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## HISTORY

# Brazilian Inequalities in the Global Balance: From *Jogo Bonito* to *Jogo Diplomático*

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This article connects two seemingly unrelated globalized processes of mobilization: the anti-FIFA demonstrations in Brazil and Brazil's diplomatic offensive around the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The purpose is to explore the tension between these two global arenas and analyze how claims about inequalities were articulated and circulated, and how the Brazilian state eventually used them as leverage for its own multilateral agenda. The first section dwells on the anti-FIFA mobilization in Brazil, focusing on the way in which the World Cup became an opportunity of global reach for citizens to express their discontent and indignation vis-à-vis structural problems and entrenched inequalities that extended well beyond all things FIFA. Here, I focus on the way claims were articulated through online resources and social media, as well as through graffiti and street art. The second section explores the way Brazil's mobilization around the SDGs created a space for citizens and civil society to articulate a series of technocratic and technocratized claims around inequalities. I analyze the way these claims made their way into the Brazilian government's position for the SDG negotiations—as an instrument to elbow its way to the “grown-ups” table and tackle broader geopolitical concerns.

## Introduction

In June 2014, Brazil was in the global limelight as it welcomed delegations from thirty-two countries to compete in the FIFA World Cup, the latest in a series of mega-events that, together with the 2007 Pan American Games, the 2012 United Nations (UN) Conference on Sustainable Development (aka Rio+20), the 2013 FIFA Confederations Cup, and the 2016 Summer Olympics, were part of the country's bid for a seat at the table of global powers.

In October 2007, when FIFA's Joseph Blatter confirmed that Brazil (uncontested) would be hosting the 2014 finals, then president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva could not hide his satisfaction. At the time, Brazil was experiencing unprecedented macroeconomic stability and its best growth rates in decades, all the while shrinking the gap between the haves and the have-nots. At last, the country was living up to its potential; Brazil had finally made it. Hosting the World Cup was going to be the government's *pièce de résistance* to showcase the Brazilian miracle. At the time, Ricardo Teixeira, from the Brazilian Football Confederation, said on CNN: “Our objective is to make Brazil become more visible in global arenas.” He promised: “The World Cup goes far beyond a mere sporting event. It's going to be an interesting tool to promote social transformation.” Brazilians seemed to agree, and thousands flooded the streets in celebration.

Fast-forward seven years to 2014. Teixeira was gone due to allegations of corruption, Lula was retired but still enjoying sky-high approval ratings, and sitting president Dilma Rousseff was facing a very different, and dire, reality: a contracting economy, thousands of citizens flooding the streets in anti-FIFA indignation, and her own reelection bid hanging in the balance. After twelve years with the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) in power and with rising expectations for better social services, citizens had naturally turned on the idea of spending US\$ 13 billion of public funds to further enrich FIFA and the already rich. Public opinion polls showed a steady decrease in support for hosting the World Cup, which plummeted from 79 percent in 2008 to 48 percent in 2014. And federal prosecutors were asking the courts to forbid the government to air advertisements flaunting the benefits that the World Cup would bring to Brazilians, arguing that they were just too absurdly divorced from reality (Antunes 2014).

On the day of the first kick, when the locals beat Croatia three to one and hopes were still high, a photograph went viral. Taken a year earlier, during the Confederations Cup, it showed swarms of football fans on their

way to the stadium. Enthusiastically wearing the Brazilian jersey, they inadvertently pass by a garbage dumpster, where one of them is disposing of a plastic water bottle. Inside the garbage dumpster, a young woman rummages through the trash, most likely scavenging for food. After years marred by corruption scandals, construction delays, and the deaths of many workers, as well as the brutal relocation of favela dwellers by a militarized police, something about the government's lavish spending to comply with FIFA's demands did not sit quite right in a country where millions of people still lacked access to quality education and health care, among other essential services. Captioned "the two faces of Brazil," the photograph aptly summarized the overarching narrative of citizens' discontent with entrenched inequalities, inadequate spending of public funds, and an unresponsive government.

Meanwhile, at UN headquarters in New York, Brazilian multilateral diplomacy was enjoying one of its best moments in history as delegations from most of the 193 member states burned the midnight oil in intergovernmental negotiations to finalize their proposal for the so-called Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—a series of seventeen goals and over 150 targets covering a broad range of economic, environmental, and social issues. Throughout this process, which had begun at another Brazilian mega-event (Rio+20), Brazil had been able to position itself as one of the protagonists, leading the charge on some of the hottest issues, such as the "common but differentiated responsibilities" of developing and developed countries, the nonmilitarization of the development agenda, and inequalities between and within countries. As a leading regional actor and emerging market economy, Brazil was largely perceived as one of the key influencers in this process, not only by other governments but also by civil society and other stakeholders, a must-have in everyone's power maps.

While the formulation of the SDGs was for the most part led by governments and the UN, it also had at its core what became the largest participatory process to date: a two-year consultation effort spanning the globe and engaging almost ten million people in dialogues on their aspirations for a sustainable future (UNDG 2012; UNTT 2012). The process was certainly complex; and while it mostly provided spaces for technocratic interventions from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and UN entities, it is also true that ordinary citizens were actively sought to weigh in. These online and off-line spaces included a High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons composed of twenty-seven people from around the world, including Isabella Teixeira, Brazil's minister of the environment, as well as national consultations in over fifty countries, thematic consultations on over fifteen issues, a global survey on people's priorities for the years after 2015, and innumerable efforts on the part of civil society, governments, and UN entities.

This article connects these two seemingly unrelated globalized processes of mobilization to reveal how a crosscutting motivation of present-day claim making was effectively co-opted by the Brazilian government for the purposes of its own multilateral agenda.

In light of ongoing theoretical debates, recent instances of social mobilization—from the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia to the post-World Cup demonstrations in Brazil, and including the May 15 and Occupy movements in Spain and the United States—have been said to be part of a single, global political moment marked by the greatest capitalist crisis in almost a century and an ever-growing divide between the haves and the have-nots. According to Rodrigo Nunes (2014a), these recent instances of social mobilization are characterized, to a greater or lesser extent, by a clearly defined national focus, a deep distrust of representative politics, a tendency to bypass formal organizations such as political parties and trade unions, and a preference for creative and extra-institutional tactics. Moreover, they exhibit a marked tendency toward networked forms of organization, which does not mean a lack of leadership or strategy.

The anti-FIFA demonstrations in Brazil not only are part of this political moment but also belong to a network-system that has made inequalities an underpinning and unifying thread of present-day claim-making processes, just as civil society and social movements in the 1980s and 1990s adopted the notion of citizenship and human rights as a central element of their political vocabulary and strategy.<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that these notions are not intricately linked or that they are at odds with each other. Quite the contrary, given the way it was incorporated in struggles for the recognition of different political subjectivities, and later appropriated and re-signified by neoliberal economic and political elites in Brazil (Dagnino 2007), the transit from citizenship and human rights to inequalities mostly seems like an organic progression.

<sup>1</sup> According to Nunes, a network-system is "a system of different networks . . . which constitute so many interacting layers that can neither be reduced to nor superimposed on each other" (2014a, 20). Since network-systems are inherently dynamic, the validity of any description is time-bound. The notion of network-systems allows looking beyond whether those who participate in a particular instance of mobilization share a series of political goals, in order to picture a broader set of ever-changing social relations.

The singularity of this network-system in Brazil stems from shared experiences and perceptions of inequalities, which delineated the networks' trajectories by progressively shaping actions, discourses, and relations that soon became entangled in the struggle to locate the country within the broader geopolitical ecosystem. This motivation was certainly behind Brazil's bid for the World Cup and other mega-events, as well as the diplomatic offensive to position itself as a key player in the multilateral arena. In both instances, the government leveraged the so-called Brazilian miracle, anchored in relative successes in participatory governance and social policy. Yet while the government managed to retain control vis-à-vis civil society throughout the SDGs process, the anti-FIFA demonstrations challenged the very foundations of Brazil's diplomatic pretensions by highlighting the limits of those institutions and policies.

In many respects, the anti-FIFA mobilization in Brazil epitomizes a bottom-up process, while Brazil's mobilization around the SDGs is more an example of a top-down approach with resulting barriers of access. Nonetheless, in both instances claims around inequalities were circulated among the different nodes of artists, citizens, football players, government agencies, multilateral organizations, NGOs, popular committees, the private sector, virtual actors, and so on; and through different channels, such as face-to-face interactions, the Internet, multilateral negotiations, nonviolent and violent protests, social media, and street art.

This article explores the tension between these two global arenas, analyzing how claims about inequalities were articulated and circulated, and how the Brazilian state eventually used them as leverage for its own multilateral agenda. Doing so can reveal a great deal about the identities, motivations, and processes that underlie this flux of social relations and the way they unfold in a particular cultural, economic, political, and social context. Indeed, both instances of claim making constitute two chapters of the same story: the story of a state's deeply fraught relationship with its own citizenry.

The first part of this article dwells on the anti-FIFA mobilization in Brazil, focusing on the way in which the World Cup became an opportunity of global reach for citizens to express their discontent and indignation vis-à-vis structural problems—that is, an economic model plagued with corruption—and entrenched inequalities that extended well beyond all things FIFA. Here, I focus on the way claims were articulated through online resources and social media, as well as through graffiti and street art. The second section explores the way Brazil's mobilization around the SDGs created a space for citizens and civil society to articulate a series of technocratic and technocratized claims around inequalities. I analyze the way these claims made their way into the Brazilian government's position for the SDG negotiations—as an instrument to elbow its way to the grown-ups' table and tackle broader geopolitical concerns.

### **#VemPraRua: Inequalities, the 2014 World Cup, and Techno-mobilizations in Brazil**

In April 2013, just before the Confederations Cup, the Rousseff administration still enjoyed some degree of acceptance and approval among the citizenry. At the time, according to a survey by the Pew Research Center (2014), 44 percent of Brazilians were satisfied with the way things were going, while 59 percent thought the economy was in good shape. One year later, the tables had turned: 72 percent were dissatisfied with the way things were going, and 67 percent thought the economy was in bad shape. This grim mood also extended to the World Cup: 61 percent of Brazilians were pessimistic about the impact that hosting it would have on the country, saying it was a bad thing because it was taking resources away from public services, while only 34 percent thought it was a good thing because it would create jobs. Further, over 60 percent thought that the World Cup would either hurt Brazil's international image or not have an impact at all.

The survey also found that some of the issues of most widespread concern for Brazilians were health care (83 percent), corrupt politicians (78 percent), the gap between rich and poor (68 percent), and poor-quality schools (64 percent). Bolsa Família, the internationally recognized cash transfer scheme, enjoyed the unyielding support of 75 percent of respondents, but the levels of disapproval of the way the government was handling key issues went through the roof: 85 percent for health care; 71 percent for education; 67 percent for World Cup preparations; and 65 percent for poverty. All this resulted in a much-degraded perception of certain institutions, for which approval ratings collapsed between 2010 and 2014: by 28 percent for the government, 20 percent for the police, and 17 percent for the military. Anecdotally, the number of people who believed that Brazil would never be one of the most powerful nations in the world experienced a 17 percent increase during the same period.

In addition, Brazilians were evenly divided on the issue of the protests: 47 percent thought the protests that took place during the Confederations Cup were a good thing because they brought attention to key

issues, while 48 percent thought they were a bad thing because they hurt the country's international image. Other polls confirmed the bleakness of the situation.

After an initial wave of enthusiasm, and feeding from the disastrous precedent of the Pan American Games in Rio de Janeiro, citizens began to mobilize against the eviction and relocation of favela dwellers and to call attention to the government's overspending on preparations that did not really improve anyone's quality of life.<sup>2</sup> Shortly after, popular committees were formed in the twelve cities that were to host World Cup matches, converging and mobilizing around environmental and human rights issues. In its *carta da articulação* (charter of articulation), the coalition of popular committees argued that while "hosting the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympic Games is an opportunity to generate investments that reduce social inequalities and improve the conditions of the Brazilian people, . . . the lack of dialogue and transparency in spending points toward the repetition of what happened during the 2007 Pan American Games, when we witnessed the squandering of public funds . . . in over-priced public works that became white elephants" (Articulação Nacional dos Comitês Populares da Copa e das Olimpíadas 2011, 86–87).

As early as December 2011, the coalition presented to local authorities a full dossier shedding light onto the "dark side of sporting mega-events" and highlighting a broad range of human rights abuses, such as evictions and relocation of thousands of homes, lack of access to public goods and services, lack of avenues for citizens' engagement in decision making, and violations of workers' rights. To call attention to the legacy of destruction of communities and of deepening inequalities, the report places a high premium on the forced and massive relocation of around 170,000 people, many of them favela residents, for which tactics included disinformation, intimidation, and threats by local authorities in complicity with state and federal authorities. The process was often violent and lacked consultation with local communities. For example, in the best tradition of biblical plagues, residents of Morro da Providência in Rio de Janeiro found out they were about to be evicted when their houses were marked overnight with paint (Amaral and Viana 2013). As land value in favelas skyrocketed, speculation became rampant—for these communities, this was the true legacy of the World Cup.

Popular committees also began to mobilize around the hashtag #CopaPraQuem? (World Cup for whom?), with a series of rights-based claims underpinning this call to action: the end of evictions and relocations, the end of state violence and social cleansing, the demilitarization of the police and the end of repression of social movements, the abolition of FIFA's exclusion zones and the nonpersecution of street vendors, awareness-raising on sexual exploitation and trafficking in persons, the guarantee of due process and the dismantlement of exceptional tribunals, and the annulment of FIFA's tax exemptions, among others. Despite their objections, the popular committees were clear that their intention was not to prevent the competition from happening altogether but rather to have it take place once all these violations to human rights were addressed.

But the tide soon turned and popular mobilizations, including those linked to the popular committees, began to revolve around the idea of preventing the World Cup from taking place altogether and FIFA from getting its way: #NãoVaiTerCopa (You won't have a [World] Cup) became the prevailing chant directly defying the government. As Nunes (2014b) acknowledges, there are two ways to interpret this slogan: one, as literally conditioning the World Cup on the adjudication of citizens' claims and the redress of human rights violations (in the same but more radical line as #CopaPraQuem?); another, as a performative attempt to disrupt any aspiration of national unity for the sake of spectacle. And while protesters failed on the first front, they certainly were successful on the second. "The party was over before it even began," argues Nunes. "One year in advance, the Brazil World Cup became a toxic brand, which curbed the extent to which it could be exploited commercially and politically and made the run-up to the event eerily low key by the country's football-loving standards." The World Cup that Brazil once dreamed of hosting and winning was soured by corruption, greed, and waste.

As in many instances of popular mobilization, the literal aspirations that seem to fuel them were nothing short of impossible to realize. It seems as though impossible aspirations are where the convening, performative, and symbolic power of many of these slogans lies. In contrast to more regimented and technocratic claim-making processes, claims here made the transit from the literal to the poetic without losing their validity as events unfolded. And so, at the eleventh hour, protesters also incorporated "Nossa

<sup>2</sup> The 2007 Pan American Games were not only a preview of what was to come but also contributed to shape much of what would take place in preparations for the World Cup and the Olympic Games. Their legacy was one of arbitrary evictions and relocations, overspending, failed promises, and white elephants. With a total cost of R\$4 billion, and despite being the most expensive Pan American Games in history, none of the facilities that were built met Olympic standards and soon fell into disrepair.



Copa é na rua" (Our World Cup is on the streets). This resounding slogan not only evoked the popular tradition of street football but called attention to the fact that the World Cup was actually being fought in two different battlefields: the stadiums and the streets. Setting up a clear divide between them and us, the chant prioritizes the protesters' battles—that is, for equality, for human rights, for social justice—over the more frivolous spectacle of the World Cup. But the slogan still seems to speak of an impossibility, which was aptly summarized by football-star-cum-politician Romário: "Now we have to cheer for Brazil to win on the field, . . . but off the pitch we've already lost and there is no way to reverse it" (quoted in Verikaitis 2014).

From Manaus to São Paulo, protests were mostly spontaneous, which, as Nunes argues, does not mean they lacked purpose or strategy. Like most network-systems, they combined horizontality in structure and heterogeneity in message and tactics (including some outbreaks of black bloc violence). Even LGBT and women's groups took to the streets, linking the protests to gender inequalities, but also to the claims of other marginalized populations—the hardest to reach and most affected by poor quality in education and health care systems. While traditional mobilization structures, that is, unions and the homeless workers' movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Teto), were also at play, many of the protests were fueled by online outlets such as the coalition of popular committees' Portal Popular da Copa e das Olimpíadas, the #VemPraRua website, and independent media initiatives such as Midia NINJA, among other instances.<sup>3</sup> Created as a decentralized communication network to advance social justice, Midia NINJA has played a key role in the dissemination of information about the protests ever since they first began, focusing on live streaming and live tweeting. In partnership with its sister coalition Fora do Eixo, a network of cultural activists, its members also created a makeshift space in central Rio de Janeiro where people could edit their cell phone videos, post them online, write on their blogs, and so forth. Documentation and dissemination through social networks was also a preferred tactic of resistance for favela residents in the midst of evictions (Zirin 2014).

Throughout this process of mobilization—which was at once organized and spontaneous, peaceful and violent, engaging new and traditional actors—street art also provided an avenue for citizens to articulate their claims against the government and FIFA. A mural in São Paulo seems to graphically distill much of what the 2013 and 2014 protests were about. On a column on the left, the vertical text "As ruas falam" (The streets speak) gives way to an overarching "Falta só construir um país em volta dos estádios" (We just need to build a country around the stadiums). Below, a crowd of protesters displays signs that speak to the government's mismanagement of the situation: "Somos 200 milhões de jogadores e não 23!" (We are 200 million players, not [just] 23), "Copa das remoções" (The World Cup of evictions), "Na copa do mundo da corrupção . . . o Brasil já é campeão" (In the World Cup of corruption . . . Brazil is already champion). The anticorruption sentiment that partially fueled these and other waves of protest in Brazil is evident, along with indignation about the thousands of forcibly evicted families and the aspiration that the benefits of hosting the World Cup be democratically distributed across society.

The streets did speak, as they were overtaken by thousands of protesters, and as graffiti and street art progressively populated walls across the country. Probably one of the best-known pieces from those days is a mural by Paulo Ito that eloquently spoke to the claims and discontent that had been slowly brewing over the years since Blatter first announced that the World Cup was coming to Brazil. Painted on the gate of a local school in São Paulo, the mural shows a weeping, scrawny Afro-Brazilian boy eating a football for lunch. Posted on Flickr on May 10, 2014, the photograph was then shared on Facebook, where it went viral. In a very sardonic way, Ito's mural embodies the central claim around which other more specific claims revolved. Very simply put, and going back to the first photograph, in a country where billions of dollars of public funds are spent on football stadiums in the middle of the Amazon jungle, people should not have to rummage through the trash for food.

Much of the indignation and outrage was directed toward FIFA and its executives, whose long-standing tradition of bribery and corruption is well known. It was not only that the government was spending inordinate amounts of money on the World Cup, but also that it was doing so to comply with FIFA's requirements and standards—bulldozing the homes of thousands of families, violating workers' rights, and even affecting local football fans in the process. It all began with law number 12.663, the General Law of the World Cup in Brazil, sanctioned by Rousseff on June 5, 2012, and which led to the speedy approval of a series of "exceptional laws," a euphemism to signify the suspension of the rule of law in favor of private

<sup>3</sup> See Portal Popular da Copa e das Olimpíadas, <http://rio.portalpopulardacopa.org.br/>; #VemPraRua, <http://vempraru.org/>; and Midia NINJA, <http://ninja.oximity.com>.

interests. These laws created a two-kilometer exclusion zone around stadiums, where FIFA controlled the circulation of people and where no products others than those sanctioned by the organizers could be sold. Inside the stadiums, private contractors paid by Brazilian taxpayers but chosen by FIFA provided security. Exceptional legislation also included the establishment of tribunals to try the freshly rehashed crime of terrorism, nonexistent since the days of the military dictatorship.

In a country that prides itself on not yielding to the interests of a foreign power—that is, the United States—and even holds this as a tenet of its foreign policy, the irony was not lost on protesters. Brazilians had no difficulty in finding just the right words to express their rejection toward FIFA's interference: from the very traditional and evocative "FIFA go home!" to the more categorical "Fuck FIFA!" Two pieces of street art also convey these sentiments. The first one speaks to the World Cup's business model, in which FIFA and private investors reap all the benefits without bearing any of the costs. The mural shows Fuleco, the official mascot, and a (capitalist?) pig grabbing onto Maracanã stadium and using it as an ashtray. Reminiscent of one of the most tragic events in the history of Brazilian football, when Uruguay beat Brazil at home and claimed the World Cup, the tagline reads: "O Maraca[nã] é nosso" (The Maraca[nã] is ours) to ironically signal a rejection of the multimillion-dollar renovation that wiped out the inexpensive standing-only sections of the emblematic stadium. The second one also shows Fuleco, only this time he is sodomizing Themis, the Greek goddess of justice, who is still blindfolded but has lost her balance scales and sword. Justice had been disarmed by corporate greed. Next to it, in English, the tagline, alluding to the forced and unjust evictions of thousands of favela dwellers, reads: "How many removals are made by a cup?" The idea of Brazil, at last a global player, yielding to corporate interests certainly struck a nerve of nationalistic pride among protesters, who called things for what they truly were: "Essa copa não é nossa, a copa é da FIFA" (The World Cup is not ours, it's FIFA's) was also a popular slogan displayed across banners and walls.

Well before the catastrophic match against Germany, the Maré Vive collective wrote on social media: "With so many 'missed shots,' Brazil cannot be the champion." These "missed shots" are linked to the evictions and relocations, but also to unfulfilled claims around education and health care, which contrasted with the US\$13 billion that the government was spending to meet FIFA's requirements and standards. Another mural in São Paulo, by artist Cranio, depicts one of his characteristic blue figures, this time dressed in a suit and tie, literally flushing a sack full of money: "dinheiro público" (public money). Lack of transparency and consultation was the rule for most World Cup–related spending, which was often made in projects that did not necessarily respond to the needs of the communities. The winners were big construction companies, coincidentally the largest campaign donors in Brazil. Another graffito shows an enraged football eating a school and shitting smaller footballs, with the caption: "A copa leva nossas escolas e hospitais . . . e nos deixa suas 'bolas'" (The World Cup takes away our schools and hospitals . . . and leaves us its "balls"). Protest signs, as well as Facebook posts and tweets, ranged from the clever "Dilma, me chama de Copa e investe em mim! Assinado: Educação" (Dilma, call me World Cup and invest in me! Signed: Education), and "Queremos escolas e hospitais padrão-FIFA" (We want FIFA-standard schools and hospitals), to the very straightforward "We don't need the World Cup . . . We need money for hospitals and education," in English for the global audience.

Throughout this process, adjudication of claims was piecemeal and results were mixed; there were major and not-so-major popular wins. For example, a first wave of massive protests managed to stop a hike in transit fares in the capital cities of Belo Horizonte, Porto Alegre, Recife, Rio de Janeiro, and São Paulo. But more often than not, mobilization and protests were met with rubber bullets and tear gas. Faithful to a criminalizing tradition, repression was the rule, not the exception. According to a local newspaper, the first outburst of social mobilization led to Brazilian intelligence establishing an online monitoring group to track protesters on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp. In a very naive way, the government also clumsily responded with its own #CopaDasCopas (The World Cup of World Cups) and #VaiTerCopa (There will be a World Cup), and with police repression.

The links between *futebol* and politics in Latin America have been apparent since the sport began to make its way as a major component of the region's cultural and social lives in the early twentieth century. When it comes to Brazil, ever since President Washington Luís (1926–1930) provided for a special budget to organize Brazil's participation in the first World Cup, the country, the sport, and the team have been part of an explosive mix ruled by economic interests, identitarian questions, nationalistic passions, and politics, reaching its peak during the dictatorship of Getúlio Vargas (1930–1945) (Mason 1995). While football has been historically used as a cultural expedient to shape Brazil's national identity and legitimate such an identity on the world stage, what the anti-FIFA demonstrations and protests ultimately reveal is a deep disconnect between the government's desire to reaffirm Brazil's place at the grown-ups' table—as will be

discussed in the next section—and citizens' willingness to play along in a game that seemed better suited for authoritarian regimes than thriving democracies.

While an increase in transit fares sparked the initial wave of protests, popular mobilizations quickly absorbed years of frustration with the PT and with deficient education, health care, and security. In general terms, the object of citizen disaffection was the infamous amount of public money that was poured into hosting the most expensive World Cup ever, and the failure to complete over 50 percent of the infrastructure projects that were once promised, from airport terminals to railways. This was the overarching narrative around which claims on education, health care, and the militarization of the police converged.

Yet some have challenged this overarching narrative (Flannery 2014; Rapoza 2014). Writing for the *Washington Post*, economists Diego von Vacano and Thiago Silva (2014) argue that what protesters failed to see is that of the overall US\$ 13-billion World Cup budget, less than US\$ 2 billion went into the construction or refurbishing of stadiums. However, they are missing the point. Stadiums in this scenario are just a synecdoche, a part that is made to stand for the whole, for an extractive business model in which costs are socialized and profits are privatized, a business model that nonetheless is not only native to FIFA but unfortunately also part of Brazilian politics as usual.

Vacano and Silva also argue that between the beginning of construction for the World Cup and the games (2010–2014), the Brazilian government spent more than US\$ 360 billion in education and health care, the equivalent of US\$ 200 for every dollar spent in stadiums. Again, they are missing the point: education and health care also stand for something greater than themselves. Regardless of spending ratios, the criticism, disaffection, and protests vis-à-vis World Cup preparations are actually an instance of Brazil being victim of its own success. Following Arjun Appadurai (2004), awareness of the links between aspirations, objectives, means, and results—what he calls the “capacity to aspire”—is unevenly distributed across different social groups. The better off people are, the more likely they are to be aware of these links, and arguably the more likely they are to prioritize a responsive and transparent government that facilitates the transit from aspirations to reality. In the case of Brazil, as millions of people were lifted out of poverty through cash transfer schemes and investments in education and health care, overall awareness of the effectiveness of these investments could only become more acute, as did the consciousness of rampant inequalities in a country where exogenous factors, such as birthplace, ethnicity, gender, father's occupation, or mother's education are often determinant in people's partaking in national prosperity and global progress. Under these circumstances, even a whiff of corruption, added to a contracting economy and the undivided attention of the global media, can and did lead to a very volatile situation.

### **“The World We Want”: Inequalities, Technocratic Fantasies, and Brazil's Place at the Grown-Ups' Table**

With the 2008 global financial crisis and a network-system of advocacy and mobilization around inequalities in play, including the May 15 and Occupy movements in Spain and the United States, it is not surprising that the notion of a development agenda that actively engaged citizens, civil society, and other stakeholders in its formulation, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation and “left no one behind” gained considerable traction in the process to come up with the successors of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).<sup>4</sup> As their 2015 deadline approached, academics, NGOs, and think tanks were all quick to hail the tackling of inequalities as fundamental to accelerate progress toward the existing MDGs and address other emerging issues.

Outreach was for the most part undertaken through UN channels, by inviting academia, citizens, grassroots movements, and NGOs to engage in different consultation modalities around a variety of topics. Whether online or off-line, consultations were for the most part structured interactions between stakeholders, with defined guidelines, questions, and time frames. While this exercise was carried out under the umbrella slogan of “The World We Want,” the truth is that these consultations were highly disciplined spaces that called for technocratic interventions more than everyday aspirations. While millions of citizens throughout the world were consulted directly, their voices were often filtered through the advocacy lens of NGOs, interest groups, and specialized agencies and were more and more diluted as the process progressed. Some of the most vulnerable populations were reached pursuant to the inclusive ethos of the process, something certainly

<sup>4</sup> Defined behind closed doors by a handful of technocrats, the MDGs were aligned with the neoliberal thinking of the day. They were mostly about implementing an antipoverty and survival agenda that was the result of a series of topical summits throughout the 1990s. Equality seemed to be conceived of as something that would be achieved once people started earning more than US\$ 1.25 a day and children were vaccinated and going to school, more or less like the proverbial rising tide lifting all boats.



empowering in itself, but actual access to decision makers in these regimented spaces was mediated by bureaucratic, logistical, and/or technological constraints. The ultimate gatekeeper was a very steep learning curve with regard to the MDGs and the process to formulate their successors.

In Brazil, consultations and surveys took place online and face-to-face across the country and engaged close to 65,000 people, including Afro-Brazilians, displaced people, indigenous peoples, members of the LGBTI community, people living in the streets, people with intellectual disabilities, prison inmates, trade unions, women, and youth. The process was carried out under the auspices of the UN Country Team (UNCT) and the Office of the President of Brazil. The official purpose of this process was to “listen to Brazilian society, including the most vulnerable and marginalized populations, so that their needs can be considered in the global post-2015 agenda” (ONU Brasil, n.d.).

Throughout these consultations, education was consistently advanced as one of the most pressing priorities for the SDGs to address, as a fundamental tool for economic and social transformation, and for fostering an active exercise of citizenship. Participants in Manaus pointed out prevailing high illiteracy rates among indigenous communities, and argued that investments in infrastructure are useless for improving quality of life if they are not made in conjunction with investments in education. Health care was also consistently identified as a priority, with geographic disparities being one of the stumbling blocks that lead to rising costs. With respect to education and health care, their relationship with rising inequalities was often made explicit through claims about lack of access: lack of access to adequate education and health facilities, lack of access to adequate training, lack of access to technology. This was made explicit, for example, in Contagem and João Pessoa. In other instances, while lack of access was not identified as an obstacle, lack of quality and relevance were highlighted as a significant pitfall. Participants in Anápolis raised the existing disparities in quality of education across different populations, linking education to equality of opportunity, while representatives from indigenous communities highlighted the little relevance that existing curricula have for them. At the same time, corruption was identified as a major obstacle. In Curitiba, participants—completely in sync with what would later become the fundamental claim for anti-FIFA protesters—expressed concern about rising corruption due to large public works and mega-events, arguing that resources lost to corruption could be well spent in advancing economic and social development.

The UNCT also facilitated face-to-face interactions between civil society representatives—including academia, NGOs, social movements, and trade unions—and government officials, with the aim of supporting the formulation of a Brazilian position for upcoming negotiations on the SDGs. Taken as exploratory and initial contributions, recommendations for the government included making income inequalities and concentration of wealth one of the crosscutting concerns of its position, along with promoting progressive taxation and tackling illicit financial flows and tax havens. On social inequalities, recommendations revolved around the realization of human rights and the achievement of social justice, linked to issues such as employment, gender equality, health care, housing, and nondiscrimination. Inequalities between countries were also addressed, with recommendations on the need to restructure the international financial architecture and to implement innovative mechanisms to finance development. Oddly enough, especially coming from civil society representatives, a premium was placed on “Brazil’s participation [in the process] as an example to other countries, by defending the interests of the Global South and emphasizing the need to consider the environmental, social, and economic aspects of sustainable development” (Centro Rio+ 2014, 5). This last goal would definitely resonate within the Brazilian government.

In parallel to the UN-led consultations, the umbrella organization Associação Brasileira de Organizações Não Governamentais (ABONG) conducted four thematic workshops in Brasília, Salvador, São Paulo, and Recife. Activist groups, NGOs, and social movements put forth a series of recommendations, including a set of principles for the SDGs: coherence, effectiveness, and representativeness. While these workshops all addressed different topics, the underlying concern throughout was that of inequalities in terms of ethnicity, gender, race, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. “These inequalities,” argues the final report, “will only be addressed through change in existing power relations, which currently impedes proper financing of health and education policies, for example. It is time to fight against power relations that result in low quality jobs and in a regressive tax system. . . . It is time to overcome power relations that continue to ignore black people, indigenous communities, women and [the] LGBT population” (ABONG 2013, 7).

Finally, in March 2014 the Brazilian government established an Inter-Ministerial Working Group as yet another space of debate and discussion on substantive content, policy guidelines, and directives for a Brazilian position on the SDGs. With twenty-seven cabinet-level members, the working group was convened by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Environment, and Social Development, and by the Office of the President (Saad 2015). The position agreed on was used at intergovernmental negotiations throughout 2014 and 2015.

Brazil's position was influenced mostly by the Rio+20 outcome document, and delegates at the UN were adamantly against including issues in the SDGs that had not been discussed and agreed on all the way back to 2012. In this sense, Brazil was quick to buy into the technocratic and politically convenient argument, which had been advanced as early as 2010, that one of the key shortcomings of the MDGs was that they sidestepped inequalities, and that aggregate indicators actually hid uneven progress and deep disparities among social groups and among countries. From a substantive point of view, inequalities became the cornerstone of Brazil's agenda for the SDGs, based on the argument that the little attention paid to these issues ultimately contributed to slowing down progress in poverty eradication and the rest of the MDGs.

Also, Brazil's position was based on the idea that the most marginalized and vulnerable populations are systematically left out of development efforts because they tend to be hard to reach through traditional policy implementation. Brazil advocated promoting equality within difference as a way to tackle the barriers which excluded and marginalized groups often face in attempting to access universal benefits and services. Brazil argued for poverty eradication to play a central role in the SDGs, based on the Rio+20 outcome document in which it is conceived as a precondition to achieve sustainable development. Human rights imperatives of dignity, equality, and justice were to be made actionable and operationalized through goals, targets, and indicators; addressing inequalities had to be a crosscutting concern and permeate all goals and their corresponding targets. It was about not only equality of opportunity but also equality of outcomes. Brazil made this crucial differentiation and advocated for the inclusion of targets on both fronts in the SDGs, as structural inequalities often prevent excluded, marginalized, and vulnerable populations from achieving successful outcomes even when they have access to opportunities.

Taking advantage of the visibility that its recent successes in tackling inequalities had progressively gained in international technocratic circles, Brazil also advanced its experience with Bolsa Família and similar social policies as an example for the SDGs to follow, advocating universal social protection floors to curb exclusion, poverty, and vulnerability. As the story went, over the past decade, a package of economic and social policies that increased formal employment, raised minimum wages, and created the largest conditional cash transfer program in the world contributed to lift thirty-six million people out of extreme poverty. As the income of the bottom 40 percent of the population grew twice as fast as that of the top 5 percent between 2002 and 2012, citizens' access to education, health care, housing, and water improved (Saad 2015). Defining a set of basic social security guarantees is not only affordable, Brazil argued, but also economically and socially necessary and should be considered a human rights imperative. These schemes play a role in the redistribution of income as well as in the transformation of society as they strengthen the capacity of excluded and marginalized groups and reduce their vulnerability.

But placing a premium on addressing inequalities gave Brazil the chance not only to boast about its accomplishments, even in the face of dire circumstances at home, but also to tackle broader geopolitical concerns. Based on a decades-long tenet of its foreign policy, Brazil argued for the need to ensure that international financial and governance architectures were made more equitable and open to the participation of developing countries. Furthermore, to guarantee adequate means of implementation for the SDGs, demands for economic opportunities, financial resources, and technology transfer for developing countries, alongside South-South cooperation, were also made. Of course all this was not unrelated to the freshly minted New Development Bank and Brazil's fight for reform of the UN Security Council. With growing influence owing to the size of its economy and its linchpin role in Latin America, Brazil's approach was nonetheless curtailed by domestic pressures and by the need to prioritize internal investments over official development assistance.

Throughout this process, citizens' and civil society's claims around inequalities had been articulated for the most part through concrete demands for universal access to quality education and health care. These demands, I argue, can be regarded as a response to the neoliberal retrenchment of economic and social rights that had been secured by previous mobilizations in the mid-1970s and 1980s, when major political shifts also led to the implementation of well-recognized experiments in participatory governance. These spaces for citizens' engagement in the development, formulation, and evaluation of public policies, namely at the local level and by PT administrations, have certainly empowered Brazilian civil society from trade unions to NGOs, professional associations, and social movements. However, they have not been as effective in facilitating the transit of citizens' claims and demands into public policies (Instituto Pólis and INESC 2011), and have even been used by the Brazilian government in its efforts to curtail the state's responsibilities toward its citizens (Dagnino 2007).

While inequalities indeed became the cornerstone of Brazil's position on the SDGs, it is no less true that this was primarily motivated by the need to leverage recent policy successes to strategically locate the

country within the multilateral ecosystem, and by geopolitical considerations to address issues related to the global balance of power. In the disciplined and regimented space of the UN-led process, the Rio+20 outcome document had positioned inequalities as a crosscutting concern for the SDGs as early as 2012. This fact heavily influenced the way online and off-line consultations were structured. In addition, citizens' and civil society's claims were filtered through preexisting technocratic assessments and reflections about the MDGs experience (Kabeer 2010; Melamed 2012; Nayyar 2012; Vandemoortele 2010b). Furthermore, access to the process presupposed a certain degree of investment in and knowledge about very specific issues: environmental degradation, poverty eradication, and sustainable development. Despite valuable attempts to reach even the most marginalized and vulnerable populations, a technocratic lingua franca was developed to translate citizens' claims, or to directly present NGOs' recommendations.

Inequalities did make it into the government's position on the SDGs, not by way of citizen's claims but through the technocratized aspirations of a handful of international actors—such as NGOs, think tanks, UN entities—and the illusions of a power grab of global dimensions. Just as it had done with the notion of citizenship, the Brazilian government appropriated the notion of inequalities to serve its own strategic purpose, resulting in an apparent disconnect between what it was arguing abroad, and the reality behind the claims that citizens and civil society articulated and formulated around the SDGs. Indeed, the tens of millions that made the transit into the middle class left plenty of others behind. For example, Brazil's youth, who swarmed the streets during the 2013 and 2014 mobilizations, continue to be a glaring developmental gap. While in the past fifteen years close to forty million people have risen out of poverty, Brazil's youth are often cut out when it comes to long-term employment opportunities, with close to half of them depending on the informal economy or precarious employment and lacking access to quality education and health care.

## Conclusions

Shared experiences and perceptions of inequality underpinned the claims and demands that were articulated and formulated either in collaboration with the UN-led process or in opposition to the FIFA-led event. In both cases, inequalities were not understood as a clear-cut issue merely related to the uneven distribution of income and wealth. A purely economic definition was transcended, as inequalities were perceived as a crosscutting concern closely linked to universal access to quality social assets and services: in this case, primarily education, employment, health care, and housing.

Having inequalities as the unifying thread binding heterogeneous demands entailed an undeniable advantage, as it provided a common vocabulary to otherwise unrelated constituencies. In the anti-FIFA mobilization as well as in the mobilization around the SDGs, demands for education, decent employment, health care, and housing can be traced to the neoliberal retrenchment of the state and the resulting curtailing of its responsibilities toward its citizens. Having a common background and articulating link undoubtedly gave these demands a stronger foothold, on top of the globalized nature of these two arenas—all of which did not, however, necessarily translate into success.

Yet, the two claim-making processes do exhibit divergent trajectories as to their technologies of organization and the ways in which said claims and demands were articulated, formulated, and adjudicated. At the core of these divergent trajectories lies what could be deemed as the Appadurai-Dagnino paradox, whereby the success of participatory institutions and progressive social policies can fuel processes of social mobilization that end up revealing their own limitations. As Evelina Dagnino explains, in an authoritarian and hierarchical social order such as Brazil's, poverty translates not only into economic deprivation but also into profound forms of disenfranchisement and a complete lack of recognition of people's condition as right bearers—what she calls “the right to have rights.” With the success of participatory governance and progressive social policies come not only positive economic, political, and social outcomes but also an enhancement of what Appadurai calls citizens' capacity to aspire. Hence, the better off people are, the more likely they are to connect the dots between aspirations, objectives, means, and results. The road between envisioned futures and realized aspirations thus becomes shorter.

All things being equal, an enhanced capacity to aspire would strengthen and be strengthened by available spaces for citizens' engagement and participation. However, their own success can make these spaces prone to co-optation by the state, as was the case of Brazil's neoliberal curtailment of economic and social rights that had been secured during the democratization struggles of the 1970s and 1980s, as Dagnino shows. This was also the case of the consultations around the SDGs, when the Brazilian government appropriated the concept of inequalities—in a broad and abstract sense—to fit its own multilateral agenda, and without really listening to the demands of those who sought access to quality social assets and services for all

citizens. Without arguing a direct causal link, this context of lacking institutional avenues of expression, compounded with the awareness that comes with an enhanced capacity to aspire, is fertile ground for more confrontational forms of social mobilization, such as the ones that emerged out of the disaffection with the World Cup.

A powerful paradox thus lies at the core of profound social transformations. Citizens' engagement in public life and their partaking in the economic success of their country, even when thwarted by their own success, can lead to a social awakening that might be, in the end, the greatest achievement of all: an achievement not of the government but of citizens themselves in the claiming of their own destiny and of their state.

## Epilogue

The tide turned pretty quickly since this article was first conceived and written. As I have argued, a more acute awareness of the economic and social gains that progressive policies can bring about—the same one that the Brazilian government so confidently exhibited internationally—along with disaffection for institutional avenues of expression, lies at the heart of the massive waves of anti-FIFA demonstrations. This new level of consciousness was corroborated by the fact that, with FIFA long gone, demonstrations continued, this time over an unprecedented corruption scandal involving the crown jewel behind Brazil's latest economic boom: Petrobras. As the Lava Jato and other scandals attest, despite participation being at the core of Brazil's democratizing project, economic and political elites still manipulate the system to serve their own interests with little or no accountability to the vast majority of the population. Rousseff's impeachment is yet another example of how Brazilian economic and political elites, from PT to the Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro and the Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira, co-opt citizens' claims and play them to their advantage. It was not a "people vs. the president" dilemma, as mainstream media tried to portray it. The days of progressive discourse—even if just for show in the multilateral arena—seem long gone, as the new government turns to harsh austerity measures and regressive policies.

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