

Football, a factor of globalization

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Abstract: *Football, the most popular sport globally, is a global phenomenon, being considered one of the most important factors of globalization that continues to play an essential role in promoting values such as team spirit, respect and perseverance. From a simple sports game, football has become a real complex social phenomenon.*

In our study, we aimed to address a phenomenon increasingly encountered both on and off the football field. Thus, we analyzed the incidents triggered during the Romania vs. Kosovo football match, which resulted in the Kosovo team leaving the field with only two minutes of play remaining. We also discussed a more severe incident that led to the outbreak of a war, the so-called "Football War." We deemed it necessary to analyze the behavior of players, as many specialists argue that the spectacle of football has turned into a stage for violence, with these violent tendencies among players being driven by the athletes' anxiety.

Keywords: *football, global phenomenon, globalization, anxiety*

Football, the most popular sport globally, is a global phenomenon, being considered one of the most important factors of globalization that continues to play an essential role in promoting values such as team spirit, respect and perseverance. From a simple sports game, football has become a real complex social phenomenon.(2)

In the current context, the focus is increasingly on inclusion, diversity and sustainability, which makes football a powerful tool for education and social cohesion. The role of the ambassadors of this sport is to inspire future generations, promote fair play and support initiatives that contribute to the development of this global phenomenon.

In his ethnological analysis, Christian Bromberger notes that football evolved into a "small but extremely serious thing", gaining "academic legitimacy" in England in the 1970s and becoming a well-defined field of research today.

Shortly before the start of the Paris 2024 Olympics, a Parisian magazine publishes detailed information about football, highlighting its links with various societies and highlighting its status as a global sport. Football is considered by some to be the most practiced sport worldwide and is perceived as a complex social phenomenon, in which the public plays an essential role.

The first researches, carried out especially by sports journalists, focused on the legends and history of football as a phenomenon of global proportions. Subsequent studies have sought to analyze the social and political impact of the sport, as well as its organizational structure and day-to-day functioning, including controversies and scandals that reflect the dynamics of society as a whole.

From this perspective, social psychology and ethnography analyze in particular themes such as "the revitalization of nationalisms", social identity, relations between different groups, the hooliganic behaviors of supporters and their involvement in the phenomenon of "collective disorder". (1)

Other research on football addresses its economic dimension, including labour migration, with a particular focus on the migration of English players between 1945 and 1995. Nowadays, football has become a topic of major interest in the fields of communication and media, being considered a global phenomenon and described as "the supreme stage of globalization."(16)

Recent studies present another aspect, namely that the game of football is perceived as a form of addiction for the public, a psychological regression, a return to archaic models or an activity characteristic of a certain social class. Also, some specialists believe that researchers tend to ignore the important role that football can play as a "cultural and symbolic binder". (3,8)

Football has become the success story that dominates the twentieth century, due to the superior valences that. (20)

Sport brings people together. At its best, it contributes to their health and happiness by breaking down barriers and creating trust and community spirit. For more than four decades, the Council of Europe has supported fair play and respect in sport, fighting corruption and contributing to the practice of sport that is safe, ethical and accessible to all. This work contributes to the creation of inclusive democratic societies that respect human rights and the state.(24)

In a society of the twenty-first century, where the principles and rules of civilization promote tolerance and respect for the fundamental rights of every person, and xenophobic, extremist and intolerant manifestations seem to be, paradoxically, more frequent than exceptional, it is no coincidence that this dark side of society often comes to light in the context of sporting events.

Initially, the Olympics represented the essence of the Olympic spirit, including games, observance of the principles of fair play, control of aggressive impulses and the establishment of a truce between opponents. Today, however, it has become a competition between individuals and nations, an opportunity to gain fame, financial gain, admiration, and the desire to dominate.

Aggressive instincts manifest themselves obviously within the limits set by the sports rules, and the social need to belong to a group is reflected in the support of a team or a representative team, often degenerating in an irrational way.

Sportsmanship has also changed, it is not necessarily the favorite team that proves to be more talented and wins the match, but rather the feeling that "we" are beating "them". The frustrations and dissatisfactions of everyday life are, in a surprising way, transferred to the sports context, and a victory in this field becomes an event of national scope.

"Games and sports in highly competitive Western societies are characterized by anything but cooperativeness."

Sport has become, in the modern world, the only activity in which violence is accepted. Therefore, in order to understand the violence associated with sport, we must not limit ourselves only to acts of interpersonal aggression on the field, but also to the mentality specific to this form of sports organization within our society.

In this context, the football match between Romania and Kosovo who met in the Nations League is also part of it, when in the minutes of extra time, at 0-0, Amir Rrahmani, the Kosovar captain and player for Napoli, had a physical conflict with Denis Alibec, who reacted in his turn. In a tense context, apparently premeditated by the visiting team, they caused an incident in the last minutes of extra time, when it was obvious that they could no longer get the victory. The behavior of the Kosovars aroused the discontent of the supporters on the pitch, who began to chant the name of Serbia, a country with which Kosovo continues to have an unresolved conflict.

This moment caused the Kosovo team, coached by Franco Foda, to leave the field, although there were only two minutes left to play.

This is where the Kosovo team's tense show began, with captain Rrahmani leading his teammates off the pitch. This gesture was perceived as a defiance of the Danish referee brigade, which refused to suspend the match. Given that only the Romanian team remained on the field, the discussions continued. At first, the Kosovar coach, Franco Foda, seemed willing to accept the resumption of the game for the remaining two minutes, and the match was to restart with a free kick in favor of Romania, from the corner of the box, on the right side.

After almost an hour of waiting, during which the Kosovo team remained in the locker rooms, and the Romanian players endured the cold, with temperatures of -2 degrees Celsius at midnight, referee Krogh returned to the field and blew the final whistle, in the absence of the Kosovars.

Amir Rrahmani, the defender of the Kosovo team, said: "After we entered the dressing room, the fans started shouting even louder 'Kosovo is Serbia'. At that moment, we decided not to return to the field," according to Telegraf Sport.

Tensions continued at the press conference, where the visiting team maintained a provocative and confrontational attitude.

The tense relations between Romania and Kosovo seem to be getting worse, especially in the context of the September 2023 match at the National Arena, played in the Euro 2024 qualifiers.

Although Romania won 2-0, the game was marked by an incident that led to a 49-minute interruption due to chants from the stands. Before the meeting, the Romanian Football Federation had initiated a campaign calling on supporters to avoid challenges addressed to the visiting team.

The main heroes of these political disputes on the football fields become the supporters, numerous studies reporting on the emotions they experience at football shows, (23), about the way the supporters manage their emotions, feelings, (17), or the rivalry between the fans of the teams on the field.(9)

Some research has also revealed the violence on numerous levels. (21, 22)

At the press conference, coach Mircea Lucescu had a vehement reaction, criticizing a behavior that, in his opinion, should not exist at such a competitive level.

Mircea Lucescu, Romania's coach, said: "Nothing happened against them. Nothing was said about Kosovo, no banners were displayed, nothing. Their behavior shows that everything was prepared for such a situation. Certainly, it was premeditated."

The incident was also reported by the biggest sports publications in Europe. L'Equipe noted: "Romania - Kosovo, interrupted due to racist chants from the public."

The Serbian supporters of Red Star Belgrade also had numerous reactions to the incidents in Romania, at the National Arena, painting graffiti on a building in Kraljevo. The painting made by Serbian supporters represents the flags of Serbia and Romania along with the following messages: **"Orthodox brothers! Kosovo and Serbia! Bessarabia is Romania!"**

On November 24, 2024, the UEFA Disciplinary Committee officially announced the result of the Romania-Kosovo match in the Nations League, in which the Romanian team won 3-0, but the Romanian Football Federation was fined 128,000 euros.

Romania will play an official match without supporters in the stands, which will lead to financial losses that can reach up to one million euros.

The Kosovo players, who incited the public and displayed indecent gestures when leaving the field, were not sanctioned. The Kosovo federation was fined €6,000 for "inappropriate behaviour", without further details.

The incidents during the match took place in a very delicate political context, due to the emergence of government policies that run football both nationally and internationally.(15)

Kosovo proclaimed its independence from Serbia in 2008 after a violent conflict in the 1990s. However, not all governments recognize Kosovo as a sovereign state, among the countries that have not accepted it are Romania, Spain, Greece, Cyprus, Slovakia and, of course, Serbia. In this context, UEFA's decision could include measures to prevent future meetings between Romania and Kosovo, given recent events.

Kosovo, officially **the Republic of Kosovo**, a partially recognized state and disputed territory, located on the Balkan Peninsula in southeastern Europe, which declared its independence from Serbia in February 2008.

Kosovo was a province of Yugoslavia, with a long history under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, and since 1918 it has been part of the federal state of Belgrade.

After its dissolution following the German-Italian occupation of 1941-1944, Kosovo was annexed to Albania, which in turn was part of fascist Italy.

After 1944, the region returned to the authority of the new Yugoslav communist state led by Josip Broz Tito, but benefited from considerable autonomy.

After Tito's death, the authorities in Belgrade began to put increasing pressure for the integration of the province into Serbia, and this step was materialized in 1989 under the leadership of Slobodan Milošević.

UN Security Council Resolution 1244 of 1999 gave Kosovo a "significant autonomy" within Yugoslavia. Supported by most Western countries, including the United States, Kosovo forces unilaterally declared independence in 2008.

In 2010, the UN's International Court of Justice ruled that Kosovo's declaration of independence did not violate international law.

So far, 99 states out of the 193 members of the UN have recognized Kosovo, but Russia and China, permanent members of the Security Council, have not done so, thus blocking Kosovo's accession to the UN.

At the same time, five of the 27 member states of the European Union (Spain, Romania, Greece, Slovakia and Cyprus) have not recognized Kosovo's independence.

Serbian supporters reacted immediately after the events of the Romania-Kosovo match at the National Arena.

After the match, Red Star Belgrade fans made a graffiti on a street in Kraljevo, through which they wanted to express their solidarity with the Romanian supporters. The graffiti featured the flags of Serbia and Romania, accompanied by the messages: "Orthodox brothers! Kosovo and Serbia! Bessarabia is Romania!", according to the source Casual Romania. In competitions organized by UEFA, such messages are strictly prohibited.

There are also other political, military or diplomatic conflicts that prevent football matches from being played, such as Armenia – Azerbaijan, Serbia – Kosovo, Spain – Gibraltar and Russia – Ukraine.

Due to the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian army on February 24, 2022, measures have been taken regarding sports competitions.

Thus, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) issued a statement asking international sports structures to cancel the events that were to be held in Russia or Belarus.

At the same time as these actions, many teams have stopped participating in sports actions in Russia, and some European and international sports federations have imposed indirect sanctions on Russia and Belarus, including the disqualification or withdrawal of football teams.

There are few studies that present the cruel truth that exists behind disputes on the football field, and present the truth about supporters, tradition, history, conflicts, Buhler and Nufer (2012), Ferrand and McCarthy (2008), because extremely complicated relationships have been created between sport and politics.

Nelson Mandela, 2000, at the first Laureus Awards ceremony "Sport has the ability to transform the world. It manages to unite people in a unique way, difficult to achieve by other means. It is a form of communication that young people understand instinctively. Sport brings hope where despair reigns and has greater power than governments in removing racial barriers. It defies any form of discrimination. The heroes that sport gives birth to are proof of this strength. They are brave not only on the ground, but also in their communities, where they inspire and offer hope to people around the world.

But unfortunately some disputes on the field even led to the outbreak of wars, the "Football War" or "Guerra del futbol" being a military conflict that broke out between El Salvador and Honduras, triggered after a football match between the two Central American teams.

Although there were some military tensions, the event that triggered the "100 Hour War" was the confrontation of June 26, 1969, held as part of the qualifiers for the 1970 World Cup.

The conflicts between the two Central American states had older roots. While in El Salvador the four million inhabitants lived on a small area of 21,146 km², a similar population in Honduras enjoyed a much more generous territory, of 112,088 km². (5)

In 1969, in the midst of the qualifying campaign for the World Cup in Mexico, Honduras and El Salvador faced each other in two play-off matches for a place in the tournament. The first game, held on June 6, 1969, in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, takes place in the context of a teachers' strike. They, as a form of protest, scatter nails on the roads, causing numerous punctures of rubber. Among those affected are the players of the El Salvador team, who interpret the incident as a deliberate act of sabotage.

The game itself was extremely tense, and the Honduran national team managed to win 1-0, thanks to a goal scored by Welsh in the last moments of the game. Enthusiastic about the victory, the hosts' supporters set fire to the stadium in celebration!

The second match took place on June 15, 1969, in San Salvador, where the Honduran team was received in an extremely hostile atmosphere. Honduras' national symbols, such as the flag and coat of arms, were desecrated, and the hotel where the players were staying was set on fire by angry locals. After moving to a new location, the footballers were kept awake all night by noisy serenades under their windows.

The victory went to the team from El Salvador and won with a score of 3-0.

The decisive match scheduled for June 27 in Mexico City attracted huge attention throughout the Central American region. Newspapers and radio stations dedicated ample space to this event, and thousands of fans from Honduras and El Salvador headed for the Mexican capital, wanting either to attend the match or to be as close as possible to the epicenter of the action.

Following a balanced confrontation marked by numerous acts of violence, El Salvador won with a score of 3-2.

An explosion of violence engulfs spectators outside the stadium, where fighting and chaos result in casualties and injuries, surpassing the capacity of Mexico City hospitals to handle the situation.

The losers launch accusations of corruption against the referees and unfair behavior against the winning team. The threats and insults, initially subtle and unofficial, quickly become direct, involving even the highest political levels of the two states. A few hours after the end of the match, Honduras decides to break diplomatic relations with El Salvador.

On July 14, the conflict known as the "football war" escalates, and El Salvador initiates military operations.

These include both ground attacks, where they mobilize 12,000 soldiers, and air strikes. Within a day, the Salvadoran army occupied several cities, but the advance was halted due to lack of fuel, after Honduras, better prepared in terms of aviation, bombed the oil depots in Acajutla.

For El Salvador, the return of refugees has caused considerable economic hardship, but it has also led to an intensification of guerrilla warfare and the outbreak of a civil war.

In 1976, the two countries agreed to resolve the conflict with the help of a Peruvian mediator.

It was not until 1980, in Lima, that a peace treaty was signed that provided for the peaceful resolution of border disputes.

There are also numerous examples of this kind, in which the football spectacle turned into a violent scene, but specialists believe that these violent outbursts of the players are determined by the anxiety of the athletes. (4)

According to the Psychological Encyclopedia (Kazdin, 2000), anxiety is defined as an emotion marked by states of tension, worrying thoughts and physiological changes, such as increased blood pressure, muscle tension, palpitations, feeling faint, headaches, nausea, feeling empty in the stomach.

Holdevici (2002, 13) - Highlights that anxiety is a "vague" fear, lacking a clearly defined object, and emphasizes that an anxious person feels constantly threatened, living in a perpetual state of restlessness, without fully understanding what exactly causes this fear.

This aspect is very important in the current context, which coaches must also take into account because conflicts on the field can easily turn into disasters.

In the sports context, especially the football one, anxiety occurs when the athlete is afraid that he will not respond appropriately to the situations or incidents that have arisen during the match.(10)

Specialists have defined this state of anxiety among footballers as a succession of events that unfold over time, each triggering the following: a stressful factor leads to the perception of danger, which, in turn, generates the state of anxiety. (7)

Starting from this state of anxiety manifested during sports competitions, specialists have come to the conclusion that the ability to regulate emotions can translate into emotional intelligence in sports. This has been defined -the aggregated or overall capacity of an individual to act with purpose, think rationally, and navigate the environment they are part of.(19)

Salovey and Mayer (1990) defined emotional intelligence as "the ability to monitor one's own feelings and emotions, as well as those of others, to differentiate between them, and to use information to guide an individual's thinking and action." (19)

Analyzing the subject from the perspective of sport, the literature reveals that) have highlighted the link between emotional intelligence and sports activity, emphasizing that athletes tend to accept the emotions they experience without analyzing them critically and constructively.(14)

Meyer (2007) points out that emotional intelligence includes various components, such as perceiving and managing emotions, that play a significant role in optimizing performance.

Laborde, Dosseville, Allen highlight, based on the analyzed research, that athletes with a high level of emotional intelligence, tend to achieve better results and be more successful both mentally and physically, contributing to improved performance and satisfaction related to it.(13)

Finally, the European political socialization of the individual was achieved by combining a logic of involvement, by participating in specially designed activities, with one of competences summarized in knowledge about the EU. The analyzed campaign is part of the double approach necessary for public actors: resizing the place of politics in society and resuming the way of communicating with the public.

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