

# THE IMAGES OF JUNE 2013: A DISPUTE FOR BRAZIL

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LEANDRO DOS SANTOS MARINHO\*

## Abstract

This article seeks to understand the events of June 2013 from a specific focus: the political-communicational clash between media activism and corporate media in their dispute over society's imaginary and the narrative control about the protests. On one hand, Mídia Ninja, here understood as the most prominent media activist initiative in the context of the protests, due to the notoriety it achieved and also its legitimacy among protesters and even among the hegemonic media themselves, and the level of challenge it established for the latter. On the other hand, the most popular and far-reaching media outlets in the country, represented here by two of the newspapers with the largest national circulation, O Globo and Estado de S. Paulo. Four photographs, seen illustrative about how these vehicles conceived the political demonstrations from perspectives not only distinct, but conflicting, are analyzed. It is argued that June 2013 was an extremely media and visual event, in which images played a key role in its construction and development, as well as the aforementioned clash reflected not only a clash between distinct media models, but also the conflicting encounter amid incongruous ways of conceiving, narrating, and representing politics, society and the nation.

**Keywords:** June; protests; images; Brazil; media.

## As imagens de junho de 2013: uma disputa pelo Brasil

### Resumo

O presente artigo busca compreender os eventos de Junho de 2013 a partir de um enfoque específico: o embate político-communicacional entre o midiativismo e os meios de comunicação corporativos na disputa pelo imaginário da sociedade e pelo controle da narrativa sobre os protestos. De um lado, a Mídia Ninja, entendida aqui como sendo a iniciativa midiativista de maior destaque no contexto das manifestações pela notoriedade alcançada, sua legitimidade entre os manifestantes e entre os próprios meios de comunicação hegemônicos e o nível de desafio que estabeleceu para estes últimos. De outro, os veículos de comunicação mais consumidos e de maior alcance do país, aqui representados por dois dos jornais impressos de maior circulação nacional, O Globo e Estado de S. Paulo. São analisadas quatro fotografias consideradas ilustrativas da maneira como estes veículos conceberam as manifestações a partir de perspectivas não apenas distintas, mas conflitantes. Argumenta-se que Junho de 2013 foi um acontecimento extremamente midiático e visual, no qual as imagens tiveram papel fundamental na sua construção e desenvolvimento, e que o embate acima mencionado refletiu não apenas um enfrentamento entre modelos distintos

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\* Doutor e Mestre em Ciências Sociais pela Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UERJ). Pesquisador do Observatório de Favelas do Rio de Janeiro (OF/RJ). E-mail: leos.marinho@yahoo.com.br.



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de comunicação social, mas também o encontro conflituoso entre formas incongruentes de conceber, narrar e representar a política, a sociedade e a nação.

**Palavras-chave:** Junho; manifestações; imagens; Brasil; mídia.

In the backdrop of June 2013, a crescendo of collective outrage and a deluge of grievances spilled onto the streets and across virtual social networks, the new arena for political contention in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A series of demonstrations erupted in numerous Brazilian cities and became part of the country's political history. Today, a decade after these events, we find that their repercussions persist, their full scope and significance still eluding comprehensive understanding.

This article endeavors to probe these occurrences through a specific lens: the collision between political and communication forces, as well as the rivalry for narrative control and public perception, between alternative media, exemplified by Mídia Ninja, and corporate media, embodied by widely circulated newspapers like O Globo and O Estado de São Paulo. On one side of this multifaceted battle lies Mídia Ninja, characterized by its unparalleled prominence within the context of the protests, the legitimacy it garnered among demonstrators (and the mainstream media itself), its audacious challenge to the mainstream media, and the notoriety it attained. On the other side, we have the most influential and pervasive communication channels in the country, represented by O Globo and O Estado de São Paulo, two newspapers with the highest national circulation. It is argued that June 2013 was a profoundly media-centric and visually driven event, where images played a pivotal role in its conception and evolution. The clash mentioned above not only represented a collision between different models of social communication but also mirrored the conflicting encounter between incongruous ways of perceiving, narrating, and representing politics, society, and the nation.

In this analysis, we delve into four photographs considered illustrative of how these media outlets interpreted the protests from not just distinct but opposing perspectives. We made a deliberate choice to spotlight images with unique characteristics, which were frequently repeated in other photographs. The selection of photographs presented in this study reflects a saturation found while observing and analyzing photographic images produced by the chosen media channels within the specified timeframe. These images serve as a small, yet believed to be representative, sample of the positions taken by the analyzed media. Of the four selected photographs, three were produced and published by these media outlets between June 6 and 30, a period that emerged as a sociological and historical landmark due to the frequency and intensity of the 2013 protests. There is one exception, authored by Mídia Ninja, which falls outside this timeframe for a specific reason: it was captured during an event on September 7, 2013. This particular image underscores that "June" as a phenomenon cannot be confined to the month of June and further accentuates the divergence in perspectives between the commercial newspapers and Mídia Ninja regarding the demonstrations and the concept of the nation.

If there is one thing we can assert about the events of 2013, it is that they remain a subject of ongoing contention. Apart from certain interpretations put forth by specific authors (Singer, 2013; Domingues, 2013; Bringel, 2013; 2017; Bringel & Pleyers, 2015; Tatagiba, 2014; Tatagiba & Galvão, 2019; Alonso & Mische, 2017; Alonso, 2017; 2019; Lima & Sawamura, 2016; Miguel, 2017; Gohn, 2019), the discourse surrounding June 2013 has largely vacillated between two mutually exclusive perspectives. On one side, there are those who view it as a collective catharsis, a legitimate display of popular power that presented a wasted opportunity to deepen democracy in the country and reduce inequalities. On the other side, there are those who perceive the spirit of the protests as resolutely anti-political, conservative, and, in the extreme, bordering on what some have labeled as "fascist."

This polarization still prevails today in discussions on social media, newspapers, and academic publications. Even the nomenclature for these demonstrations remains a point of contention. Various designations were used, such as the "20 cent revolution," as dubbed by the British daily Financial Times (*20 cent REVOLUTION shows the fantasy is over, says Financial Times*, BBC, June 20, 2013), the "Vinegar revolt," coined by social media users in reference to police repression, and the "Indignados [outraged] Movement," as termed by Gohn (2015). Some asserted that

what unfolded was the "greatest popular uprising in Brazilian history" (Braga, 2013, p. 81), while others dismissed it as a mere "impulse to imitate similar demonstrations that had recently occurred in other countries" (Reis, 2017, pp. 28-29) or labeled it a "great fraud" (Souza, 2015) and even a "fascist equation" (Santos, 2013).

However, the term that has gained greater acceptance is "June Days." Notably, this term has a historical context that should not be overlooked. Originally, it referred to the revolutionary movement that transpired in June 1848 on the streets of Paris, led by French workers who erected barricades throughout the city in opposition to the conservative direction the brief-lived Second French Republic had taken under the bourgeoisie's leadership. Marx famously described them as "the most colossal event in the history of European civil wars" in his work "The 18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" (2011, p. 34). Hence, the usage of "June Days" historically signifies extraordinary and specific events of great magnitude.

For my part, I believe that merely associating the timing of these distinct events occurring in the same month does not suffice for such a weighty historical and sociological term to be reused, as it risks trivializing the concept. While the first "June Days" event had revolutionary aspirations, the second departed from this path. Therefore, this paper avoids using the term "June Days" in reference to the June 2013 demonstrations in Brazil. This decision does not diminish the significance of these events but reflects an analytical choice grounded in the reasoning presented above. In any case, it is evident that even a seemingly straightforward matter, such as what name to assign to the phenomenon under scrutiny, unveils the intricacy of the subject and the potential for not just diverse but entirely conflicting interpretations. This, however, has not hindered these events from swiftly attaining the status of a "concept." Today, we can refer to "June 2013," and the immediate recollection is the images of Brazilian cities inundated by protesters. Thus, I contend it is fitting to refer to the phenomenon simply as "June" or "June 2013," underscoring the noun "June" as a proper term to encapsulate its unique experience and establish it as a pivotal juncture in recent Brazilian history.

June is an integral part of a process. This statement implies that it is not solely about what occurred in June 2013. The protests that engulfed the country, newspaper headlines, television broadcasts, and have captivated the attention of diverse analysts since 2013 were largely the culmination of simmering discontent that had accumulated during the years of the Lula government. These grievances emerged from various contexts and groups, which, as the protests intensified, evolved into opposing fronts. In this sense, June was the outcome of a convergence of vastly distinct factors, and their subsequent actions played a pivotal role in shaping the ongoing political conflicts that currently permeate Brazilian society.

However, June was also an "event" in the sense it is used in contemporary philosophy – an interpretation that aligns with the original perspective of Rodrigo Nunes (2014). In a philosophical tradition that spans from Heidegger to Rancière, with notable figures like Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida, and Badiou, the concept of an event denotes the emergence of the new, a singular force capable of disrupting causality, temporality, and linear historicity. In this philosophical literature, an event represents both a rupture and the establishment of new regularities, simultaneously introducing novelty into both the subject and the object. In all these regards, June qualifies as an event. It not only broke away from the events preceding it and the causal chains that could be deemed exclusive causes for its occurrence but also, in all its complexity, multi-causality, polysemy, and contradictions, engendered a new phase in Brazilian politics.

In at least three distinct ways, June marked a significant turning point for Brazilian society and politics, serving as a demarcation between two distinct eras in the recent history of the country. First and foremost, June 2013 triggered one of the most profound legitimacy crises in the history of the Brazilian republic. This crisis eventually led to the election of a president who, while undemocratic and anti-republican, was seen as a genuine anti-establishment alternative – Jair Bolsonaro, embodying an "authentic" and legitimately popular sentiment. It is essential to clarify our position: we diverge from interpretations that portray June as the "serpent's egg" of Brazilian democracy, as posited by individuals like Jessé Souza and Marilena Chaui, among others. These interpretations suggest that June initiated a conservative and authoritarian reaction led by a middle class dismayed by corruption, which found its culmination in the impeachment of then President Dilma Rousseff and the subsequent election of Bolsonaro. While it is unwise to entirely divorce

June from the subsequent events that unfolded, considering it as an event with a pristine essence untouched by the impurities of what followed, it should be contextualized within the broader scope of history. However, characterizing June as inherently "conservative" and "authoritarian," and establishing a direct causal link between events, while they may be distinct, oversimplifies historical analysis. It also disregards crucial elements of the protests, including their social and political composition and their underlying agenda.

In 2013, there was a moment when a group with limited political experience, or those tilting more towards right-leaning politics and focused on issues related to corruption, gained considerable prominence. Understanding the local dynamics in São Paulo (and to a lesser extent, in Rio de Janeiro) is important. Neoliberal, conservative, and authoritarian groups were more organized there. The mainstream media played a significant role in amplifying these dynamics, portraying them as representative of a national phenomenon. Nevertheless, it is of utmost importance to acknowledge that the protests featured significant participation from a substantial number of vulnerable workers, along with activists and advocates aligned with left-leaning ideologies. Their demands, although diverse, were concrete in their calls for improved living conditions and enhanced institutional responsiveness. Furthermore, in the ensuing years, June left a lasting impact on significant actions, movements, initiatives, and political strategies that emerged in the wake of its progressive legacy. This influence was evident in events such as the demonstrations against the hosting of the 2014 FIFA World Cup, labor strikes spanning various sectors, occupations, and the rise or fortification of social and collective activist movements committed to addressing social inequalities. Notably, these movements placed particular emphasis on anti-racist and feminist struggles. Since 2015, the sentiment of disillusionment with the political system has endured. However, during this period, the major demonstrations have taken on a more uniform character, with the right-wing assuming a more prominent role. This has led to the consolidation of the social memory of events since 2013, amalgamating and crystallizing diverse processes. This transformation can be attributed less to an alleged "conservative essence" that was supposedly present in June and more to a resounding victory by those who consistently maintained that the true essence of June aligned with these evolving narratives from the very beginning. In essence, the connection between June and its ensuing developments is not a product of an easily foreseen teleological "triumph of the right" but rather the outcome of a series of pivotal disputes in various domains that did not favor the left. Notably, one of the most significant arenas for these conflicts was the field of communication, a topic that will become clearer as the text progresses.

Secondly, June marked a pivotal turning point for Brazilian society by ushering in a cycle of mega-protests, unlike anything witnessed since the early stages of democratization. These protests were defined primarily by mass mobilization in the streets, and they persisted until 2018, closely intertwined with the aforementioned crisis. This period can be perceived as a single, continuous cycle with distinct phases, as suggested by Gohn (2019). Simultaneously, it can also be seen as a succession of distinct cycles, connected to some extent, yet characterized by critical differences that prevent their complete amalgamation (Alonso; Mische, 2016; Alonso, 2017).

Certainly, from 2013 onwards, Brazilian political culture experienced a transformation, marked by the increasingly frequent organization of protests characterized by diverse repertoires of action. These protests were driven by collective actors, often decentralized, and featured a growing influence of individual agencies. Media and performance repertoires played a significant role, and there was a constant presence of a multitude of demands and causes. Adhering to Alonso and Mische's typology, we can categorize these protests, which varied in terms of ideology, goals, and aesthetics, into three primary types of collective action repertoires: i) An autonomist repertoire, initiated by new collectives, social movements, and left-wing and anarchist groups, emphasizing direct actions, decentralization, anti-hierarchy, anti-capitalism, and anti-statism, often associated with alternative lifestyles; ii) A socialist repertoire, characterized by traditional practices and strategies commonly employed by established social movements, trade unions, and left-wing political parties, including the use of megaphones, cars with loudspeakers, and a more hierarchical organizational structure; iii) The patriotic repertoire, typical of protests by neoliberal, conservative, and authoritarian groups, aiming to reclaim national symbols and adopting an agenda similar to that of *Diretas Já*<sup>1</sup> movements, the *Fora Collor* protests,<sup>2</sup> and the *Marcha da Família com Deus pela Liberdade*<sup>3</sup>. Their focus was on political moralization and, in extreme cases, demands for

military intervention. In this context, June had a dual impact. On one hand, it invigorated popular participation in the political arena, leading to a surge in occupations, strikes, and demonstrations across the country, spearheaded by autonomous groups, collectives, unions, social movements, and left-wing political parties, especially in the immediate aftermath of 2013. On the other hand, it created fertile ground for the resurgence of right-leaning ideologies in Brazil in recent years.

This brings us to the third perspective from which June can be understood as an event that has caused an inflection in society and national politics. Not only in Brazil but also in various countries worldwide, the production of media, particularly images, has assumed a central role in politics over the past decade and a half. While media usage has been integral to political dynamics for centuries, the scale at which such resources are now deployed has fundamentally changed. The widespread accessibility to media resources, driven by the proliferation of technology and its cost-effectiveness, has led to a diversification of communication forms and the production of information and media content (Recuero, 2009). This growth in internet access has solidified a communicational sphere where interpersonal communication, traditional mass communication (historically unidirectional, with a focus on the role of the press), and mass self-communication (involving messages exchanged among many individuals) have all coalesced (Castells, 2011).

As a consequence of these transformations, initially, but now as a significant feedback factor in the two aforementioned processes, there has been an unprecedented surge in image production, circulation, and consumption. A striking manifestation of this fusion is evident in how mainstream media has progressively adapted to this new reality. Today, any individual armed with a smartphone and internet access can record events from any corner of the globe and share their recordings on virtual social networks. Depending on the content's relevance and social interest, these shared recordings can influence journalistic work. This dynamic relationship has shifted, with communication outlets proffering topics for discussion within virtual social networks, and conversely, virtual social networks setting the agenda for the press.

Various social movements, collectives, activists, political parties, and professional politicians have recognized the power of virtual social networks, particularly in the age of heightened global connectivity and a growing fascination with visual content. In the words of Nicholas Mirzoeff (2003), it can be asserted that images have become the protagonists of our time, much like novels were the primary form of expression in the nineteenth century. Within the context of the June demonstrations, the battle between mainstream media and alternative information sources, notably media collectives, resulted in a transformation of the communication field (understood in the Bourdieusian sense as a field with imbalances of power and constant conflicts seeking either transformation or the preservation of the status quo (Bourdieu, 1997; 2004)) of the country. The success and widespread impact of new entities that disseminate information in 2013 prompted the emergence of similar initiatives and an increased adoption of this type of work by non-specialized segments. Subsequently, numerous outlets, representing various ideological positions, proliferated in Brazil. This trend reached its zenith, continuing to the present day, with the emergence of an extensive network for disseminating false information, primarily through virtual social networks. Since 2013, we have witnessed an expansion and deepening of communication disputes revolving around how to communicate, what to communicate, for whom, and how to represent social phenomena and subjects. At the core of this evolution is the heightened use of images—photographs, videos, memes, posters, symbols, and more.

However, what ties together these three processes – the crisis of political institutions' legitimacy, shifts in Brazilian political culture marked by the onset of mega-protests, and the radical transformation in the scale of media production, particularly imagery, focusing on politics – beyond their origination in June? They all, to varying extents, reflect a dispute that, if not initiated in 2013, gained new significance then and has since evolved into the current state of affairs. In this contemporary landscape, we observe clearer yet more complex antagonisms – a battle for the nation, its image, imaginary, meanings, and directions. This dispute found a privileged and decisive platform, taking shape, and evolving to its present form, particularly in the media coverage of the 2013 events. Here, for the first time, two contrasting ways of presenting and representing the nation emerged explicitly and on an unprecedented scale: the first, leaning towards conservatism, highlighted commonalities, embracing civic nationalism and traditional national symbols;

the second, in defiance, celebrated diversity, acknowledging the nation's heterogeneous and fragmented nature, laying bare its historical fractures and oppressions against marginalized groups (the poor, Black, Indigenous, women, LGBTQIA+ people, etc.).

## **MEDIA AND VISUAL PHENOMENON**

Understanding June entails adopting an interpretative approach that combines rationality, logic, linearity, and cumulativeness, as suggested by Rudah Ricci and Patrick Arley (2014). This perspective acknowledges the polysemy, heterogeneity, and discontinuities inherent in the phenomenon, valuing the accumulation of past events while recognizing the ruptures and intervals that challenge a purely historical and cumulative understanding due to the diversity of motivations, dissent, and disputes involved.

The list of protests leading up to 2013 in Brazil is extensive. On the right, the period between Dilma's inauguration and May 2013 saw the creation of at least 46 movements opposing the Worker's Party (PT) and the left, advocating for the moralization of politics and a minimal state. Some even called for military intervention (Alonso, 2019). Meanwhile, on the left and within popular struggles, various mobilizations occurred throughout the country. In Belo Horizonte, Comitê Popular dos Atingidos pela Copa<sup>4</sup> (COPAC) had been organizing public meetings and actions since 2010. In Rio de Janeiro, Marcha dos Povos<sup>5</sup> brought together 80,000 people during Rio+20 in 2012 (Galvani). Additionally, in Recife, the movement Ocupe Estelita<sup>6</sup> began in the same year, challenging the evictions in the San Francisco settlements and the controversial Projeto Novo Recife<sup>7</sup> centered around the José Estelita Pier warehouses. Across various categories, workers' strikes saw a significant increase. In 2012, they reached the highest number since 1997, and in 2013, mobilizations by private sector workers nearly tripled when compared to the previous year. This surge, potentially correlated with the June demonstrations, also confirmed a growing trend in strike activities.<sup>8</sup>

While it might be argued that the country was experiencing a somatization of dissatisfactions, there was no unambiguous evidence that protests of the magnitude witnessed in June were imminent. Protests, although recurring, generally lacked significant participation and garnered more attention at the local level in cities and states. Many analysts, supported by public opinion polls, highlighted the positive assessments society gave to governors, mayors, and the president at that time. Therefore, while considering the discontent and events accumulated in the years leading up to 2013 provides reasonable evidence against interpreting June as a mere product of chance or sudden will, it falls short of explaining why and how millions of people swiftly took to the streets with diverse demands. If there were sufficient reasons for large protests, why did they erupt specifically in June 2013? This is where the coherent trail of interconnected facts, allowing a reconstruction of events, encounters an incongruent, discontinuous, and non-linear shortcut, highlighting the crucial role of images as a fundamental political weapon. To grasp this dynamic, it is essential to delve further into the reconstruction of the chain of events leading to an understanding of how June became possible, only to encounter another rupture.

As the demonstrations made their way to Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, the nation's two largest, most populous, wealthiest, and media-privileged capitals (the latter being a critical aspect of the analysis presented here), other protests against the hike in public transport fares had already unfolded in cities like Porto Alegre, Manaus, Natal, and Goiânia. Arriving in Rio and, mainly, São Paulo, however, the protests would gain another level of repercussion, adhesion, and intensity. However, it was in São Paulo, particularly between June 6 and 13, considered the first phase of the June events in the city, that the protests reached a new level. Four protests during this period drew 2 thousand people in the first act, at least 5 thousand in the next two, and an estimated 20 thousand in the last one, according to event organizers (or 5 thousand, according to the Military Police of São Paulo) (Singer, 2013). No other city witnessed acts with the same frequency, in such a short interval, or with the same level of protester commitment.

In its initial phases, June saw a prominent role played by a new, non-institutionalized middle-class left, which embraced autonomist, horizontal, and decentralized forms of organization, with Movimento Passe Livre<sup>9</sup> being a notable example, along with anarchist groups. In a subsequent phase, however, a diverse mix of participants emerged, including the less privileged residents of favelas and outcast neighborhoods, the traditional left, representatives of the middle class leaning

towards the center and the right, as well as more reactionary groups with inclinations toward the extreme right. This shift lent the protests a certain conservative hue, reminiscent of what André Singer (2013, p. 32) humorously referred to as "Juno Days" – a situation where each observer perceived the events in the streets and online through the lens of a different goddess. Up until June 13, the primary focus of the demonstrations was the opposition to fare hikes and the demand for free public transportation – issues that resonated with varying degrees of acceptance and complexity within society. However, following the actions of the military police in São Paulo on the same day, the dynamics underwent a radical transformation. Images capturing the events quickly went viral in Brazil and abroad, sparking both outrage and solidarity and serving as a catalyst for an already tense situation that had been building up over the years. The exploration of these images by various media profiles and corporate outlets played a pivotal role in transforming June into a historically significant event. While one might question why these specific images evoked such a strong reaction at that particular moment – considering that incidents of police violence were sadly normalized, especially against Black and poor populations in Brazil – it is crucial to examine the circumstances surrounding their emergence.

Firstly, the international context must be considered. The June demonstrations occurred in proximity to various protest movements that had unfolded in other countries in preceding years and throughout 2013. The Arab Spring (which began in Tunisia in 2010 and then spread to Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen, Libya and Syria), Occupy Wall Street in the United States, the March 12<sup>th</sup> movement in Portugal, the 15-M movement in Spain, the occupation of Syntagma Square in Greece, and the mobilization of high school students in Chile in 2011, as well as the uprisings in Turkey in 2013, all shared important similarities and contributed to a sense of collective discontent expressed globally.

According to Manuel Castells, these experiences signaled the emergence of a new pattern in the construction and behavior of social movements. Common features included the massive occupation of public urban spaces, a preference for autonomy and horizontality over bureaucratic structures, networking both online and offline, a simultaneous local and global character, virality in disseminating messages and images through internet networks, a multiplicity of claims, and a quest for a general transformation of culture, society, and, above all, the State, without necessarily seeking to take control of it (Castells, 2011, p. 159-166). The eruption of these protests and movements, while spatially distant, created a sense of a cohesive global movement, offering shared inspirations and aspirations, even if somewhat superficial.

Secondly, the specific moment when the demonstrations gained momentum in Brazil also played a decisive role. There was a unique confluence of factors. At that time, the Workers' Party (PT) had already completed a decade at the helm of the federal government, achieving significant progress in various areas, especially in affirmative policies, the economy, poverty reduction, and the formulation of participatory policies. However, dissatisfaction with the PT administration existed on both the right and left of the political spectrum. Among conservative and neoliberal segments, the criticism had a moral dimension, primarily focusing on allegations of corruption against the PT government – notably the episode that gained notoriety under the nickname "mensalão," a corruption case involving the party. This case, with significant media repercussions, rattled the first term of President Lula and spurred conservative forces into action, elevating their engagement and mobilization. Precisely at that time, news about the "mensalão" scandal became increasingly frequent, coinciding with the resumption of its trial by the Brazilian Supreme Court.

On the left, numerous criticisms centered on expenses and preparations for mega-events, involving forced relocations, demands for popular participation, subjecting cities to real estate speculation logic, contractor benefits through generous service contracts, overbilling of works, and the absence of effective protection for labor rights of workers involved in construction and reforms. Federal, state, and municipal governments echoed the narratives propagated by the International Football Federation (FIFA) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC), asserting that both the World Cup and the Olympics would be "windows of opportunity," demanding significant public investments that would result in a valuable "legacy" for the country. The FIFA Confederations Cup (2013), the FIFA World Cup (2014), and Summer Olympic Games (2016) aimed to reinforce the country's image as a harmonious, peaceful, prosperous, and a modern nation through national pride inspired by sports and the perceived intrinsic capacity of the Brazilian

people to be cordial, kind, and hospitable towards the world. Protesting at that moment meant capturing the world's attention and having a greater chance of exerting pressure on decision-making spheres. Despite the relatively positive outcomes of participatory experiences, areas of conflict among government, population, and private initiative, such as infrastructure, transport, and urban mobility, were left unaddressed, deepening their tendency to resist citizen oversight. As if these grievances were not enough, the federal government made a significant contribution to increasing the visibility of demonstrations against fare increases by unusually postponing the annual fare adjustment to the middle of the year. As pointed out by Lucius Gregori (in Borba et al., 2013), the federal administration shed light on the issue, revealing a certain fragility in the face of opposition, media, and movements that had been challenging the annual bus fare price increases year after year.

Within this context – marking the third crucial aspect for analyzing the decisive factors leading to the June protests – Brazil was undergoing a profound transformation concerning the organization and mobilization of political groups. In retrospect, with the advantage of temporal distance and knowledge of subsequent events, it becomes apparent that a complex undercurrent of anti-establishment culture was already brewing. Political parties and traditional social movements seemed outdated and concealed in the face of the emerging challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In fact, Brazil was undergoing a transformation in the way of organizing and protesting, and the profile of the subjects involved in protests indicated that the streets were no longer exclusively associated with the "red" traditional left. The conventional organization into parties, social movements, unions, and vertically structured entities was losing its monopoly. During the end of Lula's first term, new collectives and organized social movements emerged, influenced by horizontal precepts, counterculture, and autonomous ideals. These groups, distinct from traditional organizations that typically pressed governments, state structures, and economic elites, sought to contest the paths of cities, states, and the country.

A significant factor in this transformation was the rise of Facebook as the most widely used virtual social network in Brazil and its transformation into an increasingly image-based network. The expansion of internet access, coupled with the proliferation of computers, smartphones, and laptops during the PT governments, fueled the rampant growth of Facebook users in the country. Between 2012 and 2013, Brazil experienced the most significant increase in the number of Facebook users globally, reaching approximately 76 million users at that time, surpassing countries like India and Japan (Sbarai, 2013). This growth was tied to Facebook's expansion since 2006, when it began accepting registrations from anyone over the age of 13. In 2008, it became the most widely used virtual social network in the world. Modifications implemented on the platform since 2007 not only enhanced the popularity of Facebook, but also elevated its significance as a crucial space for political engagement and contention. The platform's evolution, including the inclusion of mobile phones for access, the introduction of the "Like" button, visual enhancements in aesthetics, the check-in service allowing users to share their location, the timeline feature organizing content chronologically, and the face detection tool, transformed Facebook into a platform focused on intense image sharing. Notably, this made Facebook the preferred platform for content sharing during the protests, as recognized by media collectives, social movements, activists, and protesters.

Within this context, Mídia Ninja emerged, gained notoriety, and established itself as the primary alternative and combative source of information about the demonstrations in Brazil, becoming one of the most crucial actors in the June protests' ecology. From a critique that is both counter-hegemonic, based on the accusation of the ideological bias and oligopolistic control of the hegemonic media, and expressivist, which believes that the production of information should serve as an instrument of emancipation and reappropriation of one's own speech (Cardon; Granjon, 2010), Mídia Ninja activists undertook the mission of reporting protest-related events on the internet from an explicitly antagonistic standpoint. They operated in a triple role: as protesters, inciters, and conveners of the protests, promoting participation and disseminating organizing group invitations, and, above all, as narrators of counter-hegemonic representations not only about the protests but also about Brazilian society. Embracing its partiality and explicitly defending historically left-linked causes, Mídia Ninja became the primary medium through which movements, collectives, and groups of militants and activists could gain visibility, albeit in a precarious



and momentary manner. Leveraging virtual social networks as a space for political intervention, the media collective played a pivotal role in the massive mobilization for the protests. They reported on claims and violations against protesters through videos, live broadcasts of protests, and photographs.

During these initial June demonstrations, the Brazilian mainstream press uniformly condemned the scenes of violence and rebellion, criminalizing demonstrators and protests while disregarding their political objectives and significance, often infantilizing the demands. Initially, the journalistic coverage of the protests lacked a plural and contextualized perspective on the events. Despite claims of impartiality, the discursive and visual narratives employed by the mainstream media opted to focus on incidents that could be immediately associated with violence and vandalism: clashes between protesters and police, burning barricades, and masked demonstrators.

On June 7, 2013, the country's major newspapers, O Estado de São Paulo and O Globo, for the first time, featured headlines highlighting protests against the rising bus fares. In these editions, the front-page stories centered on the Standard and Poor's (S&P) credit risk rating agency downgrading Brazil's debt perspective from stable to negative, impacting the country's credibility in the financial market. However, neither the attention nor the cover images of these newspapers captured the essence of the protests. The records depicted one of the tensest moments during the initial major protest against the bus fare hike in São Paulo: on the corner of Nove de Julho and Vinte e Três de Maio avenues, makeshift turnstiles constructed from wood and tires were set ablaze, while traffic cones formed a barricade to deter the approaching police.

Figure 1 – O Estado de São Paulo Front Page, June 7, 2013



Source: O Estado de São Paulo (2013a).

Figure 2 – O Globo Front Page, June 7, 2013



Source: O Globo (2013a)

Of the myriad images available to depict the protest on the night of June 6 in São Paulo, the one chosen by two of the country's most widely circulated newspapers is undeniably provocative. The frame selected by the photographer zeroes in on two individuals throwing a traffic sign into flames. At the bottom of the photo, on the opposite side of the barricade being constructed, other protesters seem to be mere observers of the dramatic scene. Captured from behind, the silhouettes and the fire take center stage in the foreground, shrouded in the darkness of the night. While the exposure of the camera lens to light remains uncertain, the photo naturally possesses a low saturation and illumination due to the nighttime setting, except for the fiery element, which serves as the focal point, albeit at the cost of reducing the richness of photo details. The reddish hue adopted by the photograph accentuates the contrast between the lighter and darker areas, crisply outlining the silhouettes of the depicted elements. Beyond that, the image intensifies the perception of being in the midst of a burning scene – the heart of São Paulo and its buildings. Warm colors dominate the presented image, rendering it vivid and compelling, capturing the viewer's attention and prompting a response to this extraordinary event.

In an editorial published on June 8, O Estado de São Paulo vehemently condemned the protesters' actions:

It was nothing more than a festival of vandalism to protest against the increase in bus, subway, and train fares, which on Thursday paralyzed significant roads in the capital of São Paulo between 6 and 9 p.m. [...]

In order not to get into trouble with the so-called social movements, the authorities have tolerated their excesses for political reasons. Right now, Mayor Fernando Haddad, instead of condemning the vandalism promoted by the Free Fare Movement, hastened to inform that he is open to dialogue. Are you going to discuss the zero fare with this band of vandals? (O Estado de São Paulo, 2013b).

O Globo, in a short editorial on June 13, was equally unequivocal:

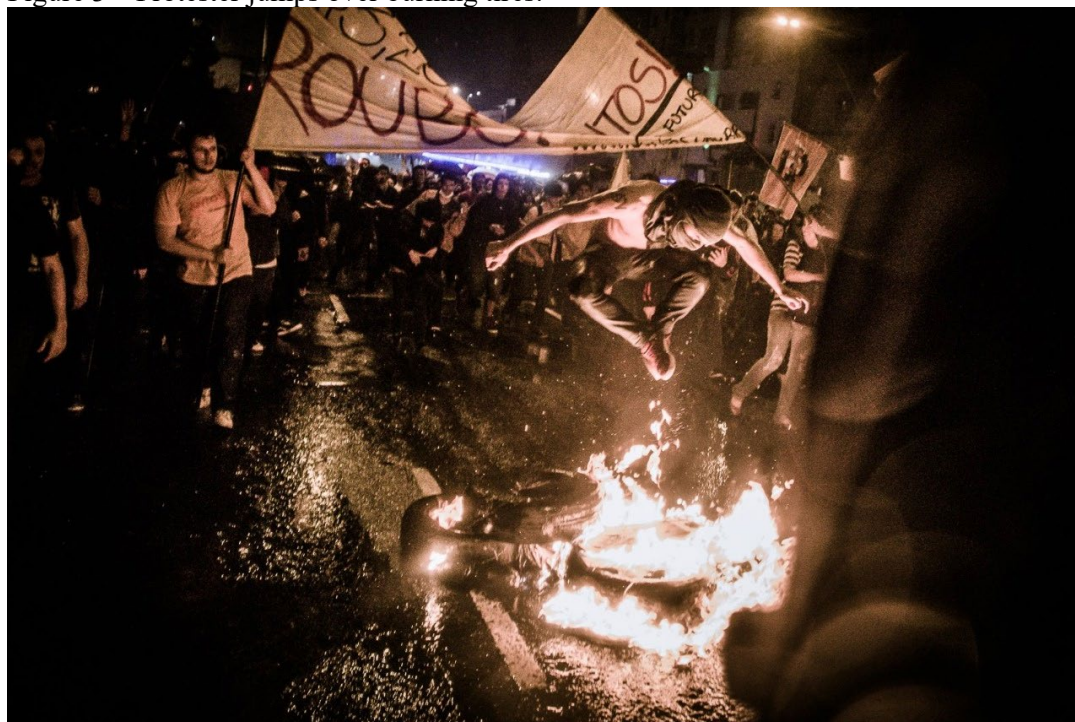
REGIME OF freedoms, democracy has legal antibodies to protect itself from the undesirable effects of its own freedoms.

EVERY TIME someone or some group breaks the established rules of coexistence, the State has to use its monopoly of force.

THE VANDALS and anarchists who have acted in the series of demonstrations in Rio and São Paulo, with depredations and damage to the city's cultural and historical heritage, need to know these usual limits of democracy (O Globo, 2013b).

If mainstream newspapers and widely watched news programs showcased a condemnation without a nuanced understanding of the violent and disruptive scenes during the protests, Mídia Ninja and other alternative media collectives took a different approach, appreciating the demonstrations and the demonstrators. Iconic photographs, later featured in books, exhibitions, and museum collections, elevated performative actions and discourses, fostering the notion, sentiment, and impression of an ongoing revolt (for some, a revolution) and contributing to its momentum. The protagonists of these images were those who dominated the initial days, utilizing protest repertoires characteristic of anarchist/autonomist and socialist/communist traditions, each with its distinct aesthetics and symbolism – black clothing, hoods, masks, and scarves for the former; red flags, shirts, megaphones, and cars with loudspeakers for the latter.

Figure 3 – Protester jumps over burning tires.



Source: Mídia Ninja (2013a).



The photo above, published on June 12, 2013, on the official Mídia Ninja Facebook page, exemplifies this perspective. Capturing the exact moment when a masked man jumps over burning car tires, the image values the act for its simplicity and high-performative nature. The use of a high ISO, along with treatment and applied coloring, adds dramaticism, creating a sharp contrast. The unconventional framing defies traditional journalism, freezing a moment in motion and emphasizing the challenge to the status quo, which diverges from the script of the “good citizen” portrayed in mainstream media.

This specific image also employs a frequently used technique in many Ninja photographs – an angle that not only embraces but leverages the presence of surrounding elements (such as the body of a person who, in theory, could hinder the visualization of what the photograph is intended to show), hinting at the challenging context in which the photograph was taken. This technique not only enhances the photographer's skill but also magnifies the protests, reinforcing the notion that they represent the collective sentiment of the people. And it illustrates Mídia Ninja's own privileged condition of being able to move freely among the protesters and at the heart of the demonstrations, unlike the professionals from the big broadcasters and newspapers.

However, the image's iconic status primarily stems from its visuality. The recorded action is not just an act of deliberate violence or vandalism; it is a performance. Jumping over a fire amid a political march carries no major consequences beyond its symbolic value. The demonstrator, with a shirt covering his face, leaps over the flames, looking directly at it, presenting a bodily expression that captivates the attention of those nearby. In flames, precisely one of the symbols of private transport: car tires. Behind this focal scene, a banner boldly displays the core message of the demonstrations up to that point – “R\$3.20 is theft.” The challenge to the status quo is evident in the demands placed on the government, the actions that diverge from the script of the “good citizen,” and in what is observed, contrasting with what might go unnoticed in mainstream media coverage. The plasticity of this action not only draws the attention of fellow demonstrators, the photographer, and the audience but also invites participation in that moment. Beyond mere contemplation, it provokes opinions and reflections, potentially generating repudiation against what might be considered an act of disorder or inspiring a deeper understanding of the reasons that led to that scene. It can, through its fetishization, awaken an appetite for rebellion.

When, on June 13, police violence reached even the corporate means of communication, everything changed. Until June, the MPL<sup>10</sup> had already carried out several demonstrations across the country since its creation in 2005, always with more local repercussion and a shy national visibility offered by conventional means of communication. In the early days of June, everything seemed to indicate that this scenario would be repeated, as the demonstrations appeared to be evolving into just another sequence of protests led by an organized political group with left-leaning ideals. The great novelty in 2013 was precisely the emergence of Mídia Ninja, which transformed the mediatic scenario and boosted demonstrations. After the violent actions of the Military Police of São Paulo, Mídia Ninja's work was essential for the dissemination of the episodes through images on social media.

The photos of the abuse committed by police officers reverberated for days in media outlets, virtual social networks, capturing the imagination of both protesters and non-protesters, thereby transforming the demonstrations to make them more attractive, instigating, and amplifying their impact. Photographs and videos projected the causes beyond the space and time confines of the demonstrations, creating a sensory impact and a sense of an urgent need for action. This, in turn, generated an emotional identity that could only be materialized through the physical presence in shared spaces or engagement in both physical and digital communication networks. When combined, images and virtual social networks potentialized the demonstrations and opened them up for massive participation. In this very process, the protests stopped being only about the increased bus fares or the right to protest. It was precisely at this moment that explanations relying solely on cumulative and linear logics began to be considered insufficient to understand June. On June 13, 2013, after the events that followed, especially in São Paulo, what unfolded was not merely the simple sum of vectors in a single direction, but the exertion of forces in multiple directions, including opposing ones.

While employing virtual social networks for strategic purposes constituted a political act aimed at challenging the monopoly and manipulation of information by major corporate clusters

in the communication sector, its use in June, with the intention of fostering engagement and participation, ultimately became too undifferentiated. The dissemination of images and the invitation to demonstrations using public events created on Facebook (and shared on other platforms) opened the streets to anyone willing to express their dissatisfaction publicly. Fueled by the desire for horizontality and autonomy, these events attracted participants from various social and economic backgrounds, with diverse life stories and political experiences. This resulted in a multitude of agendas, some even mutually exclusive, and the simultaneous emergence of conservative and reactionary groups.

The horizontal summoning and fluid organization gave rise to temporary leaderships and communities based on affective identities among the protesters. As the demonstrations grew, new groups took the lead in calling the population to the streets, attracting thousands of people to events created on Facebook in a short amount of time at little cost. This process continued even while the protests were ongoing. The dissemination of images, interaction and connectivity enabled real-time follow-up and the opportunity to join marches already in progress, leading to a form of “civil swarming” – an expression coined by David Ugarte (2004) – that could disperse in a matter of hours or minutes. After a certain point, demonstrations began to take shape from multiple events, connections, networks, and motivations that fed back on each other, even in opposition, amplifying small stimuli and reverberating a widely disseminated sense of outrage across various layers. Suddenly, all causes were considered the most urgent, and to demonstrate such urgency, strength and insubordination were necessary. There was no longer a common thread or binding force guiding protests toward a minimum possible unit and a shared purpose.

Amidst this chaotic stage of the June process, Mídia Ninja wove together the events presented and represented through their lens, employing a denaturalizing perspective on the idea of the nation.

Figure 4 – Protest at the City Council of Rio de Janeiro



Source: Mídia Ninja (2013b)

On September 7, 2013, in Rio de Janeiro, protesters participated in the #OcupaCâmaraRio<sup>11</sup> settlement, another form of protest that gained popularity across the country after the events of June. The protest took the shape of a camping site on the stairs of the Rio de Janeiro City Council and Cinelândia square, adding to the demonstrations of Grito dos Excluídos<sup>12</sup>, a series of popular demonstrations occurring since the 1990s across several cities in Brazil during the week of

Brazil's independence. These demonstrations advocate for social inclusion and the right to citizenship of marginalized groups. The photograph above captures this event, featuring the Rio de Janeiro City Council building in the background and protesters with banners and placards, predominantly dressed in black, refusing to wear the colors green and yellow on this symbolic day. However, the most striking element is the national flag waving in the upper part of the photo. The green, yellow, and blue on the flag are unevenly stained with a shade of red resembling human blood. In the given context, these stains represent the blood of those undesired and denied their place in the nation, symbolizing the violence, social exclusion, and indignity faced by Black, poor, Indigenous people, and women. They serve as a reminder that, while there is a concept of the “Brazilian people”, associated with a national independent and sovereign State in a democratic Rule of Law, there are also those denied their right to have rights as part of this people. The image exposes, behind the positivist ideal “order and progress” and the unity suggested by the national symbol, the conflicts, and the subjugation of oppressed groups. The image, therefore, encapsulates the struggle for memory.

Contrary to this perception, which extends beyond the realm of demonstrations to encompass Brazilian society itself, the June 23 edition cover of the newspaper O Globo serves as a vivid illustration of the widening gap, opposition, and ongoing dispute between media activists and corporate media, particularly during a period when the protests had already gained widespread momentum.

Figure 5 – O Globo Front Page, June 23, 2013



Source: O Globo, (2013c)

The featured cover stands out as one of the most iconic during the peak of demonstrations, both in terms of participation and societal impact. The headline reads “Disillusioned youth.” In absolute highlight, the photograph of two young, white, and blond adults, suggesting affiliation with the middle or upper class. The woman’s face is covered, but notably absent are associations

with vandalism, violence, or chaos; no flames, vandals, black clothing, or flags from the confrontation with police forces. No red, that represented left-leaning parties or social movements who were expelled from the demonstrations. The predominant colors are green and yellow and the looks and expressions convey outrage. At the top of the page, the newspaper showcases photos of its team of regular columnists, dedicated to providing insights into the unrests on the streets and online. The singular theme is 'June,' and for O Globo, these young faces represent the essence of that month. This image marks the birth of a new narrative for June, transforming the previous narrative of criticism when certain groups took to the streets. The discourse and visual representation shifted, praising the protests as a powerful demonstration of citizen strength and democracy unparalleled in the country for years.

Since then, patriotic aesthetics have persistently been associated with a challenge to the immoral order inherent to politics and its class. The newspaper cover above reflects the disillusionment of the youth. But what are its causes? Clues are provided by the textual elements accompanying the central photograph. First, the title of the image: "Brazil, show your face." This reference is not arbitrary; it stands beyond the covered face of the young woman. The clichéd connection to the protest song immortalized by Cazuza (Cazuza; Israel; Romero, 1988) immediately evokes the period it was written - the transition from military rule to democracy, marked by political dissent and a sense of hopelessness about the country's direction. In the verses of "Brasil", we find the same sentiment conveyed by the photograph: "Great nation/Unimportant/At no time/Will I betray you/No, I will not betray you". The subheading beneath the headline inside the newspaper dispels any ambiguity: "the last 14 days that rocked Brazil left a clear message: a sentiment against traditional politics" – referring to the corruption and inefficiency of the State and the PT governments, themes extensively covered by the press since the revelation of the "mensalão".

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

June was an extremely mediatic and visual event. To remember June is to recall the thousands of images created about it that ultimately shaped it. Whether in newspapers, TV news programs, virtual social networks, books, or the minds of those who took to the streets or observed from afar, images played a central role. They were pivotal in constructing the June event itself and shaping how it was perceived by different sectors of society. These images molded the June experience, fostering participation, prompting reflections, and underpinning interpretations. They offered potential frameworks for the demonstrations, making them appealing and amplifying their impact. While primarily documentary, informative and/or accusatory in nature due to their journalistic intent, these images also possessed an inevitable aesthetic dimension. In their power, they had the ability to evoke varied feelings and reflections in their relationship with the viewer. Despite being presented as evidentiary records, often deemed irrefutable, these images were utilized to make one see, to illuminate certain aspects that, without them, could remain obscure and unworthy of attention, ultimately provoking thought.

Among protesters and sympathizers, images served as instruments for complaint, mobilization, evidence, criticism, sensitization and affirmation of societal values, imaginaries, aesthetics, and political projects. The performances of individuals and groups hinged on the virtual circulation of images about them – whether self-produced or not. This held true for anarchists, autonomists, traditional leftists, conservatives, neoliberals, supporters of the Black Bloc tactics – anyone taking to the streets to voice grievances. Beyond the simple occupation of public space, with the aim of transforming social problems into public issues (Gusfield, 1981), June protesters sought to reclaim public opinion and the social imaginary, relying fundamentally on images. The mobilization of aesthetics, symbols, placards, banners, slogans, streets and online presence, and the creation of choreographies all aimed to give visibility to struggles, demands, and groups aspiring to increase their influence on political decisions. The protesters, in their assertive stance, also politically and performatively represented themselves for the cameras. Consequently, the protests transcended the space and time of occurrence, fostering a sense of urgency and generating an affective identity materialized in physical common spaces and digital communication networks. Images played a crucial role in organizing, summoning, and publicizing the protests, facilitating a more comprehensive dissemination of strategic information about them.

In the conflict described above, involving media activists and corporate communication outlets, images were also instrumentalized for other disputes, either confined within June, or extended beyond it. The narratives produced were not merely about the events; they were about the country itself, the very idea of the nation, the imagined community (Anderson, 2008). Antagonistic political projects for society and nation were reflected in photographs that favored and highlighted different social segments. While the photographs published by *O Estado de S. Paulo* and *O Globo* did not represent the faces of resistance aligned with the counter-hegemonic and subordinated subjects portrayed by *Mídia Ninja*, the images published by *Mídia Ninja* also did not feature heroic representations of conservative, neoliberal, and reactionary subjects privileged in the visual narratives of the two newspapers with the highest circulation in the country. Although, in isolation, these narratives may not be considered straightforward translations of reality – given the inherent complexity of the events – they help us comprehend the phenomenon. They caused a shift in discussions about June and, indeed, influenced its construction as an event.

June was a complex, multifaceted, and polysemic phenomenon. It was both a continuation of a previous process and a catalyst for ruptures and inflections. Within a short yet intense interval, protests managed to integrate different, and sometimes completely opposite, sectors – each exhibiting minimal similarities in behavior and how they expressed and channeled their outrage. This complexity gave June its multifaceted nature. Every group involved in the demonstrations interpreted and crafted various experiences of the movement, resulting in several ‘Junes’, making the protests themselves diverse objects. Clearly, the June experienced by favela residents differed significantly from that of native peoples, and both were markedly distinct from the June of middle-class individuals outraged by corruption, donning green and yellow attire. The multifaceted nature of June made it a subject of dispute. Although the narrative favoring civic nationalism and the patriotic aesthetic of conservative, neoliberal, and authoritarian groups emerged victorious and continues to attract attention in Brazilian society, the meanings of June and its legacy remain under dispute.

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## EXPLANATORY NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> T.N.: Diretas Já [Direct (Elections) Now] was a 1984 civil movement which demanded direct presidential elections in Brazil. Source: Wikipedia.
- <sup>2</sup> T.N.: Fora Collor [Collor, out!] protests in Brazil were a series of widespread demonstrations in the early 1990s calling for the impeachment of then-President Fernando Collor de Mello due to corruption allegations.
- <sup>3</sup> T.N.: March of the Family with God for Liberty in Brazil was a series of conservative demonstrations in 1964 supporting the military coup that eventually led to the establishment of a military regime.
- <sup>4</sup> The Belo Horizonte committee was the only one to adopt the word "affected" in its name. According to Ricci and Arley (2013), this nomenclature was fundamental for the movement to have a focus and articulate the victims of urban interventions.  
T.N.: People's Committee of People Affected by the World Cup
- <sup>5</sup> T.N.: March of the Peoples
- <sup>6</sup> T.N.: Occupy Estelita
- <sup>7</sup> T.N.: New Recife Project
- <sup>8</sup> Data on the number of strikes in the country in the period mentioned can be found in the reports produced by the Departamento Intersindical de Estatística e Estudos Socioeconômicos [Inter-Union Department of Statistics and Socioeconomic Studies] — DIEESE (2012; 2013).
- <sup>9</sup> T.N.: Free Fare Movement
- <sup>10</sup> Acronym for Free Fare Movement (Movimento Passe Livre)
- <sup>11</sup> T.N.: #OccupyRioCityCouncil, in free translation
- <sup>12</sup> T.N.: Cry of the Excluded, the official translation of the protest's name in English.

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