226440374>> accessed 3 August 2014.

⁵ Manuel Castells, 'A Network Theory of Power' (2011) 5 *International Journal of Communication* 773 <<http://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/1136/553>> accessed 27 September 2014.

⁶ Zygmunt Bauman and David Lyon, *Vigilancia líquida* (Alicia Tatjer tr, Paidós 2013).

⁷ *ibid.*

still relevant—only, it is now necessary to adapt his model in light of the technological and economic factors that define our contemporary age.⁸

This paper therefore investigates a case study that reflects the achievement of social accountability, as defined by Enrique Peruzzotti,⁹ due to the fast diffusion of clashes and arbitrary arrest reports, including some powerful images that concerned entities like Amnesty International.¹⁰ The argument put forward in this study is that the action of horizontal players caused changes to police strategies of identification and communication. These changes had an effect on the traditional media coverage of the events, as well as the enforcement of general surveillance over activist groups. Finally, this study suggests that the specific practice of watching the watchers strengthened popular mobilisation.

Network Mobilisation and Digital Empowerment

The capacity of construction, validation and diffusion of social meanings represents a central element for any kind of power exercise.¹¹ Traditionally, a select group of broadcasters and channels of communication has held a monopoly over sources of information and had a notoriously profound influence over the human mind. However, the fast development of new information technologies due to the internet and wireless networks, as Castells discussed, has been promoting a gradual redesign of this communication process through an introduction of new players into the dynamics of programming and the selection of content.¹² Instead of a vertical and

⁸ *ibid* 61.

⁹ Enrique Peruzzotti and Catalina Smulovitz, 'Social Accountability: An Introduction' in Enrique Peruzzotti and Catalina Smulovitz (eds) *Enforcing the Rule of Law: Social Accountability in the New Latin American Democracies* (Pittsburgh Press 2006).

¹⁰ Amnesty International, 'Brazil: "They Use a Strategy of Fear": Protecting the Right to Protest in Brazil' (*Amnesty International*, 2014) <www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR19/005/2014/en> accessed 3 August 2014.

¹¹ Manuel Castells, *Comunicación y poder* (Alianza Editorial 2009) 265-266.

¹² *ibid* 76-78.

unidirectional architecture, a horizontal and plural-directional structure now defines the ‘new media’ culture.¹³ Such features, typical of the 21st century, create platforms of mass auto-communication that empower individual and collective autonomy in order to make established counter-power possible.¹⁴

Within this network context, the idea regarding viral media—the process of fast and spontaneous spreading of messages shared over the internet, from text to sound but especially through images and videos—has had a profound influence on the technological age. These last two concepts deserve further consideration. It is believed that relevant social and political events are more or less visible due to powerful images that are produced and spread. In other words, if something is not seen, it does not exist for the broad audience nor is it remembered. What is meant by this is that new media allow for a ‘culture of sharing messages from multiple senders-receivers’¹⁵ that can work independently from traditional sources of information.

Therefore, one of the most common criticisms towards the mainstream media lies in selectivity and disequilibrium in reference to what is broadcasted.¹⁶ Regarding this issue, there are direct and indirect mechanisms of status quo maintenance due to political, economic and ideological factors of influence on the news agenda that can cause bias in favour of media corporation owners or sponsors’ interests.¹⁷ From this perspective, activist journalism has been considered a defining element of Brazil’s protests. In the network communication age, it has worked both as a source of information and as an incentive for mobilisation.

Pragmatically speaking, the independent press group Mídia NINJA was influential and their messages spread partly due to the fact that they spread information that was posted live and was uncut. Indeed, it can be argued that uncut video streaming, often including

¹³ Tim Wu, ‘Is Filtering a Censorship?’ in Jeffrey Rosen and Benjamin Wittes (eds), *Constitution 3.0: Freedom and Technological Change* (Brookings 2011) 94-95.

¹⁴ Manuel Castells, *Redes de indignación y esperanza* (n 2) 24.

¹⁵ Manuel Castells, ‘A Network Theory of Power’ (n 5) 780.

¹⁶ Giovanni Sartori, *Homo videns* (12th edn, Laterza 2010) 54-58.

¹⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *Sobre a televisão* (Maria Machado tr, Jorge Zahar 1997) 19-25.

exclusive coverage of events, has a profound effect on those viewing such content. Created by a group of individuals whom were members of a non-governmental cultural organisation which has produced alternative music festivals, one of its defining characteristics was the way they differentiated themselves from traditional sources of information media and told the story from a literal and insider's perspective.¹⁸ Through high-speed mobile devices (using 3G and 4G LTE connectivity), images were captured by smartphones with external battery chargers, sent to apps like TwitCasting,¹⁹ and later replicated on Facebook, Twitter and Youtube.²⁰ In addition to comments on social networks, simultaneous interactions very often suggested a different way or approach, decisive in getting graphic scenes.

In light of these new media tools, many argued that the solidarity with activists and journalists resulting from police misconduct increased the scale of protests, and thus they rapidly spread from São Paulo to other cities and towns across the country.²¹ Due to the mass sharing of images and information taken by the collaborative press, the emotion contained within these images was transformed into real street protests. It is worth mentioning that emotional aspects—like revolt, fear, enthusiasm or hope—play a central role in all social movements.²² At specific moments, as Sakamoto argued, it seemed that social networks were materialised on the streets, especially when all the banners used by protesters showed comments shared on social networks.²³

¹⁸ Camilla Hessel, 'No meio do redemunho' (*Estado de São Paulo*, 13 July 2013) <www.estadao.com.br/noticias/geral,no-meio-do-redemunho,1050880> accessed 27 September 2014.

¹⁹ <<http://twitcasting.tv/midianinja>> accessed 14 November.

²⁰ In addition, nowadays, all the information is gathered on their own website: <<http://ninja.oximity.com>> accessed 14 November 2014.

²¹ Leonardo Sakamoto, 'Em São Paulo, o Facebook e o Twitter foram às ruas' in Ermínia Maricato and others, *Cidades Rebeldes: Passe Livre e as manifestações que tomaram as ruas do Brasil* (Boitempo 2013) 97.

²² Muel Castells, *Redes de indignación y esperanza* (n 2) 30-32.

²³ Sakamoto (n 21) 95-96.

The collaborative and volunteer narrative of raw facts—facts presented without being edited—frequently marked by improvisation, has raised doubts as to whether it was real journalism or merely militancy.²⁴ Although this issue demands further analyses, this blended coverage formula is somewhat closer to the activism, as acknowledged by NINJA:

Is NINJA media journalism?

Yes. Journalism is one of the tools and a language we use to raise issues to strengthen narratives that are commonly overlooked by traditional media. In addition to journalism we also make media activism.

Is NINJA media impartial?

No. We openly advocate partiality as a principle. We do not believe that any human construction can be impartial, since it is always the result of the accumulated previous experiences and how each person/group sees the world.

...

One of the most interesting aspects of activist communication is the possibility to break the dishonest myth of impartiality in corporate journalism. In this context, the citizen who sees itself as a vehicle, or is part of a free media, is not in a protest only to register. He or she is a body in the multitude and communication is one form of mobilization and organization.²⁵

As discussed above, it is therefore the case that NINJA's collecting of images not only tells a real story through the lens of the social movement, but also enhances the efficiency of demonstrations from three different points of view: 'as a pacifier at events, as a defence

²⁴ Sylvia Debossan Moretzsohn, 'A militância e as responsabilidades do jornalismo' [2013] *Observatório da Imprensa* 756 <www.observatoriodaimprensa.com.br/news/view/_ed756_a_militancia_e_as_responsabilidades_do_jornalismo> accessed 9 August 2014.

²⁵ Mídia NINJA, 'FAQ—Frequently Asked Questions' (*Mídia NINJA*, 2014) <<https://ninja.oximity.com/partner/ninja/faq>> accessed 10 August 2014.

against false arrest or violent assault and as “offence”—namely in terms of gathering evidence’.²⁶

Therefore, it can be argued that the role played by Mídia NINJA activist journalism derives from a conjecture of the technological boom and lack of impartial information. Digital empowerment brought about not only as an alternative tool of information but also of mobilisation and inverse surveillance, which will be further discussed in the following section.

Protests in the Post-Panoptical Age: Inverse Surveillance and Social Accountability

Considering the phenomena of social movements and the digital age, as practiced by media activists, it is important to reconsider the parameters of Foucault’s disciplinary panoptic model. This widely known system presupposes two central features that help maintain order. First, incommunicability among those who are watched, which means people cannot see or talk with each other; second, total invisibility of the watchers. Both instil fear and allow the ‘watcher’ to maintain control without necessarily being present.²⁷ When applied to contemporary street protests, the metaphor of dissociation between seeing and being seen derived from Bentham’s architecture is mitigated. Although those being watched become even more visible, they also interact with and are able to monitor their state watchers, particularly security agents.

According to dialogues between Bauman and Lyon, fragmentation of modern societies and technological advances withdraw the necessary confinement idea from the surveillance concept.²⁸ In other words, within the framework of a ‘liquid’ and flexible reduction of barriers,

²⁶ Dean Wilson and Tanya Serisier, ‘Video Activism and the Ambiguities of Counter-Surveillance’ (2010) 8(2) *Surveillance & Society* 168 <<http://library.queensu.ca/ojs/index.php/surveillance-and-society/article/view/3484>> accessed 9 August 2014.

²⁷ Michel Foucault, *Vigiar e punir: nascimento da prisão* (Raquel Ramalheite tr, 20th edn, Vozes 1987) 166-167.

²⁸ Bauman and Lyon (n 6) 10-12.

a characteristic of a society of consumers, whose major symbol is the smartphone, each citizen can potentially be watched—often without being aware of such surveillance. As nowadays everyone carries their own digital panoptical device containing all sorts of personal data, this situation of cooperation with private and public oversight can be described as a voluntary servitude.²⁹

This re-adjustment of surveillance methods to informatics and marketing tools was predicted as a potential trap in the 90s.³⁰ Nowadays, marked by an accentuated concern about security, one of its threats is to produce discrimination, coercion and undue persecution of political opponents.³¹ For instance, in the case of undefined limits for restrictions on privacy and fundamental rights issues, as it occurs through indiscriminate collecting of personal data for multiple purposes.³²

In spite of the ‘endemic and very powerful’ surveillance made available by new communication devices, there are many efficient ways to organise resistance through social networks.³³ This results in the possibility of an inversion of usual power vectors caused by technology, as everyone is subject to observation, including public officials.³⁴ Consequently, the footage of repression in Brazil’s protests by Mídia NINJA represents a kind of counter surveillance, also described as *sousveillance*.³⁵ Both words are etymologically derived from French and mean, respectively, to watch from above

²⁹ *ibid* 13, 64, 149.

³⁰ Gilles Deleuze, ‘Post-scriptum sobre as sociedades de controle’ in Gilles Deleuze *Conversações, 1972–1990* (Peter Pelbart tr, 3rd edn, Editora 34 2013) 225.

³¹ Neil Richards, ‘The Dangers of Surveillance’ (2013) 126 *Harvard Law Review* 1935, 1962.

³² Bert-Jaap Koops, ‘On Decision Transparency, or How to Enhance Data Protection after the Computational Turn’ in Mireille Hildebrandt and Katja De Vries (eds), *Privacy, Due Process and the Computational Turn* (Routledge 2013) 196-199.

³³ Bauman and Lyon (n 6) 15.

³⁴ Wilson and Serisier (n 26) 167.

³⁵ Steve Mann and Joseph Ferenbok, ‘New Media and the Power Politics of *Sousveillance* in a Surveillance Dominated World’ (2013) 11(1-2) *Surveillance & Society* 18 <<http://library.queensu.ca/ojs/index.php/surveillance-and-society/article/view/veillance/veillance>> accessed 9 August 2014.

and to watch from below.³⁶ Similarly, it also enhances downwards transparency, which means that the behaviour of observers can be seen physically—or virtually—from below.³⁷

This practice of inverse surveillance therefore mitigates the asymmetric relations of power between police and citizens. The movement acts as a social check and balance, as its members monitor police misconduct via the mass communication of images.³⁸ Indeed, Foucault's thoughts, now extended to all sides of the panoptic, remain entirely relevant: the one who is subjected to visibility and knows it, often adopts the limitations of power by himself.³⁹

Moreover, Mídia NINJA activist journalism introduces a form of social accountability by creating a mechanism that allows for democratic control of power. Such methods allow protest groups to direct people's attention to the legality of government actions during the exercise of the right of freedom of expression and assembly (freedom to protest). Despite being quite frequent, especially in more peripheral areas, some misconduct has traditionally been hidden to the broader audience, since no records are being kept.⁴⁰ As Peruzzotti and Smulovitz emphasise, in creating new controls and democratic mechanisms, the role of vertical oversight performed by civil society—including non-governmental organisations, social movements and media—is essential.⁴¹

Such methods allow citizens of contemporary democracies to act as watchdogs, namely through the decentralised monitoring of public officials. Traditionally, supervising strategies typically involved formal complaints, mobilisations, media coverage, statements and judicial controls. As Mídia NINJA helps to put important questions

³⁶ *ibid* 18.

³⁷ Koops (n 32) 196-220.

³⁸ *ibid* 24-25.

³⁹ Foucault (n 26) 168.

⁴⁰ As Bobbio underlines, without the visibility of state actions, it lacks a vital element to ensure critical public opinion. Norberto Bobbio, *O futuro da democracia* (11th edn, Paz e Terra 2000) 102-103.

⁴¹ Peruzzotti and Smulovitz (n 9) 10-12, 27.

onto the public agenda, it also acts as a tool for the activation of horizontal accountability mechanisms, which has been proven to have effective institutional results.⁴² After reports of misconduct are published online, intra-state bodies such as the Administrative Justice, Parliamentary Commissions, Courts of Accounts and Public Prosecution are obligated to investigate acts of misconduct.

Following from what has been written above, in the next section, examples of abusive tactics used by security forces and reported by Brazilian media activists will be analysed. Additionally, this study will discuss how the police, mainstream media and protests are affected by and reacting to new media techniques.

Practical Effects of Activist Journalism in Brazil

Activist journalism in Brazil during protests has had direct and indirect effects on the security forces, traditional media and on protesters. For instance, thanks to new media, non governmental organisations have been successful in highlighting and proving cases of the use of excessive force, arbitrary arrests, the active denial of access to legal assistance and the lack of internal inquiries after incidents of misconduct have been reported.⁴³ Such exposure has allowed for groups to compile reports that use as their authority articles from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)—notably, articles expressing a citizen’s right of assembly and freedom of expression. Indeed, and given the information that new media has been able to expose, a report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has expressed concerns about violations of fundamental rights in the context of peaceful protests—‘a fundamental aspect of a vibrant democracy’.⁴⁴ Some of the most

⁴² *ibid* 9, 17-19.

⁴³ Artigo 19, ‘Protestos no Brasil 2013’ (*Article 19*, 2014) 92-140
<www.artigo19.org/protestos/Protestos_no_Brasil_2013.pdf> accessed 15 August 2014.

⁴⁴ UNGA, ‘Annual Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights’ (21 January 2013) UN Doc A/HRC/22/28
<www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session22/A.HRC.22.28.pdf> accessed 28 September 2014.

widespread occurrences in Brazil were the following: i) illegal detention after planted evidence; ii) unmasked infiltrated police officers; and iii) the vinegars case, as will be explained below.⁴⁵

Taking as an example the issue of police misconduct and the planting of evidence, in Rio de Janeiro a policeman had been filmed, during a body search of a teenager, putting a firework into the youngster's backpack before detaining him. In another case, a man was filmed switching sides in the middle of a protest in Rio de Janeiro. That is, an alleged protester passed through a police barrier after showing his credentials as an undercover agent. Images recorded on the same day proved that a different man had been arbitrarily arrested and charged with throwing explosive material. Thirdly, in São Paulo, many peaceful protesters were targeted and detained—allegedly, for having in their possession vinegar bottles (used to soften the effects of tear gas)—an act that is not illegal. Therefore, such incidents demonstrate a spiral of moves and counter-moves occurring between control agents and protesters.⁴⁶

Within this panorama of an inedited oversight of public officers in action, activist journalists themselves became targets of police misconduct during the events. Thereby, equipment was damaged or seized, NINJAs were taken to police stations for questioning and sometimes were attacked⁴⁷ and arrested.⁴⁸ Evidently, the presence of new monitoring devices and methods during protests was being treated with hostility by the security forces.

⁴⁵ Although extremely isolated, it is true that some protesters have also adopted illegal practices, especially those rioters known as 'black blocs'. As Gargarella remarks, such situations should not push aside other important issues being raised, as often occurs during the evaluation of this kind of mass movement. Roberto Gargarella, *El derecho a la protesta: el primer derecho* (Ad-hoc 2007) 28-29.

⁴⁶ Wilson and Serisier (n 26) 168-171.

⁴⁷ R7, 'PM agride cinegrafista da Mídia Ninja durante manifestação no Rio' (*Portal R7*, 24 September 2013) <<http://noticias.r7.com/videos/pm-agride-cinegrafista-da-midia-ninja-durante-manifestacao-no-rio/idmedia/52418afb0cf2c403c091cfb3.html>> accessed 10 August 2014.

⁴⁸ Helena Martins, 'MP defende liberdade de imprensa após prisão de ativista em Belo Horizonte' (*Agência Brasil*, 13 June 2014) <www.ebc.com.br/noticias/brasil/2014/06/mp-defende-liberdade-de-imprensa-apos-prisao-de-ativista-em-belo-horizonte> accessed 3 August 2014.

Moreover, as many police officers wished to be shielded from public scrutiny, many were reluctant to provide new media agents with badge numbers and other identification requests,⁴⁹ a violation of basic policing principles and the rule of law. Following such incidents, police administration officials began to assign alphanumeric codes to frontline agents, in order to mitigate their exposure without making formal complaint of misconducts impossible. For instance, soon after a Mídia NINJA member who was streaming the movement was detained,⁵⁰ personal and functional data of the assigned lieutenant was hacked and shared on the internet.

While tensions were increasing on the streets, communication clashes occurred on social networks. The military police of Rio de Janeiro State, for instance, expanded the use of its Twitter account,⁵¹ not only to provide press releases but also to refute information in order to minimise versions and interpretations published by activists. Thus, public officials have been responding to some new social network demands, despite doing this for self-preservation rather than providing enlightening information.

It is relevant to note that number of internal police misconduct investigations in the Brazilian police force is extremely low.⁵² For example, even though many abuses were reported in the state of São Paulo, months after the protests had ceased to exist, there were no administrative judgments or disciplinary measures.⁵³ In spite of the lack of formal sanctions, the new footage mechanism used by

⁴⁹ Artigo 19 (n 43) 26-30; 92-95.

⁵⁰ Agencia Estado, 'Membros do grupo Mídia Ninja, que transmitem as manifestações pela internet, foram detidos no Rio' (*Agencia Estado*, 22 July 2013) <<http://ultimosegundo.ig.com.br/brasil/rj/2013-07-23/jornalistas-de-grupo-independente-sao-presos-no-rio-de-janeiro-durante-protesto.html>> accessed 11 August 2014.

⁵¹ <<https://twitter.com/PMERJ>> accessed 14 November 2014.

⁵² Amnesty International (n 10) 16.

⁵³ Maurício Moraes, 'Nenhum PM foi punido desde junho por incidentes em protestos em SP' (*BBC Brasil*, 19 February 2014) <www.bbc.co.uk/portuguese/noticias/2014/02/140216_investigacao_pm_protestos_mm_lgb.shtml> accessed 11 August 2014.

citizens highlighted concerns about misconduct and inhibited illegal behaviours.⁵⁴

Traditional media, in turn, was also affected by NINJA's new media methods. While big broadcasters were covering demonstrations from a studio supported by helicopter shots, the demand for live footage on the internet was increasing, as images were coming from inside the movements. This configuration was not a mere operational choice of the mainstream companies, as they were also targets of protesters' complaints due to alleged biased analyses.

Considering this framework, inspired by activist journalists, cable channels such as 'Globo News'—owned by one of the richest Brazilian media groups—assigned undercover professionals to shoot directly from the streets to the central station through Skype.⁵⁵ Furthermore, many well-known television news programs reproduced Mídia NINJA images, following reports that contradicted the police narrative of events. Despite the power of new media, it is important to notice that mainstream media exposure of abuses of authority can still be argued to be effective in causing repercussions, as administrative processes are often long and uncertain.⁵⁶ It is interesting to observe that conventional reporters were also targeted for arbitrary attacks, including injuries caused by rubber bullets, such as the case of a journalist from *Folha de São Paulo* newspaper who was seriously hurt, after an intentional police shooting.⁵⁷ Following from incidents such as these, many feared that freedom of the press was being undermined, and thus it contributed

⁵⁴ Enrique Peruzzotti and Catalina Smulovitz, 'Concluding Remarks' in Enrique Peruzzotti and Catalina Smulovitz (eds) *Enforcing the Rule of Law: Social Accountability in the New Latin American Democracies* (Pittsburgh Press 2006) 347.

⁵⁵ Antonio Brasil, 'Os ninjas da GloboNews' [2013] *Observatório da Imprensa* 763. <http://observatoriodaimprensa.com.br/news/view/_ed763_os_ninjas_da_globonews> accessed 10 August 2014.

⁵⁶ As Wilson and Serisier remark, 'participants in general noted that they had achieved more success with channelling footage to the mainstream media than in using it for official legal complaints'. Wilson and Serisier (n 26) 173.

⁵⁷ TV Folha, 'Reporter Tells how the Police Brutality Marked the Latest Protest', (*TV Folha*, 16 June 2013) <www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6QVLE8PQJ8> accessed 17 August 2014.

to change editorials of important newspapers so far entirely averse to the protesters.⁵⁸

Roda Viva, a widely known interview program that has been televised by a public network every Monday night since the 80s, invited the founders of Mídia NINJA to appear on their program. The activists were questioned on topics that ranged from political links to funding and internal structure.⁵⁹ It can therefore be observed that the activist journalism group had attracted attention on a large scale, not only from the traditional press but also from authorities aiming to gather further information about the protesters of the digital era as a whole.

The same technological development that fosters engagement and solidarity between activists certainly enlarges the capacity of security forces to monitor movements, aiming at maintaining order. Besides classical ostensive tactics of prevention and repression, the actual arsenal includes non-visible tools such as closed-circuit cameras, network oversight and data interception, which allows the construction of huge databases. This is important because in the computational age, as Koops warns, the latter represents a serious risk related to personal data protection, assuming there are no transparent parameters for collecting and using all sorts of information available, as it occurs in public security matters.⁶⁰

From this perspective, it can be argued that, as attacks and detentions of Mídia NINJA members have demonstrated, video-activists have become one of the preferential targets of police action.⁶¹ Paradoxically, the images recorded by activists can also be used against protesters own interests that they want to protect, either as a way of collecting information or as a fortuitous footage of

⁵⁸ Artigo 19 (n 43) 21-22.

⁵⁹ TV Cultura, 'Roda Viva – Mídia Ninja' *TV Cultura* (5 August 2013) <www.youtube.com/watch?v=vYgXth8QI8M> accessed 9 August 2014.

⁶⁰ Koops (n 32) 197.

⁶¹ A similar situation happened in the Australian case. Wilson and Serisier (n 26) 169-170.

incriminating acts.⁶² In other words, it can reinforce the surveillance practices over the protesters.

Indeed, increased surveillance of key figures of mass demonstrations by activist journalists, especially by obtaining and monitoring information on social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Whatsapp,⁶³ brings this study back again to Foucault's theory. If, instead of the darkness of a dungeon, cell visibility acts as a trap of the classic Panopticon,⁶⁴ the connectivity—besides rupturing with lateral incommunicability and allowing advances in many human fields—also operates as one of the big traps of the twenty-first century digital Panopticon. The control system has worsened, as there are no more constraining physical or temporal barriers.⁶⁵

Final Remarks

This paper has aimed to investigate the role played by the independent press group Mídia NINJA during recent mass demonstrations that occurred in Brazil. First, the study stressed that this specific activist journalism phenomenon is linked to features of the technological revolution. Insofar as the digital age increases the possibilities of horizontal communication among citizens, its networks also offer background for movements of contraposition of information, solidarity and mobilisation, especially in reference to street protests. In addition to functioning as an alternative to traditional media—often criticised due to alleged biased analyses—live coverage provided by the group highlighted concerns about police misconduct besides inhibiting illegal behaviours, which go against the rights of free expression and free assembly.

Following this thread, the study emphasised that this kind of social accountability regarding the power of authorities, through footage

⁶² *ibid* 172.

⁶³ Artigo 19 (n 43) 100.

⁶⁴ Foucault (n 27) 166.

⁶⁵ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernidade líquida* (Plínio Dentzien tr, Zahar 2001) 17-18.

and multiple subsequent channels of interaction, tempered the classic panoptical logic—as nowadays there is no incommunicability and the watchers can be watched. Although the post-panoptical era still preserves powerful and subtle mechanisms in order to oversee individuals, as Bauman and Lyon argue, the sousveillance practice mitigates the asymmetric relations of power between police and citizens, as it expands the scrutiny of ostensible state actions.

This study also examined some examples of misconduct recorded by—and against—citizens' cameras and how the movement has impacted police strategies of communication and identification. Furthermore, it highlighted repercussions regarding traditional media coverage and a collateral enlargement of surveillance over protesters.

In conclusion, it can be argued that the Mídia NINJA practice of watching the watchers strengthened popular mobilisation and resistance and functioned as a social accountability tool. In a prospective approach, as far as the cost of mobile devices and connections decreases, the number of potential citizens that could act similarly to the NINJAs' sousveillance has the tendency to increase—maintaining the group's relevance as a content spreader and a source of alternative analyses.

