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AMÉLIA CORRÊA

ENQUANTO OS FLASHS MIRAM A COLUNA SOCIAL O 'MENOR' JA NO SINAL FILHO DE UM SISTEMA DESIGUAL!

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SONHO QUE SE SONHA SÓ...
É SÓ UM SONHO QUE SE SONHA SÓ...
MAS SONHO QUE SE SONHA JUNTO É REALIDADE

ESQUECERAM

REVOLUÇÃO BRASIL

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VERAS QUE O FILHO

O POVO ACORDOU!!

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NÃO SOU A FAVOR DA VIOLÊNCIA E SIM DA SAÚDE E DA EDUCAÇÃO
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COMUNIDADE

PROTESTS, PROTESTS, EVERYWHERE

Will the “June Journeys” Spoil Brazil’s Bid for Glory?

By João Marcelo Ehlert Maia and Lia de Mattos Rocha

On the morning of June 6 last year, thousands of Brazilians took to the streets to protest a rise in bus fares. Within a few days, the demonstrations encompassed other demands and grew in size, drawing more than a million people to the streets of Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and other large cities. Many of the issues raised by protesters are related to social inequality, current transformations in the country’s major cities, and the resilience of authoritarianism in Brazilian politics and society. It is also important to understand how the demonstrations may be related to globalization—that is, to the street protests that have occurred throughout the world since 2011, as well as to Brazil’s sprint on the international stage as host of the world’s premier sporting events, the football World Cup this year, and the Olympic Games in 2016.

The “June Journeys,” as Brazilians dubbed the demonstrations, started in the city of São Paulo, where the Movimento Passe Livre (MPL), or Free Ride Movement, called for a protest against a bus fare increase. The movement emerged in 1999 in the city of Florianópolis, but only in 2005 was the MPL officially created in a meeting in Porto Alegre. The movement had led mass protests against bus fare increases in Salvador in 2003 and Florianópolis in 2004 and 2005.

Between two and four thousand people participated in the demonstration in São Paulo, which ended in brutal police repression. On the same day, about two hundred people protested bus fares in Rio de Janeiro as well, also violently suppressed by police. The following days then witnessed an unprecedented escalation of demonstrations, which rapidly drew more popular support. Initially, media coverage treated the protesters harshly, but things changed when journalists became victims of the police action.

On June 10 and again on June 13, new demonstrations erupted in both cities. This time, the demands expressed a much broader agenda, which ranged from better public

◀ Protest march, Rio de Janeiro, June 21, 2013.
Felipe Dana/AP/Corbis

services (housing, education, and health care) to calls for political accountability. The latter soon became the main demand for the majority of protesters.

Another conspicuous focus was the 2014 Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup, with protesters criticizing the public spending on football stadiums for the showcase event. Brazilian federal and state administrations have been pouring a lot of money into stadiums and related infrastructural works, but many have questioned the large investments and whether they would bring real benefits for the majority of the population. The Confederations Cup, a key event organized by FIFA, was taking place in several Brazilian cities during the month of June, exactly a year before the kickoff of the World Cup in São Paulo.

The massive June Journeys were not led by any political party or social movement. They were organized through social networks, and the crowds were not following any distinguishable leadership. The political expression was random; there were no unified chants or banners. The escalation of police repression helped generate popular support for the protests. On June 17, hundreds of thousands of citizens took to the streets of many cities once again. More violence ensued, with some demonstrators trying to break into Rio de Janeiro's city hall building. A wave of police brutality spread through different neighborhoods of Rio as policemen pursued protesters relentlessly, randomly throwing tear gas and attacking people who were not even involved in the demonstrations.

Yet another round of demonstrations surged through Brazil on June 20. Thousands of people hit the streets of cities in northern and southern Brazil, such as Manaus, Recife, Belém, Salvador, Florianópolis, and Porto Alegre. Protests took place even in medium-sized cities like Uberlândia and Campinas. The numbers were impressive: officially, 100,000 protesters in São Paulo and in Recife and 300,000 in Rio. Repressive measures were harsh in many of these cities, and in Rio de Janeiro the police used cavalry and rubber bullets against the protesters.

Where is Amarildo?

In Rio, a particular sequence of events began on June 21 when nearly five hundred people gathered in front of the private residence of Cabral Filho, the governor of the state of Rio de Janeiro. In Brazil, the police come under the authority of state governors, and Cabral was seen as supporting police repression and being dismissive of any criticism of police actions. Once again, police and protesters clashed, and some demonstrators proceeded to riot in the wealthy oceanfront neighborhoods of Ipanema and Leblon. Local residents and the media were sharply critical of the violence, but this reaction did not prevent the continuous demonstrations in front of the governor's home, and a permanent camp was established there.

After the June events, contention and bitterness continued to hang in the air. On July 14, a resident disappeared in Rocinha, one of the biggest *favelas*, or slums, in Rio. Amarildo Gomes da Silva, a forty-three-year-old bricklayer, was stopped by policemen and taken to a police station in order to answer questions; the police say he was released but he has never been seen in public again. Some have pointed the finger at the Pacifying Police Units, or UPPs, part of a policy promoted by Cabral to end gang control of the *favelas*. The Amarildo case became a meme in social networks; graffiti artists sprawled “Where is Amarildo?” on walls all over the country.

In August, teachers in Rio took to the streets to demand better pay and more autonomy in the workplace. They rejected plans to impose a “meritocratic” system for evaluating the performance of instructors. The union strike drew popular support and new demonstrations took place in front of the headquarters of local government. Additionally, dozens of young people broke into the city council to call for an investigation of the transport system. A commission was formally established to investigate bus companies and their financial schemes, but the elected representatives who were in charge of the formal investigation were regarded as close allies of the mayor, Eduardo Paes, and of the bus companies. This drew criticism and triggered small but persistent demonstrations either within the premises of the city council or in front of its building.

The political fury of the June Journeys shocked the world and frightened the country’s political elite. On June 21, the day after the massive countrywide protests, President Dilma Rousseff finally addressed the nation in a televised speech. “The voice of the streets,” she said, would be heard. Rousseff proposed a package of reforms for upgrading education, health and transportation services, and also criticized what she called “a small minority of violent and authoritarian protesters.”

One can say that a second phase of the movement had begun, with three characteristics: a fragmentation of the demonstrations, which would be focused on more specific issues and organized by different groups; a decrease in the number of people participating in the demonstrations; and a regionalization of the protest agenda, especially in the city of Rio de Janeiro.

Right to the City

The rapid spread of civic anger is rooted in the very nature of the Brazilian political system and its relation to society. Between 1964 and 1985, Brazil was under authoritarian rule, established after a civil-military coup in April 1964.

Since 1985, Brazil has had six direct elections, but only in 2003 did one of the elected presidents, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, manage to finish his term and to peacefully hand over power. His successor was Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the leader

of the left-wing Workers' Party. Despite having close political aides implicated in the vote-buying Mensalão scandal in 2005, he was re-elected in 2006. In 2010, at the height of his popularity, Lula chose Dilma Rousseff, his former chief of staff, as his successor within the party, and Rousseff eventually was elected president with 56 percent of the popular vote in a second round.

During Cardoso's first administration from 1995 to 1999, Brazil managed to curb inflation and promote social and economic reforms. During Lula's terms inequality was significantly diminished, the minimum wage grew and more people found employment. However, Brazil is still largely an unequal society, with very poor public services, high levels of urban violence and serious problems in housing and education. Democracy is a very recent feature of the Brazilian political system, and even twenty-five years after the adoption of a civilian constitution, a lack of basic rights and police violence is still the reality for most Brazilians. The party system showed remarkable stability by Latin American standards, but it has not been successful in tackling people's dissatisfaction with the failures of democracy.

In this context, protests became part of Brazil's political culture. In 1984, Brazilian citizens took to the streets to demand a direct election for president; in 1992, they marched for the impeachment of Fernando Collor de Mello, the first directly elected president after military rule, who was mired in an influence-peddling scandal; and in 1997, they protested Cardoso's privatization program. Social movements have also been active in Brazil, in particular the Landless Workers' Movement (MST), which managed to organize large demonstrations during the second half of the 1990s.

The June Journeys bear similarities to as well as differences from previous social and protest movements. From the beginning, the latest protests were attended mostly by young people who rejected political parties and were also not affiliated with social movements. Social movements and left-wing parties also took to the streets, but they were definitely not leading the way. Sometimes they were even targeted by the protesters—such as the leftists carrying red flags who were beaten by a mob on June 20. However, soon afterwards, political parties and social movements returned to the demonstrations, claiming their right to be in the streets. An adversarial dynamic among the protests pitted the new actors, using the slogan “the giant has awoken,” against the old actors who claimed to have “never slept.”

Rejection of organized politics is not new in Brazil. At the end of the 1970s, when civil society was slowly emerging after the peak of military regime oppression and violence, grassroots organizations criticized both the existing political parties and the state while struggling for basic public services and democracy. The “new unionism” movement, which came to life in the periphery of São Paulo, rejected old labor organizations in Brazil, which were seen as too close to state power. Autonomy from either

the state or the political system was a major political goal for different organizations in civil society at that time, and though in the long run the democratization process helped institutionalize such concepts, this discourse of “newness” showed remarkable resilience in Brazilian political culture.

New protest tactics emerged during the June Journeys. While previous demonstrations led by the left involved chants, flags, and banners that mostly expressed the political agenda of the left, the young crowds in 2013 created their own slogans. “If the fares don’t drop, Rio will stop!” went one. Said another: “Call me World Cup and give me some money!” The protesters did not follow clear leaders, and the routes for the demonstrations could change according to the mood of people. Some argue that social media was the major reason for these innovations. Facebook and Twitter were indeed widely used for scheduling demonstrations, and pictures and videos captured during the events challenged mainstream media accounts. Moreover, social media was crucial for channeling dissatisfaction and exposing the protests for a larger audience.

One striking difference from previous forms of political protest was the emergence of the so-called Black Bloc tactics; groups of protesters covering their faces engaged in violent clashes with police. At first, these episodes of violence seemed to be random but as the demonstrations began to decrease, the role of small groups of people wearing black masks became more visible. With no apparent leadership, the so-called Black Blocs bore anarchist symbols and focused their acts of violence on targets such as banks and shops. Breaking windows and looting were predominant activities, as well as provoking the police.

Many features of the June Journeys were common to previous forms of political protest, however. For instance, mainstream media remained a relevant actor in framing the events and providing legitimacy to the demonstrations. During the month of June, media pundits tried their best to support the protests while at the same time condemning the violence. Finally, social movements were always present in the demonstrations. MPL itself is a social movement: it is a grassroots organization, with a specific agenda (public transport) and a political strategy based on mass demonstrations.

The crowds targeted corruption and the lack of accountability as two main issues owing in part to long-term disenchantment with the shortcomings of democracy and the political system. But in identifying new trends, it is evident that the urban question has come to the forefront. It is no coincidence that the protests were sparked by a rise in bus fares. Poor public transport, the high cost of living, police violence, and gentrification triggered the revolt and helped to draw millions of people to the streets.

Despite economic advances, inequality is still very deep in Brazilian society. Lula’s economic growth performance was strongly based on an urbanization process that made life in big cities very expensive. Workers commuting to their jobs spend from

three to five hours in traffic every day. Gentrification of downtown districts is pushing poor people to distant areas that are not entirely urbanized. Preparations for the coming mega-events such as the World Cup are accelerating this process; many poor neighborhoods suffer high eviction rates. Researchers have been calling attention to the growing commodification of urban life in major cities, as people have been struggling with bad public services such as health and education and still can't afford the rising costs of the real estate market.

This had sparked some isolated reactions, mostly by poor communities that were organizing even before the June demonstrations. However, in June many of these issues resonated with a bigger audience in the protests. By the same token, police violence, a common feature of Brazilian society, especially in regard to how authorities manage the use of public space and the rights of poor people to it, turned into one of the main grievances of the June protesters.

It is thus no surprise that the “right to the city” (as proposed by the French Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre, the right to build collectively a renewed urban life) and the “de-militarization of police” were issues addressed by the protesters. While the coming mega-events are increasing the commodification of city services, they are also providing a unique political opportunity for social movements and citizens who want public attention. The international press coverage of the June demonstrations was hailed as a victory by protesters in social networks and regarded with deep concern by authorities since it could “drive away tourists and investors.”

Global Revolution?

Researchers are beginning to present analyses to explain the wave of protests around the world, perhaps notably starting with the Arab Spring, which began in Tunisia in December 2010. Let us examine more closely the Indignants protests in Spain in 2011, and the Occupy Wall Street phenomenon, a series of demonstrations in the United States in that year. Is there a theory that links such events in such different countries, that explains this new cycle of global mobilizations?

The Indignants Movement, also known as 15-M Movement, is marked by a series of demonstrations against the austerity policy that followed the economic crisis in Spain. The crisis had severe effects such as high unemployment rates (especially among the youth), welfare cuts, and bank foreclosures. The Spanish media stated that between 6.5 million and eight million Spaniards have participated in these protests.

Occupy Wall Street was the name given to the two-month occupation of Zuccotti Park, in the heart of Manhattan's Wall Street district, by citizens protesting economic inequalities in the capitalist system. After demonstrators were forced out of the park and subsequent attempts to re-occupy it failed, many of the people who were in

Zuccotti started to occupy banks, corporate headquarters, board meetings, and college and university campuses.

Despite some differences, both movements are defined by similar repertoires of action: the strong presence of young protesters; the use of social networks to mobilize protesters and public opinion; the rejection of traditional political institutions; and the use of nonviolent strategies, such as the occupation of public spaces (that is the reason why some scholars proposed the term “occupy social movements” to label them and other demonstrations). Some of these characteristics could be found in the Brazilian demonstrations of 2013 (and in the protests that took place in Arab countries as well).

The political program of 15-M and Occupy is a subject of some debate. Sidney Tarrow, a social movement scholar, argues that Occupy Wall Street “had no specific political agenda.” However, the majority of analysts seem to agree that economic recession was a significant underlying cause. The decline in the standards of living, the poor quality of existing jobs and, most of all, the growing levels of social inequality and the erosion of the welfare state due to neoliberal deregulations of labor markets are pointed to as the structural reasons behind the global mobilizations. Other analysts, notably geographer David Harvey in his 2012 book *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, have spotlighted the urban crisis as a common factor.

Broad theories do not fully explain the June Journeys in Brazil. The main difference is a striking one: Brazil is not in recession and its current rate of unemployment is a relatively manageable 5 percent or so (compared to Spain’s 26 percent, for example). However, there are some similarities that make a good case for those who claim that the June Journeys are part of a global wave of unrest.

First, although inequality is diminishing and the median income is rising, the Brazilian protesters expressed their dissatisfaction with the lack of access to quality public goods and services, such as education, health care, and housing. Demonstrations in the Global North also addressed this problem, though from a different perspective (cuts in welfare). Living conditions in big Brazilian cities were also a driving force behind the demonstrations. People were angry about how their lives were not changing (or were changing for the worse) despite the huge investments made by all levels of the administration in great infrastructural works. As we know, commodification and gentrification are now global problems, affecting Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo as well as New York and Madrid. Finally, the demonstrations targeted the political system itself, which is widely regarded by Brazilian citizens as lacking accountability. This seems to us a key concern for protesters around the globe, which is (or could be?) a symptom of the shortcomings of liberal democracy. It remains to be seen whether this wave of global unrest will help improve the state of democracy in the world.