

Football Fan Groups and Police: Confrontations, Perceptions and Other Actors – The Case of the City of Goiânia/Brazil

Torcidas organizadas de futebol e Polícia:
confrontos, percepções e outros atores – o caso de Goiânia/Brazil

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ABSTRACT: This article analyzes interactions among fan groups (locally called *torcidas organizadas*), police and other actors involved in the professional football in the city of Goiânia, capital of the state of Goiás (Brazil). In a context where violent incidents and deaths related to football have grown, the initial focus of this research was the perceptions of football fans and the military police of Goiás from a global perspective of the hooliganism problem. The study was based on systematic ethnography at stadiums and data collected from 300 questionnaires. Initial access to the Police Unit of Events was complemented by extensive contacts with supporters, as well as the observation of policing. Given the different forms of abuse identified in an environment characterized by a denial of established actors about the prevailing violent atmosphere; this work asks what possible changes could be implemented? Accordingly, the paper ends with some notes for possible new approaches.

KEYWORDS: Football; Goiânia; Brazil; Supporters; Policing.

RESUMO: Este artigo analisa as interações entre torcedores organizados, policiais e outros atores envolvidos no futebol profissional na cidade de Goiânia, capital do estado de Goiás. Em um contexto em que os incidentes violentos e as mortes têm aumentado, o foco inicial desta pesquisa era a percepção dos torcedores de futebol e da Polícia Militar de Goiás a partir de uma perspectiva global do problema do hooliganismo. O estudo envolveu etnografias sistemáticas em estádios e dados coletados de 300 questionários. O acesso inicial ao 'Batalhão de Eventos' foi complementado por contatos com torcedores, assim como a observação do policiamento. Dadas as diferentes formas de abusos identificadas em um ambiente caracterizado pela negação dos atores estabelecidos sobre a atmosfera violenta prevalente; o trabalho se pergunta quais possíveis mudanças podem ser implementadas? Finalmente, o artigo termina com algumas notas para possíveis novas abordagens.

PALAVRAS-CHAVES: Futebol; Goiânia; Brasil; Torcedores; Policiamento.

INTRODUCTION

Hooliganism may be studied as a global phenomenon¹ for researchers might find common features in different countries, while elucidating the particularities of specific contexts.² Brazil, together with Argentina, stands among the countries with the highest death rates related to football in recent decades. Both countries also share another common feature: no official on-line data is available on this score from national sources. The state of Goiás is no exception. This current research deals with just one city, Goiânia, capital of Goiás, where three professional clubs share most of the passionate local fandom, *Vila Nova* (VN), *Atlético Clube Goianiense* (ACG) and *Goiás Esporte Clube* (GEC). Although the initial focus here was primarily the interactions between organised fan groups – known in Brazil as *torcidas organizadas* – and the police in Goiânia. Our observations revealed several forms of physical and symbolic violence. Therefore, our empirical contribution seeks to introduce other elements and actors besides fans and policing in the construction of the “violence” problem. With no intention to generalize from a single case study, we would like to call the attention about attitudes of established groups which condemn physical aggression but deny other forms of violence.

During the process of research, we were led to interactions with professional clubs and mainstream journalists together with other actors that compose collectively, this sort of social world.³ In can be said, in Elias and Scotson’s terms⁴ that the established groups in this nexus have shown no real interest in changing things, allowing only marginal spaces for ‘outsiders’, such as women, not to mention gay and lesbian groups. Accordingly, besides the extraordinary rate of supporters’ deaths in the urban area of Goiânia, it is also important to warn about the general environment

¹ DUNNING. *Towards a Sociological Understanding of Football Hooliganism a Global Phenomenon*, p. 141.

² SPAAIJ. *Football Hooliganism as a Transnational Phenomena: Past and Present Analysis: A Critique – More Specificity Less Generality*, p. 414.

³ BECKER. *Art Worlds*, p. 12.

⁴ ELIAS; SCOTSON. *The Established and the Outsiders*, p. 6.

of dominant masculinity around Brazilian and Goiás' football in particular.⁵ This dominant masculinity can be shown by extensive homophobic chants and expressions considered as 'normal', even celebrated by some of the local journalism establishment and ignored by public and football authorities.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES OF VIOLENCE AND HOOLIGANISM: SPECIFIC FEATURES FROM BRAZIL

This research started with a concern for improving our understanding and analysis of violence between football supporters and the police in Goiânia, however, we decided to focus this research on a broader picture of hooliganism. We do not aim to present here an exhaustive state of the art across the world. Though, it was necessary to place the problem in common and divergent frames in order to introduce elements that were observed when undertaking our own ethnographic study. Very different formulations were put forward in this sense to investigate the problem in the UK more than 40 years ago, firstly, as a reaction of the dislocated working class to transformations in relations within the game itself; then, as expressions of ritualized performances underpinned by symbolic forms of aggression.⁶ Other authors soon explained the problem as a quest for excitement and emotional release as part of lower class masculinity, with the phenomenon worsening during the early 1960s.⁷ This sort of environment in the 1970s and 1980s started to produce high levels of competition and increasing organization among male fan groups, called firms. Other researchers claimed that this sense of belonging to a group of loyal 'lads' was less about fighting and violence and more about enjoying different, heightened moments of collective expressive social life under threat.⁸ The proliferation of a recognized

⁵ LEMES. O preconceito dentro e fora das quatro linhas: o papel dos jornalistas goianos no debate sobre a homossexualidade no futebol, p. 10.

⁶ MARSH. *Aggro*, p.11.

⁷ DUNNING; MURPHY; WILLIAMS. *The roots of hooliganism*, p. 1.

⁸ ARMSTRONG; HARRIS. *Soccer Hooligans: Theory and Evidence*, p. 427.

‘culture’ of hooliganism found expression in the construction of specific attitudes and styles.⁹ However, all this culture of aggressive masculinity involved frequent clashes between hooligan groups and police.¹⁰

At the height of the hooligan phenomenon in England in the second half of the 1980s things took a dramatic turn. A series of fan tragedies brought an end to the volatile atmosphere of the terraces. Top stadia in England would now be all-seated, heavily surveilled and stewarded, and mainly violence-free.¹¹ What led to this dramatic shift? Firstly, a disaster at the Heysel Stadium in Brussels in 1985, which witnessed the death of 39 fans crushed in a crowd panic.¹² This was followed in 1989 by the tragedy of the Hillsborough Stadium in which 96 Liverpool fans were ‘unlawfully’ killed following inept policing and terrace overcrowding.¹³ A report produced 23 years later (and after many attempts to re-open the case) by the Hillsborough Independent Panel demonstrated,¹⁴ beyond question, the crucial role of crowd mismanagement by the police, by the football and stadium authorities, and the false information about ‘causes’ published by sections of the press.¹⁵ However, by late 1980s and especially during the 1990s hooliganism was not only a British phenomenon, but a world-wide concern. Cross-national studies appeared.¹⁶ Some academics began to stress the way in which police action was a decisive factor in helping to escalate, or de-escalate tensions around soccer grounds.¹⁷ Brutal policing, sensationalist media coverage, and violence on the field could also impact on supporter behaviour.¹⁸ As a result, some European countries have increasingly chosen

⁹ REDHEAD. *Some Reflections on Discourses on Soccer Hooliganism*, p. 480.

¹⁰ WARD; WILLIAMS. *Soccer Nation*, p. 271.

¹¹ KING. *The End of Terraces*, p. 15.

¹² GOULD; WILLIAMS. *After Heysel: How Italy Lost the Football ‘Peace’*, p. 587.

¹³ WARD; WILLIAMS. *Soccer Nation*, p. 217.

¹⁴ HILLSBOROUGH. *The Report of the Hillsborough Independent Panel*, p. 3.

¹⁵ WILLIAMS. *Justice for the 96? Hillsborough, Politics and the English Football*. p. 273.

¹⁶ GIULIANOTTI; BONNEY; HEPWORTH. *Soccer, Violence and Social Identities*, p. 2. TSOUKALA. *Soccer Hooliganism in Europe*, p. 5.

¹⁷ STOTT; ADANG; LIVINGSTON; SCHREIBER. *Tackling Football Hooliganism: A Quantitative Study of Public Order, Policing and Crowd Psychology*, P. 116.

¹⁸ BRAUN; Vliegenthart. *The Contentious Fans*, p. 797.

low-profile policing.¹⁹ *Fanprojekts* were funded for example in Germany,²⁰ with a variety of social projects underpinned by the support of mediators; a model that has been replicated in other European countries. These schemes of mediation have been starting to be discussed recently in parts of South America, particularly in Colombia.²¹ Thus, we would like to signal that different forms of hooliganism and violence have not been exclusively a British or even a European phenomenon. Far from it; we can trace some common and also divergent parallels in Latin America, especially, but not exclusively, in Argentina and Brazil.

The work of the sociologist Amílcar Romero, together with that of the anthropologist Eduardo Archetti, has been pioneering in studying the growing problem of violence in Argentina. Their early analysis highlighted the impact of brutal police repression, the violent aggression among organised supporters, the complexity of relationships with institutional power sources, and a useful typology of fan-related deaths since the 1950s.²² In Brazil, however, the initial studies about *futebol* focused on the idealized accounts of the game first proposed in the 1940s by the Brazilian public intellectual Gilberto Freyre and the journalist Mario Filho. This kind of early narrative also insisted on the construction of a collective cross-racial positive imaginary for Brazilian society. Violence seemed not to be a problem.

It is indeed curious, that Argentinean ‘carnival’ climate of supporting has been gradually imitated in other South and Central American countries,²³ except with the added ingredient of dispositions for confrontations, and battles against the police, which have become a source of reputation-building.²⁴ This style has been

¹⁹ LAURSEN. Danish Police Practice and National Fan Crowd Behaviour, p. 326.

²⁰ WINANDS; GRAU. Socio-Educational Work With Football Fans in Germany: Principles, Practice and Conflicts, p. 1008.

²¹ SALVEMOS AL FUTBOL. *El problema de la violencia en el fútbol argentino hoy*, p. 3.

²² ARCHETTI; ROMERO. Death and Violence in Argentinian Soccer, p. 38.

²³ RODRIGUEZ; SOTO; ZUÑIGA. Bares de fútbol/torcidas de futebol na América Latina. Um estado da situação, p. 2.

²⁴ GARRIGA. *Haciendo Amigos a las Piñas*. p. 10. MOREIRA. Juego electoral y las relaciones políticas en el fútbol argentino, p. 128. SEGURA; MURZI; NASSAR. Violence and Death in the Argentinean Soccer in the New Millennium: Who is Involved and What is at Stake?.

incorporated into recent Brazilian traditions, where the history of *torcidas* has had very different roots, relating to the samba from the 1940s in Rio de Janeiro²⁵ or the activist groups of the 1970s instituting protests against rising ticket prices and the mismanagement of club authorities.²⁶ Since the 1990s, however, a certain cultural radicalization gradually started to take place on the Brazilian terraces.²⁷ *Torcidas organizadas* grew in number by attracting mainly male teenagers and young adults from the popular classes, specific events could be utilized to stir up violent aggression.²⁸ Fan chants now increasingly swore death to enemies, accompanied by threatening gestures.²⁹ The public image of *torcidas* has been therefore increasingly associated with violence and media panics.³⁰

Accordingly, this research aims to signal specificities of violent behaviour and abuses identified in the city of Goiânia. Among the 304 soccer-related deaths that occurred in Brazil between 1988 and 2016,³¹ the state of São Paulo presented 50; Rio Grande do Norte 43; Rio de Janeiro 32 and Goiás 30 fatal casualties. The state of Goiás appears highly placed among the deadliest locations out of the 26 states in Brazil. Furthermore, the authors of this research identified at least 11 soccer-related fatalities between August 2017 and September 2019 around the metropolitan area of Goiânia alone. We propose two hypotheses about the serious problem of supporters' killings here: (1) the prevalence of national and local radical fan rivalries; and (2) the rise of internal disputes for power within the same group of fans. Then, what incidents are involved here? Should we focus only on deaths, rather than broaden our understanding of the atmosphere within the world of Brazilian soccer, the state of Goiás and the city of Goiânia in particular? We chose to expand our analysis and consider the prevailing general environment and the attitudes of different actors.

²⁵ HOLLANDA. *O Clube como vontade e representação*, p.21.

²⁶ FLORENZANO. Dictatorship, Re-Democratisation and Brazilian Football in the 1970s and 1989s, p. 147.

²⁷ TEIXEIRA. *Os perigos da paixão*, p. 33.

²⁸ TOLEDO. *Torcer: a metafísica do homem comum*. p. 176.

²⁹ MONTEIRO. *Torcer, lutar, ao inimigo massacrar*, p. 6.

³⁰ LOPES. A construção do problema social da violência no futebol brasileiro, p. 89.

³¹ MURAD. *A violência no futebol*, p. 3

FIELDWORK WITH SUPPORTERS AND POLICE, INTERACTIONS WITH CLUBS AND JOURNALISM

The first incident observed by the main author, recently arrived in Goiânia, was in the largest stadium of the city, *Serra Dourada*, back in April 2016. It was a large-scale disturbance involving a group of supporters and the military police, subject of latter widespread media condemnation of ‘violent’ fans. As a result, the researcher decided to offer a course on football culture and policing for graduate students in 2017. The Police Unit of Events of the military police (BEPE) was contacted by e-mail in order to invite them to participate in one of the sessions. The lieutenant in charge of the security at stadia, now Captain Ricardo Junqueira Dourado, asked to attend as an ‘ordinary’ student to acquire knowledge and discuss the work of his specialized police body. This partnership opened doors for what proved to be a fruitful collaboration, both in the classroom and in the field.

INITIAL METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

During the first four months, systematic observations were concentrated primarily on the behaviour of organised fans and the police. The group then produced a series of written reports compiled from first-hand information. Yet, instead of focusing on policing and its reactions, we also chose to accompany groups of supporters on their experiences: entering the stadium; performing during games in different sectors of stands; and reviewing events after matches. We stayed frequently with groups outside the stadium when they gathered to celebrate or just fraternize, eating and drinking around ‘informal’ food stalls. For a second seminar, a few more students joined: another member from the police and one young woman from one of the fan groups, Thaissa, who allowed interactions with insider fellow supporters. The team then decided to conduct a survey focused on violence perceptions at the stadia involving both fans and the police. Ethical permission was firstly granted by the graduate

programme of sociology at the Federal University of Goiás, then by the Colonel of the BEPE. All responses were provided anonymously.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

After 4 months of ethnographic observations, specific surveys were elaborated by the research group. We included some basic questions about age and gender, and then more detailed ones for fans about: club of support; being part or not of the organised groups; reasons and frequency to attend stadia; views on forms of perceived violence and abuse; ideas to reduce confrontations, as well as the role of both fans and police, though police and fans got slightly different questionnaires. These topics emerged from previous fieldwork observation, informal conversation with fans, police and our own discussions in the classroom. The following percentages show the distribution of individuals who took part in the surveys. Out of the 243 fans consulted, 95 (39%) claimed to be VN's supporters, 83 (34%), GEG's fans and 65 (26%) from ACG. It is worth mentioning that 80% of these fans were male. From the 33 BEPE members that responded, 26 were males and only 7 female officers. When conducting fieldwork and when applying the questionnaires, the group was careful in trying to avoid the role-duality problem, particularly with supporters. We introduced ourselves with an official printed message from the University explaining the academic purposes of the inquiry. Despite - or because of - that, some individuals refused to answer, while others asked whether they could bring friends to collaborate. The main researcher was involved with students in the survey process. We usually divided the data collection mission in two groups that covered different areas around and inside stadium each time. With the police officers, the surveys were conducted three hours before the games at their usual meeting point. We need to reckon that data collection was more empiric-driven than theoretical oriented. The whole process involved 70 games, but the surveys naturally produced a series of difficulties. Replies from 300 interview questionnaires were hoped for, and although the 33 target for police

respondents was reached, some replies from supporters had to be discarded when processing the data. Some left answers incomplete as they were anxious to enter the stadium when being consulted. Even though the response rate was lower than that originally foreseen, a representative sample of N = 234 supporter returns and N = 273 total returns (91%) was achieved. Moreover, a Master's dissertation on the study of public communication was being undertaken by one of the members of team.³² This research about homophobia, helped to identify, beyond our defined questions, other forms of abusive expressions in chants from organised supporters and more 'spontaneous' verbal abuse from all kinds of fans. This work also demonstrated through interviews with journalists from TV, radio and written press, how homophobic comments were considered 'natural' in the state of Goiás; justified and reproduced in in-house 'jokes' when referring to colleagues. All these elements convinced the group that our last months of fieldwork should focus not only on physical confrontations, but also consider a wider picture of the hyper-hetero masculine atmosphere around stadia and in media coverage.

FINDINGS: SUPPORTERS' GATHERINGS, POLICING, FATAL EVENTS AND HOMOPHOBIA

Football is very important for the almost two million inhabitants in the metropolitan area of Goiânia and its neighboring cities. The city of Goiânia has five stadia; *Serra Dourada*, the biggest, inaugurated in 1975 with a capacity of 50,000 spectators. Due to its precarious facilities, dirty bathrooms and unsafe sectors, but mainly because of national safety patterns adopted in Brazilian stadia, only around 30,000 spectators were allowed entry by police before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. The others, used only for games with expected crowds of no more than 10,000 fans, are the *Olympic Pedro Ludóvico*, and the home stadia of each of the three elite clubs. In relation to fan rivalries in Brazil, each club has organised fans operating within

³² LEMES. O preconceito dentro e fora das quatro linhas: o papel dos jornalistas goianos no debate sobre a homossexualidade no futebol, p. 124.

variations of the 'Bedouin syndrome', as it was the case in the UK during the 70s and 80s,³³ in relation to other peers from different latitudes in the country. This means that a 'friend of a friend is a friend; the enemy of an enemy is a friend, and the friend of an enemy in an enemy'. Nevertheless, these codes only apply to supporters and are often inconsistent and unstable; ordinary fans do not really care about them. In this context, organised fans groups of VN, AGC and GEC have been in a permanent state of tension and often engage in confrontations with rivals. The intensity of clashes, especially between the *torcidas organizadas* of VN and GEG, led the local Minister of Justice (*Ministério de Justiça*) to ban these groups for a number of years in 2011. Moreover, and despite the fact that Goiânia was not selected as a host for the 2014 FIFA World Cup, a specialized police unit for public order events in the area (BEPE) was created in 2013. One of the first interventions of this body was to establish negotiations with the leaders of the organised fan groups in order to reach agreement and convince the Minister of Justice to let these prohibited groups enter stadia. This guarantee allowed the return of *torcidas organizadas* with their flags, musical instruments, uniforms – and occasional violent aggression. Nonetheless, each member had to be registered on a list and all that information was transmitted to the BEPE.

In spite of the efforts of the police body to organise fans journeys, frequent clashes in bus stations, streets and, on more than one occasion, in the stands, gradually led the police to adopt a hardening stance. After TV coverage of a large-scale fight between the organised fans of GEC and VN in July 2017 at the *Serra Dourada*, the BEPE insisted that local derbies should be staged without away fans. The police here act as one established actor and the fans can be considered as outsiders in what could be read as a rather unequal balance of power. However, relationships around staging matches are more complex than this, since more agents can actually intervene and influence the 'game' equilibrium. According to one of our police informants, the

³³ DUNNING; MURPHY; WADDINGTON. Anthropological Versus Sociological Approaches to the Study of Soccer Hooliganism: Some Critical Notes, p. 460.

decision to ban away fans whenever the three local clubs play each other has improved crowd management around the venues. Nevertheless, a remarkably similar outcome to what happened first in the province of Buenos Aires and then in the rest of Argentina³⁴ with this measure operating since 2013, seems to have occurred in Goiânia. Violent episodes now started to be displaced, often taking place far from the stadia. They have not ceased and, more importantly, they have become a security problem in some distant neighborhoods during derby days.

It is also important to stress that Goiás was considered the 9th most violent state of Brazil in 2018: 2,025 of the 48,962 general homicides occurred there, around 4% of the national total.³⁵ Therefore, two additional hypotheses are plausible complementary of each other here. Firstly, it is likely that the high rates of domestic general crime and serious weaponised violence may have an impact and permeate the world of football. Secondly, there may be highly specific and intensive forms of soccer disputes that pertain here; meaning that different forms of abuse are inherent and generated inside the micro-cosmos of the local football environment. In the two-year period when this research was being carried out, the research group learned that during a derby match between GEC and VC, played without away fans, a supporter had travelled to a local bus station 30 minutes before the start of the match to shoot at the main group of rival fans. The individual concerned was eventually killed by a bullet coming from the other side. Some months after that episode, a supporters' bus travelling to the next derby game was attacked with a homemade Molotov bomb, producing several injuries. Just weeks after, the supporters of one of the closet allies of GEC from the southern state of Paraná were attacked by a group of VN with another Molotov. As a result, some groups of the *torcida organizada* of GEC felt their honour had been offended too far; they decided to strike back. In November 2018, a teenager of VN out walking, was the subject of a surprise attack and was beaten to death.

³⁴ SALVEMOS AL FUTBOL. *El problema de la violencia en el fútbol argentino hoy*, p. 2.

³⁵ FÓRUM BRASILEIRO DE SEGURANÇA PÚBLICA. *Anuário Brasileiro de Segurança Pública*, 13, 2019. Disponível em: www.forumseguranca.org.br. Acesso em 15 jan. 2020, p. 3.

A very delicate moment in the process of research occurred when the main author was invited in April 2018, to attend a soccer tournament among different groups of one the *torcidas organizadas*. As Rookwood and Palmer have argued³⁶, the traditional, competitive formats of soccer may not only be inappropriate to promote peaceful relations, but they can even exacerbate latent tensions among rival groups. As that journey went on, it became evident, through ethnography; that the strain during the tournament was growing ever tighter, and the atmosphere became so tense that one of the organisers eventually took out a gun and shot a live round into the air to disperse what appeared to be an imminent massive fight.

We identified among supporters, two different positions in relation to violent fights against 'enemies': those who urged for yet more punishments and revenge; and those who were more open to strategic truces. We could obviously only talk safely with this second group, as they wanted their voice to be heard. In May 2018, during a derby match between GEC and VN with no away fans; a 1-3 score created a very hostile climate. According to the police, one disillusioned fan set fire to a club t-shirt, which provoked anger among fellow supporters and police action. Fans later denied this version of events, but we could observe a huge group of supporters throwing objects at the ranks of police, some of whom reacted by beating with riot sticks. The Shock Unit (different to BEPE but in coordination with the latter) intervened by launching pepper grenade, which generated scenes of panic. The match was halted and the crowd evacuated, but the repression continued outside. Then, the mounted police charged indiscriminately against fans leaving the venue. Parents were running with their kids crying. In these sorts of events, each side tends to blame the other as scenes worsen.

³⁶ ROCKWOOD; PALMER. Invasion games in war-torn nations, p. 185.

CROSSED PERCEPTIONS OF SUPPORTERS AND POLICE: CAUGHT BETWEEN RECOGNITION AND BLAME

As far as perceptions of violence within the atmosphere of football in Goiânia are concerned, 44% of the supporters consulted considered that physical aggression had grown in recent years. Some 29% disagreed and said that violence had declined. It is important to clarify that not all answers to the survey questions appear in the tables presented below, only those considered relevant for this paper. For the 33 police officers consulted, six individuals argued that violence has increased, while twenty-one believed that it has decreased, mainly thanks to their efforts. Two facts may play a part here; some of the police surveyed were relatively new staff, with only a few games of service when consulted. Others, who declared that they ‘never’ saw or heard any physical violence, may have simply not wanted to compromise themselves with their answers, despite assurances about anonymity. We have included in the tables only those answers of complete agreement or disagreement with the key issues, although in some cases interviewees agreed partially, or simply did not have any comment about the topic. This explains the discrepancies between the percentage figures. We can see that many more supporters than police claim to have seen acts of aggression at soccer events including three-quarters who have seen fighting at matches (Tables 1 and 2).

<i>Acts at stadia</i>	Saw acts of vandalism	Saw individuals fighting	Saw people selling drugs	Saw individuals stealing
<i>Yes</i>	69%	75%	21%	23%
<i>Never saw, never heard</i>	10%	5%	57%	55%

Table 1: Perceptions of supporters on aggression and delinquency (N = 243).

<i>Acts at stadia</i>	Saw acts of vandalism	Saw individuals fighting	Saw people selling drugs	Saw individuals stealing
<i>Yes</i>	54%	54%	39%	33%
<i>Never saw, never heard</i>	6%	3%	12%	30%

Table 2: Perceptions of police (BEPE) on aggression and delinquency (N = 33).

Notice that a large majority of supporters disagree that games should be staged with no visiting supporters and oppose the ban of organised fans (Tables 3 and 4).

	Increase presence of police	Prohibit organised supporters	No visiting supporters	More stewards needed	Mediators of conflicts needed	More dialogue with police
<i>Agree</i>	66%	23%	14%	60%	68%	78%
<i>Disagree</i>	16%	63%	79%	30%	18%	12%

Table 3: Perception of supporters on security issues.

	Increase presence of police	Prohibit organised supporters	No visiting supporters	More stewards needed	Mediators of conflicts needed	More dialogue with supporters
<i>Agree</i>	60%	49%	36%	84%	63%	51%
<i>Disagree</i>	2%	18%	33%	3%	6%	3%

Table 4: Perception of BEPE officers about security issues.

Police views, perhaps unsurprisingly, are rather more divided. It can be also observed in Table 3 that BEPE's officers overwhelmingly agree with the idea of more stewards to support and relieve their work. The police also agree - in significant number - with the idea of more police presence and more dialogue with supporters, a view mirrored by our fan samples. However, almost half of police respondents (49%) agree with the ban of organised groups of supporters - fewer than one-in-four fans (23%) feel the same way. Supporters were also strongly against total bans on visiting fans, while police views were much more split on the matter. When supporters discuss violence and abuse on the part of authority figures at soccer events (i.e., the police), 98 individuals (40%) claimed to have been victims of official misbehaviour, at least once. It is perhaps useful at this point to quote the words of one of the leaders of an organised 'end' at stadium in this respect:

BEPE has done an important job to allow us to come back [into the stadium]. If it was not for them, there would be even more physical violence and confrontations. However, two factors have avoided sustainable peace. Most of us - by that I mean members of *torcidas organizadas* - we simply like fighting and that complicates things for everyone. Thus, even though we respect the battalion, they treat us as an authoritarian father. They say what we can, and we cannot, do. They do not allow us to have a more egalitarian dialogue.

We need to specify, however, that the BEPE is not the only police body active at stadiums; the Shock Unit (outside and inside), the Civil Police (inside and outside), and the Mounted Police (outside) also intervene. However, out of the 33 members of BEPE surveyed, only four claimed to have seen some abuse by authority figures. This may suggest a loyalty to the collective, or else, a view that, in the context of soccer almost any act from the police towards supporters may be construed as legitimate. Now, if we dive into perceptions of other forms of abuse and discrimination (racial or sexual), the answers from out 243 supporters show that 140 (56%) said that 'never' saw, or heard, any form of sexual discrimination at soccer events, even though a significant number observed chants and abusive songs aimed towards opponents routinely calling rival players and fans 'homosexuals'. Our observational fieldwork confirmed that around 60% of the chants deployed at stadiums contain homophobic

words against opponents. For the police, out of the 33 members consulted, 15 (45%) stated that never saw, nor heard, any form of sexual discrimination or homophobic chanting. Perhaps this is even more alarming, given their role in enforcing equality statutes. Moreover, this sort of abuse is not the monopoly of organised fans. In every single game we attended, ordinary fans (those not belonging to *torcidas organizadas*) from all kinds of ages and backgrounds, including male and female supporters, ‘insulted’ rivals’ players, referees and also their own players with homophobic abuse; but what about clubs, journalists and other actors in relation to these incidents and abuses?

AUTHORITIES AND JOURNALISM: PUBLIC DISCOURSES AROUND FAN VIOLENCE AND ABUSES

If we look into the role of the mainstream media in Brazil, it can be interpreted as being among the most deeply established groups in terms of the organization and representation of soccer. A main holding has held the rights to broadcasting games for decades in the country, to the point where they have provided more financial resources to clubs than ticket selling, and they have regularly scheduled kick-off times according to their interests. Sometimes they delay games because of their own TV drama shows. As far as this research is concerned, we organised a seminar in May 2019 on how to promote peace in the stands through the construction and intervention of club-run social programmes and mixed-gender initiatives. No reporter of any media outlet showed up at the seminar. Since mid 2016, however, one of the most important written newspapers of the state of Goiás called the lead author on at least six occasions when physical violence relating to organised supporters was a focus for extensive coverage on TV. Nevertheless, one representative of each of the three elite clubs and one from the *Federação Goiana de Futebol* (the local football federation) showed up, plus two officials of the local Public Department of Justice; all of them were invited by the BEPE and around 60 fans who participated in the survey process. Besides the presentation, we offered to assist in the launching of practices adapted to the circumstances in the area. Strangely, perhaps, but also symbolically

powerful, a donation of blood between rival supporters was also suggested by the police. For all our well-intentioned propositions, nothing that was discussed, not a single idea or social action proposed, was appropriated by any of these agents.

It is also worth mentioning that a fan seminar organised by and for women of one of the three local clubs was held in January 2018, at the local Chamber of Representatives to discuss these and other issues. More than 200 female members were present and several women's leaders spoke about their experiences within the *torcida*, or simply as soccer fans. This seminar was observed by the main author. However, no women from the other two clubs were invited and no replication of the initiative has ever taken place. Our informants had divergent opinions about the idea of a separated fan movement for females. Whereas some believed that a women's formation could operate with autonomy in relation to organised fan groups, others stressed that they could only be a branch of the whole entity, subject to the decisions and orientations of the (male) supporters.³⁷ It was also significant that while some women were willing to advocate for a less violent atmosphere, others were keen to celebrate victorious fights and even the deaths of 'enemies'. They were as deeply invested in local rivalries as some male fans were. This challenged the possibility of a consistent solidarity and cohesion among local female fan groups.

Another seminar, this time organised by the research team in September 2019 at the Federal University in the City, also focused on the role of women, in more general terms about their place in the history of football in Brazil delivered by one of the authors of this paper. Although we invited media outlets; again, no media representative appeared. In addition to that, one of the clubs was already playing at the first division of the national championship and there was pressure to develop their women's team, no official of any of the elite clubs came or even replied to the formal invitation. We also noticed, through ethnographic fieldwork, that the soccer authorities and even the public address announcements at the stadiums in Goiânia, do

³⁷ NETTO. Desigualdades de gênero no futebol: o caso das torcidas organizadas em Goiás, p. 2.

nothing to combat homophobic expressions. On the contrary, informal conversations and off-the-record comments with clubs authorities and local fans made to our team confirmed that those involved rather enjoyed the verbal abuse aimed at rivals, especially soccer players, as a means of destabilizing them emotionally. Furthermore, our interactions with the traditional local media outlets were not that different. Several journalists were interviewed by the parallel Master's dissertation student about homophobia in this state of the central region of Brazil. Under the shield of anonymity, half of the 18 interviewees stated that such expressions were 'normal', mere banter, part of Brazilian soccer-folklore. All these interactions experienced led us to acknowledge that there were no genuine interests in changing the prevailing atmosphere of football of Goiás by the soccer authorities, the mainstream media, a large majority of organised fans and the public bodies involved (in any form other than punishment for physical aggression by fans). This is one reason why we propose different approaches for further research.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This research was initially focused on the different perceptions of supporters and the military police about violence in soccer events in Goiânia, capital of Goiás, Brazil. Accordingly, some of the common ground of the hooliganism theory was considered in order to grasp international parallels and discern specificities of the local context. Some features were indeed remarkably similar to research findings produced by British –especially between the 70s and 80s-, other European and also Argentinean scholars: rivalry based on honour and prestige among peers; in other words, competition to deploy hegemonic masculinity. Strain and aggression between supporters and police can be also considered among other similar characteristics the 'old' British environment at stadiums and the current state in Argentina. However, we would like to stress particularities from this specific research. We are well aware that the full observational fieldwork and the surveys would not have been feasible (especially the section aimed at the Police Unit of Events) without the support of

Lieutenant, now Captain Junqueira. He acted as a key gatekeeper allowing access both to the BEPE and to local fan groups. We reckon, in this vein, that this unit has made important efforts to engage, both with researchers and organised supporters, although they are the main public security body at stadia and make recommendation to the authorities, this body share the final policy making decisions with other established groups. The BEPE authorities might disagree with this point of view, since they stress that they have been trying to settle meetings and discuss sensitive matters, periodically, with organised supporters. However, we realized that police exercise authority over fans in a way which is not about promoting 'egalitarian dialogue.' So, this style of management of soccer crowds and the unstable engagement to respect agreements from important segments of fans led the police, 'inevitably' to adopt -and maintain- 'high profile', militaristic policing.

Our initial, and perhaps rather naïve hypothesis was that violent episodes were the likely product of strain among fans on the one hand, and supporters against police on the other. Our interactions, during the last phase of research, with clubs' authorities, supporters, police and journalists led us to modify our discussion. It would be difficult, though not impossible, to introduce, gradually, a lower profile of policing at soccer stadia in Goiás, at least inside the venues. If we just consider the responses of the officers who were consulted, they agreed with the idea of more stewards, but that would, in fact, require more investment in training from clubs as well as a reduction in police numbers. We also need to be realistic and reckon that a lower profile of policing does not exclusively depend upon the BEPE. As far as we could ascertain, police bodies believe that they deliver the best possible service. We have never heard any senior police official offer any public admission of mistakes made. This also happens in Argentina and, indeed in England in the decades between 1960 and 1990.³⁸

³⁸ NEWSON. Football, Fan Violence, Identity Fusion, p. 433.

Other relevant findings suggest that elites clubs in Goiânia have shown a clear lack of interest in creating cosmetic, never mind structural changes to what they currently do. According to our local informants from every side, these clubs care only about three immediate things: the result of the following game; how to obtain more money from players' transfers and TV rights; and how to be in a better position than their two local rivals. Unlike other clubs who work with a diverse sample of supporters – including gays and lesbian groups, fans of African-descendants, women, fans with disabilities, and even social scientists – as it seems to be the case in the coastal state of Bahia;³⁹ the professional clubs in Goiânia seem far away from this more progressive approach. Similar reflections occur in relation to mainstream media, as they have been interested only in covering physical violence, condemning organised supporters and sometimes the police, but have shown no sensitivity at all towards playing a bigger role in fostering a more peaceful atmosphere at soccer. Maybe this approach conflicts with dominant values?

We propose then a different, and perhaps deeper, perspective for further research and preventative work. In order to reduce violence, confrontations and abuse, and to produce wider impacts, at least on the local championship of Goiás, a collective change in the prevailing culture is desperately required. However, this change will not come easily based on establishing consent among different actors. That scenario would mean reducing the power gap between the established ones and the peripheral groups who are not heard, not really considered - as authors such as Elias and Scotson,⁴⁰ Hughes and Goodwin⁴¹ have theoretically put forward in reading unequal balances of power in socially interdependent relations. In order to have a concrete starting point in this case, we would suggest actors to adopt sustainable and different roles to negotiate change. Yet, what kind of change? Due to the hetero-

³⁹ LAW. How Bahia became the most progressive soccer club in Brazil. Disponível em: <https://bityli.com/Pr8Mt>. Acesso em 20 dez. 2019, p. 1.

⁴⁰ ELIAS; SCOTSON. *The Established and the Outsiders*, p. 5.

⁴¹ HUGHES; GOODWIN. Established-Outsider relations and figurational analysis, p. 8.

normative values prevailing, this may be a long and problematic path, full of obstacles laid out by some of the established agents and even colluded in by some peripheral ones. An urgent truce is more than needed for a shift that requires working on new generations of supporters and police, as well as on representatives of the soccer and public authorities. We are also aware that an effort of mainstream journalism should also be part of the change. With the current trend to highlight and even amplify violent episodes, but no real interest in covering seminars and take part in debates to foster peace, all of this seems more a message of hope than a realistic path. There is not enough general consensus; for example, about tackling homophobia and its partner dominant hegemonic-masculinity. We call, nevertheless, for different public polices and more social science research applied to alert about these features identified. This sort of approach may, ideally, mean attempts to build substantial different female spaces at the stadiums and in terms of more support for women's soccer, along with the creation of community mixed-gender programmes where young supporters of different teams could meet, interact and reflect about a different atmosphere. Whether elite clubs are willing to underpin these initiatives is unclear, but perhaps with enough pressure of other actors they might be led to provide support.

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