

Soccer and Kinship in Argentina: The Mother's Brother and the Heritage of Identity

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This article analyses the relationship between kinship and the heritage of football identity in Argentina. Some of the classic concepts relating to kinship found within social anthropology are utilized in order to explain one of the practices that generates the strongest senses of belonging in our contemporary society. The main thrust of this article is that the mother's brother (maternal uncle), as opposed to the father of the male child, plays a fundamental role in the transmission of football passion. There are also some structural constraints that affect the father and the maternal uncle. The analysis of the relationship between football and kinship not only considers the role of general social processes such as those relating to machismo but also other esoteric characteristics of football ritual in order to provide a structural explanation of the transmission of football passions in the societies of the River Plate in Argentina.

Working Among Difficulties

This article does not intend to establish a rigid law concerning family structure in *riverplatense* societies. Rather, it aims to identify some patterns in family behaviour and kinship as they relate to and impact upon the transfer of football passions and fandom. This is a subject that has only marginally been considered in social anthropology. Thus, the analyses presented here, although supported by empirical evidence, are of a provisional nature.

This article uncovers a range of complexities in exploring linkages between football fandom and kinship. Firstly, there are serious methodological problems in explaining the position that kinship plays in the transmission of football passions. Passions, in football contexts, involve strong feelings related to the sense of belonging to a particular universe of meanings. Having passion implies that the supporter is able to display his sentiments, his love for the team, his masculinity, in a very expressive way. The essentialist view of the football supporter is that their passion for the team is an essential attribute of his self, a way to be in the world. The supporters maintain that their passion flows in the blood. Thus, attempts to explain these passions in a non-essentialist manner run counter to the typical or commonsense responses from supporters about why they follow and are passionate about a particular team. These responses are clearly represented in a famous *hinchada* chant. *Hinchada* is the name that the organized groups of supporters of the teams give to themselves.¹ The *hinchadas* are composed of

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Applying kinship theory to western contemporary societies is a heavy duty that – in this case – faces the additional difficulty of treating the topic of sports passion. However, it is important to remember that:

kinship relations are not a special kind of social relationships, like economic relations or legal relations. Rather the categories which kinship affords provide the context and the idiom for many different kinds of social relationships. It is the field anthropologist's task to determine, in the culture he is studying, what these are.⁵

Kinship studies present important complexities because of their high rate of formality, not often used in modern social anthropology, and even less in social scientific studies of sport. Although kinship is no longer the key concept in contemporary anthropology, it remains an important area for study. The continued value of studying kinship is evident when previous findings are drawn upon to make sense of a broad range of social interactions that occur within the family unit. Thus, studies of kinship are employed in this article to shed light on the tensions between the father and the mother's brother of a male child in the transmission of football passions.

Both (classic) British anthropology and French anthropology have studied kinship in different ways because they have focused upon their own distinct issues. This situation is caused partially, according to Louis Dumont,⁶ by the fact that the English approach, which translates the word kinship differently to the French or Spanish,⁷ accords attention to blood relations and underestimates affinity relationships. It is important to repeat that kinship is no longer the central analytic concept of modern anthropological theory. The epoch is passed in which the outstanding classic concepts in social anthropology (Morgan's evolutionism, Radcliffe-Brown's structural-functionalism, Malinowski's functionalism and Lévi-Strauss' structuralism) used kinship as the linchpin of their theoretical paradigms. If we start with Radcliffe-Brown, British research assigned special attention to descent and the groups related to it. Affinity relationships were relegated to a lesser level. Descent is tied to the heritage of rights and duties, and the organization of these rights between the generations as a way of regulating them. One of the main rights is related to the conservation of the inheritance because of the key issue of succession, that is to say, the way of determining the right over people and goods. And this heritage must take a functionally connected form. Early research in British anthropology took kinship as a system composed of the regularities associated with some patterns of behaviour and sentiments (attitudes towards the children, types of descendance, modes of residence, political alliances, transmission of the heir, et cetera) of those persons that have parental ties. This view of kinship, mainly embraced by Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowsky, implies a behaviour system that must be explained by the anthropologist, using the comparative method. Leach considered this form of scientific activity as 'a matter of butterfly collecting – of classification, of the

arrangement of things according to their types and subtypes'.⁸ Moreover, Leach criticized the British classical anthropologist because 'an excessive interest in the classification of ethnographic facts serves to obscure rather to illuminate our perception of social reality'.⁹

To Radcliffe-Brown, kinship relations conform to a system, that is to say, a complex and interdependent relationship lead by structural sources. Kinship was assumed to be the key social institution, as the basis through which 'primitive' societies were capable of maintaining social order creating social solidarity. Thus, these rules of kinship, marriage and residence were the priority of the anthropological enquiry of the social structure.

These dyadic relations — person and community — are regulated by the correspondent social usages. It is important to note that this view fits a functionalist approach which considers that the different parts of a social system are, to a high degree, internally coherent and free of conflicts which could not be managed. Moreover, according to Radcliffe-Brown, anthropology had the purpose of aiming at establishing social laws that imposed general, precise and synchronic explanations such as those found in the natural sciences. It was in this sense that Radcliffe-Brown explained, in a famous and also much criticized article,¹⁰ the relationship between the mother's brother and the nephew in the Bathonga of Mozambique. Radcliffe-Brown described this as an asymmetrical and jocular relationship that is characterized by the liberties which the boy takes with everything owned by the mother's brother (including the women). The boy does not risk being punished if he crosses the borders of respect. These liberties were also evident at funerals where the boy could steal sepulchral gifts. In contrast he was expected to show a high degree of respect to the mother's brother. The Bathonga studied by Radcliffe-Brown are a patrilineal society that tends to spread the conducts, attitudes and sentiments (for example, care and indulgence) towards the members of the patrilineage of the ego's mother and moreover towards the members of the patrilineage of the ego's father. If the mother is indulgent, her brothers will act in the same way. The structural principle is repeated with the father because if he is a person with authority, his brothers will be also. Thus, 'since it is from his mother that he expects care or indulgence he looks for the same sort of treatment from the people of his mother group, i.e. from all his maternal kin'.¹¹ For example, one of the relationships that needs more respect is that developed between the ego's father and the wife of the ego's mother's brother. Inversely, these relations are opposed in matrilineal societies, following the same structural principle. In these regimes where the father and his line of descent conform to the authority, the mother's brother will be a 'masculine mother', while everything is inverted in matrilineal regimes. To Radcliffe-Brown, then, filiation determined the sense of the oppositions of these ties. Furthermore, the nephew's privileges with his maternal kin derived from the relations that existed between the mother and her son into a patrilineal descent. The generational principle defined by Radcliffe-Brown shows that for all kinship systems, the distance between

successive generations cause the elder members to feel the necessity of transmitting social and culture patterns to the new members. Although the joking relationship is a way of maintaining social connections between matrilineal kin in a formally patrilineal society, the mother's brother wants to keep the relationship with his nephew open through a liberal attitude. Thus, there exists a process of struggle and negotiation between the two groups that constitutes a mode of 'organizing a definite and stable system of social behaviour in which conjunctive and disjunctive components, as I have called them, are maintained and combined'.¹² The joking relationship, understood as the opposite of a contractual relationship, implies an alliance (or relation of consociation) in a society characterized by obligations and laws. Thus, social relationships are divided into members of corporate groups and members of different groups. Therefore, alliance relations could be classified into four different categories according to the way in which they are based on intermarriage, exchange of goods, blood-brotherhood or a similar institution, and joking relationships.¹³

This explanation of Radcliffe-Brown was rejected for a number of reasons. Evans Pritchard stressed the absence of an intent of extending the principle of equivalence to subjects such as property and political authority. He also rejected the scientific pretensions of Radcliffe-Brown's famous article because it involved a 'circular depiction' which presented only five cases.¹⁴ Radcliffe-Brown was also rejected by Lévi-Strauss, who argued that 'the avuncular relationship is not limited to two terms, but presupposes four, namely, brother, sister, brother-in-law, and nephew. An interpretation such as Radcliffe-Brown's isolates particular elements of a global structure which must be treated as a whole'.¹⁵

It is not the intention here to apply Radcliffe-Brown's findings directly to my Argentinian case study. Rather, these findings, particularly the joking relationships and struggles between the families, are used in an analogous way in order to illuminate an unseen part of both football heritage and identity in Argentina. Furthermore, the final interpretation of the significance of kinship in football fandom is informed by other theories and perspectives.

Football, Kinship and Masculine Identities

The analysis of kin relationships employed in this article aims at identifying a tension between affinity and kinship. Although descent is an important subject, the key point will be the 'disturbing' action of the mother's brother in the heritage of football identity and passion. The analyses put forward to explain this process will attempt to move beyond specific football contexts and will consider gender relations within the Argentine *rioplatense* culture.¹⁶ According to Beattie:

the study of kinship is centrally and essentially a study of other people's categories; of the ways in which the members of other cultures think about kinship and about other people. I have sufficiently stressed that social

anthropology is not – and cannot be – concerned with human communities only as systems of action. It is concerned with them also and essentially as involving systems of ideas and meanings. The study of kinship is not a study of what people do; it is also a study of what people think. For what they do is not fully intelligible until their modes of classification, their fundamental categories, are understood. Only then do their actual behaviour and its institutional implications make sense.¹⁷

Football rituals display, in a dramatic way, some key values of Argentine culture, from transcendental senses related to morality and nationality, to more 'earthly' disputes such as feelings of superiority over others. Eduardo Archetti called attention to the moral values related to Argentine football, that is to say, what is judged as correct and incorrect.¹⁸ Morality is tied, in Archetti's work, to the different ways of expressing what is good in society or who is a good person. These arguments can be seen as attempts to understand the nature of moral responsibilities within a life full of sense and meaning. According to Archetti, the moralities of social actors 'create a scene in which available symbols and historical narratives, new experiences related to given situations, images and sport results, new questions, answers to these questions and judgements about the correctness of these answers are mixed together'.¹⁹ Furthermore, these moralities are expressed in contradictory ways, in the past and in the present, because 'the relationship between moral values and practice is a dynamic one. Values are continuously changing and adapting through actual choices and practices, while, at the same time, they continue to inform and shape choices and practices.'²⁰ In addition, the parts are not able to explain the whole because every social phenomenon has its own rules. Thus, a more convenient and fruitful way forward is to study concrete practices in order to detect specificities.

The crucial point here is related to feelings of superiority expressed by football supporters. These feelings are crystallized by two variables that are hard to discount: the scores and the quantity of supporters. The supporters believe that they have the capacity to influence the result of matches in a way that others, including the players, do not. Although the supporters provide an exhortatory directed at 'eternal chant' to their players, supporters can show a paradoxical feeling of admiration and scorn towards them, resulting in a conflictual dimension when the supporters think that players are deceiving them or are not defending the club's colours. For the supporters it is not a matter of winning or losing, it is a matter of attitude. The terms 'thieves' and 'chickens' indicate the fracture of their identification with the players. We can find other expressions of 'alterity' in football rituals, normally expressed by members of the *hinchada*. They construct a series of 'others' who are unable to demonstrate genuine passion in the support of the team: these 'others' are not true *hinchas*. These 'others' do not represent the true identity of the *hinchada* because some of them are opportunistic supporters (those who go to the stadium when their team is

winning) and do not possess *aguante*. Others are interested only in money (managers, mercenary players). As far as the *hinchadas* are concerned, it is only accidentally that these 'others' share the same identity with 'real' supporters.

According to football supporters, the moral feeling of superiority of the true *hinchada* is not only a consequence of the match scores, but is also related to a numerical predominance. Boca Juniors' (the most popular team in Argentina) supporters claim superiority because they feel that they are 'the half plus one' of the country. However, rival fans reply 'from Bolivia and Paraguay', and in doing so explain this claimed superiority of supporters partially as a result of minority and stigmatized ethnic groups in Argentina supporting the club. This idea that stresses, 'if we are joined, we will achieve more', results in the supporters wanting to reproduce passion in its own context. Thus, the family is the ideal social institution to achieve such a goal.

The importance of the family and kin networks in football fandom has been portrayed in the Argentine media. In fact, the relevance of certain families in the control of the most famous Argentine *hinchadas* has acquired much in the way of media coverage. Television advertisements and humorous depictions in newspapers, specific magazines and books are amongst the types of media in which kinship relations and football have been represented. In this context, the television advertisement of *yerba mate Taragüí* is very illustrative.²¹ It shows a father dreaming about bringing up his son, from birth to adolescence. The theme of the advertisement is to show how the interests of the growing child diverge from those of their father. For example, while the father listens to tango the child prefers rock music. Of particular relevance for this study is the fact the father is a Boca fan and the child supports River. Indeed, the only convergence of interests and tastes between the father and son is in their consumption of *yerba mate Taragüí* which is expressed by the following phrase: 'the true Argentine's passion.'

Argentinian children, before being initiated in football passion, are submitted to various pressures, occasionally contradictory, in order to adopt a team identity. The highest degree of contradiction is produced when the father and the mother's brother – especially when the latter is single and without sons – support different teams. The presence of the mother's brother is, in some ways, the indirect presence of the maternal family. The father aims at reserving for himself the right of transmitting the football identity of his son, but this is opposed by the maternal uncle. Some fathers try to assure the identity of the boy by buying him symbols of football identity and passion such as jackets, t-shirts, shorts and hats. They also teach their sons *hinchadas* chants and some even acquire a club membership card for their babies. Taking the little boy to the matches constitutes the typical way in which the child is imbued with a passion for a club, though this action is difficult in cities without teams competing in the first division. In the case of Mar del Plata, where most of the evidence for this study was gathered, only the summer games played by the most important teams of the country allow fathers to perform this ritual of initiation.

The pressures applied on the young child to adopt one team or another do not end with the competition between the father and the mother's brother, but extend to other members of the family, such as grandfathers and, especially, elder brothers. This was a point reinforced during interviews conducted for this study. One of the interviewees, Alfredo, aged 18, says that his elder brother, seven years his senior, was the more important influence on the choice of his football team. However, his elder brother's team choice is considered in his family as inspired by the mother's brother:

One follows the elder brother when one is a boy. In this case, my elder brother is a Boca supporter because of my uncle. But my maternal uncle was not so insistent with my younger brother. He was married by that time and was seldom in my house. Then, my father could easily transmit to his younger son the River Plate passion.²²

In the shaping of a child's identity with a particular team, we should not forget other kinds of pressure, such as neighbourhood socialization, the influence of peer groups and friends and, of course, the success of certain teams. Laura, a high school student, remembers that her young brother decided to support Independiente when this team won the Argentinian championship in 1994. The father, a Racing supporter, and the mother's brother, a Boca supporter, were unhappy at this choice. However, Laura thinks that her brother:

decided, unconsciously, to support Independiente in order to not generate problems in the family because my father very much disliked the position adopted by my maternal uncle. They never fought seriously but the discussions were heated at times. And now, my father punishes my young brother for his team choice by going to football matches with me and not with him.²³

Incidentally, it is not only boys who are subjected to extended familial pressure – the nieces are not totally excluded from this process. They sometimes play the role of the nephew when one does not exist. Such is the case of Paula, a 22-year-old student, whose father frequently remembers how his brother-in-law influenced his daughter to become a River fan. He strongly believes that because he had no nephew his brother-in-law had no other option.

Such problematic situations are very common in disputes over children's, especially boys', football identity. Graciela, 39 years, is a mother whose children support different teams because of the opposing loyalties of the father and mother's brother. She pays little attention to the matter because:

We are not very interested in football. My younger son upsets my older son sometimes. But it is not a real problem. It is very rare to find them watching a football match on the TV.²⁴

However, Graciela reckons that she does not live in a *typical* family situation. Graciela has friends who are affected by conflicts associated with football. In fact, she asserts, football is a permanent source of conflict for the children:

Mingo and Andrea have a problematic relationship with their son. The boy does not know how to answer when a person asks for his favourite team. He prefers Boca, the father's team, but at times he says that he is a River supporter, the maternal family team. All the family members are involved in this confrontation: the father, the mother, the grandparents, but especially his mother's brother.²⁵

Such conflicts are of little concern among many football supporters. They are reductionist. They think that football identity is 'in the blood'. They consider simplistically and confusingly that passion is transmitted biologically because every club is related to a specific way of life. Hence, it is expected that the son will choose the father's team. The influence of the brother-in-law is given little importance. As we have seen, this assumption can generate tension within the family. Arturo, a 17-year-old high school student in an upper-class college, asserts that:

I have very many problems with my brother in law ... At the moment, my nephew has two rugby jackets – Universitario and Sporting²⁶ – and two football t-shirts – Gimnasia and River.²⁷

Despite the class discrepancy revealed here (rugby is a middle-class game),²⁸ the confrontational situation is the same. The substitution of rugby in the place of football simply reveals the issue of sporting loyalties is not only a matter of soccer heritage. Football, and rugby in the case of Arturo, are arenas that impinge, sometimes strongly, on family relations of Argentine society.

Now to the matter of patterns of inheritance of football identities. Oscar, who is now married and the father of two daughters, remembers that he had to fight his brother-in-law determinedly in order to persuade his nephew to support River. Oscar, a 32-year-old architect, who was brought up in a typical middle-class family, confesses, however, that, 'I could not win the battle with Lucas's father. He put tremendous energy into transmitting to him a passion for Independiente, in spite of the fact that I gave my nephew a lot of things related to River Plate during his childhood.' Eight years later, he had his revenge with Tomás, a younger nephew:

Everything was too easy with the other son of my sister Rosana. Her second husband (Tomás's father) is not interested in football, then I had no problems in managing his football identity. He is now a River fan.²⁹

Jorge, a 22-year-old advertiser, is placed in a similar position. He promises that:

I will have another chance with my next nephew. I can't afford to let him escape. The three previous nephews are Boca supporters because of my brother-in-law, but I am well prepared for the fourth. I have a plan that will not fail. He will be a River fan, I have no doubt.³⁰

In reality, of course, Jorge is fighting, in the name of his family, for the sentimental attachment of his male nephews. He wants to construct a masculine association through football passion, with a nephew who is yet not born!

Football, Mother's Brother and Structuralism

The direction we are following, of course, leads directly towards some of the main points of Lévi Strauss' thesis related to the exchange of women, described as, 'the most precious category of goods'. The distinguished French anthropologist has argued that marriage, the exchange of women, is an exchange which implies a relationship characterized by solidarity and structured as a gift and a reciprocal gift. However, the reciprocity is complex, Lévi-Strauss differentiated between two major types (with their variations: closed, continuous, explicit, implicit, direct, indirect, concrete) of marriage exchanges. He classified these as restricted exchange and generalized exchange. Generalized exchange is the term used to represent a system where women are exchanged in one direction only (the son who marries into the same kin group as his father). Restricted exchange is found when women are exchanged in either direction between peer groups (for example, cross cousin marriage). It is important to be clear that this kind of exchange could be a delayed direct exchange, that is to say, when women go in one direction in one generation, and in the opposite in the following. In this sense:

Exogamy provides the only means of maintaining the group as a group, of avoiding the indefinite fission and segmentation which the practice of consanguineous marriages would bring about. If these consanguineous marriages were resorted to persistently, or even over-frequently, they would not take long to 'fragment' the social group into a multitude of families, forming so many closed systems or sealed monads which no pre-established harmony could prevent from proliferating or from coming into conflict.³¹

In this conception:

the prohibition of incest is less a rule prohibiting marriage with the mother, sister or daughter, than a rule obliging the mother, sister or daughter to be given to other. It is the supreme role of the gift, and it is clearly this aspect, too often unrecognised, which allows its nature to be understood. All the errors in interpreting the prohibition of incest arise from a tendency to see marriage as a discontinuous process which derives its own limits and possibilities from within itself in each individual case.³²

The kinship relations that have been discussed in this article are involved in what Lévi-Strauss called the 'kinship atom' or, as it is more specifically known, the 'elementary structure' of kinship. In this case, the transmission of the football passion has a believed paternal inheritance coupled with contradictions from the maternal side, embodied in the mother's brother. We do not have an exchange of women because the wife-giving family only seeks to recover the honour of the family, symbolically, by determining or at least influencing the football identity of any children.

In the Argentinian male culture, attitudes towards the sexual life of the sister are very particular. A high proportion of males state that a large portion of their honour is dependent upon their sisters' virginity. Those who are protective in this regard are called *cuidas* (persons who take care) and are often the subject of jokes when the woman (sister or daughter) establishes a relationship with a man. The phrase 'give us your sister' is a common request that a man who has an attractive sister, must bear. A good number of these brothers loose the control over their behaviour when it happens. Pablo, a 23-year-old college student, confesses that he had a lot of problems accepting his sister's boyfriend. He remembers how 'my friends cheered me all the time, they didn't leave me in peace'.³³

When a strong relationship is established, the boyfriend is generally exposed to an asymmetrical joking relationship with his girlfriend's family. Maxi, a 26-year-old salesman, still enjoys teasing his sister's boyfriend:

The boy is cool but we drive him crazy at home. He puts up with it because he knows the rules of the game. When I started dating my girlfriend her younger brother drove me nuts. He hit me and insulted me knowing I could not do anything. We are married now and the situation is quite different.³⁴

The girlfriends' brothers retain the right to tease their brothers-in-law but they will still try later to win their nephews' favour – a form of opposition to the father's image. In this context, the marriage of the sister is experienced as a symbolic gift that defines typical roles within the familiar structure. As Arturo, one of the interviewees, posits:

The children know that the uncle, the mother's brother, is the *banana*. The boy has a respectful relation with his father, who has the authority. I will ever act as a companion to my nephew, but I know that I will have to change when I become a father.³⁵

What Arturo says is an eloquent way of defining the structural position that the mother's brother tends to adopt with respect to the boy. That is to say, this figure of complicity embodies '*la viveza criolla*' (creole cleverness), displayed by the *banana*, a well known social stereotype. The banana is, in the Argentinian *lunfardo* slang, somebody who is *piola*, 'clever, subtle'.³⁶ Arturo knows that when he becomes a father, he will not have to construct a relationship based upon complicity. He will be the image of authority for his future children, stressing to

them the boundaries between what is right and what is wrong. In the same way, this informant admits that, 'I hope that my future wife does not have brothers. I guess that it must be very unpleasant if your brother-in-law is intent on intervening in your child's upbringing. But all brother's-in-law assume that they have the right to do it.'

Conclusion

Andre Green argues that the mother's brother plays a balancing role that attracts to him affective attitudes which prevent a strong sentimental saturation between the father and the son.³⁷ In the cases presented here, this is not set down as a rigid law in *riverplatense* societies. I have pointed out some structural roles and behavioural tendencies of the members of families in matters related to football identities. However, it has been demonstrated that those elements at work in such cases can be far more important and significant than the role they play simply in the choice of a football team.

The avuncular relationship associated with the creation of football identity could certainly be located in contexts other than the sports world. I have considered above that the concrete actions of the mother's brother constitute the intention of regaining, through football passion, the sister's son to his own family in a social arena where masculinity is displayed in Argentina. As a response to the symbolic 'delivery' of the sister, the mother's brother must attract the boy to his own family by developing complicit relations with him.

But these 'disturbing' effects are lessened when the mother's brother has his own family. As an authority image he tends to abandon his avuncular insertion in order to protect the familial identity of his own son because of the fear that *his* wife's brother will attempt to attract the boy to the mother's family through football. Roberto, a 16-year-old, confirms this state of affairs, but also adds a fresh complexity to the issue, when he recalls that:

My mother's brother was interested in other affairs. He never talked to me about my football identity. But my cousins – maternal uncle's sons – attempt to impose on me their passion for Boca sometimes because they are older than me.³⁸

Here, Roberto's cousins are attempting the role of surrogate mother's 'brother' because they find themselves *de facto* in the same structural position as the mother's brothers in the other cases.

Dealing with the concepts of nation and gender, Eduardo Archetti considers that football rituals include four key elements:³⁹ a practice that involves distinct agents within a process of self-definition, a specific registry of 'crucial events' (especially victories), a rethinking of past events from the perspective of the present, and 'the production of a narrative that is a mixture of real history, pseudohistories and mythologies'.⁴⁰ Archetti allows us to understand better the

symbolic dimensions of sport rituals. Thus, we can say that: 'In the constitution and modernization of nation states, the collective rituals of sport facilitate not only a privileged male participation but also, through competition, a confluence between a given male activity and national representation.'⁴¹

As this study demonstrates, football displays tensions and relations of reciprocity that are grounded in our contemporary societies. The wife-giving family experiences this 'delivery' as a theft. Thus, this family goes into a process of 'negative reciprocity' without achieving what the wife-receiver reckons is the debt.⁴² We are dealing with a process that is similar to the case of 'bride capture' among the Makuna, an Amazonian tribe of Colombia.⁴³ The Makuna can opt to steal a woman from other territorial group when the common forms of exchange of women cannot be completed successfully. The Makuna have other ways of resolving the marriage exchange but, when the balanced and generalized reciprocity of women is impeded by demographical circumstances, Kaj Arhem describes how:

in practice, however, it usually leads to retaliatory capture or post facto marriage negotiations which, in turn, may result in a sort of delayed-exchange marriage. In a wider social and temporal perspective, then, bride capture may be seen as a form of woman exchange between affinal groups; indeed, it establishes affinal relationships which may over time – through subsequent 'corrective exchanges' – develop into alliance.⁴⁵

Arhem concludes, using an extended case approach, that the negative reciprocity (bride capture) and the balanced reciprocity (direct exchange-marriage) are two individual strategies for obtaining a woman, two forms of reciprocity of women that are alternative and individual strategies. These strategies depend on two sets of circumstances of:

particular importance: first, the age and the sex structure of the male's siblings group and, secondly, his position in a pre-established network of marriage alliances. The former determines the man's control over and exchangeable kinswoman, the latter his access to a marriageable woman. The interplay between these two sets of circumstances largely determines the marriage options available to a man and the strategies employed.⁴⁵

In the cases explored in this article, the intended recovery of the boy to the maternal side through football is not only a means of contesting the identity of such children but also a way of establishing reciprocity relations through the maternal line. When the maternal uncle transmits to the nephew his football identity, he establishes strong ties that can be strengthened in the future. The uncle will have the task of renewing the contract continuously, by buying him the t-shirt of the team or taking him to the stadium. Thus, the sister's son is the symbol of the recovery for the maternal family. This is a process full of negotiations and tensions where true honour dramas are developed and played

out. Football displays the conflict between a person (the mother's brother) who wants to complete the reciprocity relation following the symbolic 'delivery' of the sister and another who refuses to complete the exchange (the father). Thus, this study has provided a way of understanding how sports rituals have particular realities and create these same realities within their own rules of functioning, with contradictory narratives and with defined actors.

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NOTES

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1. I do not use the term *barra brava* because it is a category imposed outside of football contexts. The term *barra brava* is objectified by daily use but contains a demoniac appreciation. Some journalists called them – a little jokingly – fanatics, but others name them beasts or animals. These stigmatizations are also commonplace in other countries. For example, there are the English *hooligans* and the Italian *ultras*, who are analogous to the Argentinian *barras bravas*, but with big differences. The term *barra brava* has been imposed by the Argentinian judicial structure. The journalist Amilcar Romero has found that 'the existence of *barras fuertes* [strong bands] was detected in Argentina, in a documented way, since 1938. In April 1967, the expression *barra brava* was incorporated to the judicial jargon for the declaration of a witness of a murder case in the stadium.' The *barras bravas* were then defined as 'groups that go to the pitch in order to promote disorders and harm people and things' (Amilcar Romero, *Los barras bravas y la 'contrasociedad deportiva'* [Buenos Aires: CEAL, 1994]).
2. '...(Boca o River o Independiente, or another team) es un sentimiento/no se explica, se lleva bien adentro...'. Regular song in Argentine *hinchadas*.
3. See Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969).
4. Jorge Elbaum, 'Apuntes para el "aguante"'. La construcción simbólica del cuerpo popular', in Pablo Alabarces *et al.* (eds.), *Deporte y Sociedad* (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 1998).
5. John Beattie, *Other Cultures: Aims, Methods and Achievements in Social Anthropology* (London: Routledge, 1966), p.95.
6. Louis Dumont, *Introducción a dos teorías de la antropología social* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 1975).
7. In Spanish (as in French) kinship is usually translated as kinship and affinity.
8. E.R. Leach, *Rethinking Anthropology* (London: Atholone Press, 1971), p.2.
9. *Ibid.*, p.26.
10. A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (London: Free Press, 1965).
11. *Ibid.*, p.25.
12. *Ibid.*, p.95.
13. Adam Kuper, *Anthropology and Anthropologist: The Modern British School* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).
14. E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Historia del pensamiento antropológico* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1987).
15. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (London: Penguin, 1993), p.41.
16. I prefer to avoid reference to Argentine culture because of the cultural diversity in the national territory. *Rioplatense* culture would include the central area of the country characterized by *porteña* culture of Buenos Aires and cities influenced by the capital (for example, Rosario, Mar del Plata).
17. Beattie, *Other Cultures*, p.115.
18. Eduardo Archetti, *Masculinities: Football, Polo and the Tango in Argentina* (Oxford: Berg, 1999).
19. *Ibid.*, pp.124–5.

20. Signe Howell, 'Introduction', in Signe Howell (ed.), *The Ethnography of Moralities* (London: Routledge, 1997), p.4.
21. The *yerba mate* is a drink which is consumed in Argentina, Uruguay and in the south of Brazil.
22. Interview with author, Mar del Plata, May 2000.
23. Interview with author, Mar del Plata, April 2000.
24. Interview with author, Mar del Plata, June 2000.
25. Interview with author, Mar del Plata, April 2000.
26. Universitario and Sporting are two rugby clubs of Mar del Plata.
27. Interview with author, Mar del Plata, June 2000.
28. Rugby is an upper-class sport in Argentina.
29. Interview with author, Mar del Plata, April 2000.
30. Interview with author, Mar del Plata, April 2000.
31. C. Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1969), p.479.
32. *Ibid.*, p.481.
33. Interview with author, Mar del Plata, June 2000.
34. Interview with author, Mar del Plata, April 2000.
35. Interview with author, Mar del Plata, April 2000.
36. Juan José Gobello, *Nuevo diccionario lunfardo* (Buenos Aires: Corregidor, 1994), p.204.
37. Andre Green, 'Átomo de parentesco y relaciones edípicas', in Claude Lévi-Strauss (ed.), *La identidad* (Barcelona: Ediciones Petrel, 1981).
38. Interview with author, Mar del Plata, April 2000.
39. Eduardo Archetti, 'In Search of National Identity: Argentinean Football and Europe', in J.A. Mangan (ed.), *Tribal Identities, Nationalism, Europe, Sport* (London: Frank Cass, 1996).
40. *Ibid.*
41. *Ibid.*
42. See Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1972).
43. See Kaj Arhem, *Makuna Social Organization: A Study in Descent, Alliance and the Formation of Corporate Groups in the North-Western Amazon* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiskell International, 1981).
44. *Ibid.*, p.25.
45. *Ibid.*, p.28.