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Global Rituals in Transformation: A Case Study of the Finals of the Union of European Football Associations Champions League, 1993–2016

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ABSTRACT

The Champions League finals, the most important football competition in the world, are a perfect global screen for Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), the European football government body. Through those finals, UEFA sends messages through the performance of a ritual that is increasingly complex with each year. The historic evolution of that ritual and its different elements helps to explain the configuration of a 'neo-ritual' or 'global ritual' with the goal to articulate the idea of universal citizenship among football fans. The sport has become, in a short lapse of time, a very powerful globalization agent.

KEYWORDS

Champions League history; ritual; globalization; universal citizenship; mass media

The main event. Die Meister (The master). Die Besten (The best). Les grandes équipes (The great teams). The champions

The climactic chorus of the anthem of the UEFA Champions League.¹

In present postmodern societies, processes of individualized identity and isolation contrast strongly with gregarious processes in which the sense of community is usually ephemeral and sporadic.² Leisure, entertainment, and sport, in particular football, are examples of this dichotomy. The phenomenon neither detracts from these events nor renders them of rituals, delimiting both the profane and sacred (understood in a secular sense) or affirming foundational narratives. Rituals have not died out with postmodernity rather they have been transformed and constructed with different aspirations and with different results in scope and form.³ Characterized as collective 'neo-rituals' or 'global rituals', digital television has enabled their reach to become more multicultural. This transition towards these new kinds of rituals is also visible in the historic evolution of football, through the configuration of this sport as a global phenomenon.

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British anthropologist Edmund Leach distinguishes two opposing tendencies in anthropology within the frameworks of distinguishing among rituals, ceremonies, and customs. One tendency associates them with non-rational social procedures and therefore as an ineffective means to an end:

The other trend of usage has been to distinguish the three categories: ritual, ceremony, and custom. Ritual is then usually set apart as a body of custom specifically associated with religious performance, while ceremony and custom become residual categories for the description of secular activity.⁴

The historical changes in the ritual articulated by the UEFA Champions League exemplifies an instrumental means of global communication and indistinguishable from concepts like ceremony and custom. Reflecting Leach's assertion, that intellectual discrepancy is inevitably associated with the concept of ritual. The Champions League finals, in its short history, have changed from merely a sport event towards a complex ritual with concrete political and civilizatorial goals. Understanding this process from a historic point of view encourages rich debates around the growing social role of football and especially the birth of a postmodern football.

Processes of commercialization and rationalization and the survival of the local culture based on some myths and rituals as an instrument of social control are already strongly anchored in territories and cultures that are more or less well delimited. Anthropology, sociology, and history have not stopped updating the inventory of these processes and their meanings, from the deepest Amazon jungles to any urban space worthy of consideration. Football has not been outside of those analyses. For example, one strong point in the debates on the birth of modern football has been articulated around the configuration of specific *football cultures* and their consequent sense of identity and community belonging.⁵ However, global rituals and the rituals of marked character and international reach remain elusive or neglected.⁶ With global diffusion through digital television, the expansion of a global economy and the processes of professionalization, some rituals lack a clear territorial basis for the formation of a 'global-transversal tribe', to coin a provocative term. French sociologist Armand Mattelart calls it the myth of 'right-wing anarchists',⁷ the belief that technology and information globalization will automatically become the configuration of an international civil society. Thus, although the social contract remains national, the rationalizing effect of football organizations constitutes a normative narrative that is sometimes more interesting for the citizen than the configuration of law in its own territory. In this sense, football can promote the constitution of an international civil society, as technology or laws are also doing to some extent.

Those who, like UEFA, do not have a clear territory or a well-defined tribe aspire to conquer the globalized world from a continent or a macro region are obliged to generate cultures of their own that tend to ritualize their staging of events, to affirm their brand, and to satisfy a transversal social order in multiple national spaces.⁸ In this case, where the place does not clearly explain performance, ritual or myths, analysis can prove challenging. Functional explanations cannot focus on the tribe or on their cosmology and/or cosmogony. They must articulate explanations that go

beyond and combine several simultaneous vectors, as well as its historic development—the progressive conquest of the economic market, the performative power that multiplies meanings, and also the heterogeneous tribe that engenders and aspires to organize. Although in this case the character of the tribe is territorially inorganic and corresponds to heterogeneous hobbies and very diverse cultural communities, two levels of consumption exist—the base tribe that acts essentially as a consumer of the ritual and the culture of the institutional hierarchical body that organizes the ritual itself. One is the base community (amateurs around the world) and, another, its body of priests (managers, courts, associations, unipersonal bodies, and committees, etc.). The latter have a strong professional component, with very creative processes of normative expansion and power structures that interfere and complement each other. The ritual must give a response and satisfaction to at least these two fundamental protagonists and assemble on a global scale colonizing the culture where it is performed (in this case, for example, the country where the tournament is held).

The role of rituals, according to anthropologists, is to generate security and comfort in the social order in which they become established—reinforcing and giving continuity to images and hierarchies.⁹ In this sense, to assemble myths, ideology, and performance is not only a celebratory question, it is also a question of protocol in which a legitimate way of ordering the world is staged, a question in which violence appears regulated and legitimized as a result of the ritual.¹⁰

Studying the ritualization of the 24 Champions League finals, two issues dominate. On the one hand, an evolution and on the other, their meta-narratives, i.e. the story UEFA tells through its rituals. Historical analysis provides a necessary understanding of the birth and evolution of these new rituals in order to analyze the different importance of their elements and, consequently, the changes in football as a global phenomenon. Historians can clarify the current role of football and the nature of the changes regards previous stages. Subsequent interpretations are not random, but they are based on the hermeneutical monitoring of specific performance that are documented empirically and characterized thusly as the construction of ‘neo-rituals’. A good number of these recreations contribute to the crystallization of a global citizenship.

Postmodern Rituals or ‘Neo-Rituals’

Every society needs rituals. Recreating and framing the meanings of communal belonging and the definitions of who holds power are consubstantial to human societies—even more so if these societies are subjected, with globalization, to important normative tensions and transformations that question local hierarchies. The global is no longer an aspiration and is already a concrete reality of universal importance—already a place crystallized by international regulations, the commercialization of social processes, environmental problems, forms of rationalization, and the logic of the digitization of life forms.¹¹

A ritual, for purpose of the subject at hand, is a performance of reiteration open to innovation that is assumed to have certain efficiency over social processes and

whose symbolic consistency is mediated by a more or less contingent communicative context. One of its most important characteristics is that it tends to condense power in the actors and the institutions that lead it, and its implementation tends to a certain complexity. However, the analysis shows a certain transformation within a wide range that characterizes the diversity of rituals. Global rituals must face several challenges at the same time. Global rites encounter *the challenge of multiculturalism*, embedded in a heterogeneous understanding of spaces with different languages, as well as the *challenge of de-territorialization* that enables the ritual to colonize the territory where it is performed and give a message of transcendence beyond. Finally, the *challenge of hegemony and updating* places the ritual before the necessary review and complexity of its components and communication processes. These three challenges have intensified and forced some rituals to transform. This has led to greater complexity to win the soul of the global transversal tribe. Consequently, these rituals are not stable either in time or in form, doing even more necessary their historical analysis to check the nature of their changes.¹²

Consequently, global rituals could be viewed as less effective than those more closely linked to the union between culture and territory. However, using the same exploration of data, the ritual of the UEFA Champions League has an advantage. Its de-territorialized character has a normative nucleus that, though having roots ethnically located in Great Britain, functions as a transcultural normative nucleus giving it additional strength.¹³ Seventeen historical rules of football of 1863 form the basis of the present ones. This nucleus fits perfectly with another visible change of recent years, the transition from the effect of football strengthening local identities to the promotion of a kind of *football cosmopolitanism* as a new mantra for institutions. In short, its territorial disconnection is solved through its transcultural normative order.

This smaller capacity for 'altering the physical state of the world',¹⁴ this even greater floating consistency, this lesser power to underline hierarchy, and this elaboration of universalist pretensions make the UEFA ritual process a 'neo-ritual.' By neo-ritual, the previous definition is modified to refer to a repetitive performance even more open to innovation, which is assumed to have less efficiency over social processes and whose symbolic consistency is even more floating and mediated by a more contingent communicative context. One of its most important characteristics is that it tends to shift the focus of interest away from the power of entertainment management, since managing the feeling is the new way in which power is updated.¹⁵

Every ritual is built on a story and mythical foundations that somehow tend to clothe the meaning and character of its performance. In the case of international football, the mythical function is established by memories of competitions, on the heroes and protagonists in its history, competition records, normative path and hopes for the future. Its ideological frame of reference is a certain idea of universal citizenship promoted by football as entertainment and as fun, reaffirmed also through its professionalization. This ideology also converges with the idea that this sport can be played anywhere on the planet, even if it is not strictly in accordance with its rules. (It is the power of football as a metaphor.) Its culturally purified character

enhances this cosmopolitanism.¹⁶ In this way, this ideology links well with the ideology of Human Rights and the motto 'Respect'.

A respect that is promoted by two aspects especially relevant for its visual communication ability: respect for racial ('no to racism') and political purification (football must be free from antagonisms and international conflicts). In football's history, the ideology of social peace or international peace is effectively communicated through the struggle against physical and symbolic violence. If football is a dispute and competition, legitimate violence is established by the normative regulations that channel conflicts through national and international sports justice. In this way, cosmopolitanism is linked to the promotion of shared coexistence at all levels and above the character of the contenders. So much of UEFA rhetoric has to do with building a better world without, of course, defining what the best is.

This relationship between the myths, the ideologies, and the performance of a restricted ritual construct a story that tries to conquer the soul of the fans. An empirical analysis demonstrates how these components are entwined and how they become a ceremonial celebration through the historic evolution of one of the most international products of UEFA, the Champions League.

In anthropological literature, there are discussions about the ways of delimiting, analyzing, and understanding the scope of rituals.¹⁷ There are two main types, the extended ritual (its extended temporal duration and its connection with other ritual processes) and the restricted ritual (either a part of the extended ritual or the entanglement of intertwined rituals at a specific time).¹⁸ This aspect of rituals is very important because the framing can alter their sense and their intention. As Leach suggests: 'In seeking to understand ritual, we are in effect, trying to discover the rules of grammar and syntax of an unknown language'.¹⁹ Although in this case, in which members have a status of belonging to the tribe as amateurs, the strangeness is not the main problem, but rather the proximity.

The Champions League finals are built on a clearly extended protocol. For example, transit of the trophy through the city hosting the event, meals between managers, meetings between representatives of UEFA and national, regional, and local authorities, etc. Ritual can be as restricted in three ways: restricted in the sense in the analysis of the rituals of the Champions League finals in their temporal transformation (1993–2016), restricted to the ritual as the ceremony televised in moments of maximum power of international communication, and restricted in the sense that it exclusively analyzes the staging of the final in its two most outstanding dimensions, the rituals of celebration and coronation that occur in the pre-match and in the final. The ritual of celebration is part of a ritual process of coronation, following the process described by ethnographer Arnold Van Gennep in which rituals can become complementary and overlap.²⁰ At the end of the day what is celebrated is the coronation of the champion football team of the season in Europe.

Although some could dispute that the Champions League constitutes a complex ritual, the ritual of celebration and coronation involve a whole range of aspects. These include the following: a relic (a trophy), a pedestal, sacred areas circumscribed to priests of the ritual (UEFA authorities, pitch delegates, etc.), taboos of passage (marked limits on areas of the spectacle), thresholds in the form of arches, waiting

rooms (tunnel), rituals of separation (dressing rooms, entrance on to the field), and purification (presence of girls and boys in the act of presentation of the contenders). An exchange of gifts (pennants) generates mechanisms of aggregation (as Van Gennep states: 'to accept a gift is to be bound to the giver'²¹). Additionally, there are moments in which magic constitutes the technique of transcendentalization of the moment. At the end of each year, the champion must be renewed, as each temporal cycle has to update the sacred and the divine. As Van Gennep suggests, '[L]ife itself means to be reunited, to change form and condition, to die and to be reborn'.²² Sequences as well as historical changes and their associated narratives follow the formal properties of rituals: repetition, action, stylization or special behaviour, order, staging, collective dimensions, appropriateness, multimedia, and singular time and space.²³

UEFA Champions League Competition

The UEFA Champions League was established in the 1992/1993 season, replacing the previous European Champion Clubs' Cup, a competition that since 1955 had been pitting the main European teams against each other for a continental title. However, already in the 1991/1992 season, the main change associated with this new format had been introduced. Instead of successive rounds with direct elimination matches between the participants (cup system), a group stage was organized between the last eight surviving teams, distributed in two groups of four and from which the two champions would dispute the final (mixed system).²⁴ The aim of this transformation was twofold. On the one hand, it was sought to give a greater consistency and relevance to the tournament, considerably increasing the number of matches (with the new league there was a total of 24 games for the quarter phase, against the eight in the previous format). On the other, an important step was taken in exploiting the commercial potential of the competition,²⁵ especially with the main European television channels willing to invest increasing sums of money to take over the rights of retransmission.²⁶

With this different approach, the new competition underwent several modifications during its first decade of existence, until reaching the format that, in general terms, has dominated the competition since the 2003/2004 season. Almost all of the changes have been directed towards expanding the number of total matches played in the tournament. Thus, while under the format of the old European Cup, 61 matches were normally played, in the current format there are 125 (without taking into account the previous phases of classification). In this sense, there was the extension of the competition to runner-up teams of many of the national championships (1997/1998) and to third and fourth classified of the most powerful leagues (1999/2000). This meant, in practice, the change in the historic model of the tournament, which had been developed to play off the national champions of UEFA member states and annually proclaim a global champion. However, this change did not alter the name of the competition, whose term 'Champions' was already rooted in the daily football speech.²⁷

The Methodological Approach

Approaching the study of the UEFA Champions League finals as a temporary restricted ritual requires an effort to devise an appropriate measuring instrument that captures social events that are often presented in a latent manner, speaking in Durkheimian (i.e., the French sociologist and philosopher *Émile Durkheim*) terms.²⁸ Starting from the premise/hypothesis that there is an increasing degree of (neo) ritualization in the Champions League finals, the analysis focuses on the most ceremonial/ritual part of those finals, that is, the pre- and post-match. The period of reference for the finals is from 1993 to 2016, both inclusive, coinciding, respectively, with the first of the finals contested under the new name of the competition with the latter final taking place within the framework of this article. The whole spectrum of ritual transformation is covered within a restricted framework.

Given the nature of this study (the Champions League finals) and the proposed research objectives (identification of the elements that are part of the ritual and its temporal evolution), a qualitative approach was chosen based on scientific observation, understood as ‘pre-planned capture and controlled recording of data with a particular purpose for research through the visual or acoustic perception of an event’.²⁹

Rather than breaking down the ritual aspects of the moments before and after the final, the events were structured that were taking place during them. In this sense, the goal was to establish a standardized observation protocol that recorded information or categories that were to be analyzed during the viewing of the finals. Prior to the establishment of this protocol, some finals were selectively viewed, the relevant categories of observation were discussed, and decisions were made—taking into account prior knowledge about the subject to be investigated.

After having developed the observation scheme, a matrix of data those aspects of pre- and post-match Champions League finals relevant to the topic of study were recorded. Through this codification plan on the one hand, an empirical demonstration was attempted if the studied phenomenon was actually taking place. On the other, it is hoped that by analyzing this detailed record new theoretical lines and hypotheses regarding global rituals could be developed.

Finally, the data matrix consisted of 17 categories and 58 subcategories, as presented below (Table 1).

The observational details were entered into a data matrix. The ritual status of each of the 17 categories for each final from 1993 to 2016, based on three possible moments (which we characterized with different colours as long as there was a valid record for that category and/or subcategory) were then assessed.³⁰

- a. there is no ritual, it is in an incipient state, or it is an inherited ritual from the old forms of the European Cup (red);
- b. although every ritual is in transformation as part of its essence, in this case the ritual is in outstanding transformation (yellow); or,

Table 1. Categories and sub-categories analyzed in pre and post-match events of the Champions League finals.

Categories	Subcategories
Local recreation	Hybrid between local and UEFA elements.
Authorities, discourse and national anthems	Entrance and location of authorities. Protagonism and hierarchy. Role of president. Equipment.
Ball	When and how it appears. Presentiality of the object. Transformation of object.
Trophy	When and how it appears. Presentiality of the object. Transformation of object. Description of trophy.
Managers	Circulation. Courtesy. Equipment.
Equipment	Shirt with players' names and UEFA logo. Other equipment. Kit arrangement. Post-match equipment.
UEFA Anthem	Moments. Duration. Live or recorded. Singer. Words. Other anthems. Central banner waving while the anthem is being sung.
Referees	Number. Circulation. Interaction with Objects (ball, trophy). Referees' companions. Equipment.
Entrance and player formation	Previous stay of the players. Players' companions. Layout of entrance and formation. Courtesy, proxemics. Team photo. Location.
Coin toss	Type, arrangement.
UEFA Iconography	Central banner. Other elements (presence and arrangement). Mobile iconography.
Exchange of gifts (captains)	Timing. Objects. Courtesy.
Award of trophy	Location. Timing. Who awards it? Type of trophy.
Over-represented Icons	Gigantism, reiteration of icons.
Coronation	Climax. Location. Stage. Circulation.
Journalists	Location pre-match/post-match.
Celebration	Blurring of UEFA presence. Music. Photo celebration. Announcement of man of the match.

- c. the ritual has been transformed and made complex in a manifest way or is a novel ritual; this complexity is in the act of multiplying meanings and a greater sophistication of performance (green).

Before finishing the methodological section, it is necessary to make a very important clarification—it is a non-presential mediated observation, in the most mediatic sense of the term. That is, the records are limited to space, time, and television making. Even so, this procedure was opted for because it is considered the most appropriate for capturing complex situations, as in the case of pre and post-match moments of a competition where a large number of social interactions, contacts, and relationships are produced, the speed of the outcome, and the achievement of individual facts or facets.³¹ After all, observers are the same as that of a potential audience of viewers to whom the global ritual is transmitted in the same way.

Results from the Analysis of Rituals

What results is a visualization of the analysis of the ritual performed, a selection of categories and subcategories used, as well as a subset of the finals, since it would be too extensive to present the complete picture (Table 2).

Table 2. Selection of the results found in pre- and post-match analysis of Champions League finals.

Category	Subcategory	1994	1998	2000	2005	2014
Local Recreation	Hybridization between local and UEFA elements	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Teal	Teal
Ball	When and how it appears		Red	Red	Red	Red
	Presence of object		Yellow	Red	Yellow	Red
Trophy	Transformation of object		Yellow	Red	Yellow	Red
	When and how it appears		Red	Red	Red	Red
Players entrance and player formation	Presence of object		Yellow	Teal	Teal	Teal
	Players companions (gender, equipment, contact, ethnicity, age)		Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
UEFA Anthem	Arrangement of entrance and formation (uniformity)		Teal	Teal	Teal	Teal
	Location		Red	Red	Red	Red
Exchange of gifts	Moments		Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
	Words (language)		Teal	Teal	Teal	Teal
	Central banner waving during anthem		Red	Red	Red	Red
Coronation	Moment		Red	Red	Red	Red
	Objects		Red	Red	Red	Red
Circulation	Climax		Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
	Circulation		Teal	Teal	Teal	Teal

Local Recreation

There has been a process of intensification of the hybridization between UEFA as organizer of the event and the place where the event takes place, a fact that happens mainly in the previous performance. While in the mid-1990s nothing significant appeared in this sense, some elements began to be visible at the end of that decade, to consolidate at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The appearance of local players involved in the performance (Luis Figo in Lisbon) or local singers singing the tournament anthem (Andrea Bocelli in Rome and Milan, Mariza in Lisbon) are some examples of this hybridization.

Authorities, Speeches, and Anthems

The hierarchical organizational structure has been inherited from the previous Champions League model and shows very little change in the empirical analysis. In all cases the UEFA president plays a central role. The only significant change comes with the appearance of the UEFA logo on the authority’s clothing, first in the form of accreditation and subsequently embroidered on the suits.

Ball

The ball has gone from being a secondary element previously not incorporated into the ritual to gaining in ritualization fundamentally in terms of the transformation of the object itself. However, it still does not have a major role in the staging. There is a transformation of the object at three levels: greater visibility of the UEFA logo, the logos of the competition, and the venue of the final. This element is subject to a

process of gradual ritualization (pedestal placement, greater presence in television retransmission).

Trophy

Unlike with the ball this object has not undergone major transformations. However, its relevance in the ritual process has undergone significant changes, going from being a minor element to becoming a central object of the ritual process. It is presented into the hands of a relevant character and placed on a pedestal in the corner of dressing rooms, in sight of the players and referees on their way out to the pitch.

Coaches

Coaches, and the coaching staff in general, do not constitute a relevant part of the ritual.

Equipment

The kit has undergone a fundamental transformation. It has gone from not including the names of the players to incorporating the UEFA logo and, in recent editions, to reproducing the institutional messages of the institution itself ('Respect', 'No to Racism').

UEFA Anthem

Once created this element has developed a central role in the ritual. In the early years, it was sung in the line-up phase of the players, extending later to the accompaniment of the players entrance on to the pitch.

Referees

The referees maintain a position inherited from the previous competition system, incorporating only some elements such as the entrance onto the pitch accompanied by children or the reproduction of institutional messages on their kit. It is significant that the referees never come into contact with the trophy.

Players' Entrance and Formation

With respect to this category, a series of elements of continuity, such as the location of the players in front of the authorities or the team photo, exist. At the same time, other aspects have been ritualized, such as the players' entrance and line-up or the structure of greetings between them. Since the end of the 1990s, interracial children have accompanied players, although girls were not introduced until years later. These children have gone from wearing the kit of the participating teams to wearing institutional kit from UEFA.

Coin Toss

This element has maintained the ritualization that existed in the previous system of competition.

UEFA Iconography

In this respect, there has been a progressive increase in the visibility of UEFA in stadiums, both in fixed and mobile advertising structures. The greater regulation is also noticeable in the interaction of fans with the iconographic presence of the UEFA, in the sense that it does not hinder institutional visibility. Through the years, various campaigns and institutional messages have diversified the iconography of the institution.

Exchange of Gifts

This element has maintained the ritualization existing in the previous system of competition.

Trophy Presentation

Since the early years, the inherited model has changed from the presentation taking place in the directors' box and prizes only for the winning team to the incorporation of the pitch as a place of presentation and the presentation of medals and gifts to the losing team and to the referees. However, there is no uniform ritual consolidation of this element, since it fluctuates between presentation in the directors' box stage and on the pitch without a clear continuity.

Over-Represented Icons

(Large cup representations, large panels, and/or projections): Once the overrepresentation of icons appeared in the first editions of the tournament, they have continued until today.

Coronation

This element incorporates updates like the accompaniment of the moment of the trophy's presentation (use of confetti, smoke, and other effects) and the incorporation of the anthem of the competition. The procession of the protagonists also progressively becomes more complex with the inclusion of the losing team and the referees in the collection of medals and gifts.

Journalists

This aspect shows ritual continuity inherited from the previous model with respect to the regulation of the movements and the space occupied by journalists, though being

stricter in the pre-match and more lax during the celebration in the post-match. Even so, an effort of purification of legitimized actors to occupy the centre of the ritual space in the last phases of the event is clearly observed.

Celebration

In this category, different inherited ritual elements are preserved, such as the return of honour to the pitch, the presence of celebratory music, photos with the trophy, etc. However, some attention-grabbing changes are also detected, such as the persistence of UEFA icons at the time of the coronation or the reproduction of the anthem of the tournament. There is a relative blurring of UEFA's presence at this stage. Other novel elements are the incorporation of modern music in the celebrations ('We Are the Champions', by Queen) and the introduction of the figure of the 'Man of the Match'.

Analyzing the Phases of UEFA Cup Rituals and Coronations

A more precise idea of the temporal sequence of the celebratory ritual and coronation in its televised broadcast helps to explain the temporal sequence that runs regularly through the finals. At least five key phases through which almost all the finals pass in terms of ritual exist:

The Over-Legitimation of Powers

There is an introduction to the spectacle in which the standard celebration of UEFA hybridizes with the stadium, city, region or host country. The territorially neutral celebration of UEFA is embodied in a place with signs of identity and symbolic references that the world will know. Television commentators explain the nuances through performance. This process begins every time the local and UEFA authorities take their seats (process little ritualized). A moment in which there is intense over-legitimation of powers. Local authorities rejoice in being the hosts of a global event that will make history and give prestige, while UEFA presides in splendour over a territorially defined festivity. These performances were not born with the Champions League, since the first finals did not include this part in the ritual; they are later constructions that have been occupying an increasing space—the reason for understanding the complexity of the ritual process. The spectacle acts as an introduction to the process and is now embedded in it and has consolidated its presence in television making until becoming indispensable.

The Exhibition of the Object of Desire

The trophy, informally called 'big ears', comprises a good part of the centrality of the celebration ceremony and, of course, the coronation. When the ritual was more austere, the trophy's presence went unnoticed at the beginning of the celebration. It just appeared at the end of the event functionally arranged for the award. Its

presence was limited to the coronation. However, with the increasing complexity of the ritual, it is now exhibited both on the pitch mediatically and symbolically (ceremonial gigantism). It is presented in various ways on the pitch in advance of the match and is often shown to players to intensify the desire for conquest. 'Big ears' has acquired centrality in the ritual prior to the celebration. The forms in which it enters the stadium or appears within it, often on a pedestal, bestows variety on the routine and is often combined with local cultural connotations (e.g., carried by British soldiers or a local footballer or impersonally rising from the pedestal itself, etc.). Another important element is its transformation in the final ceremony. Television has expanded the coronation show by recording the name and the shield of the winning team on the trophy, which definitively seals the cup's membership to the victorious team. At the end of the final, it is what is shown the most and passes from hand to hand during the winning team's celebrations. The colourful trims of the winning team have also been a progressive addition. The trophy moves through space in an increasingly ritualized way, becoming a material object within a display of increasingly intense gestures.

The Presentation of the Protagonists

The presentation of the protagonists (referees and players) is one of the central elements of the celebratory ritual. In fact, Durkheim points out that rituals are fundamentally 'the rules of conduct which prescribe how man should behave himself in the presence of these sacred objects'.³² As per Leach, in the relationship between protagonists and space 'in ritual celebrations, the change of individuals from one place to another physical, to another and the succession in which such changes are made are part of the message; they are direct representations of changes in the metaphysical position'.³³

The appearance of the protagonists has been steadily regulated. It has changed from the entrance in an informal line on to the pitch to a linear and symmetrical entrance of both teams. Television itself has extended the act of presenting the ritual to the tunnels where the players wait, transforming the presentation into a step-by-step process off the pitch. However, this has also been a process of late transformation and gives an idea of how the ritual has been altered by the audio-visual medium of access to it (the medium is the message). In the latest form, an arch (with UEFA symbols) symbolizing victory awaits players at the entrance. The shirts have gained in UEFA messages ('Respect' and various slogans), the number of referees has increased, and the staging of the presentation has become more sophisticated symbolically. The current companions of players and referees by boys and girls gives an idea of the importance that UEFA gives as much to the intergenerational bond as to the meta-narrative of the innocence and purity of the game. In a way, it also states its playful character so as not to forget why we started playing football when we were infants. The greeting between teams in line shaking hands already prepares the salutation between captains and the management of the field toss and kick-off toss have hardly altered in all the finals. The regulation of journalists in restricted areas and the purification of the narrative stage are especially

striking. The ritual of exchange, in this case of the team flags, functions as donations between players just when the fratricidal dispute is about to begin. It is necessary to understand, according French sociologist Marcel Mauss,³⁴ that the exchanges between groups constitute a form of social solidarity that emphasizes the bond of correspondence, mutual assistance, hospitality, and common moral debt contracted—in this particular case, fairplay and sportsmanship.

The UEFA Champions League Anthem

Composed in 1992 the anthem went clearly unnoticed in the celebration rituals until the end of the century, at which time it began to spread more intensely through the television retransmissions of the competition itself. The projection of the anthem, its marked tone of solemn coronation, and the catchiness of its tune have undoubtedly constituted a sign of UEFA's identity and a prestigious brand that promises spectators a front seat to history. Not only has it been included in the ritual in a stellar place, but it occupies a notable place throughout its duration. The anthem is not only at the presentation but also in the coronation when the trophy is awarded to the winner (and in the television broadcast a part of the anthem is repeated in each broadcasting break). It is the most intense link between the ritual and the emotion of the spectator.³⁵ Listening to the anthem, especially watching the heroes of one's own team walking out or lining up prior to the match, is one of the most exciting and most spiritual moments of the final.³⁶ Raimon Panikkar explains this process:

The myth is what you believe without believing you believe it. That is why, I repeat, I can see the myth of others and I cannot see my own myth. But the vehicle of myth is faith. This means that the myth is not a logical object of thought, and, therefore, is not objectifiable. As the symbol, it is neither objective nor subjective. The myth does not tolerate spectators: it demands actors, it demands action. Its field is the ritual.³⁷

The words of anthem in three different languages (English, French, and German) underline the category of the sporting event. Their content of 'they are the champions and they are the best' clarifies what happens here (another relevant competition of UEFA, the UEFA European League, has somewhat less epic music and without words). It is also noticeable that the waving of the UEFA banner in the centre of the pitch with the competition logo is performed while the anthem plays. The emotional climax of the moment is not only sonorous, it is also visual.

The Coronation

The coronation is the symbolization of power par excellence. In this case, the winning team is crowned, thus indirectly legitimating the UEFA administrators who perform the coronation. The coronation is part of the ritual of celebration but corresponds to the pinnacle in which at the end of the match the trophies are prepared. Also, in this aspect things have changed markedly through the years. From a disorderly and multiform coronation, UEFA has progressively regulated the coronation process itself. The aspects that most attract attention are the ascent to the

stage, generally, of the referees, of the defeated equipment and finally of the winning equipment (in that order) and the multiplication of trophies (medals, commemorative objects, etc.). Preventing the exchange of t-shirts between teams in the celebration and the edition of commemorative t-shirts of the victory gives an idea of the importance that the image rights have acquired with the professionalization of football. The most stable part of the coronation is still the one in which the UEFA president gives the team captain the trophy. However, the celebratory sophistication has filled the event with splendour: the corridor made up of the winning team through the losers' line-up, the ascent to directors' box, the anthem, confetti, lights, fans, smoke, the flash of journalists, fireworks, and a global symbolic gesture. The tradition of the winning team adds its own celebratory style. In this part, the ritual becomes the chaos of celebration and the transgression regulated by the necessity of the security and of television edition has finished purifying and separating the match of the players of the swarm of journalists who try to document the moment. There is no longer a 'totum revolutum' in the chaos of celebration. In this sense the coronation has also been complicated and regulated.

The iconography is complex: greet the one who represents the power in the place (the UEFA symbols, marketing, the red carpet, etc.). An overview of the trophy presentation is almost always the same: usually an ascension in space (going up to collect the trophy) or on the pitch but on a floating platform and/or digitized; the presentation of the trophy to the group through the captain of the team; and the gesture of raising the trophy. Everything comes into play, mixed from that moment on with the regulated chaos of celebration.

A first characteristic found in the analysis of this ritual of global communication is its degree of elaboration. A progressive complexity of the celebratory ritual exists in almost all its dimensions. It is seen that, in its evolution, the aspects that have to do with the underlining of hierarchies in the event are those that remain more stable in its staging. It is without a doubt the least transformed. An illustrative example of the remnant of this previous modernity is the arrangement of the presentation of the players and referees, always facing and in front of the authorities, legitimizing that the presentation of the rivals is made to the powers as the prime spectator to whom it is aimed. Sport sociologists Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning characterize it as a counter-move of a late modernity in which power, the formal, and the ritual face a force characterized by opposition to formalism, constraints—the informality of pleasure and open emotion.³⁸ The public demonstration of emotion would be the other side of formality of power and hierarchy.

A second characteristic occurs in the way in which the ritual is regulated, more and more in detail. There is a process of discipline and purification of actors. Regulations on gestures are increasing and the purification of scenarios increasingly intense. This can be attributed to the mechanism that, for safety, cordons off journalists, severely controls people on the pitch, preventing unavoidable access and transit, and displaces secondary characters from the ritual scene.

It also highlights the symbolic saturation of the UEFA brand. In tiers, vomitorium entrances, centre canvas, T-shirts, managers' dress, children, ball, trophy (not to mention television), and everything placed in the factorization of the media diffusion

of the event. The ritual is by and for UEFA to Europe and the world. The FIFA logo only appears on the referee's shirt.

There are other dimensions and objects involved in the ritual that seem to occupy a secondary position. Thus, for example, the ball, except for the load of symbols linked to UEFA, has not undergone an essential transformation nor has it come to occupy the centre of the ritual stage if the sport itself is excluded. The coaches, although they have been gaining more power in the spectacle, mainly because of the relevance given by the media to the micro-politics of the management of the dressing room and the spectacularization of football in all its social dimensions (the so-called post-journalism by Lluís Bassets),³⁹ continue to play a secondary role in the match ritual and their presence remains somewhat open in its regulation.

Although the protagonist of the complex ritualization is UEFA, three complementary forces push it in the process of ritual recomposition and sophistication: commercialization, television digitization, and security. As is easy to verify, these three factors, although they can be described in isolation, are interconnected and elaborate complementary synergies to the point of being confused. For example, security expels those dispensable from sacred places and improves the performance in a ritual that contains too many secondary actors for television. Image rights regulate the staging of football players-companies in their media manufacturing. The security of the protagonists converges with commercial security.

In short, the ritual grows, becomes symbolically more complex, multiplies its consumption, is mediated to different scales and is in continuous transformation. Every ritual is a narrative and that every narrative builds its commonalities through the different management of its taboos. If we were to characterize this narrative as a tale associated with the ritual, four crucial elements are recreated.

First, if Van Gennep says that magic is the technique of religion,⁴⁰ for UEFA the use of technique would be at the service of the magical reconstruction of this ceremonial event. The celebratory ritual has an inevitably instrumental aspect. To be effective, it should serve to set the tone for what is taboo and what is not.⁴¹ To analyze UEFA narratives, consider their taboos: places that UEFA does not want to transit or objects that are not allowed to be touched for fear of contagion, the symbolic transfer or to accept that which threatens it. In postmodern football that is moving forward to a greater degree of civility, violence, racism, and confrontation not governed by the strictly sporting take on a taboo status.⁴² For this reason, the ritual must manage the emotions. It must announce and encourage cosmopolitanism, in this case European.⁴³ The celebration and coronation must be performed in peace, being devoted to the construction of an international community (a transversal tribe as stated earlier) in which better life refers to non-violence, non-racism, respect, and peace as a fundamental story. This is upon what its effectiveness depends.

Second, the story must be handled with the care of political purification, as politics is a taboo for UEFA football. No gesture, no image, no circumstance should contaminate the competition in its staging. For example, improper gestures or statements on players' second shirts,⁴⁴ illegal banners in the stands, anthems, public statements, etc., should be neutralized and sanctioned. One of the current problems is to civilize symbolic violence in the stadiums. The management of insult is one of the bones of contention in Europe.

The UEFA strategy, while waiting to see how it is managed in the national federations, is to move away from the two most intense politicization scenarios: the various national realities, on the one hand, and the European Union's own narrative, which under no circumstances are intended to be associated.

Third, the language of the ritual is metaphorical. It is not only a useful simplification, it is also a poetic language with contradictions. For example, the statement of innocent and disinterested childhood (football as entertainment) clashes with football as an international phenomenon, associated with the professionalism and commercialization of social relations and the lucrative entertainment industry. At the same time, the language of respect and coexistence sits with difficulty side by side with political corruption and the less transparent granting of international events or programs.⁴⁵ The reiterative character of the ritual coexists with both the metaphor and the force of communicative redundancy. Rituals are transformed, but they also try to have some repetitive consistency.

And finally, the civilizing process is also noted in the way in which contemporary sports rituals are developed. Emotional exaltation must be compensated for by restraint and control. The final of the Champions League is a playful and fun phenomenon, saturated with emotion and with transcendence in the lives of those who experience it. This has important consequences both on breaking the routines of modern life and on labour discipline, so typical of industrial societies. In this sense the ritual announces the unforeseeable, the unexpected, and the pure emotion. On the other hand, it does, paradoxically, through certain communicative routinizations give security, order, rule, and predictability to the spectacle. The public knows how the staging will be in its most basic structure and seems to like it. This secure routine underlies all neo-ritual actions and frames the unforeseen event (the victory of a specific team). It also gives UEFA an identity in a storytelling structure saturated with both emotion and symbolic social control. After all, that was what the civilizing process described by Elias spoke about and which impregnates the social organization of the ritual of the Champions League with the same ambivalence that unfolds in the social space.

Transformations and Meanings

Global postmodernism far from liquidating rituals with its multiculturalism and its scepticism has transformed them to the point of generating new forms of ceremony on a planetary scale, called here 'neo-rituals'. Commercial rationalization, globalization, and television digitization have complicated the neo-ritual of the UEFA Champions League finals.

Local staging of finals has become more visually spectacular. The hybridization between the UEFA culture (eminently commercial) and the local culture, where the match is held, has progressively deepened and has become a prior spectacle in which both instances gain legitimacy, promotion and money.

In addition, there are aspects inherited from the previous competition (the old European Cup), which are part of the ritual tradition and that last: formation of the players before the authorities, exchange of flags, greetings between participants, etc. It is very striking that the object of dispute in the field of play has historically been

little ritualized beyond its markings and design (i.e., the ball). Nevertheless, the trophy (the ‘big ears’), as an object of conquest, has undergone an inverse transformation. In itself, the trophy has not mutated but its place in the performance has been exalted and plays a role in more parts of the ritual process.

Other ritualized aspects have been regulated more insistently and have become more complex saturated with symbols: players’ entrance in formation, t-shirts, anthem, arrangement, and trophy presentation protocol. UEFA’s control has multiplied both visually in stadiums and in its regulations of the staging of the event, including control over broadcasting.

In general, these neo-rituals are more complex than their antecedents. They have a clearly more festive and organic coronation character with the spectacle. There are forms of social control in which both the notion of risk (social violence between fans and/or symbolic violence) and commercial gain (UEFA brand, broadcasting rights, trademarks, etc.) demonstrate this.

In fact, all ritualization is a form of social control with various interests. It is the complexity of these interests that best explains both the depth of the transformations and the power of rituals. It is necessary to address the historical evolution of this kind of events and the changes in the institutional rhetoric in order to understand the football that is coming and what is going to be its position into the wider social framework.

Notes

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6. John MacAloon, ‘Introduction: The Olympic Flame Relay’, *Sport in Society* 15, no. 5 (2012): 575–94.
7. Armand Mattelart, ‘La nueva comunicación’ [The New Communication], in *La Post-Televisión: Multimedia, Internet y Globalización Económica* [Post-Television: Multimedia, Internet, and Economic Globalization], ed. Ignacio Ramonet (Barcelona: Icaria, 2002), 45.
8. The concept of alterity can serve as a scalpel to dissect these transverse identities herein. Already authors like Julián Gastón have performed the exercise of distinguishing for football a relation between identity and alterity in several subtypes:

- a) First alterity: those who do not belong to this area of ritual;
- b) Second alterity: us-them is marked by rivalry in sport contests;
- c) Third alterity: different sections in the stadiums, imaginary of class opposition;
- d) Fourth alterity: Ghettos radicalized supporters in clear opposition to those around them; and
- e) Fifth alterity: the division fans-players, staff, coaches, manager, etc.

See Julián Gastón, 'El cuerpo popular en los rituales deportivos' [The Popular Body in the Sportive Rituals], *Lecturas de Educación Física y Deportes* 10 (1998), <http://www.efdeportes.com/efd10/gjil10.htm> (accessed December 11, 2019).

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11. Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000); Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2004); Manuel Castells, *End of Millennium* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).
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13. Jose Luis Castilla, Aníbal Mesa, and Manuel Eduardo González-Ramallal, 'Football and Justice Devices: Hybrid Ethical Narratives, Sanctions and Legitimacy of Interests', *Soccer & Society* 18, no. 4 (2017): 575–90.
14. Leach, 'Ritual', 523.
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17. Rodrigo Díaz Cruz, *Archipiélago de rituales: Teorías antropológicas del ritual [Archipelago of Rituals: Anthropological Theories of Ritual]* (Barcelona: Anthropos, 1999).
18. The distinction between restricted and extended ritual is made by Marc Augé, *An Anthropology for Contemporaneous Worlds* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 68–9, to understand the framework of ritual analysis. His strategy of widening the ritual to an extended ritual explains distant and distinct effects of the event in question, limited to the international broadcasting scenario in its restricted performance, which is a first approximation that should be supplemented later with this second approach.
19. Leach, 'Ritual', 524.
20. Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), 11.
21. *Ibid.*, 29.
22. *Ibid.*, 189.
23. Díaz Cruz, *Archipiélago de rituales*, 225–7.
24. Union of European Football Associations [UEFA], 'History. Football's Top Club Competition', 2016, <http://www.uefa.com/uefachampionsleague/history/background/index.html> (accessed November 13, 2016).
25. Xavier Ginesta, 'What Is the Next Step? The Champions League Clubs and Their Sponsors: From Bwin to Qatar Sports Investment', *Soccer & Society* 14, no. 1 (2013): 66–79.
26. Although, generally, data about media impact and global ratings are built through estimations, there are two with certain significance that show the impact of the Champions League finals. Following Kantar Media, firm specialized in market studies, the 2015/2016 final generated 15,917 news reports on television, the internet and in the press, and 1,119,319 tweets. This provoked 4,420,232,400 audience impacts, valued at 74,535,816 euros. Diego Bernabé, 'Final de Champions. récord de audiencia de TV y social TV' [Champions League Final: TV and Social TV Audience Record], *Kantar*, May 30, 2016, <http://es.kantar.com/media/tv/2016/mayo-2016-impacto-medi%C3%A1tico-de-la-final-de-la-champions-league-2016/> (accessed October 25, 2016).
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29. Klaus Heinemann, *Introducción a la metodología de la investigación empírica en las Ciencias del Deporte [Introduction to Methods and Techniques of Empirical Research in Sport]* (Barcelona: Paidotribo, 2003), 135.
30. As we commented below in the body of the text, our observation was totally dependent on the television production, hence some aspects that we would have liked to record in all the finals (for example, entrance of the authorities in the box, circulation and courtesy among coaches, etc.) depended heavily on, for example, whether or not they were focused on by the cameras, whether or not the moments of connection and disconnection were captured.
31. Heinemann, *Introducción a la metodología de la investigación empírica*, 136.
32. Leach, 'Ritual', 521.
33. Díaz Cruz, *Archipiélago de rituales*, 284.
34. Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, rev.ed. (London: Routledge, 2002).
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39. Lluís Bassets, *El último que apague la luz. Sobre la extinción del periodismo [The Last One Turns Off the Light: About the Extinction of Journalism]* (Madrid: Taurus, 2013).
40. Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 13.
41. 'Rituals reveal values at their deepest level. →[M]en express in ritual what moves them most, and since the form of expression is conventionalized and obligatory, it is the values of the group that are revealed. I see in the study of ritual the key to an understanding of the essential constitution of human societies'. Monica Wilson, 'Nyakyusa Ritual and Symbolism', *American Anthropologist* 56, no. 2 (1954): 241.
42. Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning, *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).
43. In complex (specialized) societies individuals will seek to affiliate themselves with supposedly universal ideological movements, whose motto might very well be 'the world is my village'. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure*, rev. ed. (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1991), 202.
44. Manuel Eduardo González-Ramallal, Jose Luis Castilla, and Aníbal Mesa, 'Postmodern Footballers and Their "Second Skin"', *Soccer & Society* 16, no. 4 (2015): 437–52.
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