The Instrumental Mediated Visibility of Violence: The 2013 Protests in Brazil and the Limitations of the Protest Paradigm

César Jiménez-Martínez

London School of Economics and Political Science, UK

Abstract

Studies examining protest news coverage often look at it through a 'protest paradigm', arguing that 'mainstream' media delegitimise protests by emphasising violence and marginalising grievances. Focussing on the June 2013 protests in Brazil, this article takes the discussion in a different conceptual and empirical direction, examining the forces that, according to national, alternative and foreign journalists, shaped the coverage of violence during those demonstrations. Drawing on forty-three in-depth interviews, the accounts of these individuals confirm the need to move beyond deterministic approaches suggested by the protest paradigm, acknowledging that the mediated visibility of violence does neither invariably lead to support for the status quo nor to a demonisation of social unrest. News coverage of violence emerges alternatively as an instrument with the potential to be strategically exploited for contradictory political, ideological and commercial purposes. A

closer examination of the frictional processes leading up to mediated visibility also recognises that sensationalism and drama are not exclusive to the mainstream media. Despite their potential to broaden the mediated visibility of protest, alternative and foreign journalists may narrate demonstrations as politically legitimate but ultimately shallow spectacles, where the drama of violence –committed by either authorities or demonstrators– obscures the underlying grievances driving people on to the streets. The views of journalists are an important contribution to debates about protest news coverage, given the scarcity of studies examining their accounts during these episodes.

Keywords: Protest Paradigm, Mediated Visibility, Journalism, Foreign Correspondents, Alternative Media, Brazil, Hannah Arendt

Introduction

In June 2013, Brazil was hit by the largest series of protests for more than two decades. Demands were broad and contradictory, with people originally protesting against an increase in public transportation fares, and later against deficiencies in public services, the costs of hosting the 2014 World Cup, corruption, and even the then governing centre-left administration of Dilma Rousseff. The demonstrations –known as the *Jornadas de Junho* or 'June Journeys'– have become the standard against which subsequent mobilisations in Brazil and elsewhere are measured, such as the protests demanding the impeachment of Rousseff in 2015, those against the candidature of Jair Bolsonaro in 2018, and even those that rocked Chile in 2019.[1]

As this article shows, the June Journeys are a rich case study to analyse the mediated visibility of violence in a hybrid and transnational media environment. Studies examining news coverage of violence during demonstrations often look at it through a 'protest paradigm', arguing that 'mainstream' news media[2] delegitimise protests by emphasising violence and marginalising the core concerns of mobilisations (e.g. Gitlin 1980; Chan and Lee 1984; McLeod and Hertog 1999). The June Journeys however do not fit with the traditional protest paradigm thesis. Although damage[3] done by activists was originally condemned by national news organisations and framed as violence (Intervozes 2014), the Brazilian media adopted a more benevolent view in the second half of June (Mourão 2019; Intervozes 2014). This came about partly because alternative media collectives employed digital media to expose the brutality of the military police towards protesters, undermining

trust in the Brazilian media and increasing support for demonstrators (d'Andrea and Ziller 2015; Conde and Jazeel 2013). Overseas 'mainstream' news organisations also reported the demonstrations positively, applauding people on the streets and questioning the money spent on hosting the 2014 World Cup (Jiménez-Martínez 2020).

The protest paradigm thesis is therefore insufficient when considering the complexity of violence in the media during episodes such as the June Journeys. Significantly, and like most research on protest news coverage, studies drawing on the protest paradigm often rely on analyses of textual, aural or visual contents, so 'missing the complex ways in which journalists interpret and negotiate these various influences [shaping news coverage] in different topical and temporal contexts' (Tenenboim-Weinblatt 2014, 411). Moreover, the few studies addressing journalists' viewpoints have predominantly focussed on individuals working for established media organisations (e.g. Mourão 2019; Tenenboim-Weinblatt 2014). However, as seen above, the June Journeys are impossible to understand without considering the roles played by alternative and foreign media, which circulated accounts distinctly different from those by national journalists.

This article takes the discussion in a different conceptual and empirical direction. Theoretically, the article is situated within the expanding set of works applying the concept of mediated visibility to look at the production, selection and presentation of what the media show. Empirically, it draws on forty-three interviews conducted with national journalists, members of alternative media collectives and Western foreign correspondents with first-hand experience of the June Journeys. It seeks to answer the following questions:

(1) What were the perceived forces that, according to national, alternative and foreign journalists, shaped the mediated visibility of violence during the June Journeys?

(2) How did these different journalists negotiate with these forces?

The analysis of the interviews confirms the need to move beyond deterministic assumptions underpinning the protest paradigm. Although violence was perceived as a key factor throughout the coverage of the June Journeys, it was framed in ambivalent ways, supporting or questioning the status quo according to perceived organisational, technological and commercial conditions. The interviews thus portray violence as, echoing Hannah Arendt (1970), an instrument that can be exploited for political, ideological and economic purposes. Furthermore, whilst alternative and foreign journalists may narrate protests more positively, they may still emphasise drama and sensationalism over protesters' grievances. This article is therefore a timely contribution in view of the recent wave of mobilisations taking place in settings as different as Chile, Hong Kong and Lebanon, throwing in a more nuanced understanding of protest news coverage and the mediated visibility of violence.

From the Protest Paradigm to Mediated Visibility

Scholars have consistently examined the coverage of protests since the late 1960s, arguing that journalistic norms and routines follow a 'protest paradigm', a frame that stresses destruction and violence by demonstrators, gives preference to the viewpoints of authorities and marginalises the core reasons behind mobilisations (Chan and Lee 1984;

McLeod and Hertog 1999; Gitlin 1980). These studies –originated largely in the United States– have advanced important critiques of protest news coverage. Sociocultural and technological developments, such as the digitalisation of the media, and the communicational porosity of national boundaries, have nonetheless prompted a re-evaluation of the protest paradigm. As Cottle asks, '[d]o the media always, invariably and necessarily impose 'definitions of the situation' on protests and dissent which de-legitimize the protesters' aims and coincide with dominant interests?' (2008, 856). Hence, authors have highlighted how the mainstream media occasionally recognise the political legitimacy of demonstrations (e.g. Kilgo and Harlow 2019; Lee 2014), and that neither alternative nor foreign news organisations necessarily follow this paradigm (e.g. Harlow and Johnson 2011; Harlow et al. 2017).

In parallel with this, fresher conceptual approaches have been proposed to better understand the perceived forces shaping protest coverage. This article follows the growing number of studies relying on the notions of 'visibility' and 'mediated visibility' (e.g. Uldam 2018; Rovisco and Veneti 2017; Parry 2015; d'Andrea and Ziller 2015) to gain an understanding of the constrictions, affordances and vulnerabilities of the current hybrid, transnational media environment. Although the precise definition of visibility used in these works vary, it is largely understood as a political, aesthetic and technological field, where power is produced and contested through 'forms of noticing, managing attention and determining the significance of events and subjects' (Brighenti 2010a, 52). Visibility therefore refers to the strategic, albeit ultimately uncontrollable, *processes* between actors with unequal material and symbolic resources that make or prevent something becoming

public. From this perspective, protests are understood as both a visibilisation of conflict as well as an attempt to reconfigure socially dominant 'regimes of visibility' that determine what is possible and appropriate to see (Brighenti 2010b; Ranciere 2004).

Struggles over what can and should be seen have become increasingly mediatised, with *mediated* visibility acquiring greater social value (Thompson 2005; Voirol 2005). Failing to secure it can be perceived as a 'death by neglect' (Thompson 2005, 49). Protesters have therefore approached visibility as a desirable goal, and the media as technologies and institutions useful to coordinate resistance and synchronise attention (Dayan 2013; Voirol 2005). Yet acquiring visibility is not simply the fulfilment of the aim to be seen, but to be *seen on specific terms* (Dayan 2013). The protest paradigm is for instance underpinned by the belief that a mediated *hyper-visibility* of violence is ultimately detrimental for social movements (e.g. Gitlin 1980).

An examination of the coverage of violence through mediated visibility overcomes three limitations of the protest paradigm. First, the protest paradigm is highly normative. It assumes that violence and damage *necessarily* lead to delegitimisation, implying that they distort the 'peaceful' nature of protests. That view is in line with arguments that violence is a 'deviation' of modern life, overlooking that it remains a central component of society (for a critique on modernity and violence, see Walby 2013). It also fails to acknowledge that violence and damage can effectively be employed as tools of dissent (Arendt 1970; Cammaerts 2012; LeNabat 2012). Second, debates about the protest paradigm are predominantly based on American examples and stress a supposed alignment between

news organisations and authorities. That assumption however fails to take into consideration that in other contexts left-leaning news media may support protesters' views (as originally observed by Chan and Lee 1984), as well as the possibility of frictions among elites, such as the clashes between centre-left governments and news conglomerates in Brazil (de Albuquerque 2019). Third, studies on the protest paradigm generally rely solely on news coverage, suffering from what Golding and Murdock term the 'intractable problem of inference' (1979, 206), thus glossing over the perceived organisational, technological and social pressures shaping such coverage. Conversely, mediated visibility aims to highlight not only *what* has been shown, but also the processes explaining *how* and *why* particular contents become visible (Jiménez-Martínez 2020).

Conditions of Mediated Visibility during the June Journeys

Research on the news coverage of the June Journeys has largely focussed on *what* has been shown (e.g. Intervozes 2014; Cammaerts and Jiménez-Martínez 2014; Shahin et al. 2016). With few exceptions (e.g. Mourão 2019), less attention has been paid to *how* and *why* national, foreign and alternative journalists perceived and engaged with the technological, institutional and structural arrangements shaping mediated visibility. This is a significant shortcoming. Mediated visibility is sought after, avoided and negotiated by specific individuals in concrete settings, who behave according to available resources and observed pressures (Brighenti 2010b).

I assign the term *conditions of mediated visibility* to these perceived, albeit often invisible, arrangements and influences (Jiménez-Martínez 2020). This notion does not intend to

reject or replace previous research on protest coverage or news production. It is instead an umbrella term that facilitates a dynamic exploration of the forces shaping the mediated visibility of violence. It seeks to overcome the deterministic assumptions of the protest paradigm and move away from the techno-political line that, as observed by Gerbaudo (2017), dominates discussions on protest coverage. Studies on mediated visibility have similarly overemphasised how technologies alter mediated visibility (e.g. Thompson 2005; Dayan 2013), paying insufficient attention to the beliefs and perceptions of individuals, as well as to the detected pressures facilitating or preventing mediated visibility. The conditions of mediated visibility are consequently a more open approach to shed light not only on technological, but also on organisational and socio-political arrangements shaping the news coverage of violence.

Examining the conditions that shape the mediated visibility of violence requires to address the concrete circumstances in which the struggles over such visibility happen (see also McCluskey et al. 2009; Shahin et al. 2016). In 2013 Brazil was the deadliest country for journalists in the Western hemisphere, with five murdered (Saldaña and Mourão 2018). In structural terms, the 'mainstream' news media in the country –also referred to as the 'big' or 'corporate' media– belong to a handful of family-owned and commercially oriented conglomerates inclined to support conservative and neoliberal policies. Globo TV's newscast *Jornal Nacional* is especially popular, with an average of almost five million people watching it every night in 2013 (Becker and Alves 2015). Newspapers such as *Folha de São Paulo* or *O Estado de São Paulo* have low circulation but influence political and economic elites. Although these media do not represent political parties, they intervene

in debates and had a tense relationship with the centre-left administration of Dilma Rousseff –governing Brazil between 2011 and 2016–, emphasising accusations of populism and corruption (de Albuquerque 2019).

Against this backdrop, social movements, community organisations, as well as independent journalists have used community radio stations, magazines and more recently social media networks to disseminate views that differ from the mainstream media (Carvalho, de Albuquerque, and dos Santos 2020). A particularly relevant actor of these 'alternative' media was *Mídia NINJA*,[4] a collective of activists and reporters established in 2011 as part of a cultural network. *NINJA* and other similar organisations became notorious within Brazil for livestreaming the June 2013 demonstrations using smartphones and digital platforms (d'Andrea and Ziller 2015). Scholars subsequently celebrated them for being 'far richer in information and lighter on sensationalism than the printed newspaper and static TV coverage' (Conde and Jazeel 2013, 445). *NINJA* increased its number of Facebook followers from two thousand to one-hundred-and-sixty-thousand in June 2013, relevant numbers considering that Brazil was second globally in terms of users visiting Facebook on a daily basis (Gomes 2013).

Although less studied than the two previous actors, coverage by media organisations from the United States and Western Europe has been signalled as evidence of the relevance of the June Journeys (e.g. Conde and Jazeel 2013; Figuereido 2014). Reports by organisations such as *The New York Times*, *The Daily Telegraph* or *CNN* were largely supportive, stressing that the demonstrations were an act of rebellion by Brazilians against the money

spent on the 2014 World Cup. This coverage had repercussions within Brazil, with both national journalists and alternative collectives reporting how the protests were seen abroad (Jiménez-Martínez 2020).

Methodology

The conditions of mediated visibility cannot be identified solely through news coverage. Although the media provide visibility, 'they make the structures of such visibility invisible' (Brighenti 2010b, 77). I consequently chose semi-structured interviews as the data collection method to obtain accounts of the forces perceived to be shaping the mediated visibility of violence, as well as how national, foreign and alternative journalists negotiated or challenged these pressures (following Gaskell 2000). In order to avoid predisposing the interviewees, the questions were sufficiently open-ended to encourage the spontaneous recall of arrangements influencing the coverage.

A purposive sample technique (Seawright and Gerring 2008) was originally employed. I contacted either by email or Twitter Brazilian journalists, foreign correspondents and members of alternative media collectives that had taken part in the coverage. This first set of interviews led to a 'snowballing' sampling method (Weiss 1994), with people suggesting or helping me to contact other participants. Forty-three in-depth interviews (Table 1) were conducted until data saturation was reached. Although only some interviewees requested anonymity, I have assigned pseudonyms to everyone.

[Table X about here]

Table 1 – Summary of Interviewees

The interviews lasted on average one hour –with the shortest close to 20 minutes and the longest over 2 hours. They were in Portuguese, English or Spanish, depending on the preference of the participant. Most took place in early 2015 in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Brasília, but a few were conducted between 2014 and 2017 in London and New York. Using QDA Miner, I conducted a thematic analysis, in order to find, scrutinise and report patterns across the data (Braun and Clarke 2006). Although various perceived conditions of mediated visibility were discussed, I address only those that each group identified as the dominant one: *organisational pressures* in the case of Brazilian journalists; *technological affordances and constraints* for alternative journalists; *commercial influences* in the case of foreign correspondents. The distinctiveness of the three conditions is stressed for analytical purposes only, because in practice they overlap. Significantly, each group of interviewees negotiated these conditions in shifting and ambivalent ways. Brazilian journalists claimed to resist organisational pressures; alternative journalists largely embraced technological 'affordances'; foreign correspondents lamented the prevalence of commercial pressures. However, all of them ultimately portrayed themselves as almost devoid of agency, with limited possibilities of challenging or altering prevailing regimes of visibility.

Three Conditions of Visibility: Organisational, Technological and Commercial

Brazilian Journalists: News Organisations and the Political Exploitation of Violence

Journalists from Brazil stressed the perceived power of organisational pressures in shaping the mediated visibility of violence. As previously mentioned, early coverage of the June Journeys by the national media seemed to fit with the protest paradigm (see Shahin et al. 2016). It demonised activists as 'vandals', emphasised damage to public and private property, and marginalised the grievances behind mobilisations. The protest paradigm fails however to explain why in mid-June the coverage shifted and the Brazilian media narrated the June Journeys as a democratic exercise (Cammaerts and Jiménez-Martínez 2014). Furthermore, this line of thinking portrays journalists as willing or unconscious participants in an orchestrated effort to disregard protests.

Most Brazilian interviewees were keen to highlight the heterogeneous views about violence within newsrooms. In line with previous studies (e.g. Tenenboim-Weinblatt 2014), generational gaps partially explained these differences. Younger journalists expressed a more idealised perception, with one of them admitting that 'several of us were in favour [of the protests], and some were even almost like anarchists in their views'. Other interviewees similarly contended that the Black Bloc tactic was a valid form of dissent. Seasoned journalists held opposing views, and generational differences were intertwined with personal beliefs. As television reporter "Bernardo" recalled, 'the young ones were very excited about all this. But from the beginning, I had a critical opinion, because I am a pacifist, a Catholic'.

The viewpoints of these journalists –particularly of those closely identified with the protests– were however concealed in this early coverage, with the editorial and political

arrangements of news organisations favouring a mediated hyper-visibility of violence. As "Cecilia", former journalist for *O Estado de São Paulo*, told me, despite these diverse opinions, the official position of her newspaper was that 'protesters were thugs'. Likewise, journalist "Paula" admitted that she and her colleagues censored themselves beforehand, because they knew 'what the owners expect'. Other journalists, like "Cristina" from radio *CBN*, attempted to negotiate these pressures by displaying small acts of resistance, using the word 'demonstrators' in their reports, but stating that 'acts of vandalism were happening'. These heterogeneous views are significant. They reveal a higher level of reflexivity among journalists than has previously been acknowledged in the protest paradigm, and suggest that the delegitimisation of protests is not simply a by-product of unconsciously followed news routines.

Media agendas are however subject to change and may sometimes express supportive views of demonstrations (Cottle 2008). This occurred after a protest in São Paulo on 13th June 2013, which became notorious for the violence of the military police towards demonstrators, bystanders and journalists (Gohn 2014). Interviewees confirmed the relevance of this specific protest, telling me that some of the same editors who had previously labelled demonstrators 'vandals' admitted their mistake: 'They said, they're messing up with our kids now. A reporter was shot in the eye, a photographer was run over with a motorcycle and the daughter or little brother of someone I know was hurt'. In consequence, a relatively more benevolent view of the June Journeys became visible, framing them as a democratic right rather than a deviation. Newspapers and television

newscasts adopted the previously rejected term 'demonstrators' and, as a journalist from *Folha* told me, the portrayal of people on the streets shifted 'from thugs to revolutionaries'.

If the conventional theoretical argument of the protest paradigm was right, this shift in coverage would have led to a less vilifying view of protests and to a more nuanced or even supportive view of underlying grievances. Neither that nor a restoration of journalistic norms, as in other similar episodes (see Tenenboim-Weinblatt 2014), followed. Although the protest paradigm literature argues that demonstrations are often delegitimised by the mainstream media depending on whether or not they challenge the status quo (e.g. Gitlin 1980; Kilgo and Harlow 2019), the shift in this case had little to do with the protests themselves. The June Journeys were legitimised because editors and media owners perceived that violence was *against them*. Furthermore, this legitimacy was actually exploited to reinforce pre-existing criticisms of the government of Dilma Rousseff, framing it as responsible for the unrest (Intervozes 2014). As "Cecilia", former journalist for *O Estado de São Paulo*, told me, 'we went back to business in general […] It was like, okay, we had that big day of protest. Let's see how Congress and the President respond'. Some media professionals attempted to challenge, albeit unsuccessfully, these agendas. Radio journalist "Cristina" recalled how a report in which she argued that protesters did not target the Rousseff administration but expressed a more general frustration, was heavily edited prior to being broadcast.

This more benevolent, although politically charged, coverage did not stop violence against journalists. Sixty-eight Brazilian reporters and photographers were attacked and/or injured

in protests between 11th and 29th June 2013 (Associação Brasileira de Jornalismo Investigativo 2014), mostly by the military police, but occasionally by protesters angry at the 'lies' of national news organisations.[5] "Bernardo" recalled that he often felt trapped and assaulted 'by both the police and demonstrators'. "Cecilia" similarly stated how even journalists previously praised for denouncing the violence of the military police were beaten up, accused of 'showing what the owners [of media conglomerates] want'. Despite these attacks, Brazilian news organisations tried to maintain an appearance of objectivity, avoiding, at least temporarily, condemnatory frames (Jiménez-Martínez 2020).

The above accounts show that, according to media professionals, the hyper-visibility of violence and delegitimisation of protests were not the default position of mainstream news media. The variability of viewpoints within newsrooms demonstrates that journalists did not blindly follow norms and routines that invariably vilify demonstrations, as the protest paradigm suggests (e.g. McLeod and Hertog 1999). Moreover, they occasionally intended to defy or rearrange these organisational pressures. Despite these attempts at resistance, the mediated visibility of violence was ultimately sensed by national journalists to be a tool that media organisations *strategically* exploit, by highlighting or downplaying damage and aggression and by shifting responsibilities between 'socially deviant' protesters or an 'abusive' government, depending on which would benefit the political positions of editors and media owners (for a similar point, see Lee 2014). Hence, even a non-antagonistic protest coverage can be used to support conservative agendas, as evidenced by the targeting of the Rousseff administration as the main driver for the frustration vented by demonstrators. This confirms previous observations that 'ideological affiliation with the

government of the day, rather than any ideology per se' (Shahin et al. 2016, 158), is a very relevant factor in the vilification of protests by the mainstream media.

Alternative Journalists: Technologies and the Reversed Protest Paradigm

Analyses of the June Journeys have adopted a largely celebratory tone towards digital media, stressing that these technologies were vital to coordinate demonstrations and confront the coverage by Brazilian news organisations. Digital apps and platforms – particularly Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp– have been described as tools whose 'affordances' facilitated the circulation of narratives that supposedly reconfigured dominant regimes of visibility, opposing the hyper-visibility of violence and showing the core concerns of protesters (e.g. Conde and Jazeel 2013; d'Andrea and Ziller 2015). Members of alternative media collectives shared that view, holding that their purpose was to challenge the 'criminalisation' of demonstrations by the Brazilian media. "André", member of *Coletivo Carranca*, stated for instance that this collective aimed to 'expose the information that the corporate media try to conceal'.

To some extent, alternative media collectives did broaden the mediated visibility of the June Journeys. "Paulo", member of *NINJA*, recalled, '[the national media] shifted from a discourse of vandals to another of, oh, the heroes of the streets must fight against corruption and violence, because those are the biggest problems of Brazil'. *NINJA* and similar collectives thus highlighted how people took to the streets not to demand an end to the Rousseff administration, but to complain about structural problems such as the deterioration of public services, the privatisation of public space, and the biases of national

media conglomerates.[6] The broadening of visibility however had limitations. *NINJA* was severely criticised by bloggers and viewers after livestreaming a too benevolent interview with Eduardo Paes, then mayor of Rio de Janeiro (Mazotte 2013). "Paulo" told me that their mistake was to overlook how a conciliatory style did not fit with livestreaming: 'The girl who was doing that interview knew how to do written interviews and her strategy was allowing the mayor to speak and edit later. But this was a live interview'. Hence, as this quote implies, members of alternative media collectives sensed that, despite the apparent 'affordances' of digital media, communication technologies restricted mediated visibility, favouring specific contents and formats over others.

It is therefore noteworthy that the popularity of *NINJA* and other collectives was underpinned on the dissemination of photos and videos exposing the violence shown by the military police towards demonstrators (d'Andrea and Ziller 2015; Conde and Jazeel 2013). The ease with which visual content was produced and distributed facilitated counter-tactics of 'bottom up surveillance' or *sousveillance* (Cammaerts 2012, 127)*,* monitoring state forces to make visible contrasting accounts to those produced by the national media. According to photographer "Luiz", their intention was 'recording and showing to elucidate and testify [the police actions]'. Notably, alternative media collectives also provided visibility to damage committed by protesters, such as when *NINJA* livestreamed a group of demonstrators destroying a Coca-Cola advertisement in São Paulo. [7] In hindsight, alternative reporters reflected that they gave too much visibility to these episodes, particularly in a society where violence and destruction are not uncommon. As "Paulo" recalled: 'We showed the Black Blocs as evidence that people had become more rebellious,

but destruction is a relatively normal thing in Brazil. Think for example of the clashes that happen after football matches here in São Paulo'. Significantly, both sousveillance and the focus on the damage done by protesters relied on a hyper-visibility of aggression and destruction, corroborating that alternative journalists 'have the same appetite for spectacle as mainstream journalists' (Poell 2014, 726–27).

An explanation from interviewees was that the very nature of digital media, with its reliance on visuality, favoured the production and circulation of sensational contents, such as the images exposing police brutality or those showing damage being done by protesters (for a similar point, see Poell 2014). "Pedro", member of the Brasília chapter of grassroots organisation *Comitê Popular da Copa* (Popular Committee of the World Cup*)*, held that this organisation wrote online manifestos to communicate its grievances, 'but then we realised that nobody read them, so we started making videos'. Various interviewees reflected that the reliance on visual contents prevented a deeper contextualisation. "Rodrigo", a photographer for *Carranca*, admitted that, although livestreaming was praised for making visible unedited versions of the protests, it also produced shallow narratives, with reporters 'talking about what is happening right at the moment, but incapable of doing any analysis'. This emphasis on urgency and drama consequently produced a kind of *reversed protest paradigm*, which stressed violence –albeit that committed by the police– at the expense of underlying grievances. "Rodrigo" reflected:

> We have tons of hours of videos and millions of photos of destruction and police abuse, but with little analysis. In the end, the alternative media became similar to tabloids, levelling accusations that

> 'the military police did this thing, or did this other one', without thinking of why there was this level
>
> of police violence or whether people should have re-thought the way they protested.

Consequently, and contrary to observations on protest coverage in other settings (e.g. Harlow and Johnson 2011), the perceived role of digital media in the mediated visibility of violence during the June Journeys was ambivalent. These technologies were thought to have the potential to alter dominant regimes of visibility, showing contents that defy those produced by the mainstream media. They nonetheless risked constraining visibility by paying too much attention to police abuses –even when rightfully denouncing them– as well as to damage done by protesters. Confirming previous studies (Poell 2014), alternative reporters and photographers observed that, despite their intention to depict the June Journeys positively by embracing the 'affordances' of digital media, technological conditions –particularly the ease with which visual content is manufactured and distributed– meant that their coverage had similar shortcomings to those of the mainstream media, namely an emphasis on the sensationalism of violence at the expense of demonstrators' motives.

Foreign Correspondents: Precarity and the Commodification of Dissent

As in other settings (e.g. Harlow et al. 2017), coverage by foreign media organisations did not fit with the patterns of a protest paradigm. News organisations with diverse political leanings, such as *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph* and *The New York Times* adopted a largely positive view, framing the June Journeys as a spontaneous revolt of 'the people' against local elites (Jiménez-Martínez 2020). A positive view of protest does not however mean

that violence was irrelevant. It played a crucial role in directing the gaze of American and Western European media towards the demonstrations. As "Tim", former Brazil bureau chief for a global news agency, admitted:

> There are protests everywhere, every day, globally […] We started writing [about the June Journeys] when it got to about ten thousand people, but it was the violence that made us start writing more than the size. As soon as the police brutality happened, that's when it became politically sensitive with unforeseen implications.

Hence, it was the violent clashes between protesters and the military police that caught the attention of the Western media. Violence was appealing however not only for its 'political sensitivity', but also because for its sensational aspects, particularly for journalists working with photos and videos. Television producer "Emma" recalled that she 'got contacted by video news agencies telling you to give them images only if protests get violent'. In consequence, although foreign news organisations made the protests visible through a largely positive frame, this visibility was underpinned on their value as spectacle (following Brighenti 2010b; see also Kilgo and Harlow 2019). The June Journeys were romanticised as a revolt by 'the people' against national elites, but the emphasis on destruction and violence –especially when perpetrated by the police– obscured protesters' motivations, in a similar manner to the aforementioned *reversed protest paradigm*.

When I questioned the reasons behind this emphasis on violence, foreign correspondents – particularly those working freelance– pointed out commercial interests. According to British journalist "Julie": 'When something like that [the protests] happens, the media have

wonderful people who think it is really important to report on it, [but there are] all kinds of reasons why these things get reported, and one of them is, of course, profit'. This is a significant point, especially when considering that structural crises, such as revenue losses and technological developments, have forced Western news organisations to reduce the number of employed foreign correspondents and depend on freelance professionals (Phillips 2014). Although the proportion of freelancers among foreign correspondents in Brazil is unclear –when I contacted ACIE, the Association of Foreign Correspondents in Brazil, I was told they did not hold such data–, it is worth mentioning that of the eighteen foreign journalists and photographers I interviewed, ten were freelance.

In line with previous studies (Willnat and Weaver 2003), two freelance journalists stressed their supposed autonomy and independence, claiming that they could write 'about what they wanted', rather than follow editors' orders. Most interviewees were however less positive. The majority of foreign correspondents I met, particularly freelancers, admitted that they found it impossible to negotiate with these commercial pressures, holding that they operated under continuous precarity and instability, pitching stories –sometimes about other South American countries– to a whole array of news organisations, and providing text, photos and even videos of these stories. Confirming the significance of economic conditions as forces shaping what is shown and seen (Voirol 2005), foreign journalists approached mediated visibility as a commodity to trade in a market of symbolic and material goods. According to a journalist employed by a news agency: 'Freelancing is really tough; you have to sell a sexy story to get space […] and you often deal with editors who don't know anything about the country you're covering'.

Although interviewees emphasised that their job consisted of following 'the story' –thus implying that they were neutral observers of unexpected events–, they admitted to planning in advance what to cover, in order to prepare pitches to foreign editors and deal better with their own financial precarity. As Spanish reporter "Oscar" told me:

> We [journalists] had an idea of what to do during three to four years. 2014 was going to be about the World Cup and presidential elections, 2015 was perceived as a desert in terms of information, but then the Olympic Games were planned for 2016. I arrived in 2013, and that was the year to settle down, report on the World Cup preparations and the Pope's visit. But of course, the protests took all the attention in the end.

The fact that the protests 'took all the attention' meant that they became a potential source of income. According to American reporter "Robert", freelance journalists saw in the June Journeys 'a huge opportunity to make more money'. This potential increase in their earnings however came at a price. The same journalist stated that, in order to augment the chances of trading stories about the protests, freelancers were 'willing to simplify and reinforce stereotypes […] by saying that Brazilians hate the World Cup or something about soccer and so on'. The last point is key. The June Journeys were an extremely complex outbreak of social unrest, with unclear leadership and contradictory grievances (Gohn 2014). Foreign journalists nonetheless downplayed that complexity and stressed the hosting of 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympic Games as the main motives (Jiménez-Martínez 2020). The emphasis on that specific angle was partly due to the perception

among journalists that this frame increased the chances of selling content to Western news organisations. As Brazilian journalist "Marco" recalled:

> My friends [freelance journalists] have told me, "if I sell them [foreign editors] a story of how a protest to improve health and education in Brazil is important, people will not read it. But stories that Brazil will host the World Cup and people are against it, that sells much more".

This financial precarity made freelance journalists prioritise maintaining good relations with foreign editors in order to, as one of them told me, 'put food on the table'. Freelance media professionals admitted that they sometimes chose stories based on their earnings potential. Echoing the views of several colleagues, television producer "Emma" admitted that 'the story that was published [about the June Journeys] wasn't necessarily accurate', partly because of the emphasis of Western news media on the friction between football and protests as well as the hyper-visibility of violence. Significantly, "Emma" stressed that neither reporters nor editors attempted to manipulate or lie. Instead, she –along with other interviewees– advised that the core concerns driving the June Journeys remained largely invisible because conflict, destruction and spectacle *work in the media* and therefore generate profit.

Consequently, the benevolent albeit simplified coverage of the June 2013 protests in Western news media emerged because of perceived commercial conditions that pushed journalists to stress the drama and spectacle of violence. Strikingly, most interviewees voiced a defeatist posture, portraying themselves as incapable of resistance and as prisoners of perverse commercial pressures that, in the words of an American journalist, 'they were

forced' to accept. Similarly, as reporter "Julie" told me, 'it is a whole kind of system that is probably guilty'. Echoing the views of Brazilian journalists, foreign media professionals voiced a perceived lack of agency, with limited opportunities to reconfigure dominant regimes of visibility.

Discussion: The Instrumental Mediated Visibility of Violence

The accounts by national, foreign and alternative reporters and photographers stressed three dominant conditions that, according to each group of interviewees, shaped the mediated visibility of violence during the June Journeys: (1) *organisational pressures* in the case of Brazilian journalists; (2) *technological affordances and constraints* for alternative journalists; (3) *commercial influences* in the case of foreign correspondents. These perceived conditions strengthen arguments –some of them within the framework of the protest paradigm– about the need to take into account the specific contexts and arrangements influencing protest coverage (e.g. Kilgo and Harlow 2019; McCluskey et al. 2009). The interviews nonetheless corroborate the 'changing media politics of dissent' (Cottle 2008, 853), by questioning deterministic assumptions of the protest paradigm, namely that the mainstream media invariably condemn demonstrations or that digital technologies give preference to protesters' grievances.

Although some studies have addressed these limitations from the perspective of the protest paradigm (e.g. Lee 2014; Shahin et al. 2016), the empirical and conceptual departures taken by this article –scrutinising the beliefs and perceptions of the individuals producing the coverage and drawing on the notion of mediated visibility– paint a more nuanced picture

of the uses and shapes of the mediated visibility of violence during protests. Whilst all interviewees agreed that violence was a key factor in the coverage, they perceived that it played an ambivalent role, given broader circumstances such as the political agendas of news organisations, the affordances and constraints of communication technologies and the commercialised nature of the media.

Brazilian journalists revealed that the delegitimisation of protests was not an inescapable product of professional norms and routines willingly or unconsciously followed. Whilst favourable approaches towards the June Journeys remained invisible in the early stages of the coverage, national news organisations became more open to supportive perspectives once external conditions shifted –specifically when reporters and photographers were attacked by the military police–, even though the core reasons for the protests had not substantially changed. Notably, and adding more nuance to the understanding of the mediated visibility of protest, this benevolent view was not traduced into an exposure of protesters' grievances, but was exploited to support pre-existing agendas targeting the centre-left government of Dilma Rousseff.

Additionally, the conditions of mediated visibility shed light on the ambiguous role of the foreign and alternative media. Despite being praised for supposedly avoiding the protest paradigm (e.g. Harlow and Johnson 2011) and thus reconfiguring dominant regimes of visibility, the perception among interviewees was that technological constraints and commercial pressures facilitated a *reversed protest paradigm*, stressing police brutality at the expense of the motives driving the demonstrations. This emphasis on damage and

aggression demonstrates that there is no direct relationship between the mediated visibility of violence and the marginalisation of protest. Violence, as Hannah Arendt famously argued, can 'dramatize grievances and bring them to public attention', but its arbitrariness and unpredictability undermine the reasons guiding it (1970, 79–80). Moreover, if public debate predominantly focusses on whether protesters or authorities are to blame for violence, 'the state will have succeeded in turning participants' attention completely away from politics […] and away from other conversations, such as those about the current distribution and functioning of economic and political power' (LeNabat 2012, 468). Hence, and as suggested by other studies (e.g. Poell 2014; Lee 2014), when alternative and foreign journalists fall into sensationalism and drama to denounce police brutality, they risk marginalising the grievances driving people on to the streets.

The above insights reveal that, contrary to the traditional protest paradigm thesis, violence and its mediated visibility should neither be considered a deviation from the alleged 'peaceful' nature of protests nor the default position of journalistic routines. The mediated visibility of violence emerges instead as, following Arendt (1970), an instrument that, depending on the limitations imposed by broader conditions, can strategically be exploited to support or question diverse social, political or economic arrangements, particularly in societies with huge disparities and conflict. This is significant when taking into consideration that, although the protest paradigm literature stresses how a focus on violence protects the status quo, 'there is no irrefutable conceptualization of "status quo"' (Kilgo and Harlow 2019, 510; see also Lee 2014). In the case of Brazil, the agendas of authorities and news organisations clashed when the country was governed by the centre-left Workers'

Party between 2003 and 2016. Hence, when the June Journeys were vilified or legitimised in the media, which status quo was protected or challenged? Was it the one defended by the state or the private interests guarded by news conglomerates?

Another problematic issue was that, despite the reflexivity voiced by interviewees about their own vulnerabilities and limitations, they portrayed themselves as devoid of agency, operating within conditions that limited the negotiation or reconfiguration of dominating regimes of visibility. Works focussing on the role of technologies in relation to the protest paradigm (e.g. Harlow and Johnson 2011) as well as on mediated visibility (e.g. Thompson 2005) have depicted the current media environment as a space where dominant powers can potentially be challenged. Although this 'cacophonus field of protest' (Cottle 2008, 857) may give the impression that dominant regimes of visibility are contested, the perception among individuals covering the June Journeys was that the production and circulation of contents, as well as the possibility of altering prevailing distributions of visibility, were actually restricted. Consequently, in the same way that the delegitimisation of dissent should not be approached as the invariable position of mainstream news organisations, alternative media collectives should not be romanticised as actors necessarily altering what is possible and appropriate to see. As Brighenti observes, although 'media activists campaign for the visibility of their own topics of choice […] they are struggling within the same regime of visibility' (2010b, 99).

There are two important limitations to this article. First, the conditions of mediated visibility refer to those mentioned by interviewees. Other pressures might remain invisible.

It is also unclear how audiences perceived the contents that were made visible. Previous studies have suggested that audiences are not inevitably drawn towards drama and sensationalism during protest coverage, and may equally engage with violent or peaceful contents (Harlow et al. 2017). Second, the data were contingent. They were collected at a time of relatively sober views of the June Journeys, with neither the optimism of their immediate aftermath (e.g. Conde and Jazeel 2013) nor more pessimistic interpretations in view of Brazil's recent crisis (e.g. Carvalho, de Albuquerque, and dos Santos 2020). Current interviews may reflect those changes. Despite these restrictions, the views of these individuals are an important contribution to debates about the mediated visibility of violence at times of protest, given the scarcity of studies examining the perceptions, negotiations and reflections of journalists about these episodes.

Conclusion

Although the protest paradigm has produced invaluable insights in the past, the accounts by individuals covering the June Journeys show that it does not capture the complexity of the mediated visibility of violence in the current hybrid and transnational media environment. The assumption that 'the mainstream media' invariably delegitimises dissent not only goes against Chan and Lee's original formulation (1984), but also fails to acknowledge the shifting uses and shapes of the mediated visibility of violence, particularly in unequal and discordant societies. This is an important observation in view of the recent wave of demonstrations in non-Western settings, such as those in Lebanon, Hong Kong and especially Chile. In a similar vein to the June Journeys, these protests have been

characterised by violence and damage committed by both the state and protesters, and have been covered by national and foreign, as well as mainstream and alternative, media.

The interviews highlight how the mediated visibility of violence does not invariably lead to support for the status quo nor to a demonisation of social unrest. Instead, the mediated visibility of violence emerges as an instrument that can be exploited for different purposes, depending on broader organisational, technological and commercial conditions. A closer examination of the processes leading to mediated visibility also recognises that sensationalism and drama are not exclusive to the mainstream media. Despite their potential to broaden visibility, alternative and foreign journalists may disseminate contents that stress state violence at the expense of underlying grievances, thus narrating protests as politically legitimate but ultimately shallow spectacles of social unrest.

Notes

[1] See https://www.americasquarterly.org/content/what-brazils-2013-protests-tell-us-about-chile-2019

[2] The terms 'mainstream' and 'alternative' are used for explanatory purposes. Although 'old' media still command the attention of audiences and decision makers, 'the very nature of the mainstream is itself changing' (Chadwick 2013, 59).

[3] As Cammaerts (2012) observes, violence and damage are conceptually and morally distinct. Whilst the former is directed at people, the latter focusses on property.

[4] NINJA is an acronym for *Narrativas Independentes Jornalismo e Ação*, which translates as Independent Narratives, Journalism and Action.

[5] Attacks against journalists took a particularly dramatic turn in February 2014, when a television cameraman was mortally wounded by a flare thrown by protesters.

[6] See https://medium.com/@MidiaNINJA/ninja-2013-f6d5618375b2

[7] Ibid.

Table

Interviewee Type	Number of Interviewees	Organisation
Brazilian journalists	15	*Folha de São Paulo, O Estado de São Paulo, Jornal Nacional, Terra, Rádio CBN, Época Magazine, Rede TV, TV Brasil, Valor Económico, Rede Bandeirantes.*
Foreign journalists	18	*The New York Times, The Economist, Reuters, The Los Angeles Times, The Guardian, The Daily Telegraph, BBC*, and freelance journalists for other news media.
Alternative journalists	10	*Mídia NINJA, Coletivo Carranca, Comitê Popular da Copa,* independent activists.
Total	**43**	

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