

PLAYING WITH VIOLENCE IN LEISURE SPORT: ETHNOGRAPHIC NOTES ON THE “KID” AND THE “OLD HAND” IN OUTSKIRTS FOOTBALL

*JOGANDO COM AS VIOLÊNCIAS NO ESPORTE DE LAZER: NOTAS
ETNOGRÁFICAS SOBRE O ‘GURI’ E O ‘NEGO VÉIO DA VÁRZEA’*

*JUGANDO CON LAS VIOLENCIAS EN EL DEPORTE DE OCIO: NOTAS
ETNOGRÁFICAS SOBRE EL ‘CHAVAL’ Y EL ‘PILLO DEL BARRIO’*

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Keywords:

Sports.
Leisure activities.
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Ethnography.

Abstract: This work is part of the discussions on the diversity of sports meanings in leisure situations. It is the result of a multisite ethnographic research developed in a large circuit of ‘outskirts football’ in the city of Porto Alegre, Brazil. Its aim was to understand the dynamics of formation of the concepts of violence in leisure by focusing the analysis on two ‘empirical characters’: the ‘kid’ and the ‘old hand in outskirts football’. The enterprise is carried out within a debate with Eliasian theory on violence and the pursuit of pleasurable excitement in mimetic sporting practices. Finally, we point out two aspects as contributions to leisure studies: the existence of unpleasant types of violence that do not represent ruptures, but which ‘are part’ of that mimetic context, pointed out as disproportionalities; the experience of pleasant tension-excitement not only at an ideal level, but also in the emotional slidings between different tension balances.

Palavras chave:

Esportes.
Atividade de lazer.
Violência.
Etnografia.

Resumo: Este trabalho se insere nos debates sobre a diversidade de significados dos esportes nas situações de lazer. Resulta de uma pesquisa etnográfica multilocalizada desenvolvida num grande circuito de ‘futebol varzeano’ da cidade de Porto Alegre. O objetivo foi compreender as dinâmicas de constituição das noções de violência nessa esfera de lazer, tendo como enfoque analítico dois ‘personagens empíricos’: o ‘guri’ e o ‘nego véio da várzea’. Esse empreendimento é efetivado num debate com a teoria elisiana em relação à violência e à busca da excitação agradável nas práticas miméticas do esporte. Ao final, apontamos dois aspectos como contribuições para os estudos do lazer: a existência de violências desagradáveis que não representam rupturas, mas que ‘fazem parte’ do contexto mimético, apontadas como desproporcionalidades; a vivência da tensão-excitação agradável não apenas num nível ótimo, mas também nos deslizamentos emocionais entre distintos equilíbrios de tensão.

Palabras clave:

Deportes.
Actividades recreativas.
Violencia.
Etnografía.

Resumen: Este trabajo se inserta en los debates sobre la diversidad de significados de los deportes en las situaciones de ocio. Es resultado de una investigación etnográfica multilocalizada desarrollada en un gran circuito de ‘fútbol de barrio’ de la ciudad de Porto Alegre. El objetivo fue comprender las dinámicas de constitución de las nociones de violencia en esa esfera de ocio, utilizando como foco analítico a dos ‘personajes empíricos’: el ‘chaval’ y el ‘pillo del barrio’. Ese trabajo é efectivado en un debate con la teoría elisiana en relación a la violencia y a la búsqueda de excitación agradable en las prácticas miméticas del deporte. Al final, señalamos como contribuciones: la existencia de violencias desagradables que no representan rupturas, sino que ‘forman parte’ del contexto mimético, apuntadas como desproporcionalidades; la vivencia de la tensión-excitación agradable no sólo en un nivel óptimo, sino también en los deslizamientos emocionales entre distintos equilíbrios de tensión.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In academic debates on the understanding of sports practices, the approach directed to diversity of appropriations and heterogeneity of meanings, apart from official speeches and grand narratives, is not new. Works such as Magnani (1984), Stigger (2002, 2005), Damo (2003) and Rigo (2004) strengthen the understanding of sports fundamentals based on research into the daily lives of ordinary people (not professionals or media characters) in leisure situations, especially in urban life. It is in the context of such debate that this work aims to present some contributions.

This article focuses on the controversies surrounding the diversity of cultural constructions of different notions of violence at football matches in a large leisure circuit in the city of Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, known as “Municipal Outskirts Tournament”.¹ It was carried out with a multisite ethnographic study (MARCUS, 2001) conducted between 2009 and 2011, following clubs’ officials, referees, coaches, players and their friends, neighbors and relatives in the circuit, living with them, helping them whenever it was possible, in different situations (meetings, matches, parties, dinners, excursions, etc.) and places (offices, auditoriums, bars, fields, streets, neighborhoods, villages, etc.).

During the period, 216 (both “friendly” and “official”) matches were observed in different areas of Porto Alegre. Each ethnographic immersion was recorded in field diaries (FD). Documents were also analyzed and semi-structured interviews were conducted with interlocutors considered important. Strangeness resulted, specially from observation experiences – most of them participant – collaborating to organize competitions and teams. One of them was related to “violence in leisure”.

In the fourth research immersion, in a meeting including the organizers of the 2009 “Municipal” (officials from the Municipal Department of Sports, Recreation and Leisure and representatives of Football Leagues), there was clear concern about players called “kids”, who were linked to the most serious problems of “violence in the field”, which did not occur with those known as “veterans” or “*nego véio² da várzea*” (DC, March 26, 2009). Recurrence of that concern could be seen already in the early months of the investigation, which was plausible if we observed the most impressive “facts of indiscipline” listed by the organizers – some of which led Mr. Jair³ (team owner and league official) to sentence that *free force* [category over 16 years, which includes most “kids”] would no longer exist four years from now, it’s nothing but trouble, that doesn’t happened in the veteran’s category” (DC, October 10, 2009).

Observations like these have led us to wonder how “veterans” dealt with or established acceptable levels of violence in the field in the leisure circuit. What made kids’ indiscipline practices a nuisance to the point of determining the end of the competition in the “free” category? Would the way to deal with violence be a defining aspect of what being a “kid” or an “old hand” is? In this paper, we show results of our ethnographic experience with those issues and how it allowed us to develop dialogues among academic conceptual schemes and native categories that guided the practices of our interlocutors.

¹ We are calling Porto Alegre’s “Municipal Outskirts (*Várzea*) Tournament” an annual football circuit held as championships in different categories, involving around 300 teams. In the first half of the year, Football Community Leagues in the city used to hold their “regional” competitions and select teams for the second phase held in the second half of the year. This second phase was called “the municipal” and included teams selected in regional phases, coordinated by the Football Management – a body under Porto Alegre’s Municipal Department of Sport, Recreation and Leisure.

² We chose not to use the expression “old hand” in plural because that is how it was commonly used by the study’s interlocutors.

³ Names were replaced to prevent interlocutors’ embarrassment regarding information published.

We started by revisiting the conceptual schemes derived from studies conducted by Norbert Elias and colleagues, considering his importance in the scenario of discussions about understanding sport and especially his proposals on violence in sports settings. Following that – in dialogue with our empirical material – we seek to understand processes of constitution of ways to play with violence in leisure sport.

2 VIOLENCE IN THE CIVILIZATIONAL PROCESS

Sociologist and historian Norbert Elias, based on his studies of European social configurations, was able to observe and show regularities around a long and not deliberate “social process” that advanced towards a so-called “civilizational” direction. In different works (ELIAS, 1993, 1994, 1995, 2001, 2008), the author points out historical events that depict theoretical and empirical constructs of that procedural constitution, including increasing functional differentiation and democratization, higher interdependence chains or networks, parliamentarization and structuring of societies-States, State monopoly on physical violence, pacification of instincts, growing intolerance towards shame and disgust, refinement of etiquette and social figurations, softening of drives in face of psychologization and rationalization of behaviors.

Unable to further explain each of those constructs here, we chose to emphasize that they are what Elias called social configurations, i. e., relational structures among mutually oriented and dependent people, who reciprocally and socially create and recreate their needs, their institutions, their patterns of perceptions and actions, which is not to say that they are immutable, but that their reproduction or transformation demands the assertion of a tension balance. Thus, individual civilized behavior denotes – in the sense of indissoluble interrelationship – incorporation of a given social configuration, the inculcation of a habitus or second nature. In the author’s logic, social processes speak of individual psychological processes on a reciprocal basis, which is different from the abstraction that dichotomizes the individual-society relationship.⁴

At the heart of this theoretical framework lies the debate on violence, closely linked to the power relations that underlie social structures. According to Elias, violence is a relational concept in the sense that it is imbricated in a configurational social constitution marked by disputes rooted in and nourished by individual personalities. Therefore, we cannot say that a given individual behavior is violent without understanding it within their relations in a given social configuration and its changes. It is no coincidence, then, that Elias sought to show that relational dimension by describing “empirical characters” and the meaning of their actions in the configurations.

Our first example in this regard is that of medieval warriors (ELIAS, 1993, 1994). The author shows how and why their cruelty explosions did not exclude them from social life; on the contrary, those who show taste for killing and torturing were appreciated since such behaviors were necessary and advantageous in that often belligerent medieval social structure. Those same warriors, from the 11th to the 16th centuries (configurational contexts more sensitive to violence) were gradually “transformed” into courtiers.

King Louis XIV was another example of the materialization of the discussion of Elisian concepts of configuration and interdependence, stressing violence and power as social etiquettes. In “The court society” (*A sociedade de corte*, ELIAS, 2001, p. 132-159), the author discusses how a

⁴ A discussion on the relationship between the concepts of “society” and “social configuration” is included in the Appendix, which brings an Introduction to the 1968 Edition (ELIAS, 1994, p. 214-251).

historical figure who was considered the biggest name of absolutism, the self-styled “Sun King”, was himself conditioned to a configuration where interdependencies consolidated and fed each other in daily life. In the chapter entitled “The binding of the king through etiquette and status chances”, Elias demonstrates how that noble man dealt with these relationships according to his interests.

Equally important in this presentation of “empirical characters” is the case of Mozart (ELIAS, 1995), where the author maintains that the composer – a “genius” of classical music – was buried in a unmarked grave without social recognition because his “genius” did not fit behaviors expected in the context in which he lived. Mozart, who was born in a courtiers’ family, produced something that was not in keeping with the tastes of sovereigns and even courtiers in that social configuration – an impropriety in his relationship with others that justified the violence he suffered as lack of opportunities and support, and even as contempt and indifference.

What these three “Elisian characters” synthetically described helped us establish is that violence and its control depict a construct related to social configurations. Violence is not “something”, but a condition of that which deserves contempt, indifference and coercion in a given network of interdependence.

3 MIMETIC VIOLENCE OF SPORT IN LEISURE

With the advancement of the civilizational process and the direction it takes during the 18th and 19th centuries, Norbert Elias sees the establishment of a specific configuration in which it became possible to experience pleasant stress-excitement: the sphere of leisure. While in other – “serious” – spheres impulses related to violent acts should be internalized, he was surprised to find a specific structure of “fun” dedicated to externalization of stress in a positive and acceptable sense. This analysis was presented by Elias, along with Eric Dunning, in “Leisure in the spare time spectrum” (ELIAS, DUNNING, 1992b). They start by saying that “tension” itself is not positive or negative, good or bad, but one aspect to be studied and understood.

In this work by Elias and Dunning we found that the tension-excitement experienced in leisure is considered pleasant, even though it includes aspects related to violence. This characterization happens because, in leisure, an individual can find the opportunity to awaken repressed emotions at no risks for himself or others and with social approval. The socio-cultural construction of such opportunity happens through destruction of routines, which is materialized by a decrease in interdependencies chains, reduction in functional differentiation, and a balance of tensions as a counterpoint to what happens in “serious life”. This is because routines are taken as currents of action that impose a high degree of regularity and emotional stability on individuals’ conduct, thus requiring too much self-control and mastery of social etiquettes from them.

One typification indicated by the authors in question about leisure is what they termed mimesis. In such leisure, pleasant tension implies the destruction of the exacerbated control, but imposes acceptable limits so that it (tension) is not experienced as unpleasant, both for those who experience it and the “good society”. In the context of mimetic facts, according to Elias and Dunning (1992b), people can experience fear, anxiety, sympathy, antipathy, friendship, hate, which are also present in the non-leisure life – the so-called “serious life”. The difference is that in leisure sensations are transposed to a sphere that imposes fewer limits, where the thrills of violence can be experienced under a different key, that is, tensions with positive and pleasant meanings.

From this perspective, sports are recreational configurations that offer opportunities to experience violence in a mimetic way, as controlled lack of control. One of the “empirical characters” presented by Elias and who illustrates that experience is the “Hunter with his pack of hounds in pursuit of foxes”. In “An essay on sport and violence” (ELIAS, 1992), the author describes aspects of the social configuration of 18th- and 19th-century English elite and, in it, the transformation of “fox hunting” from a hobby into a sport in this mimetic expectation.

The English sporting ritual forbade any direct human involvement in the death of foxes, which represented “a civilized step” towards violence control. In those simulated battles, even if they denote a departure from “serious life”, there is a set of rules. In sport hunting, hounds could only follow and kill foxes, while hunters would train their hounds, follow them and watch over them during persecution and killing. This violence used to be experienced indirectly (by proxy), resulting in pleasant tension-excitement that was socially accepted. This means that leisure sports configurations create their own commitments, according to the specifics of their practices, their interdependence chains and their tension balance, given the experience of pleasant tension for a time that was neither too short nor too long.

However, as emphasized by Elias (1992), although the rules reflect the maturity of a sport and its autonomy from the social structure where it is played, that autonomy is always relative or limited. A configurational analysis is necessary in order to understand the dynamics of interdependence and the balance of tensions and therefore how one experiences violence – between pleasant tension-excitement (leisure) and a (not mimetic) serious attitude. Next, we will focus on the inter-relationship between violence and leisure, having as empirical field what occurred “within the fields” at the “outskirt municipal championship” in the city of Porto Alegre.

4 PLAYING WITH VIOLENCE IN THE FIELD

Of course the football matches observed involved skills and tactical-technical actions for conquering-protecting the ball, spaces and goals. But the balance of tensions with which it was experienced often showed variations with resonances on the classifications of violence that changed even during a match. We will briefly present some “native categories” apprehended during the ethnographic work, pointing out the most striking constructs in order to relate them to the polyphonic configuration of different balances and the implications for body etiquettes and the understanding of violence.

The first category highlighted is “playing on the ball”. Such “way of playing” denoted doing so by recognizing and respecting the rules, especially regarding the disciplinary aspects that physically and morally protected those involved in the disputes. This does not mean absence of body contacts, but they occurred within the boundaries of rules coded and institutionalized in the circuit, particularly as regards the set of delimitations called “Rule 12”⁵ of the code adopted as official in the circuit. In “playing on the ball”, flexibility of the “letter of the (disciplinary) rules” was blatantly lower and referees and assistants had strong authority to take care of mistakes and apply relevant warnings and punishments.

This condescending way of playing was found in different connotations, i. e. in different arrangements in spite of the balance of tensions. One was the so-called “friendly match”, where knowing how to “get one’s foot out” was crucial, i. e. to evade disputes that posed higher risks to oneself and opponents, even if it meant sports losses (of the ball, of spaces or vulnerability

5 Rule 12 of the official code of the Brazilian Football Confederation’s Referee Commission (CONFEDERAÇÃO BRASILEIRA DE FUTEBOL, 2009) deals with faults and mistakes and establishes disciplinary measures, especially on using the body in disputes, not in order to avoid body contact, but to make sure that they are not dangerous or reckless regarding possible physical and moral risks of actions to those involved.

of goals). In “friendly matches”, situations in which players, coaches and referees stood in a self-controlled manner toward others and rules were common. Etiquettes of individual and collective actions were clearly aimed at protecting physical and moral integrity, not meaning that the sporting objectives were disregarded, but that they could be subordinated to protection of oneself, colleagues and opponents, thus justifying prudence in the way of “playing by running away” from tougher body contacts that were seen as “violent” in that configuration.

Different from this “friendliness”, another connotation for “playing on the ball” could be seen in the participation mode referred to as “tough game”. In that mode, bodily skills and condescendence towards rules and authorities were not immune to the demands of firmness, disposition, effort or high dedication from those entering the field. Sporting achievements were part of another type of etiquette with respect to exposure and coping with body risks. Thus, an action considered “violent” in a “friendly match” could be considered “normal” during “tough match”; it is not by chance that players were constantly called to “work hard, fight [for the ball/space]” as an official-player underscored to one of his teammates, demanding that he be “tougher” (DC, July 12, 2009).

Although “tougher playing” highlights the importance of sports results in the field, the solidarity network around “toughness etiquettes” was equally precious. While football body skills were adequate, they were often more strongly applauded when expressed as hardness, strength, virility and disposition. Players praised for their skills (so-called “ballers” or “distinguished players”) would be quickly criticized if they were not willing to “put their feet” firmly and harshly in disputes when there is “tough game”. Our observation of technical mistakes (passes, kicks, launching the ball, defenses, etc.) was very rich in this regard. There were constant situations in which lack of skills and mistakes were applauded as long as they were preceded by bravery, “boldness”, insistence or firmness.

In a “tough match”, “taking one’s foot out” or “fleeing more abrupt contact” quickly resulted in reprimands. The stress balance built arrangements that collectively orchestrated an antithesis to softness, lack of virility, but that did not mean, in itself, impropriety when it came to the set of rules, after all “toughness does not mean disloyalty, it means firmness” as a player pointed out to his colleagues, hoping to motivate them to play tough (DC, December 13, 2009). What happened was that such tension balance created more elasticity⁶ to interpret rules when it came to using one’s body in disputes, but did not mean disregard for the institutional set of rules – “tough” and “on the ball” were not antitheses.

While rule 12 established that pushing an opponent would be a violation for reckless and ill-considered use of excessive force, the criterion for judging that reckless and ill-consideration in pushing was pervaded by the different tension balances at the time of the action. For example, while disputing the ball with excessive use of arms in the middle of the field would be quickly signed and accepted as a violation in a “more friendly setting”, it would quite often appear as “normal”, since many, including referees, would say that a in a “tough match”, “that was how it was”, that it that “part” of the game. That elasticity enabled us to understand the positive statement of a “team owner” who lost in the final of a regional championship: “It was tough, we lost, but that’s it, it was ‘on the ball’” (DC, October 10, 2010).

⁶ Elasticity here is related to the Elias’s argument (1992) on flexibility of rules. The author maintains that in a game, the group of participants is organized so that every encounter corresponds to a specific dynamics, i. e. a flexible standard regarding their relationship with the rules. Pimenta (2009) demonstrated that elasticity, showing how the dynamics of solidarity also empowers individuals to act in the game, not just the rules.

The orchestration of the “tough game” usually involved a “pressure game” in the form of intimidating reprisals and retaliations directed to the bodies of opponents, especially those who fought for the ball. A firmer, more aggressive move by an opponent, of the type that demanded more elastic interpretation of the rules, immediately posed a question experienced as “pressure”: should it be “accepted” or “not accepted”? The “pressure” was pretty direct to inform the current “way of playing”. “Accepting” the move without payback was a demonstration of “misfit” (the player should know that he must “take his foot out” in a more “friendly” match or “put his foot on” firmly in a “tougher” match). Fighting back “tough play” with the same body intensity conveyed that “he was in the game balance” and therefore willing to subject himself and encourage most ill consideration and recklessness.

One could often anticipate that matches would be characterized by “pressure” and, in such cases, one could say that they would be “storm matches”, i. e., effervescent, emotionally hot. The trajectories of previous clashes between groups and teams, which gave substance to the “rivalry”, for example, created certainty and even ambiguous expectation that no member of the teams would “take his foot out”. In such matches, even referees’ role changed and the criteria for elasticity in interpreting rules was significantly under control of those involved in the strife in the field. Now “it’s between them”, “they will decide”, some referees would say, “letting faults go” since they were unable to “apply” stricter interpretations of harshness and imprudence. It was up to referees to maintain “the same criterion” for interpretation in order to “take the match to the end”.

A distinct tension balance would emerge in those games or “storm times”, radically opposed to “playing on the ball” – less frequent, but important for understanding violence. When team members ceased to “focus on the ball” and started to focus mainly and deliberately “on the enemy”, “playing on pressure” gained autonomy over “playing on the ball”, i. e. sports aims had become secondary or even irrelevant, because other issues – “more serious ones” – became more important, especially for individual/group honor. Under such conditions, it became appropriate to say that it was a “dangerous game” – expression used by a player watching a match in which “putting pressure” had become as important as (or more than) scoring goals (DC, October 17, 2010), thus endangering the continuity of the dispute.

In “dangerous matches”, amid the dynamics of reprisals and retaliations that were reckless and more imprudent as to excessive use of force, elastic interpretation was sometimes replaced by ignoring the rules, creating paradoxical situations in which a fight with punches and kicks, although it determined exclusion from the match and even its end, could have both positive and negative evaluation (boos and applauses). It was negative because it was a set of practices that had gained full autonomy from the sphere of sport configuration, shortening the period of tension-excitement of leisure; it was positive because it indicated the importance of identity, of honor whose seriousness goes beyond sports results and becomes a “serious thing.” Therefore, “dangerous playing” denoted the tenuous threshold for removal of the match’s mimetic character. It was related to situations of tensions quite remembered in the stories told, whose memories were charged with ambiguity between positive and negative. Experiencing such fine line and such ambiguity was certainly exciting.

5 THE “KID” AND THE “OLD HAND FROM THE OUTSKIRTS”

After explanations on violence in configurational sociology, especially those experienced in a mimetic sense, and after descriptions of the different ways of playing correlated to different tension balances, we should return to our initial issues, pointing out “kids” as problems and

“veterans” (or “old hand of the outskirts”) as behavioral parameters. As Elias, we will take the “kid” and “old hand” as “empirical characters” who experimented and constituted, in different ways, sports configurations in their different ways of playing with violence. To address this, we resort to information produced by ethnographic immersion in five football teams from the city of Porto Alegre, in 2010 and 2011. During that period, several members of Guarani (from the Paraná neighborhood), Bandeirantes, São Pedro and Esperança (all from Ibema) and Cerro Azul (from Cambé)⁷ were closely monitored. The teams were observed in 97 of the 216 matches.

The “kids” were mostly younger players, but this chronological criterion was not enough to say who was “being a kid”. In the football configuration studied, it was also difficult to address that issue based on the notion of age. That is because young players (20, 30 years of age) were often identified as “veterans” and older ones (40, 50) were treated as “kids”. Therefore, the “kid” and the “old hand”, as we understand them, were “empirical characters” that indicated how football was experienced in/among different figurations of the matches, and the relationship with violence in leisure matches was surely one of the core elements in that classification operation. Other aspects were also important in that construction of the “kid of the outskirts” in relation to “veterans”. Even older players, for example, were mentioned as “kids” when they displayed good physical abilities (resistance, agility, flexibility, for instance), when they told their peers about the number of sexual partners they had in their daily lives (two, three women), when they did not contribute money to pay for the team’s expenses or even for rounds of beer.

Despite the relevance of these other aspects, we chose to focus on the analytical construction of the characters of the “kid” and the “old hand of the outskirts” regarding different ways of playing and different nuances of violence. The option was relevant because there were often charges that the “kids could beat” others but did it when it was not necessary, making matches “dangerous” and leading coaches to replace them in order to “hold the play on the ball” or even to withdraw their teams from the field when “things got ugly”. Our research made it quite clear that those called “kids” were more susceptible to “pressures” and intimidation and, quite often, were mentioned – in complaints from “veterans”, competition organizers and team owners – as those dealing with it disproportionately. The “kids” were more easily related to “confusion” in the sense that they were not willing to “accept” and “return” intimidation within the limits of football mimeses, according to different tension balances.

Criticism by a league official that said that “kids only want to fight and don’t accept any referee” (DC, June 30, 2011) was recurrent and this also manifested itself in the limitations of those “kids” to circulate in the city’s fields, as explained by a team official, pointing out that “we can no longer take the kids out of the neighborhood”, referring to their movement between neighborhoods, which “is becoming more complicated” (DC, May 21st, 2011). An event recorded in the diary and related to this apprehension felt by “veterans” and organizers involved a 17-year-old young player known as Palito. In the first of two matches against one team, this time out of his neighborhood, Palito was hit while disputing a ball with an opponent and had to leave the match because of pain. But he made a point of saying that he “did not accept it” and that “there would be payback” (DC, April 17, 2011). Days later, in the second match, this time in “his neighborhood”, under the eyes of “the community”, the “kid” clearly made the game “dangerous”. His moves in disputes clearly posed risks for opponents and himself, who acted quite disproportionately regarding the prevailing “playing on the ball”. That discrepancy meant

⁷ Names of teams and neighborhoods were also replaced to avoid embarrassment.

“violence”, which made one of the “veterans” who was watching the match on the edge of the field to shout the following comment: “This kid is crazy, he’s nuts” (DC, May 29, 2011).

However, while there was apprehension towards “kids” because of disproportional “violence” regarding their way of playing, the same “kids” learned “in their bodies” and “in the pressure” that it was necessary have “some malice”, which meant “being disloyal”. Disloyalty was related to “malice”, denoting what we understand as violence of the discrepancy between modes of playing and players’ behavior, which was intolerable especially when it left no chances for opponent’s defense. Differently, “having some malice”, “showing the studs on one’s cleats”, “putting one’s arm in a dispute”, not “taking one’s foot out” when possible to avoid further risks in a dispute represented a necessary etiquette to communicate “non-acceptance” of “pressure”.

More than “having malice”, stop “being a kid” was related to fruition in/among the different modes of playing (“on the ball”, “friendly”, “fleeing”, “tough”, “under pressure” “storm”, “dangerous”), that is, being able to evaluate, move around and behave among/in those different tension balances. Among many others, one of the situations that illustrates that condition – a requirement inscribed in bodies – was a “play off” match between São Pedro (an “old hand” team recognized in the circuit for the “pressure” it put in order to win) and Concórdia (a “kid” team from Paraná neighborhood). Near the end of the match, with São Pedro winning 5-1, its coach Edilson – an “old hand of the outskirts” – started to justify the score. The quality of football was not even cited as decisive, but rather their “pressure” on their opponents: “They’re just ‘little kids’. We move on them and they feel intimidated, then they don’t ‘put their foot’. Their number 17 [pointing to a skinny teenager] has not even touched the ball yet [laughs]” (DC, October 24, 2010).

The “little kids who accept” needed to internalize and externalize some “evil”, otherwise they would be close to being qualified as “square” players rather than “outskirts” players”. For example, in 2011, Guarani from Paraná neighborhood included several boys. Coach Miranda complained that they were “square kids”, claiming that they were “no good for the outskirts”. This was even more visible in a game “away from home”, especially regarding the behavior of one of the players known as Preguinho.

[...] In the second half, after taking several “moves” and “plucks” from opponents, Preguinho came to the side of the field and said: “I’m not playing anymore, I’m leaving”. Those who were “on the bench” said he could not leave because there was no one to replace him. At that time, the complainant was showing his knee and the “cut” on his shin, saying: “I’m leaving, look at this, they beat my knee, look at my leg”. Seeing that there was no other possibility, he returned to play. Regarding Preguinho, Chileno (an “old hand”) started to complain about the “kids” after the match, saying: In a “tough match” like this, he wanted to get the ball and just dribble away!?” He was “begging” to take some “moves”. (DC, May 1, 2011)

Two days after that match, in the meeting of the League that organized the competition, the behavior of the “square kids” from Guarani still resonated in the coach’s comments. Explaining the defeat, he said that the “kids” in his team “didn’t ‘move’ and that they had ‘bitched out’ under Centenários’s pressure” (DC, May 3, 2011). Therefore, “kids” were those who were included in the team for their football ability but had not mastered the etiquette of “malice” and “pressure”. “Old hands from the outskirts”, in turn, were those who received the ball, occupied spaces and, in doing so, took “moves”, but did not find them odd, knowing exactly the ways and times to face them.

“Putting pressure” and “standing the pressure” were also prerogatives of “good players”. Those who showed ability to “play under pressure”, who were not terrified and could handle

it, were appreciated. This is not to assert and boast that “old hands from the outskirts” were violent, but to understand that they had internalized – as their second nature – ways that were appropriate to different configurations and tension balances. In the “storm games”, “old hands” knew how to have some “malice” to protect themselves and continue participating actively in matches, when referees were urged to “let the game continue”. Therefore, paradoxically, “the malice” that could be seen as an act of “violence” in a more “friendly” configuration reflected exactly the contrary in a “tough” match “under pressure”, that is, a necessary educational process, a way to make opponents “respect” and play “on the ball”.

In dynamics of “pressure”, it was not prescribed that those involved should be less reckless and imprudent, but that they would need to “know how to be” if necessary, as a “veteran” required of a younger player, accusing him of not fighting back opponents’ “moves”: “You have to take it, but you also have to give it too, that’s how you’re respected ‘in the outskirts’” (DC, October 4, 2009). This “knowledge” could/should not be indiscriminately applied to every match or dispute. Since that discrepancy indicated inappropriate violence, it was necessary to have and maintain coherence in order not to be, on the one hand, a “square kid”, “bitched out” or a “whiner” or, on the other, “malicious”, “criminal” or “disloyal”, which were easily accused of “endangering” a match.

Therefore, there were types of “etiquettes” related to different tension balances. The “old hands” were those who knew how to move around in those differences and avoid discrepancies. They played “escaping”, “though”, “under pressure” according to the configurations. While the unpleasant “troubles” were related with disproportional body uses, the “veterans” created fewer such situations. They “just pla[yed] ball, they don’t make trouble”, as explained by Ruben, a team owner, comparing his team of “veterans” with that of the free category made up of more “kids” (DC, February 19, 2011).

“Veterans” expressed more clearly their concern to “hold the game on the ball”, which did not mean only “playing by escaping” or “accepting” provocations. Even in emotionally tense matches, they created conditions to assess what was violence and what was not, match by match, dispute by dispute. The match that drew the most attention in this regard took place in the finals of a veteran championship, between Bandeirantes (“the house” team) and Horizonte (“visiting” team). It was one of the tensest games, with many “tough moves”, with “pressure by the community” around the field. Referees could do little but “take the game”. In that scenario, a woman who watched the dispute said: “Everyone rules themselves there! Where’s the referee?!” (DC, November 2, 2010). In those few words, she defined much of what was seen in the field. Veterans mutually ruled the limits of body uses; a ruling that included their assessment about the proper use of “malice” given the need for production-avoidance of recklessness and imprudence.

In that match – many would agree that it was “dangerous” – in situations where a general fight was clearly imminent, players themselves, with the help of referees, tried to redraw the boundaries in or continue the dispute, with screams, gestures, threats and name-calling. The screams, the name-calling, the threats, some “moves” and “tough playing” in such cases, rather than negative, are a way to discipline, to return to “playing on the ball”. Another example of that happened on the field of Iguaçú Park in the city center, where two teams from the outskirts played a match. In that park, the presence of a woman and a teenager on the edge of the field again showed how much the “pressure game” was naturalized, in order not only to destabilize the opponent or referee, but also to ambiguously “hold” disputes “on the ball”. The situation was as follows:

In a move, a veteran player from Guarani fell out with the opponent and both started pushing with gestures that suggested the beginning of a fight. Seeing the situation, one of the player's (teenage) children tried to run towards his father's opponent. The mother-wife sought to prevent the boy from doing that, holding him, but does not hide her distress about the situation, asking her husband to leave the match and suggesting they should go away. She was clearly scared. Given that reaction by the woman, both husband and other colleagues and even opponents laughed at the situation and some said: “Don't worry, the ‘outskirts’ are like that”. Trying to soothe her, her husband said: “I was not going to punch him, everyone knows that; but they ‘put pressure’ and we have to ‘put pressure’ too, that's all”. (DC April 29, 2010)

The laughter, even from opponents, showed how much the wife and the son were unaware of “etiquettes” ruling the matches. Those recognized as “veterans”, even if they were young, showed sensitivity in that exercise of “ruling themselves” without this implying the early end of the match or, even worse, limitations on their potential to circulate around the city's fields to enjoy leisure.

6 FINAL REMARKS

The strangeness we mentioned at the beginning, which made us look into “kids” and “old hands”, urged us to try to understand them in their relation with violence in the “outskirts” leisure circuit. Given the strong presence of the contribution of Elisian theory in academic debates, we decided to do an exercise of approximation to “outskirts characters” under this conceptual framework, expecting to finally introduce some views that were not present in the understanding of leisure.

One view is related to the Elisian notion that in mimetic leisure sports emotions of violence can be experienced in a different tone, but in a manner accepted by the “good society”. In “Quest of excitement” (A BUSCA DA EXCITAÇÃO, ELIAS; DUNNING, 1992a), it is clear that the unacceptable violence is that which represents overly serious – not mimetic – participation, that is, involving social issues outside the configuration of the match, causing sports rules to be suspended or disregarded.

However, what we noticed in this research is that improper violence is not limited to non-mimetic participation. Besides that, we tried to show unpleasant violence as a result of disproportional “ways of playing” for the different nuances of tension balances (“on the ball”, “friendly”, “fleeing”, “tough”, “pressure” “storm”, “dangerous”). The lack of understanding of those nuances matched unpleasant behavior, that is, “which were not part of” the tension balance, but which were not located outside of the mimetic context. This led us to observe and define unpleasant mimetic violence that does not portray a complete break from sports configuration, but rather the discrepancy derived from the lack of sensitivity in evaluations and slidings between different ways of playing. That is a sensibility that is clearly placed in the constitution of the “kid” and “old hand of the outskirts”.

These two “characters” also made us revisit the concept of pleasant tension-excitement in leisure. In the case of outskirts sports leisure, we conclude that tension-excitement did not end only in the establishment of “an optimal level” for disputes – not too short, not too long. When we found different “levels or tension balance” that occurred even within a match, we could not help but notice that pleasant excitement was also experienced in emotional slidings between different appropriate balances. What made matches exciting was also the flow between ways of playing. In this sense, the games lived with enough intensity were those in which the tension

balance often was under construction, something which “old hands of the outskirts” could deal with properly in order to “hold the game” within the limits of mimetic practices.

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