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Brazilian World Cup 2014: *Global and local media narratives for democratisation*

The scenario depicted in the international (and even national) press in the run up to Brazilian 2014 World Cup promised disaster in a country that still tends to be understood, after three decades of a gradual political democratisation and the rise to the position of the world's 7th wealthiest economy, through a postcolonial lens of football lovers, semi-naked women in beaches, corrupt millionaire elites versus shanty town dwellers. Newspapers such as the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times* underlined the negative atmosphere of the country a *priori* to the start of the event, with others like the Chilean *El Mercurio* emphasised a war zone state. The Brazilian press also provided their share of "colonial" images of European foreigners dazzled by a tropical country and a friendly people: the German player Miroslav Klose for instance appeared dancing alongside 20 members of the indigenous tribe *Pataxo de Coroa Vermelha*, in the south of Bahia. The obsession with providing images of buses on fire and angry poor people screaming was also pointed out by journalists as a "must have picture" for foreign news agencies.

Evidently the negativity of much of the coverage reflected to some extent the mood of disillusionment and anger of Brazilians with the excessive governmental spending on the tournament of $ 11.3 billion to the detriment of the same level of engagement and political will with the investments in public transport, hospitals and schools, in a country where citizens pay high taxes and money is badly spent by the state. The black and white narratives are slowly making room for more sophisticated analyses and more sheds of grey, permitting the articulation of a wider empathy and understanding of the *roots* and causes of the structural inequalities in Brazil and the suffering experienced by Brazilians, many who are seeking emancipation from *both* oppressive global structures and discourses (i.e. it is estimated that Fifa will make a profit of 10 billion dollars from the 2014 World Cup) and local powers, among others the state police authorities who crack down on protesters, as evident in the July 2013 demonstrations.

The growth of the Internet as a *political blogosphere* and social media has facilitated and enabled such protests. This started before the notorious July 2013 demonstrations, and has been very much a consequence of both political democratisation of the last three decades as well as on going media diversity and expansion of communication outlets since the 1990's. This has included sites on the web from different under-represented groups, many of whom are slowly gaining a voice and debating various issues in the *blogosphere*, from balance in journalism, to public services and political reform of the party system. Many citizens have thus taken the advantage of the world stage to express anxiety for a better future with a "Fifa standard" of public services, including not just more political participation but also demands for a more democratic and better quality media. Thus the world has seen the tube strikers in Sao Paulo and various other smaller but not less significant protests. In the run up to the presidential elections in October 2014, where the re-election of Dilma Rousseff is cast in a shadow of doubt, the question that

seems to be on everybody's lips is less who will win the World Cup, but rather where will we go from here? How will *the day after* be?

Similarly to the change in the Brazilian media coverage that occurred last year with the July protests, when the media shifted from condemning the demonstrators on the basis of *a law and order* framework, to providing more balanced (or politically motivated) stories that served citizens better by underlining the legitimacy of the demands, pressured also by the successes of online citizen journalism coverage and alternative media outlets such as *Midia Ninja* , there also seems to have been two shifting narratives here. The first one highly negative, and at times stereotypical, in the run up to the event, and which is slowly giving way to empathy, praise to the natural beauty of the country and the safeness of Rio (in spite of the high cost of living), as well as the hospitality of its people, as commented by Chinese journalist Fang Hou of *HBETV*. Newspapers like *The Guardian*, and even the *Daily Star*, have correctly explored some of the roots of all the anxiety, with the latter pointing out the intersection of security measures (57.000 military personnel were deployed), with the corruption of Fifa and the lack of enthusiasm of many Brazilians, including the displacement of 200.000 from their homes due to construction work. Another highlight from *The Guardian* was the story on the reasons for rooting for the protesters. Thus a key legacy of the protests seems to have been their capacity to contribute to changes in perception, and more (positive) sympathetic understanding of a whole people.

The mainstream Brazilian media on the other hand is still highly politicised and concentrated. It is represented by organisations such as *Globo* and *Folha de Sao Paulo*, which have shown some signs of improvement in terms of professionalism in the last decades. Critics argue that they have been using the protests and the World Cup for political gain, being quick to point out the delays in airports and stadiums whilst ignoring Fifa's impositions as well as their own profit with the event. *Globo TV* for instance has the monopoly rights over the transmission of the events, and the same organisation was also at the centre of the July 2013 protests, which among others also saw protesters demand media democratisation alongside quality public services. Some accuse the media of trying to undermine Dilma's government, and gain support for the opposition in the coming October elections.

The World Cup in all of this is proofing to be a mixed blessing for the country, with both positive and negative implications. On one hand it has exposed the fragility of Brazil's democracy, its levels of corruption and the lack of preparation before the World Cup, affecting its image and claims to "super-power" status. On a more positive note, it is contributing to change perceptions, underlining the growing political and social consciousness of its people. After all, this is a country that has seen rapid advancements, a middle class now composed of 108 million people, with extreme levels of poverty falling down to 6% of the population.

Other changes have included the approval of the Internet draft bill, which safeguards net neutrality and liberty of expression and which is being seen as a model for other countries, as well

as further discussions on media reform, anticipated to occur throughout the year. Changes have been slow, making it evident that it is more deep-rooted problems that are a cause for concern, including political corruption, police repression, concentrated mainstream media and a lack of a serious commitment to quality public services, better education and healthcare for all and not to mention a better debate in the public sphere on these crucial needs, all of which can improve the well-being of the general population, from the working to the middle classes. These are the real tools for long-term development, and not just the current minerals and other products devoured by China. Only time will tell what the legacy of the World Cup will be. But what is emerging is a new Brazil, a more complex and fascinating one that is not passive and is pushing forward for more change and equality.