

## WHAT CHANGES CAN GRASSROOTS ACTIVIST FILMS MAKE? THE CASE OF “COMPLEXOS” (2020, Cafuné na Laje[Brazil] / ARMA Alliance [Finland])

Lecturer: Leonardo Custódio, PhD (Åbo Akademi University, [www.armaalliance.com](http://www.armaalliance.com))

*Hi, everyone. I'm Leonardo Custódio. Some of you remember my talk in 2019 entitled “**Anti-Racism Films by Filmmakers Racialized as Non-White**”. This year, I'd like to propose something different. Instead of a lecture (in which I speak and you listen), what would you think of dialogue (in which we all say something and learn from one another)? Let me explain.*

*The initiative I coordinate, the **Anti-Racism Media Activist Alliance**, collaborated with the grassroots, favela-based collective **Cafuné na Laje** in the production of the film “Complexos”. You will watch the film before the lecture (synopsis, link, and password below). As a researcher in social sciences, I look at this film as an instrument for sociopolitical change. However, different from you, I have little to no knowledge in the practicalities of making a film.*

*So, the dialogue I am proposing to you is: I explain what leads me to think of this film as an instrument for change and you bring in your practical/technical expertise on filmmaking (also arts, poetry, photography, journalism, etc.). Then, together, we think about the kinds of changes that are possible from a grassroots perspective in cases like the making of “Complexos”.*

### HOW WILL THIS DIALOGUE WORK?

*We have two hours together.*

*In the first hour (13:00-14:00), I will briefly explain you how the background for the film and how it came to be. The topics will be:*

- 1. What “favela media activism” is.*
- 2. How “favela media activism” is decolonial by nature.*
- 3. How “Complexos” is an example of “favela media activism”.*
- 4. After dealing with these three topics, **I will answer to your questions about the practicalities around the making of the film.** So, when you watch “Complexos”, write down all questions about aspects of the film about which you would like to know more: budget, team, story, production, distribution, etc. I'll try to answer to the best of my knowledge.*

*In the second hour (14:00-15:00), I'd like you to think and share your thoughts – both from your own standpoint, but also empathetically putting yourselves on the activists' shoes – on:*

- 1. The aspects of the film you consider positive.*
- 2. The aspects of the film you consider improvable or that could be done differently.*
- 3. **What kinds of changes films like “Complexos” can make? What changes can't be made through such films?***

*[continues on page 2]*

*We will be in Zoom. So you can ask/speak as you wish: speak up with video, with no video, or chat. I'll try to mediate as much as possible considering my lack of skills with the technology. ;)*

*The materials for you to prepare include:*

1. Slides
2. Book chapter "The meaning of favela media activism" (from my book "[Favela media activism: Counterpublics for human rights in Brazil](#)").
3. Book chapter "The decolonial nature of 'comunicação popular'" (to come out at the book "[The Evolution of Popular Communication in Latin America](#)", edited by Ana Cristina Suzina, Palgrave, 2021).
4. Vimeo link and password to "Complexos".

*This is it. See you soon online! Here's the synopsis and link:*

### **COMPLEXOS (2020)**

*Production: Cafuné na Laje & ARMA Alliance*

*Director: JV Santos*

*Year: 2020*

*Duration: 26 mins*

*Genre: Documentary*

*Themes: Favela, Media activism, Art, Anti-racism*

*Language: Brazilian Portuguese*

*Subtitles: English*

*Description: The short documentary "Complexos" features intimate and emotional views on how residents of favelas in Rio de Janeiro use media and arts to raise their voices and act for justice, dignity and respect. The film features testimonies of people who turned their passions for photography, journalism, poetry, graffiti and theater into actions to preserve local histories, to dismantle prejudices and to mobilize solidarity actions in the complex everyday lives in the underprivileged side of the Brazilian divide. "Complexos" is part of a collaborative process between the Finland-based Anti-Racism Media activism Alliance (ARMA Alliance) and the favela-based audiovisual collective Cafuné na Laje. This partnership - started during the research for Leonardo Custódio's book "Favela Media Activism" - aims at exploring respectful and transformative forms of collaboration between academic institutions and grassroots activists. "Complexos" was made possible by the financial support of the Ella and Georg Ehrnrooth Foundation (Finland) and Kone Foundation (Finland).*

<https://vimeo.com/459601986>

*Password: 4RmA&C4fUNe*