ASTONISHING IMAGES:

TV news and accountability processes

BRAULIO B. NEVES
Unicamp, Brazil

ROUSILEY C. M. MAIA
UFMG, Brazil

ABSTRACT
Several scholars acknowledge the important role that journalism has in promoting accountability. Precisely how television news images contribute to triggering accountability dynamics, however, remains virtually unexplored. With this in mind, this study aims at a theoretical specification regarding the potential of video images to provoke public debates supporting accountability. Taking into consideration a case of extreme police violence - "*Favela* Naval Event", which occurred in Diadema, São Paulo, Brazil - the authors analyze how TV news constructs the denunciation of police brutality and shapes controversies regarding attribution of responsibilities. Several dimensions of accountability are addressed in a range of competitive contexts that underscore the debate concerning the meaning of such scandalous images. This study challenges the common sense view that images degenerate the public sphere.
Key-words: TV news; accountability; public debate; police violence.

INTRODUCTION

Classical thinkers such as Edmund Burke, Jeremy Bentham and James Mill have acknowledged the fundamental role of journalism in monitoring the activities of political authorities. This is done by promoting control in power-sharing through check and balance mechanisms, which helps to keep governments accountable in democratic societies. Many contemporary scholars have explored the way watchdog journalism exposes scandals that affect the common welfare, which include governmental flaws and power transgressions (DENNIS et al., 1989; SCHUDSON, 1995; WAISBORD, 2000; THOMPSON, 2000). Nonetheless, these studies of accountability still pay little attention to the *specific properties of images* that allow journalists to depict public events and to trigger accountability dynamics.

The aim of this article is to clarify the importance of TV news images in constructing denunciations of power transgressions and configurations

of public controversies. For this study, the authors take into account the TV news coverage of a police power abuse situation that took place in the *Favela* Naval (a slum in the Diadema satellite district) in São Paulo, Brazil, in March 1997: a group of São Paulo military policemen during three nights humiliated and beat ordinary citizens in alleged "operations against drug dealing." These actions resulted in the assassination of a black worker who lived in suburban São Paulo. This episode offers a good opportunity to explore the use of technical images as "objective witnesses" in TV news. This is so because the next day the victims formally denounced the crimes, which were also reported in the cover story of a local newspaper (the *Diário do Grande ABC*). This denunciation, however, only resulted in customary processing at the local police station and two footnotes in major newspapers (BLAT; SARAIVA, 2000). The aforementioned crimes had been recorded by a video amateur. Nearly a month after the episode, the exhibiting of the video images during the main Brazilian TV newscast – "*Jornal Nacional*" – changed the nature of those occurrences. Upon becoming public, knowledge of the crimes was no longer confined to publicity-lacking remote urban outskirts or local newspapers. It appeared in millions of homes in Brazil. It shocked viewers and national and international public opinion; it remained in the media for several weeks.

We believe that the *Favela* Naval incident became a *publicly relevant event* due to the video images denunciation. Most of the Brazilian media gave significant coverage to the unfolding events in the following weeks after the initial denunciation. Almost immediately, the legitimacy of the so-called "normal" procedures adopted by the military police, by the government of São Paulo, and by judicial authorities in investigating these crimes was questioned. During the following days, many other anomalies in the São Paulo military police were made public, as well as other police crimes which had happened in other places at other times. Such entangled denunciations raised harsh criticism from part of the civic society and the media directed against Brazilian military police operations. Once public attention converged on police crimes, there was a significant acceleration in the process of passing laws on these issues. These dynamics resulted in law approval (with amendments) in a much shorter time that usually expected by habitual defenders of human rights.

This article is structured in three parts. First, we present the *Favela* Naval episode and explore how the case became a media event through video image denunciation in a TV newscast. Secondly, we attempt

to show how politicians and public officials face television publicity to respond to public criticism and how they try to make their ideas, identities and interests legitimate. We argue that video images can play an important role in provoking public debates and supporting accountability dynamics. We conclude by summarizing the fundamental elements for understanding the relevance of video images in news construction and accountability processes.

The empirical material of this research is composed of recordings of two major television newscasts – Globo Network's *Jornal Nacional* and Bandeirante Network's *Jornal da Band* – broadcasted between March 31 and April 14, 1997. The analysis of the *Favela* Naval event material was done in three stages: (a) the television news reports were chronologically transcribed; (b) the enunciations were grouped according to four discursive perspectives: from the viewpoints of "TV news agents," "police agents," "political representative agents," and "civil society agents;" and (c) each audiovisual enunciation was examined to identify relationships between the definition of the situation by its actors (GOFFMAN, 2005) and the incorporation of their pronouncements in news narratives. The combined analysis of stages (a), (b) and (c) aims to evince audiovisual narration concerning the denunciation process and the public debate process.

The *favela* **Naval story line**

> (Newscaster/sync): " 'Astonishing images, exclusive in *Jornal Nacional*, 'The Military Police of São Paulo torture, attack and kill during police raids,' 'Abuse, violence and cowardice. São Paulo Military Police officers turn raids in outskirts into terror episodes … humiliation, beating…extortion… shooting. The exclusive scenes … were recorded by an amateur movie-maker … and reveal extreme cruelty inflicted on defenseless citizens, whether suspects or not. *Jornal Nacional* warns that these images may offend, … but its duty is to denounce'."

The March 31, 1997 edition of *Jornal Nacional* (Globo Television Network), the major Brazilian TV news program, opens with warnings and editorial indignation. These are the introductory lines of a series of unprecedented images in Brazilian television that show a group of São Paulo military policemen humiliating and beating ordinary citizens (who offered no resistance) during three nights, and the assassination of a black worker. According to the *Jornal Nacional* news report (referred to as "JNa" throughout the rest of this article), recordings of "police operations" had been made by an unidentified "amateur movie-maker".

The video denunciation of police crimes in *Favela* Naval, in many ways similar to Rodney King's beating recorded in Los Angeles five years before (LOON, 1996), triggered a generalized search for explanations and forced police officials, government officials and public authorities to give explanations for their actions or inaction (HALLIN, 1994; THOMPSON, 2000; WAISBORD, 2000). The construction of denunciation in the media stands for what Habermas (1996:357) describes as "transportation of the problem situation" to the public sphere: a sharing of experience of an originally local, indistinct, non-public nature leads to ample visibility, and is thus accepted as of general interest, requesting broad public interpretation. This transportation forced political and social actors to discuss the recurring inefficacy of routine legal and administrative mechanisms in scrutinizing police power transgressions.

The resulting scandal after the publishing of these images appears to be paradoxical: the power of journalistic reporting does not originate from the facts themselves, as urban police brutality – a current practice of Brazilian public security forces – is often reported in the media. Furthermore, human rights defense movements systematically denounce police power abuse. The scandal is related to television exposure of *the video images* of police brutality to public view. The video images were particularly relevant in creating a "problem situation", directing attention to the role of the police in Brazilian society, the fragility of accountability mechanisms, the need to debate and pass effective human rights laws and to redefine the attributions of military courts. The video images had enough power to catalyze public debates and to trigger accountability processes.

Having established the *Favela* Naval Event (FNE) "problem situation", journalists went on to cover parliamentary decisions and the judicial process that resulted from the initial denunciation.

As presented in the mass media, images recorded at *Favela* Naval showed enunciations from several sources: crime witnesses and victims, ordinary people, executive, judiciary and parliamentary authorities, lawyers and jurists, policemen, etc. Many Brazilian political and social actors initiated discussions on the meanings that TV news images should have (BRITTO NEVES, 2000).

TV news, visibility and accountability

It is necessary to shed light on the concept of accountability before exploring our empirical case. Accountability is the democratic imperative by which representatives – when directing public business

– are bound to consider the wishes and needs of citizens. Regardless of the existence of formal control, a government is considered "responsive" when it preferentially adopts policies indicated by citizens (PRZEWORSKI et al., 1999). At an operational level, accountability includes a search for institutional mechanisms designed to supervise and control the performance of public institutions, and to judge how representatives and public agents really act in their use of powers and performance of duties.

In democratic nations, elected representatives make political decisions which public officials – to whom representatives delegate some government tasks – put into practice. Democratic institutions therefore should offer a panoply of accountability devices: "the separate branches of government answer and render accounts not only to citizens but also to one another" (PRZEWORSKI et al., 1999:19). This yields appropriate coercion, as government representatives are required to provide explanations to their superiors about their actions and their use of delegated powers. If norms are violated or power is transgressed, representatives and public officials should accept legitimate sanctions.

The accountability concept is manifold, and may be developed in different analytical dimensions (PRZEWORSKI et al., 1999; MULGAN, 2000, AUTHOR, 2006). *Political accountability* refers to the way governors attempt to satisfy the wishes and needs of citizens by adopting corresponding policies even without formal control. It also includes several methods used in controlling public organizations to assure that agents act according to the formal rules. *Professional or personal accountability* refers to the inner sense of individual responsibility for public interests in any given situation, which includes consciously undertaking functions and obligations. *Legal accountability* refers to juridical processes of investigation and sanctions if the law is transgressed. A critical debate among citizens and their representatives is fundamental to enforce accountability processes. Arato (2002:92) states that "an accountability regime cannot be purely procedural". In this author's view, "an accountability regime can only work well alongside deliberation that takes place in the public sphere, and which is sustained by civic society" (ARATO, 2002:96). One should keep in mind that specification of misuse of power and attribution of responsibility are not straightforwardly attained but are rather processes that involve the exchange of views and perspectives among several social actors to interpret actions and their consequences (ROBERTS, 2002). In this sense, the accountability process is based on "the ability of individuals or groups to demand explanations

from representatives about their actions - what they account for, what they can be responsible for, what they can be punished for, or even what they can be rewarded for" (ARATO, 2002:9).

The media have many important functions in the accountability process, as follows: (a) to give visibility to the actions of political representatives and public officials; (b) to denounce improper acts, transgressions or abuse of power regarding the ideals and rules of democratic policy; (c) to set up a platform for social actors to exchange points of view and (d) to monitor scrutiny and investigation processes undertaken by legislative or judicial institutions (WAISBORD, 2000). In the media environment, interlocutors are encouraged to be responsible for their acts "not only one to another, but also to an audience of citizens (the general public)" (GUTMANN; THOMPSON, 1996:137). This does not obviously result in open dialogue between the public administration and its publics. People involved in transgression often avoid frank and transparent communication; they aim to protect private or corporative interests for non-public reasons (WAINSBORD, 2000; AUTHOR, 2006). Following media disclosure, responsible institutions may be ineffective or have no interest in conducting further investigations.

For our purpose, it needs to be stressed that the role of the image changes during TV news from "denunciation" to "controversy" construction. The former is the investigation activity by media professionals, during which they attempt to confirm the truthfulness of the images which are then organized as journalistic narratives. Only after confirmation of the "fact" could JNa break the news, dealing with it as a public "scandal". The second role is a social interpretation of events, called here "controversy," in which media professionals and other actors attempt to define political, moral and ethical implications of the events. In this step we see that enunciation shifts from assertions to arguments and gains abstraction power. The media event is established when social actors interpret the happenings reflexively. In the mass media environment, each new enunciation redefines the meaning of events and previous enunciations, and is simultaneously made available for subsequent interpretation (LESTER; MOLOTOCH, 1993; MOUILLAUD, 1997).

The denunciation: narrating and constructing the event

Modern Western common sense insists on considering images as "objective witnesses" (FARGIER, 1988). It assumes that events are somehow autonomous relative to values, and can in themselves define causal connections or evince logical conclusions. The ideal or ideology

of journalistic objectivity and the definition of video images as "objective witnesses" are strongly influenced by the idea of "objective objectiveness" (TUCHMAN, 1972; MOUILLAUD, 1997). The assumption here is that indices are able to propose general rules in their own right. This form of conceiving technically-captured images is paradoxical, considering how easily images can be manipulated nowadays. Considering events as indices, camera images remain strongly resistant to the symbolic framings and interpretations they generate. In different contexts, video images constantly offer new possibilities of meaning by sketching different narrative paths, never becoming wholly absorbed in these reports (ECO; SEBEOK, 1991).

In moments of denunciation, it becomes clear that TV news report interventions reproduce procedures pertaining to criminal justice. Advocating their ability to intervene immediately on the crime scene, TV journalists may witness criminal acts, collect testimonies of witnesses, point out and summarily assign guilt, and punish with public vexation (WAISBORD, 2000).

A first publication of the original event (police crimes on videotape recordings) appeared on JNa at 8:00 p.m. Most of this news edition intended to display the initial video-enunciation segments that had been edited and associated with the data investigated by the TV news production team.

> JNa0 (Newscaster/off): "Diadema District, Metropolitan São Paulo. Seven past midnight, the 3rd day of this month. A military police squad of the 22nd battalion begins what officially was an operation against drug dealing activities on a side street in the outskirts of town. A car is stopped. The occupants climb out. They are placed against a wall with their hands up. Nobody offers resistance. But an angry police officer shouts "Jerk! Shut up!" The other police officer is more violent <*Face slaps* – "Wanna get beaten? Huh?" *Face slaps* >. The police officer turns to the other men …and punches them on their kidneys. Twenty minutes past midnight. Cap on backwards and holding a weapon; this police officer leads the violence. Another car is stopped. The police officers leave the other young men, and run towards the occupant, who tries to explain himself. No use. The men in the car are set free. No witnesses left. The military policemen listen to the explanations … and become even angrier. <*Face slaps*>. A large police officer appears. The young man wipes his beaten face. Shortly after, the large police officer takes him to the back of the wall. <*Beating, shrieks, cries*>. The beating does not interfere with conversation among the military police officers. Another police officer grabs a cudgel and hands it over to his large colleague. <*Beating, shrieks, cries*>. The amateur moviemaker manages to capture part of the scene in which the large police officer beats the young man <Beatings, shrieks, cries>. Disregarding the young man's

appeals, the large police officer shakes his head and calls one of his colleagues … who is already pointing his weapon at the driver of the other car. *<The same>* He then walks naturally … holding his weapon. *<Beating, shrieks, cries>* and silence.

    The entire torture lasted eight minutes. The large police officer massages his arm. His colleague puts his weapon away … and laughs, as if nothing had happened. The police officer never called headquarters to check whether the cars had been stolen."

Initially, there is a short presentation of tape segments of the FNE showing the most violent moments. These tape segments are not in chronological order. This form of organizing the TV news report aims to produce an enhanced emotional impact (GRABE et al., 2001; NEWHAGEN, 1998). Shortly afterwards, the FNE video images are shown again, now in the "normal" chronological order. A reporter makes comments in off, which is redundant when considering the information already in the video images (JNa0/6). The next FNE segment shows images of military policeman Gambra playing with his private (clandestine) gun:

    JNa0/8 (Newscaster/off): "Thirty minutes past midnight on the 5th day. Rambo plays with his gun. He sets the cartridge clip."

This police officer, rapidly referred to by his nickname ("Rambo"), so far is the only officer to be identified. Another newscast shown at 11:00 p.m. by the same television station reveals that the identification "Rambo" was wrongly applied to police officer N.S. Silva Jr.:

    JGl0/4(Newcaster/off): "After being slapped in his face, this man is taken to an alley and beaten by the large police officer known as Rambo. *<Beating, shrieks, cries>* After the beating, the large police officer calls a friend who walks calmly by. Minutes later, a shot is heard *<bang!>*."

The hurried application of the epithet and the identification "mistake" suggest that, in these first denunciations, journalists introduced and distinguished the character of the antagonist. In the perspective of media agents, the "Rambo" designation does not refer exactly to a person, but is rather a general characterization of the criminal police officer, whoever he may be. Captured as a sign, the name Gambra becomes an example of the generally violent military police "Rambos", standing for abusive institution procedures that are beyond individual behavior.

    Immediately after this descriptive pause, JNa0 shows the "proof" of police corruption that had been denounced. The image of a military

police sergeant collecting the papers of a Volkswagen driver is shown, but not his image giving them back a little later. This false denunciation depicts the strong disposition of the TV news in selecting the most incriminating images without showing any element in favor of the police officer's defense.

In the remaining sequence, aggressions which took place during the following night (from March 6 to 7, 1997) are shown - a driver was badly beaten and another one, mechanic Mario José Josino, was killed. The exhibition of the segments omits the long aggression "session," which is summarized in a verbal report:

> JNaI0/4(Newscaster/off): "Rambo approaches. The suspect tries to explain himself. First cudgel blow. The second blow. And others. The large police officer holds and twists the young man's foot. The beating continues. The large police officer now strikes the young man's foot with the cudgel. In only three minutes, the victim will have received thirty-four blows".

The sequence closes with an announcement of the assassination of Mario Jose Josino, showing video images of the shots. "Take a look at the young man holding a memo book. He is going to die. (…) But the worst is still to come (…)". Aside from a typical personalizing approach of the journalistic narrative ("Rambo", the antagonist; "Mario Josino", the victim), a sentence of the narration in off shows the double meaning of the "scene":

> JNa0/8(Off/off): "… After being beaten, they enter the car. The young man with the memo book sits in the back. When it all seems to be over, Rambo calmly enters the scene. He shoots at the car <*car speeds up. Bang!*> In the rear, someone else also shoots, but into the air <*car, bang!*>. Rambo finishes his job with another shot."

Now, "Rambo" really enters the "scene" - he had been hiding behind a lamppost. He appears before the camera, but he also does this in a figurative sense by *performing* an *Extra*ordinary and spectacular act. Here, the expression "crime scene" becomes uncommonly literal due to the recording of the crime. The moment and place where the violent and customary gesture takes place become "exemplary," taking on public and symbolic meanings.

> JNa0/9 (Newscaster/sync): "One of the police officer's shots hit the young man who was sitting in the back seat. Mechanic Mario Jose Josino, who was on vacation and had been visiting a friend, was taken

to the State hospital in Diadema by his peers … where he died hours afterwards."

JNa0 probably abides by the chronological order of the video images because at that moment temporal verisimilitude is necessary to establish the authenticity of the videotape recordings (Tuchman, 1993; Hallin, 1994). The second part of JNa0 starts with a "summary of the worst moments," which is longer and more descriptive than the initial report. The taped scenes were displayed out of chronological order. The leading reporter who presents the denunciation describes one of the beatings in detail. The victim's testimony, given exclusively to the TV newscast, was announced as a teaser for the next day's edition. The newscaster ends that day's edition with a long comment on the events.

From proofs to emblems

The following day, (April 1st) JNa1 shows testimonies by victims supporting the veracity of the first recordings. The images are strategically edited for increased objectivity, either to intensify the sensorial impact or to emphasize the testimonies by showing images of witnesses during the beatings (GRABE et al., 2001; NEWHAGEN, 1998). It may be said that the "scenes" were assembled with a clear intention to produce metaphors. One of the scenes in particular depicts a driver's face being slapped (FNT 12:18, 3 March 1997), which was repeatedly shown and "recycled" in many different ways. During its first exhibition, the video segment suggests the identity of one of the police officers, coherently named the "slapping king" (JNa1/5). The second time the video is aired, the segment depicts the beatings while we hear the testimonies of *Favela* Naval dwellers (JNa1/5). The third time the video is shown, the image is frozen right after the victim is slapped (JNa1/8). The police officer's face is exposed while the "defenseless citizen" remains hidden by the backward movement resulting from the blow. This short scene (blow-slapping still) is used to introduce the "people-speak" sequences (JNa1/8, 19 and 34). After the blow and the frozen videogram scene, the background is discolored to highlight two men against a black and white background; the background is "colorized" in red. This image is once again altered to serve as a background for JNa newsmen, which visually identifies the FNE-linked enunciations.

For JNa, this scene became metonymically the *Favela* Naval media event emblem. The treatment and form that are given appear to condense a number of important semantic operations related to the appropriation

of abstraction through the initial images, and to establish a thematic field of visibility within broadcast journalism (TRAQUINA, 1993; TUCHMAN, 1993; HALLIN, 1994; GRABE et al., 2001).

First, showing the police officer's face leads to a unique representation of police violence, resulting from an individual act of transgression (IYENGAR, 1991, 1996). In the degenerative style of certain politicians at that moment, occurrences are depicted as "unique cases that recur." Secondly, this video image generically identifies the victim of aggression ("the citizen"), emphasizing the transitory nature of his relationship with the television audience (an operation explicitly conveyed by JNa1 teasers: "Imagine: *you* are approached this way"). This appeal to the use of transitoriness could be a typical form of relationship between the contemporary broadcast public and mediated reports. The spectators are placed simultaneously in the roles of witnesses and victims, as seen in the beginning of the *Favela* Naval crime denunciations (WARNER, 1993:394).

Thirdly, the "FNE emblem" aims at limiting the polysemy of the initial enunciation. This helps public circulation of the initial video denouncement, favoring its appropriation as a "cornerstone scandal" that is able to catalyze a debate on a specific thematic field. Nevertheless, it is also in the dispute among media companies for divulging the event that the images are ultimately expropriated of any authorship, becoming sufficiently public and "autonomous" to fulfill "their denunciation role." This means once again that the video enunciations require an accountability mechanism. Within this scope, proper conditions for establishing a public debate process for the interpretation of images are prepared, which become consolidated in the "controversy" stage of news coverage.

Public debate: developing "controversies"

In the surge of public commotion after the initial media denunciation, denouncing procedures are replaced by the necessary "journalistic coverage" for the "controversy" report, which is the social interpretation of the event. This passage is the onset of a second interpretative demand in the media sphere of visibility. Now the public-political meaning of the event needs to be assigned. This demand cannot be supplied by the discursive production of the media professionals themselves; it requires also the participation of society and State actors. During "coverage," media agents abandon the initial interventionist position to access other actors. The reporting teams assiduously appear in enunciation situations

that are proposed by the other actors. A second translation of the video images is then produced within the public controversy. Video images become part of enunciations by different actors, becoming elements of their argument. Public attention is directed more explicitly to a collective evaluation of the political, moral and ethical implications of the event.

The various forms by which social actors judge the initial recorded images are particularly significant for our investigation. In the first TV news editions, conditions for allowing the images to attain their testimonial importance and their emotional appeal (scandal) were established. Beyond this first moment of shock, however, the event unfolds as a reflexive communicative process. The sense of the occurrence remains open, requiring public sphere actors to take a stand.

This is literally visible in the corners of the images that were analyzed; from the day after the denunciation on, marks of enunciation contexts began to be appropriated by several brands. The *TV Globo* logotype was added to the first date and time graphic symbols of the initial recording; also added were credits for reporters, the news agency logo, and those of other broadcasting stations. The competing broadcasting stations were allowed to show the images in black and white and in less open frames of video screens; the initial recording had been shown in a press conference organized by a state prosecutor. Furthermore, during the period that was examined, TV news shows gradually shorter and decreasingly varied segments, which once again suggests a change in their function, now as a general representation of police violence. A discursive environment takes place, as several actors attempt to explain the event, to attribute responsibilities, and to recommend solutions for perceived problems (IYENGAR, 1991, 1996).

The TV news shows the video images of the crime – in several places with different attributions – as a synecdoche of institutional "repercussion," including the Public Prosecutor's Office in Diadema; the Human Rights Subcommittee of the Chamber of Deputies (in Brasília); the room where a representative of Amnesty International is interviewed by a JNa reporter (while the screen shows JNa0 images); the São Paulo State Legislature (during sessions of the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry into organized crime); the Court of Diadema and others. With this synecdoche, an explanation is given for the contrast between the ample public circulation of the *Favela* Naval tape "scenes" after their TV news airing and the previous restricted access to the "tape". The original recording was copied in black and white by an independent moviemaker and then handed over to the military police. The incriminating video

images were watched by officers of the São Paulo State military police High Command and by the *Jornal Nacional* news crew. The High Command sent a copy to the Military Judiciary and to the Public Prosecutor´s Office of Diadema shortly afterwards, on March 24th . As a result of these "adequate measures," the military policemen were arrested on March 25th – a week before the recordings were first aired.

Aside from abuse of authority and illegitimate use of force by members of the police force in the FNE, many procedures for concealing illegal actions were also brought to public attention, including: falsification of legal documents, concealment of incriminating evidence, criminal neglect in the search for proofs, disqualification of victims´ testimonies, exposure and intimidation of witnesses, among others (BLAT; SARAIVA, 2000). News reporting questions the lack of publicity of the legal actions against the criminal police officers. "Concealment" was variously questioned and was associated with accounts of freedom from punishment for most of the military police officers judged by the Military Judiciary. In the next section, we will explore various demands for accountability in the actions or inactions of representatives, both with respect to each other and to an extended audience of citizens.

Different dimensions of accountability

The demand for official representatives and governors to be publicly accountable for their actions – either within the legislative context, in court, or before the media – forces a specific type of dialogue with the public (DENNIS et al., 1989; MAIA, 2006; SCHUDSON, 1995; THOMPSON, 2000; WAISBORD, 2000). The media generate opportunities for citizens to question representatives, who are thus required to be responsible for their acts and utterances in a broader way than face-to-face interactions would allow. Making political representatives – and those involved in transgressions – responsive is not an easy task, since these persons do not volunteer information on errors or abuse of power. Nevertheless, as mentioned above, a representative democracy is configured as a chain of assignment of competencies and a corresponding chain of accountability that operates in the opposite direction (MANIN, 1997). This notion demonstrates the mechanisms that allow representatives to impose responsibility on official agents for the actual performance of institutions in democratic systems. Aware of the importance of public communication, political authorities exert various forms of pressure on members of the police force in the media sphere of visibility (WAISBORD, 2000; PRICHARD, 2000; MAIA, 2006).

TV newsagents actively participate in demands for justification, emphasizing the absence of various dimensions of accountability in the FNE. Lack of professional accountability is stressed; no principle of personal or inner responsibility, or even a principle of corporative loyalty, would justify negligence in communicating facts to hierarchical superiors or to elected representatives:

> JG10/7 (Newscaster/sync.): "… 'The military police High Command was informed of the crimes through an agent who was part of the group' … 'The *tape* of the amateur moviemaker … had also been available to the military police for a week. The São Paulo State Government press staff was unable to explain …the reason why the military police High Command concealed this fact from the State Secretary for Public Security and even from the Governor' ".

> JBa1/3 (Anchor/sync.): "'The Governor of São Paulo … saw those images for the first time yesterday on Globo Network´s *Jornal Nacional*. If it were not for this news … the alley of shame would possibly end up as so many other … alleys … in Brazilian slums … where the police torture, extort money and kill citizens … like you and me … and nothing happens. This could be another … alley of silence' ".

Facing accusations of lenience or connivance at all levels from the officer in the command of the "operation" to the State Governor (including the commander of the 24th Military Police Battalion of Diadema – the "chief" of the local military police force), all the official enunciators repeat the same maneuvers, based on a defense of "professional," "corporative," and even "personal" concepts of accountability. Professional accountability supplies the main justification for *jus interna corporis* and for a defense of the sufficiency of routine bureaucratic treatments. This recurs in discourses of enunciators close to the São Paulo military police force, as well as in the discourse of State Executive Branch representatives during coverage of the FNE. Let us consider a few declarations given by the Governor of São Paulo on the second day the TV news airs the video:

> JBa (Governor): "… I could perfectly complain about … not having been informed … if … I knew, I would be obliged to take measures. But, once I know … if all the measures I order … are taken … how can I complain about it? (*Jornal Nacional*, April 1, 1997)".

> (Governor): "I consider this fact very serious. (…) what happened is inexcusable. There is, as a matter of fact, a hierarchy in government … each one … has an obligation to acquaint his hierarchical superior of facts … There are many intermediaries between … myself, as Governor … and the commander over there. The news came to me through the

Secretary for Public Security ... who had received the information from the military police commander, who in turn had received it from the mid-level command ... The news had not reached the military police commander ... But I don't want to present this as an excuse.. No, this is ... only a ... fact, I really didn't know. But this does not eliminate the event".

(Anchor): "But, Governor, the fact that you were not told by a subordinate ... about such an important fact ... is this not also an important fact? It is evidently not as important as ... the monstrosity we have seen, but isn't there an administrative misstep ... a very serious one?"

(Governor): "Yes ... but let us not get lost in asides, for this is not the fundamental issue. In fact, ... this would be, had I not left this morning ... gone to the headquarters, seen the ten arrested men, followed the two police official ... inquiries, talked to the two ... chiefs of the inquiries ... and checked from the initial moment ... that the measures to be taken were taken ... on day 6, as an outcome of ... the call from the hospital where there was a dead person ..."

The Governor shields himself behind a "professional" concept of accountability to describe his "accountability duty" as taking place through many hierarchical levels, the "chain of command" of the public security system. Each level "responds" to the next level (and only to it). That is, he justifies himself with the concept that he must only "respond" to whoever asks. This is evidently a far cry from a strict definition of accountability, which would involve not only a commitment of *enouncing to whoever really should know, even if the information is not required by this person, but also of making enunciations to the general public*, and not only to an immediate hierarchical superior.

In the FNE controversy, lack of accountability to the general public on the part of transgressors was emphasized. Members of the police force refused to talk in public, or used mere formal mechanisms of legal and/or administrative accountability. This formalism is a corporative tool to avoid public scrutiny. Silence then appears as an audiovisual and verbal symbol for the whole logic of institutional routines:

JG10/5 (Newscaster/sync.): "We looked for Governor Mario Covas, the Secretary for Public Security and the São Paulo military police commander himself ... *but none of these authorities wanted to comment on the Jornal Nacional TV news...*".

JNa4/8 (Newscaster/off): "At the end of the afternoon, I tried

to talk to the police spokesman again, but he refused to record an interview" … The military police High Command gathered hastily. After much insistence, our cameraman was allowed to produce images of the meeting. While the camera was operating, the police colonels … said not a word. *<coughing, throat clearing, flashes, air conditioning noise>*".

According to Avritzer (2002), accountability mechanisms in Latin America are systematically undermined by the practical logic of political actors. The persistence of police abuse in Brazilian cities, widely denounced by Brazilian and international human rights movements, demonstrates "two major areas of stress between public opinion and political society":

"The first area of stress is between the willingness of political society to formally support human rights, as well as its unwillingness to support legal and administrative measures needed for enforcement. …The second source of stress concerns punishment of human rights violators. When opinion public is engaged, Brazilian courts … are more willing to take human rights abuse seriously, compared to the political society or local administrators. Yet, in Brazil … the courts lean more toward indemnifying victims than punishing abusers; sometimes their decisions even help human rights abusers to evade justice". (AVRITZER, 2002:115-116).

The absence of "internal" and "external" accountability in the police force leads us to infer that elected governors are only accountable after the public is informed, an inversion of the "normal" logic of accountability. The problem of institutional procedures within State administrative bodies emerged from TV news denunciation of crimes and the existence and delayed publicity of video recordings. "Who in the Military Police Command knew about the tape?", "Who in the Government of São Paulo was aware of its existence and content?", "Why has punishment not been ordered before?" are questions often posed by news crews. Several enunciators of civic society are suspicious of military police inquiries and other related non-public and internal administrative processes in the police force.

During the two weeks in which the FNE was examined, the focus of TV news rapidly shifted from denunciation to institutional processing. A prolonged quarrel about responsibilities regarding the "tape" originated in the São Paulo military police command; more precisely, the issue of who failed to take the necessary measures to avoid a scandal kept the State Secretary for Public Security and the São Paulo military police command

busy for weeks. TV news agents focused on the publics endowed with power: the Public Prosecutor´s Office, from which a consistent accusation is expected; the Courts, in the hope that the accused are punished and damages are compensated; the parliaments in charge of discussing changes in the normative frame and also the parliamentary inquiry commissions that investigate political responsibility for the events.

A peculiar feature of mediatization stands out along with the questioning of institutional procedures followed as a result of events that are denounced. This includes the connection between (in some cases, the conflation of) different temporalities in several social processes (GHEUDE, 1988; HAY, 2001; LOON, 1996). This appears in journalistic coverage as explanations of temporal unbalance between news production procedures and those of administrative accountability, which allowed TV news to highlight the slowness of bureaucratic processes as a corporative maneuver to allow the aggressors to go unpunished.

TV news gave unprecedented attention to the legal proceedings involving the accused. In the case of enunciators attached to parliament, the actions that were reported and displayed most were those related to the investigation of institutional responsibilities, rather than the actions of legislative branch members as *legislators*. To a certain extent this may be explained by the fact that certain institutional processes offer more "spectacular" results than others. In the case of the FNE, testimonies of the accused and witnesses, the technical findings, the court sessions, and the investigation process of the local State Legislature became widely disseminated, while the deliberations of parliament were reported in an extremely abstract manner. One could ask whether the media agents would be interested in avoiding a depiction of the efficiency of *Political accountability*.

Conclusion

Throughout this article, we have explored the importance of TV news images in constructing public events and triggering accountability processes. To construct the public event, the first activity of media professionals was to draw on video images to produce a denunciation of criminal acts. Through journalistic narratives, TV news reporting reproduced procedures pertaining to criminal investigators, advocating their ability to intervene immediately on the crime scene, to collect testimonies of witnesses, and to summarily determine guilt. Video images, appropriated as a "cornerstone scandal," become increasingly autonomous when circulating in various TV News programs. Proper

conditions for establishing a public debate process for interpreting the images within this scope were prepared.

The second activity of media professionals was to organize the social interpretation of images to define the political, moral and ethical implications of criminal acts. The media professionals showed video images of the crime in several places as a synecdoche of institutional "repercussion." In this step, several authorities were asked to answer "who was responsible for what happened" and "how the perceived problems might be appropriately dealt with." The attribution of causal responsibilities shifted from the individual responsibility to institutional deficiencies and long-standing predispositions in Brazilian police forces. TV news images effectively catalyzed a broad public debate regarding the *Favela* Naval Event, defining it as a recurring "problem situation." Finally, the third activity of media professionals was to produce coverage of parliamentary decisions and legal proceedings. TV newsagents actively participated in demands for justification, emphasizing the absence of various dimensions of accountability in the *Favela* Naval Event.

Video images may certainly be seen as an important form of inducing accountability processes. The efficacy of accountability however depends on myriad interconnected factors, such as the nature of the institution and its relationship with public powers for triggering formal investigation and sanction mechanisms, the patterns of negotiations and compensation of conflicting interests, and the degree of public support for given causes. Furthermore, it is known that two essential elements are necessary for accountability processes to flourish: public spheres that are continuously nourished by a mobilized civic society, and a critical public that would consider themselves ceaselessly responsible for activating political responsibility. In the case in point, other researchers have shown that citizens and the organized civic society promoted several mobilizations involving the *Favela* Naval Event, which added to the regime of accountability. These civic initiatives, however, did not receive much attention in the media.

This study confirms that video images in TV news reporting play an important role not only in denouncing power transgressions but also in requiring representatives to be publicly accountable for their acts. In the Brazilian context, and probably in that of many other Latin-American countries (AVRITZER, 2002; WAISBORD, 2000), with fragile accountability mechanisms, the power of images is particularly relevant to construct a "problem situation", to catalyze public debate and to trigger accountability mechanisms, which otherwise would not take place. In this sense, this

study challenges the common sense view that the images are likely to degenerate the public sphere and obstruct democratic public debate. In the *Favela* Naval case, the images helped to support demands for formal accountability in political practices. However, in contexts where formal accountability mechanisms are weak, one should be aware that journalism runs the risk of replacing institutional processes, assigning to itself penal and judiciary functions that are totally devoid of public control, of higher court appeal, of the right of reply and of the assumption of innocence, all of which are completely essential for the due process of law. Acting despotically and seductively to trigger "social accountability" instead of favoring administrative, legal and *Political accountability* mechanisms, the media may even cause these processes to stagnate, reinforcing an already strong disbelief of citizens in public institutions.

|NOTES

1   These demands, supported by the video-denunciation scandal, apparently led to approval of legislative alterations in the Brazilian National Congress. Although the 1988 Constitution had formally assured civil rights as opposed to the power of the State, up to that time few democratic legal provisions for control of the police were established. Corporative justice privileges were maintained, the crime of torture had not been typified in ordinary legislation, police hearings had not been regulated (these existed in only two States). Under the impact of public commotion and the wave of new and previous cases of police brutality reported by the media, legislators were quick to promulgate laws that had previously suffered delays in Congress, such as the law that typifies the crime of torture, which was voted in April 1997.

2   See Barcellos, 1993; Pinheiro, 1982; Shirley, 1997; Human Rights Watch, 1997; Soares, 1996; Lima, 1997; Cárdia, 1997.

3   The sequences are identified by abbreviations and numbers: Nnn##. The abbreviations indicate the programs: JNa, *Jornal Nacional*; JBa, *Jornal da Band*; JNo, *Jornal da Noite* (Bandeirantes); JG1, *Jornal da Globo*. The first digits indicate the day of exhibition (0=March 31, 1997; 14=April 14, 1997), and the last digits are the sequence (space-temporal unit) in which the segment is placed.

4   Governor Mario Covas´ interview by Paulo Henrique Amorim, *Jornal da*

Band, April 1., 1997.

5   The dwellers of Diadema organized various public actions: they helped the independent cameraman to record police violence images; they placed the Diadema Military Police Headquarters under "siege;" they massively attended a public act organized by Diadema's City Hall; a Hip Hop movement in Diadema organized a manifestation against police violence and impunity (BRITTO NEVES, 2000). This willingness to partake in manifestations and protests contradicts the apathy and individualism by which Brazilian citizens are usually characterized.

| BIBLIOGRAPHY

ARATO, A. "Representação, soberania popular e accountability". In: *Lua Nova*, v. 55-56, p. 85-103, 2002.

AVRITZER, L. *Democracy and public space in Latin America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.

BARCELLOS, C. Rota 66. São Paulo: Globo, 1993.

BLAT, J. C. G., SARAIVA, S. *O caso da favela naval: polícia contra o povo*. São Paulo: Contexto, 2000.

BRITTO NEVES, Bráulio. Da câmara no barraco à rede nacional: o evento da Favela Naval. Belo Horizonte: Faculdade de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais. 2000.

CARDIA, N. "O medo da polícia - e as graves violações dos diretos humanos". In: *Tempo Social*, v. 9, p. 249-265, 1997.

DENNIS, E., GILLMOR, D. & GASSER, T. L. *Media freedom and accountability*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1989.

ECO, U., & SEBEOK, T. A. org. *O signo de três*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1991.

FARGIER, J. P. "Les effets des mes effets sont mes effets". In: *Communications*, v. 48, p. 93-104, 1988.

Folha de S. Paulo. CD-Rom edição 98. São Paulo: Publifolha Multimídia, 1998.

GHEUDE, M. 1988. "Double vue - l'espace vidéo à la television". In: *Communications*, v. 48, p. 199-213, 1988.

GOFFMANN, E. *A representação do eu na vida cotidiana*. Petrópolis: Vozes,

2005.

GRABE, M. E., *ZH*OU , S., & BARNETT , B. "Sensationalism in Television News: Content and the Bells and Whistles of Form". In: *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, v. 45, n. 4, p. 635-655, 2001.

GUTMANN, A., & Thompson, D. "The scope of accountability". In: *Democracy and disagreement*, Gutmann, A., & Thompson, D., Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996.

HABERMAS, J. 1992. "L'espace public, 30 ans après". In: *Quaderni: la Revue da la Communication*, v. 8, p. 161-191, 1992.

HABERMAS, J. *Between facts and norms; contributions to a discourse theory of law and democracy*. Massachussets: The MIT Press, 1996.

HABERMAS, J. *Mudança estrutural na esfera pública*. São Paulo: Tempo Universitário, 1984.

HALLIN, D. *We keep America on the top of the world: television journalism and the public sphere*. New York: Routledge, 1994.

HAY, J. "Locanting the televisual". In: *Television and New Media*, v. 2, p. 205-234, 2001.

Human Rights Watch/Americas. *Brutalidade policial urbana no Brasil*. New York: Human Rights Watch, 1997.

IYENGAR, S. "Framing Responsibility for Political Issues". In: *Annals, American Association for Political Sciences*, v. 546, p. 59-70, 1996.

IYENGAR, S. *Is anyone responsible? How television frames political issues*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991.

LOON, J. "Chronotopes: of/in the televisualization of the 1992 Los Angeles riots". In: *Telos*, v. 106, p. 99-104, 1996.

MAIA, Rousiley C. M. "Mídia e diferentes dimensões da Accountability." E-Compós, 2006.

MANIN, B. *The principles of representative government*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

MOLOTOCH, H., & LESTER, M. "As notícias como procedimento intencional: acerca do uso estratégico de notícias de rotina, acidentes e escândalos". In: *Jornalismo: questões, teorias e "estórias"*, Traquina, N. org. Lisbon: *Veja*, 1993.

MOUILLAUD, M., & PORTO, S. D. org. *O jornal; da forma ao sentido*. Brasília: Paralelo 15, 1997.

MULGAN, R. "Accountability: an ever-expanding concept?". In: *Public Administration*, v. 78, p. 555-573, 2000.

NEWHAGEN, J. E. "TV News images that induce anger, fear, and disgust: effects on approach-avoidance and memory". In: *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, v. 42, p. 155-167, 1998.

PEIRCE, C. S. *The collected papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935. v. I-VI.

PEIRCE, C. S. *The collected papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958. v. VII-VIII.

PRICHARD, D. 2000. "The process of media accountability". In: *Holding the media accountable: citizens, ethics and the law*, Prichard, D. org. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.

PRZEWORSKI, A., STOKES, S., & MANIN, B. *Democracy, accountability and representation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

ROBERTS, N. C. 2002. "Keeping public officials accountable through dialogue: resolving the accountability paradox". In: *Public Administration Review*, v. 62, p. 658-69, 2002.

ROMZEK, B. S., & DUBNICK, M. J. "Accountability and the public sector: lessons from the challenger tragedy". In: *Public Administration Review*, v. 47, p. 227-38, 1987.

SCHUDSON, M. *The power of news*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.

THOMPSON, J. B. *Political scandal: power and visibility*. Cambridge: Polity Press., 2000.

TRAQUINA, N. org. *Jornalismo: questões, teorias e "estórias"*. Lisbon: *Veja*, 1993.

TUCHMAN, G. "Contando 'estórias'". In: *Jornalismo: questões, teorias e "estórias"*. Traquina, N. org. Lisbon: *Veja*, 1993.

TUCHMAN, G. "Objectivity as strategic ritual: an examination of newsmen's notion of objectivity". In: *The American Journal of Sociology*, v. 77, p. 660-679, 1972.

WAISBORD, S. *Watchdog journalism in South America: news, accountability and democracy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.

Braulio B. Neves is a doctorate candidate at the Arts Institute of the Postgraduate Program in Multimedia at the University of Campinas – Unicamp (Brazil)

Rousiley C. M. Maia received her PhD in Political Science from The University of Nottingham (U.K). She is an Associate Professor in the Social Communication Department at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (Brazil) and coordinates the Media and Public Sphere Group (EME) of this institution