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The Mediation of the Brazilian V-for-Vinegar Protests: From vilification to legitimization and back?

A mediação dos protestos brasileiros "V-de-Vinagre": da vilificação à legitimação e de volta?

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RESUMO

Neste artigo argumentamos que os protestos de junho de 2013 no Brasil, que alguns apelidaram de "V-de-Vinagre", constituem um caso extremamente produtivo para explorar as atuais relações complexas e altamente dinâmicas entre mídia, comunicação e protesto. Embora a representação dos fatos feita pela grande imprensa continue sendo importante, o conceito de mediação atravessa a fronteira entre produção e recepção e traz à tona as práticas de automediação. Consideramos que a estrutura de oportunidade de mediação é uma ferramenta conceitual útil para entender e analisar o papel da mídia e da comunicação em relação ao protesto. A análise demonstra que a estrutura de oportunidade de mediação é dinâmica e semi-independente da estrutura de oportunidade política. Consideramos também que ela tem uma dimensão contextual espacial, com atenção a questões como o local dos protestos e a interação entre as visões nacional e internacional. Por fim, identificou-se também uma dimensão temporal que aponta as diversas mudanças entre estrutura e agência em diferentes

ABSTRACT

In this article, we argue that the June 2013 protests in Brazil, which some dubbed the V-for-Vinegar protests, is a highly productive case to explore the complex and highly dynamic relationship between media, communication and protest today. While mainstream media representations of protest remain important, the concept of mediation crosses the boundaries between production and reception and also brings self-mediation practices into the fray. We argue that the mediation opportunity structure is a useful conceptual tool to understand and analyse the various roles that media and communication play in relation to protest. The analysis demonstrates that the mediation opportunity structure is dynamic and semi-independent from the political opportunity structure. Furthermore, it also has a spatial contextual dimension, paying attention to issues such as the locality where the protests take place and the interaction between the national and international gaze. Finally, a temporal dimension was identified as well, pointing towards various different shifts between structure and agency occurring at different

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momentos durante os protestos e em suas mediações.

Palavras-chave: Protesto; V-de-Vinagre; Brasil; Mediação; Estrutura de oportunidade.

moments during the protests and in their mediations.

Keywords: Protest; V-for-Vinegar; Brazil; Mediation; Opportunity structure.

INTRODUCTION

On the 15th of June 2013 the ninth edition of the FIFA Confederations Cup was about to kick off at the National Stadium of Brasília. The football tournament served as a test-run for some of the infrastructure and logistics of the upcoming edition of the World Cup. Media professionals from around the globe were present to cover the opening match between host-nation Brazil and Japan.

The gaze of the international media soon shifted away from the events on the pitch to what was going on outside the stadium, where around 500 people clashed with police in protest against the massive public expenditure on stadiums for the 2014 FIFA World Cup. With 30 people injured, 22 arrested and several fans inside the stadium receiving medical treatment due to the tear gas used by the police, this was the first of several protests during the FIFA Confederations Cup.

In fact, the protests had started months earlier as a reaction against a rise in public transportation fares. Over time, however, they addressed wider issues, such as critiquing the astronomical costs of organising both the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic games. The height of the protests coincided, however, with the start of the Confederations Cup in late June. With over a million people taking to the streets in over a hundred cities it became arguably the largest unrest Brazil experienced in more than two decades. As the stadiums became one of the prime elite-spaces targeted by the protesters, media organisations from all over the world, but also locally, divided their attention between sport and politics.

In this article, we suggest that the aforementioned protests in Brazil, which were dubbed amongst others the "V-for-Vinegar" movement or the "Salad Revolution"¹, is a useful and productive case to explore and elucidate the complex and highly dynamic relationship between media, communication and protest today. In this age of "new visibility" (Thompson, 2005), mainstream media representations of protest remain important. At the same time, beyond mainstream media and journalistic representation, mediation blurs the boundaries between production and reception and also brings self-mediation practices into the fray; today activists have many more avenues and opportunities to self-mediate their movement frames and discourses, their ideas and their struggles across space and time. Networked technologies play an increasingly important role in this regard; amplifying, mobilising, and coordinating protest, but also becoming a potent weapon in the repertoire of contentious action, as well as conducive to recording/archiving protest artefacts.

First, the theoretical concept of the mediation opportunity structure will be presented and outlined as a conceptual framework comprised of self-mediation practices, mainstream media representations, network(ed) power and a dialectic

¹ This refers to police arresting protesters, including journalists, for carrying vinegar which they used to lessen the impact of teargas and they are just two of the many codenames for the Brazilian protests of June 2013. Another commonly used name is "jornadas de junho" (June days or June journeys).

between production of frames by journalists as well as movement actors and the reception of these by audiences as publics. Subsequently this framework will be applied to the Brazilian protests of June 2013 to assess the nature of the mediation opportunity structure for this particular movement.

THE MEDIATION OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE

Elsewhere, one of us argued that given the hyper-saturated media and communication environment we live in today, the increased mediatization of society and the quite distinct role information and communication technologies played historically in terms of the political, it makes sense to recognize a distinct mediation opportunity structure, obviously overlapping with the prevailing political opportunity structures, but to some extent also semi-autonomous from it as well (Cammaerts, 2012).

Opportunity Structures

In the social movement literature the concept of "political opportunity structure" is a very prominent one, albeit also contested. It refers, according to Tarrow (1994: 85), to the "[d]imensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure". As a theory it thus foremost attempts to explain which structural aspects of the external world, i.e. outside the control of activists, affect the development and success of social movements (Meyer and Minkoff, 2004).

The concept of the political opportunity structure tends to be foregrounded by social movement scholars adhering to a political process approach. Those scholars inspired by constructivism and advocating a more culturalist approach to social movements argue that political opportunity neglects the importance of culture and favours structural characteristics over and above strategies of agency. From this culturalist perspective, Jasper and Goodwin (1999: 122) assert that "this distortion is especially problematic in the study of politics and protest, which contain a great deal of intention and will, strategy and choice, desire and fantasy".

However, in spite of these culturalist critiques, the idea of an opportunity structure can also be defined in a more balanced way, approaching the relationship between agency and empowerment on the one hand and structure and domination on the other as being dialectic. As Koopmans (1999: 102) pointed out, opportunity structure implies that "not all of opportunity is agency, but that some of it is structured". Approaching opportunity structures in such a more dialectical way allows us to account for both structural impediments to and opportunities for change, as well as acknowledge their crucial interplay. It also enables us to define this interplay between structure and agency as productive in a Foucaultian sense, namely as a result of the both generative and repressive coercive power and including practices of resistance being developed against both. Seen from this perspective the macro can also be connected to the micro level of analysis.

All this, importantly, has material consequences, for instance on what is seen to be legitimate protest and what is being sanctioned as uncivic; on the way in which "change" is argued for, decided upon, implemented and resisted; or in terms of the question as to whose interests are being served? Opportunity structure is also a useful concept in this regard precisely because it is situational; it accounts for

different historical trajectories, various cultures of protest and distinct contexts. It is important to fully recognize that the costs that are associated to different forms of protesting and of contesting varies from one place to the next and changes over time. The intrinsic link here between opportunity structures and repertoires of contentious action is particularly noteworthy.

Mediations

Epistemologically, mediation as a theoretical construct positions itself in similar ways to opportunity structures. While the asymmetric relationship between producers of media content and the designers of media and communication technologies on the one hand and users, consumers, audiences, publics on the other is acknowledged, the latter actors are attributed a considerable degree of agency too and this interplay between both sets of actors in many ways defines the mediation process.

As a theoretical concept mediation is often used to overcome as well as complicate common dichotomies such as between production and usage/reception, between alternative and mainstream and between traditional media and new media. As such, it also rejects media-centricity and technological determinism. All this makes mediation a highly useful concept to apply to social movements, something which Martín-Barbero (1993) already pointed out quite some years ago. He basically contended that mediations occur as a cultural process which negotiates between the dominant actors in a society and the subordinate who in turn develop bottom-up strategies to resist.

Approaching mediation as a process invites us thus to define it as negotiations of power, which are asymmetrical but not totalizing, i.e. leaving room for counter-hegemonies, for the building of alternate collective identities and for the waging of social and political struggles (Silverstone, 2006). From this perspective, mediation is thus intrinsically about power. The symbolic power of representation is important here, but also crucially the empowerment of self-mediation and the enactment or performance of resistance. Silverstone's double articulation of mediation is useful in this regard as this acknowledges both the symbolic as well as material nature of mediation processes.

Just as opportunity structures, mediation processes have consequences at the material level through the affordances of media and communication technologies and the variety of communicative and media practices they enable and which are appropriated into the everyday lives of ordinary people as well as elites. By introducing media practices in relation to mediation we suggest an emphasis on intentionality, on the purpose of communicative action, and this is especially the case for activists. Couldry (2004: 115) emphasises the importance of media practices and argues that this allows us to shift the attention away from "proving" effects of media on audiences to what elites, activists and non-activist citizens actually do with media and communication tools and how a "media saturated culture" affects our everyday life.

Exploring the mediation opportunity structure for social movements further

The mediation opportunity structure, as presented elsewhere (see Cammaerts, 2012) is comprised of a triad of opportunity structures: 1) the mainstream media

opportunity structure, 2) the discursive opportunity structure and 3) the networked opportunity structure.

When it comes to the first of these opportunity structures, this has traditionally been recognized as an important aspect of any social and political struggle by a number of social movement scholars. In fact, Gamson and Wolfsfeld (1993) even spoke of media and social movements as interacting systems arguing that gaining media resonance is of crucial importance for a social movement. Eliciting media attention can potentially broaden the scope of conflict because "most of the people [social movements] wish to reach are part of the mass media gallery, while many are missed by movement-oriented outlets" (ibid: 166). Maybe even more important than communication beyond the like-minded is the idea that profuse mainstream media attention is not only the result of, but also feeds the political and public legitimacy of a particular movement and/or struggle.

Getting access to the mainstream media, influencing the public sphere, articulating alternatives and receiving positive exposure from the media is, however, not that straightforward for activists and protest movements. This is due to the stiff competition for attention from a diverse and wide spectrum of causes and organisations, but also to the resource, gate-keeping and discursive power of the liberal media (Street, 2001). Journalists are prime actors in this, fulfilling a mediating role in the public sphere, but also having to cope with both internal – journalistic routines and editorial guideline – and external pressures – from other political elites and capitalist interests. This inevitably brings the issue of media power and ownership as well as ideological bias into play.

Many media scholars have over the years argued that the liberal media is inherently biased against (progressive) social movements, certainly those that are anti-systemic and challenge capitalist structures and private ownership. More recent research has, however, nuanced this rigid assessment. While many struggles and certainly anti-systemic ones have a hard time getting their voices heard in the mainstream public space, not all media is anti-protest or intrinsically biased against social movements all of the time (Van Zoonen, 1992; Cottle, 2008; Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2009; Cammaerts, 2013).

Mainstream media attention is of prime importance at a discursive level in terms of getting movement frames and discourses into the mainstream public space and to communicate beyond the likeminded (Rucht, 2013). Activists also know this and will develop strategies to increase their visibility. One of the most powerful ways of achieving this is through the performance of protest spectacles. In this regard, tactical "image events", which seek to attract positive coverage (DeLuca, 1999) and dissent events which simply seek publicity. Unlike the more strategic image event, a dissent event is "a tool to directly confront those in power, whether or not that confrontation was likely to produce "good copy"" (Scalmer, 2002: 61).

At the same time, it also needs to be acknowledged that social movements have always developed their own independent means of communication using whichever media and communication technologies that were available to them at a given time to be visible, to have a voice, to distribute their various frames and to mobilise for action. This broader phenomenon of alternative and/or movement media, has also received increased scholarly attention in recent years (Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi, 1994; Couldry, 1999; Downing, et al., 2001; Atton, 2002; Bailey, et al., 2008).

Arguably, networked technologies have greatly increased the possibilities for citizens, activists and social movements to self-mediate and to distribute movement frames through websites, email, streaming, social media, mobile technologies, etc. All this has reduced the cost of communication and also made it much easier to communicate and organise transnationally or to increase the scope of conflict beyond the local. However, in recent years, the literature on communication and social movements has tended to over-emphasise the role of the internet to the detriment of more traditional media such as print, street art or radio, which remain important means of communication today.

Despite this caveat, the internet and networked technologies as movement media do play an increasingly important role in the everyday practices of activists and protesters in terms of their outward- as well as inward-oriented communicative practices (Hermanns, 2008; Van Laer and Van Aelst, 2010; Bennett and Segerberg, 2012). The internet and the networked structure it represents can be seen to have two distinct roles for activists and social movements. Networked technologies:

- a) facilitate and enable movement activities and practices which activists that form part of movements have always enacted – such as dissemination of movement frames, mobilization for direct action, coordination of direct action, or archiving protest artifacts.
- b) have become constitutive of direct action; networked technologies have become weapons to strike at ideological enemies – examples of this would be "hacktivist" strategies or attempts to penetrate the mainstream public space through political jamming tactics.

Finally, mediation is not merely constituted by or through those that produce media content – whether it is journalists representing social movements or activists self-meditating their own actions and frames – but crucially also by those who receive this content in a variety of ways – i.e. audiences and publics (Silverstone, 2006). It is thus the interplay between protest performances, their mediation in terms of organisation and coordination, their mainstream representations as well as self-representations amplified through self-mediation, and the degree of resonance with audiences and publics, which constitutes the mediation opportunity structures.

In this article, we will assess the nature of the mediation opportunity structure in relation to the June 2013 protests in Brazil by assessing:

- a) the **core frames** of the movement
- b) the online as well offline **protest spectacles** performed by the movement
- c) the **self-mediation** practices of the movement
- d) the **mainstream representation** of the movement
- e) the **resonance** with audiences and publics

THE "V-FOR-VINEGAR" MOVEMENT FRAMES

Movement frames provide discursive justifications and rationales for struggles and for the ways in which these struggles need to be waged, a prism through which to make sense of the world – frames are, as Goffman (1974) explained "schemata of interpretation". They "are continuously articulated and elaborated during the course of conversation and debate among the interactants within a discursive field" (Snow, 2004: 403). Frames also tend to articulate quite complex and nuanced issues in more

simplistic and straightforward terms and tend to align with common sentiments of fairness and justice.

Snow and Benford (1988) identified three distinct but inter-related collective action frames:

- a) **Diagnostic frames** articulate the problem that needs to be addressed, what needs to be fixed and they also aim to weaken or undermine the frames of opponents.
- b) **Prognostic frames** convince recruits of the goals of the movement and above all provide possible solutions to the problem that is articulated by the diagnostic frames and proposes a certain strategy and tactics to achieve the identified goals.
- c) **Motivational frames** are aimed at mobilizing recruits for actions. They are what is called the agency component of collective action frames, "[t]hey suggest not merely that something can be done but that "we" can do something" (Gamson, 1992: 7) and thus instill a sense of urgency to act despite everything.

In the case of the "V-for-Vinegar" movement, the initial *diagnostic frames* focussed almost exclusively on attacking the rise of public transportation fares (cf. Movimento Passe Livre, 2013; Mudança Já, ca. 2013 and Figure 1). In mid-June, however, a whole array of other groups joined the protests, thereby expanding the diagnostic frames and at the same time making it less clear what the protests were actually about. Consequently, the now leaderless movement addressed a variety of issues, such as corruption among politicians, deficiencies in the provision of public health and education, or the expenditures incurred for both the World Cup and the 2016 Olympics (Barbara, 2013; Reche Ávila, 2013; Guimarães and Soares, 2013).

Figure 1 – Originally, the diagnostic frames of the protests focused on attacking the rise of public transportation fares and police violence/intimidation.



Photo: Tânia Rêgo/Agência Brasil, 13th June 2013. Used according to License Creative Commons Atribuição 3.0 Brasil.

Likewise, the *prognostic frames* were initially limited to measures geared towards stopping the rise of public transport fares or demands for policies to make it free at the point of use (cf. *Movimento Passe Livre*, 2013). Over time, however, the demands became more heterogeneous. The prognostic frames were mostly concerned with pressuring the government to respectively implement more stringent legislation against corruption, increase the budget of public health and education, reform Brazil's political system and/or to implement policies to stop considering homosexuality as a psychological disorder (Barbara, 2013; Reche Ávila, 2013; Guimarães and Soares, 2013; see also *Blog do Estadão*, 2013).

Finally, the *mobilizing frames* could be found in the calls made by the movement to start protesting in the streets and inviting all Brazilians, independently of their political affiliations, to join them. As will be discussed later on, most of these mobilization efforts were focused on self-mediation practices. They not only invited people to go onto the streets, but also made the claim that "The Sleeping Giant" – a common metaphor used to describe Brazil – had woken up (cf. *Marcha pela legalização do vinagre*, 2013; see also Gomes, 2013; Guimarães and Soares, 2013). These mobilizing frames were not fixed and mutated in reaction to external situations. For instance, in response to accusations of violence, the movement highlighted the peaceful nature of the protests and when claims were made that the movement was co-opted by political parties, its independence from formal politics was emphasized (cf. *Marcha pela legalização do vinagre*, 2013).

ONLINE AND OFFLINE PROTEST SPECTACLES ENACTED BY THE PROTESTERS

Protest events are staged and performed in order to maximize exposure and attract attention to the movement frames. To achieve this, but also to demonstrate the strength, resolve and determinacy of the movement, activists select from a repertoire of contentious action, which is situated offline, but increasingly also online (Tilly, 1986; Rolfe, 2005; Chadwick, 2007). The repertoire of contentious action to the disposal of activists today is varied and includes judicial activism, (online) petitions, demonstrations, occupations, sit-ins, smart mobs, as well as tactics of damage against property, hacktivism or hunger strikes. The link with opportunity structure here is quite evident as the price activists pay for engaging in protest activities varies greatly according to which protest tactic is used in which context.

Della Porta and Diani (2006) attribute three core logics to the different protest tactics that make up the repertoire of contentious action, namely 1) the logic of numbers, 2) the logic of bearing witness to injustice and 3) the logic of damage. It could be argued that in the case of the "V-for-Vinegar" protests all three of these logics were at play.

Numbers: The protest movement managed to mobilize a large number of people on the street creating a spectacle of numbers and bodies. While in early June, the protests gathered a mere 500 to 5,000 people in each location, a few weeks later this number had reached around 100,000 people in some of Brazil's largest cities². This resulted in the protests themselves becoming spectacular image events. The numbers became even more impressive when approaching them nationally with press reports from national and international media organizations estimating that on some days around a million people took to the streets (cf. BBC News, 2013a).

But the logic of numbers was not limited to the quantity of people in the streets. Protesters carried banners demanding FIFA to pay for people's transportation costs or comparing the astronomic monetary differences in payment between football stars and teachers. In a similar vein, there were mainstream media reports calculating that the money spent on the World Cup would enable more than 2 million classrooms to be built, buy 350,000 ambulances or fix 24,000 kilometers of paved streets (cf. *R7 Notícias*, 2013). Numbers were also used to evaluate the impact of the movement, including research about the behavior of Brazilians in social media during the protests or polls concerning the general support towards the activists' demands as well as their consequences for the popularity of President Dilma Rousseff. We will return to these later (cf. *Blog do Estadão*, 2013; *Folha*, 2013a).

Bearing Witness: This logic refers to the importance of symbols and above all the attempts at capturing or occupying elite spaces or spectacles, making vivid connections between social injustice and the vast spending on these elite organized spectacles. This became a definitive feature of the protest movement. Its highest moment of visibility occurred at the very same time that Brazil was hosting the Confederations Cup; the protesters thus cunningly redirected the limelight that was cast on the elite-organized event towards their messages of dissent. Activists converged outside the football stadiums when games were being played³. It is also interesting to note, as is apparent from Figure 2, that the protesters also used

² See, for instance, the following map prepared by newspaper O'Globo, about the protests on 17th June: <http://oglobo.globo.com/infograficos/protestos-17-junho/>

³ See, for instance, a graph showing the protests which occurred at the same time of some of the matches in <http://esportes.terra.com.br/infograficos/copa-das-confederacoes-protestos/>

banners in English catering to international media and audiences. In doing so, protesters aimed to create attention for one of their core-frames, namely linking the vast amounts of money spent on global sport events to a decrease in spending on public services (Barbara, 2013). Furthermore, throughout history there has always been an interesting connection between sports, politics and protest (Houlihan, 2000; Cottrell and Nelson, 2011).

Figure 2 – Activists converged outside the football stadiums where the Confederations Cup was being played, thus redirecting the limelight that was cast on the elite-organized event

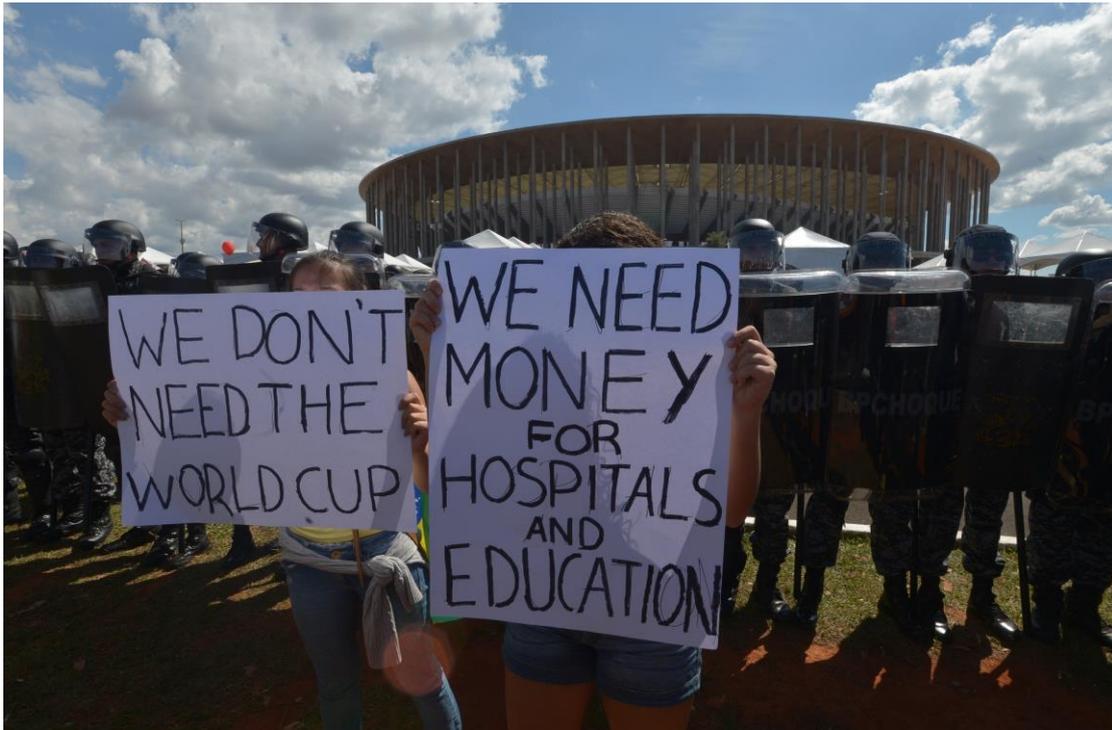


Photo: Marcello Casal Jr./Agência Brasil, 15th June 2013. Used according to License Creative Commons Atribuição 3.0 Brasil.

The protesters also amply used humor and frivolity to express their anger in a somewhat joyful way. The story of protesters, including a journalist, that were arrested by the police for carrying vinegar during one of the protests (to reduce the effects of tear gas) went viral and a series of online jokes and Facebook events calling for "the legalization of vinegar" started circulating and as mentioned above the protests were increasingly described as the "Salad Revolution" or the "V-for-Vinegar" movements, the latter in reference to the graphic novel and movie V for Vendetta (Gomes, 2013; Barbara, 2013; *The Economist*, 2013; see also V-for-Vinegar website, 2013; Salad Uprising, 2013; *Marcha pela legalização do vinagre*, 2013). Some activists wore the mask of Guy Fawkes during the protests, and an online game called V-for-Vinegar, in which a protestor must run away from the police for carrying vinegar, was also created (Canaltech, 2013).

Damage: This logic refers to confrontational tactics and dissent events created by the activists. The spaces targeted carry a symbolic meaning for the protestors, and in fact, a "Black Bloc" group operating within the movement had among its objectives attacking icons of capitalism, such as car sellers, fast food restaurants, banks or

multinational companies (Gomes, 2013; Reche Ávila, 2013). Thus, the demonstrations targeted commercial spaces such as the Avenida Paulista, but also the vehicles of some of Brazil's main media organizations covering the events (Gomes, 2013; see also BBC Brasil, 2013) and, later on, the stadiums in which the Confederations Cup games were played.

This logic was not limited to offline spaces and also included cyber attacks. For instance, the group Anonymous Brazil hacked several websites from public authorities, mainstream media or related to the Confederations Cup. Most notably, they attacked the Twitter account of *Veja* Magazine, inviting people to take part in the protests, as well as the Instagram account of President Dilma Rousseff, putting a picture of a Guy Fawkes mask with the Brazilian flag on there. In addition, they also uploaded several videos to different websites denouncing the violence of police against protesters (Gomes, 2013; Vallejos, 2013).

In this regard, eliciting aggressive police reactions can also be a tactic in its own right. As will be discussed in more detail below, while the protests were originally framed as the work of mobs, thugs or vandals, the strong reaction of the military police against the protesters (and journalists) eventually prompted more positive coverage by mainstream media, narrating the protests as legitimate unrest and representing the protesters more as underdogs or victims rather than perpetrators (Reche Ávila, 2013; Guimarães and Soares, 2013).

Figure 3 – Echoing what has happened in other demonstrations, activists wore the mask of Guy Fawkes, referencing the graphic novel and movie "V for Vendetta".



Photo: Marcelo Camargo/Agência Brasil, 20th June 2013. Used according to License Creative Commons Atribuição 3.0 Brasil.

THE SELF-MEDIATION PRACTICES OF THE PROTESTERS

Throughout history activists and social movements have used whatever means at their disposal to communicate independently; be it the street, through visual and textual print-media, radio and TV broadcasting or today the internet, which can be approached as a convergent media and communication technology. At the same time, governments and the powers that be have always attempted to limit or at least control access to the means of communication as much as they possibly can get away with; from the licensing of print presses, controls over the distribution of paper, licensing of broadcast frequencies and today the filtering of and dragnet surveillance practices on the internet.

Despite all this, activists also tend to be very apt at circumventing these limits and controls, at finding new ways to disseminate their movement-frames or to mobilize for direct action. Elsewhere, one of us identified six logics of self-mediation for activists and social movements (Cammaerts, forthcoming):

- a) To Disseminate movement frames=>**DISCLOSURE**
- b) To Mobilize for direct action
- c) To Organize the movement=>**EXAMINATION**
- d) To Coordinate direct action
- e) To Record protest events=>**REMEMBRANCE**
- f) To Archive protest artifacts

It was also suggested that these logics map onto Foucault's three Stoic technologies of the self, namely 1) disclosure, 2) examination and 3) remembrance (Foucault, 1977), whereby dissemination and mobilization are relevant to strategies of disclosure, constituting the movement; organization and coordination link to examination and self-reflexivity of a movement; and recording and archiving belong to strategies of remembrance, also potentially leading to what is called movement spillover.

Disclosure: Although the role of digital technologies within the protest movement has perhaps been over-emphasized, as is often the case these days, they did play a highly relevant role in contributing to amplify the movement frames, to mobilize for action and to bypass mainstream media, especially at the beginning of the protests. Thus, activists used forums, websites and social media platforms to disseminate their movement frames, instilling a sense of urgency to motivate people to act and take to the streets. Among these actions, a particularly relevant one was the creation of the Twitter hashtags #VemPraRua [#Come to the Streets - our translation] and #OGiganteAcordou [#The Giant Woke Up - our translation] (Gomes, 2013; Ramalho and da Silva, 2013).

Additionally, activists news collectives such as *Pós TV*⁴ and *Mídia NINJA*⁵ (an acronym for *Narrativas Independentes, Jornalismo e Ação*, Portuguese for "Independent Narratives, Journalism and Action") attempted to offer a different perspective to the events in comparison to mainstream media organisations (Mazotte, 2013; Gomes, 2013; Reche Ávila, 2013). These groups were founded before the start of the protests,

⁴ See <http://canalpostv.blogspot.com.br/>

⁵ See: <http://midianinja.tumblr.com/>

but they became more visible during the demonstrations, especially after mainstream media organisations started to pick-up content produced by *NINJA* (Watts, 2013b). Another source of disclosure was the *YouTube* video "No, I'm not going to the world cup", created by a Brazilian student living in the United States⁶. Although, according to its creator, the video was developed before the protests, its timing and high visibility – reaching more than 2,5 million views in a couple of days – made it widely covered by national and international media, becoming a kind of representative voice for what was in effect a leaderless movement (cf. Phillips, 2013; Zinser, 2013; O Estado, 2013d; Salles, 2013; Watts, 2013c).

Examination: Closely related to the previous point, the internet was highly instrumental for activists to coordinate the movement and organize actions. For instance, through the use of the aforementioned Twitter hashtags or by creating Facebook events, people were mobilized to take part in protests (Gomes, 2013; Ramalho and da Silva, 2013; Della Barba and Costa, 2013; see also *Marcha pela legalização do vinagre*, 2013). Most importantly, it was also a source of self-reflexivity, allowing activists to change some of their tactics, such as widening the original aims of the movement, or, as mentioned before, responding to accusations made by authorities and mainstream media that the protests were essentially criminal acts (cf. *Marcha pela legalização do vinagre*, 2013). However, coordination was not always successful and harmonious; at moments, different groups disputed the control of shared Facebook or Twitter accounts (INFO, 2013).

Remembrance: Organizations such as the aforementioned *Mídia NINJA* or *Pós TV* not only facilitated the amplification of the movement frames, but also played a key role in documenting the protests and served as a repository of protest artefacts. In particular, *Mídia NINJA* gained notoriety for, using devices like mobile phones, recording cases of police abuse during the demonstrations. These images were not only made available through websites and other social media platforms, but started to be picked up by mainstream media as well (Mazotte, 2013; Gomes, 2013; Reche Ávila, 2013; Watts, 2013b). The surveillance practices were not limited to the activists, obviously, with the Brazilian Intelligence Agency monitoring closely the activities of the protest movement online (O Estado, 2013e; Veja, 2013; Terra Brasil, 2013).

MAINSTREAM MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF THE V-FOR-VINEGAR MOVEMENT

As already pointed out earlier, much of the recent literature on the mainstream representation of protest emphasizes the importance of context, and especially of elite and public opinion reactions in defining the tone of the mainstream reporting of protest. In a more globalized context with a plethora of 24/7 news organizations and their global audiences, not only national/local news matters, but likewise international news and crucially the interaction between local and international news production relating to localized protest. This latter point is not that prevalent in the literature on mainstream media and protest movements, but is becoming all the more apparent in recent events such as the Arab spring, but also in the Brazilian case. First, however, we address the national media reaction to the protests.

⁶ See: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZApBgNQgKPU>

Although protests against the increases in public transportation had happened across Brazil in 2012 and early 2013, only in June, when they reached larger cities such as Sao Paulo, Brasília or Rio de Janeiro, were they widely covered by some of the main national media organizations. Initially, mainstream media framed the protests exclusively as disruptions to the social order, with some reports even demanding a much stronger intervention by the police (Fraga, 2013; Reche Ávila, 2013; Guimarães and Soares, 2013). To mention a few examples, on 7th June 2013, the front page of *Folha* read "Act for cheaper transport in Sao Paulo is marked by vandalism" ["Vandalismo marca ato por transporte mais barato em SP" - emphasis added]; and *O Estado* titled one of its articles as "Protests against fares ends in chaos, fire and destruction in downtown" ["Protesto contra tarifa acaba em caos, fogo e depredação no centro" - emphasis added] (*Folha*, 2013b; *O Estado*, 2013a).

Figure 4 – The response of the police against protesters and journalists arguably contributed to a shift in the way national mainstream media covered the movement.



Photo: Marcello Casal Jr./Agência Brasil, 15th June 2013. Used according to License Creative Commons Atribuição 3.0 Brasil.

The intensification of the protests, in terms of their recurrence and number of participants also led to an increase in its coverage, occupying front pages and becoming the main story on the TV news. As some Brazilian analysts have observed (Fraga, 2013; Guimarães and Soares, 2013), a relevant shift in the frames of mainstream media occurred on 13th June, when, during the protests in São Paulo, the

police attacked not only demonstrators but crucially also journalists. Although some media representatives denied that the violence suffered by journalists was the main reason for this shift (Singer, 2013), the tone of mainstream media towards the demonstrations changed markedly in the aftermath of this.

Suddenly, the protesters were not framed exclusively as vandals anymore, but more attention was given to the peaceful protesters. Some media started to represent the protests as more legitimate, while the role of the police and public authorities was increasingly questioned (Fraga, 2013; Guimarães and Soares, 2013). For example, while on 13th June the cover of *Folha* read "Government of Sao Paulo says it will be harder against vandalism" ["Governo de SP diz que será mais duro contra vandalismo"], on the following day it said "Police reacts with violence to the protest and São Paulo lives a night of chaos" ["Polícia reage com violencia a protesto e SP vive noite de caos"] (*Folha*, 2013c and 2013d). It has to be said though that this tendency of a more positive representation of the protesters and protests was not necessarily prevalent in all media.

After the demonstrations and jeers against Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff and FIFA's President Sepp Blatter during the opening of the Confederations Cup on 15th June, the national media started to realise that the protests not only targeted the rise in public transportation fares, but a much wider range of social issues, most notably the massive expenditures of the World Cup and the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro (*O Estado*, 2013b; *Folha*, 2013e). Up to this point, the demonstrations were also almost exclusively a national matter. However, the targeting of the opening ceremony of the Confederations Cup drew the attention of foreign media organisations as well. Like the national media, international media originally narrated the demonstrations almost exclusively as a violent movement against the increases in public transport fares, pointing to how local elites label the protesters as thugs or vandals (cf. *The New York Times*, 2013; *BBC News*, 2013b; *The Times*, 2013).

By directly targeting an elite-organised sports-event such as the Confederations Cup, the protesters presented the media with a dramatic and stark contrast between the image of a football-loving country, represented inside the stadium, and a series of protests happening right outside the venues. This arguably intensified the gaze of international media organisations on Brazil, especially in view of Brazil's hosting of the 2014 World Cup football and the 2016 Olympic games, which in turn led to protesters explicitly catering to the international gaze, by also showing banners with slogans in English rather than just Portuguese (cf. Figure 2). The international media also expressed some degree of surprise as the protests disrupted the stereotype of Brazil as a happy and football-mad country (cf. Phillips, 2013; Zinser, 2013; Watts, 2013a; *BBC News*, 2013c).

In addition, the reports seemed to be framed as acts of war, emphasising images and stories of chaos, revolt, fire and destruction. On television, in particular, international journalists recorded some of their dispatches in the middle of the confrontations between demonstrators and the police, running through the streets wearing helmets and gas masks all contributing to the dramatic effect (cf. *BBC News*, 2013d, 2013e). Despite this, the protests were also represented as a "social awakening" of Brazilians, and were related to the unrests taking place at the same time in Turkey. Thus, the complaints against rising transport fares were portrayed only as the spark of a movement targeting wider social and political issues, as well as symptoms of global distress and contestation (cf. Romero, 2013; *BBC News*, 2013f; Phillips, 2013).

However, it would be a mistake to consider the coverage of national and international media as completely separate spheres. They not only interacted but also became news for each other. For instance, international journalists ran stories referencing domestic coverage either as sources or to criticise how Brazil's main television networks and newspapers described the events (cf. Romero, 2013). At the same time, the Brazilian media followed closely how the protests were represented in the international media, not only to highlight the global interest which the protests received, but also to point out that the protests were related to demonstrations in Turkey, the "Occupy" movement in the United States, or unrests occurring in Israel and Greece (cf. *O Estado*, 2013c; *Jornal Nacional*, 2013a, b and c; *Folha*, 2013f, g, h and i).

FRAME ALIGNMENT AND RESONANCE BEYOND THE PROTESTERS

As pointed out above, mediation is not merely about the producers of meaning, in this case the activists and journalists, but just as much about those receiving mediated content and either appropriating or rejecting the meanings embedded in the mediated content. Mediation, Silverstone (2006: 42 – emphasis added) argued, is "constituted in the practices of those who produce the sounds and images, the narratives and the spectacles, as well as, crucially, *those who receive them*". Hence, it is also important to assess the role of public opinion and the way in which this shifts and impacts on activists' as well as media narratives.

Of crucial importance here is the degree to which movement frames align or resonate with everyday concerns of ordinary people. As discussed above, the original concern of the demonstrations related to increases in public transportation fares. However, over time, the movement was fuelled by a wider set of issues, including education, health, gay rights, and anti-corruption (Barbara, 2013; Reche Ávila, 2013; Guimarães and Soares, 2013). Some studies observed how, at that time, the number of Twitter accounts from Brazil in discussions about the movement increased, with 11 million tweets mentioning the word "Brazil" and 2 million ones the word "protest" between 6th and 26th June (Malini, 2013; Costa, 2013). Interestingly, these online discussions were not ecstatic; in the beginning many tweets were concerned with inviting people to mobilize, afterwards with denouncing police abuse during the protests, and finally moving to issues such as calls for a plebiscite or a general assembly (Della Barba and Costa, 2013).

In addition, a series of polls conducted during the demonstrations showed general support towards the protests increasing steadily, with some sources claiming that by mid-June about 75 per cent of Brazilians agreed with them (Guimarães, 2013). Other polls found that the popularity rating of President Dilma Rousseff, which at the beginning of June 2013 was at 57%, plummeted spectacularly to 30% after the protests (*Folha*, 2013a).

All this shows, to some extent, that the protests and the movement frames of the movement did manage to resonate with the wider public in Brazil and this might also explain the shifts in media resonance. However, as with the Occupy movement and indeed the aforementioned protests in Turkey, there are serious issues of sustainability. Once the Confederations Cup ended and the international media went back home, the protests continued but they attracted less participants and the political energy of the June 2013 protests dissipated somewhat. At the same time, while the popularity ratings of President Dilma Rousseff did not return to the same

approval rates prior to the protests, they rose steadily in the following months, reaching 41% at the end of November 2013 (Datafolha, 2013).

CONCLUSIONS

By applying the theoretical concept of the mediation opportunity structure to the case of the Brazilian V-for-Vinegar protests, we can begin to see how this particular opportunity structure operates; to some extent it can be seen as semi-independent from other opportunity structures, especially the political opportunity structure. In this particular case, protest events are staged and performed, while protest artefacts are being produced, recorded, disseminated and archived.

The protests started low-key, both in terms of demands, numbers and protest events. Initially, the protest events, a combination of image events and dissent events, received quite negative exposure from the national Brazilian media. This rapidly changed due to three inter-related shifts. First, the number of causes and demands increased thereby widening the scope of conflict as well as addressing and at the same time drawing in more people. Second, the protesters targeted an elite organized media event with lots of symbolic value in relation to the issues they wanted to address – the Confederation Cup. This created a dramatic media narrative, juxtaposing the image of Brazil as a football-loving nation with the passionate dissent enacted by the protesters challenging this stereotype. Third, the strategies of the police and the security forces aimed at repressing and containing the dissent achieved – just like in Turkey – the exact opposite, namely it fueled the protests. In this regard, it did not help that police also targeted journalists covering the protests thereby alienating the media and arguably creating a shift in the tone of the reporting on the conflict.

The interplay between the protest events and the elite-organized media event helped to create more attention for the protests and for their various demands. In this regard, self-mediation practices mainly geared towards the independent dissemination of movement frames (disclosure), the coordination of direct action, self-reflexivity and adaptation (examination) and the recording and archiving of protest artefacts (remembrance) played an important role throughout the protests. Humour and frivolity are important too, but so is the creation of counter-spectacles. The latter also fed into the mainstream media, in a rather negative way at first, but receiving more sympathetic coverage at later stages, at least in some media. The interactions between the national and international media are also relevant here. Brazil is highly sensitive to how it is perceived abroad, especially given its attempts to establish itself as a "post-modern" nation. Likewise, the spotlight of the international media is very much on Brazil in view of the upcoming 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic games.

Without assuming crude causality here, public opinion towards the protests, especially after the set of demands were broadened, was generally favourable towards the protests, which might also have contributed to the gradual shift towards a more positive representation and legitimization of the protests in some mainstream media, both national and international. However, public opinion is also volatile and it seems many Brazilians appreciate the way the government has reacted to the protests, while the protests themselves have not been able to sustain the level of public support they received in June 2013.

Many of the recent cases of protest movements, be it the Spanish Indignados, the Occupy movement or the protests in Turkey and Brazil, have great difficulty sustaining themselves over a longer period of time. It could be that the weakness of such movements lies at the lack of a compelling overarching narrative binding together the plethora of diagnostic and prognostic frames these movements disseminate. Furthermore, with the current tendency of approaching protest as performative and emphasizing spectacle and the symbolic, there is a danger that getting onto the media and political agendas becomes the main goal, while in fact that is where the struggle for social change only begins.

The analysis of this case study also demonstrates that the mediation opportunity structure is dynamic and has a logic of its own. The mediation opportunity structure is not autonomous from the political opportunity structure, but neither is it fully determined by it. Furthermore, there are also spatial and contextual dimensions to the mediation opportunity structure – the locality where the protests take place and the way in which structure and opportunities for agency in that context are aligned or not matters a great deal; movement spill-overs are also relevant in this regard, as is the interaction between the national and international gaze. Finally, there is also a temporal dimension to the mediation opportunity structure – while structure might be winning in one moment, agency might take the upper hand at another moment, but this can also shift back to structure asserting itself and, who knows, the Brazilian Winter of 2014 might be a very hot one again.

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