

Football and religion: Football Players as New Missionaries of the Diaspora of Brazilian Religions¹

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Enter my house
Enter my life
Change my constitution
Heal all the wounds
Teach me to be holy
I want to love only You,
Because the Lord is my greater good,
Make a Miracle in me.
(By Regis Danese and Gabriela)

A painting by the artist Orlan – known for the way she systematically transforms her body through plastic surgery - shows a large, illuminated, white acrylic cross hanging over green grass, lined with dozens of footballs. Orlan is presenting an image of a new universal religion, which she emphatically repudiates: football. The painting can be seen as a good illustration of one of the most widely circulated ideas in Marxist or Weberian sociology,² that of religion as the opium of the people – and in this case, football as its substitute, capable of maintaining large masses of humans submissive.

Is it possible to think of football as a new universal religion? If so, what are its gods? Do these gods have a religion? If they do, what is it, and how do they practice it? These are some of the questions that this article will address by looking at the diaspora of Neopentecostal religion through the emigration of Brazilian football players throughout the world.

¹ I am grateful for the reading and suggestions made by three fellow anthropologists: Maria Amélia Dickie, who inspire this article and helped me avoid slipping in the religious field, Maria Regina Lisboa, Miriam Grossi and Claudia Fonseca. I would also like to thank journalist and sociologist Jeffrey Hoff for the translation.

² “Secular authorities are interested in using monks to domesticate the masses” (Weber 1958: 245); popular religions were tolerated in Confucian China, because they guaranteed the docility of the masses (Weber 1951:164); Japan imported Buddhism from China because it was capable of “taming the masses”(1951:195, 1958: 271) in Sadri 1992: 47.

Football, undoubtedly one of the languages shared today throughout the planet, offers global communication, connecting billions³ of humans, mostly men, in a single practice and in a single viewing, mostly on television. In this logic, football games would be rituals, and the World Cup, now the most watched televised event on the planet, with an accumulated audience of billions of viewers, would be the mega-ritual that every four years affirms this religion, consecrating its main priests and Gods.

Anthropologist Marc Augé used other words to say what Orlan did with her painting about the place that football occupies in the contemporary world, without however, connecting it with Christianity: “for the first time in the history of humanity, at regular intervals and determined times, millions of individuals settle in front of their domestic altar to watch, and literally, participate in the celebration of a single ritual” (Augé 1998 :74)⁴.

Is it an exaggeration to mix profane acts and religion? This is not new. In 1906 Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert recognized this possibility, in a much cited passage:

If the gods, each one in their time, left the temple and became profane, we would see, on the other hand, the human, but social things - such as homeland, property, work, the human person - enter one after the other. (Hubert and Mauss, 1906 : XVI)⁵.

Mauss anticipated his uncle, who expanded the concept of religion in order to embrace, for example, the combination of a multitude of people to commemorate a great national event, affirming that there is no essential difference,

between an assembly of Christians, celebrating the main dates of the life of Christ, or of Jews, celebrating either the departure from Egypt, or the promulgation of the Ten Commandments, and a meeting of citizens

³ Three and half billion people (nearly half of the world's 6.7 billion inhabitants) regularly watch football. The Cup, in Germany in 2006, was transmitted to 214 countries. The final between Italy and France had 715 million viewers. Source: FIFA.com

⁴ “...pour la première fois dans l’histoire de l’humanité, à intervalles réguliers et à l’heure fixe, des millions d’individus s’installent devant leur autel domestique pour assister et, au sens plein du terme, participer à la célébration d’un même rituel.”

⁵ “Si les dieux chacun à leur heure sortent du temple et deviennent profanes, nous voyons par contre des choses humaines, mais sociales, la patrie, la propriété, le travail, la personne humaine y rentrer l’une après l’autre.”

commemorating the institution of a new moral charter or any large event of national life. (Durkheim 1968 [1912])⁶.

In fact, the relationship between football and religion has been identified by many for quite some time. That there are a great number of rites in modern-contemporary complex societies does not appear to be an issue for debate. The thesis that the more complex the society, the less ritualized it becomes, has been widely questioned. Football today is only one among many of the social spheres in which we find rituals being professed and followed on a daily basis, and is probably the one which involves the largest number of followers.

If watching a game is compared to participation in religious rituals, the performance of the players on the field would correspond to that of the clergy:

“... the drama is celebrated in a central place by twenty three officiants and some assistants before a multitude of fans, whose number varies, and can reach up to fifty thousand individuals and be followed with the same faith, at home, by millions of practitioners of the liturgy who, without apparently being given an order, stand up, chant, wail or sit once again, at the same rhythm as the gathered multitude” (Augé 1998 :74)⁷.

Clergy of a new planetary religion? More than this, certain players rise to the condition of true saints and as such populate in the form of posters –although not as small statues - the walls of bars and the bedrooms of youngsters throughout the world. They are seen as gods: “God lives in Catalonia,” was the headline of *L’Equipe*, one of France’s most important and traditional sports newspapers. It was praising the performance of Barcelona forward Lionel Messi, 22, the man elected the world’s greatest player in 2009, , , when he scored four goals, declassifying the English club Arsenal from the most important club competition, the Champions League in 2010. The

6 “entre une assemblée de chrétiens célébrant les principales dates de la vie du Christ, ou de juifs, fêtant soit la sortie d’Egypte soit la promulgation du Décalogue, et une réunions de citoyens commémorant l’institution d’une nouvelle charte morale ou quelque grand événement de la vie nationale. ”

7 « ... le drama célébré en un lieu central para vingt-trois officiants et quelques comparses devant une foule de fidèles d’importance variable mais pouvant atteindre cinquante mille individus est suivi avec la même foi à domicile par des millions de pratiquants si au fait des détails de la liturgie que, sans apparemment s’être donné le mot, ils se lèvent, s’exclament, rugissent ou se rassoient au même rythme que la foule rassemblée.» (Augé 1998 :74)

consecration of Messi was echoed worldwide and the lay terminology of praise (“genius” or “ace”) was exceeded only by the religious metaphors (“God” or “extra-terrestrial”) in various newspapers, including the highbrow *Times* of London. Anyone who has seen all the fans in the *Camp Nou* stadium greet Messi with open arms, rocking back and forth and issuing a thundering “Méeééésiiiiii, Méeééésiii,” cannot fail to think that the multitude can only be bowing down before a divine being. A god stimulated by the forces of his time, which disseminate his image to all corners of the planet, as they did with other gods before him: Pelé, Di Stefano, Ronaldo, Ronaldinho. These others, however, do not enjoy the phonetic coincidence of their name: stores and shops in Barcelona now sell a football shirt that reads: “I saw the Messiah play”, with an image of the football star, his arms raised to the skies, circled by a golden aura.

Is Messi the Messiah? Perhaps, but a God still without a church, except for that located in the mediascape (Appadurai 1990:9), a transnational space that redefines the geography of the sacred⁸. Another Argentine player, in his time and at least in his country, received this level of consecration and even more - the formation of a sect around his personality cult, the Maradonist Church, which is clearly an expression of a well defined local identity: the Argentine national identity. Founded playfully in 1998 by a group of fans that began to celebrate Christmas on Maradona’s birthday, it now has some 200,000 fans, its own 10 commandments, prayers, rituals of veneration to his goals and specifically the goal he scored with his hand against England in the Cup of 1986, considered by Diego Maradona as a divine intervention in a game marked by the memory of Argentina’s tragic defeat four years earlier during the Guerra das Malvinas (as it is known in Argentina, or the Falklands War as it is known in England). Maradona’s number, *diez* (10) in Spanish, and *Deus Dios?* (God in Spanish) also have a phonetic proximity that helps sustain the myth.

Is football a religion? Similarities have been suggested elsewhere, as in the following passage by another observer of the liturgy:

In fact, football has procedures that are similar to those of a church: its protagonists have a rigid hierarchy; there are conventions and taboos; its special moment, the game, is held in a closed space, where there is a field, equivalent to the altar; it has a specific language and its calendar is somewhat liturgical; there is a moment of retreat, the

⁸ Mediascape is the capabilities to produce and disseminate information and images of the world, in global cultural flows, created by electronic media

concentration, which excludes the opposite sex, and a final result, which can lead to an examination of the conscience if there was a mistake, followed by contrition, or a moment of compensation and glory, for some, eternal, as Pelé would say. (Alvarez 2010).

Recognizing the similarity, however, we must be careful not to reduce one thing to another. Da Matta (2003) made a pertinent critique of the affirmation by Michael Novak, author of *The Joy of Sports* (1976), that sport is a type of religion. As Da Matta rightly argues, the reduction of one social dimension to another does not resolve the problem.

Magic has already been reduced to a primitive science; rituals were seen as neurotic repetitions or as expressions of mysticism; kinship ties and terms were interpreted in their matrixes of “blood” and Sport was seen as sublimation for aggressive and bellicose impulses, in the same way that Novak sees them as a modality of religion. But this does not resolve the problem, because the task remains of explaining the social dimension to which the activity in focus was reduced. If Sport can be reduced to religion, as Novak suggests, we now have to ask, what is religion? (Da Matta 2003:21)

Da Matta’s observation is appropriate and clarifies this point: football is above all a ludic and anti-utilitarian activity, although it is strongly influenced by economic and political interests. It does not need to be transformed into an activity that substitutes war, as Elias proposes (1992), or into religion to merit academic or artistic reflections. Such a perspective does not imply the complete absence of religion (and even of magic) in some of its practices, whether those of fans, or players.

Perhaps it would be most suitable to say that football, especially but not exclusively South American, and religion are easily (and advantageously?) associated to each other. I found religious symbols in locker rooms I visited in different places in the world: altars, images of Christ and especially of the Virgin Mary, at times simply stuck to the white tiles in heterogeneous compositions that reveal the multitude of their origins. Serene images of the Virgin Mary, as in the pitch of the club *Payssandú*, in Belém, in northern Brazil, or cruel images of Christ, bleeding under a crown of thorns, as in the locker room at the *Sanches Pijuan* stadium in Seville, in southern Spain. I found one expression of this association that startled me in a visit one afternoon to Madrid’s *Vicente Calderón* stadium. I thought I had entered a stadium museum, like those that now exist in nearly all of the world’s big clubs – places impregnated with the sacred, where visitors come to worship the objects exposed whose auras (Benjamin 1987) stir emotions much more intensely than the art in our traditional museums. But

the stadium also housed the *Memorial del Atlético Madrid*, a space where the members and fans of the club could leave their ashes in small urns nestled in a space in one of the tiles that compose large mosaics with photos of the club and its emblem. This is nothing less than a cemetery installed in a broad and modern space inside the *Vicente Calderón*, with a chapel to conduct funeral services. This was the solution found to respond to the many requests from fans to have their ashes strewn on the stadium's field, given that European law has prohibited such practices for alleged health reasons.⁹ One way to legitimate the fans' intentions was to prolong, beyond life, their passion for football.

The relationship between football and religion appears in various social forms. We find it in appeals to the *au-delà*, a greater force for the players, a protection -- prayers in the locker rooms, the fact of asking for a blessing upon entering the field are indications of this significance. We can also find it in the thanks offered for 'gifts' -- the arms raised to the sky after the goals, the group prayers conducted after victories.

Aren't these appeals to a greater force similar to the situation of the hunter that Mauss (1934) describes in his classic study "Techniques of the Body"? In one passage, in which he relates corporal practices to magic rites, Mauss reports that a hunter was able to remain in a tree for many hours, and that the strength and resistance to pain needed to conduct this vigil came from reciting magical chants. In another, when analyzing the super human ability of Australians near Adelaide to run with kangaroos and wild dogs, he also attributes this competence, as well as that of grabbing a possum out of a tree, to the fact that the hunters endlessly chant a magic formula.¹⁰

⁹ Created in 2009, the memorial already holds the ashes of about 150 fans, most of them men (20% are women) who do not rest there for eternity, because the contracted time of permanence is 25 years, for which 1,500 euros were paid. Many left this wish in their wills, along with the needed funds. According to the person responsible for the memorial, Ana, the visits are more intense on special days, such as All Saints Day, but occur throughout the year. One of the rooms in the memorial serves at times as a chapel: it is a place for prayer, with chairs, a pulpit and a high table that recalls an altar, with Christian and Greek icons. If the families want, or if it has been requested in a will, she conducts a brief ceremony that may or may not have prayers, music – such as the club hymn – or another mode of performance that may have been requested. The Argentine Club Boca Juniors also has its own cemetery, but it is located in a suburb of the city.

¹⁰ "Strike it with the tuft of eagle feathers (initiation, etc.)/ strike him with the belt,/ strike it with the bandage of head,/ strike it with the blood of circumcision,/ strike it with the blood of the arm,/ strike it with menstruation of the woman,/ make him sleep, etc »

Football players appear to find in prayer and in their practices of a religious character the extra strength that helps them to make or defend against a goal, or that pushes them beyond their bodily limits. There are a variety of countless small rituals that they conduct before, during and after each game, as we have seen. To raise their hands to the sky in celebration of a goal (a gesture Brazilian goal keeper Taffarel made in 1994, which has been imitated by Kaká and many other players), to kneel after a goal or say a blessing after a play that barely missed the goal – a gesture that Romário made famous (Rial 2003). As well as these expressions of gratitude, it is also common for Brazilians to use their right foot and say a blessing upon entering the pitch, and raise their arms to the sky moments before the match begins. Goalkeepers, meanwhile, may kick the posts and touch the crossbar while saying a blessing and asking for protection¹¹.

Would it be appropriate to call them rites? Once again, wouldn't we be inappropriately expanding the religious domain to mundane practices? Upon looking at the *prayer* Mauss (1909) determined the type of acts the rites constitute and, upon doing so, defined ritual in a broad manner that includes rituals conducted outside of religions. In this light, we can include individual acts among the rituals, on the condition that they are regulated in some way; Mauss exemplifies this with the rules of politeness. What is a rite in one place may simply be a custom in another and vice-versa. Thus, what would distinguish a rite from other social forms is that in the rite one seeks an action which in practice on another social domain, a “veritable efficacité matérielle” (Mauss 1960:404). It is for this reason that touching the grass with the hand or stepping on the field with the right foot upon entering the field, kicking the goal posts, in addition to more explicit gestures such as raising one's arms to the sky or making the sign of the cross before the opening whistle are thus rituals introduced into football. They are conducted in the hope of achieving a true material effectiveness, whether that of protecting against possible injury, of preventing the ball from passing a limit designated by a magic gesture, or, on the contrary, causing it to enter the goal. If the ritual element in football is important for

« frappe-le avec la houppes de plumes d'aigle (d'initiation, etc.)/ frappe-le avec la ceinture,/ frappe-le avec le bandeau de tête./frappe-le avec le sang de la circoncision./ frappe-le avec le sang du bras,/ frappe-le avec les menstrues de la femme,/ fais-le dormir, etc” Mauss (1934).

¹¹ Christianity no longer holds a monopoly in relations with the divine in football. Recently, players have appeared bowing in a Muslim position upon celebrating a goal.

the search for protection, it also has importance for giving thanks, as a counter-gift (Mauss 1990), a reciprocal exchange.

The point that I would like to make is that, without being a religion, football, through its most important protagonists, enjoys planetary veneration, probably greater than that of any one religion.

“Brazilian” Evangelical church

Among the many remarkable tourist attractions in Munich’s central square, the “Brazilian” Evangelical¹² church is worthy of note¹³. The quotation marks around Brazilian are justified. The Pentecostal movement was created in the United States and introduced into Brazil in 1910, and recreated locally in the 1950s, with the formation of the *O Brasil para Cristo* [Brazil for Christ] movement, which had a meteoric rise in the country, coinciding with the growth in urban population (Fry 1978). According to some estimates, one in every six Brazilians is now Evangelical, in other words, some 30 million people (Mariano 2010). In the 1980s, the *Universal Church of the Kingdom of God* (UCKG) began “the internationalization of its proselytizing, thus inverting the North-South direction of the missionary flow and Brazil’s former condition as a destination for European and U.S. missions” (Mariano 2010). The first country in which UCKG was established was the United States (1986), followed by Uruguay (1989), Portugal (1989), and Argentina (1990). The expansion abroad went hand in hand with the growing emigration of nearly four million Brazilians. At the same time, other Neo-Pentecostal churches (Reborn in Christ, God is Love), directed by Brazilian pastors and bishops, also went global and are now located in some 180 countries.¹⁴ They all share

¹² I use Evangelical to refer both to the historic Protestant religions as well as the Pentecostal and Neopentecostal religions.

¹³ I thank fellow anthropologist Maria Amélia Dickie for calling my attention to this monument.

¹⁴ In 2000, the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God already had “franchises” in 172 countries. Its penetration is greater in Portuguese-speaking countries. In others, its temples are located within communities of Brazilian immigrants. It has confronted considerable resistance upon entering Asia (except in Japan where there are 300 thousand Brazilians) the Middle East and Africa, where non-Christian religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and Islam are hegemonic (Mariano 2010).

the belief that intimate contact with the Holy Spirit allows them access to Jesus, a contact that is interpreted as being the “possession of the Spirit.” The churches share the mission of converting the world to the Evangelical faith, and in order to accomplish this they are managed as businesses and make extensive use of the mass media.

There is, however, something unique about the church in the Munich square: it was created by a football player, Jorginho, who won the 1994 World Cup, and for many years played in Germany for Bayer Leverkusen and for Bayer of Munich, and is one of those most responsible for the popularity of Evangelicalism among the players in the German *Bundesliga*. In addition to the predictable company of fellow Brazilians, including the leading striker Cacau, German players have also adhered to the Evangelical movement.¹⁵ Jorginho’s church was initially one among many prayer groups created by players around the world - I found a similar group in Spain among the players of Celta de Vigo during ethnographic research with Brazilian football players living and working abroad.

Furthermore, becoming a pastor now appears to be an increasingly frequent option after the end of footballers’ careers on the field. For instance, another former member of the Brazilian national team, Müller, has become a pastor after leaving football. Kaká has also expressed his desire to become an Evangelical pastor¹⁶, not a coach, a team executive or a commentator.

They may organize reading Bible groups among players, open (or plan to) churches, and wish to be preachers in the after-football future to support their Neo-Pentecostal denominations. However, these seem negligible compared to the extent achieved by their religious message propagated by them in the media and the amount of their donations. As we know (Oro 2005/2006:320), “Brazilian” Neo-Pentecostal

15 “Playing Football for God: Brazilian Footballers and the Holy Spirit” *Der Spiegel*, 09/17/2008 In: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,578716,00.html>. Accessed on Sept. 30, 2009.

16 “I would very much like [to be a pastor], but it would be a long journey. It is necessary to study theology, take a course, go deep into Bible study, into Evangelicalism”. In: “Kaká said that he was a virgin when he got married and intends to be a pastor,” Folha on-line, 17/12.2007, accessed on April 29, 2010, on <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/folha/esporte/ult92u355651.shtml>

denominations are disseminated among the Brazilians diasporic communities and largely, but not exclusively, through mediascape (Appadurai 1990). For instance, during fieldwork I noticed that players in Spain, Holland, France, Japan, Canada and Morocco watched Record network television daily. Present in over 80¹⁷ countries, Record is a powerful weapon of dissemination of precepts of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG). Along with the Women's Network (Rede Mulher) and the 62 radio stations in Brazil that also belong to the UCKG, Record helps hold together a community of believers that in 2000 surpassed two million people (Oro 2005/2006: 324). As Oro has shown, Neopentecostalism is known for its use of media*.

Since football is the most-watched television program in the world, the Brazilian players of the national squad and the Brazilian players living abroad have had an important role in the dissemination of neo Pentecostalism. Even though FIFA prohibits religious (or ideological) propaganda¹⁸, this has occurred since the 1970 World Cup¹⁹. In fact, one image stands out from the many photos of Brazil's victory in the 1994 World Cup: that of a circle formed by players and the technical staff of the Brazilian team, in a group hug, praying at the center of the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, in the United States. The scene would be repeated with even greater intensity during the 2002 World Cup, with the players kneeling at the center of the field of the International Stadium in Japan. This evolution underlines a change in Brazilian football from originally associated with the nation (through flags, national anthems) to strongly evoke religion. The image transmitted to the largest global audience ever promoted Brazilian faith worldwide and established itself as a visual *topos* repeated each time the Brazilian team won a tournament.

This was visible at the commemoration of the Brazilian team's victory during the Confederations Cup of 2009, held in Johannesburg, South Africa. The scene of the

¹⁷ <http://noticiasdaigrejanomundo.blogspot.com/>, consulted in April 2011.

¹⁸ "Players must not reveal undergarments showing slogans or advertising. The basic compulsory equipment must not have any political, religious or personal statements. A player removing his jersey or shirt to reveal slogans or advertising will be sanctioned by the competition organiser. The team of a player whose basic compulsory equipment has political, religious or personal slogans or statements will be sanctioned by the competition organiser or by FIFA"

<http://www.fifa.com/aboutfifa/documentlibrary/doclists/laws.html#laws> Accessed in April 2011).

¹⁹ At the time, it issued a note of clarification that there was no punishment because the acts of faith took place after the end of the game. The first time was probably after a goal by Petras, from the former Czechoslovakia team against Brazil in the 1970 World Cup, which was commemorated by the player on his knees, in a gesture that was repeated by the Brazilian star Jairzinho a few games later.

players and the technical staff in a circle, with their knees on the pitch praying was repeated once more. Moreover, most of the players wore a white shirt that read *I belong to Jesus*. When they reached the podium to receive their trophies, and were told that they could not go on wearing their shirts, they took them off, taking care to carry them in a visible place. Some held them in their hands, and Lúcio, the captain, placed it on his shorts in such a way that it was visible when he raised the Cup. The message was thus shown on TV throughout the world – I was watching the scene in Athens, Greece. News reports about the return of the Brazilian delegation from South Africa written by reporters who shared the plane said the flight was peaceful, serene, and nearly silent, quite different from the party atmosphere, or the samba and dancing that were common after other Brazilian victories. The transition from a party mood to a more peaceful atmosphere appears to reflect the transformation in the ethos of the national team: the new religious hegemony is expressed in the players' behavior.

In the four years between the victory of the Confederations Cup of 2005 and 2009, the Brazilian squad traded a “partying” (“bad-boy”) captain, Ronaldinho Gaucho, for a Neo-Pentecostal one, Lúcio, and exchanged a group of players who prayed after victories, but celebrated more intensely by dancing with *pandeiros* (tambourines) and *atabaques* (drums), for one in which they still do the samba, but are more likely to be found praying and listening to gospel on their headphones.²⁰ At least one of these percussion instruments are not religious neutral: although present in secular contexts, *atabaques* are largely used in Afro-Brazilian religious rituals (Carvalho 1984, Ferreti 1985, Lody & Sá 1987) and are avoided in Pentecostal ones. *Pandeiros*, even if absent of such religious rituals, are connected with another African-Brazilian cultural expression since they are largely used in *capoeira* along with *berimbaus* (single-string percussion instrument) and *atabaques*.

For years prayers and *pagoda* samba music lived together in harmony within the national team. The harmony persists, however, the celebrations of 2009 clearly attest to the new hegemony of religion over samba. If Ronaldinho gave up the tambourine to raise the trophy, Lúcio lifted his *I Love Jesus* shirt in a gesture that has great

²⁰ Brazilian footballers contacted during the study also played Brazilian religious music in their cars.

significance in the football liturgy. To be sure, religious propaganda was not absent in 2005. In the photos of that event, Lúcio and six other Brazilian players appeared with shirts praising Jesus, but they were behind the stage where the players received the trophy, and the images were dominated by the *pagode* musical celebration commanded by Ronaldinho (the player voted the best in the world that year) and his wide grin. Music and dance prevailed in the televised images and photos. The team of the Brazilian coach between 2006-2010, Dunga, was the first to clearly place Neo-Pentecostal religion at the center of its group manifestations. While in 1994, captain Dunga raised the Cup while cursing the press, and in 2002, Captain Cafu did so expressing his love for the poor home neighborhood and for his wife,²¹ it is very probable that Jesus would once again be praised by Lúcio, had Brazil won the 2010 World Cup. The television cameras and the photographic images would thus be transmitting a faith that through football conquers a planetary stage, formidable and astounding disseminating religion. In this sense, more than being Dunga's team, it is that of assistant coach Jorginho, who is the Neo-Pentecostal founder of the Munich church.

In addition to bringing along their religious practices, attending Evangelical churches abroad along with other Brazilian immigrants and, in some cases, establishing their own temples, the diaspora of Brazilian players has significantly contributed to the promotion of Neo-Pentecostalism in the media, or, at least, of the words “Jesus” and “God”. These symbolic gestures propagated in the mediascape promote their religious beliefs on a global scale, in a sort of “banal religion” if we borrow the term coined by Billig (1995) to qualify, in his case, a less clear expression of nationalistic sentiments (“banal nationalism”) that nevertheless are vital in the reproduction of nationalism. In the case of the Brazilian players, propagating Neo-Pentecostal religion in the stadiums, away from temples, preachers and Bibles, is a powerful (and yet banal) Neo-Pentecostal propaganda. These go unnoticed by FIFA's stricter control that of the secular countries authorities, which do not allow religious propaganda on television to silently infiltrate the daily lives of millions viewers of the global spectacle.

21 “100% Jardim Irene” was written on his tee shirt (referring to his neighborhood) and he said “Regina, eu te amo” [Regina, I Love you].

Like the flag “hanging unnoticed on the public building”²², the constant references to God in their interview statements to the press (the numerous phrases that begin or end with “as God will”, or “Thank God”), the mimicry of thanksgiving and the sacred words on T-shirts constantly remind us the importance of God to fans in the stadiums but also to larger television audiences.

The presence of these Brazilian players on every continent and their central role in the clubs where they perform, make them important channels in the dissemination of a religious sentiment. Of course, the players are not the only channel. However, even when a television program is transmitted to over 80 countries, we are still dealing with a explicit religious rituals. The potential power of the football transmission of religious words and gestures lies exactly in its semi-visibility, in its underground spread—i.e., banal religiosity. Perhaps, we could say we are facing a new desterritorialization of religious beliefs, in relation to with the media act as a tool both in direct ways and in more banal, mundane ways - like the display of religious slogans on players’ T-shirts or their making of the sign of the cross at the entrance of the field or after scoring a goal. For this strong involvement of the players to become possible, profound changes had to be made in Evangelical religions.

Prosperous Athletes of Christ

The adhesion of football millionaires (and of other players who are not millionaires and have lifestyles similar to economic migrants in the Brazilian diaspora) coincides with the adoption by Brazilian Pentecostal churches of the Theology of Prosperity in the 1970s (Mariano 2010). Until then, Brazilian Pentecostal followers, who call themselves *crentes* (believers), were known for their adhesion to rigid norms of behavior. They were prohibited from enjoying pleasures in this life, such as drinking alcohol, listening to music other than that during religious service, watching television and having sex before marriage. Sports and gambling were among the prohibited

²² “The metonymic image of banal nationalism is not a flag which is being consciously waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building” Billig 1985:8.

activities, the football ball was known as the “devils egg.” The Theology of Prosperity preached, however, that the faithful had the right to enjoy their happiness on Earth, and that they could and should seek financial success and enjoy it. They aggregated principles of self-help and of mental control (“positive thinking”) to their Biblical preaching. This sparked ethical changes among the faithful, who were now free to express themselves through consumer goods, music and sports and integrate these pleasures into their lifestyle. This also started an aesthetic revolution, as women could cut their hair short, wear jeans, etc. The Theology of Prosperity had such a strong repercussion that scholars argued it formed a third wave of Pentecostalism and constituted what is known as Brazilian Neo-Pentecostal churches. The church that gained the most notoriety at this time was the *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus* (Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, also known as IURD/UCKG), founded in 1977, although other Neo-Pentecostal churches were created in this period, such as *Sara Nossa Terra* (Heal Our Earth) in 1976, *Igreja Internacional da Graça de Deus* (International Church of the Grace of God) in 1980, *Renascer em Cristo* (Reborn in Christ) in 1986 and *Bola de Neve* (Snowball) in 2000.

It is noteworthy, however, that the first explicit association between football and Neo-Pentecostalism took place through the *Atletas de Cristo* [Athletes for Christ] movement which rejected the Theology of Prosperity. As Nunes (2003) reports, the movement was created in Belo Horizonte in 1978 by a pastor and João Leite, a goalkeeper of club Atlético Mineiro. He sought to include athletes from different sports, but it was football that gained most visibility. After this initial impulse, players were transformed into Evangelical messengers. Although João Leite insists the movement is neither a sect nor a church (even if it maintains relations with the local Christian churches), nor a work union, and does not have political affiliations and impose rules of conduct, its founders did have relations with the Baptist Church (Nunes 2003). The movement enjoyed popularity among players from some large Brazilian clubs, creating groups of *Atletas de Cristo* in different clubs, and even with members from the Brazilian national team. A Brazilian team of *Atletas de Cristo*, composed of former players from the Brazilian national team, now plays matches to spread the Evangelical

message.²³ Although Athletes of Christ remains a reference, other denominations gained the preference of the players, such as the Snowball Church, which is founded by a former drug user who became an Evangelical after contracting hepatitis in 1992, and who still surfs in the weekends. Snowball targets young people with informal rituals that incorporate rock and reggae music, Bibles with images of radical sports on the cover, and an ambience of a party in their temples.

The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of football playing

Football and religion clearly have a close relationship and it would not be an exaggeration to say that contemporary football presents the world's most widely watched religious performances. Similarities between football and religion have been suggested elsewhere, as in the following passage:

In fact, football has procedures that are similar to those of a church: its protagonists have a rigid hierarchy; there are conventions and taboos; its special moment, the game, is held in a closed space, where there is a field, equivalent to the altar; it has a specific language and its calendar is somewhat liturgical; there is a moment of retreat, the concentration, which excludes the opposite sex, and a final result, which can lead to an examination of the conscience if there was a mistake, followed by contrition, or a moment of compensation and glory, for some, eternal, as Pelé would say. (Alvarez 2010).

However, we must be careful not to reduce one thing to another. Da Matta (2003) made a pertinent critique of the affirmation that sport is a type of religion by Michael Novak,

²³ Formed by Jorginho, Silas, Tafaél, Paulo Cruz, Giovanni, Paulo Sérgio, Silvio, Axel, Paulinho Kobayashi, Deivid, Cléber Lima, Zé Carlos, Pereira, Guilherme, Daniel, Fábio Freitas and the coach Ricardo Ximenes. In: <http://www.overbo.com.br/portal/2009/01/30/selecao-brasileira-de-futebol-'atletas-de-cristo'-visita-o-amapa-em-marco/>

author of *The Joy of Sports* (1976). As Da Matta soundly argues, the reduction of one social dimension to another does not resolve the problem.

Magic has already been reduced to a primitive science; rituals were seen as neurotic repetitions or as expressions of mysticism; kinship ties and terms were interpreted in their matrixes of “blood” and Sport was seen as sublimation for aggressive and bellicose impulses, in the same way that Novak sees them as a modality of religion. But this does not resolve the problem, because the task remains of explaining the social dimension to which the activity in focus was reduced. If Sport can be reduced to religion, as Novak suggests, we now have to ask, what is religion? (Da Matta 2003:21)

Da Matta’s observation is appropriate and clarifies this point: football is above all a ludic and anti-utilitarian activity, although it is strongly influenced by economic and political interests. It does not need to be transformed into an activity that substitutes war, as Elias proposes (1992), or into religion to merit academic or artistic reflections. Such a perspective does not imply the complete absence of religion (and even of magic) in some of its practices, whether those of fans, or players.

Perhaps it would be most suitable to say that football (especially but not exclusively South American) and religion are easily and advantageously associated to each other. I found religious symbols in locker rooms I visited in different places in the world during ethnographic research with the Brazilian football players diaspora. There were altars, images of Christ and especially of the Virgin Mary, at times simply stuck to the white tiles in heterogeneous compositions that revealed the multitude of their origins. For instance, there were serene images of the Virgin Mary, as in the pitch of the *Payssandú* club, in Belém, northern Brazil, and cruel images of Christ, bleeding under a crown of thorns, as in the locker room at the *Sanches Pijuan* stadium in Seville, in southern Spain. I found one expression of this association that startled me in a visit one afternoon to Madrid’s *Vicente Calderón* stadium. I thought I had entered a museum, like those that now exist in nearly all of the world’s big clubs – places impregnated with the sacred, where visitors come to worship the objects exposed whose auras (Benjamim 1987) stir emotions much more intensely than the art in our traditional museums. I was especially surprised, when, after visiting the museum, I saw that the stadium also

housed the *Memorial del Atlético Madrid*, a space where the members and fans of the club could leave their ashes in small urns nestled in a space in one of the tiles that compose large mosaics with photos of the club and its emblem. This is nothing less than a cemetery installed in a broad and modern space inside the stadium, with a chapel to conduct funeral services. This was the solution found to respond to the many requests from fans to have their ashes strewn on the stadium's field, given that European law has prohibited such practices for alleged health reasons.²⁴ One way to legitimate the fans' intentions was to prolong, beyond life, their passion for football.

Certain players rise to the condition of true saints and as such populate in the form of posters –although not as small statues - the walls of bars and the bedrooms of youngsters throughout the world. “God lives in Catalonia,” was the headline of *L'Equipe*, one of France's most important and traditional sports newspapers. It was praising the performance of Barcelona forward Lionel Messi, 22, the Argentine elected the world's greatest player in 2009 and 2010. The consecration of Messi was echoed worldwide and the lay terminology of praise (“genius” or “ace”) was exceeded only by the religious metaphors (“God” or “extra-terrestrial”) in various newspapers, including the highbrow Times of London. Anyone who has seen all the fans in the *Camp Nou* stadium greet Messi with open arms, rocking back and forth and issuing a thundering “Méeééésiiiiii, Méeééésiii,” cannot fail to think that the multitude can only be bowing down before a divine being. A god stimulated by the forces of his time, which disseminate his image to all corners of the planet, as they did with other gods before him: Pelé, Di Stefano, Ronaldo, Ronaldinho. These others, however, do not enjoy the phonetic coincidence of their name: stores and shops in Barcelona now sell a football shirt that reads: “I saw the Messiah play”, with an image of the football star, his arms raised to the skies, circled by a golden aura.

24 Created in 2009, the memorial already holds the ashes of about 150 fans, most of them men (20% are women) who do not rest there for eternity, because the contracted time of permanence is 25 years, for which 1,500 euros were paid. Many left this wish in their wills, along with the needed funds. According to the person responsible for the memorial, Ana, the visits are more intense on special days, such as All Saints Day, but occur throughout the year. One of the rooms in the memorial serves at times as a chapel: it is a place for prayer, with chairs, a pulpit and a high table that recalls an altar. If the families want, or if it has been requested in a will, she conducts a brief ceremony that may or may not have prayers, music – such as the club hymn– or another mode of performance that may have been requested. The Argentine Club Boca Juniors also has its own cemetery, but it is located in a suburb of the city.

Is Messi the Messiah? Perhaps, but a God still without a church, except for that located in the mediascape, a transnational space that redefines the geography of the sacred. Another Argentine player, in his time and at least in his country, received this level of consecration and even more - the constitution of a sect around his personality cult, the Maradonist Church, which is clearly an expression of a well-defined local identity: the Argentine national identity. Founded playfully in 1998 by a group of fans who began to celebrate Christmas on Maradona's birthday, it now has some 200,000 fans, its own 10 commandments, prayers, rituals of veneration to his goals. They worship in particular the goal against England in the 1986 World Cup. Scored with his hand, Maradona himself considered it as divine intervention in a game marked by the memory of Argentina's tragic defeat four years earlier in the *Guerra de las Malvinas* (as it is known in Argentina, or the Falklands War as it is known in England). Maradona's number, *diez* (10) in Spanish, and *Dios* (God in Spanish) also have a phonetic proximity that helps sustain the myth.

The point that I would like to make is that, football, through its most important protagonists, enjoys planetary veneration, probably greater than that of any religion. This takes place, as we said, without support from the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), the entity that controls global football, which as we noted, prohibits ideological or religious expressions. The press also prefers to report on players' sensationalist activities rather than on the mundane activities of the faithful. What most interests journalists are the impious actions of the non-religious players, the "bad-boys," as they call their professional colleagues who "go out at night." It is visits to the pubs of Manchester, or the nightclubs of Barcelona and Madrid, or to the funk dances in Brazilian favelas, and players' trysts with call girls or transvestites that are covered in the media, almost never the pilgrimage to Pentecostal or Catholic churches. Only in exceptional cases involving big stars do religious activities gain space in the mediascape, as with Kaká, who, when suspended from a game of the Brazilian squad, participated in the inauguration of a new temple, and appeared on the front page of Brazil's two leading newspapers praying intensely alongside Estevam and Sonia Hernandes, the husband and wife couple of bishops who lead the Neo-Pentecostal

church *Igreja Renascer em Cristo*.²⁵ Based on the news reports, in which Kaká was an exception, I expected to find “bad boys” when I initiated my contacts with Brazilian players who had emigrated abroad. Not that I did not find them, but it was the opposite that surprised me.

My research draws from discussions with more than 50 Brazilian players and their *entourages* (families, friends, agents, secretaries, club directors, doctors) living or trying to live in foreign countries. The contacts were conducted in Toronto, Canada; Almelo, Groningen, Alkmaar, Rotterdam, and Amsterdam, Holland; Tokyo, Japan; Lyon, Le Mans, Nancy and Lille France; Monaco; Charleroi, Belgium; Athens, Greece; Seoul, Korea; Marrakesh, Morocco and Fortaleza, Salvador and Belem, Brazil, between 2003 and 2010²⁶. Most players I interviewed had only attended elementary school, around 10% had been able to finish high school, one had applied for college (and dropped out when he moved abroad), and only one had higher education. This was also the case of only three of their wives, although there is a general tendency for the wives to show higher schooling than the players.

Wages are not their main concern and their high salaries did not change radically all their consumption habits, friends or religion practices. Indeed, what amazed me most was the large number of football players who read the Bible daily, attended religious services in Neo-Pentecostal temples, and at home prayed and met with other players, family members and other Brazilians living abroad, and even traveled to other cities to participate in religious services. With surprising consistency, interviews suggested these practices to be quite common, even among players of different social origins and educational levels (Rial 2008). Let’s look more closely at some of the players’ statements, beginning with Ricardo Oliveira, a globally recognized striker, now

²⁵ Kaká’s relations with this church have gained extensive media coverage. In 2007, he displayed the FIFA trophy he won as the world’s best player at the church headquarters, and defended the bishop couple (whom he calls the “apostle and the bishop”) when they were arrested and condemned to 140 days of house arrest in the United States for money laundering and conspiracy. Kaká was shown consulting the church’s websites during the World Cup 2006. A video available on the Internet (<http://vodpod.com/watch/1938949-kak-ungido-a-presbtero>) shows the moment when he was anointed a Presbyterian in the United States and reveals financial details of his sale to the Real Madrid club saying that his career success “is a conquest of the apostolic people.”

²⁶The ethnographic data was gathered mainly in Seville, Spain (where I lived for two months in 2003 and one in 2004), and Eindhoven, Holland (where I went visit several times between 2004 and 2008).

playing at Al Jazira, a club of the United Arab Emirates. Ricardo met his wife Débora Oliveira at a church when she was 14 years old. When I talked with him in Seville, Ricardo had already played for the Brazilian national team, was the leading scorer in the Spanish tournament where he played for Bétis, and was being courted by a number of large European clubs. He lived with his wife Débora who was 17 and their 8-month-old son, Anthony Richards, in a two-story house in Simon Verde, a luxury condominium in the city, and drove a BMW with leather seats and impeccable white carpets. He was extremely polite with me at all our meetings*. Ricardo repeatedly told me how important in his life his relationship with Evangelical followers was. His entrance into the church was seen as a watershed marked by a “commitment to God.” Ricardo, like other players, described his life as being divided by a *before* in the kingdom of evil, and *after* when they entered the kingdom of God. In the *before* these players “messed up,” drank, took drugs (not Ricardo’s case) went out with lots of women (this is not usually mentioned to me, maybe because I am a woman, but I could understand it by their way of not referring to it), and as studies show, could be violent at home. In the *after* (“when I came to know the Word²⁷”) there was self-improvement, not in the sense of having more money or being famous, but in a more spiritual and broader sense of “being a good person.” Ricardo Oliveira told me that it was thanks to this “commitment to God” that he was able to win as a football player.

If the player were not born into an Evangelical family, the conversion to the church takes place through friendship with other Evangelicals. Sometimes a future wife is religious and converts the player. It is more common for the player to emulate the behavior of Evangelical teammates. Ricardo Oliveira, told me, with tears in his eyes:

It was at Portuguesa. There I was with many Evangelicals: Sandro, Simão, Sandro Fonseca, Cafu, Evandro, Élson, Tinho. When I was with them, I saw how they were, the way they cared for me. It was a very strong example, and this made me think “wow, the Evangelicals are different.” One day I was with the team in the hotel, on the eve of a game, and I saw on TV a fire in the neighborhood where my brother lives. I saw my brother, I saw the people I knew, I began to cry. And when I turned to my side, my friend was crying with

27 “Word” is often used as a synonym for the Bible.

me. And I asked myself “why is he crying? He doesn’t even know me well, he doesn’t know these people.” It was a strong example, sharing sadness with a companion. “Tell me, maybe I can help.” He saw me crying at that moment, he began to feel, in a way, the sadness that I was feeling. This example of companionship transformed my life.

The conversion took place much more through caring behavior of people who were admired than through proselytism. It is the “example of life,” of which Ricardo Oliveira speaks that is reflected in another vision of the world and another lifestyle. It is not so much the religion, but the “Word of God” that is important, as if the reading of the Bible were capable of establishing a direct dialog between two beings, one human, another divine. For them, the Bible is a support; it assists in establishing a conversation with a friend. “God is a friend who is always with me,” declared Edu (Betis/Seville, today at Santa Cruz/Recife*). Ricardo says that one must do the right thing to “please God,” in order not to “make God sad.” God, in return, “concedes these privileges that I can enjoy today.” Both among the players from the global clubs as well as those from the smaller clubs I found those who considered the Bible, God and prayer great allies. This was the case of Jeferson Luis Escher, a player on the Kawba Athletic Club of Marrakech, today at Wydad Casablanca. We spoke in a taxi that took us to his house, where we found his wife and one-year-old child who had just arrived from Paraná, Brazil. He confessed that the Bible was his most important support to withstand loneliness, and that he read it twice a day.

I say that I am Catholic, but it is more the Bible, the word that the Bible gives me. It helps a lot. It gives me strength to not be so lonely, not be worried so much with what will happen later. It gives me security, I feel very good. Reading makes me much stronger.

The daily Bible reading takes place even among the Catholics who, theoretically, do not directly seek this form of support, as Pentecostals do. Also Jeferson did not convert; he adopted the Pentecostal practice of Bible reading, and probably the accompanying ethics.

Ricardo was a key contact who helped me approach other players and their families in Seville. He arranged for Denilson and Marcos Assunção to meet with me. What was to be a quick contact ended up being hours sitting at an improvised table at

the Betis training center until we were kicked out by club security. Denilson, who is Evangelical, and Assunção, who is Catholic, also said that God was very important in their lives.

Denilson (today retired): I'm more religious (than Assunção). I'm Evangelical, a believer.

Assunção (today at Palmeiras): I accept anything; if you invite me to go to church I'll go. [laughter] You can't argue over taste and religion. Each one has his own taste and religion, we have to have respect. I'm a Catholic and you're a believer [Evangelical].

Denilson: The importance of God. I think nothing happens by accident and everything has an answer: this answer can only be given by God. I pray all the time. Because there is evil, and if you don't pray, evil will take hold of you. I pray all the time, I ask for things, neither too much nor too little. It's like a struggle, you know, between good and evil.

Assunção: I try to thank Him for everything He gave me. Thanks to Him I have a good life, even though I'm not [religious].

The statement of the Evangelical Denilson reveals more rigid religious practices than that of Assunção who is Catholic. Catholicism is more lenient in behavioral guidelines. This reveals two essential points in the theology of the Neo-Pentecostal denominations: the struggle between good and evil and the permanent negotiation between the individual and God ("I ask for things"). Their statements are similar to many others that I heard:

- (i) Adriano (Seville, today at Barcelona): In Brazil, we would meet the day before the matches to sing hymns, read the Bible and use the Word. On the day of the match we would pray before taking to the field. Here, we don't, because here most of them are not religious, so it's a little harder. But I think we can't judge the others, each person has his own religion and we have to respect it. It's like the Bible says, "God gave everyone free will, so we are free to do whatever we want." So who am I to judge?
- (ii) Alex (PSV, today at Chelsea): For me it's (God) super important. I got to know it when I was 14 at an aunt's birthday. My mom invited me to the church,

and I liked it. To me God is what gives strength to my life. He has put me here, and I thank God every day for his support, his help to get here. But it's not enough to rely on God; one has to struggle.

- (iii) Dill (Bahia, has played in France and Switzerland, today at FC da Foz): I've converted. I've been an Evangelical since 1996, after my marriage. You ask me if I'm religious, and what I think, is that God doesn't like religion. He likes you to give yourself wholeheartedly. So, regardless of religion, I think the important thing is that we search for God. God is the touchstone, the basis of everything in our life. That's what I think, and we always have meetings here at Bahia [his club]: me, Neto, Luciano, those who are Christians. Now Marcelinho has arrived, who's also a Christian [Evangelical].

“Belief,” as the players say, is seen as an indispensable support to withstand the difficulties of a career and survive the “sacrifice” of living abroad. This is the importance of the Word. We find it in appeals to a greater force by the players, for protection. Prayers in the locker rooms, the fact of asking for a blessing upon entering the pitch are indications of this significance. We can also find it in the thanks offered for ‘gifts’ -- the arms raised to the sky after the goals, the group prayers conducted after victories. Aren't these appeals to a greater force similar to the situation of the hunter that Mauss (1934) describes in his classic study “Techniques of the Body”? In one passage, in which he relates corporal practices to magic rites, Mauss reports that a hunter was able to remain in a tree for many hours, and that the strength and resistance to pain needed to conduct this vigil came from reciting magical chants. In another, when analyzing the super human ability of Australians near Adelaide to run with kangaroos and wild dogs, he also attributes this competence, as well as that of grabbing a possum out of a tree, to the fact that the hunters endlessly chant a magic formula.²⁸

²⁸«frappe-le avec la houppes de plumes d'aigle (d'initiation, etc.),
frappe-le avec la ceinture,
frappe-le avec le bandeau de tête,
frappe-le avec le sang de la circoncision,

Football players appear to find in prayer and in their practices of a religious character the extra strength that helps them to make or defend against a goal, or that pushes them beyond their bodily limits. It is for this reason that they touch the grass with the hand, or enter the pitch with the right foot, kick the goal posts, in addition to more explicit gestures such as raising one's arms to the sky or making the sign of the cross before the opening whistle. These ritual acts are conducted in the hope of achieving a true material effectiveness, whether that of protecting against possible injury, of preventing the ball from passing a limit designated by a magic gesture, or, on the contrary, causing it to enter the goal. If the ritual element in football is important for the search for protection, it also has importance for giving thanks, as a counter-gift (Mauss 1990), a reciprocal exchange.

But, as Alex (a defender on the Brazilian national team who is currently playing for Chelsea in England) put it, "it's not enough to rely on God; one has to struggle", one has to work hard at the club. Belief in God has a fundamental role in consolidating a righteous personal ethic, that of a disciplined, obedient, supporting man who cares about others, who "struggle". These are important characteristics in short careers in which the body is the main tool. It is especially important in the practice of a team sport, where coexistence with others is prolonged and not only when practicing the sport itself – the training and games – but in preceding moments: the long hours in "concentration" when the team is isolated in a hotel or training center, the tense waiting in the locker room, the unending hours traveling by bus, in airports and on flights. These periods away from families are generally seen as unpleasant, when not as veritable prisons, which is accentuated among players who live abroad.

In addition, belief establishes and consolidates friendship with other Brazilian players. It provides support in an extremely competitive professional field. "The pressure comes from all sides: the club, the manager, the fans," Ricardo summarizes the situation of a Hobbesian environment. Mediation from preachers is rarely emphasized in these statements, with the exception of Alex. When I met him, at Eindhoven, where

frappe-le avec le sang du bras,
frappe-le avec les menstrues de la femme,
fais-le dormir, etc" Mauss (1934)

he played for PSV, Alex told me that he often went to Amsterdam to attend services of a Brazilian pastor. At times, he went in the company of the goalkeeper Gomes (Cruzeiro, the Brazilian national team, PSV, and Tottenham), but neither Gomes nor his wife highlighted the presence of the pastor, although they mentioned it. Both took their families in a sort of pilgrimage that combined religion and tourism. According to Alex:

Most (of the believers present at the church) are Brazilian, the pastor is also Brazilian. He doesn't speak Dutch, it's all in Portuguese. We talk to people there, they're not players, but we make friends. I saw it on the website of "God is Love," it's www.deuseamor.com.br, it's from Brazil. I called and spoke to the pastor. They are also in Belgium, Switzerland, England, I always go there. To me, it's fundamental."

These churches are meeting places for Brazilian migrants, where in addition to religion, a banal nationalism, as Billig has dubbed, is reaffirmed. Michael Billig (1995:6) distinguishes 'nationalism' from 'banal nationalism'. Both cover "the ideological means by which nation-states are reproduced". But "there is a distinction between the flag waved by Serbian ethnic cleansers and that hanging unobtrusively outside the US post office". Banal nationalism is a term he created to "cover the ideological habits which enables the nations of the West to be reproduced", daily, in the lives of its citizenry²⁹. Sports, through mediascapes, plays an important role to daily remind readers and viewers what nation they belong to, and doing so "they can be seen as banal rehearsals for the extraordinary time of crises, when the state calls upon citizenry, and especially its male citizenry, to make ultimate sacrifices in the cause of nationhood" (1995:11).

By meeting other Brazilians of the diaspora at Neopentacostal churches and through talks about the Globo's soap-operas and Record's programs, by sharing cooking recipes adapted to local ingredients, by exchanging addresses of Brazilian groceries, they also stress this nationalism. Indeed, as other Brazilian emigrants abroad, these players display their nationalism daily - the Brazilian flag that I saw used as tablecloth at the entrance hallway of Gomes's (PSV/Eindhoven, today at

²⁹ Banal, as Billig explain by referring to Arendt (1963) is not synonymous of harmless or innocuous since nationalism can express itself in more violent forms, such as wars.

Chelsea/London) house is just one example among many others. The father of André Bahia (Feyenoord of Rotterdam) invited me once to eat *bobó de camarão*, made possible by a ‘Suriname market’. I had rice, beans, and *picadinho de carne* (beef hash) at Ari’s (AZ/Alkmaar, today at Spartak Moscow) with ingredients supplied by the ‘Turkish’ shop. In Japan, I saw a large roving lorry which shuttles between the Brazilian Embassy, Banco do Brasil (Brazil’s national bank) and other spots. Brazilians were able to find in its shelves Perdigão chicken, Phebo soap, barbecue sausage, and even rice and Brazilian Playboy magazines. Players of the Tokyo Verdy interviewed (Hulk³⁰, today at Porto, Diego de Souza, today at the Kyoto Sanga and Zé Luis, last club Atlético Mineiro) were unanimous in affirming that they would rather consume Brazilian products, and that they do have easy access to them. In the Netherlands, even Brazilian steel wool (Bombrill) may be purchased online, through the website Finalmente Brasil (Finally Brazil), which also provides mail-in orders to other European countries. Its store in Amsterdam is supplied yearly with eight containers of Brazilian products (shampoos, Minâncora ointment, cheese roll, beers, Fanta Uva grape soda, meat, and so forth), as the manager told me. The restaurants they go to almost every day are either Brazilian or serving food which is similar to Brazil’s. Each time they visit the country, many products are brought back in their luggage, and many others are obtained through importers or brought by guests (relatives and friends). Thus, items regarded as ‘national’ are not limited to the usual beans, manioc flour and other consumption items; also Tang juice (according to Edu’s wife) and various medicine (Gomes’s wife).

In an analysis of players’ regular consumption patterns, the national identity dimension is the most salient. Television, Brazilian music DVDs and cassette tapes, and also the web³¹ bring them daily back to Brazil – or, perhaps more accurately, keep them there. They lend meaning to the players’ life experience, allowing them to share that imagined community even while abroad, stressing their nationalism through everyday consumptions.

The same is true in regards to their choice of church. Helinho (Toronto Lynx, today at Milionarios of Bogotá), who is not an evangelical himself, would attend the

³⁰ Hulk told me he was not religious.

³¹ I noticed that the younger were more familiar with using internet tools, including phone. Those over 24 did not use it as often, and preferred the regular telephone. All of them gave me their email addresses, and I have exchanged messages with some players, therefore attesting to their intensive use of the web.

Toronto temple in order to meet other Brazilians. Ricardo Oliveira and Débora went to a temple, and as with Gomes and Flávia, did not like the foreign temple's style – although for opposite reasons. Gomes' wife explained she did not like it because in Amsterdam they were “too serious” in contrast to Brazil, where it is “more cheerful”. Ricardo Oliveira's wife thought the opposite about the temple she visited in Seville. In reality, many players prefer to organize domestic services with other players and migrant Brazilians, as the players of Celta de Vigo. The religious space, either houses or churches, thus serves to reaffirm a national identity in the diaspora.

None of the players I contacted spontaneously mentioned anything about paying a tithe, and in general, avoided mentioning the delicate issue of their wages. It is quite probable that many of them are among the Evangelical churches' largest contributors.³²

To conclude this section, let's return to the words in the epigraph “Make a miracle happen in me,” which I heard sung by Felipe Mello, now at Juventus, the Italian club with the largest fan base, and who was also on the Brazilian national team.³³ The song appears to include some of the maxims that allow us to understand why the Neo-Pentecostal theology conforms so well to the life projects of the football players: a project of social mobility (“I want to rise/As high as I can), which involves great transformation (“Change my constitution”), marked by a highly competitive professional environment that poses constant danger of work accidents (“Heal all the wounds”), and by warnings against hedonist appeals, seen as harmful to the body – the

32 Neymar (Santos), a rising young talent is a faithful contributor to the Igreja Batista Peniel, of São Vicente. He donates 10% of everything he earns, as his father told journalist Debora Bergamasco. “His first little salary was R\$ 450. We signed his first contract at Santos and my wife took the R\$ 45 and gave it to the church each month, OK, there was still R\$ 400 left over to pay the bills. Then he started to earn R\$ 800. Very good, he donated R\$ 80... But God began to test, right? We got R\$ 400 thousand. Caramba, oh my, how are we going to tithe R\$ 40 thousand? It's worth a car! Man! But then you think that God was faithful. Boom, he gives R\$ 40 thousand! But then came ‘catapatapum’ reals. My God, I don't even want to know, ‘tithe’ this right away (smiling). That's right... God tests you in the little and the great,” exclaims the patriarch of the Silva Santos family. And what does the player think of this (...). Does it hurt giving up R\$ 40 thousand? ‘For God, nothing hurts. And I think it's good. We know the pastor at Peniel very well. I've been there for ten years and now they are expanding the church. I think that if we believe in God, things come naturally. God gave me everything: a gift, success.’”
At: <http://blogs.estadao.com.br/sonia-racy/'quero-um-porsche-e-uma-ferrari-na-garagem'/#respond>, 26 April, 2010.

33 TV Program: Expresso da Bola, de Décio Lopes, 9/04/2010, Sportv.

players' principal work tool ("Teach me to be holy"). A career that can lead to such tremendous wealth is experienced as a divine prodigy ("Make a miracle happen in me").

Final Considerations

Football joins religion in a perfect matrimony of interests. Everyone benefits. For the clubs, the players' Pentecostalism guarantees good tools for profit: healthy bodies and sound minds. For the players (especially to Neo-Pentecostal adherents), it offers a cosmology that orders their daily lives, prescribes what they should and should not do, differentiates *good* and *bad*, and thus keeps them away from the temptations of a lifestyle seen as harmful to their professional career. In addition, the Bible readings in particular, but also attending services in temples or meetings with one another, help them to remain serene in a field of great tension and competition with other players in the clubs. At the same time, it brings them closer to their fellow faithful on levels other than the professional, which is a strong stimulant of sociability and for the creation of networks.

Finally, for those who live abroad, religion is also a great foundation to endure the *sacrifice* of being distant from their families and childhood friends, from an imagined Brazil, the nostalgia for solidarity and authenticity, which affirms the national identity. The hymns that the players sing or hear in their luxury cars speak of radical changes like those that these players experience in their daily lives, and for that reason they make sense. They establish a dialog with a life project of social mobility where the sports victories are associated with victories in the economic sphere. They make tolerable radical transformations in a short time and in strange spaces, because even those who remain in Brazil usually live far from their families of origin and their childhood friends. Religion, that is, faith, offers football players extra strength, the ability to expand the limits of their bodies in endurance and strength, as Mauss has indicated.

On the other hand, football offers religion nothing less than the largest and most important stage for its preaching, capable of simultaneously reaching billions of homes on the planet. It offers 'selfless soldiers of the Word', missionaries who demonstrate the faith globally (through slogans on tee-shirts, tattoos, and interviews), thus disseminating

banal religion through the mediascapes and increasing the contingent of believers. They are ‘soldiers of the faith’ who also sustain it financially, tithing their millionaire earnings - when they do not themselves open a church, as entrepreneurial missionaries. Through the power of the images they transmit on the mediascapes, the Pentecostal denominations, recreated locally in indigenized forms in Brazil, gain impetus, facilitating their worldwide dissemination.

As so many other emigrants of the Brazilian diaspora, these players and their families reinforce their Brazilianness through everyday consumptions. The set of commodities they consume continuously reasserts their national identities. What would seem like a cosmopolitan consumption connecting them to elsewhere (cable TV, internet, other electronic media) is in fact an instrument of approximation with Brazil. It keeps them integrated with their original national community. Their consumption therefore manifests *banal nationalism*: their quotidian practices repeatedly, and almost unconsciously, reaffirm their Brazilianness, bringing them together while demarcating borders vis-à-vis the local ‘others’.

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