

## The decline of the ‘Soccer-Nation’: journalism, soccer and national identity in the 2002 World Cup

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This essay analyses the media narrative in the coverage of the Brazilian team during the 2002 World Cup. The *corpus* of our work is concentrated on the sports supplements of *Jornal do Brasil* during the 2002 World Cup from two days before the event until two days after its end, reaching the total of 32 supplements. We focus on the hypothesis that the qualification ‘Brazil: the soccer country’, usually even more intense and singular during this worldwide event, has been decreasing and the journalistic narratives about the Brazilian soccer team do not approach soccer homogeneously as a metonym for the nation. The reflection about the role of the sports press as cultural builder is fundamental to observe how newspapers confirm and construct mythologies and identity discourses, in spite of the journalistic objectivity, one of the pillars of the profession.

### Introduction

In this essay, we aim to continue a debate started by Ronaldo Helal and César Gordon when they presented the paper ‘The Brazilian Soccer Crisis and post-modernity: perspectives on the twenty-first century’ at Compos 2001<sup>1</sup> in the ‘Communication and Sociability’ working group. The essay shows how soccer went through an intense cultural incorporation process to become ‘the Brazilian passion’. Helal and Gordon analysed the so-called ‘Brazilian soccer crisis’ and evaluate its importance. They link this ‘crisis’ to the changes that took place in Brazilian society in the last decades because of general cultural transformations caused by the process of globalization. After reviewing the role soccer played in the passage of a traditional and rural society to a modern and urban one, the paper left provocative remark in the air: ‘if soccer has played an important role in the history of the 20th Century, being part of the process that results in the creation and consolidation of Brazilian cultural identity, what is its role in the twenty-first century?’

At that time, the remarks made by Micael Herschmann about this paper inspired new perspectives about the theme, highlighting the importance of raising empirical data to understand more about the relations between soccer and national identity nowadays. Helal and Gordon affirmed that the agents of the soccer universe do not have any idea of how ‘the soccer country’ was not something created naturally, ‘but a social construction that depended on a ad hoc connection of soccer with totalizing domains of social life’. They also did not understand that when emphasizing that

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soccer is a product to be consumed by the more and more fragmented and diversified entertainment market, a project is needed to articulate it to more inclusive levels, resulting in the intensification of a bind previously established.

Herschmann draws our attention to the fact that we are watching two distinct movements in the process of globalization: on the one hand, the consolidation of a local culture and, on the other, cultural manifestations that operate from global references. Many times, according to Herschmann, 'these expressions of local culture are reinvented when they are hybridized with other globalized and deterritorialized ones'. Herschmann asks, 'why can't the global hegemonic model of the soccer-market be adopted by hybridizing and deterritorializing it?' We do not disagree with Herschmann's opinions, but this process has not been finished yet. So, some of Helal and Gordon's arguments were more speculative than conclusive.

We intend to analyse in this essay the media coverage given to the Brazilian soccer team during the 2002 World Cup. The corpus of our work is concentrated on the sports supplement of *Jornal do Brasil* during the World Cup – from two days before the beginning of the event until two days after its end, reaching the total of 32 supplements.<sup>2</sup> We focus on the hypothesis that in a World Cup the qualification 'Brazil: the soccer country' becomes more intense and singular. But, even in Brazil, the emphasis on this qualification has been decreasing and journalistic narratives about the Brazilian soccer team do not universally refer to soccer as a metonym of the nation anymore. What would be in question is the relation between culture and the way soccer news is published in Brazil.

### **Sports and nation in a globalized world**

Competitions like the Olympic Games and the World Cup were idealized as a specific meeting between nations where the dispute and competition for hegemony should take place in the symbolic space designated to sporting conquests. The mimesis of war in sports thus means a friendly rivalry among nations, as sweet and peaceful an activity as commerce in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>3</sup> We must observe that such competitions were created when the ideology of national identities was being constituted and consolidated. Based on the interpretations of Stuart Hall,<sup>4</sup> we could affirm that the trend of a globalized culture would be transforming or disintegrating national identities, resumed in the homogeneous narrative of our 'soccer-nation'. But this does not mean that cultural homogenization in the globalized world be established without resistances and dialogues.

Most of the so-called 'Brazilian soccer crisis'<sup>5</sup>; as it has appeared in press coverage for more than two decades, was based on the number of people who go to the stadiums, bad financial results of the teams and lack of idols similar to those of the 'golden age' (in the fifties and sixties), a romantic perspective that could be translated as a dialogue with the continuous globalization process in progress.

Brazilian soccer, or more precisely, Brazilian soccer players, represents the country while at the same time they represent European teams and multinational companies. A brand like Nike, for instance, is associated with different teams of as many countries. The consumer is conducted to a kind of multi-identification, because he is identified with the team, the player and the company simultaneously.<sup>6</sup> Brands are deeply mixed in with the sports phenomenon nowadays.<sup>7</sup> So, while Ronaldinho, for example, represents Brazilian soccer as a Brazilian idol, he also has

been an Italian and a Spanish one as well. This process of deterritorializing the idol and soccer, of redefining time and space, creates a new identification and translation process of different cultural identities.

The space occupied by the companies that sponsor national teams goes beyond merchandising. They become news. In the final game of the 2002 World Cup, when Brazil played against Germany, the Brazilian press dedicated almost half a page to this headline: 'The final brand game: in an Adidas vs. Nike dispute, there are no losers'.<sup>8</sup> In the article itself, the CEOs of these companies affirm that there are no losers in this game. Luciano Kleiman, marketing manager of Adidas in Brazil, said that 'Our project doesn't depend on the results of the teams we sponsor. Our brand was shown in 58% of the games on the uniforms and, in all of the games with the official ball and on billboards'.<sup>9</sup>

Even with the fragmentation of national identities, other hybrid ways forms of identification come into being. The resistance and consolidation of local identities in the World Cup still presents a narrative structure based on the kind of nationalism affirmed between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In Brazil in the 1930s, soccer and other cultural manifestations became part of a project for constructing a Brazilian national identity. Newspapers, radio, government and other cultural mediators played a very important role in this construction.<sup>10</sup>

The journalist Mário Filho, in his articles and his emotional and professional ties to the World Cup of 1950, serves as an example of national concept-construction via soccer in Brazil.<sup>11</sup> Even so, afterwards, specifically during the 1950 World Cup, soccer was not the main headline of the front page of middle-class or upper-class newspapers.<sup>12</sup> Soccer only came to the front pages of these newspapers when the success of the Brazilian team in the Cup and enthusiastic multi social class support obliged them to do so.

Basically, our point is that in spite of the differences between the journalistic narratives of the media, newspapers were obliged to narrate soccer as an expression of nationality. The structure of competition in addition to the nationalism project constructed a homogenous image of the 'Brazilian man'. This image was reinforced and was very effective from the period of President Getúlio Vargas (in the 1930s) onwards. Nowadays, despite the nation-project having a new design, journalistic narratives still assume soccer as an emblem of the nation during the World Cup.

### **Sports journalism**

Although the ideology of journalism is ruled by the news objectivity, the sports segment seems to allow more flexibility than would normally be the case in journalistic ideology.<sup>13</sup> In sports journalism, opinion and judgement are mixed up with the news itself. Journalists and columnists, mainly in this field, confess the team, the players and the coaches they prefer, even though they use the rhetoric of objectivity in order to present a certain distance in their analyses. Both sports journalists and art critics understand that passion for these kinds of activities is an essential requisite to their fields. This is a tradition that goes back to Mário Filho's day and age. He used to tell journalists that sports news should be emotional and 'hot', as if investigative journalism not be fit the sports page.<sup>14</sup> So, specialized journalism seemed to understand that the nature of sports compels transmitting news and information without extinguishing the flame of emotion and excitement that sports evoke. This is why

Mário Filho used to say that even dubious exceptions to a rule (such as a corrupt referee, for instance) should not inspire a disbelief in sports.<sup>15</sup>

On the one hand, the structure of the sport demands transmitting emotion, but on the other, journalism, like any other field of knowledge, produces internal status disputes among different newspaper specialties (politics, economy, sports, etc.). So, sports journalism becomes closer and closer to the ideology of objectivity in its search for an internal valorization of the field. Thus, investigative journalism has started to make itself be felt on the sports page.

In fact, we are watching a gradual transformation of Brazilian society regarding sports and how sports events are presented to a public, but when the World Cup is being played, once we understand that the ideology of nationalism is present in the event's structure. Are there special internal demands here in the field of journalism and even more wide-spectrum cultural changes that would include soccer?

Based on the sports page of *Jornal do Brasil* during the 2002' World Cup, we can affirm that most of the articles highlight soccer techniques and start to publish information related to the Cup. Reports on the World Cup follow two distinct directions. Some insist on recovering the soccer-nation concept, and others pay greater attention to what has been going on in Brazilian daily life. Therefore, there seems to be a fight between publishing sports news for fans using journalistic objectivity and transmitting emotions, thus making the Brazilian team a metaphor of the nation.

Our objective is to present an analysis of 32 sports pages of the *Jornal do Brasil* in order to ascertain how journalistic narratives articulated the narrative of the nation. We will also see how both kinds of narratives were moving in the direction of objectivity presenting technical, economical and cultural aspects of soccer and seeing the event from different standpoints.

### Media coverage during the 2002' World Cup

Days before the beginning of the World Cup, the *Jornal do Brasil* dedicated its *Caderno Idéias*<sup>16</sup> to soccer. There are articles by journalists, a geographer who studies the diffusion of the soccer, a psychoanalyst who analyses the problem of being poor and becoming transformed into a celebrity, a philosopher who analyses the narrative about 'Scolari's family'<sup>17</sup> as a despotic discourse, and also, reviews on soccer books.

We also noticed that it was becoming common to complain about the lack of awards rewarded for a sport considered as 'the national passion'. In spite of this, there has also been a multiplication of soccer books, including translations of foreign literature on the subject. This 'opening' can be seen as a demonstration of a slight change in the approach to talking about soccer: the newspaper gives voice to the opinions of specialists, whose analyses are less influenced by the passional aspects of the game. The only exception is the article 'The masters of soccer' by Augusto Nunes. In this article, the author praises the romantic images of Brazilian soccer (amateur soccer, the geniuses of the past, etc.) as part of a Brazilian identity.

The issues that preceded the 2002 World Cup show us that the Brazilian team was not considered competitive, even after winning the unofficial game against Malaysia 4–0. Sports coverage by columnists and sports reporters dealt with technical issues such as how the coach was conducting the team. The team structure of using three defenders and changes made in the attack were used to criticize coach Luis Felipe Scolari. It should be recalled that the Brazilian team almost did not get

classified for the Cup, leaving the country sceptical about its capacities to win. The victory over Malaysia inspired the following headline: 'Brazil Wins the Last Game', with the subtitle, 'Team takes 51 min to score a goal against the weak Malaysian team, but scores 4-0'.<sup>18</sup> In the text, it is highlighted that the Malaysian team is the 112th ranking Fifa team, yet, even so, Brazil took 51 min to score the first goal; it still draws our attention to the fact that Brazil played better without using its regular team. There were also protests for Luiz Felipe Scolari not calling Romário on to the team. The coach did not give in and resisted sports media pressure, as well as artists and politicians, including the ex-President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who insisted on the convocation of the hero of the 1994 World Cup to the 'Scolari family'.

In general, the coverage of the 2002 World Cup was aimed at fans: the technical aspects prevailed over the general ones, taking for granted the legion of 'fans that only appear for the the World Cup'.<sup>19</sup> In the selected articles, topics related to national identity were only timidly presented. Most of the time national identity figured as something secondary in the chronicles and articles about the team's playing style. However, after winning and advancing to the playoffs, we can notice a tendency to include national identity in the journalistic narratives.

In the beginning, journalists Roberto Assaf and Marcos Caetano, in 'Diary of a Tri-champion'<sup>20</sup> and 'Ten Reasons to Believe',<sup>21</sup> respectively, refer to this subject and show how ambiguous the discourses are until the end of the competition. Roberto Assaf emotionally relates his memories about the Brazilian victory in the 1970 World Cup and registers the 2-day national holiday given to the population after this victory, seeing the conquest in a nostalgic and critical way: 'nowadays, 32 years after, I consider this holiday absurd'. This discourse may be indicating changes in the relations between the Brazilian team and the nation. The 1994 and 2002 victories did not lead to national holidays, for instance.

We must remember that, even though people say there is a 'Brazilian soccer crisis', the team had never played before in three successive finals, having won two of them. The celebrations of the championships (1994 and 2002) and the suffering of the defeat (1998) did not transcend the universe of sports, and neither the championship in 1994 and 2002 nor the defeat in 1998 were dramatized as 'the victory of the Brazilian nation' or 'the defeat of the whole country',<sup>22</sup> respectively. It was just the opposite of what happened in 1950, when Brazil lost the final, and in 1970, when it became tri-champion.<sup>23</sup>

Marcos Caetano talks about the Brazilian hopefulness as a national 'vocation'. The text opens 'Brazilian Profession: hopeful. This was the theme of a very significant show in Brazil (...) The week the World Cup starts, being faithful becomes more important than ever'. And he ends: 'Lovely nation, my nation, my sweet nation. The verses of Vinicius de Moraes will be in my heart when I get on the plane and when I get off, after almost forty hours to arrive at Ulsan. I'm Brazilian. So, as every Brazilian, I'm hopeful. Even though, as a professional, I am not so confident.'<sup>24</sup> Although he does not use the Brazilian team as a metaphor for the nation, Caetano reinforces a stereotype: 'Brazilian Profession: hopeful', ignoring here journalistic objectivity. His narrative transcends the sports universe and talks about the event as a unique way of revealing the Brazilian national character abroad.

Indeed, the World Cup may be understood as a 'duel of nations'; yet, Brazil is no different than Argentina, Italy, Germany and France. Countries that adopted soccer as their main sport are traditional World Cup competitors who tend to get

more involved with and demonstrate greater patriotic and nationalistic behaviour during the event, because the World Cup structures the narrative of the nation-state. Brazil has the differential of having won five times and also the quality of its players (Pelé, for example, is considered the most important athlete of the twentieth century, and Ronaldinho was elected the best soccer player in the world three times). At the same time, constructing a project of a national identity via soccer took place during the forties and the fifties.

This 'duel of nations' was shown in the headline 'Better Impossible – Brazilians celebrate France's unexpected loss to the weak Senegalese'.<sup>25</sup> There are photos at the end of the article, with the following captions: 'While Senegal players were dancing to celebrate their victory at the opening of the Cup, Brazilians commemorated the unexpected revenge against their guillotine four years ago'. But even so this 'duel of nations' may be interpreted as a 'duel over opponent soccer teams', the same thing that occurs in regional championships when, for example, a traditional state team goes to the Second Division and other teams celebrate. We also should not forget the ideology of miscegenation that preaches that we, Brazilians and Africans, maintain an interwoven identity narrated by soccer, in addition to other cultural manifestations such as music, happiness and naivety. All of these are romantic characteristics related to identity.<sup>26</sup>

We will now look at articles that introduce traces of identity that reinforce local stereotypes, rather than national ones. At first, *Jornal do Brasil* was very critical of coach Luis Felipe Scolari, but afterwards the articles started warming up to him, collaborating in the construction of a friendly character, a father figure, somebody tough, but, at the same time, gentle. This is clear in the article 'A Morning to Tell Stories'.<sup>27</sup> In this article, the identity of the southerner (from Rio Grande do Sul) is reinforced as tough but, at the same time, loyal, sincere, a story teller.<sup>28</sup> After scoring 2–1 against England, the headline grants redemption: 'Victory reveals another "Felipão"<sup>29</sup> – tears of a man who promised that the team would be in the semi-finals and lived up to his promise'.<sup>30</sup>

Another highlight was an incident involving Emerson, a mid-field player and captain of the team, taken out of the game because of a bruise, an occasion used to bring up the sports-nation identity problem, peeping up behind the discussion over playing style. In an article signed by Joaquim Ferreira dos Santos called 'Someone is missing in the "Dunga" position',<sup>31</sup> we read that 'Dunga's position is fundamental for modern teams' and also 'the Brazilian melodrama that formerly danced samba with the soccer ball has returned. In the previous chapter, the convulsion. Now, the distension'. The question is not value judgements concerning the technical qualities of the former soccer player, Dunga, but what he has come to symbolize. Dunga used to be considered the antithesis of what Brazilians idealize as 'soccer-art'. The 1994 Cup win, in which he was captain of the team, in spite of having redeemed him to a certain extent, was celebrated as the victory of 'roguery', symbolized by Romário's<sup>32</sup> playing style. It is revealing that in such a short space of time, the vigorous and hard persecution-style game would now be celebrated and the soccer that danced samba became a 'melodrama'. Yet the same journalist writes the article 'The Little Brazilian team: the history of the four-time soccer champion might be written with its players'<sup>33</sup> and then comments 'In 58 we won with Garrincha, Zito, Vavá, Dida, Didi – the nickname showed the dimension of a fun player's soccer with no press advisers, no blondes, no newcomers, all of whom had fun-loving nicknames. An atmosphere of a brilliant and fun game prevailed'. This ambiguity



between what was conventionally classified as soccer-art and soccer-force seems to indicate a weakening of the debate about differentiated playing styles, 'in a Brazilian way' more and more globalized. It was possible to identify a Brazilian game style in the fifties and the sixties, but nowadays this is a romantic and nostalgic discourse, as sports chronicle reminds us. The journalist's ambiguity may be genuinely seen as a sign of the weakening of this narrative, or reveal the sports journalism paradox, that would simultaneously transmit the emotion of the national identity narrative, of memory, and, at the same time valorize, the modernization of soccer.

The uncertainty over the preference or even the existence of a differentiated playing style continues through 'Brazil is good at making allegories: Korean TV shows Denílson and Roberto Carlos' "beautiful game"<sup>34</sup> in which the same journalist – Joaquim Ferreira dos Santos, says:

We are not good at playing as a team as those who have already seen Manguera's Carnival parade in Sapucaí know – the strong point is allegory, the highlight. The *'Mestre-sala Delegado'* dances, the player Denílson dribbles. Korean television also understood the whole situation and did not waste time in complaining that the Brazilian team wasn't coordinated in its midfield and lost the organization of its defense. It preferred to spend a good part of the last day showing the lackluster moves of the Brazilian stars against China. 'Ten, grade ten', seems to say the commentator. Roberto Carlos' control of the ball with his thigh, a strange dribble from Juninho. These were valuable moves that Brazilian TV never showed in the *replay* – like the stylish way of Rivaldo's caressing the ball -, but this continues fascinating the world. Abroad, the name given to this soccer played exclusively by Brazilians is *the beautiful game*. In Brazil, people aren't always pleased by this characterization, calling it 'aimless' (...) The clips were repeated throughout the programs. (...) But the images seem to say that, in a Cup without any evolution in the team group, the allegory can be the decisive point of the parade, such as a scene in which Denílson dribbles a Chinese opponent's leg – in this, we still are ten, grade ten.

In other words, if we have any doubt about the best way to play and if, in fact, we play different, non-Brazilian audiences do not seem to have any doubts about our singularity and are amazed by it, as according to the journalist. Further on, 'The Brazil that Pedals – Dribbles from Ronaldinho Gaúcho over Cole is what represents this team'<sup>35</sup> the same journalist seems to surrender once and for all to the artistic discourse on Brazilian soccer:

Brazil's Victory in World Cups is because of its famous dribble history. In 58 and 62, the team won with Garrincha's 'pretend-it-goes-and-goes' (...) the 'cow dribble', consisted in passing the ball on one side of the opponent and running through the other, leaving the opponent unsure as to who he should run after. The most famous of all the 'cow dribbles' was Pelé's on the Uruguayan Marzukevski in the Cup held in Mexico in 1970. And still: it was a 'cow dribble' without touching the ball, attaching an extra dribble over the goalkeeper. The rest is history. The final kick scraped the crossbar and it must be being played again right at this moment somewhere else in the world. In 1994, we were notorious Dunga Germans.<sup>36</sup> There were no dribbles. However, Romário scored unforgettable goals for Vasco, which started with the 'elastic dribble', a consecrated play also, in Rivelino's repertoire. Romário offered the ball to the defender, then held it under his foot. This was the beginning of the elastic dribble. When the opponent jumped on top of it, because he thought it would be easy to do so, Romário pulled the elastic back and brought the ball together, starting a race for the side left open by the defense. Then there's the puzzling 'pedal dribble'. The origin of the name works like this - the player passes one leg on the top of the ball, without touching it, raises the other one, again without touching it, and the sensation the viewer has is of a

person pedaling an imaginary bicycle, in the air (...) the defender that tries to prevent this madness, gets dizzy with the Brazilian player's mastery of the move.

It should be emphasized that the 'Brazilian style' discussion rarely appears in local competitions. In the matches disputed by local teams, the media gives excessive value to the guts, desire and determination of the players. The winning teams of state competitions or of the Brazilian Championship are described as the most regular and determined ones, who played with 'guts' and tactical discipline.<sup>37</sup> The aesthetic side – 'soccer-art' – is only actually called into action for the national team, showing that there is a universe separating international and ordinary local soccer, tied to its 'positions'. However, the memory (as a national identity) of the soccer-nation is always activated in World Cup events, whether in failure or success. Note that even here there is apparently, although in a slow and gradual form, a weakening of the debate process, consequence of a more and more globalized soccer, in which the idols or heroes belong less to their clubs or countries than to the brands that sponsor them.<sup>38</sup>

In fact, soccer as a national narrative loses strength if we observe that, in this last Cup, 48% of the players were acting in Europe, independent of their nationality. In this World Championship, there was an increase equivalent to 16% regarding the last Cup. The market also expresses the cleavage between central countries and the periphery in soccer if we compare that Europe had 529 athletes against 84 from South America, even if we consider that in the eighth event's editions these Continents had been awarded, before Brazil's Victory, 8 titles each.<sup>39</sup>

The sport-nation matter also appears in newspaper articles about other teams. In 'The Argentina that does its homework – Country stays up until dawn to watch to the impressive victory of their team over Nigeria',<sup>40</sup> we find that: 'even though a close score, the result enlarged the expectation for the Friday's game against England. After countless disappointments, the Argentines seem to have found something they can trust: their team'. And in 'Streets that Vibrate and Suffer: Between London and Buenos Aires, the Mood Goes from Total Party to Solidarity'.<sup>41</sup> It registers:

Precisely at that very same moment – deducting the four hour difference between Buenos Aires and London – Argentines and English people went to the streets yesterday. On the other side of the Atlantic, screams and flags filled downtown London with happiness. On this side, a melancholic crowd tried to demonstrate optimism. A minute before this spontaneous pilgrimage started, both capitals looked like ghost-cities. Argentines and the English alike were at home, in front of the TV, vibrating or suffering with England's Victory (1 the 0) over Argentina, in the 'battle of the century', the 'historical revenge' battle between two of the most prestigious teams in this World Cup (...) National sovereignty is always at stake concerning a confrontation with Argentina.

These articles highlight, as previously mentioned, the similarity between how both Brazilians and other countries relate to the Cup. There is a myth that only we stop to watch the World Cup that Brazilians experience it in a more intense form than other nations. In these articles, we believe that the press is gradually starting to demystify this belief by the flow and speed of the information that circulates in a globalized world. Even in the article 'The Day in which Saara Stopped'<sup>42</sup> after the



Brazil versus Belgium match, 'With the confirmation of the Brazilian team's victory, life in Saara went back to the normal. In five minutes all the stores reopened'.<sup>43</sup>

There is currently more critical journalism, such as the columnist Roberto Assaf in 'Advice to the Navigators',<sup>44</sup> in which he criticizes opinions in the Letters Section as well as some of the columns that protest against soccer. He comes to this conclusion: 'The country Brazil, believe it, will neither improve nor get worse whether the selection wins or loses the World Championship. But you can certainly be sure that without soccer there would be even more unemployment and poverty in the country. Besides less happiness, this is clear'. This sort of affirmation may be seen as part of a deconstruction of the myth that soccer is the 'opium of the people', which was spread in the 60s in the academic field and became popular in the media as a 'cultured opinion' during several Brazilian participations in Cups after the dictatorship.<sup>45</sup>

The journalistic narratives about soccer in Brazil are changing. There are narratives that are still too attached to the national identity affirmation and others that try, as they may, to demystify them. It is not by chance that more and more newspapers are giving opportunities to professional soccer specialists, academic or not. Nevertheless, the closer Brazil came to the final game, narratives valorizing the 'national style of soccer' and the activation of memories of the great victories and idols of the past become more significant. Small columns about Brazilian champion players of the world were published on the eve of the final game.<sup>46</sup> Joaquim Ferreira dos Santos affirms on the eve of the final game that:

Brazil played its part. After winning in 94, having a convulsion in 98, the team of Felipe Scolari became more offensive, with a bunch of electric jugglers honoring the tradition of Garrincha, Pelé, Jair, Rivelino and other soccer ball magicians. Ronaldinho's Goal against Turkey in the semifinals, the pedalled dribble which Ronaldinho Gaúcho used to bend the defense of England, securing the ball on his chest and Rivaldo's turning against Belgium, all these moves are already coming together as the most unforgettable of the season, stars of a fun and light soccer in its essence.<sup>47</sup>

The columnist Armando Nogueira, in the wake of this euphoria, also reported on the eve of final game:

Brazilian soccer is the way it is: pure spark. Just as a verse, which comes from a divine blow, the dribble, the curving pass or with the heel are inventions unknown by reason. A dribble by Ronaldinho Gaúcho is the perfect portrait of the proverbial Brazilian way, which today, more than ever, shall make the difference. In favor of the good fantasies and good dreams. Amen.<sup>48</sup>

Despite this romantic scene in the above texts, we may observe that the headlines of the sports page placed Ronaldinho and Oliver Kahn's pictures together to get ready for the great duel. Such polarization was due to obvious reasons. Ronaldinho, a striker with a significant number of goals in the competition, Kahn appointed as the best goalkeeper. We might still ask, though: why did not the newspapers highlight the emulation between states-nations? By comparing articles on the national team from the post-dictatorship scepticism and later on, when the team was becoming a greater success, in this more recent period, we may note the emphasis given to the 'Scolari Family', to the heroic challenge that Ronaldinho would have to overcome given his shortcomings in the World Cup final of 1998, and to criticism related to technical and tactical matters adopted by the team. It cannot be forgotten that the

victories filled with aesthetic moves, such as Ronaldinho Gaúcho against England, deflate the whole technical and tactical debate to valorize ‘the natural characteristics of the Brazilian player’ and the singularities of ‘our soccer’. However, this discourse has been losing its homogeneity in terms of constructing narratives.

The journalist Aydano André Motta writes, for instance, an article of three columns occupying the better part of the right page, entitled ‘To the aesthetic people of the steam soccer’, criticizing the interpretations of Brazilian soccer based on its memorable past. He draws attention to the fact that ‘It’s been at least a couple of decades, since no result manages to please a robust part of the fans – besides an influential group of sports chroniclers’.<sup>49</sup> Motta furthers his argumentation by claiming that bitterness moves our daily sport, becoming more and more potent with the insistence of repeating memorable passes, moves and goals of Didi, Gérson, Pelé and Garrincha. In a tone of exhortation:

Whatever the Brazilian destiny in the 2002 Cup will be, it should be consigned: it will be for the centuries past a great pleasure watching steam soccer, those spectacular scenes, almost considered fiction. The eternal showman’s ball. It’s time to stop comparisons, though. There is no possibility in measuring today’s game based on yesterday’s. [...] Between both, there is an abyss of technological, scientific evolution, which transfigured the sport. It is like comparing a brick to a cow. [...] Ronaldinho, Rivaldo, Ronaldinho Gaúcho and (a few) others do not deserve to be condemned for living in another era. They are incontestable stars, as their biographies show. They are the true Brazilian soccer game – the one which wins. Opposed to Denilson, this useless dancing guy who went to the second Cup in a roll, as the modern redemption of steam soccer. Even China can annulate him.<sup>50</sup>

The emotional tone of the article represents a sort of exhorted voice for those who evaluate today’s soccer through memory – which is always rebuilt, updated and published – of a golden past. This is the kind of voice that has been rising little by little in the press as a reaction to sports journalism and, perhaps, a collision between generations of players, supporters and journalists.<sup>51</sup> Reactions of this kind perhaps are taking part in a movement that intends to place the sports section in tune with the ideology of the career.

### **Final considerations**

This debate becomes important for the field of communication theory in a way in which mass communication propagates – in this case, the newspapers – fundamental elements in the communities’ imagined construction, as according to Benedict Anderson. The newspapers, for instance, became researchers’ source from different areas (sociology, history, communication, physical education and others) to study constructing nationalism.<sup>52</sup> The reflection over the importance of the sports press as a cultural builder is fundamental to allow us to observe how the newspapers ratify and build mythologies and identity speeches, despite journalistic objectivity which is the pillar of this career.

We have to admit that we are assuming the proposals present in several studies about soccer and identity, in which the journalistic narrative had a more homogeneous and totalitarian character of the nationalist project in the past, mostly from 1950 Cup on. However, we could question to what extent these journalistic narratives create such a homogeneous character in the past, because, if we start from another previous argument present in cultural studies, which affirms that there is

neither pure nor homogeneous culture, and that such constructions are the result of hybridization, we thus find it necessary to review the newspapers that covered past Cups with special attention given to the transformations in sports narrative in the comparative sense for constructing a genesis partner of this journalistic specialty.

One of the points made by Micael Herschmann in the working report on Helal and Gordon in Compos 2001 was this: ‘why, when transforming soccer into a product can’t we keep associating it to its totalizing domains?’ We believe that even after the analysis of the printed material on the 2002 World Cup, we would have to reflect more on this subject, which is not an easy matter, since we would have to ask if the current ‘market’ could be seen as a totalizing domain, in a ‘national state’, ‘national territory’ and ‘national culture’. After all, it is difficult to think of a product associated to these domains.

Another matter presented by Herschmann is that there are new holy rites in soccer, especially media rites, like Ronaldinho’s image. According to Herschmann, ‘Ronaldinho is an idol worshiped all over the planet and this does not prevent him from being idolized as a national hero’. And he thus questions: ‘is his biography, like every hero, a strong reference in the construction of collective and national identities?’ We believe that our analysis answers this question, though we still need to do more empirical research (besides newspaper material, TV material, interviews, etc.) to have a better idea. We consider in our analysis that idols like Ronaldinho are less and less ‘national heroes’. It is as if Ronaldinho belonged more to Nike than to Brazil. The most important players are increasingly more associated to the international ‘jet set’: living in Europe and taking out millionaire contracts with multinational companies, very different from soccer up to the 1970s. Everything gained ‘globalized dimensions’. We believe that one of the symptoms is always a resurfacing of these ideas of selecting a Brazilian team composed by players who actually play in Brazil, because the ‘foreigners’ ‘do not honor the yellow shirt’, ‘are no longer interested in Brazil, because they win lots of money abroad’, etc.<sup>53</sup>

Soccer, we think, still operates as an integrating/totalizing mechanism. However, the agents of the soccer universe do not work according to this association anymore, or at least in a clear and conscientious way as it was at the time of Mário Filho. This association appears in a diffuse form – in a narration of the commentator of the Globo Television Network, Galvão Bueno, for example, in a nostalgic chronicle written by Armando Nogueira; in the supporters’ outburst when the selection loses a game or performs badly. But at the same time, there is a whole different discourse that says something else, absolutely different: the soccer-market, soccer as ‘business’, marketing, club-company, internationalization, a need for managerial administration and, in this sense, ‘the idea of a soccer-nation becomes smaller and smaller’.<sup>54</sup>

## Notes

1. Compos is an annual meeting of Graduate Programs in Communication. The article ‘The Crisis of Brazilian Football: Perspectives for the Twenty-first Century’ presented there was published later in the book *Sport in Latin American Society: Past and Present*, by J.A. Mangan and Frank Lamartine Da Costa, London, Frank Cass, 2002. It was also published in the academic publication *Eco-Pós – Publicação da Pós-Graduação em Comunicação e Cultura*, UFRJ, 2002.

2. In fact, all the supplements of *Jornal do Brasil* and *O Globo* of this period were used. This material had previously been used to analyse the narrative on Ronaldinho as 'the hero' of the Brazilian team (Helal, 'Mídia e Idolatria'). We are thankful to students Daniele Rivera and Nathalia Machado, from the Communication Course at UERJ, for putting this material together. We only chose to analyse only *Jornal do Brasil* here because there are no relevant differences between these two newspapers.
3. See Hirschman, *As Paixões e Interesses*. In this text, the author enumerates several European thinkers that from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries who place the commerce as a beneficial and civilizing activity, that is, with generalizing beneficial effects.
4. Hall, *A Identidade Cultural na Pós-Modernidade*.
5. See Helal, *Passes e Impasses*, for a deeper analysis about the 'Brazilian soccer crisis' and its correlations to the country's culture.
6. We cannot forget that nowadays uniforms are commercialized in different countries from their teams of origin.
7. Remember the controversial participation of the Brazilian tennis player Guga in the Sidney Olympic Games, in which he would either be obliged to use his sponsor's brandname or the brand that sponsored the Brazilian Olympic Committee.
8. 'The Final Game and the Final Brand: In an Adidas and Nike Dispute, There are No Losers', *Jornal do Brasil*, June 30, 2002, Sports Section, 9.
9. Ibid. During the 1996 Olympic Games, the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* presented the ranking of the sponsors of national teams in the article, 'Business: Official Sponsors Gets More Gold Medals in the Olympic Games which Establishes the Big Sports Companies', *Folha de São Paulo*, 11 August, 1996, Sports Section, page 10.
10. See Pereira, *Footballmania*; Souto, 'Imprensa e Memória da Copa de 50'; Soares, 'Futebol, Raça e Nacionalidade'; Idem, 'História e a invenção de tradições no futebol brasileiro'. Hermano Viana in his article *O mistério do Samba* uses the concept of cultural mediators when he argues that the modernist intellectuals played a very important role in the transformation of samba in national music, and the same can be thought about soccer. He observes that this debate about 'the genuine Brazilian music', called 'samba de raiz', similarly to the German romanticism by Herder, is also present in the narratives of the 'essence of the Brazilian soccer'.
11. Soares, 'Futebol, Raça e Nacionalidade'.
12. Souto, 'Imprensa e Memória da Copa de 50', 32.
13. Ibid.
14. Soares, 'Futebol, Raça e Nacionalidade'.
15. Castro, *O Anjo Pornográfico*, 225.
16. *Caderno Idéias*, *Jornal do Brasil*, 25 June 2002. *Caderno Idéias* is dedicated to literary articles and book reviews. It is always published on Saturdays.
17. Expression that became well-known in Brazil to define the team coached by Luis Felipe Scolari.
18. 'Brazil Wins the Last Game', *Jornal do Brasil*, 02 May 2002, Sports Section, 28.
19. During the World Cup, a legion of seasonal supporters that only show up every four years get together and make from this event a competition that transcends the universe of sports, facing the team as a 'soccer-nation', a not literal translation to *Pátria de Chuteiras*. This expression was created by the writer Nelson Rodrigues to express the role of the Brazilian team in the fifties and sixties and the relation between national identity and the Brazilian team. We can easily speculate that TV news and advertisements give special attention for these seasonal supporters. See Gastaldo, *Pátria, Chuteiras e Propaganda*, on representing Brazil in the advertising world during the World Cup.
20. Roberto Assaf, 'Diary of a Tri-champion', *Jornal do Brasil*, 24 May, 2002, Sports Section, 21.
21. Marcos Caetano, 'Ten Reasons to Believe', *Jornal do Brasil*, 27 May 2002, Sports Section, 2.
22. Surely the CPI (*Comissão Parlamentar de Inquérito*), an Investigating Committee, on soccer has become stronger after the defeat of 1998, but even so, the debate did not extrapolate the universe of sports.

23. See Vogel, 'O Momento Feliz', on soccer and national ethos based on the 1970' World Cup. See Filho, *O Negro no Futebol Brasileiro*, and Perdigão, *Anatomia de Uma errota*, about the dramatization of the Brazil's defeat in the end of the 1950' World Cup.
24. Caetano, 'Ten Reasons to Believe'.
25. 'Better Impossible – Brazilians Party Thanks to France's Unexpected Loss to the Weak Senegaleses', *Jornal do Brasil*, 01 June 2002, Sports Section, 1.
26. The way the African teams play is frequently narrated as similar to the Brazilian game style.
27. 'A Morning to Tell Stories', *Jornal do Brasil*, 01 June 2002, Sports Section, 4.
28. In May, 2002, Helal participated in the Colloquium 'Soccer, Media and Society' at Unisinos (in Rio Grande do Sul), and saw that southerners' understanding of 'confrontation' between Scolari and Romário led to a duel between southern and southeastern regions. Such an interpretation did not appear in the supplements we analysed. Moreover, if there were objections to the coach, they were being gotten off during the competition.
29. Felipe Scolari's nickname.
30. 'Victory Reveals Another 'Felipão' – Tears of a Man Who Promised Team Would Be in the Semi-final and Kept His Promise', *Jornal do Brasil*, 22 June 2002, Sports Section, 4.
31. Joaquim Ferreira Santos, 'Someone is Missing 'Dunga's Position', *Jornal do Brasil*, 03 June 2002, Sports Section, 4.
32. For an analysis on the trajectory of Romário in the 1994 Cup, see Helal 'Idolatria e Malandragem'.
33. Joaquim Ferreira Santos, 'The Little Brazilian Team: The History of the Four-time Soccer Champion Might Be Written with the Names of its Players', *Jornal do Brasil*, 05 June 2002, Sports Section, 4.
34. Joaquim Ferreira Santos, 'The Brazil that's Good at Allegory: Korean TV Shows Denilson and Roberto Carlos' "Beautiful game'", *Jornal do Brasil*, 10 June 2002, Sports Section, 1–3.
35. Joaquim Ferreira Santos, 'The Brazil that Pedals – Ronaldinho Gaúcho's Dribble Over Cole is What Represents This Team', *Jornal do Brasil*, 24 June 2002, Sports Section, 4.
36. Dunga was the captain of the 1994 team and was seen by the sports press as a symbol of European style soccer, specially the 'German style', an antithesis of what Brazilians idealize from being 'soccer-art', as we previously mentioned.
37. The Brazilian Championship final of 2002 between Santos and Corinthians restarted a debate over team finances. This can be seen as an exception, though, which affirms the rule.
38. Such as the lifetime contract between Nike and Ronaldinho.
39. *Jornal do Brasil*, 26 May 2002, Sports Section, 26.
40. 'The Argentina that Does its Homework – Country Stays Until Dawn to Watch to the Impressive Victory of the National Team Over Nigeria', *Jornal do Brasil*, 03 June 2002, Sports Section, 8.
41. 'Streets that Vibrate and Suffer: Between London and Buenos Aires, the Mood Goes from Total Party to Solidarity', *Jornal do Brasil*, 08 June 2002, Sports Section, 1.
42. 'The Day in which Saara Stopped', *Jornal do Brasil*, 18 June 2002, Sports Section, 5.
43. Saara is a popular outdoor inexpensive shopping area in downtown Rio de Janeiro.
44. Roberto Assaf, 'Advice to the Navigators', *Jornal do Brasil*, 14 June 2002, Sports Section, 6.
45. We observe that this sort of opinion started undergoing criticism by the academic world in the eighties. See Da Matta, *Universo do Futebol*.
46. *Jornal do Brasil*, 30 June 2002.
47. Joaquim Ferreira Santos, *Jornal do Brasil*, 30 June 2002, 7.
48. Armando Nogueira, *Jornal do Brasil*, 30 June 2002, 9.
49. Aydano André Motta, 'To the Aesthetic Persons in Steam Soccer', *Jornal do Brasil*, 23 June Sports Section, 3.
50. Ibid.

51. See the press debate about yesterday and today's soccer in an article by Joaquim Ferreira dos Santos (*Jornal do Brasil*, 07 October 2001, Sports Section, 33), who considered the soccer of the seventies (from video tapes) as boring, mediocre and easy to be played. The article was promptly contested by Tostão and Augusto Nunes in *Jornal do Brasil* edition: 14 October 2001, 26.
52. The research work, *Deporte y Sociedad*, held at CLACSO – Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales – in which the authors of the present article participate, uses has the journalistic narrative as one of its main subjects in order to observe how it articulates with the construction of identities via sports.
53. We could talk about Ayrton Senna. But Senna is a totally distinct case. He had a special way of acting. He always invested too much in national symbols, like the Brazilian flag, for instance. It is as if he refused to be a product. This is visible in the distinct way Senna and Piquet were viewed by the public. Although Piquet was an excellent pilot (almost as good as Senna), he never invested in this narrow relationship with his country.
54. Hugo Lovisolo, also a member of the *Deporte y Sociedad* group, in an interview to *O Globo* Newspaper on 01 October 2001.

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