



## IN THE LAND OF «FOOTBALL-ART»: FOOTBALL BOOKS, NATIONAL IDENTITY AND THE BUILDING OF IMAGINED COMMUNITIES IN MODERN BRAZIL

### *En la tierra del «fútbol arte»: Libros sobre el fútbol brasileño, la identidad nacional y la construcción de comunidades imaginadas en el Brasil moderno*

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#### Keywords

Football  
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**ABSTRACT:** This article aims to show how the social history of football in Brazil can be used to reflect on nationhood. The text is based in an analysis of essay genre, both from foreign and Brazilian authors, as well as several books on Brazilian history and identity through the study of football. Although the essay genre has been privileged by many intellectuals who sought a totalizing understanding of the country, this very type of writing has been mobilized for interpreting social representations around the professional practice of football. This text argues that the identity synthesis franchised by the idea —of artistic and/or culturalist order— of a unitary «country of football» ends up eliding social and economic differences in the construction of modern Brazil as an «imagined community».

#### Palabras clave

Fútbol  
Identidad  
nacional  
Imaginario  
Ensayo  
Intelectuales  
brasileños

**RESUMEN:** El presente artículo tiene como objetivo mostrar la manera en que la historia social del fútbol en Brasil puede servir para reflexionar sobre la «brasilidad». El texto plantea un análisis con base en el género ensayístico, tanto de autores extranjeros como brasileños, así como de una lectura de una serie de libros en Brasil dedicados a la historia y identidad acerca de los estudios del fútbol. Si el género ensayístico ha sido privilegiado por muchos intelectuales, con vistas a una comprensión totalizante del país, este mismo tipo de escritura ha sido movilizado para una interpretación de las representaciones sociales respecto a la práctica profesional del fútbol. El argumento del texto sostiene que la síntesis de identidad favorecida por la idea —de orden artística o culturalista— de un unitario «país del fútbol» termina por eludir diferencias sociales y económicas en la construcción del Brasil moderno como una «comunidad imaginada».

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the past few years, in the context of the announcement of the 2014 FIFA World Cup in the country, the memory of Brazilian football has become a field of growing interest. We have witnessed sports journalists dedicating entire books to the biography of great players of the past. National idols and historic characters of various eras such as Charles Müller, Arthur Friedenreich, Pelé, Leônidas da Silva and Garrincha are some of the most notorious examples, as analyzed by Brazilian researchers as Leite Lopes (2009), Helal (2001), Mills (2005), Ribeiro (2007), Alfonsi (2013) among others.

In institutional terms, sports memory has become an object of growing attention, as we may notice in the recent and successful creation of the Football Museum, based in the Pacaembu Stadium in São Paulo, in 2008. In historical perspective, it can be stressed the pioneering role of conservation undertaken by the Museum of Image and Sound (MIS) in Rio de Janeiro, which compiled a series of interviews with players that began in 1967 and was extended until the 1990s. In the last decades, dozens of interviews were conducted with great stars, either retired or at the prime of their careers. An exemplary case would be the one of Marcos Carneiro de Mendonça, the goalkeeper for Fluminense Football Club during its amateur period, in the first decades of the twentieth century, who was interviewed at the end of the 1960s. This initiative of MIS was materialized in the form of a book, *Futebol é arte (Football is art)*, organized by journalist Mário de Moraes in which three interviews with great stars of the Brazilian national team are integrally transcribed: Domingos da Guia, Pelé and Zizinho.

In this context, the goal of this article is to introduce non-Brazilian audiences to how football has been thought in Brazil. Through the work of writers and intellectuals it sheds light on essay production on football, developed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the sport took root and became popular in the country. The search for the matrices of the essay allows us to identify a lineage of intellectuals, of whom two of the most emblematic representatives are Gilberto Freyre in the late 1930s and Roberto DaMatta in the early 1980s. Despite distinct epistemological principles and debatable theoretical premises<sup>1</sup>, Freyre's (2001) propositions and DaMatta's conjectures (1979), viewed within their respective periods, are useful to reflecting on football in the context of Brazilian urban popular culture. As will be shown below, this statement can be extended to authors linked to the academic tradition of the University of São Paulo, such as Décio de Almeida Prado (1997), Flávio Aguiar (2003), Nuno Ramos (2007), Hilário Franco Jr. (2007), José Miguel Wisnik (2008) and Boris Fausto (2009, 2010), among others. These authors share an interest in their essayistic approach to analyzing Brazilian football, characterized by non-submission to standardized writing patterns reinforced in graduate programs.

It is suggested that in the last 80 years the essay has become an attractive narrative genre for many Brazilian thinkers, whose contributions deserve attention for their understanding and acknowledgment of football as a legitimate subject of reflection on popular cultural expressions. In general, essay writing, privileged by a certain intellectual tradition linked to the university, has reflected on football outside academic scientific production *sensu stricto*. Thus, we propose that essay writing, a common genre in Brazilian social thought between the

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<sup>1</sup> Freyre was not an academic *stricto sensu*, his formation dates back to the 1920', when Anthropology and Sociology were not institutionalized in Brazil. On the other hand, DaMatta was responsible to the introduction of Social Anthropology as a field area in the post-graduation programs in Brazil of the 1970'.

1930s and 1960s, continues producing interpretations of Brazil through explanations of the phenomenon of football. These interpreters, in turn, should not be viewed merely as pre-scientific thinkers in the field of sports studies. One of the interpretative singularities of the social essay is to include the so-called Brazilian style of playing football, emphasizing wider pictures and generalizing syntheses.

Without attempting to critically compare thesis and essay writing, this paper seeks to revisit the works of authors who wrote about Brazilian football from the first decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century to the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. The institutionalization of social science as a discipline in Brazil in the 1940s ensured the scientific supremacy of the thesis, given its precision in method, theory, analysis, source and demonstration, among other scientific foundations. At the same time, it rejected essay writing as the production of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century authors. Nonetheless, the persistence of the social essay in contemporary times shows the potential appeal of this form of narrating and interpreting aspects of Brazilian social life.

This paper is divided into five main parts. The first one is related to English influence on the Brazilian sports during the second half of the nineteenth century. The second part contextualizes the political process of institutionalizing football practices in Brazil, which is done through a system of leagues, championships and monopolistic public-private entities, organization controllers and professional sport management. The purpose is to give an introductory historical backdrop to help the reader understand the popularity of football in Brazil, specifically over the course of the twentieth century. The third part is dedicated to present the state of art of academic football studies, in parallel with the production of essays about the subject. Then, in the following part, we seek to address the importance of the tradition of the social essay in Brazil, due to the writings of Gilberto Freyre, and the criticism it received during the institutionalization of social science in Brazil and in the wake of the creation and development of universities between the 1930s and 1970s in the country. At the same time, it shows that since that period, recognized and university-trained writers were already interested in the subject of football, producing reflections in the essay format. This leads to contemporary examples, which attest to the genre's topicality and vitality. Finally, the last part focuses on a major work of the Brazilian contemporary scene. It is a book written by the professor and critic José Miguel Wisnik (Universidade de São Paulo), influenced mainly by some artistic, aesthetic and culturalist ideas of Gilberto Freyre. The purpose of this section is to present an outline of the main ideas that underpin this hefty tome of over four hundred pages, which offers an extraordinary interpretive synthesis of Brazilian popular imagination and social inequalities, revisiting, in the light of football, the canonical ideas of modernism, «Freyrism» and the classics of social thought in the early the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The publication is of interest insofar as it emerges when part of Brazilian academics believes it no longer makes any sense to investigate the centrality of Brazilian identity or consider the famous expression «the nation in football boots» as an explanatory metaphor or defining metonymy of Brazil.

## 2. THE ENGLISH SPORTS MATRIX IN BRAZILIAN HISTORY

Brazilian elites had always been pleased to emulate foreign habits and tastes, mainly those coming from Europe, because of its colonial past. In the cultural field, France has traditionally

had a wider influence, whether over language, eating habits, or fashion, exporting to Brazil its codes and rules of a so-called civilized and modern social behaviour. A like for things French had been cultivated since colonial times, and it was intensified throughout the nineteenth century. The French influence was not any less intense in political matters; the Napoleonic invasions of the Iberian Peninsula profoundly and directly affected Brazil's declaration of independence from Portugal in 1822. France then continued on as an institutional model for the new Brazilian republic.

However, it was more specifically in the arts and literature that the French marked the imperial period in Brazil. Since D. João VI invited the Artistic Mission, which arrived in Rio de Janeiro in 1816, painters like Debret became famous in the country for their landscapes and taught their techniques locally on tropical soil. At the same time, young elite Brazilians with artistic and literary tendencies were sent to Europe to learn about literary movements, such as Romanticism, Realism and Naturalism, so that these could be introduced in the country. Throughout the nineteenth century, the French influence over Brazil would mould its monarchy as well as the republic that followed by way of cultural and civilizing values. The period between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century is better known by its French name, the Belle-Époque (1890-1914).

France's central role as a model for the Brazilian elite does not mean, however, that they were the sole model. The Italian opera, for example, influenced theatre building in the capital of imperial Brazil, Rio de Janeiro, during the second half of the nineteenth century. According to Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre (2001), despite having been marked by a growing acceptance of European models that to some extent denied Portuguese roots of the country, the former colonizer still had tremendous influence over the country in less noted aspects, such as architecture, eating habits and folklore.

England also deserves mention, especially because of Portugal's economic and financial dependency on that country, which came to dominate all Atlantic trade. The English presence in Brazil increased after the Industrial Revolution, in the late eighteenth century. In general terms, England left its mark on Brazilian history in commerce, which dates back to early nineteenth century when the country broke the Portuguese monopoly on commerce in ports and harbours along the country's coast. From then on, England imported more and more Brazilian raw materials, such as cotton, for its own factories, which were sold back to the young country as industrialized products. The initially weak consumption of British products was blamed on slavery, seen as an obstacle to developing a consuming domestic labour force in the nineteenth century. Pressure against slave work grew in the 1850s with new laws gradually introduced to stimulate a free work force. The non-slave force was initially recruited from new European immigrants, most of which were sent to colonize farmlands in the South. The English dominated Brazil's economy by founding banks, increasing commerce, and building railroads, among other investments.

A less mentioned English legacy in Brazil is its sports culture. Besides spreading industrial products throughout the country, the English were responsible for introducing leisure practices more suitable to the discipline and rules that urban industrial life demanded. According to Norbert Elias (1986) and Pierre Bourdieu (1990), modern sports represent a dramatic change in relation to old traditional amusements that were still connected to medieval religious rites and parties. In a modern political, juridical and economic scenario, football and other sports were invented in the English public schools during the nineteenth century as a

way to redirect energies, prepare bodies and educate the children of the British aristocracy and bourgeoisie. These new concepts speedily made their way to Brazil.

At the end of nineteenth century, university leagues and municipal team championships rapidly spread football across Great Britain and throughout Europe. This sports modality had four entry points into Brazil: (1) young Brazilian students in England who brought the game back home with them; (2) English factories in Brazil taught football to native workers as a means of giving them a leisure activity; (3) English and German schools aggregated physical activities as a new pedagogical approach; and (4) immigrant clubs and associations sought to maintain their own traditions, which included sports.

Football is said to have arrived in Brazil in 1894, when Charles Muller, son of an Englishman, came back to São Paulo after 10 years of studying in Southampton, England. Once in Brazil again, he carried a leather ball and a rulebook in his suitcase. In 1902, another student, Oscar Cox, came back from Switzerland and helped founding the Fluminense Football Club in Rio de Janeiro. There were several immigrant associations in Rio, but none of them was exclusively dedicated to football. Most of the important clubs were dedicated to rowing, which was the most popular of the British sports in Brazil.

### 3. GILBERTO FREYRE: FROM THE INTRODUCTION OF BRITISH SPORTS TO THE INVENTION OF «FOOTBALL-ART»

The origins and proliferation of sports in Brazil at the end of the nineteenth century, as stressed above, have been well documented in literature. Modern sport arrived on Brazil's shores in the post-slavery era (1888) inspired by the model from the United States of America; however, it was not extensively adopted by the federalist republican regime (1889). Football, as it is true for other sports, emerged during a period of intense social and political transformation. These sports affected the physiognomy of the major Brazilian cities, which were subsequently marked by a discourse of regeneration, modernization and sanitization of the urban environment.

The waves of immigrants, encouraged as part of state policy with a view to replace slave labor and promote the whitening of the population, brought the habits and customs of these immigration flows with them. Little by little, many of these traditions and novelties started to grow and disseminate within these social clubs, which were largely created to meet the demand for cohesion between members of the British, German and Spanish colonies in Brazil.

Football was initially one of a number club-based leisure and entertainment activities. This sports modality was a practice of young foreigners, but also students, children of Brazilian elites, who were in turn inspired by these activities, seen as an imported modernism from Europe. If art and French culture occupied the most prominent position in terms of imitation by the locals, the modern sports founded in England and popularized throughout continental Europe clubs became a benchmark for fractions of Brazilian young people as a leisure.

The local scale of these games took on new dimension as the 20th century progressed. Municipal leagues were created at the beginning of the 1900s, and the first championships disputed by clubs from the same town were played out. This began to happen in São Paulo

from 1904 onwards, while in Rio de Janeiro competition between amateur clubs was instituted two years later, in 1906. Despite professionalism only being adopted in the 1930s, researcher Leonardo Affonso de Miranda Pereira (2001), in a comprehensive survey of social history, identified the popularization process of football, rather than horse racing and rowing, as the most popular sport towards the end of the 1910s. This was largely due to the beginning of international tournaments, in particular the 1916 South American Championship, organized by Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Uruguay. The transposition of national feelings —shirts, anthems and flags— towards football galvanized Brazil's young population, which was true in the big cities and the more rural cities in the countryside, wherever the press, the main means of communication at the time, were able to reach. The Brazilian football team's successful campaign in the 1919 South American Championship in Rio de Janeiro gave rise to national euphoria, and increasingly enabled the sport to overcome its social elitist origins.

Brazilianist Robert Levine (2001) states the idea of expanding interest in football as a practice of enjoyment, both in terms of civil society and the government. This scholar recognized the circumstances of this professionalism conformation, in the midst of an environment conducive to national assimilation in the 1930s, which was, until then, the expression of European modernity:

«The sport spread through the poorer classes when the English factory owners fielded teams composed of employees, but it only became a national institution in 1933, when it was declared professional under the management of the Brazilian Sports Confederation (*Confederação Brasileira de Desportos - CBD*). From one day to the next, the elite teams competed to contract athletes from the working class, thus creating an institution that combined the passions of the rich and poor. The Brazilian government took advantage of this movement by appropriating the nationalist symbol of the Brazilian team's victory at the 1932 South American Cup and allowed the involvement of black players (a policy that initially faced resistance from the CBD) in Brazilian teams in the early World Cups of the 1930s.» (Ibídem: 73)

The competitions among different countries from the South American continent gave rise to the first patriotic imagination that married the metaphor of the Brazilian nation to its football team, along with the organization of political entities such as the CBD, responsible for structuring this sporting field, in a Bourdieusian sense (1990), conformed to by a group of actors, organizers and consumers. The appeal of nationalism was subsequently grown with the creation, by FIFA, of the World Cup in 1930. This action empowered the metaphorical condition that links sport and nationalism. Constructing national identity and pride in a peripheral country such as Brazil turns the investment made in national mythology and symbology through football understandable.

The 1930s bore witness to the invention of the *pátria de chuteiras* (homeland of football boots). This idea grew in power at each four-yearly edition of the World Cup organized by FIFA, as it did in South America and Europe. The development of the media, a cornerstone of nationalist rhetoric, as theorized by Benedict Anderson (2008), brought Brazil's ties with football even closer at the end of that decade. The mass media, particularly radio, would be a key mediator for catalyzing the population's emotional sentiments. The media followed the Brazilian national team during the 1938 World Cup, when Brazil was under the dictatorial regime of the *Estado Novo* (New State), led by Getúlio Vargas, one of the architects of centralization politics and nationalist sentiment that was prevalent in the country.

The third installment of the World Cup saw the Brazilian national team travel to France, which was commentated on live by Brazilian radio broadcasters, such as Gagliano Neto, and would be revered as a heroic achievement by Brazilian athletes overseas. The incredible reception given by the French press in regards to the performance of the Brazilian football players made the local reporters and enthusiasts believe that Brazil had performed very well during that World Cup. Black player Leônidas da Silva, top scorer at that competition, was one of the most acclaimed, becoming the symbol and embodiment of a new era of Brazilian football, capable of overcoming its elitist and segregationist background.

Football went on to become the center of an identity that reversed the country's problems, one example being miscegenation, into a set of virtues. One of the most prominent elements worth highlighting in football in Brazil was its porous condition, with the ability to synthesize and express the contradictions of the country's social shape. This porosity drew interest from sociologist Gilberto Freyre (2001), whose most important study was called *Casa-Grande & Senzala* (The Masters and the Slaves, 1933), a reinterpretation of the history of Portuguese colonization, in which adaptability is exalted, as a virtue of social democracy in Brazilian race relations. The author then wrote texts in which football was earmarked as one of the contemporary success vectors of miscegenation in Brazil, producing players such as Leonidas, characterized as creative, spontaneous and astonishing.

The 1930s saw the self-representation of Brazilian culture solidify (Fiorin, 2009), with the principles of integration and culture and participation being seen as defining characteristics of modern Brazil. Thus, despite the poorly developed political-economic situation in Brazil being damaging aspects regarding its image, the country was internationally advertized in a positive way. Thanks to its attractive football, this performance transcended their sporting condition and it was converted into artistic and cultural expression. Therefore, according to Freyrean rhetoric (2001), the influence of music, capoeira and religious syncretism was absorbed, among other selected elements, to represent the authenticity of a nation that was believed to be interclass and interracial.

#### 4. BRAZILIAN ACADEMIC STUDIES ON FOOTBALL

The contrast between the popularity of the sport and the belated recognition of its analytical worth by Brazilian social scientists and historians is striking. Such an initial framework, however, has been changing rapidly in recent years, overcoming prejudices against this «minor subject». Thus, it can be said that football in Brazil is now very much a legitimate object of analysis. If the pioneering studies in the 1980s by the anthropologist Simoni Lahud Guedes (1977) and by the historian José Sebastião Witter (1990), among others, aroused academic interest in football with their interpretive insights, it was in the 1990s that the sport truly established itself as a field of systematic research. Studies on sport, especially football, have resulted in dissertations and theses related to various disciplines ranging from physical education to psychology, media communication to anthropology and history. Beyond books and articles by individual authors, research groups have been established in universities and other research institutes in many Brazilian cities—in Porto Alegre, Curitiba, Belo Horizonte, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Recife—and collaborative work has led to the creation of specialised journals.

In order to familiarise readers with football studies in Brazil, we will briefly identify its main strengths and major contemporary trends. Dominating the agenda of most researchers is the relationship between sport and modernity, or that of sport and nation. The objective is to explain how, historically and sociologically, a leisure market in Brazil was structured and what role modern sport played within it. In particular, researchers have sought to understand the way in which football has become one of the main vectors of condensing the idea of 'Brazilian-ness'. Among this subject's preferred sub-themes we find: research on the sport by state apparatus, the strategic and indispensable role of the media in the popularisation of sports, and debates among intellectuals and journalists about the significance of the practice of football.

The introduction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century of various sports as elite pastimes, and the popularisation of some —most notably football— have been extensively explored by Brazilian scholars. It dates back with crucial historical experiences since the country's transformed from a monarchy to a republic in 1889 (such as the nationalism and authoritarianism of the 1930s and the civil-military dictatorship between 1964 and 1985). In this sense, football's historical significance forms another major strand of research activity.

Another theme of great prominence amongst researchers —one which is included in this article— is that of ethnic identity. Relating to the early decades of football in Brazil, immigrant groups (such as Italians and Portuguese in the early twentieth century) and their social networks (including their recreational and sport clubs) have been examined. Racial integration is also a theme of lively discussion, driven by the participation in football of people of African-descent which rapidly increased as the sport transformed in the 1920s and 1930s from an amateur to a professional pursuit. Discussions on Brazilian 'race' and 'culture' are guided by the writings of the journalist Mario Rodrigues Filho assembled in the form of the book *O negro no futebol brasileiro* (2003), published originally in 1947. This work is of huge importance, not least it includes a foreword by the sociologist Gilberto Freyre, who is well-known for his controversial studies on the historical origins of race in Brazilian society and his views of racial elasticity. If Freyre (2001) is reputed to have overcome the concept of race in favour of a culturalist approach learned during his years of study in the United States with the anthropologist Franz Boas, his essay was accused of being an apology of the 'racial democracy' in Brazil by the academics of the Sao Paulo universities, such as USP, in the 1950s and 1960s.

The specific stories of certain professional football clubs from Rio and São Paulo, such as Bangu, Corinthians and Palmeiras, as well as the anthropological and sociological analysis of the construction of «belonging» to a club of organised supporters, are growing and converging themes of research. The history of certain sporting institutions, the power structures that govern football and how sport overlaps with the political history of the country are topics of increasing exploration. Also among the emerging areas of interest are the intersections between football, architecture and urban history, demonstrating the vitality and scale of new visions and new investigations.

The intersection of the worlds of society and football is a key field for intellectual production on sport in Brazil. Historians and social scientists have emphasised the close linkage of the genesis and development of sports with nationalism, urbanisation and industrialisation. Particular attention has been given to the processes of the formation of the working class since the nineteenth century, as well as their connections with the adoption of modern British sports in the country. It reflects a significant part of this important and growing area of Brazilian academic production.

## 5. AN OUTLINE OF ESSAY PRODUCTION ON FOOTBALL IN BRAZIL

In the last 65 years, the epistemological project of the School of Sociology of São Paulo, led by Florestan Fernandes, has become definitely established in the Brazilian university environment. In the 1970s, its consolidation was enhanced with the introduction of graduate programs in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, progressively expanded to the other state capitals and their respective federal universities. Within this setting of standardization and leveling, the interpretations of Gilberto Freyre (2001), as mentioned in the previous section, were criticized and the essay was deemed an irregular genre. It became accessory, secondary or relegated to newspapers, at a time when the written press still published more complex texts, addressing controversies and debates in its cultural and literary supplements. However, despite the loss of status due to a supposed evolutionary line that condemned the genre to ostracism when compared to the superiority, rigor and universality of methodical research, the essay did not totally disappear.

It can be affirmed that the essay continued to coexist in academic life and in public forums of intellectual debate, even in the places where the *homo academicus* pattern was most pronounced, as is the case of São Paulo and the School of Philosophy, Languages and Human Sciences (FFLCH/USP), under the influence mainly of Florestan Fernandes. Contrasting with scientific papers and academic theses, the essay drew attention with its experimentalism in works published in the 1960s and 1970s. Also important is the appearance of highly influential seminal essays, such as those by Antônio Candido —«Dialética da Malandragem» (Dialectic of Roguery) in 1970— and Roberto Schwarz entitled and «As ideias fora de lugar» (Misplaced Ideas) published in 1972. Some examples of authors and essays worthy of mention are listed below, in a diachronic yet not exhaustive approach. Attention is given, albeit not exclusively, to professors and researchers linked to USP, one of the mainstays of research canon in social science, as pointed out above, to illustrate how the university environment remained exposed to essay writing amid the increasing institutionalization and specialization of research.

As early as the 1950s, the German immigrant Anatol Rosenfeld (2007), a future drama professor at ECA/USP, wrote a study on the importance of football in Brazil. Running to a little over thirty pages, the text introduced to the German-speaking public, through the *Hans Jahrbuch*, historical, economic and psychosocial aspects of the practice of football in Brazil in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. More than just an introduction to foreign readers, the essay dialogues with the work of the journalist Mario Filho, author of the famous book of 1947 *O negro no futebol brasileiro* (Blacks in Brazilian Football). In this dialogue, Rosenfeld (2007) criticizes Filho's assumption that the economic ascension of blacks through football implied social recognition. The author of German origin sought to refute the idea of a metaphorical overcoming of racism in Brazilian society, as assumed by the culturalist trend inspired by Freyre's ideas, to which Mário Filho belonged.

At the end of the next decade, still under the visible influence of Gilberto Freyre's essayistic production—he wrote several essays on football between the 1930s and 1970s, emphasizing the metamorphoses undergone by the sport of British origin, straight and angular, when played by Brazilians, lithe and curvilinear— another insightful essay on the subject is published. This is the work of Professor Pessoa de Moraes, *Tradição e transformação do Brasil* (Tradition and Transformation of Brazil) published in 1968. The book, which was never reis-

sued and is today both unknown and of difficult access to the public at large, was written by a professor of the Federal University of Pernambuco. In the book the UFPE professor explores a myriad of cultural themes deeply rooted in Brazilian popular imagination, such as *frevo*, *samba*, *bossa nova*, politics, messianic movements and magic. The second chapter is titled «O futebol e a psicologia brasileira» (Football and Brazilian Psychology) and addresses, in more than forty pages, «the influence of the deep roots of our culture on the style of football played in the country» (1968: 69). In a language that closely resembles Gilberto Freyre and written under the impact of international victories of the Brazilian team in the 1958 and 1962 World Cups, Moraes views the practice of football as a successful assimilation or transplantation of the sport invented in England. In Brazil it is enhanced by the «prodigious elasticity of blacks», their «versatile agility», the «impulsive flashes of mestizos» and their «strong emotional waves» (1968: 71, 83).

Back in the universe of authors linked to the University of São Paulo, it is worth mentioning the writer Décio de Almeida Prado, a renowned theater critic and professor at the School of Dramatic Art. Aside from his knowledge of literature and dramaturgy, Prado published memoirs and essays on the subject of sports. Five of those texts were gathered in the book *Seres, coisas, lugares: do teatro ao futebol* (Beings, Things, Places: From theater to football) and was published in 1997. This, in turn, compiles writings on football produced between 1961 and 1989<sup>2</sup>.

The essays vary widely between longer and shorter, more complex and more evocative texts. Out of the five, «Time (and Space) in Football» stands out for the suggestive nature of its ideas. It is an attempt to abstract the randomness of combinatorial possibilities of the game and reflect on its fundamental properties, embodied in rules, actors, values, languages and equipment. In little more than ten dense pages, Décio de Almeida Prado proposes to sketch, in abstract terms, the spatial foundations and temporal dimensions that make up the hard core of football practice. The dense description leads him to a conclusive statement of the relationship of dependence between writing and football practice: «I have concluded affirmatively: football, the art of the ephemeral, does not dispense with words fixed on paper, which, without containing the images, evoke the sensations roused by them at the magical moment of execution» (1997: 11).

Another immigrant living in Brazil who took an interest in understanding the meaning of football in the country was the Czech philosopher Vilém Flusser. A professor at the University of São Paulo, Flusser had a book published in Germany in 1994 with the unusual title of *Brazil or the Search for a New Man – Toward a Phenomenology of Underdevelopment*. Despite the posthumous publication in the mid-1990s—exactly in 1998 in Brazil—the nine essays in the work had been written in previous decades. One of them is called «Alienation» and reflects on the meaning of football in Brazil. The comparison contrasts this sense with the meaning formulated in Europe.

The complexity and originality of this philosophical essay can be attested by the reading of its twenty pages. Flusser seeks to refute the current view that football served merely as a means to evade reality. To him, this argument was overly simplistic and the phenomenon of Brazilian

<sup>2</sup> The titles are the following: 1) «Recordação de Leônidas da Silva» (Memory of Leonidas of Silva); 2) «Quatro bicampeões» (Four Two-Time Champions); 3) «Fotos de Pelé» (Pictures of Pelé); 4) «Latejando com o futebol» (Throbbing with Football); and, 5) «Tempo (e espaço) no futebol» (Time (and Space) in Football).

football required a more accurate analysis by the country's intelligentsia. If the primary motivation of football fans is to evade everyday life, escaping from the oppressive world of work, a fact which the author considered evident in the European setting, the Brazilian case for him is qualitatively distinct, since a kind of «dialectic leap» occurred in relation to the first reality-masking stage. According to the philosopher, Brazil shifted football from alienation to engagement, since here the reality of the game became dominant, absorbing, and not merely complementary. It spilled out of its original realm towards all networks of social life, not the opposite. Thus, Brazilian football did not become a mere outlet to replenish energies drained at work and consume the revolutionary potential of the oppressed masses. On the contrary, through it men have realized the possibility of forging a new reality, the reality of the game, in which he feels he plays an active role within a complex and dynamic universe. Flusser concludes the essay affirming that, based on his life experience in Brazil, it is possible to predict, in terms of a Brazilian-style dialectic utopia, «a new man», *homo ludens*, authentic and spontaneous, and whose life would no longer be conditioned by economic ties (1998: 101).

Another author linked to USP is Flávio Aguiar, professor of Brazilian literature. In the early 2000s, in a collection organized by Alfredo Bosi, Aguiar published the instigating essay «Notas sobre o futebol como situação dramática» (Notes on Football as a Dramatic Situation). Its fifteen pages may at first glance seem light, but its reading proves otherwise. One encounters a broad and deep reflection along the lines proposed by Décio de Almeida Prado, capable of probing and investigating its more abstract constitutive principles. To this end, in a method that will reappear in José Miguel Wisnik in the following section, Professor Aguiar explores the comparison with other sports modalities and the concentrated dissection of the internal elements unique to the game. Without resorting to political circumstances or social determinants, the descriptive and reflective quality gives the impression that one is before a structuralist exercise. It is as if the approach focused on a specific literary text or erudite interpretation of a certain mythical narrative. Here is an example:

«The space of football is the totality. This totality is made up of circles and quadrilaterals. The universe fits in a circle; the movement, as a desire for harmony, in a quadrilateral. Football solves the problem of squaring the circle, although the quadrilaterals are not square. They stretch into rectangles; the harmony of movement extends in a desire for adventure (...) The circle of the stadium is breached. It has rectangular entrances, the tunnel mouths that are passages for triumphant entries and melancholy or victorious exits. These rectangular entrances are doors to the past and of the past. Whoever passes through them is transfigured.» (Aguiar, 2003: 103)

The chronological sequence of the essays once more moves away from the São Paulo university milieu. The focus is now on the ideas of the Bahia essayist Antonio Risério, an anthropologist and public intellectual recognized in the contemporary cultural scene. In 2007 Risério launched the book *A utopia brasileira e os movimentos negros* (The Brazilian Utopia and the Black Movements), a set of sixteen essays. Almost thirty pages long, one of them focuses on the subject examined here, entitled «A escola brasileira de futebol» (The Brazilian School of Football). In his work, the author addresses certain recurring questions related to the constitution of national identity from the modernist viewpoint that enhance the universe of popular culture. Thus he stresses the «anthropophagic cultural disposition» (2007: 322) of Brazilians and praises the mestizo neo-baroque, also to explain the success of Brazilian football. In this sense, Risério goes to great lengths to evoke the ethnic and esthetic criteria that raised

football to the level of artistic ambience. He also discusses why «kids» and «scamps» were able to give a foreign sports phenomenon its unique Brazilian style, agreeing with Freyre's view (2001), which underlies the discourse of many intellectuals, whether consciously or unconsciously expressed. Risério's comprehensive outlook is nevertheless grounded on a rigorous and vast grasp of academic literature related to the history, sociology, and anthropology of football in Brazil. Such grounding offset criticism about the author's lack of specialized knowledge, scarce contribution and general statements. Moreover, it must be recognized that, in their substratum, the ideas are strongly linked to the culturalism of a modernist or Freyrean bent.

In 2007, the same year Risério's essay was published, another author releases a work which dedicates space for reflection on the practice of football. Nuno Ramos (2007), a São Paulo artist and writer, publishes *Ensaio geral* (Dress Rehearsal), an assortment of writings comprising projects, essays, scripts and memoirs. One of its five sections features nine texts focusing on sports topics. The focus is speculating about the figure of the football player, whether Tostão, Ademir da Guia, Reinaldo, Ronaldinho Gaúcho or Robinho. The longest and most intense essay, in turn, is called «Os suplicantes: aspectos trágicos do futebol» (The Suppliants: Tragic Aspects of Football). There is a remarkable convergence of viewpoints of this piece with those of USP authors mentioned above, especially Prado, Wisnik and Aguiar. The recurrent themes indicate the interest of part of the intelligentsia in linking the football universe to the search for transcendent literary dimensions. These are now dramatic, now tragic, now baroque, now epic. This lineage, by the way, can be traced to the sports columns of the playwright Nelson Rodrigues.

The last essayist in this selection is also a professor at USP. It is the renowned historian Boris Fausto, a fundamental name in Brazilian historiography with work dedicated to the study of the 1930 revolution, immigration, work and daily life in Brazil. More recently, the author has focused on exercises of micro history and memoir writing. The books *O crime do restaurante chinês: carnaval, futebol e justiça na São Paulo dos anos 1930* (The Chinese Restaurant Crime: Carnival, football and justice in São Paulo in the 1930s) published in 2009 and *Memórias de um historiador de domingo* (Memories of a Sunday Historian) of 2010 combine narratives about the history of the city of São Paulo and episodes of personal experience. The purpose is to investigate, from unexpected viewpoints, the formation of the urban environment of São Paulo in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In both, football features as one of the key elements in understanding the period, enlivened by his own memories.

The first book, whose setting is the true case of a mysterious crime that occurred in São Paulo in the late 1930s, dedicates a chapter, «O fio invisível do Diamante Negro» (Black Diamond's Invisible Thread), to addressing the football player Leônidas da Silva. This black player became a national idol during the 1938 World Cup in France and acquired fame with the professionalization of football. Amidst the adventures of solving the controversial murder, attributed to an employee who is also black, the historian reconstructs the country's historical background and offers an original discussion of the controversial issue of racism in Brazil by contrasting Leônidas and the supposed murderer of the case under investigation.

The second book, a more explicit memoir, narrates in one of the chapters the historian's relationship with football in São Paulo in the 1940s and 1960s, during his adolescence and youth. «Futebol e cinema: um mundo masculino» (Football and Cinema: A male world) recalls affectionately a phase of sports professionalism in which the most popular clubs, Corinthians,

Palmeiras, São Paulo and Santos, already shared the preference of the inhabitants, mostly young and adult men. With the construction of large stadiums, such as Pacaembu, the spectators at sports venues, among them the author himself, were considered the metonymy of the Brazilian people. In this reminiscence, Fausto acknowledges:

«I've always enjoyed mixing with the crowds in football stadiums, amid the most radical 'politically incorrect,' perhaps as a way to compensate for my conventional life. It is a mistake to think that the fans are mere particles of a shapeless mass that randomly reviles, jeers, hoots or applauds, expressing unbridled emotion. It's not quite like that. Supporters have their rites, their motivations, their criteria of approval, of enthusiasm, of discouragement and of rapture. (...). How to account for this permanent presence of football and the supporter's passion throughout a lifetime? The simplest explanation, in my case, is that football was one of the formative elements of my personality in the childhood years and then opened a breach of salutary irrationality in an existence in which rationalism features in excessive doses.» (2010: 49-50).

Following this overall description of several essayistic writings addressing football in Brazil, with an analysis of some of their main characteristics, whether in form or content, the proposal of the next section is to consider a single work. In our opinion, it condenses and symbolizes to the highest degree the qualities of the essay, its evocative virtues and its interpretative potential, therefore contributing to the reflection on the sportive and cultural meaning of Brazilian football.

## 6. THE PERSISTENCE OF THE ESSAY – FOOTBALL, LITERATURE AND MUSIC IN JOSÉ MIGUEL WISNIK

In *Veneno remédio: o futebol e o Brasil* (Poison Remedy: Football and Brazil) published in 2008, the professor of USP, composer and critic José Miguel Wisnik contributes with one of the most surprising works of the Brazilian essayist tradition. Remarkable for combining a myriad of qualities —pan-disciplinary scholarship, narrative breadth, esthetic imagination, and analytical rigor— the work is an original contribution to unraveling the enigmas of modern Brazil through one of the more prosaic domains of Brazilian popular life in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: football.

Renowned for his critical insight in the spheres of literature and music, Wisnik (2008) extends his method of reading texts and music scores to the exegetical analysis of what happens inside a football pitch. He thus scrutinizes, merges and leaps over his privileged interlocutors, reinventing the ideas of the artists of the Modernist Week of 1922, the interpreters of social thought of the 1930s —with special attention to Gilberto Freyre's masterpiece, *Master & slaves* (2001)—, and the artistic-architectural vanguards of the 1950s and 1960s, matrices that exposed the contradictions and the potential of the cultural formation of Brazil.

Resulting from a long process of maturation, the book is based on the idea that football is «the general idiom of a non-verbal language.» (2008: 18). Its leitmotif is announced by the author himself and might be compared to what the US literary historian Stephan Greenblatt called «wonder»: the reading of an essay about Brazilian football by the Italian filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini, written shortly after Brazil won the World Cup for the third time, in 1970.

Fascinated by the performance of the squad led by Pelé and Tostão in the final against his country's national team, Pasolini identifies two main ways of playing football in the world: one represented by prose and the other by poetry. While the former prized collective play and aimed to reach its objective, the goal, through a «logical chain» of passes, being thus a «straight-lined discourse to the end» (2008: 201), the latter, more individualistic, was capable of abolishing means and ends, coming and going like a flourish of verse, foiling the links of the chain with dribbles. More than a means to get pass an opponent, dribbling constitutes what Wisnik defines as ellipse, a technical term of rhetoric, «a disturbance of linearity that produces a poetic effect.» (2008: 139). Although Pasolini (2005) had established an analogous division in his métier by contrasting poetic cinema (artistic-authorial) and prose cinema (serial-industrial), the encounter of those two poles of literature would reach its most dazzling point in the sphere of sports, in a rare moment of fusion of prose with poetry. If Europe's acclaim evoked catchphrases from the 1920s and 30s such as «kings of football» or «artistic football,» the Mexico World Cup —broadcast live in color to several countries worldwide— represented the overcoming of Brazil's «mongrel complex» with the national triumph on an imagistic scale never seen before. On the one hand, Pasolini's enchantment with Brazil's game can be interpreted as a renewal of the attitude of other European artists, such as the fascination of Pablo Picasso and the French surrealists with African naive art. On the other hand, the conversion of football into yet another phenomenon of international-popular culture provided input to help understand the capacity of atavistically colonial peoples to establish a «logic of difference» with the elliptic-anthropophagic recreation of cultural practices such as football.

Thus, instigated by Pasolini's insight, Wisnik investigates the anthropological, historical, philosophical and psychoanalytic factors that enabled that «fatal goal» (2008: 29). Two main questions can be roughly identified: first, how can the intrinsic properties of the game explain the sport's spectacular global spread, the «footballization of the world»? and second, how was Brazilian football able to become the «empire of the ellipse», hypostasizing the dribble and turning sports values on their head? To answer the first question, Wisnik (2008) probes the roots of the immemorial allure of ball games. The combination of violence with festive ritualism supports its archaic, primary and irrational foundation, and therefore the power of football comes from its ambivalent core, capable of «harboring the fight» and sublimating it into rite. Rather than a sociological division between tradition and modernity, Wisnik (*ibidem.*) resorts to an anthropological continuum between both terms to show how the sublimation of ritualistic clash, since its English origin and the codification of its rules in 1863, does not annul the agonistic potential of football. This sport has a non-exclusionary nature, in which the ancient, the agrarian and the rural are able to sneak into the modern, the urban and the industrial.

The invention of football enables an examination of the spatial, angular and geometric dimensions of the game, in which the circle and the semicircle, the line and the square acquire preeminence. The author exposes how the functional distribution of players, the «occupation of the quadrilateral» and the «optimization of performance» come about in modernity, based on the fundamental equation: field/ball, man/goal. This enables the tactical schemes and the configuration of numerous combinatorial variables, such as the triangulation of players. The equitable symmetry of the configurations between the two halves of the field, as well as between the two teams contrasted by identifying colors, is the starting point that will result in asymmetry. In language steeped in psychoanalysis, Wisnik states: «...there is a

single basis: winning relates to the imaginary world (the full and fleeting sensation of completeness), losing relates to the real world (to the experience of an interruption that restores the feeling of need)» (2008: 51). In this sense, to the mathematical principles and rationalizing planning is added the margin of structural unpredictability of the game. Its interpretative opening brings football closer to the gratuitousness of art and reveals its scenic aspects, with the gestures of the players, the fallibility of the referee, the participation of the fans, the inconstancy of the score producing an unequal combination of genres which simultaneously incorporate the parodic, the polyphonic, the dramatic, the comic, the burlesque, the grotesque, etc. Regarding the practices and representations of supporters' violence, José Miguel Wisnik states that:

«One might say that in Brazil, violence between rival supporters is perhaps akin to an extreme sport of the poor, among the poor, terrifying the rich – poor people for whom inclusion among the supporters of a team and its emblems, waging pitched battles with other supporters, makes more sense than the symbolic tournaments of the game. A youthful mass for whom shared social symbols mean less than images of collective recognition that emerge to oppose the existence of the other, in a reverse relationship of reciprocity.» (2008: 55).

To answer the second question raised above, Wisnik (ibidem.) addresses Brazilian wisdom in the use of time, the reinvention of micro spaces and the unusual creation of football moves, elements that denounce a «dialectic of difference.» The author lists a choice of stars who sketched with their dribbles new lines, imaginary and fluctuating, turning the «squared circle» into the «curved line,» expressed through the erratic creativity of ellipses, hyperboles and parabolas. According to the author: «With feints and ellipses, the dribble arises from the suppression of links composing the linear nexuses in the sequence of a play» (ibidem: 156).

If «readiness is body intelligence,» and if the defense/attack ratio is the «Archimedean point of the Brazilian soul,» Wisnik (ibidem.) analyzes the exemplary plays of Brazilians as cultural assets of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Marcos de Mendonça's saves, Friedenreich's volley, Da Guia's defense dribbling, Leônidas's bicycle kick, Didi's «dry leaf» free kick, Rivelino's flip flap, Socrates's back-heel, in a succession of inventions that culminates in Robinho's step over and the «ellipse anthology» of the two Ronaldos. However, the most important players from the cultural point of view are the *Macunaíma*-like Garrincha, with his dizzying swirls, and the *Machadian* Pelé, a kind of sphinx of Brazil's racial dilemmas. The association between football and literary characters aims to relate the internal debate of football to interpretations of Brazil. When he equates Garrincha with Mário de Andrade's character and Pelé with the meanings of the life and work of the mulatto Machado de Assis, Wisnik (ibidem.) tries to explain the paradoxes of Brazilian football based on the ambivalence of the Greek term *phármakon*, which designates the pendular oscillation between «poison» and «remedy».

Wisnik's interpretation of football —a leap over the ideas of his professor and preceptor Antônio Cândido in his essay «Dialectic of Roguery,» which points to the country's zone of permeability between order and disorder— views Brazil as a «drug,» an irremediable remedy, and the heritage of slavery as its *phármakon*. From the psychic substratum of slavery one can extract the recipe of its constitutive ambivalence: an «evil» never surpassed in the national experience and a valuable «good» in its existence, expressed in manifestations such as *capoeira*, samba and football, but also in the ambiguous and incomplete fabric of a country whose social barriers both assert and deprive, include and exclude, admit and reject.

## 7. TO CONCLUDE

«Applying the procedures of art criticism to football was one of the paths this book followed to try to capture the singularities with which it was invested in Brazil.» (Wisnik, 2008: 345) This sentence, taken from José Miguel Wisnik's book, can be extended to the purpose of the other authors quoted in this paper. The objective of carrying out a bibliographic review of Brazilian football, from Freyre to contemporary essayists, with the aim of introducing it to a foreign audience, fostered the search for new clues and the identification of alternative ways of understanding it in 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Despite the scant attention given to the subject, great intellectuals have resorted to essay writing over time to reflect on the phenomenon of football. Due to the plastic and polymorphic character of the essay, short texts alternate with wide-ranging narratives, suggesting interpretative clues to decipher modern Brazil through football. In this sense, the strategy adopted here was to select a list of intellectuals who, linked to academia, did not follow the standard format prescribed by graduate programs.

Among such essayists Gilberto Freyre was one of the most outstanding interpreters, given the influence of his best known work, *Casa-Grande & senzala* (The Masters and the Slaves) published in 1933. The characteristics of Freyre's long essay in both form and content have made it a paradigm to be surpassed by modern social science as idealized and established in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially in the universities of São Paulo. The criticism of Freyre's ideas was also a denunciation of his work as an ideological viewpoint, elusive and ambivalent in its indeterminacy between science and art. The epistemological demands of science made the essay an unreliable genre to meet the demands of scientificity and universality of academia.

Such a proscription extended to the field of sports studies, with the attempt to consolidate the area through the adoption of the graduate thesis format and the underlying criticism of Freyre's hitherto adopted essayist narrative. However, as I have tried to show here, the social essay was never completely abandoned in academia, not even in its USP core. From foreigners such as Anatol Rosenfeld and Vilém Flusser to local authors such as Pessoa de Moraes, Décio de Almeida Prado, Flávio Aguiar, Antônio Risério and Nuno Ramos, the social essay continued to contribute acute insights with genuine interpretations alluding to the Brazilian style of playing football and the stylistic reach of football practice. From this list of authors, José Miguel Wisnik's book *Veneno remédio* was chosen as the most paradigmatic of the virtues of the essay genre, not only because it is a work of remarkable erudition and magnitude, more than four hundred pages long, but also because of the analytical quality of its original interpretations of the phenomenon of Brazilian football.

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