FROM VIDEO ACTIVISM TO COLLABORATIVE CREATIVE DOCUMENTARY: CO-AUTHORSHIP IN *5 BROKEN CAMERAS* AND *FOR SAMA*

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INTRODUCTION

With the technological transformations brought by digital video and new forms of online distribution, video activist experiences have increased markedly in the 21st century. Defined as "social practices on audiovisual media used as political intervention strategies by agents excluded from the dominant power structures—subjects of the counterpower—with a transformative objective achievable through different tactical aims" (Gaona and Mateos, 2015: 124), video activism has been an identifying tool of certain movements of the past decade, such as those of the Arab Spring, the 15M women's movement in Spain and Occupy Wall Street in the United States (Sierra and Montero, 2015).

Some of these experiences have involved long-term creative processes resulting in the development of films out of their video activist archives, adopting new aesthetic approaches and expanding the usual audiences for their productions.

This paper presents case studies of two documentaries made in the last decade that arose out of the video activism of their protagonists, who, after a few years of gathering footage, realised that what they had filmed could be used to make a documentary feature. The titles in question are *5 Broken Cameras* (Emad Burnat and Guy Davidi, 2012) and *For Sama* (Waad Al-Kateab and Edward Watts, 2019), which deal with two extremely important contemporary social conflicts: the territorial dispute in the West Bank and the Syrian Civil War, respectively. In both cases, a co-director from outside the protagonist's community with training and experience as a filmmaker became involved in the project to convert the footage accumulated over the years into a feature film.

5 Broken Cameras depicts the resistance of the people in the Palestinian village of B'ilin against the occupation of their land by Israeli settlers in an area historically used for farming by the community, which later becomes the site of a wall di-

viding the two nations. Emad Burnat, a villager who films videos of family and social events in his community as a hobby, bought his first video camera in 2005 and for the next eight years, he would film the demonstrations of his people and their repression by the Israeli army.

For Sama recounts the tumultuous life of its protagonist and director, Waad al-Kateab, during five years of war in the Syrian city of Aleppo. The film is presented as a letter to her daughter Sama, who was born during the war, and the dilemma faced by Waad and her family over whether to stay and fight or flee the country for their own safety. Waad works as a correspondent for British news media, filming footage at the hospital run by her husband, bearing witness to the brutal consequences of the war.

In both cases, the filming processes began as defensive responses to violence and repression, as expressions of resistance, producing footage that would be used by different international media outlets in their coverage of the conflicts (Kostrz, 2016; Hasday, 2019; POV, n.d.). These video activist practices were reconfigured when they were conceived of as potential footage for a documentary film, whereby much of the same material previously used in television reports would serve to construct a different type of language and aesthetic form in the editing and development process.

These films are studied here in relation to their processes of discursive production, the narrative and aesthetic elements involved in the transition from video activism to documentary film production. The research draws on elements of film analysis (Cassetti & Di Chio, 1991) and narratology (Gaudreault & Jost, 1995), as well as the analysis of news archives on the production process (articles, interviews and press releases about the films) in an effort to answer a series of questions: What strategies do these films adopt in the treatment of the footage filmed by their protagonists? How has that footage been edited to create a film? To what extent was it necessary for an individual from outside the community with filmmaking experience and training to join the project to bring it to fruition and achieve international visibility? What kind of negotiations and tensions did this collaboration give rise to? How do these films construct processes of memory related to recent political and social conflicts experienced in the first person by their protagonists and directors?

The first section of this article focuses on analysing the enunciative perspectives of each documentary, examining the use of voice-over as a structuring device that combines the personal dimension with the historical/political dimension, its testimonial nature and its impact on the construction of memory. The second section presents an analysis of the co-direction process of each documentary and the aesthetic and narrative elements that transform the original video activist footage into a first-person documentary film.

SUBALTERN VOICES IN THE FIRST PERSON

Both *5 Broken Cameras* and *For Sama* were created out of footage filmed by their protagonists over the course of several years. Although editing is the key element in filmmaking for constructing a discourse that redefines each shot separately through its articulation with others, in these films the discourse is orchestrated based on footage that at the time it was taken was not yet conceived of as part of a film. In each case, this footage is used to construct a complex storyline that combines the personal experience of the protagonist/filmmaker with the political, social and historical dimensions of the conflict afflicting the community portrayed. The voice-over in both films plays a key role in articulating a heterogeneous materiality and constructing a discourse through its juxtaposition with the sounds and images of the film archive.

Far from trying to sustain a pretence of objectivity in its description of the events shown in the

film, the voice-over adopts a reflexive and emotional perspective. There is no attempt to assert absolute truths; instead, what is presented is the truth as experienced personally by each film's protagonist. This approach raises questions and doubts while weaving the personal and historical dimensions together and introducing universal themes such as memory, the struggle against oppression, parenthood and the world we are building for future generations.

5 Broken Cameras begins with a voice-over narration by the protagonist and co-director, Emad Burnat, who introduces us to a few central themes of the documentary, such as the importance of filming as an act of memory and as a contribution to the resistance. While we see dizzying images taken by a camera that seems to be rushing away, to the sounds of shouting, screaming and gunfire—combined with the gentle, enigmatic musical strains of a sitar—we hear his voice for the first time:

> EMAD: I have lived through so many experiences. They burn in my head like a hot flame. Pain and joy, fears and hope are all mixed together. I'm losing track. The old wounds don't have time to heal. New wounds will cover them up. So I film to hold onto my memories. (00:00:45' - 00:01:22')

The chaotic shot cuts to a close-up of Emad standing at a table, showing the five cameras he used throughout the period covered by the documentary. He explains—still in a voice-over—how each of these cameras has captured different stages of the conflict that has affected his village and his own life.

While images of the village of B'ilin appear on screen, Emad talks about the connections that he and his community have with this land, and how when Israeli surveyors arrived in 2005 to prepare the construction of a barrier that would take much of that land away from them, an era of resistance began in his village. This was the same year as the birth of Gibreel, his fourth child, and the year that he bought his first video camera, initially with the intention of filming his family. The strategy of combining a personal/family time-frame with a historical, political and social time-frame is significant in this film. While we see typical home movie images of his children at a school event, Emad (in a voice-over) connects each child's birth to different stages of the local conflict. This provides contextual information on the background of the conflict at the beginning of the story, not with an expository or informative voice, but by foregrounding the emotional impact that these historical events have had on the life of his family. In this way, the film articulates the political and personal dimensions of the film's story.

Image 1. Stillframe from *5 Broken Cameras*. Emad shows his five cameras



For Sama begins with archival photographs showing the protagonist and co-director Waad al-Kateab at the age of 18, while she introduces herself in a voice-over expressed as a testimony or letter to her daughter, a strategy that shapes the whole narrative. The image of the baby Sama in a close-up and the calm voice



Image 2. Waad al-Kateab filming the devastation of Aleppo. (Source: https://ambulante.org)

of her mother talking and singing to her contrasts with the faint sounds of explosions we hear coming from outside the frame. This counterpoint between caring for a small child and the war raging all around them runs throughout the film.

A cityscape of Aleppo is shown in a shot from a drone that rises above the buildings, followed by a 360-degree pan that reveals the devastation of the war-torn city, while a caption locates us in time: "July 2016." Waad's voice-over contextualises the situation in the city, which is under a siege imposed by the Syrian regime and its allies. She then explains her testimonial role as the film's protagonist/director: "I keep filming. It gives me a reason to be here. It makes the nightmares feel worthwhile" (00:05:35' – 00:05:50'). We see images of wounded, bleeding children being treated in a hospital under precarious conditions, many laid out on the floor, as Waad's voice-over continues: "Sama, I've made this film for you. I need you to understand why your father and I made the choices we did. What we were fighting for" (00:06:20' – 00:06:50').

Like *5 Broken Cameras*, the opening sequence of *For Sama* establishes the point of view from which the story is structured, with the voice-over of its protagonist/director piecing together the footage she has filmed, articulated around a socio-political conflict and a personal family story. Sama's existence challenges Waad's militant activism against the Syrian regime and poses the dilemma of whether to keep fighting or to flee the country to protect her child. The documentary is thus constructed as an audiovisual testimony addressed to her daughter, attempting to preserve a memory in the context of a process of extermination and destruction taking place in Syria.

As protagonists/directors guiding their respective stories, Emad and Waad constitute authoritative voices not in epistemic terms of objectivity about the conflicts depicted but in terms of truth as witnesses to the violence being perpetrated

against their communities. The first-person perspective in these documentaries establishes the enunciation from a position that provides a guarantee of truth about the injustices of war.

As Renato Prada Oropeza (1986) argues, the aim of the testimony-discourse is to "provide proof, justification or verification of the truth of a prior social fact, an interpretation guaranteed by the speaker when they declare themselves to be a participant in or (mediate or immediate) witness to the events narrated" (1986: 11).

As Bill Nichols suggests in relation to the *performative documentary mode* (2001: 233), in these types of documentaries the filmmakers not only participate actively in the world being portrayed but also directly play a leading role in it. They feel a strong need to tell of the suffering experienced in their respective communities, which is expressed in the narrative of their films as an agency that gives them strength to keep up the fight.

Emad occupies the role in his village of documenting the protests of the people and their repression by the army. In some cases, the footage he films is used to raise morale in the community and to recover their faith in their struggle, in addition to providing archival material for news media outlets covering the conflict in the region. As the documentary progresses, the sense of protection that the protagonist feels when he is behind his camera begins to fade, reflecting his own vulnerability to the violence around him. His third camera is broken when a bullet becomes lodged between the lens and the housing. Halfway through the film, the Israeli army storms his house in the middle of the night and arrests him on charges of throwing stones at soldiers during a demonstration. Emad does time in jail and is sentenced to house arrest for a while thereafter.

The voice-over serves a reflexive function here, as he ruminates on the dangers and the potential of the footage he has been filming, the risks it entails, but also its political role as testimony. While we see him alone in a house outside B'ilin where he is serving his house arrest, juxtaposed with POV shots out the window of a flock of birds in the sky, Emad reflects on the trouble he has exposed himself to as a video activist. But far from dissuading him, it leads him to a greater awareness of the importance of his work and a reaffirmation of his identity as a witness. He is thus determined to go on: "Nature gives me new vitality. I know I have a purpose in life. The price may be high, but the path I've chosen is the one meant for me. It's my destiny" (00:54:44' – 00:55:00').

This marks a point of no return for the protagonist, who is willing to risk his life rather than give up his video activism. Testimony is presented as a key feature of his work to construct his community's memory, which at the same time it provides him with a personal way of dealing with the trauma caused by the violence.

The image of his son Gibreel, who was born at the same time he obtained his first video camera, is constructed in the story as a metonym for the children who have grown up surrounded by the violence of the conflict. In one of the final scenes, after a small victory for the people of B'ilin when an Israeli court orders the barrier to be dismantled, we return to the shots shown at the beginning, in which Emad displays his five broken cameras on a table. These cameras, the tools he has used to record and construct the memory of this conflict, also serve as evidence and as memory objects themselves, as proof of his existence. While playing a testimonial role of great significance, they also fulfil a metacinematic function as they

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confront us with the very means of production of the images contained in the film.

In the final scenes of *For Sama*, Waad ponders the trauma that her daughter may one day have to grapple with and defends her decision to stay as long as they could in Aleppo to fight the oppression of the Syrian regime. She is pregnant again, and the new hospital they had managed to set up has been bombed; finally, they make the decision to leave the country, like many others who can no longer bear the imminent risk of death. Waad takes hundreds of hours of footage filmed over that period with her, hoping to be able to expose the terror perpetrated in her country, to raise awareness in the international community and to bring about some kind of change.

The film culminates with her flight into exile and the birth of her second daughter. While images of different moments of struggle, camaraderie and dignity recorded in those five years flash past on the screen, Waad's voice-over concludes her letter to Sama:

> WAAD: If I could rewind the days, I would do exactly the same. Even if I never recover from the trauma, I don't regret anything. I can't wait for you to grow up, Sama, to tell me how you feel. I want you to know that we fought for the most important cause of all. So that you and all our children would not have to live as we lived. Everything we did was for you. (01:31:20' – 01:32:55')

The final scene, filmed with a drone over the rubble-filled streets of Aleppo, begins with a close-up rising from Waad's feet to a mid-frontal shot of Sama strapped to her mother's chest in a baby carrier. In her hand, Waad holds her camera. The scene then cuts to an overhead shot of Waad and Sama walking down the street, before panning upwards to show the city in ruins. These shots encapsulate the protagonist's combined role of mother and witness and reflect the dialogue the film establishes between the personal and the public, the individual or family story and the story of the Syrian Civil War.



Image 3. *For Sama* promotional poster. (Source: https://www.imdb.com)

The films analysed here construct historical discourses through individuals who are positioned as enunciating agents. They explore the construction of memory outside the totalising schemes characteristic of classical documentary cinema, based on an *open voice*, an enunciative perspective that proposes "a different conception of the world, one in which reality may be unknowable, characters ineffable, and events follow one another without resolution" (Plantinga, 1997: 108). Pablo Piedras (2014) suggests that the shift made in contemporary documentary filmmaking towards the first-person perspective has changed its ways of representing others, facilitating "a politics of identity based on dialogue

between minorities and their neighbours, establishing an ethics of inter-subjective contact over the certainties provided by the totalising explanatory systems of the world" (2014: 233-234). The status of Emad and Waad as protagonist-subjects vests each of their stories with a guarantee of truth, based not on epistemic certainty but on the subjectivity of their personal experience. As René Jara (1986) suggests in relation to testimonial literature:

> The view of the vanquished and the voiceless, more than serving as testimony to a defeat or to some act of heroism, draws on the pain and noise of the battle to outline a project for the future. They know that the archives of humanity are always more complete than the compilations of the most ambitious historiographies. (1986: 2)

Moreover, this locus of enunciation eschews any possibility of a sensationalist tone that turns the pain of others into "a form of media spectacle" that "causes laughter and enjoyment rather than distress or outrage" (Ahmed, 2015: 66). Instead it locates the pain and oppression of the protagonists and their communities on terrain that interpellates us, inviting us to transform our outrage into a stimulus for hope through resistance. It uses words, but also—and above all—the bodies themselves, understanding cinematic narrative in terms of the affective power and performativity of the images (Soto Calderón, 2020).

Waad Al-Kateab has described her filming process as a way of getting involved as an activist, and that she trusts that her material could be used not only to raise public awareness, but also as support for future legal proceedings (Al-Kateab in Hasday, 2019). The film has won or been nominated for several awards, including Best Documentary at Cannes in 2019, several BAFTAs in the UK in 2020 and an Oscar nomination for Best Documentary Feature Film. It has also been broadcast on several TV networks and has been available for several years on the Netflix streaming platform.

In the case of *5 Broken Cameras*, the scope of its distribution was always based on a strategic objective to expose the human rights violations being committed in the West Bank and to challenge political assumptions in the public sphere in order to win new allies for the Palestinian cause (Robbins, 2012). The documentary received significant international attention, with screenings at numerous festivals and awards at the Amsterdam International Documentary Festival (IDFA), Cinéma du Réel, the Sundance Festival, and the Emmy Awards, as well as receiving an Oscar nomination for Best Documentary Feature Film. It was released in cinemas in several countries and has also been released on DVD and broadcast on television (IMDB, n.d.).

FROM VIDEO ACTIVIST FOOTAGE TO CINEMATIC CO-AUTHORSHIP

Emad Burnat did not consider the possibility of using his video footage for a film until 2009, when he contacted Guy Davidi—an Israeli activist and documentary maker whom he met at the demonstrations in B'ilin—to ask for help to make a documentary. Emad had no specific training in filmmaking or photography; he was a simple villager who used his various video cameras to record a first-person account of the conflict in his homeland and how it affected his community. Davidi, who had just finished a documentary about the water crisis in the West Bank, initially had doubts about whether it was worthwhile to embark on another documentary about a conflict that had already been the subject of several films and television reports. However, he realised that the personal perspective that could be constructed out of the archival material and Emad's presence as co-director and protagonist offered the possibility of a powerfully different approach to the topic (Kostrz, 2016).

With the almost 800 hours of footage that Emad had gathered, they embarked on the ardu-

ous task of defining the film from among so many possibilities, in a process of editing and screenwriting that took several years. For the first stage, Davidi took the footage home to view, to test possibilities with the editing and to try out a few ideas for the film's structure, in a process that lasted two years. During this time, Emad continued to film new events in the conflict, which was becoming increasingly intense. They then worked together editing and defining the script, in a stage that included writing the voice-over narration. Finally, in a third stage of editing, they worked together for a month in Paris with French editor Véronique Lagoarde-Ségot (Robbins, 2012).

Initially, Emad was opposed to the idea of a first-person approach, as he was uncomfortable with placing so much focus on himself as the filmmaker: "The struggle of the Palestinian people is a collective struggle, and I was afraid that this decision would not be understood by the Palestinians, that it would be perceived as a desire to put myself first" (Burnat, quoted in Kostrz, 2016). But Davidi believed that the only way to create a different film about a conflict that had already received so much media attention was to approach it from the perspective of personal experience.

Similarly, Waad al-Kateab was not thinking about making a feature film when she began filming the footage that would later form part of *For Sama* (BFI, 2020). She was covering the battle of Aleppo as a citizen journalist for the British television network Channel 4,[1] and as a form of video activism. When she left Syria with her videos, Channel 4 put her in contact with the filmmaker Edward Watts, who joined the project as co-director. Watts says they engaged in long discussions to determine the selection of footage for the film. He points out that a strong focus of his contribution was the search for universal themes to define the story: the dilemma of whether to stay or leave, motherhood, etc.

> It was a sort of intensely emotional experience, and it also came with a real feeling of responsibility [...] to do it right, to make sure that these incredible lives that they'd led and the archives she'd gathered would reach people in the way that I felt certain that it could. (Watts, on Hollywood First Look, 2019).

Like Emad in *5 Broken Cameras*, Waad did not initially embrace the idea of a personal approach, as she wanted it to be about the people who were fighting, rather than focusing on her as an individual. But later she understood that the stories of her whole community could be told from a personal point of view (Watts, in Cineuropa, 2019).

The involvement of the co-director in each case resulted in the transformation of an archive compiled by an individual with no specific training in filmmaking into a film that could connect with a wider audience beyond the community portrayed in the footage. This transformation entailed an understanding of narrative and aesthetic strategies in terms of a testimonial materiality that directly involves the protagonists/directors. The archival footage thus fulfils a function of *monstration* that confronts us with the experience of the conflict through the bodies of the protagonists as witnesses, rather than using testimonial interviews or institutional archives to construct the memory of the events.

It is reasonable to assume that the co-authorship of *5 Broken Cameras* and *For Sama* involved a division of roles related to *monstration* (the production of the footage over the course of several years) and *narration* (editing the footage and defining the structure of the film).[2] While it is clear that there was more of a dynamic of dialogue and negotiation than a strict division of roles, the interviews analysed seem to suggest that the co-directors from outside the community focused particularly on the development of a dramatic structure and the use of editing to define the discourse and aesthetics of the films, while respecting the point of view of the protagonists.

Comments by Davidi suggest that the co-direction involved differentiated roles and func-

tions that constituted a collaboration, but where the task of editing and definition of the structure and script fell upon him, while the footage was taken by Emad, who is identified as the subject of enunciation in the documentary (Serrano, 2013).

An analysis of the dramatic structure of the films reveals that both adhere quite closely to the classical narrative design described for cinema by scholars and authors of screenwriting guides such as Syd Field (1995) and Robert McKee (2002).[3] The graphs below present a breakdown of the structure of the two films analysed, considering the plot points in relation to the timeline of each film.

Although both documentaries experiment with a first-person archive with the immediacy of those directly experiencing the oppression, each film is constructed using a classical narrative structure with three clearly differentiated acts based on plot points, as well as a mid-point, a climax and a final sequence marking the return to calm. This is a highly significant element of each film, reflecting the transformation of a video activist's record into a work that uses cinematic language to create a new discursivity. As Javier Campo (2015) suggests in the distinction he draws between audiovisual documents and documentary cinema, in the latter the footage is reconfigured

> according to cinematic aesthetic parameters that move beyond the level of recording reality. That is, initially images, and then also sounds, which function not only to record reality but also to organise it, modifying it temporally and spatially, fragmenting and altering the events; in short, constructing discourses. (2015: 5)

It is particularly revealing that the script for the voice-over narrated by Emad was written by Davidi (Robbins, 2012). This may raise questions about the extent to which this process serves to affirm the perspective and voice of the protagonist, and how much the external co-director ended up imposing his own point of view. But it also reflects a collective process of transculturation[4] (Rama, 1982; Pritsch, 2021;2025), establishing a dialogue of subjectivities and knowledges. Determining the authorship of each element within the creative process is difficult when that process involved a collaboration lasting several years. Although it is clear that Emad Burnat was the documentary's principal photographer and that Guy Davidi helped structure and edit it, the film as a whole would not be what it

Image 4. Dramatic structure of *5 Broken Cameras* (Source: Author)

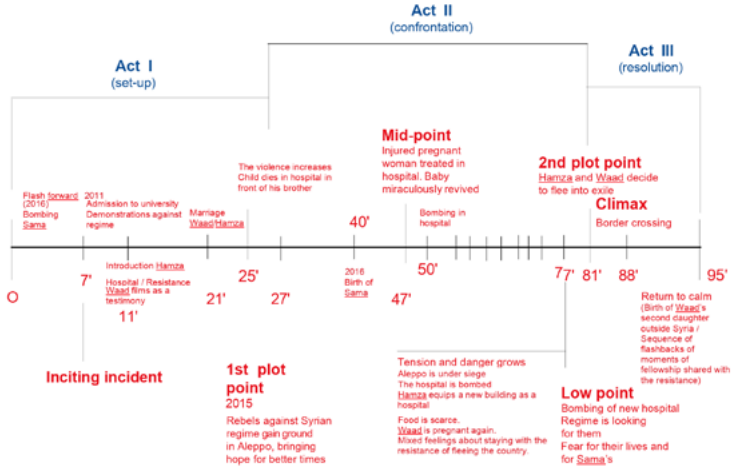
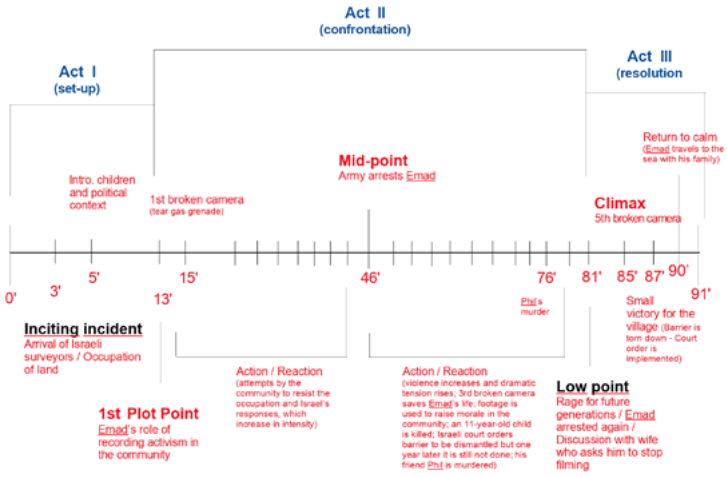


Image 5. Dramatic structure of *For Sama* (Source: Author)



is without its co-authorial essence, with each perspective complementing the other to create to a personal work that at the same time evokes universal themes that have facilitated its impact on international audiences.

> If I say that I wrote the text, yes, it is true, but I was inspired by Emad. So there is kind of an atmosphere of doing it together, and that is important for us. [...] I wrote the text, but it is an interpretation of him [Emad]. [...] It was something we did together over several years. (Davidi, quoted in Robbins, 2012a).

In his essay on collaborative forms of documentary film, Jay Ruby (1991) suggests that although most documentary makers see filmmaking as a way of expressing their perspective on the world they live in, many have sought to convey the perspective of the social actors featured in their work, assuming the role of giving a voice to the voiceless, those excluded from the means of film production. Ruby argues that films made collaboratively or by the subjects themselves are significant because they represent a different approach to the dominant practice, whereby certain minorities traditionally excluded from the "control of the means for imaging the world" are given the chance to express their point of view (1991: 50). As the ability of those in dominant social positions to represent oppressed and marginalised minorities is being met with increased scepticism (in a shift associated with decolonial processes), some theorists and filmmakers have found a possible solution in autobiographies or personal films in which "the self and the other become intertwined" (1991: 52). Between the two extremes of representing communities from a hegemonic perspective and documentaries made by the communities themselves, Ruby posits the possibility of

> a third voice: an amalgam of the maker's voice and the voice of the subject, blended in such a manner as to make it impossible to discern which voice dominates the work. In other words, films where outsider and insider visions coalesce into a new perspective. (1991: 62)

The co-authorship process in the films analysed has also entailed a change to the mode of production, with the involvement of professional production studios that included working with editors, the composition of original music, audio-visual post-production, and—once the films were completed—worldwide distribution plans, with a focus on participation in festivals, international marketing and deals with streaming platforms.

CONCLUSIONS

Both *5 Broken Cameras* and *For Sama* were created out of footage filmed by their protagonists over several years, resulting in archives made as a form of video activism in response to the situation of oppression being experienced in their respective communities. This material was used on several occasions by different international media outlets in their coverage of these conflicts. When the creative process evolved into the production of a documentary film, the footage previously used for television reports or in community screenings was reconfigured as raw material for the creation of a different type of aesthetic form and language.

The use of a first-person testimonial approach is undoubtedly an identifying feature of both films analysed, distinguishing them from other documentaries made about the same conflicts. As viewers, the way we become immersed in the lives of Emad and Waad and their respective communities elicits a much more empathetic and heartfelt response, as in each case we connect to an intimate, first-person viewpoint. This approach in turn allows a deeper and more sensitive treatment of the problems experienced, quite distinct from the approaches of productions taking external perspectives. The collaborative creation of these films and the cinematic language they use grew out of video activism as a form of grassroots resistance and culminated in the production of creative documentaries that have had an exceptional international impact.

THE COLLABORATIVE CREATION OF THESE FILMS AND THE CINEMATIC LANGUAGE THEY USE GREW OUT OF VIDEO ACTIVISM AS A FORM OF GRASSROOTS RESISTANCE AND CULMINATED IN THE PRODUCTION OF CREATIVE DOCUMENTARIES

It is unlikely that these films would have enjoyed such success without the collaboration of co-directors from outside the communities they portray, whose background and training as filmmakers enabled them to combine the personal perspective of their protagonists with solid narrative structures and aesthetic treatments resulting in films that have gained worldwide attention.[5]

Although over the course of film history there have been different points of resistance against hegemonic representations, in the 21st century new forms of democratisation have arisen with the development of new technologies that have lowered costs and facilitated wider access to the means of film production. However, access to film equipment alone does not guarantee a successful film, much less the possibility of achieving a level of visibility that goes beyond the limits of the local community to bring the discourses the film constructs into the public sphere.

The more than 500 hours of raw footage taken over several years by the protagonists of these two films—with no specific training or experience in filmmaking—would never on their own constitute a documentary film capable of reaching audiences as large and diverse as they ultimately did. The possibility of subaltern[6] subjects constructing cinematic discourses to convey their own perspectives on the oppression they suffer in their communities constitutes an original response to the numerous productions that have been made on the same geopolitical situations by filmmakers looking in from the outside. The involvement of Guy Davidi and Edward Watts as co-directors had a substantial impact on the development of these films, using their knowledge of the resources and potentialities of cinematic language to articulate the personal perspective of their protagonists/directors.

The rawness, urgency and immediacy of their testimony is evident in the footage filmed and the events experienced by Emad and Waad. But that footage found its cinematic form in the editing process, in a space of dialogue and collaboration with individuals who do not belong to the protagonists' world, who acted as mediators to create films that could connect with audiences outside B'ilin and Aleppo, respectively. In this process, each external co-director has had to work with a meticulous respect for the point of view of his protagonist/director responsible for gathering several years' worth of material.

The external co-director thus played a mediating role between the subjective gaze of the protagonist/director and the possibility of connecting with a wider audience, enriching the film with his experience and knowledge of cinematic language, articulating the personal, subjective perspective of its protagonist with a structured narrative and universal themes.

The experience of co-authorship in the documentaries analysed here seems to offer an interesting mode in which the gazes and voices of subaltern subjects historically excluded from film production can be seen and heard in the public sphere and their symbolic, social and political meanings can be debated on a global level.

NOTES

1 In 2016, the British program *Channel 4 News* asked Waad to make a series of reports titled "Inside Aleppo". She would subsequently win an international Emmy Award for these videos, which have received more than 500 million views online (Lahalle, 2019).

2 André Gaudreault and Francois Jost (1995) posit that the process whereby a film establishes its discourse includes two basic layers of narrativity: *monstration*, the result of the joint work of staging and framing that articulates the various frames to form shots; and *narration*, resulting from the editing, which articulates the various shots to form sequences (1995: 63). The authors suggest that these two layers of narrativity presuppose and correspond to two different agents: the *film monstrator* and the *film narrator* (1995: 64). They argue that "on a higher level, the *voice* of these two agents would actually be modulated and regulated by the overarching agency of the *film mega-narrator*, responsible for the 'mega-narrative' that is the film" (idem.).

3 Field proposes the idea of the *paradigm*, a conceptual scheme for explaining the elements of classical narrative structure. The structure is comprised of three acts (set-up, confrontation and resolution) which are separated by "plot points", events that radically change the direction of the action. The set-up (or first act) introduces the protagonist and ends with the event that serves as the plot point leading to the development of the conflict in the second act. The protagonist then faces a series of obstacles to the satisfaction of their dramatic needs. This second act ends with a crisis point or low point preceding a second plot point that will give rise to the resolution in the third act. On the other hand, McKee (2002) proposes the notion of the *archplot* to refer to the classical narrative design based on principles that can be recognised in the ancient epics, drawing on the Aristotelian three-act model. Other plot points discussed by these authors include the *inciting incident*, an event located in the first act that upsets the balance of the protagonist's ordinary world, establishing the need to solve the main problem of the story; the *midpoint*, or point of no return, which connects the development of the conflict in the second act; and the *climax*, the moment of greatest dramatic tension, located in the third act, where the protagonist's objectives clash with antagonistic forces to achieve a resolution.

4 Taking up the concept of *transculturation* proposed by Fernando Ortiz (1978), referring to a process that combines qualities of two cultures, abandoning features of the original culture and taking on elements of an external culture, Ángel Rama coins the term *narrative transculturators* to describe writers who engage in a process of selecting, discarding and combining to construct a culture that at the same time is based on and distinct from both their own culture and a foreign culture (Rama, 1982: 47). In previous studies, I have proposed the category of *transculturating cinema* to describe films which, although the filmmaker does not belong to the subaltern contexts represented in them, adopt an approach focusing on the points of view of these subjects, combined with the director's own perspective (Pritsch, 2025: 134).

5 While this article was being written, the Oscar for Best Documentary Feature Film was awarded to *No Other Land* (Basel Adra, Hamdan Ballal, Yuval Abraham and Rachel Szor, 2024), a film that also deals with the conflict in the West Bank, in this case in the occupied region of Masafer Yatta. Like *5 Broken Cameras*, it is a documentary identified as a collaboration between Palestinian and Israeli filmmakers, beginning as a video activist project that provided the material for a feature-length documentary. Its success at the Oscars has given this documentary a very significant level of worldwide visibility in the context of a conflict that has become increasingly violent in recent years, affecting the lives of tens of thousands of people and displacing entire communities.

6 *Subaltern* refers here to those excluded from the spaces of power in society, for reasons of class, race, gender or sexual identity, among others (Gramsci, 1981; Spivak, 1998; Guha, 2002).

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FROM VIDEO ACTIVISM TO COLLABORATIVE CREATIVE DOCUMENTARY: CO-AUTHORSHIP IN *5 BROKEN CAMERAS* AND *FOR SAMA*

Abstract

This paper presents case studies of two documentaries made in the last decade that arose out of the video activism of their protagonists, who, after several years of gathering footage, sought out external co-directors from outside their communities to help them create a documentary feature film. The films in question are *5 Broken Cameras* (Emad Burnat and Guy Davidi, 2012) and *For Sama* (Waad Al-Kateab and Edward Watts, 2019), which deal with two extremely important contemporary social conflicts: the territorial dispute in the West Bank and the Syrian Civil War. These films are analysed here in relation to their processes of discursive production, the narrative and aesthetic elements involved in the transition from video activism to documentary film production, their enunciative perspectives and their processes of collaborative creation.

Key words

Video Activism; Documentary Cinema; Collaborative Creation; Co-Authorship; Testimony; First-Person Documentary; 5 Broken Cameras; For Sama.

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DEL VIDEOACTIVISMO AL DOCUMENTAL DE CREACIÓN COLABORATIVO. CO-AUTORÍA EN *5 CÁMARAS ROTAS* Y *PARA SAMA*

Resumen

En este trabajo propongo el estudio de caso de dos films documentales de la última década, surgidos a partir de una práctica videoactivista de sus protagonistas que en una etapa avanzada del rodaje sumaron a co-directores externos a la comunidad para construir un largometraje de cine documental. Se trata de *5 cámaras rotas* (Emad Burnat y Guy Davidi, 2012) y *Para Sama* (Waad Al-Kateab y Edward Watts, 2019), que abordan conflictos sociales de enorme actualidad como la disputa territorial en Cisjordania y la guerra civil en Siria. Me interesa analizar estos films en relación con sus procesos de producción social de sentido, los elementos narrativos y estéticos implicados en el pasaje del videoactivismo al cine documental de creación, sus perspectivas enunciativas y sus procesos de creación colaborativa.

Palabras clave

Videoactivismo; Cine Documental; Creación Colaborativa; Co-autoría; Testimonio; Documental en Primera Persona; *5 Cámaras Rotas*; *Para Sama*.

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