

WHO ARE THE ACTIVIST AND ENGAGED WE ARE TALKING ABOUT?

A look at the Brazilian commercial press
and political positioning as a journalistic
strategy of objectivity



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DOI: 10.25200/BJR.v19n3.2023.1609

Received in: March 31st, 2023

Desk Reviewed in: April 17th, 2023

Desk Review Editor: Rogério Christofoletti

Revised on: September 15th, 2023

Revised on: October 16th, 2023

Revised on: November 15th, 2023

Approved on: November 20th, 2023

ABSTRACT – In this article we initially problematize the terms activist/militant/engaged and how they should also be included to qualify the Brazilian commercial press. We then perform a theoretical contrast of these terms and propose the idea that political positioning is being practiced in newsrooms, which they may also not announce. The research is based on a bibliographic review and critical analysis of elements of journalistic objectivity. We point, in the end, to a reflective practice (announced or not) that collaborates for a necessary greater democratic density in the Brazilian press.

Key words: Positioning. Objectivity. Hacker sensitivity. Humanity. Otherphobia.

**SOBRE QUE MILITANTES E ENGAJADOS ESTAMOS FALANDO?
Um olhar sobre a imprensa comercial brasileira
e o posicionamento como estratégia jornalística**

RESUMO – Este artigo problematiza, inicialmente, como os termos ativista/militante/engajado também devem qualificar a imprensa comercial brasileira. Depois, realiza uma distinção teórica dos termos citados e busca avançar na ideia de posicionamento como uma prática política possível em redações variadas, podendo também não ser declarada. A pesquisa se baseia em revisão bibliográfica e análise crítica que tensiona elementos da objetividade jornalística. Apontamos, no final, para uma prática reflexiva (anunciada ou não) que colabore para uma necessária maior densidade democrática na imprensa brasileira.

Palavras-chave: Posicionamento. Objetividade. Sensibilidade hacker. Humanidade. Outrofobia.

**¿DE QUÉ MILITANTES Y COMPROMETIDOS ESTAMOS HABLANDO?
Una mirada a la prensa comercial brasileña y al
posicionamiento como estrategia periodístico**

RESUMEN – Este artículo inicialmente problematiza cómo los términos activista/militante/comprometido también deberían calificar la prensa comercial brasileña. Posteriormente, realiza una distinción teórica de los términos citados y busca avanzar la idea del posicionamiento como posible práctica política en diversas redacciones, que también puede no ser declarada. La investigación parte de una revisión bibliográfica y un análisis crítico que destaca elementos de objetividad periodística. Apuntamos, al final, a una práctica reflexiva (anunciada o no) que colabora para una necesaria mayor densidad democrática en la prensa brasileña.

Palabras clave: Posicionamiento. Objetividad. Sensibilidad hacker. Humanidad. Outrofobia.

1 Introduction

Decades of studies in journalism, communication, and other related fields have been exploring the political positions adopted by modern national journalism, which as Sodr  (1998) highlights, has been heavily financed by private companies. Thousands of articles, dissertations, theses, magazines, symposiums, and conferences have already analyzed the many ways that commercial media outlets frame certain subjects while excluding or instrumentalizing others, a topic investigated in studies by Azevedo (2018), Moraes (2019), Ijuim (2020), Valentini (2020), Veiga da Silva (2014), and Moraes (2022).

In this sense, with the practices of the Brazilian press being extensively mapped by academia, it is worth asking: why do we use

the terms engagement and activism without also referring to media outlets/companies such as Correio Braziliense, Jornal do Comercio, Zero Hora, O Povo, Rede Globo, O Liberal, UOL, piauí, etc? Why do journalism studies mostly associate these aforementioned terms – strongly linked to concepts of partiality and subjectivity – with non-commercial news initiatives such as the Brazilian websites O Joio e o Trigo, Mídia Ninja, Repórter Brasil, etc.? The traditional rules of impartiality and neutrality, for example, never prevented the favorable positioning of important commercial media outlets on the Brazilian Military Dictatorship, as is well documented. Larangeira (2015) points out how reputable newspapers such as Folha de S.Paulo and Jornal do Brasil took on a permissive silence, ignoring hundreds of dead and missing people in the name of a liberal capitalist society under military dictatorships/governments. This silence can also be an effective strategy toward strengthening democracy, as we shall look at later (after all, an unpronounced position is still a position). In short, I ask: which militant, activist and engaged media outlets/journalists are we talking about?

This article first discusses how the criticized notions of objectivity, neutrality and impartiality continue to be associated with commercial journalism, contrary to current academic research which identifies specific actions taken by established media outlets, but does not label them as “engaged”. Next, we look at distinctions between activist, militant or engaged practices in order to underline the political positioning (reflexive action) in journalism, whether adopted by more independent media outlets or more conservative ones. I do state that these political positions are not always evident, and can also be carried out through commonplace actions. Lastly, I shall argue that this reflexive action can help us overcome rigid binaries in the field and, with the collaboration of the press, contribute toward strengthening Brazilian democracy, which has been at risk in recent years.

2 Development

The idea that established professionals and companies practice self-proclaimed neutrality continues to be a misconception not only in academia, but also in the professional sphere and in common sense. It is almost a tautology: commercial media outlets understand each other and are seen as more credible because

they themselves claim to possess the qualities that make them hierarchically superior. For example, when analyzing what he calls “fantastical news”, Motta (2006) wrote:

What reasons or intentions are behind *serious newspapers* such as O Globo, Folha de S.Paulo, Estado de S. Paulo, Correio Braziliense, Estado de Minas or Jornal do Brasil publishing this news? (...) By walking the line between the rationality of journalism and the irrationality of fantastical reports, these types of news can suggest singularities in the game of journalistic meaning, they can reveal the impregnation of the objective by the subjective. (Motta, 2006, p.94. Italics added).

This is an interesting excerpt that specifically addresses the broadcaster’s intentions (or subjectivities) behind fantastical news: this excerpt refers to the particular media outlets as ‘serious’, thus demonstrating a level of surprise toward the fact they would publish “irrational” material. Of further note is that none of the newspapers cited in the excerpt are from the northeast, a region which has the highest levels of social inequality in Brazil and where “seriousness” and “rationality” are, historically, seen as less possible (Albuquerque Jr, 2011).

Another interesting point is that media outlets publicly in favor of the authoritarian regime from 1964 to 1984 in Brazil were considered to be “serious”, an adjective for describing its neutrality or impartiality. This concept would be carried forward (although with less force) to present day, even after historical coverage of scandals such as Operation Car Wash¹, in which the publication of allegations (Kuwahara, 2018) and the media construction of villains and heroes ended up destroying the country’s politics and gave rise to the extreme right (Kerche & Marona, 2022; Cioccarri, 2015). Moving on, the concepts of neutrality that are still symbolic of the commercial press, spared from stigmatizing terms such as militancy, engagement and activism, also refer to networks and newspapers with strong classist, xenophobic, or racist positions and which focus primarily on the market (Moraes, 2022). But these issues, also mapped academically, were often seen as less political (merely “identitarian”) or technical. There is a clear demarcation and valuation here between objective/subjective and other hierarchical binaries, such as reason/emotion, male/female, and white/black.

Henriques (2018) reminds us that journalistic objectivity has already been the subject of several academic studies and, although the analyses have circulated through several publications, they

have not “philosophically changed the way information consumers, journalists, and even journalism professors understand objectivity and, consequently, its application in the routines and procedures of journalistic practice” (Henriques, 2018, p. 1). Biroli and Miguel (2010) observe how impartiality, neutrality and objectivity remain guiding values, from the self-image of journalists to the construction of an ethical framework, which include the valuation of work and the defense of the journalistic field. This concept, however, “does not allow us to adequately deal with the forms of restricted inclusion of diversity and contradictions that appear in the news” (Biroli & Miguel, 2010, p. 74); these practices actually publicize a simulation of social conflicts, thus ensuring, via the press, that we continue to be guided by false ideas of plurality and democracy. When interviewing journalists from O Globo (Rio de Janeiro) and Valor Econômico (São Paulo), Undugarra (2018) demonstrates how the characteristics mentioned above are based on established newsrooms.

In almost every interview, when I asked what constitutes a job well done, the ideal of neutrality in reporting was mentioned repeatedly. This means presenting both sides of a story, verifying information from a variety of sources, and maintaining normative neutrality regarding the subject matter. Neutrality, in this sense, was often associated with objectivity. (Undugarra, 2018, pp. 9–10).

I realize that discussions about activism/militancy/engagement in journalism cannot advance as long as we continue to separate, even if unintentionally, media professionals and outlets who are openly engaged through the use of sacred concepts of journalistic objectivity/impartiality/neutrality (in a word, seriousness). These separations even appear in some of the guiding questions behind this dossier, such as the understanding that newly adopted political positions are capable of leading to new tensions, questioning whether journalism and activism can be adopted in different contexts or *if militancy is acceptable* in the exercise of the profession, and lastly, questioning whether the *traditional rules of impartiality and neutrality* (once *abandoned*) guarantee legitimate actions (emphasis added). These are important issues to think about and rethink within the field. However, these issues are still based on hierarchies that need to be denaturalized so as not to conform the complexity of the debate to a binary model. Based on the issues presented above, I believe it necessary:

1. To disclose the differences between militancy, activism, engagement and positioning, understanding that the latter is often a reflexive political gesture that does not always go announced (Moraes, 2022).

2. To understand (as stated at the beginning of this text) that engaged actions have always existed in the commercial media (they are not “new positions” in media), and that the rules of impartiality do little to prevent the dehumanization and death of various groups (Ijuim, 2020). In concordance with Larangeira (2015), one needs to recognize the permissive silences in this media, as well as the self-shielding that occurs behind the standards of objectivity and neutrality.

3. We must also understand that recognizing and confronting issues such as racism or an intensely pro-market practice does not mean abandoning the rules of journalistic objectivity. This kind of perception can even harm current journalism initiatives, including from the commercial press, as we shall see in the study by Veiga da Silva (2020). This recognition focuses on the need to qualify journalistic objectivity and strengthen it, noting that issues such as news values have always been used to protect a neoliberal, white, male dominated press that has historically been directed away from majority-minorities (Santos, 2020), an issue also identified by Usher (2021) in the North American press, where news production directed toward the wealthier, white, Republican classes (party opposition to the Democrats) is a majority reality. Ward (2020), in his analysis that draws heavily on philosophy, argues for an engaged objectivity that advances the objectivity of fact, since any complete theory of objectivity needs to explain beyond our knowledge of perceptual facts. He defends an objectivity “with a human face”, with agency (what I refer to as positioning), which occurs through our involvement in defending causes and ideals.

It is important to point out that the commercial press in Brazil has been activist and engaged since its inception. With its eyes on a broader market, it proclaimed to be “impartial” back in the 19th century (Schwarcz, 2017), which is evidence of how this alleged “neutral” quality was born precisely at the moment when Brazilian journalistic activity sought to diversify its audience and not limit its message to just specific groups and parties. Regardless, this impartiality has never prevented journalists and media outlets from aligning themselves with specific business or

political projects. The state-supported strategy of whitening the Brazilian population was one such project. In his article *Nem tudo era italiano: São Paulo e pobreza, 1890-1915* (in English, *It wasn't all Italian: São Paulo and poverty, 1890-1915*), Santos (2003) observes how the presence of black people, even after slavery had been abolished, was erased from much of the documentation at that time, including photography and the press. Since they started to sell to a diverse audience, newspapers began a strong process of othering and dehumanization (Carneiro, 2005), unfortunately seen by part of academia as not engaged. What we can see is that, even though the term “slave” was no longer used post-abolition, newspapers began to classify the black population by highlighting their color, thus maintaining the distinction between white/black, rational and irrational, serious and emotional. “It is not possible to disqualify the forms of knowledge of dominated peoples without also disqualifying them, individually and collectively, as recognized subjects” (Carneiro, 2005, p. 97). What’s more, these same populations were also legally prohibited by the state (and supported by the press) from owning land and housing, as per the Land Law established in 1850 (Gadelha, 1989). This reality persists to this day. Researching the relationship between the newspaper O Estado de S.Paulo and the Landless Workers Movement (based on editorials between 2001-2004), Pita states:

The data showed an **active media** that constantly used a stigmatizing discourse against the MST. The newspaper tried to depoliticize the actions of landless people, turning the land issue into a war while, on the other hand, the MST argues that it wants to solve land problems, inequality and citizenship. (Pita, 2022, p. 406. Emphasis added).

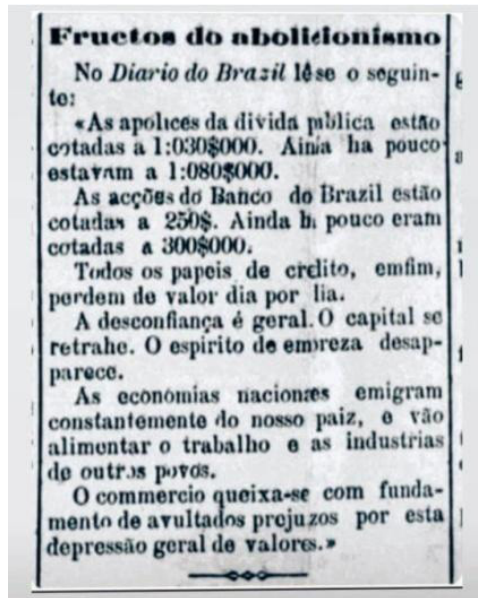
The poor-black/state-market relationship has demonstrated activism throughout the history of the Brazilian commercial press, which also includes the stigmatization and otherization of the northeast region, where rates of social inequality are historically high (Albuquerque Jr, 2011, Moraes, 2022). This relationship remained strong over time, and was visible in the post-presidential elections in Brazil, in November 2022. At that time, the president-elect, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, discussed the possibility of raising the spending ceiling for social benefits (a fiscal rule that regulates investments in primary government expenses, such as health and education, established in 2017 with strong support from the

commercial press). This scenario led journalist and writer Marcelo Moutinho (2022) to post a series of texts and images on social media from past newspapers that, due to their power of synthesis, are worth including here.

The first image (figure 1) is of a periodical published in the *Diário do Brazil* on September 21, 1884. It comes from the time when Brazil was finally moving towards abolition, which occurred in 1888 (Brazil was the last country in the world to abolish slavery). The periodical highlighted the market's distrust with the future liberation of thousands of enslaved people: "Capital is withdrawing".

Figure 1

"The Fruits of Abolitionism": title criticizing the end of slavery



Source: *Diário do Brazil*, 09/21/1884

The second image (figure 2) is of the front cover of the *Globo* newspaper on April 26, 1962, two years before the Military Coup. It shows the market's reaction to the establishment of the 13th salary, which became law in July 1962 under president João Goulart.

Figure 2

Front cover of *O Globo*, 04/26/1962, two years after the Military Coup



Source: Rubens Goyatá Campante (The 13th salary was the result of a general strike, undated)

The third image (figure 3), from the Folha de S.Paulo website, on November 11, 2022, exemplifies the aforementioned post-election. It was incorporated here with the purpose of demonstrating how market complaints from 1884 continue to echo in 2022.

Figure 3

Article from *Folha de S.Paulo* newspaper

Citi diz que mercado pode ter se enganado em relação a Lula

Em relatório, banco diz que decidiu cortar a exposição a riscos do Brasil após reavaliação



Luana Maria Benedito

SÃO PAULO | REUTERS Os mercados financeiros podem ter se enganado ao se convencer de que o presidente eleito Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva seguiria uma agenda fiscal ortodoxa, disse o Citi em relatório, acrescentando que o banco decidiu cortar sua exposição a riscos do Brasil diante dessa reavaliação.

"O mercado parecia ter se convencido de que o presidente (eleito) Lula seria fiscalmente ortodoxo. O fluxo de notícias mais recente agora coloca essa hipótese em dúvida", escreveu Dirk Willer, chefe de estratégia de mercados emergentes do Citi Research no documento.

Source: article written by Luana Benedito (2022) for the *Folha de S.Paulo* newspaper

Keeping the economic and historical distinctions between the three periods in mind, we can see a discursive convergence on the part of the press, claiming how it is the one who has been harmed by the market, and not the poor, indigenous, or black people.

It is primarily because of these issues (alongside studies that have analyzed and analyze the positions of the national press) that activism, militancy and engagement is only associated with non-conformist media outlets among the so-called “hegemonic press” (or “professional press”). Additionally, if militancy/activism in the press presupposes journalists belonging to certain groups and parties, then it is also worth looking at the market and party politics, and how they too are formed by groups with specific interests. These groups have deep connections to commercial media outlets, and the aforementioned Car Wash scandal coverage (Kuwahara, 2018; Kerche & Marona, 2022; Cioccaro, 2015) is one of the most recent examples of this reality in Brazil. It is understandable that this type of journalism does not want to be labeled as “activist” as it believes it is “universal”. But I understand that academia can be a locus of denaturalization of these hierarchies.

2.1 Objectivity and suffering

Before moving on to the second part of this text, it is important to point out the destabilization of the idea of journalistic objectivity not only from academia, but also from a society affected by various kinds of hardships, such as climate emergencies, precarious work, etc. A brief review of some of the relevant issues that have reshaped these contexts in Brazilian society in recent years are the establishment and advancement of social and racial quota policies, the popularization of debates about race, gender, class, and territories, and the growing use of cell phones and digital social networks, which are used intensively throughout the country. In this context, public criticism of what the news reports grows, and thus pressures companies to review their stances, particularly on important issues such as the black population, the poor population, transgender and transvestite people, women, indigenous people, peripheral people, etc. The covid-19 pandemic, which killed almost 15 million people around the world, was a decisive factor in this regard, when the very notion of what is political was maximized in popular debate.

These contexts are totally intermingled and force the news field to rethink itself, either by its own will or by pressure from society. There is one question that cannot be ignored: in the midst of so much personal and collective suffering, what should journalists prioritize? How do we look back at events like the murders of João Pedro² (g1, 2020; Guimarães, 2021), Agatha Felix³ (Carta Capital, 2020) and George Floyd? (AFP, 2023). What should we think about the organized movements that, during the pandemic, criticized the wealthy lives of celebrities and the super-rich (Moraes, 2020, Bhattacharya, 2021⁴)?

This is where the objectivity of journalism also begins to be questioned, as a value in itself, evidenced by a number of studies conducted within the academy itself. In Brazil, for example, Veiga da Silva and Moraes (2019) claim that journalistic objectivity has race and gender, while Laia and Guimarães (2022) propose an ontological turn in the communication model based on the knowledge of the original peoples of Brazil. The same strangeness about objectivity occurs in the professional field, which is more attached to the myth. In the study *Beyond Objectivity* (Downie Jr. & Heyward, 2023), former executive editor of The Associated Press, Kathleen Carroll, also views the standards filtered by gender, race, and class. "It's objective by whose standard? That standard seems to be white, educated, reasonably wealthy men. When people don't feel like they're covered in the news, it's because [they] don't meet that definition" (2023, p. 7, my translation). It is a scenario that, fortunately, prompts changes in the three environments mentioned here – academia, professional and public. But this kind of change is extremely challenging as those who champion objectivity and those who fault subjectivity (which separate activists from supposed non-activists) are connected to places of power.

As Biroli and Miguel (2012) observed when analyzing the value of objectivity in the discourse and practices of a national magazine, the attachment to neutrality does not mean an absence of values, but rather the naturalization of a standard of values. This also occurs in academic production and teaching (a legitimized place for forging and disseminating ideas), in training individuals who will become part of a multifaceted professional environment, and in training future educators. Differentiating between media outlets classified (or not classified) as activists leads us not only to false problems, but also to failing to emphasize key elements in this debate.

Why doesn't the commercial press cover the private sector as much as it covers government bodies? Are recent events that shed

light on the harmful presence of private companies in Brazilian life not enough to warrant looking into this sector? A number of events in Brazil have shown the enormous hand this sector has played in the destruction of society. We have: the genocide of the Yanomami indigenous people, with companies such as H.Stern, D'Gold and Ourominas being investigated for illegal mining, according to the press (Henrique & Magalhães, 2021); the thousands of people working under slave-like conditions in large Brazilian wineries, such as Aurora, Garibaldi and Salton (Pontes, 2023); and the companies and health plans that disinformed the public during the pandemic. One such health plan, Prevent Senior, even referred its patients in intensive care (more expensive) to palliative treatments (cheaper) without informing their families (Jucá, 2021). The commercial press' intense coverage of government bodies (particularly on scandals and corruption) is inversely proportional to its coverage of large private companies. The anti-political rhetoric grows stronger and the state becomes the only one held responsible.

3 Militancy, activism, engagement and positioning

Even though the terms militancy/activism/engagement may appear synonymous, there are a few distinctions between them, particularly in the field of communication and journalism. We first look at the definition given in Houaiss, the major reference dictionary for the Portuguese language (Militancy/Activism, 2017, online). It defines militant and activist as synonymous: the former describes an individual who fights, who actively defends a cause, while the latter describes an individual who works for a cause; a defender; a militant. Both of these concepts have similar definitions to that of engagement, given by the same dictionary. It describes an engaged individual as someone who actively participates in matters and issues of political and social relevance, likely to occur through public intellectual manifestation, of a theoretical, artistic or journalistic nature, or within organized groups, movements, parties, etc. (Lacerda, 2007). Basically, an engaged individual is one who is involved intellectually or practically (an anti-Freirean separation) in areas such as art, academia and journalism. However, I understand this connection between activism/militancy as both these activities can be connected to political parties and movements.

These subtle differences are also perceived in theoretical analyses on the topic. We look back at Freire's thoughts (Bach & Paula, 2017; Dalbosco et al., 2020) on activism, theory-practice and reflective action. Even though he is strongly connected to education studies and pedagogy, Freire, as seen by Meditsch (2017) and Ijuim (2009), can be valuable in making qualitative advances in journalism and communication. His proposal is an idea that takes place from a contextualized and reflective perspective, vital for the development of democratic actions (Dalbosco et al., 2020). Freire talks about the need to establish constant vigilance over our own thinking: he was a fierce critic of theories without practice and practices without reflection, and insisted that both must go hand-in-hand. For him, non-reflective action is mere activism, and does not promote dialogic communication. I shall revisit this Freirean understanding later, as it no longer finds support in contemporary reflexive activism (in academia, in the press) and differs from journalists' criticism of activism.

Ijuim (2009) brought Freire to analyze the social responsibility of journalists and ask for their necessary engagement: in his argument, there is a separation between engagement and militancy/activism:

An engaged journalist is not necessarily a journalist who is an activist for causes, ideologies or political segments. In this case, as Alberto Dines reminds us, it is a misunderstanding to adopt the stance as "partisan or supporter" (Dines, 1986, p. 62). The engagement we refer to is what Cremilda Medina refers to as "solidarity with universal pain". (Ijuim, 2009, p. 36).

Here we can see that Ijuim perceives militancy/activism as always being connected with political groups, parties, and followers, while he perceives engagement as being based on otherness/solidarity (which, of course, requires reflexivity). In fact, solidarity is an important basis for being a journalist since it can tension the ways in which journalism relates to its sources/characters, which are often instrumentalized (Moraes, 2015). But this may not be enough to expose issues related to race, class, gender, xenophobia, and other expressions of otherphobia (Castro, 2015).

This leads to our interest in the Pluriverse of Human Rights and the thoughts of Boaventura de Souza Santos (Santos & Martins, 2019), a concept that Ijuim (2022) later worked on to qualify the sense of humanity in journalism, moving away from the universalized term of "more human" (white, Western) versus "less human" (black,

indigenous, Latin American, transgender, etc.). This same criticism is evident in the important concept of radical humanism presented by Wynter (Paterniani et al., 2022), for whom the overrepresentation of the Western bourgeois and the way of being human offered us the very notion of human. In other words, the concept of humanity (and even that of democracy) assimilated by various institutions, including journalism, did not prevent poor, black, indigenous, transgender, and other populations from suffering various forms of violence. In the field of communication, Sodr  (2017) reminds us that the concept of “human” served as an ideological facade for legitimizing markets in Southeast Asia, precious metals in the Americas, and labor in Africa, and supported the way Europeans see themselves, as “fully human men”, and see others as not so full (2017, p. 14).

This exclusionary and classificatory perspective of “true” humanity is central to the concept of positioning defended in this text: it is a practical-reflective position, a conscious action, which can bridge professional journalistic activity with teaching and academic research. Furthermore, this can be achieved by professionals from more independent media outlets (particularly in terms of advertisers and/or political groups) and by professionals who collaborate in more conservative newsrooms, as we shall look at later.

To achieve this, we must analyze Freire’s criticism of what he negatively classified as activism. This is key to requalifying this action and helping us think about its relationship with universities and journalism. Freire’s observation does not rest on adhering to causes, but rather on the lack of articulation between doing and thinking. This was a way for Freire to value his own practice, since doing and thinking were also (and are) places of hierarchies and different powers, including racialized ones. On the other hand, Freire also demystifies the place of self-enclosed intellectuality, moving away from a binary reading of possible actions within a space viewed as only for thinking. Thus, Freire’s criticism of activism/militancy (interpreted as a kind of betrayal of the precepts of the field) differs greatly from those of academics and press professionals. As Russell (2016) rightly puts it, the word “activism” being used as an accusation is strongly related, among journalists, to an absence of objectivity. “Critics of emerging forms of journalism often appeal to the notion of objectivity to argue that professionalism is being violated, pointing the finger at what they see as vagueness in the standards of new actors in the field of journalism” (2016, p. 112).

Another point is that the activism Freire criticizes is not the activism in contemporary studies that associate academia and social movements. Reflexive action is a focus in studies from Boaventura (Benzaquen, 2012), Allene Lage (2008), Sueli Carneiro (Silva, 2022), Neon Cunha (Cunha, 2016), Dennis de Oliveira (2021), Allan da Rosa (2013), etc. These works are the result of action and reflection, of acting-thinking, attempts to overcome constraints pertinent to power disputes.

That said, in addition to searching for a “precise” classification of actions, we look at a reflective and positioned journalistic practice which not only contains elements of otherness, but also the understanding that the dehumanizing and otherphobic aspects that separate liberal societies (like the Brazilian one) have an important supporter in journalism, teaching or practice. Practicing reflective journalism means being aware of the discrimination directed at various populations, understanding that we cannot talk about democracy without questioning the slavery, patriarchy and patrimonialism that Brazil was originally founded on.

Adopting this position does not require one to have any connections with groups or entities, thus giving greater independence to those conducting investigations and/or writing. It doubly criticizes the dehumanizing actions with which journalism operated and the search for restorative discourses. It does not deny the subjectivities inherent in doing-thinking, since this denial tries to minimize inequalities and represses fundamental elements in the formation of Brazilian society, such as racism. In short, positioning is also formed by an intersectional reading of social space (Akotirene, 2019). Examples of these positions include choosing sources outside the spaces of power, checking with specialists from internalized universities, listening to children, naturalizing transgender and transvestite voices in everyday debates aside from identity issues, installing images outside the usual visibility menu, etc. These are hacker/democratic actions that are possible within a variety of spaces and rely on specific partnerships. For example, journalist Helaine Martins, creator of the *Entreviste um Negro* project, made a huge contribution with her database that allows journalists to find and contact experts from a wide array of fields. Unfortunately, her work was only “discovered” in Brazil after the murder of George Floyd, in the USA, in 2020, five years after her project had been created. It is a gauge to measure how much the press has naturalized the hundreds of deaths of black people in Brazil (and also how we search for a

database that brings visibility to black people, but only when the subject is death and violence).

That said, it is important to state that the act of positioning oneself, different from spectacular logic, does not need to be announced or vocalized as revealing one's position can result in various prohibitions, especially in commercial newsrooms. This also means that some of the actions that are taken can weaken or make journalism itself impossible as they are difficult to identify, such as making up sources, misrepresenting words, or precarious investigation. As previously stated, objectivity in journalism is necessary and fundamental. This unannounced position is part of a hacker sensibility, not exactly in the sense proposed by Russell (2016), who describes mediations between journalists and the public as occurring more strongly and mediated by physical technologies such as messaging services, editing applications, online groups, etc. This particular reflexive and positioned hacker action requires the use of strategies, tricks and retaliations, speaking to the thoughts of Allan da Rosa and his constitution of an anti-binary, black, sweaty theory (2013). In short, it's about circumventing; the reflective body and the agenda that frames the world, which is published by media outlets, are the technologies themselves. Positionings and framings cause variations in the system and, in this way, understanding how the Brazilian commercial press has historically positioned and framed itself can help us to develop new discourses that can re-humanize (Villanueva, 2017).

It is important to note that journalism with a strong sociological appeal performed by many media outlets in the USA has already been the subject of investigation by Boynton (2005) who, after conducting dozens of interviews with reporters from newspapers such as the Washington Post, refers to this type of journalism as "new new journalism". Made by investigative reporters interested in North American social issues, such as the prison system, anti-drug policy, racism, etc., this new new journalism is different from *New Journalism* as it doesn't focus on the elites and social status, but the striking inequalities in the United States. In Brazil, Veiga da Silva (2020) conducted interviews and analyzed books and reports by reputable journalists in the field working for commercial companies. These professionals, more accustomed to working with otherness, told da Silva of how their journalism is different from the alienating form of doing journalism, even in acknowledged spaces.

These practices were understood as actions of resistance and modes of subversion to hegemonic journalism, especially the modes of journalistic objectification, which serves as an episteme that guides knowledge and power relations in the field. Through reading the books, the procedures of criticism and self-criticism of practices, the rescue of the journalists' agency and their responsibilities for the construction of the Other that they dedicate themselves to narrating suggest paths capable of not only renewing and suggesting better practices for better encounters with otherness; they mostly suggest paths for an epistemological break from the ways in which journalism knows and makes known based on the social knowledge it produces. This means that there are clues as to how journalism can serve as a transformative agent in the ways in which culture operates (transforming differences into inequalities). (Veiga da Silva, 2020, no page).

4 Final considerations: take a position and strengthen democracy

After considering issues such as (i) the studies and various examples of partnerships between the commercial press and authoritarian governments, (ii) the journalistic criminalization of social movements, (iii) the meaning of an exclusionary idea of humanity, and (iv) the defense of the economic market to the detriment of poorer populations, we question whether the terms militant, activist and engaged should continue to qualify only those media outlets with little or no commercial partnerships. This questioning also takes place with the understanding that the non-vocalization of guidelines and editorial actions (such as Operation Car Wash) should not continue to safeguard this press in the still current standards of neutrality and objectivity. As we have discussed, activism, militancy and engagement are almost seen as synonymous, with only engagement having a slight distinction (in the dictionary; however, it is effectively ignored in everyday imagination). Seeking to further the discussions on agencies that operate according to political strategies, I believe 'positioning' to be an appropriate term to describe the practical-reflective action for journalism that is not committed to companies, organizations or parties, but is committed to the quality of a democracy that has done little to help the majority of the Brazilian population.

This is an attempt to advance the sense of democracy in the Brazilian commercial press. For example, most of the more established media outlets relativized the far-right candidate for the Brazilian presidency in 2018. Then, in 2020, this same relativization

occurred during the pandemic, with statements from an authoritarian leader being quoted in headlines without any contextualization. This was made possible through objectivity resources, such as declaratory journalism (Henriques, 2020). It is in this sense that we talk about the instrumentalization of an element that is treasured by the field. Once again, this criticism is not an attempt to implode the necessary journalistic objectivity; news production cannot abandon principles such as broad investigation, confirmation and cross-referencing of information, accessible writing etc. However, we do draw attention to the fact that these objective practices are structurally permeated by choices and criteria that, proclaimed as neutral, harbor various otherphobias, as noted in studies by Veiga da Silva (2014) and Barcellos (2021) based on gender. When analyzing the Celina Project, a project created by the O Globo newspaper which focuses on gender and diversity issues, Barcellos wrote:

Even with some masculinist and hierarchical professional norms, the commitment to objectivity ends up being one of the main obstacles in feminist journalism, which is more prone to subjectivity, partiality and otherness. This objectivity also ended up limiting the openness of journalists [editors] toward subjects and realities that are distant from their own, whether in proposing agendas or in their own development. Even though there is an effort to cover the agendas of intersectional feminism, considering gender inequalities in relation to other social markers, Celina's journalists, by denying their subjectivities and activism in the news they broadcast, end up legitimizing only the voices of some women and only some types of gender violence, which are closer to them as subjects. (Barcellos, 2021, p. 8).

For this reason, I propose a reflective and positioned approach that can be realized through different and possible strategies. The first task is to rethink how sources are chosen, remembering that transgender people can also talk about the economy, that black people can also talk about geopolitics, that children are also political subjects. We must also remember that private companies can be covered on a regular basis, even if not required by the newsroom. This is not the place to create a technical manual on this way of thinking, since there are also contexts (leaders, agreements, etc.) that need to be taken into account. However, whether precarious newsrooms or not, independent or not, it is possible to make eloquent choices that break from the historical discursive standards of journalism.

The more specific positions in established commercial media outlets such as Rede Globo, which cover issues of race and gender (and are also against the policies of the former Jair Bolsonaro government),

could place more emphasis on female journalists, such as Natuza Nery and Flávia Oliveira. On the other hand, non-commercial outlets such as Pro-publica, Intercept Brasil, O Joio, o Trigo, and Sumaúma provide journalistic excellence in their coverage, even though it is positioned. We understand that these aforementioned non-commercial media outlets differ from newsrooms such as O Antagonista (conservative-liberal, linked to the financial market) and Brasil 247 (progressive, linked to left-wing parties), both of which operate in Brazil. They differ because their political connections do not allow them to harshly criticize the media that support them, and they almost always have a negative attitude towards those who differ ideologically from their projects (Caldeira, 2020). Thus, both O Antagonista and Brasil 247 are characterized by a type of militancy/activism/engagement that turns them into spokespersons for specific groups, and not for a position with a vested interest in championing equality in gender, race, or regions.

In short, these examples not only highlight the blurring, but also the possibility that antagonism exists in the type of journalism that confronts the issues that pose the greatest threat to the Brazilian democratic environment. We uphold that confronting these issues does not depend on vocalizations or heroic acts. If the permissive silence of the commercial press has brought us countless social losses, then a positioned silence, not spectacularized, can help us reduce them.

NOTES

- 1 Launched in March 2014 by the Federal Police, this operation investigated money laundering and embezzlement schemes involving Petrobras (state-owned petroleum company, mixed economy), contractors and politicians.
- 2 On May 18, 2020, a teenager was killed in the house where he was staying with five other children, in the Salgueiro Complex, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The residence was raided by civil and federal police officers who were carrying out an operation against drug traffickers operating in the region. At the time, the Civil Police stated that while chasing the criminals, they broke into the home and then began shooting at the police officers at the scene. Once the gunfire had ceased, there were a total of 72 bullet holes

throughout the house, which belongs to João Pedro's uncles. The young man was shot in the stomach and was missing for around 17 hours until he was declared dead.

- 3 8-year-old Agatha Felix was killed in Morro da Fazendinha, in the Alemão favela complex, in the North Zone of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. She was inside a VW van with her mother when a bullet struck her in the back. The Civil Police investigation concluded that the bullet that killed Ágatha had come from a military police officer's gun.
- 4 Book written by young scholarship holders at Ashoka University, in India.

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TRANSLATED BY: LEE SHARP