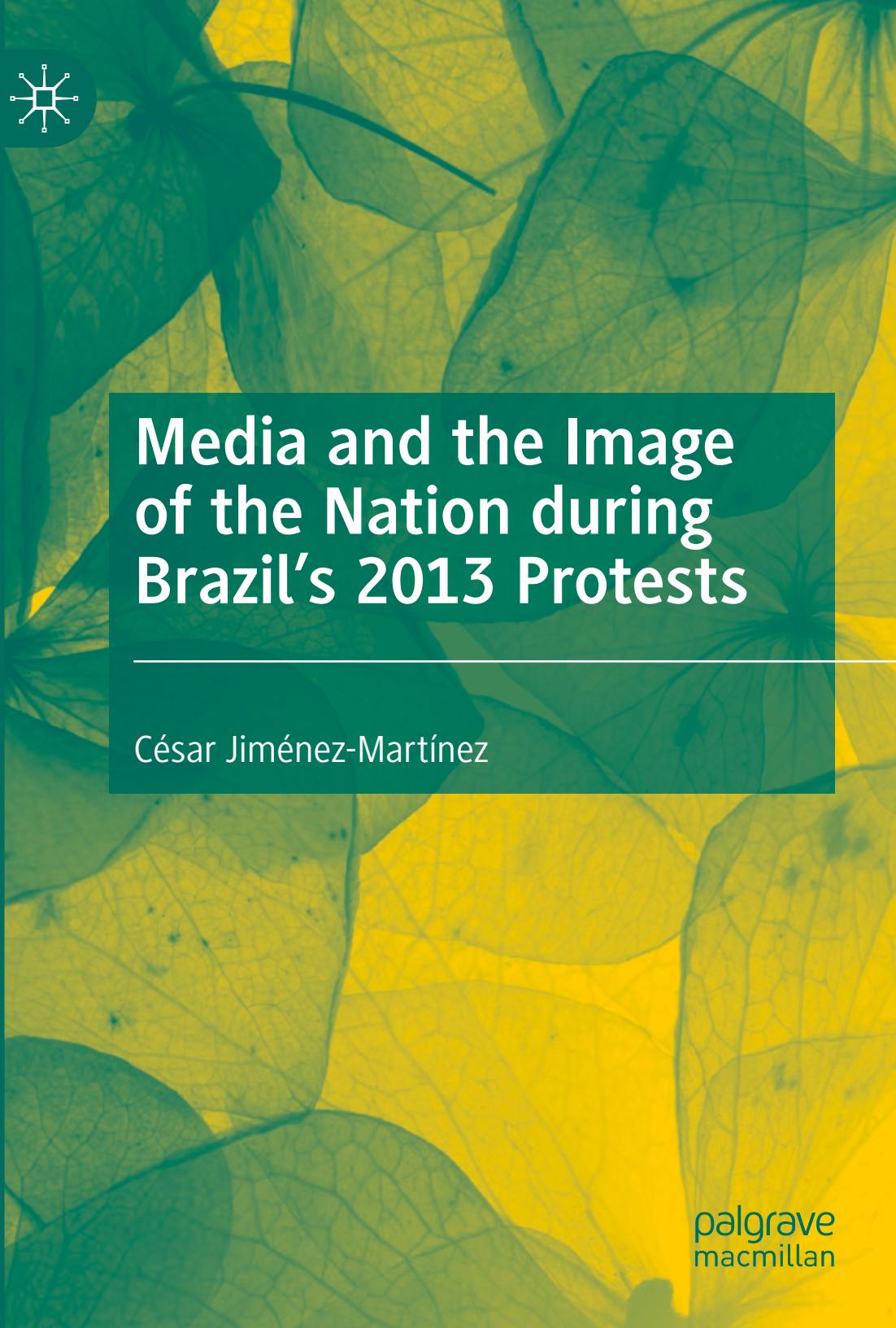

Media and the Image of the Nation during Brazil's 2013 Protests

César Jiménez-Martínez

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"Jiménez-Martínez has produced a highly readable, in-depth analysis of mediated nationhood in contemporary Brazil. Drawing from a rich body of original research, the book persuasively shows that the mediated process of nationhood is contested, with unpredictable consequences. It is not firmly controlled by the State or any other actor, particularly in societies with huge social disparities and political conflict. The meaning of nationhood is essentially unstable, as actors contend to (de)redefine its response to the actions of others. This book should be of great interest to scholars of media, journalism, and nationalism."

—Silvio Waisbord, *Professor in the School of Media and Public Affairs at the George Washington University, USA*

"Greeted initially as a moment of triumph of democracy, the Brazilian 'June Journeys', in 2013, ultimately opened the pathway for its collapse, and the rise of the ultra-right politician Jair Bolsonaro to the presidency. Jiménez-Martínez's book provides a rich, nuanced view about this puzzling political phenomenon, and the disputes about the event's meaning, involving the government, protesters, the mainstream and the alternative media. A must-read book."

—Afonso de Albuquerque, *Professor of Cultural Studies and Media, Universidade Federal Fluminense, Brazil*

"The Brazilian 2013 June protests have had a profound impact on the nation's contemporary history and political life. Jiménez-Martínez provides here an in-depth engagement with the June Journeys by conducting extensive research on how the nation was constructed in the national and international media, analysing 797 newspaper articles and TV reports and conducting sixty-four interviews. This book is theoretically dense and innovative, destined to contribute to research on nation-building and the role of media in democratisation processes."

—Carolina Matos, *Senior Lecturer in Sociology and Media, City, University of London*

"This book is an original, thoughtful and incisive contribution to the literature around the mediation of national identity and protests. It engages very effectively with various theoretical frameworks, shows an admirable grasp of recent research and makes excellent use of empirical investigation to tell the story of how the mediation of the June Journeys unfolded."

—Tim Markham, *Professor of Journalism and Media, Birkbeck, University of London, UK*

César Jiménez-Martínez

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ISBN 978-3-030-38237-7 ISBN 978-3-030-38238-4 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-38238-4

Cover image: Maram_shutterstock.com
Cover design by eStudioCalamar

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

To Sandra

Acknowledgments

When I set out on this journey, I was warned that writing a book would most likely be a lonely and slow endeavour. While those who told me so were right to some extent, I would not have been able to reach this stage without the help of many people, who offered me their unconditional guidance and support. First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to the first person who pushed me to write a book about the June 2013 protests in Brazil: Shani Orgad. She was my supervisor when this research started as a doctoral project at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Many of the ideas that I am most proud of were born during my meetings with her, which opened up new, intensely stimulating, intellectual avenues. Needless to say, I take full responsibility for any shortcomings in the pages that follow.

I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of all those who were so gracious to consent to be interviewed. Many of them have asked to remain anonymous, but I would like to thank them all for their generosity, time, memories and insights. On many occasions, their perspectives on the issues explored in this book were in stark contrast. However, they all shared a deep love for Brazil and a strong desire to make the lives of Brazilians better, even though what they understood as 'better' usually differed. Some of them may not agree with the arguments I present in these pages, but I hope nevertheless to do justice to the love of Brazil expressed during the interviews.

I wish to express my gratitude to all the old and new friends I met during my research in São Paulo, Brasília and Rio de Janeiro. They took me into their homes, allowed me to crash on their sofas, fed me, helped me contact people for my interviews and listened for hours to the avalanche of new things that this *gringo* was seeing and hearing every day, even though it must have sounded quite obvious to them. Again, not all of them wish to be mentioned. I can however openly thank: Dríade Aguiar, Samuel de Alburquerque Carvalho, Alexandre Amaral, Priscilla Amaral, Thiago Bonna, Thais Brugnara Rosa, Daniel Buarque, Georgiana Calimeris, Pedro Franco, Célia Franco, Júlio Lubianco and Pollyana Brêtas, Camila Risso Sales, Aleksandra Ristovic, Mauricio Savarese, Magá Telles and Eduardo Zanelato. This book would not have been possible without all of you. A deep thank-you must also go to all those friends and family in Chile, London, Germany and other locations, who have kept me more or less sane throughout the years.

I also wish to express my appreciation of the intellectual generosity of those who provided me with valuable insights at different stages in my journey. I would like to specifically mention Sabina Mihelj, Michael Skey, Nadia Kaneva, Simon Cottle, Lee Edwards, Bart Cammaerts, Liz Moor, Benjamín de la Pava, Melissa Aronczyk, Nick Anstead, Silvio Waisbord, Afonso de Albuquerque, Carolina Matos, Lilie Chouliaraki, Sonia Livingstone, Terhi Rantanen, Wendy Willems, Shakuntala Banaji, Nick Couldry, Don Slater, Amelia Arsenault, James Pamment, Stephanie Dennison, Leslie Marsh, Anna Roosvall, Colleen Murrell, Bernard McGuirk and Craig Calhoun, as well as the members of the NYLON group in London.

I am grateful to all those in Palgrave Macmillan who guided me through the publication process, especially Lucy Batrouney, who believed in this book from the very beginning, Mala Sanghera-Warren, who guided me through the processes of writing, re-writing, editing and re-editing, as well as Bryony Burns. I also want to thank Julia Samuel, who proofread each chapter several times.

Arguments and data that appear in this book have been presented previously in different forms in other published work. I am grateful to the publishers for allowing this material to be used. Some ideas discussed in Chapters 2 and 6 have appeared in Jiménez-Martínez, C. (2018).

Protests, news and nation branding: The role of foreign journalists in constructing and projecting the image of Brazil during the June 2013 demonstrations. In D. Fehimović & R. Ogden (Eds.), *Branding Latin America: Strategies, Aims, Resistance* (pp. 1–33). Lanham, MD: Lexington.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to some of the most important people in my life: my extended family in Dorsten, my best friend Christine Stein, my siblings Victoria and Pablo, my parents Miguel and Nancy and, overall, to my beloved Sandra. Thank you all.

London
February 2020

César Jiménez-Martínez

Map of Brazil, showing the cities of Brasília, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Original image: https://www.d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=16010&lang=en

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: The June 2013 Protests and the Image of Brazil

Nobody saw them coming.

In hindsight, many reasons have been given, including the state of the economy, a pursuit of social justice, a representational crisis in the national political system and media, the development of new communication technologies, the birth of a different kind of social movements and even a fascist conspiracy. However, in every conversation I have had ever since, those who witnessed and/or took part in the series of protests that stormed Brazil in June 2013 told me that they were surprised.

I didn't see them coming either.

In June 2013, I was preparing for the final examination for my first year of doctoral studies. Up to that point, my research focussed on how the Brazilian authorities and business elites employed nation branding and public diplomacy initiatives to create and make visible a positive image of their nation and achieve political and economic goals. Brazil promised to be an interesting case study, given that, during the timeframe of my PhD, it was going to host both the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games. Local authorities were hoping to use these events to build on the increasing admiration within financial, journalistic and academic circles for the country's economic growth, political stability and poverty reduction witnessed during the governments of Fernando Henrique Cardoso and particularly Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. However, just two weeks prior to my examination, national and international news broadcasts began to show completely unexpected images. Whilst Brazil was hosting the FIFA Confederations Cup, an international two-week

C. Jiménez-Martínez, *Media and the Image of the Nation during Brazil's 2013 Protests*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-38238-4_1

Fig. 1.1 Protesters occupying the National Congress in Brasília in June 2013 (*Photo* Rafael Holanda Barroso)

football tournament that served as a dress rehearsal for the World Cup of the following year, thousands of people were taking to the streets in cities all over the country.

National and foreign news media reported that Brazilians were protesting against the amount of money spent on sporting mega-events, to the detriment of health, education and public transportation. Some demonstrators carried banners with slogans in English such as 'We don't need the World Cup' or 'We need money for hospitals and education'. Others set up barricades, violently clashed with the police, and occupied streets, squares and even the National Congress in Brasília (Fig. 1.1). I still remember how, whilst watching one of the football matches on television, I heard the protesters' chants from outside the stadium, followed by the surprise of British television commentators about what was happening. After all, were things not going so well in Brazil, a nation that until recently had been praised for its strong economy and political stability? Was not Brazil one of the most promising members of the BRICS—Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa—the economies that were

expected to dominate the twenty-first century? How was it possible that Brazilians were angry and opposing the World Cup, one of the events that I thought they would love the most? Only time showed that the June 2013 protests were a turning point in Brazil's contemporary history, and a rich opportunity to examine the tensions for and over the mediated construction, projection and contestation of the nation in the current interrelated, transnational and content-intensive media environment.

The June Journeys

The June 2013 demonstrations amounted to the largest period of social unrest in Brazil since 1992, when people demanded the impeachment of then-President Fernando Collor de Mello.[1] 20 June 2013 alone saw one million people protesting in 353 cities, including state capitals Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Belo Horizonte, Porto Alegre and the federal capital Brasília. It is estimated that one in every twenty Brazilians took part at some point in the demonstrations (Branford & Rocha, 2015, p. 33). Local and international academics, journalists and pundits were puzzled by the sheer magnitude and potential implications of the protests, which were called 'The 20 Cent Demonstrations', 'The Demonstrations Cup', 'The V-for-Vinegar Movement', 'The June Movement' or simply 'June'. Ultimately, various analyses converged on one name: the *Jornadas de Junho*, which has generally been translated into English as the 'June Journeys'.[2]

The June Journeys actually began before June 2013. Some authors suggest that the seeds were in the demonstrations against an increase in public transportation fares in the city of Natal, in Northeast Brazil, during August and September 2012. These protests successfully forced local authorities to reduce bus fares. Others propose February 2013 as the starting point, when activist group *Bloco de Luta pelo Transporte Público* (Fight for Public Transportation Bloc) mobilised people to take to the streets to protest against an increase in public transportation fares in Porto Alegre. Whilst local or regional media covered these earlier protests, they were barely acknowledged by the national or international media.

The demonstrations only became a national concern in June 2013, when the *Movimento Passe Livre* (MPL, Free Fare Movement), a non-partisan activist collective founded in 2005, which demands free public transportation, called for protests in São Paulo. The objective was to

demonstrate against a seven per cent increase in public transportation fares and specifically against a rise of twenty Brazilian reais cents (approximately six British pence sterling at that time). The MPL convened successive demonstrations on 6, 7 and 11 June, attracting around two thousand participants to the first protest and reaching between five thousand and eleven thousand for the third one. The fourth protest held on 13 June drew in between five thousand and twenty thousand people. On that evening, the military police of the State of São Paulo were particularly violent, arresting around two hundred people and injuring an unknown number, including Giuliana Vallone, journalist from the *Folha de São Paulo* newspaper, who was hit in the eye by a rubber bullet shot by a military policeman.

The violence of the military police against protesters and journalists proved to be a turning point.[3] Organisations like Amnesty International and Reporters Without Borders condemned the police actions. The general public became more supportive of the demonstrations, with a survey published at the time claiming that fifty-five per cent of São Paulo inhabitants were in favour of the protests (Gohn, 2014, p. 28). Furthermore, as Chapter 4 details, Brazilian newspapers and television stations, which had originally condemned the protests, became more sympathetic towards them.

Simultaneously, in the city of Brasília, the non-partisan activist network *Comitê Popular da Copa* (Popular Committee for the World Cup) called for a protest outside the national stadium in Brasília, to coincide with the inaugural match of the Confederations Cup on 15 June. The Committee was set up in 2007 to raise awareness of the forced evictions that the authorities had carried out, particularly in favelas, in preparation for the World Cup and Olympic Games. Only five hundred participants took part in that demonstration, but the clashes with the military police outside the stadium successfully put into the spotlight the disenchantment of many Brazilians with the astronomic costs of organising sporting mega-events. Complaints about the vast sums of money spent on the World Cup and Olympics rather than on public social services became one of the signature characteristics of the June Journeys, for Brazilian and international pundits.

When on 17 June the protests returned to São Paulo, they were not only about public transportation fares. Participants' demands went in different and sometimes contradictory directions, including LGBTQ discrimination, infrastructure costs for the World Cup and Olympic Games,

public health and education deficiencies, corruption among the political class, and even support for a return to a military regime. A whole array of non-partisan organisations took part in the protests and many demonstrators emphasised that they did not belong to political parties, to the point of expelling those carrying parties' banners or flags. Young demonstrators employing the 'Black Bloc' tactic became especially notorious,[4] and in response, the police increased their belligerence and the number of arrests.

With the intensification of protests in mid-June, authorities all over Brazil agreed to freeze or reduce public transportation fares. As a consequence, on 21 June the MPL stopped calling for more mobilisations. The demonstrations however continued, with polls estimating that eight out of ten Brazilians were in favour (Gerbaudo, 2017, p. 55), and became practically a daily event, especially in cities hosting the matches of the Confederations Cup, such as Belo Horizonte, Fortaleza, Brasília and Rio de Janeiro. The Brazilian authorities and FIFA voiced their concerns about possible implications not only for the Confederations Cup, but most importantly for the 2014 World Cup. Foreign media organisations also started covering these events, linking them to other apparently similar episodes, such as Occupy in the United States, the Indignados in Spain and the demonstrations taking place in Turkey at the same time. Although protests continued throughout the year, they significantly decreased with the end of the Confederations Cup on 30 June 2013. By then, more than seven hundred demonstrations had taken place in June alone, in which more than thirteen hundred people had been arrested, six had died, and hundreds had been injured (Figueiredo, 2014; Gohn, 2014).

Protests Disrupting the Image of Brazil

The drivers and implications of the June Journeys are still debated in areas such as politics, civic participation, social movements and the media, among many others (e.g. Amaral, 2016; Branford & Rocha, 2015; Gohn, 2014; Judensnaider, Lima, Pomar, & Ortellado, 2013; Moraes et al., 2014; Purdy, 2019; Suzina, 2019; Vainer et al., 2013). The June Journeys are the standard against which subsequent outbreaks of social unrest in Brazil have been measured, including the protests demanding the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff in 2015 and those against the candidature of Jair Bolsonaro in 2018. They have been celebrated as a positively

exceptional moment for democracy and vilified as the beginning of a political and economic decline. Analyses in their aftermath largely looked at them favourably, stressing that the protests had been the manifestation of a politically engaged *povo*—the 'people' in Portuguese—standing up to the abuses of local elites. Over time, a more sceptical view has crystallised. It is noteworthy that in early 2018 former President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva tweeted that the seeds of the impeachment that ended the government of his successor Dilma Rousseff in 2016 had been planted during the demonstrations.

Despite the important contributions of the above debates to a better understanding of the June Journeys, one area that has received limited academic attention is the impact of the protests on the symbolic construction and projection of the Brazilian nation in the domestic and international media. This is a relevant omission. The June Journeys happened in the context of local authorities intending to use the hosting of the World Cup and Olympic Games as Brazil's 'coming out party', portraying it as a modern and market-friendly nation, and showcasing its social, political and economic achievements. The protests were a surprising turn for a nation that in the early twenty-first century appeared to have 'reversed its fortune' (Montero, 2014) and was ostensibly 'on the rise' (Rohter, 2012).

With news focussing on people's discontent rather than on the achievements promoted by authorities, Brazilian and foreign journalists began to claim that the demonstrations disrupted the *image* of Brazil. An article in the 23 June 2013 edition of Brazilian newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo* bore the headline 'Protests *ruin Brazil's image* and worry FIFA' (Chade, 2013, italics mine). Another piece published on the same day by British newspaper *The Sunday Times* read 'Brazil's samba smile perishes in the flames; the speed with which protests have exploded a nation's *fun-loving image* has left cities asking who might be next' (Phillips, 2013, italics mine). *BBC World News* similarly stated that the protests were '*not the image* that Brazil wanted to present to the world' (Rainsford, 2013, emphasis added).

A report by Brazilian Public Relations agency *Imagem Corporativa* provided an insight into these concerns within Brazil. It argued that the stories by foreign news media about the June Journeys were predominantly 'negative', because they emphasised police violence and the troubled preparations for the World Cup. The report stated that these stories

questioned the image of Brazil as an emerging power (Imagem Corporativa, 2013). Relatedly, a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center stated that in 2014 Brazilians had ambivalent feelings towards the June Journeys. Forty-seven per cent saw them positively, arguing that the demonstrations had contributed to an increased awareness of the everyday hardships of Brazilians. Forty-nine per cent held however that they were bad because 'they damaged the country's *image* around the world' (Pew Research Center, 2014, p. 10, italics mine).

In these articles and reports, the word 'image' is not restricted to visual representations. It has a broader meaning. It refers to the general impression that people, both domestically and abroad, have of Brazil. The term 'image', as employed by them, is therefore more in line with Boulding's conceptualisation of image as the 'subjective knowledge' of ourselves and our surroundings (1961, p. 6). Images form an idea of 'us', others and the world, beyond our immediate experience. They may consequently refer to the 'cognitive representation', 'external perception' or 'reputation' of a given (national) community, its geographical location, political stability, economic performance and/or cultural output, among other dimensions (see also Buhmann & Ingenhoff, 2015; Kunczik, 2002). Sources for that subjective knowledge can certainly be visual representations, but also textual and aural, which combined constitute an unstable, contested and shifting collage of what the nation supposedly is.

Images are therefore not a concrete 'thing'. Billig states that '[the] voice of a nation is a fiction; it tends to overlook the factional struggles and the deaths of unsuccessful nations, which make such a fiction possible' (1995, p. 71). The same point can be made in relation to the image of the nation. The latter is also a fiction, which conceals the continuous struggles that, as discussed later in the book, are constitutive of nationhood. Notwithstanding their fictional nature, images matter, because they guide the behaviour of individuals and organisations (Boulding, 1961). Governments spend hefty sums of money on extravagant events—such as the World Cup or the Olympic Games—hoping that these events will paint a favourable picture of the nation in the minds of individuals located overseas (Giffard & Rivenburgh, 2000). A good image is thus seen as a necessity to successfully entice tourists, attract investment, increase exports and consolidate political aspirations. Activists and sometimes journalists contest in turn these portrayals, seeking to convince domestic and distant audiences that the 'real' nation is different from the one depicted by authorities (Cottrell & Nelson, 2010; Latham, 2009).

Images are sometimes perceived as a key element of individual and common identities. This is particularly true in the case of Brazil, where continuous associations with stereotypes of carnival, samba, beaches, sex, poverty and violence have left an indelible mark in the national consciousness. According to some, concerns about the subjective knowledge that foreigners have about 'us' are an essential characteristic of Brazil's national identity (Buarque, 2013).[5] These concerns have sometimes led to calls to correct 'false' or 'distorted' portrayals of Brazil in Hollywood movies or foreign news (Amancio, 2000; Buarque, 2015). Images cannot however be measured against reality. They 'can only be compared with [other] images' (Boulding, 1961, p. 165). Yet images are not free from cultural contexts, social structures and material resources. It is noteworthy that concerns about how 'the world' is looking at 'us' are founded on a structural asymmetry of global power relations. As discussed later in the book, developing or emerging nations such as Brazil tend to predominantly seek the approval of Western nations, given that the latter are perceived as authorities or models to follow. Very rarely, if at all, the process happens in reverse.

Images do not simply emerge. They are unwillingly or deliberately constructed, sometimes with the aim of advancing social, political, cultural or economic goals. Images are also increasingly mediated. They are fabricated and disseminated in and through a series of hybrid and interrelated institutions, corporations and technologies called 'the media'—such as newspapers, television, social media, websites, apps and platforms—which collude and compete among themselves on a local, national, regional and global level (Chadwick, 2013; Thompson, 2005). The media facilitate the prevalence of certain images over others, synchronise the attention of geographically dispersed audiences and provide 'a version of the world which increasingly constituted the world' (Silverstone, 2007, p. 54). Being seen and especially being seen 'by the world' are thus increasingly equated with being seen and shown by media organisations and technologies.

Being seen and being shown are nonetheless neither neutral nor transparent actions. Images cannot exist without 'modes of seeing' (Brighenti, 2010b, p. 33) that make or prevent people, objects or events becoming visible. These 'modes of seeing' are articulated in and through visibility. Visibility, as discussed in Chapter 2, refers to the 'perceptual forms of noticing, managing attention and determining the significance of events and subjects' (Brighenti, 2010a, p. 52). Visibility—particularly in its mediated form—is ambivalent and can be a source of recognition,

control or both. Protesters or national promotional campaigns may strive for visibility in order to be acknowledged, yet the same visibility may put them under control and surveillance. Crucially, visibility is a never-ending and uncontrollable process. Individuals and organisations engage in continuous strategic struggles to make competing images—such as the image(s) of the nation—visible in specific ways. These struggles, as seen throughout the book, aim to determine not only the content and shape of a certain image. They also intend to contest, respond and appropriate other images, as well as reconfigure, negotiate or perpetuate power relations that define what is possible and appropriate to see (Brighenti, 2010b; Dayan, 2013; Thompson, 2005).

When discussing 'the image of Brazil' or 'the image of the nation', I therefore mean the competing depictions, points of view, opinions and/or versions of a particular national community and geographical place that various individuals and organisations construct and circulate in and through a variety of mediated platforms, in visual, textual or aural formats. The supposed fidelity of these competing images to an 'authentic' nation is consequently beyond the remit of this book. I even doubt that such fidelity can be properly measured. The focus is instead on the following questions: What images and accounts of Brazil were constructed and communicated during the June Journeys? How and why different people and organisations made these images visible?

Contesting Mediated Nationhood

One of the main arguments of this book is that the disruption caused by the June Journeys to the authorities' efforts to construct a specific image of Brazil sheds light on the tensions over the mediated construction, maintenance and contestation of the nation. The June Journeys are thus an example of the rapidly shifting nature of nationhood in a digital, transnational, content-intensive, hybrid and increasingly hard to control media environment.

Although nations continue to shape contemporary public life, the ways in which they are communicated have dramatically changed. Political, economic and technological upheavals—including the proliferation of digital media, financial crises, and a growing mistrust in politicians, news organisations and globalisation as a whole—have made the terrain of mediated nationhood unstable, upsetting established channels and practices of communicating national belonging. The relative, albeit never

completely settled, monopoly enjoyed by states and the national media on communicating the nation as a homogeneous whole has been disrupted. Multinational corporations, ranking agencies, NGOs, branding consultants and social movements, all located both within and outside national boundaries, seek nowadays to push in and through the media the idea of the nation to advance political, cultural and economic agendas. At the same time, nations are increasingly imagined and communicated as economic units, and even promoted as brands. This is due to a host of factors ranging from the growing commercialism of the media, the steady weakening of public institutions and the embracement of neoliberal policies (Castelló & Mihelj, 2018).

The latter point—the communication of nations as brands—has received substantial attention in the last decade. Governments from all over the world have expressed renewed interest in the task of constructing and projecting a specific image of the nation they claim to represent, drawing on concepts and practices like soft power, nation branding and public diplomacy (Aronczyk, 2013; Castelló & Mihelj, 2018). So-called 'emerging' or 'developing' nations, such as those from Latin America, have enthusiastically followed the advice of advocates of these practices, in an attempt to leave behind perceptions of exoticism, dictatorial governments, failed economies or pre-modernity (Fehimović & Ogden, 2018). Although critical scholarship on the topic (e.g. Aronczyk, 2013) influenced the early stages of this book, its scope was insufficient to grasp the complexity of the June Journeys. Protesters were not simply reacting against a particular brand, public diplomacy campaign or official promotional effort. Despite their broad and contradictory agendas, people took to the streets on behalf of the nation, making the latter 'a central battlefield and source of identity' (Gerbaudo, 2017, p. 117).

Some contend that the June Journeys were not a 'nationalist' movement (Gohn, 2014, p. 9). It is however noteworthy that the demands were domestic rather than cosmopolitan or global, aimed to reform rather than rejecting the nation-state, and sought to reclaim the nation from global forces (Gerbaudo, 2017). Hence, the demonstrations were an explicit *national* movement, particularly in the second half of June. Protesters sang the national anthem, waved the Brazilian flag, painted their faces yellow and green, and voiced slogans such as: 'The people united, do not need a party' ('*O povo unido não precisa de partido*'), 'We don't have a party. We are Brazil!' ('*Não temos partido. Nós somos Brasil!*') and especially 'The giant has awoken' ('*O gigante acordou*'). Confirming