

Dressing the nation: historical, political and media disputes around the Brazilian national team's jersey¹

Marcelo Alves de Resende
State University of Rio de Janeiro
mar.marceloresende@gmail.com

Leda Maria da Costa
State University of Rio de Janeiro
ledamonte@hotmail.com

Ronaldo Helal
State University of Rio de Janeiro
rhelalfla13@gmail.com

Fausto Amaro
State University of Rio de Janeiro
faustoarp@hotmail.com

Abstract

This article explores the recent disputes related to the green-yellow jersey of the Brazilian men's national football team. We will therefore address the far right's rise in Brazil, represented by Bolsonarism, and its attempt to appropriate national symbols, including the Brazilian national team's jersey. Guedes and Almeida (2019) named this phenomenon the second sequestration of the national team's jersey and its context will be scrutinized here. We will emphasize the debate on the rejection of the Brazilian national team's uniform by part of the population. Finally, we will analyze some media narratives that, in the months leading up to the 2022 World Cup, sought to disentail the Brazilian national team's jersey from the far right, a phenomenon that we call "de-sequestration".

Keywords: Brazilian national team, Green-yellow jersey, Bolsonarism, Football, Far-right.

1. Introduction

In the 21st century, the world is experiencing what Dutch political scientist Cas Mudde (2022) calls the fourth wave of the far right, which came to power in several countries shaking liberal

¹ In this article, we will use the expression Brazilian national team's jersey referring to the men's national football team uniform.

democracy.² With a young democracy implemented after the last military dictatorship (1964-85), Brazil hosts a strong far-right that managed not only to win the presidency of the republic, by democratic means, but also to be present in the National Congress by electing deputies and senators³. The rise of the Brazilian far right, represented by Bolsonarism⁴, occurred during the last decade after a series of political events that allowed Jair Bolsonaro to be elected president in 2018. Among these events are the 2013 Brazilian protests, the 2014 presidential elections, the protests leading to Dilma Rousseff's impeachment in 2016, the Lava Jato scandal and the withdrawal of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva from the presidency race in 2018.

This article takes us on a journey through recent disputes regarding the green-yellow jersey of the men's national football team. We will address an important discussion about Bolsonarism and its attempt to appropriate national symbols, such as the Brazilian national football team's jersey, a moment understood by Guedes and Almeida (2019) as the second sequestration of the Canarinho jersey⁵. We will focus on the debate, notable during the 2018 and 2022 World Cups, about the rejection of the Brazilian national team's uniform shown by many left-wing Brazilians and those who disagreed with Bolsonaro's ideals. Finally, we will address the emergence of media narratives that, in the months leading up to the 2022 World Cup, sought to disentail the Canarinho jersey from Bolsonarism, a phenomenon that we call "de-sequestration"⁶.

2. Bolsonaro's rise: Brazilian democracy shaken

Jair Bolsonaro is a retired military man who built his political career in 1989, defending his class in the first direct elections after the fall of the last Brazilian military dictatorship. His first term was as a councilor in Rio de Janeiro, and, in 1991, he was elected federal deputy in Brasília, a position he held until becoming President in 2018. Bolsonaro, therefore, has always been part of the political system, contrary to his candidacy's discourse of a political outsider.

During the Confederations Cup in June 2013 – a test event held a year before the World Cup that would be hosted in Brazil –, we saw an escalation of demonstrations that called into question the classic models of political representation that had been structured since the democratic transition in the late 1970s. (Pinheiro-Machado and Freixo, 2019). From the 6th to the 13th of

² See Also Demuru (2024) and Teitelbaum (2020).

³ The most conservative Congress of the last forty years. *Le Monde Diplomatique*. (2018). Available at: <https://diplomatique.org.br/o-congresso-mais-conservador-dos-ultimos-quarenta-anos/>. Accessed on: January 11, 2024.

⁴ Bolsonarism can be characterized as a political movement with a conservative, authoritarian, and right-wing populist orientation which emerged in Brazil in the late 2010s around Jair Bolsonaro's leadership. Driven by social resentments, anti-systemic rhetoric, and intensive polarization mechanisms, Bolsonarism mobilizes a broad, heterogeneous, and decentralized social base whose symbolic practices and political narratives show resilience even before the electoral weakening of its central figure. For examples see Souza (2024 and 2016), Pinheiro-Machado (2019), Rocha (2023 and 2021) and Ricci (2022).

⁵ Canarinho is another way to refer to the Brazilian team's jersey which started to be worn predominantly in yellow from the 1954 World Cup to erase from memory the white uniform used in the Maracanazo. *Museu do Futebol: A História da Camisa Canarinho: Como o amarelo-ouro passou a vestir o Brasil*. Available at:

<https://museudofutebol.org.br/exposicoes/a-historia-da-camisa-canarinho-como-o-amarelo-ouro-passou-a-vestir-o-brasil/>.

The first kidnapping attempt would have occurred in 1970, during and after the World Cup that year.

⁶ As the word "dessequestro" (de-sequestration) does not exist in Portuguese, we will understand it as a neologism and use between quotation marks along the essay.

that month, the demonstrations were confined to São Paulo, coordinated by the Free Fare Movement (MPL), against the 20-cent increase in public transportation fares. Around five thousand young adults and left-wing activists, including members of the Workers' Party (PT), attended these marches (Altman, 2023). On June 11th, police repression against demonstrators escalated, resulting in injuries and strong press repercussions. On June 13th, MPL called for new protests, even with threats from the then São Paulo governor and now vice president of Brazil, Geraldo Alckmin. Police abuse against protesters and journalists generated commotion and solidarity which broke the regional character of the acts. From June 17th to 20th, the protests amassed over two million demonstrators in more than 400 Brazilian municipalities, marked by several agendas and a retreat in the price increase of public transport fares by state and municipal administrations (Altman, 2023). Breno Altman (2023) states that the protesters' national profile consisted mostly of middle sectors that rose socially during the PT administrations. Initially, the demands were progressive in nature, criticizing the removal of homes caused by World Cup construction and the high investments made to hold the event, in addition to the rising public transportation fares. Just as FIFA had required from the Brazilian government the "FIFA standard"⁷ in the construction of World Cup venues, society took to the streets to demand the same for the various areas of public administration (Damo, 2020). As the protests became nationwide, MPL and other progressive movements lost representativeness while the right-wing gained space by adopting an aggressive conservative discourse against institutional politics – chanting slogans such as "no political party," "the giant has woken up," "thou shalt see that a son of thine fleeth not from battle"⁸ – and presenting a nationalist character, including the use of green and yellow (Reis, 2021).

Mobilization of the right-wing on the streets resumed in March 2015, gaining strength in the marches of August and December of that year and reaching its most expressive point in the massive protests of March 2016 (Rocha, 2021). The consecutive terms of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff as president enabled the automatic association of PT and the left with the establishment, placing the right as the opposition for the first time in the history of the Brazilian republic (Rocha, 2021). PT had remained in power for 14 consecutive years, from Lula's first election until Dilma Rousseff's impeachment in 2016 which, according to Rocha (2021), changed the country's political framework without the left having perceived this process.

Even in a scenario marked by the growing deterioration of the political system, PT managed to regain momentum and emerge victoriously at the polls in 2014, in the closest election since 1989 (Dilma Rousseff 51.64 % *versus* Aécio Neves 48.36%). However, PT was unable to govern, as a key point occurred in this election: the losing ticket questioned the result, asking for a recount of the votes and publicly raising concerns about electronic voting machines, a very clear target of Bolsonaroism in the following years: "not accepting the other's victory is the first step taken in coup adventures" (Rocha, 2021, p. 13). The National Congress, represented by Eduardo Cunha, obstructed the federal government's work and created so-called bombshell agendas⁹ to implode

⁷ "FIFA Standard" refers to the specifications and standards established by the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) required for organizing events like World Cups. In Brazil, this expression is popularly used to denote something of great quality.

⁸ Excerpt from the Brazilian National Anthem.

⁹ The term designated projects with a strong fiscal impact and contrary to the interests of the Executive branch, whose approval increased public spending and made governability difficult. G1: Dilma faz apelo para que Senado barre 'pautas-

the Rousseff administration, who was trying to reduce public investment pressured by the market. At the end of 2015, Cunha launched the impeachment process against Dilma Rousseff, which ended in May 2016 with her definitive departure from the Presidency¹⁰. In the vote to continue the impeachment process, Jair Bolsonaro gained more notoriety by voting for Dilma's removal and saluting Colonel Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra, the first military man recognized by the courts as a torturer during the last military dictatorship¹¹.

Amid right-wing protests, the impeachment process that began in 2015 and the contestation of election results, Operation Lava Jato emerged in 2014 with the promise of saving Brazil from corruption. One of the themes of greatest political capital for right-wing extremists is the narrative created about corruption (Eco, 2018), imbued with an anti-systemic strategy to build the far right as saviors of the nation. Added to the economic crisis, political dissatisfaction and opposition from the country's main media outlets to the Rousseff administration (Pinheiro-Machado and Freixo, 2019), the issue of corruption appears more strongly, which generated large protests against the PT administration from 2015 onwards. Lava Jato, according to Marcos Nobre (2022, p. 19), "ended up showing itself, for a huge portion of the electorate, to be the last resort in politics, the only institutional path available for channeling their dissatisfaction." After the 2013 Brazilian protests, the political system failed to regain control of national politics. Nobre (2022) concludes that Lava Jato was one of those responsible for preventing such resumption. Federal judge Sergio Moro was the person responsible for the operation, a central figure in the national political events that created the instability that led Brazil into the arms of the far right. Essentially, Moro used judicial activism to close the siege on politicians, especially from the Workers' Party (PT), "with selectivity and Manichaeism marking the behavior of anti-corruption activists on social media, in the streets, in the media, and in the repressive state apparatus" (Miguel, 2022, p. 220). A selectivity confirmed by the tolerance of corruption by the governments of Michel Temer and Jair Bolsonaro, Dilma Rousseff's successors as president. Sergio Moro used the media as a judicial tactic to influence public opinion in his favor with selective leaks to the country's main media outlets when making decisions that were not supported by law – such as the leak of a conversation between Dilma Rousseff and Lula (Jinkings, 2016). Moro also acted in collusion with prosecutors – the best known being Deltan Dalagnol, elected federal deputy for Paraná in 2022 and impeached in 2023 by the Superior Electoral Court – to coordinate actions and impede defense mechanisms for those under investigation. This selective action was revealed by Vaza Jato, a leak of messages that exposed the joint action between Moro and prosecutors on Telegram (Vaza Jato, 2024). With an anti-corruption speech and in collusion with the media and prosecutors, acting in a corrupt manner, Moro removes Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (PT), Bolsonaro's main opponent and leader of voting intentions, from the presidential race by arresting him, a decision later annulled by the Supreme Federal Court. In such circumstances of

bomba' da Câmara. Available at: <https://g1.globo.com/politica/noticia/2015/08/dilma-faz-apelo-para-que-senado-barre-pautas-bomba-da-camara.html>. Accessed on: January 19, 2024.

¹⁰ In 2023, Dilma Rouseff was acquitted of the crime of fiscal backpedaling, a maneuver in which the government delays transfers to public banks, who pay for social programs with their own resources, creating a temporary debt and hiding issues in the public accounts, for which she was accused in the impeachment process.

¹¹ Gazeta do Povo. Available at: <https://www.gazetadopovo.com.br/ideias/quem-foi-brilhante-ustra-o-primeiro-militar-reconhecido-como-torturador-pela-justica-504br0rhl21rxfxsjkjygv79/>. Accessed on: January 19, 2024.

the far-right advancement, Jair Bolsonaro grew in the polls of voting intentions from 2017 onwards and defeated Fernando Haddad, Lula's replacement, in the 2018 elections.

3. Sequestration and rejection of the Canarinho jersey

Attachment to tradition and the use of national symbols as political and ideological legitimacy are not specific to certain periods or political leanings but are more prevalent in dictatorial governments (Guedes & Almeida, 2019). The last Brazilian military dictatorship attempted to forge national unity by suppressing cultural and social particularities in the name of a so-called nation. Its government narratively constructed a positive discourse about certain events, like the country's economic growth, as a way to capture the population's support. Anything that deviated from the national ideal was seen as the communist enemy to be confronted, as in the government's strong campaigns entitled "Love it or Leave it" (Guedes & Almeida, 2019). The third world championship won in Mexico fits into the political use of the national team and football as an echo of the last military dictatorship's success. Guedes and Almeida (2019) argue that the 1970 World Cup was a milestone in the incorporation and appropriation of national symbols as national pride, with the emergence of improvised flags, painted streets, sales of green-yellow accessories, objects and clothing under strict control by the military dictatorship over this symbolism previously restricted to the elites and the armed forces. At that time, however, the state still controlled how, when, where and why to use national symbols, punishing non-compliance with dictatorial rules¹². Guedes and Almeida (2019) define this moment as the first sequestration of the green and yellow.

Once elected, Jair Bolsonaro modified the federal government structures by adopting two governance forms to guarantee the interests of the national elite: neoliberalism¹³ and the reduction of space and rights of minority populations. In addition to eliminating important ministries¹⁴, such as Labor and Culture, he placed names opposed to the agenda of minority individuals at the head of the Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights (Damares Alves) and the Palmares Foundation (Sergio Camargo), an institution dedicated to promoting and preserving Black culture in Brazilian society. Similarly, in the sports field Bolsonaro sought to take advantage of football and tried to stay close to the country's most popular sport to promote far-right ideas, such as the adoption of hate speech (Williams, 2021) and cultural warfare (Rocha,

¹² We believe it is important to draw attention here to Robert Entman's work on framing, since for him (2009) framing consists of selecting and emphasizing certain aspects of reality in a message to promote a particular interpretation – defining problems, assigning causes, making moral judgments, and suggesting solutions, thereby shaping how audiences understand events and actors. Entman emphasizes framing as a strategic practice in media and political communication aimed at guiding interpretation. This notion fits well with our analysis.

¹³ JORNAL DA USP: Bolsonarismo é a nova racionalidade governamental do neoliberalismo. Available at: <https://jornal.usp.br/articelistas/dennis-de-oliveira/bolsonarismo-e-a-nova-racionalidade-governamental-do-neoliberalismo/>. Accessed on: January 31, 2024.

¹⁴ AGÊNCIA SENADO: Com vetos, Bolsonaro sanciona lei que reorganiza ministérios. Available at: <https://www12.senado.leg.br/noticias/materias/2019/06/19/com-vetos-bolsonaro-sanciona-lei-que-reorganiza-ministerios>. Accessed on: July 14, 2023.

2021). In football, he intervened in several ways. He created the Home Club Law¹⁵, which established changes that exclusively guaranteed the home club the right to the arena¹⁶, that is, the right to negotiate the licenses to transmission and reproduction of matches. Before, the arena's right involved negotiations between the home and visiting team. He also reduced investments in Olympic sports in 2020, interrupting payments of the Athlete Scholarship¹⁷ which is fundamental in the Olympic cycle. Another attempt to popularize Bolsonaro through football came with the former president's initiative to wear jerseys from more than 80 Brazilian teams¹⁸ in recent years, dressing in the uniform of Brazilians' favorite clubs.

Leader of the Brazilian far-right, Bolsonaro seemed to have understood the importance of football in Brazil and that this sport is a stage for the dispute of narratives. Even wearing a non-official jersey¹⁹ has a meaning: it attributes a popular narrative to Jair Bolsonaro, bringing him closer to fans who cannot afford an official jersey. Bolsonaro knows it is an expensive item and uses that fact to his political advantage. But why do so? Because clothing goes beyond dressing the player or fans' consumerism of wanting to get the latest fashion from their favorite team. The jersey, therefore, ceases to be just an object and produces "ambiguities between strictly individualizing and/or sportingly collectivizing uses" (Toledo, 2019, p. 37). Football jerseys, according to Toledo (2019), create a double link between the social and the subjective as a symbolic material property of inducing relationships. Buying a jersey creates one's individuality as a fan while joining them to a club collective of other fans with similar taste. Fan culture creates interactive dualities of belonging between the individual and the social – my team and my rivals'. Amid the pandemic, Jair Bolsonaro agreed to host the 2021 Copa America, after Argentina and Colombia withdrew, a fact that generated much criticism of the administration due to the health crisis. In 2021, Brazil had already surpassed 460,000 deaths from COVID-19 which led to a manifesto by Brazilian national team players and Tite, the coach of the team at the time, against the tournament²⁰. Consequently, Jair Bolsonaro tried to intervene in the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) to replace Tite with Renato Gaúcho, a declared Bolsonaro supporter. With

¹⁵ FOLHA DE S.PAULO: Bolsonaro sanciona Lei do Mandante, que altera regras de transmissão de jogos. Available at: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/esporte/2021/09/bolsonaro-sanciona-lei-do-mandante-que-altera-regras-de-transmissao-de-jogos.shtml>. Accessed on: January 5, 2024.

¹⁶ Right to the arena is one that guarantees exclusivity in the negotiation, authorization, capture, fixation, broadcast, transmission, retransmission or reproduction of images of sporting events, regardless of the broadcasting means.

¹⁷ UOL: Governo faz manobra e, na prática, não pagará Bolsa Atleta por 2020. Available at: <https://www.uol.com.br/esporte/colunas/olhar-olimpico/2020/08/05/governo-anuncia-cancelamento-do-bolsa-atleta-de-2020.htm>. Accessed on: January 11, 2024.

¹⁸ UOL: Jogo de poder. Bolsonaro veste a camisa na 'autopromoção' com o futebol; presidente já usou mais de 80 uniformes de clubes. Available at: <https://www.uol.com.br/esporte/reportagens-especiais/bolsonaro-ja-exibiu-81-camisas-de-clubes-de-futebol-especialistas-apontam-uso-politico>. Accessed on: January 11, 2024.

¹⁹ UOL: Bolsonaro usa modelo pirata de nova camisa ainda não lançada pelo Flamengo. Available at: <https://www.uol.com.br/esporte/futebol/ultimas-noticias/2023/01/04/bolsonaro-vaza-nova-camisa-do-flamengo-em-dia-de-pizza-nos-estados-unidos.htm>. Accessed on: January 11, 2024.

²⁰ ESPN: Jogadores do Brasil divulgam manifesto: 'Somos contra a organização da Copa América, mas nunca diremos não à seleção'. Available at: https://www.espn.com.br/futebol/artigo/_/id/8755133/jogadores-do-brasil-divulgam-manifesto-somos-contra-a-organizacao-da-copa-america-mas-nunca-diremos-nao-a-selecao. Accessed on: January 11, 2024.

his popularity at a low point at the time²¹, Bolsonaro tried to use football and the Brazilian national team politically to promote himself.

Added to these attempts to appropriate football for self-promotion, there is the main one: the sequestration of national symbols as a way of legitimizing far-right ideals through the Brazilian flag and the national football team's jersey, a historical attribute of national identity, as did the last military dictatorship (Guedes & Almeida, 2019). In the right-wing protests of 2015 and 2016, with millions of people on the streets in several Brazilian cities, the use of green and yellow and the national team jersey was absolute (Reis, 2021). The protests received massive press coverage. *Fantástico*²², on March 13th, 2016, aired a report in which the Brazilian national team's jersey was shown 35 times in 13 minutes, an average of three cuts per minute as analyzed by Reis (2021). Combined, the scale of protests, the text and the excessive display of the jersey strengthened the association of the Brazilian national team's jersey with a political group, paving the way for its kidnapping. Bolsonaro adopted the anti-PT rhetoric, the anti-corruption topic and exacerbated patriotism, taking on national symbols and the yellow jersey against the red of PT and communism (Fortuna & Resende, 2024). At his inauguration as president on January 1, 2019, Jair Bolsonaro asserted that Brazil's flag would never be red²³.

Guedes and Almeida (2019) defined this association of Bolsonarism with national symbols, especially the Brazilian football team's jersey, as the second sequestration. Groups opposed to Bolsonarism no longer identified themselves with the green and yellow jersey, creating aversion and rejection of the attire, a topic that was addressed during news coverage of the 2018 World Cup in Russia. With headlines like "Part of the left rejects the yellow jersey for fear of 'turning' into pot bangers"²⁴, "The fans who don't care for the 'yellow jersey'"²⁵ and "The national team's jersey, the symbol contaminated by ideological feuds and the shady dealings of the bosses"²⁶, part of the national press already signaled the divide regarding the uniform. Notably, however, the rejection was restricted to the Canarinho jersey, not extending to football or the Brazilian national team since those who opposed Bolsonarism and feared being confused with Bolsonaro supporters found new ways of cheering like wearing the blue jersey, the second uniform of the Brazilian national team (Oliveira & Farias, 2021).

²¹ BRASIL DE FATO: Popularidade de Bolsonaro despencou e fica abaixo de 20% pela primeira vez desde janeiro de 2019. Available at: <https://www.brasildefato.com.br/2021/11/29/popularidade-de-bolsonaro-despenca-e-fica-abaixo-de-20-pela-primeira-vez-desde-janeiro-de-2019>. Accessed on: January 12, 2024.

²² *Fantástico* is a weekly program on Rede Globo, the largest Brazilian broadcaster, on air since 1973. A hybrid between variety show and journalism, the program presents on Sunday nights a combination of investigative reports, news, entertainment, culture and sports.

²³ VALOR ECONÔMICO: 'Nossa bandeira jamais será vermelha', afirma Bolsonaro na posse. Available at: <https://valor.globo.com/politica/noticia/2019/01/01/nossa-bandeira-jamais-sera-vermelha-afirma-bolsonaro-na-posse.ghtml>. Accessed on: January 14, 2024.

²⁴ FOLHA DE S. PAULO: Parte da esquerda rejeita camisa amarelinha com medo de 'virar' paneleira. Available at: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/esporte/2018/06/parte-da-esquerda-rejeita-camisa-amarelinha-com-medo-de-virar-paneleira.shtml>. Accessed on: January 14, 2024.

²⁵ PLACAR: Os torcedores que não querem saber da "amarelinha". Available at: <https://placar.com.br/placar/os-torcedores-que-nao-querem-saber-da-amarelinha/>. Accessed on: January 14, 2024.

²⁶ EL PAÍS BRASIL: Camisa da seleção, o símbolo contaminado por rixas ideológicas e as negociatas dos cartolas. Available at: https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2018/06/16/deportes/1529108134_704637.html. Accessed on: January 14, 2024.

4. Media narratives for “de-sequestration”

Throughout 2022, the year of presidential elections and the World Cup, celebrities, politicians, and brands built narratives for the “de-sequestration” of national symbols – especially the Brazilian national team’s jersey. Singers Anitta, Ludmilla and Djonga²⁷ are such examples. On social media and in their concerts, they introduced the debate about the sequestration of national symbols by Bolsonarism and positioned themselves in favor of reclaiming a symbol that belongs to Brazilians. In the case of Ludmilla and Djonga, to the *favela* people²⁸. During the campaign before the World Cup, Lula, Bolsonaro’s main opponent in the elections, stressed the importance of wearing green and yellow. In April, at an event held at the State University of Rio de Janeiro, Lula waved the national flag in front of a packed audience clad in red and stated that “this fascist does not own” the green-yellow jersey²⁹. In 2022, the left seemed to have understood how dangerous it was to leave a national symbol in the hands of only a certain group (Resende,2024). Seeing the adoption of the national team’s jersey by far-right groups and realizing the importance of taking a political stand, groups opposed to Bolsonarism reorganized themselves to act in the political debate, clashing against the far-right discourse in various fields of Brazilian society, including football. One moment directly related to the use of national symbols sequestered by the far-right was during the 2022 World Cup. Fans reframed the green and yellow jersey and the national flag in various ways to separate themselves from Bolsonaro supporters. Some preferred to wear the blue or black jersey, but others reframed the green and yellow uniform: stamped with the number 13 (the Worker’s Party number) on the back, in reference to Lula; with a red star on the chest or the Brazilian team’s red jersey in allusion to PT, Lula’s party; or the national flag with the words “For the World Cup.”

²⁷ Larissa de Macedo Machado, known as Anitta, is considered the Brazilian singer with the greatest international repercussion. Ludmilla is the stage name of Ludmila Oliveira da Silva, a funk singer and songwriter. She won the Latin Grammys in 2022. Gustavo Pereira Marques, known as Djonga, is a Brazilian rapper, songwriter and writer considered one of the most influential names in the Brazilian rap scene.

²⁸ BBC: ‘Resgatar o orgulho de ser brasileiro’: o movimento para ressignificar o verde e amarelo antes da eleição e da Copa. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-63069515>. Accessed on: January 31, 2024.

²⁹ UOL: Lula critica uso de verde e amarelo por Bolsonaro: ‘Não são desse fascista’. Available at: <https://www.uol.com.br/eleicoes/2022/03/31/lula-critica-uso-de-verde-e-amarelo-por-bolsonaro-nao-sao-desse-fascista.htm>. Accessed on: January 31, 2024.

Fig. 1. “It’s for the World Cup” written on the Brazilian flag



Source: Folha de S. Paulo, 2022

Fig. 2. National team’s jersey in red



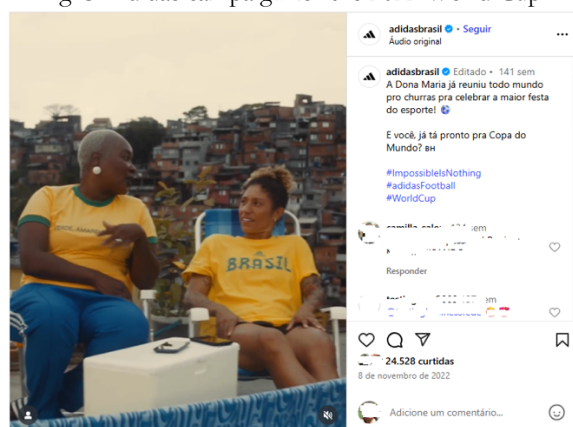
Source: Silva, 2022

Besides this ambience of civil society movements to redefine the Canarinho jersey, companies, CBF and media groups created the narrative of a national team belonging to all and, particularly,

of reclaiming the green and yellow jersey. Luiz Gonzaga Motta (2007) argues that narrative can interpret objective and subjective knowledge of the world (physical nature, human relations, beliefs, identities, values, myths, etc.) in accounts. This would allow us to put things in order and perspective, producing a discourse that creates and gives meaning to everything that involves human actions, from everyday to complex situations. Based on this conception, we will briefly analyze some examples of media productions that sought to create a narrative of unity about the national team and to disentail the Canarinho jersey from the far-right for the 2022 World Cup. Various brands and celebrities made declarations throughout 2022 to “de-sequester” the green-yellow jersey starting from the 2022 World Cup. Neither the presidential election, which ended in October before the Cup, nor the Carnaval; this was for the World Cup, a national mobilization event every four years (Guedes, 2023).

Adidas published on its social media an advertising piece of one minute and 35 seconds to promote a World Cup atmosphere weeks before the tournament. In the story created by the German multinational, fans from all tribes are gathered at “Dona Maria’s,” a common name in Brazil. Popular expressions like “get together with the guys” were used as synonymous for collective association and the names of former players Adriano and Cafu, player Cristiane, ex-player Formiga, influencer Luva de Pedreiro, among others, featured as characters who would be at Dona Maria’s to watch Brazil play. Using images of *favelas* and meanings produced by the national team’s players – Black individuals who rose from a difficult reality – , the narrative of the sports equipment brand provokes emotional effects (Motta, 2007) to emphasize a popular image for the national team, especially by plastering green and yellow throughout the piece. In other words, Adidas staged an advertising campaign to ‘return’ the yellow jersey to Brazilians, without any connection to the far right.

Fig. 3. Adidas campaign for the 2022 World Cup

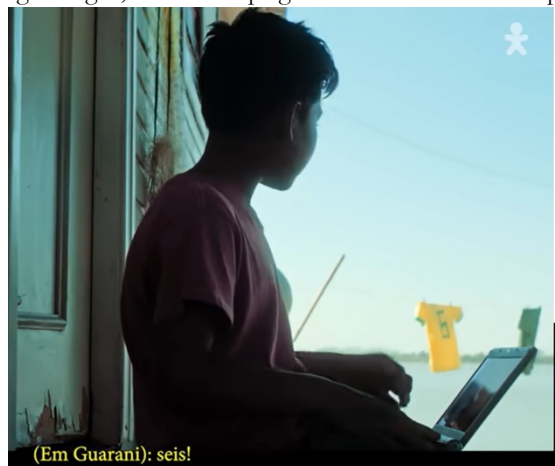


Source: Instagram – Adidas Brasil

Vivo, a telephone company and sponsor of the national team, associated the Canarinho team with winning its sixth championship, helping to reinforce the idea of a winning and respected jersey before the world. To convey its popular and national character, the brand created a one-minute story entitled “Signs”: at night, two children are on a farm, to connote the Brazilian countryside, counting six stars in the sky. Soon after, Vinicius Junior, one of the technical references of Tite’s team in that World Cup, wakes up with the alarm clock at 6 am on the day

he was to debut for Brazil in the World Cup. With the number six – in reference to the sixth title – used in several moments of the film, including in Indigenous villages and in the staged game’s overtime, Vivo “dresses” the population in green and yellow to support Vinicius Junior and the national team. He even scores a decisive goal, leading the Brazilian fans to celebrate effusively – whether inside the stadium or across Brazil – the victory in a difficult and important game. Choosing Vinicius Junior was not random: he is a black man born in São Gonçalo, metropolitan region of Rio de Janeiro, and has faced racist situations since he started at Real Madrid in 2018, bringing the Brazilian national team player closer to a less favored social stratum. By linking itself to a victim of racism from a poor background, Vivo works on the fan’s identification with the team, connecting the Canarinho jersey to all Brazilians and, most importantly, distancing it from the far right and its cultural war against minority populations.

Fig. 4. Signs, Vivo’s campaign for the 2022 World Cup



Source: Vivo, 2022

In a one-minute video, Nike uses the same approaches as Vivo, but with even greater emphasis on the national team’s jersey which is shown being pulled by other opponents at every moment – whether with the player Rodrygo on the field, the boy playing on a dirt field or the singer Djonga in the middle of a crowd. Its connotation and reading is clear: the yellow jersey is pulled by the nation’s rivals all the time, exemplified in the three contexts shown, but its symbolism resisted as something that belongs to everyone, seen in the three characters: Rodrygo, Djonga and the boy who plays on a simple dirt field, the latter representing the less privileged social stratum. We can interpret these opponents as those who try to steal the jersey for a specific group, like the far right. Entitled “*Veste a garra,*” meaning put on your fighting spirit, the video invokes the average Brazilian who faces a life full of mishaps and calls on fans to wear the jersey in unity with the national team, while a vibrant song in the background asks Brazilians to cheer together.

Fig. 5. Nike Football presents: Never-say-die attitude



Source: Nike, 2022

Nike invokes the same meaning Vivo attributed to Vini Jr. when exploring the images of Rodrygo and Djonga. Official supplier of the Brazilian team's uniforms, Nike used "Dynamic Yellow" in the jersey's design for the 2022 World Cup. It is a lighter and more vibrant shade of yellow that enhances the jaguar's spots, an emblematic species of Brazilian forests. By valuing the Brazilian fauna and flora and referencing nature and national biodiversity, the brand narratively constructs piece of symbology that the far right has vehemently attacked in recent years by denying the climate change caused by global warming.

Singers Anitta and Ludmilla also spoke up for the Canarinho jersey. In April, Anitta defended on social media that the green and yellow shirt belongs to all Brazilians which provoked a direct response from then-President Jair Bolsonaro. As to not generate content for the Bolsonaro base, Anitta blocked Bolsonaro.³⁰ A declared voter of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Ludmilla performed at Rock in Rio 2022, in September, two months before the elections and three months before the World Cup, on a green and yellow stage and asked the audience to sign the "L" (for Lula) before singing "Baile de Favela," equating favela to people disconnected from the kidnappers. Soon after the show, Ludmilla went to social media and spoke about the popular character of the yellow jersey on a post about reclaiming the flag and the pride of being Brazilian with photos that translated everyone's involvement in the nation via the national symbols, seen on Brazil's green and yellow jerseys.

³⁰ G1: Anitta bloqueia Jair Bolsonaro no Twitter após mensagens sobre cores da bandeira do Brasil. Available at: <https://g1.globo.com/pop-arte/musica/noticia/2022/04/16/anitta-bloqueia-jair-bolsonaro-no-twitter-apos-mensagens-sobre-cores-da-bandeira-do-brasil.ghtml>. Accessed on: January 6, 2024.

Fig. 6. X, 09.11.2022



Source: Ludmilla, 2022

Another important statement for constructing a “World Cup climate” and for putting aside the dissent caused by the political dispute in a presidential election year was a call from Rede Globo, the largest Brazilian TV network and holder of the rights to broadcast the World Cup since 1970. In a one-minute campaign broadcast on open TV, the network uses Galvão Bueno, the “official voice” of the national team’s games on the channel, to narrate an emotionally appealing text for creating a narrative of Brazilians uniting for Brazil in the World Cup. In it, TV Globo uses elements of unity such as “family together” and values the encounter of differences to support the Brazilian team as one, creating a narrative of “Brazil against the world.” Despite no political references in the text or images, we can perceive references to the political climate that divided the country. Galvão Bueno’s narration reminds us that “Nothing unites us like football. Nothing brings us together like a World Cup”³¹. In the text’s illustration, the atmosphere of unity is reinforced by images of Brazilians clad in green and yellow united by football, by the World Cup, streets painted in the country’s colors, in an attempt to produce “Brazilianness” (Vieira, 2019), a national stereotype created during the World Cup. To legitimize the discourse about antagonistic people who come together through football, the campaign shows Vasco and Flamengo fans embracing, as if football could produce harmony between individuals with opposing views. In the message, the political rivalry between Lula supporters and Bolsonaro supporters are equated, through metaphor, to Vasco and Flamengo fans, one of the greatest classic matches in the

³¹ Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BoCQ8ZYXD5k>.

country and holder of one of the main rivalries in Brazilian football. If a Vasco and a Flamengo fan can put their differences aside, Lula supporters and Bolsonaro supporters can too.

Fig. 7. Globo's campaign for the 2022 World Cup



Source: Canal de chamadas, 2022

In September, a month before the elections and two months before the World Cup, Globo released details of its coverage of the World Cup in Qatar, announcing 300 hours of broadcasting on SporTV, the broadcaster's pay TV channel, and 160 hours on TV Globo. The channel's official slogan for the tournament broadcast followed that of the call: "We're together for the World Cup." Globo's sports director, Renato Ribeiro, mentioned that the 2022 World Cup would have a different meaning, because it would be a competition "after an election that promises to be the most polarized in Brazil's history" and that, according to him, "only a World Cup is capable of uniting the country in a single crowd."

Considering the far-right in power and the constant attacks on democracy by Bolsonarism, this is an action that takes advantage of football and the World Cup, especially in the case of brands and celebrities, to create democratic narratives, even if largely driven by commercial interests.

5. By way of conclusion: the Brazilian team's red jersey and the new chapters of the dispute for national symbols

New chapters about the dispute for national symbols started in 2024 and 2025, especially regarding the Brazilian flag and the Brazilian football team's green-yellow jersey, synonymous with Brazil's success worldwide. Recent discussion emerged from the disclosure, by the sports press, that the new Brazilian team's number 2 jersey for the 2026 World Cup would be red, generating great repercussions in the public – in the digital environment and beyond. Debate around the red jersey ranged from political to club issues, leading the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) to deny production of the red uniform and declare that the new jersey would follow the entity's statute, which defines that the colors must follow those of the country. Succinctly, CBF released a note reaffirming the "commitment to its statute (the standards in the traditional yellow and blue colors will be maintained) and informs that the new uniform collection for the World Cup will still be defined together with Nike."

According to a report published by the newspaper *O Globo* on April 29³², when the news came to light, the color choice would have no political undertones – in terms of a communication campaign, it would be strange to create a concept that generates political rift among Brazilians. It considered commercial and advertising requirements, following the launch of uniforms from Nike, sponsor of the CBF and Jordan brand, which would be stamped on the Brazilian uniform. Journalist Diogo Dantas, author of the Rio de Janeiro newspaper's web article, said that the red uniform would have been not unanimous within the confederation itself. Some defended a third uniform, without replacing the current green-yellow (main) and blue (reserve). However, Nike has not yet created a third kit for any national team because it could hurt sales of the other two. But the fact is: the shirt was approved, as initially published by the foreign website specializing in uniforms *Footy Headlines*. Nike's idea of making the third uniform prevailed, endorsed by CBF's president Ednaldo Rodrigues.

Consulting and research institute, Quaest conducted a survey on social media about the alleged red shirt, considering April 28 and 29, on platforms X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, Facebook, Reddit, Tumblr and YouTube, as well as news sites³³. The survey unveiled a strong rejection to the color change: 90% of the comments were negative and 10%, positive. Quaest identified 24 million mentions to the topic, with an average of 43 million views and 13 million mentions. Figures that confirm the stir around the subject among the population.

In an editorial entitled "It is not appropriate for the Brazilian team to wear a red jersey," the newspaper *O Globo* criticized the possibility of a red uniform for the Brazilian team stating that "respect for tradition is essential", recalling political discussions and drawing attention to the "polarization" around Brazil's uniform, captured by Bolsonaro supporters: "One could argue that brazilwood, with its reddish color, is at the origin of the country's name. But it didn't take much sophistication to predict the explosive effect of said change in a polarized country where the national team's yellow jersey was adopted as a uniform by Bolsonaro supporters, while red is the color traditionally associated with President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's PT," the outlet said. The alleged red shirt was even featured on the agenda of National Congress representatives. G1 (Rede Globo's online news portal) highlighted speeches by congresspeople on the subject.³⁴ Jair Bolsonaro's son, Senator Flávio Bolsonaro defended the green-yellow uniform against the red jersey: "it has always been green and yellow, the colors of our homeland. Changing this makes no sense. It is an insult to everything that has always represented the pride of our people!" Similar cries came from federal deputy Arthur Maia, from the right-wing party União Brasil: "The national team is one of the most expressive symbols of our country and obviously the colors must echo the national flag: green, yellow and sky blue, as our glorious canary team has always acted." G1 also highlighted the criticism by Randolfe Rodrigues, from the left-wing party PT: "The colors of our national team are not an 'ideological identity'; they represent what distinguishes us in the world. A national team's color is related to national identity. Any color other than green, yellow, white and blue is unjustified".

³² Available at: <https://oglobo.globo.com/blogs/diogo-dantas/coluna/2025/04/entenda-como-camisa-vermelha-da-selecao-foi-escolhida-e-por-que-ela-ja-nasceu-sem-ser-unanimidade-na-cbf.ghtml>. Accessed on: May 4, 2025.

³³ Available at: <https://www.cnnbrasil.com.br/esportes/futebol/selecao-brasileira/camisa-vermelha-da-selecao-tem-forte-rejeicao-nas-redes-aponta-pesquisa/>. Accessed on: May 4, 2025.

³⁴ Available at: <https://g1.globo.com/politica/blog/andrea-sadi/post/2025/04/29/camisa-vermelha-da-selecao-brasileira-de-futebol-vira-briga-politica-nas-redes-sociais.ghtml>. Accessed on: May 4, 2025.

G1 highlighted the statements of three parliamentarians from different political spectrums: one from the far-right, another from the center-right and the other from the left – all three against the red jersey. Left-wing, Randolfe Rodrigues criticized possible ideologized national symbols. Marcelo Alves de Resende (2024) reminds us that instead of signifying it with popular discourses, linking it to the Brazilian people, removing all ideology leaves national symbols free to be re-kidnapped. Leaving them open without a unifying meaning opens doors to future social segregation, as happened with the sequestration by Bolsonaro supporters.

Despite new events, it is still too early to affirm a regaining of national symbols by the Brazilian population, disassociating them from the far right. In 2023, just over two months after Lula won the elections, Bolsonaro supporters invaded Brasília and vandalized the Praça dos Três Poderes [Three Branches Plaza]³⁵ dressed in national symbols. In March 2025, Jair Bolsonaro asked for amnesty for the vandals who destroyed Brasília two years earlier, in an act also held in Copacabana that was inundated with green-yellow jerseys. The dispute is still ongoing and 2026 promises important chapters with a presidential election year and the World Cup, in a different scenario from what happened in 2022 and 2018, mainly because (so far) Jair Bolsonaro is ineligible which is a blow to the far-right camp.

Fig. 8. Bolsonaro on Avenida Atlântica, in Copacabana, Rio



Photo: Alexandre Cassiano (O Globo)

References

Altman, B. (2023). Ruas em transe: a insurgência das camadas médias contra o petismo. In B. Altman, & M. Carlotoo (Orgs.). *Junho de 2013: a rebelião fantasma*. São Paulo: Boitempo.

Cunha, J. (2022, November 20th). A nossa seleção. *O Globo*, p. 32.

Damo, A. (2020). A tragédia que a Copa legou ao Brasil – as Jornadas de Junho e a efervescente anticorrupção. *Interseções: Revista de Estudos Interdisciplinares*, 22(2), 167-200.

³⁵ A public square in Brasília, Brazil, where the headquarters of the country's three branches of government – the Executive, Legislative, and Judiciary – are located.

- Eco, U. (2018). *O fascismo eterno*. Rio de Janeiro: Record.
- Demuru, P. (2024). *Políticas do Encanto: extrema direita e fantasias da conspiração*. São Paulo: Editora Elefante.
- Entman, Robert. (2009). *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Fortuna, V. O; Resende, M. A. (2024). Narrativas midiáticas para o “dessequestro” da camisa da seleção brasileira de futebol. *Alcen*, 24(52), p.38-58.
- Guedes, S. L & Almeida, E. (2019). O segundo sequestro do verde e amarelo: futebol, política e símbolos nacionais. *Cuadernos de Aletheia*, 3, 73-89.
- Kfourri, J. (2022, 13 de novembro). Quem tem medo da camisa amarela? *Folha de S.Paulo*, Caderno de esportes, p. b12.
- Jinkings, I. (2016). O golpe que tem vergonha de ser chamado de golpe. In: Singer, André. et al. *Por que gritamos golpe? Para entender o impeachment e a crise política no Brasil*. São Paulo: Boitempo.
- Ludmilla. O resgate da nossa bandeira e do orgulho de ser brasileiro. Available at: https://twitter.com/Ludmilla/status/1569130083260190721?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw. Accessed on: january 25, 2024.
- Magalhães, L. G. (2014). *Com a taça nas mãos: sociedade, Copa do Mundo e ditadura no Brasil e na Argentina*. Rio de Janeiro: Lamparina.
- Miguel, L. F. (2022). *Democracia na periferia capitalista: impasses do Brasil*. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica.
- Motta, L. G. (2007). Análise pragmática da narrativa jornalística. In C. Lago, & M. Benetti (Org.). *Metodologia de Pesquisa em Jornalismo*. Petrópolis: Vozes.
- Mudde, C. (2022). *A extrema-direita hoje*. Rio de Janeiro: Ed. UERJ.
- Nobre, M. (2022) *Limites da democracia: de junho de 2013 ao governo Bolsonaro*. São Paulo: Todavia.
- Oliveira, R. & Farias, W. (2021). Os novos sentidos da “amarelinha”: relações discursivas entre político e esportivo na camisa da seleção brasileira na Copa 2018. *Recorde*, 14(1), 1-19.
- Pimenta, E. (2022, November 13th). Viemos do mesmo lugar, a África. *O Globo*.

- Pinheiro-Machado, R. (2019). *Amanhã vai ser maior*. São Paulo: Planeta.
- Pinheiro-Machado, R., & Freixo, A. de. (2019). *Brasil em transe: Bolsonaroismo, Nova direita e Desdemocratização*. Rio de Janeiro: Oficina Raquel.
- Reis, M. (2021). *Amarelo desbotado: crise e sequestro da camisa da seleção brasileira de futebol*. Ebook.
- Resende, M. A. (2024). *A amarelinha é de quem? Narrativas midiáticas para o “dessequestro” da camisa da seleção brasileira de futebol*. 171 p. Master's Thesis (in Communication)— School of Social Communication, State University of Rio de Janeiro.
- Ricci, R. (2022). *Fascismo brasileiro: e o Brasil gerou o seu ovo da serpente*. Curitiba: Kotter Editorial.
- Rocha, J. C. (2021). *Guerra cultural e retórica do ódio: crônicas de um Brasil pós-político*. Goiânia: Caminhos.
- Rocha, J. C. (2023). *Bolsonarismo: da guerra cultural ao terrorismo doméstico*. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica.
- Rousseff, D. (2023). Prólogo. In B. Altman, & M. Carlotoo (Orgs.). *Junho de 2013: a rebelião fantasma*. São Paulo: Boitempo.
- Silva, L. C. L. (2024). A minha já está limpinha e cheirosa esperando a Copa!!! <https://encurtador.com.br/nLSY2>. Accessed on: January 19, 2024.
- Silva, I. L. (2024). Política e futebol não se discutem? Efeitos de sentidos e a ressignificação da camisa da seleção brasileira como simbologia política. *Leitura*, 80, 83-96.
- Sousa, J. (2024). *O Pobre de Direita: a vingança dos bastardos*. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira.
- Souza, J. (2016). *A Radiografia do Golpe*. São Paulo: LeYa.
- Toledo, L. H. de. (2019). (In)vestindo camisas de futebol: moda esportiva e agência na produção das emoções torcedoras. *dObra[s]*, 12(27), 31-46.
- Oliveira, R. (2023, October 23th). 'Vaza Jato', a investigação que obrigou a imprensa brasileira a se olhar no espelho. *El país Brasil*, Available on-line: <https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2020-10-23/vaza-jato-a-investigacao-que-obrigou-a-imprensa-brasileira-se-olhar-no-espelho.html>. Accessed on: January 19, 2024.
- Teitelbaum, B. (2020). *Guerra pela eternidade: O retorno do tradicionalismo e a ascensão da direita populista*. Campinas: Unicamp.

Williams, M. (2021). *A ciência do ódio; a jornada de um cientista para compreender a origem dos preconceitos e da violência que ameaçam o futuro da sociedade humana*. Rio de Janeiro: Globalivros.