

Shirt 13 – Series of 13 books, Camisa 13 - Seriado de 13 livros

VARIOUS AUTHORS. São Paulo: DBA, 2001 – 2003. Rio de Janeiro, Ediouro, 2004 - 2005

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13 Brazilian football teams

In the year 2001 the Brazilian editor DBA had the lucky idea to start publishing a series called “Camisa 13 – Shirt 13” to pay homage to the 13 most important Brazilian football clubs. The concept was to invite 13 of the most known contemporary Brazilian writers to describe their club from a fans’ view and in a humorous way. They asked Ruy Castro to write about Flamengo, José Roberto Torero about Santos, Mario Prata about Palmeiras, Washington Olivetto and Nirlando Beirão about Corinthians, Ricardo Galuppo about Atlético/MG, Sergio Augusto about Botafogo, Luis Fernando Verissimo about Internacional, Eduardo Bueno about Grêmio, Nelson Motta about Fluminense, Conrado Giacomini about São Paulo FC, Bob Fernandes about Bahia, Jorge Santana about Cruzeiro and Aldir Blanc about Vasco da Gama (only the last three I haven’t read yet). In 2003 the DBA got bankrupt and the Ediouro finished the collection.

The result was a fine compilation of contemporary Brazilian literature, which succeeds in connecting best entertainment with information about the favourite Brazilian sport football and its basic institutions, the clubs. Each author found an own and mostly intimate way to praise his favourite football team. And they really praise them and don’t just describe them. To exemplify that, I just quote two subtitles: “You are the first between the greats” (São Paulo FC) and “Nothing can be greater” (Grêmio). This fact

¹ . I wish to thank Martina Schreiber from the Ruhr Universität Bochum for assisting me with the translation.

must make it difficult for a Brazilian football supporter to read any other book than that about the own club. So I think there are two groups of readers for this book series: the real Brazilian football fans and the outsiders.

The fans will buy only one issue of the series and that's the one about the own club. For them it will be a great homage and so they will be well entertained. Maybe even cry some tears on the most emotional chapters, which remember historical victories or defeats. In some kind the books are a piece to reproduce the imagined communities of the fan groups. For them there is a lot of affection in these books. It is a memorial for this mysterious and magic feeling to be a fan of a specific football club.

The outsiders, like non football fans, non Brazilians, or experts like scientists and sport journalists, may buy some more books of Camisa 13, if they like the issue. And they will find maybe less emotion, but more information in the lines. They will have a brief overview on the history of Brazilian football in general and especially of the described clubs. But they will have principally a look on what it means to be a football fan. Or in other words they can have a voyeuristic view on the intimate emotions described in the preceding paragraph. contest

Why Football?

In march 2006, the German literary scholar Matías Martínez (Wuppertal University) talked at a congress at the UFRJ university in Rio de Janeiro about his book: "Why football?" ("Warum Fußball? Kulturwissenschaftliche Beschreibungen eines Sports", Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2002), asking for the reasons why football is so popular in the world. He contested the validity of some explications to be found in

social theory, like Gunter Gebauer's or Desmond Morris'. Instead, he demanded to take into account the meaning which football gains in the self-understanding of fans. How do they communicate about football, what do they say about it, what means football to them? As an example of such a description Martinez referred to Tim Parks' "A season with Verona" (2002). Other examples would be the famous "Fever Pitch" by Nick Hornby (1992) or hooligan biographies like "Terrace Legends" by Cass Pennant and Martin King (2003).

The "Camisa 13" Series is the Brazilian contribution to this search for the meaning of football. And the meaning for each author couldn't be more multifaceted. Prata sees Palmeiras as the team of love, Augusto is writing about a mystic, supernatural and weird Botafogo, for Castro Flamengo represents Brazil and on the other hand Bueno describes the regional identities of Grêmio fans in southern Brazil. That makes it so difficult to review this book series, because there is not really commonness.

It seems like the club histories are a common ground. But that is not true, because Torero has written a dictionary of Santos, Motta described only an episode in the mid-seventies of Fluminense and Prata has presented a love-novel, which turned in an excellent screen-play for the cinema-movie "The wedding of Romeo and Julietta". It is significant, that the history of Internacional starts for Verissimo just with his first visit to the stadium. Supreme entertainment is the history of the Corinthians written by Olivetto, but he says, that he is not a writer, but a publicist, and so he is allowed to lie. It is dangerous to take the presented stories as historic facts.

The spirit of the Camisa 13 histories can be explained by a declaration of Eduardo Bueno, which he made in an interview on television: "My book is not about the history of

Grêmio, not even about my history of Grêmio, but it is about the history of my Grêmio”. A football club has a certain meaning for a fan and maybe for another fan of the same team, it has another meaning. The majority of the authors created a thesis, of what signifies their club and tried to prove it with historical facts. Let’s have a look on two examples.

Flamengo

Ruy Castro is a well known author of biographies of popular Brazilian personalities like the actress Carmen Miranda, the dramatic adviser Nelson Rodrigues and the football player Garrincha. He described his club Flamengo Rio de Janeiro in a first instance not with the characteristic to be the most glorious, but the most loved team. It is estimated that Flamengo has about 30 million supporters distributed all over Brazil. That means that Spain has fewer inhabitants, than Flamengo fans. Nowadays it is called the team of the people or the workers club. But that’s not true; Flamengo can be the team of people of any social layer and provenience. It was founded in 1895 as an elite rowing-club. So Castro makes the question: “How was it possible, that Flamengo turned from an elite club in Rio to a nationwide popular club?”

In 1911 the Rios side Fluminense had internal problems, which made nine players leave the club. On their search for a new club, they found Flamengo, which was still a rowing club. So it had no team, no pitch and no infrastructure for football. The solution was to change clothes in the boathouse and walk to an improvisational pitch on a square nearby. The consequence was that the Flamengo players had a very close contact to the people, which they met on this walk. Quite the contrary to Fluminense, which had a real

stadium that separated the players on the pitch from the spectators on the terraces. They had even different entrances.

For Castro this is the crucial point for Flamengo becoming the most popular team of Rio and later, with the help of Rio's radio and television stations, the most popular of Brazil. Flamengo started to have black players and black supporters. It had the first fan club playing marches in the stadiums. With Flamengo it is possible, that poor and rich assist a match together and so it turned into a synonym for Brazil. A symbol for the Brazilian ethnical mixture: the samba, the carnival and the Brazilian style of football. Flamengo represents the nation.

Grêmio

Exactly on the contrary Eduardo Bueno described Grêmio Porto Alegre as a club, which represents the far southern Brazilian state Rio Grande Do Sul. Bueno has made his name in publishing various books on the history of Brazil like the "Terra Brasilis" collection and "História do Brasil". So he is perfectly informed about the secessionist tradition of the "gaúcho" habitants of his home state, which already were in a war for independence against the federal troops in 1835 - 1845.

On this historical background Bueno is drawing a hilarious portrait of Grêmio as a symbol of opposition to the rest of Brazil. He sees the character of the gaúchos very close connected to their southern neighbours from Uruguay and the principal immigrant group in the 19th century: the Germans. Based on this legacy he defines the gaúcho-qualities as very masculine, tough and powerful. Their football style is based on fighting men, which "value the elbow more than the heel". The principal player is the central defender, who

does not construct the match in a creative way like a sweeper, but destroys the game of the opposite team. A 1:0 is a massacre in Buenos eyes! He likes to see matches in which his team is saving a 0:0 draw with a collective spirit on a rainy afternoon, similar like in European stadiums.

So he is describing exactly the opposite of the typical Brazilian football stile, with all its individualists and artists, which play in the sunny Rio de Janeiro. “The beautiful game is only for faggots” is his clear statement. And by the way Bueno does not live in Brazil, but in the *Cisplatine Republic* in allusion to the La Plata River, which divides Argentina and Uruguay). How could he: the word Brazil is derived from the red-coloured brasil-wood or in his theory from the Celtic word breazil, which means also red. This is the club colour of Grêmios biggest local rival Internacional, to which he only refers as municipal.

Identity

The two books described are my favourites, because they develop clear theses and try to prove it, they provide many historic and regional facts and they have a great sense of humour. In the centre of the presentations is the identity transmitted by a football club. I think that many people will agree with the characteristics of Flamengo as the most loved team of Brazil and Gremio as the German-Uruguayan representative from Cisplatina. That means Castro and Bueno succeeded in describing the story of their clubs and at the same time the clubs of many other Brazilians. They are transmitting a generally accepted image. I think the other writers succeeded in the same way.

Even, if everybody thinks the own team is the most glorious and most successful, the titles are not important. The fans don't watch their teams playing, because of the victories, but because of the identity, that they transmit. This is the central conclusion of the Camisa 13 series: The meaning of football is identification.

Every "Me" needs an "Other", like a mirror, to define itself. Only this way it is possible to say we are like this, because we are different or the opposite of someone else, like it was described in the case of Grêmio. So it is no wonder, that a commonness of the books is a description in opposite to the biggest adversary, like for example Corinthians and Palmeiras in São Paulo, Internacional and Grêmio in Porto Alegre and Atlético/MG and Cruzeiro in Belo Horizonte. Olivetto is going so far, that he supports everything what is white and black (Corinthians) and dispraises all green (Palmeiras). So he makes a comment in his book about the match Germany (white and black) vs. Saudi Arabia (green) at the 2002 world cup in Korea and Japan. The German 8:0 victory was no surprise for him.

I don't know, if the Camisa 13 collection gives a definite answer to the question "Why football?" Maybe there are people, which interpret another meaning than identity in football. But this is the answer of Camisa 13. And by the way the series consist of really good, informative and entertaining books.