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Projeto gráfico, Diagramação e capa: José Luiz Stalleiken Martins

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Revisão: Sônia Peçanha

Supervisão Gráfica: Káthia M. P. Macedo

Coordenação editorial: Ricardo B. Borges

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NOTA DOS EDITORES

Com este número de *Antropolítica*, iniciamos uma segunda fase de nossa revista, com uma nova apresentação gráfica e uma organização distinta. Ao completar sete anos de atividades ininterruptas, reafirmamos nossa proposta de publicar textos que possam contribuir de modo significativo para as ciências sociais e, em particular, para as linhas de pesquisa desenvolvidas no Programa de Pós-Graduação em Antropologia e Ciência Política, da Universidade Federal Fluminense. É nesta direção que projetamos as novas seções de *Antropolítica*. Destacaremos, de agora em diante, em cada número a ser publicado, uma temática relacionada a estas linhas de pesquisa, compondo um *dossiê*, organizado por um pesquisador do Colegiado do PPGACP e expondo a perspectiva de especialistas – brasileiros ou estrangeiros – na temática. Além disso, criamos uma nova seção, denominada Notícias do PPGACP, na qual, além de relacionar as dissertações e, em breve, as teses defendidas no programa, apresentaremos, em cada número, as principais propostas e atividades dos grupos e núcleos de pesquisa.

Registramos, ainda, nosso profundo pesar pela perda do nosso colega, o professor René Armand Dreifuss, cuja memória homenageamos nas palavras do professor Eurico de Lima Figueiredo.

Finalmente, com este número, temos a certeza de continuar disponibilizando para os pesquisadores da área de ciências sociais reflexões da mais alta qualidade.

A Comissão Editorial



DOSSIÊ:

Esporte e modernidade

E D U A R D O P . A R C H E T T I *

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

TRANSFORMING ARGENTINA: SPORT, MODERNITY AND
NATIONAL BUILDING IN THE PERIPHERY

By 1914 the sports introduced by the British were national practices that made possible the expansion of the incipient civil society (clubs, associations and organized competitions). The practice of sports was concomitant to the rapid process of urbanization and modernization of Argentina. The construction of the “national” through the bodily practices, created outside the country, can be seen as an example of a radical modernity that allowed Argentina to be integrated in the process of consolidation of a global sport arena. The sports discussed are football, polo, car racing and boxing that brought to great success to the nation and produced key sport idols. The great heroes, Fangio in car racing, Monzon in boxing and Maradona in football, were national but also furnished a transnational sport imaginary. Following those sports the article argues that through sports the social and cultural heterogeneity of the nation was formed in a kind of complex collage.

Keywords: *sports; nation; modernity; heroes; nacionalization.*

* Antropólogo argentino, professor e pesquisador da Universidade de Oslo, Noruega

From the end of the nineteenth century and through the first three decades of the twentieth century, Argentina became integrated into the global scene of massive world commodity exchange, vast international migrations, rapid urbanisation, new images of urban consumption, and circulation of mass cultural products. Between 1890 and 1914, Argentina became one of the great immigrant nations in the modern world. Buenos Aires, the city capital, grew dramatically from 260,000 inhabitants in 1880 to 1,576,00 in 1914. In 1914 almost half of the population of Buenos Aires were aliens. Spanish and Italian immigrants constituted the bulk of the immigration. The British with 30,000 immigrants represented less than 2 per cent of the total foreign population (SOLDERG, 1970, p. 33-61). By 1930 the city had almost 3 million inhabitants, one-third of whom were European immigrants. This historical context is important for a proper understanding of the relations between sport and modernity in a peripheral country.

In Europe, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the shaping of modern masculinity was related to normative standards of appearance, health and bodily performances and care. After the end of the civil wars in the 1860s Argentina entered into a process of modernisation where European trends were sources of inspiration for the political elites. Argentina imported the two competing models of bodily and moral care: the Germanic, based on gymnastics, and the English, based on games and team sport (MOSSE, 1996, p. 40-47). Gymnastics was confined to the military barracks and schools while team sport developed in private clubs, in working places and in regulated public spaces. The British immigrants brought not only capital and technology to Argentina. Their boarding schools, with their emphasis on the practice of new sports, and their clubs, where leisure time was occupied with sport activities, have played a key role in the construction of identities in the making of modern Argentina. The expansion of sport consolidated a civil society at the margins of the State and created by 1930 a national space of sport competition dominated by Buenos Aires. The written press and especially the radio in the 1920s were crucial in the social and symbolic unification of a vast territory.

Since the first Olympic Games of 1896 the rapid expansion of a global space for sport competition can be seen as a radical project of modernity because it created stereotypes of performances and symbolic schemes that are still in function. Sport was a creator of mirrors, human myths and powerful images open to any nation and its citizens. Thus, Argentina could be seen and placed in the world through their

sportsmen concrete performances. In this paper my emphasis will be on football, polo, car racing and boxing because Argentines had very early outstanding international results. One of my central hypothesis is that a process of nation building through sport must contain all the social fragments, all the dislocated and mismatched identities that arise from the changing character of the groups which inhabit its territory. I will argue that these different sport practices were conditioned by class origins and regional historical developments. Certainly, sports like tennis, golf, basketball or rugby were nationally important, but not until late in the twentieth century and only incidentally did Argentina produce good players or teams in these branches. Therefore, they did not play a decisive role in nation building like the four disciplines chosen. My paper covers a period from the end of the nineteenth century until the end of the Peronist regime in 1955.

FOOTBALL: A SPORT WITHOUT FRONTIERS

Some the most important football clubs were founded in the 1880s sprang from British schools. In 1883, Alexander Watson Hutton, founder of the Buenos Aires English School, was the first president of the Argentine Association Football League and the first “national league” was organised in Buenos Aires. The board of the association was entirely composed of British citizens. The association kept English as the official meeting language until 1906. Not until 1934 was “football” replaced by the Spanish “fútbol”, when the new and definitive association was created (SCHER; PALOMINO, 1998, p. 25).

Not only was the game an import from Britain, but so were the standards and the quality of the play. During the first decade of the twentieth century and until the First World War, Argentine football grew under the influence of the excellent teams that came to play in Buenos Aires. Southampton, Nottingham Forest, Everton and Tottenham, all of them professional teams, visited Argentina with great success. In a global landscape articulated through the visit of British teams, the myth of the invincibility of British football was born. The local clubs, Lomas Athletic Club and Alumni, with roots in the British boarding schools and players of British origin, dominated the national league. Thus a hegemonic local British football tradition was established. A new way of playing was to develop in relation to what was perceived as British style.

Football became very popular in Buenos Aires and all over Argentina. From 1900, a great number of football clubs have been founded in Buenos Aires and surrounding industrial cities.¹ Provincial leagues were also organized. The majority of the new clubs rapidly incorporated European immigrants and their sons, or were directly founded by them. It is possible to define the competition between British teams and the new “mixed” clubs as a growth point for inventive creolization. The British were the founders of the game; they codified the rules, they developed a morality based on fair play, they constructed a style of playing and exported it all over the world. The native Argentines and the immigrants accepted and incorporated football as an important physical leisure-time activity and as a ritual context for competition and the emotional display of loyalty and engagement.

The turning point in creating a creole football was the victory of Racing Club in the national league in 1913. The victory was defined as the “creole victory” and Racing Club was called and popularly perceived as the “first creole team”. In this context, “creole” was associated with the fact that almost all the players had Spanish and Italian names. The exceptions were three marginal players with names like Wine, Loncan and Prince (ARCHETTI, 2001a, p. 8). Alumni, “the great British team”, was dissolved in 1912 and almost automatically became the symbol of the “British period”. The victory of Racing in 1913 almost coincided with democratic changes, like the extension of civil rights and voting, and the incorporation of the immigrants in political life brought about by the Radical party, that won the national elections in 1916 and stayed in power until 1930. While focusing on the importance of football, sports journalism and the popular press articulated new images and representations based on creolization and the important contribution of the immigrants in defining a national style (ARCHETTI, 2001b). This even can be measured by the names given to the football clubs. Until 1910 names related to places and neighbourhoods (like Boca Juniors, River Plate, Barracas Central, San Telmo, Chacarita, Tigre, Sportivo Barracas, Colegiales, Almagro, Lanús or Quilmes) or with clear youthful allusions (like Estudiantes, Estudiantil, Unión, Argentinos Juniors, or Juventud) predominated. Since this year will be more common to use names of national heroes and commemorations (like Almirante Brown, Vélez Sarsfield, Belgrano, Leandro N. Alem, Juan José de Urquiza, Liniers, General Lamadrid, San Martín, 25 de Mayo, 9 de Julio or Sol de Mayo) (SCHER; PALOMINO, 1998, p. 239-239).

The narrative of a “creole” or “national” style was created as opposed to the British founding style. In this narrative, the British style was

seen as being based on solid collective work, high team morale, long passes, speed, physical strength and lack of individual dribbling. It was defined as an “aerial style”. On the contrary, the “creole style”, called euphemistically “creole foundation”, was a “terrestrial style” based on short passes, precision, the ball preferably on the ground, slower than the British and with an emphasis on creative dribbling.² Through this foundation, Argentine football was supposed to be liberated from the British cage and a new form was developed. This process was consolidated through the international victories of Argentine clubs and the national teams during the 1920s. Boca Juniors, one of the great clubs of Buenos Aires, visited in 1925 several countries in Europe, among them Italy, Spain, France and Germany, played more than twenty matches and returned undefeated. In 1928 in the Olympic Games in Amsterdam the Argentine national team reached the finals and lost against Uruguay in two homeric matches. In the first World Cup in 1930 in Montevideo, Uruguay, the same national teams played the final with the same result: the victory of the Uruguayans. The South American cups were also dominated by Argentines and Uruguayans teams. During this decade Argentine football was not a local phenomenon, it was recognized as something different and very competitive. The emigration of local players to Italy began in 1926 and was accelerated after 1930. Argentine players, most of them midfielders or forwards, were seen in Europe as representing a new style of playing football, as a way of playing a more artistic football (BRERA, 1979, p. 98; PAPA; PANICO, 1993, p. 158-163) For Argentines, the Italian and Spanish styles were perceived as different but not in a systematic contraposition to their own style (ARCHETTI, 1999).

During the same decade football will be consolidated as the most popular spectacle that crisscrossed class boundaries. It was a national passion anchored in local communities and neighbourhoods where the clubs and their stadiums were located. Professionalism was introduced in 1931 and favoured the rich clubs of Buenos Aires, the so-called “five great teams” (*los cinco grandes*): Boca Juniors, Independiente, Racing, River Plate and San Lorenzo. All five between them had 55,000 members and in their installations other sports were practised as well as dance or theatre. We can say that clubs were very successful in organising the leisure-time of middle-class and working-class Buenos Aires neighbourhoods. The clubs of the Argentine provinces were less well-off or decided to remain apart, like the great clubs of Rosario, the second city of Argentina and capital of the province of Santa Fe, Newell's Old Boys and Rosario Central that joined the professional league only

in 1938. With the clear domination of Buenos Aires the clubs of the other provinces functioned as a kind of poor hinterland providing talented players. In order to consolidate this supremacy it was obligatory for professional teams to travel systematically to the provinces playing exhibition games. In this process, catalysed by radio transmissions of the matches played in the 1930s by the five great teams, football aficionados of the interior became supporters of the teams of Buenos Aires. This hegemony, both emotional and symbolic, increased during the following decades. Football was, in this sense, one of the main vehicles of creating a national space, integrating the most remote places and creating, for the first time, real national audiences. The loyalty towards the Buenos Aires clubs was also possible due to the fact that local provincial players were bought and became national figures. Professionalism made possible social and regional mobility.

By 1936, the five great teams had 115,000 members and a capital of almost 4 millions pesos. The other ten professional teams had 55,000 members and a modest capital of 1.3 millions. During the 1930s the spectators attending football matches increased from 2 to almost 4 millions a year. The building of underground and the expansion of the tramway and sub-urban trains lines in Buenos Aires made attendance to the stadiums more easy. At the same time, many stadiums were modernised and the new big arenas of River Plate and Boca Juniors were terminated in 1938 and 1940, respectively. The rivalry of these two clubs developed in the 1940s and until today marks the Argentine championships.

After the end of the second World War the world market of players was open again and many Argentines emigrated to Italy, Spain and France. They continue the pattern opened by many of the great players of the 1930s like Libonatti, Cesarini, Orsi, Monti, Demaría and Guatia. The expansion reached Mexico and Colombia where dozens and dozens of good players continued their careers when professionalism was introduced. The exodus was accelerated after the general strike of 1948 organised by the Association of Football Players that was founded in 1944. The main aims of the strike were: to get the right to have “free and renegotiable contracts” with the clubs and to have a guarantee of a minimum wage for all players, independently of their individual contracts. These demands were satisfied a year later.

The migration process was not only in one direction because Argentina received in this period European coaches, British referees and South American players. Paradoxically enough and in spite of these continu-

ous exchanges, the Argentina Football Association decided to boycott the World Cups because Argentina did not get the World Cup in 1934. This boycott continued until 1958 when Argentina sent a national team to the World Cup in Sweden.

Nevertheless, we can say that the 1940s were a kind of “golden age” of Argentine football. The national teams dominated the South American Championships and teams like River Plate and San Lorenzo had successful tours in Latin America and Europe. The Argentine style was again displayed in the world. San Lorenzo in 1946 made an impressive impact in Europe, especially in Spain. The “essence” of short passes and sudden changes of rhythm fascinated the Europeans (LAGUINECHE; UNZUETA; SEGUROLA, 1998). The national team toured Europe several times with very positive results. The ambition of winning over England was, however, never fulfilled. Argentina played against England at Wembley and the English team was clearly superior winning 2 to 1.

From the above we can conclude that in the period covered by this paper (1880-1955) the beginning was dominated by the obsession of creating a style different from the British and ended with an ambiguous confirmation of its superiority. We cannot deny that in almost a century football became the national sport of Argentina and that during these years the country exported hundred and hundreds of players who were seen as models of a way of playing. The confirmation of a supposed excellence was only achieved with the first World Cup obtained in 1978, more than a century after the first football match was played in Buenos Aires in June 1867 (ARCHETTI, 1999, p. 45-48). Football contributed to the integration of the immigrants in the clubs and to the growth of a self-awareness of the importance of a national football style and identity. These two processes were important for a peripheral nation striving towards modernity. The emigration of Argentine players, sons of immigrants, to Europe greatly contributed to the production of an imagery of the way Argentine played football.

POLO: LANDLORDS, HORSES AND WORLD HEGEMONY

In 1875, the first polo match was played in Argentina. All the players were British (LAFFAYE, 1989, p. 23). The first polo club was founded in Buenos Aires in 1882. By the 1890s, polo was mostly played in the provinces of Buenos Aires and Santa Fe in *estancias* owned by landlords of British origin. In 1892, delegates of the existing British clubs founded

the Polo Association of the River Plate in Buenos Aires. By the First World War, polo was rather exclusively practised by British ranchers and their sons and by some Argentine cavalry officers. The first “creole club”, El Palomar, was founded in late 1915 (LAFFAYE, 1989, p. 54). After this, polo expanded and became a popular sport among the landed Argentine elite. This process culminated with the foundation of an Argentine polo association in 1921, the Federación Argentina de Polo. The old British polo association joined the new organisation in 1922.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the rise of organised equestrian sport in the pampas followed the demise of the gaucho and of his traditional contests and pastimes. The gauchos had a number of rugged and violent games, contests and plays which required a good deal of strength and courage in both man and horse, as well as great speed. Accidents were common in the course of these competitions. In contrast, polo was considered to be a civilised spectator sport and a sign of modern times. The enthusiastic adoption of polo by the native landed aristocracy was seen as an expression of a well-achieved civilising process (SLATTA, 1986). The British pioneers also perceived that in Argentina the riding style of the natives and the quality of their horses were a clear advantage for developing this sport. Ceballos, a very important figure in the Argentine association of the 1920s, commented that from the first years of polo, the British in Argentina did not hesitate in thinking that polo would become a great sport due to the fact that the country “was a land of centaurs, where the fields are as even as chess-boards and the horses show exceptional characteristics and a predisposition for the struggle” (CEBALLOS, 1969, p. 22; ARCHETTI, 1999, p. 82-87).

From 1896 the British landowners and polo players living in Argentina took part in the big tournaments in Britain with great success. Each participation implied an impressive mobilisation of maritime resources: five or six players, the peons (called *petiseros*) and between 20 and 30 horses with all the fodder needed for crossing the Atlantic Ocean. Usually they embarked in Buenos Aires in February or March in order to be in good shape for the summer tournaments in Europe that began at the end of May. Success and victory were also business because the best horses, relatively cheap in Argentina, were sold in Britain. It was common that the best players were the owners of the best horses and gradually Argentine “creole” horses gained international fame. Moreover, an international circuit developed and the good players were invited to play in different countries with teams organised by British and European

aristocrats or American millionaires. 1922 is a foundational year for Argentine polo. The new association decided to send an “official” team to England. The team had six “*anglos*” – sons of British immigrants – and two “creole” players. They won the most tournaments in England, including the Hurlingham Open. Invited by the United States Polo Association they continued their victories winning the North American Open. With this event the Argentine polo was recognised as a powerful tradition.

Paradoxically, some of the best world players in this transnational arena of the 1920s, like John Traill and Louis Lacey, were raised and lived in Argentina but as British citizens they played with the British national team (LAFFAYE, 1989, p. 73-88). The fact that Argentina was unable to utilise these players in international competitions contributed to the “nationalisation” of polo. Traill and Lacey would not join the Argentine team in the Olympic Games in Paris in 1924, the first great victory of the Argentine national team and the definitive recognition of their different playing style.

In the Paris Olympics the Argentine “creole style of playing” was founded. The Argentine team, consisting of three “*anglos*” – sons of British immigrants, Nelson, Keeny and Miles, and one “*criollo*”, the captain Padilla, won the Olympic title defeating the favourite teams of the United States and Great Britain – without Traill and Lacey because they refused to play against Argentina (ARCHETTI, 1999, p. 90-95). Suddenly, the “world discovered” a new way of playing based on a gentle and determined riding style and the speed and marvellous movements of the ponies (LAFFAYE, 1989, p. 96). The victorious team was received in the harbour of Buenos Aires by thousands of people: they had won against the two big economic world powers, they were “champions of the world”, as Olympic gold medallists were usually called, and they had amazed the sophisticated Parisians and the European aristocracy. The image of an original “creole style” came back to Argentina and confirmed, in many ways, the existing self-image. Argentine players were not surprised by this victory, they were expecting it (ARCHETTI, 1999, p. 95-102).

In the 1930s Argentine polo was dominated by the Santa Paula club which was defined as the “first great creole” or “melting-pot” team, composed by two Argentine aristocrats, the brothers Reynal, the “gaucho” Andrade and Gazzotti, descendant of Italian immigrants. The hegemony of past “British” clubs like North Santa Fe, Las Rosas, Hurlingham and Santa Inés ended. Santa Paula had three important

tour in the United States, from 1929 to 1931, and they won the Open twice. The Santa Paula style was seen as expressing all the vigour of the riding style of the gauchos and open the North American market for the Argentine ponies. At the end of the 1930s the international polo of high handicap was reduced to three countries: United States with 2,590 players, Argentina with 1,755 and Great Britain with 1,153. In India and Pakistan polo was still important but the poor quality of the horses hindered a successful competition with the dominating new nations: Argentina and United States.

In 1928 the *Copa de las Américas* (Cup of the Americas) confronting the national teams of Argentina and the United States was played for the first time. The United States won two matches out of three that year, and, with the same result, the second Cup disputed in 1932. In 1936 in Berlin polo returned as an Olympic sport. The Argentine team with two *anglos*, Cavanagh and Duggan, the “gaucho” Andrade and Gazzotiti won easily. This victory was facilitated by the withdrawal of the powerful team of the United States. The Argentine team after this victory travelled to the United States for playing the third Cup of the Americas. For the first time the Argentines won in two straight matches. The Cup was played again in 1950 and the Argentines won again. In Buenos Aires, the year before, the first World Polo Championship was played and the host country won. The hegemony of the Argentine polo was thus consolidated. The identification of polo with the pampas and the gaucho tradition was in the period under consideration definitively established. The strategy of localising sport practice in concrete territories was indeed more than successful in this case: polo became a symbol of the country and an expression of the abilities of the landed aristocracy in a sport where class, money and distinction were so important. Argentine polo players entered this world as privileged performers.

MOTOR RACING AND MODERNITY: LANDSCAPES, MACHINES AND MEN

The Argentine Automobile Club (AAC), founded in 1904, had, among its main goals, to develop motor racing in the country. In 1910 the first town-to-town race was held from Buenos Aires to Córdoba, approximately 500 miles away, setting a pattern for long-distance over-the-road races in Argentina that would endure for half a century. The first car reach Córdoba after four days, struggling in roads without signs,

but with excess of water and mud. This race continued until 1932. The context for these type of races, in Argentina called *Turismo de Carretera* (TC), was poor roads, long legs, a great public impact, pilots full of courage and mechanics able to do the most difficult repairs in short time. The romanticism related to extreme conditions was accompanied by the idea that motor racing was the supreme expression of modernity, the perfect unity between industrial products – cars – and individual performers – pilots. Another important element was the concrete recognition by Argentines of the national landscape when, at the end of 1920s but especially in the 1930s, the most important races were transmitted by radio with the help of airplanes (ULANOVSKY; MERKIN; PANNO; TIJMAN, 1995, p. 186-191).

During this period the pampa region was by far the most developed in Argentina with the rapid expansion of modern agriculture. Modern traction machinery needed a technical infrastructure that this area provided. Cars and trucks become vital to Argentina's sprawling rural economy, which depended on the ability to move products from farm to market. The Americans set up assembling plants in Argentina. By 1924 Ford's Buenos Aires branch could assemble 45,000 vehicles a year. Fords and Chevrolets were the most popular cars and trucks in Argentina, although other European firms were also able to export vehicles in smaller numbers.

Car race circuits were established in the pampa region in the 1920s in the towns of Rafaela, Esperanza and Rosario in the province of Santa Fe, Laboulaye, Villa María y Moldes in the province of Córdoba, and La Plata, San Martín, Bahía Blanca, Coronel Suárez, and Mercedes in the province of Buenos Aires (PARGA, 1995, p. 57). All these circuits had different length, from a few miles to the classic 500 miles of Rafaela, but always in ameliorated dirt roads. Raúl Riganti, one of the great Argentine racing names of the pioneer time, was Rafaela's first winner in 1926. He was the first Argentine sportsman to race seriously abroad, competing in the Indianapolis 500 in 1923 (Bugatti), 1933 (Chrysler) and 1940 (Maserati). The long-distance TC racings were consolidated by the establishment of the *Gran Premio de Carreteras* (GP) in 1928 when 40 drivers participated and 19 car producers makers were represented (PARGA, 1995, p. 136).

This was a period of technical experimentation. The racing cars were real hybrids, a mixing of parts and engines assembled with the intention of obtaining more speed while keeping the necessary stability. One clear example was the car of Domingo Bucci, a modified Hudson, called

the “Bestium” for its capacity of 4800cc and its particular appearance. In order to obtain good results it was crucial to have access to a garage as well as access to economic resources. The drivers usually got support from the agencies importing cars or representing Ford and Chevrolet or from especial organised local committees of their home towns. This was also a period of tragic accidents. Many good drivers were killed, among them Giannini, Bóssola, Blanco, Gaudino, Riganti and Bucci.

The cars for long-distance competitions were radically modified in 1935 with the introduction of reinforced and more solid structure. The racing cars looked like ordinary cars and the security of the drivers was increased (SOJIT; MISOLI, 1956, p. 246). At the same time the circuit of the GP was increased, covering a great part of the vast Argentine territory and replacing the traditional Buenos Aires-Córdoba. Not only was the nation united, in 1936 the GP reached Chile with a length of 3,400 miles. Argentine drivers and cars were then displaying mechanical modernity in neighbouring countries. The GP of 1937 and 1938 covered two-thirds of the Argentine territory with the intention to prepare for the most ambitious race of its kind Argentina ever attempted to realise. In 1940 the racers would roar north-west from Buenos Aires through the Andes to Lima, Peru, then back again, a round trip of almost 6,000 miles. This was done in exactly 16 days. The winner was Juan Manuel Fangio with a Chevrolet. For more than a decade, the TC was dominated by the rivalries between him and the brothers Juan and Oscar Gálvez, representing Ford. Argentina was divided for a long time: the *Fangistas* against the *Gálvistas* and the *Chevroletistas* against the *Fordistas* (LUDVIGSEN, 1999, p. 14).

The long-distance racings were followed by a large number of shorter circuit competitions. In 1937 the so-called *Mecánica Nacional* (MN) with open cars, similar to the European Grand Prix cars, had a very intensive programme. In that year 70 competitions were organised in different parts of the country, a record that demonstrated the maturity reached by motor racing in Argentina. This development was, however, interrupted by the Second World War. The import of cars, tires and parts was heavily restricted, and severe restrictions on the use of petrol were also implemented.

After the war an important change in car racing occurred. In 1947 the Argentine Automobile Club (AAC) attracted some European drivers and racing cars to the Buenos Aires summer to race against the best local talents and machinery – MN cars. Among the Argentines, Fangio

and Gálvez, and among the Europeans, stars like Varzi and Villoresi in their Maseratis. The Europeans won easily all the races, and it was clear that the Argentine MN could not compete with the best European cars. The following year the AAC bought two Maseratis and one of them was given to Fangio. Again the Argentines were overpowered by the Europeans drivers and their cars. However, in the last two races Fangio borrowed a light Simca-Gordini from one French driver and almost won. He demonstrated that with a good car he could give some fight. The leader of the Alfa Romeo team commented that “Fangio should be put at the wheel of a first-class car and then he would surely do great things” (LUDVIGSEN, 1999, p. 16). Two years later, in 1950, this happened. Fangio won a race in Mar del Plata with a inferior engined Maserati in a frenetic battle with the Maserati star driver Ascari. A crowd of 300,000 watched the race and among them 30,000 from Balcarce, the town where he was born. From then on Europe was open for his career.

In the meantime, the AAC organised in 1948 the impossible: a TC race Buenos Aires–Caracas–Buenos Aires, almost 12,000 miles. The original idea was to include the best European drivers but not a single one accepted the invitation. Finally, 22 South American drivers took part against 119 Argentines. The AAC saw the race as a privileged mean to promote Argentine technology while others defined this enterprise as “colonising process”, a way of showing the Argentine superiority in the most modern sport competition (PARGA, 1995, p. 472). The result was in many ways a catastrophe: seventy percent of the cars did not reach Caracas. The return was shortened in 3,000 miles and additional rest days were given. Out of the 141 inscribed cars only 26 were able to accomplish the race. The Argentine superiority was not confirmed and the plans for an even most gigantic project, a TC race Buenos Aires–New York–Buenos Aires, was forever abandoned. Circuit racing became the turning point of success for Argentine drivers.

Let us come back to Fangio. He was born in 1911 in Balcarce, a town of 40,000 in the province of Buenos Aires wher potato farming was the main economic activity. He was the fourth child of Italian immigrants. His father was a stonemason and a painter. At the age of 11, he began to work, first as a blacksmith and later as an apprentice in a local car-repair workshop. He moved to Balcarce’s Studebaker agency where he learned to repair, rebuild and even build cars from the scratch. He then became a fitter of the newly imported cars. In 1936 he began his career as a racing driver, first in minor MN competitions and from

1938 in long-distance TC. Driving a Chevrolet he became a symbol of this mark as Gálvez brothers were for the Ford. Fangio was Argentina's TC champion in 1940 and 1941. During his career as a TC driver he always had the support of the potato-growers of his home-town. TC racing was a central activity in the semi-rural towns of the pampa region as we have seen above. The drivers represented a local community and the relation between Balcarce and Fangio was not an exception. The modest origin of Fangio as well as his occupational record were also prototypical. Car drivers in the 1930s and 1940s had a "*chacarero*" (farmer) and immigrant background.³

Fangio went to Europe in 1948 but his success was limited. The 1949 season was the beginning of his international exploits. He won four races with a Maserati financed by the AAC and the Argentine government. Europeans found Fangio's entourage large, rich and efficient and his mechanics first class (LUDVIGSEN, 1999, p. 36). He also won with a Simca-Gordini in Marseille and with a Ferrari in Monza. All these races were transmitted by radio to Argentina and followed with great passion. Fangio was showing the kind of superiority that Argentines expected, and in this process he became the symbol of a "modern nation" able to compete with Europe. His return to Buenos Aires in August 1949 was spectacular. He was received by a huge crowd, that included all the *Gálvistas*, and when the following day he visited the President Perón, the public accompanying him counted several thousands.

In 1951 Fangio won his first Grand Prix World Championship with the new Alfetta model of Alfa Romeo. Between 1951 and 1957 he was World Champion five times, a record still to be beaten, with four different cars: Alfa Romeo, Ferrari, Maserati and Mercedes-Benz. He was a reliable driver, combining endurance, courage and technique. In a time of fatal accidents, he was always fast and prudent, taking risk only when it was needed. He was defined as a master and "compared to his capabilities the entire world elite is blown into the second rang" (LUDVIGSEN, 1999, p. 162). Stirling Moss, the great English driver and one of Fangio's most tenacious rivals, believed that his physical strength, product of many years of TC in Argentina, and tactical intelligence were Fangio's most incisive virtues. Moss wrote that this combination transformed him into an "absolute genius" (MOSS, 1991, p. 130). Without any doubt the expansion of motor sports – and modernity – in Argentina culminated like in a happy dream with the great achievements of Fangio.

BOXING: THE FISTS OF THE NATION

The great Argentine writer Bioy Casares tells us that he, sleepless, in a cold dawn of 1923, waited for the first newspapers, and that, with great desolation, read that Luis Angel Firpo, Argentine heavyweight champion, had lost his match of the world title against Jack Dempsey, the champion (BIOY CASARES, 1994, p. 29). This day, and in spite of the result, Argentine professional boxing became international. Amateur boxing confirmed this performance, and during the Olympic Games of Paris in 1924 Argentine boxers won two silver and two bronze medals. These achievements were, however, not a product of an even development of boxing. The provinces played an important role in the creation of the Argentine Boxing Federation in 1922 because until 1924 boxing spectacles or even exhibitions were prohibited in Buenos Aires.

In the 1920s boxing expanded and the performances of Firpo were, in many ways, determinant. Born in Junin, a small town of the province of Buenos Aires, in 1894 Firpo began boxing in 1914 in the International Club of the city of Buenos Aires, founded this same year by members of the Socialist Party. Due to the difficulties in Buenos Aires his career was initiated in Uruguay, and in 1918 he emigrated to Chile where boxing was important. He went to the United States in 1922, the Mecca of professional boxing, where he won three matches. In 1923 he won ten matches and lost against Dempsey. Until 1926, when he retired Firpo belonged to the heavyweight world elite. He was able to box in his career against three world champions. His style was not sophisticated but he had a great punch and a great physical resistance. He was baptised "The Wild Bull from the Pampas" at a time when all Argentine performers, from football and polo players to tango singers, were associated with "wildness", "pampa" and "gauchos" (ARCHETTI, 1999, p. 193).

The way open by Firpo was followed in 1930 by Justo Suárez, a very technical and intelligent lightweight boxer. The first year in the United States his campaign was brilliant, but in 1931 he was defeated by Billy Petrolle, one of the best fighters in his category. At his return to Buenos Aires his decadence accelerated when he lost his national champion title in 1932. Called "the boxer of the people", Suárez was, before football players, the first real national idol of modern sports in Argentina (BIALO, 1999, p. 48). The imagery created in the United States for Firpo was used for Suárez; he was called "The Little Bull of Mataderos", in allusion to the neighbourhood of Buenos Aires where he was born.

Amateur boxing grew during the 1920s and 1930s and it was better organised. Regional and national competitions were also a channel for selecting the Olympic representatives. Argentina did very well in the 1928 Olympic Games in Amsterdam with two silver and two gold medals. The first gold medallists were in light-heavyweight, Avendaño, and in heavyweight, Rodríguez Jurado. The two champions can be seen as representing the recruitment in boxing at that time. Avendaño was a working class son while Rodríguez Jurado was born in a rich family in the province of San Luis. Rodríguez Jurado went to the University, received his engineer title and became an excellent rugby player, playing as a forward in San Isidro, aristocratic Buenos Aires club, as well as in the national team. He was an excellent boxer with a good technique for a heavy-weight fighter, and also admired by his courage and discipline. When asked why he did not follow the steps of Firpo becoming professional, he answered that for him sport was an activity for amateurs (ARCHETTI, 2001a, p. 88).

In the Olympic Games of 1932 in Los Angeles Argentina almost repeated its results of 1928. Two gold medals and one silver were obtained. Once again a heavyweight boxer, Santiago Lovell, got the title. He was one of the few Argentine mulattos who did well in sports. He continued his career as professional but never reached international standards. Lovell was elegant, technical but he did not have the punch of a heavyweight fighter. In Berlin in 1936 five medals were gained: one gold, one silver and three bronze. This time the medal in the category of heavyweight was only silver. In the Olympic Games of 1948 and 1952 Argentina obtained more medals: two gold, three silver and three bronze. We can say that from 1928-1952 Argentina was one of the most powerful nations in amateur boxing but without obtaining a single professional world champion title.

The first World Champion was the fly-boxer Pascual Pérez who won the title in 1954. The former Olympic champion (1948) Pérez represented the so-called *escuela mendocina* (the school from the province of Mendoza). This school was characterised by an attempt to reach a perfect synchronisation between time, speed and distance. It was said that a *mendocino* fighter never lost his line, had a good defence and was able to keep an ordered aggressiveness (ARCHETTI, 2001a, p. 92). Pérez was a genuine model of this tradition that in the 1960s produced the most adored Argentine World Champion: Nicolino Locche.

Boxing was a provincial sport for poor youth and an avenue for social mobility. The local scenario was dominated in the 1940s by a charis-

matic boxer: José María Gatica. Born in San Luis, like Rodríguez Jurado, he became a street-child in Buenos Aires until boxing channelled his talent for fighting. His professional career was initiated in 1945 and lasted until 1956, overlapping almost completely with the Peronist regime. Gatica was a fervent and devoted Peronist and the government use him as a popular figure. His boxing was courageous, almost demerital, and his personality boundless – a kind of wild boxer. His fights against his main opponent Prada were intense, bloody and spectacular. They entered into the legend of violent boxing and political confrontation. The mythology associated Gatica with Peronism and Prada with the opposition represented by the Radical Party. The Peronist government never hid its preferences: Gatica was a symbol of the fighting-spirit of the working-class of the Argentine poor hinterland (*cabecitas negras* – black heads). In 1951 Gatica went to the United States, and in a fight against Ike Williams, World Champion, he was humiliated. His fists did not bring the expected glory to the nation. This failure as well as his extravagant life-style provoked his physical decadence. He died in extreme poverty in a traffic accident at the age of 38.

Amilcar Brusa, the trainer of many Argentine champions, said that he will never try to find his boxers in religious secondary schools or in universities, but in the marginal and poor neighbourhoods of the provinces or in Buenos Aires. He sustained that in an environment full of injustice, the child became used to the negative sides of life and they learned to react with determination and to survive with intelligence (MONZÓN, 1976, p. 45-46). A nation like Argentina, where so many social and class boundaries and differences developed during the modernisation period, produced also good boxers.

CONCLUSION

I have tried to show how sports played a crucial role in the incorporation of Argentina in an international system of competitions and at the same time creating a national arena of leisure time. This process was helped by the press and the radio that made possible the free circulation of symbols, legends and heroes. Some of the Argentine heroes became also transnational idols, like Juan Manuel Fangio, a world figure, or like football players as Orsi or Monti in Italy or Di Stéfano in Spain. Globalisation was at work. The sports discussed are heterogeneous but important for getting a better understanding of Argentine social and cultural complexity. The highly fragmented social structure produced performers of great quality: the landed aristocracy polo play-

ers, the middle-class of the rural pampa drivers like Fangio and others, the urban middle and working-class football players, and the marginal provincial groups excellent boxers. Sport was a successful avenue for social and symbolic integration into the realms of modernity and national building. Argentina is not an exception but an interesting case.

The cases referred to above illustrate how civil society expanded through sports. Sport institutions were relatively autonomous and regulated by their own rules and moral systems. The fabric of social relations in Argentina was strengthened by the practice of sport. The only real and systematic intervention of the State occurred during the two Peronist governments, between 1946 and 1955. Since 1947, Perón, a military man very interested in sports, implemented a national policy in which youth national championships in different disciplines were carried out with an explicit aim of political propaganda for the government. The sport victories were always acclaimed and the sportsmen received by the President Perón himself. The case of Fangio was obvious given his international impact, but the victory of the Argentine polo team in the World Championship was also presented as an expression of important national virtues: will, courage and ability to win. This in spite of the fact that the Peronist Party was politically and ideologically against Argentine landed aristocracy. One of the failures was the investment in Gatica. During the two presidencies of Perón, the infrastructure was considerably improved building new stadiums and new sport centres, which made possible to host big events like the World Championship of Basketball in 1950 and the First Pan-American games in 1951.⁴

RESUMO

Em 1914, os esportes introduzidos pelos britânicos haviam-se convertido em práticas de tempo livre disseminadas no território nacional argentino. A prática desportiva é concomitante com o rápido processo de modernização e urbanização da Argentina. A construção do “nacional” através da introdução de práticas corporais criadas fora das fronteiras do país pode ser vista como um exemplo de uma modernidade radical que permitirá à Argentina participar na expansão de uma arena global esportiva. Os esportes analisados são o futebol, o pólo, o automobilismo e o boxe, que trouxeram grande sucesso para a nação e produziram ídolos esportivos. Os grandes heróis, Fangio no automobilismo, Monzon no boxe, e Maradona no futebol, foram heróis nacionais mas também foram parte de um imagi-

nário esportivo transnacional. Analisando estes esportes, o artigo tenta demonstrar que através destes a heterogeneidade social e cultural de uma nação foi recuperada mediante uma espécie de colagem complexa.

Palavras-chave: *esportes; nação; modernidade; heróis; nacionalização*

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NOTAS

- ¹ See FRYDENBERG, J. Los nombres de los clubes de fútbol: Buenos Aires 1880-1930, *Lecturas: Educación Física y Deportes*, Buenos Aires, año 1, no 2, 1996. Disponible em: <<http://www.sportquest.com/revista>>; FRYDENBERG, J. Práctica y valores en el proceso de popularización del fútbol: Buenos Aires 1900-1910, *Entrepasados: Revista de Historia*, Buenos Aires, v. 6, no12, p. 7-31, 1997.; FRYDENBERG, J. Redefinición del fútbol aficionado y del fútbol oficial: Buenos Aires, 1912. In: ALABERCES, P.; DI GIANO, R.; FRYDENBERG, J. (Ed.). *Deporte y sociedad*. Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 1998.
- ² See E. Archetti, Estilo y virtudes masculinas en El Gráfico: la creación del imaginario del fútbol argentino, *Desarrollo Económico*, v. 35, no 139, p. 419-42, 1995; ARCHETTI, E. Playing styles and masculine virtues in Argentine football. In: MELHUUS, M.; STOLEN, A. (Ed.). *Machos, mistresses, madonnas: contesting the power of Latin American gender imagery*. London: Verso, 1996).
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