

THE BATTLE OF BERNA (1954): THE STRUGGLE FOR IDENTITY MEANINGS IN THE FOOTBALL FIELD

BATALHA DE BERNA (1954): A LUTA PELOS SENTIDOS DE IDENTIDADE NO CAMPO DE FUTEBOL

BATALLA DE BERNA (1954): LA LUCHA POR LOS SENTIDOS DE IDENTIDAD EN EL CAMPO DE FÚTBOL

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Keywords

Mass media.
Soccer.
Power.

Abstract: The article aims at identifying, describing and analyzing different strategies of Brazilian press to narrate the dispute between Brazil and Hungary in the 1954 World Cup in Switzerland. The analysis of articles published in newspapers *O Globo* and *Folha de São Paulo* reveals the presence of a discussion about national character, the belief in the superiority of the “natural” characteristics of Brazilian football in comparison with Europeans’ “spirit of organization” and the Hungarian victory as a result of a European collusion. The study concludes that the press reverses the hierarchy between nature and culture, stereotyping identifications in a context of unbalanced power relations

Palavras-chave

Meios de comunicação de massa.
Futebol.
Poder.

Resumo: O artigo objetiva analisar as diferentes estratégias da imprensa brasileira para narrar a disputa entre Brasil e Hungria na Copa do Mundo da Suíça (1954). A análise dos textos publicados no *O Globo* e na *Folha de São Paulo* revela a presença de uma discussão sobre o caráter nacional, a crença na superioridade das características “naturais” do futebol brasileiro em comparação com o “espírito de organização” dos europeus e a vitória húngara como resultado de um conluio europeu. Conclui que a imprensa elabora uma inversão da hierarquia entre natureza e cultura, estereotipando identificações em um contexto de relações de poder desequilibradas.

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Resumen: Objetiva identificar, describir y analizar las diferentes estrategias de la prensa brasileña para narrar la disputa entre Brasil y Hungría en la Copa del Mundo en Suiza (1954). El análisis de los textos publicados en *O Globo* y en *Folha de São Paulo* revela la presencia de una discusión sobre el carácter nacional, la creencia en la superioridad de las características “naturales” del fútbol brasileño en comparación con el “espíritu de organización” de los europeos y la victoria húngara como resultado de un acuerdo europeo. Concluye que la prensa elabora una inversión de jerarquía entre naturaleza y cultura, estereotipando identificaciones en un contexto de relaciones de poder desequilibradas.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This text establishes a dialogue with Von der Lippe and MacLean's (2008) article on the use of racial and national stereotypes in the coverage by British, Norwegian and Swiss newspapers about violence during the Brazil-Hungary match in the 1954 World Cup Football in the city of Bern. The structure of the journalistic discourse on the event reveals how the stereotypes invoked to characterize Brazilians and Hungarians were backed by asymmetrical power relations between center and periphery and between each country's respective cultures, in addition to exhaling a sense of threat to Europeans' cultural codes (VON DER LIPPE; MACLEAN, 2008).

Von der Lippe and MacLean (2008, p. 76) underscore how European newspapers, especially British ones, narrated the match between Brazil and Hungary as a breakup in the behavior of the "Western man" because, "according to dominant media views of the time, [...] western male was a rational being who had conquered his innate aggression and now preferred to settle disputes by negotiation and superior reason". In this context, Hungarians' behavior was seen as only partially civilized insofar as it opposed the ideal of the Western white bourgeois gentleman. The Hungarian male was labeled as partially refined, having incorporated the virtues of industrialism, but whose personality structure still lacked the capitalist ethos that softens relations according to interests (VON DER LIPPE; MACLEAN, 2008; HIRSCHMAN, 2002). The media covered Brazilians based on a view of "racial hierarchy, of European superiority, of Black ill-discipline, volatility, lack of civilisation, and skill and brawn without tactical nous or emotional restraint" (VON DER LIPPE; MACLEAN, 2008, p. 89, our translation). Indeed, Brazilians were defined as undisciplined, hot-blooded, wild, black subjects. Finally, "The hegemonic ethical-racial values of the sports press reasserted the dominant social values, and as such of the moral and political authority, of northern and central-west Europe" (VON DER LIPPE; MACLEAN, 2008, p. 87, our translation).

As we know, construction of identity refers to a necessarily contextualized, conscious link based on symbolic oppositions (MAGUIRE; POULTON, 1999, WEISS, 2001, DENHAM; DESORMEAUX, 2008). At the level of international sport, the identity dilemma is dramatized in the challenge of distinguishing local meanings from universal ones (ZUCAL, 2007). Norton (1997) proposes the concept of *cultural identity* as the individuals' relationship with members of their own group, who share a common history, a common language and a more or less consensual way of understanding society and individuals' behaviors. In this context, several studies have focused their efforts on understanding how the media, especially the printed press, has been framing cultural identity narratives by ascribing them precise and stereotyped meanings. In the past and in the present, different sports in the media, especially in competitions between nation-states, take on the grammar of national identity to create emotion, adherence and participation by different segments of consumption (BARTHOLO; SOARES, 2006, TAVARES *et al.*, 2007, SALVADOR; SOARES, 2009). In the specific case of football, Helal, Soares and Lovisoló (2001) showed how Brazilian media narratives can be considered romantic and essentialist discourses on what is thought to be quite unique characteristics.

National teams can be understood as metonymies of nation-states (HOBSBAWN, 1998) and identity is socially constructed in specific contexts, determining the position of the social actors and guiding their choices in relation to an "other" (CUCHE, 2002). Therefore, it is important to examine how the same match between Brazil and Hungary was treated by Brazilian

newspapers, exploring how national identity narratives were produced and set about the same event analyzed in European newspapers by Von der Lippe and MacLean (2008). The hypothesis is that the Brazilian press, when covering the match, starts to narrate it under a grammar of identifications that organizes and ascribes meaning to the team, the game and the people, placing “Brazilians” in relation to their “others”, in this case, Hungarians and Europeans in the context of that time.

2 METHODS

We selected two media for this study: *Folha de S. Paulo* and *O Globo* – major Brazilian newspapers that covered the event. The issues analyzed were published from June 19 to July 3, 1954.

Folha de S. Paulo presents its first edition on the match on June 22, 1954, while *O Globo* starts covering it on June 21. We analyzed 39 articles from *Folha de S. Paulo* and 78 from *O Globo*¹.

We sought to build a hermeneutic interpretation of the enunciation of narrative elements of national identity through sports in newspaper articles about the 1954 match between Brazil and Hungary. The analysis showed three interrelated discursive moments: Brazil’s defeat in the 1950 World Cup final as a contextual reference, the comparison between Brazilian talent and European organization, and the result of the match as the result of a European collusion. The axis of the analysis lies in the central theoretical issue: construction of national identity as something contextual and relational. Therefore, in addition to this document corpus, we take as a comparative reference the article of Von der Lippe and MacLean (2008), seeking to understand *if* and *how* the discourses of the Brazilian press reconfigure the hierarchy and asymmetrical power relations due to the development of an identity or a character of nationality identified by the authors.

3 THE 1950 TRAUMA

A significant part of the discussion on the preparation of teams for the match between Brazil and Hungary in the 1954 Cup focuses more on the psychological conditions of the Brazilian team to face the decisive faceoff than on technical and tactical aspects of the two teams. In order to understand that type of behavior by the press, it is necessary to consider the meanings of Brazil’s defeat in the previous World Cup. In 1950, Brazil hosted the World Cup Football, and the State saw that investment as a means to earn symbolic profits towards consolidating Brazilianness and spreading the image of a country that progressed toward development². The management of the event, the construction of the Maracanã stadium and the flawless campaign of the Brazilian team before the final match were reasons for the vainglorious discourse about Brazil’s potential compared to the developed world. Winning that Cup would be further evidence of that potential. The speech delivered by Rio de Janeiro mayor Mendes de Moraes just before the final match between Brazil and Uruguay indicated the ambitions projected on the moment:

Brazilians, you who within a few minutes you will be world champions, you who have no rivals across the planet, you whom I already salute as victors: I have kept

¹ All texts analyzed were written by special envoys from the newspapers or news agencies.

² The Brazilianness discourse had been strongly promoted since Vargas’ times.

my word by building this stadium. Now, fulfill your duty by winning the World Cup (SANDER, 2004, p. 289).

The defeat to the Uruguayan team in that game was seen as a tragedy and a mark of Brazilians' psychological inferiority as inevitable (NOGUEIRA *et al.*, 1994).

The interpretation of so unlikely a defeat revolved around the debate on the atavistic insecurity of the national character. That perception of an inferiority complex in comparison with foreign situations was translated by important Brazilian playwright and journalist Nelson Rodrigues as the "mutt complex".

For a long time, Brazilian defeats were explained by a psychological reading of the national character. In that vein, Brazilians would be the best in the world with regard to football technique, but the final match required more than mastery of body techniques: Brazilians missed control and will to succeed at crucial moments. Nelson Rodrigues (1993) spoke of defeats to Uruguay in 1950 and Hungary in 1954 under the totalizing lens of national character:

And it was not individual failure: it was collective drowning. That was a shipwreck of players, fans, the head of the delegation, the delegation, the coach, the masseur. At such times, the most important factor is lacking. Players, coach and the masseur are ready. But matches are won or lost by the soul. It was our soul that collapsed before Hungary; it was our soul that collapsed before Uruguay. [...] Just Freud would explain Brazil's defeats to Hungary, to Uruguay and, in short, **any defeat of the Brazilian man in football or elsewhere.** (RODRIGUES, 1993, p. 26, our emphasis)

This question lies at the center of the debate leading up to the match in an almost obsessive way, since it is not restricted to football; it is a debate that speaks of national identity. Even the Hungarian preparation for the 1954 match was analyzed based on the intentions and psychological characteristics of the peoples. The Brazilian press reported that Hungarians regarded the game as a guaranteed victory, either because of their little concern about the absence of Puskas, their main player (CHIORINO, 1954b) or because the Hungarian coach scheduled preparatory training sessions for the semifinals (BRÁS, 1954a). The Brazilian press underscored that the arrogance of that favoritism glimpsed by Hungarians was similar to the early victory climate experienced by Brazilians before the 1950 final.

Brazilian journalists, however, struggled to show confidence in the Brazilian national team, criticizing the opponent's excess of optimism. Embarking on psychological speculation, journalist Américo Mendes (1954) stated that:

[...] Hungarians have always been sober and restrained in their impressions. All opponents, including Korea, deserved their respect and the absolute certainty of victory did not lead them to blindly believe in the defeat of the opponent team. Then there was a sudden change. The Hungarian coach came to see Brazil as defeated the day before and became swanky [...]. Either this man is disoriented or he felt the need to maintain confidence in his pupils because he thought they lacked it or faced a task beyond their strength. (MENDES, 1954, p. 7)

The alleged arrogance of the Hungarian coach could be read as confirmation of Brazilian superiority that would be disturbing the confidence of the players. On the other hand, Brazilian coach Zezé Moreira was portrayed as having a serene and confident optimism. The transfer of the self-proclaimed superiority to Hungarians this time would be positive, since Brazilians did not risk the illusion of superiority again.

Zezé Moreira is able to keep calm and wait for the events. He explains: 'Fortunately, for the first time in many years we are playing a championship without having the title secured in advance'. And indeed Brazil will play Hungary without the traditional and ridiculous champion sash, which is being worn – perhaps for over-optimism – by the Magyars and their unconditional fans [...] (SERRAN, 1954a, p. 10).

Similarly to the Brazilian coach, some Brazilian journalists had a thinly veiled hope that Hungarian favoritism could help the Brazilian team: “[...] we have already lost a World Cup for considering ourselves supermen and now – good for us – they are the supermen” (BRÁS, 1954a, p. 10).

After the 1950 experience ranging from euphoria to frustration, Brazilian football sought to reconstitute itself for a retest in the 1954 World Cup. Part of the reconstruction included the attempt at professional and planned preparation. However, beyond rational and concrete actions, that reconstruction of the Brazilian team would have been deeply symbolic, too. This symbolic character of the changes and the intended regeneration was evident in the decision to change the uniform of the national team, replacing the 1950 white shirts with the yellow ones, or the 1954 establishment of the ritual of kissing the national flag before the team entered the field (NOGUEIRA *et al.*, 1994).

4 TECHNIQUE VERSUS ORGANIZATION

The Brazil-Hungary faceoff in the quarterfinals was the result of a lottery system then used at World Cups. According to Brazilian newspapers, Hungarians themselves did not want that clash so early, because one of the four favorites would be eliminated “[...] before time” (SILVA, 1954a). For the Brazilian press, that would be the main match of the 1954 World Cup.

We finally arrived at the week of the big game! The whole world is speaking of it [...]. We are undoubtedly at the high point of the V World Championship.

Brazilians, for their exceptional campaign in 1950 that was not erased by its disastrous ending and for the victories of our clubs in Europe, keep their prestige high. Hungarians, in turn, have been gathering credentials for four years. They are unbeaten over more than forty games, including the one was against legendary England (BRÁS, 1954a, p. 7).

On the day before the long-awaited match, Brazilian press showed growing confidence. Chiorino (1954c) highlighted in a headline: “Hopes on the rise: the national team performed magnificently”, reporting on the excellent preparation and movement of the Brazilian team in their last training session. The very term “match of the century”, used in another headline, indicates the degree of importance ascribed to both teams by a press that did not see an early winner (MENDES, 1954).

In addition to the technical component, which made that match a must-see event, the national press showed elements also outlining to some extent a confrontation between nature and culture. Brás (1954a, p. 7) argues that Brazil would be representing “[...] astuteness, its people’s natural inclination to the sport of crowds [and] Hungary would portray Europeans’ spirit of organization”. This belief in the “natural” talent of Brazilian players – a metonym for the Brazilian people – acquires a confirmatory character when texts of the international press are cited uncritically by Brazilian newspapers, before the match itself.

Talking about Brazilians, 'La Tribune' from Lausanne wrote that Brazilians still have a lot to do to rival the Europeans in terms of team homogeneity. On the other hand, Brazilians' individual virtuosity was a discovery for us. In the absence of collective homogeneity, Brazilians showed slight, subtle, spectacular technique made of improvisations and facilitated by elegance of style. They are unsurpassed in head game, thanks to their natural athletic value and they feline flexibility (DIÁRIO..., 1954, p. 10).

Despite four years unbeaten and the Olympic football title won in 1952, the Brazilian press considered inconceivable that the Hungarians had a better team than their national team. According to *Folha de S. Paulo*, one could not conceive that "[...] without continuous exchange with South Americans, Hungarians could progress so much in the game's technique as to become the masters of the world all of a sudden" (BRÁS, 1954d). This emphasis on individual technical superiority and the ability to improvise ignored European criticism to the Brazilian way of playing marked by absence of the sense of collectivity (SOARES; LOVISOLO, 2003, DAMO, 2006), which not even the defeat to the Hungarians was able to shake.

Article called "Brazilian team eliminated in a match in which its superiority was clear" (ELIMINADA... 1954, cover), reads: "[...] the Hungarians were inferior from all points of view. We acknowledge the value of Hungarian football, but the Brazilian technique is unsurpassed". Not even the defeat to Hungary changed the conviction that, although the game was collective, individual technique was evidence of the superiority of Brazilian football. This tradition of reading Brazilian football as having a unique technique spreads as a grammar for national football, inside and outside (SOARES, 2014).

This allows us to think that the association of national identity to the topic of nature was certainly well-accepted, since it was not necessarily seen as something negative, but as that which created the differences and distinctions over the "other".

According to Von der Lippe and MacLean (2008), Brazilian players were portrayed by British, Norwegian and Swiss newspapers as "technically brilliant" and "undisciplined" but at the same time "primitive" and "hot-blooded". European newspapers' key to explain the behavior of the Brazilian team focused on racial stereotypes that had as their backdrop the hierarchy between cultures whose center was northern Europe.

The Brazilians were not only presented as lacking in self-control by their Blackness, but were also by their South American origins. As "Negroes" the Brazilians were held to be less civilized than the Hungarians, as Latins they were like their Southern European counterparts, more volatile. (VON DER LIPPE; MACLEAN, 2008, p. 84)

This is also evident in the narratives treating Hungarians as more civilized than South Americans. However, when the comparison goes to Europe itself, it becomes possible to produce a distinct "other" that is incomplete in terms of civilization and its dominant social values.

The Hungarians are situated near the centre but not quite "one of us" to be neither quite, nor the right type of, White. As a result, the stereotypes of this team included more positive characteristics than the "dark-headed" Brazilians, such as "fabulous discipline", a "machinelike defence", with "more refined" play. This refinement of the north is partial: the 17 Hungarians are "sly as foxes". This is because these men took part in a fight outside of the rules of football. In this way, they did not manage to cool their tempers. They have the opposite of the ascribed characteristics of a white bourgeois gentleman from the western world: they have the virtues of industrialism but not of capitalism. (VON DER LIPPE; MACLEAN, 2008, p 84, our translation)

5 THE BATTLE OF BERNE

According to Von der Lippe and MacLean (2008), the European press they analyzed portrayed the match as a meeting of teams from two cultures with different civilization deficits regarding a moral order seen as superior. Such narratives, through national and racial stereotypes, reinforce asymmetrical power relations in the context of threats to the true civilizing values embodied in modern sport.

For Brazilian newspapers, as we have seen, the match would be a confrontation between Brazilian players' individual technique and European ability for tactical organization, which ended with the Hungarian victory by 4-2. How did the Brazilian press narrate and explain yet another national defeat represented by football?

Two days before the match, *O Globo* journalist Ricardo Serran (1954b) stated that “[...] English referee Arthur Ellis will be in charge of the fight, which is a good recommendation for normal battle”. However, after the game, he ensures that he never had any doubts about the danger of European referees officiating matches of European teams, adding that FIFA would have its “favorite” teams, and the Hungarian team would be surrounded “[...] by all care and protection until the final” (SERRAN, 1954c, p. 10).

On the front page of the same issue, beneath a picture of a crying Brazilian goalkeeper Castilho, *O Globo* points out the second reason that would have destroyed Brazil's chances: violence. Unlike the narratives analyzed by Von der Lippe and Maclean (2008), according to journalists from *O Globo* and *Folha de S. Paulo*, Hungarians were responsible for unfair moves and attacks on Brazilian players. At that point, the game's narratives gain a different content. While European newspapers point Brazilian players as responsible for violence in the field, which would be explained by their racial characteristics and limited cultural pattern, the Brazilian press said that Hungarians were the big aggressors. Moreover, it was “[...] a real battle for Brazilian players, who faced a group determined to win through legal and illegal means, and a partial referee that indignantly favored the Hungarian team” (ELIMINADA... 1954, front page).

O Globo columnist Serran (1954c, p. 10) said that “Mr. Ellis truncated yesterday's battle in Bern, facilitating the victory for the Hungarians – two goals in off-side and a non-existent penalty allowed the Magyars the 4-2 win”. The penalty referred to in the paper was defined by the referee when the match was 2-1 for Hungary:

Thanks to that penalty, the Hungarians could raise the difference to 3-1, which greatly broke the reaction that our players had been enthusiastically undertaking. Yet Brazil still reached 3-2, eventually capitulating at 4-2 because of another error by the referee who validated an offside goal by midfielder Kocsis (O PENALTY..., 1954).

Violence in the field extended to the dressing rooms after the match. However, the narratives of the Brazilian press have few details about those events. *Folha de S. Paulo* reports that the confusion after the match was created by Hungarian forward Puskas who would have thrown a bottle at Brazilian defender Pinheiro's forehead. Despite police intervention, the delegations of the teams went into physical confrontation in the dressing room (SERRAN, 1954e).

There is evidence to think of the inconsistencies present in articles published by the Brazilian press, because they were consciously or unconsciously intended to present the national audience with a narrative to explain adequately how the superiority of the national football had

collapsed in Bern. The expression “truncated the battle” means that the referee would have seen too many fouls, being too strict and thus hindered the smooth development of the match. This is contradictory to the claim of violence by the Hungarians and especially to Mr. Ellis’s respective complacency to this behavior.

O Globo and *Folha de S. Paulo* reported Hungarians’ opinion accusing Brazilian players of initiating the attacks in the field. However, the newspapers did not take violence as a cause of Brazil’s defeat. The defeat had a name and nationality: Mr. Ellis, the English referee, the one that would have undermined the team with his mistakes, his technical inability and his moral commitment.

Conversely, as shown by Von der Lippe and MacLean (2008), when comparisons between South Americans and Europeans are made by Swiss, Norwegian, and especially English newspapers, there is a clear distinction about the character of the peoples. English newspapers were more incisive at the time about the character and morality of “other peoples”. Because they founded and disseminated modern sport, they felt authorized to establish the “rule of civility” also in football:

The English claim football as theirs, and assert the right to define and prescribe the moral codes and ethical practice associated with it. A higher status and greater moral power was claimed for English football specifically and British football more generally through claiming football as a marker of Englishness and given the terms of the repeated refusal of the (English) Football Association and its allies in Scotland, Wales and Ireland to participate in the early world Cups and their strained and spasmodic membership of FIFA. These assertions to moral superiority and the wide-spread adherence to the cultural codes of popular imperialism meant that English papers were likely to find a sympathetic audience for their claims that despite the quality of the teams, they could not resist ‘foul play’. (VON DER LIPPE; MACLEAN, 2008, p. 79, our translation)

This “Englishness” ideal is reflected in the discourse on the work of the referee, Mr. Arthur Elliot, aided by fellow Englishman Mr. W. Ling, in control of the match, as identified by Von der Lippe and MacLean (2008, p. 80, our translation). According to the newspaper *The Manchester Guardian*, the referee worked to maintain law and order. *The Daily Mail’s* front page states: “Bloodshed was only avoided on the pitch by the gallantry of an Englishman, Mr. Arthur Ellis, the Halifax referee, who had charge of the game, with Mr. W. Ling, of Cambridge, one of his linesmen.”

However, a day after the defeat, Serran (1954c, p. 10) defines the person who would have taken away Brazilians’ chance to compete for the title of World Champion of football: “Brazilians defeated because of the referee’s mistakes”. Indeed, the referee’s role, when narrated by the Brazilian press, takes on very different characteristics: the Hungarians did not defeat the Brazilians; Arthur Ellis did. According to an article published by *Folha de S. Paulo* on June 29, the referee’s “disastrous” performance would have influenced the result: “The final result does not reflect in any way the progress of the battle, since it was won with the clear help from the referee, the famous Mr. Ellis, whose fame must have certainly collapsed due to his partisan conduct this afternoon” (ELIMINADA... 1954, front page).

Without any impartiality or modesty, Brazilian newspapers accused the referee of condoning the Hungarian team’s violence. For Brazilian journalists, if the referee had acted impartially, the result would have been different:

Referee Ellis finally crowned his clumsy performance with the expulsion of Nilton Santos and Humberto, both aggressed rather than aggressors, and not pointing Kocsis's offside when he scored the fourth Hungarian goal, and the penalty committed by Zakarias over Julinho after 39 minutes of the second half.

Under these conditions, the task of commenting on a battle won by a team that was inferior in the field from every point of view is most deplorable. The Swiss fans did not spare applauses to Brazilians, unanimous in recognizing that they were the real winners of the match (ELIMINADA... 1954, front page).

In another issue of the newspaper, days after the match, Serran (1954c, 1954d) kept discussing the mistakes of the English referee, saying that there would be a unanimous revulsion to the referee and that Brazilian officials had sent a protest against Mr. Ellis to the International Football Federation (FIFA).

To the Brazilian press, the referee's performance is "unworthy", "partial" and indecent. The result of the match is seen a consequence of moral deficit by both the Hungarian players and the referee. The language of conspiracy implied that FIFA and the referee were part of European collusion to restrict the chances of success of Brazilians and South Americans in general. It seems clear that Brazilian newspapers' discourse about the defeat also pointed out and identified asymmetrical power relations between the center (Europe) and the periphery (South America), between North and South on the world's configuration.

Von der Lippe and MacLean (2008) indicate that European newspapers' narratives on the said game and its consequences were based on an ethnocentric selection and framing still present at the time, which placed Europe as the center and reference of the civilized world in all spheres, even forgetting the then recent barbarism of two World Wars. The Brazilian press operated a type of reading on the defeat to the Hungarians based on the narratives on Brazilian football's technical superiority, the referee's dishonesty and a conspiracy by FIFA and the Europeans against Brazilians and South Americans in general. Finally, Brazilians would have been the victims of those in power in the configuration of the world and international football.

Let us also observe that the production of journalism, yesterday and nowadays, uses newspapers themselves, national and international, as sources to cover the different events and facts that deserve to be news. Brazilian newspapers in 1954, without escaping the practice of the field, used different European newspapers as sources to produce their stories about the Brazil-Hungary match. When using this resource and source, the Brazilian press presented the stories of European newspapers in line with rationalizations produced here about that defeat and about the praise to the superior Brazilian football, despite its misfortune. The ethnic and cultural stereotypes about Brazilian players presented by European newspapers in that match (VON DER LIPPE; MACLEAN, 2008) were not the sources of Brazilian newspapers we observed. Indeed, in one of the few times that a European view on the match is provided, it was reworked to reiterate the argument of the conspiracy against the Brazilian team. *O Globo* underscored the opinion of the president of the Scottish Football League and the club Glasgow Celtic, Mr. Bob Kelly:

Hungarians have a good football team, but they think no one else can have one [...]. In my opinion [...] the World Cup is a complete disaster. Its organization is chaotic and the conduct of the players is hopeless (A COPA..., 1954).

4 CONCLUSION

We can say that, differently from Von der Lippe and MacLean's (2008) findings, narratives by the Brazilian press about the Battle of Berne did not lie in concern about the decay of sport as an ethnocentrically determined civilization index. Their narratives are built from a local perspective, in a dynamics of production and affirmation of a national identity in which football is a totalizing vector – a metonymy of nation.

The background concern prior to the game was related to the fragility of the will of the “Brazilian Man” and his ability to turn the alleged superiority of Brazilian football into results. This would be the first reason for the losses suffered so far and the obstacle to be overcome. Brazilian narratives about the Battle of Berne (Hungary 4-2 Brazil) outline power relations between center and periphery in which we would have been deprived of the chance to present “our potential” in face of the vested interests of those who represent the “center”: the European referee and FIFA.

At the time, *O Globo* and *Folha de S. Paulo* pointed out that the “natural” and “unique” characteristics of Brazilian players and football could make a difference and even be an advantage over “Europe’s spirit of organization”. This confirms the notion that, at least in that context, individual qualities, which translated the Brazilian style of playing, were more appreciated than collective organization and tactical planning.

In the context of a competition between nation-states, beyond the intrinsic dynamics that determined its result, the match became a flashpoint for newspapers from different countries to activate discursive arsenal of identities, stereotypes and differentiation between neighbors and aliens. The dear idea of Western civilization and its civility standards – still as a measure for everything in that context – was what classified and hierarchized individuals, behaviors and people. It is from the notions of *European* and *civilization* that the game gains meaning and rationalization both in Brazilian and in European newspapers. It is true that the notion of civilization was appropriated in different ways in that context – in Brazil it was based on Freyre, for here we were establishing an original and unique civilization (SOARES; LOVISOLO, 2003, SOARES, 2014). It is in the field of identity disputes that matches have been narrated and their results have been interpreted since 1950, in Brazil. A competition that naturally triggers the market of nation-states eventually obscures the analysis of the intrinsic factors of games and sports as these are encompassed by national narratives. The results are not analyzed from the tactical organization or the recognition of the technique of the “other”, since these aspects were obliterated by the nationalist climate of the structure of this kind of competition in the media.

In short, the interpretation that emerges from analysis started by von der Lippe and MacLean (2008) and which we undertake here reveals how that post-war world had the totalizing grammars of national, singular, civilized and barbarian as the key for reading cultures and its consequences, and confrontations in any social space where nation-states competed. When describing the Battle of Berne, newspapers end up explaining – each from its own place – the asymmetries between center and periphery and, in the case of European newspapers, the very European asymmetries when observing the Hungarians. They would be second-class civilized citizens.

In Brazil, in the 1950 World Cup, at the 1954 Battle of Berne and perhaps even today, football mobilizes grammars that speak of projects of nation and that challenge the complex and stereotypical ambivalence between values associated with traditional and patriarchal society as well as those associated with modern and individualistic societies.

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