

Tomando Partido: Soccer and Political Opposition in O Ano em Que Meus Pais Saíram de Férias (Cao Hamburger 2006) and Paisito (Ana Díez 2008)

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ABSTRACT: Cao Hamburger's *O Ano em Que Meus Pais Saíram de Férias* (2006) and Ana Díez's *Paisito* (2008) explore soccer's potential to serve the state as a distraction for the masses or oppose hegemonic ideologies. The Brazilian director of *O Ano* and Spanish director of the Spanish-Uruguayan-Argentine co-production *Paisito* allegorize in sporting terms Brazilian and Uruguayan political turmoil in the early 1970's. Soccer offensives coordinate with the political opposition to the Brazilian military dictatorship during 1970's World Cup in *O Ano* whereas citizens must *tomar partido* in *Paisito* with either the military or the Tupamaro resistance during Uruguay's 1973 military coup.

KEYWORDS: *O Ano em Que Meus Pais Saíram de Férias*, *Paisito*, Cao Hamburger, Ana Díez, soccer, children

Soccer is the national sport of Brazil and Uruguay, and it is intimately entwined with both national and Latin American politics. Its adaptability is great; soccer can serve the government as an opiate for the masses—like the Argentine 1978 World Cup 3-1 victory over Holland during the Dirty War (1976-83) featured in Gaston Birabén's *Cautiva* (2003)—or provide an opportunity for the expression of ideologies contrary to the state. Brazilian director Cao Hamburger's *O Ano em Que Meus Pais Saíram de Férias* (2006) and Spanish filmmaker Ana Díez's *Paisito* (2008) represent early 1970s Brazilian and Uruguayan political turmoil as political diversion and division, respectively. Twelve-year-old Mauro's (Michel Joelsas) dissident parents go “on vacation,” or into political exile, and promise to return for the 1970 World Cup in Hamburger's feature. Concurrent to the televised national soccer game and Uruguay's 1973 coup, the Spanish Republican and Uruguayan

military fathers of enamored eleven-year-old neighbors Xavi (Pablo Arnoletti) and Rosana (Pía Rodríguez) fatally face off in Díez's film. I argue that soccer offensives coordinate with the political opposition to the Brazilian military dictatorship during 1970's World Cup, whereas citizens *toman partido*, or take sides, with either the military or the Tupamaro resistance to Uruguay's 1973 military coup. After briefly detailing the plots of each film and referencing pertinent sports theory, I will demonstrate the political uses of soccer and the transnationality of both the game and historical memory.

The opening of *O Ano em Que Meus Pais Saíram de Férias* marks 1970 as a pivotal year in politics and sports alike: "Depois que o homem pisou na Lua e Pelé marcou seu milésimo gol, o ano de 1970 começou de cabeça para baixo. Guerra fria, regimes totalitários, democracias ameaçadas . . . No Brasil não foi diferente." Mauro's dissident parents are harbingers of a decade of resistance to the military regime that was a result of the 1964 coup against President João Goulart's left-wing government. In *O Ano em Que Meus Pais Saíram de Férias*, the deaths of Mauro's grandfather and father encompass the film. Although Hamburger's film takes place during the so-called "Brazilian Miracle" of economic growth (Godoy and Nakatani 13), the rupture of Mauro's family belies the idealistic portrait of a strong and unified Brazil. The twelve-year-old and his parents Daniel (Eduardo Moreira) and Bia (Simone Spoladore) leave their home in Belo Horizonte to travel to the home of Mauro's paternal grandfather, Mótél (Paulo Autran), in São Paulo's Bairro do Bom Retiro. Daniel and Bia are forced into political exile, which they refer to as "vacation," and must entrust Mauro to the care of his estranged grandfather. Mótél, who is stubborn and always arrives early, dies prematurely before Mauro arrives at his house. Hamburger allegorizes the political resistance of Mauro's parents in a jocular vein, but he turns to biblical analogies when treating Mauro's abandonment (inadvertent when his parents leave him in his grandfather's vacant home). Mauro's father, who is also stubborn but always tardy, tells Mauro that he and Bia will return for the World Cup. Mauro anxiously waits for them by the phone until his young, enterprising neighbor Hanna (Daniela Piepszyk) distracts him with an outdoor soccer game. Although reluctant at first, Mótél's neighbor Shlomo (Germano Haiut) welcomes Mauro, whom he calls Moishale in allusion to the Biblical parable in which the Pharaoh's daughter cares for

Moses, and collaborates with the young subversive Ítalo (Caio Blat) to reunite the boy with his parents. Finally, Mauro's weakened mother returns during the World Cup final against Italy although his father does not. Mauro explains that he and his mother go into exile because his father is so late this time that he never comes home. Although Brazil wins the game, Mauro's family is amongst the many defeated by the dictatorship.

Paisito, Ana Díez's Spanish-Uruguayan-Argentine co-production, also concludes with exile. Uruguayan Ricardo Fernández Blanco, Díez's former student, wrote the screenplay on the basis of his parents' experience in the *paisito*. It is possible to speculate that director Ana Díez's and actress María Botto's interest in Fernández Blanco's screenplay is due to their practical knowledge of military regimes; the actress who plays Rosana as an adult took refuge in Spain after her father, actor Diego Botto, became one of the thousands of victims of state terrorism in Argentina (Picatoste 97). *Paisito* is, to a certain extent, autobiographical for both its director and screenwriter, as Ana Díez recalls: "Mi infancia fue en el franquismo y me marcó. Y en cuanto a los desaparecidos . . . sigo soñando con Galíndez. Me interesa cómo un régimen totalitario cambia tu vida. Te puede marcar en muchos sentidos: estético, amoroso . . ." (Picatoste 97). In June 1973, the year of the film's action, Uruguayan President Juan María Bordaberry dissolved the government, declared a state of martial law and defeated the guerrillas (Labrousse 129-31). Historians attribute Bordaberry government's (1972-76) *auto-golpe* to a number of contributing factors: the mismanagement of the national economy since the 1950s, a high level of social mobility, weak response to the demands of political parties, and the financial limitations of a Welfare State whose gross national product was barely above \$500 per capita (Varela Petito 91). Academics, politicians, and the media refer to the responsible parties in the 1973 coup as "dos demonios:" the Tupamaro Movimiento de Liberación Nacional guerrillas and the military (Demasi 67). *Paisito* portrays how these two demons corrupt the childhood paradise of sweethearts and neighbors Rosana and Xavi when Rosana's father is killed and she and her mother leave Montevideo.

As Montevideo's police chief, Roberto becomes aware of the escalating conflicts between the military and the Tupamaro guerrillas. Rosana is the daughter of upper-middle class Ana (Viviana Saccone) and Roberto, nicknamed "Tito" (Mauricio Dayub), while Xavi is the

son of lower-middle class Spanish emigrants and Republican exiles Lola (Andrea Davidovics) and Manuel, called “el Gallego” (Emilio Gutiérrez Caba). Xavi’s father is a shoemaker and, despite the epithet, the character is Navarran like his director. Roberto and Manuel observe danger mounting on their own street and respond by prudently sending Rosana and Xavi to the countryside where the children subsequently share their first kiss. In the meantime, Manuel’s associates convince him to take action against the military in order to thwart the potential installment of a regime in Uruguay like the thirty-six-year dictatorship he renounced in Spain. Manuel’s comrades appeal to his Republican spirit and request that “el Gallego” coordinate a meeting between the rebels and Roberto. Although they assure Manuel that no one will be hurt, the rebels threaten that Xavi might be in danger if Manuel does not comply. Coronel Moreira (Eduardo Miglionic), Tito’s commanding officer, kills Rosana’s father during the televised soccer game their families watch in the countryside. Rosana interprets the tragedy as punishment for kissing Xavi; a sin that ushers the two demons into their childhood paradise. In a ploy to sway public opinion, the military imprisons Manuel and reports that the Tupamaros killed the chief of police. Twenty years later, Rosana (María Botto) insists on remembering their past and pays Xavi (Nicolás Pauls) a surprise visit in Spain where he plays forward for Pamplona’s first division soccer team, Osasuna.

Critics have documented the relationship between soccer and Latin American politics. According to their article on the historical context of the 1970 World Cup and the linkage between Brazilian soccer and politics, Ana Paula Pacheco Godoy and Tony Shigueki Nakatani indicate that the national sport is a forum for the discussion of Brazilian cultural paradoxes and a more comfortable venue for the uneasy colloquy regarding the military dictatorship (31, 29). Brazilian soccer scholars Cesar Gordon and Ronaldo Helal date the golden age of Brazilian soccer between 1933 and 1970 (142), the year Brazil wins the World Cup in *O Ano em Que Meus Pais Saíram de Férias*. Scholars of Argentine soccer Vic Duke and Liz Crolley identify the political and social function of the sport: “One of the prime reasons why the state originally became interested in *fútbol* was to control the masses by structuring and defining social identities and reinforcing national sentiments as international football became more important. The state targeted *fútbol* as being a location where the masses could

gather and channel their frustrations” (104). Soccer allows nations to define and publicize themselves while providing an outlet for popular discontent. With regards to Brazil, Gordon and Helal reveal the homologous political use of soccer: “Thanks to its immense popularity, football became an effective means by which the government could transmit its message, principally the idea of an ‘integrated country’” (148). The community soccer game in *O Ano em Que Meus Pais Saíram de Férias* illustrates this point beautifully: Mauro’s voice-over distinguishes the religious and ethnic backgrounds of the players and spectators (Shlomo of Polish Jewish heredity, Ítalo of Italian descent, and Edgar of African grandparents) who have come together for the game. Janet Lever espouses a similar understanding of soccer’s ability to unify at the same time it divides society into opposing teams: “Sport’s paradoxical ability to reinforce societal cleavages while transcending them makes soccer, Brazil’s most popular sport, the perfect means of achieving a more perfect union among multiple groups” (87). Soccer, however, does not succeed in reconciling greater political issues nor can it mask brewing turmoil. While Mauro’s parents are “on vacation,” his new neighbor in the Bairro do Bom Retiro, Ítalo, protests the military dictatorship—whose slogan was “Brasil—ame-o ou deixe-o”—by writing “abaixo a ditadura” graffiti in the street. In the synagogue, Shlomo’s Jewish community speculates about the fugitives’ communism while in the bar men conjecture about a soccer player’s Marxism. Ítalo (Caio Blat), the most politically-engaged character in Bom Retiro, proclaims that a Czechoslovakian victory over Brazil in the First Round of 1970’s World Cup would be a triumph for socialism; however, Ítalo’s enthusiasm for Brazilian soccer during the game takes precedence over his lofty socialist ideals.

Soccer is something that Mauro shares with his father as well as a means for Daniel to teach his son life lessons. In the first sequence of the film, Mauro is playing table soccer at his family’s home in Belo Horizonte. Mauro’s mother anxiously phones her delayed husband and nervously smokes a cigarette. Mauro’s sports-casting voice-over comments on his father’s lesson of the goalie’s importance: “Meu pai diz que no futebol todo mundo pode falhar menos o goleiro. Eles são jogadores diferentes porque passam a vida ali, sozinhos, esperando o pior.” As goalie on and off the field, Mauro is alone and expects the worst. The jarring noise, perhaps of tumbling pans, that follows Mauro’s fatalistic assessment sonorously re-enforces the

precariousness of the goalie's position and foreshadows the fall of Mauro's father in his struggle for democracy. Although in a hurry to leave Belo Horizonte to go into exile, Daniel plays one last game of soccer with Mauro and places the goalie on the table; fortuitously they score, however Mauro will mistakenly leave his goalies in Belo Horizonte as a result of their scrambled departure. Mauro's voice-over doubts whether Brazil will win the World Cup like his father has assured him as a military truck they pass on the road to São Paulo incites both sporting and political uncertainty in the young protagonist. Later, Shlomo brings Mauro his goalies from Belo Horizonte making possible a game of table soccer between Mauro and Ítalo after the dissident is beaten during a police raid on the university. In place of Mauro's father, Ítalo plays a game of table soccer with the boy at the young goalie's goading: "você está com medo?" Ítalo is understandably afraid and reacts to an alarming knock on the door by speaking both of their soccer game and political resistance: "acabou a brincadeira." The game is indeed over for Daniel since he does not survive to come home to his son for Brazil's third World Cup win (4-1 to Italy on June 21, 1970). Mauro understands that his father knew he would become a goalie and now passes him the ball; thus, the fight for democracy is in Mauro's goalkeeper hands.

Like Mauro, eleven year-old Xavi in *Paisito* is a soccer player. While Rosana goes with her mother to see a movie, Xavi goes with Roberto to meet player Pedro Rocha after Uruguay's selection for the 1974 World Cup. Found on the Uruguayan political field, and amongst *Paisito*'s protagonists, are the military and conservative wealthy versus the liberal middle and lower classes. Both Rosana's mother and Coronel Moreira believe that they must "acabar con los tupamaros." On the other hand, Roberto is reluctant to suffocate the resistance (his neighbor and driver will in fact collaborate with the Tupamaros). Ana Díez explains, with regards to Roberto and Manuel, that it is important to "tomar partido, pero a la vez, estos personajes están condenados a perder siempre" (Vallín 31). The film first associates sport with the offensive against the Tupamaros when a man evades military pursuit outside the school courtyard where Xavi is playing soccer. Moreira tells Tito that they must "acabar con los comunistas" and that Roberto must "tomar partido" in the conflict. Alluding to Roberto's neighbor or his driver, Moreira warns: "cuidá las amistades, no se puede andar pateando para cualquier lado, te pueden meter un

gol en contra.” Although Ana argues that her immigrant family has always tried to stay out of politics, she chastises Roberto for being a “milico raro” and echoes Moreira’s words: “si te quedas en medio los dos lados te vienen a joder.” As they conspire against each other, both Manuel and Coronel Moreira employ sports analogies to convey their political messages. Manuel stages the conflict: “en el campo de juego es donde se habla.” The neighborhood soccer game in *Paisito* does not denote unity as it does in *O Ano em Que Meus Pais Saíram de Férias* but rather division and conflict in Montevideo in 1973. A soldier interrupts the game asking for the whereabouts of the neighbors from across the street that he is pursuing on account of their suspected ties with the Tupas. The medium close-up of the soldier’s foot stopping the ball instantly amplifies the conflict to the greater political arena and analogizes control of the ball on the field with command of the country. Díez’s film thus represents the military coup and squashing of the Tupamaro resistance as a soccer play.

The sentimental relationship between Rosana and Xavi allows Díez to dramatize transnational discussions regarding historical memory and human rights. Unlike his Republican exile father, soccer is an escape for Osasuna forward Xavi. Rosana curses Xavi for making goals and kissing Uruguay’s flag as if the coup had never happened, yet Xavi argues: “Tiene que haber justicia y la memoria es necesaria pero no creo necesariamente que haya que remover todo.” Xavi’s father Manuel, who would have been approximately Xavi’s age during the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), would no doubt be disappointed by his son’s evasive and conservative opinion. The son’s soccer affiliations are also significant; Osasuna’s alignment with the centralist government during Francisco Franco’s dictatorship contrasts Athletic de Bilbao’s association with Basque separatism (Duke and Crolley *Football* 30). In their personal debate of historical memory, Xavi does not ask Rosana for a *Ley de Punto Final* to discourage Rosana from dwelling on their past like this 1986 Argentine law that prohibited the prosecution of military officers accused of committing crimes during the dictatorship (Reati 14). Xavi suggests that in order for their relationship to move forward, they cannot rehash the past. Rosana’s goal is to take control of her past while Xavi wishes to dodge his entirely through sport. Rosana advocates that historical memory and human rights violations be recognized in Uruguay while she argues with Xavi on Spanish land.

With determination, opposing interests have dribbled the serious dispute regarding human rights violations—justice or impunity—to and fro on national and international playing fields. Recently, Spain passed the *Ley de Memoria Histórica* in 2007, a law antithetical to the Argentine *Ley de Punto Final*. The Argentine dictate, akin to the 1986 Uruguayan *Ley de Caducidad de la Pretensión Punitiva del Estado*, was indeed overturned in 2003 and declared unconstitutional in 2005 (Reati 17). Argentina and Spain have recognized the victims' right to legal claims, yet the 2012 judicial misconduct trial of Spanish jurist and champion of universal justice, Baltasar Garzón, brings into the question the finality and closure that such laws and human rights work wish to grant. In Brazil and Uruguay, legal proceedings remain to be seen to their fruition but both countries have begun to take steps in the direction of overturning their amnesty. The Inter-American Court holds Brazil responsible for the actions of state agents who disappeared guerrillas. Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff, who took office on January 1, 2011, vowed to bring human rights violators from the dictatorship to justice since she numbered amongst those whom the military regime imprisoned and tortured for participating in the resistance (Barrionuevo n. pag.). A former guerrilla also heads the government of Uruguay; José Mujica was a Tupamaros leader and imprisoned for over a decade. Nevertheless, President Mujica has been hesitant to mediate between the armed forces and fellow human rights victims (Fleitas n. pag.). In 2009, Uruguayans voted on a referendum that, had it garnered fifty percent support, would have nullified the *Ley de Caducidad* (Fleitas n. pag.). Joining the field, Brazil's *O Ano em Que Meus Pais Saíram de Férias* and Uruguay's *Paisito* signal each country's outstanding debt to its past.

Hamburger's and Díez's films explore sport's subversive potential in the context of political conflict. In *O Ano em Que Meus Pais Saíram de Férias* Mauro's father teaches him the importance of protecting the goal, their rights, during the divisive Brazilian military dictatorship. In *Paisito*'s Uruguay, the shuffle for domination of the soccer ball manifests as either command of Uruguayan politics or political evasion. Daniel and Bia of *O Ano em Que Meus Pais Saíram de Férias* and *Paisito*'s Manuel *toman partido* in opposition to dictatorships and support of democratic futures for the next generation. Their grown children, like Rosana, may choose to inventory their personal and national pasts in an effort to overcome the powerlessness

they experienced growing up under dictatorships. Consistent with my discussion of sports allegories of national conflict, we might consider the denomination and significance of the *Ley de Punto Final* in terms of political score keeping. In such cases contested at the national level, international arbiters like the Inter-American Court in Costa Rica and the International Court of Justice of the United Nations in The Hague, Netherlands become referees and key players.

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