

Silences in media coverage of the World Cup in Pernambuco, Brazil

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Abstract

The 2014 World Cup occurred in Brazil at a time of great political turbulence and change in communications markets. From the standpoint of a person involved in media coverage of this championship, the MA thesis titled *Os silêncios, os silenciamentos e a cobertura midiática da Copa do Mundo em Pernambuco* (Silences, silencing and media coverage of the World Cup in Pernambuco), by Eduardo Baptista Amorim, analyzed the forms of silencing employed by the traditional mass media today.

Keywords: silences, media silencing, media concealment, World Cup impacts.

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Amorim studied the media role in the production of information about preparations for the 2014 World Cup, with special attention to the removal of residents and the negative impacts of public expenditures on the populations living in areas affected by the Arena Pernambuco stadium and the construction of public transportation infrastructure in the Recife metropolitan area. The resulting thesis revealed that silencing by the media prevented facts of great social relevance from becoming public knowledge, especially the expenditures on these projects, the removal of families and the consequences of these removals for those affected, including physical and mental health consequences (Amorim, 2017; Figueiredo; Amorim, 2019).

Images in the exposition “Silences in coverage of the World Cup in Pernambuco,” which took place during the #OcupeEstelita movement on the José Estelita Docks in Recife, and later at the Federal University of Pernambuco (both in 2014) were used as references for the concept of an establishing silence (ORLANDI, 2007).¹ Such images bring together elements that can be counterposed to the texts, photos and videos of traditional media coverage of the 2014 World Cup in Pernambuco.

The perception that moving and often appalling images were left out of the construction of the collective imaginary about the Cup makes us see the necessity of studying media silence about themes that do not necessarily fit with the interests of communications companies. Years after the end of the megaevent, someone wishing to describe the location where the Arena Pernambuco stadium was built, in São Lourenço da Mata, Recife metropolitan region, would visualize a surprisingly vacant scene, because the corporate media paid scant attention to this theme.

On the eve of the Confederations Cup, in May 2013, the Terra portal produced a report showing that little was known about the communities neighboring the place where one of the largest television events in the world

¹Exposition organized by the Graduate Program in Anthropology, in collaboration with the Family, Gender and Sexuality Center (Núcleo de Família, Gênero e Sexualidade), both of the Federal University of Pernambuco, during the seminar *Legados e Impactos da Copa do Mundo em Pernambuco* (Legacies and Impacts of the World Cup in Pernambuco), November, 2014.

would take place. The lack of information about what happened in São Lourenço and the neighboring municipality of Camaragibe was a function of policies of silence and silencing about the subject. That is, the research indicated that the traditional media strove more to hide information from the public than to reveal it. Images in the exposition “Silence in coverage of the World Cup in Pernambuco” registered moments in the removals that were little seen in the traditional press.

The images suggested what the mass media ignored. The principal themes of the images were: emptiness and destruction, abandonment of the aged, and young people denied recreational spaces. To evaluate whether the communications companies addressed these themes, Amorim selected television, newspaper and internet reports that in some way cited or showed images recorded in the area of the removals carried out between 2011 and 2013, using the archaeological method (FOUCAULT, 2002).

On the eve of the 2014 World Cup, the Integrated (transportation) Terminal of Camaragibe had already been transformed into a place of recurrent protest. The protests should have been covered by the press because they involved thousands of people and suffered violent police repression. However, the majority of the 102 reports analyzed omit the presence of the expropriated and, even when they show the destroyed houses and the areas around them, are silent about what led to this scene of devastation. This was the case in the reports aired on May 7, 2014 on NETV, Pernambuco affiliate of the national TV Globo network.

One of the reports that shows the devastated local, but fails to explain the World Cup removals, is called “Problem in the Recife metro (urban train system) delays trips and outrages passengers.” At 6’10’’² in the video, the Military Police³ appear shooting rubber bullets at the people, who flee past the rubble of the destroyed houses. However, the report does not state that the expansion of the Camaragibe Integrated Terminal, a mobility project for the 2014 World Cup, being the cause of both the disruption in the metro

²Available at: <<https://globoplay.globo.com/v/3329795/>>. Access on 27 January 2019.

³The Brazilian Military Police are state police organizations responsible for regular patrolling and maintaining order, in contrast to the Civil Police, which are responsible for criminal investigations.

system and the house demolitions. The traditional media also neglected to mention that the land under the destroyed houses seen in these images went unused until the end of the World Cup, when it became a parking lot for a private bus company.

Comparison of the material collected from the mass media with the images in the exposition shows that even long reports produced in the São Francisco subdivision (*loteamento*) avoided critical themes. The questions addressed by the corporate vehicles of communication went off in a different direction to the reality of local residents, focusing on investments and benefits, sometimes even avoiding the subject of the World Cup. At times of protest, the media even avoided relating them to the Cup. This study focuses on the months of May, June and July of 2014, immediately before and during the football championship. It concludes that the traditional media practiced silencing during coverage of the event and omitted difficult subjects, focusing on themes more agreeable to the public and following the orientation of corporate and government interests rather than emphasizing the negative consequences of the event for the population (whether these be the mistreatment of Camaragibe residents or the impact of the public works projects on government budgets). This certainly led a significant portion of the Pernambuco population, and that of the rest of Brazil, to a distorted perception of the nature of preparations for the World Cup and their consequences for the society.

The example of the World Cup in Pernambuco is relevant precisely because of the tacit alliance between traditional media, corporations and governments in the silencing of negative information about the event. The large communications companies invested in the championship as a product to leverage their audience; the Federal Government mobilized the public bureaucracy and its public relations machinery to defend the legacy of Brazilian megaevents; and entrepreneurs were still in a period of high expectations about the economic strength of Pernambuco. For their part, social movements that had just gone through the June Days (of protest) of 2013 were unable to impose a discourse of their own in contraposition

to the predominant defense of investments considered necessary for the World Cup.

One can thus conclude that media silence favored the official, optimistic story about these events (which helped to sell the World Cup as a product), in detriment to the story told by the local population, considered unofficial and worthy of silencing. We are talking here about a society in which the corporate media still largely defines what enters the society's agenda. This should be obvious, but it is important to emphasize that such silencing generated communication problems that facilitated manipulation of the public with regard to important questions such as the right to the city in peripheral locations such as the São Francisco subdivision.

One perceives that there is no one formula that guarantees information pluralism. It is important to discuss who owns the means of communication and to guarantee that public and community sectors hold rights to a significant part of the television and radio spectrums. At the same time, we must discuss the content broadcast or published, and how to guarantee space for diversity in the media, as well as, depending on the circumstances, the right to respond of people or groups that suffer abuse by communications professionals and entrepreneurs. In the academy it is also necessary to train communicators who perceive the limitations of their activities within large media vehicles and are able to develop more effective communication strategies in situations such as the World Cup neighborhood removals, in which policies of silence, which favored corporate and government interests, impeded public knowledge of important events.

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