

Categorisations and transformations of rooting for: Comparative analysis concerning the sportiveness of watching

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Abstract

Our proposal is to conduct an ethnographic, conceptual, comparative debate concerning the sportiveness of watching, beginning with sociological and emic categories that describe the performance of supporters' clubs in a specific sport, professional football. We will focus on the 'games' between categories that define the spheres of 'rooting for' (a team) in a Brazilian urban context and then contrast these with performances of 'rooting for' (a fighter) in another sports landscape, an Amerindian form of ritual combat that takes place during the interethnic rituals of *egitsü* (*Quarup*) in Upper Xingu, Brazil. The dialectical relationship between playing and rooting for, mediated by watching, constitutes what we define as a 'model of relationships', an analytical and ethnographic construct used to problematise analyses that assume rooting for as a subsidiary and/or epiphenomenal condition of playing.

Keywords: rooting for; football; the sportiveness of watching; ritual combat; Xinguan interethnic rituals

Categorizações e transformações do torcer: Análise comparativa em torno da esportividade do olhar

Resumo

Nossa proposta é realizar um debate etnográfico, conceitual e comparativo em torno da esportividade do olhar, partindo de categorias sociológicas e êmicas que descrevem a atuação de coletivos torcedores numa modalidade específica, o futebol profissional. Focaremos os “jogos” entre categorias que definem as esferas do torcer num contexto urbano brasileiro para em seguida contrastar às performances do torcer em outra paisagem esportificada, uma luta corporal ameríndia que ocorre durante os rituais interétnicos do *egitsü* (Quarup) no Alto-Xingu/BR. A relação dialética entre jogar e torcer, mediada pelo olhar, compõe aquilo que definimos por “modelo das relações”, constructo analítico e etnográfico utilizado para problematizar análises que tomam o torcer como condição subsidiária e ou epifenomênica do jogar.

Palavras-chave: torcer; futebol; esportividade do olhar, lutas corporais; rituais interétnicos xinguanos

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Background

In their multiple manifestations, playful and sportive practices harbour an expressive set of phenomena that take the form of universalised, mass spectacles. Regarding football specifically, a phenomenon with an intense global presence, it is revealing how this sport and related themes, including the fan experience that surrounds it, were not embraced without reservations in academic studies, both by modern historiography and the human sciences. It is evident today that football is an interdisciplinary subject, recognised in a vast, dense and highly diverse bibliography. With regard to European social sciences, sociological thinking was tasked with placing itself at the forefront of sports studies through wide-ranging analytical models¹.

In this sense, football is imposed as a participant in the historical processes in the transformation of playful bodily activities inserted in a broad westernising process condensed in play practices, which promoted social interactions and urban sociability interlaced with other domains of social life. One canonical example we consider worth citing is the inevitable contributions to historical sociology that thrived around Norbert Elias, an author who advanced sports and football as social facts of relevance on a scale of political and historical importance equal to other phenomena revealed in their sociogenetic interdependencies (Elias and Dunning, 1985; Garrigou and Lacroix, 1997).

While regarding the diverse empirical landscape revealed by this sociological movement to embrace the phenomenon, in Brazil, a large part of the most crucial studies on football originated in another academic field, social anthropology (DaMatta et al., 1982), which has informed investigative paths and provided further impetus for the theme in the social sciences. The methodological and theoretical itineraries of the discipline inflected approaches that stressed the same phenomena of European and American games and sports within the field, in which various meanings of the notion of culture were imposed on that of society.

Thus, football as ritual, as a participant in processes of the symbolisation of identity, or as an expression of classificatory regimes of otherness, took the lead in anthropological approaches. Tributary to this initial movement, known for the rupture it established with various historicist and sociological theses on such themes as ideology, power and stratification (Volpicelli, 1967; Vinnai, 1970), this inaugural culturalist anthropology of football facilitated the transposition of football to the centre of debates on symbolic aspects of nationality.

Later, approaches of a more ethnographic nature were imposed on academic literature as methodological requirements, while football as ritual, which advocated the perspective of the performances of playing, began to embrace other expressive domains within it, enunciating the point of view of watching and imposing an epistemological tension on sociological studies based on playing as a determining instance of practice.

¹ Assessments of analytical models and theoretical approaches to sports themes by social sciences, in Europe and Latin America, have been detailed in recent works (Toledo, 2019; Costa and Toledo, 2022, 2023).

In addition to the aforementioned pioneering essays in anthropology (DaMatta et al., 1982), research from other contiguous disciplinary areas focused their analyses on notions that include nation, identity, power and ideology, violence, media and mass culture, modernity and globalisation (Meihy and Witter, 1982; Pimenta, 1997; Helal, 1997; Pereira, 2000; Gastaldo, 2002; Morais, Ratton and Barreto, 2008; Florenzano, 2009; Mascarenhas, 2009; Maricato, 2014; Buarque de Hollanda and Burlamarqui, 2014; Simões, 2023).

From an ethnographic perspective, and as a methodological reference, numerous themes related to football have become evident, including approaches to working classes, youth, urban sociability, body and person (Araújo, 1980; Leite Lopes and Maresca, 1992; Toledo, 1996; Guedes, 1997; Teixeira, 2003), which combined with other aspects, particularly after the so-called *década esportiva* [sporting decade]², such as professionalisation, race, gender and sexuality, and social markers of difference (Damo, 2007; Rial, 2008; Silva, 2008; Toledo and Costa, 2009; Spaggiari, 2016; Pisani, 2018; Toledo and Camargo, 2018). Given this multiplicity in the understanding of football: ‘an “instrument of meaning” emptied of its own aspects and filled with other meanings’ (Guedes, 2023 [1977]: 80), it has become increasingly imperative to approach it in its expressive multiplicity as ‘footballs’ (Damo, 2018).

More recently, the comparative enterprise, another proposition raised by this article that has almost always been at the mercy of a broad spectrum of factual views and sociological assumptions, gained the refinement of emic and ethnographic comparisons from another anthropological perspective. Contributing to the discussion of ontological regimes, another epistemological schism was advanced in studies of ludic phenomena, including football itself, which, as is well known, also expanded into non-Western landscapes, above all ethnological.

By developing the description and analysis of bodily disputes that are part of countless ethnographic landscapes, with rich empirical diversity, ‘Amerindian sports’ were approached based on their own categories, mythologies, rituals, and relationalities. Although maintaining different perspectives and interests, authors like Blanchard (1981); Fassheber (2006); Vianna (2008); Course (2008); Delgado (2010); Avelar (2010); Walker (2013), followed similar paths by suggesting similarities between cosmologies, native body disputes, and Western sports. Football, in particular, is a sport that is increasingly consolidating itself as a model of interethnic relationships, ‘the others of our others’, and a principle of spatial/temporal ordering, whether in the daily life of the village or when inserted into the ritual calendar (Costa 2021a).

The itinerary of this article begins with the scenario briefly outlined above, to embrace sportive practices from the perspective of watching, in a categorical movement concerning the notion of rooting for (someone or something) and its prevalent classifications that provide dynamism to an enhanced sociability based on football. Another aspect we focus on here are observations from the perspective of rooting for in other landscapes concerning Amerindian ritual and play practices, specifically their examination in the Indigenous context of a region called the Upper Xingu interethnic complex.

We seek to provide a comparative effort of apparently discontinuous ethnographic landscapes, but which, considered from a categorical point of view, enable us to observe symbolic extensions of categories resulting from both the uniqueness and expansion of playful and sportive practices. The uniqueness is due to the place of ‘rooting for’ in a ritual combat, *kindene*, an ethnography of which was developed with interlocutors of the Kalapalo people, speakers of the Karib language.

This expansion will be verified based on the play of categories of rooting for in the context of Brazilian urban sociability, conveyed to alternative regimes of otherness, as a practice contiguous to Amerindian ritual expressions, as verified in the case of the *kindene* ritual combat and its relationships with the practices of playing and of rooting for.

² The ‘*década esportiva*’ is how the period during which Brazil held some of the world’s main sporting events became known: the Pan American Games (2007), Military World Games (2011), FIFA Confederations Cup (2013), FIFA World Cup (2014), World Indigenous Games (2015) and the Rio Olympics and Paralympics (2016). For further reading, see: Damo and Oliven (2013) and Spaggiari, Machado and Giglio (2016).

The model of relationships

The most general assumption of the model of relationships (Toledo, 2019) is to consider the condition of whoever participates as that of spectator, a universal position in every play and sports system, in the generic category of supporter, that is, those whose representational condition is to root for others who play. It is intuitive to think that in the practice of football, nobody is born a player, a football club manager or a sports journalist, and of course, nobody is born a supporter, but as a stage of possible trajectories, this is probably the most ubiquitous condition and as important as the practice of playing in the definition of the sportive *person*.

Rooting for (someone or something) is a collectively socialised personal pursuit that situates the person in a subjective, emotional turmoil often inherited from family circles and close relationships. However, rooting for is also a reversible condition, after all, at the end of their professional careers, former players or former sports managers can recognise themselves as supporters. Thus, it also imposes itself as a fluctuating condition, pivoting and superimposed on other categories in every sporting culture.

The model of relationships seeks to place under dialectical examination that established as developments of a socio-historical sharing between two sensorial constitutive instances of any sports practice, namely, playing and watching, successively expressed metaphorically in the specialisations and knowledge around two defining nuclei of a social sports organisation, roughly subdivided between those who play or promote the game and those who watch it.

This key, which seeks to criticise the models that presume to or epistemologically depart from this dissociation or dichotomy between playing and watching, we propose that such sensorial qualities operate better through syntheses in which playing is watching and watching is playing, inferring in each of them other dialectical relationships, denominated *play watching* and *watch playing*. In other words, every act of *playing* is also an experience of *watching*, just as every act of *watching* presupposes some form of *playing* in the political distribution of the sensible within play experiences. *Rooting for*, which is one of the expressions of *watching* within sports culture, expands into movements of bodily surrender and expressive techniques, assuming an existential, political and tactical space within the institutional spheres of football.

First, we discuss rooting for and its expansions in sports culture and the Brazilian socio-anthropological context of category appropriations, after which we focus on the uniqueness of an Amerindian playful phenomenon – *kindene* ritual combat. In this combat, rooting for both singularises and exposes the socio-cosmological relationship between ritual and play (Lévi-Strauss, 1962), while providing dynamism to relational alterities.

Rooting for in Brazilian football and categorical multiplicity

Rooting for is not seldom defined as either another functional sociological role or stylisation of fun, leisure, play, or subsumed to subjective functions and, in such cases, conditions a regressive psychologising interpretation that shifts it within an alienable essentialist mass meaning (Vinnai, 1970; Sebreli, 1981). In general, the idea of *rooting for* is also based on the notion of indivisibility from the person as supporter, the result of an order conceived as an intimate personal choice.

The ethnographic view seeks to avoid the generic and instrumental uses of *rooting for* subsumed by sociological totalisations, in which the individual who experiences sport from the functional perspective of *playing* is, more accurately, a citizen, a parent, a sibling, a worker, etc., and from the perspective of *rooting for*, an epiphenomenon with emotional compensatory purposes for other denser, more fundamental relational properties. The universe of the fanatical supporter and the production of native categories that define it re-establish aesthetic and expressive political experiences that put such notions in critical perspective.

In Brazil, fans were historically designated by the collective category *assistência* [audience] (Toledo, 2014), which clearly showed the role of distancing in relation to the sensorial attributes of those who played. Another

category used at the same time was *sócio* [member, partner], and together they formed the first repertoire of terms that were most continually used in journalistic narratives since the first decades of sports activity at the turn of the twentieth century.

Sócio designated the most engaged and committed figure within the clubs (associations that offered sports practices), someone who was linked to numerous tasks that condensed various experiences, from *playing* to *rooting for*. The figure of the *sócio* largely remains in football clubs today, occupying recreational, administrative and/or political positions, since *playing* has gained substantial autonomy in the regimes of professionalisation among high-performance athletes.

The formation of communities increasingly interested in the expressive embodied activity of rooting for linked the vicarious gaze to the commodification of the practice supported by political and economic rationalism, conferring a reciprocal but hierarchical commitment to the relationship between *playing* and *rooting for* in the form of sporting spectacles.

Assistência (audience) came to express greater emotional engagement with the *watching* transfigured into *rooting for* (supporters), although obviously such designations likely have overlapping origins. Currently, little or nothing about rooting for refers to the category of audience, which in the process of the metaphorisation of its original meaning fell into disuse and unfolded into numerous semantic functions, pressuring the perceptions between *playing* and *watching*.

Subsumed in another category beyond *rooting for*, *audience* was diluted into a more ubiquitous political category: *the public*. It should be noted that spectator is a term oriented by the perspective of the institutionalisation of *playing*, which remains common and instrumental up to the present to designate gregarious dynamics and phenomena or political rhetoric. Based on contractual rationality, the notion of *the public* is aggregated to long-term processes that relate to pacts of mutual responsibility between legally equal individuals supported in the relationships between rights and duties, an appanage of Western societies.

Watching, and above all *rooting for*, in principle an action verb (Malaia, 2012), when encompassed by the more generic notion of *the public*, came to mean choices guided by rationalised conceptions within an expanding sports sphere, ceasing to be manifestations determined solely by individual will and local wilful bodily expressivities.

Categories like *the public* and *sports public* began to confer a normative vector to the sporting practices of *rooting for*, a process controlled or symbolically motivated by the conventions present in football towards institutionalised forms of spectacularisation.

However, this process of the convention and extension of metaphors (Wagner, 1981) of *rooting for* in the notion of *the public* or *the supporter public*, which further promoted the distancing effects between *playing* (an increasingly monetised activity) and *rooting for* (a recreational activity), did not deter the emergence of more ambiguous categories in which, over decades and from the perspective of *watching*, some games of definition in the supporters' struggle for existential and political spaces began to compete with the universality and seriousness of the expression *supporter public* in the institutional arrangement of football.

Thus, *massa* [crowd], *povo* [peeps], *galera* [posse], *nação* [nation], etc., and other much more contemporary, dialectal and local groups present in popular fan speech, such as *facção*, *falange*, *consulado*, *bonde*, *pista*,³ continuously re-semanticise and reinvent rooting for, which from the point of view of the sportiveness of watching seeks to question the universality present in the generic, distanced and aseptic category of *spectators*.

After critical events dating back to the mid-1980s in European stadiums (Roversi, 1990; Bromberger et al., 1995) and then attested to in the 1990s throughout Brazil (Toledo 1996) and in other Latin American countries

³ These terms are indicative of elements of a team's fan base, with an implicit sense of confrontation: *facção* means faction; *falange* relates to battle lines; *consulado* refers to consulate, a subdivision of a 'nation' of supporters; *bonde* is similar to *galera*, meaning posse or crew; while *pista* is a reference to motorways, though in a more allegorical sense: *pista* refers to fans who accompany their teams to away games, who are prone to violence and commit transgressions during the trip.

(Alabarces et al., 2005), the propensity of ‘supporters’ (fans, supporters, hooligans, ultras, *kurves*, *barra bravas*, *hinchadas*, *torcidas organizadas*)⁴ was contained by a broad agenda of state reforms focused on the theme of public security in several countries, with England as the epicentre, through a recomposition of professional spectacle football, for many defined by neoliberal directives aimed at popular exclusion and the elitisation of spectacle football (Giulianotti, 2002).

In the Brazilian context, the category of *the public* was subject to re-semanticisation within categorical games seen from the perspective of those who control the conventions of *playing*. The compound term *sócio-torcedor* [partner-fan], also identified in the terms *consumer fan* and *customer fan*, composed the list of new categories that began to constitute the repertoire of restructuring spectacle football in Brazil from the year 2000 onwards (Simões, 2017).

Public policies induced numerous demands, including consumer rights, the judicialisation of fan transgressions and issues related to stadium safety and leisure in sports venues, generally called for the use of these ‘neutral’ functional categories of the public, consumer and customer. The scope and heuristic character of these categories participate in political and legal decision-making within a process that turned sports into a serious economic phenomenon aimed at maximising rooting for as belonging to the spheres of consumption.

It is clear that the idea of consumption is polysemic and also subject to metaphorisation from the perspective of *watching*, and therefore subject to appropriations in categories based on the perspective of rooting for, given that the very dynamics of transgressions between fan collectives are often considered to be agonistic games of consumption.

Nevertheless, separated from *playing* by the assumption of the category of sports fans, in yet another expansion of the categorical set in which the supporter is also defined as consumer, *rooting for* is separated from ‘sportive’ and even from the original political semantic function associated with *the public*, promoting the economic sphere of consumption as a central referent in its definition, at least from the more hegemonic point of view of the current perspective of *playing* in which the supporter is restricted to the condition of customer.

If, from the point of view of *playing*, the categories of *audience*, *sports audience*, *sports fan*, *sports consumer*, *partner-fan* and *customer* lead to generic transformations within the production process of the spectacle of football, others, such as *crowd*, *nation*, *faction*, *posse*, *crew*, etc., compose the set of native categories attentive to the demands coming from supporters, forming new domains within the logic of metaphorisations that affect the same unfolding historical process in dialectically confronted relationships between the perspectives of *playing* and *rooting for*.

Mixing categories

These sets of categories more or less established by *playing* and *rooting for* are eventually subjected to appropriations, mixtures, juxtapositions and exchanges among themselves, promoting an anarchy or metaphorical abuse (Almeida, 1999:10) in which categories from the perspective of *rooting for* are tested against the sets of categories that have been consecrated from the perspective of *playing* and vice versa.

Within these two sets that dispute the meanings of *rooting for*, at least two belong to both, they are the generic categories supporters and supporters’ clubs. Centred both on the notion of the ‘individual’ (supporter/fan) and on its collective extension (supporters’ club), these categories blur the line that places institutional experiences and demands around *playing* on one side and on the other, the mass of anonymous individuals involved in political projects that are sensitive to the more collectivised demands of *rooting for*, which strain the spheres of a consumptive sportive individualism.

⁴ The native European categories fans, supporters, hooligans, ultras, have relative equivalents throughout Latin America. *Kurves* seems to be very similar to ultras; *barra bravas* are considered dangerous, shout endless chants and use fireworks; *hinchadas* are characterized by chants, flags, supporting dancers and choreographies; while the most popular supporters’ clubs in Brazil are known as *torcidas organizadas*. In addition to their performative and transgressive character, these supporters’ groups show similar features as popular, cultural and political institutions.

Beginning with the generic category *supporters* (and beyond the popular allegorical appropriations *rabble*, *crowd*, *nation*, *posse*, etc.), the culture of football in Brazil has encountered alternative popular collectivist phenomena since the advent of *torcidas uniformizadas*, uniformed fan collectives that from the 1940s onwards gained visibility and political participation on the premises of the first large stadiums built in the country; the inauguration of Maracanã in 1950 is the most emblematic edifice that re-dimensioned football as a spectacle of mass presence.

However, it is the generic category of *supporters* that can be defined as promoting greater transversality and that glides between the categorical games. From the perspective of those who mobilise around *playing*, the supporter appears to be explicitly named and contemplated in the legal system through the *Estatuto do Torcedor* [The Statute of the Supporter], enacted in 2003 (Law n°. 10.671)⁵, which established rules for fan behaviour by formalising a set of rights and duties subject to the consumerist perspective (the right to consume).

Therefore, supporters and supporters' clubs are maintained as interchangeable terms and dispute meanings in contiguous and distinct contexts, feeding notions that refer to rooting for both in popular spheres of sociability (*crowd*, *crew*, *nation*, *posse*) and in support of the legal categories of *consumer public*, *consumer supporter*, *customer*.

Importing categories, maintaining the playing/watching dialectic

There are categories outside the context of Brazilian supporters that have transposed and come to accommodate sports culture. These categories have even edged into socio-anthropological analyses, suggesting exchanges and importations of both ethnographic and conceptual experiences. Thus, here we focus on the descriptor with the most important semantic and metaphorical extension, the political designation of *hooligan*.

Hooligan was a category that became popular in several European sporting contexts due to critical events that have taken place in England since at least the 1960s, but which gained enormous and dramatic visibility in the 1980s, re-dimensioning the production relations of spectacle football in neoliberal moulds and, beginning in the United Kingdom (Giulianotti, 2002), a football management model that assumed the designation of 'modernisation' and was related to issues of fan safety (Tsoukala, 2009), above all, oriented towards the management of spectacles in stadiums. In subsequent decades, its metaphorical uses and expansions would acquire other landscapes, affecting fan behaviour in Latin America.

The specific political phenomenon of hooliganism ended up stimulating a set of concrete actions that began to define a new institutional rationality, gaining autonomy as a diffuse synonym of fan transgression and soon appeared as an inclusive category coupled with numerous other behaviours, while equally serving as political rhetoric to combat violence in sports in distinct landscapes.

Although *hooligan* was not the only category associated with fan transgressions – *barras bravas* used by fans in South America is a contiguous example and partly imported by Brazilian supporters; *ultras* is another European category that appears in the supporter imaginary of the South American continent –,⁶ the uses of this expression soon assumed a generic designation of groups of contending supporters in Brazil and gained vocative primacy, especially from the 1990s onwards.

Substituting while also contrasting with the supporters' clubs created in the 1940s, the emergence of the so-called *torcidas organizadas* in the 1970s (Toledo, 1996) were strongly associated with the category of *hooligans* due to their contentiousness and autonomy regarding the way they conducted themselves within the spheres of rooting for, often in open confrontation with the sports institutions that legislate playing. Complex in their social composition, they were systematically blamed for all 'fan violence', a known stigmatising expression

⁵ The *Estatuto do Torcedor* [Statute of the Supporter] (2003) is a conceptual development of another normative piece dating from 1990, the Statute of the Consumer (Law n°. 8.078).

⁶ As noted by some authors, like Bolaños (2016) in Colombia, and Argentine researchers assembled in a collection organised by Alabarces et al. (2005).

that promoted the dispersion of conflicts and spread a convenient fear so that projects for the elitisation of football would gain moral support and that of public opinion.

At present, hooligan behaviour has been retrieved in fan conduct associated with other categories, such as *bonde*, *facção* and *pista*. From the supporters' point of view, the use of these categories, forged in the context of more transgressive youth groups, tend to enhance the visibility of more forceful forms of horizontal (among supporters) and vertical confrontations (with police) when compared with the sociability present in current *torcidas organizadas*.

After numerous attempts to criminalise the more transgressive *torcidas organizadas* throughout the country, these supporters' associations became politicised in the sense of affirming other demands and collective projects of insertion in the institutional context of football and popular sports culture. In any case, they were protagonists in a scenario fuelled by decades of deliberate promotion of conceptual extension that subsumed the category of organised supporters into that of hooliganism.

In contemporary times, the presence of a myriad of more autonomous demands regarding rooting for, contenders for and adjacent to *hooliganism*, like those observed in associations designated *bonde* and *torcidas de pista* in Brazil, *barra bravas* in Argentina, as well as the presence of collectives on the right (ultras) and left (antifas) of the ideological spectrum, is due to the diverse responses of supporters in the face of overpowering processes of modernisation that redefined the vectors of consumerist exclusion in countless projects concerning the symbolic reframing of the presence of supporters at football spectacles.

In short, the sportiveness of watching understood through the model of relationships allows for disputes over the categories of rooting for to be situated at the epicentre of political phenomena bound to playing, a movement commonly characterised ethnocentrically as civilisational, urban and modern. However, the sportiveness of watching is not necessarily a prerogative of Western historical societies.

We now subject the model of relationships, which recommends that the instances between watching and playing are taken to be dialectic, to an examination of another ethnographic landscape. Here, the ontological exteriority of *rooting for* is taken into account, radicalised by explicitly establishing other approximations between watching and playing, which comparatively open up to new terminological and performative adventures of rooting for.

Supporter transformations: *watching/playing/rooting for* in Upper Xinguan ritual combat

One of the main conceptual concerns regarding the diverse ethnic and linguistic group that inhabits the region known as Upper Xingu, in the southern portion of the Xingu Indigenous Territory,⁷ is considering the 'limits' that differentiate them from neighbouring peoples, an alleged idea of 'totality', or even 'Upper Xinguan specificity' (Hugh-Jones et al., 2015). The peoples traditionally described as forming this regional complex are: the Kalapalo, Kuikuro, Matipu and Nahukua (*karib*); the Yawalapiti, Wauja, Mehinaku (*arawak*); and the Aweti and Kamayurá (*tupi*). They live according to a regime of matrimonial, commercial and ceremonial exchanges, wherein the ritual universe is the presumed 'lingua franca' in this communication system⁸.

The region has been the focus of an extensive literature over a wide range of topics,⁹ and a form of wrestling has been described since pioneering authors Von den Steinen (1894), Murphy and Quain (1955) and Schaden

7 The *Território Indígena do Xingu* [Xingu Indigenous Territory] is located in Mato Grosso, Brazil. Within its extension there are numerous indigenous groups located among the sources of the Xingu River. For details on Law no. 50.455 of April 14, 1961, which demarcated the area, see Lea (1997).

8 An intense debate concerning what the 'upper Xingu system' is gave rise to the dossier: '*Antropologia, arqueologia e linguística no Alto Xingu*' [Anthropology, archaeology and linguistics in the Upper Xingu], recently published in volume 18, number 1 of the *Boletim do Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi – Série Humanas Ciências* (Barcelos Neto and Valentini, 2023). War and ritual, chieftaincy and sorcery, commercial and marriage exchange networks, food, genealogy, were all themes raised that indicate the relevance of the notion in the integration between peoples. The most general idea defended here is that *kindene* is one of the ethnographic aspects that configure this notion, one of the differential markings that consolidated the interethnic group around what is known as Upper Xingu.

9 Within our objectives, we highlight the so-called 'language of corporeality' and the processes of building of the body and construction of the person that provided new impetus to the ethnology of the South American lowlands (Overing, 1977; Viveiros de Castro, 1979) directly linked to the universe of ritual combat.

(1965). Following the demarcation of the Xingu Indigenous Territory, authors began to more fully consider the relational universe that was encompassed the regimes of exchange that were formed and the gradual abandonment of the practice of warfare (Menget, 1978; Menezes Bastos, 1989; Gregor, 1990), consolidating what became known as the *pax xinguana* [Xinguan peace]. This transformations between war and ritual (Costa, 2022), metaphorised in the transformation of the enemy into an adversary, situated both in native discourses and in theoretical references, is discussed here according to the variable positions taken by fighters and supporters during interethnic confrontations. Despite the diversity of this ceremonial complex, we specifically focus on the post-funerary ritual *egitsü*, better known as *Quarup*, as the central theme, since it is in *Quarup* that the *kindene hekugu* [real fight] takes place.

Kindene, also known as *huka-huka*, is a form of grappling combat between two opponents in which the objective is to reach the back of the opponent's leg, hold him from behind or apply some type of throw. It is a very technical combat, with many different movements and tactics, in which competitors move around in circles before colliding with the aim of grabbing the opponent's hands and neck. The intention is to disrupt and unbalance the opposing fighter so that you can reach the back of their leg, a result that, due to the distance between the fighters and their supporters, can generate doubts and contradictions concerning the results, triggering ambiguous celebrations.

Currently, as a way of dealing with this ambiguity, each *sinhongo* [supporter's group] sends a representative who remains close to the fighters precisely to 'watch' the matches. They are known as *nginiko* (lit. 'watchers'), and are former champions who get close to the fighters and incite the participation of the supporters every time a grab leaves room for doubt. Sometimes each of them calls different results, which are accompanied by the respective supporters, transferring emotions between the effective competitors and their collective supporters (Costa, 2021b).

The fights are fast and intense, with a large predominance of draws – not losing is one of the main qualities of great champions. It is worth noting that fights between champions take place separately, one fight at a time, the purpose of which is to grant visibility to the best fighters. These champions, who go through differential processes of constructing their bodies and their formation as people (Costa, 2020), are presented at the regional level as potential future caciques and, at this stage in life, being a champion is fundamental in the construction of their biographies. The other combats take place at the same time, following the same rules and developments, with more than 20 simultaneous fights.

Another organisational division is that established between competing teams: the hosts confront the guests separately, competing in many more combats than their opponents. The relational dynamic, anchored in kinship, means that a regime of alliances and oppositions begin with the relationships between the caciques and the deceased being honoured. Relatives of the dead form part of the same combat team, allied with the hosts, and face off against the other guests.¹⁰ These dynamics are situational, with teams changing at each new ritual in honour of the deceased of each occasion, which highlights the idea of *tetsualü*, the 'mixture', the 'colour' among the peoples of the region (Mehinaku, 2010).

This ethnic and linguistic multiplicity, experienced during a period of the abandonment of warlike practices in the name of matrimonial, commercial and ceremonial exchanges, ended up reshaping interethnic relationships between the different peoples that live in the region. Here we consider, through the model of relationships, the way in which the ritual combat is a typical example of this transformation. Initially, when instability in the relationships and the possibility of warfare was a constant, there was a certain inseparability between war and ritual, in the sense that both were conducted at the same time and among the same peoples,

¹⁰ For a better appreciation of ritual positions in *egitsü*, Guerreiro (2015), Fausto (2017). Here we specifically discuss the combat teams that reverberate among the supporters: hosts plus allies versus guests, with interchangeable positions at each event.

depending on a set of factors. This is common in the literature more specifically on the theme of war in the region, and in the many stories that are told about warrior incursions and the extermination of peoples.

It is evident in the works of earlier authors, such as the aforementioned Steinen and Schaden, who indicate how the relationship between the supporters was such that their participation was almost nil, abstaining from celebration or provocation, due to the ambiguity of being face to face with potential enemies, even though they were competing in a fighting modality. However, due to the transformation processes that the region has gone through, the *pax xinguana*, this group of peoples, sometimes uniting alterities under the same name in the same village despite their internal differences, eventually consolidated this regional system. Gradually other peoples stopped being invited, owing to the absence of fighters. As this occurred, the performances of the supporters became more active and it is in this sense that we highlight the transformations in rooting for, since their participation in the combats continues to increase, which also makes the fight a function of rooting for.

If commemoration was previously subdued, today it is roused to action by the figure of the *nginiko*, the ‘watcher’, hence the emphasis on these transformations, despite the consolidation of the *pax xinguana*, because like in any other sporting or disputed environment, rivalries can arise and fights occur, and the performance of the caciques is essential to calm people’s tempers.

Relational multiplicities

For the Kalapalo,¹¹ *kuge hekugu* [real people] is a kind of self-reference, coming out of the *otomo*, meaning ‘the people of’, denoting familiar surroundings commonly related to some territory. *Kuge* (people) are those with whom interethnic relationships are established, whether through rituals, commercial trades, matrimonial exchanges, in short, the nine peoples who share the same way of life: a fish-based diet, pacifism, circular villages, the avoidance among affines. *Ngikogo* are ‘different others’, Indigenous populations with whom they have sporadic contacts, ‘ugly, angry’ peoples, the image of distant, dangerous otherness. Lastly, there are the *kagaiha*, ‘whites’. Knowing how to fight is an essential condition to be considered *kuge*, that is, the fight, among other aspects, assumes the condition of mediator of relationships of otherness.

Following this relational dynamic, which associates and differentiates through distance gradients, Patrick Menget (1977) highlights that the idea of ‘totality’ in the Upper Xinguan system is concentrated in two institutions: the kinship system and war, principally through processes of name capture. Although we will not discuss these fundamental issues here, especially given the transformations between war and ritual experienced through combat, we emphasise the notions that Menget develops concerning the so-called ‘morphological levels’ in an attempt to identify the elements of identity and otherness present in intra and interethnic relationships: the domestic fire, the most intrafamilial level; the village, intermediate level; and the regional level, marked mainly by the set of interethnic ceremonies.

Beginning with the most intra-sociability, kinship in the domestic nucleus and its spatial expansion, first to the patio of the village, the public, the place of late afternoon conversations, the model attains the regional system, markedly ritualised interethnic relationships, the place of sociality, expanding even more when going beyond the confines of those considered to be *kuge* (people).

Observing this intricate system of alliances and oppositions that compose the ritual universe allows us to glimpse the background relationship that interests us here, that is, between fighters at the peak of their performances – *egitsü* – and the supporters’ groups that change according to kinship relationships between the chiefs and the honoured deceased.

¹¹ The people with whom one of the authors of this text conducted 14 months of field research to complete his doctoral thesis (Costa, 2013).

In the case of Upper Xingu, and the entire discussion concerning the biographical character of champion fighters, of their individuality (Barcelos Neto, 2012), what happens is that the constructing their bodies and their formation as people are connected to their results in the fights during *egitsü*. When demonstrating this biographical character, it overlaps with others that modulate a whole relational set of 'supporters' that moves beyond a more restricted, familial level, and expands until it achieves what we might call a higher level, which is precisely the final showdown in *egitsü*. A unique moment in the set of interethnic relationships in which all the peoples are present in the same space/time. The expectations and frustrations that associate fighters and supporters, and the ways in which these emotions are transferred during ritual combat, construct this path from the individual to the collective, and from the collective to the individual.

Thus, we have the family nucleus that produces champions (the idea of a house), and the associations surrounding a cacique that promote a village, which through kinship relationships form the fight teams that, in turn, form contextual supporter associations between a set of houses and a set of other villages related through kinship between the deceased and those honoured. These champions and their respective supporters face off against other groups formed from the same relationships, or even through the previously mentioned overlaps that inform these levels.

Therefore, what happens with the relationships that involve the supporter universe in Upper Xinguan ritual combat is directly linked to the context of producing alliances for the fight and rooting for within the regional complex. Choosing opposing fighters is, to a certain extent, choosing supporters, which brings them closer to our perspective of played watching and or watched playing, given the imbrication of both processes: the formation of fighters from the *otomo* and the formation of supporters from the alliances. Thus, rooting for is revealed less by the supposed instance of a fleeting subjectivity (rooting for as a merely personal recreational form) and alienated from fighting (playing), and assumes an act of deciding within more fluid political agreements given the possibilities of disputes revealed in expressive interethnic relationships.

The peculiar outcomes with these Indigenous supporters' groups are that rivals in one *egitsü* may root for their former opponent in the following event, and the supporters act the same, shouting out the victory or calling a draw. Despite this variety, those who form part of the same crowd in a specific event will root for their fighter, even when he is not from the same town or village as the supporter. This symbiosis between fighter and supporters promotes immediate identifications, marked by ritual time/space, that breaks through the boundaries of villages, ethnicities, linguistics. In other words, it is as if this process establishes the necessary connection between *playing* and *rooting for*, anchored in a system marked by ethnic and linguistic variation, whose components sustain associations or rivalries through kinship relationships.

We return to the transformations highlighted in the literature on rooting for and the way in which regional pacification changed supporters' performances, even ratifying the central position of the *nginiko* (Costa, 2023). If in the past, supporters were supposed to abstain from any manifestations due to the inherent risks that placed them face to face with potential enemies, today their participation is incited. In other words, there is an appeal to the sportisation of this participation that confers some homology to that which occurs in the sphere of football. Here, the dispute between the fighters is transferred/transformed into a dispute between supporters through the *nginiko*, promoting a situational variability, a *played watching* that transfers the emotions of the fight to the performances of the 'watchers' themselves who define who the winner is.

Beyond this performative transformation of supporters, who connect with the played practice through the eyes of these *nginiko*, it is important to emphasise that the variability in the collectives formed is the distinguishing mark of the universe of rooting for in relation to the combat. In contrast to that discussed in relation to the universe of football, here it is not a question of expanding and mixing games of categorisation, which presupposes the historical and epistemological separation engendered between playing and rooting for, but rather emphasising the volatility and the way in which such dynamics are directly linked to the sociological

precepts in their ethnographic context. Thus, once again we emphasise the importance of kinship and the contextual relationships of alliances formed in this organisation of the teams, since it is through them that the supporters are also consolidated.

We have then a relational set that begins with involvement at the most familial, domestic sociability, and evolves through consanguinity as a mark of kinship and the construction of bodies and the formation of people, specifically in the figure of the fighter. This is projected in interethnic relationships, in the domain of sociality, when facing other champions in ritual moments sustained by new extensions of rooting for.

Final considerations: the sportiveness of watching

We began with the example of the sportiveness of watching established in the category of *audience*, in a still tenuous urban context of the emergence of football in Brazil at the onset of the twentieth century, to homologously observe the presence of Xinguan *nginiko*, the ‘watchers’, who induce incisive forms of supporter competitiveness in *kindene* combat within a traditional funeral ritual. Our efforts sought to clarify that the perspective adopted here is not intended to establish immediate comparisons, but rather to articulate ethnographic and conceptual expansions within what we define as a model of relationships.

Football, a reference modality in sports studies, and *kindene* combat, originating from ethnological research, both spheres of *play*, were considered from the same perspective, that of *rooting for*. It was possible to observe the different ways that these modalities of *playing* enter into a dialectical regime with *rooting for*, with the supporters and with the categories that define them in each case.

The universalist historical vocation that imposes a sociological separation between playing and watching football allowed for the establishment of the incessant production of political categories of rooting for, in the same movement that it does not conceal the games and tensions that concern the manner in which supporters accommodate, experience or question the historical transformations within the institutionalization of this sporting modality.

Whereas with regard to supporters in the ritual combat, the issue lies in the interethnic complexity marked by kinship and the language of corporeality, which are defined and concern the apogee of the cacique-fighter. Far from the stylisation or complete autonomy of the fighter, competitiveness in current times establishes the sportiveness of watching the combat as an indicator of interethnic pacification, revealed in the supporters who amplify the forms of the results forged in the supporter relationships, approximating the fighting (playing) and the rooting for.

The categories of rooting for in football have tended towards speculative movement between two sets that reveal distances, proximities and mixtures, accommodating the expansions of *rooting for* that surround a *playing* that is intended to be increasingly circumscribed by the commoditisation of rooting for. This movement was never spontaneous, but articulated to the forms of playing that re-dimensioned football into a globalised, mass, mega spectacle within expanded production policies, as advocated by the concept of the ‘FIFA standard’, aimed at establishing or domesticating both the organisational forms of playing and the expressive, not infrequently political and insurgent, forms of rooting for.

In the Xinguan context of ritual combat, due to the ceremonial organisation, the kinship between the caciques and the deceased to be honoured, the caciques gather around them their peoples and their allies, building teams and situational supporters’ groups. If certain people are participating together with others, they root for fighters in common. However, if they are in antagonistic positions in the next event, opponents in the fights, they will root against that same fighter.

The profusion of alliances, intimately linked to kinship, is experienced in different ways at each new ritual, as each of them honours the deceased with whom they had their own relationships. Ethnographically,

it is like rooting for a fighter who is now an ally, due to the fact that he is part of the same fighting team as the supporter, while in the next event it could be that they are rooting against the same fighter. The supporters are formed at each new ritual and are internally differentiated based on the language of kinship, but with the decisive idea of *tetsualü* [mixture], which begins at the more restricted, familiar level and expands to the formation of an ethnic identity, marked by pluralism.

Thus, the transformations of rooting for are considered from the imminent risks of animosities, to the consolidation of the *pax xinguana*, while also marked by variations in kinship among the caciques and those honoured, which change with each new ritual. Thus, if we sought to classify the supporters' groups of Upper Xingu fighters, who actively participate in the developments of the combats through their own performances, it would be like fusing several layers, one top of the other, based on the diverse ethnic mixture.

It should be emphasising that, in this case, unlike the terminological disputes present in rooting for in football, the practice of rooting for is the same, since singing and shouting about the victory of your competitor or calling a tie to end the fight and start the next one characterises the only condition for or category of rooting for. What changes is the composition of the supporters, not the very category that defines the sociological place of the supporter. Adhesions to teams of specific fighters are altered in different ways to account for these dynamic relationships of otherness.

However, both football and *kindene* ritual combat do not encourage the existence of their supporters solely for reasons that sociologically justify the former as mere consumers of a spectacle and the latter as formers of alliances aimed at strengthen the victory of fighters. Indeed, the forms of rooting for in each specific context dialectically connect the sportiveness of watching the bodily forms of playing and fighting, where one transforms the other in reciprocal speculative movements.

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