

| 2021 |

| Vol. 5 |

*Funes*

Journal of narratives and social sciences



# GLOBAL MARADONA

MAN, ATHLETE, CELEBRITY, IDOL, HERO, MYTH



Editors:

Luca Bifulco

Stefano Bory

Gianfranco Pecchinenda

Joint issue with Eracle. Journal of Sport and Social Sciences

ISSN 2532-6732





Journal of narratives and social sciences



Open Access - Double Blind Peer Review  
Annual Online Journal  
<http://www.serena.unina.it/index.php/funes>

### Directors

Stefano Bory and Gianfranco Pecchinenda,  
Dipartimento di Scienze Sociali dell'Università degli Studi di  
Napoli Federico II.

### Responsible person

Stefano Bory

### Members of the Scientific Committee

- Alfonso Amendola, Università degli Studi di Salerno;
- Giovanni Boccia Artieri, Università di Urbino;
- Antonio Cavicchia Scalamonti, Università di Roma  
La Sapienza;
- Massimo di Felice, UISP, Brazil;
- Giovanni Fiorentino, Università della Tuscia;
- Serge Gruzinsky, Princeton University, USA;
- Eva Illouz, EHESS Paris, France;
- Adriana Lopez, Universität Bern, CH;
- Paolo Renato Jesus, University of Lisboa, Portugal;
- Michèle Leclerc-Olive, CNRS-EHESS, France;
- Mariano Longo, Università del Salento;
- José Luis Mora, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid,  
España;
- Giustina Orientale Caputo, Università degli Studi di  
Napoli Federico II;
- Carlo Sorrentino, Università di Firenze;
- Oreste Ventrone, Università degli Studi di Napoli  
Federico II;
- Marta Vignola, Università del Salento.

### Contact

[atelier.funes@gmail.com](mailto:atelier.funes@gmail.com)

### Sponsored by

Dipartimento di Scienze Sociali  
Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II  
<http://www.scienze sociali.unina.it>

### Licence

Creative Commons (CC-BY 4.0)



### Published by SHARE Press

[http://www.sharecampus.it/main/static\\_page/share\\_press](http://www.sharecampus.it/main/static_page/share_press)

### Editorial Board

- Antonio Rafele, Université de la Sorbonne Paris V;
- Luca Bifulco, Università degli studi di Napoli  
Federico II;
- Elena Trapanese, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid;
- Sabrina Garofalo, Università della Calabria;
- Paolo Bory, Politecnico di Milano;
- Valentina Fedele, Università della Calabria;
- Daniele Nuccilli, Università Tor Vergata di Roma;
- Valerio Pellegrini, Università degli studi di Napoli  
Federico II.

ISSN: 2532-6732

DOAJ index

**GLOBAL MARADONA:  
MAN, ATHLETE, CELEBRITY, IDOL, HERO, MYTH  
YEAR 2021 - VOLUME 5**

**Editors: Luca Bifulco, Stefano Bory, Gianfranco Pecchinenda**

*p. 1*

**Introducción:**

**Global Maradona: la dimensión narrativa, cultural y mediática**

Luca Bifulco, Stefano Bory, Gianfranco Pecchinenda

**PAPERS**

*p. 4*

**A hero's journey: the monomythical narrative of Diego Maradona's World Cup appearances.**

Steph Doehler

*p. 18*

**The televised goodbye to D10s: from the Casa Rosada to our homes.**

Ezequiel Ramon Pinat

*p. 31*

**Diego Armando Maradona: Globalization's First Sports Superstar.**

Amit Gupta

*p. 43*

**Efecto DAM: Diego Armando Maradona en algunas representaciones literarias.**

Pablo Brescia

*p. 55*

**Maradona and Utopia: social dreaming and the left (foot).**

Mariano Paz

*p. 69*

**Maradona As A Versatile Media Figure: A Study On Turkish Press.**

Denizcan Kabaş, Şükrü Güler

*p. 90*

**Maradona's Ghosts and Co.: Narrating Maradona in Argentine Football Literature.**

Carlos Andrés Bertoglio

*p. 105*

**Santa Maradona: agiografia di un calciatore.**

Alessandro Perissinotto

*p. 120*

**The Unlikely Hero. The treatment of Maradona's Death in American Media.**

Ismael Lopez Medel

## **REVIEWS**

*p. 136*

**Maria Angela Polesana, Tito Vagni (a cura di): *L'influenza digitale. Studi, teorie e ricerche***

Vincenzo Piccolo

## INTRODUCCIÓN

### **GLOBAL MARADONA: la dimensión narrativa, cultural y mediática**

Luca Bifulco

Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II

Stefano Bory

Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II

Gianfranco Pecchinenda

Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6093/2532-6732/8963>

Entre todos los campeones de la historia mundial del deporte, es difícil encontrar un personaje a quien se haya reservado una atención pública más grande de la que obtuvo Diego Armando Maradona. Siempre en el primer plan de la escena, siempre como un imán del interés colectivo, un personaje nunca ordinario. Lo mismo en la vida como – se podría decir – después de su muerte. Maradona fue un gran futbolista con una biografía llena de extraordinarios éxitos y derrumbes en el deporte así como en la vida cotidiana; fue una celebridad, gozó de una continua popularidad mundial, metido de lleno en la dinámica deportiva comercial y espectacular; ha sido y es todavía catalizador de conflictos culturales, políticos, jurídicos o más prosaicamente materiales, como aquellos vinculados a su herencia económica o a la explotación de su imagen; fue y sigue siendo ídolo y héroe para varias generaciones de comunidades de aficionados, quienes pudieron encontrar en su personaje un molde para identificarse más allá de lo simplemente deportivo; finalmente, sobre todo después de su muerte, pudo resurgir definitivamente como mito, modelo de inspiración ejemplar, pero también como patrón de muchas contradicciones y paradojas.

En definitiva, si en la Argentina y en Nápoles el Pibe de Oro pudo convertirse con facilidad en un ícono de la cultura y de la tradición popular, la resonancia de su figura en vida, y el clamor planetario engendrado por su muerte, nos llevan a pensar más bien en un fenómeno cultural universal, que encuentra ramas, lecturas, aceptaciones de nivel internacional.

El número especial que las revistas FUNES y ERACLE (<http://www.serena.unina.it/index.php/eracle>) proponen en conjunto, tiene por lo tanto como objetivo investigar, en un plano comparativo y según una perspectiva interdisciplinaria, el alcance global, así como local, del fenómeno Maradona.

Los ensayos contenidos en FUNES exploran diferentes características de las dimensiones narrativas, mediáticas y culturales vinculadas a Maradona.

Steph Doheler recorre las apariciones de Maradona en el Mundial utilizando la teoría narratológica de Joseph Campbell, el viaje del héroe, a través de la plantilla mítica de tres actos

significativos: la partida, la iniciación y el regreso. Siguiendo la pista de Steph, Maradona fue la representación perfecta de la contradictoria capacidad humana de transmitir simultáneamente la belleza frente a la fealdad y el bien frente al mal.

Ramón Pinat ofrece un interesante análisis de la muerte de Maradona describiendo su cobertura televisiva en directo por el programa Telenoche, aplicando la teoría de los 'media events'. Considerando los eventos transmitidos como un género narrativo, Pinat hace una rica interpretación de los usos públicos de la muerte del Golden Boy.

Amit Gupta examina la relación entre la globalización y el estatus de Maradona como icono mundial y argumenta que una combinación de talento, una economía globalmente integrada y una persona pública más grande que la vida, hicieron de Maradona la estrella internacional que fue. Esto contrasta con la inmensa mayoría de los deportistas que pierden su protagonismo público tras su retirada. Diego emerge como una figura extremadamente significativa en la relación entre la biografía individual y las estructuras políticas y sistémicas globales.

A través de una fina exploración de los procesos de construcción y deconstrucción de la figura maradoniana en el ámbito de la literatura y de la ficción, con un enfoque que atraviesa la semiótica y los estudios narratológicos, Pablo Bresca desvela los mecanismos constitutivos que se activan desde la literatura en las representaciones de Diego en Argentina y en la cultura sudamericana. Un héroe ascendente, un héroe caído que resiste en la memoria, la encarnación de una enfermedad, un esclavo liberador, son algunas de las imágenes arquetípicas que surgen de los relatos y ensayos analizados por Brescia, que plantea la hipótesis de un verdadero "efecto DAM" en la ficción latinoamericana.

Mariano Paz nos invita a considerar la relación entre Maradona y la utopía examinando una serie de productos culturales de amplia circulación como películas, documentales y series de televisión. A pesar de los detalles biográficos de Maradona el hombre, y de las cuestiones morales que sus acciones plantean, Maradona el mito puede considerarse como un significante imbuido de tropos utópicos. La epistemología expuesta por Paz es muy interesante no sólo a nivel narratológico, sino también en cuanto a la ambivalencia política que permite el proceder utópico.

Denizcan Kabaş y Şükrü Güler nos llevan a Turquía y nos dan una visión de la representación de Maradona como figura global dentro del ámbito cultural turco. Se realiza una investigación específica sobre la representación de la muerte de Maradona en los medios de comunicación turcos utilizando el método de análisis de contenido. La prensa nacional turca presenta la imagen de Maradona desde su propia perspectiva y lo evalúa como una figura mediática versátil.

En su estudio sobre la literatura en Argentina, Carlos Bertoglio entiende a Maradona como el centro indiscutible, el punto nodal alrededor del cual se organiza el discurso contemporáneo del fútbol argentino. Como tal, la relevancia y el área de influencia de Maradona se expande naturalmente hasta alcanzar la de la literatura futbolística argentina, cuyos autores aprovechan la flexibilidad de su figura y su mito para elaborar algunos de los temas centrales de este subgénero.

Alessandro Perissinotto ha creado una verdadera hagiografía de Maradona. El autor estructura su texto demostrando cómo la memoria de la vida de Maradona se equipara a la de un santo y al culto que se le dedica: representaciones iconográficas – en este caso el cine -, epígrafes, monumentos y objetos de diversa índole, todo ello destinado a su santificación. En

este ensayo podemos seguir la "santificación secular" de Diego Armando Maradona, un proceso de beatificación que ya había comenzado en vida y que, forzosamente, se aceleró tras su muerte. A través de una serie de indicadores y procesos colectivos de representación del "santo Maradona", Perissinotto utiliza la figura profanamente sagrada de Diego para describir las modalidades antropológicas a través de las cuales se origina y refuerza la práctica de un culto.

Un último análisis de la muerte de Maradona lo ofrece el rico estudio de Ismael López Medel sobre la cobertura mediática en Estados Unidos del fatídico hecho. Analizando treinta y cuatro medios de comunicación a través de múltiples plataformas, Medel no sólo muestra un sesgo informativo específico de Estados Unidos cuando se trata de Maradona, sino también un distanciamiento sobre su figura y su legado. El artículo argumenta que el análisis de los medios de comunicación refleja el papel social secundario del fútbol en Estados Unidos en comparación con el resto del mundo, reconociendo la importancia de Maradona, pero también viéndolo como un ídolo no para el pueblo norteamericano, y sobre todo como un fracaso. Como si hubiera que explicar a Maradona para que lo entienda la cultura americana, porque la historia de Maradona no se corresponde con el panorama deportivo yankee.

## **A hero's journey: the monomythical narrative of Diego Maradona's World Cup appearances**

Steph Doehler

Open University UK

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6093/2532-6732/8964>

### **Abstract**

A genius and cultural figure who transcended the sport he played, Diego Maradona is one of the most important icons of popular football culture. The 'Pibe de Oro' attracted attention each time he graced the pitch, perhaps none more so than on the international stage at four World Cup tournaments between 1982-1994. Whilst social science research has failed to unequivocally define the notion of sports heroism, this paper aims to build upon this concept through the lens of a mythical narrative. We will trace Maradona's World Cup appearances using Joseph Campbell's narratological theory, the hero's journey, through the monomyth template of three significant acts: the departure, the initiation and the return. This paper will provide a detailed enquiry into Maradona's extraordinary skill and achievements, addressing both his World Cup highlights and lowlights for Argentina in an international journey that is unlikely to be replicated.

**Keywords:** Diego Maradona; Soccer; Hero; World Cup; Argentina

### **Introduction**

Diego Armando Maradona may well be one of the most complex characters, not just in football, but in sports history. The Pibe de Oro, or golden boy, is frequently hailed as the greatest footballer of all time and the protagonist of many iconic moments for the Argentinian national team. A hero in his native country, compared by some to legendary South American liberator General San Martín (Carlin, 1999), Maradona's genius charmed audiences whilst simultaneously petrifying opposing defences. A product of one of the poorest areas in Buenos Aires, Maradona's imagery exemplified his role as a cultural icon which, in many ways, exceeded the limits of both his nationality and his sport. In a traditional sense we might look for our heroes to be wholesome, respectful characters who overcome challenges and evil to succeed. Arguably, Maradona achieved this throughout his international career, certainly from the perspective of his fellow countrymen. Yet his life was tainted with scandal through volatile actions and statements, not only on the playing field but also in his unstable private life, which made him a contentious individual who defies clear characterisation. Stories of drug taking,



illegitimate children and dubious links to the Italian mafia increase his ambiguity as a hero.

The heroic narrative is articulated around the individual who stands above others based on their own merits (Alabarces and Rodríguez, 2007). Though on its own, skill is not enough for a hero to be truly defined as such; a triumphant outcome must also occur. For Maradona, this culminated in Argentina's successful 1986 World Cup campaign. However, this was one of four World Cup tournament appearances for the player. His journey through the competitions between 1982-1994 did not come without obstacles and contention. This paper will not only explore the highs of Maradona's World Cup appearances, but also note the lows, some of which question the theory behind the hero's journey. That said, here we will not challenge the concept of Maradona as a mythical hero, since that in itself is largely indisputable. Instead, we seek to trace his World Cup appearances through a monomythical narrative, a hero's journey that became a symbol of the South American nation and their love for the sport. Whilst the focus of this paper is Maradona at the World Cup, context will be added by discussing his career more widely to offer a fuller narrative to the concept of him as a hero.

### **The hero's journey and the notion of the sporting hero**

The hero is one of the most consistent figures in mythology and there exists a recurring template for the hero's journey or, as American professor Joseph Campbell termed it, the monomyth. Campbell's seminal work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (2012, first published in 1949) introduced this concept as a consistent narrative which he described through a series of 17 stages. These stages can be organised into three components, or acts - the departure, the initiation and the return. Whilst Campbell does not suggest that all journeys encounter each of the stages, the three acts remain relatively consistent for the archetypal hero. Building upon Campbell's work, scholars Williams (1994) and Lule (2001) both introduced their own perspective on the hero narrative, although a degree of commonality exists within all three approaches. For the purposes of this paper we will focus our attention specifically on Campbell's work as the instigator of the concept. Campbell's theory has been subject to criticism from academics who suggest that it suffers from source selection bias. Nonetheless, Campbell's work has resonated with storytellers and is especially evident in film (McMullen, 2017). The issue here, of course, is that Campbell's work has been largely theoretically applied to fiction. However, we suggest that there is little subject which involves more drama, conflict and direct opposition than that of sport. The fact that Maradona resonates as both a hero and villain depending on football and national allegiances only reinforces why this subject is worthy of such investigation. Little research exists whereby scholars apply Campbell's theory to a real-life individual and therefore this innovative approach of tracking Maradona's career through the conceptual eye of the hero's journey will assess its applicability to factual events.

The term which sits at the heart of this paper, hero, originates from the Greek *heros*, or demi-god, one who transcends the mortal and the mundane (Boon, 2005). Whether

athletes should be considered heroes has long been questioned (Wagg, 2007). The rise of the 'sporting hero' has produced a significant source of debate with Boorstin (1992) suggesting that war provided the only source of heroes throughout the twentieth century. Conversely, Wann, Melnick, Russell and Pease (2001) and Parry (2009) propose that, in fact, sport provides one of most significant platforms for people to identify their heroes. Archetti (2001) suggests that the sports hero belongs to a specific time. We would challenge this belief in relation to Maradona; there is little doubt that he transcended the sport to become something considerably more to millions across the globe, even following his death in 2020.

### **Act 1: the departure**

The opening narrative of a hero's journey is the departure, in which the hero leaves their familiar world behind after receiving the 'call to adventure'. Growing up in Villa Fiorito, a violent slum on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, Maradona was exposed to the world of football in the *potreros*, the empty spaces on small, hard and crowded pitches where no coaches or teachers would interject when tempers flared. Young Argentines played with a streetwise mentality and tight, technical ability. By eight years old Maradona's successful trial for the youth side of Argentinos Juniors led to widespread acclaim and by 11 he was noticed by the national press. Ten days before his 16<sup>th</sup> birthday Maradona became the youngest player to appear in the Argentine *Primera División* (since usurped by Sergio Agüero). It soon became clear that he would embark on an adventure that would take him to international stardom. However, this would not occur at the 1978 World Cup hosted in Argentina. Seventeen-year-old Maradona had already made three international appearances prior to the World Cup, but in a contentious decision on the eve of the tournament he was one of three players dropped by head coach César Menotti. The conclusion that Maradona was too young to cope with the pressure of performing for his country on home soil struck him hard, weeping for three days. Menotti's action proved to be decisive as Argentina went on to win their first World Cup. As Campbell (2012) suggests, the call to adventure can begin with a blunder that may amount to the opening of a destiny. In Maradona's case, not being selected for the 1978 squad was deeply influential and supports Campbell's assertion that «even though the hero returns for a while to his familiar occupations, they may be found unfruitful» (Campbell, 2012, p.46). In his autobiography Maradona described it as the saddest day of his career and the biggest disappointment of his life (Maradona, 2004).

Events the following year saw Maradona experience the next step of his hero's journey, the 'supernatural aid'. Once committed to a call the hero's guide appears; for Maradona this was the familiar face of Argentina coach, Menotti, the protective figure in Campbells' theory. Following the disappointment of 1978, Maradona gained the opportunity to impress on the world stage at the 1979 Youth World Cup in Japan. Menotti, now a World Cup winner, specifically requested to coach the youth side preparing a new generation of players to be ready for the 1982 World Cup. Maradona emerged at the start of the tournament, helping Argentina to lift the trophy by contributing six goals in six matches.

He later described Menotti as the «architect of the team» (Maradona, 2004, p.25) and according to Campbell (2012) this figure represents the benign, protecting power of destiny. Menotti was aware of the precocious talent he had in Maradona but claimed that the prodigy was too young to shoulder the weight of expectation from the home nation in 1978 and instead protected him until a more suitable opportunity arose.

As Maradona progresses towards the end of Act 1, two further stages of the hero's journey can be explored which focus on his experiences at his maiden World Cup, the 1982 tournament held in Spain. Following prolific spells with Argentinos Juniors and Boca Juniors, Maradona agreed to join Barcelona for a world-record transfer fee prior to the competition. Argentina's sporting icon was set to depart from his homeland and embark on the next step in his journey, the 'crossing of the first threshold'. According to Campbell (2012) in this stage the hero leaves his known world (Argentina) and ventures into the unknown (life in Spain). Unlike today, where it is entirely natural for South American footballers to compete for domestic European clubs, only three members of Argentina's 1982 squad played outside their homeland. The tournament itself was challenging for Maradona and symbolises the final stage of the departure, the 'belly of the whale', where the hero shows a willingness to undergo a metamorphosis but, instead of conquering, is swallowed into the unknown. After the devastation of missing out on a home tournament in 1978, Maradona was desperate to make an impression in Europe and the Catalan supporters were not left waiting long for a sample of their new investment as Argentina kicked off the tournament against Belgium at Barcelona's Camp Nou.

However, Belgium, who had previously never progressed beyond the first round in a World Cup tournament, upset the titleholders with a solitary goal. Maradona's performance was largely ineffective, as described in *The New York Times* his «lackluster showing seemed to infect the entire Argentine side» (Markham, 1982). The behaviour towards Maradona by the Belgium defenders set the example for the strategy employed by each team who faced Argentina during the competition – stop Maradona and you stop the team. Argentina's second game saw a more cohesive performance, with Maradona scoring twice against Hungary in a 4-1 victory. A steady 2-0 win in the final group game versus El Salvador saw Argentina progress into the next round.

Tied against Brazil and Italy for a place in the semi-finals, the three nations held a collective six World Cup titles between them. In the group's opening game, Maradona was targeted by the Italians in what one senior football writer would later describe as «probably the nearest I would come to witnessing a public assault» (Horsfield, 2017). Marked out the game by Italy's Claudio Gentile, Maradona could do little to prevent a 2-1 loss to the Azzurri. Gentile performing his role expertly with meticulous attention to Maradona was testament to the emerging genius of the Argentinian. If Maradona serves as the hero of this paper, Gentile certainly plays the role of archetypal villain. Occasionally brutal, Gentile harassed Maradona, committing 23 fouls against him throughout the match. Fortunes failed to improve three days later for Argentina in their encounter with the imperious Brazil. The reigning champions would fall to a 3-1 defeat, consigning them to an early exit from the competition. Maradona's influence on

proceedings was peripheral at best. One glimmer of skill came in the second half as Maradona skipped past left-back Júnior into the penalty area. The Brazilian recovered only to lunge at Maradona with little hope of getting the ball. When the referee pointed for a corner an incredulous Maradona screamed at the official. Frustration at what he considered to be ineptitude from officials throughout the tournament for their lack of protection boiled over with five minutes remaining. Following a high challenge on a teammate, Maradona retaliated with a dangerous looking kick to his opponent's waist and was immediately dismissed. His first World Cup, featuring a competition's worth of bitterness, frustration and youthful insolence, represented by a single moment of petulance, was over. Three matches in Barcelona brought three defeats for Argentina, an omen of his time to come with the Catalan club. Nevertheless, Maradona's 1982 World Cup performance introduced him to the world stage and established the groundings for one of the greatest tournament performances four years later in Mexico, as he progressed to the next act of the hero's journey.

## **Act 2: the initiation**

Through the four intervening years between tournaments Maradona went on a challenging journey. Successes were more sporadic than had been anticipated when he joined Barcelona. Despite an admirable 38 goals in 58 appearances a bout of hepatitis, a broken ankle and a violent on-field brawl during the 1984 Copa del Rey final against Athletic Bilbao which saw Maradona headbutt one opponent and elbow another, knocking him out, characterised his turbulent employment in Catalonia. Campbell believes that Maradona's time in Spain illustrates the first stage of the initiation, the 'road of trials', where the hero is repeatedly tested, and whilst he doesn't pass every test, proves himself by building will and skill throughout. Here, Maradona embarks on what Campbell outlines as the beginning of a long and perilous path of conquests and moments of illumination. The next stage would prove to be pivotal in the lore of Maradona.

In summer 1984, in a move to Italian club, Napoli, Maradona became the first player to break the world transfer record twice. Southern Italy was hardly an obvious destination for Maradona with the club narrowly avoiding relegation to Serie B the previous season. The Neapolitans were lifted by the arrival of their new superstar, with one local newspaper writing that despite the lack of a «mayor, houses, schools, buses, employment and sanitation, none of this matters because we have Maradona» (Carter, 2012, p.?). It was in Naples where Maradona would experience the next steps of his journey. 'Meeting with the goddess' centres on the hero experiencing unconditional love, the female playing a metaphorical role. Maradona was revered by the Napoli fans immediately with 85,000 fans cramming into the Stadio San Paolo to mark his arrival and this became the stage whereby he would be nourished into the world's top footballer. Campbell suggests that at this point the hero is purged of his infantility and resentments, with his mind opened to an inscrutable presence that exists in this new realm. In Maradona's case this was partly true; he certainly became aware of his own legend in Italy, but also succumbed to the

many temptations in front of him, leading onto the 'woman as the temptress' stage. Maradona remained committed to his pursuit of football immortality, yet often became distracted by the attention and adoration that followed. His personal life became the main temptress for him, living in the public eye where private parties were broadcast live, chat shows were dedicated to rumours of illegitimate children, and disputes with partners filmed and leaked. He existed with constant distractions and a cocaine habit that would ultimately cost him several years of his career.

Prior to the 1986 World Cup the Argentina side was in internal disarray, emphasised by criticism of coach Carlos Bilardo when he controversially awarded Maradona with the captaincy at the expense of more experienced teammates. Despite the uproar, Bilardo later revealed that he had decided Maradona would be his captain some three years before the tournament: «In 1983 I went to see Diego when he was playing in Barcelona. I started talking to him about the way I wanted Argentina to play in Mexico. I told him that at that stage he was the only starting player in my team and that he was also the captain» (FIFA, 2009).

Thus, Maradona experienced 'atonement with the father', a central point of the hero's journey with all previous stages having worked towards this vital point and all subsequent stages being influenced by it. Maradona's relationship with Bilardo proved crucial in achieving «hope and assurance from the helpful figure» (Campbell, 2012, p.110), none more so than when Bilardo told him a «You are a symbol, the most important player of your generation» (Maradona, 2004, p.106).

The necessity for a World Cup saviour was never more evident than at Mexico '86. The competition should have been held in Columbia, but civil war and extensive brutality forced the Colombian government to withdraw as hosts and Mexico was unanimously voted by FIFA as their replacement. Nine months before the World Cup was due to start a devastating earthquake hit Mexico City, with over 5,000 casualties and the region's infrastructure severely impacted. Grahame Jones (1985) of the *Los Angeles Times* wrote «...there were those...who said that holding international soccer's quadrennial world championship here was now even more imperative». Maradona arrived at the tournament in the 'apotheosis' stage, whereby the hero's position (in this case as captain and star player) is resolved and he is ready for more difficult challenges within the adventure.

Asserting his dominance from the start, Maradona provided three assists for Argentina's goal in their opening match against South Korea and scored the equaliser in an ill-tempered group stage draw against Italy - a semblance of revenge for the Azzurri's bludgeoning in Barcelona. This was a more experienced Maradona from four years before, no doubt the two years playing in Serie A, influencing the player. Argentina topped their group with a straightforward 2-0 victory over Bulgaria, in which Maradona provided another assist. The early uncertainty that hindered their preparation was gone; the side had transformed into a solid unit ready to fight for one another, Maradona serving as the leading talisman.

Following a second-round victory over Uruguay it was Argentina's quarter final battle against England that cemented both Maradona's legend and infamy in one of the most unforgettable and controversial matches in World Cup history. The game, played against a



backdrop of the Falklands War, was billed as the ultimate grudge match. Six minutes into the second half Maradona, despite conceding seven inches in height, outjumped goalkeeper Peter Shilton, fisting the ball into the back of the net. Replays showed the Argentine's handball but the referee saw no infringement and the goal stood. Shortly after the match Maradona coyly described the goal as being «a little of the hand of God, and a little of the head of Maradona». Minutes later, in a scene diametrically opposed to the previous goal, Maradona picked up the ball inside his own half and independently took on England, slaloming past every white shirt that dared to approach, before bearing down on a helpless Shilton, and calmly slotting the ball into the net: 44 strides and 12 touches was all it took. Unlike the contentious first goal, there was no disputing that this was pure majesty from a hero writing his own World Cup adventure. The goal was later voted Goal of the Century in a poll conducted by FIFA. Argentina secured a 2-1 victory over England, setting up a semi-final against Belgium in a further opportunity for Maradona to exact retribution on another of his tormentors four year earlier. This time Maradona scored both goals in Argentina's 2-0 victory, the latter of which was another skilful solo strike akin to his second against England.

The only nation stood that between Maradona and permanent hero status in his homeland was two-time winners, West Germany. The world's media played up Maradona's role in the match, «never before in more than half a century of World Cups has the talent of a single footballer loomed so pervasively over everybody's thinking about the final» (McIlvanney, 1986); «few would complain if tomorrow's game completes the apotheosis of Diego Maradona» (Lacey, 1986) – the latter quote making direct reference to the relevant stage of the hero's journey. In the match, Argentina went two goals ahead before the resurgent opposition scored twice late on. Double-marked for much of the final, Maradona was afforded little opportunity to showcase his skills. Nevertheless, in the 85<sup>th</sup> minute he punished his opponents with a perfectly lofted through pass to teammate Jorge Burruchaga for the winning goal. In front of nearly 115,000 fans at the Estadio Azteca in Mexico City Maradona lifted the World Cup trophy as captain, his childhood dream coming true.

Ending the tournament with five goals and five assists tells only a subplot in the story of Maradona's dominance. He was awarded the Golden Ball as the best player at the tournament by a unanimous vote and widely regarded as single-handedly winning the competition for Argentina. «For players on opposing teams, he has left them with the unforgettable sensation that they were playing against - and were beaten by - one man» wrote Riding (1986), whilst Chad (1986) stated «For the past 10 days, "Diegomania" headlines have dominated the sports pages as Maradona showed the dazzling possibilities of the gifted, motivated athlete in command of his game». We acknowledge this tournament as the 'ultimate boon' in Campbell's theory, the breaking of Maradona's personal limitations in the development of his spiritual growth. Consistent with Campbell's philosophy Maradona crossed threshold after threshold, conquering 'dragon after dragon' (his opponents) to achieve what he held most divine (the Jules Rimet Trophy), concluding in a realisation that surpasses all previous experiences, «a dream turned to reality» (Maradona, 2004, p.134).

Maradona had transformed into a mythical Argentinean sport hero and if this analysis into his World Cup journey had been penned by Hollywood scriptwriters, we would likely end the paper here, closing with his triumphant return to Buenos Aires to celebrate with the hundreds of thousands of fans who poured onto the streets. However, at the age of 25 and with the world at his feet, the hero's World Cup journey would continue for a further two competitions.

### **Act 3: the return**

It is within this act that the lines between Campbell's theory and Maradona's trajectory become less consistent. The act traditionally begins with the 'refusal of the return' whereby the hero would be reluctant to return to normal life following his achievements and will, occasionally, experience the 'magic flight', the stage by which the hero must escape with his *boon* intact. These stages were removed from Maradona's journey, which saw his return to Italy following the World Cup in Mexico. In the years between the 1986 and 1990 World Cups Maradona dethroned the domination enjoyed by the northern powerhouses of Italian football, Juventus, AC Milan and Inter Milan, leading Napoli to two Serie A titles, a UEFA Cup and a Coppa Italia. Coming into the 1990 World Cup Maradona was set to lead Argentina in the same country where he earned his living. He may have been the darling of Naples, but such admiration was not reciprocated across the rest of Italy where he was regularly characterised as a drug addict and criticised for alleged affiliations with the *Camorra*, a criminal Mafia-type organisation.

Popular opinion was that Argentina had little chance of retaining their title at Italia '90 and injuries, including one to Maradona's foot which required painkilling injections, affected *La Albicelestes*. The Milanese crowd gave Argentina a vicious reception during the opening match against Cameroon with their National Anthem roundly booed inside the San Siro – an indication of what would be a disastrous afternoon as the Africans secured a 1-0 victory, their first ever win in a World Cup tournament. Maradona was jeered and whistled by fans throughout and the fouls committed against him were met with loud approval. The Italian crowd basked in schadenfreude at Argentina's expense, especially Maradona's humiliation. Following the game, Maradona made the first of several provocative comments about the residents of his current home, «...thanks to me the people of Milan have stopped being racist. Today, for the first time, they supported the Africans» (Maradona, 2004, p.155).

A must-win match against the Soviet Union saw the Argentines victorious, notwithstanding controversy when a goal bound Soviet header was stopped by the right hand of Maradona – a less heralded handball by the captain. A 1-1 draw against Romania, who had failed to qualify for the previous four tournaments, allowed Argentina to progress as one of the best third-placed teams.

A repeat of the infamous 1982 fixture, saw Argentina meet Brazil, in the round of 16. With ten minutes remaining Maradona picked up the ball in the centre circle, ploughing past three midfielders before masterfully threading it through three more defenders to teammate Claudio Caniggia: Argentina one, Brazil nil. Following a penalty shootout

victory against Yugoslavia in the quarterfinals, Argentina would face the hosts for a place in the final. Maradona had his own vendetta to pursue against Italy and the setting was his adopted home at the Stadio San Paolo in Naples.

Maradona was the messiah in the eyes of the Napoli faithful, yet for the rest of Italy he was the devil, an adversary with the intention to knock them out of their own tournament. The affection between Maradona and Napoli had always run deeper than football. Growing up in an impoverished region of Argentina, he understood from a young age how it felt to be ridiculed and discriminated by other classes of society. Upon arriving in Naples in 1984 the perceived racism, suffered by the southern club at the hands of their northern neighbours, resonated strongly with him. Maradona would incense most Italians with his pre-match comments: «I don't like the fact that now everyone is asking the Neapolitans to be Italian and to support their national team. Naples has always been marginalised by the rest of Italy. It is a city that suffers the most unfair racism» (Maradona, 2004, p.165).

The fact that he could demand allegiance from the people of Naples above their own nation was testament to the impact Maradona had on the city. The incendiary statements enraged the Italian press and were even rejected by Napoli Mayor Pietro Lezzi (Vecsey, 1990). The media termed Maradona as «public enemy number 1» (Hersh, 1990) and as the teams walked onto the pitch, a banner read: “Maradona, Naples loves you, but Italy is our homeland”. Following a 1-1 draw, Argentina were taken to penalties for a second successive match. Maradona calmly dispatched his kick, rolling it beyond the Italian goalkeeper. Two misses from the hosts saw Argentina progress and for a second successive tournament they would face West Germany in the final. Whilst the Neapolitan crowd may have been devastated, they applauded Maradona off the pitch. Some years later he said: «I think that penalty was the one I suffered the most in my whole life, I was telling myself ‘If you fail, you are an idiot’...It was me who eliminated Italy. I knocked the Italians out of the World Cup» (FIFA, 2020).

Five days later the Stadio Olimpico in Rome exploded in taunts as Argentina emerged from the tunnel for the final. Their National Anthem was barely heard over the boos and a fuming Maradona could be seen scornfully looking around the stadium, repeatedly mouthing “*hijos de puta, hijos de puta*” (sons of whores) to the antagonistic crowd. A poor final saw an 85<sup>th</sup> minute German penalty, enough for a measure of retribution for events in Mexico City. At the final whistle the victors were expectedly elated, but there, in the middle of all the activity, stood a tearful and devastated Maradona, struggling to understand that his body and his talent had failed him on the grandest of stages. He had played every minute of every game for Argentina throughout Italia '90 and fouled a tournament record of 50 times. He did everything he could to secure a second World Cup medal, but it was not quite enough.

Maradona's journey at Italia '90 provides an irregularity in Campbell's theory and, if anything, would be better suited as part of his journey during the latter stages of Act 1 or the early stages of Act 2, chiefly the 'belly of the whale' and the 'road of trials'. Nonetheless, we can pick up the hero's journey in the build up to the 1994 World Cup. After announcing his retirement from international football three months after the 1990

final Maradona's career was soon under threat when he tested positive for cocaine following a Serie A match in 1991. A 15-month FIFA imposed ban ended his time in Italy and following his return to football Maradona reunited with his World-Cup winning manager Carlos Bilardo at Sevilla, where he remained for one season before returning home to sign for Argentinian club Newell's Old Boys.

Argentina's campaign to qualify for the 1994 World Cup was under threat, highlighted by a 5-0 loss to Colombia in Buenos Aires. Following coach Coco Basile's decision to remain with the squad that won previous two Copa Américas, Maradona was a helpless spectator in the stands. The loss meant that Argentina had to qualify through an intercontinental play-off against Australia and Campbell's 'rescue from without' stage of the journey can be illustrated here, albeit with an asterisk accompanying it. Campbell (2012) suggests that it is within this stage that the hero is brought back from his supernatural adventure with assistance from the world. We flip this notion and express a belief that when football experts, supporters and, naturally, Argentina came calling for Maradona's return, this was the rescue – the prodigal son returning to the realm where he felt most cherished. Following a two-legged victory over Australia, Argentina qualified with their talisman leading the charge.

Maradona entered USA '94 intending to recapture past triumph. Consistent with our approach of reversing the last stage, we assert that rather than the hero returning to the human world when 'crossing of the return threshold' as Campbell suggests, Maradona actually returned to the divine world that he held in such reverence and where he was always most content. However, on this occasion the golden boy would serve as the fallen angel, in a twist that fails to follow the traditional narrative of a hero's journey.

Despite contributing 173 minutes of play during USA '94, the real narrative of Maradona's involvement at the tournament lies in both the build-up and aftermath of those minutes. Between Italia '90 and USA '94 the sport was transforming into a global phenomenon, personified by the initiator of globalisation, the United States, hosting the 1994 competition, despite having qualified for just one of the previous ten tournaments. For Maradona, the tournament offered a chance of redemption after years of controversy over drugs, run-ins with the police and health issues. Before leaving for the United States, he had told the Argentine news media: «I am tired of all those who said I was fat and no longer the great Maradona. They will see the real Diego at the World Cup» (Verhovek, 1994).

The competition started well for Argentina, who were seeking their third consecutive final. The 4-0 victory over Greece is best remembered for Maradona's remarkable goal celebration as he ran towards a camera on the sidelines in menacing fashion shouting undeterminable words with his eyes bulging. The scene became as synonymous with Maradona as his iconic exploits against England eight years before. It would be his last goal for *La Albiceleste* and four days later he played his final match for the national side in a 2-1 victory over Nigeria. In an unusual scene, Maradona was escorted off the pitch by a medical nurse to undertake an immediate drug test. Shortly after it was announced that he had tested positive for ephedrine, a weight loss stimulant. Protesting his innocence, Maradona attributed blame to his personal training and later wrote in his autobiography:

«I didn't even know I'd taken ephedrine: I played with my soul, with my heart» (Maradona, 2004, p. 201). Argentina, fearing sanctions from FIFA, quickly distanced themselves from the captain, removing him from the squad before the decision was taken out of their hands. Argentina were subsequently eliminated in the last 16 by Romania, and Maradona received a 15 month ban from football. According to one American newspaper, «Maradona's suspension stunned the soccer world and prompted havoc in Buenos Aires, where one television newscaster called the development “total madness, an absolute disaster”» (Verhovek, 1994). *Clarín*, Argentina's largest newspaper, led with a picture of Maradona and a single word: pain (Archetti, 2001). Meanwhile Britain's *The Independent* termed it «The most sensational scandal in the history of the tournament» (Shaw, 1994). The situation certainly fails to follow the path set out by Campbell and instead belongs to another facet of human heroes, their decline and decadence.

The hero's journey should, according to Campbell, conclude with the 'master of the two worlds' and 'freedom to live' stages, neither of which Maradona truly achieved. He never became comfortable and competent in both worlds and displayed problems accepting boundaries and control throughout his career, with a lifestyle that was as devastating to him personally as his performances were to rivals. His death following a heart attack at the age of 60 was met with an outpouring of grief throughout Argentina, Naples and the football world. National mourning was declared in his home nation where many newscasters were unable to hold back the tears, whilst Napoli renamed their ground 'Stadio Diego Armando Maradona'. Maradona may have been a complicated hero whose World Cup journey ended in disgrace, but his superhuman ability with a ball no doubt made him a genius by any definition of the word.

## Conclusion

The real-life journey of Maradona is more convoluted and intricate than the confines of any theory. Never before or since has a player been so adored and vilified in equal measure. Maradona was an inconsistent hero with a thirst for self-destruction off the pitch. The opportunity for a glorious comeback story was there for the taking during USA '94, but Maradona's life had always been precariously balanced and this is why tracing a theory aimed largely at fiction conjures up challenges when relating it to a real life individual, especially one as divisive as Diego Maradona. Had we focused purely on events at the four World Cup tournaments, Maradona's hero journey would be lacking in context as many of the stages occurred outside of the international competition. Thus, whilst this paper served to track Maradona's World Cup appearances, it was unrealistic to omit the intricacies of his wider world. Undoubtedly there are elements of Campbell's approach that failed to resonate with Maradona's journey. For example, during the first act a hero may refuse the call to adventure. For Maradona this was not the case, he never refused to play, especially for his one true love – the Argentinian national team. Furthermore, whilst Campbell's theory acknowledges the personal challenges faced by heroes in their journeys, it fails to recognise the very human characteristics that many real-life 'heroes' represent. We use inverted commas here to acknowledge that we are not



referring to heroes who save lives, protect us from harm and such like, but the notion of a hero who brings us joy in their artistry. Maradona balanced an extraordinary gift with wavering morality, resulting in endless conflicts between desire and outcome. Adopting Campbell's theory here only offers a finite understanding of Maradona's stardom. He was the perfect representation of contradictory human ability to convey both beauty versus ugliness and good versus evil simultaneously. Thus, whilst the hero theory may successfully track the arc of more wholesome individuals, it did prove challenging to apply it fully to Maradona – an individual who was painfully human and yet a superstar at the same time.

## References

Alabarces, P., & Rodríguez, M. (2007). Football and Fatherland: The crisis of national representation in Argentinian soccer. *Culture, Sport, Society*, 2 (3), 118-133.

Archetti, E. (2001). The spectacle of a heroic life: the case of Diego Maradona. In D. Andrews & S. Jackson (Eds.), *Sport Stars: The Cultural Politics of Sporting Celebrity* (pp. 151-163). London: Routledge.

Boon, K. (2005). Heroes, Metanarratives, and the Paradox of Masculinity in Contemporary Western Culture. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 13(3), 301-312.

Boorstin, D. (1992). *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*. New York: Vintage Books.

Campbell, J. (2012). *The Hero with A Thousand Faces*. Novato, California: New World Library.

Carlin, J. (1999). Locos por el fútbol. *El País Semanal*, 1195, 20-29.

Carter, J. (2012). Maradona brings success to Napoli. Retrieved from [https://www.espn.co.uk/football/columns/story/\\_/id/1033038/rewind-to-1987:-maradona-brings-success-to-napoli](https://www.espn.co.uk/football/columns/story/_/id/1033038/rewind-to-1987:-maradona-brings-success-to-napoli)

Chad, N. (1986, July 1). Maradona: The Spirit of Soccer Argentine Superstar Made the '86 World Cup Memorable. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/sports/1986/07/01/maradona-the-spirit-of-soccer-argentine-superstar-made-the-86-world-cup-memorable/45ec47f9-3a46-4173-a720-0648fd8e72f5/>

FIFA. (2009). Bilardo goes down memory lane on SA trip. Retrieved from <https://www.fifa.com/worldcup/news/bilardo-goes-down-memory-lane-trip-1051265>

FIFA. (2020, June 30). The Diego Maradona Story, Argentina at Italy 1990, FIFA World Cup [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2GthALlujpg>

Hersh, P. (1990, July 3). Maradona at 'home' in Naples. Chicago Tribune. Retrieved from <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1990-07-03-9002260039-story.html>

Hoebeke, T., Deprez, A. & Raeymaeckers, K. (2011). Heroes in the sports pages. *Journalism Studies*, 12(5), 658-672.

Horsfield, S. (2017). Diego Maradona at the World Cup 1982: the innocent devil. Retrieved from <https://thesefootballtimes.co/2017/02/23/diego-maradona-at-world-cup-1982-the-innocent-devil/>

Jones, G. (1985, December 15). World Cup : Draw Comes as Mexico Tries to Pick Up Pieces. Los Angeles Times. Retrieved from <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1985-12-15-sp-628-story.html>

Lacey, D. (1986, June 28). World awaits Maradona's grand finale. *The Guardian*, p.13

Lule, J. (2001). *Daily News, Eternal Stories: The Mythological Role of Journalism*. New York: Guilford Press

Maradona, D. (2004). *El Diego*. London: Yellow Jersey Press

Markham, J. (1982, June 14). World Cup Opens and Belgium Upsets Argentina, 1-0. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/06/14/sports/world-cup-opens-and-belgium-upsets-argentina-1-0.html>

McIlvanney, H. (1986, June 29). W. Germany may master Maradona. *Sunday Independent*, p. 24.

McMullen, J. (2017). Are we confounding heroism and individualism? Entrepreneurs may not be lone rangers, but they are heroic nonetheless. *Business Horizons*, 60(3), 257-259.

Parry, K. (2009). Search for the Hero: An Investigation into the Sports Heroes of British Sports Fans. *Sport in Society*, 12(2), 212-216.

Riding, A. (1986, June 29). The World Cup final; the king seeks crowning glory. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/1986/06/29/sports/the-world-cup-final-the-king-seeks-crowning-glory.html>

Shaw, P. (1994, June 30). Maradona banished from the World Cup. *The Independent*. Retrieved from <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/football-world-cup-usa-94-maradona-banished-from-the-world-cup-1417451.html>

Vecsey, G. (1990, July 3). Naples Loves Maradona, but Loves Italy More. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/07/03/sports/world-cup-90-naples-loves-maradona-but-loves-italy-more.html>

Verhovek, S. (1994, July 1). After Second Test, Maradona Is Out of World Cup. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/07/01/sports/world-cup-94-after-second-test-maradona-is-out-of-world-cup.html>

Wagg, S. (2007). Angels of Us All? Football Management, Globalization and the Politics of Celebrity. *Soccer & Society*, 8(4), 440-458.

Wann, D., Melnick, M., Russell, G. & Pease, D. (2001). *Sport Fans: The Psychology and Social Impact of Spectators*. New York: Routledge.

Williams, P. (1994). *The Sports Immortals: deifying the American athlete*. Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press.

### **About the author**

Steph Doehler is an academic at the Open University within the School of Education, Childhood, Youth & Sport. She has research interests in both sport sociology and sport history. She has recently researched athlete activism, the media framing of sports protests, and the social construction of athletes.

[steph.doehler@open.ac.uk](mailto:steph.doehler@open.ac.uk)

Twitter: @StephDoehler\_OU.

## The televised goodbye to D10s: from the Casa Rosada to our homes

Ezequiel Ramon Pinat  
Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB)  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6093/2532-6732/8965>

### Abstract

A few hours after the announcement of his death, Argentina started a long goodbye to the 'Pibe de Oro' (Golden Boy), covered in resignation and sadness. A farewell was organised at the Casa Rosada (presidential house), where citizens could go to bid their last farewell despite Covid restrictions. This article aims to analyse its live TV coverage by the 'Telenoche' program, applying 'media events' theory. Such a focus was developed by Dayan and Katz in the communication field and analyses events broadcast as a narrative genre. Organised outside the media, events are planned, previously announced and broadcasted live as an interruption of daily life, against routine TV shows, which have been broadly studied in the academy.

Maradona's funeral, applying a functionalist paradigm, could serve as a ritual to guarantee social integration and the conciliatory function, at the same time that farewells make us wonder about our past, present, and future as a community.

**Keywords:** Media Studies; Media Events Theory; Television Broadcasting

*Los jugadores del las divisionales del ascenso se doblan del dolor, en silencio.  
Toda Nápoles se deja caer.  
Las paredes de chapa de los ranchos con tu imagen remachada tiemblan.  
Los lobos de Ensenada y Berisso aúllan de tristeza.  
Mozo cobremé, hoy garpo con lágrimas.  
Si yo era vos y vos eras yo, aunque sea por un rato y de mentira.  
¿Dónde rajó la alegría?  
¿Y ahora quién podrá defendernos? (Lutman, 2020)*

### Introduction

Diego Maradona passed away alone, after a life of excess and being surrounded by multitudes. Although he died, a legend was born. His mythical figure was created by television in the 1980s and 1990s. His achievements were broadcast by national TV: both his performances in World Cups and his failures off the pitch that ended up humanising him. In this final step, at the Casa Rosada, where the Argentinian national team had been

crowned after winning the tournament in 1986, he received a last goodbye from fans and family.

In this article I shall analyse the four-hour special broadcast on November 26th 2020 on Canal 13. From the closing of the doors where his body rested to the final ceremony in Bella Vista cemetery, a qualitative approach is applied using 'Media event' theory.

Media-event transmissions have been underestimated by critical perspectives. Fostering a sense of community, of sharing common values, beyond ideological approaches, is seen as a way of distracting inhabitants from important issues. For Marxism and the Frankfurt School, Such broadcasting serves as a mere way of keeping the working class distracted from engaging in revolution. Even in uncritical administrative research, which accepts reverence to the *status quo*, possible revulsive effects are put down to an adverse retransmission or lack of control of the audience's interpretation.

In both cases, these are reductive views, taking for granted that only one kind of event is transmitted and that it has a single interpretation by its audience. But what happens when a revolutionary or, more broadly, non-establishment act is the one shown? In the last few decades, moreover, with the spread of mobile devices and social media (mainly Twitter), media has been seen as a revolutionary tool. Academics from around the globe emphasise (in an optimistic way informed by technological determinism) its emancipatory potential in the Arab Spring, Indignados (15-M) and Occupy Wall Street movements, among others.

In fact, the role of the mass media as a social catalyst has been studied for a long time, as well as its role as a tool for the elites to preserve their power. The nostalgic view of the liberal press at the beginning of the industrial age in the United Kingdom, by which it contributed to widening the rational political participation of the masses, has been questioned (Curran, 2011). More recently, in the television age, it is true that contestative movements have had visibility, but mainly by the media focusing on its more radical members and their violence to persuade audiences not to empathise with or support their demands (Gitlin, 1980).

Within the ambiguity offered by the media, Maradona's funeral also allows two kinds of interpretation. On the one hand, a way of keeping the masses entertained (especially taking in account the spread of the pandemic and economic crisis). But on the other hand, in opposition, the veneration of an out-of-the-box hero known for his lack of politeness, sympathy towards Cuba and Venezuela, and notable activism against particular free-trade agreements.

The broadcasted edition should not be explained in terms of positive or negative coverage, but with regards to resignation, consternation and vindication. The classical classification of the three main types of media events put forward by Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz (1994) consists of 'contests', 'conquests' and 'coronations' (while the authors accept there are others that do not fit these groups). In this article, in contrast to the aforementioned categorisations, I identify three momentums within the same event: 'football match', 'procession' and 'intimacy', in a sequential order, from beginning to end.



## The media-events theory

It has been three decades since Dayan and Katz elaborated their theory, in 1994, yet it has preserved its strength and validity, although major changes have taken place. After a long time when television was the prominent media, the era of «enchantment with the modern technology of broadcasting, of confidence in the national culture, and of willingness to bear witness to the happy marriage between national broadcasters and establishments has been on the decline in some parts of the world» (Sun, 2014, p. 457). But new forms of disruptive, unexpected and unplanned events, such as 9/11 and Arab Spring, were added to the repertoire, at the same time that certain iconic mediated events became templates for symbolic re-enactment in similar contexts. Paul Frosh and Amit Pinchevski consider, from a different perspective and assuming a risk of oversimplification, that «event-temporalities can be identified through a distinction between ‘eventfulness’ and ‘eventness’» (2018, p. 136).

More recently we could observe a burst of groundbreaking popular cultural works, some of them also covering social media and instant messaging as a complement to television (Mitu and Poulakidakos, 2016). Media events are focused on a specific thematic core, straddle different media products and aim to reach a wide and diverse multiplicity of audiences and participants. In a wider definition, «media events are certain situated, thickened, centering performances mediated communication» (Hepp and Couldry, 2010, p. 12).

The emergence of social media platforms diversified consumption. The proliferation of mobile devices and multi-attention stole television monopoly in media events narratives. However, media events as media practice continue to be valid and have been renewed by this new scenario. Nowadays, an event is considered a media event only if it takes place across a wide variety of digital media. We shall consider them as a media event if they take part undertaking cross-media coverage, where they did not only thicken the produced media of television, radio and newspaper mainstream (Couldry and Hepp, 2018).

Media influence on society, not just through its agenda – selecting what is going to be shown and thus given visibility – but through its framing or treatment, is crucial to its reception. Framing an issue determines its acceptance or rejection:

The empirically demonstrable set of common frames exhibited in the discourse and thinking of most people in a social grouping. Framing in all four locations includes similar functions: selection and highlighting, and use of the highlighted elements to construct an argument about problems and their causation, evaluation, and/or solution (Entman, 1993, p. 53). In media events, the highlighting process exceeds its technical achievement. It diminishes the role of exhortations and announcements emanating from the organisers (Dayan and Katz, 1994).

Media events, from an anthropological angle, are considered as a form of ritualised mass communication. They offer the opportunity to integrate citizens into rituals and celebrations, thus building national identities. In recent years, they have renewed the

relevance of many existing studies and inspired a stream of research in relation to the grand narratives of national interest and collective memory (Lee and Li, 2018). Academic research that focuses on senders, traditionally, tends to underestimate the active role of audiences. In this sense, Sabina Mihelj (2008) managed to solve this gap by analysing fragmented audiences, avoiding to take spectators as a whole.

Audiences conceive media events as an invitation to stop their daily routines and take part in a monopolistic live happening organised outside studio settings, paying reverence and ceremony, fulfilling a pre-planned arrangement between an organisers committee and broadcast by media partners (Dayan and Katz, 1994). It consists of an authentic media-communication 'genre'. Such events form an interruption in spectators' daily routines. They monopolise the antenna space across different channels and shows. They are broadcast live although they are planned and organised previously (with the exception of spontaneous acts) outside the media.

The broadcasting of Diego Maradona's funeral can be situated in a 'grey zone', where the limits between media events and news are blurred, where each event can be treated as a news item and at the same time as a media event. A situation can be addressed through different formats simultaneously, lending itself to a whole array of discursive statements that enter in dialogue or debate against each other (Dayan, 2008). In the post-modern age, when multiple narratives get in the act, events become part of a conversation involving competing versions, from local roots to foreign echo, instead of being spoken by a single, monolithic voice.

The event broadcast highlights the communal nature of the experience; the unanimous adherence to the values and symbols being celebrated. But, most importantly, what is stressed is not just unanimity but unity within diversity (Dayan and Kutz, 1994). In the football world, it means fraternity over rivalry, putting Diego first. Newell's Old Boys, Argentinos Juniors and Boca fans showing affection and camaraderie with their local-derby opponents were shown by the cameras. It means, moreover, paying homage to an enemy idol, to someone who, to some extent, has hurt you.

### **Telenoche and Canal 13**

The amount of free-to-air television stations is relatively low in Argentina (in relation to the number of inhabitants). In 2014, there were nearly 50 active channels for a population of 41 million. Absence of such an offer has been compensated by the abundant and vast presence of pay television. In 2014, open-access TV had 48.43% of the audio-visual-consumption share, before experiencing the impact of diversification through platform consumption (Becerra and Mastrini, 2017). This situation, however, has been dramatically changed in recent years thanks to the prominent emergence and rise of Netflix, YouTube, PrimeVideo, HBO and, lately, Disney+.

Sectoral concentration is very high, where the two leading channels (Telefé – belonging to ViacomBBS – and Canal 13 – to the Grupo Clarín) exceed 65% of the share. Their programming is, furthermore, replicated by free-to-air channels from the rest of the country (Becerra and Mastrini, 2017). This means that what is broadcast in the

capital city, Buenos Aires, is replicated and watched by spectators all over the country. Symbolically speaking, it constructs the same identity, that in a land of more than 2,500,000 km<sup>2</sup> helps people feel as if they shared the same space, and the same interests and goals.

The owner of Canal 13, for which Telenoche is recorded, is the Grupo Clarín. They started in the communication business with a newspaper that gave the holding its name: Clarín, the main daily in Argentina and one of the most-read Spanish-language publications. Nowadays, they are also Internet distributors, publishers, film producers and cable-TV operators. They have radio stations and open-access TV channels, one of them being Canal 13. In 2000, they sold an 18% share of their entire group for 500 million dollars to the US vulture fund Goldman Sachs (Becerra and Mastrini, 2017).

Clarín maintained constant confrontation against Argentina's authorities until the end of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's second term, in December 2015. That government had sponsored a new audiovisual-communication law in 2009 that limited the concentration of media ownership. However, six years after being passed, Clarín maintained its structure and dominance in the Argentine media market. With an annual revenue of around 2,500 million dollars, they are among the medal-winning Latin American media groups, although a distance behind Globo and Televisa (Becerra and Mastrini, 2017). Now Fernández de Kirchner is the country's vice-president and Alberto Fernández is in charge, but open conflict persists.

At the same time, the clash takes place from the flag newspaper across the whole media group. Canal 13 and Telenoche are very active in this sense. In the mid-1960s, Canal 13 launched a renowned news program called Telenoche. In the 1990s, after two decades of existence and the rise of cable channels dedicated 24/7 to news coverage, Telenoche was revitalised. The newscast, led by Mónica Cahen D'Anvers and César Mascetti, became a powerful information machine, surging due to investigative reports on corruption cases during the Menem government, simultaneously earning it audience and prestige (Pelitti, Mársico, and Casazza Herrera, 2008).

The Telenoche news program is clearly identified with liberal-conservative party ruling in Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires – Argentina's capital and largest metropolis. They stayed silent over Diego's activism in favour of the current Government and the support he gave to the wave of leftist leaders in Latin America, such as Evo Morales, Fidel Castro, Rafael Correa, Lula da Silva, Hugo Chávez and José Mujica. The program campaigns against the progressive party currently in the national government. During the funeral broadcast, news anchors repeatedly exonerated Buenos Aires police from the riots and blamed federal agents for lack of organisation. The capital city is governed by Horacio Rodríguez Larreta of the conservative Propuesta Republicana party.



Image 1: Fans outside Casa Rosada (Screenshot).

### From the Casa Rosada to Bella Vista cemetery

The more than four hours analysed can be divided into three different stages: a first one, at the beginning, similar to a football match atmosphere; a second, the journey from the Casa Rosada to the cemetery; and a final third, with the intimacy of a family ceremony.

The multitude congregated were not representative in terms of socio-economic, age and gender categories. They were football supporters or, at least, they behaved as if they were in a stadium. They turned up as football fans, failing to abide by the strict dress code. During the Maradona funeral analysis, there weren't close-ups or interviews with the fans. The sense of an out-of-control crowd was highlighted by the director. Usually, people's reactions were underlined by television, which selected the most relevant of them (Dayan and Katz, 1994).

They cheered, bowing their arms to pay honour and tribute as they know. Fans also sang the Argentinian national anthem, as if the 'Albiceleste' (Sky-blue and Whites) team were about to play. But, although in recent decades there has been a surge in women's football and in women attending stadiums, the farewell failed to represent such diversity, being mainly a middle-age working-class men's event.

A second stage could be identified in the march that crossed the city to the final destination by highway. A last trip from homage to eternity. If until then the corpse had been static and the crowd in procession, now the roles reversed and it was Maradona's corpse in a hearse that was the one moving thing. Meanwhile local neighbours

(identifiable as non-hooligans) who had approached spontaneously to pay tribute were the ones who were still. The stage had the attraction of uncertainty, tension and the desire to know if the coffin would finally arrive as envisaged.

A final third momentum was characterised by the intimacy of the Catholic ceremony. The family made a short guest list with relatives and friends. The press remained outside the door, but drones were flying in the sky. A mutual family-press agreement was reached and the latter kept a prudent distance to respect privacy. On the one hand, they showed what was going on inside the walls with spectacular aerial frames; but on the other, the roof of the tent protected their intimacy.

Here, a journalist highlighted the role of Claudia Villafaña, Diego's former wife:

Claudia was, once again, the organiser, the person who achieved unity among all the internal contradictions that the family continues to have. Claudia, once again until the end, occupied that place that she occupied all her life and that she resumed yesterday from the first minute. Her daughter Gianinna had taken that job from the moment that Diego had begun to be in poor health and Claudia, as her mother, took charge of all this since yesterday and was the one who guaranteed that everything would turn out (María Laura Santillán)<sup>1</sup>.

This reminds us of the relevance of family, of close ties, the importance of fidelity and unconditional love. Although Maradona had had a lot of affairs, the moment he died the attribution of companion was given to Claudia, who had known Diego since childhood. They did not mention the gender violence and sexual harassment affairs.

As a national hero, Maradona's wake took place in la Casa Rosada, a palatial mansion that serves as the government headquarters, as happened with several former presidents. As captain, and conqueror, he and the rest of the national team that had won the México '86 World Cup was received there. On its balcony the trophy was offered to the multitude that attended Plaza de Mayo square, celebrating what can be likened to a coronation event. He was there a second time, after the defeat in Italy '90, under a framework of recognizing the team's effort and loyalty in the face of adversity. The third and final time Diego was in the Government house was to receive homage after his death.

Maradona's coffin was installed in the Salón de los Pueblos Originarios (Hall of Native Communities). Formerly called Columbus Hall, this was renamed after the postmodernist turn. In a country where white establishments had been in power since colonial times, Diego 'el pibe de oro' (the golden kid) was born in Villa Fiorito, at the bottom of the society, and with indigenous roots.

While most prominent brave men, like former presidents and Nobel prize winners, were buried in the cemetery in the Recoleta neighbourhood, Maradona was laid to rest in

---

<sup>1</sup> «Claudia fue otra vez esa ordenadora, unificadora, la persona que lograba justamente entre todas las contradicciones las internas que la familia sigue teniendo, Claudia una vez más hasta el final ocupó ese lugar que ocupó toda su vida y que reasumió ayer desde el primer minuto porque su hija Gianinna un poco había tomado ese trabajo, lo había tomado ella desde el momento en el que el Diego había empezado a estar mal de salud y Claudia como su mamá se hizo cargo desde ayer de todo esto y fue un poco la que garantizó que todo salga como salió» (Santillán, M. L. (Anchorwoman). (2020, November 26). In C. De Elía (Director), *Telenoche*. Arctear; Todo Noticias.)



Bella Vista, alongside his parents 'Don Diego' and 'Doña Tota'. La Recoleta is the most affluent neighbourhood in the capital and Bella Vista is in poor suburbs. There, The Fuzz (Pelusa) bought his first country house when he started to earn money as a footballer.

### The rejection in an 'Elvis is alive' effect

From the moment his death was announced, there was a feeling of disbelief, as if it had not really happened. It seemed impossible that no one could save him. During his transfer to the cemetery, one reporter said «They are carrying Maradona to his funeral»<sup>2</sup>, as if he were alive and merely a guest watching the celebration taking place to pay tribute to himself. We tend to think that our heroes are invincible, that they do not belong to the human species. During the broadcast it was announced that the circumstances of his death were being investigated, and details were provided on the medicines he took and the attention he received on his last day.



Image 2: Bella Vista cemetery ceremony (Screenshot).

Journalists left the door open to negligence and mistreatment having taken place. They put the focus on the doctor and his team, saying that they did not monitor him like he deserved or that he did not receive the appropriate care. Someone had to be guilty. Diego died alone shut in a room in which he had been suffering from depression and withdrawal. It makes us remember that we'll face death alone, and that success, fame and all liberal economic goals finish at that moment. It reminds us we are vulnerable, as much as the Golden Boy himself.

<sup>2</sup> «Están llevando a Maradona a su entierro» (Wiemeyer, F. (Reporter). (2020, November 26). In C. De Elía (Director), *Telenoche*. Artear; Todo Noticias.).

The reporter put in this words:

The sadness, the sordidness of this end and how lonely he was until then. He did not want to see anyone. He was bad, he was sad, all day in his room. Not the legend but the man. He died like that, with a TV and nothing else. He only got up to bathe and hardly ate because he did not have the will. The biggest idol in our country and one of the biggest in the world, who was going to eat a little sandwich that remained untouched, tells us about the loneliness he felt. It is being investigated whether it was more abandonment than loneliness<sup>3</sup>.

Because he deserved something else, he was not just one of us, there was a need to render importance to his death. To paint the narration with a layer of poetry in order to avoid monotony. As human beings, we need to give a remarkable meaning to birth and death rituals. The sun and the ochre tones accompanying the evening helped in this sense, helping to build a mystical atmosphere:

Look at the sun. The sun is leading the cortege. It is not poetry. It is not a metaphor. This is what is happening. The light gives it a tone, a strong colouring. This sun begins to fade when dusk begins. It seems like a companion. If it were up to us, it is time not to speak, but to be calm and watch the sunset begin.<sup>4</sup>

Even when the funeral car chauffeur got confused and took a different route, it was interpreted as a signal from Diego that he wanted to delay the cemetery arrival: «There is a kind of magic in all this that we cannot explain. He does not want to get there. He did what he had to do»<sup>5</sup>. Near the end of the broadcast, the sun was also a diegetic tool that served to give cohesion to the storytelling:

And now, María, the sunset, as you said. Alongside the sun, the only light that remains is the artificial one mounted on one of the security structures. Without natural light, without anything else to say or do. That is the most difficult thing. The situation is something irreversible for the family because he will not be there, his presence will no longer be there. It is nice that you highlighted it, the sun

---

<sup>3</sup> «Lo triste, lo sórdido de este último tramo y lo solo que estaba hasta el final. Él no quiso ver a nadie. Estaba mal, estaba triste, todo el día en su cuarto. No la leyenda, sí ese hombre, se fue muriendo así, con el televisor y nada más. Solo se levantaba para bañarse y casi no comía porque no tenía ánimo de comer. El ídolo más grande de nuestro país y uno de los más grandes del mundo, que iba a comer un sanguchito que ni lo tocó, nos habla de esta soledad que tenía. Se está investigando si no era más abandono que soledad» (Geuna, L. (Journalist). (2020, November 26). In C. De Elía (Director), *Telenoche*. Artear; Todo Noticias.).

<sup>4</sup> «Fíjense en el sol, el sol está guiando el cortejo. No es poesía, no es metáfora. Es lo que está pasando. La luz le da un tono, un agregado fuerte. Este sol que se empieza a apagar, cuando empieza el atardecer. Que parece que acompañara. Si fuera por nosotros, es un momento para no hablar, para quedarnos callados y ver el principio del atardecer» (Santillán, M. L. (Anchorwoman). (2020, November 26). In C. De Elía (Director), *Telenoche*. Artear; Todo Noticias.).

<sup>5</sup> «Hay algo de magia en todo esto que no podemos explicar. No quiere llegar, hizo de las suyas» (Santillán, M. L. (Anchorwoman). (2020, November 26). In C. De Elía (Director), *Telenoche*. Artear; Todo Noticias.).

accompanied us until this moment. The sunset is the end. When the sun goes down, set the moment of burial, because of those magical things, perhaps from Diego<sup>6</sup>.

### «The world is watching us»

The press serves as a guide, providing interpretation, meaning and understanding of which an event is a carrier for this. It imposes a coherent narrative, an aim, by endowing it with a storyline. It obliges its organisers to conceive the event as a whole. Its participants, at the same time, are invested with roles and attributes that add depth to the identity of the event (Dayan and Kutz, 1994). By comparison, reporters gave Pelusa as much importance as a head of state, reminding us of Juan Perón and Raúl Alfonsín's funerals in Argentina, or others of cultural figures, such as the folk singer Mercedes Sosa and rock singer Sandro. During the cemetery transfer, a special motorbike division of the Federal Police were shown escorting the funeral car. Narrators explained that this was something normally reserved to diplomatic visits or to the head of state.



Image 3: Special motorbike division of the Federal Police escorting the hearse (Screenshot).

To highlight the universality of Diego, presenters proclaimed goodbyes from prominent global stars, like the Rolling Stones and former basketball player Magic Johnson. Also, they announced the presence in the private ceremony of the Italian

<sup>6</sup> «Y ahora sí final María, el ocaso como decías vos, haciendo el paralelismo con el sol la única luz que queda es la luz artificial que está montada en una de las estructuras de seguridad y ya sin luz natural sin nada más que decir sin nada más para hacer eso es lo más difícil es algo irreversible de esta situación para la familia; y porque no va a estar, ya no va a estar el cuerpo. Es lindo que lo marques, nos acompañó hasta esta hora el sol. El atardecer el final cuando el sol se va marca, por esas cosas de la magia, quizás de Diego, el momento del entierro» (Leuco, D. (Anchorman). (2020, November 26). In C. De Elía (Director), *Telenoche*. Artear; Todo Noticias.)

ambassador in Argentina. This emphasis was provided, at the same time, through visual images. As Danial Dayan and Elihu Katz (1994, p. 88) observed «by displacing audience focus from explicit statements to visual clues, television ‘naturalises’ the event; it authenticates its inlaid message, transforming the performative aspects of ceremonies (utterances emanating from figures of power) into visual anecdotes».

Images were shown from the UEFA Europa League match taking place in Naples. The five hours separating night in Italy and afternoon in South America highlighted the big distance between them and the universality that Diego represented. Television, by itself, turns its voice of authority into exercises in seduction. It conquers by inviting audiences to an interpretation, by encouraging hermeneutic pleasure in the deciphering of indexes and the scrutiny of symbols (Dayan and Katz, 1994). As an event, reporters compared the funeral to a celebration after winning a world cup or a visit to the country by the Pope.

Journalists emphasised the farewell in Southern Italy: «What happened last night in Naples, with pagan altars and the Europa League qualifying match, was the loudest applause in history. At the level of San Gennaro»<sup>7</sup>.

## Conclusions

The broadcast, in general terms, presented the event as burning news with a historical perspective. All the open-air channels, with Canal 13 among them, transmitted the funeral live, prioritising it above the other shows programmed. By choosing to show it in the news show of *Telenoche* its news anchors sparked the framing of the event as breaking news. The first part of the show, with Maradona fans behaving as football hooligans, could not be explained as well by them as if covered by reporters from the sport section.

The political parallelism between political actors and press, as pointed out by Hallin and Mancini (2004), is very clear in the Argentinian media system. Canal 13, sharing the whole of the Grupo Clarín’s editorial line, acts as a partisan outlet in favour of the conservative party (ruling in Buenos Aires) and against the left (in charge of the national administration). They ambiguously put Diego above every dispute. They silenced his activist side and, at the same time, they created a dispute by blaming the national government for organisational failures.

In this regard, football fans did not fall short of the Golden Boy legend, unlike journalists’ short-sightedness. Newell’s Old Boys, Argentinos Juniors and Boca supporters embraced their rivals, displaying their different-coloured shirts and flags. They stopped being enemies for a while to sing together and share their sadness. Hooligans shared the same physical space but did not fight as a way of paying homage.

The chosen place for the funeral was the Casa Rosada, as Maradona was a hero of the nation. But he was buried, as the normal human being he was, alongside his parents in Bella Vista graveyard, not in La Recoleta with all the establishment people. The way he

---

<sup>7</sup> «Lo que sucedió anoche en Napoli con altares paganos y la previa de la Europe League, el aplauso más fuerte en la historia que se dio. A la altura de San Gennaro» (Barbano, R. (Reporter). (2020, November 26). In C. De Elía (Director), *Telenoche*. Artear; Todo Noticias.).

passed away, alone, reminds us of the value of loyalty, of family roots and the human face behind success. His first wife, Claudia Villafañe, was allowed a leading role, although she had not been his partner for more than a decade. Reporters gave importance to her conciliatory role in relation to family disputes and did not mention the gender violence and sexual harassment affairs.

Rejection of Diego's death was notable. This was seen first, by delaying communicating the news, when the most common behaviour is to try to give a scoop. And, second, by digging into the causes, recreating his last moments, focusing on the medical team and his assistants. Echoing the judicial process started, they explained in detail how this evolved as a reaction to the incredulity of losing Pelusa.

Another way of giving sense to his departure was by using metaphysical and poetical frameworks to narrate the issues happening. The sun served as a metaphor and as a storytelling tool for this purpose. The use of drones in media coverage added not only spectacular images. From a narrative point of view, they reinforced the awe-inspiring character of the event, its epicness. Drones make this easier than helicopters.

The projection of Maradona as a universal figure was also driven by the journalists. In order to highlight his grandeur, they emphasised the large amount of participants on the day and the homage he received in Italy. The big difference in time zone helped to get across the global meaning of the images shown. Rather than television's reading is, thus, «more 'expositive' than interpretative» (Dayan and Katz, 1994, p. 83), TV proposes an interpretation to the audience based on what it shows or, more importantly, what it hides or, at least, fails to show.

## References

Becerra, M. & Mastrini, G. (2017). *La concentración infocomunicacional en América Latina (2000-2015): Nuevos medios y tecnologías, menos actores*. Bernal: Universidad Nacional de Quilmes.

Couldry, N. & Hepp, A. (2018). The continuing lure of the mediated centre in times of deep mediatization: Media Events and its enduring legacy. *Media, Culture & Society*, 40(1), 114-117.

Curran, J. (2011). *Media and democracy*. London: Routledge.

Dayan, D. & Katz, E. (1994). *Media events: the live broadcasting of history*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Dayan, D. (2008). Beyond media events: Disenchantment, derailment, disruption. In E. P. Monroe & D. Dayan (Eds.), *Owning the Olympics: Narratives of the New China* (pp. 35-43). Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of communication*, 43(4), 51-58.

Frosh, P. & Pinchevski, A. (2018). Media and events after Media Events. *Media, Culture & Society*, 40(1), 135-138.

Gitlin, T. (1980). *The whole world is watching: Mass media in the making & unmaking of the New Left*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hallin, D. & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing media systems*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Hepp, A. & Couldry, N. (2010). Introduction: Media Events in Globalized Media Cultures. In N. Couldry & A. Hepp (Eds.), *Media Events in a Global Age* (pp. 1-20). London: Routledge.

Lee, C. & Li, H. (2018). 'Media events': First quarter of a century and the next. *Media, Culture & Society*, 40(1), 127-130.

Lutman, K. (2020, November 26). Los jugadores del las divisionales del ascenso se doblan del dolor, en silencio. Toda Nàpoles se deja caer. Las paredes (...). Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/kurt.lutman/posts/10224246552100282>

Mihelj, S. (2008). National media events: From displays of unity to enactments of division. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 11(4), 471-488.

Mitu, B. & Poulakidakos, S. (2016). Introduction: Media Events - A Never Ending Story. In B. Mitu & S. Poulakidakos (Eds.), *Media Events: A Critical Contemporary Approach* (pp. 1-10). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Pelitti, P., Mársico, V., Casazza Herrera, M. (2008). Los noticieros en la televisión actual. *Question*, 1.

Sun, W. (2014). Media events: Past, present and future. *Sociology Compass*, 8(5), 457-467.

### **About the author**

Ezequiel Ramon Pinat is professor at the Department of Media, Communication, and Culture - Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB). He is also researcher at Compress (Comunicació i Responsabilitat Social) - Incom UAB.

Ezequiel.Ramon@uab.cat



## Diego Armando Maradona: Globalization's First Sports Superstar

Amit Gupta

United States Air Force War College

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6093/2532-6732/8966>

### Abstract

Maradona is important because he was the first superstar of an increasingly globalized world and in retirement his reputation only grew as we were able to follow the life and tribulations of the great man in real time—something that was not possible in a pre-globalized era. This paper examines the link between globalization and the status of Maradona as a global icon and argues that a combination of talent, a globally integrated economy, and a public persona that was larger than life, made Maradona the international star he was. This is in contrast to the overwhelming majority of sportsmen and women who lose their public prominence after retirement.

**Keywords:** Globalization; Sports; Media; Political Controversies.

### Introduction

Many sportsmen and women have dominated their sports but Diego Armando Maradona captured the imagination of the world. Thus, Pete Sampras and Roger Federer have dominated tennis, Floyd Merriweather may have been the most complete boxer, Mia Hamm the best woman football player, Michael Phelps is the greatest swimmer ever, and Usain Bolt's records may never be beaten. But while famous, they do not compare with the superstar status that was accorded to Maradona in his lifetime. Diego Armando Maradona is important because he was the first superstar of an increasingly globalized world and in retirement his reputation only grew as we were able to follow the life and tribulations of the great man in real time - something that was not possible in a pre-globalized era. Thus, apart from Maradona's great performances in the world cup, his flamboyant life-style, his political affiliations, his illnesses, his term as coach of Argentina, and finally the world-wide outpouring of grief about his death, all indicate that we ended up with the world's first truly globalized sport star. Maradona is special because while Michael Jordan, Lionel Messi, Usain Bolt, and Michael Phelps could all lay claim to the title of world-famous athlete, Maradona stood head and shoulders over the rest of them. This paper examines the link between globalization and the status of Maradona as a global icon and argues that a combination of

talent, a globally integrated economy, and a public persona that was larger than life, made Maradona the international star he was.

### **Sports Personalities in the Pre-Globalization Era**

We have always had international sports stars although their fame and reputation were due to a small internationalized elite that followed global sports and many of these athletes became famous in retirement as their stories were spread through books, articles, and grainy film. The fact is that in a pre-globalized world the technology was not readily available, nor were the sporting networks, that would have made the players in various sports more famous across the world. Further, in most of the non-western world, economic standards were not high enough to allow for the spread of televisions which would have made universal viewership of sports a possibility.

It was only in the 1960s and 1970s that income levels rose globally and international consumer demand saw television sales boom across the world. The 1980s saw the creation of satellite broadcasting companies like ESPN, Sky, and STAR TV which were broadcasting across continents, in the case of ESPN globally, and these networks required 24 hour-7 days a week programming to remain commercially viable. This need led to sports like Rugby, Australian Rules, Sumo wrestling, and even the fake sport of professional wrestling got international viewership. By the 1990s, teams and individuals in the sporting world were able to gain international fan bases. Thus, with the spread of satellite TV, European football leagues were broadcast around the world and teams like Real Madrid, Barcelona, Manchester United, and Chelsea had followers on every continent and in the 2000s the English Premier League, among other factors thanks to its global audience, became the richest league in the world. In a pre-globalized world, however, most sportsmen and sportswomen did not get the international fan base that sports stars in the globalized era were to acquire because their achievements on the sporting field were not seen in real time by global audiences.

Thus, Jesse Owens, perhaps the most complete athlete to participate in the Olympics, only became an international figure after the Second World War when his achievements were broadcast on television and he was mistakenly used to promote the mythology that he single-handedly punctured Adolf Hitler's myth of Aryan superiority.

Similarly, Pele was only seen by the world in the 1970 World Cup because the world's most popular sport reached a global audience for the first time with the 1970 final although, even then, both China and India were excluded from this audience (nor was Pele seen in the European leagues unlike his successors from South America - Messi, Ronaldo, and Ronaldinho). Other players like the swimmer Mark Spitz, the tennis player Rod Laver, the cricketer Don Bradman, and the sprinter Tommie Smith while famous and having remarkable sporting records never reached the fame of Maradona because at the time they played, there was no global communications network - of television, cable, satellites, internet,

and social media - to broadcast and highlight their achievements around the world. Further, with the exception of Tommie Smith, who along with John Carlos, gave a black power salute at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, no one brought political or social issues to the fore in the way Maradona was to.

The one exception, of course, was the boxer Mohammed Ali who, in the era of pre-globalization, became an international icon because of his sporting prowess, his struggle against racial injustice, his principled stand on the Vietnam war, and eventually his individual courage facing a debilitating disease like Parkinson's. Ali's career began in a segregated America when he won the light-heavyweight gold medal at the Rome Olympics and he won the world heavyweight boxing crown in February of 1964 before the civil rights act that ended segregation was passed. Ali went on to convert to Islam, and to reject the slave roots of his original name, which further raised the ire of angry white sports fans who were keen to have a white Christian boxing champion - the idea of the "so called" great white hope.

Ali was to go on to refuse being drafted to serve in the Vietnam war even though he had been assured that he would be given a cushy assignment, much in the way Elvis Presley had, and would not be put in harm's way. Ali's principled opposition to the war led to his being stripped of his boxing license, vilified by sections of the American public, and being threatened with jail time. Yet, at a time when the Vietnam war had inflamed public opinion around the world, Ali gained global fame for the stand he took against America's participation in the war. Later in life, when debilitated by Parkinson's, he was to be fondly remembered when he lit the flame at the 1996 Olympics thereby reigniting memories of his fame and career. Yet, despite such global fame, Ali's impact waned as he grew older to the point that by the mid-1980s he had disappeared from the public view and in retirement was not the focus of media that Maradona remained till the day he died. There were several reasons for this.

After Ali retired, boxing became a pay for view sport (in fact Ali's "thriller in Manila" against Joe Frazier was the first pay-per-view fight in the United States) seen by gamblers and die-hard sports fans on big screens in restaurants, bars, and the casinos of Las Vegas. The shift to the pay-per-view format, however, led to the sport being removed from the purview of the common man and it increasingly lost its viewership to the point that most people in the world today no longer know who the world heavyweight boxing champion is.

Ali's ill-health also contributed to his not being a public persona in the way Maradona was since the boxer was diagnosed with Parkinson's in the 1980s and, thus, was unable to have a public image or to comment on the important political and racial issues that America faced in the last thirty years of his life - he died in 2016. In contrast, Maradona stopped playing internationally in 1994 and professionally in 1997, but he remained in the limelight as a true celebrity. What then was the reason Maradona continued to receive such global adulation?

First, like many other athletes, Maradona's story was one of rags to riches that saw him emerge from the slums of Buenos Aires to become an international superstar and like other players from a humble background he had trouble handling wealth and fame—leading in

part to heavy drug use. Yet, while exhibiting such behavior, he was more like Elvis Presley in that he never forgot his humble roots and, instead, remained connected to the people of Argentina. In contrast, Lionel Messi, Argentina's other superstar, has always been more connected to Spain where he has lived since being a teenager and now has dual nationality, a move that was taken so he would count as a Spanish player and allow Barcelona to play three other foreigners in the team.

Secondly, while football is a team game, Maradona was the one who repeatedly took his teams to the pinnacle of glory through his individual efforts. If one looks at the two world cups where Pele played an important role in achieving Brazilian victory, 1958 and 1970 (in 1962, Pele played in two games and it was Garrincha who single handedly took Brazil to the final by scoring two goals each in the quarter and semi-finals), the Brazilian great was surrounded by a cast of truly impressive players. In 1958, Pele scored 6 goals while his fellow forward Vava got 5. Moreover, Pele was not the player of the tournament with that honor going instead to the Brazilian mid-field playmaker, Didi (Didi was the originator of the *folha seca*, a bending and curving free kick which later commentators prosaically labeled banana kicks). Similarly, in 1970, Jairzinho scored 7 goals, Pele got 4, while Rivellino got 3, and Tostao 2. Three other Brazilians scored in the tournament making it a true team effort and in the final, it is generally recognized that Gerson, the Brazilian playmaker brought about the downfall of the Italian side (Smith and Murray, 2016). Maradona's greatest triumphs, however, were solo efforts.

As Simon Kuper (2020) has written, Maradona used individual brilliance to take mediocre teams to glory both at the World Cup and in domestic leagues. In the Brazilian or German cases, since these are the two teams that have played the most World Cup finals, when one studies their World Cup winning teams one can always name a group of players who were influential in the victorious sides. Brazil, in 1958, had Pele, Vava, Didi, and Garrincha while in 1970, they had Jairzinho, Rivellino, Gerson, and Clodoaldo alongside Pele. The Germans in 1974 had talent all over the field: Beckenbauer, Brietner, and Gerd Muller being the most notable—while the 2014 German team had an embarrassment of riches in Thomas Muller, Andre Schurrle, Miroslav Klose, and Mario Goetze.

Argentina, however, won the world cup in 1986 because of the individual efforts of Maradona. It was his two goals each against England and Belgium that led to Argentina dominating the quarter and semi-finals and in the final, while playing a more subdued role, it was Maradona's clever through pass that saw Burruchaga score the winner. As the Harvard scholar Mariano Siskind (cit. in Mineo, 2020, Internet Citation) put it:

When Pelé played for the Brazilian national team in the World Cup in 1970, arguably the best team in the history of all World Cups, he played with five or six of the best players of the world next to him. Messi, as much as I love Messi ... his greatest accomplishments in Barcelona were surrounded by Xavi, Iniesta, Busquets and other incredible players. But Maradona in 1986 won the World Cup by himself. Argentina's team had effective role players, but that's it. In Mexico '86, Maradona performed the

most remarkable individual performance in the history of the World Cup. Many people said that whichever team Maradona played for in 1986 was going to win the World Cup.

In the 1990 World Cup, Maradona was hobbling on one leg and the Argentineans, once again with an unexceptional team, got through to the finals by surviving two penalty shootouts in the quarter and semi-finals although both were a tribute to the goalkeeping skills of Sergio Goyocochea. But it was in the round of 16 match against a Brazil, who were dominating Argentina on the field, that the genius of Maradona came through. Running at the goal, Maradona drew away three Brazilian defenders thus leaving Cannigia unmarked and a precise pass from Maradona with his rarely used right foot saw his teammate score the winning goal.

Similarly, when Maradona moved to the Italian league, he did not go to one of the fashionable Italian teams in Milan, Torino, or Rome but, instead, went to Napoli which was at that time an unfashionable club in the south of the country. While Milan and Juventus had bought some of the best players in the world, Maradona had the Brazilians Alemao and Careca along with a group of competent but not brilliant Italian players - unlike Milan and Torino where the bulk of the Italian team played. Such was his individual ability that in the years that he played for the club it won the Italian Serie A title twice and Maradona even won Napoli a UEFA cup in 1988-89. No player before or since Maradona has had such an individual impact on a team's fortunes and it is a testament to his phenomenal skills as a player.

Alfredo di Stefano is considered one of the greatest players of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but he never made an impact at the world cup and at Real Madrid his glory years were when he formed a partnership with the Hungarian Ferenc Puskas and a star-studded team of Spanish players (although such was the power of di Stefano over the team that when the Brazilian Didi, who was the best midfielder of his generation, joined Real Madrid, he was largely consigned to the bench by the Argentinean). Maradona, on the other hand, was the player that inspired mediocre teams to greatness and, in doing so, was to make his image and legend grow across the world.

Maradona's career ended in ignominy when he tested positive for illegal drugs at the 1994 World Cup but not before he had whipped up a world-wide frenzy with his reappearance at the highest level of international football. In fact, to protest his expulsion, thousands of Bangladeshis took to the streets to demand that FIFA reverse its decision because by then the legend of Maradona resonated in a country as distant from Argentina as Bangladesh. The Bangladeshi scholar Tohweed Feroze (2020, Internet citation given) explains why Maradona became a phenomenon in Bangladesh and traces it to the 1986 World Cup:

Football is war, and Maradona knew how to use the skill of the perfect feint to get maximum points. The Hand of God goal triggered ferocious debate here too, though most decided to overlook it because the memory of the Falklands War was still vivid in the minds of Bangladeshis...As Brazil was eliminated, there was only one team to

support – Argentina...Even in football, memories of the imperial past play a crucial role in cementing loyalty. As a “third-world” country, Bangladeshis could relate well with the Latin Americans, who had also faced the same economic hardships and exploitation by the West. Once the final came, there was complete support for Argentina, and after the game, Bangladeshis found a new hero in Diego.

Siskind makes a similar point when he points out the significance of the Hand of God goal in 1986 where, he argues, that the view of the goal is based on a North-South divide coming from the legacy of colonialism and breaks along geopolitical lines:

The typical U.S., British moralistic view said that was cheating, but across Latin America, Africa, and the Third World, they view it as a form of humiliating a former colonial power and the ultimate expression of cunning or shrewdness, which is central to a ludic conception of the game (and of life) that stands outside of the realm of morality.

For non-western nations, who had followed the Falklands war and equated it with a clash between the colonized and their colonial oppressors laying unjust imperial claims to territory, the hand of God goal was justifiable revenge especially since Maradona was to make the explicit connection between the game as a form of retribution against the Falklands war and the killing of young conscripted Argentineans.

The Falklands war was viewed in the non-western world as an attempt by a former imperial power to reimpose its colonial policies in an era when the world had by and large moved beyond colonialism and, instead, there was a growing international consensus on dismantling apartheid which was viewed as a vestige of colonialism. Paradoxically, the Argentinean junta, which had murdered thousands of dissidents, was able to garner support for its decision to wage war even though a large chunk of the international public opinion that supported the Argentine position, opposed its brutal domestic policies.

Maradona’s international career ended with his ejection from the 1994 World Cup and this was around the time of the emergence of the internet. Further, sporting networks with global audiences like ESPN, Sky Sports, and STAR, were creating 24 hour-7 days a week sports channels that needed content and they started scouring the world for programming to fill network hours and to attract eyeballs. These networks were to air sports as diverse as Sumo and Australian Rules Football and, amusingly, the fake sport of professional wrestling that gained a global fan base (Gupta, 2009).

As part of this search for programming, the football leagues of lesser-known countries were shown on these sporting networks and seemed to attract an audience. Thus, the Dutch league, which could not compete with the major leagues of Europe both in terms of wealth and players star quality, was to attract a global audience. In the case of South America, the

---

<sup>1</sup> cit. in Mineo, 2020, Available at, Harvard professor explains why Diego Maradona matters – Harvard Gazette. Accessed on February 8, 2022.

Argentinian league benefitted from such global exposure as did the Copa America which, till the advent of global television, had an audience that was restricted to South America. How did this impact on the image of Maradona?

The fact is that not only did Maradona find a global platform to espouse his views on subjects ranging from sports to politics, but this globalized sporting media required someone as interesting, divisive, and controversial as Maradona. While Maradona may not have been the most insightful of commentators on football, his views, life-style, and flamboyance, made him an ideal person for the media to quote and to pursue. To understand why, one has to go with James Hoberman's (1997) analysis of what makes sportsmen and sportswomen popular. Part of it is athletic ability but, as noted above, once the sportsman retires that sporting aura rapidly disintegrates and we rarely hear from such people or seek out their opinions on issues, either sporting or societal. Hoberman argued in the 1990s that the stereotypical black male style had become a combination of athlete, rapper, and criminal and was thus severely damaging to the African-American community. It was also what drew fans to such stereotypical figures.

Maradona was an immensely talented bad boy and the coming together of a globally integrated economy gave Maradona a continuing presence on the global stage. Thus, his infidelities, his homophobia, and his belligerence would have brought down any other public figure but in the case of Maradona, it only served to feed the legend. In contrast, Michael Jordan was a phenomenal basketball player who decades after having retired from the game still has the most popular Nike shoes named after himself. But, Jordan's influence on society is minimal and he has become another boring, rich, golf-playing millionaire.

What makes a sportsman a legend past their sporting years is the whether they are able to create and maintain a public persona that is larger than life. And Maradona was very good at that. In his lifetime, Maradona stood up for political issues but unlike other sportsmen, particularly in America, he was not to pay the price for his ideological positions. In contrast, athletes like Tommie Smith, Mohammed Ali, and more recently, Colin Kaepernick, all of whom perhaps have done far more to raise political awareness on social and political issues faced a backlash that hurt their careers. Smith came back from the 1968 Mexico City Olympics with a world record breaking gold medal run in the 200 meters yet he was vilified by the American public and only rehabilitated decades later. Today, a statue of Smith and Carlos stands on the campus of San Jose State University, Smith's alma mater. At the time, Smith and Carlos were ejected from the Olympic Village and the racial abuse and public vitriol against them was palpable. They were called "treasonable black rats" and faced a barrage of criticism from the American public where

It was commonly held that they had disgraced the Olympics and disgraced the American flag. Chicago columnist Brent Musburger went even further than most of their detractors and anointed Smith and Carlos, who had explicitly taken an anti-racist stance, 'black-skinned stormtroopers'. (Siquig, 2018)



Ali has been discussed already, but the case of Colin Kaepernick shows that the French are right - *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. Kaepernick's stand was made to publicize a major crisis in American society which was the killing of black men by police officials. The response to Kaepernick's protest ranged from anger and abuse to his being effectively boycotted by America's National Football League. The League to head off expensive litigation reached a settlement with Kaepernick and another player (Perez, 2019). Interestingly, other famous black sportsmen like LeBron James and Kobe Bryant only jumped on the issue after Kaepernick's position made it difficult for renowned black athletes to sit on the fence on such an emotional issue.

Maradona's political leanings were to the left and he did stand up on issues or make political statements that were seen as contradicting the trends in the world, particularly a United States led international system. He was to be the friend of Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez even though both were considered *persona non grata* in many capitals around the world. His leftist politics were perhaps best on display when he met Hugh Chavez wearing a T-Shirt with a photo of George W. Bush and the words "war criminal" emblazoned across it. Domestically, he called for the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo - who have campaigned to both recover the bodies of their dead children who had died in Argentina's dirty war and to bring the criminals who killed them to justice - be awarded a Nobel Peace Prize.

The symbolism of his politics was perhaps more important than their actual impact as witnessed by the fact that he tattooed the face of Che Guevara on his shoulder saying it was time the two greatest Argentines were united in one body (Kuper, 2020). To people in the global South, Maradona's symbolic politics were hugely important since he represented, however unconsciously, the aspirations and struggles of the people of the Southern countries in their battle against the western world. In that sense Maradona inherited the mantle of Mohammed Ali as a champion of the nonwestern world. Moreover, Maradona stood in sharp contrast to the prevailing economic, social, and political thinking that had pervaded the world in the era of globalization.

The new era of globalization began with the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 because it led to the end of two competing economic systems at the global level and the emergence of one security provider for the entire international system. Until 1991, there was a competition between the capitalist and communist economic systems and there were not large amounts of trade between the two politico-military blocs. With the demise of the Soviet Union, no alternative economic ideology could compete with the free-market philosophies of the United States. The Soviet Union disintegrated into multiple nation-states, most of which went through major economic crises in the 1990s. China, while keeping its communist political order in place, brought about market reforms which permitted the influx of foreign capital and thus led to the phenomenal growth of the Chinese economy to the point that it is now a near peer economic competition of the United States.

Militarily, America's position as the remaining superpower and the overwhelming technological superiority of its weaponry meant that there was only one security provider left around the world. It was this role of the sole security guarantor that facilitated the creation of a single global market since no other country could create a market system that could shut off American influence.

Politically, Yoshihiro Francis Fukuyama (1989, p. 18) wrote about the end of history because, according to him, in the history of ideas, liberal-democracy had triumphed over other ideologies in their attempt to shape national societies. He argued

The passing of Marxism-Leninism first from China from the Soviet Union will mean its death as a living ideology of world historical significance...And the death of this ideology means the growing "Common Marketization" of international relations, and the diminution of the likelihood of large-scale conflict between states.

The orthodoxy about the End of History continued for over a decade as the goal of spreading liberal-democracy and free-markets became an integral part of the United States' and the western world's foreign and economic policies. It was the events of September 11, 2001 that brought home the fact that globalization had not led to the end of history and, instead, deep political divides existed within the international community of nations.

By the early to mid-2000s it was becoming clear around the world that globalization and free-markets were not providing the economic benefits that were expected by the global population or lifting large sections of most nonwestern societies out of poverty and, instead, were leading to the growing disparities between the wealthy and the poor within societies. It was with this in mind that the Filipino sociologist Walden Bello (Bello 2014) coined the term 'deglobalization'. He argued that the creation of a single global market had spawned even greater levels of inequality within societies and what was needed was for governments to take a step back from the process of what Friedman called a Flat World where all national economies were interconnected. Bello (2014, p.1) suggested a process of Deglobalization which he described as:

...not a synonym for withdrawing from the world economy. It means a process of restructuring the world economic and political system so that the latter builds the capacity of local and national economies instead of degrading it. Deglobalization means the transformation of a global economy from one integrated around the needs of transnational corporations to one integrated around the needs of peoples, nations, and communities.

Ironically, Bello's call for deglobalization was seen as the nonwestern world's inability to compete in a globalized economic setting but, after the economic collapse of 2008, this demand was also taken up in Western Europe and later by economic populists like Bernie Sanders and Donald John Trump in the United States.

But when globalization was at its peak in the early to mid-2000s, a series of leftist regimes took over in Latin America calling for economic justice and they gained some legitimacy from their ties to Maradona. Thus, Maradona was to befriend Hugo Chavez and his successor Nicholas Maduro as well as the leftist Bolivian president Evo Morales. Added to these friendships was his support for Fidel Castro and the Cuban Communist movement and the fact that he was a staunch supporter of Palestine at a time when even in the Arab world support for the Palestinians had fallen in national governmental circles.

Maradona's political views reinforced his credentials as a globalized superstar because in a global economy dominated by transnational corporations, to succeed, sportsmen and sportswomen had to toe the line of their teams and their commercial sponsors and not raise political controversies. Being anti-globalist or raising the cause of unpopular issues was not going to get the endorsements that modern sportsmen seek to augment their personal fortunes. Instead, sportsmen were expected to have bland squeaky-clean images because that helped sell the goods and services they endorsed. Tiger Woods, for example, was the darling of advertisers as long as he had a clean, uncontroversial image but once the messy details of his infidelities emerged, his sponsors quickly canceled their contracts with him. Other sportsmen like Michael Vick, Mike Tyson, Wayne Rooney, and Maria Sharпова lost endorsements due to transgressions as varied as animal abuse, rape, infidelity, and failing a drug test. Thus, common wisdom was that to get lucrative endorsements you had to take an apolitical stance on controversial issues however just the cause was.

## Conclusion

Where players have taken political stands, as in Brazil, it has been in national elections with Romario supporting former president Lula while Ronaldinho endorsed current president Jair Bolsonaro. But neither was to take a stand on international issues and even if they had they lacked the charisma of Maradona and would, therefore, have had little public impact. In more recent times, when taking a knee to support Black Lives Matter or to support the fight against racial injustice became controversial, the most courageous display by sportsmen was, in fact, by the United States Women's National Team (football) where Megan Rapinoe and most other players took a knee to express support for Black Lives Matter. They also wore black warm-ups with Black Lives Matter printed on them. They faced the wrath of American conservative commentators and United States Soccer (the sport's governing body) stipulated that players would have to stand during the national anthem. But, by February 2021, US Soccer repealed its ruling and said standing was not required. This was an obvious response to the nation-wide outcry against police violence against African-Americans and the need to permit public protest. The courage of the women's team - who are also fighting for equal pay with the men - stood in stark contrast to the extreme caution expressed by the overwhelming majority of male players and the owners of men's teams they played for.

Not surprisingly, in an age of globalization, taking a knee for racial justice caught on elsewhere around the world when, in 2017, the players on the German football team Hertha Berlin took a knee to call for “an open-minded world”. Yet in a world of transnational corporations such protests are few and far between and this makes Maradona’s stand on political issues all the more impressive for if he had adopted less-controversial political views he would most likely have enjoyed financially lucrative endorsements from multinationals. For, even twenty years after playing his last game for the Argentinian national team, his image was more recognizable than any player on the national team except Messi and even there, he was always far more popular around the world than his successor to the national captaincy. No other player in retirement could have commanded such endorsements if he wanted them. Pele, Ronaldo, Pete Sampras, Chris Evert, Jurgen Klinsmann, and Zinedine Zidane were never at the same popularity level as Maradona but they all adopted non-controversial political positions in their careers.

Lastly, globalization helped perpetuate the legend of Maradona since he was able to combine extreme footballing talent with a larger-than-life personality which appealed to both fans and the global paparazzi. At the time of his death there were over 67 million google web pages that covered Maradona and it is unlikely that any other sportsmen will achieve such fame in their lifetime. Maradona was the world’s first globalized sport star due to a combination of talent, lifestyle, political stances, and the fact that his rise to international fame coincided with the development of a global integrated media. Other players will certainly make more money, some may live larger than life and even take controversial political positions, but only Maradona was able to combine all of these factors to create a unique international image.

## References

Bello, W. (2014). Notes for the Debate: Globalization. *Systemic Alternatives*, pp. 1-10.

Feroze, T. (2020, November 30). How Maradona impacted football in Bangladesh. *Dhaka Tribune*. Available at, [OP-ED: How Maradona impacted football in Bangladesh | Dhaka Tribune](#). Accessed on February 8, 2022.

Fukuyama, F. (1989). The End of History?. *The National Interest*, Summer, 17, pp. 3-18.

Gupta, A. (2009). The Globalization of Sports, the Rise of Non-Western Nations, and the Impact on International Sporting Events. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 26 (12), pp. 257-276.

Hoberman, J. (1997). *Darwin's Athletes: How Sport has Damaged Black America and Preserved the Myth of Race*. New York: Mariner.

Kuper, S. (2020, November 20). Maradona Obituary. *Financial Times*.

Mineo, L. (2020, December 4). Why Maradona Matters. *Harvard Gazette*. Available at, Harvard professor explains why Diego Maradona matters – *Harvard Gazette*. Accessed on February 8, 2022.

Perez, A.J. (2019, March 21). Report: Colin Kaepernick, Eric Reid got less than \$10 million in NFL collusion settlement. *USA Today*.

Siquig, A. (2018, October 17). The Smith-Carlos Black Power salute: Once vilified, now praised. *Al-Jazeera*.

Smyth R. & Murray, S. (2016, October 25). World Cup Final 1970: As it happened. *The Guardian*.

### **About the author**

Amit Gupta has written on arms production and weapons proliferation, South Asian and Australian security policies, popular culture and politics and, more recently, on the impact of demography on US foreign policy. He has published in *Orbis*, *Asian Survey*, *Security Dialogue*, *The Round Table*, and *Mediterranean Quarterly*. He is also the author or editor of seven books the most recent of which is: *Air Power: The Next Generation*, Amit Gupta Ed., *Howgate Publishing*, 2020.

### **Disclaimer**

Amit Gupta is an Associate Professor in the United States Air Force Culture and Language Center. The views in this article are his and do not necessarily reflect those of the USAF or the Department of Defense.

amit.gupta1856@gmail.com

**Efecto DAM:  
Diego Armando Maradona en algunas representaciones literarias**

Pablo Brescia

University of South Florida

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6093/2532-6732/8967>

**Abstract**

Since its arrival to the shores of the River Plate, football has been an integral part in the construction of Argentine national identity. As Pablo Alabarces states, in the last 30 years social and cultural discourses point to a clear phenomenon: “‘footballization’, meaning that many aspects of Argentine society are discussed in terms of sport”. During that time, Diego Armando Maradona, symbol of the Argentine national team between 1979 and 1994 has been thrown into the spotlight and cast as a representative of such identity, joining fictional and historical figures such as Martín Fierro, Carlos Gardel, Che Guevara and others. For this article I will study the intersection of football, Maradona, and national identity as seen through the lens of literature (fiction and essay). I will then analyze and interpret the different “construction and de-construction” operations around the player Maradona and what does that mean for the dynamics of national identity as related to football.

**Keywords:** Maradona; Literature; Nation; Identity; Myth

*Diseminados y en franca expansión  
Hoy nos espera el mundo entero  
No es para menos, la coronación  
Brotó el encanto del suelo argentino  
Y no me vengan con cuentos chinos  
Que el Che, Gardel y Maradona  
Son los number one, como también lo soy yo  
¡Y argentinos gracias a dios!  
“La argentinidad al palo”, Bersuit Vergarabat.*

## DAM y la identidad en/de las letras

Desde su llegada al Río de la Plata, el fútbol ha sido homologado como una actividad que forma parte de los procesos contribuyentes a establecer la identidad nacional argentina según ha investigado Eduardo Archetti (2003). Como bien apunta Pablo Alabarces (2000, p.17), a pesar de los múltiples impedimentos para la construcción del objeto “fútbol” en el campo de los estudios sociales, en las dos últimas décadas las superficies discursivas en la Argentina han sido testigo de un fenómeno que autorizaría dicha construcción: la «*futbolización*, según la cual todo debe ser discutido en términos deportivos». Desde los años setenta, Diego Armando Maradona (de ahora en adelante, DAM) había sido lanzado - por fanáticos y expertos del fútbol y por los medios de comunicación - como encarnación de esa identidad como casi ningún otro hombre argentino en la historia. Si bien la figura de DAM se ha constituido en objeto de estudio académico en las últimas décadas en relación con la sociología del deporte y también en lo que respecta a sus intersecciones mediáticas y a sus relaciones con la política, poco se ha dicho de sus representaciones en diversas disciplinas artísticas como la literatura, la música o los medios audiovisuales y de qué manera participan en esta configuración de un “personaje” que aúna características de mito, héroe y Dios en torno a esa intersección deporte-identidad.<sup>1</sup>

En este artículo tomo selectos ejemplos del campo literario para analizar las maneras en que DAM se convierte en un significante capaz de cobrar sentidos diversos que, no obstante, parecen rondar sobre una misma idea: la excepcionalidad individual - como aduce la canción del grupo de rock argentino Bersuit Vergarabat - muchas veces ligada a una idiosincrasia nacional argentina mitologizada, tipificada y esencialista. Haré calas en algunos textos de ficción y de ensayo que problematizan la identidad desde el fútbol sintetizada paradigmáticamente en la figura de DAM. Así, lo veremos como héroe en ascenso en el ensayo del escritor peruano (premio Nobel de literatura) Mario Vargas Llosa, “Maradona y los héroes” (1982), y como el héroe caído que perdura en la memoria en el cuento del escritor argentino Eduardo Saccheri “Me van a tener que disculpar” (2000); como la encarnación de una enfermedad en el ensayo “Las tinieblas del corazón. Fútbol argentino y mal de Maradona” (2002), del también escritor argentino Rodrigo Fresán, y como el “esclavo liberador”, en la crónica que hace el escritor mexicano Juan Villoro en “Vida, muerte y resurrección de Diego Armando Maradona” (2006).

---

<sup>1</sup> El campo de los estudios maradonianos está en proceso de constitución, como lo demuestra la próxima aparición de *Diego Maradona: A Socio-cultural study* (Eds. Pablo Brescia and Mariano Paz, 2022) y los numerosos volúmenes publicados luego de su fallecimiento. Para la relación entre DAM, fútbol, política e identidad nacional, consultar los aportes de Eduardo Archetti (1997, 1999, 2001) y Pablo Alabarces (1996, 2007, 2014). Para una aproximación a DAM como héroe deportivo, sobre todo en lo que respecta a su *status* como ídolo napolitano, ver el libro de Luca Bifulco (2020). El único trabajo dedicado con exclusividad a la relación entre DAM y sus representaciones literarias hasta ahora es el de García Cames (2018a).

Como base teórica, utilizaré las nociones de Roland Barthes en su reflexión “El mito, hoy” cuando sostiene que el mito es un *sistema semiológico segundo* que emite un mensaje. Dice Barthes (1980, p. 205): «Recordemos aquí que las materias del habla mítica (lengua propiamente dicha, fotografía, pintura, cartel, rito, objeto, etc.), por diferentes que sean en un principio y desde el momento que son captadas por el mito, se reducen a una pura función significante». Más adelante (*ivi*, pp. 221-222) explica que nos convertimos en lectores del mito cuando lo entendemos como «un todo inextricable de sentido y de forma» que produce ambigüedad y nos dirige al «mecanismo constitutivo del mito» (pp. 221-222). ¿Cuáles son los mecanismos constitutivos que se activan desde la literatura en las representaciones de DAM?

### **DAM en la literatura: ensayo y ficción**

Vargas Llosa redacta su artículo cuando se halla en funciones de corresponsal para comentar las vicisitudes del Mundial de España de 1982, torneo en el que triunfara la selección de Italia. Argentina, campeón defensor, llegaba con la base intacta de la selección de 1978 más el agregado de un DAM en franco ascenso. Luego de la primera fase clasificatoria, Argentina debió enfrentar una durísima segunda ronda contra las selecciones de Italia y Brasil. Perdió ambos encuentros (1-2 y 1-3) y quedó eliminada.

DAM no era todavía Maradona y estaba lejos de activar los procesos de identificación futbolística, nacional y mítica que reconocemos hoy. Sin embargo, dos partidos (la derrota ante Bélgica 1-0 y la victoria ante Hungría 4-1, donde DAM marca dos goles y da una asistencia) le bastan a Vargas Llosa en “Maradona y los héroes” (1982) para dar su veredicto: «Maradona es el Pelé de los años ochenta. ¿Un gran jugador? Más que eso: una de esas deidades vivientes que los hombres crean para adorarse en ellas». Es interesante desde donde lee el escritor a la nueva estrella del fútbol mundial: desde el molde del heroísmo.<sup>2</sup> La idea del héroe/mito rentable —DAM acaba de ser comprado por el FC Barcelona de España— recorre todo el ensayo. Y también la excepcionalidad de la figura y del juego de DAM: de baja estatura, se enfrenta a los defensores belgas o húngaros y su destreza en el juego se conjuga con un carisma inexplicable: «juega maravillosamente, pero también porque su nombre y su cara se graban en la memoria al instante». Hay algo en su cuerpo y en su nominación que sobresale y, se sabe, la memorabilidad es un ingrediente esencial tanto en el deporte como en el arte. Así, el peruano le da a DAM una cualidad de artista: «en el fútbol . . . lo que cuenta, a la hora de patear la pelota, no son de ningún modo las patas, sino la fantasía y las ideas» (El Grafico, 20/11/2020).

Fantasía e ideas. La exhibición de genio en el partido ante Hungría da lugar a una teorización de Varga Llosa (1982) que luego sería retomada, tal vez insospechadamente, por periodistas y académicos: la traumática discusión sobre el estilo de fútbol que representa a Argentina. La dicotomía razón (Europa)-pasión (Latinoamérica) se presenta en DAM de

---

<sup>2</sup> El excelente libro de David García Cames *La jugada de todos los tiempos. fútbol, mito y literatura* (2018b), trabaja con estas nociones de héroe y mito aplicadas a la literatura del mundo hispánico dedicada al fútbol.



manera interesante: «El delantero argentino practica ambas cosas a la vez y ninguna de ellas en especial, es una curiosa síntesis en la que la inteligencia, la intuición y la inventiva se apoyan continuamente con el cálculo y, al igual que en su literatura, Argentina ha producido un estilo de fútbol que es la manifestación más europea de lo hispanoamericano»<sup>3</sup>. Vargas Llosa (1982) distingue las características nacionales argentinas, equiparando fútbol y literatura, pero va más allá y, profético, acierta y se equivoca de manera brillante: por un lado, habla de la «urgencia irracional» de las sociedades contemporáneas de erigir héroes, «monstruos sagrados»; luego arguye que los futbolistas «son las personas más inofensivas a quienes se puede conferir esa función idolátrica» porque, por un lado, su culto desaparece al terminar la carrera y, por otro, «nada está más cerca de la ovación que los silbidos» (El Grafico, 20/11/2020).

Es claro que DAM gambeteará las afirmaciones del escritor peruano al cumplir con algunas - la dicotomía reconocimiento y rechazo desde los valores exististas del fútbol - y con otras no - el culto a DAM siguió vivo, sobre todo en Argentina y en Nápoles; para más pruebas, ver la fundación de la “Iglesia Maradoniana” en 1998.

En tanto ficción, el texto de Saccheri “Me van a tener que disculpar” pone a funcionar estrategias discursivas distintas a la pieza de Vargas Llosa. Aunque emanadas de sectores del imaginario popular, dichas estrategias están filtradas por una voz en primera persona que, como si fuera el narrador en *off* de una película, nos explica lo que representa DAM y justifica su excepcionalidad:

Es que hablar de él, entre argentinos, es casi uno de nuestros deportes nacionales. Para ensalzarlo hasta la estratósfera, o para condenarlo a la parrilla perpetua de los infiernos, los argentinos gustamos, al parecer, de convocar su nombre y su memoria (Saccheri 2000 p. 37).

Para el momento de la publicación del texto, DAM es exjugador, pero queda la memoria de sus grandes momentos y, también su nombre, aspecto en que también se había detenido Vargas Llosa. Saccheri (2000) señala con claridad los supuestos extremos de la idiosincrasia nacional reactivando los mecanismos mitogénicos: DAM habita el cielo y el infierno argentinos. En un relato preñado de culpas y disculpas, la culpa mayor la tiene una entidad abstracta, que destruye la imagen que aparentemente queremos preservar: el tiempo pasa, el recuerdo del Maradona jugador se pone viejo y el narrador quiere eternizar una secuencia del pasado como presente. Frente al tiempo, la memoria:

---

<sup>3</sup> Archetti es el que más ha insistido sobre la figura de DAM como encarnación definitiva del estilo de fútbol argentino criollo bautizado como “la nuestra”.

Digamos que mi memoria es el salvoconducto para volver el tiempo al lugar cristalino del cual no debió moverse, porque era el exacto sitio en que merecía detenerse para siempre, por lo menos para el fútbol, para él y para mí” (Saccheri 2000 p. 39).<sup>4</sup>

Más adelante, el narrador comenta el partido de cuartos de final Argentina *vs.* Inglaterra del Mundial de México 1986 que definitivamente coloca a DAM como héroe futbolístico al catapultarlo hacia la obtención del campeonato para la selección argentina. Para el país y sus habitantes no fue solo un partido más ya que, como narra el mismo relato, frecuentemente se equipara lo sucedido en la guerra de las Malvinas en 1982 - la derrota militar ante Inglaterra - con lo ocurrido ese día de junio de 1986 - la victoria del equipo argentino por 2-1 con dos goles de DAM, conocidos como “La mano de Dios” y “El gol del siglo”. «Es fútbol, pero es mucho más que fútbol», dice el narrador (*ivi*, p. 40). Saccheri (*ivi*, p. 41) ensaya una versión política de la metáfora del “barrilete cósmico” que popularizara el relator uruguayo Víctor Hugo Morales en su narración del segundo gol del jugador argentino a los ingleses:

ni siquiera cuando el tipo les regala una fracción de segundo más, cuando el tipo aminora el vértigo para quedar de nuevo bien parado de zurdo, ni siquiera entonces van a evitar entrar en la historia como los humillados, los once ingleses despatarrados e incrédulos, los millones de ingleses mirando la tele sin querer creer lo que saben que es verdad para siempre Saccheri 2000 p. 41).<sup>5</sup>

La idea del Sur, los de abajo, contra el Norte, los de arriba, y las múltiples diferenciaciones (raciales, históricas, económicas) están marcadas en el relato desde la incredulidad de los espectadores ingleses: «pensando que no va a suceder, que alguno lo va a parar, que ese morochito vestido de azul y de argentino no va a entrar al área con la bola mansita a su merced» (*ibidem*).

El mecanismo culpa-deuda estructura «Me van a tener que disculpar» y deja al descubierto las maneras de construir la identidad nacional a partir del deporte; incluso el narrador reconoce que, ante su actitud de no juicio, puede «que alguien me acuse de patrioter» (*ivi*, p. 38). La culpa parte de una idea de conducta moral donde no puede haber contradicción en el juicio a los demás. Pero el narrador se excusa en el carácter excepcional del personaje («no me jodan con que lo mida con la misma vara con la que se supone debo juzgar a los demás mortales», *ivi* p. 42) y así justifica el primer gol a los ingleses, no como producto de la viveza criolla, sino como un acto de una especie de Robin Hood de la redonda: «porque le robaste algo al que te afaná primero» (*ivi*, p. 40). El robo se acepta, porque es frente a los “piratas”, al

---

<sup>4</sup> Dice García Cames (2018b, p. 423): «El regate, la gambeta, puede ser así la puerta de entrada a un universo épico que nos encamina al territorio de los antiguos héroes, allí donde no existe el tiempo, donde todo es sagrado».

<sup>5</sup> Dice García Cames (2018b, p. 423): «El regate, la gambeta, puede ser así la puerta de entrada a un universo épico que nos encamina al territorio de los antiguos héroes, allí donde no existe el tiempo, donde todo es sagrado».

otrora imperio, a los que robaban. En ese hurto va la deuda: «Porque yo le debo esos dos goles a Inglaterra», dice el narrador (*ivi*, p. 42). El héroe, caído, lleno de «presentes vulgares» (*ibidem*), es, ante todo, único y no puede ser medido igual que los demás mortales, porque sus acciones han sido desmedidas.<sup>6</sup> Son justamente esas acciones, repetidas hasta la mitificación nacionalista, las que se han entendido como la huella de un sistema asimétrico: el que genera la deuda (el héroe símbolo de un país surcado por los delirios de grandeza) está sucio (hace trampa y luego corroe el recuerdo), pero se salva porque la deuda es impagable y esto genera culpa. Por eso, la voz narrativa anuncia (y concluye al empezar): «Hay un tipo con el que no puedo» (*ivi*, p. 36).

En su ensayo, Rodrigo Fresán “Las tinieblas del corazón. Fútbol argentino y mal de Maradona” también reconoce en DAM un ser que se representa como fuera de lo común, «dios caprichoso y pecador» (2002, p. 32). El tono del texto es muy distinto de los aportes de Vargas Llosa y de Saccheri ya que Fresán dice escribir desde la indiferencia por el fútbol, pero liga sin ambages nación, identidad y DAM. Reconoce en la simbología maradoniana una especie de *phármakos*, cura y veneno y así, circularmente, en un eterno retorno en el que la aceptación es total: «Maradona es Argentina. Potencia e impotencia argentina. Maradona es Alfa y Omega, local y visitante», inicia (*ivi*, p. 28). Para el escritor argentino, la *futbolización* de la que hablaba Alabarces es clarísima: «Los argentinos hablan de fútbol para hablar de varias cosas al mismo tiempo: de lo que les pasa, de lo que no les pasó, de lo que puede llegar a pasarles y, finalmente, de fútbol» (*ivi*, p. 29).

En este ensayo pleno de referencias culturales y literarias, DAM es el equivalente de Kurtz, el europeo hecho semidiós en la selva africana que protagoniza *El corazón de las tinieblas*, de Joseph Conrad. En un giro posmoderno de nostalgia derruida, y con cierto humor desencantado, Fresán (*ivi*, p. 32) dice que en realidad DAM debería haber sido interpretado por el último Marlon Brando porque son (los dos), «alguien a quien le pagan demasiado por no hacer nada salvo, simplemente, ser quién es y recordar quién fue a los que, por otra parte, no pueden olvidarlo». Como en el caso del cuento de Saccheri se enfatiza el rol de la memoria, pero aquí no hay ninguna eximición de culpas. El DAM del que habla el artículo es el *discursivo*, al decir de Alabarces (2014, p. 116), y Fresán destaca el *self-fashioning* maradoniano que lee en la autobiografía de DAM, *Yo soy el Diego*, caracterizada como «una memoria punk y horrorizada ante su futuro» (*ivi*, p. 30). La activación de la simbología mítica nacionalista se da en el ensayo de Fresán en la homologación inmediata entre DAM y

---

<sup>6</sup> Como indica Bifulco (2020, p. 11), en referencia a los *tifosi* napolitanos: «la figura de Maradona, que oscila en la imaginación entre el heroísmo, la mitología y el símbolo de la adoración, vive la típica simplificación que esta forma de dedicación, por parte de los aficionados napolitanos, requiere: la puesta entre paréntesis de toda ambivalencia. El lado negativo de su vida, de su carácter, las múltiples contradicciones que lo han caracterizado y que todavía lo caracterizan no son negadas por los aficionados, son bien conocidas, pero se dejan de lado, se hacen secundarias y en cierto modo inofensivas. Un mecanismo de “olvido consciente” —aceptemos el oxímoron—, un dejar de lado las ambivalencias y contradicciones, que sirve para mantener una identificación pura y gratificante...».

múltiples tics de la cultura nacional: el asado, en tanto «los argentinos son la carne a la parrilla y Maradona los viene masticando desde hace más de dos décadas» (*ivi*, p. 32); la tendencia psicótica a la paranoia, enumerando continuos complots en su contra;<sup>7</sup> la exaltación del pasado para tolerar el presente; la necesidad de seguir creyendo en leyendas como aquellas que tildan a la Argentina de «Sexta Potencia Mundial’ y ‘Granero del Mundo’» (*ibidem*). Incluso Fresán recurre, como Saccheri, a los dos goles a Inglaterra del ’86 para hablar de la «perfección maniquea pero pertinente el Ying y el Yang de un hombre y un país» ante un gol tramposo y otro inolvidable (*ivi*, p. 31). Propone un ejercicio: leer testimonios aparecidos en el 2002 de escritores e intelectuales argentinos y reemplazar donde dice “Maradona” por “Argentina”. Fresán cita y reemplaza: María Moreno hablaría de fascismos de entrecasa, impunidad y privilegios; Rodolfo Fogwill diría que es un dios de pacotilla y que es un deber pensar lo peor de él; y Beatriz Sarlo se referiría al capital simbólico del jugador argentino: «Nadie puede tomar su discurso al pie de la letra. Nadie tampoco podría decir que es falso. Se sitúa, sencillamente, más allá de la objetividad, del valor y de la norma ...» (Fresán 2002, p. 30).

Allí se encuentra el punto de convergencia entre la propuesta de Saccheri (2000) desde la ficción y la de Fresán (2002) desde el ensayo: la idea de un esencialismo Maradoniano pleno de momentos sublimes y caídas estrepitosas que es, ante todo, inmovible, irreductible y fuera de todo juicio ético. Curiosa paradoja: la humanidad de DAM, su falibilidad, sus debilidades, engrandece sus llegadas a la cúspide - no sólo en el rubro de los logros futbolísticos, sino también sus ocurrentes y a veces ofensivas salidas lingüísticas como el famoso “se le escapó la tortuga”, que ha pasado a ser parte del idiolecto nacional - y lo exime de un juicio que deconstruya los rasgos de una identidad que es móvil pero no cambia. Desde una plataforma, si se quiere, más desinteresada que la de Saccheri (que, al fin y al cabo, hace un homenaje), Fresán (2002, p. 31) no logra evadir el mismo *impasse*: ¿cómo escribir sobre DAM sin criticarlo y, a la vez, aceptarlo? Acierta no obstante es cuando apunta las coincidencias entre el discurso maradoniano y el de ciertos sectores políticos y sociales argentinos: «Su procedimiento [el de Maradona] ha sido en insistir una y otra vez en su pasada condición de ex superdotado para que se le perdone su abundante presente en el que, cuando la cosa no sale, es por culpa de ‘los que no me quieren o me quieren hacer mal’». La canción de Andrés Calamaro, “Mi enfermedad”, que marcó el retorno de DAM al fútbol después de la primera suspensión por drogas, comienza «Estoy vencido porque el mundo me hizo así/no puedo cambiar,/soy el remedio sin receta/y tu amor mi enfermedad», y condensaría la idea de Fresán de DAM como símbolo del mal - incurable - argentino.

Para cuando analizamos el texto de Villoro “Vida, muerte y resurrección de Diego Armando Maradona” (2006) la perspectiva que da la distancia de lo nacional - no ser argentino - propone otra manera de acercarse al tema. Empieza enfatizando las proezas de

---

<sup>7</sup> Para ello, nada mejor que recordar la novela de Julio Llinás y Fernando Niembro, *Inocente* (1995), donde DAM es víctima de una conspiración entre la FIFA, la CIA y el Vaticano que lo deja fuera del Mundial de Estados Unidos de 1994.

DAM - «el dios de los pies pequeños» (*ivi*, p. 72) - en el Nápoli y luego se detiene en varios momentos de la carrera descendente del futbolista, eligiendo algunos obvios como, por ejemplo, el enfrentamiento Italia-Argentina en el Mundial de 1990 y la división nacional que causó en el país europeo y el icónico rugido a la cámara de televisión luego de convertir el tercer gol a Grecia en el Mundial de Estados Unidos en 1994. Los otros momentos que selecciona Villoro pertenecen a la etapa “posjugdor” de DAM: comenta la autobiografía *Yo soy el Diego* y también hace referencia a la película que filmó sobre el jugador argentino Emir Kusturica y al documental de Javier Vázquez *Amando a Maradona*, y se detiene en el programa de televisión inaugurado en el 2005 *La noche del diez*, particularmente en el primer show que tuvo como invitado especial a Pelé, con quien DAM jugó un épico “cabeza a cabeza”.

El ensayo toma como un juego un acontecimiento que ocurriría tiempo después. En el 2004 la revista colombiana *Soho* propuso anticipar muertes ilustres. Villoro (2006) aprovechó y se imaginó la de DAM. Escribió: «Si Onetti descubrió que una persona podría llevar varias vidas breves, Maradona encontró que podía sobreponerse a varias muertes breves. En ese momento eclipse, un hombre destinado a la cambiante supervivencia es captado con la fijeza de la literatura necrológica» (*ivi*, p. 78). Villoro (*ivi*, p. 73) salpica su ensayo de frases que, como en el caso de los otros textos analizados aquí, intentan condensar los significados múltiples del símbolo DAM: «Fue el mayor artista del capricho que ha conocido el futbol, el más dramático y el que más ha influido en su equipo», haciendo referencia a la influencia de DAM sobre el juego de la selección argentina en el Mundial de México de 1986 y en el juego de las escuadras del Nápoli); «Maradona tiene razón en lo que compete a los abusos sufridos por los jugadores, pero fracasa al postularse como un Tupac Amaru de pantalón corto» (*ivi*, p. 75), indicando que las aparentes contradicciones y reacciones intempestivas ante lo que se denomina vagamente como “el poder” fueron muchas veces rabieta indulgentes; «Maradona no conoce recato y suele referirse a Dios como su vocero de prensa» (*ivi*, p. 88), estableciendo una nueva referencia a la supuesta divinidad del jugador, pero también a la tempestuosa relación de DAM con los medios de comunicación.<sup>8</sup> La necrológica imaginaria que escribiera Villoro tiene increíble actualidad a casi un año de la desaparición física del astro argentino.

Villoro no homologa tan abiertamente a DAM con la cultura nacional, aunque hay una referencia a la capacidad argentina para producir mitos melodramáticos. Pero no puede dejar de explorar esa imagen que conjuga opuestos en el jugador: al hablar de la autobiografía, sentencia: «la expedición a un ego colosal va acompañada de una franqueza que vulnera y muchas veces agravia al autor» (*ivi*, p. 74). Lo saliente del ensayo son los disfraces con los que el autor viste a DAM para intentar describir su excepcionalidad. En primer lugar, aparece el que se aprecia desde el título: DAM como una especie de Cristo, imperfecto, sí, pero igualmente redentor. Por eso, cuando Villoro imagina la muerte y escribe la necrológica, puede decir: «en el futbol, solo una vez un hombre fue todos los hombres» (*ivi*, p. 84). Esta

---

<sup>8</sup> Ver el libro de Leandro Zanoni. *Vivir en los medios. Maradona off the record*(2006).

idea de DAM como Cristo, divino pero imperfecto, se relaciona con la otra imagen que aventura Villoro: «El futbol ha tenido un rey, Pelé. Pero sólo ha tenido un esclavo liberador. El egresado de Villa Fiorito estuvo lejos de las jerarquías nobiliarias. El ultraje lo alimentó tanto como la miseria del comienzo. En un juego de conjunto, llevó su calidad individual a un límite superior...» (*ivi*, p. 84).<sup>9</sup> La idea del oprimido que se rebela ante sus circunstancias, que supera sus condiciones socioeconómicas y las usa como “combustible” no sólo para sus proezas deportivas sino también para sus articulaciones discursivas es clara. Y esto, a partir de ese retorno al origen, se relaciona con la tercera imagen que propone Villoro: el niño; DAM se ha fagocitado en su propio espectáculo y en uno de los episodios de su *show* de televisión se observó a sí mismo decir a los once años que tenía dos sueños (jugar un mundial y salir campeón), en lo que fuera su primera aparición televisiva. «El héroe fue rescatado por el niño», cierra Villoro (*ivi*, p. 88). Esto tiene puntos en común con lo que propone Archetti (1999) sobre la identificación DAM=“pibe” (niño), en tanto ente que conserva la capacidad lúdica pero no acata la lógica del mundo adulto. La idea de lo que se sale de la norma, de lo que no se puede explicar con nociones de este mundo se relaciona con una escena del documental *Amando a Maradona* que narra Villoro, donde le piden a uno de los hermanos del jugador, el “Turco” (Hugo Maradona) que se compare con él: «Mi hermano es un marciano», contesta (*ivi*, p. 86).

### La mano de Dios y el efecto DAM

Finalizo estas reflexiones recurriendo a otra dimensión del campo maradoniano que merece mayor atención y comparte varios elementos con la literatura: la música. Entre las muchísimas canciones dedicadas a DAM, la que el jugador argentino elige como su favorita es la composición del cantante de cuarteto Rodrigo Bueno, “La mano de Dios”.<sup>10</sup> Un rápido repaso a la letra arroja varios elementos salientes que se relacionan con la “función significativa del “habla mítica” en torno a DAM de la que hablaba Barthes (1980): «En una villa nació, fue deseo de Dios,/crecer y sobrevivir a la humilde expresión./ Enfrentar la adversidad/con afán de ganarse a cada paso la vida» dice la primera estrofa. La referencia al origen, al carácter divino del nacimiento y a la superación de la circunstancia adversa no hacen más que reforzar los mecanismos constitutivos del mito enunciados desde diferentes momentos y en diferentes formas por la literatura: la excepcionalidad, el estilo y el heroísmo en Vargas Llosa (1982); la absolución de la culpa por haber “vengado” a una nación a través

---

<sup>9</sup> Esta carga política del significante DAM ha sido vista también por críticos como Alabarces (1996, 56) («lémos a Maradona como puesta en escena de los reclamos tercermundistas, de la disputa por la legitimidad en situaciones de inferioridad, de la lucha por la injusticia y la apropiación desigual del ingreso y del poder»), quien también ha hablado de “la épica del pobre”, con DAM como símbolo del ascenso social que no transa con el poder, y enfatiza su carácter de Espartaco único, líder, individual e irrepitable, del pueblo.

<sup>10</sup> El video oficial está disponible aquí: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EAK-l1VHzBw>

del fútbol y producido un recuerdo imborrable en Saccheri (2000); el diagnóstico del “Mal de Maradona” como representativo de la identidad nacional en Fresán (2002); la trayectoria inigualable, sublime y patética, de un futbolista excepcional, en Villoro (2006). La canción hace además referencia a su posición frente al poder, a su drogadicción y a la idea de un Cristo que «carga con una cruz», pero el estribillo vuelve a la capacidad emocional de DAM de producir un efecto: «sembró alegría en el pueblo/regó de gloria este suelo», versos que se relacionan con el “brota el encanto del suelo argento” del epígrafe de la canción de Bersuit Vergarabat, y ligan a DAM casi indisolublemente con el suelo-patria-origen-identidad argentinos.

«El lector vive el mito a la manera de una historia verdadera e irreal», dice Barthes (1980, p. 222). El mito es, ante todo, relato. Atraviesa culturas, define imaginarios, articula ideologías. Puede provocar aperturas o ser reductor. Al ser eminentemente histórico, dice Barthes (*ivi*, p. 212), el mito no es fijo. Es incuestionable que la muerte de DAM resignifica su efecto y por eso, más que nunca, el mito tiene «carácter de interpelación», en palabras de Barthes (*ivi*, p. 218). ¿Qué nos llama, nos continúa llamando, de DAM? Barthes hace bien en prevenir ante la posible naturalización del mito que conduce a una univocidad de sentidos. En el caso de DAM, muchas de las publicaciones surgidas en torno y a partir de su muerte parecen ofrecer una única vía de lectura, la del DAM político, o héroe plebeyo. Pero, «el lenguaje del escritor no tiene como objetivo *representar* lo real, sino *significarlo*» (*ivi*, 231). Y más allá de los reparos de Barthes ante los aspectos conservadores - en la acepción amplia de la palabra - del mito, la tarea de «plantear un real *finalmente* impenetrable, irreductible, y, en ese caso, poetizar» (*ivi*, p. 256) se adecua muy bien a DAM y la onda expansiva de sus múltiples efectos. Hay que poetizar, en serio, a Maradona, que, impenetrable e irreductible, nos sigue mirando a los ojos, esperando que le demos sentido.

## References

Alabarces, P. (2000). Introducción. Los estudios sobre deporte y sociedad; objetos, miradas, agendas. En P. Alabarces (Comp.), Peligro de gol: estudios sobre deporte y sociedad en América Latina (pp. 11-30). Buenos Aires: CLACSO.

Alabarces, P. (1996). Maradona revisitado. Apostillas a ‘El fútbol no es la patria’. En P. Alabarces y M. G. Rodríguez, Cuestión de pelotas. Fútbol, deporte, sociedad, cultura (pp. 53-57). Buenos Aires: Atuel.

Alabarces, P. (2007). Maradonismo, o la superación del peronismo por otros medios. En Fútbol y patria: el fútbol y las narrativas de la nación en la Argentina (pp. 133-161). Buenos Aires: Prometeo.



Alabarces, P. (2014). La patria, Maradona y Messi: variaciones sobre el ser nacional. En *(Héroes, machos y patriotas. El fútbol entre la violencia y los medios* (pp. 103-132). Buenos Aires: Aguilar.

Archetti, E. (1997). 'And Give Joy to My Heart': Ideology and Emotions in the Argentinean Cult of Maradona. En G. Armstrong & R. Giulianotti (Eds), *Entering the Field. New Perspectives on World Football* (pp. 31-51). Oxford; New York: Berg.

Archetti, E. (1999). The Masculine Imagery of Freedom: The World of Pibes and Maradona. En *Masculinities. Football, Polo and Tango in Argentina* (pp. 180-189). Oxford; New York: Berg.

Archetti, E. (2001). The Spectacle of a Heroic Life: The Case of Diego Maradona. En D. L. Andrews & S. J. Jackson (Eds.), *Sport Stars: The Cultural Politics of Cultural Celebrity* (pp. 151-164). London; New York: Routledge.

Archetti, E. (2003). The Spectacle of Identities. Football in Latin America. En S. H. and R. Young (Eds.), *Contemporary Latin American Cultural Studies* (pp. 116-126). London; New York: Routledge.

Barthes, R. (1980). El mito, hoy. *Mitologías* (pp. 199-257). México, Siglo XXI.

Bifulco, L. (2020). Maradona, un héroe deportivo. Tres estudios sociológicos de Italia. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Godot.

El Grafico (2020). 1982: "MARADONA Y LOS HÉROES" POR VARGAS LLOSA, <https://www.elgrafico.com.ar/articulo/1090/31925/1982-maradona-y-los-heroes-por-vargas-llosa> (25/11/2020)

Fresán, R. (2002). Las tinieblas del corazón. Fútbol argentino y mal de Maradona. *Letras Libres*, 4 (41), 28-32.

García Cames, D. (2018a). El gol y el héroe. Aproximación mítica a Maradona en tres cuentos argentinos. *Passavento. Revista de Estudios Hispánicos*, 6 (2), 413-431.

García Cames, D. (2018b). La jugada de todos los tiempos. fútbol, mito y literatura. Zaragoza, España: Prensas Universitarias de Zaragoza.

Maradona, D. (2000). *Yo soy el Diego*. Buenos Aires: Planeta.

Niembro, F. & Llinás, J. (1995). *Inocente*. Barcelona: Grijalbo Mondadori.

Saccheri, E. (2000). *Esperándolo a Tito y otros cuentos de fútbol*. Buenos Aires: Galerna.

Vargas Llosa, M. (1982). *Maradona y los héroes*. *El Gráfico*.  
<https://www.elgrafico.com.ar/articulo/1090/31925/1982-maradona-y-los-heroes-por-vargas-llosa>

Villoro, J. (2006). *Dios es redondo*. México: Planeta.

Zanoni, L. (2006). *Vivir en los medios. Maradona off the record*. Buenos Aires: Marea.

### **About the author**

Pablo Brescia es escritor, crítico y catedrático de literaturas y culturas latinoamericanas en la Universidad del Sur de la Florida (Tampa). Es autor de las monografías *Borges. Cinco especulaciones* (2015) y de *Modelos y prácticas en el cuento hispanoamericano: Arreola, Borges, Cortázar* (2011). Es además editor de otros seis volúmenes críticos sobre literatura latinoamericana. De próxima aparición, editado junto con Mariano Paz es el libro *Diego Maradona: A Socio-cultural study*.

[pbrescia@usf.edu](mailto:pbrescia@usf.edu)

## Maradona and Utopia: social dreaming and the left (foot)

Mariano Paz

University of Limerick, Republic of Ireland

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6093/2532-6732/8968>

### Abstract

This article discusses the representation of Diego Armando Maradona in popular culture from the perspective of utopian studies. Analysing the Netflix documentary series *Maradona in Mexico* (2019) and the film *Maradona by Kusturica* (dir. Emir Kusturica, 2008), in addition to selected examples from Latin American cultural production such as songs and TV programmes, the article maps the utopian tropes that are often associated with the figure of Maradona, generally represented as a saviour of working and popular sectors of society, and as an emancipatory political figure aligned with left-wing regimes in Latin America.

**Keywords:** Utopianism; Maradona; Emir Kusturica; Dorados de Sinaloa; Latin American 'Pink Tide'

### Maradona and the utopian impulse

The film *Adiós querida luna* (Goodbye Dear Moon, 2004, dir. Fernando Spinner) is a science-fiction parody about an Argentinean space mission into outer space. In the year 2068, three astronauts are sent on a mission that, if successful, would destroy the Moon so as to alter the rotation axis of the planet. This, in turn, would revert climate change – according to a theory formulated by an Argentinean scientist. Only the government of Argentina believes in this scientific theory: the world's developed nations have categorically rejected its conclusions. However, the government decides to go ahead in secret, believing that if it managed to solve the catastrophic effects of climate change it would be hailed as a global hero and placed at the forefront of the international order. Ultimately, the enterprise is a failure: the spaceship loses its power and is left stranded, floating around in space.

With nothing to do except await instructions from the mission control base in the suburbs of Buenos Aires, the astronauts amble around the ship. At one moment, one of them decides to play a videogame. It is not a traditional game in which a screen acts as an interface: it brings up a holographic 3D image of footballer Diego Maradona, controlled by a joystick on a console, that shoots penalties against an equally holographic goalkeeper. The hologram, about 50cm tall, depicts a young Maradona (played by an actor), with unruly hair, who resembles the Maradona captured in early news footage when he was in his early teens. In this game, however, the player is wearing an Argentina kit with the number 10 on his back – thus combining the imagery of an innocent,

youthful Maradona with that of the symbol of the Argentina national team. This is reinforced by the sound: excerpts from the famous Víctor Hugo Morales commentary of Maradona's second goal against England in the Mexico 1986 World Cup.

This is a minor element in the film, but late into the story the holographic Maradona acquires a more relevant role. At this stage, an alien creature has boarded the ship. Although it adopts a human form, it is a monstrous being who at some point attacks one of the astronauts. The alien is powerful, but the man finds an ingenious form of defence: he activates the videogame and shoots the holographic balls not at the goalkeeper but at the alien, hitting him repeatedly until he falls to the floor, defeated. I have discussed the dynamics of this film and the symbolism of Maradona within its narrative elsewhere (Paz, 2014), but here I want to highlight the utopian resonances of these scene. Within a space mission that is intended to raise the international profile of Argentina from the periphery to the centre of the world-system, almost turning the country in the saviour of humanity, the proudly nationalistic astronauts' resort to a figure also considered a saviour across the globe, not only for entertainment but also for saving their own lives when faced with a threatening, powerful enemy. This is only one example among a extended list of similar representations.

The objective of this article is to discuss the figure of Maradona as a narrative trope in audio-visual texts from the perspective of utopian studies. By discussing a gamut of cultural texts such as popular songs, the film *Maradona by Kusturica* (Serbia/France/Spain, dir. Emir Kusturica, 2008), and the Netflix TV series *Maradona in Mexico* [*Maradona en Sinaloa*] (Angus Macqueen, 2019), I will trace the utopian resonances behind carefully constructed versions of Maradona that portray him as a key actor in different processes of social change and the search for a better, more equal society. It is important to clarify that the term utopian is being used here in its scholarly sense, as developed by a number of thinkers working in the field of utopian studies over the past decades. Utopia understood in this sense is not, as in common usage, a perfect but inexistent society, but the expression of a desire for a better way of being or living (Levitas, 2013, p. 3).

As proposed by Lyman Tower Sargent, there are three dimensions of utopianism, understood as an impulse towards social dreaming (that is, imagining and constructing better ways of social life): utopia as a narrative genre, utopia as social theory and praxis, and utopia as commune, or lived communal experiences. Maradona as an image, myth, and signifier operates along all these three spheres. Narratively, he has been represented in a number of literary and audio-visual texts, both fictional and documentary, that portray him as a saviour or as somebody engaged in an emancipatory struggle for a better society. In terms of political practice, Maradona chose to actively endorse specific political leaders and movements which favoured, at least in theory, those same views. Regarding the sphere of utopian communities, it can be seen in rituals and followers of the Church of Maradona. In this article I am concerned with the first form of utopian expression, which Fredric Jameson has defined as «an obscure yet omnipresent Utopian impulse finding its way to the surface in a variety of cover expressions and practices» (2007, p. 3).

As Lucy Sargisson (2014, p.8) puts it, «by asking ‘what’s wrong with our world?’ utopias perform a diagnostic function. They identify core problems with the world around them and these are often the cornerstones that prop up the entire society». The above does not deny the importance of utopia as a narrative genre (Vieira, 2010), and in fact in this chapter I discuss the utopian connotations in specific texts that offer narratives involving Maradona. Neither of these productions (documentaries, films, songs) could be defined solely as utopian, but they do present a strong affiliation with a utopian impulse that, according to Sargisson, contains «challenges to the roots of contemporary socio-economic and political systems» (2014, p. 8). Following Ernest Bloch, Tower Sargent (2010, p. 11) has called utopianism the “philosophy of hope”, and Levitas adds that «read in this way, utopia does not require the imaginative construction of whole other worlds. It occurs as an embedded element in a wide range of human practice and culture» (2013, p. 5).

Maradona’s exploits can be, and have been, read as a social and political metaphors along these lines. The most obvious examples are his performance in the Mexico 1986, particularly in the quarter-final match against England, and his career for SSC Napoli in Italy. The Argentina-England game became the scenario for the two most renowned goals that Maradona ever scored: the “Hand of God” goal and the “goal of the century”, in which he dribbled past five opposition players and the goalkeeper. As everybody familiar with Maradona knows, this victory was read as a vindication, as a symbolical revenge following Argentina’s defeat in the Falklands/Malvinas War in 1982 (cf. Alabarces, 2008; Sacheri, 2013; Galeano, 2017). Maradona himself would also favour this interpretation in his autobiography (Maradona, 2006). The second example of Maradona as utopian signifier is his career in Italy, helping Napoli to win the Serie A title for the first time in history, and standing for the underprivileged Italian south against the wealthier, industrialised north (Bifulco, 2014).

## Maradonian Utopics On Screen

The Netflix documentary *Maradona in Mexico* draws on the same utopian connotations behind the two moments mentioned above (both acknowledged in the series’ opening credits), now mapped onto Maradona’s experience as the head coach of the team Dorados de Sinaloa. The club, based in the city of Culiacán and playing in the second division of Mexican football, hired Maradona as manager in September 2018, and the series charts how this experience played out for the fans, the club’s president, local journalists, and Maradona himself. The first scene of the first episode, which takes place before the credits, already casts Maradona in a utopian role. Alone in a dressing-room office, Maradona speaks before the camera that is recording him: «I want to improve football, for the good of the people»<sup>1</sup>. That is to say, Maradona presents himself as the leader of a utopian mission: changing the lives of the people through football. Later on, in Episode 3, Maradona extends his utopian aspirations towards a socioeconomic sphere, albeit vaguely, with an appeal for the redistribution of wealth. The scene takes place at a

---

<sup>1</sup> All translations from the series are mine.

fundraising dinner in which he is asked to give a short speech. He states: «all of us, in our own homes, we have too much stuff. And we need to share some of this wealth».

Such phrases, as used by Maradona, could be read as examples of Bloch's notion of utopianism being «driven by wishful thinking» (Sargisson, 2014, p. 15), a stance that is directed towards imagining better social alternatives, although it is essential to note this does not mean that Maradona is a utopian thinker or activist (although many do see him in this light). The point is that utopianism permeates the series as a discourse conveyed through the aesthetic tools of audio-visual productions: camerawork, editing, and scoring. One should also acknowledge that documentaries, despite being non-fiction works, are not by any means representations of an objective truth. They are, indeed, carefully constructed audio-visual texts that convey specific ideas and views (Sounders, 2010; O'Rawe, 2016).

Maradona's statements could be taken as simple talk from a person who was particularly prone to making self-aggrandizing comments and eager to embrace the role of hero. But the connections between utopianism and Maradona go well beyond his own public declarations, and utopian tropes run through the entire series (seven episodes in total). A key one is related to the way Maradona's arrival in Culiacán is told. The shock produced within the world of Latin American football when the appointment of Maradona as the manager of Dorados was announced is well documented in the series. Not only fans but local football journalists and even the Dorados players were unsure whether these reports were serious and if Maradona was going to show up in Mexico. All of them, however, are shown eagerly expecting his arrival. But it should be remembered here that Maradona's career as a coach had been erratic and unsuccessful, mostly limited to short stints in clubs in Argentina in the mid-1990s and the UAE in the 2010s. His single high-profile appointment had been as manager of the Argentina national team in 2008-2010, with his contract being terminated at the end of the World Cup in South Africa. Argentina reached the quarterfinals in that tournament, which meant that Maradona either equalled or exceeded the World Cup performances of all national coaches since 1990, when Maradona himself was playing.<sup>2</sup> However, the team was thrashed 4-0 by Germany, a defeat made more resounding given the quantity of footballing stars that were playing for Argentina at the time (including Lionel Messi, Angel Di María, Gonzalo Higuaín, Javier Mascherano, Carlos Tévez, all of them at the peak of their careers).

That is to say, when he eventually arrived in the city of Culiacán to take charge of Dorados, Maradona did so with a poor track record as a manager. Moreover, he was taking charge of a team sitting at the bottom of the second division table. Despite this, he was regarded as a saviour by the team's fans, staff, and even the players, in scenes similar to those that took place when Maradona joined Napoli in 1984, also received as a form of messiah (Dini, 2014, p. 15). It is true that this time Maradona was coming to Dorados as

---

<sup>2</sup> Argentina lost in the Last-16 stage in USA 1994, managed by Alfio Basile, reached the quarterfinals managed by Daniel Passarella in France 1998, did not go past the group stage under Marcelo Bielsa in Korea-Japan 2002, and reached the quarterfinals in Germany 2006 coached by José Pekerman.

an established legend and one of the most iconic football players of all time. But this is a status Maradona had achieved through his extraordinary skills as a player, not a manager.

There are multiple ways in which Maradona's arrival as messiah is portrayed in the series. The opening-credits sequence is one of them. Visually, this short clip uses a combination of animated visuals and photographs to revisit the highlights of Maradona's career, among which the two that stand out the most are his World Cup victory in 1986 (emphasising a Mexican connection with Maradona) and his spell at Napoli: that is to say, the two defining moments in Maradona's career, those most connected to the utopian tropes that have defined the majority of the narrative and political discourses on the player, and the two that have contributed the most to turn him into a sporting myth.

It is also essential to consider the track that scores the credits. The song, by the Sinaloan band Evolución Quattro and titled "Diego Maradona llegó", combines rhythms from popular musical genres from Argentina (cuarteto) and Mexico (corrido). It is a celebration of Maradona's decision to coach Dorados. The chorus reads:

Y Diego, llegó  
Llegó, Diego  
Llegó para alegrar al fútbol  
Y Diego, llegó  
Llegó, Diego  
Llegó para cambiar el fútbol  
Y Diego Maradona llegó.<sup>3</sup>

Maradona is arriving (the repetition leaves no doubt) and he is doing it with a purpose: to bring joy to football, to change it for good. Maradona is not just returning to coaching, but also, as the song points out, "ha regresado donde alcanzó la gloria" [he has come back to the place where he reached glory], Mexico. The animated sequence shows Maradona parachuting off a plane to land softly amid the pitch of the Dorados's stadium, as if he was somebody engaged in a rescue mission.

Moreover, in the first episode, the first image following the credit sequence, right after the final two words of the song's chorus ('Maradona arrived'), is a 360-degree drone shot of a giant statue of Christ which sits atop the Sanctuary of Divine Mercy in Culiacán. The shot shows Christ, arms widely stretched, looking at the sprawling streets and buildings of the city, with the sun sitting low on the horizon in the background (it is unclear whether it is sunrise or sunset, but the audience has to conclude that this is the dawn of a new era). The association of Maradona with the symbols of Christianity should not be surprising. As Tower Sargent states, the Judeo-Christian tradition is «permeated with utopian imagery» (2010, p.86). Discussing the New Testament, he adds that «the message of equality, forgiveness, and loving strangers as well as neighbours provided the basis of much Western utopianism and many literary utopias» (2010). Indeed, the links between

---

<sup>3</sup> "And Diego, he arrived/he arrived, Diego/He arrived to bring joy to football/ And Diego, he arrived/he arrived, Diego/He arrived to change football/And Diego Maradona llegó".

utopianism and Christianity continue to inform utopian ideas and practices, such as the Liberation Theology in Latin America (Moylan, 2020).

The song “Diego Maradona Llegó” is not, however, an isolated example. Although understudied by academics, there are clear and extended links between Maradona and music, particular regarding the player as the focus of songs across a wide range of musical genres. While many of these songs simply celebrate the footballing skills of Maradona, a good number of them are informed by utopianism in lyrics which, supported by positive and upbeat melodies, cast Maradona as a redeemer, as an agent for social change, and even as a saviour. Music, writes Levitas (2010), has the capacity to transport the listener into a better world. This capacity, she adds, «renders music utopian, for it is this better world and the attempt at and experience of its prefiguration that is the defining character of utopianism» (*ivi*, p. 216).

A well-known example of the utopian impulses in the Maradonian song is analysed by Eduardo Archetti when discussing “Dale alegría a mi corazón” [Bring Joy to my Heart], by Argentinean pop star Fito Páez. The lyrics state: «Y ya verás/Como se transforma el aire del lugar» [and you will see, how the air in this place is transformed]. Less poetic, and more overt, is the song “Maradó”, by Argentinean rock band Los Piojos, which includes the following lines: «Caen las tropas de su majestad, y cae el norte de la Italia rica/y el Papa dando vueltas no se explica, muerde la lengua de Joao Havelange» [Her Majesty’s troops fall down, the rich Italian North falls down/and the Pope cannot explain how, he bites the tongue of Joao Havelange]. Here, we encounter Maradona’s key enemies: England and Northern Italy (as the sites of football teams Maradona played against and defeated), and discursive targets such as the Pope and FIFA president Havelange – both powerful figures who were publicly attacked by Maradona on several occasions. Both songs (although Fito Paéz does not mention Maradona by name) present the footballer as a popular hero, with “Maradó” also portraying him as the weaker David facing powerful Goliaths, like the Queen of England and the Pope.

The Los Piojos song adds: «Cuando se caigan a pedazos las paredes de esta gran ciudad/cuando no queden en el aire más cenizas de lo que será, que será/Maradó, Maradó» [When the walls of this big city fall into pieces, when nothing remains in the air but the ashes of what will be, will be/Maradó, Maradó]. Maradona, the song hints, is thus the spearhead of a social revolution: even if this will come about through collective action amid rising poverty and hunger<sup>4</sup>, Maradona has shown the way, by demonstrating it is possible to stand up before powerful opponents, and indeed beat them.

### **Utopia between the individual and the collective**

Dorados is a small team which, according to the Netflix documentary, was only founded in 2003. For most of its short history it has played in the Mexican second division (it also played three seasons in the first division, having obtained promotion on two occasions). When Maradona arrived, he found the team at the bottom of the table

---

<sup>4</sup> The song was released in 1996, the beginning of a period of sharp economic decline in Argentina that would lead to a major socio-political crisis in December 2001.



and a group of players who lacked conviction and motivation. His presence generated a boost of interest in the club from international and national media (the shots of Maradona in a densely packed Culiacán airport, with dozens of photographers and cameramen confirm this), reinvigorated the small but hardened Dorados' fan base, and most importantly inspired the players, who managed to stage a sporting comeback and go on to mount a serious challenge for promotion.

Interestingly, the same cycle is repeated for the second part of tournament (the season is divided in two different competitions, Apertura and Clausura), after Maradona's health problems provide an added layer of drama. Having returned to Buenos Aires on holidays during the Christmas break, the footballer was admitted to hospital, and it was not clear whether he would be able to return to Culiacán to manage the team in the Clausura tournament. Eventually, Maradona recovers and makes it back to Culiacán a few games into the season. Once again, he finds the team at the bottom of the table, and once again the performance of the players improves, so that Dorados climbs all the way up to the play-off positions. The team reaches the final once again and loses by a small one-goal margin.

Although the ultimate happy ending (winning the final and getting promoted) is not attained, it is important to put things into perspective and recognising the significance of Maradona's achievements at Dorados. In two occasions he finds a team that is struggling in form and lacking in confidence, in a league in which he has never played or managed before, and on both occasions he is able to revert the situation, inspire the team, and lose promotion by narrow margins after having reached the final. Ultimately, not being able to get promoted by the smallest of differences (a goal suffered in extra time in the second leg of the final, playing away) should not be considered a failure.

An additional curiosity is that, if Maradona's presence revitalises the team of Dorados and their fans – those portrayed are all working class people who clearly struggle in an impoverished Mexican city, as the scenes that take place in the homes of some of these fans show – the series also shows that the utopian impulse can go both ways, and that the experience also has a positive effect on Maradona. It is evident that, when he arrives to take charge of the team, Maradona (57 years old at the time) is struggling with a variety of health problems, the most obvious of which is excess weight and what he describes as arthritis of the knees. He genuinely struggles to make even light physical movements such as climbing stairs or getting out of a car. He walks slowly, with his knees bent outwards.

On the one hand, this look contributes to emphasise the figure of Maradona as a martyr, placing the benefit of the team, the fans, and football in general before his own personal health, given that he still attends training sessions, delivers dressing room talks, and stands by the touchline during matches, shouting orders at the players and, more often than not, vocally confronting fourth officials and rival coaches. He is even portrayed, on more than one occasion, dancing in the dressing room celebrating victories, fostering a positive atmosphere amid the group. He does all of this despite the pain he has to endure, echoing important moments of this playing career, such as the Italy 1990 World Cup, which he played with a severely injured left ankle. But it is also evident, during the Clausura tournament in the second half of the year, that Maradona is feeling

better, physically and mentally. He seems happier, there are less confrontations with match officials and rival coaches during the games. While still struggling with his knees he seems to walk more smoothly, perhaps standing upwards more.

Maradona's improvement on a personal level is not, of course, a utopian signifier. As Moylan states, «settling for utopia in one person results in nothing but a tantalizing indulgence that is all too easily available for the capitalist disciplinary imagination». Utopias «must necessarily be collective» (Moylan, 2020, p. 5). However, it could be argued that the utopian praxis aimed at improving the conditions of a group of individuals in the city of Culiacán (not only the players but, as mentioned, the club backroom staff and fans) seems to take place in a dialectical manner, looping back and improving Maradona himself. The team, its confidence improved, stages a renewed challenge for promotion until kept alive until the very last minutes of the final game. The fans, lower-class people for whom following the team regularly, particularly for away matches, is clearly a struggle, have regained a sense of purpose and happiness. Local sports journalists and commentators based in Culiacán have found in Maradona an object for perpetual analysis and discussion.

### **Football and politics: the utopianism of the Patria Grande**

One could argue, at this stage, that the utopian overtones outlined above are far too vague to be considered properly political. To an extent this is true, although the series contains several scenes in which the filmmakers venture into Culiacán and its suburbs, showing the impoverished surroundings of the city and hinting at the sharp inequalities that characterise Mexican society. It is also clear that for some people, such as the club president and the local journalists, Maradona's contribution goes beyond the realm of football, helping to improve the image of Culiacán, a city most often associated, in Mexico and globally, with drug cartels. Through his presence, and the attention it generates among the international press, the city's dark fame might be at least mitigated. But ultimately Maradona can only improve the conditions of Culiacán residents and Dorados' fans only symbolically, through the joy of watching their team play better football and challenge for promotion. None of this will change the socio-economic structures in which these people live.

At this stage, additional audio-visual cultural texts can be examined for a more political vision of Maradona as a force for social change. Two will be mentioned here: the opening sequence of the TV programme *De Zurda* (2014), and a scene from the documentary *Maradona by Kusturica* (2008), directed by the renowned filmmaker Emir Kusturica. The first case study refers to a TV programme broadcast daily during the 2014 World Cup in Brazil. It was hosted by Maradona and Victor Hugo Morales, and it consisted of football comments and analyses, mixed with interviews to assorted players and managers. It was broadcast by Telesur, the Venezuelan TV network founded by President Hugo Chávez in 2005, conceived as a Latin American media outlet that would voice the interests of Venezuela and its left-wing allies in the region. Maradona had been a committed supporter of Chávez and, following his death, the incoming president Nicolás Maduro

also cultivated close relations with the footballer. The programme's title, *De Zurda*, can be loosely translated into English as «with the left» (BBC, 2014)<sup>5</sup>.

The opening sequence of *De Zurda* is, like that of *Maradona in Mexico*, a montage that shows the connections between Maradona, music, and utopianism. It is essentially a video clip of a song specially composed for the show, under the same title. It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of the singers who perform it: Gustavo Santaolalla, the song's composer, an Argentinean musician who works with a variety of musical genres (winner of two Academy Awards in the category of Best Original Score<sup>6</sup>); Julieta Venegas, an extremely popular Mexican singer; the Colombian hip-hop group ChocQuib Town, and Gustavo Cordera, founder of the Argentinean rock band Bersuit Vergarabat. The song, a lively mix of cumbia and pop, can be considered a hymn to the idea of *patria grande* [Great Fatherland], a notion that refers to the united community of Latin American nations, closely connected on the basis of their common colonial past and the set of social problems that they presently share. The term tends to be used across the wide spectrum of leftists and socialist parties and movements in the region.

The sequence consists of an edited clip that shows the performers singing before a microphone, groups of mostly young lads playing football on streets or beaches, footage from football games (including of course the ubiquitous goal of Maradona against England) and some additional images of Maradona. The opening shot, which shows a strip of beach, the sea, and the sky, already contains some utopian hints, through the association of the seaside with nature and freedom. Two titles attempt to locate the image in space and time, telling the audience that the date is June 2014, and the place is "Latin America." The date is the month in which the World Cup would begin in Brazil. But with thousands of miles of coast, the inscription does little in terms of geographically locating the place. This, however, is precisely the point: it is Latin America, one single region. The presence of musicians of European and African descent, and their different national accents, connote the ethnical variety that characterises Latin America.

At first the lyrics celebrate the new tournament, and the fact that it is held in Latin America. The sense of importance grows bigger with the lines: «¡Estamos haciendo historia en América Latina! Cuando el mundo está al revés, mejor pegarle de zurda» [We are making history in Latin America! When the world is upside down, it's best to strike it with the left]. This is an evident reference to the "pink tide" – the wave of left-wing governments that spread throughout Latin America in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, including those of Chávez and Maduro in Venezuela, Rafael Correa in Ecuador, Evo Morales in Argentina, Inácio 'Lula' Da Silva in Brazil, and Néstor and Cristina Kirchner in Argentina among others (cf. Lievesley and Ludlam, 2009; Ellner, 2019). Analysing the specificities and complexities of this aggregate of political movements exceeds the scope of this article. The relevant point for the present discussion is the utopian ideal that informed

---

<sup>5</sup> «With the left» would work in the sense of doing something, like kicking a ball, with the left foot. Being *zurdo* o *zurda* would mean somebody who is left-handed, but also, colloquially, somebody who sympathises with the left as a political ideology.

<sup>6</sup> Santaolalla won the prize on consecutive occasions for his scores for the films *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, 2005) and *Babel* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2006).

this united front of administrations that defined themselves as the enemies of a postcolonial order of globalised capital, and whose aim was improving the socioeconomic realities of a region characterised by sharp inequality and widespread poverty. From this perspective, the ‘pink tide’ governments would spearhead a series of reforms that would lead to a fully independent, interconnected, and prosperous Latin America. The neoliberal world order, led by the US, is precisely what is “upside down” and has to be hit from the left, the song implies.

The final verses read: «El mundial hoy mira al sur, a la izquierda del planeta/todos con un ideal, con caño, toque y gambeta/sueños en forma de gol y el pueblo como bandera/¡Hoy celebramos la copa, con la Patria Grande entera!» [Today the World Cup looks south at the left of the planet/all of us with an ideal of nutmegs, passes, and dribbles/dreams in the forms of goals and the people as symbol/Today we celebrate the cup, among the entire Great Fatherland]. The global south, firmly situated in the left, presents a united front that will lead to beauty and skills on the pitch, but that is also supported by the people, joined together under the ideal of the *Patria Grande*.

This ideal, advocated by Maradona, features prominently in another cultural product involving the footballer: the documentary *Maradona by Kusturica*. The film, as Marcus Free (2014, p. 208) indicates, «explores Maradona’s notionally Christlike symbolism as a potentially redemptive, revolutionary figure for the geopolitical South». Shot over a two-year period in which Kusturica meets Maradona, interviews him, and follows him around with a camera on several occasions, the film is organised around certain structuring moments: they include trips to Naples and the director’s own country, Serbia; footage from Maradona’s playing career; a long interview between player and filmmaker; and the rituals performed by the Church of Maradona. Arguably the most colourful part of the film is devoted to the protests against President George W. Bush and the US agenda during the IV Summit of the Americas.

The summit was hosted in Argentina in November 2005, in the coastal city of Mar del Plata (about 400km south of Buenos Aires). It was attended by the heads of state of all nations in South and North America, and many from Central America and the Caribbean. The summit turned out to be a chaotic event since the leaders participating had sharp disagreements regarding the agenda to be discussed, particularly in relation to the FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas - ALCA in Spanish), a free trade agreement proposed by the US and favoured by other countries, such as Canada and Mexico, which had strong opposition from most countries in South America (Marridoriaga, 2005; New York Times, 2005).

Against this background, a “counter-summit” that would denounce the US agenda and the presence of Bush was planned for the same time and place. One of the main organisers was Miguel Bonasso, a left-wing journalist and politician, but he secured the support of regional leaders such as Chávez and Bolivian President Evo Morales, and also of Maradona. The organisers travelled from Buenos Aires to Mar del Plata by train, in a trip that became known as *Tren del Alba* [Dawn Train]<sup>7</sup> (Russo, 2005; Guardian, 2005).

---

<sup>7</sup> Alba, literally ‘dawn’ in Spanish, acts both as pun and allusion to ALCA (the acronym that stands for Free Trade Area of the Americas).

Travelling in the train, among hundreds of protesters, were a number of renowned figures from the world of culture (actors, singers), Bonasso, Morales, and, most notably, Maradona (followed by Kusturica and his crew). For them, the FTAA was simply an excuse to extend neoliberal policies across the region, to the benefit of the US and detriment of South American nations. Once in Mar del Plata, thousands of people gathered at the city stadium, where the regional leaders delivered speeches. Maradona here does not take centre stage, but upon Chávez's invitation, he approaches the main stand, wearing a T-shirt with photo of George W. Bush and the caption "War Criminal", and offers a few words advocating peaceful but firm protests aimed at «restoring our dignity» and calling to defend «what is ours» in the face of the US pressures for the FTTA treaty to be signed.

In the film, the train scenes are shot with a hand-held camera, offering shaky and fluid takes (understandable amid the train movement and the huge crowds) that convey a sense of realism and urgency to the images. As usual, Maradona is surrounded by masses of fans, photographers, and police escorts. In the voice-over narration, Kusturica, a true utopian, reflects that the train is not just headed for Mar del Plata, but towards better times in Latin America. He had already included footage of Maradona meeting Fidel Castro, and expressing his admiration for the Cuban leader. Interviewed by one of the many journalists covering the event, Kusturica explains that people need somebody to lead them because the leaders of the world today, they are not good enough. Naturally, he thinks that Maradona could be that leader. In this case, then, Maradona would not just be improving football, but the lives of millions through an emancipatory project that would counter the inequalities produced under by the current global order.

## Conclusion

None of the texts discussed above explore the potential contradictions that can be found in Maradona. It is clear that readings that problematise, if not directly refute, many of the assumptions offered in these works would be possible. Maradona's behaviour often contradicted his own stances and positions, or those that are conveyed in cultural texts about him. His role in defence of the powerless and marginalised is perhaps at odds with his endorsement of Middle-East regimes and with his treatment of women. In fact, recent controversies in the media about his relationships with women show an aspect of his life that is highly questionable from a moral perspective (if not directly unlawful). Moreover, the films and texts mentioned above erase any inconsistencies that may exist in Maradona or in the positions that are being advocated. One example would be the controversy surrounding the high salary that Maradona was supposedly paid for the TV show *De Zurda*, exacerbated by, at the time, increasing economic problems that affected Venezuela and other countries that financed Telesur (*Cronista*, 2014, BBC, 2017). Others could be that his anti-globalisation position has not prevented him from making extremely lucrative deals across the world, or that he has endorsed and supported regimes with questionable human rights records, from Cuba to Belarus.

The images and meanings surrounding the figure of Maradona, however, cannot be easily controlled or directed, even if many have tried to manipulate them. Despite the biographical details of Maradona the man, and the moral questions that his actions raise, Maradona the myth can still continue to be a signifier imbued with utopian tropes. In the texts discussed in this article, the utopian impulse associated with Maradona do not go beyond a very early stage, the one Bloch would define as wishful thinking (or abstract utopia), which simply refers to an unfinished, vague set of ideals imagining a better world. The legacy of the “pink tide” governments, which ultimately failed to alleviate the conditions in which millions of Latin Americans live in the long term, is an example of the complexities of progressing into a more advanced utopian stage of building a concrete, improved society. As the fictional astronauts in *Adiós Querida Luna* show, Maradona (and its representations), can be a lot more than innocent entertainment. When the Maradona hologram can defeat a powerful alien, we enter a diffuse territory that blurs the boundaries between representation and praxis, and between spectacle and the real. According to Alabarces, Maradona has become an empty signifier, one that can be filled by whoever is trying to produce meaning through his figure (2008, p. 134). Perhaps, then, it is a question of the right utopian project coming along to provide an anchor to the Maradona signifier, one that could mobilise the people towards a genuine and truly inclusive utopia.

## References

Alabarces, P. (2008). Fútbol y patria: El fútbol y las narrativas de la nación en la Argentina. Buenos Aires: Prometeo.

Archetti, E. P. (1997). “‘And Give Joy to my Heart’: Ideology and emotions in the Argentinian cult of Maradona.’ In G. Armstrong & R. Giulianotti (eds.), *Entering the Field: New Perspectives on World Football* (pp. 31-51). Oxford: Berg.

BBC (2014, 11 June). “‘Pegale de Zurda’”: el Mundial visto por la izquierda latinoamericana.

[https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2014/06/140611\\_brasil2014\\_mundial\\_izquierda\\_cobertura\\_amv](https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2014/06/140611_brasil2014_mundial_izquierda_cobertura_amv)

BBC (2017, 8 November). Maradona signed by Venezuelan TV for World Cup show. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-41909163>

Bifulco, L. (2014). Essenza e routinizzazione di un eroe: Maradona per due generazioni di tifosi napoletani. In L. Bifulco & V. Dini (eds.), *Maradona: Sociologia di un mito globale* (pp. 109-126). Caserta: Ipermedium.

Cronista, El (2014, 22 July). Lanata y Víctor Hugo se cruzaron por los sueldos del programa “De Zurda”.

<https://www.cronista.com/economia-politica/Lanata-y-Victor-Hugo-se-cruzaron-por-los-sueldos-del-programa-De-Zurda-20140722-0101.html>

Dini, V. (2014). Maradona, eroe, simbolo, mito globale. In L. Bifulco & V. Dini (eds.), *Maradona: Sociologia di un mito globale* (pp. 15-25). Caserta: Ipermedium.

Ellner, S. (ed.) (2019). *Latin America's Pink Tide: Breakthroughs and Shortcomings*. London: Rowman and Littlefield.

Free, M. (2014). Diego Maradona and the psychodynamics of football fandom in international cinema. *Celebrity Studies*, 5 (1-2), 197-212.

Galeano, E. (2017). *Cerrado por fútbol*. Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno.

Guardian, The (2005, 4 November ). 10,000 Protest Against Bush. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/nov/04/usa.argentina>

Jameson, F. (2007). *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. London and New York: Verso.

Levitas, R. (2010). In eine bess're Welt entrückt: Reflections on Music and Utopia. *Utopian Studies*, 21 (2), 215-231.

Levitas, R. (2013). *Utopia as Method: The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lievesley, G. & Ludlam, S. (eds.) (2009). *Reclaiming Latin America: Experiments in Radical Social Democracy*. London: Zed Books.

Maradona, D. A. (2006). *Yo soy el Diego*. Buenos Aires: Planeta.

Marridoriaga, J. (2005). 'La Cumbre de las Américas se cierra sin poner en marcha un área de libre comercio.' *El País*, 5 November. [https://elpais.com/diario/2005/11/06/internacional/1131231607\\_850215.html](https://elpais.com/diario/2005/11/06/internacional/1131231607_850215.html)

Moylan, T. (2021). *Becoming Utopian: The Culture and Politics of Radical Transformation*. London and New York: Bloomsbury.

New York Times, The (2005, 6 November). 'Negotiators fail to agree on free trade proposal at Americas Summit.' <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/06/world/americas/negotiators-fail-to-agree-on-free-trade-proposal-at-americas.html>

O’Rawe, D. (2016). *Regarding the Real: Cinema, Documentary, and the Visual Arts*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Paz, M. (2014). *Maradona on the Moon: Postcolonial Politics and Cultural Hybridity in Argentina’s “Adiós Querida Luna.”* In S. Fritzsche (ed.), *Liverpool Companion to World Science Fiction Film* (pp. 220-234). Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Russo, S. (2005, 5 November). ‘El Tren del Alba.’ *Página 12*.  
<https://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/elpais/subnotas/58860-19451-2005-11-05.html>

Tower Sargent, L. (2010). *Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sacheri, E. (2013). *La vida que pensamos. Cuentos de futbol*. Buenos Aires: Alfaguara.

Sargisson, L. (2014). *Fool's Gold? Utopianism in the Twenty-First Century*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Sounders, D. (2010). *Documentary*. London and New York: Routledge.

Vieira, F. (2010). *The Concept of Utopia*. In G. Claeys (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* (pp. 3-27). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

### **About the author**

Mariano Paz is Lecturer in Spanish and Associate Director, Ralahine Centre for Utopian Studies, at the School of Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics, University of Limerick, Ireland. His research interests lie at the intersection of popular cultures, film studies, and Latin American societies. He holds a BA in Sociology from the University of Buenos Aires and a PhD in Film Studies from the University of Manchester.  
[mariano.paz@ul.ie](mailto:mariano.paz@ul.ie)



## Maradona as a versatile media figure: a study on turkish press

Denizcan Kabaş  
Üsküdar University (Turkey)

Şükrü Güler  
Üsküdar University (Turkey)  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6093/2532-6732/8969>

### Abstract

The death of world football legend Diego Armando Maradona was on the top of the agenda of Turkish media as well as all over the world. Maradona has found a place in Turkish society at different times not only as a football player or manager but also as a rebellious, funny, and astonishing figure. This study consists of two parts in total: The first section focuses on media figures in the globalized world and it provides examples of Maradona with Turkey crossroads. Here, it is investigated by which representations the physical existence is established. Although the identity of the players or coaches worked in Turkey, though, points of intersection with Turkey in recent history, have been of crucial importance for the transport of these attributes until today. In the second part of the study, contents published in the Turkish printing press are investigated during their dissemination in the first week after the death of Maradona,. The study is focused on newspapers, columns, and thematic magazines; The memory, evaluation, and exemplification related to Maradona are evaluated by the “content analysis” methods. Findings of the study; Maradona is not only a footballer, but also a powerful figure with an ideological point of view, and is a celebrity personality that has always been curious; they, with the historical intersections corresponding to the projection of the recent history of Turkey and axles, are forming the meaning of the name Maradona. As a result, it can be said that the examined newspapers and magazines published memories by focusing on Maradona’s different identities.

**Keywords:** Maradona; Turkey; Turkish press; Media; media figure

### Introduction

Diego Armando Maradona is known as a football player who has achieved global fame, has achieved remarkable success, and has a huge fan base. Maradona’s global image is not limited to these. He is known as a famous person as well as a football player. Especially his family relations, sensational events, and relations with other football people are other elements of his image. On the other hand, he makes his political point of view visible by using various images: he is close friends with Fidel Castro, who is well known in left-ideological circles. He declares that he also adopts the social perspectives in

geographies such as Venezuela, Cuba, and Palestine. Therefore, Maradona can be considered as a global symbolic name where different identities come together, not a one-dimensional reputation.

Maradona did not work in Turkey as a football player or a coach. However, all these mentioned points were acceptable for Turkey as well. Maradona's visits to Turkey and his connections with the world of football, magazines, and entertainment reinforced this interest. His scenes in important programs in terms of television culture were shown many times, and the memories of the matches he played were repeated many times. On the other hand, there must be claims that Maradona's family origins are based on Turkish lands. The reality of the information that important names among his close friends belong to families who have immigrated from Turkey is also noteworthy. All these reveal the different dimensions of the Turkey-Maradona relationship.

This study focuses on the main argument that Maradona is a media figure with different aspects. The study aims to test this point of view and to establish up-to-date connections. In this direction, it is emphasized with which elements the image of Maradona was created in the Turkish print media. The scope of the study, published in a week after Maradona's death; news, columns, and visuals in newspapers, newspaper supplements, and magazines. The content analysis method was adopted in the study. In this direction, all contents were analyzed and thematic categories were determined. The data were analyzed along with technical elements such as publication type, page number, and publication date.

### **Media Figure in the Globalizing World: Representation of Maradona from the Global Arena to Turkey**

Development of television and the usage of satellite broadcasting, the partnership of these two mediums has materialized in a faster, more efficient, and more widespread manner. This phase reinforces the assumption that "everything on television is very significant." Not only wars, political issues, or economic depressions, but also fictional productions, events, and celebrities are becoming important now. In a way, this was creating a global agenda (Slotten, 2002). Everything shown on television can be watched at anytime from anywhere in the world. All images are reproduced over and over again. Therefore, everyone knows many people such as politicians, journalists, and business people shown on television. Audiences recognize them even if they do not see them in real and everyday life. At this point, the globalization of figures and the reflections of different personas of famous people are constantly being reinforced (for related activities of the media in different fields: Turow, 2020).

Looking at the past from today, we can see that television has globalized certain media figures with its live broadcasting activities (for prominent examples: MeTV Staff, 2016). They are now beyond history and have become persons known to the masses for generations, even if they are not physically present. At this point, media figures who have achieved global recognition through sports events can be pointed out to focus on the area of interest of this study.

Sports events, since their emergence, have been important areas of communication that can reach large audiences and establish a partnership with athletes and audiences. As the most important example of this intersection, the Olympic Games, which started in Ancient Greece and became regular, are shown in the historical framework. “Gladiator competitions” and “equestrian races” in the Roman Empire are also important both for mass entertainment and for the “unforgettable figures” to be known by the masses (Swaddling, 2004). Of course, these examples can be multiplied and popularized in different geographies, and popularized sports organizations and figures can be pointed out. However, to reach the definition of “multidimensional media figures” which is also at the center of this study, athletes who stand out with their talents, success, and sensations in football fields (which are the “arenas” of the modern era) can be discussed. Therefore, all kinds of sports competitions held in the world can be the subject of the media, and certain types of sports are highlighted. In this respect, the Olympics, which is a global arena that includes different sports branches, can be considered as the sports organizations that reach the widest masses. Many countries compete to win “medals” in different sports branches, and this event is limited to a certain period. The second sports organization that reaches the largest audience after the Olympic games is the football championships (for detailed charts: World Heritage Encyclopedia, 2016).

Today’s football, which is defined as “modern”, has become widespread on a global scale for more than 150 years and has reached an effective industry position within itself (Crocombe, 2019). When today’s football is considered in this direction, it can be stated that it is not only the “game itself” but also an industry in which the actors of the game are famous. It can be seen that football has gone far beyond being a sports organization, especially given the spectacular achievements and potential financial values of football players who have become figures of social media as well as communication opportunities in development on the Internet. In this context, if an example is given from today’s social media universe, it is seen that 3 football players are among the 20 most followed accounts on Instagram. (Cristiano Ronaldo-304m followers/2nd; Lionel Messi-221m followers/8th rank, Neymar-152m followers/18th rank: Brandwatch, 2021). At this point, the recent time can be considered: Diego Armando Maradona is an important example when we look at media figures with features far beyond the identity of a football player, especially in an environment where the internet is not widespread.

Maradona, as the whole world knows, can be seen as a name that left its mark on world football history. Maradona is one of the most important names of this period, with his success as a football player, his unique mass of fans, his spectacular activities as a coach, his activities positioned by the media in search of “sensation”, and his political discourses that are influential on a global scale. Maradona, who is also closely followed in countries other than Argentina, Spain, and Italy where he played before, is in line with the conceptualization of a “versatile media figure” who is also at the center of this work. While media attention focused on Maradona, sensational news blurred the border between the footballer’s private life and public opinion. Maradona is now at the center of a narrative on the axis of the upheavals with success, every moment of which is recorded by cameras, and which is constantly on the first pages of the print media. This situation

has increased the interest of the masses and brought together tens of thousands of people who want to watch him on the football field, and has increased the number of people who will attribute political, religious, social, or cultural meanings to him on a global scale, even if they do not see him in person. Different kinds of religious/spiritual communities declared Maradona a prophet, left wing politics were able to find the concrete equivalent of their discourse, authors placed him as a figure in their novels/stories, musicians and filmmakers gained new inspirations (Burns, 1996; Maradona, 2011; Gill, 2020).

The image of Maradona finds a response in Turkey. Although he has never worked in this country as a football player or coach, the discourse practices in the relevant field emerge on multiple levels. In this context, it can be stated that Maradona's visits are the basis of the intersections with Turkey. It is stated that there was an intense interest in Maradona, who came to the city of Istanbul in Turkey with the Sevilla team he played in the 1992-1993 season. The whole stadium cheered for Maradona, who took the field in the special match played between Sevilla and Galatasaray, and the displays of affection continued after the match (Hamarat, 2012; Sporx, 2020). Two years after this date, Maradona, who came to Istanbul again for a sports organization, welcomed him with great interest, as in his previous visit. A prominent event here is as follows: Maradona announced the television program *Televole*, which is considered as a reflection of football, magazine, and entertainment culture in Turkey, and "Maraba Televole!" he said (in fact: "Merhaba/Hello, Televole" is the difference due to the accent difference) (Socrates, 2019). Because this announcement has been used in the credits of the TV show for years and has become a stereotyped expression of this television culture (Socrates, 2019). Another example of Maradona's presence in television entertainment culture can be given as his participation in the television competition show, which received high ratings in the period it was broadcast, bouncing the ball there and "belly dancing" with a belly dancer (Hürriyet, 1999).

Maradona's connections with Turkey are not limited to his visits. Especially historical discourse practices enable to establish relations in different contexts. In this direction, although it cannot be verified; The allegations that Maradona stated that his grandfather was a member of a family that migrated from the Ottoman Empire were occasionally reported in the Turkish press. The allegations were strengthened, especially since his brother Hugo was nicknamed "El Turco" (İçerik Haber, 2020). On the other hand, the point that has reached a historical reality is the origins of his friend Noray Nakis, who is an important name in terms of Maradona's career. The fact that Nakis, who took on senior positions in the Independiente club and the Argentine Football Federation, is an Armenian who immigrated from Turkey and maintains his relations with Turkey is a subject discussed by the Turkish media (Karaköse, 2017). The image of Maradona in the 2014 World Cup constitutes an important agenda topic of this relationship for the Turkish media. The head coach of Argentina in the tournament, Maradona, was on the side of the court with a rosary "from Turkey". In addition, he chose some objects that his "friends" in Turkey gave as gifts to him as "good luck" (Milliyet, 2010). Of course, Maradona's relationship with Turkey or media fans is not limited to these. For example; George Hagi, who was the captain of Galatasaray, the only team in Turkey to win the UEFA European

Cup, is known by the nickname “Maradona of the Carpathians” (Scragg, 2017). There is even a fish restaurant named Maradona due to the physical resemblance of its owner in a resort town of Muğla city in Turkey (Datça Detay, 2014). At this point, it can be pointed out in which axes the Turkish media deals with the image of Maradona, to better understand the social reflections. In this context, the news, columns, and images that appeared in the Turkish print media after Maradona’s death are examined to clarify the axes in question.

## Method

In this study, it is aimed to embody which elements Diego Armando Maradona is addressed by in the Turkish print media. In this direction, in the one-week period after Maradona's death (26.11.2020-03.02.2020), the national newspapers and their supplements were published in Turkey and the national printed magazines were published in a month after his death (26.11.2020 - 31.12. 2020) have been examined. In this context total of 38 newspapers, 32 “daily”, 2 “weekly”, 4 “six days a week”; 4 “daily”, 5 “weekly”; a total of 9 newspaper supplements; 1 “bi-monthly”, 6 “monthly”, 4 “weekly” a total of 11 magazines were reached. A total of 38 newspapers, 32 “daily”, 2 “weekly”, 4 “six days a week”; 4 “daily”, 5 “weekly” a total of 9 newspaper supplements; 1 “bi-monthly”, 6 “monthly”, 4 “weekly” a total of 11 journals were reached. The names of the relevant newspapers are; Akşam, Analiz, Anayurt, Aydınlık, BirGün, Cumhuriyet, Daily Sabah, Diriliş Postası, Doğru Haber, Dünya, Fanatik, Fotomaç, Gazete Pencere, Günlük Evrensel, Hürriyet, Hürriyet Daily News, Karar, Korkusuz, Milat, Milli Gazete, Milliyet, Posta, Sabah, Sözcü, Sözcü Haftasonu, Şalom, Şok, Takvim, Türkgün, Türkiye, Türkiye’de Yeni Çağ, Uykusuz, Yeni Akit, Yeni Asır, Yeni Asya, Yeni Birlik, Yeni Mesaj, Yeni Şafak, Yeni Yaşam; the names of the relevant supplements are BirGün Pazar, Gazete Pencere Pazar, Hürriyet Kelebek, Milliyet Pazar, Sabah Cumartesi, Sabah Pazar, Sabahla Günaydın, Yeni Asır Cumartesi; the names of the relevant magazines are Baran, Episode, Four Four Two, Gerçek Hayat, Hafta, Kafa, Oyungezer, Spor Arena Plus, Tarih, Teknik Elektrik Postası. The publications examined in the study; publication times (daily, six days a week, weekly, monthly, and bimonthly), publication types (newspaper, newspaper supplement, magazine), publication characteristics (actual, informatics, TV-series, cinema, literature, business, electronics, celebrity news, humor, politics, sports, history, and life). At the same time, the visual elements of the content in these sections were also examined. In addition to the categorical classification of the contents, the frequency of publication, the types of content (news-column), the use of photographs, and the placed page numbers were also examined within the scope of the study. In this study, in which “content analysis” was preferred as the method, thematic analysis of the columns in the relevant date range was made in addition to the data presented. It does not take into account television channels, internet news sites, video content, and social media shares, which are important in today’s media systems. Because, especially in terms of content analysis method, printed publications offer more concrete data. At the same time, the fact that the topics covered

in national printed publications are directly related to Turkey's agenda also contributed to this preference.

## Findings

The analyzes of the content and images examined in the study are shown under two main headings; “Technical Analysis” and “Content Analysis”. In the “Technical Analysis” section; sub-titles “Types of Publication”, “Positioning”, “Frequency” and “Use of Visuals” were given and relevant findings were shared. In the section titled “Content Analysis”, analyzes were carried out under the sub-headings of “News”, “Columns”, “Uses of Visuals”.

## Technical Analysis

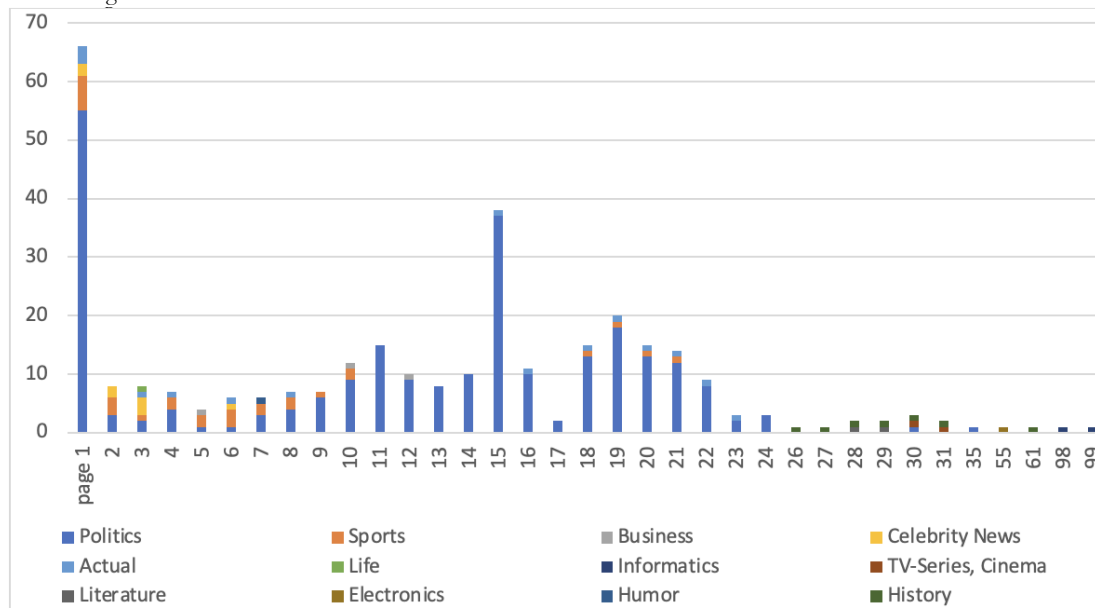
The technical aspects of the examined publications are discussed under different sub-titles. In this context, the category of “Publication Characteristics” is looked at first:

Table 1. Total Distribution by Publication Types and Characteristics

	<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Newspaper Supplement</b>	<b>Magazine</b>
Actual		4	1
Informatics			1
TV-series, cinema			1
Literature			1
Business	1		
Electronics			1
Celebrity News		2	
Humor			1
Politics	35	2	2
Sports	2		2
History			1
Life		1	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>11</b>

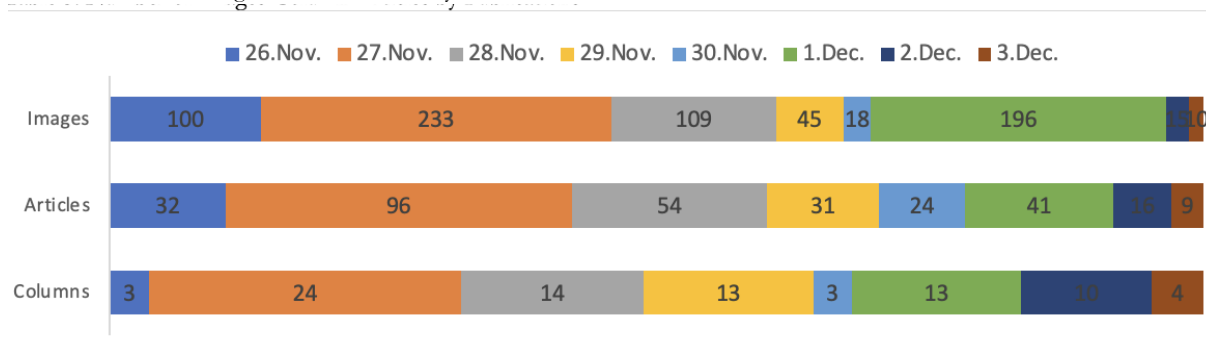
In Table 1, it is seen that the characteristics of publications that include news about Maradona are mostly in the “political” category. In the second place, it can be stated that the “actual” supplements of the newspapers are.

Table 2. Page Numbers and Publication Characteristics



When the characteristics of publications and the page numbers of the related news is examined, it can be stated that there is more news on the 1st page. After this page, where 66 news is seen, the most intensive use of the page is the 15th. This situation draws attention to the fact that it is the last page of the relevant newspapers and that this area has sports content. On the other hand, page numbers are generally seen as 20 and above in monthly magazine publications. In characteristics other than political; while it is on the first pages of the celebrity news supplements, the sports newspaper includes Maradona news spread throughout the newspaper. When a day-based evaluation is made; it can be stated that the news concentrated on pages 1 and 15 on November 26, 27, and 28; pages 1 and 4 on November 29; page 30 on December 1; page 2 on December 2; pages 2 and 11 on December 3. This situation primarily includes the themes of announcing the news of his death, then giving place to the ceremonies held on a global scale, and reflecting the way the news outlets of other countries gave the news. Therefore, in the first days, the news took place on the first pages of the publications, while in the following processes, it showed a tendency towards the back pages.

Table 3. Number of Images-Column-Articles by Publications



Considering the daily content and visual usage of the publications, an increase can be seen within the second day after the news of Maradona's death was announced. Although the content and image rates have decreased proportionally since this date, the increase on December 1 is related to the publication of new issues of monthly periodicals on this date. The main reason why the number of images is higher than the number of news at a general level can be explained as the presence of a large number of images in one content. When we look at the findings here in terms of columns, there is a serious increase in the second day as in other contents. In addition to the columns published in the magazine category on December 1, an increase is seen in the related articles in the daily newspapers.

## Content Analysis

The thematic classifications of the content and images discussed in the study also provide concrete data on how the figure of Maradona was constructed by the Turkish press. In this context, the analyzed contents were handled in three categories as news, column, and visual. Each of these categories was subjected to content analysis, and “death”, “family relations/private life”, “sensation”, “remembrance”, “reflections from Turkey”, “political opinion”, “football career”, and “personal remembrance” themes were achieved. The contents of the themes could be explained as follows:

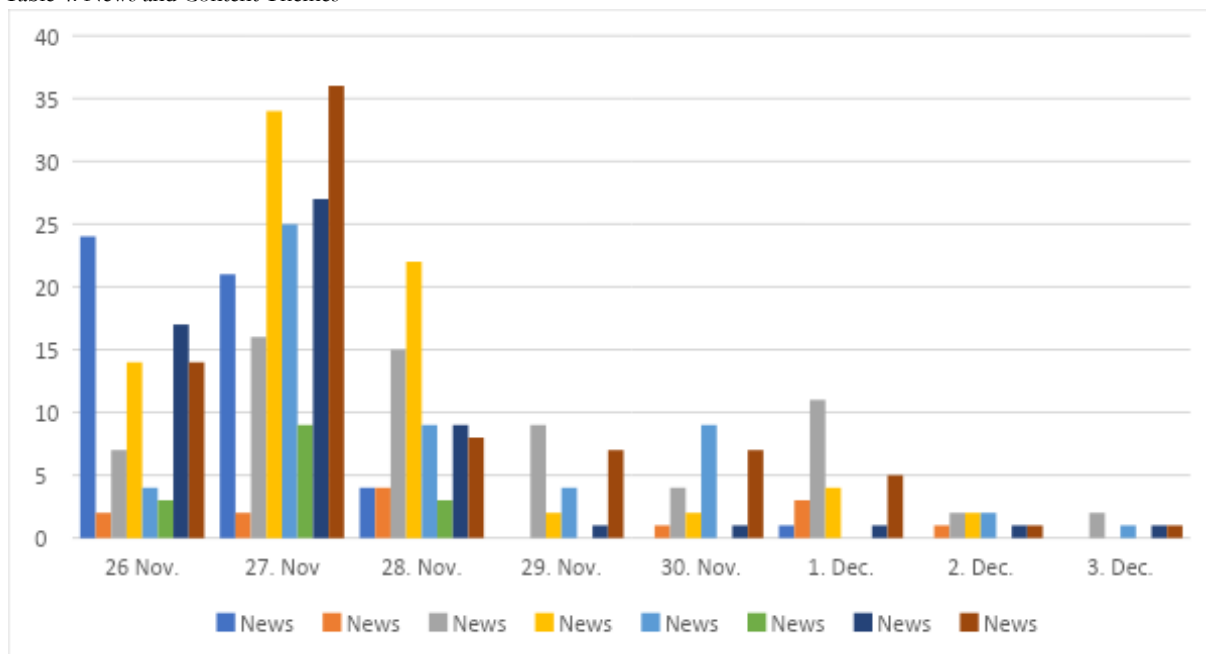
- **Death:** Information about Maradona's “death” and the place, time, and possible causes of his death.
- **Family Relations/Private Life:** This theme conveys information about Maradona's family, his relationships with his family, and his past with people in his private life
- **Sensation:** This theme conveys news about drug use, financial problems, controversial issues. The photos used in this theme support the mentioned content.
- **Remembrance:** Remembrance ceremonies held in different countries consist of content such as official commemoration statements, a moment of silence, illustration, and graffiti works.
- **Personal Remembrance:** The statements of people (well-known athletes, government officials, businessmen, etc.) about Maradona’s death are cited in this theme. In the columns, the individual commemorations of the author about Maradona are also included in this context.
- **Football Career:** This theme covers Maradona's football history, achievements, career milestones, managerial period, etc., and includes information and assessments on this subject.
- **Political Opinion:** This theme conveys the memories, evaluations, and discussions about Maradona's ideological discourses, his closeness with political/ideological figures, and his social point of view. In visual uses, elements such as the tattoo of Che and his photographs with Fidel Castro come to the fore.
- **Reflections on Turkey:** Maradona's visits to Turkey, the matches he played with Turkish teams and the memories of different people related to them, the commemorations held in Turkey after his death, a moment of silence before the matches,



and official statements were discussed in this context. The use of visuals in this theme is also directly related to this subject, and news images and match photos from the Turkish press in the past are also evaluated.

Each of the relevant categories has been analyzed on the axis of the themes pointed out here. However, it is seen that news, columns, and images are not included in a single theme, on the contrary, there is more than one theme in all content. In this context, the thematic intensities of the contents in the “news” category are shown daily basis in the table below.

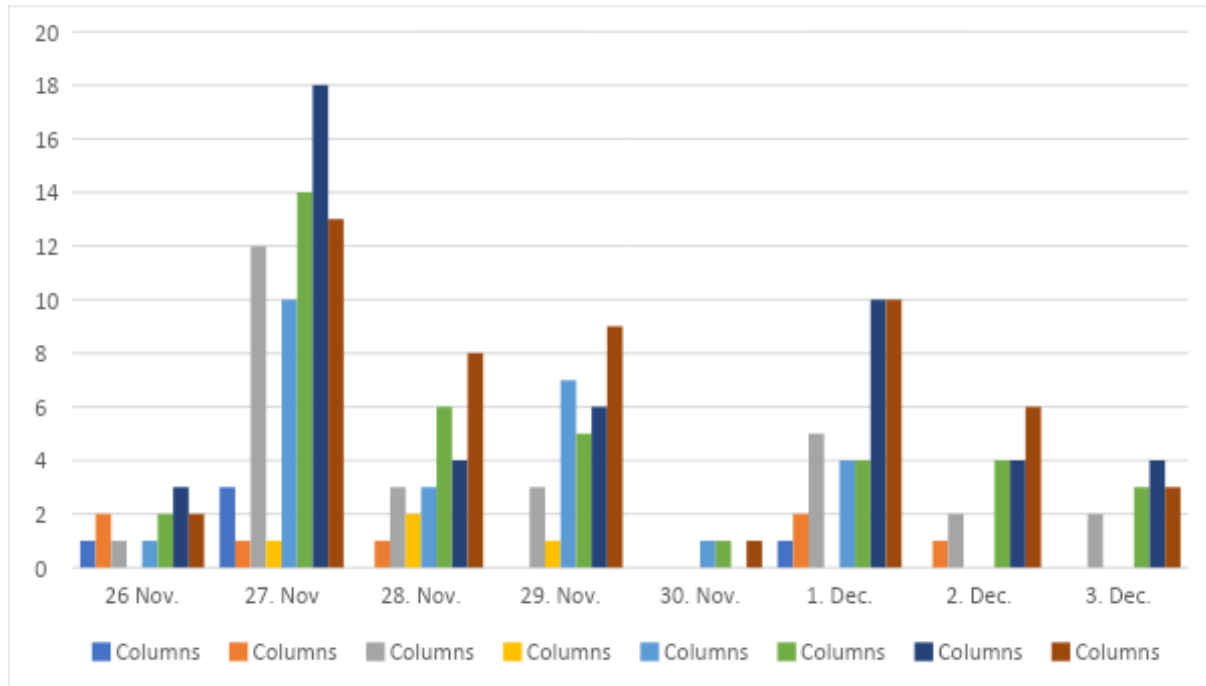
Table 4. News and Content Themes



When the themes of the news category are examined, the prominent findings are as follows: On November 26, the numbers of news with the theme of “death” ranks first. This situation is directly related to the fact that the relevant date is the day after Maradona's death. At the same time, it is seen that this date is frequently included in the information about his “football career”. Also, condolence messages of well-known people from different countries and with different qualifications are conveyed intensively. On November 27, it is seen that the “personal remembrances” and the news about Maradona's funeral made up the general density. The increase in the remembrance news on November 28 drew attention. The remarkable point for today is the rise of “sensational” news, which was less than before. There was a significant decrease in news content on November 29. When the contents of November 30 are examined, the theme of “reflections on Turkey” takes the first place because of the moment of silence and commemoration events held before the Fenerbahçe-Beşiktaş match, which was an important match for Turkish football. On December 1, it is noteworthy that the news about the fact that there were some doubts behind Maradona's death, uncertainties in financial situations, and inappropriate posts about his body focused on the “sensation”

theme. It can be stated that the number of news and related themes decreased on December 2 and 3.

Table 5. Columns and Content Themes



Although the themes of the columns show a similar trend to the news content, the content of the publications in the category of magazines in this field varies in the relevant balances. Because of the preparation time of the columns, it is seen that there were very few columns on November 26. His football career is in the first place in columns on November 26. On November 27, when the columns were on the rise, his football career again took the first place, and unlike the news, it can be said that the theme of “political opinion” had a remarkable intensity. Other themes that follow these “personal remembrance” and “reflections on Turkey”. The themes of “personal remembrance” and “political opinion” draw attention on November 28. Also on November 29, “personal remembrance” and “reflection on Turkey” themes are in the foreground. Columns are also published in magazine publications on December 1. On this date, the themes of his “football career” and “personal remembrance” are on the rise again. The theme of “personal remembrance” is placed at the top on December 3 and comes after “football career” on December 3. The usage of the themes in this category, especially the “personal remembrance” theme shows different connections regarding the relationship that the authors established with Maradona. Especially in this period, the memories of the writers who watched Maradona live on television constitute the intersection point. Where, with whom, and under what conditions the matches are watched, also coincides with Maradona's figure.

Table 6. Images and Content Themes

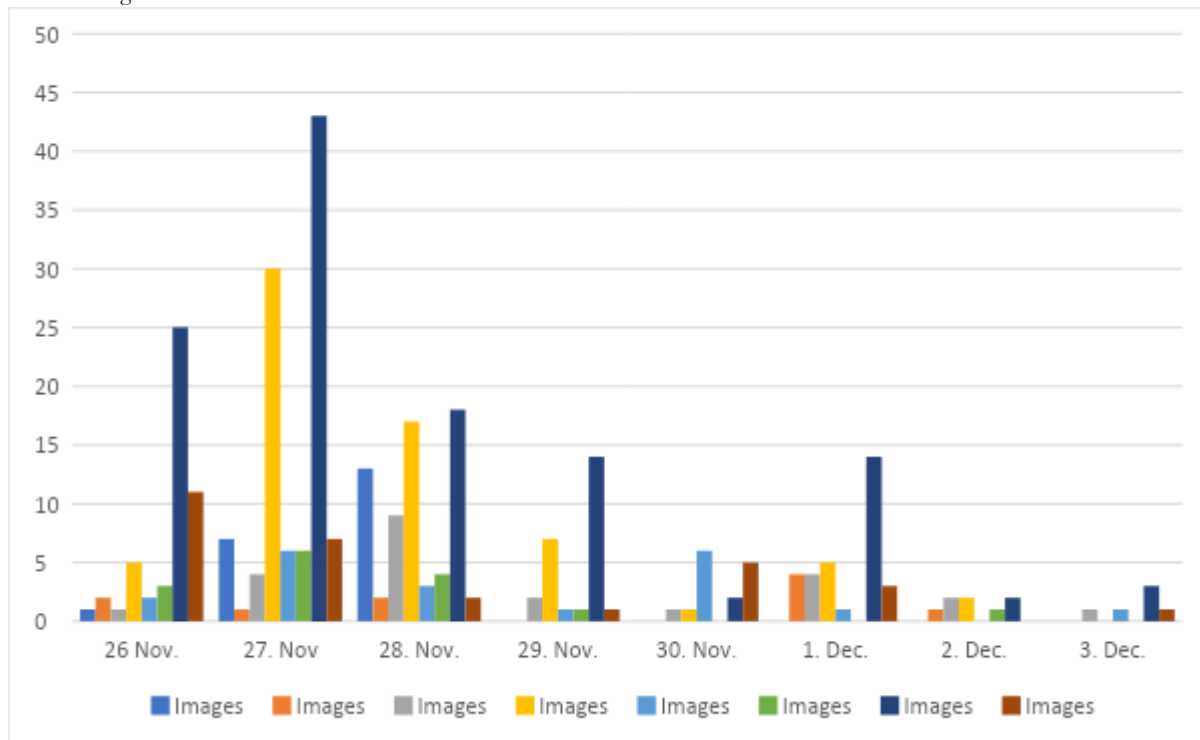


Image usage in news and columns is also discussed in this study. In the analyzed data, there may be more than one image in a news article or a column, and these images can carry different themes within themselves. In this context, it is seen that on November 26, different images related to his “football career” were used intensively, while memories and photos were shared on the theme of “personal remembrance”. On November 27, while the theme of “football career” was in the first place and also it can be said that the photographs suitable for the theme of “remembrance” have increased. Since this date is the funeral day, it can be said that the printed publications give information about the commemoration ceremonies. This date is also the date when the images of the body and coffin are used, and a “sensation” theme comes to the fore, in which the chaotic events in the commemorations are conveyed with photographs. On November 29, the theme of “football career” is on the rise again, with the theme of “remembrance” taking second place. Along with the commemoration events held before the Fenerbahçe-Beşiktaş match played on 30 November, the intensity of the theme of “reflections on Turkey” draws attention. Image usage decreases on December 1, 2, and 3. The preferred images focus on the “football career” theme in these days. Visual images that are used extensively according to their themes can be presented as follows:

Image 1. Death



Source: Akşam (2020, November 27)

The image, which is mainly presented with the theme of death, is presented as a composition consisting of Argentina's flag, Argentina's national football team jersey, and Boca Juniors jersey placed on Maradona's coffin.

Image 2. Family Relations/Private Life

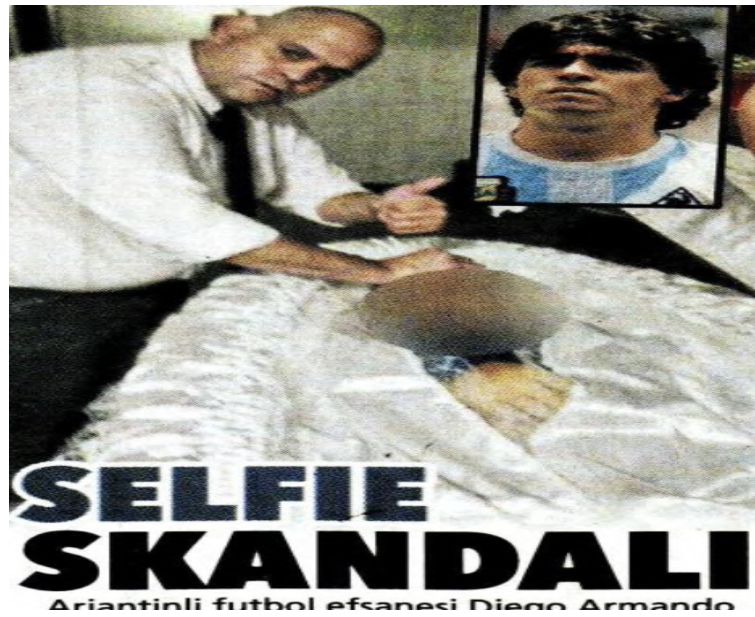


Source: Tarih (2020, December 1)

The photographs referenced in this theme are about the relationship between her daughter and Maradona. One of them is the image of Maradona's daughter placing daisies in his socks. This composition shows the relationship established between family relations and football.



Image 3. Sensation



Source: Posta (2020, November 28)

Although the theme of “sensation” points to many different areas in the content, the image that is used most intensely is shown as the photo of “taking a selfie” with Maradona's body.

Image 4. Remembrance



Source: Yeni Astar (2020, November 27)

The “remembrance” theme images focus more on fan photos. In this context, one of the frequently used images is River Plate and Boca Juniors team fans, who are considered to be ‘arch rivals’, hugging each other for Maradona.

Image 5. Reflections on Turkey



Fenerbahçe.Racilistac derhicinde aילה) vazzan va Maradona'nın fotoğrafi

Source: Yeni Şafak (2020, November 30)

T-shirts with the image of Maradona, worn by Fenerbahçe, one of the leading football clubs in Turkey, before a derby match, can be explained as the most intense visual of the “reflections on Turkey” theme.

Image 6. Political Opinion



Source: BirGün Pazar (2020, November 29)

In the political reflection of the Maradona image, there is a photograph of Maradona and Cuban President Fidel Castro side by side. This photo also includes the image of the Argentinean Che Guevara, who is the symbol of the Cuban Revolution and leftist movements.



Image 7. Football Career



Source: Milliyet Express (2020, November 26)

The preferred images of Maradona's football career focus on the concept of “success”. The image frequently used in this framework is the photo of Maradona when he lifted the World Cup. Here, the density of fans both in the stands and on the field draws attention.

Image 8. Personal Remembrance



Source: Takvim (2020, December 1)

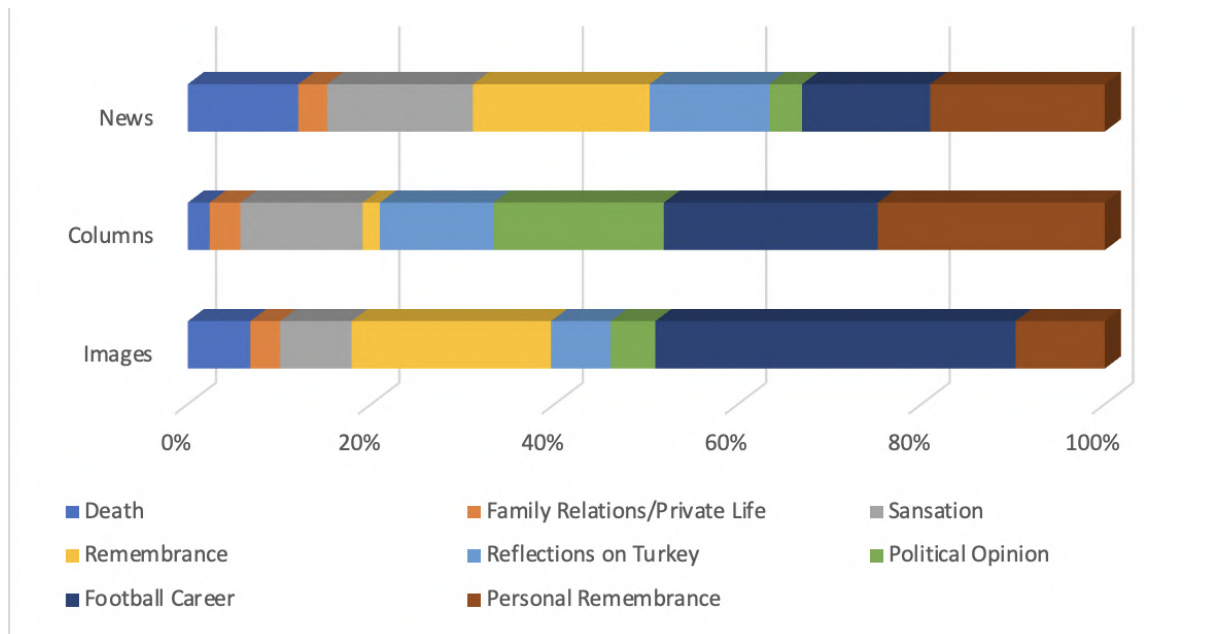
Within the theme of “personal remembrance”, there are visuals attached to the explanations of different names from around the world. The most commonly used image

of this theme is photos of Lionel Messi wearing the same jersey and cheering like Maradona after scoring a similar goal to Maradona’s Newell’s Old Boys.

A general evaluation of all categories and themes examined within the scope of the study is also presented in the table below.

Table 7. Numbers and Rates of Themes in All Categories

	Death	Family Relations / Private Life	Sensation	Remembrance	Reflections on Turkey	Political Opinion	Football Career	Personal Remembrance
News	50	13	66	80	54	15	58	79
Columns	5	7	28	4	26	39	49	52
Images	21	10	24	67	20	15	121	30
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>238</b>	<b>161</b>



When we look at the total number of all themes, it is seen that the theme usage density is categorical as follows: it can be said that “remembrance” (80) took the first place, “personal remembrance” (79), and “sensation” (66) took the third place in the news category. At the columns category; a thematic order can be seen as “personal remembrance” (52), “football career” (49), and “political opinion” (39). The theme of “football career” (121) in the “visual” category is the most intense part. Those who follow this theme; “remembrance” (67) and “personal remembrance” (30). In return for all categories, “football career” (238) comes first, followed by “personal remembrance” (161), “remembrance” (151), and “sensation” (118).



Table 8. Frequency of Words Used in Titles

Word	Word Count
"Maradona"	114
"10"	24
"World"	23
"Legend"	16
"Football"	16
"Farewell"	11
"Died"	11
"Investigation"	10
"God's Hand"	8
"He lost his life"	7

Finally, the densities of the most frequently used words in the titles of all kinds of news and columns were also discussed. In terms of publications, Maradona (114) comes first among these words, which are evaluated in terms of showing from which points the image of Maradona is built. The name, which makes up 11 percent of the words used in the headlines, was conveyed in different contexts in the news. The second word, 10 (ten - It is written and read as 'on' in Turkish), was used regarding Maradona's jersey number. Another point that stands out here is the use of the expression 10 for word games such as Marad10a. The third word, World, is used both to convey reflections from the world and to indicate Maradona's influence on a global scale. The next word, Legend, is also intended to reinforce Maradona's position on the football field. The other word Football refers directly to Maradona's career, and Farewell refers to the ceremonies held after his death. The word Death was used to announce the news, especially in the early days. The next word, "Investigation," describes the legal processes that took place after Maradona's death. This word is also directly related to the theme "sensation". "Hand of God" is also a phrase used about Maradona's career, and is presented with an iconic image of the related football event. The phrase "he lost his life" also intensifies in the first two days and is the most frequently used phrase during the announcement of Maradona's death.

## Conclusion

Diego Armando Maradona is a global media figure. At a time when television broadcasts were accessible on a global scale, he became a person shown without distinction of time and place. He is presented as a football player, a coach, a father, a brother, a political figure, a celebrity, an object of sensation. He brought the teams he played for to the top. He not only won the World Cup on the football field but also took revenge on political issues. Maradona was always discussed, and he was featured on television screens and in the print pages with sensational news. In addition to his footballer identity, many elements have created the image of Maradona and placed him at the center of global interest, admiration, and curiosity. Turkish football fans watched him on the television screen and read from newspapers and magazines, apart from these limited periods. In the narratives here, different details about the Maradona-Turkey relationship have come to the fore. Therefore, Turkey is quite familiar with the image of Maradona.

This study examined the elements with which the Maradona image was constructed from the perspective of Turkey. In the study, content analysis was applied to a total of 58 publications with different qualities in terms of news, columns, and images used. In this context, the contents are classified under eight different themes. In the analysis, it was seen that the contents and the images could be suitable for more than one theme. In the study, the titles of news and columns were also examined and the most frequently used words were discussed in terms of showing which expression patterns the image of Maradona conveyed.

Based on the findings, it can be said that two main axes stand out. First of all, for the “technical analysis” part, the results can be summarized as follows: It is seen that there are news or columns about Maradona in different publication types. It is not only national daily newspapers that contribute to the image of Maradona, but also publications with different themes. The page positioning of the articles about Maradona is concentrated on the 1st and 15th pages. This situation primarily corresponds to the fact that the news of Maradona's death, commemoration, and sensationalism is given on the first page (to show its important emphasis). Page 15, on the other hand, is usually a section with “Sports”. When the number of news, columns, and images are examined on daily basis, it can be said that the content in all categories reached the highest level on November 27.

In the findings given under the title of content analysis, the following evaluations can be made: the intersection points of all content can be explained with 8 different themes. Content/image is associated with more than one theme. When the densities in the themes used are examined categorically, the first rows are as follows: in the news category: “remembrance” and “individual remembrance” themes; in the Column category: “individual remembrance” and “football career” themes; in the Visual category: “football career” and “remembrance” themes. In this context, highlighting the successes of Maradona's football career and the individual memories of the people who prepared the articles to gain importance. The moods of those who watched Maradona live on television, their memories of their past, and their relations with their inner circles at that time are the subjects of these articles. When the photographs, which are frequently used in visual usage, are examined, it can be said that his “football career” is matched with the World Cup. It is noteworthy that the image of “death” was established with the image of a coffin and football team jerseys. The “sensation” phenomenon is presented with the selfie scandal image. The theme of “remembrance” shows the solidarity of Boca Juniors and River Plate fans. “Political opinion” is constructed with images of Fidel Castro and Che. The commemorative t-shirts of the Fenerbahçe football team are shown in the theme of “reflections on Turkey”. “Family Relations/Private Life” is presented with a frame featuring Maradona and her daughter. In “individual remembrance”, a visual featuring Messi's goal and his joy stand out. On the other hand, the main reasons for the similarities between the images used are the use of the photographs used by the international press and the fact that most of the preferred images were taken from visual archive sources. Another remarkable situation is that the subject of sensation is directed towards the event, which is expressed as a kind of “disrespect”, rather than the actions of which Maradona is the subject. In the titles preferred in the content, the word Maradona takes place in the

first place. In the titles preferred in the content, the word Maradona is in the first place. Among the ten most used words; number 10, World, legend, football, farewell, died, Hand of God, investigation, lost his life are included.

As emphasized in the first part of the study, Maradona and Turkey relations have “surprising” or “controversial” ties. However, as the second part of the study shows, these relationships have not been given much attention. It was emphasized that Maradona's death had a “shocking” effect, and its importance and “irreplaceability” in terms of “the world of football” was emphasized. Issues that can be directly associated with Turkey can be explained with commemorations/remembrances. The situation, which is mostly seen in the columns and gaining importance for the concretization of this relationship, can be shown as another reflection of the Maradona image, the individual memories, and the “excitement” of the period in which those moments were lived. Nevertheless, it can be said that in general terms, the Turkish national press handled Maradona from many different angles and presented concrete contents regarding his role as a global media figure. When all the examined sources are evaluated, different discussions can be seen in terms of journalism/journalism practices. In particular, issues such as the translation of news from the international press or agencies in many different publications or the use of images from archive websites narrow the original perspectives on the image of Maradona. This situation can be seen as related to today's global journalism practices and work patterns as well as the media system in Turkey. Nevertheless, as a result, the Turkish national press was able to present the image of Maradona from its own perspective and evaluate him as a versatile media figure.

## References

Akşam (2020, November 27). “Dünya Diego'ya veda etti”. p.18.

BirGün Pazar (2020, November 29). “10'dan başkası yalan”. p.15.

Brandwatch (2021). Retrieved June 21, 2021, from Brandwatch, The top 20 most followed Instagram accounts. <https://www.brandwatch.com/blog/top-most-instagram-followers/>.

Burns, J. (1996). Hand of God: The life of Diego Maradona. Guilford, Connecticut: Lyons Press.

Crocombe, M. (2019). Retrieved June 4, 2021, from Live About, The origin, history, and invention of soccer. <https://www.liveabout.com/who-invented-soccer-3556873>.

Datça Detay (2014). Retrieved June 2, 2021, from Datça Detay, Datça Balık Lokantaları. <https://www.datcadetay.com/balik-lokantalari.html/2>.

Gill, A. (2020). Life and times of Diego Maradona: What you need to know about one of the greatest footballer of all time. Independently Published.

Hamarat, A. M. (2012). Retrieved June 28, 2021, from Eurosport, İnönü'de maradona. [https://www.eurosport.com.tr/futbol/inonude-maradona\\_sto3176567/story.shtml](https://www.eurosport.com.tr/futbol/inonude-maradona_sto3176567/story.shtml).

Hürriyet (1999). Retrieved June 6, 2021, from Hürriyet, Çarkıfelek'te Maradona şovu. <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/carkifelekte-maradona-sovu-39062626.02.06.2021>.

Hokkabaz (2006). <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0827503/>.

İçerik Haber (2020). Retrieved June 6, 2021, from İçerik Haber, Maradona'nın Dedesi Türk mü?. <https://www.icerikhaber.com/trend-haber/maradonanın-dedesi-turk-mu/16324/>.

Karaköse, N. (2017). Retrieved June 6, 2021, from Agos, Norayr Nakış'ın Şarkışla'dan Buenos Aires'e uzanan yaşamı. <http://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/17422/norayr-nakisin-sarkisladan-buenos-airese-uzanan-yasami>.

Maradona, D. A. (2011). Maradona: The autobiography of soccer's greatest and most controversial star. New York: Skyhorse.

MeTV Staff (2016). Retrieved June 23, 2021, from Metv, The 10 biggest live television moments of the 20th century. <https://www.metv.com/lists/the-10-biggest-live-television-moments-of-the-20th-century>.

Milliyet (2010). Retrieved June 6, 2021, from Milliyet, İki uğuru Türkiye'den.... <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/skorer/iki-uguru-turkiyeden-1256342.02.06.2020>.

Milliyet Express (2020, November 26). 10'u emekli edin. p.19.

Posta (2020, November 28). Selfie skandalı. p.1.

Slotten, H. (2002). Satellite communications, globalization, and the cold war. *Technology and Culture*, (43), 315-350.

Socrates (2019). Retrieved June 6, 2021, from Socrates, Maraba televole. <https://www.socratesdergi.com/maraba-televole/>.

Sporx (2020). Retrieved June 6, 2021, from Sporx, Pinada: "Maradona ile Türkiye'ye gittik, inanılmazdı".

<https://www.sporx.com/futbol/ekstra/pinada-maradona-ile-turkiyeye-gittik-inanilmazdiSXGLQ49058SXQ?sira=6>. 02.06.2021.

Swaddling, J. (2004). *The ancient olympic games* (3rd edition). London: The British Museum Press.

Takvim (2020, December 1). Özel forma. p.12.

Tarih (2020, December 1). Ölümsüz Maradona: “Tanrı’nın eli” futbolun ilahına değdi. p.27.

Turow, J. (2020). *Media today: Mass communication in a converging world* (7th Edition). London & New York: Routledge.

World Heritage Encyclopedia (2016). Retrieved June 4, 2021, from Self Gutenberg, List of most watched television broadcasts.

[http://self.gutenberg.org/articles/eng/List\\_of\\_most\\_watched\\_television\\_broadcasts](http://self.gutenberg.org/articles/eng/List_of_most_watched_television_broadcasts).

Yeni Asır (2020, November 27). Dünya 10’u unutmayacak. p.10.

Yeni Şafak (2020, November 30). Maradona unutulmadı. p.19.

### **About the Authors**

Denizcan Kabaş and Şükrü Güler work as Assistant Professors (Ph.D.) at Üsküdar University, Faculty of Communication. Research interests: mass communication, media, representation and digitalization.

denizcan.kabas@uskudar.edu.tr

sukru.guler@uskudar.edu.tr

## Maradona's Ghosts and Co.: Narrating Maradona in Argentine Football Literature

Carlos Andrés Bertoglio  
Southern Utah University

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6093/2532-6732/8970>

### Abstract

When Roberto Santoro wrote *Literatura de la pelota* (1971) little did he imagine that this book, written from the margins of Argentine literature, would open a new literary path for a considerable number of 'football writers' in Argentina and Latin America. In the five decades that followed this seminal work, this genre has continued to grow and diversify. However, one key thematic element that has been periodically revisited in the Argentine context is that of the mythical concept of the *pibe* as a central reservoir of Argentine footballing identity and the figure of Maradona as its most perfect incarnation. This essay will attempt to, on the one hand, describe and illustrate the *pibe-Maradona* connection in the context of Argentine Football Fiction and on the other, explain the pivotal role of Maradona and that of his phantasmatic presence as fundamental components to approach this literary subgenre in the Argentine context.

**Keywords:** Argentine Football Literature; The pibe Myth; Narrative Construction; Phantasmatic Maradona

### Introduction

Diego Armando Maradona played his last match as a professional on October 25<sup>th</sup>, 1997, wearing the colors of Boca Juniors, which, that day, defeated their archrivals River Plate by a score of 2-1. A slow, aging and overweight Maradona did not play well and was substituted at halftime by the (then) young and promising Juan Román Riquelme, a player later considered to be a sort of heir—one of many more to come—to Diego's crown as the national *pibe*. Only 5 days later, precisely on his 37th birthday (Christmas day in the Maradonian church's calendar), the *golden pibe* announced his retirement from professional football.

The void left by his absence was going to prove too big to fill: Maradona was not only the last Argentine (football) hero but also probably the most "real" and authentic of them all. He was not only an erratic individual, a unique and inimitable genius touched (by his own admission) by God's grace, but also the most potent incarnation and re-actualization of Argentine football's mythical narratives: he was not like mythical *pibes*, he was "the" mythical *pibe*. As Eduardo Archetti (1997) explains: "Maradona is the perfect product of a mythical tradition and is put historically into motion through the emotional contract with the worshippers. The cult of Maradona is the worship of a tradition" (p.49).

This is a tradition started from the margins of Argentine culture, from sport magazines like the immensely popular *El Gráfico* where writers such as Borocotó and Chantecler constructed a narrative that made sense of this British invention of football by capturing and reorganizing its significance around the figure of humble kids (*pibes*) playing in *potreros* (paddocks). The figure of the *pibe* is presented as that of a trickster who adds beauty, freedom, indocility and ingenuity to this sport by using dribble (or *gambeta*) as their main weapon, turning scarcity into excess. When we talk about scarcity, we refer to the humble origins of the participants of *potrero* football which, for instance, would play with a rag ball or anything resembling a ball, but also to the lack of space present in these types of informal settings where there could be up to twenty players per team. According to this narrative, the traditional dribbling style was born out of these circumstances, where the ball became a precious object that players needed to treasure and retain for as long as possible.

In these narrative constructions, *pibes* invariably spring out of the neglected and deprived suburbs—a liminal space in-between the city and the countryside— where buildings are scarce and vacant lots or *potreros* abound. *Potreros* function narratively in two ways: first, they are the inevitable breeding ground for the archetypical Argentine football player so much so that the advance of the city over these liminal spaces will be blamed (especially by the sports media) for the always imminent disappearance of creative players in the Argentine context; second, at the margins of the nationalist movement of *gauchismo/criollismo* but parallel to it, *potreros* work as the space where immigrants and their sons—with the exception of the British— will become Argentinian on a football field (this sport working as a powerful cultural machine capable of assimilating immigrants' threatening heterogeneity), creating a national style— referred to as “our way” or “la nuestra”— that's hybrid, open and, at the same time, exclusive (Archetti, 1999, p.71). On the other hand, the British (later simplified as the English), as Pablo Alabarces affirms, become a *significant other* (2008, p.46), the perfect opposite without which the construction of such a strong national footballing narrative could not have been possible.

Maradona's retirement from the football fields not only represented a crisis for Argentinians' ongoing construction of a national football identity but also coincided with the beginning of a social and economic decline that would reach its most dramatic point in the year 2001. By 1997, Argentina was two years into the second term of Carlos Menem's neoliberal government and the dream of belonging to the select group of nations enjoying the privileges of the so-called “First World” (thanks in part to a delirious peso-dollar peg) was starting to show its uglier face—a consistent trade deficit, the shutdown of factories, the growth of economy's informal sector— and slowly but surely turning into what was going to end up being 2001's full scale nightmare.

Moreover, the 1990s brought about a serious deterioration and, in some cases, almost the entire dissolution of some of the institutions in charge of producing a sense of “Argentineity”, specifically the State and along with it the public school system and the family. In this context, the media (especially the TV) took over the role of main producer of narratives and football became one of its most successful products and effective social binders. As Beatriz Sarlo (1998) affirms football is not the nation, but can become its easy, universal and pulsatile substitute (p.3).

It was from this decade on that Argentine society experienced a process of complete footballization fueled, in big part, by this sport's strong and constant media presence. Several sport channels (with football as its central product) were born: among them Cable Sport (VCC) and PSN, TyC Sports, ESPN Latinoamérica, America Sports, Fox Sports, etc. Argentine radio saw the launch of Radio La Red (also in the highly symbolic year of 1997), a TyC Sports' owned station entirely dedicated to sports. In addition, *Olé*, Argentina's first sport newspaper (with approximately 70 % of its pages reserved to football), appeared in 1996 and thanks to the use of an innovative visual design, journalistic informal style and street-like jargon revolutionized the way of doing sport journalism in Argentina.

Finally, the ties between sports (in general) and football (in particular) and politics became stronger than ever. President Menem may have not held the title of the country's "first sportsman" (that honor was reserved to Juan Perón) but was, in fact, the first and only head of state to fulfill his own "sueño del pibe" (boy's dream) and—on July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1989—play the whole 90 minutes of a football match for the national team. Needless to say, Maradona (a year later appointed by Menem as Argentina's sporting ambassador) was also there, as was the TV to carry the images of this game to the rest of the nation and the incredulous world. At this point, there was no way of denying the obvious profitability as well as the enormous visibility and relevance of football within Argentine society. The worst fears of intellectuals such as Carriego, Martínez Estrada or Sebrelí were realized: the much-anticipated football "invasion" had taken place leaving no corner of Argentine culture untouched or indifferent to it.

In this context of hiper-footballization, the proliferation of literary texts that revolved around this sport seemed almost logical. Even though there were writers such as Osvaldo Soriano and Roberto Fontanarrosa who regularly published stories about/with football as a central part of them, it was not going to be until the decade of 1990 that these football short stories would be given a special attention thanks mainly to the editing of compilations that gathered them in single volumes: this is the case of Soriano's *Cuentos de los años felices* (1993) and *Memorias del Míster Peregrino Fernández y otros relatos de fútbol* (1998) (followed by *Arqueros, ilusionistas y goleadores* in 2006) and Fontanarrosa's *Puro Fútbol* (2000). This decade will also see the return of two of the forerunners of football literature as are Eduardo Galeano and Juan José Sebrelí. The former with the best-seller *Fútbol a sol y a sombra* (1995) where he attempts to rescue the poetic, beautiful and ludic elements of the game in times of football's commodification and hyper-professionalism (in a romantic gesture that will be repeated by many of the post-1990s' Argentine football writers) and the latter with his essay *La era del fútbol* (1998) where he continues with his attack on a sport and cultural phenomenon that he sees as a reservoir of fanaticism, authoritarianism and racism among other evils.

When searching for an explanation for this renewed interest in football as a literary subject, it would be possible, but probably very naïve, to say that the attention and space given to football literature in Argentina from the mid-1990s onwards was the sole result of the democratization of the Argentine literary circles that were eager to hear the voices of a growing number of "popular" writers, among them many former/current sport journalists who were starting to produce texts centered on 'the beautiful game'. However, it would be equally shortsighted to reduce this phenomenon exclusively to cold market variables. It is



true, new “football” authors like Eduardo Sacheri have a numerous readership, but that could also be said of Fontanarrosa and Soriano in the seemingly distant 1980s. What is more, the publishing house Ediciones al Arco, responsible for editing many of the new football fiction writers, remains—after almost twenty years and more than one-hundred titles later—as small, humble, and peripheral as it was in its beginnings in the year 2003.

What could be affirmed though, is that the growth of football’s transversal presence and relevance in Argentine society opened the doors for new critical approaches to this phenomenon (especially from the social sciences) and established its legitimacy as an object of studies. Simultaneously, the increasing number of writers who started including football as part of their fictional universes helped dispel (in part) the antiquated notion that this was a thematic area not worth exploring by more “serious” literature. More than twenty years later, when reflecting about this football “explosion”, Pablo Alabarces (2014) concludes:

...la explosión futbolística de los años noventa, el crecimiento descomunal del peso del deporte como mercancía mediática (...) permitió otra configuración del campo. En lo académico, se dio una mayor visibilidad y legitimidad a los estudios sociales del deporte y el fútbol latinoamericanos (...). En lo literario, apareció una profusión de compilaciones de crónicas, memorias y biografías —deudoras de la práctica periodística, que se volcaba al libro como forma de colonizar un espacio de una supuesta legitimidad mayor a la del periódico—; pero también narraciones, ficcionales o semificcionales, deudoras de la serie que inaugurara el inglés Nick Hornby con *Fever Pitch*... (Alabarces, 2014, p. 205)

Without trying to diminish the impact that Hornby’s acclaimed *Fever Pitch* and the works of the group of ensuing British *socceratti* may have had in the Argentine football literary scene, it can be confidently said Argentina had its own models and precursors in writers such as Fontanarrosa and Soriano. Furthermore, Galeano’s *Fútbol a sol y a sombra* marked a significant milestone in the recent history of football literature in Latin America as it did in Argentina the publishing of *Cuentos de fútbol argentino*, a book compiled by Fontanarrosa and published by Editorial Alfaguara in the momentous year of 1997. With the exception of Galeano’s *Su majestad el fútbol* (1968), Roberto Santoro’s seminal, pioneering but obscure *Literatura de la pelota* (1971) and Jorge Valdano’s Hispano-American compilation *Cuentos de fútbol* (also published by Alfaguara in Spain in 1995), there were no other compilations that brought to light the presence of football fiction within the field of Argentine literature.

### **The Maradona Factor in Argentine Football Literature: narrating the definite *pibe***

Cuando Maradona, fue por fin, expulsado del Mundial del 94, las canchas de fútbol perdieron a su rebelde más clamoroso. Y también perdieron a un jugador fantástico. Maradona es incontrolable cuando habla, pero mucho más cuando juega (...) En el frígido fútbol de fin de siglo, que exige ganar y prohíbe gozar, este hombre es uno de los pocos que demuestra que la fantasía puede también ser eficaz. (Galeano, 2006, p. 236)

In these lines, Eduardo Galeano (2006) summarizes part of the appeal of the stocky Argentinian number 10, that is, basically what we presented as the main features of *pibes*: his rebelliousness and his magical creativity. What is more, Maradona—Galeano continues—was not only a rebel within the football field, standing for players’ rights and speaking to power. Despite Galeano’s known tendency towards romanticism and Maradona’s own contradictory tendencies (for instance, defying FIFA and supporting Menem’s neoliberal government in the same decade), the weight, relevance and fertility of this player’s figure (both metaphorically and literally) cannot be denied, and this is what transforms him into a potent star around which many football fiction writers will gravitate.

This is already evident in 1997’s anthology *Cuentos de fútbol argentino*, where José Pablo Feinmann (“Dieguito”), Guillermo Saccomanno (“Transito”) and Rodrigo Fresán (“Final”) arrange their stories around the Maradona persona/myth. While Fresán presents the magical feats of Diego in Mexico as both background noise and curative treatment for his recent divorce, Feinmann and Saccomanno focus on the off-the-field football star, as shown and consumed on TV (Feinmann) and on the street posters of an infamous anti-drug campaign (1996’s “Sol sin Droga”) during Menem’s government.

Maradona is presented in these stories as a phantasmatic and mediated individual, either as a via-satellite miracle-maker equally capable of mesmerizing an intellectual with no previous football interest or experience (in Fresán’s “Final”), an eight-year-old doll-loving “idiot” (in Feinmann’s “Dieguito”) or as a time-frozen and multiplied smiling face captured and reproduced in a million posters invading the streets of Buenos Aires (in Saccomanno’s “Transito”). Interestingly, the only material appearance of the flesh and bone Maradona occurs when he is already presumably dead, when Dieguito (the idiot in Feinmann’s story) finds his idol’s deteriorated body, moments after being crushed by a train when trying to cross the railways with his expensive car while the barriers were down (the ineffable *pibe* fulfilling his mythical destiny by dying while attempting to break the law). Feinmann’s metaphor is strong and it can serve to explain Diego’s centrality in the realm of Argentine football literature: now that the national hero is down, it is time for us (the football idiots?) to try to re-assemble his figure. This is exactly what young Dieguito struggles to do in a literal way by carrying Maradona’s body to his house’s attic and—using his doll-maker expertise—attempting to sew him back to life: in his own gerund-ridden speech “Dieguito armando Maradona” (Dieguito assembling Maradona).

Trying to define the figure of Diego Maradona can be a challenging task. He is pure excessiveness, the nodal point of most contemporary football narratives in Argentina, exactly at the center of it, but also escaping all categories with a creativeness that exceeds that of his bodily performances within a football field. Maradona is much more than an incredibly gifted left foot; he is also a voice: a very resounding one<sup>1</sup>. A voice in country full of voices

---

<sup>1</sup> In his autobiography, *Yo soy el Diego de la gente*, Maradona acknowledges and embraces this characterization: “Yo soy la voz de los sin voz, la voz de mucha gente que se siente representada por mí, yo tengo un micrófono delante y ellos en su puta vida podrán tenerlo” (p.133).

where arguing and debating are national pastimes, and verbally dissecting Diego's chaotic and unique life became a habit. Written in 1995, read for the first time in Alejandro Apo's radio show "Todo con afecto" in 1996<sup>2</sup> and published in 2000's *Esperándolo a Tito* and 2013's anthology *La vida que pensamos*, Eduardo Sacheri's "Me van a tener que disculpar" is both a diatribe against the fanatical admirers as well as the implacable detractors of the legendary number ten, as well as an attempt to rationally articulate the narrator's own suspension of all critical judgment and ethical coherence when dealing with Maradona's figure.

The author's exceptional treatment of Maradona stems from a debt he feels he has with the emblematic football player. A debt that originated on June 22<sup>nd</sup> 1986, in a torrid Mexican midday, a day in which Maradona entered immortality and ultimately became Argentina's *pibe* for the rest of eternity by scoring 20<sup>th</sup> century's most beautiful and symbolically charged goal (or we should say, pair of goals) against the English team. As the narrator explains, the political resonance of this match was obvious: the Falklands/Malvinas war had taken place only four years earlier and the pain and the frustration were still fresh in the minds of most Argentinians. In this context, following Michael Billig's (1995) concept, something as banal as football becomes a much more emotionally charged territory, a potent communal channel of expression:

No es un partido. Mejor dicho: no es solo un partido. Hay algo más. Hay mucha rabia, y mucho dolor, y mucha frustración acumuladas en todos esos tipos que miran la tele. Son emociones que no nacieron por el fútbol. Nacieron en otro lado. En un sitio mucho más terrible, mucho más hostil, mucho más irrevocable. Pero a nosotros, a los de acá, no nos cabe otra que contestar en una cancha... (Sacheri, 2013, p.55)

It is precisely in the midst of this rarified scenario that "he" (Sacheri, the same as Hernán Casciari almost twenty years later, does not need to mention Maradona by name) humiliates the English "big Other", first by stealing from them, using his hand—or that of "God"—illegally (in the realm of professional football, but almost logically in the world of short,

---

<sup>2</sup> From 1995, Apo's show took over Saturday's *siesta* hours and filled it with music, interviews, anecdotes and, crucially, football literature. The oral register dominating large part of football short stories as well as its reduced extension made them perfect for this medium. Apo not only used his show to revisit and promote the work of published writers such as Soriano, Sasurain or Fontanarrosa, but also provided an invaluable space for unpublished ones who could send their work for Alejandro to read in his program. The most remarkable of these previously unpublished authors was Eduardo Sacheri, a history teacher who in 1996 sent Apo three short stories ("Me van a tener que disculpar", "De chilena" and "Esperándolo a Tito") that earned him immediate recognition among listeners and in turn, helped fuel his career as a writer.

mischievous *pibes*<sup>3</sup>) to score the match's first goal, to later forever embarrass them by single-handedly dribbling past half the English team before sending the ball to the net. As he narrates Maradona's second goal, Sacheri does not shy away from employing the notion of football as a metaphor of war, in this case, a little, insignificant but unforgettable war won by an artist dancing to the idiosyncratic (thus hardly comprehensible for "the others") music of Argentine *gambetas*:

Arranca desde el medio, desde su campo (...) Y aunque va de azul, va con la bandera. La lleva en la mano, aunque nadie la vea. Empieza a desparramarlos para siempre. Y los va liquidando uno por uno, moviéndose al calor de una música que ellos, pobres giles, no entienden. (Sacheri, 213, p.56)

These same historic *gambetas* are referred by Hernán Casciari (in his short story "10.6 segundos") as something mystical while Maradona— simply mentioned in the story as "the player" or "the Argentine player"— is presented as a ball sorcerer, a privileged knower of the secret geometry of dribbling, someone capable of—through his intimate contact with the ball as a sacred sphere—seeing the infinite universe from his own leathered aleph, someone able to suspend time and belief for the duration of his fleeting miracle. A miracle that perfectly aligns with the Argentine football narrative tradition and serves to confirm the long-awaited arrival of the definite *pibe*.

As we observe, it can prove difficult for Argentine football writers to abstain from approaching the figure of Maradona from an emotional realm. This should come as no surprise, however, as it confirms and reinforces Eduardo Archetti's theory (1997) that bases and explains not just the popularity of the *pibe* from Villa Fiorito, but also the intensity and the extent of the devotion for this football player on his remarkable capacity of producing collective joy:

The fond remembrance of his achievements however does not explain his almost sacred status and cult in Argentina. (...) His possession of the human gift of producing and giving joy lies behind his incomparable cult. Being the cause of individual feelings of joy and enabling a collective expression is Maradona's precious secret, a very simple one indeed. (Archetti, Armstrong & Giulianotti, 1997, p. 44)

---

<sup>3</sup> Argentine *pibes*' adoption of this alternative set of rules, codes and practices among which we find the favoring of joy, aesthetic pleasure and creativity over practicality and systematicity, and the use of tricks and simulation to escape the laws of the game can be read as, both, a subversive and a conservative element. Subversive in the way Josefina Ludmer (1988, p.210) understands it in Hernández's Martín Fierro—the central work of *gauchesca* literature— where an autonomous and organic oral code exists side by side with the written law of the land and sometimes supplants it; conservative when this alternative code becomes a nostalgic imposition, the only possible way of playing the game the "Argentine way". Football literature and sport journalism in Argentina will move back and forth, inhabiting the tension between these extremes.

## Diego Maradona and the Power of Dreams: A Star to Guide Us through Darkness

This unique joy inducing capacity is highlighted by another one of Casciari's stories "Vivir para contarlo (Carta a Diego)", a text originally published in 2004 as part of the blognovel *Más respeto que soy tu madre* at a critical time in Maradona's life when he was on the brink of death for the second time in four years. In this text Casciari employs the narrative voice of a housewife (Mirta Bertotti) to help explain Argentinians' adoration for Maradona by acknowledging Diego as the main source of happiness for her family and her sad, neglected and divided country in the past twenty years<sup>4</sup>: "Me dan ganas de explicarle al mundo qué país es este, qué pocas alegrías hemos tenido en los últimos veinte años, y que de esas pocas, casi todas vinieron con tu firma" (Casciari, pp. 204-205). The author touches on Diego's particular loquacity when the narrator confesses her dislike for him due to his arrogance and foul-mouthedness while at the same time proving that his excessiveness exceeds the realm of football, impacting the lives of those, like Mirta, who do not care about the sport.

Another important point this story makes is that of the role of football in general and Maradona in particular as a sentimental trigger for Argentine men. The narrator comments that Maradona helped her realize that her husband was able to let his emotions flow (and that he had any) as two of the three times she saw him cry were because of Diego. This is another recurring element in Argentine football literature, where we see (mostly male) characters use the sport as a safe channel for the expression and communication of intimate feelings. Mariano Siskind (2012) describes this as the "socio-affective significance" of football which he presents as a "proven global fact". Football, he continues, is much more than a sport as it is also "...one of the names of the sentimental mediations that make up our (masculine for the most part) subjective identities, and the relations we form with our fathers, our sons, our friends" (paras.4). In other words, football is not just a sport but a sentimentally and emotionally charged symbolic territory, a world where identities are shaped, one which accompanies subjects throughout their lives. A world that most Argentine football writers find imperative to capture and protect.

One of such crucial territories to be protected, that of adolescence, is at the center of "Bautismos", a short story exquisitely written by Walter Vargas where two idle and horny teenagers witness, by accident, the first squad "baptism" of an also pubescent Diego Maradona. This friendly match, which has been forgotten, eclipsed by Diego's official debut in October of that same year, took place in La Plata on September 5th, 1976. In "Un sueño de barrilete" (A kite's dream) a part chronicle, part interview that journalist Horacio Pagani

---

<sup>4</sup> Nicolas Sorin's independent film "El camino de San Diego" (2006), set in 2004, also centers on this emotional debt and the religious fervor around Diego's figure.

published on November 17th, 1976 in the Argentine newspaper *Clarín*<sup>5</sup>, Maradona makes reference to the friendly match that Vargas rescued from oblivion: “Un día fuimos a La Plata a jugar un amistoso contra Estudiantes y cuando bajaba del micro el técnico me avisó que iba a estar en el banco de Primera. Jugué cinco minutos” (paras. 8). This type of narrative serves to represent another one of Argentine football literature’s distinctive characteristics, that is, its ability to go above and beyond the journalistic coverage of sports, turning its attention to “non-events”, capturing their human, social and intra-historical significance.

In the now highly collectible article, Pagani describes the state of Argentine football in that period as “anemic” and the 16-year-old Maradona is presented as an illusion, a dream, which feeds the collective imaginary of the entire “football nation”. A dream that, in those somber and dictatorial days, only a teenager could be brave enough to entertain. It is precisely that what the two protagonists in Vargas’ story do as they walk through the streets of La Plata: they dream of the beautiful spring to come, of the girls they fantasize having sex with, of summer and freedom. However, their daydreaming is abruptly interrupted by the presence of a police cordon typical under that dictatorship. After showing their IDs and receiving the obligatory admonition by the officer in charge, the boys realize they have just gone through their own kind of sordid baptism.

One of Vargas’s major accomplishments in this story is the vividness with which he depicts the everyday, routinely aspects of living under a dictatorship; a subtle and ominous presence working in the background of an otherwise sunny and peaceful Sunday afternoon. Another one is his ability to uncover the density and significance of even the most seemingly trivial actions, the characters’ dexterous inhabitation of the microscopic instances of power within society, the creation of almost imperceptible pockets of resistance. For this, he resorts to the intrepidity of *pibes*, neither afraid to verbalize their raging, imaginative (and up to that point mainly imaginary) sexuality in times of strict state censorship and imposed decorum, nor to express their simple yet powerful and insightful political views. However, as Pagani indicates, one must dream to regenerate the faith, and this is by far the most subversive of all actions these *pibes* (the story’s two protagonists and the young Maradona) perform.

After going through the police control, the teenagers decide to head to the stadium of Estudiantes de La Plata as they know a friendly match is being played there and assume the doors should be open as the game must be reaching its final stage. Their assumption turns out to be correct and they unimpededly join a small crowd of fans bored to death by a slow and uneventful match. Enter Maradona.

---

<sup>5</sup> Coincidentally, Maradona’s first appearance in the national press was on September 28, 1971, also in *Clarín* where a reporter (who did not sign the article) was captivated by Diego’s juggling skills during the halftime of a match between Argentinos Juniors and Independiente. Although his last name got butchered (Caradona) the report did not miss Diego’s link to the *pibe* tradition as he is described as someone who has escaped from a *potrero* (Wilson, 2007, p. 209).

When spotting the stocky Diego getting ready to enter the field, the teenagers first recognize him due to his ephemeral participation as a ball juggler in a famous Argentine TV Show (“Sábados circulares”) to then acknowledge him as a fellow generational member, a *pibe* in a world of adults: “¡Pero es más pibito que nosotros! (...) Mirá la cara de pendejito que tiene. El técnico debe querer probarlo para ver si se la banca” (Vargas, p.108). As soon as he gets the ball, two experienced and tough defensive players of the opposing team (Miguel Angel Reguera and Carlos Pachamé) approach him with the unmistakable intention of intimidating young Diego, knocking him down while trying to strip him of the ball. In short, a traditional “welcome” to the rough world of adult football; Diego Maradona’s own baptism:

...a su encuentro iban Reguera y Pachamé ... como (...) dos leones hambrientos (...) entendidos de que no estaba en juego una pelota cualquiera (...) sino una pelota que definía claramente la línea que separaba el honor de la humillación. ¿O se iban a dejar ningunear por ese mocoso que a lo mejor todavía juntaba figuritas? (Vargas, p.109)

In this passage we find the notion of the duel and the ensuing menace to the participants’ personal honor as another element that reverberates throughout Argentine football narratives, along with the added ingredient of a generational showdown. More importantly, the rough and violent nature of Maradona’s adversaries in this story not only can be said to typify the state of Argentine football in the mid 1970’s but also the temperament of Argentine society as a whole. Naturally, Diego responds to this threat as only a *pibe* would: dribbling past his opponents, toying with them, making them look ridiculous thus reverting their age statuses: “Reguera cayó sentado como un bebé que juega con el balde y la palita en el charco de la playa. Pachamé quedo con una rodilla apoyada en el suelo, como Colón... con pantalones cortos...” (Vargas, 2004, p.109)

Maradona’s emergence represents more than just the arrival of another Argentinian dribbler, plentiful up until the 1950’s and always part of the (mythical) national footballing landscape. As previously stated, he incarnates the mythical construction of the figure of the *pibe* in the realm of Argentine football, but crucially, as a prototypical *pibe*, he also embodies the quintessential defiance to rules and authorities; a rebellious individual (a teenager who else?) who dares to dream and freely play in times of highly mechanized, well-oiled machines: those of 1970s tactical football and the dictatorial machines of death and repression.

Along similar lines, the power of dreams in dark times, the myth of Maradona and the idea of the return to football’s most basic and pure aspects are part of Sergio Olguín’s 2004 young-adults novel *El equipo de los sueños* (The Dream Team), a bildungsroman built around a teenage crusade consisting of the recovery of Diego’s first ball in the depths of Villa Fiorito. The author cleverly turns Maradona’s original, metaphorical and unstainable ball into a real and historical one: young Diego Maradona’s first ball, a sort of Holy Grail of Argentine football, which has been stolen to be sold to the highest bidder. Fourteen-year-old Ariel, the

story's protagonist, is the one - with the help of a group of friends: his "dream team" - in charge of recovering this highly symbolic item, and with it, salvaging what is left of football's - and metonymically - society's integrity in the aftermath of 2001's Argentinian collapse.

Insofar as Maradona's ball symbolizes the purest, most essential aspect of this hyper-commoditized sport, its retrieval, along with the deliberate effort to not turn it into saleable merchandise, represents not only an act of rebellion but also the reclamation of utopia in the midst of a corrupted and cynical social and political scenario<sup>6</sup>. Olguín offers a hopeful and encouraging vision that escapes from televised football and the panoptic experience of the stadiums to take his attention back to this sport at the grassroots level where community replaces commodity and people can afford the luxury of entertaining their own dreams. The author understands football - with its enormous transversal potentiality - as a site from which to rebuild a disintegrating community or, at the very least, offer a space of resistance to this gradual but seemingly inevitable process.

Similarly, many of this subgenre's works continually insist on the urgent need to re-humanize sport and by extension, life in general by recapturing the plasticity and freedom of play (exactly what *pibes* like Maradona and his literary ghosts do best). Following this sport's Argentine narrative tradition these texts create a territory where rules and regulations do not matter as much as the priceless and liberating opportunity to express oneself creatively. A territory where losers and antiheroes have the chance of founding their own epic of defeat, a defeat that is never completely so and always a partial victory against the monopolization of life's possible outcomes.

### **Football's monstrosity: Maradona's haunting ghost**

In the last section of this text, we will focus on the work of Horacio Convertini, a writer who focuses on the lives of anonymous and peripheral characters/players (a common feature of the subgenre) and, using elements from the noir genre, explores the sordidness and inhumanity of professional football. In his football-themed novels *El refuerzo* (2008) and *El último milagro* (2013) we find no traces of the idyllic and nostalgic patina that some other writers (Sacheri, Scher, Bracelli, Roncoli, etc.) cast over this central area of Argentine culture and their own sentimental education. For Convertini, football is not a space of freedom and resistance but one of blind and painful submission where footballers have lost ownership of their bodies and are bonded to a life of strenuous play (i.e., work) for the enjoyment and the benefit of others, a situation that connects them to other liminal subjects such as hitmen, slaves and prostitutes.

---

<sup>6</sup> In the novel's closing paragraphs Ariel describes his encounter with this mythical ball in quasi-religious terms: "Bajé mis manos como ...los creyentes que meten las manos en el Ganges. Tomé la pelota ... ese cuero viejo y gastado pero limpio, eternamente limpio por los siglos de los siglos (...) Juro que esa pelota latía" (Olguín, 2004, pp.198-199).



This is the case of “El tanque Millán”, the protagonist of *El refuerzo*, an aging second-rate center-forward with a busted knee that wants to escape what he defines as the transient circus of professional football. Millán’s dream is not entirely different from that of the *gaucho* Martín Fierro in *La Vuelta*, that is to find a peaceful place where to rest his bones after a long and infamous life of errancy<sup>7</sup>. However, this is not an easy task as he sees the window of opportunity shrinking as he reaches the last years of his obscure career as a footballer. That is why, it does not come as a surprise to see him jumping at the possibility of earning some easy money (ten thousand dollars) by playing the final of a regional tournament for a team in the Argentine countryside. The town is called Villa Luppi and its exact location is never revealed, but the cardinal direction and the intertextuality are clear: Millán has to go south, to “El Sur” where he will face and be haunted by a contemporary cipher of the South— not Borges’s static *gaucho*—: number ten, Diego Maradona or the quintessential Argentine *pibe*.

Once in the small town, Millán is introduced as “Maravilla Millán” a nickname that is not his, and to make matters worse, he is handed Club Atlético Villa Luppi’s number ten jersey: “Antes de ponerse la camiseta, miró el número. Diez. La cifra mágica del fútbol. Pelé, Platini, Maradona. ¿Y si se habían confundido de jugador?... Millán sintió que las cosas no encajaban bien” (p.61). This number was surely the right fit for “Maravilla Millán” as they had called him, the problem was that there was nothing marvelous about his style of play. He was simply “El tanque” (the tank) a robust center-forward with a powerful right foot, an ailing knee, and little else. The familiar horror of *the double* reemerges as Millán feels himself vanishing under the pressing desire of Argentine football’s fabricated traditions. He is to become Argentine’s mythical number ten in order to succeed; a *pibe* in the middle of this country’s fertile *pampas*, the ultimate traditional narrative Frankenstein. Expectedly, the protagonist miserably fails to find his inner *pibe*<sup>8</sup>—according to the journalistic myth, present in every Argentine football player’s DNA— and becomes another victim of this narrative creation. Maradona’s number ten jersey—as that of Argentine *pibe*’s most perfect reincarnation—functions in this story (as it does in the realm of Argentine football) not only as an *empty signifier* but also as an oppressive symbol, haunting those who try to fill this void, invariably condemning them to the role of imposters.

By the end of the story, Millán, as a footballing Bartleby, prefers not to move anymore, to stop forcing his wrecked and abused body in the chase of an ever-elusive dream. A dream that on the Argentine context is based almost entirely on the *pibe*/Maradona myth, which promises fame, money, glory, and a quick way out of poverty to millions of hopeful individuals. Crucially—by focusing on this minimal and marginal football stories—Convertini as well as other football literature authors (Fontanarrosa, Vargas, Sacheri, Scher,

<sup>7</sup> Millán’s life as a second-rate professional footballer is described as infamous, marked by its fleetingness and emptiness, the life of a survivor and a mercenary, a football vagabond destined to be forgotten (Convertini, p.12).

<sup>8</sup> Unlike characters such as the protagonist of Sacheri’s short story “Ultimo hombre”, a dull and conservative defender who, magically and momentarily inhabited by the mythical *pibe*, dribbles his way towards freedom and indocility.

etc.) exposes what the sport media typically keeps hidden under the overwhelming spectacularization of 21st century's glamorous, commodified, and ultra-professional football; the *pibe* myth as an instance of the *unheimlich*: warm, familiar but also terrifying, a voracious monster feeding off millions of aspiring players' partially impaired, maimed or dead bodies. The road to professional success is paved with them and this literary subgenre does its small part to provide some visibility to this lesser explored side of the football phenomenon.

To conclude, football literature is much more than literature about football as this sport's transversality makes it an ideal vehicle to look at (in this case) Argentine society's history, intra-history, tensions, and internal contradictions. This subgenre's uncomfortable and very productive place (in-between journalism and literature, the traditional and the disruptive, the central and the eminently peripheral) allows for a much-needed reflection on this society from one of its focal cultural phenomena. Furthermore, we understand Maradona as the indisputable center, the nodal point or *point de capiton* following Laclau's (and Lacan's) term, around which the contemporary discourse of Argentine football is organized. He acts as an *empty signifier* but also a floating one (Laclau, 1996, p.36), providing the internal limits of discursivity and the possibility of producing new chains of equivalence<sup>9</sup>. As such, Maradona's relevance and area of influence naturally expands to reach that of Argentine football literature, whose authors take advantage of the flexibility of his figure and myth to elaborate on some of this subgenre's central themes. Without trying to be definite or comprehensive, this study has focused on one possible approach to the reading of this corpus through his figure.

## References

- Alabarces, P. (2008). Fútbol y patria: el fútbol y las narrativas de la nación en la Argentina. Buenos Aires. Prometeo Libros.
- Alabarces, P. (2014). Héroe, machos y patriotas. Buenos Aires. Aguilar.
- Archetti, E., Armstrong, G., & Giulianotti, R. (1997). 'And give joy to my heart'. Ideology and emotions in the Argentinian cult of Maradona. Oxford: England. Berg.
- Archetti, E. (1999). Masculinities: Football, polo, and the tango in Argentina. Oxford: UK. Berg.
- Billig, M. (1995). Banal nationalism. Los Angeles. Sage.
- Casciari, H. (2005). "Vivir para contarlo (Carta a Diego)" in Más respeto que soy tu madre. Buenos Aires. Editorial Orsai.

---

<sup>9</sup> For instance, Messi is obviously not Maradona (hence he is Messi) but in the Argentine context his actions on and off a football field are characterized and defined in relation to Diego's.

- Casciari, H. (2021). "10.6 segundos" in *Messi es un perro y otros cuentos*. Buenos Aires. Editorial Orsai.
- Convertini, H. (2008) *El refuerzo*. Alicante: España. Agua Clara.
- Feinmann, J.P. (1997) "Dieguito" in *Cuentos de fútbol argentino*. Buenos Aires. Alfaguara.
- Fresán, R. (1997) "Final" in *Cuentos de fútbol argentino*. Buenos Aires. Alfaguara, 1997.
- Galeano, E. (2006) *El fútbol a sol y sombra*. Madrid: España. Siglo XXI Editores SA.
- Laclau, E. (1996) *Emancipation(s)*. New York: NY. Verso.
- Ludmer, J. (1988) *El género gauchesco: un tratado sobre la patria*. Buenos Aires. Editorial Sudamericana.
- Maradona, D. Arcucci, D., & Cherquis Bialo, E. (2001). *Yo soy el Diego: (... de la gente)*. La Habana: Cuba: Instituto Cubano del Libro.
- Olguín, S. (2004). *El equipo de los sueños*. Buenos Aires. Grupo Editorial Norma.
- Pagani, H. (1976). *Un sueño de barrilete*. La Agenda - Ideas Y Cultura En La Ciudad. <https://laagenda.buenosaires.gob.ar/post/132210100970/un-sue%C3%B1o-de-barrilete>
- Sacomanno, G. (1997) "Tránsito" in *Cuentos de fútbol argentino*. Buenos Aires: Alfaguara.
- Sacheri, E. (2000) "Último hombre" in *Esperándolo a Tito y otros cuentos de fútbol*. Buenos Aires. Galerna.
- Sacheri, E. (2013). "Me van a tener que disculpar" in *La vida que pensamos*. Mexico, D.F. Alfaguara
- Sarlo, B. (1998 July 8) *Una comunidad llamada nación* in *diario Perfil*. Buenos Aires.
- Sebreli, Juan J. (1998) *La Era Del Fútbol*. Buenos Aires. Editorial Sudamericana.
- Siskind, M. (2012). *Sentimental Soccer* (English version). In *archive.revista.drclas.harvard.edu*. *ReVista*. Harvard Review of Latin America. <https://archive.revista.drclas.harvard.edu/book/sentimental-soccer>
- Vargas, W. (2004) "Bautismos" in *Del diario íntimo de un chico rubio y otras historias futboleras*. Buenos Aires. Ediciones Al Arco.
- Wilson, J. (2017). *Angels with dirty faces: the football history of Argentina*. London Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

**About the author**

Carlos Andrés Bertoglio is an Assistant Professor of Latin American Literature and Culture at Southern Utah University. His research mainly focuses on the intersection of Latin American Popular Culture and Literature from the 1990s onwards. He has published part of his academic work in journals such as *Céfiro* (Texas Tech University) and *Soccer and Society* (Routledge).

carlosbertoglio@suu.edu

## Santa Maradona: agiografia di un calciatore.

Alessandro Perissinotto

Università degli Studi di Torino

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6093/2532-6732/8971>

### Abstract

In 2001, the movie *Santa Maradona*, directed by Marco Ponti, was released. Its title was taken from the song of the same name by Mano Negra. The movie make no mention of Maradona and this is, paradoxically, the most interesting aspect for an investigation into the role of the Argentinean superstar in the popular imagination, because the simple evocation in the title allows the director to create a paradigmatic link between his characters and a real person who has now become an exemplary character in human comedy, Maradona. Like the saints in the medieval *exempla*, *El Pibe de Oro* is the one who falls into sin, but who never ceases to point out an exemplary path of redemption and redemption. This essay proposes to analyse the "secular sanctification" of Diego Armando Maradona, a process of beatification that had already begun during his life and, forcibly, accelerated the day after his death.

**Keywords:** cinema; social impact; iconology

### Da idolo a Dio, da Dio a Santo.

“L’idolo delle folle”, espressione iper-codificata che si attaglia a moltissimi campioni dello sport, ma non a Maradona e le ragioni che fanno concludere che “idolo” sia un termine riduttivo se applicato al Pibe de Oro hanno un grande rilevanza per lo studio della costruzione sociale della realtà. Benché la parola “idolo” muti il proprio significato passando dall’ambito religioso a quello della cultura di massa, essa conserva nel proprio nucleo semantico il valore di “oggetto di venerazione” e non vi è dubbio che Diego Armando Maradona sia stato, in vita e in morte, l’oggetto di una venerazione collettiva; tuttavia, il concetto di idolo nelle religioni monoteiste (e la matrice cattolica dell’Argentina ci costringe a confrontarci con queste) assume una connotazione fortemente negativa.

Per il cristianesimo (e non solo) l’idolo è l’oggetto che si sostituisce a Dio, è la reificazione immanente di un’entità che, per non perdere le proprie caratteristiche divine, deve rimanere immateriale e trascendente; tanto per l’Antico Testamento quanto per il Nuovo, l’idolatria è uno dei peccati più gravi. D’altro canto però, il cristianesimo ammette e incoraggia il culto dei santi, cioè di figure di transizione tra la corporeità e l’incorporeità, tra l’immanente e il trascendente; nel venerare i santi, il fedele non commette peccato, perché il santo non è l’oggetto della venerazione, ma il tramite attraverso il quale passa la venerazione di Dio. E, naturalmente, non commette peccato nel venerare l’incarnazione stessa del Dio, cioè Gesù Cristo.

Ecco, questo saggio intende mostrare come la narrazione intorno a Diego Armando Maradona abbia costruito non un idolo laico o, peggio, pagano, ma una figura oscillante tra la santità e la divinità. In altri termini, questo lavoro vuole mostrare come il racconto su Maradona sia, caso quasi unico nel mondo dello sport, un'autentica agiografia che presenta molti tratti in comune con le agiografie medievali.

Contrariamente a quanto accade con queste ultime però, nel flusso narrativo su Santa Maradona è possibile individuare un primo autore e una data di inizio: l'autore è Maradona stesso e la data di inizio è il 22 giugno 1986. Quel giorno Maradona, con la maglia dell'Argentina, segna all'odiata compagine inglese due gol completamente diversi: il più grande gol nella storia della Coppa del Mondo FIFA (la definizione è ormai ufficiale) e quello più antisportivo, con la mano sinistra che colpisce la palla e la indirizza in porta scavalcando il portiere in uscita. Ed è proprio con quella rete rubata, con il gol "del ladron" e del "pecador", come lo definirà Eduardo Galeano (Galeano, 2017) che l'idolo si trasforma in divinità grazie a una felice invenzione verbale che, durante le interviste, attribuisce il colpo alla "Mano de dios". Lì per lì, sembra solo una battuta fortunata, ma ciò che accadrà dopo dimostrerà che in quel momento si mettono le basi per l'incarnazione del divino nella figura di Diego Armando Maradona.

Nel definire la propria mano la "Mano de dios", il calciatore non si limita a un "dire", ma conferisce alle sue parole lo statuto di "segni efficaci" (Marin, 1986), cioè performativi; il suo verbo, attraverso un processo retorico e semiotico di "trans-significazione" (Fabbri, 1993), consente una transustanziazione quasi eucaristica: l'umanissimo arto che ha toccato il pallone assume natura divina, non proprio un dio da mangiare, come nel sacrificio eucaristico, ma almeno un dio da portare in campo, un dio che, dopo la mano, prenderà possesso, almeno nella leggenda, dell'intero corpo di Maradona. E, riprendendo i termini proposti da Luis Marin, noi possiamo reperire un altro "segno efficace" nel tetragramma "D10S". Il processo qui non si limita alla "trans-significazione", ma passa anche attraverso la "trans-figurazione": il numero 10 del centravanti si sostituisce alle lettere I e O della parola Dios e, nuovamente, propone una transustanziazione tra il giocatore e la divinità.

Ancora una volta, il meccanismo può apparire ingenuo, quasi puerile, ma, lo sappiamo bene, i dispositivi che meglio funzionano nella comunicazione di massa sono proprio i più semplici. Il problema non è quello di un'analisi in *corpore vili*, ma semmai quello della creazione di un corpus di testi compiuto e coerente. Dunque meglio sgomberare il campo da fraintendimenti e inutili aspettative: in questo saggio non vi sarà alcun corpus definito e omogeneo; i testi che verranno presi in esame per ricostruire il percorso agiografico su Maradona saranno i più vari, dagli articoli giornalistici ai dibattiti televisivi, dalle immagini stampate sulle cover per i telefonini alle canzoni e, naturalmente, ogni pretesa di esaustività deve essere considerata più che velleitaria.



Poster di Maradona in vendita sul web

(<https://www.redbubble.com/i/poster/Maradona-d10s-by-orion3g/63793701.LVTDI>)

Ma che dio è quello che scende in campo per restituire agli argentini l'onore perduto durante la guerra delle Falkland? Che dio è quello che, attraverso le performance di un giocatore piccolo e tarchiato, vuole ribadire (come ancora oggi si vede scritto con vernice brillante sulle insegne di molti circoli sociali in Patagonia) che *Las Malvinas son argentinas*? (Donot, 2015)

Ci viene di nuovo in aiuto il ritratto che lo scrittore uruguayano Eduardo Galeano (2017) fa del suo amico Maradona:

Ningún futbolista consagrado había denunciado sin pelos en la lengua a los amos del negocio del fútbol. Fue el deportista más famoso y más popular de todos los tiempos quien rompió lanzas en defensa de los jugadores que no eran famosos ni populares.

Este ídolo generoso y solidario había sido capaz de cometer, en apenas cinco minutos, los dos goles más contradictorios de toda la historia del fútbol. Sus devotos lo veneraban por los dos: no sólo era digno de admiración el gol del artista, bordado por las diabluras de sus piernas, sino también, y quizá más, el gol del ladrón, que su mano robó. Diego Armando Maradona fue adorado no sólo por sus prodigiosos malabarismos sino también porque era un dios sucio, pecador, el más humano de los dioses. Cualquiera podía reconocer en él una síntesis ambulante de las debilidades humanas, o al menos masculinas: mujeriego, tragón, borrachín, tramposo, mentiroso, fanfarrón, irresponsable. Pero los dioses no se jubilan, por humanos que sean. El nunca pudo regresar a la anónima multitud de donde venía. La fama, que lo había salvado de la miseria, lo hizo prisionero. Maradona fue condenado a creerse Maradona y obligado a ser la estrella de cada fiesta, el bebé de cada bautismo, el muerto de cada velorio. Más devastadora que la cocaína es la exitoína. Los análisis, de orina o de sangre, no delatan esta droga.

Galeano sostiene che i fan amano in egual misura i due gol della famosa partita Argentina-Inghilterra, ma un altro grande scrittore, Martin Amis (2004), afferma che:

Nell'America del Sud si dice a volte, o si suppone, che la chiave per capire il carattere degli argentini si trovi nella loro valutazione dei due gol di Maradona nella Coppa del Mondo dell'86. Per il primo gol, battezzato "la mano di Dio", Maradona era lievitato in maniera

incredibile su un cross e aveva mandato la palla in porta con un intelligentemente nascosto colpo della mano sinistra. Ma il secondo gol, che arrivò pochi minuti dopo, fu uno di quelli che Bobby Robson chiama un "maledetto miracolo": raccogliendo un passaggio da una punizione nella sua stessa area, Maradona come in un'espiazione, chinò la testa e sembrò volesse aprirsi una strada attraverso tutta la squadra inglese prima di mandare a terra Shilton con una finta e di mandare la palla in rete. Ebbene, in Argentina, è il primo gol e non il secondo quello che piace veramente. Per il macho argentino (o così dice almeno questa calunniosa generalizzazione) i modi furbi danno molta più soddisfazione di quelli corretti. Lo stesso succede a livello di governo e negli affari. Non tollerano solo la corruzione. La idolatrano. Si tratta di una propensione che si estende alla sfera sessuale nella quale si attribuisce un grande valore, nell'ambiente dei macho, alla sodomia eterosessuale [...]. Nel lessico personale di Maradona la stessa parola è usata per il segnare un gol e il fornicare.

Secondo Amis, i fan argentini amerebbero dunque maggiormente il gol del “furbo”, del “disonesto”, ma il rischio di un approccio superficiale, che lo stesso scrittore britannico intravede, è davvero grande; basta leggere gli articoli apparsi sui quotidiani italiani il 23 giugno del 1986 per capire quanta indulgenza vi sia, anche in Italia, nei confronti di quel gesto così antisportivo (Stampa Sera, nel titolo, associa la parola “Diavolo” a Maradona, ma l'intento è più che bonario). E allora ha ragione Galeano, il dio transunstanziato in Maradona è dunque un “un Dio sporco che ci assomiglia: donnaiole, chiacchierone, ubriacone, divoratore, irresponsabile, bugiardo, fanfarone” è “il più umano degli dei”. Ma è qui che la costruzione teologica vacilla: Dio (non un dio qualsiasi, ma il Dio dei cristiani) può farsi uomo, ma non peccatore; l'unico che si è fatto veramente uomo rimanendo veramente Dio, il Cristo, è stato preservato dal peccato, fin dal suo concepimento. La figura di Maradona è quindi costretta a scendere qualche gradino nell'Empireo, è costretta a ridimensionarsi, da D10S a Santa Maradona, e in questo passaggio la narrazione agiografica popolare diventa ancora più interessante sotto il profilo sociologico, perché la beatificazione in vita di un “santo peccatore” è un procedimento di modellizzazione sociale molto pericoloso. I rischi che si corrono sono quelli della caduta etica (idolatria della corruzione, machismo, violenza morale) che Martin Amis riconosceva nel popolo argentino e che invece è decisamente globalizzata. In altri passaggi di questo saggio proveremo a riconsiderare la portata di questi pericoli, ma, per il momento, limitiamoci a vedere come la figura del “santo peccatore”, capace di uccidere, di stuprare, ma anche di compiere miracoli, popoli i racconti dal medio evo fino ai giorni nostri (in realtà, il progetto ambiziosamente annunciato in questa frase si risolverà, per ragioni di spazio, in alcune esemplificazioni).

### **Il Santo Peccatore nell'agiografia medievale.**

Il legame tra il peccato e la santità è antico quanto la santità stessa: Maria Maddalena, la prostituta redenta (almeno secondo la maggior parte delle interpretazioni), è probabilmente il primo esempio di Santa Peccatrice. La segue di poco, in ordine di apparizione, San Paolo, il persecutore seriale di cristiani folgorato sulla via di Damasco; non un semplice peccatore, ma un vero e proprio *rough hero*.

Il rough hero, nella definizione di Eaton, è come l'antieroe un personaggio pieno di difetti, ma i suoi difetti sono decisamente più gravi: è un sociopatico, un fuorilegge, un assassino,



uno psicopatico, un sadico [...] Ma se il *rough hero* viene rappresentato come moralmente inaccettabile in assoluto per lo spettatore, quello stesso personaggio in ogni caso è sempre il protagonista del racconto che lo spettatore deve trovare affascinante, e che deve essere oggetto del suo coinvolgimento emotivo. Secondo Eaton le tecniche narrative per ottenere questo effetto sono varie. Il *rough hero* viene spesso rappresentato come carico di tratti umanizzanti e idealizzanti: è ad esempio leale, attento, e premuroso nei confronti della famiglia, degli amici, dei bambini o degli animali, o di qualsiasi essere indifeso. È spesso carismatico e affascinante. (Bernardelli, 2016, pp. 26-26)

Forse Maradona non è un autentico *rough hero* nei difetti, ma la narrazione dei suoi “tratti umanizzanti” è del tutto aderente a quella utilizzata per rendere accettabili gli eroi sociopatici, assassini e sadici. Non vi sono invece dubbi sul fatto che San Paolo rientri perfettamente nella categoria del *rough hero* e che in tale categoria rientrino anche molti altri santi prima disumani e poi più che umani. Seguiamo quindi le gesta di uno di essi: Sant’Albano. Il testo al quale ci riferiamo è *La leggenda di sant’Albano, prosa inedita del secolo XIV e la Storia di San Giovanni Boccadoro secondo due antiche lezioni in ottava rima per cura di Alessandro D’Ancona* (1865, pp. 69-84). Ecco la sintesi della leggenda:

La figlia undicenne di un re indiano, cristiano, parte per una battuta di caccia insieme al padre, ma, inseguendo a cavallo un cervo, si perde e, sul far della sera, si trova davanti alla capanna di un eremita. Lì chiede ospitalità per la notte, ma il santo romito, temendo che si tratti del diavolo tentatore, la accoglie solo dopo molte insistenze. *Ma come la pulzella fu drento, el dimonio traditore incontamente ebbe tentato il romito di lussuria della fanciulletta, e di subito ebbe voglia di giacere co’ lei carnalmente. E di presente prese questa verginella, e a mal grado di lei e giacque con lei.* Compiuto lo stupro, l’eremita, di nome Albano, si rende però conto che il suo crimine non potrà rimanere nascosto; allora, preso un coltello, uccide la ragazzina con alcuni fendenti alla gola e ne seppellisce il corpo all’interno della capanna stessa. Uccide poi anche il cavallo e lo sotterra nelle vicinanze. Il giorno successivo, i cavalieri al servizio del re, seguendo proprio le tracce del cavallo, giungono dal romito, ma questi, con spergiuri e manifestazioni di puro ascetismo, li convince di non aver veduto né la fanciulla, né l’animale. Scampato il pericolo di essere scoperto, l’eremita sente tutto il peso del suo peccato e prende a condurre una vita ancora più essenziale, nutrendosi di radici, camminando carponi e non levando mai gli occhi al cielo. Passano sette anni e, durante un’altra battuta di caccia, il re e il suo seguito si imbattono nel romito, ormai belluino nell’aspetto: non reggendo la vista di un uomo che ancora manifestava nell’aspetto tutto il dolore per la perdita della figlia, Albano gli confessa la verità e lo conduce nel luogo dove è sepolta la principessa. Di fronte alla sepoltura della ragazzina, il re impone all’eremita di levare finalmente gli occhi al cielo e di pregare Dio perché resusciti la povera vittima: se i sette anni di penitenza sono davvero stati accolti dall’Altissimo, questi concederà il miracolo. E così avviene: mentre dalla terra la principessa resuscita con le stesse fattezze di quando era stata uccisa, Albano viene assunto in cielo in mezzo a cori d’angeli. Il re, felice e commosso, riabbraccia la figlia e fa trasportare le spoglie mortali dell’eremita in un luogo dove egli farà edificare una chiesa affinché i fedeli possano venerare l’assassino redento e santificato, affinché possano celebrare il culto di Sant’Albano.

Nella vicenda di Sant’Albano, l’ascesa al cielo è preceduta da una discesa all’inferno: il peccato è condizione necessaria per la santità. A prima vista si potrebbe obiettare che l’analogia tra Sant’Albano e Santa Maradona si riduce all’appartenenza di entrambi alla categoria dei Santi

Peccatori. Questo non sarebbe già argomento da poco per lo studio della costruzione narrativa su Maradona, ma uno sguardo alle cronache giornalistiche ci dice che la *Leggenda di Sant'Albano* e mille altre narrazioni simili (la violenza carnale di un eremita su una fanciulla si ritrova, ad esempio, nell'*Orlando Furioso* o nella decima novella della terza giornata del Decameron, quella che vede come protagonisti Rustico e Alibech) costituiscono un architetto diffuso con il quale tutte le agiografie maradoniane, anche quelle inconsapevoli, devono fare i conti. Il 3 luglio del 2017, i giornali di tutto il mondo danno la notizia che Dieguito è stato accusato di molestie sessuali da parte di una giornalista russa, Katerina Nadolskaya. La donna sostiene che, dopo averla invitata nella sua camera d'albero a San Pietroburgo con la scusa di un'intervista, Maradona le avrebbe chiesto di spogliarsi e l'avrebbe molestata. Di segno opposto, ovviamente, la versione dell'entourage del calciatore, secondo il quale sarebbe stata la Nadolskaya a spogliarsi per accattivarsi le simpatie dell'intervistato. In questa sede non ci interessa stabilire quale delle posizioni sia la più fedele alla realtà, ma constatare come quell'episodio abbia generato altre narrazioni che, pur partendo dai fatti di San Pietroburgo, si ricollegano ad archetipi più antichi e profondi, cioè a testi diffusi che parlano di santi stupratori. Alcuni giorni dopo la morte del Pibe de Oro, la calciatrice spagnola Paula Dapena, che milita nel *Viajes Interrías FF* (in terza divisione femminile spagnola), si è platealmente rifiutata di rendere omaggio al giocatore scomparso e si è seduta a terra mentre le compagne seguivano compunte il rituale del minuto di silenzio. Spiegando il suo gesto al giornale online Pontevedra Viva, la giovane ha definito Maradona un "Violador, pedófilo y maltratador" e ha affermato: "Por las víctimas no se guardó un minuto de silencio, entonces, obviamente no estoy dispuesta a guardar un minuto silencio por un maltratador y que no se haga por las víctimas". La presa di posizione sarebbe del tutto condivisibile se i presupposti fossero verificati, ma non è così. E di nuovo non ci interessa prendere posizione nella vicenda, ma analizzare il flusso narrativo in cui prende forma il sostantivo "pedófilo" attribuito a Maradona; sì, perché se l'accusa di essere un violentatore può nascere dal caso Nadolskaya e quella di essere un violento dalle dichiarazioni rese dalla ex compagna Rocio Oliva nel 2014, quella di pedofilia sembra essere abbinata alle altre per soprammisura, per appesantire il carico, partendo non da voci correnti (per quanto incontrollate), ma proprio da quell'archetipo testuale nel quale il Santo Peccatore è stupratore di bambine. Ovviamente, l'idea di fondo non è che la giovane calciatrice spagnola abbia letto la leggenda di Sant'Albano, ma che esista un modello culturale, antico di secoli ma ancora estremamente attuale, che attribuisce al Santo Peccatore, al *rough hero* delle agiografie vecchie e nuove determinate caratteristiche; in altre parole, è come se anche Paula Dapena, pur col suo gesto controcorrente, avesse contribuito a collocare Maradona in una logica di santificazione. Questo tipo di meccanismo, basato sull'interazione a distanza (nel tempo e nello spazio) tra i testi è ben spiegato dalle considerazioni bachtiniane sull'intertestualità.

Sorge un problema più generale: da quale punto spazio-temporale l'autore guarda gli eventi che egli raffigura? In primo luogo, egli guarda dal suo presente incompiuto, in tutta la sua complessità e pienezza, ed egli si trova come sulla tangente della realtà da lui raffigurata. Il presente, dal quale l'autore guarda, comprende in sé prima di tutto la sfera della letteratura, e non soltanto della letteratura contemporanea, nel senso stretto della parola, ma anche di quella passata, che continua a vivere e a rinnovarsi nel presente (...). Il rapporto dell'autore coi vari fenomeni della letteratura e della cultura ha un carattere dialogico, analogo ai reciproci rapporti tra i cronotopi all'interno dell'opera. (Bachtin, 1979, p. 403)

Termini come “autore” o “opera” potrebbero farci pensare che queste riflessioni si attaglino solo all’ambito di studio di Bachtin, cioè alla letteratura, ma chiunque abbia approfondito il lavoro del grande studioso russo sa che le sue teorie possono estendersi dal campo ristretto della letteratura a quello molto più generale della testualità.

Il testo come tale non è morto: da qualsiasi testo, a volte passando attraverso una lunga serie di anelli di mediazione, in ultima analisi arriviamo sempre alla voce umana e, per così dire, cozziamo nell'uomo; ma il testo è sempre fissato in un materiale morto: nelle prime fasi dello sviluppo della letteratura - nel suono fisico, nella fase della scrittura - nei manoscritti (...); in seguito il manoscritto può assumere la forma del libro (...). Ma i manoscritti e i libri in ogni forma si trovano già al confine tra la morta natura e la cultura e se noi ci accostiamo ad essi come portatori di testo, essi entrano nella sfera della cultura e, nel nostro caso, in quella della letteratura (Bachtin, 1979, p. 400)

Le agiografie medievali, in quanto testi, non sono dunque “morte”, al contrario, esse trovano nuova vita e vitalità, trasformandosi e adattandosi, ogniqualevolta una nuova beatificazione richieda un adeguato storytelling.

Proseguiamo dunque la nostra ricognizione alla ricerca delle tracce dell’antico nel nuovo. Come Gian Paolo Caprettini (1981, pp. 117-139) ha efficacemente mostrato, esiste, nella *Leggenda di Sant’Albano* e in molte altre agiografie, una dinamica spaziale che figurativizza, in senso greimasiano, l’opposizione santità-peccato. All’interno della sua capanna, l’eremita è in stato di santità e al riparo dal peccato:

Il romito, sentendo picchiare, che mai persona non v' era venuta , ebbe paura ; e dubitò che non fusse il nimico dell’umana generazione che venisse per tentarlo, e incontanente incominciò a scongiurare questa fanciulla. (D’Ancona, 1865, pp. 71-72)

Cedendo alle insistenze della ragazza, l’eremita apre la porta e notiamo, utilizzando le categorie proposte da Benveniste (1969, p. 242), che il “Foris” irrompe nel suo “Domi”, l’esterno invade l’interno e il peccato prevale sulla santità. Per ogni Santo Peccatore c’è dunque uno spazio del peccato e uno spazio della santità e, di solito, il secondo, almeno prima della santificazione, è più limitato e circoscritto del primo. Riprendiamo ora le dichiarazioni di Paula Depena per il solo fatto che esse, in questo specifico passaggio, rappresentano un sentire comune. La calciatrice sostiene che Maradona aveva “habilidades futbolísticas espectaculares, pero fuera del campo dejaba mucho que desear”. L’affermazione è piuttosto scontata e, appunto, largamente condivisa; l’aspetto interessante è la riproposizione di una logica “Domi – Foris”. Come i veri Santi Peccatori, Maradona ha un Domi, uno spazio di santità che, nel suo caso, si identifica con il campo: è lì che si compiono i miracoli che gli vengono riconosciuti dagli ammiratori quanto dai detrattori, è lì che anche un fallo di mano diventa un gesto divino. E poi ha un Foris fatto di feste sfrenate, di pranzi e cene senza moderazione, di rapporti sessuali più o meno chiari, di assunzione di droghe, di sbornie e di risse. Il suo Foris è il fondale su cui le sue imprese di santo spiccano più nettamente.

Lo schema “Domi-Foris” ritorna anche nelle agiografie immaginarie e letterarie del XX secolo. Per Andreas Kartak, il protagonista della *Leggenda del santo bevitore* di Joseph Roth

(1939/1975) esiste un unico Domi, la chiesa di Ste-Marie des Batignolles a Parigi, il luogo dove si è impegnato a restituire, in forma di offerta, i 200 franchi che un misterioso donatore gli ha elargito. Il Foris invece è tutto il resto; è il lungo Senna dove vive da sbandato dopo aver ucciso il marito della propria amante, sono le bettole dove ogni volta spende in alcolici il denaro che dovrebbe restituire, sono le stanze in cui consuma rapporti mercenari: solo con l'approssimarsi della morte per infarto Kartak potrà raggiungere, trasportato a braccia, la sacrestia di quella chiesa e lì ricevere la definitiva consacrazione.

E anche il racconto di Roth è uno dei tanti testi archetipali che contribuiscono all'elaborazione dell'agiografia di Maradona. Dieguito è la versione calcistica di Kartak (e non assomiglia invece a Kanjak, per quanto il nome di questo personaggio venga sempre accompagnato dall'epiteto fisso di "famoso calciatore"); con lui condivide le dipendenze, la voracità sessuale, la propensione a mentire e a mancare di parola, con lui condivide persino la morte. *La leggenda del santo bevitore* è la filigrana attraverso la quale, in modo non dichiarato (ma ricordiamoci del lavoro sotterraneo del testo teorizzato da Bachtin), i media leggono la storia di Maradona e, a loro volta, la raccontano.

### L'agiografia maradoniana come flusso narrativo

Come rilevato in precedenza parlando delle difficoltà nel costituire un corpus agiografico sulla figura di Diego Armando Maradona, la vita e le opere del "santo" non sono raccontate in un insieme circoscritto di testi ufficiali, ma sono affidate a un flusso narrativo che si compone degli elementi più eterogenei e che si avvale dei più diversi codici: testuale, figurativo, musicale, plastico... Dedichiamo dunque un po' di spazio all'analisi di questo flusso. Di questo "racconto diffuso" fanno ovviamente parte alcuni testi canonici, quelli che l'industria culturale, almeno a partire dal successo di *Open. La mia storia* di Andre Agassi, non nega a nessun sportivo che abbia raggiunto un discreto grado di notorietà: biografie, (pseudo)autobiografie, documentari, saggi, reportage. Altrettanto ovviamente, trattandosi di uno dei calciatori più famosi di tutti i tempi, questi materiali sono di assoluta qualità (il documentario più importante è firmato da un regista del calibro di Emir Kusturica e il titolo, *Maradona by Kusturica*, pone regista e protagonista sullo stesso piano come eroi eponimi) e il loro esame riserva poche sorprese: vi si ritrovano omaggi, critiche, contestazioni e dichiarazioni d'amore, come accade per tutti gli altri, solo in forma più elaborata. Ma se i testi ufficiali sono alla portata di tutti, non si può dire la stessa cosa per ciò che nasce dalla fantasia popolare, per ciò che, nel flusso, scorre più lontano dal nucleo centrale; in altri termini, sono molti quelli che possono guadagnarsi o pagarsi un'autobiografia, pochissimi sono quelli che, con le loro gesta, fanno nascere canzoni. E almeno due sono le canzoni scopertamente agiografiche dedicate al Pibe de Oro. La prima, del 1994, è *Santa Maradona* dei Mano Negra (o, se si preferisce, di Manu Chao).

#### **Santa Maradona** (Mano Negra)

Devant de champion du monde de football [...]

Football, football, football

Larchuma football club

Football!, football!, football

Tous les mecs se déchainent devant la Télé

St Etienne, Bourg La Reine tous des enculés  
 Dans les gradins c'est l'enfer, (écoutez les supporters)  
 Football!, football!, football  
 Allez, allez, allez, courez, courez, courez  
 Allez, allez, allez, tapez! dans le ballon, tapez! sur le voisin  
 Football!, football!, football!  
 [...]
   
 Santa Maradona priez pour moi [...]
   
 La coupe du Monde est terminée  
 Maradona n'était plus là pour protéger les Italiens  
 [...]
   
 Santa Maradona priez pour moi  
 Football, football, football, football  
 [...]
   
 Santa Maradona priez pour moi  
 Gran gusto Maradona  
 Santa Maradona priez pour moi  
 Diego-Diego, Diego-Diego, Diego-Diego  
 Ole, ole-ole-ole, Diego, Diego

Contrariamente a ciò che fa nella celebrativa *La vida Tombola* (che si apre significativamente con il verso: “Si yo fuera Maradona viviría como él”), qui Manu Chao tratta il mito di Maradona con un minimo di distacco: la preghiera rivolta a Santa Maradona ha un significato antifrastico e, mascherata dentro un “second degré”, irride proprio l’atteggiamento fideistico dei tifosi nei confronti dei loro idoli, primo tra tutti il più divino di quegli idoli, il D10S. Eppure, come ogni buona parodia, la canzone dice molto del testo parodiato e, per ciò che qui ci interessa, dice che negli otto anni trascorsi tra il gol de “La mano de Dios” e l’uscita dell’album Casa Babylon (che contiene il brano), i fan di Maradona sono diventati dei fedeli.

Decisamente più netta nei suoi intenti agiografici è *La Mano de Dios* del cantautore argentino Rodrigo Bueno. Uscita nel 2000 (pochi mesi prima della tragica morte del suo giovane autore), la canzone è attraversata da ciò che in semiotica si potrebbe chiamare una “isotopia della santità”, è cioè costellata di termini ed espressioni di chiaro significato religioso.

### **La mano de Dios** (Rodrigo Bueno)

En una villa nació, fue deseo de Dios  
 Crecer y sobrevivir a la humilde expresión  
 Enfrentar la adversidad  
 Con afán de ganarse a cada paso la vida  
 En un potrero forjó una zurda inmortal  
 Con experiencia sedienta, ambición de llegar  
 De cebollita soñaba jugar un mundial  
 Y consagrarse en primera  
 Tal vez jugando pudiera  
 A su familia ayudar  
 Al poco que debutó  
 La doce fue quien coreó  
 Marado, Marado

Su sueño tenía una estrella  
 Llena de gol y gambetas  
 Y todo el pueblo cantó  
 Nació la mano de Dios  
 Sembró alegría en el pueblo  
 Regó de gloria este suelo  
 Para el numero uno del mundo  
 Cargó una cruz en los hombros  
 Por ser el mejor  
 Por no venderse jamás al poder enfrentó  
 Curiosa debilidad  
 ¿Si Jesús tropezó, por qué él no habría de hacerlo?  
 La fama le presentó una blanca mujer  
 De misterioso sabor y prohibido placer  
 En su hábito al deseo y usarla otra vez  
 Involucrando su vida y es un partido que hoy día  
 El Diego está por ganar  
 Al poco que debutó  
 La doce fue quien coreó  
 Su sueño tenía una estrella  
 Llena de gol y gambetas  
 Y todo el pueblo cantó  
 Nació la mano de Dios  
 Sembró alegría en el pueblo  
 Llenó de gloria este suelo  
 Olé, olé, olé, olé  
 Diego, Diego  
 Regó de gloria  
 ¡Te quiero, Diego!

Riprendendo il tema, accennato nel primo paragrafo di questo saggio, delle oscillazioni tra santità e divinità nell'agiografia maradoniana, dobbiamo ammettere che il brano di Bueno si colloca nettamente sul versante della divinizzazione del calciatore: siamo di fronte a una specie di racconto cristologico dove Diego e Gesù camminano affiancati. Il primo verso ("En una villa nació, fue deseo de Dios") non può che rimandarci alla narrazione neotestamentaria sulla nascita del Cristo in Betlemme e l'intera prima strofa riecheggia del racconto dei vangeli apocrifi dove Gesù trascorre la sua infanzia aiutando la propria famiglia. Ma è soprattutto nel passaggio in cui il Pibe de Oro è raffigurato con una croce sulle spalle ("Cargó una cruz en los hombros") che si compie la transizione dall'umano al divino (e non la semplice santificazione); una transizione confermata dalla successiva considerazione: se Gesù inciampò, perché lui non avrebbe dovuto farlo? ("¿Si Jesús tropezó, por qué él no habría de hacerlo?"). I tempi sono ormai maturi perché la Iglesia Maradoniana, fondata due anni prima a Rosario, venga presa sul serio e non semplicemente come la versione iperbolica di un fan club.

## Il santo e le sue icone

E se il racconto agiografico sui santi del canone cristiano ha sempre potuto contare su un ricco apparato iconografico, come potrebbe essere altrimenti per il primo vero santo del canone Pop (canone nel quale sono inclusi Lady D, in qualità di martire, e pochi altri)? Non troppo diversamente da quanto accadeva con le immaginette sacre, la figura di Maradona è stata riprodotta in milioni di esemplari sugli oggetti più disparati: una maglietta, un poster, una tazza sono al tempo stesso raffigurazioni e reliquie, immagini del sacro e oggetti sacri in sé. Naturalmente, anche centinaia di altri sportivi hanno avuto diritto a un loro merchandising e a alla diffusione della loro immagine, ma la rappresentazione con l'aureola dietro il capo pare essere un'esclusiva del campione argentino.



Maradona in forma di santino su una cover. Torino 2020 (Foto di A. Perissinotto)

**AUREOLA.** Immagine che ha il significato di una corona (corona regale). L'aureola è rappresentata da un irraggiamento introno al viso e talvolta a tutto il corpo. Tale irraggiamento di origine solare indica il sacro, la santità, il divino, e materializza l'aura fissandola in una forma specifica. (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1993, p. 116).

Quindi, quando sullo sfondo non c'è l'aureola, ci sono forme e colori che ricordano i raggi del sole.



Il “Diego Cafè” in un centro commerciale. Abu Dabi 2015 (Foto di A. Perissinotto)

L'iconografia maradoniana non è quasi mai laica, anche quando la sua funzione è esclusivamente commerciale e, anche in questo, non differisce dall'iconografia di alcuni santi contemporanei (primo tra tutti Padre Pio) il cui culto si colloca tra fede e business. Dipinto sui muri lungo le strade e agli incroci, il volto di Maradona trasforma quelle superfici in moderne edicole votive, in piloni, in tabernacoli per dirla con Manzoni<sup>1</sup>: l'immagine del calciatore sacralizza il luogo, trasfigura un semplice muro e lo trasforma in uno spazio di devozione. Nell'agiografia diffusa di Maradona il paesaggio urbano si fa simbolo e testo, i muri si fanno racconto.



Murale di Maradona dipinto nel 2020, dopo la morte del calciatore, nel Barrio 3 de Mayo a Bariloche. (Foto di A. Leiva per il periodico online Río Negro)

<sup>1</sup> “I muri interni delle due viottole, in vece di riunirsi ad angolo, terminavano in un tabernacolo, sul quale eran dipinte certe figure lunghe”. A. Manzoni, *I Promessi Sposi*, cap. 1.



Nel murale dipinto da Carlos Pacheco Bezemer a Bariloche, in Argentina, il volto estatico di Maradona è accompagnato da una frase la cui paternità è oramai difficile da stabilire, tanti e tali sono state le citazioni e le piccole storpiature: “No importa lo que hiciste con tu vida... importa lo que hiciste con la nuestra”. Eccolo l’ultimo grado della santità, la santità performativa, trasformativa, miracolosa. Qui ci accostiamo a un sottogenere dell’agiografia, l’*exemplum*. La funzione dell’*exemplum* non si esaurisce nel concretizzarsi dell’atto comunicativo (nel caso specifico, nella contemplazione dell’immagine da parte del passante), ma si concretizza nelle azioni che il destinatario compirà dopo l’esaurirsi di quell’atto, cioè nella sua vita quotidiana. Ancora una volta ci troviamo di fronte a “segni efficaci” che producono effetti nel mondo extratestuale. L’*exemplum* non nasce per essere semplicemente ascoltato durante la predicazione, ma perché chi lo ascolta conformi ad esso i propri comportamenti rendendo così palese il legame tra *persuasione e narrazione* (Vitale-Brovarone 1980, p. 87). Del particolarissimo *exemplum* costituito dal racconto delle gesta di Maradona, il regista Marco Ponti dà una lettura sociale (se non addirittura sociologica); nel suo film *Santa Maradona* (2001) il calciatore argentino non solo non appare in immagine, ma non viene neanche citato, eppure il peso del suo “esempio” grava su tutti i personaggi della pellicola e, attraverso di loro, su un’intera generazione. «Volevo che il titolo evocasse la figura di Maradona come esempio della contraddittorietà di una generazione che ha un futuro immenso davanti a sé e si concede il lusso di sprecarlo»<sup>2</sup>. Benché Marco Ponti non ceda in alcun modo alla tentazione di idolatrare El Pibe de Oro e del “Santo Peccatore” privilegi il secondo termine, egli non può sottrarre il suo testo filmico dalle logiche intertestuali, non lo può (e non lo vuole) estrarre da quello che a più riprese abbiamo chiamato un “flusso narrativo agiografico”. L’agiografia maradoniana è così diffusa, così pervasiva, così radicata nella nostra cultura che essa non è accantonabile.

## Conclusioni

Malgrado il titolo lasci pensare il contrario, questo non è un saggio su Diego Armando Maradona, questo è un saggio sulle modalità di strutturazione, di stesura e di diffusione di un testo collettivo. È un’indagine sul modo in cui nascono le leggende, non nel senso contemporaneo e abusato dell’“essere una leggenda”, ma nel significato più proprio e antico del concetto. Esplorare la nascita della narrazione intorno a Maradona, il suo “gonfiarsi”, il suo assumere connotazioni trascendentali ci dà il privilegio di poter rivedere, nell’oggi e in un arco di tempo relativamente breve, i fenomeni che, nell’antichità, hanno dato vita ai racconti leggendari; equivale ad osservare a velocità moltiplicata, come in un *time laps*, un fiume che scava un canyon. Sì, perché se i meccanismi socio-semiotici dell’agiografia maradoniana sono identici a quelli della classicità o del medioevo, nell’era della televisione e poi del web, la circolazione testuale è infinitamente più rapida, la condivisione è infinitamente più capillare, l’appropriazione e la trasformazione del racconto infinitamente più aperte.

Partendo da tali presupposti, questo studio intende anche aprire la strada a ulteriori approfondimenti che potrebbero collocarsi in un ambito antropologico e in quello della sociologia delle religioni per rispondere alla domanda di sempre: come nasce un culto? A consentire questa espansione disciplinare è, ancora una volta, il concetto di “segno efficace” e di “testo efficace”: il “testo efficace” genera, attraverso la sua ricezione, una pratica che dà a

<sup>2</sup> L’affermazione è del regista, in una conversazione con l’autore del presente lavoro.

quel testo il fondamento reale che prima non aveva. Detto altrimenti, mentre una cronaca segue temporalmente e causalmente i fatti che racconta, nella fondazione di una nuova religione, di un movimento o di una setta, sono i fatti a seguire e il testo a precedere. Nel mormonismo (tanto per scegliere un esempio meno impegnativo di altri) è il libro di Mormon, pubblicato da Joseph Smith nel 1830, a narrare, in forma di prescrizione, le azioni svolte oggi da oltre 15 milioni di persone. L'Iglesia Maradoniana, al momento, conta "solo" 850 mila fedeli (Fazio, 2019), e, al pari di quella mormone, si fonda su un testo. Ma qui il testo non è un libro, è, come abbiamo detto, una narrazione diffusa; è grazie a quella narrazione che si stabilisce che la Pasqua andrà celebrata il 22 giugno (giorno in cui la Mano de Dios si incarna in quella di Maradona) e il Natale nella notte tra il 29 e il 30 ottobre (data della nascita di Diego). Al momento, i suoi adepti sono ancora cauti nelle dichiarazioni e, di tanto in tanto, concedono che nella fondazione di quella nuova chiesa vi siano tratti parodistici, ma sarà interessante osservare se, nei prossimi anni, non inizierà a prevalere la corrente che tende a "prendere sul serio" la fede nel Pibe de Oro. Che si possa riconoscere la natura divina a un calciatore può sembrare assurdo ai più, un po' come deve essere sembrato assurdo riconoscerla al figlio di un falegname, ma a forza di raccontare la sua storia, di aggiustarla, di arricchirla, ciò che sembrava impossibile tende a diventare reale, perché i testi, lo sappiamo, fanno più miracoli dei santi.

## References

- Amis, M. (2004). Povertà, rivincita e distruzione. La vita esagerata di Maradona, in *La Repubblica* del 2 ottobre 2004.
- Bachtin, M. (1979). *Estetica e romanzo*. Torino: Einaudi.
- Benveniste, E. (1969). *Il vocabolario delle istituzioni indoeuropee*. Torino: Einaudi.
- Bernardelli, A. (2016). *Cattivi seriali*. Roma: Carocci.
- Caprettini, G.P. (1981), *La foresta, l'eremita e la figlia del re. Personaggi e modelli spaziali*, in
- Caprettini, G. P., & Corno, D. (1981). *Forme narrative e modelli spaziali*. Torino: G. Giappichelli.
- Chevalier, J., & Gheerbrant, A. (1993). *Dizionario dei simboli*. Milano: Rizzoli.
- D'Ancona, A. (a cura di) (1865). *La leggenda di sant'Albano, prosa inedita del secolo XIV e la Storia di San Giovanni Boccadoro secondo due antiche lezioni in ottava rima*. Bologna: Romagnoli.
- Donot, M. (2015). «Las Malvinas son argentinas », *Mots. Les langages du politique* [Online], 109 | 2015, Online since 30 November 2017, conneon on 06 July 2021. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/mots/22110>

Fabbri, P. (1993). Louis Marin: trans-sustanziazione, trans-significanza, trans-figurazione <https://www.paolofabbri.it/saggi/louis-marin-trans-sustanziazione-trans-significanza-trans-figurazione/>

Fazio, G. (2019). In cosa credono gli 850 mila fedeli che hanno aderito alla Chiesa di Maradona. AGI 27 giugno 2019 [https://www.agi.it/sport/chiesa\\_maradona-5729157/news/2019-06-27/](https://www.agi.it/sport/chiesa_maradona-5729157/news/2019-06-27/).

Galeano, E. (2015). El fútbol a sol y sombra. México, D.F: Siglo Veintiuno Editores.

Galeano, E. (2017). Cerrado por fútbol. Madrid: Siglo XXI de España Editores, S.A. (e-book)

Marin, L. (1986). La parole mangée et autres essais théologico-politiques. Paris.

Roth, J. (1975). La leggenda del santo bevitore: Racconto. Milano: Adelphi.

Vitale-Brovarone, A. (1980) "Persuasione e narrazione : l'exemplum tra due retoriche (VI-XII sec.)", *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome. Moyen-Age, Temps modernes*, tome 92, n°1. 1980: 87-112.

#### **About the author**

Alessandro Perissinotto insegna “Storytelling” e “Processi comunicativi nello sport” all’Università di Torino dov’è attualmente Delegato del Rettore per la Comunicazione. Tra le sue monografie troviamo *Sport e comunicazione* (Mondadori, 2012) e *Raccontare* (Laterza, 2020). Come narratore ha pubblicato una ventina di romanzi tradotti in otto lingue.  
[alessandro.perissinotto@unito.it](mailto:alessandro.perissinotto@unito.it)

## The Unlikely Hero. The treatment of Maradona's Death in American Media

Ismael Lopez Medel

Azusa Pacific University (USA)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6093/2532-6732/8972>

### Abstract

The news coverage of a figure as complex as Maradona reflected his importance as an idolized sports figure, immensely popular despite his tumultuous existence. But media coverage also reflects a sociological view of sports heroes, and especially flawed ones. In this chapter, I look at the coverage of Maradona's death in the United States, analyzing thirty-four media outlets across platforms. The study shows an informative character when reporting about Maradona, but also a detachment about his figure and legacy. The paper argues that the media analysis reflects the secondary social role of soccer in the United States in comparison with the rest of the world, acknowledging the importance of Maradona, but also viewing him as a foreign idol, and a failed one. We finally argue that Maradona's history is unparalleled in the American sports landscape, and it is only understood when explored in depth.

**Keywords:** Maradona; soccer; American media; sports

### Introduction

On November 25, 2020, Diego Armando Maradona died in his home of Buenos Aires, Argentina, from a heart attack after complications resulting from brain surgery. The news sent shockwaves across most of the world, especially in Europe and South America. In his native Argentina, television coverage of his death and the raucous funeral was 24/7, something habitual on the other hand. As a result, Maradona's death was on the front cover of the most important media outlets globally and was featured in the day's news reports and news coverage. Specialized sports media such as *L'Equipe*, *Marca*, *Mundo Deportivo* and *La Gazzetta dello Sport* featured long pieces about his death. General media across different countries also included the news on the cover and featured lengthy eulogies, such as *La Nación* (Argentina) *Liberation* (France), *El Pais* (Spain), *The Guardian* (England), *Sddeutsche Zeitung* (Germany), or *Corriere della Sera* (Italy). The news was also quickly spread on social media, where Maradona-related posts were the most commented and shared topics of the day: Twitter recorded 35.4 million worldwide tweets using hashtags such as #D10S, #ElDiego o #GraciasDiego. In Argentina, seven out of the top ten hashtags for that day were related to Maradona.

While the rest of the world was covering the news of Maradona's death, in the United States, the event's coverage was slightly different and explained the event and the complicated context of Maradona's immense popularity in other countries. Of course, the

popularity of soccer in other nations can justify the media attention that Maradona received (and one can argue that not only on the days after his tragic death, but throughout his life). However, American media treated the story as a second-tier story for the day, with a much more detached language and reflecting certain respect for Maradona's figure but a distant lack of understanding of Maradona's incredibly complex figure.

This article aims to analyze the media coverage of Maradona's death in the United States in the days following the event. A content analysis of the coverage in mainstream media across platforms (thirty-four outlets in radio, television, printed, and online news outlets) will describe how American media views a figure like Diego Armando Maradona. Therefore, the first section of the article will examine the event's coverage across media, pointing out the main characteristics of such coverage, including language, imagery, and tone of each article. The second part analyzes the coverage from a wider perspective, including the sociological worldview on Maradona and the reasons why from an American cultural worldview, Maradona's figure was difficult to comprehend.

### **The treatment of Maradona's Death in American Media**

The news of Maradona's death was featured on every major media outlet in the United States. The following section analyzes the coverage on different outlets, including both online and offline, across platforms (television, newspapers, radio, and internet) and both sports-oriented and general media. The resulting list of thirty-four articles provides us with a good understanding of the treatment of the news in the American media landscape. The outlets have been selected by relevance and timeliness, and not limiting ourselves to sports outlets, but including generalist media as well. The news listed cover mostly November 25 (23 of the 34 references), going until December 3, mainly for the lengthier, more elaborated eulogies. The final list includes four agencies (*Associated Press*, *Reuters*, *United Press International*, and *Bloomberg*), seven magazines (*Sports Illustrated*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *GQ*, *The Economist*, *The Harvard Gazette* and *Forbes*), eight newspapers (*The New Yorker*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Miami Herald*, *Denver Post*, *The World*, *USA Today* and *The New York Post*), two online outlets (*Bleacher Report* and *The Ringer*), one radio station (*NPR*), and ten television stations (*CBS News*, *CNN Sports*, *FOX News*, *ESPN*, *CBS Sports*, *CNN*, *NBC Sports*, *ABC News*, and *NBC News*).

One of the main features of the articles analyzed is the overall detachment in the treatment of the event. Starting with the headlines: overall informative, repeating the name, age, and country of origin. Of the thirty-four headlines analyzed, all of them include the last name, 29 add the first name. Half of them include a reference to Argentina and also to the player's age. A third references soccer, usually followed by an adjective (star, legend, icon, great). The adjectives used in the headlines reflect an overall positive sentiment (loved, great, legend, icon, mesmerizing, star, superstar, greatest, better, bigger, genius, human, genius, hero) while only a few headlines reflect negative sentiment (tragedy, dangerously, darker, flawed, leftie, tormented).<sup>1</sup> It is also very interesting to note the radical difference in

---

<sup>1</sup> Thirteen of the headlines used almost the similar verbiage: "Diego Maradona Dies at 60" with added variations ("Argentinian", "Soccer Star", "Legend").

treatment in the headlines of American media (as an example, *Boston Globe's* "Diego Maradona, Argentine soccer great, dies at 60") with the superlatives and adjectives used in European and South American headlines: "I Have Seen Maradona" (*La Gazzetta dello Sport*, Italy), "In the Hands of God" (*The Times*, UK), "Diego Lives" (*Corriere dello Sport*, Italy) "Which planet did you go to?" (*La Nación*, Uruguay), "D10S is dead [playing with the word Dios, God in Spanish, and Maradona's jersey number 10]" (*As*, Spain), "God is Dead" (*L'Equipe*, France), "Thank you, Diego", (*La Nación*, Argentina).

Overall, the coverage in American media has followed a similar pattern. The articles were generally informative and explanatory for an audience unfamiliar with Maradona. For this reason, and to emphasize the worldwide reach of Maradona's death, the articles frequently included quotes from dignitaries (The Pope, Argentina's president) and celebrities (Pelé, Cristiano Ronaldo, Leo Messi) to emphasize the importance of the news. The features typically explain his life, paying particular attention to the 1986 Mexico World Cup and the game against England. Some lengthier pieces set him up in the context of the military junta of Argentina in the 1970s, but most pieces explain his humble origins, the quick boost to stardom, and time in Barcelona and Naples. Inevitably, all the features include Maradona's addiction, scandals, and downfalls, with different degrees of detail.

The first paragraph of the note published by the *National Public Radio* can serve as a succinct summary of the coverage in mainstream media: "Diego Armando Maradona, who rose from the slums of Buenos Aires to lead Argentina's national team to victory in the 1986 World Cup, lost his way through substance abuse and then pursued a second career as a coach, died Wednesday at the age of 60, according to media reports" (Booker, 2020).

*United Press International* published an aseptic note citing the Argentinian Football Association and the Buenos Aires newspaper *Clarín*. Another agency, *Associated Press* provided the content used by *ABC News*, *Denver Post*, *USA Today*, *Fox News*, and *Boston Globe* (Rey, 2020). It is a long piece that offers a review of Maradona's life on and off the pitch ("although his reputation was tarnished by his addictions and an ill-fated spell in charge of the national team, he remained idolized in soccer-mad Argentina as the "Pibe de Oro" or "Golden Boy"), along with his soccer-style. As with many other articles, the Mexico 1986 World Cup game against England, with the infamous Hand of God takes much of the space of the feature, though as with many other articles, the second goal in the same game does not deserve as much attention as the first one.

*Bloomberg* published the news noting that he was "worshiped in his home country of Argentina despite his flaws" and introduces the Maradona-Messi debate: "And it was his time there -- at least for his supporters -- that helps place Maradona above modern-day prodigy Messi on the podium of soccer greats. While Maradona heaved a mediocre side to glory, Messi has always operated in relative comfort, accompanied by other star players at Barcelona. Still, the Maradona-Messi debate, split largely down generational lines, runs on." The piece also briefly comments on Maradona's politics: "Maradona himself was a political romantic. He tattooed an image of Che Guevara, the Argentine who co-led the Cuban Revolution, on his arm; vehemently supported Venezuela's socialist government; and allied himself with leftist leaders in Argentina's Peronist movement" (Clark et al., 2020).



It was interesting to discover that only three outlets commented on the outspoken left-leaning politics of Maradona, most particularly *Newsweek* that published a piece entitled "After Maradona's Death, His Opinion of America Resurfaces: 'I Hate Everything From the U.S.'". The article highlights the player's negative perception of the United States, which did not change over time, especially since his infamous expulsion from the World Cup in 1994 and his visa denial from the U.S. government: "I hate everything that comes from the United States. I hate it with all my strength," along with comments on Trump "When you see such cartoon characters like Trump, you begin thinking that if such a man takes it into his head we may all become enemies" (Crowley, 2020).

*CBS* published a few different articles. First, an informative piece reflecting on his life. It draws heavily from the *HBO* documentary and includes quotes from fellow soccer stars such as Leo Messi, Pelé, and Cristiano Ronaldo. It also references the importance of the news worldwide: "The soccer world was stunned and heartbroken over the news of his death" (Brito, 2020).

*CBS Soccer* bases its connect on a long, and heartfelt of a six-minute edition of *CBS's* soccer podcast where Argentinian soccer pundit and personal friend of the player Andrés Cantor barely manages to explain that soccer had died on November 25, 2020. This is an interesting piece because it resembles much more the media coverage the news received in Argentina, Italy, and Spain, heavily relying on commentators, former players, and coaches who knew Maradona and share their experiences with him. Naturally, therefore, this piece combines a very passionate eulogy from Cantor ("he was unstoppable", "the best I've seen play") among other superlatives (González, 2020).

*CNN* published three different articles. The first one from is a more aseptic eulogy detailing the news and commenting on Maradona's life: "While his performances on the pitch dazzled, Maradona faced a number of demons off it" (Correa & Church, 2020). The second article included in the content analysis is a lengthier feature by Matias Gretz. He comments on Maradona's social relevance for Argentinians ("almost national monument") and offers a justification for his popularity despite his downfalls ("Maradona, as has been widely documented, was flawed, but perhaps people saw some of themselves in those imperfections"). Quoting Argentinian journalist Marcela Mora y Araujo, the article explains that Maradona's extreme qualities are "the universal aspect of his appeal. I think people all over the world identify and acknowledge and recognize that and feel somehow reassured by the incredible humanity of someone who is seemingly superhuman" (Gretz, 2020). Finally, the last piece, also by Gretz & Morse draws on Asif Kapadia's 2019 *HBO* documentary "Diego Maradona" and reviews the Argentinian's life and downfall. Altogether, *CNN's* coverage summarized the three features we have seen in other media: one shorter informative piece about the news, another covering Maradona's style and influence on the game, and a third explaining the worldwide impact of Maradona dispute his raucous life off the pitch.

*Reuters* released a short note quoting the official press release from the Argentinian government: "His unparalleled footballing skill transformed him into one of the best-known people in the world, crossing frontiers and being universally recognized as the world's best player". Furthermore, they added a quote of Maradona eulogizing himself in a 2005

television show: "Thank you for having played football because it is the sport that gave me the most joy, the most freedom," Maradona said. "It is like touching the sky with my hands. Thanks to the ball" (Garrison & Misculin, 2020).

*ESPN* utilized the original note from *Reuters* and *Associated Press* to offer an aseptic coverage of Maradona's death, with plenty of quotes from players, dignitaries, and celebrities. Interestingly enough, it is the only American outlet that includes a quote from late Kobe Bryant: "I love Maradona. When I was young in Italy, I used to always watch Maradona when he played for Napoli" (ESPN, 2020). The death of Kobe Bryant in January 2020 serves as a good example of the journalist approach to the tragic deaths of sports icons. In the United States, the news of Bryant's unexpected death headlined every major news outlet, yet the language was still informative and descriptive: "Kobe Bryant Dies in Crash" (*LA Times*), "Helicopter Crash Kills N.B.A. Star Known to All as Kobe" (*The New York Times*), "NBA Icon Dies in Helicopter Crash" (*The Washington Post*). Therefore, even in the case of a much more comfortable figure, a perfect example of the sport idol for a country, the treatment was more detached than the South American views of Maradona.

*The Wall Street Journal* published two pieces with only five hours of difference. In the first one, Joshua Robinson defines the Argentinian as "unlikely, outlandish, dazzling, and flawed" and then summarizes his career with little attention to his personal life (Robinson, 2020). The second piece tackles the worldwide repercussion of Maradona's death and its reactions, both in Argentina and elsewhere. It includes an in-depth look at the Argentinian-ness of Maradona, quoting 1986 World Cup teammate Jorge Valdano, who describes Maradona as a combination of two personas: "Diego, the cheerful kid from the barrio, or working-class neighborhood, and Maradona, the legend. He quoted the team's trainer Fernando Signoroni saying, "With Diego, I'd go to the end of the world. But with Maradona, I wouldn't walk to the corner" (Forero & Dube, 2020). Finally, sports psychologist Laura Spaccarotella summarizes the mood of the nation those days: "with all of his contradictions, with everything that he provoked, he was always ours. Today we cry for that reason. Part of our collective identity is in sorrow for the loss of Diego" (2020).

*Forbes* published two articles. First, a brief note that quickly overviewed Maradona's career. Then, a week later, the magazine published a longer and more detailed figure. Written by an Argentinian contributor, the article sets Maradona in its context: "Maradona's life story responds to several of the archetypal characteristics of an epic poem of the ancient past, while his rise to fame accompanied the growth of modern communications technologies, particularly television." Argentinian journalist Jorge Fontevecchia explains the Argentina where Maradona grew and set his popularity in the political turmoil of the decade. The transition from a *potrero*, a dirt-field player in the Buenos Aires slums, to 1986 World Champion left an indelible mark in the Argentinian psyche, and that explains his immense popularity and cult-like figure "Maradona became the world's most famous person in the world after the 1986 World Cup and retained that level of popularity until his death". Also drawing from Kapadia's documentary, Fontevecchia does a brilliant job analyzing Maradona's main features: his technical brilliancy, his rebelliousness, and his exuberance (Fontevecchia, 2020).



*GQ* published a long piece by sports contributor Ryan O'Hanlon asking the audience to compare Maradona's legacy with other great athletes such as Michael Jordan, Peyton Manning, Messi, and Cristiano Ronaldo, adding a key question to understand Maradona: "When was the last time you saw Roger Federer self-sabotage?" (O'Hanlon, 2020). In this sense, O'Hanlon's article was the one that tried to connect the figure of Maradona for a wider audience, translating it and adapting it to other world sports superstars.

Reporting for *NBC*, London-based Alexander Smith demonstrates that location undoubtedly influences the coverage of Maradona in the world. We can see this in a small detail that separates the media treatment in the United States versus the rest of the world. While American media were direct, bold, and unapologetic about Maradona's excesses and abuses, international media were much softer. In the article, Smith quotes a British agent who explained that the player "went to some very dark corners, but history will be kind to Diego because his talent was so supreme and he never lost that desire to help the unfortunate" (Smith, 2020). Smith even goes to the extent of rooting Maradona's myth in the 19th-century arrival of soccer to Argentina through British emigres and then situates the 1986 World Cup performance against England in the Falkland war between the two countries.

*Sports Illustrated* also published two articles, one with the eulogy and an introductory comment on his career and a wink from Brazilian star Pelé "Certainly one day we'll kick a ball together in the sky above" (Shapiro, 2020). The second piece, as expected, is a much longer in-depth analysis of the life and career of the Argentinian. Written by Grant Wahl, the article starts in Mexico 1986, to then acknowledge his failures and note that "Maradona's dark side and human frailties only seemed to endear him more to an Argentine public that anointed him a cultural deity among the likes of Eva Perón and the tango singer Carlos Gardel" (Wahl, 2020).

Writing for *The World*, Jorge Valencia eulogizes Maradona in a piece that comments on Maradona's political views and connections (including the adjective "leftie" in the headline) and explains how his death was able to unite people in his home country of Argentina.

For the *Miami Herald* article, reporter Michelle Kaufman quotes Argentinian journalists and players to explain the impact of Maradona: "For us, Argentinean people, especially for me, he was our inspiration" - Soccer player Federico Higuaín - "He will be the No. 1 forever for me ... I don't care what he did in his life, I just care about him as a football player and I really love him", words that summarize a very Argentinian vision of Maradona, one that ignores, if not justifies, his excesses off the pitch to concentrate on his value as a player and an icon (Kaufman, 2020).

*Bleacher Report* features an article that first summarizes Maradona's career on the pitch, to then explain the reason for the fanatic love he received: "his nation is rightly mourning him, but he was a man who lived three lives in the space of one. Everything, all the time, was his mantra and he pretty much always had the pedal to the metal." (Stead, 2020). The article makes a great point of situating Maradona in his context: "Now, in the information age, reputations grow, blossom and quickly die, but back then, if you'd heard of pretty much any player from outside these shores before they played here, then you knew they simply had to be something special. The UK media, especially the press, was largely inward-looking and

parochial (then as now), so you had to be something special to break their wall of xenophobia and ignorance to become known outside of the World Soccer readership” (Stead, 2020).

*The Economist* published two articles. The first one was a shorter note on November 25 that briefly summarizes Maradona’s career and hints at his transcendence at the end with a degree of detachment: “Whether Mr Maradona was the greatest-ever player, ahead of his compatriot, Leo Messi, or Brazil’s Pelé, is a debate there is no need to resolve. With his humble origins, Guaraní blood and mop of dark curls, for Argentines he was ever the *pibe de oro*, the golden boy” (*The Economist*, 2020). In the obituary, Maradona is presented as a complicated character filled with contradictions (“a peronista and a Chavista”), touched by God’s genius (“the bearded guy” as he would call him), and more importantly, fueled by a very Argentinian concept of “anger, *bronca*, fury tinged with resentment”, that transformed in a sense of revenge that drove his career. (The Economist, 2020 b)

Sean Gregory writing for *Time* magazine, does not doubt to label Maradona as “undoubtedly one of the greatest” even in the headline, to then quote Telemundo sports broadcaster Andres Cantor, who situates Maradona in the context of Southern Italy: “Everyone, regardless of their nationality, wanted to see him play because of his magic. He made Argentina famous around the world. He made Napoli famous around the world. It's very hard for any reader to understand what he meant for Napoli. The very poor southern city in Italy that no one paid attention to. And suddenly this kid put Napoli on the map playing soccer and rebelled against the industrial north and beat the powerhouses of Milan and Juventus and Inter who were the more important and powerful teams not only in Italy but in the world and Europe especially” (Gregory, 2020).

One of the longest and more thoughtful obituaries was published in *The Washington Post*. Clarke defines Maradona as “a champion alternately invincible and incorrigible — and ultimately inscrutable”. The piece praises Maradona for his performance on the pitch and bashes him for his excesses elsewhere: “A self-proclaimed champion of the poor, he led a lifestyle of toxic excess”, explaining that an evaluation of Maradona’s career was complicated because “his sporting heroics so often undercut by inexcusable behavior”. Then the article explains Maradona’s career as a player and as a manager, ending with a quote from Argentine historian Osvaldo Bayer: “Maradona is what a kid dreams when he steps onto the field. It’s as simple as that. Later, he became something he never should have been. He fell from grace when he should have been a hero” (Clarke, 2020).

### **Maradona According to American Media**

Once analyzed the content of the articles and notes published in the thirty-four outlets selected, the second half of the paper explores the overall similarities in the approach to the death and life of Diego Armando Maradona.

The first and obvious conclusion is that the news occupied space and time in media. Maradona's death made it to the cover of *The New York Times* and the main page of ESPN, CNN, and multiple other platforms. However, it was not the main story of the day, as in European and South American media, which is easily explained by soccer's reach in other

countries. Therefore, it was expected that American media would cover the news but would not treat it as the main feature.

The content of the articles was informative and generalist. However, there was an evident detachment from the figure, which shows in the headlines analysis. Again, compared to media in other countries, American outlets did not spare too many adjectives and typically limited themselves to informing about the basic facts (one could argue that the most common headline would be something like "Diego Maradona, Argentine soccer star Dies at 60"). Therefore, the detachment from Maradona's figure is only a reflection of a society's journalistic culture, not prone to verbal or visual excesses (at least in the traditional media considered for this project). Nevertheless, the headlines were informative, and the treatment of the information was explanatory and succinct.

It can be argued that the approach to Maradona's death is a reflection of the media culture, which stems from a culture of hard-core news and a traditional journalistic approach to reporting. As an example, we had briefly noted the comparison with Kobe Bryant's death in January 2019. The life and careers of both figures are miles away, and so were the tragic circumstances of Bryant's death. However, even in that situation, American media were much more conscripted and austere than their European and South American counterparts. It is also interesting to note that one-third of the pieces were authored by Argentinian, Mexican, or Italian journalists, who generally offered a more personal, historical, and sociological explanation of Maradona.

It was interesting to discover a two-level approach to the figure of Maradona. Those outlets that only published one article tended to remain on the surface of the Argentinian. Those pieces typically explained the cause of his death, included quotes from the Argentinian government, explained Maradona's career, overwhelmingly concentrated on the 1986 Mexico World Cup game against England, and included an unapologetic take on Maradona's downfalls.

Of course, when the longer obituaries were published, the analysis reached a deeper level. Longer pieces situated Maradona in the context of Argentina in the 1970s, explained his boy wonder condition, his early signing with Argentinos Juniors, all the way to his last days as a manager in Mexico. Shorter pieces concentrated the explanation of Maradona in fundamentally one single moment in his career, that is the 1986 game against England, which seems reasonable because that game encapsulated both extremes of Maradona's life and career: the *potrero* attitude of the first goal and the whirlwind of technique and mastery of the second goal. Nevertheless, the longer pieces were able to explain even that game with more depth. First of all, by providing political and social context to the game and tying Maradona's rebellious worldview with the social tension in the country facing that game. Incidentally, most short pieces miss the game's second goal, which is still considered by many the best goal in the sport's history.

Another element of the media coverage that was common to all media coverage was the treatment of the many downfalls and episodes that Maradona lived throughout. It is difficult to find a similar example of an athlete who has enjoyed the popularity that Maradona did while incurring many dark episodes (from tax evasion to illegitimate fatherhood to very public drug recovery efforts). This is perhaps the crucial point of difference in the treatment

of Maradona in the American media vs. the rest of the world (perhaps we should add the soccer-dominated countries, the craze about Maradona was evident in South America and Europe, but it was also present in countries like India, Israel, Egypt, or South Africa).

The difference in the treatment of Maradona's scandals in different countries can be simplified: South American and European media explain the Argentinian excesses as something apart from the game, disconnected to his skills and value as a soccer player. American media, however, does not disassociate the two and even looks at the sometimes forgiving views of Maradona with surprise. Therefore, the coverage in the United States did not shy away from explaining Maradona's life off the court. The short pieces included references to his health issues, addictions, and personality. Moreover, while they were able to acknowledge the tremendous popularity of Maradona, they often had to include quotes from Argentinian journalists and commentators to explain the meaning of Maradona for the country.

It is not only the prevalence of football as the world's most popular sport almost everywhere but the United States, it was also the fact that the figure of Diego Armando Maradona was difficult to encapsulate, understand, and appreciate by American audiences, much more accustomed to a different sports hero narrative. Maradona was a problematic figure to interpret for an audience used to a much more comfortable success story in the sports world.

Like any other country, the American sports pantheon is filled with heroes, with rags-to-riches stories of athletes overcoming structural poverty and becoming successful at their job. Some other stories are ones of tenacity, resilience, and determination. Americans understand sports as an extension of their competitive nature and nurture their kids to be competitive from a younger age. In a broad sense, it reflects a country built upon the idea of entrepreneurship and leadership. An American sports hero is someone who not only excels at their craft but that inspires others: "Indeed, being a hero goes beyond performing physical feats. Every athlete does that. It's their business. It's the ones who are heroic away from their respective sport, the ones who sacrifice their time, money, and sometimes even personal well-being for the betterment of others, that are actually worthy of our admiration" (Rymer, 2010). Sports heroes are a reminder of an attitude in life that includes overcoming difficulties, striving to better oneself, and learning to appreciate the value of effort. However, sports practice is constrained by a series of unwritten sports codes, such as loyalty, humility, and respect for the adversary. When sports heroes break those codes, American media tends to find a moralistic approach. Mariano Siskind, professor at Harvard University, uses Maradona's second goal in the 1986 World Cup game against England ("the goal of the century") to exemplify this circumstance: "There are two interpretations of that goal that break along geopolitical lines: The typical U.S., British moralistic view said that was cheating, but across Latin America, Africa, and the Third World, they view it as a form of humiliating a former colonial power and the ultimate expression of cunning or shrewdness, which is central to a ludic conception of the game (and of life) that stands outside of the realm of morality" (Mineo, 2020).

Sports heroes in the United States are admired and respected in media for their sporting achievements. Nevertheless, the expectations of how they need to behave are strict, and the



media is unforgiven. Therefore, when sports idols become the center of attention for anything unrelated to their performance, media and public opinion quickly shift to remove them from the pedestal or question their legacy (the question of which comes first, media or public opinion is one worth exploring in this case). There is also a financial impact on athlete's downfalls. Falling from grace for athletes also involves losing sponsorships and contracts (another element of stark differentiation between American and European sports organizations).

While American sports have had a fair share of controversial sports heroes, from Denis Rodman to Muhammad Ali (perhaps the closest figure in terms of his political involvement), it is hard to find an equivalent to the figure of Maradona. The Argentinian was an extremely gifted player, who rose to stardom in challenging social and economic circumstances, and who received a level of fan adoration and media attention unparalleled to any other soccer celebrity before or after. Maradona's personality, political opinions, and struggles with addictions were part of his charm: Argentinians and Neapolitans saw him as a folk hero, as a reminder of simpler times with simpler rules. Maradona openly admitted the many mistakes throughout his life, and yet these were not seen as impediments to the passion he sparked in soccer fans everywhere.

Maradona was the perfect exemplification of the explosive combination of Argentinian and Italian ethos in his cultural context: a superb talent with a survivor attitude in a never-ending fight against the establishment. In that sense, his figure represented something more significant than a soccer player. Other legends such as Johan Cruyff, Pelé, or Alfredo Di Stefano, had passed into posterity as great heroes with impressive legacies, but no one achieved the demi-god status of Maradona.

While Americans culturally agree on admiring the achievements on the field, it is more complicated to make sense of someone as publicly flawed as Maradona. When American sports heroes fall from grace, they usually appeal to the better angels of public opinion asking for forgiveness, showing signs of repentance in press conferences, and apologizing profusely. Maradona could never fit that mold. He was unapologetic about his shortcomings and wore like a badge of honor his tumultuous personal life. Nevertheless, his countrymen adored him and the soccer community, in general, had a sweet spot for him.

The key to understanding Maradona for American media lies in the lack of an equivalent figure. American sports have produced great heroes such as Babe Ruth, Michael Jordan, or Michael Phelps. Some other heroes have fallen from grace for different reasons, such as O.J. Simpson, Tiger Woods, or Denis Rodman. However, in the history of sports in the United States, no figure has accumulated as much talent and tragedy as Maradona did for soccer in Argentina.

Another element of importance in the analysis is the contrast between the sports landscape in the United States versus South America and Europe. American fans have many competitions and leagues to follow, even with specific calendars to avoid overlapping. American sports fans tune in to the "big five" sports: football (college level through the NCAA and professional leagues such as the NFL), baseball (MLB), basketball (NBA), hockey (NHL), and lastly, soccer (MLS). Television audiences also reflect the same tendency.

According to a poll by Gallup, football was the preferred sport to watch (37%), followed by basketball (11%) and baseball (9%) (Norman, 2019).

In contrast, European audiences overwhelmingly prefer to follow soccer, both at the national league level and at the international European competitions, according to a recent white paper published by the research think tank YouGovsport. The same applies to South American audiences, who turn in massively for FIFA World Cups, Commebol, Copa Libertadores, and local leagues. Of course, other important sports are played and followed, but the prevalence of soccer is overwhelming. Therefore, while Americans have various sports heroes to idolize, the rest of the world mostly looks at soccer.

American media also falls short of understanding the profound social and political roots of sports teams in South America. While in the United States, sports franchises and leagues have operated as businesses since their inception, in South America (and Europe as well), sports teams are deeply rooted in cities and villages. While in America, teams may change owners, move to a different city, and adopt a new name, teams are part of the local fabric in other nations. In the case of Argentina, soccer clubs have become an indivisible part of the social fabric of the cities and regions, with arguably the most passionate follower bases in the world and, unfortunately, an unparalleled level of violence around the games.

Understanding Maradona's history, personality, and persona require an in-depth look at the historical, cultural, and socioeconomic circumstances that turned Maradona into the larger-than-life figure he became. Maradona was a product of the troubled 1970s decade in Argentina and the military junta that ruled the country with an iron fist. At only fifteen, he became a boy prodigy in a country arguably void of idols since Eva Perón's death in 1952. Nevertheless, his humble origins were something that Maradona not only never forgot but wore as a badge of honor and shaped much of his worldview.

In a world of sports heroes, Maradona was the archetypical anti-hero, a player filled with talent and tragedy at the same time. Professor Siskind explains the tension of heroes and anti-heroes utilizing Nietzsche's "The Birth of Tragedy," which contrasts Apollo's myth as the god of order, poetry, and rational behavior, and Dionysus god of festivities and madness. Pelé represents the former, Maradona the latter: "I propose that Maradona is the perfect embodiment of the Dionysian in us, and how important it is to make room in our lives, in the world, for the forms of unbounded freedom and desire he represents. Maradona and other Dionysian figures make it possible to imagine ourselves beyond the boundaries of social pieties, to imagine ourselves breaking free from structures we often experience as asphyxiating prisons" (Mineo, 2020).

American media looked at Maradona first from a journalistic distance and reported his death based on the facts and the global impact of the Argentinian. American media acknowledged his relevance for the sport of soccer and also reported on his controversies, scandals, and tumultuous episodes. Maradona was presented as a global icon, a sports legend, but his negative side was less apologetic than media in Europe and South America. While the rest of the world somehow forgave Maradona's excesses (not just in his death but throughout his life), American media's treatment did not try to justify or contextualize his dark side.

The gradual growth of soccer in the United States explains the treatment and the acknowledgment of Maradona's figure for the international soccer community. However, he is also seen as culturally foreign to the United States, where soccer faces much fiercer competition with other sports such as football or baseball. The analysis also reflects that when the media published more than one article and offered a more in-depth look at Maradona, the analysis became much more precise. In those cases, and many times, aided by Argentinian commentators, American media started to grasp a figure hard to understand and unparalleled in the American sports landscape.

## References

Alarcón D. (2019, October 13). "The Tragedy of Diego Maradona, One of Soccer's Greatest Stars". *The New Yorker*.

Retrieved from

<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-tragedy-of-diego-maradona-one-of-soccers-greatest-stars>

Associated Press (2020, November 25). "Argentine soccer great Diego Maradona dies at 60". *Associated Press*. Retrieved from

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/argentine-soccer-great-diego-maradona-dies-at-60>

Beer, T. (2020, November 25). "Soccer Legend Diego Maradona Dead At 60". *Forbes*. Retrieved from

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/tommybeer/2020/11/25/soccer-legend-diego-maradona-dead-at-60/?sh=53b41c301dc6>

Booker, B. (2020, November 25). "Argentine Soccer Legend Diego Maradona Dies At 60". *NPR*. Retrieved from

<https://www.npr.org/2020/11/25/938872137/argentine-soccer-legend-diego-maradona-dies-at-60>

Brito, C. (2020, November 26). "Soccer legend Diego Maradona has died at 60". *CBS News*. 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/diego-maradona-death-age-60/>

Butler, A. (2020, November 25). "Argentine soccer icon Diego Maradona dies at 60". *United International Press*. Retrieved from

[https://www.upi.com/Sports\\_News/Soccer/2020/11/25/Argentine-soccer-icon-Diego-Maradona-dies-at-60/7451606323655/](https://www.upi.com/Sports_News/Soccer/2020/11/25/Argentine-soccer-icon-Diego-Maradona-dies-at-60/7451606323655/)

Clark, G.; Gilbert, J. & McLuskey, D. (2020, November 25). "Diego Maradona, Soccer Icon Who Led Argentina to Glory, Dies at 60". *Bloomberg*. Retrieved from

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-11-25/maradona-soccer-icon-who-led-argentina-to-glory-dies-at-60>

Correa, H.M & Church B. (2020, November 26). “Diego Maradona dies after suffering heart failure”. CNN Sports. Retrieved from <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/11/25/football/diego-maradona-death-argentina-spt-intl/index.html>

Clarke, L. (2020, November 25). “Diego Maradona, mesmerizing soccer star and Argentine legend, dies at 60”. The Washington Post. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/obituaries/diego-maradona-dead/2020/11/25/924f032c-1ebb-11eb-90dd-abd0f7086a91\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/obituaries/diego-maradona-dead/2020/11/25/924f032c-1ebb-11eb-90dd-abd0f7086a91_story.html)

Crowley, J. (2020, November 25). “After Maradona's Death, His Opinion of America Resurfaces: 'I Hate Everything From the U.S.'”. Newsweek. Retrieved from <https://www.newsweek.com/diego-maradona-death-hated-everything-united-states-1550353>

Dedaj, P. (2020, November 25) “Argentine soccer legend Diego Maradona dead at 60”. FOX News. Retrieved from <https://www.foxnews.com/sports/argentine-soccer-legend-diego-maradona-dead-60>

Edwards, E. (2020, November 28). “Maradona: Out of this world”. Buenos Aires Times. Retrieved from <https://batimes.com.ar/news/sports/maradona-out-of-this-world.phtml>

ESPN (2020, November 25). "Argentine football legend Diego Maradona dies at 60". ESPN. Retrieved from <https://www.espn.com/soccer/argentina-arg/story/4244900/argentina-legend-maradona-dies-at-60>

Fontevicchia, A. (2020, December 1). “The Life, Death And Philosophy Of Diego Maradona”. Forbes. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/afontevicchia/2020/12/01/the-life-death-and-philosophy-of-diego-maradona/?sh=5354287cc584>

Forero, J. & Dube, R. (2020, November 25). “Maradona’s Death Prompts Outpouring of Grief in Argentina, World”. The Wall Street Journal. Retrieved from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/marodonas-death-prompts-outpouring-of-grief-in-argentina-world-11606344640>

Garrison, C. & Misculin, N. (2020, November 26). “Argentines bid final farewell to Maradona as national mourning begins.” Reuters. Retrieved from <https://www.reutersagency.com/en/coverage/argentines-bid-final-farewell-to-maradona-as-national-mourning-begins/>



Gonzalez, R. (2020, November 25). "Diego Maradona, legendary Argentina superstar, global soccer icon, dies at age 60". CBS Sports. Retrieved from <https://www.cbssports.com/soccer/news/diego-maradona-legendary-argentina-superstar-global-soccer-icon-dies-at-age-60/>

Gregory, S. (2020, November 25). "'Undoubtedly' the Greatest: Why the World Is Mourning Soccer Legend Diego Maradona". *Time Magazine*. Retrieved from <https://time.com/5915782/diego-maradona-dead-soccer-argentina/>

Greze, M. (2020, November 27). "Diego Maradona did 'everything better and bigger, but fell more dangerously and darker'". CNN. Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2020/11/26/football/diego-maradona-death-argentina-spt-intl/index.html>

Greze, M. & Morse, B. (2020, November 27). "Diego Armando Maradona: The tormented genius who became one of football's greatest players". CNN. Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2020/11/25/football/diego-armando-maradona-obituary-spt-intl/index.html>

Kaufman, M. (2020, November 26). "Diego Maradona was a genius player and flawed hero whose death hit South Florida hard". The Miami Herald. Retrieved from <https://www.msn.com/en-us/sports/soccer/michelle-kaufman-diego-maradona-was-a-genius-player-and-flawed-hero-whose-death-hit-south-florida-hard/ar-BB1bn1MV>

Joyce, G. (2020, November 25). "Soccer legend Diego Maradona dead at 60". The New York Post. <https://nypost.com/2020/11/25/soccer-legend-diego-maradona-dead-at-60/>

Mineo, L. (2020, December 4). "Why Maradona matters". The Harvard Gazette. Retrieved from <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2020/12/harvard-professor-explains-why-diego-maradona-matters/>

Norman, J. (2018). "Football Still Americans' Favorite Sport to Watch". Gallup. Retrieved from <https://news.gallup.com/poll/224864/football-americans-favorite-sport-watch.aspx>

Noveck, J. (2019, September 18). "Review: From god to devil: Doc tells Maradona's mythic tale". Associated Press. Retrieved from <https://apnews.com/article/amy-winehouse-movies-diego-maradona-asif-kapadia-sports-9794b370bf4b4bda6035c26a65c6c0e>

O'Hanlon, B. (2020, November 25). "Diego Maradona Was a Deeply Human Superstar". GQ Magazine. Retrieved from <https://www.gq.com/story/diego-maradona-legacy>

O'Hanlon, B (2017, October 13). "The Ripple Effect of U.S. Soccer's World Cup Debacle". *The Ringer*. Retrieved from <https://www.theringer.com/2017/10/13/16467560/us-soccer-world-cup-2018-failure-ripple-effect-christian-pulisic>

Phillips, B. (2019, October 1). "The Two Sides of Diego Maradona". *The Ringer*. Retrieved from <https://www.theringer.com/2019/10/1/20891805/diego-maradona-hand-of-god-argentina-world-cup>

Phillips, B. (2020, November 25). "Mourning Diego Maradona". *The Ringer*. Retrieved from <https://www.theringer.com/2020/11/25/21720683/diego-maradona-death-argentina-legend>

Prince-Wright, J. (2020, November 25). "Diego Maradona dies at 60". NBC Sport. Retrieved from <https://soccer.nbcsports.com/2020/11/25/diego-maradona-dies-at-60/>

Rey, D. (2020, November 25). "Argentine soccer great Diego Maradona dies at 60". ABC News. Retrieved from <https://abcnews.go.com/Sports/wireStory/argentine-soccer-great-diego-maradona-dies-60-74399792>

Rey, D. (2020 b, November 25). "Diego Maradona, soccer legend who led Argentina to 1986 World Cup title, dead at 60". Boston Globe Post. Retrieved from <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/11/25/sports/diego-maradona-argentine-soccer-legend-who-scored-hand-god-goal-dead-60/>

Robinson, J. (2020, November 25). "Diego Maradona, Soccer's Flawed Genius, Dies at 60". *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/diego-maradona-soccers-flawed-genius-dies-at-60-11606326745?page=1>

Rymer, R. (2010, November 11). "10 Sports Heroes That Are Actually Heroes". Bleacher Report. Retrieved from <https://bleacherreport.com/articles/515589-10-sports-heroes-that-are-actually-heroes>

The Economist (2020, November 25). "The blessed and cursed life of Diego Maradona". *The Economist*. Retrieved from <https://www.economist.com/the-americas/2020/11/25/the-blessed-and-cursed-life-of-diego-maradona>

The Economist (2020 b, December 3). "A Boy and a Ball. Diego Maradona died on November 25th". *The Economist*. Retrieved from

<https://www.economist.com/obituary/2020/12/03/diego-maradona-died-on-november-25th>

Shapiro, M. (2020, November 25). "Argentina Legend Diego Maradona Dies at 60". Sports Illustrated. Retrieved from <https://www.si.com/soccer/2020/11/25/diego-maradona-dies-60-argentina-legend>

Smith, A. (2020, November 25) "Diego Maradona: Why Argentine soccer legend was loved like no other". NBC News. Retrieved from <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/diego-maradona-why-argentine-soccer-legend-was-loved-no-other-n1249118>

Stead, M. (2020, November 27). "Diego Maradona: Genius, entertainer, bull, demi-god, greatest". Bleacher Report. Retrieved from <https://www.football365.com/news/everybody-loves-diego-maradona-napoli-barcelona-argentina-greatest>

Valencia, J. (2020, November 30). "Remembering Diego Maradona, a leftie on the field — and in politics". The World. Retrieved from <https://www.msn.com/en-xl/latinamerica/top-stories/remembering-diego-maradona-a-leftie-on-the-field-and-in-politics/ar-BB1bwYce>

YouGovSport (2021). "The many faces of sports fans across Europe". Retrieved online from <https://sport.yougov.com/the-many-faces-of-sports-fans-across-europe/>

Wahl, G. (2020, November 25). "Diego Maradona Was a Timeless Icon". Sports Illustrated. Retrieved from <https://www.si.com/soccer/2020/11/25/diego-maradona-dies-obituary-argentina>

### **About the author**

Ismael Lopez Medel (Ph.D., CEU University) is a communication professor at Azusa Pacific University, USA, where he and currently directs the undergraduate program in Public Relations. He has combined extensive academic and administrative positions in Spain and the United States, as well as visiting teaching experiences across Europe. His research in the fields of advertising, public relations, social media and sports has been published internationally.

[ilopezmedel@apu.edu](mailto:ilopezmedel@apu.edu)

**Maria Angela Polesana, Tito Vagni (a cura di): *L'influenza digitale*  
*Studi, teorie e ricerche***

Vincenzo Piccolo

Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.6093/2532-6732/8973>

Il primo a proporre la culturologia come disciplina di studio è stato Leslie A. White, col fine di dare inizio ad un nuovo filone scientifico per lo studio dei fatti culturali. Lo studioso infatti intendeva la cultura come qualcosa in costante sviluppo e, di conseguenza un fenomeno cumulativo. Secondo quanto egli sostiene, tale materia dovrebbe avere come fine la formulazione di quelle leggi che descrivono lo sviluppo culturale «Noi dobbiamo ora scoprire i principi di uno sviluppo millenario della cultura e formulare le leggi» (*the Science of Culture, a Study of Man and Civilisation, New York, 1951*). Un'introduzione alla culturologia si è ritenuta necessaria in quanto il volume che si sta prendendo in analisi è il primo della collana Culturologia della Guarini e associati di cui gli autori, Maria Angela Polesana e Tito Vagni, sono anche direttori insieme a Federico Tarquini. Il volume *L'Influenza Digitale. Studi, teorie e ricerche* si propone con l'intento di indagare quelle nuove figure d'influenza sociale nate grazie ai social media, l'influencer, attraverso le procedure metodologiche descritte da Robert Kozinets nei suoi studi sulla netnografia. La netnografia è un metodo di ricerca qualitativa etnografico che ha l'obiettivo di studiare le interazioni sociali nei contesti comunicativi digitali contemporanei (online). Conseguentemente a questi assunti metodologici, gli autori nella prima parte dello studio, si soffermano considerando due ambiti principali ovvero il cibo e la moda e due ambiti connessi che sono il turismo e lo sport.

Kozinets chiarisce che, «il nucleo della netnografia – ciò che la differenzia da una raccolta e codifica di dati qualitativi online – è che si tratta di un approccio partecipativo allo studio della cultura e delle comunità online». È un tipo di analisi che dà la possibilità ai ricercatori, attraverso un'osservazione più puntuale e naturalistica dei comportamenti degli utenti in rete, di usare tecniche multidisciplinari e di attuare conoscenze e metodi che vengono da altre discipline come l'antropologia, la sociologia, la comunicazione, la psicologia. Visto l'importante incremento della mediatizzazione del nostro quotidiano in cui il confine tra online e offline si fa sempre più labile, gli studi netnografici si dimostrano essenziale nel campo della ricerca per le scienze sociali. Nel volume, tuttavia viene chiarito come questa funzioni solo se l'osservatore ha una base esperienziale solida dell'universo sociale e simbolico che intende analizzare, perché nei nuovi spazi digitali (di cui si parla sempre all'interno del volume) si trovano una sterminata quantità di casi e di dati.

Va da sé che il ricercatore deve essere munito di intuito, conoscenza ed esperienza per indagare il materiale a disposizione al fine di far emergere tutti i codici e i processi comunicativi dei gruppi studiati, caratterizzati da un sentimento di forte appartenenza alla comunità, specie nei contesti digitali odierni. Passando poi ad osservare quale tipo di comunicazione caratterizza l'interazione sul web tra influencer e follower viene spontaneo iniziare definendo l'interazione online come il luogo privilegiato della socievolezza (*wechselwirkung*, interazione e forma di comunicazione fatica fondamentale, così come la intendeva il sociologo tedesco Georg Simmel) che rimanda a una intesa, cioè a stabilire un contatto. Michel Maffesoli sostiene che ad accomunare i soggetti è un comune sentire, per questo parla di etica dell'estetica attraverso cui

gli utenti si uniscono in community in cui nasce un comune sentiment di condivisione di valori e passioni, senza alcun tipo di obbligo, se non il vincolo di sentirsi parte di un corpo collettivo. Al contrario dei media generalisti del passato, l'influencer non si rivolge ad un pubblico di massa, ma si costruisce un seguito a cui rivolgersi e con cui interagire, attraverso i suoi atti comunicativi. Le community di follower potrebbero essere accomunate al concetto di pubblico. Si tratta, in effetti, di individui geograficamente distanti uniti dall'adesione ad un tipo di comunicazione e ad un codice estetico che si traduce nella partecipazione costante agli atti comunicativi. Essendo comunità affettive che fanno sviluppare nuove forme di appartenenza: la credibilità, l'autenticità sono fondamentali nell'innescare del rapporto tra follower e influencer. Ad avere un ruolo centrale nel rapporto tra follower e influencer è proprio l'autenticità, su cui deve essere modellata la figura dell'influencer, che risulta un "soggetto qualunque" che ha avuto la capacità di emergere grazie alla sua abilità nel sapersi vetrinizzare e raccontare all'interno dell'attention economy, generata dai social media.

Difatti gli utenti recepiscono le promozioni comunicative degli influencer, come dei consigli di qualcuno che conoscono, che gli è vicino. Gli influencer diventano dei mediatori di autenticità, con sé stessi, con i propri follower, e col mondo del marketing. In quest'ottica sono numerose le strategie da loro adottate per fornire una sensazione di autenticità, tanto che alcuni studiosi parlano di autenticità costruita, tuttavia il volume tenta di esaminare, queste strategie, attraverso un'ontologia emotiva. Il concetto di celebrità ha avuto un'elevata importanza per l'economia della ricerca, affrontato da Vanni Codeluppi, che ci dimostra come sia possibile diventare divo grazie a un abile uso delle tecnologie. Le nuove prospettive comunicative offerte dai social media, infatti, sostengono la nascita delle micro-celebrità. Ma per diventare una celebrità bisogna essere credibili, perché bisogna instaurare un rapporto, una relazione col "seguace". Guido Gili, nel capitolo dedicato alla credibilità, puntualizza che non basta chiedersi perché una persona sia credibile, ma per chi. In quest'ottica la credibilità assume i caratteri di una costruzione sociale, è il risultato di apparire più credibili attraverso l'esibizione di comportamenti e segni che sono ritenuti segni della credibilità in un dato contesto o cultura. L'influenza in rete va intesa come una manipolazione di uno stato di coscienza e di conoscenza: un cambiamento dell'io. Tito Vagni spiega che questa interferenza può essere provocato dai mezzi di comunicazione e dagli individui, ma anche da luoghi, oggetti, circostanze, e quindi non è solamente intenzionale, ma può essere casuale e indiretto.

Questo stato di alterazione dell'io è difficilmente percepibile dall'individuo se non in presenza di un salto tecnologico e culturale; oltre a manifestarsi nei tempi fulminei dell'istantaneità, può affiorare dopo aver agito in maniera sotterranea nell'identità dell'individuo, come una forma di shock postumo. Questa definizione complica ogni tentativo di quantificare l'influenza della comunicazione digitale, perché la colloca su un piano difficilmente circoscrivibile e la immagina come un processo costante e inesauribile, che va oltre la dimensione mediale.

Nella seconda parte del volume vengono affrontati dei casi studio sui vari settori in cui oggi operano la maggior parte degli influencer. Simonetta Buffo si sofferma sull'analisi di diverse figure: dai virtual influencer, ai fashion blogger ed alla loro rispettiva evoluzione ed il loro modello di fare impresa, focalizzandosi sul nuovo rapporto che si è creato con il marketing dei brand di lusso. «Una nuova influencer economy sta nascendo: i talent iniziano a guadagnare con

la vendita diretta [...] I brand dovranno quindi capire come far parte di questo cambiamento.» (We Are Social e Hootsuite, 2020b).

Un altro settore rilevante sondato da Simona De Iulio, Laurence Depezay e Susan Kovacs è quello del food. L'obiettivo è quello di indagare l'influencer nella pluralità dei contesti in cui opera, i casi presi in analisi vanno a confermare lo sviluppo di diverse soluzioni tematiche e comunicative in base a specifiche passioni e interessi. I casi mostrano come sia essenziale la "testimonianza", un tipo di forma espressiva sfruttato per attirare l'attenzione e a suscitare reazioni.

Il volume continua cercando di rintracciare altri ambiti in cui opera l'attention economy attraverso le nuove figure digitali, come lo sport ed il turismo. Settori in cui la figura dell'influencer ricopre un ruolo marginale rispetto agli altri settori succitati. Soprattutto se ci si sofferma a ragionare intorno al marketing del turismo in cui l'utente/viaggiatore si affida, volendo ritornare al concetto di affidabilità, nella scelta della destinazione, alle recensioni di persone comuni, amici o conoscenti.

In conclusione il volume si propone come un'analisi puntuale sulle nuove figure lavorative che sono nate grazie ai social media, figure lavorative che rasentano la celebrità e che si collocano nell'economia del web come nuovi modelli alla quale si affida il marketing dei brand di lusso e del cibo. Inutile dire quanto questi fenomeni del web siano temporanei e caratterizzati da confini labili, da margini facilmente sgretolabili e che mutano già mentre si sta scrivendo.

## References

Baudrillard J., (1970) *La società dei consumi. I suoi miti e le sue strutture*. Bologna, Il Mulino.

Goldhaber Michael H., (1997). *The attention economy and the Net*. First Monday, Volume 2, Number 4 – 7. (<https://journals.uic.edu/ojs/index.php/fm/article/download/519/440>)

Kozinets Robert V., (1998), *On Netnography: Initial Reflections on Consumer Research Investigations of Cyberculture*. Provo, UT, Association for Consumer Research.

We Are Social, (2020). *We Are Social Trends*. (<https://wearesocial.com>)

We Are Social, (2020). *Hootsuite*. (<https://wearesocial.com>)

White Leslie A., (1949). *The Science of Culture: A study of Man and Civilization*, New York, Farrar Strauss and Co.

## About the author

Vincenzo Piccolo consegue la laurea in Culture Digitali e della Comunicazione presso la facoltà di Scienze Sociali dell'Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II, per poi trasferirsi a Milano dove si specializza in Editoria, Culture della Comunicazione e della Moda presso l'Università degli Studi di Milano. Giornalista pubblicista scrive e collabora con diverse testate online, dove si occupa di cultura, arte e moda. [vincenzo.shake.piccolo@gmail.com](mailto:vincenzo.shake.piccolo@gmail.com)