Central America's Soccer Fan Groups

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Introduction

This chapter addresses three questions: 1) How have Central American scholars approached the concept of soccer fan groups[2] in the region? 2) What are the main analytical categories in the region and how have they been employed? 3) What is the current state of the scholarship on this topic in the region?

The methodology involved advanced searches[3] in the following websites: *Redalyc, Dialnet, Latindex, Jstor, Google Scholar, ProQuest ebook* and *Scielo*[4]. This process was completed during the initial months of 2019, and yielded a total of fifteen documents related to soccer fan groups in the various Central American countries. The majority (ten) are articles published in scientific journals; the remainder are graduate theses or research reports that are available on the internet. It is worth mentioning that 11 of the 15 publications were made in and from Costa Rica, making it, according to the search, the only country in the region with sustained reflection on the subject, at least since 2005 and until today. There is likely additional research in the different Central American countries, but the internet search did not locate it.

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[2] Translation note: Throughout the chapter, the term "soccer fan group" is used to refer to the Spanish terms *barras organizadas, hinchadas,* and others. As posited in Rodríguez, Soto and Zúñiga (2019), this term cannot be defined *a priori* and has to be designed *in situ.* Per the chapter author, a basic definition is: a group of people, in the Latin American context mostly youth, who gather to support and encourage the soccer team they follow. This is key as it is the central reason why they gather. Other important aspects include: 1) the use of violence; 2) the use of specific symbology and ritualized practices; 3) total opposition to other soccer fan groups; 4) complex organizational structure, often with political qualities that involve the use of power.

[3] I thank BA student Isabel Sáenz Gutiérrez, who conducted the search as part of the courses I teach at the University of Costa Rica.

[4] Some of the keywords (in Spanish) employed in the search are: *hinchadas*, *barras,* soccer, violence, youth, gangs, Central America, Costa Rica, Panama, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, among others, which were combined to narrow the results.

From reading and systematizing the publications, I derived four categories[5] from which stems the critical summary of this chapter. These are: 1. Diachronic-temporal dimension: documents that emphasized the historical perspective of fan groups; 2. Cultural dimension: research that centered on rituals, symbols, youth configurations and identifications, etc.; 3. Forms of violence: studies that followed the tradition of focusing on this conceptualization of soccer fan groups; and 4. Structure and leadership: integration of structural and organizational aspects[6].

Before presenting this material, it is important to provide some general information about Central America. I will emphasize historical, demographic, political and sociocultural aspects, to clarify the context within which unfold the lives of people in the region who integrate these soccer fan groups.

Some Contextual Aspects of Central America

Central America has faced social, political, and economic processes that throughout its history have characterized it as a region full of contradictions and complexities, which have rendered impossible regional integration on the one hand, and on the other, the crystallization of processes that enable a worthy level of wellbeing for the majority of the isthmus's inhabitants.

Geary (2017) refers to the influence of the United States in the recent histories of the Central American nations (fundamentally, in the 1970s and 80s), which supported right-

[5] The information was processed using *Atlas-ti* software. It was grouped and classified in each of the categories; the data generated for each other delimits its analytical profile.

[6] A previous work by Onésimo Rodríguez, Diego Soto and Cindy Zúñiga (2019) references four analytical categories found in the analysis the authors make of the state of the research on soccer fan groups in Latin America: historicization, culture and identity, violence/*aguante*, and politics. Despite the proximity to this chapter, the categories outlined in this text are somewhat different; first, because they refer to a research effort that is analitically and geographically different, and second, because despite Central America forming part of Latin America, there are certain cultural specificities that suppose, in the case of soccer fan groups, alternative dynamics. For example, Central American studies don't refer to the *"aguante"* (dimension linked to violence), which is a central category in the south of the continent. With respect to the historical referent, fan groups exist in South America since the 1950s, and in Central America since the middle of the 1990s; therefore, it is impossible to refer to a history as in the case of the more extended South American one, but rather, as I posit here, of a shorter temporal dimension that include some processes that speak of the diachrony of the phenomenon. In addition, it is impossible to speak of the "political" dimension in Central America that exists for Latin America, because research in the isthmus refer only to structural and organizational aspects of fan groups, and no to a more complex "politics" as understood by Rodríguez, Soto and Zúñiga.

wing movements with the manifested intention of stopping the advancement of leftist movements, leading to the political and social destabilization of the region, generating exclusion, poverty, internal and external wars, and, evidently, thousands of deaths. These economic and political conflicts of the 1970s and 80s were gradually resolved in the 1990s; nonetheless, residues of that sociopolitical context remain.

According to the Fifth Report on the State of the Region in Sustainable Human Development, between 2010 and 2014 the Central American countries "accomplished undisputed economic and social improvements", which were, nonetheless, insufficient to ensure that human development "advanced in a substantive manner". There was a recovery in exports, moderate growth and low level of inflation, with an increase in the majority of social indicators, as well as improvements in environmental management. Despite all this, "almost half the population remains affected", as in years prior, by "poverty and social exclusion", mainly in the countries in the center and north of the isthmus, where inequalities in income distribution levels "remain among the highest in Latin America, the most unequal region in the world" (State of the Nation-Region Program, 2016, pp. 35-36).

In this scenario, states are unable to provide basic services to their populations, which is worsened by the region's growth in fiscal deficits, limiting their capacity to "face the action" of organized crime, a problem that affects all the countries, though with different intensity. Moreover, the high levels of violence persistent in Central America, "erode the social coexistence and threaten the fragile stability of various nations" (Idem, p.36).

By 2014, Central America had almost 45.6 million inhabitants, approximately 10 million (27%) more than in 2010 (Idem, 2016), of which 9.1 million (one-fifth) were youth aged 15-24 (IEEPP, 2017). The vast majority of soccer fan group members in the different countries in the region belong to this age group. Under the structural scenario described above, they are one of the most affected sectors of the population: "5.4 million youth aged 15-24 (60% of the total) today are outside the educational system (State of the Nation-Region Program, 2016, p.36)[7].

[7] The worst cases are Guatemala (whose annual investment in education is under $200US) and Honduras, where two-thirds of youth either only work, or neither work nor study. This differs from Costa Rica and Panama (countries where annual investment in education per person is $1,053 and $926, respectively), and in which about half of all youth study full-time (State of the Nation-Region Program, 2016, pp. 77,78 and 80).

With respect to demographics, for countries like Costa Rica and Panama, “in five years the period in which they will count with a growing flow of productive-age population will subside, and there are already signs of the consequences brought by population aging”, like the coverage and sustainability of social security systems, rise in the demand for health services, increase of economic dependency ratios, etc. For nations in intermediate phases (Guatemala, Honduras, Belize, Nicaragua, and El Salvador) the challenges are different, and they include the demand for food, and the need to broaden health and educational services. In addition, data projection from the State of the Region shows that today over four million people (over 8% of the Central American population) “lives outside its homeland”; in principle this generates the benefit of remittances, but in the medium and long run it leads to “family disintegration and the consequent weakening of affective relationships”, as well as a loss of productive-age population (Idem, p. 43).

Between 2000-13 Central America improved on key indicators like life expectancy, infant mortality, access to public services and educational coverage. However, in 2013 “almost half the Central American population (47%)” lived in poverty and “about one-fifth (18%) lived in conditions of homelessness”. In 2014, the proportion of households in exclusion was 42%; that is, they were outside the labor market and without access to basic social services. It is true that social investment grew, but considerable gaps remain: “in 2013, average regional investment in health was $194US per inhabitant, with amounts ranging from $714US in Costa Rica to $79US in Nicaragua” (Idem, pp. 47-48).

In the economic panorama, the performance of the region after the 2008-09 crisis was neither sufficient nor sustainable enough to guarantee substantial improvement for the population. There have been efforts to advance “greater taxation progressiveness” through internal economic reforms that privilege direct taxes, and yet, the growing fiscal deficits are leading to “indebtedness conditions that could become unsustainable”. This is in addition to the “economies’ inability to generate employment in sufficient quantity and quality” to incorporate the increasing working age population associated with the demographic transition summarized above. In this scenario, young men and women “have limited access to the labor market, making their unemployment rate of about 11% more than double that of the average national unemployment rate (Idem, pp. 53-54).

Regarding the political situation of the region, between 2011-15 "democratization in Central America lost impulse and, in some cases, showed signs of regression". This activates old threats that affect peace, liberty, and human rights, "in a region that not long ago suffered grave violations in these areas" (Idem, p. 65).

All of this seems to suggest that perhaps the traditional democratic system is not the adequate path to strengthen social, political and economic processes that generate greater wellbeing for the Central American population. In this sense, propitiating citizenship participation would necessitate the maturation of diverse social movements around citizens' reactions to corruption and impunity that are also very present in the isthmus (Galdámez and Morales, 2016).

Finally, as the data show, the outlook is discouraging, not only for the people who make up the soccer fan groups, but for the majority of the population, including youth who are one of the most affected sectors in the region.

I will now present a summary of the research conducted in and from Central America to comprehend soccer fan groups[8]; as I mentioned in the introduction, I will center on the four categories (temporal dimension, culture, violence, and structure and leadership).

[8] Rodríguez, Soto and Zúñiga (2019) attempt to define what a soccer fan group is in Latin America. To do this, they cite several researchers who, over various decades, have approached the topic in the region. They assert that some, like Segura (2013), perceive them as "*barras bravas*/rough groups" (despite this not being a native designation but externally imposed). Others like Aponte, Pinzón and Vargas recognize the groups (comprised of youth) as a social space with its own "rules and hierarchies" (2009, p.12). For the authors, some approaches suggest a relationship between the groups and caos and disorganization (Yunez, 2002, p. 36); others view them as violent, problematic, and linked to gangs (Arboccó and O'Brien, 2013; Gersi, 2003; Cornejo, 2014) [Regarding this definition, there are notable differences between fan groups and gangs; see Rodríguez, 2018].
For Rodríguez, Soto and Zúñiga there are also less criminalistic version, like those of Recasens (1999), that views fan groups as subculture; Bolaños and Hleap (2007) who see them as urban tribes, and García (2009) who defines them as a cohesion of youth who integrate "small communities" (2008, pp.14 and 15).
There are other conceptualizations with greater conceptual elaboration, the Panfichi's reflection, who adopts Benedic Anderson's work on imagined communities to elaborate the notion of "fan group communities", where members may never meet in person but they all "share the same belonging" (2016, pp.19 and 20). There is also the subjectivixed and embodied vision of De Toledo (2013), who warns in the Brazilian case, of the existence of a "thought out corporality", a cult of the body stylized and worked in the gym, counterposed with the "*aguantadora"* (enduring) corporality of Argentinian soccer fan group members (Cabrera, 2013; Garriga Zucal, 2015 and 2016).
The trend of these definitions indicates that in countries like Costa Rica, Mexico, Colombia and Honduras, soccer fan groups are integrated primarily by youth; unlike Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Peru, where scholarly does in those countries does not refer to a strictly youth phenomenon. This can be due to the fact that the fan groups in those South American countries exist since the 1950s, 60s, 70s and 80s, which differs from Mexico, Colombia, and the Central American nations where the groups are newer, and have other sociocultural and historical logics.

The aim is to transcend certain methodological nationalism that exists, not just in the isthmus but also in the rest of Latin America, in how the topic is addressed.

Temporal-Diachronic Dimension of Soccer Fan Groups

Rodríguez, Soto and Zúñiga (2019), in their text about soccer fan groups in Latin America, mention the contribution of Rodríguez (2006) who presents a publication in which he tracks the history of soccer in Costa Rica: its origins, division into clubs, and sociocultural and political relations. This author exposes the contexts that made possible the creation of soccer fan groups in that Central American nation. He outlines in detail the history of the Ultra Morada (the soccer fan group of the Costa Rican soccer team Deportivo Saprissa S.A.). Regarding this, he provides a very interesting datum: this group was formed in 1995 by the leadership of Deportivo Saprissa when they brought members of Los Cruzados (the Catholic University of Chile's soccer fan group) in order to create their own group. This marks an exception to the Latin American rule, where most fan groups are born precisely in opposition to the team's guidelines.

Rodríguez describes what to him are three constructive milestones in the history of the fan group: first the conformation of the group, then consolidation and demographic explosion in the early 2000s, when the group peaks in membership, and a third period in the first decade of the twenty-first century where membership declined given several factors, including the constant criminalization of the group.

Geary (2017) provides a regional outlook that mentions some historical facts about soccer fan groups in Central America, in a publication in which she labels them *"barras bravas"* (rough groups). In contrast with the label, however, she dedicates little space and depth to describe them. For some countries, she only spends a paragraph defining some of their general characteristics; it is most concerning that she borrows almost all the information about these groups from a website (https://barrabrava.net) that celebrates them, with no analytical or scientific rigor (which is not the purpose of the site). The author also cites no primary references: everything written about the fan groups is descriptive, and limited to listing some general aspects like which and how many groups exist in the region and the soccer teams of which they form part. There is also no analytic articulation between

the history of the region and these "rough groups"; one assumes some relationships but none are clarified in the text. Notably, there is also no clarity about the intention behind including the *maras*[9], whose relationship to the fan groups, according to Geary, "needs to be researched" (2017, p.34).

In the last section, the author analyzes the relationship between the fan groups, violence, and masculinity. She develops a theoretical discussion emphasizing the idea that the lack of jobs has made young men in the region reorient their frustrations: lacking a work space in which to redeem themselves as men, they employ alternatives to achieve this, and soccer is one of them. In addition, she argues, "more than women, men have a role in the creation of their own identities. Men worry about how other men view them, so their manly appearance is in benefit of other men" (Geary, 2017, p.29), meaning that men construct their identities starting from what other men think, which attaches to them strong masculinity codes made by and for men. This is certainly an interesting idea that nonetheless again has no empirical basis.

It is evident that there is a need in the region to consolidate field research extended with a historical perspective, with the goal of building more integral arguments that take into account the specificities of these subjects who circulate our realities.

The next section is richer in terms of the research efforts and density of the existing information. As we will see, the cultural dimension is one of the most employed constructs in research to understand soccer fan groups.

[9] Translation note: the term *maras* refers to groups that formed in the United States, who after extradition processes, deported several of its members to their origin countries where they formed transnational groups (e.g. the Mara Salvatrucha). For Zúñiga (2016) the term "*mara"* bypasses the background and history of these collectives in the northern triangle of Central America, reducing them only to their violent dimension which stigmatizes them. In addition, for this author, the terms *marero* or *marera* are rarely used internally in these collectives; for this reason, he prefers using the term *pandilla* (gang) which, albeit it "evokes stigmatization and problematization", it is more "research and standardized with allows a discussion and deepening into other conditions". In this way, gangs can be understood as "collectives of youth or that operate with a youthful logic, predominantly masculine and masculinizing, that generate common identity, that come from popular sectors and conduct actions that fall out with the established social norms. These collectives share a history that is specific to each one and can be understood taking into account the becoming of the social relationships that are carried out at the personal, group, community or national level" (Zúñiga, 2016, pp.7 and 11).

Cultural Dimension

Romero characterizes soccer fan groups (which he refers to as "cultural youth groups") in Honduras: 1) they bring together a heterogeneity of individuals that present a homogeneity in certain beliefs; 2) they view the fan group as a familial group; 3) the youth name themselves as *hinchas* (fans/supporters) (in Honduras, the main youth group influence comes from Argentina); 4) the organization of the fan groups has a lineal structure where leaders function like mentors of newer members; 5) fan group members never forget that the main objective is unconditional support of the soccer team; and 6) the role of women in the groups has been less prominent than that of men (Romero, 2015; cited in Rodríguez, Soto and Zúñiga, 2019). It is important to specify that Romero's text also makes evident other dynamics, including the idea of the fan group as a family, to which other researchers in the isthmus refer.

From the discipline of psychology, Víquez (2006) developed a research project with members of two Costa Rican fan groups: La Ultra Morada and La Doce (associated with the soccer team Liga Deportiva Alajuelense), with the intention of revealing the social identities of these groups. Using semistructured interviews, the author describes the social dynamic of these groups (defined as youth groups), focusing on "the impact of the individual biography in the current group identity" (2006, p.9).

The results of this research show members' use of enlarged positive traits to describe the group they belong to and, "on the contrary, using characteristics of disparagement to describe rival groups" (Idem, pp.11 and 76).

This publication by Víquez (along with those of Rodríguez 2005 and 2006) is one of the first efforts related to the topic that show up in the Costa Rican and Central American academic scenario. Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning that the fieldwork conducted (twelve interviews with fan group members selected from various high schools in the country) hinders observing the phenomenon from other dimensions, including the relationship between group members and their disposition and practices in stadiums and other venues.

Similarly, an Interpeace (2014) report, as well as Romero (2015) in the case of Honduras, defines these collectives as youth groups whose rivalry moved from street

violence to manifesting as armed confrontations in their communities. According to this document, belonging to a fan group in that context is an element of identity and a lifestyle in the search of spaces of cohesion. Therefore, it indicates that these dimensions have enabled the idea that the fan groups can also bring opportunities for peace; in that sense, the "Youth leadership in Honduras: sports fan groups for peace" project has sought to reduce and prevent violence among these groups through a conflict transformation education project[10].

The social context and voice of fan group members are elements necessary to comprehend these groups. Most group members are youth from "marginal urban" neighborhoods where violence forms part of social relationships at the individual, familial, and community levels (the latter through activities like drug, human and arms trafficking). In these contexts, youth groups (soccer fan groups, *maras*, and rock music groups) arise as means of identity and solidarity. For this reason, according to the report, for the fan group members interviewed the group acts like a family that allows them to find friendship and support in the face of diverse sociopersonal problems (Interpeace, 2014; referenced in Rodríguez, Soto and Zúñiga, 2019).

Onésimo Rodríguez, in a series of publications (2005, 2006, 2007a and 2007b) stemming from ethnographic research, explores and analyzes various constructive elements of organized fan groups (understood as youth collectives) in Costa Rica, in particular the Ultra Morada. In the writings he mentions the relational and identity qualities of these groups (Rodríguez, 2005 and 2006), as well as the use of graffiti as cryptic coding that enables them to appropriate a territory or simply, to leave evidence of their presence in a specific place (Rodríguez, 2007a). In addition, these texts analyze the relationship between these youth and their neighborhoods (Rodríguez, 2014a), and some practices that the author understands as rituals (Rodríguez, 2007b), to define that these actions have been central to the creation and consolidation of the soccer fan groups in that country.

Rodríguez, Soto and Zúñiga (2019) cite another text from Rodríguez (2019) that

[10] The initiative "fan groups for peace", carried out during 2007-2010 with evident youth action seeks, according to this document, a slow change towards non-violence and the visualization of soccer fan groups as important groups in the Honduran scenario. It highlights the needs to widen and deepen the knowledge acquisition process about transforming conflict among groups members and a greater dialogue between members of rival groups (Interpeace, 2014).

explores two dynamics of the Ultra Morada: “the previous” and “the exit” (employed by the group in two distinct moments: before a soccer match and when the team exists unto the field), which must be understood as “moments of encountering and reproducing the identity of the youth collective; that promote the creation of social ties that serve to solidify the mass, to tie it, at least during the few minutes during which they are employed” (p.13).

Unlike the previous text (Rodríguez, 2007b), in this case the author doesn’t speak of rituals, but rather deploys a critique towards the lax use of that concept by authors like Bromberger and himself. Warning that “stating that ‘the previous” and “the exit” (or other dynamics related to soccer) are rituals, in addition to the analytical bias that this would immediately suppose, appears as a sort of exotization of these dynamics, granting them a status they do not have” (Rodríguez, 2019, p.14). Therefore, he proposes understanding them as “[…] ‘common’ practices, repeated compulsively but with a great deal of improvisation, because it’s in these places (among many others) where diverse meanings are constructed that give sense to the groups attached to soccer” (p.14). Rodríguez suggests, given the compulsive and organized repetition that supposes, ambiguously, some destructuring, to speak of a “structured performance of breath”, an idea that must be viewed articulated with the notion of a “new fan”: a new sensibility of support in Costa Rica stadiums personified by group members, in opposition to the “common fan”.

One element to highlight in the approximations of Rodríguez, Romero and Interpeace, is that fan groups are analyzed in context: incorporated into society, explaining the existing difference between these and diverse social actors (written press and television, “ordinary” fans, police, and national soccer administration). This is given that the mediatic and police treatment of this phenomenon make a disaggregated analysis, as if fan groups were a self-reproduced phenomenon, cause and a consequence of themselves (Rodríguez, Soto and Zúñiga, 2019).

Forms of violence

In a study developed from criminology, Ajanel (2014), exposes the case of violence in the Major League Soccer of Guatemala; he doesn’t locate the analytical center in the fan groups, but mentions them in various sections of the document. The problems that the

author poses include assessing that in Guatemalan soccer culture, “the attitudes that generate violence have not been eradicated” and therefore he seeks to “find a judicial mechanism that reduces the indexes of violence in soccer stadiums”. In this way, he aims to “determine the deviated behavior of the fan” to establish “what crimes are committed” in sports venues (2014, pp.1 and 3).

The treatment of violence ends up being simplistic and irreflexive; for example, when he wields the idea that in Guatemala and many parts of the world, violence is “the main reason why the public abstains from going to the stadium”, an idea for which he provides no theoretical or empirical support. This light treatment remains evident when it is mentioned that “rough groups” are part of the “social cancer” (p.40) that soccer lives, which also pathologizes the dynamic of these groups. I believe that it is because of this pathologizing of the behaviors that the author proposes, from the beginning, to “eradicate violence”, as if it was something that can be removed (a tumor?) from a sick body (society).

It is clear that for the author, violence, viewed from the punitive, sanctioning and pathological level, possesses, in addition, a strong irrational component. In his words, “as a general norm, the irrational person is considered violent […]” (p.47). From this perspective it is understood that Anajel sketches out some regulatory, disciplinary and controlling proposals to reduce violence in stadiums, like a “registry of vandals” (p.61).

On the other hand, a research report from the Institute of Strategic Studies and Public Policy (IEEPP, for its name in Spanish) (2017) in just a couple of paragraphs of a document aimed at understanding the situation of youth in the region, indicates that Central American soccer fan groups are integrated by youth who come from “poor and marginal neighborhoods and communities” and which “represent a mechanism of cohesion, identity and solidarity”. Furthermore, it claims, only citing a Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO) study, that the metropolitan areas of El Salvador and Honduras “have become the amplified scenario of violent confrontations between the fan groups” (IEEPP, 2017, p.27).

Evidently, the objective of the report is not to present a dense situation of the collectives organized around soccer, but nonetheless, the aggressive tone with which the participation of these groups in different Central American scenarios is mentioned without presenting varied bibliographic support and even less so empirical ones, does not help

understand the phenomenon. Rather, fan groups appear as only and exclusively violent, without delving into other sociocultural dimensions.

Rodríguez, Soto and Zúñiga (2019), present a text from Zoila Suyapa (2013), who, with support from the World Bank, developed a study for the Institute of Educational and Social Research at the National Pedagogical University (Honduras), which seeks to trace the evolution of violence generated by youth soccer fan groups in educational centers, with the goal of influencing strategies to prevent, treat, and mitigate it. The author conducted a survey with a sample of 612 people, among them ninth grade students; she also interviewed parents, teachers, and school principals.

Regarding soccer fan groups, she states that "they are perceived as a risk like *maras*. Almost the entire student population is a soccer fan, and this appears as a sign of national identity, which makes it difficult for students to remain alert in the face of the risk they can represent." For the students surveyed, the ones who join the fan group do so "because they do not have the support of their parents; they don't study, because they don't have anything to do; they don't have jobs, that's why they are in this…. Some are studying but they join the group anyway, in there they find friends", they say they "join the fan group to secure fame…". This ambivalence of values is what attracts many students at an age in which "protagonism and eagerness to feel part of a group that recognizes them play an important role in the conformation of personality" (p.37).

Consequently, she conceives of school as a space where it is necessary to review its role in the generation, prevention, or mitigation of social phenomena like violence. In this way, the steps necessary to promote resilience in the educational context are: provide opportunities, support and affection, establish high expectations, teach "life skills" and set clear and firm limits (p.25). Therefore, for the author, the most important message is that educational systems "must provide alternatives to fill the students' needs to belong to a group—that understands them, protects them, and helps them face together the adversities. Without these group structures, youth will seek their own means to fill that need (p. 54 and 55).

What is particularly interesting in the Central American approaches to soccer fan group violence, is that there is no precise definition developed from youth subjectivities about this important category. In short: although there have been some methodological

proposals based on direct participation with fan group members, these have not managed, except for rare exceptions, to delve into the meaning coordinates that these subjects produce, thus, violence and any other notion, suffers from a lack of reflection that enables the observation of the constructs about their experiences that make people join soccer fan groups in the region.

Next, I will review the contributions related to the final category: structure and leadership. As with the previous ones, the studies found that refer to this are very few. This fact makes these few studies even more important, because they are a starting point for future research.

Structure and Leadership

Onésimo Rodríguez (2014a) presents another article in which he refers to the organization and structure of the Ultra Morada. In this text, the author conceives of an internal organization crossed by class conflicts where the neighborhood origin of group members is determinant. In this way, there are conflicts between Those from the South and Those from the North[11]; the denomination South and North follows the neighborhood origin of the *peñas* (subgroups within the Ultra): some come from the neighborhoods located in the south of the capital, San José, (urban-popular), and others come from those in the north (with more favorable socioeconomic conditions). Thus, one of the general leaders of the group is backed, according to Rodríguez, by the *peñas* of the south (demographic majority within the Ultra), while the rest of the leadership group members hail from the north, whose *peñas* are not as numerous as those from the south. This provokes internal tensions that claim, according to the author, neighborhood and class contrapositions.

Still, in another text by the same author (Rodríguez, 2014b), referenced in Rodríguez, Soto and Zúñiga (2019), there is a critique of the ideas just mentioned. Both articles were published the same year, but the first one (Rodríguez, 2014a) refers to a

[11] Bands within the Ultra, organized in a leadership team that the author characterizes under the metaphor of the old knight orders: The Round Table, conformed by the knights (eight high level leaders of the Ultra: seven from the north, one from the south). The rest of the Ultra are squires and vassals (the former close to the knights or leaders; the latter have been with the group less time).

reflexive process that in the new version he attempts to complement with new ideas and additional data.

In that other publication Rodríguez (2014b) continues to center his attention to the leadership practices in La Ultra Morada, now understanding them not as class conflicts, but as power struggles between Those from the South and Those from the North. In this sense, the author suggests the need to establish a more focused gaze, in which "the manifest and authoritarian intentions of the leaders"; Those from the North to maintain power and dominance of the group, and Those from the South to gain general control of it" (p. 2).

Power is the central element that permits an understanding of the conflictive dynamic, given that from this conceptualization it is possible to explain the practical and discursive actions of group leaders: "[…] the ethical/profound dimension of the conflict has to do with the dominance and control of the subjectivities that conform La Ultra, 'managing' the youth for personal benefit of a few" (Idem, p. 14). Following the authors' words: the class conflict is a "smokescreen" in the dispute over power in the group.

The reflection and its conclusions contribute additionally to the discussion of two socially positioned ideas about the fan groups. The first: the supposed distance they have with societal organization revealing, rather, a closeness with the organizational logic of the "official culture"; and the second: the construction of monolithic identity and only in confrontation with external others (other fan groups or "agents of order"), revealing the complexity of the internal relations in the group, that far from being homogeneous, show tension and difference (Rodríguez, Soto and Zúñiga, 2019).

Conclusions

The revision of the categories around which Central American soccer fan groups research has revolved reveals a couple of interesting aspects: 1) The reflections have had certain thematic articulation, despite researchers not reading or citing each other; and 2) the dimensions that are more socio-anthropological (culture and violence) had been the most addressed in the region, which assumes an interest in observing the phenomenon from its most visible manifestations (rituals, symbols, identity, aggressiveness, violence); this leaves a sense of exoticization of the soccer fan groups (perhaps generated by the agenda that

sensationalistic mass media establishes, which, apparently, has permeated other more "critical" sectors). This supposes the need to look towards other angles (for example, the historic-temporal and structure-politics-power-organization dimensions) that enable the understanding of these groups from more complex visions.

Notwithstanding that violence has been one of the most developed topics, the reflections on it have been very superficial: few efforts have delved into the processes of constructing the more aggressive practices from the subjectivities of fan group members themselves. For this reason, sophisticated definitions have not yet been produced akin to those in South America, including the contributions of Gil, 2008l Czesli and Murci, 2015; Garriga Zucal, 2014 and 2015; and Cabrera, 2013, where they speak of violences that create, beyond the rational-irrational, thought in plural terms, and determined by geographic-spatial constructions. Interestingly, the Central American approaches, unlike the South American publications, do not speak of the "*aguante*" (enduring), a native and central category, to describe and understand some of the soccer fan group practices.

In this way, several paths can be suggested to continue advancing and densifying those diverse and changing worlds. First is the need to overcome, as outlined in Rodríguez, Soto and Zúñiga (2019), certain methodological nationalism: most research referenced in this chapter focuses on cases in specific countries. It would be interesting to develop efforts that attempt to compare the realities of these fan groups in two or more countries, to begin to understand the distances and proximities among the different groups present in the region. This chapter was thought in that direction.

Also, some ideas are mentioned although not delved into in the texts located: notions like youth and family. It seems as if youth are the social subjects that primarily make up this type of collective, but with rare exceptions (Rodríguez, 2005 and 2006), there is no dense analysis that approaches this dimension. The same occurs with "family". Several Central American studies speak of a centrality in the relationship that group members make between family and the group ("the group is my family"); despite this, this articulation has also received little attention[12].

[12] Regarding this, Mario Zúñiga's (2009) approach is interesting. The author conducted fieldwork (using life histories and life stories) with former El Salvadorian mara members. The author describes problematic ties between the biological family (hierarchical) and the "substitute family" (the gang, which narrates a logic of equality among its members); he concludes that in these subjectivities there is a substitution of the family by

The issue of gender cannot be forgotten: the non-participation of women inside a very masculinized works is far from being specified. None of the works cites, except for Geary (2017), takes into consideration gender relationships, which encompasses not only female practices but male ones as well.

In addition, it is important to make inroads into linking academic or nonacademic research with public policies. Of all the texts evaluated, only *Fan groups for Peace* (Interpeace, 2014), conducted in Guatemala, has had some success in the consolidation of a policy that attempts to mitigate the violent manifestations of these groups.

Taking all of this into account, it is worth trying to observe these subjects in other contexts beyond those related to the fan group dynamic; other worlds in which they participate[13]: work, studies, family, neighborhood, consumption, other formal and informal groups of socialization, etc. We have considered them, mainly, within the spectacle, which is central, but these subjects are not only fan group members, they have other activities. The question remains: what exists before, during, and after the fan group?

In summary, the research developed in the region on soccer fan groups presumes very clearly the need to undertake systematic qualitative-experiential and quantitative studies[14] about this phenomenon. We cannot know the realities of these collectives if we do not make an effort to view them in their everyday life. Speaking about them from limited methodological gazes o theoretical perspectives distant from their specificities promotes the generation of prejudices and analytical biases that can feed restrictive and prohibitive measures that are very common in the countries of the region, lead evidently by populist governments.

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the gang as alternative institutionalization. Therefore, youth violence is founded on the "decomposition of the primary ties" (pp.307-309).

[13] In a recently published article, there is an effort in this sense, by understanding the dynamics between fan groups, gangs and squads in Costa Rica as *plural practices of* youth (see Rodríguez, 2018).

[14] Recently, the Institute of Social Studies in Population, National University of Costa Rica, revealed the results of a survey about soccer fan groups in that country (IDESPO, 2019). The results of that report were not incorporated into this chapter because they are part of a research project still in process.

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