

Modelo de Escalas da Visibilidade: Mapeando Percursos de Visibilidade e suas Consequências para Mdiativistas do Sul Global

The Stepping into Visibility Model: Mapping out Visibility Journeys and their Consequences for Mediactivists from the Global South

Andrea Medrado¹

Rosane Rosa²

Resumo: Neste artigo, desenvolvemos o Modelo de Escalas da Visibilidade para mapear os percursos de visibilidade de mdiativistas em países do Sul Global. Desenvolvido com base em observações digitais etnográficas e entrevistas em profundidade, o modelo é aplicado em dois estudos de caso: a) ativistas de uma favela brasileira que utilizam as mídias sociais como proteção contra a violência policial (Maré Vive) e b) um fotógrafo Queniano que produz imagens noturnas de Nairobi para discutir temáticas sociais (Msingi Sasis). O estudo oferece uma discussão teórica acerca do mdiativismo e analisa as múltiplas facetas do conceito de “visibilidade”. Espera-se oferecer uma contribuição à maneira como ativistas de comunidades marginalizadas podem se fortalecer quando se deparam com uma visibilidade negativa não intencional.

Palavras-chave: Modelo de Escala da Visibilidade; Mdiativismo; Sul Global; Favela.

Abstract: In this article, we develop the Stepping into Visibility Model, mapping out the visibility journeys of mdiactivists from Global South countries. Drawing from digital ethnographic observations and in-depth interviews, we apply the model to two case studies: a) activists in a Brazilian favela and their

1 Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF). Niterói, RJ, Brasil.
<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9408-9688> E-mail: andreamedrado@yahoo.com.br

2 Bournemouth University. Bournemouth, United Kingdom.
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9149-8531>E-mail: irega@bournemouth.ac.uk

use of social media for protection against police violence (Maré Vibe) and b) a Kenyan photographer who produces images of Nairobi at night to discuss social anxiety themes (Msingi Sasis). The study provides a theoretical discussion on mediactivism and analyses the multiple facets entailed in the concept of “visibility. We hope to offer a contribution to activists from marginalised communities by helping them become stronger when stepping into negative unintended visibility.

Keywords: *Stepping into Visibility Model; Mediactivism; Global South; Favela*

Introduction

The term “global south” has a wide and flexible definition, it is not literally linked to the geographical location of South, but rather, to a geography of injustice and oppression. Quoting Boaventura Sousa Santos (2014), the population of the Global South are largely diverse human beings united by the idea that the understanding of the world overcomes, by far, the western understanding of the world. Working on personal and historic narratives centered in the border between the United States and Mexico, Gloria Anzaldúa approaches the geography of “being between places” and the importance of writing from the *margins* for the construction of new decolonial epistemologies. Here, what especially interests us is an articulation of coalition politics between “third world writers” (MORAGA and ANDALZUA, 1983), using the designation that was common at the time and is not used anymore. Such coalition is important because it carries a strong position against the exclusion of otherness of privileged places of construction of modernity. Therefore, it is for this *other* excluded and marginalized that we dedicate our attention in this article. In this sense, Leonardo Custódio (2016) offers us an interesting background when analyzing peripheral political actions realized through communication in different parts of the world. Writing about the Global South is elaborating on the concept of peripheral area, defined in a wide form. According to Custódio, peripheral areas must be understood:

Not only as heterogeneous urban spaces that historically suffer with the precariousness of public services, with the predominant condition of underemployment and violence, especially in unequal societies like the Brazilian, but also as a metaphor for the situation of exclusion and/or discrimination of marginalized groups of legitimate places of speech (for instance: media channels) and power spheres, including in countries commonly treated as developed (2016, p. 139).

Offering a global panorama, Custódio talks about the use of community communication as an instrument of a) fight against the impacts of

social inequality and distance between workers and poor populations and the spheres of power in Latin America (2016 p. 144); b) valorization of local content alternative to media corporations in North America (2016, p. 146); c) expansion of political, cultural and ethnic representation in Europe (2016, 147); d) promotion of development with transmission in local languages in Africa (2016, p. 150); e) work in rural villages and urban slums for the promotion of dialog and information in Asia (2016, p. 152); f) valorization of culture, diversity and legacy of aboriginal people in Oceania (2016, p. 153). Such perspectives are useful because they illustrate the variety and complexity of uses of communication for the search of a less unequal world in different parts of the world.

In this article, we highlight mediativist communicational practices of two countries located in the Global South, respectively, in the Latin American and African continents: Brazil and Kenya. In the next sections, we will bring theoretical discussions on visibility and mediativism, putting the second concept in contrast with other communicational practices coming from the “margins” such as community communication. One of our contributions is the creation of a South-South connection, recognizing that such connections bring significant challenges, given the colonial legacy of fragmented relations among the people in the Global South. Many authors have pointed towards the urgent need of rewriting, re-teaching and re-learning the stories of indigenous and African people for Brazilians that are direct descendants of these people. For centuries, these stories were “concealed, camouflaged, distorted or mutilated”, either by the force of circumstances, ignorance or interest” (KI-ZERBO, 2010). These practices resulted from the activities of the XXX network, financed by XXX³. The goal of the network was to gather academics, professionals and members of the civil society to exchange knowledge on how mediativism can fight marginalization in different contexts of the Global South.

3 The name of the network and the sponsor are hidden to preserve the anonymity of the authorship of the article.

Brazil and Kenya were chosen because, when we analyze their mediativist practices, we perceive that the reach of visibility in the social media, something desired by activists, would generate critical moments in both contexts. That would include attacks, hate speech and destruction of reputation, which could become even physical attacks. In both countries, these moments needed to be surpassed so that mediativists could keep using their pages and profiles in social media for socially progressive causes. Therefore, with the goal of supplying to activists a tool for mutual protection against the negative consequences of visibility, we developed a model titled “Model of Scale of Visibility”.

We applied the model to two case studies: 1) A mediativist initiative (Maré Vive), created by residents of a favela in Rio (Maré), which uses social media to report human rights violations and police violence; and 2) a Kenyan photographer (Msingi Sasis), which produces images from Nairóbi at night to create a reflection on social inequality. When presenting the model, derived from the knowledge exchange between Brazilians and Kenyans, the goal is to offer mediativists with reflections on the need of planning their journeys of visibility. That can be relevant when the mediativists face negative and unintentional media visibility. When sharing these experiences between Brazil and Kenya, the article brings a contribution from and to the South-South dialog, opening new paths for an activist research and a mediativism informed by research.

The multiple faces of visibility

In their fight against injustice, social movement need that these same injustices get seen. In contrast, the invisibility creates exclusion and marginalization (BRIGHENTI, 2010; ULDAM, 2017). New technologies, in particular social media, emerge in this scenario as important tools to promote visibility with goals of empowerment. Among some of the advantages are the convenience of access and the capacity of not depending of mass media, exposing arbitrariness of governments or enabling marginalized groups to narrate their stories in their own terms.

However, visibility is a two-way street because it can also work as a form of control. The visibility that Internet technologies give to actors of the alternative, civil society, can easily become surveillance. Private corporations and governments can use such technologies to monitor, censor and contain dissenting voices. According to many authors (DE BACKER, 2018; ULDAM, 2017), the metaphor of the model of panopticon prison of Michel Foucault (1977) gives us a starting point for the discussion on surveillance and control. Andrea Brighenti calls attention to the asymmetric nature of visibility. He affirms that, in an ideal natural context, “the rule is that if I can see you, you can see me”, but things are not as simple. The relation of visibility is often asymmetrical, and the concept of intervisibility, of reciprocity of vision, is always imperfect and limited (2007, p. 326). The efficiency of the panopticon depends on the invisibility of the watchman. At the same time, the role of invisibility is not simply accentuating the power of authorities that monitor, but making the panopticon efficient through uncertainty. Recurring to the technology of invisibility with the panopticon, the spectacle of surveillance (the tower) can be performed. In addition, surveillance does not have any value, alone, in stimulating discipline. It is necessary to also have a threat (and, presumably, in a certain point, the implementation) of punishment. That means that surveillance needs to be supported by power. According to Brighenti, we are facing “regimens of visibility”, which are highly dependent of social contexts and dispositions, complex techniques and policies, which makes visibility a deeply ambiguous phenomenon (2010, p. 3).

For activists in the border of society, visibility in social media is mostly reached in periods of large-scale protests. As Anthony McCosker points out, literature has extensively examined the role of social media in the proliferation of marginalized voices, generating possibilities for the civic participation in different contexts, such as in Egypt, Hong Kong and Spain (2015, p. 1). Here, we choose to emphasize the steps mediativists take in what we call their paths of visibility. Instead of analyzing visibility and social media in a certain large-scale event, we adopt the perspectives

of mediativists in Brazil and in Kenya and we try to follow their paths of visibility, reflecting on the implications that this reach of visibility (or, on the contrary, invisibility) can have for them. Even when activists are aware of the problems caused by surveillance dynamics, many see themselves forced to take risks in exchange of the reach and capacity of mobilization enabled by social media exposure. For example, Lina Dencik et al. noted that “the dependence of dominant social media to execute activist agendas mined the efforts to avoid or resist surveillance practices in an intense manner” (2016, p. 6).

A considerable number of studies focuses on mediativism(s) under a perspective of the Global North, approaching experiences of countries like Denmark (ASKANIUS; ULDAM, 2011), Germany and United Kingdom (DENCİK et al, 2016), among many others. In turn, this study offers a contribution to the growing literature about social activism in the Global South (MILAN; TRERÉ, 2019). In fact, the discussion of potential dangers that involve the conquest of visibility in social media took us to consider specific social and political contexts of Brazil and Kenya, both countries located in the Global South.

Despite the significant differences in terms of public policies of surveillance and security in Brazil and in Kenya, the oppressive character of these policies have similar consequences in people’s daily lives. Being investigated both contexts, Chloé Villalobos shows that they “have roots in the sense of inevitability, practicing a strict policing of poor, informal areas inhabited by the working class as the only solution for their respective security issues” (2019, p. 41). In addition media representations characterized by binary oppositions of – “formal city” versus “informal city”, the “good citizen” versus the “criminal”, and the “State” versus the “enemy” – marginalize poverty and normalize daily assassinations (ibid).

These issues bring out additional challenges to the way mediativists of the Global South deal with the social media visibility. Christina Neumayer and Jakob Svensson (2016, p. 138) offer the outlines of the types of activism throughout two axis. The first turns around how participants

identify in relation to “other” actors and social institutions, such as: media organizations, government authorities and the police, and if this “other” is conceived as an “enemy” (antagonism) or “adversary” (agonism). The second axis is about the state of readiness of the activists to act with civil disobedience, in a general manner, and in violent actions or with damages to property, in particular (NEUMAYER, SVENSSON, 2016, p. 123). In our cases, we suggest that the mediativism of the Global South (especially the mediativism of favela) is not so guided by the way these people see “other” social actors. Before directioning their view to these “other” values, favelas already automatically suffer a process of “otherness”. They are treated as others because the societal forces see them as enemies of the city that need to be excluded and even eliminated. That inversion of order may seem subtle, but it is important. It implies a dynamic in which favela activism is shaped precisely as a response to the treatment given to these communities, considering them as enemies, denying them citizenship. Certainly, we are aware that mediativists in other countries are considered enemies, as it happens in Brazil and in Kenya. However, under the perspective of the Global South, the fact that a person was born in a favela or shantytown community is reason enough to put this person in a situation at a margin of society, without having, necessarily, being engaged in counter-hegemonic actions.

Contextualizing and Defining Plural Mediativisms

Multiple forms of media contestation have been named in different forms such as alternative media, popular and community communication and, more recently, mediativism. It is not this study’s focus to delve into a deep discussion about the distinction of each term. However, it is important to highlight that the different terms appeared in specific contexts and “were employed to describe historically localized practices” (MAZETTI, 2018, p. 79). To quote some examples, the years of military dictatorship in Brazil propelled the existence of an “alternative communication marked by resistance and report”. In turn, the Brazilian process of political reopening blossomed a “series of initiatives of popular

communication, supported in social movements that were originated from sectors of the Catholic Church, unions and other associations” (MAZETTI, 2018, p. 82). Here, Festa (1986, in MAZETTI, 2018, Ibid) suggests a differentiation between alternative communication and popular communication through a class bias. The first would be original from the medium level of civil society, while the second would come from social basis. However, even if alternative community would have given space for popular communication after the process of redemocratization of the country in late 1980s, both terms continued to be widely used by academics and communicators (MAZETTI, 2018, p. 85).

Mediativism has been associated to the growth in the number of Internet users in the late 1990s, when “new democratic issues and hopes begin to be articulated within counter-hegemonic critics”. That happened as a consequence of some characteristics of digital technologies that favored communicational mobilizations. Among them, we can cite:

“1) the reduction of leadership issues; 2) the reduction of costs of diffusion; 3) the insertion of communication models ‘many-for-many’ (in contrast to a model ‘one-for-many’ of mainstream media); and 4) the facilitation of collaborative production and the expansion of participation spaces” (MAZETTI, 2018, p. 86).

Nowadays, some of these propositions of Internet as a catalyst of transformation seem romanticized and even naive facing the concentration of property of Tech corporations such as Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft (GAFAM). Still, with their counter-hegemonic character and goals, mediativism keeps operating in the gaps of the corporate hegemonic spaces (ULDAM, 2017). With that, mediativists find obstacles when trying to challenge algorithmic logics, which do not favor their social propositions (instead of profit), and have their digital traces collected and used for persecution and surveillance, as we will show later.

Even operating in these contradictory and complex territories, in the Brazilian context, as highlighted by Cicilia Peruzzo, mediativism has roots in popular movements and in progressive social organizations. The

author adds that the action of these mediativist movements are usually wide, “not setting only in virtual and/or digital (network) profiles in “social media websites” such as Facebook, Twitter, etc.” To cite them integrally:

“Their presence is also constituted by media (channels), in other words, websites, blogs, collaborative platforms like Wiki, YouTube and/or Vimeo channels, networks formed within apps (WhatsApp, Instagram, etc.), the creation and use of free softwares and alternative apps, and many other types of instruments of communication, data transmission, articulation, mobilization, report and ask for support, such as: petitions, consultation platforms, streaming platforms, forums, polling, campaigns, search engines (hashtags), games and representative, emotional or satiric symbols (comics, memes, etc.) that go viral on the Internet” (2018, p. 52).

Having offered a historic context, it becomes necessary to answer to this question: What is mediativism, exactly? Antônio Braighi and Marco Câmara affirm that mediativism represents more than a fusion between the words “media” and “activism”. Mediativism configures a symbiosis as “mediation without activism is a simple media register” and “direct action without medium artifact is pure activism”. Therefore, it is in the intercession of both fronts, and in the manifestation of the most simultaneous form possible that mediativism comes to be (2018, p. 33). With inspiration in Tim Jordam’s work (2002), the authors explain how to dismember the “almost-binomium” media-activism. Activism refers to:

“The set of investments with aim of altering the established social reality. These are undertaken by subjects that, together, sharing feelings about a certain public context, pull efforts in a common goal. Having the solidary logic as reference, they aim to alter the usual forms on how their lives are lived (BRAIGHI and CÂMARA, 2018, p. 33).

The media element results from the reciprocal influence of technology and their manipulation by the subject agent of and in activism. He comes from the recognition that actives are engages in multiple mediations sustained by media devices that do not verticalize their way of acting, but help conform specific and strategic forms of making activism

(BRAIGHI and CÂMARA, 2018, p. 35). Therefore, mediativism configures a sum between activist perspectives and the classic process of mediation. However, citing once again Braighi and Câmara, “being mediativist isn’t only carrying a media”. We need to be aware of the uses and purposes. In other words, more than a syntactic neologism, mediativism forms an almost-binomium and generates a hybrid that must be equated and balance, combining functions of information and mediation to alter reality. In other words, mediativism “is what makes of it, since we do not lose sight of the purpose of social change, the effective involvement and that we keep solidary transgression” as goal (BRAIGHI and CÂMARA, 2018, p. 39). In the next section, we will discuss the methodologic approaches used, with the incorporation of two case studies of mediativist initiatives in Brazil and Kenya.

Methodology

According to Helen Simons, the approach of the case study represents “an in-depth investigation of a specific project, policy, institution, program or system of real life, with the goal of capturing their complexities and singularities” (2009, p. 21). In particular, the case studies presented in this article are of an interpretative field, according to Sharam Merriam’s (1998) classification, because they are used to inductively develop a Model of Scales of Visibility, mapping how visibility affects groups of mediativists.

With Facebook page, Instagram and Twitter profiles, the Maré Vive project (<https://www.facebook.com/Marevive/>; @Marevive) was created to cover the entrance of the Armed Forces at Favela Maré, in Rio de Janeiro, on April 5th, 2014. Today, in the moment we are writing this article, the page already has over 160 thousand likes. In every social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), “Maré Vive” is described as “a channel of community media made collaboratively. Our news are developed through the collaboration of residents, the channel is made by all of us here at Maré”. In addition, the following description can be found in the “history” tab on the Facebook page.

We keep our news constantly updated, while information and reports arrive, that way we reduce the risks of making mistakes or publishing any wrong data. Your contribution is essential so that we can bring news in a quick and reliable manner. Our policy is to keep the people who collaborate with the page anonymous. [...] We do not have any anti-army, anti-police or any other stance in the moment we report a fact. Our stance is always in favor of the residents, that is our side and we do not have any problems in saying that. We are together, Favela! #Marévive (MARÉ; VIVE, 2018, online, in MEDRADO et al, 2018, p. 288).

Msingi Sasis is a Kenyan photographer who opened a company or cultural production and enterprises called Nairobi Noir, working with different forms of expression, from writing (poems and short stories) to visual arts (video and photography) to sound (music and field records of the streets of Nairobi). The “noir” (the color black, in French) perspective, of Msingi Sasis, is revealed in black and white pictures of Nairobi at night, allowing him to capture and document social issues in the Kenyan capital, such as corruption, prostitution, social anxiety, homeless people and poverty. When explaining the purpose of the mediactivist project, Sassis affirms that:

Nairobi Noir originates from a very concealed social criticism, gearing towards issues that are often neglected. [...] when you look towards the dark side of a city, you can tackle many social issues in a way people do not find too offensive, excessive or obvious. It doesn't look like a traditional protest. [...] You can approach all of these issues in an indirect way (interview with Msingi Sasis, 08/26/2018)

In both cases, we evidently perceive a mediactivism made with the purpose of revealing painful aspects of marginalized realities, aiming social change. In Sasis' case, we have a mediactivism in close dialog with art and creative experimentation (PASQUINELLI, 2002). In turn, in the case of “Maré Vive”, we have an initiative that seeks collective positioning guided by the philosophy “us by us”, characterized by the principle that favela residents must be in charge of telling their own stories (MEDRADO et al., 2018).

As we said before, Brazil and Kenya share a few important similarities. Rio de Janeiro and Nairobi are two global cities marked by their deep inequalities and social conflicts. Their urban environments reveal State policies that tend to discriminate economically vulnerable populations through their offer of precarious transportation systems, deficient access to health and education and public security policies that frequently disrespect their rights. Extrajudicial executions are common in informal settlements in Nairobi and in favelas in Rio, where the “war on drugs”, among other arguments, works to justify the adoption of the logic “shoot first, ask later”. In consonance with this discourse, “those who are considered ‘criminals’ can and must die”. Inherent to these policies is a project in which the political and economical elite tries to “clean up” the urban landscape of what does not fit in the modern neoliberal model (VILLALOBOS, 2019).

Regarding the data collection for both cases, it consisted in:

- a. Digital ethnographic observations of mediactivist initiatives of Favelas in Brazil, especially the profile of “Maré Vive” on Facebook (@marevive), between January and December, 2017.
- b. Digital ethnographic observations in the Facebook and Instagram profiles of Nairobi Noir (@nairobi noir) between September and January, 2018 (after our researchers traveled to Nairobi).
- c. Nine in-depth interviews with Kenyan mediactivists, during the event “In/visible Margins” promoted in the city by the XXX Network, from August 20th to 25th, 2018 and eight in-depth interviews with Brazilian Favela mediactivists, conducted between May 14th and 16th, 2018.
- d. Notes of the field work produced by the authors, during the events produced by the XXX Network, in Niterói-Brazil (May, 2018) and in Nairobi, Kenya (August, 2018).

In terms of ethical procedures, the approval for the conduction of this research was conceived by the Ethics Committee of the XXX University

and XXX University⁴ (through the approval of the proposition by Plataforma Brasil). For safety reasons, the real names of the mediactivists involved in the “Maré Vive” initiative were not revealed, because they constantly deal with sensitive issues, such as police violence. Msingi Sasis gave us permission to use his real name, since his story was published in different media in Kenya and in other countries.

Having presented a contextualization of our case studies – “Maré Vive”, in Brazil, and Nairobi Noir, in Kenya – we hope to offer a contribution in the Global South for studies that analyze the efforts of counter-surveillance of mediactivists to mitigate risks and to self-protect. According to some authors, these efforts can be treated as *sousveillance* (MANN, 2004), in a wordplay in which the prefix “sur” of the word surveillance is replaced by “sous”, which, in French, means “under”, to describe “the surveillance that comes from below”.

However, the issue is that, many times, these efforts tend to focus on a techno-legal solutionism, with the implication that they “end up being circumscribed in a specialized discourse between experts” (DENCICK et al. 2016, p. 5). Therefore, it is relevant for us to understand to what extent activists committed with social justice issues engage in surveillance agendas. In this article, we follow this line of thought, analyzing how mediactivists in Brazil and in Kenya experience surveillance and how they manage their visibilities.

The Model of Scales of Visibility applied to “Maré Vive”

a) Context:

In March 30th, 2014, the government installed Federal troops at Complexo da Maré, a group of sixteen favelas located in the Northern Area of Rio de Janeiro. Composed by 2,700 military officials, shielded tanks and jeeps with machine guns, the occupation was estimated to last until July 31st, 2014, soon after FIFA’s World Cup. It was in this tense environment that a group of mediactivist young people decided

4 Names of universities were hidden to guarantee the anonymity for the blind review.

to create a Facebook profile called “Maré Vive” (www.facebook.com/marevive/; @Marevive). The goal was to cover and monitor the military occupation, under the perspective of favela residents.

b) Growth of Visibility:

Based on our research, we perceive that the “growth of visibility” comes about when mediactivist initiatives are in emerging stages. They adopt strategies to share their message and call attention to their causes and fights. In the case of “Maré Vive”, that happened when mediactivists decided to establish a tool of counter-surveillance (DENCİK et al., 2016) or “sousveillance”, the surveillance that comes from below (MANN, 2004) in order to protect the residents. Therefore, they began to dedicate themselves to document the abuse of authority, recording, taking pictures or receiving videos and photos made by followers. However, the activists chose to describe the initiative not as a counter-surveillance of the military occupation, but rather as a philosophy “us for us”, manifested when favela residents become narrators or their own stories.

c) Reach of Visibility:

In this stage, mediactivists are getting success in the diffusion of their message, both for members of their circle and for a wider audience. In groups that present a significant online activity, this moment can correspond to the reach of high engagement metrics in social media, for instance. In the case of “Maré Vive”, soon after the creation of the profile, an avalanche of complaints against abuse of authority were shared on social media, followed by the hashtags #oqueamarétem, #dedentrodamaré and #marévive. The profile then got 50 thousand followers and likes in three months. Managed by three mediactivists that remained constantly online updating information, the page began to regularly publish posts about different topics, such as: local events, job opportunities, motivational messages and images that referred to the collective memory of the favela. As a profile picture, the page showed a photo of Dona Orosina, one of the first residents of the favela. The page began

to attract the attention of residents of Favela da Maré, from other favelas and areas of Rio de Janeiro through regular and immediate updates of police operations conducted in the favela.

Image 1 – Post published at 5:17 in November 21st, 2017.



Source: Reproduction – Screen capture.

a) Critical moment:

Here, the growing degree of visibility has the probability of leading to a critical moment. Often, this moment is unpredictable. It is also influenced by the marginalization and “otherization” of activists in society. Therefore, activist groups that reach peaks of visibility inevitably put themselves into a vulnerable position, becoming victims of serious attacks and repression by the authorities. To “Maré Vive”, this page rapidly became a fairly visible resource for daily survival. However, this visibility came at a high cost. In 2015, one year after the creation of the profile, the mediativists were shocked to discover a fake version of their Facebook page. The fake profile began to publish pictures of supposed drug dealers, who put the life of the managers of the profile at risk, because they began to receive death threats by the police and by the drug

dealers. The activists believe that such hostility can be a result of the quick visibility that “Maré Vive” had reached.

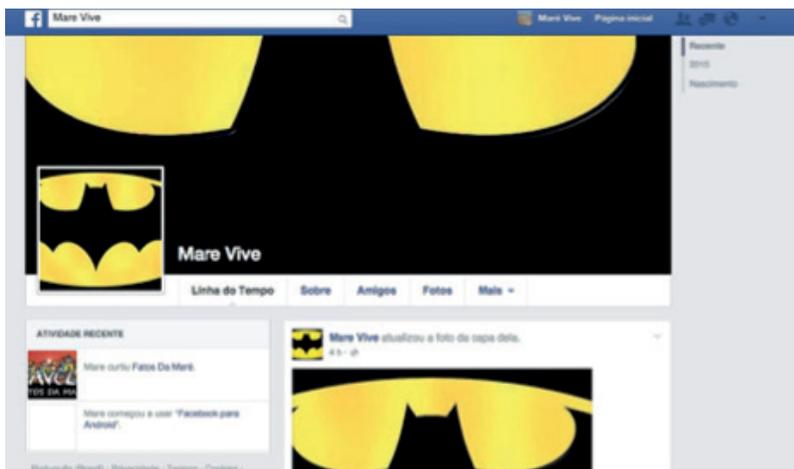
b) Management of the Critical Moment:

With this model, we suggest that the way the activists deal with the critical moment is essential to determine the lifespan, and, in the last resort, the destiny of these initiatives, as well as the reach of the fourth stage of visibility. In order to manage their critical moment, “Maré Vive” activists decided to get in touch with reporters of TV Record. Therefore, they got to challenge the silence structures (LOKOT, 2018, p. 342) of the mainstream media in relation to favela residents and their lives in these communities. The strategy was successful: TV Record had broadcast a report about the fake page on *Balanço Geral*. The report helped clarify the confusion, showing that the real profile of “Maré Vive” had the goal of publishing local news, in the favela perspective, not reporting the identity of criminals.

c) Overcoming the Critical Moment:

If the strategies put into practice for the management of the critical moment were successful, the mediativist group is capable to overcome the crisis and work in favor of their long-term goals. These could include, for instance, the desire to grow and reach a wider circle, or, in an opposite manner, the decision to remain hidden to the public eye. To “Maré Vive”, after the news were broadcast at *Balanço Geral*, the fake page disappeared from Facebook. A fake profile added one of the managers of “Maré Vive” on Facebook and sent an apology via inbox message.

Image 2 – “Maré Vive”’s fake page, with references to the comic superhero Batman, which also represents a symbol for Rio de Janeiro’s militia.



Source: Reproduction – Screen capture.

d) Retraction by the Critical Moment:

The critical moment of visibility can hit a group or a collective harshly, to the point of eliminating the mediativist ecosystem, or, what is even more tragic, result in violence and death. Miller (1999), for example, notices that some groups can become victims of their own success, without getting to deal with the quick expansion that comes with visibility. As a consequence of tensions in the organization of the initiative, they could fragment themselves or even deactivate the initiative. That did not happen with “Maré Vive”, but it can happen in other cases.

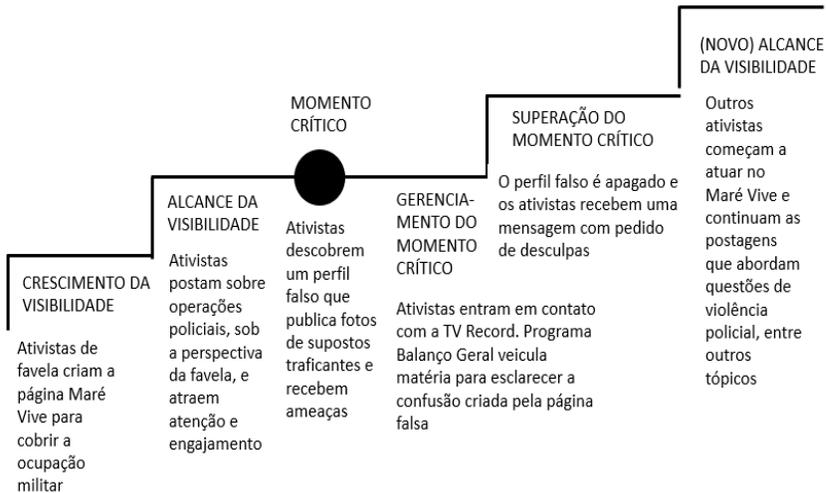
e) (New) Reach of Visibility:

The “Maré Vive” profile has now 6 years of activity, having attracted over 164 thousand followers⁵. Time has brought maturity and a better internal organization, and the activists decided to have a rotational team publishing posts and interactions with the residents. This is a way of ensuring that the people behind the page remain anonymous, and that new groups of young mediativists can be trained to take on responsibilities,

5 In November, 2020, when this article was written.

ensuring, thus, that the initiative do not die, in case the more experienced activists no longer get involved.

Image 3 – We present a graphic representation of the Model of Scales of Visibility.



Source: Created by the authors.

We observe that the mediativists of marginalized communities need to reach visibility as a first step to any successful campaign or collective action, because visibility is vital for recognition (BRIGHENTI, 2007). However, we argue that, for favela activists, that are labeled as enemies of society (NEUMAYER; SVENSSON, 2016), reaching such visibility will inevitably lead to a crisis. With “Maré Vive”, this critical point happened after the page attract attention to the violent nature of many police operations, which led to the virtual attack to the page. Oddly enough, in order to defend themselves, the activists developed a strategy to reach an even bigger visibility, getting in touch with a commercial TV channel. The result was the tension between the need to become visible and the risk of being vulnerable (LOKOT, 2018).

The next case study will discuss how the reach of visibility generated a crisis for the Kenyan mediativist Msingi Sasis.

The Model of Scales of Visibility applied to Nairobi Noir

a) Context:

In the end of 2007, Kenya had general elections, the dispute for the maximum role between Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga, leader of the opposition party, the Orange Democratic Movement. Declarations that the polling was rigged originated tensions within the party, with violent protest all around the country. Over 1,100 people were dead and over 500 thousand were forced to flee their home. In this period, media played a significant role as fuel for these ethnic divisions, of construction and dissemination of the narratives that provoked inter-ethnic hostility (WACHANGA, 2011).

The consequence of this experience left marks in Kenyan society. Artists, in particular, reacted through a creative combination of uses of activist technologies and aesthetic tactics (LOKOT, 2018). The changes in the technological scenario have also facilitated the promotion and sharing of opinion in virtual spaces (in addition to the physical space). Cartoonists, animators, musicians and multimedia artists created a variety of content, unlike mainstream media, that were distributed online (CALLUS, 2018).

In this context, Boniface Mwangi, an award-winning photojournalist that had documented the events of violence in the 2007 elections, decided to create an organization that gathered artists that desired to use their art to promote political and social change. PAWA 254 was created in 2009 as a non-profit organization. It is, today, a strong artistic and cultural nucleus of Kenya that shelters, motivates and catalyzes creative projects geared towards community, with the goal of social change. Msingi Sasis, the founder of Nairobi Noir (www.nairobinoir.org), is part of this nucleus and his story is another interesting example of the ambiguous face of the regimens of visibility (BRIGHENTI, 2007). The story of Msingi shows the power of social media and the Internet to protect and support activists and their cause, but also highlights the other part of the story, the risks linked to visibility and the importance of online reputation.

b) Growth of Visibility

In 2012, the work of photographing the streets of Nairobi after sunset was considered a hobby until 2 years later, in 2014, he edited one of these photos and posted on Facebook, having 500 likes overnight. Since then, Msingi started to pick one of the hundreds of photos he took a day, editing and publishing always one picture per day during 2 years. The photos had a repercussion with his followers and his popularity began to grow.

c) Reach of Visibility

After one month of posts, the photographer received a Facebook message from PAWA254 with an invitation to show his work in an international event, “African Metropolis”. For that occasion, Misingi decided to create a website and establish the brand Nairobi Noir.

Image 4 – Screen capture of Nairobi Noir’s Facebook page.



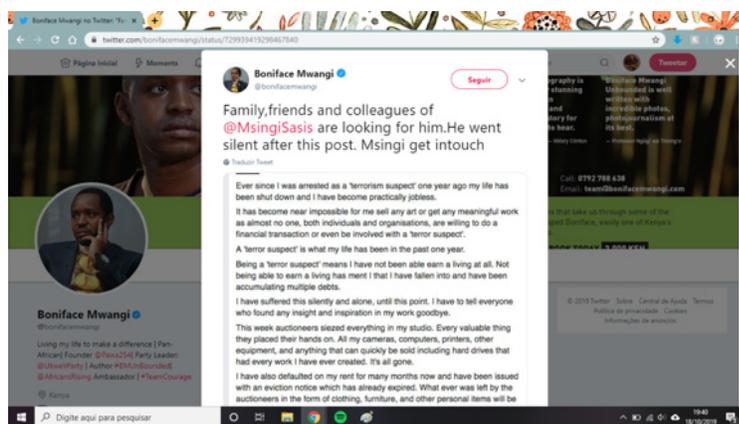
Source: Reproduction – Screen capture.

d) Critical moment

In April 2015, he went out after sunset, as usual, to photograph the city and the Shopping Center Galleria Mall and a few people were suspicious about his presence. Kenya was still under the impact of the terrorist attacks at *Shopping Westgate*, in 2013, which caused the death

of 71 people and left 200 people injured. Thus, people in the shopping mall began to find the situation odd and spread rumors that Msingi would be planning terrorist acts. The crowd began to act violently and Msingi was almost lynched until the police was called and arrested the photographer.

Image 5 – Twitter’s screen capture of Boniface Mwangi.



Source: Reproduction – Screen capture.

e) Management of the Critical Moment

After the massacre at Westgate Shopping Mall and other terrorist attacks that took place in the country, the Kenyan government approved a Security Law Amendment Act, in December, 2014. Among other measures, this law gave the police the right to keep any suspect of terrorism under custody for 360 days, without sharing the case to the public. Therefore, when Msingi’s family went to look for him and the police did not confirm his arrest, they sought the help of Boniface Mwangi, the founder of PAWA254.

f) Overcoming the Critical Moment

The organization PAWA254 began an online campaign, on social media, to report Msingi’s arrest and pressure the police so that the

photographer could be discharged. They were successful and he was released in 24 hours.

After my arrest, I had a huge support and incentive and felt I couldn't simply let an arrest stop me. To all these people, my work had a great resonance. Many people told me how my work had opened their eyes [...] (Interview with Msingi Sasis, 08/26/2018).

His arrest represented an incident of panoptic vigilance. We can infer that the photographic excursions of Msingi through the streets of Nairobi at night had been observed by the authorities. Consequently, the tense and distrust environment that happened that night when he was arrested offered (in an unfair manner) a justification for his arrest and punishment (FOUCAULT, 1977).

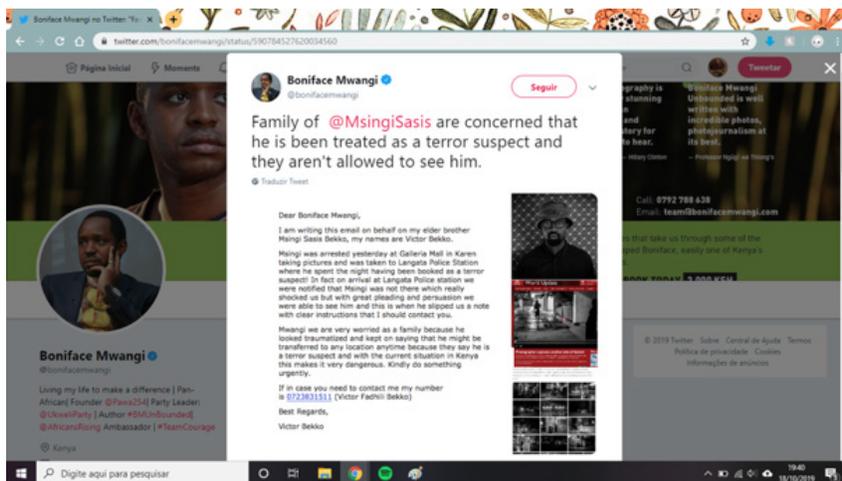
g) (New) Reach of Visibility

After his arrest, Msingi returned to photography, both for his project, Nairobi Noir, and in his studio. However, clients began to distance themselves from the photographer because of news that identified him as suspect of terrorism, began to spread online and on social media. This process generated a type of involuntary negative visibility, bringing unintentional consequences to him.

h) Critical moment

The artist began to not achieve professional projects and began to get into debt. He started to owe rent and was evicted, being unemployed and homeless. That was an extremely hard moment in Msingi's life. However, once again, the network of activists gathered by PAWA254 offered support and created an online campaign to find him and make visible his unfair treatment.

Image 6 – Twitter’s screen capture of Boniface Mwangi.



Source: Reproduction – Screen capture.

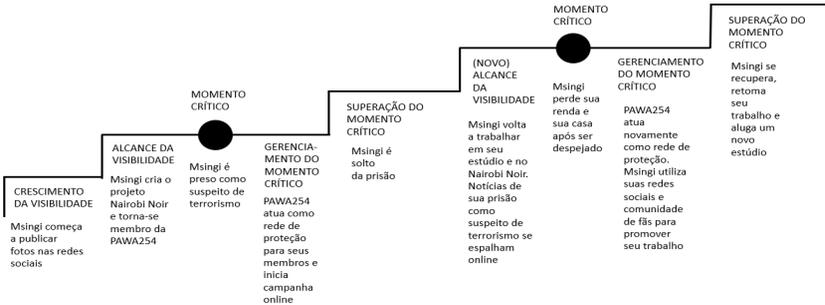
i) Management of the Critical Moment

A few weeks after being evicted, still on the streets, Msingi found, by accident, a people who knew him and he learned that people were looking for him on social media. He took this information to publish a call for help on Facebook, encouraging his followers to buy his photographs so that he could reestablish himself.

j) Overcoming the Critical Moment

The visibility helped Msingi win back his artistic recognition. At the same time, the community of followers he had formed offered support, once again, buying his photos so that could put his life back on track and create a new photographic studio.

Image 7 – The Model of Scales of Visibility applied to Nairobi Noir



Source: Authors.

In both cases, the activists adopted different strategies to overcome their critical moments and manage their unintentional visibilities. A key element in the path of visibility of Nairobi Noir was the relationship with a strong network of activists and with Boniface Mwangi, a famous and connected artist of the country. His organization, PAWA254, was successful when it was necessary to pressure for Msingi's release, through the strategic use of visibility on social media. In Rio de Janeiro, the tactics of "Maré Vive" (LOKOT, 2018) included an appeal to mainstream media. With that, activists got to neutralize the negative effects caused by the fake page that put their reputation and their lives in danger. As suggested by De Backer (2018), it was possible to see the ways in which the elements of control and recognition was mixed. The recognition reached by the page in the community turned into surveillance and control – in fact, the page was attacked because maybe it became too recognized. It was necessary, then, that the wide reach of the mainstream media become visible for the social relevance of this initiative, preventing that the attacks could cause more damage for these activists. Furthermore, the activists could perceive that the critical moment generated by the fast reach of visibility of the page meant the adoption of a few measures for caution, such as the need to keep anonymous the identity of the people behind the page. This decision to promote a rotation of the team of activists responsible for the page, avoiding the association of

their accounts with the management of profiles (Interview, “Mediativist Maré Vive”, 06-18-2019) represents an effort of counter-surveillance. As affirmed by Dencik et al. (2016), these efforts go beyond techno-legal solutions, such as the use of tools of increase of privacy since these activist groups are not a part of a group specialized in technology.

Final Considerations

With these two case studies, we find a confirmation for the authors perspective that highlight the ambiguities inherent to the concept of visibility. The work of De Baker is useful as he articulates both faces of the concepts of reaching visibility – recognition and control – and their implications. In fact, they can even happen simultaneously, with recognition turning into control or vice-versa (2018, p. 2). In our study, we perceived that mediativism has a transgressor character, geared towards transformation of reality (BRAIGHI and CÂMARA, 2018). In this context, visibility is fundamental for the communication of activist causes, however, at the same time, brings significant challenges for them. In this article, our goal wasn't so much about identifying the counter-surveillance efforts performed by activists. When adopting a perspective of the Global South, our intent was to highlight the paths of visibility of activists, identifying the achievements and challenges brought by the reach of visibility or by the maintenance of invisibility.

Mediativists of marginalized communities or those who deal with marginalization generally have the need of making their work with very limited resources, with little time to prepare for the future. This article had the goal of offering a tool, the Model of Scales of Visibility, so we could map their paths of visibility until the overcoming of or retraction from the critical moments. We argue that these critical moments will inevitably happen with the reach of visibility. That happens as a consequence of the ways in which mediativists of marginalized communities are treated as enemies of society. In these contexts, civil disobedience acquire diverse meanings. Legitimate causes, like the fight against police violence or the artistic representation of social issues can be repressed

with punishment, prison or even execution. With that, we confirm that, when dislocating from the axis of the North for the Global South, the reach of visibility can bring a bigger magnitude with equally bigger and more serious consequences.

However, the model presents limitations. Here, it is important to observe that the paths of visibility of activists not always follow a growing trajectory, as we could infer by the graphic representations included in this article. In fact, they seem to depend on the strategies used by the groups, since the same can choose to become invisible in order to mitigate a crisis for a long period of time, interrupting their online activities. The graphic representation of paths of visibility of “Maré Vive” and “Nairobi Noir” was referring to events that transform the lives of these activists, since it was not possible to include a wider variety of events. After all, the model needed to be simple so it could be a reference for mediativists, without being necessary a high degree of technical specialization. In addition, it is not our intention to try to predict the future of activist initiatives based on a small number of cases. After the development of a model based on both cases, as a next step, it becomes necessary the conduction of more researches on how this could be applied to a larger number of cases in countries of the global south.

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On the Authors:

Andrea Medrado – Professor at the Department of Social Communication and the Graduate Program in Media and Daily Lives at Universidade Federal Fluminense. Worked as a co-researcher at the Network eVoices Redressing Marginality, sponsored by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) from the United Kingdom. In July, 2020, was elected Vice-President of the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR). Completed a Post-Doctorate Research by Royal Holloway University of London, got a Doctorate by University of Westminster and Master's with Fullbright scholarship at University of Oregon. Theme researches related to mediativism, marginalized communities and South-South communication. In the present article, based on data obtained in the project eVoices Redressing Marginality (sponsored by Arts and Humanities Research Council – AHRC developed the model described in the article, in addition of making the Portuguese version of the text.

Isabella Rega – Professor and researcher at Bournemouth University and at Jesuit Worldwide Learning: Higher Education at the Margins (JWL). At Bournemouth University, she works as an Associate Professor in Digital Media for Social Transformation at the Department of Media and Communication. She is a Vice-Coordinator of CEMP - Centre of Excellence in Media Practice. She is Coordinator of the Research Centre Media and Digital Literacies and is a member of the Civic Media Hub. At JWL, she works as a Global Research Director, coordinating projects that analyze the impact of higher education in marginalized communities in different countries of the world, evaluating the role of digital technologies in high-quality educational experiences. In the present article, based on data obtained in the project eVoices Redressing Marginality (sponsored by Arts and Humanities Research Council – AHRC developed the model described in the article.

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