

the social issues surrounding the popular revolt and the day-to-day questions of the uprising in order to meet the needs of the movement.... The best and most relevant leadership in these cases is the one that understands how to foster autonomous practices created and produced by the social mobilization.<sup>35</sup>

They are grassroots groups made up of activist-intellectuals who are able to organize and work with popular sectors and also identify projects and strategies that promote social change from below. Their characteristics allow us to say that a new political culture emerged in Brazil in the first decade of the century: a new organizational and activist culture embedded in small and medium-sized groups that became publicly visible during the mass protests in June 2013.

### **The Pan American Games as rehearsal**

“People have the illusion that they will profit from the World Cup events, but the truth is that they will be brutally suppressed,” said Roberto Morales, deputy adviser to Marcelo Freixo of the Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL), a year and a half before the Confederations Cup.<sup>36</sup> Morales participates in the Comitê Popular da Copa (World Cup Popular Committee) that emerged during the Pan American Games in Rio de Janeiro in 2007, when locals resisted the forced relocations that made way for games’ facilities.

The experience of the Pan American Games was instrumental in convincing the activists of the coming disaster. In the ensuing years, the city has hosted or will host four mega-sporting events that will lead to long-term changes in the urban fabric, affecting mainly poor residents: the 2011 World Military Games, the 2013 Confederations Cup, the 2014 World Cup, and the 2016 Olympic Games.

For activists with the World Cup Popular Committee, the Pan American Games were a watershed that revealed the Brazilian government’s inability to manage public funds in a democratic, transparent manner or to create space for effective dialogue with civil society on the legacy of the Games.<sup>37</sup> For the social movement, the games provided an opportunity to create a broad and

stable organization that could bring people together, overcoming localism and fragmentation.

At this time, urban movements in Rio were riven by division, as were student and land reform movements.<sup>38</sup> According to the investigation of Marques, De Moura, and Lopes, demonstrations and street actions against the Pan American Games began in 2006, and focused on the forced evictions caused by the construction of sports infrastructure. Between April 2006 and October 2007, there were as many as forty-five demonstrations protesting the Games in Rio held in July.<sup>39</sup>

During the first stage, from April 2006 to April 2007, neighborhood groups resisting eviction organized the demonstrations. They had the support of professional associations (geographers, in particular), municipal council people, the MST, the association of Rio *favelas*, and the Order of Lawyers of Brazil. They organized street actions, meetings, and seminars to highlight how these publicly funded mega-events benefited the private sector and hurt the poor. Three months before the Games, 5,000 activists participated in “The City—A Right For Everyone” conference in São Paulo, an event that was cosponsored by the MST, the Intersindical and Conlutas trade unions, as well as the PSOL and other left parties.<sup>40</sup>

On May 1, 2007, more than forty organizations convened a rally in a *favela* threatened with eviction, a coalition led by local social and political organizations and joined by social groups from across the city. The coordinating committee organized numerous demonstrations throughout the year and decided to hold an event on the opening day of the Games, July 13. More than a hundred activists from a coordination of sixty groups organized the protest on the opening day of the Games. Defying the climate of fear of protest in the city, 1,500 protesters attended. Inside the Maracanã Stadium, Lula was booed by protesters to such an extent that he was unable to finish his address.<sup>41</sup>

The coordinating committee of social movements continued organizing resistance to *favela* home demolitions caused by the Pan American Games and many consider it a key element in

creating the network of social movements that came together in the lead-up to the June uprising.<sup>42</sup>

The two main organizing groups—the Popular Committee on the World Cup and Olympics, and the National Popular Committees for the World Cup—built on the experience of the Pan American Games and formed groups in each of the twelve cities chosen to host the 2014 World Cup matches. In its report, *Mega-Events and Human Rights Violations in Brazil*, the World Cup Popular Committee claims that a total of 170,000 people will be affected by the construction works, and outlines the numerous problems accompanying the mega-events, from the violation of housing rights to labor issues, as well as the lack of environmental impact studies.

In twenty-one *villas* (townships) and *favelas* in seven cities hosting the World Cup, says the report, the state is implementing “strategies of war and persecution, including marking out houses with paint without explanation, the invasion of homes without court orders, and misappropriation and destruction of property.”<sup>43</sup> All those affected live in low-income areas with varying degrees of precariousness and working in the informal economy. “The lack of information and prior notification creates a climate of instability and fear about the future,” says the report, which paralyzes affected families and puts them at the mercy of the authorities or speculators.<sup>44</sup>

The Popular Committees, like the Free Fare Movement, devoted a lot of energy to research, followed by widespread dissemination of their findings. Their report concludes that only a handful of construction companies—those benefiting from the privatization of the stadiums—carry out the huge public-work programs for the mega-events. In addition to benefiting from the construction contracts, the small group of companies also take long-term control of the privatized facilities constructed with public funds. The sheer scale of the infrastructure construction (highways, airports, stadiums, and transport) leads the authors of the report to come to the same conclusion as the Free Fare Movement: citizens’ right to the city is being violated.

Researching and publishing such reports is one dimension of the Popular Committees activity; the other is organizing mobilizations and working with affected communities. In March 2010, the political climate changed when the Urban Social Forum took place in Rio, consolidating the coalition of movements against mega-events. In 2011, the Popular Committees organized thirteen public activities in Rio alone, involving mobilizations, public forums, seminars, demonstrations of support for affected communities, and a protest march outside of the 2014 World Cup qualifiers.<sup>45</sup>

One can see the change in the political climate in the electoral landscape in Rio de Janeiro. PSOL activist Marcelo Freixo was elected to the state congress in 2006 with 13,500 votes. He became president of the Human Rights Commission of the Rio parliament and chaired committees investigating militias and arms trafficking in the city. On the basis of his campaigning against corruption and mafias, his grassroots support grew and Freixo won reelection in 2010 with 177,000 votes. In the 2012 municipal elections, he ran for mayor without any major financial backing and very little television time, relying instead on grassroots support, young people's social networks, popular artists like Caetano Veloso and Chico Buarque, and personalities like Frei Betto. He chose Marcelo Yuka as candidate for vice-mayor, a former rap musician who was shot in a robbery, which rendered him a paraplegic. Despite heavy rains, 15,000 attended his campaign finale, despite heavy rains. Caetano Veloso said he had not participated in a political event since Lula's campaign for president in 1989. "I'm here as a resident and voter of Rio de Janeiro to simply say what a joy and honor it is to vote for a candidate like Marcelo Freixo, who represents dignity in Brazilian politics." Freixo didn't win, but obtained more than 900,000 votes, 28 percent of the electorate.<sup>46</sup>

Construction work on stadiums for the 2014 World Cup—some unveiled during the 2013 Confederations Cup—remains the most controversial public issue, even among athletes. Much of the criticism focuses on the refurbishment of the legendary Maracanã Stadium, which is a symbol of the country's great soccer prowess. Renovations took three years, longer than its initial

construction, and cost more than \$600 million, double the cost of South Africa's Soccer City Stadium where the 2010 World Cup final was held. A business consortium in which Odebrecht, Brazil's biggest construction company, holds 90 percent of the shares, has leased the Maracaná Stadium for thirty-five years. This consortium is also a major donor to political parties, particularly the governing Worker's Party.<sup>47</sup>

However, even more than the cost of the construction, the soccer-mad public is angry about feeling excluded from the national sport. More than 203,000 spectators—8.5 percent of the population of Rio de Janeiro—attended the 1950 World Cup final in the newly opened Maracaná Stadium. Working-class people made up 80 percent of the total attendance in the “general” and “popular” standing-room-only sections. After several remodels, the stadium's current capacity is 75,000, less than 1 percent of the population of the city. The gentrification of the sport is visible in the reconstruction of Maracaná to suit the requirements of FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association, soccer's international governing body). The once rowdy, packed and disorderly bleachers have been replaced with sterile rows of seats where crowd participation is limited to choreographed “waves” and the orderly fluttering of mini-flags. The refurbishment aims to create a “multi-purpose arena” to host concerts and shows with segregated corporate boxes equipped with private bars, television screens, and air conditioning, which elites access directly by car via a private ramp, thereby avoiding any contact with the “multitude.”<sup>48</sup>

The tickets are far more expensive than previous World Cups: Categories 1, 2, and 3 in terms of the best seating views are priced at \$203, \$192, and \$112, compared to \$126, \$75, and \$57 in the 2006 World Cup in Germany and \$160, \$120, and \$80 in South Africa in 2010. Only category 4 tickets are cheaper than in Germany (\$25 versus \$45) but more expensive than in the last World Cup.<sup>49</sup> In addition, facilities built for the 2007 Pan American Games such as the velodrome and Aquatic Park were demolished because they failed to conform with the World Cycling and Aquatic Federation's requirements, at the cost of \$50 million for public expenditure.

In 2011, Atletas pela Cidadania (Athletes for Citizens) formed as a platform for promoting a public debate around the sports and social impact of the mega-events. Sixty top athletes supported the effort, including popular soccer players like Kaka, Dunga, Dani Alves, and Cafu. During the 2012 municipal election campaign, Atletas pela Cidadania petitioned mayoral candidates in eleven cities to make a commitment to supporting public use of the event facilities. Shortly before the large demonstrations that marked the Confederations Cup in April, fifty-seven top athletes from varied sports signed a petition against the demolition of the Maracaná complex, which includes swimming pools, running tracks, a municipal school, and an Indian Museum, to make way for parking lots and shopping centers. The petition read: “Sporting [in Brazil] is now in a sad state. There is long-term planning and evaluation for construction and infrastructure investments, but none for the development of sport.”<sup>50</sup>

Reflecting the opinion of many Brazilians regarding the myriad construction works for the World Cup, the Popular Committees noted: “The historical stadiums are being destroyed to be rebuilt as consumption and tourism centers like shopping malls. Tickets to national and state championships are too expensive and out of reach for the ‘traditional’ fan.”<sup>51</sup>

### **Debating the character of the June mobilizations**

Considering the trajectory of the new urban movements, the massive demonstrations in June 2013 came as no surprise. The scale and duration of the protests, as well as the radicalism of many of the protesters, is striking, but not the general outrage against the increase in transport costs and deep anger at the Confederations Cup setup.

Taking into account this brief overview of the Free Fare Movement and the Popular Committees, I want to challenge some common falsehoods about the June demonstrations. My hope is to contribute to a debate about today’s popular struggles. I have attempted to approach the events from the perspective of the people themselves, rather than that of the government or political