

Soccer under Authoritarian Regimes

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Soccer has been trying to find its place in the university and intellectual system since the first academic stories in the seventies. For the research workers today, it is slowly becoming legitimate to show soccer in its creative dimension as a sport taking part in the development of social and political and in its role in the construction of personal and collective identities. The historiography and the sociology of soccer, as the game itself, are developing unevenly around the world. Its success is nevertheless increasing. It is without doubt one of the strong symbol of globalization. The research carried out on the subject is taking more and more innovative and original paths, thus largely expanding our knowledge. It enables a better understanding of our societies, of their development, their strains and their contradictions.

Soccer under authoritarian regimes is the overall thematic of this issue. Numerous studies and publications about the instrumentalization of sports in general, and of soccer in particular, have already been released. Mussolini's 1934 World Cup in fascist Italy, the operation of Nazi propaganda during the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin, 1978 World Cup in Argentina whose generals counted on a resurgence of legitimacy and popularity and 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing symbolizing China's rise are some well-known examples. Recently, the World Cup in Putin's Russia or in Qatar show how topical the subject is. Doping policies structured by the State powers to assert successful sports policies and to restore the States' image are another aspect of the instrumentalization of sports by authoritarian regimes. This ordinary practice during the Cold War is far from over as the recent penalties against Russia in athletics show it.

The purpose of this issue is not to revisit these well-known and already fully analysed events. Its main purpose is to understand how authoritarian regimes respond to the various protests and objections brought into existence by soccer competitions in their countries.

Authoritarian regimes are often exposed to stadiums where strong protests are expressed and which are, by nature, out of control. Indeed, no regime, however harsh it may be, is able to totally control its civil society. The latter tries to gain more autonomy in order to loosen the noose created by the dictatorships. This issue is an attempt to analyse the strains and the contradictions faced by numerous authoritarian regimes through their setting-up of sporting events in general, and of soccer games in particular. Good results or the setting up of prestigious international competitions can benefit the leaders, if only by serving as a diversion to the daily social or political problems. At the same time, no power, whatever its nature, is able to control sports arenas. How do we control the chants and the catcalls of tens of thousands of people ? Who are the leaders ? It is impossible to have a policeman looking over the shoulder of every supporter. Stadiums have often been the sounding boards of protestations and resistance to authoritarian regimes. We know how soccer clubs can be the bearers of local, social, religious or political identities. In every regime, soccer stadiums offer various possibilities of liberated, deviant or anti-establishment behaviours. Moreover, the most active groups have the habit of collective and organized actions to support their teams. The tifos, chants and choreography require an organization and a structure that may, in some cases, become a contestation and protest structured movement. Needless to say that each situation is peculiar and that there is no automatic

action. Supporters may be seized upon by the regime for the sake of national interest or to resist an internal or an external enemy. There is no reason of glorifying the supporters. They can both serve the interests of the regime and sometimes express discontent, opposition and protest. Moreover, they are not united in the grandstands where they can represent different neighbourhoods or social groups. They are even fierce adversaries whose rivalries, sometimes full of hate, prevent any common actions.

The problem of managing the stadiums and supporters is far from being the only issue which authoritarian regimes have to face. For instance, the “soviet” regimes had to manage the issue of their best players’ payments which went against their ideals of amateur sport and social equality. In Iran, the issue of the regime’s inability to enforce its religious rules, the women’s access to stadiums, etc. produces important strains.

The works of this issue show the close relationship between soccer and politics, but this connivance must not be seen as a fatality. They present the uniqueness of each situation characterized by its singular relationship with soccer which does not play the same role all the time and in every State. There are also different kind of authoritarian powers. The diversity of the situations, the regimes and the historical periods under consideration is the great richness of this publication.

Brice Fossard studies in the case of the French colonial regime in Vietnam. At first, one might think that soccer has not played an important political role in this country. He reveals that, on the contrary, it has been used to put up a strong Annamite resistance to the French settlers. He shows the strains of the Vietnamese society and how, during the colonial period, soccer became, for a part of the local population, one of the significant means of their struggle for independence. The nationalist project of a radical elite had found a dissemination tool : soccer.

In his article, Fabien Archambault proposes a qualified viewpoint of the relationship between soccer and the Italian fascist regime. He reminds us that soccer was not a national sport under Mussolini but will be the ultimate brand of Italian modernity in the sixties. His article questions the fascization of the society. During the interwar period, soccer was very popular amongst the Italian urban middle class where it flourished with the help of an upper-middle-class elite with which the regime had to negotiate. Even if it is less popular than cycling, box or athletics, it comes within the scope of the first wave of the democratization process of the practice of sports before 1914. Step by step, it won its place in the national sports system thanks to the industrialists’ involvement and the State’s tolerance. The lack of interest from the State gave soccer clubs their omnipotence ; Mussolini remained indifferent to the success of the “Serie A”.

The “Soviet-style” regimes in Eastern Europe are the subjects of three studies addressing the theme under different and original point of view.

Sylvain Dufraisse points out the problematic issue of the payments of their top athletes for the Communist States in general, and in particular, for the Soviet Union. What is the best way to control the financial bonus and forbid the gifts in societies promoting egalitarianism ? It could only create tensions and divergent interests. It is interesting to understand how the

regime tried to find solutions throughout the different periods. The subject is not new as, since 1920, the Physical Culture Committee had been trying very hard to find a way to adjust the athletes' wages to the Socialist model. On the basis of Russian records, the article reveals that the desire to reform the world of sports during Khrushchev and Brejnev's regimes encountered a resistance which weakened the Soviet power's actions. In an era where soccer was becoming more and more popular and visible, the issue of payments illustrates the professionalization of Soviet sports as well as the ambiguous status of soccer. The prestige coming with victories goes hand in hand with the intensification of opaque payments appealing the best players. As there was no strong sports administration after the Second World War, the Army, the Ministry of Home Affairs and other ministries and State bodies were the sponsoring suppliers.

Robert Adam reveals how Romanian soccer has been exploited as an instrument of propaganda to the benefit of the Communist power. It also shows that it has given a rare opportunity to express disagreements towards the government in power. The author analyses the difficulties soccer encountered to adapt itself to the authoritarian policies of successive regimes in Romania from 1938 to 1989. Soccer was already popular at the beginning of the twentieth century, but became a matter of State and thus, an instrument of propaganda, with the establishment of Carol II's royal dictatorship. The regime then intensified its dominance. The Romanian soccer did not perform as well as its neighboring countries, but enjoyed a very successful period in the eighties which coincided with the self-sufficient withdrawal policy decided by Ceausescu. The prestige it had won strengthened the argument of the Communist society's pre-eminence throughout the world. On the other hand, inside the country, a power game between the clubs of the capital city representing either the Army or the Securitate took place. Some provincial clubs, including the most repressive regime of the Eastern Bloc, however, showed certain subversive tendencies at the risk of being relegated into lower leagues. The case of the Rapid Bucarest, the capital's "working class" club is a model of the protest expressed in grandstands ; the authorities also had to handle the defection of several icons who sought asylum in the West. It tarnished the golden image Ceausescu desperately tried to give of the pre-eminence of Communism.

Joris Lehnert's angle of approach concerning the case of East Germany is uncommon. He analyses the control of the public speech about violence in East German soccer by the Socialists. He favours video sources to point out the exploration potential of other sources than texts and sports newspapers. The author focuses on the episode of a very popular TV series in the then East Germany : *Abseits/Offside*. The authorities often used it to push through their conception of the world as well as detailed messages to their population. The episode states that violence in soccer is a non-political issue. It is depicted as a social issue whose main leaders are young people with deviant behaviours provoked by their excessive drinking, their psychological tendency or their social condition. The fiction structured around a youth gang aimed at creating a new reality compatible with the official position of the violence in the areas outside stadiums presented under socialism as a festive place.

Daghan Irak analyses the strategies used by Erdoğan's regime to establish its supremacy on Turkish soccer. In the nineteenth century, the latter was introduced by the weakened Ottoman Empire as a modernization concept amongst other ideas such as secularism and nationalism and it took part in the creation of the new Turkey. Erdoğan's growing

authoritarianism had to face the joint participation of supporters of the three big teams of Istanbul united for once to contest the authorities in demonstrations harshly repressed. Daghlan Irak analyses the numerous measures taken by the regime to impose its supremacy on Turkish soccer which played a social role too important to slip from its grasp : entry controls in front of the stadiums, attempts to influence the managers, instrumentalization of some stars playing in big clubs abroad supporting Erdoğan and even creation of new clubs meant to reduce the weight of Istanbul's historical clubs. According to the author, this must also be understood as an attempt to reinvent a neo-ottoman tradition of soccer. For the time being, it seems that the results, as well as the strategies implemented, are, to say the least, lukewarm.

Christian Bromberger analyses the repeated attempts of the Iranian political and religious authorities to try to control soccer and stadiums. Even if it only took root in the forties, it became a very popular sport. The Islamic State has from the beginning been suspicious of soccer, of its customs, its easy money, the soccer stars way of life and the less than ethical behaviours of its supporters in the stadiums. It even put a stop to the national championship during a few years before returning to it at the beginning of the nineties. The clubs belong to the State system. The regime's attempts to control the sports arenas by trying to convince the supporters of behaving in a moral and pious way remain mostly unanswered at proving the limits of the propaganda's influence and the difficulties it poses to the Mullahs' regime. The stadium is almost the only place of freedom where behaviours considered as deviant can take place. So does after the important victories won by the clubs or the national team arousing misbehaviour such as chants and dances intolerable in the eyes of the religious ethos. The presence of women in stadiums or the women playing soccer also put the authorities in a difficult position within the international sports bodies as well as within the urban classes of the large Iranian cities. Which is of particular interest in this study is that it shows the difficulties encountered by an authoritarian regime for religious motives.

Célestin Mvutsebanka deals with the situation in Burundi, a small country in Central Africa bearing the marks of a deadly civil war. The current authoritarian regime is all the more interesting as its leaders instrumentalize soccer in two ways. On the one hand, Pierre Nkurinziza, 55, keeps playing exhibition games to show his footballing talents which are often lauded by his political supporters. One can indeed imagine the opposing team's fear of playing against such an opponent. These games played in the regions are used as a propaganda tool showing a president close to his people. The regime controls all the world of soccer as far as the remote villages and it allows it to establish a substantial social control.

On the other hand, the regime challenged by both its opposition and a great part of the international community also uses soccer as a means of national reconciliation. It organizes matches between ethnic groups to try to build peace through soccer. By organizing these games, the power, yet divisive at the level of domestic politics, can be seen as leading an original policy of reconciliation.

The cases studied therefore cover different types of authoritarian regimes (fascist, Marxist-Leninist, and theocratic). They also cover different periods and regions of the world. There is also a methodological diversity: some are field studies, others are based on archives.

All the articles examine how the various authoritarian regimes have attempted to exploit football to their advantage. But they all highlight the many problems encountered by these states in the management of football. Not all of them are organized resistance against the regime. Ideological contradictions can sometimes lead to significant contradictions between the regime's ideological or moral discourse and the attitudes of supporters or football club leaders.

It would be simplistic to conclude that football has been or is an instrument of resistance to authoritarianism, but it would be equally wrong to conclude that football is simply an instrument in the hands of dictatorships to strengthen their power. Provoking large gatherings of the population, it carries within it the potential for resistance and protest.