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Fútbol y Dictadura:
Analysing the effects of the 1978 World Cup on
Argentinian internal politics and its representation in
the Italian and Spanish media

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1. Introduction

In 1978, Argentina was living one of the darkest times in its history. While, during the daytime, Generals of the Armed Forces were sitting in the *Casa Rosada* administering the State, in the night, innumerable Ford Falcons patrolled all the corners of the country in the hunt for *la subversión*. As a result, around 30,000 Argentines “disappeared” between 1976 and 1983. A deep wound in the Argentinian society that is yet to be cured.

The militaries’ Argentina was not an anomaly. In those years, many Latin-American countries came to be run by repressive, far-right dictatorships. Nevertheless, *el Progreso de Reorganización Nacional* boasted a peculiarity that no one else could count on: the luxury to host a massive sports event that would present the World the counterfeit image of a virginity that the Junta had already lost a long time before. Just like Mussolini had had his *Mondiale* in 1934 and Hitler had had his *Olympische Sommerspiele* in 1936, general of the Army Jorge Rafael Videla was reaching the peak of his popularity with his *Mundial de Fútbol 1978*.

This research paper will, therefore, focus on the political salience of the 1978 World Cup, and will do so from two viewpoints. First, the *Mundial* will be analysed within its borders. The focus, hence, will be placed on the way the World Cup affected the Argentinian society in the construction of a renewed national sentiment, and the Military Junta in the manufacturing of internal consensus and of an external image of a peaceful country. Second, we will look at how this image was perceived and depicted in Europe, especially in Italy and Spain, by analysing the publications of three critical newspapers of those countries: *Corriere della Sera* (Italy), *La Repubblica* (Italy), and *El País* (Spain).

The significance of this historical event for what concerns further research is ample and topical. Although we have recently “celebrated” the 40th anniversary of the *Mundial*, in fact, this topic is still able to generate a great deal of debate, especially but not only in the Argentinian society – as symbolised by the presence of extremely recent sources in our bibliography. It follows that the room for the propagation of new keys of interpretations remains considerable and, as it will be noted in 1.1, further researches are still auspicial.

Nonetheless, it is useful to remind that history is not only studied for the sake of it and the (extremely noble) reason of curiosity. Indeed, the study of the management of mass-sports-event by repressive or undemocratic governments continues to be a more-than-necessary exercise, even in 2019, in order

to achieve a better understanding of our daily reality. Just about a year ago, for example, Russia was hosting its own World Cup. With the repression of dissent in the background¹, President Vladimir Putin was declaring that the tournament “helped break many stereotypes about Russia” and that “people have seen that Russia is a hospitable country, a friendly one for those who come here” (Reuters, 2018). As the reader will note through the pages that follow, these words are strikingly similar to those the Generals and their press used to pronounce in 1978 – while thousands of Argentinian families were crying the disappearance of their loved ones. That is the same Russia that is classified by the Economist as “Authoritarian Regime”, just like Qatar, which is set to host the World Cup in 2022² (The Economist, 2018). Hence, if we want to be aware of what the potential effects of these events are when their organisation falls in the wrong hands, it is of utmost importance that we insist on studying the outcomes these produced in the past.

The present paper will respond to two primary research questions. First, “Has the Military Junta actually been able to take political advantage of the organisation of the World Cup and, if yes, in what ways?”. Second, the last interrogatory focused on the so-called *campana antiargentina*³: “Did an anti-Argentina campaign exist in Italy and Spain, and what characteristics did it have?”.

Concerning the first research question, our thesis will be that the *Mundial* has been a low-yield political and economic investment for the Junta in the medium/long-term, although it helped it to reach the peak of its popularity in the short-term. For what concerns the second question, our thesis is, of course, double-sided. For the case of Italy, it will be argued that, although with exceptions, the majoritarian position adopted in the media was (through *Corriere della Sera* and due to its political affiliations) of defence of the dictatorship and its World Cup. On the other hand, the case of Spain will be approached with more curiosity, as it is a topic that, up to this moment, has gained less significance within the academia. It is to expect, however, that no extreme critiques were made in the

¹ In June 2018, for instance, The Telegraph published the following article: “Russian court jails teenage critics as Putin cracks down on dissent ahead of World Cup” (Luhun, 2018). Consult the bibliography for the URL.

² The Economist Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index ranks 167 countries by giving them scores from 0 to 10, based on 60 indicators of democratic performance. Accordingly with the score obtained, a country is classified as “Full Democracy”, “Flawed Democracy”, “Hybrid Regime”, or “Authoritarian Regime”. Russia and Qatar were respectively ranked 144th and 133rd in 2018, hence falling in the “Authoritarian Regime” category.

³ As it will be explained in further detail in chapter 2, *The dictatorship came to name campana antiargentina (anti-Argentina campaign) whatever voice coming from abroad – especially Europe – and either denouncing the Human Rights violations occurring in the country or claiming that the government would have not been able to conclude the tournament’s organisation before the due date. Otherwise, as explained by the government through the first Directiva de Difusión al Exterior of 1977, it was an “intense campaign of international discredit, put in place by terrorist gangs who acted in our country and, currently, are situated abroad”.*

period we studied – which is not to say that the newspaper would praise the dictatorship and its *Mundial*.

The research paper will be structured as follows. Chapter 1.1 will offer a Literature Review of the most significant pieces of bibliography utilised. Chapter 2 will deal with the 1978 World Cup by focusing on some of its most noteworthy aspects – namely, the organisation, its relationship with the regime and repression, the explosion of nationalism following the victory of the Argentinian National Team, and the so-called *campaña antiargentina*. The argumentation – which also features a short yet interesting interview of Alfredo Ayala, former prisoner of the *ESMA* detention centre – will be instrumental to the demonstration of the first thesis mentioned above.

Chapter 3 will provide a specific focus on the *campaña antiargentina* by investigating the approach of Italy and Spain's leading newspapers. In section 3.1 we will analyse *Corriere della Sera*. The analysis includes a brief outlook of the political affiliations the newspaper's direction had developed through its participation to the Masonic Lodge P2. Finally, *La Repubblica* will serve as a necessary argumentative counter-weight before passing to the next section. Prior to drawing conclusions in 3.3, section 3.2 will, hence, provide an analysis of *El País* and its thorough reportage of the World Cup. The paper will end with Chapter 4, in which the main conclusions drawn will be recapitulated.

Finally, before the reader begins his study of the paper, it is necessary to precise that this is not meant to be an encyclopaedia. As a consequence – and unfortunately, indeed – some pieces of information that are not strictly necessary to our argumentation have been left out or only briefly mentioned, although they all undoubtedly are essential pieces of the overall historical puzzle⁴. It is the case, for instance, of the wider socio-political scenario, which is only briefly introduced in Chapter 2. Or of the anti-Argentina campaign – outside of Spain and Italy – and of the domestic media's narration of the World Cup, which, again, cannot receive all the attention they would deserve.

Although an individual research of the bibliography listed at the end of the paper would surely enrich the reader's general knowledge about these particular topics, this can be, of course, taken as an invitation to historians to focus their future researches on the aspects that we failed to address appropriately, both because they fall out of the scope of the research or because the available literature can still be improved.

⁴ To compensate for this shortage, some suggested readings will be provided in the footnotes.

1.1 Literature Review

Each bibliographic reference the reader will encounter throughout this text is the final outcome of a careful selection, as resulting from a long yet entertaining study. As a consequence, this research paper has been written with the virtual certainty that the featuring literature is the most complete and reliable in the academic and journalistic panorama (at least up to the date of its publication).

The overwhelming majority of the sources come from Argentine authors. Some of the most important of them were even obtained physically in Argentina due to the complexity of finding them in Europe. Unfortunately, it must be reported that a part of the bibliography regarding the subject studied turned out to be scarcely available. Nevertheless, we are strongly confident that what the reader will find in the bibliography generously exceeds the essential literature for what concerns the 1978 World Cup of Football.

In Chapter 2, the reader will be briefly introduced to the Argentinian socio-political situation in 1978. In that occasion, references are supported by two of the most reliable manuals regarding that segment of history – namely Marcos Novaro’s “Historia de la Argentina 1955-2010”, and “La Dictadura Militar 1976-1983: Del Golpe de Estado a la Restauración Democrática”, written by the very Novaro and Vicente Palermo. Finally, Pilar Calveiro’s “Poder y Desaparición” will help us complete this general overview by providing us a focus on Argentina’s concentration camps. As specified, this research paper aims at explaining the dynamics that connect the military dictatorship with the 1978 World Cup. Hence, it is directed to a public that already has some familiarity with the overall historical period. To compensate for this shortage of general information, some additional readings will be signaled in the footnotes to help the inexperienced reader orientating in the historical context.

After that, the chapter rapidly shifts its focus towards the *Mundial*. Here, several books resulted fundamental both for the comprehension of the event as a historical fact and for the production of a reasoned interpretation of it in its social and political acceptance. In this sense, Matías Bauso’s “78. Historia oral del Mundial” has been a sensational reference point for this paper. This is not only due to the dimensions of the book (a brick of more than 800 pages), but also for the great deal of illuminating information contained in it. Indeed, the Argentine journalist carried out an extraordinary work of investigation, comprising of more than 150 testimonies between the protagonists of that historical event. Although it was put on the market just a year ago, “78” is destined to become the main reference point for those who want to understand the *Mundial* in its multiple facets.

Pablo Llonto has been another fundamental author thanks to his book “La vergüenza de todos”⁵. Not by chance, this author is, in turn, largely quoted in most of the academic papers that appear in the bibliography. Similarly, sociologist Pablo Alabarces has offered interesting viewpoints through his books “Fútbol y patria” and “Héroes, machos y patriotas. El fútbol entre la violencia y los medios”. Furthermore, Novaro and Palermo’s text appears again in the context of the *Mundial*, to which they devote a fascinating analysis in its central chapter. Finally, between the most important references here used we find “Deporte, Desaparecidos y Dictadura” by Gustavo Veiga. Perhaps less quoted than its colleagues, the latter also offers a valuable insight on how sportsmen and -women extraneous to football were treated during the dictatorship. Of course, this was not the place to deal with this topic, so we only extracted the segments strictly regarding the World Cup.

Apart from the books, the bibliography also includes several academic papers, signed by, among others, authors such as Marcelo Borrelli, Mariana Santángelo, Lía Ferrero, Daniel Sazbón, Diego Roldán, and Eduardo Archetti. Furthermore, the research paper avails itself of documentary “La fiesta de todos” in order to supply the reader of a taste of the sentiment that, in a certain sense, prevailed in those times of national exaltation for the victory of the World Cup.

Reasons of availability aside, some potential pieces of bibliography were consciously excluded for their unconvincing approach to the matter, or because they did not furnish a significant contribution to our argumentation. Indeed, studying sports-related events has demonstrated to be an arduous task. When moving in this tricky territory, the researcher must, in fact, develop the ability to “dribble” what Alabarces defines “coffee chats” (1998, p. 75), which are far from having a proper academic value. Indeed, although virtually everyone loves sports, not everyone is entitled to speak about sports. Even more so, if the topic is as delicate as the one we deal with here. It was of primary importance, therefore, to bear this particular in mind in the selection of the bibliography.

The general difficulty to deal with sports without blanketing them in the over-simplifying *panem-et-circenses* rhetoric has definitely complicated the researches. However, it did not do so alone. Indeed, the last dictatorship remains an open wound in the Argentinian society and, while the country has already entered in an effective process of digestion of the events, one must always evaluate whether the text that he or she is reading is excessively affected by emotions or subjective views to be

⁵ As it has been impossible to obtain it in Spanish, the Italian version has been used. It can be found in the bibliography as “I Mondiali della Vergogna”.

considered valid. Concerning this, our personal, first-hand knowledge of Argentina and its people⁶, combined with the distant European mentality from which we produced our analysis, might have been the key factors that helped us discerning the “reliable” from the “unreliable”, and the “coffee chat” from academic wisdom.

Although Bauso’s “78” is a phenomenal step forward towards a potential “rational turn” for what concerns sports literature, there remains undeniable room for improvements. Our wish is that works of this kind – in which we hope it is possible to include this research paper – proliferate in order to keep enhancing the debate regarding the 1978 World Cup and sports event in general. We just need to acknowledge that “football is the most important thing of the least important things” – as coach Arrigo Sacchi used to define it – hence, work for the goal of giving it the dignity that, in many cases, it has been undressed of.

Whereas the research related to chapter 3 was not easier, the enunciation of its bibliographical sources is, luckily, far briefer. As the chapter is mostly composed of newspaper articles, the greatest part of the sources responds to the names *Corriere della Sera*, *La Repubblica*, and *El País*. Nevertheless, there at least four further elements that deserve to be mentioned here.

The first two were instrumental to the explanation of the political inclination of *Corriere*, which is crucial to mention in an analysis of *this* newspaper in *this* historical period. These are Claudio Tognonato’s book “Affari Nostri” and the documentary, produced by Sky Italia, “Storie di Matteo Marani Argentina 78”. Both of them, hence, inspect the relationship of the editorial group *Corriere della Sera* with the Argentinian government and the Masonic Lodge P2.

Finally, two last instruments have helped alleviating our work. Indeed, the works of Joaquín Anduro Félix and the *Centro Interdipartimentale di Ricerca Educativa e Sociale* of Roma 3 University, have represented a very useful starting point for the research of the articles. As a matter of fact, both provided a preliminary cataloguing of some articles of, respectively, *El País* and *Corriere della Sera*. Considerable individual research remained, nonetheless, necessary in order to obtain the desired amount of articles regarding the World Cup. Similarly, the interpretation of the sources is entirely personal.

⁶ This also gave us the opportunity to include an interesting interview to a former prisoner of the *ESMA* detention centre, available in Chapter 2.

2. The 1978 World Cup and the dictatorship

“Ten European countries, four American countries, Iran and Tunisia participated. The Pope sent his blessing from Rome. To the sound of a military anthem, general Videla decorated Havelange during the inauguration ceremony in Buenos Aires’ Estadio Monumental. At a few steps’ distance, the Argentinian Auschwitz, the torment and extermination centre Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada, was fully functioning”

- Eduardo Galeano (2015, p. 175-176)

On the 24th of March 1976 yet another military *golpe* was forcefully removing from office all the components of an Argentinian government. Whereas the population seemed to have gotten used to the militaries seizing power with the aim of bringing order back to the Country, the civilians were yet to discover that they were about to enter into one of Argentina’s darkest periods. In the background there was a context of daily violence between the groups of the Peronist Left and the paramilitary forces informally backed by the State: a guerrilla which had already killed 576 as of 1976 (Novaro, 2013, p. 135).

The new political project, led in its most fervent years by general Jorge Rafael Videla, came to be known as the “*Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*” (*Process of National Reorganisation*). Indeed, while the destitution of Maria Estela Martinez de Perón⁷ came as no surprise to the population, in this occasion the Armed Forces were entering the political scenario with an objective that went much beyond the “classic” reinstallation of order. As Novaro argues, they aimed to cure “the nation’s body, ill from head to toe, injecting in it by means of force the antidote against its evils” (2013, p. 137)⁸. That is, to re-educate the population by annihilating Peronism and the Left at all costs. These targets, in the mind of the dictators, were not only represented by the violent factions of *Montoneros* or the *Ejercito Revolucionario del Pueblo* (ERP)⁹, yet they also included intellectuals, artists, journalists, professors and the heads of the unions.

⁷ Popularly known as *Isabel Perón*.

⁸ To read more about the Process of National Reorganisation, we suggest Paula Canelo’s book “La política secreta de la última dictadura argentina (1976-1983)” (Canelo, 2016).

⁹ Vera Carnovale provides an interesting insight on the ERP in her article “La guerra revolucionaria del PRT-ERP” (2010).

Hence, the *golpe* paved the way for a terrifying “anti-subversion war” – alternatively referred to as “dirty war” by the generals – which institutionalised the *desaparición* (literally: *disappearance*) of the enemies of the regime and the use of concentration camps as its privileged weapons (Calveiro, 1998, p. 27). Only after the Argentinian defeat in the Falklands War (1982)¹⁰, the term “dirty war” was to be commonly replaced by “repression” or “state terrorism” in the public discourse (Novaro & Palermo, 2003, p. 486-487). As the dictatorship ended in 1983, the number of victims is estimated around 30.000.¹¹

During the first hours of existence of the new regime, the Junta issued a series of statements; the vast majority of them sanctioned prohibitions, suspensions of rights and governmental interventions in otherwise autonomous institutions “in favour of the whole country and not against certain social sectors” (El Historiador, s.d.). Moreover, the television and the radio had interrupted their broadcasting for official order. Only with statement number 23 of March 24 the Armed Forces derogated this rule: broadcasting would resume solely in order to let the people watch the game Poland-Argentina¹² live. Although those were the first hours of life of the new regime, an act like this “allows to infer the place football would occupy for the dictatorship” in its near future (Alabarces, 2014, p. 5). Videla and his colleagues, who were to host the 1978 Football World Cup, knew the importance this sport had in their country and were already starting to build a plan on how to politically take advantage of it.

2.1. Hosting a World Cup: the long road to the *Mundial*

One of the biggest myths regarding the 1978 World Cup is that it has been awarded directly from FIFA to the Armed Forces. On the contrary, Argentina had been promised the World Cup in the 1964 FIFA Congress in Tokio. There, it was decided that Mexico would host the 1970 tournament, leaving Argentina the honour for the 1978 edition. This was possible by virtue of a customary law that was generally¹³ respected within the highest football authority: a European country and a Latin American one ought to alternate as hosts of the World Cup every four years (Bauso, 2018, p. 38).

¹⁰ To read more about the Falklands/Malvinas War and its effects on the Argentinian society, we suggest historian Vicente Palermo’s book “Sal en las heridas: las Malvinas en la cultura argentina contemporánea” (2014).

¹¹ Most of the authors and human rights organisations agree on this figure. Nevertheless, few others report that the killings were less. For instance, Calveiro (1998, p. 29) claims that the victims of the regime were around 20 thousand.

¹² Friendly match played in Europe.

¹³ As Bauso (2018) mentions, this rule was not respected when, as Italy had hosted the 1934 World Cup, France organised the following edition.

In the 35th FIFA Congress of 1966, the hosts were officialised up until 1982, confirming that Argentina was the winning candidate for 1978. However, the designation was yet to be nationally ratified a “ridiculous” number of times (Bauso, 2018, p. 41) for it to be, once and for all, formally official. From 1964 on, in fact, seven presidents had had the organisation of the tournament in their hands before the Process of National Reorganisation: Arturo Umberto Illia, Juan Carlos Onganía, Roberto Marcelo Levingston, Alejandro Augustín Lanusse, Héctor José Cámpora, Juan Domingo Perón and María Estela Martínez de Perón. “Only one thing united all these administrations: all of them tried to get a political return through the World Cup” (Bauso, 2018, p. 41). Nevertheless, most of these governments were absolutely inactive in the practice of the organisation, while making strong yet empty promises about its realisation. This implied that the realisation of the World Cup in Argentina was brought into question almost until the kick-off, since all the preparation works begun with a severe delay.

It should not surprise, therefore, that as the Armed Forces occupied the *Casa Rosada*, they found out they had inherited only one concrete advancement made by the previous governments for what concerned the tournament: the logo. Isabel’s Peronist government had, in fact, taken care of drawing the symbol that, despite the futile attempts made by the Junta to change it, would be forever known as that of the *Mundial* ’78: Juan Domingo Perón’s arms holding a football. The fact that both of them wanted to leave a mark on the competition will not be the only parallelism of the military dictatorship with Perón’s era – ironically, since the Process aimed at re-educating precisely the part of the population that politically recognised itself in the Peronist paradigm.



Figure 1: On the left, Argentina '78's logo (source: Fifa.com). Figure 2: On the right, the classic gesture Juan Domingo Perón used to greet the masses (Source: Instituto Nacional Juan Domingo Perón).

The World Cup already emerged as a crucial theme during one of the very first meetings of the Junta in March 1976. Nevertheless, the *Mundial* did not figure in the plan presented by José Martínez de Hoz, the Process' minister of Economy, nor was it perceived as a significant theme for the *de facto* President Videla. On the contrary, it was the Admiral of the Navy Emilio Massera¹⁴ who took the floor to define an eventual organisation of the tournament “politically advantageous” (Llonto, 2010, p. 31). In that occasion, Massera was thoroughly reading a report numbering the political and economic gains that Argentina could enjoy by hosting the XI World Cup that had been prepared by a Captain of the Navy, Carlos Lacoste¹⁵.

Even though the majority of the highest ranks of the Junta did not have the slightest personal interest in football, Massera was able to convince Videla to give his consent to take the organisation on. Although “there was a debate within the government on whether to do it or not”, Videla would then declare that they understood that by “demonstrating to the world that we were able to do it [...] we could get gains in terms of image” (Bauso, 2018, p. 71).

On the 7th of June, the Junta sanctioned Law no. 21.349, which declared that “the organisation and realisation of the XI Football World Cup” was a matter “of national interest”. Furthermore, article 2 established the creation of the *Ente Autárquico Mundial 1978* (EAM78), whose – virtually unlimited – powers were set out in article 3:

“[EAM78] Has in its mission to formulate [...] the specific policies related to the event; to coordinate the work of the distinct bodies and organisms having jurisdiction over the matter; [...] to supervise the decentralised areas; to subscribe and/or endorse conventions; to approve, to project, to contract, to execute, to finance of its own accord or by means of third parties the creation of infrastructure and/or the offering of related services and to realise whatever other work necessary to the attainment of its objective” (Sumario del Boletín Oficial N° 23444, 1976).

Videla named general Omar Actis president of the EAM and Carlos Lacoste his vice. He had decided with Actis for an “austere *Mundial*” (Alabarces, 2008), expecting an expense between 70 and 100 million dollars: that was what the President of the EAM78 was exactly going to announce in his first press conference on the 19th of August (Bauso, 2018, p. 79). Actis never officialised such information, as he was killed in a gunfire on his way to the conference. Whereas Antonio Merlo was appointed in

¹⁴ Admiral of the Navy, spokesperson of the “hard line” against the “subversion”, and head of the ESMA detention centre, Emilio Massera was undoubtedly one the most influential personalities within the Junta.

¹⁵ As Bauso reports (2018), Lacoste was an expert of the theme. This is due to the fact that he had previously been part of the Organising Committee created by López Rega, former minister of *Bienestar Social* under Isabel Perón.

his stead, Lacoste – who retained the role of vice-President – immediately established his role as “owner of the World Cup” (Bauso, 2018, p. 77), virtually taking every decision from then on, and allowing the Navy to take control of the competition and of the AFA (the Argentinian Football Association).

Actis’ death was and still is surrounded by mystery. His “death was attributed to the guerrilla: nevertheless, the preponderant role that Lacoste came to cover, displacing Merlo in practice, brought many to suspect an ordered murder, which would permit the Navy to take control of the organisation”, quoting Alabarces (2008). Bearing in mind that there is no significant proof of the latter affirmation, it is true that a certain competition for power existed within the three branches of the Armed Forces, and that Massera had a strong interest in placing Lacoste in a position of freedom of decision-making with respect to the competition.

“Since the 24th of March a few pesos have been spent. From this conference on great investments will begin to take place”, declared Lacoste in a press conference that took place four days after Actis’ death. Indeed, the World Cup was about to be inundated with money thanks to Lacoste’s renewed leadership. He would, in fact, be able to convince the Junta to issue the decree number 1261 of April 1977, which opened the door to almost unlimited spending. As Alabarces (2014, p. 10) reports, the decree “empowered the EAM to realise all kinds of agreements supported ‘by reasons of urgency, security and discretion in the diffusion of its acts’”. The World Cup had just received an inexhaustible credit card.

The cost of the organisation remained one of the most debated themes of the *Mundial*. Juan Alemann, the Secretary for Finance, was the one who denounced the enormous expenditure devoted to the competition and its inflationary effects¹⁶. According to him, the World Cup costed Argentina an unjustified \$700 million¹⁷ – a figure that strikes even more if compared with the \$120 million that Spain would spend for the organisation of the same tournament just four years later. After his “bothersome”, and reiterated, declarations, Alemann was victim of a failed assassination attempt on the 21st of June 1978, at the exact same time Argentina was scoring their fourth goal against Perú. Although this has never been proven, Alemann had strong suspects the militaries were the authors of the attack¹⁸.

¹⁶ In 1977 inflation was at 160.4% (Bauso, 2018, p. 816).

¹⁷ Officially reported expenditures were 521.494.931\$ (Lag & Acevedo). Nevertheless, Alemann’s version remains the most accredited for the broadest part of the authors.

¹⁸ He would then declare “Who had, back then, the impunity to dare to put a bomb at few meters’ distance from a police station? Who could have so much interest in killing or intimidating me?” (Bauso, 2018, p. 816).

Undoubtedly, Massera and Lacoste were in strong opposition with him, as they kept publicly insisting that the *Mundial* had to be organised at all costs – literally and metaphorically – as it was a “political decision”: “How much does it cost to demonstrate that Buenos Aires is the capital of Argentina to 1.5 billion people? And how much for 5 thousand journalists informing the world about the Argentinian reality after they have seen it?”, the latter would declare (Bauso, 2018, p. 811).

Regardless of the objective and the expenses incurred to achieve it, it is fair to say that the Armed Forces did an impressive job organising the World Cup, especially considering that they were able to do it in around two years. The Junta built three stadiums (Córdoba, Mendoza and Mar del Plata) and renewed Buenos Aires’ Estadio Monumental, Rosario’s Gigante de Arroyito – the two pitches where Argentina played its matches – and the José Amalfitani, home of Vélez Sársfield. Moreover, the government improved roads, hotels, infrastructures, airports and telecommunications. Finally, \$100 million were spent on the Buenos Aires Production Centre and on *Argentina 78 Televisora*, which enabled the colour transmission of the *Mundial*. The Junta saw this last element as crucial, for it enabled to “export the best image of the country, [that is], a united and pacific country” (Santángelo, 2014, p. 136).

The grand objective of the Junta was, in fact, to show the world an image of a peaceful Argentina, that distracted from the tortures and systematic violations of Human Rights that were still happening in the country. As Antonio Merlo perfectly summarised in 1976, “The *Mundial*, beyond football, will have two fundamental ends: to show abroad an image [of Argentina] that has been deformed by foreign interests and to unite the inhabitants of the country” (Bauso, 2018, p. 192).

In order to fulfil the first objective, which was the one the regime most cared about, the Junta hired – for 5.5\$ million – Burson-Marsteller, a private company that had the job to devise a “Program of International Communications for Argentina”. Argentina’s government planned exactly to revert what had been expressed in one of the first reports issued by the company: “The majority of the journalists consider the Argentinian government as oppressive and repressive, a military dictatorship that only deserves condemnation” for “the question of Human Rights is a central concern” for the US and European countries (Bauso, 2018, p. 250-251). As we shall see, this objective has not been attained by the militaries.

In fact, the militaries were very attentive on the image the incoming journalist would find in June 1978. For this reason, they promised no violence would occur during the tournament¹⁹ and took care to indoctrinate the public to “play as an Argentine” – that is, to behave appropriately in the stadiums and to treat kindly the country’s visitors. Finally, the Junta implemented the Plan of Eradication of the infamous *Villa Miseria*, the poorest neighbourhoods in Argentina. Once again, the objective was to greet the journalists with an image of the country that clashed with the one of a barbaric regime that was becoming rather popular in Europe.

2.2 Victory, Torture and Doubts

“Even nowadays, it is still possible to live together in unity and in diversity – the only way to build peace. Therefore, I ask God, our Lord, for this event to truly be a contribution to affirm peace. That peace that we desire. [...] That peace within which the man could fully realise himself, as a person, with dignity, and in liberty. [...] Under the sign of peace, I officially declare inaugurated this eleventh Football World Cup” (Videla, 1978).

With these words, an applauded Jorge Rafael Videla²⁰ was addressing the *Monumental*’s public in the opening ceremony of the *Mundial* ’78. His posture and the almost unnatural rhythm he gave to the speech were markedly revealing of a public-speaking experience that was confined to Military-related occasions. A few moments before, FIFA president João Havelange was congratulating “the government” for the “gigantic work that, once more, [showed] the capacity of realisation and the dynamism of this great nation and [realised] the importance of football for these people” (Havelange, 1976).

Many have asked themselves how has it been possible that FIFA allowed a World Cup to be played in Country run by a repressive, undemocratic regime. Pablo Llonto (2010, p. 57-58) has found an answer that is considered highly reliable by a great deal of his colleagues. The key character of the Argentine Journalist’s version is Paulo Antonio Paranguá, son of Brazilian diplomat Paulo Paranguá, who had been arrested in Argentina in 1977. In that moment, the country’s capacity to host the World Cup was already in doubt also due to its severe delay in the works for the organisation. While

¹⁹ According to Llonto (2010), this has been possible thanks to a secret deal made between Massera and Mario Firmenich, head of Montoneros. He adds that the mediation has been possible thanks to the figure of Licio Gelli, a member of the massonic lodge P2 that will be introduced in greater depth in the following chapter.

²⁰ It is worth reminding that Videla would be condemned to life sentence in 1983 for crimes against humanity and – after having been freed in 1990 – once again in 2010 for having executed about thirty political prisoners by firearm. He would be sentenced further 50 years’ prison in 2012 “for a systematic plan of babies theft”. He died in his prison cell at 83 (ELMUNDO.es, 2013).

Paraguá Senior had tried anything to make his son “reappear”, nothing gave a positive outcome until Havelange directly contacted Videla. The deal they were able to make sanctioned that Paraguá would be sent to France in exchange of the “guarantee that the FIFA will confirm Argentina as host of the World Cup in order to put an end to all that [was being said] in Europe”.



Figure 3: Videla gives his speech for the inauguration ceremony of the XI FIFA World Cup (Source: Archivo Histórico RTA)

The Estadio Monumental, historic home of River Plate and location of the most important matches of the tournament, is situated less than one-kilometre far from the *Escuela Mecánica de la Armada*²¹ (ESMA), the most infamous detention and torture centre of the dictatorship. Alfredo Ayala – who was also known as *Mantecol* when he was a member of the *Movimiento Villero Peronista* – is a former prisoner of the ESMA. He is one of the many Argentines who were incarcerated despite not taking part to the guerrilla and regardless of the fact that they had not received a due process. “I was there from September ’77 until December ’79, when I escaped. In 20 days, they found me again and took me back to the ESMA, where I stayed until June of 1980, when I escaped once and for all”, he tells me.

Alfredo is one of the many prisoners who was obliged to work for the military in the hope of not being killed as a reward. “I have been *encapuchado*²² for the first six months, then they made me work for the World Cup in the *Sótano*²³. There I took care of the infrastructure; other *compañeros* dealt with bureaucracy. This was because the Navy was at the head of the organisation of the World

²¹ The ESMA was directed by Admiral Emilio Massera, previously mentioned in 2.1. To know more about the detention centre’s functioning and structure, we suggest the reading of “Marcados a fuego 3 (1973-1983). Los 70, una historia violenta” (Larraquy, 2013). Today, it is still possible to visit the structure, since it was transformed into a museum.

²² During most of their stay in the detention centres, the prisoners had a hood on that completely impeded their sight.

²³ The *Sótano* is the basement of the ESMA.

Cup”. Perhaps the most famous history of this kind is that of prisoner Raúl Cubas, who was asked to interview Argentina’s coach Menotti after attending his press conference.

“In fact, if it wasn’t for the *Mundial*, maybe they would’ve killed me. If it wasn’t for this, for the fact that they needed my labour, I don’t know for what other reason. On top of that, I felt on the brink of dying in many occasions, but in the majority of times those were only simulations: it was their way to reinforce their influence over us”, *Mantecol* follows.

Many prisoners had the chance to attend the World Cup physically, as Alfredo reveals. “Sometimes [the militaries] made us go out, but it never was for fun. It was to lay a trap to our *compañeros*, whom they would have taken to the detention centres too if they recognised us on the streets. They took me twice to the stadium during the *Mundial*. The first time, it was not for a match, rather, but for the inauguration. The second was a match of Italy in Vélez’s stadium. In spite of everything, I went to have fun and I enjoyed the match! Also, they took us out for a stroll when Argentina won the final. We were 10 prisoners”.

“The players believe that we feel resentment towards them, but it’s not this way. For many of us, the moments when we listened to the screams coming from the stadium²⁴ were one of the few in which we felt free. We don’t have bad feelings towards the *Mundial*. At least, I don’t”, *Mantecol* concludes.

Argentina’s coach César Luis Menotti called up the following players:

- Goalkeepers: Ubaldo Fillol, Héctor Baley, Ricardo La Volpe.
- Defenders: Américo Gallego, Luis Galván, Miguel Oviedo, Daniel Killer, Jorge Olguín, Rubén Pagnanini, Daniel Passarella (C), Alberto Tarantini.
- Midfielders: Norberto Alonso, Óscar Ortiz, Osvaldo Ardiles, Rúben Galván, Omar Larrosa, José Valencia, Julio Ricardo Vila
- Strikers: Daniel Bertoni, René Houseman, Mario Alberto Kempes²⁵, Leopoldo Luque.

This is the team that went on to win the World Cup. First, Argentina qualified to the second phase of the competition by arriving second in the group composed by them, France, Hungary and Italy. Secondly, it won a second group completed by Brasil, Perú and Poland. Lastly, *la selección* triumphed

²⁴ Many ex-prisoners reported that the celebrations of the supporters in the Monumental were distinctly audible in the ESMA. On the contrary, the screams of the *desaparecidos* being tortured were inaudible from anywhere.

²⁵ Kempes was the top scorer of the tournament with six goals.

3-1 in the final against the Netherlands, winning in the extra time²⁶ (after Netherland's Rensenbrink hit the goalpost at the 90th minute). Captain Passarella would receive the trophy from the hands of Videla, even though Havelange, as FIFA President, was the one to originally have this duty, according to FIFA rules. As Llonto (2010, p. 195) reports, Havelange allowed to derogate this law following a petition from the EAM78, "which ensured that the Argentine players so desired".



Figure 4: Videla gives Passarella the cup after Argentina's victory against the Netherlands. On his right, Emilio Massera (Source: Clarín).

Argentina-Perú (6-0) is perhaps the World Cup match which has attracted the greatest deal of debates over its regularity. As Argentina were playing their final game in the second group, Menotti's men went to the pitch knowing they had to win by at least four goals if they wanted to reach the final²⁷. Argentina were a better team than Perú: since 1972 the *albiceleste* had won six out of six games played against the *blanquirroja*. Nevertheless, Perú had had a good first half of the tournament and could count on striker Teófilo Cubillas, who would end the tournament as second topscorer with five goals – just one less than Kempes, who scored a brace in the final game.

Before the match, Videla visited the opponents' locker room accompanied by former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. "I just wanted to tell you that tonight's is a game between two brother countries and, in the name of Latin-American fraternity, I come to manifest my desire that all ends up well", would have told Videla to the Peruvian players, according to Llonto (2010, p. 121). Within the opponent's staff, there was Paquito Morales Bermúdez, son of the President of Perú²⁸. Henry

²⁶ The goalscorers were: Kempes (A) 38', 105'; Bertoni (A) 116'; Nanninga (N) 82'.

²⁷ They had the certainty of that because Brazil had already played their last match against Poland. While it is customary in football to play the last games of a group at the same hour – in order to not give the advantage of playing knowing the previous result to the two teams scheduled afterwards – in this specific case, Argentina had been accorded by the FIFA the possibility to play *all* its matches later than all other teams. This was because the broadcasting hours had been scheduled for the matches to be easily visible live also in Europe, yet the Argentine were used to go to the stadium at night.

²⁸ Francisco Morales Bermudez.

Kissinger, instead, had been invited by the very Videla to attend some matches and would praise the dictatorship in some occasions afterwards. For example, after the final he will declare: “It has been a wonderful party, with a deserved win. This, and not just for the victory in sport, is an irrefutable proof of what the Argentines are able to do” (Veiga, 2006, p. 50). In any case, Bauso (2018, p. 710) signals that this peculiar visit put a significant pressure on the Peruvian national team, but he also holds that this could not be the primary reason for their *debacle*.

In spite of the difference in the quality of the two teams, Perú’s performance was excessively poor to not cause any controversy in public opinion. The first suspect was Ramón Quiroga, the *blanquirroja* goalkeeper: many of his teammates did not want him to play because his was born in Argentina, although he possessed a Peruvian passport. Interviewed by Bauso (2018, p. 736), captain Héctor Chumpitaz said: “We didn’t want him to play. [...] His family lived there and Videla’s dictatorship was ready to do anything to win that tournament. [...] For me, Quiroga could have avoided two goals”. Nevertheless, the goalkeeper would declare afterwards: “I didn’t sell myself. It’s likely that some of my teammates have accepted such thing” (Bauso, 2018, p. 732).

This is kind of declaration echoes with many others that have been made by the other protagonists, who tended to clear their name yet specifying that they could not guarantee anything regarding their teammates’ correctness (Bauso, 2018, p. 731). “Four of five Peruvian players received money” in order to fix the match, said, for instance, Peruvian striker Oblitas (Llonto, 2010, p. 131). Furthermore, Riccardo Gotta, in his book *Fuimos Campeones*, interviewed a Peruvian player, who asked to remain anonymous. To the question “Have there been any contacts to make Argentina secure the qualification?”, he answered: “Look... They knew who to touch”. “Is one enough?”, Gotta asked again. “No”. “Was it everybody?”. “Neither, that is throwing money”, concluded the player (Quoted by Bauso, 2018, p. 727).

Today, the doubts of corruption are more than diffused, although the Argentinian press was silent about it in the following days (Alabarces, 2014, p. 54). Another strong suspect of having received a bribe is Rodolfo Manzo, a Peruvian defender who, after the World Cup, moved to Vélez, an Argentinian team owned by one of the highest directors of the AFA, over which the Process held a strong control (Alabarces, 2014, p. 55). Jorge Fernández, athletic coach in Vélez at the time, revealed to Llonto (2010, p. 138) that “Manzo said it in front of all of the group of players of Vélez. He said they made a deal” to fix the game.

A less accredited version – although of significant diffusion – is that of a corruption net connecting the two national governments involved. As anticipated, Francisco Morales Bermudez’s son was one of the staff members who allowed Videla to enter the dressing room before the match. Furthermore, the relation between the two governments was indeed one of friendship. María Laura Avignolo, an Argentine Journalist, published an article in *The Sunday Times* in 1986 claiming that Argentina had given 50\$ million to Peruvian authorities, most of which would have been paid in the form of 35 thousand tons of grain. However, according to Bauso (2018, p. 739), these donations of grain had already begun a lot earlier – 1971 – and were made periodically and not always in the agreed amounts. Moreover, it is complex to demonstrate up to what point a deal between governments may be able to affect the result of a football game. Bribing a handful players undoubtedly seems a more effective and cheaper solution – other than the most likely to have been used, if it is true that this match was fixed.

2.3 Nationalism and the anti-Argentina campaign

The dictatorship came to name *campaña antiargentina* (anti-Argentina campaign) whatever voice coming from abroad – especially Europe – and either denouncing the Human Rights violations occurring in the country or claiming that the government would have not been able to conclude the tournament’s organisation before the due date. Otherwise, as explained by the government through the first *Directiva de Difusión al Exterior*²⁹ of 1977, it was an “intense campaign of international discredit, put in place by terrorist gangs who acted in our country and, currently, are situated abroad”.

Whereas the term “terrorist gangs” is of debatable truthfulness, it is true that the countries that showed the most fervent opposition towards the *Mundial* were some of those which hosted more exiled Argentines³⁰: France, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden³¹. All of them, following the guidelines given by Montoneros’ leaders, did not necessarily advocate for a boycott. Instead, they saw the *Mundial* as the perfect occasion to place Argentina in front of the cameras and, therefore, to expose to the World all the crimes the Junta was committing – a position resumed by the motto *Argentina campeón, Videla al paredón* (“Argentina champion, Videla before the firing squad”).

²⁹ Formerly secret, now declassified, document.

³⁰ In this sense, it is indeed curious that neither Italy nor Spain could develop an opposition movement as strong as those quoted above.

³¹ Moreover, also Israel developed an interesting boycott movement. Nevertheless, factors such as the non-participation of the national team to the World Cup did not help the protest to spread massively (Rein & Davidi, 2009, p. 688).

The epicentre of the anti-*Mundial* campaign was France, where the COBA (*Comité de Boicot a la Organización del mundial de fútbol en la Argentina*) was the organisation that most pushed for a real boycott of the World Cup – which, as the beginning of competition approached, became clearly impossible to realise. In the Netherlands, the inauguration ceremony was broadcasted with the live transmission of the march of *Madres de plaza de mayo*³² playing on the corner of the screen. Moreover, the players of the national team refused to attend the final dinner with the Junta and the winning team. In Sweden, footballers were let free to decide whether to attend the World Cup or not for ethical reasons. However, not a single player, coming from whatever country, is said to have refused to go to the *Mundial* as a protest to Argentina's political situation – this includes Breitner, Carrascosa and Cruyff, in some cases erroneously reported as absent for this exact reason (Bauso, 2018, p. 237).



Figure 5: A poster diffused by the COBA recites “No football in concentration camps” (Source: Papelitos).

As the Junta took power, it exercised a substantial policy of restriction of the freedom of the press, announcing that whoever informed about activities related to the “subversion” or discredited the new government would be punished with imprisonment (Borrelli, 2011, p. 31-32)³³. The means of information, indeed, represented an invaluable support to the regime, as they helped building a rhetoric that suggested that the attacks made from outside were directed to Argentina's nation, rather than government.

³² *Mothers of Plaza de Mayo* is an organisation of mothers of *desaparecidos*. Still today, they claim truth and justice for their sons and grandchildren by symbolically marching around *Plaza de Mayo* (where the presidential office is situated) every Thursday.

³³ However, Borrelli states that, within the media, “nobody repudiated the *golpe*” and that some newspapers, such as *Clarín*, presented it as something “logical” or “inevitable”, before it took place (2011, p. 31).

The political publication *Somos*³⁴, for example, informed in its front page that “[t]he next World Cup will show how Argentina is, lives and works. On the 1st of June [...] the systematic falsities and all the distortions, which terrorist gangs’ ill-gotten money is able to create, will fall behind” (Bauso, 2018, p. 244). *Para Ti* made a further effort to reinforce mass-nationalism around a common enemy. In its August 1978 issue, the Magazine of *Editorial Atlántida* came with four postcards and a list of addresses of people or organisations who “judged us without knowing us”, in order for the readers to “personally respond” to their offences and to show “today’s Argentina, a country that is committed to defend the peace it struggled to gain”. The list of addresses included the most disparate personalities, as they ranged from President of the United States James Carter and Amnesty International to Italian singer Ornella Vanoni.

Hence, this attitude helped building a strong sense of national belonging around the dictatorship, which, with the support of its press³⁵, was successfully constructing a narration that went beyond the classic “us against them”: the Argentines were asked to show they were tougher than adversities, than terrorism and even history. The result was a consistent recurrence to a “*nosotros inclusivo*, which associated governmental action to sport and to all the nation” (Alabarces, 2008, p. 117) by discursively incorporating the whole population in the realisation a common cause. The “inclusive we” became the subject of official statements as much as of the language of the mass-media, and is perfectly summarised by the title of one of the two official anthems of the competition: *25 millones de Argentinos jugaremos el Mundial* (“25 millions of Argentines will play the World Cup”)³⁶.

Another perfect instance of this concept has been expressed in *El Gráfico*, the most important sports journal in Argentina, two days before the final against the Netherlands:

“We got to the end. Not only the players, but everybody. All the ME sheltered behind isolated screams have ended. Now its US, without distinction of colours, as we always had to be. We rolled over destiny and defeated the shadows”³⁷ (Ferrero & Sazbón, 2007, p. 148).

³⁴ 14/04/78, unsigned.

³⁵ For a further focus on the role of the political press during the World Cup consult article “El Mundial 78 en la prensa política argentina: entre la “fiesta”, el nacionalismo y los derechos humanos” (Borrelli & Ozust, 2018).

³⁶ The second one, “El Mundial” was signed by Ennio Morricone. Although it is considered one of the best World Cup anthems in history, “25 millones” was the one that was played the most in those times.

³⁷ 23/06/78

Finally, nationalism exploded as the people massively reversed on the streets of all the country after the matches of their national team³⁸, in a phenomenon Roldán (2007) defines “regulated spontaneity”. Indeed, the celebrations came spontaneously and were by no means requested by the regime, although they were unconsciously stimulated by the official rhetoric. Whatever their nature, the consequence of this outburst of joy and chauvinism was a complete suspension of any critique towards the regime. The reason is effectively commented by historian Marina Franco, interviewed in Bauso’s book “78” (2018, p. 749):

“Football has a national and popular dimension that is so massive that produces identification and identity. If this is associated to national identity [...], it produces a mix in which the political identity ends up constructing itself in terms of football identity. The amalgam that is produced is indestructible”.

A year after the conclusion of the World Cup, the documentary *La fiesta de todos* (1979) showed the popular celebrations of the victory across the country. Or, as Alabarces prefers to say (2014, p. 47), “the acquiescence, the complicity and the genuflection [of the people] in front of the dictators” and their crimes. The voice of historian Félix Luna concludes the film as follows:

“These delirious, clean, unanimous multitudes are the most similar thing to a nation, that is mature, realised, vibrating with a common sense, with no one left aside or marginalised, I have seen in my life. And, perhaps, for the first time, in which the happiness of some does not imply the sorrow of others”.

These words have a striking resemblance with Videla’s after the end of the tournament: “It is the jubilation of a nation that [...] celebrates the re-encounter with itself, that is proud of its past, that does not reject its present and that assumes with heroic optimism the immediate future”. (Alabarces, 2014, p. 52). In the background, the Argentines were buying and displaying Argentinian flags like never before: even though in an environment of severe repression, the population and the regime were living in an astonishing harmony (Novaro & Palermo, 2003, p. 162-164).

³⁸ Around 70% of the country’s population went out to street to celebrate after the game against Perú (Bauso, 2018, p. 19).



Figure 6: On the 30th of June, *Somos* chooses to praise the victory of the Mundial with a photo of Videla celebrating and the headline “A country that has changed”: the dictatorship was at the peak of its popularity (Source: Papelitos).

2.4 Conclusions: has the dictatorship politically benefitted from the World Cup?

To sum up what has been said above, Argentina in 1978 was ruled by a regime that distinguished itself for its high degree of repression and could count on a scarce social mobilisation in its favour, although it controlled the media. Another great difference from other forms of authoritarianism, either close or far, was that it could afford itself the luxury of hosting a mass-sport-event and to politically exploit it. Moreover, this was favoured by the behaviour of a public that not only manifested no form of rejection towards its rulers, yet it also presented “the image of a united country, a community in harmony and peace, in which everybody felt Argentine and was proud to be so” (Novaro & Palermo, 2003, p. 159-160).

Novaro and Palermo (2003, p. 166) hold that the organisation of the World Cup signs the closest the regime has been to fascism – an affirmation that is echoed by other authors as well. Bauso (2018, p. 20), for instance, expands on this concept by enumerating the three elements that configure the “fascist fact”: first, the attempt of exploitation of the masses mobilised due to football; second, the rampant nationalism; third, *unanimism*. With the latter point, Bauso refers to the ability of the regime and its media of having its masses unanimously supporting its causes, up to the point of emarginating the (scarce) dissident voices. A meaningful example of that is the extensive recourse to the “inclusive we” in the public discourse, as mentioned above.

Roldán (2007, p. 132) goes even further to express the audacious belief that “*Argentina 78* was a large-scale enterprise of political indoctrination, probably more sophisticated than that set in motion by Nazism in the 1936 Olympics”. While this statement may encounter criticism for a number of points that we are not interested in dealing with here, it is less debatable that the World Cup represented the peak of popularity and power for the Junta (Felix A., 2010, p. 1441). Indeed, the climate of popular joy and diffused national fervour the *Mundial* was able to generate has only been reached again through a war (Falkland/Malvinas), by means of which the Junta was exactly aiming to reproduce that massive “justification of the unjustifiable” that football had made so natural in 1978 (Bauso, 2018, p. 24, 749).

Although the almost complete adhesion to the regime, either passive or active, is the clearest of the short-term effects of the World Cup on Argentina’s internal politics, it arguably is of greater interest to evaluate the long-term impacts of this event and its management by the Junta. These can be evaluated based on two criteria: the political and the economic.

Politically, the Junta proved unable to exploit a situation that promised earnings, in terms of popular subscription to the regime, that were immeasurably higher than those that have been actually collected. In fact, while the highest charges of the regime were publicly expressing complacency for the victory, intended as a step forward in the process of reorganisation of the nation³⁹, they did very little to translate this generalised happiness into a tangible long-term political advantage. As a matter of fact, this is Reynaldo Bignone’s greatest regret: “Our main mistake has been to not have hold elections in 1978. Had we done it, they would still be applauding us today. But no one wants to leave when things go well” (Llonto, 2010, p. 205), declared, in 2002, the last dictator holding office in *Casa Rosada*.

Economically, the *Mundial* was an “overwhelming fiasco”. Indeed, the Junta, had promised through Lacoste an organisation that was to be financed by the economic earnings it would have produced – although, as we have seen above, the political possibility to host an event of this magnitude was considered a massive, yet intangible, gain which could not be measured in terms of money. As a matter of fact, Argentina received 7,000 tourists against a foreseen flux of 50,000. Consequently, the

³⁹ Minister of Economy Martínez De Hoz commented: “The World Cup has been a total success. I am not only referring to the success on the field, where the commitment and the heart of our players have been fantastic; rather, also to the commitment of every Argentine, which made possible that this great party was realised with maximum correctness. What happened is an example that must continue in Argentina. We need to play the great match of the national process, in which the final triumph does not only depend on the government, but also on the commitment and participation of every Argentina. Together we will win” (Llonto, 2010, p. 206).

final revenues stationed around \$10 million, against an expense of \$500 million if we want to use the official figures, or of \$700 million if we are to accept Alemann's strong and accredited claims.

Nonetheless, the very first, and declared, objective of the Junta what to improve Argentina's international reputation thanks to the showcase of the World Cup. In this respect, however, the visibility created by an event like the *Mundial* allowed the World to discover all the Human Rights violations that were happening in the country, making of it, on the contrary, "a showcase of atrocities" (Bauso, 2018, p. 22). Moreover, the great triumph against the Netherlands convinced the militaries, taken by a delusion of grandeur, to invite the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to visit Argentina a year later, certain of the fact that they would have confirmed their view of Argentina as a peaceful country. The effect was exactly the opposite for, from 1979 on, international denunciations grew exponentially.

In conclusion, the World Cup represented "the best moment of the regime" (Novaro & Palermo, 2003, p. 168), for it constituted a mechanism that legitimised, in the short term, the Process of National Reorganisation, as it made a vast share of the population deaf to the pleas for help of the victims of state terrorism (Roldán, 2007, p. 134). In the long run, however, the Junta proved unable to extract all the potential the *Mundial* had to offer in terms of image and political consensus. In the end, the regime succumbed to the international denunciations – propelled by the visibility the very World Cup had given to the country – and its progressive lack of legitimation before the population, due to the worsening economic conditions and the Human Rights violations – which will become impossible to ignore also for the unaffected share of the population in the 1980s.

3. Two views from overseas: An analysis of *Corriere della Sera* and *El País*' approaches to reporting the World Cup

The bibliography used in the previous chapter is pre-eminently composed by Argentine authors of books, academic papers and journalistic investigations. In this chapter, the point of view of the reader will shift towards the boreal hemisphere as we will analyse the way the European media transmitted the news regarding the *Mundial* and the Argentinian society. In particular, Italy and Spain will be analysed through a study of two of their leading newspapers: *Corriere della Sera* (Italy) and *El País* (Spain)⁴⁰.

The reasons for focusing on these two countries are undoubtedly numerous. First, the conclusions drawn in the previous chapter should rouse an immediate interest in understanding the real intensity and reach of the infamous *campaña anti-Argentina*. Secondly, although there were countries – such as France – that conducted a more confrontational approach against the military government, the massive presence of Italian and Spanish nationals in Argentina should make these countries naturally attractive to the observer that is to study this topic. Finally, whereas literature regarding Spanish and Italian media and their relationship with Argentina's last dictatorship already exists, their specific treatment of the *Mundial 78* is a topic that still admits considerable investigation within the academia.

Furthermore, some reasons are particular to Italy and Spain individually for which reading between the lines of *Corriere* and *El País*' articles becomes an even more interesting exercise. For what regards *Corriere della Sera*, the literature regarding the suspicious relations held by this newspaper, but also the Italian government in general, with Argentina has become to flourish in the last years. The most useful contribution in this sense has come through the book – curated by Claudio Tognonato – *Affari Nostri*, which will be a precious guide in the first part of the chapter.

Concerning *El País*, the reader is expected to be curious about Spain's most influential newspaper due to the peculiar position from which country was observing the World Cup. Indeed, as a whistle was signalling *Mundial*'s kick-off, Spain had closed its undemocratic experience headed Francisco

In the case of *Corriere della Sera*, we retrieved the articles from the newspaper library of the Centro di Documentazione Giornalistica, located in Rome's *Rai* headquarters. Conversely, those from *El País* are available in the online library of the newspaper's website. Although we personally made the research in both occasions, two instruments have been of great importance in simplifying the task: first, a list of some of the instances the Italian press dealt with the Argentinian situation that has been drawn up by the *Centro Interdipartimentale di Ricerca Educativa e Sociale* of Roma 3 University; second, a research paper written by Joaquín Anduro Félix, who presented in it a brief list of interesting articles of *El País* dealing with the 1978 World Cup.

Franco just three years earlier. Moreover, in four years, it was to host another *Mundial*: two elements that, *prima facie*, made it somehow resembling Argentina, although with substantial differences. Nevertheless, those similarities seem enough to make us infer that *El País* had a significant interest in analysing the *Mundial* in depth and from its numerous facets.

The Italian case is undoubtedly one of a kind in this context. Therefore, the study of *Corriere della Sera* will be supported by two sections that are necessary for a complete understanding of its style of information. Firstly, an introduction will set out the dense net of relations existing between Italy, Argentina, and the Rizzoli Group's newspaper. Secondly, the reader will be presented with a brief comparison with some articles of *Corriere*'s historic competitor in the news market – *La Repubblica*. Finally, the study of *El País*' approach will be the last step before it will be possible to draw conclusions over the research presented in the chapter.

3.1 “Videla passes, Argentina stays”: *Corriere della Sera* and its “benevolent” commentaries

Corriere della Sera's attitude towards Argentina's military dictatorship was, starting from 1977, surprisingly indulgent; in some occasions, the journalists of the most sold newspaper in Italy (Murialdi, 1992) even seemed to justify the dictatorship or to minimise its guilt. In order for the reader to understand the roots of this unusual attitude, it is necessary to explore the relationship Argentina cultivated with Italy at the time and to understand the role the masonic lodge Propaganda Due (P2) had in establishing those linkages between the two countries and in shaping public opinion through its control of the Rizzoli Group – the publishing company of *Corriere della Sera*.

The P2 Lodge and the Italo-Argentinian relations

The history of the relationship between Italy and Argentina cannot be told without mentioning Licio Gelli. Italian member of the Masonic Lodge P2 and also known as *il venerabile*, Gelli was one of the most influential figures within the secret organisation, which was mostly composed of Italian and Argentine affiliates. Even though he did not have the formal right to it, he acquired the Argentinian citizenship and a diplomatic passport in 1974. These allowed him to enter in the Argentinian embassy in Rome as “Economic Counsellor in Italy” (Tognonato, 2012, p. 13-14).

Gelli developed meaningful connections with Argentina as he organised Perón's "comeback" in 1972 on an Alitalia plane that took the *caudillo* from Rome to Buenos Aires. This was possible due to his friendship with Raúl Lastiri and José López Rega, both prominent figures in the about-to-be-formed Peronist government and both affiliated with the P2. In a few years, another member of the lodge came to occupy another essential office in the government – that is, Celestino Rodrigo in the Ministry of Economy. Parallely, the P2 was issuing two programmatic documents – the "R Scheme" and the "Plan of democratic reborn" – both of which communicated a new political project based on an "ill-concealed *golpist* vocation", rooted in the anti-communist nature of the lodge (Tognonato, 2012, p. 27). What P2 had put on paper, hence, was one of its founding ideals – that is to say, every government that was leaning excessively to the left concerning its political orientation had to be, or should have been, subverted through a *coup d'état*.

As the *golpe* took place, Gelli and his P2 colleagues remained central figures of the Argentinian government. Admiral of the Navy, spokesperson of the "hard line" against the "subversion", and head of the ESMA, Emilio Massera was undoubtedly one the most influential personalities of the lodge within the Junta. As Lacoste, one of Massera's men, became the key figure in the organisation of the *Mundial*, the P2 was allowed to put its hands on the World Cup won by Argentina in 1978 (Tognonato, 2012, p. 47). Supporting the latter argument, the documentary *Storie di Matteo Marani Argentina 78* (2018) shared for the first time a personal statement of Licio Gelli, in which he confirms his presence in an official event celebrating Argentina's victory. Furthermore, he reveals that he was taken there "with a government car, made available to me in quality of minister".

After the World Cup, and thanks to his position of power, Gelli mediated between the Armed Forces and the Italian Republic for the selling of arms Argentina would use in the Falklands War, contributing to a substantial increment of commercial exchanges between the two countries (Tognonato, 2012, p. 43). There was, indeed, a relaxed relationship between the two countries, despite the evidently different appreciation of democratic values they displayed. This is well epitomised by the fact that, on the one hand, Videla officially summoned the Italian ambassador in Argentina to complain about the street protests occurred in Italy for the *Mundial*; on the other hand, Italian officials never had any formal meeting with the Argentine ambassador in Rome – which is at least unusual given the fact that numerous Italian nationals were risking their lives in Argentina (Calamai, 2012, p. 67, 68).

In 1982, Massera would resume Gelli's "services" for Argentina with the following words: "Gelli carried out services of undoubtful merit for Argentina [...]. He helped us in the anti-subversion war and the diffusion of the Argentinian image abroad" (Tognonato, 2012, p. 53)

Corriere della Sera and P2

If the Italian population did not develop much empathy with its Argentine counterpart as much as it did with Pinochet's Chile, there is indeed a reason that goes beyond simple inter-governmental relations. First and foremost, people in Italy were not assisted by a certain part of the press which treated with excessive complacency the crimes that were committed daily by the Argentinian Armed Forces. In particular, *Corriere della Sera*, which was the most sold newspaper at the time, adopted an astonishingly benevolent approach towards the dictatorship, especially when the World Cup was being played.

Corriere's reporter from Argentina was, until February 1977, Gian Giacomo Foà. Until that date, the Italian journalist based in Buenos Aires was doing a thorough job in telling the Italian public what was happening in his country of residency. Indeed, Foà built a narration of the fact of absolute journalist precision. Hence, the reader of *Corriere della Sera* was presented with reports comprehending statistics of deaths and incarcerations, multiple points of view and truthful descriptions of a country of people that were "used to odd *golpe*" but that "this time, however, [were] scared" and, although "the streets [were] always crowded, cinemas and restaurants [were] full [...], no one [wanted] to speak" (*Corriere della Sera*, 9/04/76). A country where, as he communicated to Italians, the "hunt for opposers" was "unrestrained" (*Corriere della Sera* 24/05/76) and whose "real owners" were "the death squads" (*Corriere della Sera*, 12/06/76).

His removal from Argentina coincided with the beginning of Franco Di Bella's direction of the Rizzoli Group's newspaper, "which by that moment had passed under the control of the men of the P2" (Chiaramonti, 2012, p. 150). After Foà forcefully moved to Brazil, *Corriere's* attention towards the news coming from Argentina became almost insignificant. Paolo Bugialli, therefore, became the leading reporter from Buenos Aires in his stead. He will become famous for his astonishingly benevolent commentaries directed to the Junta during the World Cup – which will be examined below.

Indeed, the publishing house Rizzoli, thanks to the presence of Umberto Ortolani in the directing board, had become intensely permeated by P2. Moreover, it was expanding its influence and affairs in Argentina through the acquisition of *Editorial Abril*, a publishing house owning 23 newspapers in the Argentinian market. This operation was one of the critical points P2 intended to achieve in order to implement and fortify its *R Scheme* and *Plan of democratic reborn* in Argentina (Tognonato, 2012, p. 41).

Analysing *Corriere della Sera*

Corriere della Sera has provided occasional information regarding the World Cup before its beginning. Having analysed the publishing of the newspaper from the 24th of March 1976 – the day of the *golpe* – until September 1978, the first news, signed by Gian Giacomo Foà, announces: “Killed in Argentina a FIAT manager and the president of the World Cup of Football”, the latter being the aforementioned Carlos Actis. However, just a few lines of the article are centred on the man of the Navy (*Corriere della Sera*⁴¹, 20/08/76). The day after, an unsigned article titled “In Argentina they can only promise that no player will be kidnapped or killed” goes more into the depth of the question:

“Twenty-four hours after the killing of general Omar Actis, killed by shotguns of an assault rifle in broad daylight by a command of guerrilla, all those interrogatives that many times arose regarding the opportunity of having the World Cup of Football played in Argentina in 1978 are to be proposed again” (CdS, 21/08/76).

In the same article, the journalist questions the capacity of Argentina to host the World Cup for security reasons and reports that the government seems “ready for every sacrifice” to keep the *Mundial* home. The very ability of the Argentinian government to guarantee security is put into test in the friendly game between Argentina and the USSR, as *Corriere* reports on the 28th of November in an article that also underlines how, up to that moment, the Junta had already killed 1200 people (CdS, 28/11/76).

From that moment on, *Corriere*’s readers hardly receive news regarding the World Cup – and Argentina in general – until the end of 1977. On the 21st of September, in fact, the newspaper informs about the queues that Argentine football fans were doing in order to get a ticket for the *Mundial*. According to Milan’s publication, Montoneros would have invited the government to reduce the

⁴¹ From now on, CdS.

prices in exchange for a relaxation of confrontations between “subversion” and “anti-subversion” during the tournament (CdS, 21/09/1977).

On the 10th of December of the same year, Leonardo Vergani signs an article titled “The goal industry gives jobs and hopes to Argentina”. In his piece, after having premised that “a good half” of the country is of Italian origin, the journalist states:

“Now the military government that is ruling Argentina is putting an enormous effort for everything to function properly in the days of the World Cup, stadiums, streets, telephones. There won’t be security problems – it is said – because many agents and soldiers will be monitoring in order to avoid terrorist attacks. [...] In Argentina, as in Italy, many things work with everyone’s will. [...] Despite the police regime, cities are cheerful, people stay out late at night, from the records shops, open in the night, come out songs that we sang thirty years ago, Claudio-Villa-like melodies. The World Cup of Football will leave a more modern Argentina, for astronomical figures are being spent for infrastructures” (CdS, 10/12/1977).

Along the long road to the World Cup, the articles are sporadic, often centred on the Italian national team and never critical regarding the political situation that Argentina is living. This includes interviews, not only of protagonists of the tournament, yet also of the big names of the Junta. For instance, Martinez de Hoz is interviewed on the 21st of March 1978, yet no question nor reference is made to Human Rights violations in the article. Moreover, journalist Demetrio De Stefano appears quite gentle with the Minister of Economy even for what concerns the topics of his direct competence – regardless of the disastrous economic situation of Argentina, which was facing, at the time, a rate of inflation equal to 147%, according to the journal (CdS, 21/03/78).

In other occasions – such as on the 26th of March – different journalists try to draw a comparison between Argentina and Italy, as both are seen as victims of terrorism. Those were, indeed, the days of the kidnapping of Aldo Moro.

On the 23rd of May, the trip of the Italian national team to Buenos Aires is reported. Furthermore, Roberto Milazzo devotes a relatively long article to talk to “the footballer owner of himself between the 22 Argentines chosen by Menotti”, Alberto Cesar Tarantini. The curious story of the former Boca player is that he will take part to the World Cup as a free-agent. Although Tarantini is interviewed in the article, not a single word is expressed regarding the dictatorship. On another page, an unsigned

article shortly tells the story of the French coach Hidalgo, who had “[foiled] his kidnapping” (CdS, 21/05/78).

On the 29th of May, just three days before the competition started, *Corriere della Sera* publishes one of its most infamous articles regarding the Argentinian dictatorship. The author is Paolo Bugialli – the reporter especially chosen to cover Argentina by the P2 management of the Rizzoli Group. The article is titled “Videla passes, Argentina stays”, and will be cited below in almost all its entirety.

“They can’t all be dressed-up policemen those taxi drivers that understand that you’re a foreigner who arrived for the World Cup, and refuse the payment of the fare saying ‘es una atención’. They can’t all be dressed-up policewomen the servants that while you sleep enter on tips of their toes, and put the package of newspapers on your night table to avoid you the effort of going to look for them under the door. They can’t all be dressed-up policemen all those that, at the restaurant, hearing you are Italian, look for a pianist that plays you ‘O sole mio’, the song of ancient nostalgia. It’s nothing, it’ll be said. But they can’t all be dressed-up policemen all those that do all they can to give incredible attention to the foreigner who came for the World Cup. They can’t all be fascist, or dressed-up policemen, all those that, hearing you speaking Italian, stop you in the street [...] and ask where are you from, and when they know that you’re a journalist they ask you, almost imploring: ‘Please, tell the truth’.

The truth. It is almost always individual and relative. A few days of pre-World-Cup Argentina hint one: who came from Europe took with him, along with a coat for the cold, also a number of prefabricated ideas. ‘The World Cup in a concentration camp’ is one of these ideas. It is evidently not necessary to deny that the prisons are filled with political prisoners [...]. But it is neither necessary to deny that the Argentines, all those that love Videla, those that tolerate him, those that detest him, feel that the great sport exhibition that is imminently beginning [...] is something of their own, of all the Argentines, of the whole country, and not only of the general residing in the ‘Casa Rosada’ [...].

The satisfaction of who shows you that if you ask for Sidney at the phone, you don’t have time to lift the handset that Sidney has already arrived, is authentic, not imposed by the propaganda as well as the pride of who shows magnificent stadiums and as well as the joy of all those that feel that everything works.

[...] The cup, it has been said, will reinforce the respectability of the military Junta. Erroneous. It will reinforce the respectability of Argentina, a country that deserves affection for its pains.

[...] The sources of the boycott signal that in barracks at a few hundreds of meters from the ‘River Plate’ stadium [...] until recently tortures have been carried out. In a country certainly not lacking

the respect of Human Rights, as it is ours, Aldo Moro has been atrociously tortured, perhaps at a few hundred meters from the stadio Olimpico.

[...] The World Cup of terror, it has been said. But they can't all be dressed-up policemen all those that give vivacity and cheerfulness to the nights of Buenos Aires [...].

[...] So? Let's all let the footballers play the World Cup, let's all let hundreds of millions of all over the world enjoy them, let's all let the Argentines express without further hesitation the satisfaction of having organised them, and well, and paying out of their pocket.

It would perhaps be high time to stop with these trifles. Like those of our travel agencies that give to some customers, along with the tickets to come to Argentina and to get into the stadiums, also propaganda flyers against the World Cup, something that has already provoked diplomatic trouble. Travel agencies would better sell tickets, that's all: they already have their profit.

Of course it would be nice to have an Argentina that is democratic, respectful of everyone's ideas, with a freely elected government, with the prisons empty of political prisoners. An Argentina, that is to say, as it has almost never been in its modern history. But, we shall repeat, they can't all be policemen and fascists all those that stop you in the streets asking you to tell the truth. That is this: the whole country is committed to making everything work, to making the visitors find friendliness, the whole country feels under pressure and faces it with trepidation. Videla passes, Argentina stays" (CdS, 29/05/78).

Bugialli speaks with a voice that is strikingly similar to that used by Argentinian journalists, as he essentially transposes all their redundant clichés in Italian. The way the reporter describes a country "without any preoccupation that is not the usual pickpocket" is indeed frightful. This is not only for, as it has been said, it resonates with what the Argentinian press used to communicate to its nationals, yet because Bugialli enjoyed two "privileges" their South-American colleagues could not count on: a comparison with another reality – truthfully democratic and peaceful – and, most importantly, the right to producing information that is – theoretically – carried out freely from official influence.

Taking personal views out of the picture, this article blatantly lacks an informative value. In some occasions, Bugialli even states erroneous and unproven facts, such as the claim that the ESMA is not a place where tortures are carried out anymore. In other, similarly, he depicts a reality that is actually more complex than he lets understand: prisons are not filled with political prisoners – instead, concentration camps are.

The constant, redundant and aggressive defence of the dictatorship – which, in the end, stands out more than the defence of the World Cup, which was Bugialli's *prima facie* objective – the reporter

carries out clarifies that what has been expressed in the article – that, it is useful to remind, appears on the front page of the newspaper – is not only the result of the writer's personal thought. Rather, it is fair to infer that it is the outcome of a clear editorial line imposed by the P2 management, which, as it has been explained above, was a fervent defender and promoter of the military junta and the anti-communist crusade.

A few days later, *Corriere della Sera* will publish a short letter received from Amnesty International's president Margherita Boniver confuting what has been said in Bugialli's article with statistics showing that "the guerrilla seems almost completely cut off, but this is not to say that the violations of Human Rights have ceased" (03/06/78). However, it of course did not have the same significance the first article had, primarily because the space for correspondence was closed for the last pages of the journal than to the front page.



Figure 7: On the 29th of May 1978 – three days before the inauguration of the World Cup – *Corriere della Sera* publishes in his front page the article "Videla passes, Argentina stays" (on the right). The picture is personal.

The only critiques *Corriere della Sera* will direct to Argentina or its *Mundial* will be related to insignificant issues, never relevant to the political situation the country was living. For instance, on the same day as the aforementioned article, Bugialli defines the World Cup “a terrible deal” for Argentina, due to the price paid for its realisation. Nevertheless, he cannot refrain from expressing the “enthusiasm and pride” that these expenses have infused in the population due to all have been built with that money – “new stadiums, new streets, renewed airports, telephones of fulminating efficiency” (CdS, 29/05/78).

On the day of the beginning of the *Mundial*, *Corriere*’s front page displays an article written by Alberto Bevilacqua, who hopes that football will “detoxify” Italy after “the Moro case” (CdS, 01/06/78). A similar article will be published – once again, on the front page – on the 11th of June by Alfredo Todisco. In this occasion, the latter compares the Italian struggle with terrorism with the one undergone by Argentina, hoping that the victory in the field of sports may give to one of the two countries the reassurance “that we can get over our troubles” (CdS, 11/06/78).

On the 2nd of June, Bugialli resumes the opening ceremony with a piece titled “The airplanes were flying lower on the stadium to show the party to the passengers too”. The correspondent from Buenos Aires alludes to the airplanes flying towards the domestic airport *Aeroparque Jorge Newbery*; some of them, in fact, fly right over the Monumental. Nevertheless, no information of this kind has been found in another piece of bibliography used in this research paper. Furthermore, who has visited the stadium knows well that airplanes already fly very close to it, and thinking that someone could take the risk to fly even lower, for whatever reason, can either be the result of a reporter’s fervid imagination or of a rather dangerous manoeuvre of a fearless aviator. Whatever the truth is, Bugialli concludes the article by stating that “If the Football World Cup will ensure, sometimes miracles happen, that it will be eternal peace [...] it won’t be played in vain on the banks of the Río de la Plata” (CdS, 02/05/78).

On the 6th of June Bugialli signs an article titled “Argentina sells air to home-made tourists”, referring to all the gadgets that are sold during the World Cup especially to domestic fans, due to the fact that few tourists have come to Argentina to watch the games. In the last paragraph, the correspondent from Buenos Aires states:

“Buying the *gaucho* doll with a footballer shirt [...] or whatever other trifle among the two-hundred for sale, for the Argentines, has a sense that goes further than the simple euphoria of the moment. It will be necessary to remember this brief dream populated by goals, by television, by joy, by collective pride for how the ‘World Cup’ is going, a dream with legs astride, like the truces in the Games of the antiquity, between the Argentina of before, charged with pains and frustrations, and the Argentina of after, who knows how it is going to be. Let’s hope not the same” (CdS, 06/06/78).

On the 12th of June, Bugialli slightly changes the tones, perhaps looking to find redemption between the lines of the directives imposed by the Rizzoli management. In “The occasion Argentina lost with the ‘Mundial’”, the reporter immediately specifies that he will not deal with sport in his commentary. Most of the article reprocesses a great deal of the arguments Bugialli had already expressed, with other words, in previous occasions: he underlines the tranquillity and festivity that are possible to perceive in the country and that the propaganda has not been carried out by the regime, “yet by the country as a whole, with its passionate dedication for everything to end up well” also thanks to “the amiability of its people”. Moreover, he depicts Argentina as a winner, as organiser and sportively: even when they lost on the pitch against Italy – he says – “they won in any case for what concerns civility, and the people stayed on the streets until the sunrise to celebrate the victory against prejudices”. However, at the end of the article, Bugialli acknowledges that:

“another reality exists as well and it is that the newspapers don’t see but that they unfortunately know. The Argentina of the hidden pains, the Argentina of the prisons filled with political prisoners [...]. The good Argentines turn their back when they advert that the World Cup of Football is contributing to change the external image of their country. It is true that they would be happier, and not only them, if along with the image the behaviours that reign, or reigned, in Argentina changed” (CdS, 12/06/78).

On the following day, Italy will be ruled out of the competition, while Argentina will get to the finals. *Corriere* gives space to the Brazilian denounces of corruption after the criticised game against Perú, yet various of its journalist underline that “words and justifications are useless”⁴² and that Argentina got to the final also thanks to his manager, “who has made the country vibrate for pride”⁴³, and to its public, “vibrating and passionate, that represent the whole nation”⁴⁴.

⁴² Franco Melli on 23/06/78.

⁴³ Paolo Bugialli on 24/06/78.

⁴⁴ Gianni de Felice on 25/06/78.

On the 27th of June, Bugialli will give his last significant contribution in the narration of the World Cup, as he reports the spectacular celebrations occurred in the centre of Buenos Aires. He defines the victory as “Everyone’s party, without anyone abstained and without anyone indifferent. Rich and poor hugging on the streets and exchanging kisses, friends or not of the military regime”, scarily anticipating the dictatorship’s documentary *La Fiesta de Todos*, which would be aired a year later. “We have all won, twenty-five million Argentines, the people screamed – he continues – finally satisfying a profound necessity of winning something [...]. Every bitterness and resentment cancelled by three goals” (CdS, 27/06/78).

A necessary comparison: *La Repubblica* and its denunciations to the regime

Although the reader is expected not to believe that this was the reality of the entirety of the Italian press, it would be deceptive to only present the articles written by Bugialli and colleagues in the section devoted to Italy. For this reason, in this subsection, a few articles from *La Repubblica* – a recently born newspaper destined to become *Corriere della Sera*’s biggest competitor in the information market – will be briefly presented in order to offer a possibility to compare *Corriere*’s overtly pro-regime newsmaking with a medium of different political alignment. Since *Repubblica* is not the primary focus of the analysis presented here, the research is solely based on publications issued throughout June 1978.

On the 1st of June, the day of the beginning of the World Cup, *Repubblica* prints on its front page “At the World Cup, without forgetting”, an article in which Franco Recanatesi presents a question to the reader: “There is no doubt that this is the greatest show in the world. [...] But up to what point will this world be able to enjoy it?”. Although Argentina lives “in an atmosphere packed with tension”, Recanatesi follows:

“During the ‘World Cup’ it is necessary that everybody is satisfied and relaxed, the reason is evident and for those who have not understood it there is the declaration brigade general Andres Ferrero made to ‘Cronica’: ‘The best or the worst image the country will be able to offer abroad depends on the outcome of this World Cup’.

People must not see and must not know: this is what the Junta asks in exchange for the 400 million dollars spent to build or renovate the stadiums, smooth new roads, renovate the airports and erect buildings. The Junta asks, substantially, to reconstruct a virginity in front of

the world through football. But it will have to take on totally different commitments, a massive televised show is not enough to erase kidnappings, tortures and killings.

This World Cup is to be seen in depth: let's have fun, turn on the televisions on the Argentinian perfect efficiency, go to the street if our national team will win, but without forgetting [...] what's behind those beautiful, colour stadiums" (La Repubblica⁴⁵, 01/06/78).

While Recanatesi seems to refer only indirectly to Bugialli, on the 3rd of June correspondent Saverio Tutino goes overtly against those journalists, such as those quoted above, that tried to make a somewhat emphatical comparison between Argentina and Italy, both victims of terrorisms although of profoundly different kinds. The title of the article is "The impossible comparison with Italy", while its subheading recites "In the gulag-Argentina beyond the bleachers of the Football World Cup" (LR, 03/06/78). Along the lines, Tutino provides informed explanations of the reason why the killing of Moro has minimal points in common with that of Argentina's former president Aramburu, enriching his production with opinions of sociologists, historical descriptions, interviews and current news regarding the regime: an all-around narration that *Corriere della Sera* hardly ever displayed in the framework of the dictatorship.

Before the end of the competition, *La Repubblica* also leaves some space to the only form of dissent the Argentinian society could afford in 1978. Indeed, on the 10th of June, an unsigned short piece informs about the protest of *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* dating back the day before. Through this research, no article of *Corriere della Sera* mentioning the *Mothers* during 1978 has been found⁴⁶.

After the victory of the World Cup by Argentina, an unsigned article asks: "What will happen in Argentina after the "Mundial" party ends?". In it, the author asserts that:

"the success of the Mundial and of the Argentinian national team will not be able to make us forget the protests of those the militaries call 'the foolish of May square', the women who demonstrate because they have no news of their relatives, disappeared years ago, after the arrest" (LR, 27/06/78).

After having presented statistics regarding killings, *desaparecidos*, and the catastrophic state of the economy, *Repubblica* concludes by expressing a reasonable doubt:

⁴⁵ From now on, LR.

⁴⁶ Please note that the research has been conducted over the period starting in March 1976 and finishing September 1978.

“During the execution of the World Cup, the Junta has announced some measures of liberalisation: [...] Are these the symptoms of a real willingness to openness or should they be considered as the simple result of international pressures [...] against a country too watched these days by the world’s public opinion to continue undaunted along the dark road of repression?” (LR, 27/06/78).

In conclusion, *La Repubblica* demonstrates that another approach to the Argentinian question was indeed possible and that the justification of the regime cannot be said to have been a feature common to all Italian media. This newspaper, in fact, has been taken as an example, but many others in Italy have also chosen the path of denunciation, each with its personal and legitimate political views. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that none of these publications could reach the diffusion of *Corriere della Sera*, which was, as it has been outlined above, the most sold newspaper in Italy.

3.2 *El País*: Completeness of information before personal opinions

El País was born in 1976, during the period of the Spanish democratic transition, which followed the conclusion of Francisco Franco’s regime. Shortly, Madrid’s newspaper became a point of reference for Spain’s progressists and has come to be the most-read generalist journal in Spain⁴⁷ (AIMC, 2018). On its website, it defines itself as an “independent”, “vanguard” newspaper, progressive “in its literal, and not political, sense”⁴⁸.

As it will be observed, we are now switching to a markedly different style of information. Indeed, *El País* represents, in the analysed period, an excellent example of essential journalism. Its style, in fact, is simple and schematic. Reporters avoid romanticising the narration and try to get the reader straight to the point of the question, providing him or her, when possible, the multiples points of view of the protagonists of the piece of news. As a consequence, commentaries will be somewhat rare to find within classic news (as opposed to editorials). Hence, *El País* will be mostly evaluated for the degree of completeness of information offered to the reader, rather than for respectability of its ideological position towards the Junta. Nevertheless, whatever case in which a journalist shares a personal opinion will duly be outlined.

⁴⁷ If we are to count *all* the journals in Spain, in reality, *Marca* is the most read. However, the latter is a newspaper specialised in sports.

⁴⁸ <https://elpais.com/corporativos/>

Analysing *El País*: The period preceding the World Cup

El País's report of the *Mundial* of the Junta begins on the 13th of June 1976, as the journal informs that "The presidency takes charge of the World Cup"⁴⁹ through the creation of the EAM78 (*El País*⁵⁰, 13/06/76). In that occasion, the reporter expresses his worries regarding the high cost for the organisation of the competition and enumerates some of the essential works this necessitates to be completed. Almost a month later, the readers receive the news that the *Mundial* has been "declared of national interest", and that the EAM78 will take advantage of numerous fiscal and economic benefits for the completion of the organisation of the Cup (EP, 08/07/76).

In August, two articles report the death of EAM78's president – Omar Actis – (EP, 20/08/76) and the selection of his successor – Antonio Merlo (EP, 27/08/76). In September, Ignacio Alonso informs about the press conference given by Rodolfo De Lorenzo, "head of communication of the World Cup". In that occasion, De Lorenzo presents the advancements of the organisation ensuring that "Argentina will be the scenery of the Mundial-78" (EP, 26/09/76). The author abstains from commenting or adding further information to the declarations.

This article is the first of a long series through which *El País* informs its readers about the advancements of the preparative works for the World Cup by reporting the multiple voices of those directly involved in the organisation. Another piece of news of this kind, for instance, has been written by Alfredo Relaño under the title "The rear admiral Lacoste achieved giving a good image of Argentina". The article states that Lacoste, "with talent and ability", proved able to face "all kinds of questions" – including those regarding Argentina's political situation – "and reiterated, once again, that the interest of the Military Junta is that the World Cup serves to let the real situation of Argentina be known" (EP, 01/04/1978). However, just a day before, the very Relaño was criticising that "this desire of advertising a situation that [...] does not correspond with the image perceived abroad and contrasts with the denial of some journalists' accreditation" to the grand event. *El País*' journalist is referring to *Cambio 16*, "a [Spanish] magazine that has been forbidden in Argentina" and, as a consequence, would not be allowed to assist to the *Mundial* (EP, 31/03/78).

In at least two occasions, Madrid's newspaper devotes a full article to the exorbitant cost of the World Cup. First, in February 1978, an unsigned article titled "The World Cup will cost 56.000 million

⁴⁹ Unsigned.

⁵⁰ From now on, EP.

pesetas” quotes Juan Alemann’s reiterated accusation to the EAM78, which is said to be culpable of “ill-informing the government with respect to the necessary investments” (EP, 16/02/78). Secondly, a day before the beginning of the competition, Julian García Candau states that “in a country persecuted by inflation, the World Cup has become the most expensive of history”. In the same piece, Candau informs about the increasingly high cost of living, the current rates of inflation and the prohibitive prices that tourists will have to pay in order to lodge in a hotel or eat in a restaurant (EP, 30/05/78)⁵¹.

In numerous instances antecedent to the *Mundial*, *El País* divulged news regarding international boycott attempts or uncertainties concerning the host’s capability to realise the competition, either due to its political situation or to the apparent lack of security it conveyed. Most of these articles are rather informative and do not include mere comments of the journalist who wrote them. For instance, in 1977 Francisco J. Uriz, a correspondent from Stockholm, reports that Sweden was assisting to a debate “that has filled the television, the radio and the press” about whether or not should have the national team taken part to the competition. “Those who propose the boycott – Uriz follows – affirm that the Military Junta will use the World Cup – as Hitler did in his days with the Olympic Games of 1936 – to improve its image abroad” (EP, 04/11/77).

Similar news will be repeatedly published concerning other countries, such as France, Germany or the Netherlands. *El País* will, in fact, give extensive visibility to protests and opinions contrary to “a dictators’ World Cup”. Up until the day of the beginning of the competition, indeed, correspondents from all over Europe will signal dissenting voices – just like Feliciano Fidalgo did in his article “Numerous demonstrations in France asking for the boycott”⁵² on the 1st of June 1978 (EP, 01/06/78).

In December 1977, the journal publishes part of an article from the newspaper *Le Matin*. As *El País* reports, the French colleagues conclude their argumentation by saying that “the world would do justice to itself if it refused to play in Argentina, between the concentration camps and the chambers of tortures. The Military Junta does not deserve the World Cup” (EP, 24/12/1977).

⁵¹ Quoting from the article, “the delicious Argentinian meat does not allow one to order more than one plate, because, conversely, the bill will be a lot higher than a thousand pesetas, and not in luxurious restaurants. The tourist that comes to this country has to get used to the idea that he can’t spend money with joy, or, on the contrary, he has to limit his stay to just a part of the championship”.

⁵² The actions of the COBA – the committee for the boycott of the World Cup in Argentina – had already been mentioned in other occasions. An example is Alfredo Relaño’s article titled “International polemic around the World Cup of Football”, published on 31/03/78.

Furthermore, the newspaper frequently mentions Montoneros and the Organisation of Exiled Argentines as major sources when it comes to giving an account of the state of the art of the boycott movement. For instance, on the 2nd of March 1978 Enric Canals reports that “the Organisation of Exiled Argentines asks Spain to boycott the World Cup”. Canals quotes a statement by the organisation that signals that “the Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada, repeatedly denounced by Amnesty International as concentration and torture camp, is located 500 metres’ far from River Plate’s stadium, where the final will be played” (EP, 02/03/78). Nevertheless, Montoneros preferred that the World Cup were played, as Relaño informs the day after a press conference given by the leftist group in Madrid. Indeed, the World Cup was perceived by Montoneros as “an opportunity to make all the World know the truth of Argentina” (EP, 06/04/78).

The latter position held by Montoneros has, of course, attracted critiques, especially within the movement. As a demonstration of that, *El País* published a letter sent by a reader, “an exiled Argentine refugee in France”, who responds explicitly to the previous article by letting known that, according to him:

“proposing a truce means giving the dictatorship a chance to [...] increase its influence over the people. It means they’re losing ahead of time this ‘bet’ they say they are doing against the dictatorship. And, most of all, it means losing it in front of our people, in spite of the fact they think the opposite” (EP, 04/05/78).

This opinion echoes with that Relaño had conveyed in the last lines of the article reporting Montoneros’ cease-fire: “If [both Montoneros] and the Military Junta want to bet on the World Cup and the expect the same from it, it is evident that one of the two is wrong. Or otherwise that a pact [between the parts] has been made” (EP, 06/04/78).

To conclude the series of articles antecedent to the beginning of the World Cup, *El País* showed preoccupation for two security issues. The first one is the explosion of a bomb at the press centre, a piece of news that “has created much preoccupation in all the ambits of football”, for it stimulated a sense of worry that “accidents of this kind accompany the World Cup” (El País, 12/05/78). The second coincides with the kidnapping of French Coach Hidalgo. According to his almost homonym Feliciano Fidalgo, this event “heated up until the explosion the anxiety and political-sporting feelings provoked by general Videla’s dictatorship” (EP, 25/05/1978).

Analysing *El País*: kick-off

After Poland and Germany “raise the curtain” of the competition on the 1st of June, *El País*’ narration of the event begins to be pre-eminently centred on Spain’s performances. Much of the attention is, in fact, comprehensibly drawn by a *selección* that bears the weight of being seen as “the worst national team in history” just four years before it will be the host of its own *Mundial* (*El País*, 02/06/78)⁵³. The latter undoubtedly was another source of preoccupations, as Julian García Candau warned that “Spain does not promote its World Cup” (*EP*, 10/06/78).

However, the Spanish newspaper still found some space to devote to Argentina’s socio-political situation. The inauguration is reported on the 2nd of June by Juan José Fernández. The latter grasps from the outset that the World Cup will politically be a double-sided coin for the observers:

“The reigning climate, with all the public singing the Argentinian anthem [...], was of absolute tranquillity, as it was expected, and the screams, as well as the Argentinian flags waving everywhere, left well clear the support that the Argentinian selection is going to receive [...]. In Argentina, if there are problems, now it’s the worst moment to detect them” (*EP*, 02/06/78).

On the same day, Antonio Valencia signals his astonishment for the inauguration of the World Cup – “how much have we doubted in the previous year that this was going to happen!”, exclaimed the journalist in his article. Between the reasons for his amazement, he enumerates the Argentinian capacity to organise it, the country’s economy – “whose currency has dropped in a giant slalom” – and its political situation – “with the presence of the armed subversion” (*EP*, 02/06/78).

Juan José Fernández is the first openly speaking about the dictatorship during the World Cup through his article “Football leaves Argentinian problems in the background”. Although it is possible to perceive some criticism between the lines, the correspondent from Mar del Plata tries not to take a political stance and prefers to focus on the competition and its social repercussions:

“Football, once more, has achieved its intents. In Argentina, the country that now lives close to its peak, everything revolves around the World Cup; the success is a matter of national pride, in which all the country’s interested. Problems have been left aside for a month.

⁵³ The author of the article is Julian García Candau.

Argentina is united more than ever recently thanks to the World Cup. [...] Nationalism commands over everything.”

Fernández concludes by affirming that “the World Cup can be considered a success” and “the flaws of the organisation are saved by the exquisite amiability of its people” because “Argentina is a welcoming country like any other for the foreigner”. In fact, according to him, “the truthful image of the Argentinian country [...] is to be felt in its own lands” (EP, 06/06/78). This is the way the reporter closes his article, with a surprising dissonance with the tones used at the beginning of the piece and, especially, in the title. Fernández, indeed, seems caught up in the confusion that hit many other journalists at their arrival in Argentina: was the reality of the country the one he was observing or the one he read or even wrote about from the distance of their home State?

The latter intuition leads us to an important conclusion. That is, the Junta achieved its objective to indoctrinate the population to “play as an Argentine” in order to have its visitors believe that the social situation was more distended than the media had depicted it. Indeed, both *Corriere della Sera*’s and *El País*’ journalist appear to have fallen in the trap. As a matter of fact, Fernández seems to be yet to resolve this dualism between what he previously deemed was the truth and what he, at the moment of the redaction, perceived was real. On the other hand, for all that has been explained in 3.1, it is fair to assess opinions expressed in *Corriere* with more malice – at least for the fact that they were *systematically*, rather than sporadically, pro-dictatorship.

Going three days ahead in time, Candau explains in what ways “Football, medically, is like an anaesthetic”. Although he makes no specific reference to the Argentinian reality, he argues that “the emotion of goals, indeed, has saved Governments from the catastrophe in more than one occasion and has made forgetting fundamental problems” (EP, 09/06/78).

On the 15th of June, Candau informs *El País*’ readers about the limited number of tourists that got to Argentina to attend World Cup games. “The Argentine World Cup has been a fiasco, from a touristic point of view – he argues. The thousands of tourists that were expected have not shown up”. The results of this underpopulation of travellers become evident “in the main streets of Buenos Aires”, whose shopkeepers are “disappointed” due to the fact that they have not observed the foreseen “avalanche over the countries’ typical products, such as leather and hide”. As a consequence, the reporter notes, “prices have skyrocketed to excess” (EP, 15/06/78).

A few days later, the very Candau will title his next article “Videla and Borges don’t like football”. Nevertheless, he continues, Videla – who “isn’t that Argentine who said that the World necessitates democracy and far-Left” – “wants to test his popularity in the stadiums”. In the last lines, the author argues that “contrarily [...] to what could be thought, police vigilance is less evident than that of other World-level sports competitions celebrated in the last years” (EP, 16/06/78).

After having reported the Junta’s request to the Organisation of American States to investigate about its domestic terrorism, *El País* issues a series of articles in which it convincingly claims that “no fraud has occurred in Argentina-Perú” (EP, 24/06/78). Moreover, after the latter game – Candau reports – the country reached a “patriotist explosion” that had not even been possible “in the hours of the greatest Peronist fanaticism” (EP, 23/06/78). Thanks to this precious victory, as we saw, Argentina qualified to the final. On the day of the decisive game, Antonio Valencia underlines that “Argentina is a party and if the *selección* wins tonight [...] the party will last for long, long. The objective of the immense majority of the citizens and the objective of the Government will have coincided” (EP, 25/06/78).

Two days later, the newspaper will provide its readers with extensive comments about Argentina’s victory, occurred “despite not counting on a historical national team”, says Candau (EP, 27/06/78). On the same date, the very Candau, however, also provides us with a distinct view over the matter, and he does so through an article titled “Tomorrow silence will come back”. It is interesting to quote some passages:

“The light blue and white wind inundated the streets of Buenos Aires again. [...] In a week it will all be a memory. Already in a week, no one will remember the patriotic speech at the end of the game that gave the title to Argentina. The official loudspeaker, before Passarella picked up the FIFA cup, threw a patriotic pep talk of our past years’ purest style. [...] In a week euphoria will already have calmed down. For then, there won’t already be in Avenida 9 de Julio that immense vertical banner that says: ‘Let’s keep constructing together’ and ‘Argentina, future’. The Argentines forgot about their selves with a limitless generosity when ‘Kempes Corazón’ scored the goals to the Netherlands. The Argentines, to whom they have told that Europe has been against them – no one explained to them the difference that exists between talking about the people and a government –, have wanted to say the World that sufferings are less with goals. And the Argentine people, happy for their afternoon of bread and goals, applauded its national team, applauded Videla perhaps like it has never done and perhaps like it won’t do again, applauded its flag and

hoisted it everywhere. [...] Kempes' goals have come to produce a patriotic exaltation that is difficult to frame.

[...] Tomorrow silence will come back" (EP, 27/06/78).

Objectivity, as in journalism as in all aspect of life, is a somewhat debatable concept. Indeed, the author of an article will almost always impress a particular leaning to its words, be it willingly or not, that will help the reader propend towards a version of the reality rather than another. It is so unavoidable that, arguably, a journalist should care more about giving voice to all the parties that are included in the piece of news, rather than aiming at being objective straight away. In this respect, it is fair to say that *El País*' journalists have been very attentive, at least in the analysed period, not to leave voiceless any of the protagonists of the World Cup – be it the Armed Forces or Montoneros.

It is unavoidable, nevertheless, that the selection of the news and the words written – more or less – between the lines of some articles here reported betray a mild propensity to condemn the dictatorship. If the newspaper were favourable to the regime, for example, it would have certainly not given significance to an article of a foreign publication that outspokenly claims that a World Cup should not be played in "concentration and torture camps"⁵⁴.

However, up to the moment we have referred to merely informative articles, not to editorials, where the opinion of the author, instead, is explicit and required. After having examined an extensive list of articles issued by *El País* from 1976 until the end of the World Cup, Candau's latter article indeed results the editorial in which the opinion of the author shines through the most. Through his columns, the author shapes with efficacy – and a certain foresight – a discourse that in some respects runs parallel to part of the conclusions that have been extracted from the precedent chapter. Whether his opinion ought to be shared or not, it is simple and clear, even if not fully explicit: "bread and goals" have satiated the Argentines for the length of the World Cup. Nevertheless, as life will resume from where it suspended on the 1st of June, Videla will stop enjoying his applauses and the population will come back to the "normality" of repression and *desaparición*.

3.3 Conclusions: the multiple faces of newsmaking

In Chapter 3 the viewpoint has been shifted from Argentina to Spain and Italy. In particular, what has been studied is the latter two countries' representation of the *Mundial* through their primary media.

⁵⁴ In this case I refer to *Le Monde*'s article, reported in *El País* on 24/12/1977 and quoted above.

Precisely, the focus has been placed on the daily newspapers *Corriere della Sera* and *El País*. Moreover, *La Repubblica* has provided an exciting term of comparison as it came to analyse its Italian competitor.

Italy and Spain were selected based on two criteria. The first is one of opportunistic nature. Indeed, until now literature has tended to focus on other countries' media's treatment of the World Cup, whereas an in-depth analysis of these newspapers had not yet been provided – at least, as far as the author is concerned. The second has to do with the relationship Spain and Italy share with Argentina. Their descendants, in fact, were the absolute protagonists of the massive migratory wave of the Old Continent's workers that inundated Argentina between the end of the XIX and the first half of the XX Century. As most of the Argentinian population was made up of people with either Italian or Spanish origins, it appeared therefore logical to feel curious about the way those newspapers portrayed such a delicate topic.

Before drawing any conclusion, it is appropriate to make a premise. In the above chapter, what has been analysed, rather than the mere treatment reserved to the dictatorship, is the way these two newspapers dealt with the World Cup as a phenomenon, both *per se* and in relationship with the socio-political environment. From this we derive that most of the reporters mentioned in the chapter were sports journalists whose articles appeared in the sports section of their newspaper – especially in the case of *El País*.

Hence, it should be understood that those writers may not have perceived the duty to portray Argentina's political situation. Instead, they could have felt the need just to narrate what happened inside the pitch. The debate over whether or not should sport journalists inform about politics along with sports is long and still unresolved. Here, it is only necessary to acknowledge that, when political evaluations are utterly absent from the lines brought to the reader, we generally do not have the means to infer that the author had in his or her mind to hide a certain piece of news.

As the reader will have undoubtedly noticed, the analysis of *Corriere della Sera* has been more attentive than that of *El País*. Indeed, a simple list of the articles which did not include an explanation of the intricate relations between the Armed Forces, P2, and the Rizzoli Group would have conveyed just a partial image of the newspaper's editorial line. The latter appeared crystal-clear as Franco Di Bella became *Corriere*'s director in 1977: the objective was being benevolent with the dictators when they had to be mentioned and, in turn, avoiding referring to them when it was not necessary to do so.

In the light of the analysis provided above, it is clear that the Italians that, as they got up, read the *Corriere* while sipping an espresso enjoyed a mediocre reporting of the World Cup, especially before its beginning. Information about the competition was occasional and, when delivered, often incomplete. The organisation, with all the protests and doubts connected to it, has in fact been entirely neglected by the Rizzoli Group's publication.

On the other hand, *Corriere* reserved considerable space to the competition at the end of May and in June 1978. Most of that space was, however, occupied by the Italian national team. In the many interviews conceded by components of the team to the journal, nothing was ever asked about the dictatorship and the feeling of insecurity this may have brought to them.

Conversely from *El País*, *Corriere della Sera*'s journalists overwhelmed their readers with personal – or, better said, editorial – opinions, either explicitly or implicitly, and both in simple pieces of news and in editorials. While the former often told only one version of the story – the official one –, the latter were blatantly pro-dictatorship. The best example in this respect is the article “Videla passes, Argentina stays”, written by Paolo Bugialli and placed on the front page by his Director. The only critiques *Corriere della Sera* directed to Argentina or its *Mundial* were, in fact, related to insignificant issues, never relevant to the political situation – for instance, its reprehensible souvenirs and the high prices. Just in one occasion Bugialli auspicated that “along with the image”, “the behaviours that reign, or reigned, in Argentina changed”, letting understand that, perhaps, he did not fully agree to the editorial line, which he had espoused for reasons of convenience.

It was fundamental to show, parallelly, that *Corriere della Sera*'s view might have been the most diffused in Italy (for the newspaper was the most sold), yet not the only one. That is why it has been decided to place it side by side with a few articles from *La Repubblica*. Conversely from *Corriere*, Eugenio Scalfari's newspaper vehemently criticised the dictatorship, whilst arguing in favour of playing a World Cup “without forgetting” the horrors of repression.

The confrontation between *Corriere della Sera* and *El País* is not only one based on ideology, yet also on distinct styles of newsmaking. As commented, *Corriere* presented the news with a fluid, narrative style, often enriched with the journalist's view. However, the pieces of news, at least for the topic studied, were centred only on the protagonist of the event, hence lacking a narration of the facts delivered by a contradicting view. On the contrary, *El País*' articles presented a more essential

structure, which journalists tried to present with the least possible number of adjectivisations and rhetoric elements, following a rather Anglo-Saxon newsmaking style. Moreover, they often included many contrasting voices, in order for the reader to be able to decide what side of the story would he take. Therefore, when an article quoted, say, a Montoneros' press conference, it used to include an official voice of the Armed Forces as well.

In the case of editorials, *El País* remained more restrained than *Corriere* in conveying its journalists' views. We saw this feature, for instance, in the last article quoted. There, the opinion of the author – Candau, in this case – is evident yet subtle, clear yet implicit. Moreover, another sensible difference lays in selection of the news. Indeed, from 1976 to 1978, the reporting of the World Cup is impressively ample and complete. Finally, as commented above, the strong presence of reports of boycott movements' and Montoneros' actions and declarations might let infer that the newspaper generally leaned towards an anti-*Mundial* position.

4. Conclusions

This research paper aimed to fulfil an ambitious task: borrowing the most popular sport in the history of mankind in order to confer it a scientific dignity. In the meantime, however, it was crucial to not dismiss from mind the main difficulty a sports analysis hides: the fact that sports are and will always be one of the main sources of human passion and, therefore, somehow perfect antagonist to rationality. The study of the *Mundial 1978* here presented was, therefore, a thorough attempt to get over the classic *panem-et-circenses* view of football for the purpose of providing the reader with the right balance between emotional transport and a research of historical value.

In particular, this paper answered two research questions. First, “Has the Military Junta actually been able to take political advantage of the organisation of the World Cup and, if yes, in what ways?”. Second, the last interrogatory focused on the so-called *campana antiargentina*: “Did an anti-Argentina campaign exist in Italy and Spain and what characteristics did it have?”.

In the case of the first research question, our thesis was confirmed. Although a somewhat minority view, a careful study of existing literature and a first-hand investigation of the Argentinian society has in fact confirmed that the *Mundial* ended up being a low-yield investment for the Junta in the medium/long-term. Indeed, although the victory created considerable short-term gains in term of popular consensus, Videla and colleagues proved completely unable to aliment or exploit the nationalistic fire they had lit up. In the end, in fact, the impossibility to recreate such climate of diffused joy proved to be one of the factors that led to the ultimate fall of the Armed Force’s regime.

The second research question had, of course, two answers. While the case of *Corriere della Sera* and its connection with P2 was well known, it was a pleasant surprise to discover *La Repubblica*’s interesting – and indeed very distinct – point of view. In the case of Italy, therefore, we can affirm that, in general, the *campana antiargentina* was rather weak, yet this is not to say that there was no room for criticism in society. However, both the wide diffusion of *Gruppo Rizzoli*’s newspaper and the silence of the Italian government contributed to hinder the creation of a solid debate regarding the Argentinian dictatorship in Italy.

On the other hand, the study of Spain’s *El País* has been approached with more curiosity and a certain unconsciousness regarding the outcomes to expect. This is especially because the examined literature tends to focus on those countries which presented the strongest critiques in the media (in the first

chapter, we made the example of the Netherlands, where the inauguration ceremony was aired in split-screen with the protest of *Madres de plaza de Mayo*). Spain was not of those countries, as we observed. Nonetheless, what we discovered was a thorough and comprehensive reportage of the World Cup in all its phases, from its embryonal state to the explosion of popular joy in the end of June. “Completeness of information before personal opinions” is how we titled the subsection dealing with this journal, and it is perhaps the best description that can be given in such few words. Finally, we have abstained from making a subjective judgement on whether a sharper critique of the dictators’ World Cup would have been more appropriate. We prefer to leave this task to the reader, accordingly with his or her personal opinions and sensibility.

Reaching the first conclusion was not easy, indeed. It required long and attentive readings – some of them resulting, in the end, unfruitful. As highlighted in the Literature Review, the greatest part of the bibliography used is signed by Argentine authors. This is, on the one hand, extremely positive for obvious reasons: if we are to evaluate this specific historical event we cannot do so without listening to the voices of those who were screaming “Argentina, Argentina!” in Avenida 9 de Julio during those passionate days of 1978. On the other hand, however, the choice of the literature was complicated by the need to discern the authors that are able to display a healthy detachment from the matter from those who appeared too emotionally involved to be considered fully reliable. This is a task that is particularly significant for the 1976-1983 period in general, not only for what concerns the World Cup. Indeed, the last dictatorship remains an open wound for the Argentina, and knowing the Argentinian society without having been born in it is perhaps the best viewpoint from which to write this research paper.

In this sense, Matias Bauso’s 78. *Historia oral del Mundial* proved to be the perfect piece of bibliography for this topic. There is no doubt that the recently-published book is by far the most complete research about this event, and, as a consequence, one of the most objective. Although many more pieces of bibliography were necessary to complete the picture here provided, it is out of doubt that the quality of this research paper would not have been the same without Bauso’s contribution. Nonetheless, the academia should be expected to produce more literature regarding this delicate topic, taking advantage of the increasing temporal distance that separates us from it. The hope is that the latter will increasingly cool down the pervasive searing sentiments that, in Argentina, use to accompany the discourse regarding the *Mundial* and the dictatorship. If this research paper was to be deemed a step forward in this “rational turn”, then it would be a valid contribution to the still open debate.

Furthermore, it is fair to expect that the international reactions to the 1978 World Cup occupy a greater space in the discourse regarding this historical period. Indeed, the *Mundial*, if it is to be studied in its political acceptation, it is almost incomprehensible if analysed only from within the Argentinian borders. Although the second chapter is fully devoted to the approach the main media of two European countries had towards the World Cup, the relative absence of the other countries is one of the limits of this research. Nevertheless, studying each and every case of States opposing to the World Cup would have implied an immensely greater quantity of work (and, of course, time at disposal to carry it out). The hope, hence, is that the academia will help completing this task in the future.

To conclude, the historical analysis of a sports event has been a very stimulating exercise. We wish that the academia focused more on the political side of sports, that are, in some countries in particular, still considered a phenomenon that can pertain to the plebs, yet not to the literatus. When we will be able to depart from the classic *panem et circenses* narrative, both in everyday life and in the academia, historians and researchers will find plenty of topics they can measure up to. Or, ironically, *bread for their teeth*, as we say in Italian.

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- Figure 1. Argentina '78's logo. Fifa. Retrieved April 13, 2019, from <https://www.fifa.com/worldcup/archive/argentina1978/photos/index.html#2920709>.
- Figure 2. The classic gesture Juan Domingo Perón used to greet the masses. Instituto Nacional Juan Domingo Perón. Retrieved April 13, 2019, from <http://www.jdperon.gov.ar/2013/08/el-retorno/5-9/>.
- Figure 3. *Videla gives his speech for the inauguration ceremony of the XI FIFA World Cup*. Archivo Histórico RTA. Retrieved April 21, 2019, from <http://www.archivorta.com.ar/asset/ceremonia-de-apertura-del-mundial-78-01-06-1978/>.
- Figure 4. *Videla gives Passarella the cup after Argentina's victory against the Netherlands. On his right, Emilio Massera*. Clarín. Retrieved April 21, 2019, from https://www.clarin.com/cultura/matias-bauso-mundial-78-militares-quisieron-tapar-crmenes-ocurrio-contrario_0_BJm7fMH7.html.
- Figure 5. *A poster diffused by the COBA recites "No football in concentration camps"*. Papelitos. Retrieved April 23, 2019, from <http://papelitos.com.ar/nota/el-boicot-al-mundial>.
- Figure 6. *On the 30th of June, Somos chooses to praise the victory of the Mundial with a photo of Videla celebrating and the headline "A country that has changed": the dictatorship was at the peak of its popularity*. Papelitos. Retrieved April 23, 2019, from <http://papelitos.com.ar/nota/el-caracter-politico-del-futbol-en-el-mundial-78>.

Figure 7. *On the 29th of May 1978 – three days before the inauguration of the World Cup – Corriere della Sera publishes in his front page the article “Videla passes, Argentina stays” (on the right). The picture is personal.*

Abstract (in italiano)

Nel 1978, l'Argentina stava vivendo l'epoca più oscura della sua storia. Il 24 marzo di due anni prima, infatti, le Forze Armate portavano a termine un colpo di Stato attraverso il quale Jorge Rafael Videla, Tenente Generale dell'Esercito, rimpiazzava alla Presidenza della Nazione Maria Estela Martínez Cartas – vedova del suo predecessore, Juan Domingo Perón. Lo scenario era quello del confronto, violento e costante, fra i gruppi di armati della sinistra peronista e le forze parapoliziali che facevano, informalmente, capo al governo. Una *guerrilla* che, nel 1976, aveva già ucciso 576 persone.

Non sarebbe un azzardo dire che, a quel punto, gli argentini erano più che abituati ai *golpe* che arrivavano con la promessa di riportare tranquillità al Paese. Questa volta, tuttavia, il piano delle Forze Armate era diverso. Videla e compagni chiamarono il loro progetto *Proceso de Reorganización Nacional* (Processo di Riorganizzazione Nazionale), per mezzo del quale ricercavano una vera e propria rivoluzione della società argentina. Quest'ultima era considerata “malata dalla testa ai piedi” del virus del Peronismo, che doveva essere eradicato ad ogni costo in quanto ritenuto responsabile delle tensioni che, ormai, tormentavano la vita di tutti i giorni.

Ciò si tradusse con l'attuazione del *piano antisovversivo*, che si sarebbe realizzato attraverso il sequestro, la tortura e, nella maggior parte dei casi, nella *sparizione* di tutti coloro che potessero essere legati alla sinistra ed ai suoi ideali, non solo alla *guerrilla* armata. Dunque, le barbarie dello Stato non erano solo dirette ai suoi obiettivi primari, ma anche ad artisti, professori, studenti, letterati, dirigenti sindacali e via dicendo. Il risultato finale fu la *sparizione* di circa 30.000 persone fra il 1976 ed il 1983, una ferita tuttora profonda nella coscienza dell'Argentina.

L'America Latina, in quegli anni, venne massicciamente colpita dalle dittature militari. Nessuna di queste, però, ebbe la possibilità di concedersi il lusso di organizzare un evento sportivo di massa come un Mondiale di Calcio, eccezion fatta per i Generali argentini che, per una fortuita coincidenza di eventi, si ritrovarono fra le mani uno straordinario strumento per la costruzione del consenso. Di conseguenza, nel '78 argentino cominciarono a convivere due universi paralleli: quello dei campi di concentramento, dove venivano torturati i detenuti politici, e quello degli stadi, come il *Monumental* di Buenos Aires, dove Videla si proclamava l'ambasciatore della pace di fronte a folle in delirio.

La *Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada* (ESMA), il più famigerato centro di detenzione del Paese, si trova a meno di un chilometro di distanza dal Monumental, lì dove Mario Kempes avrebbe

ripetutamente fatto impazzire i tifosi argentini grazie ai suoi gol. Le grida dei tifosi, si racconta, penetravano addirittura fino a dentro la ESMA. Nessuno, però, poteva sentire da fuori le urla che producevano i detenuti sottoposti alle barbariche torture.

Questa Tesi include la testimonianza diretta di uno di questi, Alfredo Ayala. Alfredo, che preferisce che lo si chiami con il suo soprannome, *Mantecol*, è uno dei pochi sopravvissuti della ESMA. Lui, attivista non violento di sinistra, mi ha raccontato della sua relazione, particolarmente stretta, con il Mondiale. Come tanti altri, *Mantecol* ha infatti svolto lavori d'ufficio per la Marina Militare, che controllava l'organizzazione della competizione e aveva dunque bisogno della forza lavoro delle menti brillanti che aveva strappato dai loro cari. "Se non è stato per questo, perché avevano bisogno della mia mano d'opera, non saprei dire perché sono sopravvissuto", mi ha detto, fra le altre cose.

L'intrecciarsi del Mondiale con la situazione politica e sociale argentina offre davvero una serie di temi e spunti di discussione impressionanti, come suggeriscono le parole appena citate. Qui ne verranno trattati alcuni, quantomeno quelli che risultano necessari per rispondere a uno dei due quesiti di ricerca principali: la dittatura riuscì realmente a riscuotere un ritorno politico attraverso l'organizzazione del Mondiale e, se sì, in che modo? Si cercherà di comprendere, dunque, quali erano i reali piani della Giunta al momento di ratificare la realizzazione un Mondiale che sarebbe costato cifre da capogiro, e se questi piani saranno stati veramente portati a termine come programmato.

Si è giunti a quattro conclusioni principali, rispetto a questo punto. In primo luogo, si è stabilito che l'obiettivo primario della Giunta era di usare il Mondiale come vetrina internazionale per mostrare al Mondo che l'Argentina non era il Paese barbarico che si raccontava in Europa e che, dopo aver arrestato l'impeto della *guerrilla* armata, il governo stava guidando i suoi cittadini verso un futuro di pace. Un concetto riassunto dal mantra che recitavano spesso i Generali: "Il Mondiale è un fatto politico". In realtà, si è valutato che il Mondiale rappresentò una vetrina, sì, ma per tutte le atrocità che accadevano in Argentina, esponendo quest'ultima ad un incremento sostanziale delle denunce per violazione dei Diritti Umani. Queste ultime risulteranno uno dei fattori decisivi perché la Giunta militare perdesse la sua linfa vitale nell'83. Si può dire, dunque, che il Mondiale spinse l'Argentina verso la transizione democratica, anche se il passaggio non avvenne dall'oggi al domani.

In secondo luogo, si è concluso che il Mondiale è stato, a breve termine, una manna dal cielo per il governo militare. Grazie alla vittoria della *selección*, infatti, la Giunta raggiunse il picco della sua popolarità. Il nazionalismo sfrenato causato dai gol di Mario Kempes, di fatto, non fu più replicabile,

se non, forse, attraverso la Guerra delle Falklands/Malvinas, che i dittatori organizzarono esattamente per cercare di riprodurre il senso di adesione al regime che il Mondiale aveva provocato. Come evidenziato da alcuni autori presenti nella bibliografia, il *Mundial* si dimostrò il grande “fatto fascista” della dittatura, che grazie ad esso ha potuto, brevemente, godere di un esteso clima di “giustificazione dell’ingiustificabile”.

A lungo termine, tuttavia, l’aver ospitato la competizione si dimostrò un investimento a basso rendimento per i dittatori. Infatti, e qui arriviamo alla terza conclusione, l’impressionante clima di euforia popolare non fu sfruttato a dovere dalla Giunta, che non seppe come gestire il consenso spaventosamente unanime che in quei giorni del ’78 si trovò fra le mani. Non a caso, l’ultimo dei capi del governo militare, Reynaldo Bignone, dichiarerà poi che “l’unico errore” commesso in quei sette anni di sangue e repressione sia stato proprio non aver chiamato il Paese ad elezioni terminate il Mondiale. “Ma nessuno vuole andarsene quando le cose vanno bene”.

In fine, ma questa è stata la conclusione più evidente da riscontrare, il *Mundial* si rivelò un clamoroso fiasco economico per il governo. Carlos Lacoste, l’uomo forte dell’organizzazione, aveva speso la cifra spropositata di 700 milioni di dollari – consacrando il Mondiale argentino come “il più caro della storia”. Le sue scelte erano a più riprese giustificate attraverso l’argomento del “fatto politico”: “Quanto costa dimostrare a 1,5 milioni di persone che Buenos Aires è la capitale dell’Argentina? E quanto perché 5.000 giornalisti possano informare il Mondo riguardo la realtà argentina dopo che l’abbiano vista?”. Costò davvero molto, visto che la grande spesa non venne ammortizzata dagli introiti provenienti dai turisti, arrivati in numeri particolarmente contenuti rispetto alle stime. E costò soprattutto ai cittadini argentini, che nei mesi seguenti videro schizzare l’inflazione a percentuali prima di quel momento impensabili.

Quando Lacoste dice che i giornalisti avrebbero dovuto giudicare la realtà argentina solo dopo averla vista con i loro occhi, si sta riferendo al secondo dei due temi principali di questa Tesi. Il governo, come già segnalato, era particolarmente attento alla stampa estera, specialmente a quella che si esponeva contro la Giunta e ne denunciava non solo i crimini, ma anche la capacità concreta di organizzare un Mondiale in soli due anni. Nel dibattito pubblico, queste voci “nemiche” vennero raggruppate sotto la dicitura *campaña antiargentina*. L’obiettivo era di stimolare la popolazione, attraverso la retorica istituzionale e dei media nazionali, a pensare che fosse essa stessa il bersaglio di questa campagna di discredito, aizzandola contro un nemico comune, sebbene le critiche fossero ovviamente rivolte unicamente ai loro governanti.

Nell'impossibilità di riferirci a tutti i possibili casi di Paesi inclusi nella cosiddetta *campagna antiargentina* per evidenti limiti di spazio e tempo, in questa Tesi si tratta del caso specifico di Spagna e Italia. La seconda domanda di ricerca è, dunque: Esisteva una *campagna antiargentina* in Italia e Spagna, e che caratteristiche aveva? Per lo studio, sono stati presi come riferimento il *Corriere della Sera* per l'Italia ed *El País* per la Spagna. È stata inoltre brevemente citata *La Repubblica*, in quanto ritenuta un contrappeso argomentativo al *Corriere* necessario per spiegare nella sua interezza l'approccio che si riservava in Italia alla dittatura argentina. I giornali italiani sono stati consultati e studiati nelle loro copie originali (rinvenute nell'emeroteca del Centro di Documentazione Giornalistica di Roma) nel periodo che va da marzo 1976 a luglio 1978. Diversamente, mentre la ricerca de *El País* si è basata sullo stesso lasso di tempo, il giornale madrileno è stato consultato in versione digitale per mezzo dell'emeroteca accessibile dal suo sito internet.

Per quanto riguarda l'Italia, si è appunto riscontrato che la situazione del *Corriere della Sera* è eccessivamente peculiare per usarla come unico riferimento per l'intero sistema giornalistico del Paese. Come spiegato all'interno della Tesi, effettivamente, i solidissimi legami che aveva stabilito il *Gruppo Rizzoli* (editore del *Corriere*) con la Giunta argentina (attraverso la Loggia Massonica P2) hanno fatto sì che la narrazione del Mondiale da parte di questo giornale diventasse un esercizio di costante sotterramento o minimizzazione dei crimini degli uomini di Videla. Questa dialettica è perfettamente riassunta dall'articolo con cui Paolo Bugialli introduceva i lettori alla competizione, qualche giorno prima del fischio d'inizio, "Videla passa, l'Argentina resta", citato quasi integralmente in questa Tesi.

Si è rivelato dunque necessario inserire una piccola sezione che illustrasse ai lettori come un giornale che non presentava interessi privati così preponderanti – *La Repubblica* – affrontasse in maniera completamente distinta il tema *Mundial*, caratterizzata da una condanna, sì, della dittatura, ma non della competizione in sé. Sarebbe stato, infatti, scorretto e ingannevole presentare al lettore un atteggiamento così "particolare" di un solo giornale come rappresentativo del mondo dell'informazione italiana nella sua interezza. Allo stesso modo, però, il *Corriere della Sera* non poteva essere una pubblicazione trascurabile in questo contesto, in quanto comunque giornale più venduto in Italia.

Per quanto riguarda *El País*, invece, si è riscontrata una copertura del Mondiale impressionante per completezza e presenza nelle colonne del giornale madrileno. Il suo tipo di narrazione è stato lodato

per offrire, anche nello stesso articolo, tutti i punti di vista dei vari protagonisti delle storie presentate, che in certi casi erano tanto la Giunta militare quanto le associazioni per il boicottaggio del torneo. Si è inoltre riconosciuto che la presenza di opinioni nette verso un Mondiale della Giunta è stata abbastanza scarsa, sebbene in qualche occasione queste sono state manifestate, evidenziando un'attitudine di generale rigetto verso la dittatura.

Questa difficoltà a trovare articoli in cui l'opinione dell'autore risaltasse in maniera evidente (non pervenuta, invece, nello studio del *Corriere*) è stata attribuita parzialmente alla maniera distinta con cui gli spagnoli si avvicinano al *newsmaking*. In maniera particolare, è stato riscontrato un metodo di scrittura molto anglosassone, caratterizzato dall'essenzialità della struttura del testo e da un ricorso poco frequente alle aggettivazioni. Lo stile tipicamente più romanzato di cui si avvalgono gli italiani, effettivamente, sembra prestarsi di più a far trasparire l'opinione dello scrittore laddove questo non sarebbe prettamente necessario. Quando, poi, l'opinione è richiesta per motivi di vicinanza politico-ideologica, come abbiamo constatato per il *Corriere della Sera*, ovviamente questo può fare relativamente la differenza.

Questa Tesi si propone come un elemento di novità nel panorama della ricerca accademica riguardante il Mondiale di Calcio del 1978 in due modi. In primo luogo, ci si auspica che questo paper di ricerca possa far parte di quella che, in queste pagine, si è denominata *svolta razionale*. C'è infatti un elemento che caratterizza buona parte della letteratura studiata ma non utilizzata in questa Tesi e, in alcuni frammenti, una mancata elementi della bibliografia: la difficoltà di formulare un discorso quanto più oggettivo e meno romanzato possibile intorno a questo accadimento. O, come dice Alabarces, di superare le “chiacchiere da caffè”, che al dibattito scientifico aggiungono poco o nulla. Qui speriamo, dunque, di aver presentato al lettore una chiave di lettura efficace ed informata che, diversamente da come è capitato a svariati autori argentini, non si è lasciata trasportare dai luoghi comuni o dall'emotività che questo tema implica.

In secondo luogo, questa Tesi risulta un sostanziale passo avanti per quanto riguarda lo studio dei giornali qui analizzati nell'ambito di Argentina '78. Nonostante, come segnalato, esistessero già dei punti di riferimento nella letteratura studiata, questi non erano sufficienti per la nostra ricerca o erano piuttosto generali, focalizzandosi soprattutto sull'approccio che questi giornali hanno avuto rispetto la dittatura di per sé, e non rispetto al Mondiale. Non risulta, per l'appunto, che l'analisi e la ricerca qui offerte siano state portate a termine da altri autori con la stessa profondità ed efficacia.