

Endings at the World Cup: What a German Victory means

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Global Research, July 14, 2014

Region: [Europe](#), [Latin America & Caribbean](#)

Theme: [History](#)

It resonates with the predictability that all stereotypes have. Like clichés, they are gifts from some opportunistic, and handy deity, though stereotypes have that terrible drawback of being misinformed. Their very use, and enduring existence, is based on that very fact.

The German efforts in winning the World Cup final in extra time by a beautiful, solitary goal by the God-fearing Mario Goetze were praised in an assortment of circles. The clichés did make their terrible appearance, and the youthful German player had become a 'Super Mario'.

A column in The Guardian even went so far as to throw in German re-unification and a few yard posts of school history for the reader. Learn from Germany – in their achievement lie many lessons, and there is no shame for a Briton in learning from them.

It seemed somewhat odd – the players on the pitch were hardly interested in discussing matters connected with either World War II or German re-unification, but the British, foremost among Europeans, maintain a mania for it.

To this day, history syllabi remain strewn with memories of aerial dog fights, Hitler's clinging shadow and all that Jerry did that was so naughty. There was glory then in defeating Nazism, but now, there is only lingering melancholia. When enemies win the peace, self-esteem plummets.

Football has that remarkable tendency to draw out the militarists, and perhaps more rarely, the humorists. Better that than loading actual guns, though the behavior of some of the spectators – and the press corps – might suggest something else.

Matches between Germany and England -and also between Germany and The Netherlands, are always bountiful with historical motifs. Victor and victimhood do the ugliest of dances, shadow boxing between passes and echoing in the stands.

English supporters simulate bombers laying waste to their enemy's territory. The Dutch supporters sometimes go further than their English cousins, demanding rather loudly that their bicycles be returned, given the German confiscation order inflicted on the country during the Second World War.

While Germans court a chronic guilt that is drummed into them from zygote to grave, England maintains the belligerence that won them El Alamein. Remember how well we did in the war, making sure to relegate the US to the role to that of valiant supplier and economic underwriter.

Recalling the World Cup semi-final in 1990, one that West Germany eventually won, also against Argentina, British papers, notably those in the Murdoch pack, went bad with feral enthusiasm. War can be such a terrific thing for some faux combatants – to this day, the almost frothing Stuart Pearce became the attack dog of England and the press, the darling of the anti-German establishment. He ended up missing a penalty at Turin, and West Germany ended up holding the trophy.

What, then, of the German supporter? As W.G. Sebald would suggest in his *The Natural History of Destruction*, German writers should have paid more attention to the ruthless destruction of Germany as topic and harrowing subject. German football supporters, in the main, kept mum, careful that any retaliation would be swooped upon with political eagerness by critics on all sides of the fence. Best not be seen as a vile revanchist, whatever the historical cost.

It was refreshing that the language from the Argentinian press, while suggesting moments of suspicion that a penalty should have been grated in the ninetieth minute, conceded that the team did them proud. No bomb throwing in that department, though the revisionists may be waiting.

The Berliner Morgenpost came up with a rather cheeky image: Argentina was represented pictorially a raw bit of steak, the sort which is done with such delectable perfection by the Pampas gauchos; Germany was represented as the disposers, the utilitarian fork and knife.

Even German commentary had to concede that something miraculous had happened, a transmutation of certain basic metals from 2004 onwards into precious gold. It began as a rickety project, one that did stumble when mental stamina and the unpredictability of football intervened. According to Der Spiegel, 'Now Germany is world champion, and German football is barely recognisable. It's the perfect mix of virtue and magic, of hurrah and heave ho.'

The Taz newspaper embraced a structuralist concept, adding some fuel to the presumptive fire that German success lies in the smooth humming of a machine, the genius of a system planned in the board room and executed on pitch and in mud. 'Many will write that [German coach] Jogi and his boys wrote history last night. But history isn't written by great men, but by processes and structures.'

So much for the hero vision of history, one where great people write it by their actions. In that, Taz are on to something. None of that would have mattered, however, had a deft Lionel Messi finish careered into the net. It might well have done. Theories, are, after all, useless till the pudding is made.

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