One wonders what he thought, the young Portuguese captain Pedro Alvares Cabral, when, after a possibly deliberate deviation from the planned route to India, he one day in April 1500 disembarked onto an unknown strip of land. At first he thought it was an island, which he named Ilha de Vera Cruz, but he realized later that it was a continent. Today we know that he was correct, it was South America, and Ilha de Vera Cruz is today’s Brazil. The colonial era that ensued lasted until the early 1800s, when a peaceful but inconsistent emancipation process was initiated. Thanks to another Pedro, Portugal’s King João VI’s son, the country was able to declare its independence in 1822; the Portuguese prince became the independent Brazil’s first emperor.

Sixty-two years later, a Scottish railway engineer in São Paulo sent his ten year old son, Charles Miller, to England to attend school. Miller was an accomplished athlete, and he quickly became involved in the emerging sport of football. After playing with Southampton FC and Corinthians, Miller returned to Sao Paulo in 1894 with some football equipment and a rule book, and was able to sort out the developing football trend. The ball was set in motion. In 1918, the Brazilian Football Confederation was founded, and in 1923 a process began, where football went from being a white upper-class sport to be the color-blind sport for all it is today. With the national team’s involvement in all World Cups since the start in 1930, and a record five World Championships, Brazil is considered by many to be the world’s top football nation.

Brazilian football, writes Fredrik Ekelund, is characterized by the “africanization” that followed when the racial and class boundaries were demolished in the 1920s and ‘30s. Traditional football techniques and strategies, merged with the Brazilian movement patterns that were retrieved from samba and capoeira, the African martial dance, gave rise to the beautiful, flowing game called o jogo bonito and characterized by a fast, rhythmic attacking style football with elements of individual creativity and team choreography.

In 2005, a group of masters students at the University of São Paulo formed the Grupo Interdisciplinar de Estudos sobre Futebol (GIEF), and thus initiated a new kind of progressive football research in Brazil, based on social science and the humanities. Three members of the group, Diana Mendes Machado da Silva, João Paulo França Streapco and Paulo Nascimento have written the article about community, national identity, and Brazilian soccer in this update. They discuss three main aspects of football in Brazil: football and the racial issue, the role of football in the formation of the Brazilian national identity, and football as a domain of everyday life and popular sociability. The article is based on a paper presented to the conference Centers and Peripheries in Sport, Malmö University, April 2010.
This article presents the formation and development process of the Interdisciplinary Study Group on Football (Grupo Interdisciplinar de Estudos sobre Futebol, GIEF), between the years 2006 and 2010, focusing on its activities and readings on themes relating football to the racial issue, Brazilian national identity, everyday life and popular sociability.

Introduction

In the second semester of 2005, along with the Post Graduation Program at the History Department of the Philosophy, Language and Humanities College, University of São Paulo, the discipline “Sociocultural History of Football” was taught, for the third time, by professors Flávio de Campos and Hilário Franco Júnior, whose discussions resulted in the essay A dança dos deuses: futebol, cultura e sociedade. Students from many fields of the Humanities were assembled on the occasion and, by the end of the course, formed a study group to continue the discussions and studies on the matter. Because of the plurality of fields represented by its participants, it was named Interdisciplinary Study Group on Football so as to reflect and ensure its interdisciplinary character.

The group began to meet in March of 2006, and from the start it’s had as a common premise to regard football as a “total social phenomenon”, staying away from some common perspectives which view football only as a vehicle of ideology, the “opium of the people” or a simple “cultural industry phenomenon” in the service and in the interests of big business, the dominant classes or national states. In GIEF, it’s a question of viewing football as an encompassing cultural element, assembled on the interface of distinct dimensions and temporal contexts, which makes evident its metonymic character of internal index of a broader social process. Football not only represents society, it is an organic part of it.

The interdisciplinarity and the diversity of directions of research present in the group were translated into two central points that initially guided the work. Surpassing the premise of football as the total social phenomenon, what else could be shared, in a way of effectively allowing the creation of a study group? And, at the same time, how would we select and organize readings that take account of the diversity of interests among the participants? To answer these two questions, apparently contradictory, we defined two main theoretical perspectives.

2 The group is currently coordinated by Professor Dr. Katia Rúbio from the Physical Education and Sport School of the University of São Paulo (USP) and recognized by the National Council of Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq). The members are Diana Mendes M. da Silva (master’s postgraduate in Social History at USP), Enrico Spaggiari (doctorate postgraduate in Urban Anthropology at USP), João Paulo França Streapco (master’s postgraduate in Social History at USP), Marcel Diego Tonini (master’s postgraduate in Social History at USP), Marco Antunes de Lima (graduated in History at USP), Paulo Miranda Favero (master in Geography at USP), Paulo Nascimento (master’s postgraduate in Education at USP), Sérgio Settani Giglio (doctorate postgraduate in Physical Education at USP), Vítor Canale (master’s postgraduate in Physical Education at UNICAMP).
3 In the general understanding of Marcel Mauss (2003), Pierre Bourdieu (1983; 1990) and Roberto DaMatta (1982).
4 According to the understanding of essay writer José Miguel Wisnik (2008).
Based on the first, diachronic, perspective, we developed a model based on the main discussions in Brazil when football began to appear as a theme for chronicles, essays and other forms of writing. By suggestion of the text *Futebol e teoria social: aspectos da produção científica brasileira* by Luiz Henrique de Toledo (2001), the group tried to contemplate a variety of text genres and analyses on the themes between the 1920’s and present days.

The second perspective, based on a synchronic model, comprised primary concepts and themes with which members of the group deal directly or indirectly in their individual research, such as: corporeality and corporeal techniques; sport and modernity; the press and national identity; culture, race and racism; gift and form-representation; everyday life and popular sociability.

The experience acquired from these two lines of study led the group to adopt a new organization model, also related to the increase of Brazilian publications on football within the fields of the Humanities. Currently, the centrality of the work revolves around the reading of recently published reference works, a choice which pointed to new thematic and methodological modes on the approach of the subject. Three main themes have been debated in GIEF, either because of the centrality or recurrence in the field of study, or because they are also related to the individual researches of its participants. These themes are: football and the racial issue, the role of football on the formation of the Brazilian national identity and football as a domain of everyday life and popular sociability. We would like to comment on them.

**The “readiness” for football: gift, race or culture?**

This is a difficult question, especially because it is a matter of considering Brazilian football, known worldwide for its black players such as Leônidas da Silva, Garrincha, Pelé, Romário and Ronaldo. That is a polemic debate, old and at the same time current. In order to discuss this question, we chose three authors who have recently published books on football: Damo (2007), Wisnik (2008) and Florenzano (2009). Although each of them draws on a specific theoretical referential, it is possible to draw important conclusions from the manner each one analyses this sport.

Damo (2007) bases his work on the notion of gift, in order to understand how the formation of Brazilian players takes place, in comparison to the formation of French players.

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5 Football and social theory: aspects of the Brazilian scientific production, in free translation.
6 A specific concept to describe the Brazilian way of playing football in Toledo’s work.
7 Two important essays were published on the subject, Franco Júnior (2008) and Wisnik (2009), besides master’s and doctorate level research like Antunes (2004), Holanda (2004), Damo (2008) and Florenzano (2009).
8 As conceptualized by Mauss (2003)
From this theoretical basis, the author elaborates a refined ethnography representing the long and excluding path through which the boys will be exposed during the whole process of formation, in the pursuit of the dream of becoming a professional player. The final stage of this process, represented by the moment of recruitment by the market, is an opportunity for few.

Florenzano (2009) investigates the practices of freedom in Brazilian football through the Corinthians’ democracy, experienced by players, coaching staff and supporters at the club from São Paulo, between the end of the 1970’s and beginning of the 1980’s. According to the author, the experience:

[...] provided the players with insights in the art of ruling, individually or collectively, making the participation in the resolution of common questions a sine qua non condition to the construction of the autonomy project, whose main points may be delineated as: participation in the choice of coach to whom they were subordinated in the hierarchical structure of football; participation in the hiring and firing of team members; participation in the elaboration of disciplinary guidelines followed by the group; and last but not least, engagement in the social matters of the country (2009, p. 40, in free translation)\(^9\)

To the author, the practices of freedom are narrowly related to the creation or revitalization of a playing style called football-art as opposed to football-strength, instigated at that time for Brazilian Military Government.

In his essay, Wisnik aims to analyze, simultaneously, the in itself, the internal aspect of football and its environment, through processes that surround and conform it. Writing in an erudite manner, the author dialogues with a series of intellectuals in an attempt at better grasping the sport and its meanings in Brazil. In his main chapter, which seeks to understand why black and mulattoes dominate sport in general and Brazilian football in particular, Wisnik bases himself on Gumbrecht in order to advocate in favor of the disenchantment of a taboo, namely the:

[...] assertion that African descendants show a congenial disposition to instantly respond, and with the whole body, to challenges that are presented and resolved in the space-time of the game, as well as in the fields of music and dance. It is an incarnated improvisation ability that could be translated in the word readiness or promptness, meaning celerity, agility, spontaneous vivacity in the face of an objective demand that echoes in one’s desire (Wisnik, 2008, p. 226, in free translation)\(^{10}\)

\(^9\) “[...] proporcionou aos jogadores o aprendizado na arte de se governar, individual e coletivamente, colocando a participação na resolução de questões comuns como condição sine qua non para a construção do projeto de autonomia, cujos pontos principais podem ser assim alinhavados: participação na escolha do técnico ao qual se achavam subordinados na estrutura hierárquica do futebol; participação na contratação e dispensa dos integrantes do elenco; participação na elaboração das normas disciplinares seguidas pelo grupo; e, por último, mas não menos importante, engajamento nas questões sociais do país”.

\(^{10}\) “[...] afirmação de que afrodescendentes manifestam uma propensão congenial a responder instantaneamente, e com o corpo todo, a desafios que se colocam e se resolvem no tempo-espaço do jogo, assim como no da música e da dança. Trata-se de uma capacidade de improvisação encarnada que poderia se traduzir na palavra prontidão, no sentido de presteza, agilidade, desembaraço espontâneo diante de uma demanda objetiva que encontra eco no desejo do sujeito (Wisnik, 2008, p. 226, grifo do autor).
Wisnik’s argument keeps close relation to one of the manners in which gift is approached by Damo (2007, p. 186): as a synonym of blessing, which is equivalent to a predisposition that apart from being innate (genetic) is inherited (relates to a deity).

Aware that this touches on a sensitive matter and risking being misinterpreted by readers, Wisnik states, subsequently, that the argument should not be mistaken for racism. On that account, he believes “bossa” is a more appropriate term, once:

[...] it became in Brazil the meaning of an “immaterial patrimony” of difficult nomination: the swing, the way, the disposition to inhabit the interval of rhythm, the hiatus of language, the tossing of the body, namely, the most qualified equivalent of readiness. One may say talent is a forewarned readiness, that knows the shortcuts of time and space, that goes leisurely without giving up grace and malice (Wisnik, 2008, p. 230, in free translation)  

To Wisnik, the mulatto (not necessarily the literal mulatto) would be the meta-cultural agent of “readiness” and “talent” above all, the mediator of cultural reciprocity – not the representative of an assumed culture naturalization – and the relativization facilitator of the fixture of races and cultures.

When thinking of the reasons for which football became the most practiced sport in Brazil, one frequently resorts to the connections established by the author and many others such as the ‘gift’. Although Florenzano is aware of certain tricks his themes may create, at a given point in the text, he yields to an argument very close to the one used by Wisnik: to entail a playing style to dance and to capoeira in order to explain the career of the player Wladimir:  

Wladimir’s transformation was actually associated to the cultural practices ministered at the dance academy inaugurated by the player himself [...]. The link established between football-art and dance mixture, combat and game in which capoeira was constituted allowed him to unveil new possibilities for the use of the body [...]. Wladimir

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11 The Word “bossa” in the context refers to a song by Noel Rosa (1910-1937), an important Brazilian song writer.
12 “[...] virou no Brasil o significante de um “patrimônio imaterial” de difícil nomeação: a ginga, o jeito, a disposição a habitar o intervalo do ritmo, os hiatos da linguagem, os meneios do corpo, ou seja, um equivalente mais qualificado de prontidão. Pode-se dizer que a bossa é uma prontidão avisada, que conhece os atalhos do tempo e do espaço, que vai sem pressa e sem abrir mão da graça e da malícia”.
13 According to Florenzano (2009), to comprehend Wladimir’s prominence, Corinthians’ wing back, it is necessary to recur to the period of the Corinthians’ Democracy. In the words of the author (p. 196): “Ao invés do jogador deformado pelo excesso atlético, constituído pelos mecanismos de poder como corpo-máquina e submetido pelos técnicos do comportamento à condição de mero comandado, Wladimir emerge como exemplo do jogador que se autoconstituiu através das práticas de liberdade autor de si mesmo, figura soberana em cujos traços se contemplava a harmonia do corpo e da alma [...]”. “Instead of a player deformed by athletic excess, built by the mechanisms of power as a machine-body and submitted by behavior coaches to the condition of merely commanded, Wladimir emerges as an example of player who self constitutes through the practices of freedom, author of himself, sovereign figure in whose traits one could contemplate the harmony of the body and the soul [...]” (“Ao invés do jogador deformado pelo excesso atlético, constituído pelos mecanismos de poder como corpo-máquina e submetido pelos técnicos do comportamento à condição de mero comandado, Wladimir emerge como exemplo do jogador que se autoconstituiu através das práticas de liberdade autor de si mesmo, figura soberana em cujos traços se contemplava a harmonia do corpo e da alma [...]”, (in free translation).
guided himself through the desire of freedom that characterized capoeira [...]. (Florenzano, 2009, p. 189, in free translation)

Is it possible that Wladimir’s transformation, one of the leaders of the Corinthian democracy, came about due only to being part of a dance school? And how do we perceive players who did not undergo dance training? They will not have swing? They will play only football-strength? Was capoeira responsible for generating a desire for freedom? We cannot forget Wladimir is black and, thus, would fit into the model developed by Wisnik. He would therefore have a predisposition to the use of the body in the best possible desired manner. But, on this perspective, one slithers once more on the biological dimension, argument to which one still resorts in order to explain someone else’s success in the sports or artistic fields, when, in fact, the use of the body is the central point:

This professional field may be generous to some individuals, and the fact that it is, in general lines, with the people and, particularly, the black, sometimes creates a flank to the populist apotheosis. However, as in other fields of the artistic world, the spectacle of football may be generous with a certain class of individuals, but not with all individuals of that class. There is no prejudice of color regarding the professionalization of football players, which does not mean to say there is no prejudice of color regarding other posts – such as coach or manager [...]. (Damo, 2007, p. 204, in free translation)

It seems that Damo’s argument goes against Wisnik’s assertion, since it is always dangerous to assume as a starting point the connection between being a football player and being black. If we consider the “readiness”, as Damo does with gift, we begin to escape the biological trap, which is the gift as something concealed in the essence and visible as a manifestation. Hence the difficulty in explaining the gift or when it happens, it is through genetic attributes which explain only a part of the question. If we do not think of “readiness” as the gift, we will continue on the genetic interpretation and find another complication, as explained by Damo:

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14 “A transformação de Wladimir, na verdade, estava associada às práticas culturais ministradas na academia de dança inaugurada pelo próprio jogador […]. O vínculo estabelecido entre o futebol-arte e a mescla de dança, luta e jogo na qual se constitui a capoeira lhe permitia descortinar novas possibilidades para o uso do corpo […]. Wladimir se guiava pela ânsia de liberdade que caracterizava a capoeira […].”

15 “Esses campo profissional pode ser generoso com alguns indivíduos, e o fato de sê-lo, em linhas gênicas, com os populares e, particularmente, com os negros, por vezes cria um flanco para a apoteose populista. Entretanto como outros campos do mundo artístico, o futebol de espetáculo pode ser generoso com uma dada classe de indivíduos, mas não é com todos os indivíduos de uma classe. Não há preconceito de cor em relação à profissionalização de futebolistas, o que não implica dizer que não haja preconceito de cor em relação a outros postos – como o de técnico e de dirigente […].”
Even in the case of explanations based on biology and its codes, there will be an indetermination: how two children of the same couple can present unequal performances and, particularly, in the case of the twins – Diego and Diogo, my informants –, how can one be more successful than the other? Why is one of them better than the other and not the opposite? Ultimately, the gift is useful, as a fluctuant meaning, to fill these and other columns. (Damo, 2007, p. 200, in free translation)\footnote{“Mesmo no caso das explicações calcadas na biologia e seus códigos, haverá indeterminação: como dois filhos de um mesmo casal podem ter performances desiguais e, particularmente, no caso dos gêmeos – Diego e Diogo, meus informantes, por exemplo –, como um torna-se mais exitoso do que o outro? Por que um deles é melhor do que o outro e não o inverso? Enfim, o dom se presta, como significante flutuante, para preencher estas e outras colunas”.}

If we take the path of nature, of genetics, we will find serious problems in answering Damo’s question. Furthermore, Wisnik seems to fall into his own trap, for he developed the idea of “readiness” and related it to the black. However, Wisnik himself has a very well-turned way out of his own rub. If we do not misinterpret him, a junction between the corporeal techniques of the black culture and the inadequate social conditions in which the blacks live in Brazil would bestow upon this population contingent a “cultural DNA” (Wisnik, 2008, p. 361) capable of making it invent artistic ways of standing out in football, music and dance, having a “decisive role on the cultural constitution of modern Brazil” (ibid., p. 229).

This “cultural DNA” would be what characterizes us as a country which values the practice of football from the early age and refers to the different ways of learning football, revealing that often children are stimulated only to play football. In thinking of the “cultural DNA” Wisnik withdraws from a purely biological approach and finds an expression that covers not only that which is biological but also what is culturally built. And it is through this expression that we are able to perceive that the gift “only exists when there is an audience to recognize it as such” (Damo, 2007, p. 192), namely, without the “cultural DNA” that values football, the gift loses its meaning.

**National identity and football**

The group’s reading and research activities enabled the perception of the existence of an intellectual debate in Brazil concerning the connections between football and Brazilian national identity, which permeates the entire twentieth century. As early as the second decade of said century, memoirists and historians from the city of Sao Paulo attempted to draw a genealogy of the sport in the city, while journalists built the field of sports chronicles in newspapers such as *A Gazeta* and *O Estado de São Paulo* seeking to provide the public with information that would enable them to follow the development of the South American Championship of Football, which took place in the city of Rio de Janeiro in 1919. From then on, football has served as a reference to the construction of local, regional, class, racial, genre and national speeches and identities, as well as having its control as a subject of dispute between several regional and social groups.
In order to point out our discussion on national identity, we employed the concept of imagined communities, developed by Benedict Anderson (2008). According to him, the structures of social comradeship establish a collective ‘us’ from the temporalities which remit to the structure of the myth. Regarding the identities forged through football, Toledo’s (2002) work is our reference, for the author noted that in football the supporter establishes a link with the team and other supporters marked by the election of a common enemy which enables the cohesion of the group.

The participation at the South American Championships allowed the development of a Brazilian identity on the field as opposed to the football and identities of Uruguay and Argentina, since the 1919 championship. The journalists’ perception that the theme aroused public interest enabled the appearance of the first publications and debates on the subject on the occasion.

The reasons for the Brazilian population to become interested in football and to assign it a new meaning as an instrument of national identity remain a source of controversy amongst researchers. Some of the studied authors speak of the intervention of the Brazilian State during the time of Getúlio Vargas’s dictatorship as the great definer of this process, while others, as examined here, establish a genealogical link between football and the traditional corporal practices of the Brazilian society.

Therefore, when we speak of the existence of a rational dilemma relating to football, we take into consideration these broader aspects which are hardly noticed when we are in a football stadium, in the position of supporters. If is it true that football enables the contact with others and stimulates the construction of identities and representations through games of mirrors, it is also true that it turns into a privileged space so we may unveil the processes which forge these identities, whether they are national or local, ethnic or class related.

da Matta (1982) even then drew the attention to the connections between football and the national dilemma, work which was done in opposition to the supported idea, for instance, in Ramos’ (1984) book, where football was regarded as the people’s opium, or an instrument for mass control used by authoritarian governments. This willingness to discuss the singularities of the Brazilian people, however, was not unheard of. A generation of intellectuals form the 30’s onwards produced studies committed to this anthropological view, and influenced those who worked with football history on the same period, as is the case of Mário Filho whose book, O negro no futebol brasileiro, in its first edition dates from 1947. From our perspective, the dilemma of the national identity, recurring throughout the twentieth century, is not exhausted as a theme in the debate produced by the most recent publications on football (and maybe of the social science in a more ample manner). The works of Marques (2000), Antunes (2002), Toledo (2004), Damo (2007), Franco Jr (2007), Wisnik (2008) and Florenzano (2009), that seek to approach football with various methods and documentary sources, on the many levels of social science, maintain the mat-

17 Works such as Raízes do Brasil (Roots of Brazil), Casa-Grande e Senzala (The Masters and the slaves) and Formação do Brasil Contemporâneo (The colonial background of modern Brazil), by essay writers Sergio Buarque de Holanda, Gilberto Freyre and Caio Prado Junior, respectively, are to this day classical references for the discussion on the Brazilian society. In general lines, the promptitude of said authors was to analyze the Brazilian character from the original processes of the Portuguese colonization maintained throughout the imperial period and endured with great impact during the republican period – even if, in some cases, it seemed antagonistic to the new regime in which affectionate relationships (or cordial, in the words of Holanda) supposedly no longer made sense.

18 The black in Brazilian football, in free translation.
term of the Brazilian national identity as a guiding axis for their respective discussions, even if the reported intention of the authors was different. The central proposal of DaMatta’s work (1982) still resounds in present time – at least in research on football.

Through our activities, we noticed that some regionalisms functioned in the construction of this Brazilian national identity. The reading of other authors, such as Antunes (2004) and Mario Filho (2003), permitted us to verify how particular local references (the trajectory of the clubs from the city of Rio de Janeiro, their players and stadiums, especially Maracanã) turned into national ones, disregarding regional realities distinct from them. This view meets the discussion presented by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1997), which, in the book *The invention of Tradition* (1983), on discussing how traditions are invented and legitimated in modernity, asserts that determined fundamental practices for the construction of national identities, albeit assumed “natural”, went through a process of construction and of nonconsideration of regional realities diverse of those constructions in recent periods.

This commitment to the construction of this football tradition, however, was not consensual. It is necessary to emphasize that a considerable portion of the Brazilian intellectuals mistrusted (or disliked) the game of football. Even in this group, some authors, on criticizing the sport, also introduced themselves in this debate on the connections between national identity and football. Perhaps the most emblematic case is that of novelist Lima Barreto known for his critique of fashions brought from abroad by the elites who invaded the Brazilian society in the beginning of the century. In the 1920’s, he published many chronicles in which he accused the fashion of the foreigner who practised sports considered by the author to be genuinely national, such as *capoeira*.

From his texts, we observe the particular trajectory on football in the Brazilian society, until it is assigned a new meaning as the sport of the masses, capable of bringing more than a hundred and fifty thousand people to a football stadium to watch the national team, as well as the matter of the promptitude to football.

From our perspective, these are correlating themes and new researches done by members of the group certify how much these ideas connect and produce recurring representations of what it means to be Brazilian.

Although some authors may refrain from relating their discussions to the theme of the Brazilian national identity, the readings of their works allow us to assert that this dilemma keeps on being central in these debates.

**Quotidian and popular sociability**

For decades, Brazilian research on football was dedicated, in the majority of cases, to the identity representations associated with it, as described in the previous section. Concerned with investigating how football was mobilized to the bringing up of identity bonds, whether on regional or national level, the works faced, fundamentally, the uses the dominant classes and the national state made of the originally British sport.

Nevertheless, another project went on parallel to the treatment provided to football by the academy. Journalists, chroniclers and writers, connected mainly to the sporting press of Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, constructed a specific view on the relationship between
football and the working class. In their works, they presented a configuration of what popular football would be, and in it they included the contents of Brazility, the nation’s identity mark\(^\text{19}\). In São Paulo, this characterization was associated to várzea football\(^\text{20}\).

The várzea integrated football imagery and is even now associated to originality, freedom and creativity, traits related to Brazilian football. It was seen, for a long time, as the responsible for the “shaping up” of the good players that performed in professional football in São Paulo. But, even though the speech on the várzea is recurring on the press and on the social imagery, endless questions associated with it are yet to be answered, or are even absent from academic researches on football.

It is possible to say the connections between football and popular classes are incipient on the academic universe and, on the other hand, still influenced by the treatment given by the press to the subject. Notwithstanding, we may already point out works that diverge from the questions brought forward the press and approach concrete experiences, from social practices around football.

It is the case of Odette Seabra’s (2003) research that, on investigating the urbanization of São Paulo, assumed várzea football as a source to understand the political distribution of work and leisure in the city. According to the author, football organized into clubs shaped modern times and spaces in the areas of the city, substituting the centrality of the church in the organization of leisure time. Her work also highlights the role of these associations in the rearrangement of social relationships that began to assume, through football, a clear political content:

> [At the clubs,] the scopes were hierarchized, dexterity and judgment criteria were formulated and, finally, these distinction effects, derived from the experiences originating from the club toil, which, transported or projected in the relationship circles closest to each one, could transform the environment without appearing to do so [...] From this gregarious football character came the disposition of organizing and making the club function, as well as the residents motivation of falling in love with a common cause (Seabra, 2003, p. 407, in free translation).\(^\text{21}\)

Concerning sociopolitical representation, we can observe that local clubs rapidly multiplied and promoted the organization and participation of members on collective levels with the

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\(^{19}\) Especially after the World Cup of 1938, a championship in which Brazil was prominent and, at the same time, lived under the dictatorial regime of Getúlio Vargas, who showed interest in forging identity national bonds from football.

\(^{20}\) The low and flat land alongside a watercourse; the space in which rivers discharge. In São Paulo, the rivers várzeas were used as football fields during the period that immediately preceded the intense metropolization of the city, from the 1940’s.

\(^{21}\) “[Nos clubes,] hierarquizavam-se as competências, formulavam-se critérios de perícia, de julgamento e, enfim, eram esses efeitos de distinção, oriundos das experiências originadas das lides no clube, que, transportados ou projetados em relações mais íntimas de cada um, podiam ir mudando o meio sem parecer que mudavam [...] Desse caráter gregário do futebol vinha a disposição de organizar e fazer funcionar o clube, como também a motivação dos moradores de se apaixonarem por uma causa comum”.
tutorship of the church. On the other hand, they also promoted the circulation of the members around town, in tournaments and festivals involving football. This situation lasted until the beginning of the 1940’s, when the várzea ceased to be the articulating space of areas and turned into a subject of dispute between the sporting associations and the capital of factories and industries which began to settle in it, without the intervention of the state or social control.

Other dimensions related to the role of the popular classes in the development of national football have appeared in the research. Harmonized with the perspective of historians E.P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm (1983), they refer mainly to the protagonism of common people in the formation of nationalism. Researchers Souza (2008) and Pardini (2010), whose works deal with the production context of the identity representations during the end of the 1930’s, under the authoritarian government of Getúlio Vargas, dealt with the appropriation of these images by the popular classes. Their analysis demonstrates that the contribution of workers to the construction of the national identity did not come up merely from the acceptance of values such as eugenics, discipline and work delivered by the ideologists of the New State through football. On the contrary, the workmen represented in football the universe of leisure, a space of resistance “of the ethics of the non-work that had its origins in the slavery period, when the act of working acquired all of its negativity” (Souza 2008, p.139). Leônidas da Silva, player known worldwide as the inventor of the bicicleta, ‘the bicycle kick’ (a technique in which a player jumps and kicks the ball backwards, with his head upside down), shared this universe inside and outside of the field, representing “the transgression to the established order, for not accepting the values and discipline imposed from above. But [he] was also the hope of rebuilding a better world, for identifying to leisure and joy” (Souza 2008, p.141, in free translation)22. The construction of the player’s myth is based on these traits. To summarize, even though they cooperated in the construction of an identity formulated from “above”, the workers added a new content to the nationalistic representations and were able to relate to it.

The mentioned works, albeit isolated, provide the possibility of rethinking the role of popular classes in the configuration of sports and, at the same time, offer new work perspectives on the subject in broadening the scope of questions and their approach.

**Concluding remarks**

Although we may not state that football is a consolidated theme in Brazilian academic institutions, it is now possible to recognize a meaningful growth of the volume of production on the subject, especially from the 1980’s, when, in revisiting the problem of the construction of the concept of a Brazilian nation, one cannot help but consider the role played by football, as both an index of consolidation of this concept and, at the same time, an element of negotiation and dispute between society, its social classes and the State.

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22 “a transgressão à ordem vigente, por não aceitar os valores e a disciplina impostos de cima. Mas [ele] também era a esperança de reconstruir um mundo melhor, por se identificar ao lazer e à alegria”. (Souza, p.141)
On the other hand, the emergence and development of a study group on football is an indication of this transformation. The GIEF’s way of working has proven advantageous in creating and partaking in contemporary debates on football, and in permitting diverse lines of action, such as the participation in seminars and congresses and the organization of similar events; obtaining interviews with professionals from the football area and from researchers in this area; development of a new generation of academic researchers – some of which count on financial aid from research funding agencies – in the main universities of the state of Sao Paulo, strengthening the possible creation of research centers in those institutions; creation of an online group for discussions and bibliographical suggestions; production of articles on the group’s activities; and the production of a website for publicizing information (www.ludopedio.com.br).

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