



Kopenhagen, 20. Oktober 2009: Das Internationale Olympische Komitee (IOC) verkündet den Austragungsort für die Sommerspiele 2016: Brasilien. Auf den Straßen von Rio feiern die Menschen diese Entscheidung und freuen sich, der Welt Brasilien von seiner schönsten Seite präsentieren zu können. Die Folgen: Die Immobilienpreise steigen. Menschen werden umgesiedelt. Sie gehen auf die Straßen und protestieren. Die Euphorie schwindet. Wie hat sich Rio in den letzten Jahren verändert? Wer profitiert von Sportgroßereignissen wie diesen? Was passiert mit den Menschen, die in der Folge zwangsumgesiedelt werden? Erfahren Sie mehr im Interview mit Juliana Barbassa.

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» » Rio als umkämpfter Ort?!

Die Journalistin Juliana Barbassa (JB) ist in Brasilien geboren. Nach Zwischenstationen im Irak, Malta, Libyen, Spanien, Frankreich und den USA ist sie in ihre Heimat zurückgekehrt und nun seit 2010 als Korrespondentin für die Associated Press in Rio de Janeiro tätig, um vor Ort zu berichten. 2015 erschien ihr erstes Buch: „Dancing with the Devil in the City of God“. Darin beschäftigt sie sich mit den Vorbereitungen der Fußballweltmeisterschaft 2014 und Olympia 2016 in Brasilien. Im Interview mit der Frauen*solidarität berichtet sie über Hintergründe und Zusammenhänge von Menschenrechten und Sportgroßereignissen.

Claudia Dal-Bianco & Petra Pint: *How has Rio changed in the last decades?*

Juliana Barbassa: Rio de Janeiro has grown immensely, adding population in the city proper and in the suburbs that ring it. But this growth has happened without development of the required infrastructure, whether that is transportation, roadworks, adequate affordable housing, sewage collection and treatment. This has resulted in a sprawling metropolis with more than 6 million residents in the urban core, and nearly 13 million total in the metropolitan area, which suffers from some of the worst traffic in the world, from air and water pollution (stemming from the lack of sewage infrastructure), and from the growth of favelas, communities in which residents build their own homes, and which lack basic government services.

What happened with the euphoria of the population in 2009 when it was decided that Brazil will be the place for the Olympics and Paralympic Games in 2016?

JB: When the IOC president pulled the name of Rio de Janeiro from the envelope with the Olympic rings, and Brazilians learned Rio would be the host of the 2016 Games, the country and the city, exploded in celebration. The festivities were about much more than the honor of hosting the Olympics: Brazilians were celebrating a moment when the country was doing well – the economy was growing, inequality was diminishing, and millions were rising from poverty into the middle class. The Olympics would allow them to show the world these achievements. Now, the reality in Rio and Brazil is absolutely the opposite. The economy shrank by nearly 4 percent last year, and this year it is expected to do the same. The political stability that had been achieved, finally, after transitioning to democracy from a military regime that had lasted from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s, is threatened. There is a move to impeach the president, and a vast investigation into a corruption scheme that exposes links between the country's largest construction companies and high government officials. Among the companies deeply implicated in this corruption scheme are those directly responsible for building Olympic venues. Odebrecht, for example, won just over half of Olympic contracts (by value), but its CEO is now serving 19 years in prison on charges of money laundering and corruption. Faced with all this, there is little enthusiasm left.

Who is profiting from the Olympics?

JB: If you look at the projects that were promised to the population as legacies of the Olympics, you can see who won (or profited) and who lost by seeing which projects were carried to fruition, and which were not. For example, a refurbishing of the port region, a lengthening of the metro, and a construction of new bus routes (all of them projects in which Odebrecht was directly involved) were carried out. Who profited from those? Well, the construction companies involved, and the neighborhoods served. In the case of the metro line extension and the new bus rapid transit routes, they all link to the west side of Rio. This is where the biggest Olympic complex is located; it is also the area of town where real estate prices have been going up the fastest, and it is a very wealthy area with a Human Development Index on par with Norway. Not that they don't deserve improvements, but I would argue it was not the area of Rio that had the biggest needs. And which projects did not happen? To summarize and simplify, projects that would have benefited the lowest income population the most didn't happen. For example, the project that was supposed to be the biggest social legacy of the Games is called Morar Carioca. This was supposed to bring basic services like safe electricity and running water to all of Rio's favelas by 2020. That project was de-funded, and never happened as it was promised. Another project that failed to deliver, to the great detriment of the population, is the de-pollution of the bay at the center of metropolitan Rio de Janeiro – Guanabara Bay. This has great impacts on the health of athletes



that will compete in those waters, but of course, it has tremendous impacts for the population that lives around it.

What happens to the people who are being evicted?

JB: They are offered several options: rent money for one year to find other housing, though the money offered was not enough in Rio's escalated real estate market; cash in the equivalent to what the government decides their home was worth (again, not even close to enough to get similar housing, given the boom in housing prices in pre-World Cup and pre-Olympic Rio); or a unit of housing in government projects. The problems here were myriad. In nearly all cases, the new housing was not ready, or even close to ready, when people were pushed out of their homes. In nearly all cases, the new housing offered was many hours away from the demolished homes, causing people to lose jobs and children to leave school. In nearly all cases, the speed and violence with which these removals happened violated local, federal and international laws that regulate how such evictions should take place.

Which women did you interview for your book? What did they tell you?

JB: My goal was to show the impacts of all these rapid changes through the lives and experiences of residents, so I interviewed a number of women, from many walks of life: the mother of a drug trafficker who spoke about security policy, the head of a family trying to make ends meet as rent went up in her favela house and she struggled to meet her children, prostitutes being pushed out of brothels as the

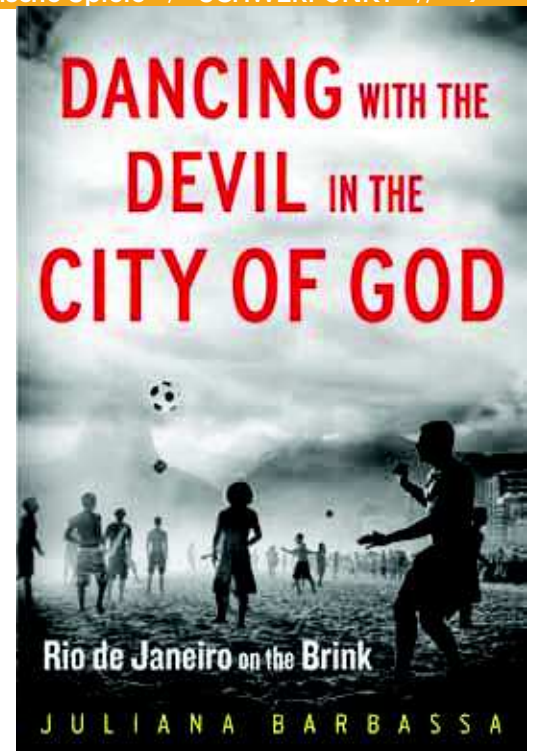
city attempted a social 'cleansing' before big international events, the owner of a new business in Ipanema who was doing well as the economy went up and foreigners flocked to Rio. There were many more. Each was a window into a segment of Rio that was changing fast, with tremendous consequences, good or bad, for herself and those around her.

According to "Reporters without Borders" Brazil is the land of the 30 Berlusconi. How do you see the media coverage of the protests? Which role do citizen journalists like Midia Ninjas play?

JB: The protests in Brazil over the past two years or so have had very different causes, and have drawn different sectors of the population. They've also been covered very differently by the media, which in Rio in particular is very conservative. In that context, citizen journalists like Media Ninja, but also like Voz da Comunidade, a newspaper started and run by residents of the Alemão complex of favelas, have helped expand coverage and bring different voices to the conversation. In general, it has been very interesting to see favela residents become more organized and participate more actively in resistance to removal, for example, often using social media like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to share their stories about what is happening to them and to their city.

What must happen to improve the situation of the population to a better?

JB: Unfortunately, as I mentioned, this is a case of a missed opportunity. Now the economy is in the dumps



– not just nationally, but in Rio specifically. The state relied heavily on oil revenues, and with the price of oil very low, and the national oil company deeply involved in the unraveling corruption process, that revenue has declined precipitously. This means less money for basics like health and education. Rio will not get another moment of promising political and economic conditions again so soon – and that is the real tragedy here.

What do you think Rio will look like in ten years?

JB: Unfortunately many of the changes put in place in Rio during the lead-up to the World Cup and the Olympics have laid in place structures that will increase inequality throughout the city. We can look at the new transit systems, at the lack of services for the poorest, and at the tremendous investment in unnecessary venues for sports events, to see how an opportunity has been missed to make positive change, and worse, how the groundwork has been laid for growth that is environmentally unsustainable and that will lead to even worse traffic problems. The city we will inherit post-Olympics will be far less livable than the one we had hoped for.

Thank you for the interview!