

Hegemony and Counter-Hegemony in Football

Abstract: *As Michael Silk argues, we should see sports as “an element of the cultural terrain” which shapes the everyday experiences of the individual and becomes thus an important element in forming or contesting hegemony. (Andrews and Silk 2012, 5) In this article I will on the one hand analyze the process of forming the hegemony in football and, on the other hand, I will analyze the movement that challenges the effects of the neoliberal hegemony in football, in order to find out to what extent the Against Modern Football movement could be seen as a counter-hegemonic movement.*

Keywords: *hegemony; counter-hegemony; neoliberalism; social movements; football*

Introduction

This paper has two main goals, the first one is to analyze the way in which the current form of neo-liberal capitalism has become hegemonic in football and thus, I will highlight the results it produced and the way it is reproduced. Further, I will analyze the counter-hegemonic movement that has appeared in the terraces of the stadiums all over Europe. I will focus on the way in which the Against Modern Football movement is contesting the commercialization of football. I find it important to analyze the way in which hegemony operates at the level of civil society, thus, according to Gramsci, at this level hegemony is working as to create consent, but also, a counter-hegemonic movement can appear.

In the first part of the paper I will briefly define the concept of Hegemony and, using Carroll's ideas, I will shortly discuss the current hegemonic model. Afterwards, I will define the concept of counter-hegemony and, furthermore, I will explain the theoretical framework I will use in my analysis. The next part focuses on the definition of ultras and the differentiation between fans, ultras and hooligans. I believe that by understanding the characteristics of each group, one could more easily understand why the counter-hegemonic movement started in the terraces of the stadiums and why the ultras play the crucial role here. Finally, the last to parts focus, as mentioned above, on the analysis of hegemony and counter-hegemony in football.

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Hegemony – Defining the Concept

Hegemony is referring to a form of a stable rule, which is not based only on the exercise of violence, but uses it only in exceptional cases. Here comes the difference between dominant and hegemonic class; a class becomes hegemonic when it succeeds to lead to consents among the ruled classes. A hegemonial project is successful, when it is actively supported and the support is depending on the fulfillment of the interests of the society. Therefore, a Hegemonic rule has to seek to always have in sight the interest of different classes, but at the same time, to look for their own interest. For a class to be hegemonic, first it has to control and organize the production of goods/commodities; second, it has to take into consideration the interests of other classes and third, to have control over culture. (Scherrer 2007, 72–73) There are three phases in the construction of a hegemonic rule: the forming of a socio-economical basis, a civil-society and a political-society. The economical-corporate phase is the one in which a class discovers its economic interests by evaluating the role in the process of production. The movement from the first phase to the second one, the ethico-political one, takes place only when the class is able to come up with a strategy to universalize its interests. The last phase is only reached, when the plan or the program takes the shape of a state and, thus, the civil-society can be controlled by the coercion of the state. For Gramsci, hegemony starts in the basis, that means in the sphere of production, but that doesn't necessarily mean that the class that is dominant in the basis, will be dominant in the superstructure. (Scherrer 2007, 73) An important distinction has to be made here, between civil-society and political-society. Joseph Femia argues that, in order to understand this distinction, one has to look at the way in which social control is expressed. The social control is expressed in a dualistic way, internally and externally. The external control works through a system of rewards and punishment and the second type, the internal one is shaping the personal ideas of the people, as a way of replicas of existing norms. Hegemony has its roots in the second form of control, which is "obtained by consent rather than force of one class or group over other classes" and it works on the perception of the people, changing the way in which they perceive society. Gramsci argues that, as I mentioned above, it is not enough for one class to have control over others in the basis, to dominate in the superstructure (seen by Gramsci as formed by the two types of society), but it also needs moral and intellectual leadership. (Femia 1987, 23–25) Therefore, there is a need for intellectuals and for the work of institutions and relations of power, for hegemony to be successful. The intellectuals have a crucial role for Gramsci, they have to be involved in the production of class-consciousness and thus, in the universalization of interests. (Scherrer 2007, 74) There are two more distinctions that have to be made while defining hegemony, the first one between domination and hegemony, the first concept relies on the forming of allied groups that become leading, while hegemony has its roots in the civil society. The second distinction is between hegemony and supremacy, hegemony being part of supremacy, but it also involves state coercion. (Scherrer 2007, 74) The reproduction of hegemony takes place structurally, in the rhythm of the everyday life. That means that one group doesn't express constraint directly, but through the routine inducted by the capitalist mode of production. The most important condition here is the acceptance of the constraint, thus a person who accepts the conditions, will not feel the constraint, only those who do not accept it, feels it. (Scherrer 2007, 78)

Going back to division between social and political society. It is important to highlight that Gramsci sees the civil society as the institutions that create and promote ideology and thus,

part of the superstructure. The political society on the other hand represents the repressive apparatus of the state. There are moments when these two types of society overlap, as Femia argues, especially when political parties, part of the civil society, move to the political society and thus control the apparatus of repression. (Femia 1987, 26–28) Esteve Morera clarifies these concepts by saying that civil society organizes consensus while political society organizes force. Furthermore, he argues that in the modern society, the civil society has a greater role than the political one, so that a hegemonic class has nowadays to work on the economic conditions and also, maybe more important, as an educator, and thus not use the force. (Morera 1990, 28–32)

Another important concept in the analysis of hegemony is the historic bloc. The concept is used by Gramsci to describe the combination between the leadership of the hegemonic class in the civil society and in the sphere of production. As Roger Simon highlights, for a class to be hegemonic, it has to both control the economic factors and the civil society, but the bourgeoisie never managed to gain total control in the field of production. This mainly refers to a system of alliances between “a bloc of social forces capable of enduring for an entire historical period” (Simon 2005, 30–36)

Jonathan Joseph argues that one should not see hegemony as a whole, but there are two aspects that have to be distinguished. The first sense is the deeper sense and it operates at structural level as to ensure social cohesion and it reproduces relations and structural processes. The second one is the surface hegemony, a more conscious type that includes hegemonic projects. The hegemonic projects have their roots in the deeper conditions, at the structural level. It is difficult to distinguish between the two of them, but it is important to know that the deeper form is expressed through projects and these projects are generated and determined by the pre-existing conditions. Analyzing hegemonic problems and trying to seek out the interests they represent, the classes involved and the promoted world-views, could be a good way in which hegemony could be analyzed, Joseph argues. (Joseph 2002, 128–29)

There is one more aspect I will shortly discuss before moving to the concept of counter-hegemony. As Barfuss argues, in the foundation of the concept of hegemony lies the process of self-liberation from the ruling order. In the process of getting out of the old hegemony, the need of counter-hegemony arises. To get to a sense of self-consciousness, one has to go through a struggle between contrasting hegemonic orientations. This is how a counter-hegemony becomes effective, by replacing an old hegemony. (Barfuss and Jehle 2017, 28)

Counter-hegemony

The civil society is, thus, for Gramsci, the place where counter-hegemony could appear. Brand argues that the counter-hegemonic projects do not appear in the whole civil society, but in the small sectors of the civil society, where the power-relations start to be questioned. (Brand 2005, 10) Seeking to answer the question: how can social movements become counter-hegemonic, Carroll starts by looking at the formation of a counter-hegemonic historic bloc and by analyzing the concept of the war of position. In this case, war of position means creating post-capitalist ideas and belief in the possibility of a radical transformation. In the same way in which consent is organized in the society, there is the possibility of organizing dissent. (William K. Carroll 2010, 8) It is important to know that Carroll sees globalization, neoliberalism and fragmentation as part of the post-modern hegemony. This is why he argues that

counter-hegemonic movement appear in contrast to the aspects of capitalist hegemony mentioned above. One of the biggest challenges for a counter-hegemonic movement is that of avoiding to be captured by hegemonic discourses and practices and furthermore, how to “how to weld the present to the future”.(Carroll 2014, 20) In opposing the current capitalist hegemony, Carroll argues, a counter-hegemonic movement has to build solidarities, which means gather different social forces together, around an alternative ethico-political view that transcends the interests of one group, in order to build a historical bloc and to conduct a war of positions. Also, it is important for them to address state issues, as well as international issues.(Carroll 2014, 21)

In another article, Carroll develops a theoretical framework that could be used in the analysis of counter-hegemonic movements, focusing on the “cultural-material formation”. The first aspect is the so called “process of catharsis”, meaning, the assimilation of the formation of the collective will, which implies recognizing the forces that makes the individual passive and the creation of new ethico-political initiatives. Basically this implies the reorientation from an economically-based view, in which interests are narrowly formed, towards a ethico-political view. The next facet refers to the unification of different classes around a common view, which involves partial transformations in the identity of several classes or groups. The next aspect is the war of positions through which the “balance of power” in the civil society could be changed. In this way, post-capitalist values are created, while also being a mutually reinforcing process. Another important facet is the international character, thus a counter-hegemonic movement has to start local, but, in time, it has to become transnational. Prefiguration is also important, meaning here, the incorporation of politics in the everyday routine, so that elitism and the bourgeoisie can be more easily combated. The last facet is the construction of a historical bloc around a counter-hegemonic project.(Carroll 2010, 174–77)

There is one more aspect that I need to shortly clarify, before moving towards the analysis. As mentioned above, Carroll sees three important features of the current capitalist hegemony: postmodern fragmentation, neoliberalism and globalization from above. I will shortly describe those terms in the following paragraph. In his view, Carroll sees as one important way of action of capitalist hegemony, the idea of “divide and conquer”. Through implanting the idea that different groups can perform different roles, fragmentation appeared, which led to the formation of “consent without consensus”, mainly because, as he argues, capitalism does not seek to form consensus, but to stimulate consumption and production. Fragmentation is the product of ideological diversification, which basically means the impossibility of forming a sense of solidarity between different groups and “semiotic implosion”, meaning the prevalence of superficiality, leading to the impossibility of conceiving anti-capitalist projects. (Carroll 2014, 11-13)

Neoliberalism has the crucial role in reproducing hegemony, according to Carroll. Two concepts are important here, “accumulation by dispossession” and market liberalization. The economy, in this sense, has to work like a independent mechanism, protected by the state and insulated from the people. Market becomes the central pillar in the life of the people, guaranteeing freedom and leading thus to “possessive individualism”. (Carroll 2014, 13–15)

The last feature, globalization from above, is described a mechanism of organizing consent. Globalization is tightly bound by the internationalization of capital and became a meta-narrative. By offering a story about an endless circuit of exchangeability that will form the new world order, globalization became a form of “hegemonic crisis management”. One result of this metanarrative is the transfer of financial crisis to weaker states, while offering the image

of stability and prosperity to the stronger ones. Important to note here is that these 3 features are seen by Carroll as an assemblage, working very effectively together and reproducing capitalist hegemony. (Carroll 2014, 16–18)

Ultras – a short history

First, I have to draw a distinctive line between fans, ultras and hooligans, in order to have a better understanding of the way the different groups on the stadium are organized. The fan is perceived as the individual, whose affiliation towards the favorite club became central to its personal identity, dominating other identities. The favorite football club is the principal reference point, using “we” when talking about the club, developing in this way a sense of “we-ness”. According to Porat, there are three types of experiences, which stand at the root of the fan’s identity: the “emotional-affective experience” (consists in a spontaneous way of perceiving the wins and losses of supporting the club), the “cognitive experience” (a conscious way) and the “symbolic experience” (tightly bound by the symbolic and cultural characteristics of the club). (Porat 2010, 277–82)

The term hooligan was first used in the nineteenth century and it was referring to an Irish family that “terrorized” London. Hooliganism, according to Van der Vilet, can be seen as a sub-culture, manifested both inside and outside the stadiums. Hooliganism is based on friendship, common norms and values, among which consumption of alcohol, drugs and fighting rival groups. (Kontos and Brotherton 2008, 49–51) Guschwan sees two main differences between ultras and hooligans, first difference is related to violence, hooligans using physical violence, while ultras rather focus on symbolic violence. The second difference is related to the use of alcohol and drugs, these characteristics are not typically to ultras. (Guschwan 2007, 254)

The origins of the term “ultras” are tightly bound to the left-wing groups that started to appear in Italy after 1948 and, according to Adam Brown, it described political extremism. The Italian society after the Second World War was characterized by deep political conflicts and political meaning was attributed to every sector of the social field, including football. The conflicts started to become more evident even in the terraces of the stadiums, so that rivalries between clubs started to appear. A good example in this sense is the city of Milan, where the big rivalry between Internazionale and AC Milan had an ideological basis. Inter was perceived as being the club of the bourgeoisie, while AC Mila was the club of the middle class and the workers. The first ultras groups on the stadiums started to appear in the 1960’s, some of them having their roots in the big student strikes of the period. (Brown 1998, 88-90) This is why, the interest in politics is a crucial characteristic for the ultras. Guschwan sees different periods in which the interest in politics had different meanings. Starting with the 60’s, until the 80’s, there was a huge interest in national politics, but after 1983, the interest in local and regional politics started to outgrow the national level. During this period, the level of violence increased, while the stadium became the “mother country”. Starting from 1995, the latest period is characterized by the fight against the “Modern Football”, which means, the neo-liberalization and globalization of the sport. (Guschwan 2007, 254–57) This will be my focus in the next part of the paper.

Before moving to the next part though, it is important to describe the main characteristics of the “ultras identity”. Doidge sees the rituals as the core of the identity, thus through these, symbols come to represent the group himself. In addition, the rituals have the role of forming

a sense of community, bringing people together while enabling the interactions between the group-members. Among these rituals, the most important ones are the preparation of choreographies, the weekly or periodically meeting between the group-members, the trips to the away games, the displaying of messages during games. The symbols, as I said above, are also important in the reproduction and the displaying of the group-identity, thus there are certain symbols, which stand for the group. Among these are songs, flags, colors, players. Usually every ultras group has its own flag which delimitates their place in the terrace.(Doidge 2017, 51–52) Important in the reproduction of the group-identity is the presence of rivals. Giulianotti argues that war is an important factor in the ultra culture. The wars against the rivals are mainly symbolic, even though there were cases of physical clashes between groups. Its role is, on the one hand to form alliances or to further the rivalry and on the other hand to strengthen the collective identity. The alliances are mainly formed ideologically, as were most of the rivalries, even though there were rivalries based on cultural cleavages (Celtic Glasgow and Rangers) or on local or ethnical basis. The fight with the rivals is mainly symbolic, through songs, messages or choreographies as the ultras seek to symbolically humiliate them. On the other hand, the process of identifying with the group works through a process of acknowledging the characteristic of the “inner-group” and, in the same time comparing those with the rival groups. (Giulianotti, 1994, 82–84)

I find that Guschwan’s definition describes the ultras very well, according to him, ultras are: “organized groups of fans committed to supporting the team and are a significant element of youth culture throughout Italy and Europe.” Important is that Ultras act according to a code, “La Mentalità” which “dictates that the ultra must be an active spectator, overtly display identity, and confront authority and other ultras within the limits of an honor code”. (Guschwan 2007, 254)

Neoliberal hegemony in Football

In order to understand the “against modern football” movement, first one has to understand the meaning of the “modern football”. I would call it, the way in which hegemony is established in football. One of the starting points of the “modern football” is England and in the next part, I will shortly describe the way in which capitalism became hegemonic on the football stadium. Also, I will approach the cases of Germany and Italy as well. Prior to the appearance of modern football, the stadiums were considered the places of working class communion, football being at first a proletarian sport. Starting with the emergence of the financialisation of the British economy, wealth started to be concentrated in London, producing though a modification in the class structure. The post-Fordist era furthered the difference between the middle-class and the working class, relations within classes were affected as well, leading to powerful fragmentation. This phenomenon was immediately reflected on the stadiums. Starting with the 70’s the fragmentation between classes was reflected as acts of physical violence between hooligan firms, according to Webber. During Thatcher’s period as prime-minister, free-market was seen as more important than public safety. This led to intensification of violence on and off the stadium, culminating with the tragedy at Hillsborough, which is seen as the culmination of the neo-liberal policies. (Webber 2017, 4–7) After the tragic event, the Football Association decided to apply the same neo-liberal market principles in football, stating that football had to become more commercially and market-oriented. One important con-

dition for this to happen was to attract a new type of fan, to replace the old proletariat from the terraces. The FA argued that it had to focus more on the middle and upper-middle class, so that the necessary measures had to be taken as soon as possible. The “bourgeoisisation” of the football stadium started through the commodification of the game. The advertisement boards, Man of the Match awards and sponsorships started to become more important. All this changed the match-day experience, putting emphasis on marketization and increased consumption. Due to the growth of the ticket prices and to the increased media-coverage of the games, the split between the fans and the club started growing. (Webber 2017, 9–10) In the quest to attract the “new supporter”, even the stadiums had to be radically changed, facilities were upgraded, marketing spaces were increased, so that football became, as Webber says, a “revenue-maximizing business”. The combination between the renewal of football stadium, the reproduction of neo-liberal market values transformed the clubs in interesting businesses for outside investors, as an evidence, in 2003, Roman Abramovich has bought Chelsea, Michael Glazer has bought Manchester United in the same year. In 2016, AC Milan was bought in 2017 by Li Yonghong, a Chinese businessman, but he sold the club only 16 months later to Elliott Management Corporation. In the last 10 years, Asian businesspersons bought many European football clubs (Inter Milano, Manchester City, Leicester City, Cardiff, City, Southampton, etc). Another important factor is the growing importance of the broadcasters. In England, for example, the television rights were sold for a 305 million pounds, five-year deal. (Webber 2017, 10–12) Of course this deal was signed in the 90’s, once Premier League was created, but the neo-liberal strategy continued until today. For example, the television rights were sold to Sky in 2015 for £4.176bn (a three-year deal). (Rumsby 2015) A study made by thisismoney.co.uk shows that since the 1990 the ticket prices at a Manchester United game have grown by 700 per cent. In the 90’s a ticket was only £3.50, but in 2011 it was £28. (thisismoney.co.uk, 2011) Today a ticket costs even more, the cheapest one is 36 pounds, according to the official website. All these have contributed to the transformation of the football fan. As Toby Miller argues, the fan has become both a consumer and a producer, but I would argue that the fans, now, with the clubs owned by the world’s richest and with the high influence of the television channels that own the broadcasting rights and the intense surveillance and strict rules, the fan is mainly a consumer, thus he is only a quite spectator on the stadium. (Andrews and Silk 2012, 29)

There are two effects of the neo-liberal strategy, on the one hand there are some clubs which have gained tens of millions of euros, but at the same time, there are way more clubs, especially in the lower leagues, which have faced serious financial problems. On the other hand, “this has led to the disembedding of clubs from the working-class communities out of which they arose”. (Webber 2017)

The case of Germany is slightly different; of course, the national context was different as well. Since the creation of the Bundesliga in 1963, a big transformation happened; the small, local or suburban clubs slowly disappeared, while the large towns were “monopolized” by one major club, breaking in this way the connection between fans and the club. Another important change happened in 1972, with the removal of the upper limit on player’s wages and with the introduction of business principles. Starting with the 80’s, sponsors became more and more important, in the early 2000’s, more than 120 million German Mark were paid as sponsorship fees to the clubs, reaching 330 million Euros in 2005. (Merkel 2012, 361–63)

This type of new rule over the football and especially football stadium was not imposed by a violent exercise of power by the state, even though, the security controls have increased, the

stadiums have video surveillance and the police or even private security companies are ready to act at any point. Looking at the three phases that occur in the construction of a hegemonic rule, I would say that the plan can be easily seen in the neo-liberalization of football. First of all, the bourgeoisie, in this case, the club owners and the leaders of the football federations discovered their economical interests, turning football into a profitable business. The plan was to adopt the neo-liberal principles and re-organize football according to those. In this process, the middle class was involved as well, as the class which profited from the change, for example by attending the games on better stadiums, with better catering services or other facilities. The last phase, the control of the civil society through coercion is reached here in a dual way, first through the initial exclusion of those who cannot afford the prices and second through the presence of the security on the stadiums. As mentioned above, the reproduction of hegemony takes place through the activities of everyday life. In the case of football, it is reproduced through the regular activities which became part of the ritual before the game, wearing the official shirt of the team, buying articles from the official store, even spending time and money at the stadium before the game, paying the high prices of the tickets. Another important aspect here is the acceptance of the coercion, of the security checks, the only ones opposing coercion are the ultras, but these I will talk about in the next part. What is important here is that the effects of neo-liberal policies have drastically changed the football and the stadiums. Most of the fans are now bound by the commercialization of football, in England for example, the phenomenon of football tourism is growing every year, according to the last study conducted by VisitBritain, there were 800,000 international fans between 2013 and 2015. (“VisitBritain’s Reports Football Tourism a Great Score For Britain” 2015) Another emerging habit is that of sponsorships of the stadiums. There are huge international companies which have bought the name rights of several important stadiums, for example, Red Bull has two stadiums with the same name “Red Bull Arena”, one in Leipzig and one in Salzburg; the stadium where Bayer Leverkusen plays is named after the big pharma company Bayer, the same happened in several other cases all over Europe. (Football-Stadiums.Co.Uk” n.d.) The stadiums became similar to shopping malls, with lots of shops, restaurants, being places where consumerism is strongly encouraged. Not only did the purpose of the stadium change, from a cultural space, towards a consumerist space, the fans are changed as well, already mentioned. Most of the fans nowadays are more passive, focusing more on buying merchandising articles or enjoying the facilities or the “shows” before the games, leading thus to a passive acceptance of the neo-liberal hegemony. As mentioned above, the neoliberal hegemonic project does not seek to create consent, but to stimulate production and consumption and, this is what was achieved in this case as well. (Carroll 2014, 11–13) The only ones opposing these practices are the ultras that mainly populate the terraces of the stadiums, because of the lower prices. The “No to Modern Football” movement is the most important counter-hegemonic movement that emerged, in contrast to the neo-liberalization of football.

“Against Modern Football” – a Counter-hegemonic Movement?

The Against Modern Football is, according to Perasoiviã, “a widespread and heterogeneous social movement that exists all over the world. Most of the Ultras groups belong to this movement at least symbolically, and they express their solidarity with other actors in the movement

in various ways.”(Perasoviæ and Mustapiæ 2018, 9) It is important to see AMF as a movement with the precise goal to form a resistance against the commercialization of football.(Webber 2017, 12) The various ultra groups adopted very different ways of action. The research conducted by Perasoviæ has shown that there are two main modes of action, one symbolic, through messages that have a “universal meaning”, expressing solidarity with other ultra-groups all over Europe. The second type includes a more active approach, depending on the context it can result in protests or other concrete actions against commercialization and increased surveillance or against the establishment. (Perasoviæ and Mustapiæ 2018, 9) For a better understanding, I will use the examples provided by the Croatian context, further I will relate to the German and Italian context as well. The Torcida (the ultras of Hajduk Split) used banners with anti- modern football messages, flags, stickers, t-shirts and even graffiti on the walls around the stadium. Most of the time the message is simple and direct: “Against Modern Football”, of course accompanied by messages of support for groups from all over Europe. This types of messages were shown in Italy, Portugal, Spain, Germany, Romania. Also, an important tool for the distribution of the no to modern football message is the internet, an important role here is played by ultras-tifo.net, the most popular international ultras-forum, where pictures form various choreographies, banners and messages are posted. Besides this symbolic actions, Torcida also use boycotts, demonstrations, even physical conflict as forms of fighting against the modern football. In 2012, for example, Torcida boycotted the national team game against Switzerland and the next year they boycotted the local derby against RNK Split, mainly because the ticket prices became very expensive. Torcida members gathered in front of the stadium before the game and started a violent conflict with the police. Another example would be the protest started by the Torcidas in Split, in 2014. The protest gathered 30,000 people who demonstrated against the Football Federation. Also, one year earlier, Torcida managed to stop the privatization of the club, opposing to the decision of the city council to sell the shares to a US company. (Perasoviæ and Mustapiæ 2018, 9–11)

The English case is different from the Croatian, mainly because hooligans populate the English terraces, not by ultras. As a rejection of the modern football, the hooligans have adopted, in the 90’s a “new casual style”, trying to re-shape the terrace culture and to become more authentic. The new style is characterized by a preference for a defined style of clothes, not related in any sense to the football club, but mostly produced by expensive brands. The ritualic meeting and drinking before the game and the expression of masculinity became important as well.(Webber 2017, 12–13) This is the main reason why I don’t consider the English version of the AMF as being relevant in this context, mainly because they have chosen to fight the commercialization of football with the tools provided by the capitalist hegemony itself, mainly consumerism. Moreover, as argued above, a movement has to step out of the frame imposed by the hegemonic rule, to be considered a counter-hegemony.

In Italy, for example, “Movimento ultras” was formed in 2012 as a network of supporters, with the precise goal to “defend the tradition of Italian supporters vis-à-vis the commodification and commercialization”. One interesting aspect here is that the AMF movement broke the bridges of rivalry between clubs, forming thus a common interest and automatically, a common enemy. Protests started to appear in Italy even before the Movimento, for example, in 2005 the ultras of AC Parma have left the terraces and placed there a message: “Do you prefer money over your supporters? This is the terrace that you merit.”(Numerato 2015, 126) When the surveillance procedures on the stadium intensified, the ultras of AS Roma proceeded to the

same type of action, in 2010. The Italian ultras often associated the modern football with the National Basketball Association in USA, where supporters only clap their hands, but there is no support for the favorite club or a strong connection between them. (Numerato 2015, 126-27)

The German model is again slightly different from the ones described above. Central to the German ultras is the sense of community formed around the club. This is mainly produced by the 50+1 rule, according to which, supporters have to own the majority of the shares in a club. Nonetheless, big companies managed in some cases to own clubs despite of this law, it is the case of RB Leipzig or VFL Wolfsburg. (Webber 2017, 14) The German ultras feel that the DFB marginalizes them by establishing patterns of consumption. In addition, a major concern is the maintenance of the original name of the stadiums, thus more and more stadiums are named after big companies. (Merkel 2012, 369) In this sense, for example, the ultras of Borussia Mönchengladbach protested against during the game against RB Leipzig, while they stood silently for several minutes, thus RB Leipzig is perceived as the product of the modern football in Germany. (www.ruhrbarone.de, 2019)

Among important result achieved by the AMF movement is the appearance of Supporters Direct and its Manifesto to Reform Football, which appeared in 2015. The manifesto calls for important changes in the English football, among those, a new law that protects the supporters, the promotion of supporter ownership and a more rigorous check on the owners of the clubs. Also, another important result is the appearance of STAND, an online-forum which is the “unofficial AMF fanzine”.(Webber 2017)

Looking back at the theoretical framework described by Carroll, I would argue that the phenomenon of catharsis has already happened, thus without the influence of an organic intellectual, but it was a purely bottom-up phenomenon that appeared as a result of the perception that the ultras were being pushed aside by the new form of supporters. Not only the high prices of the tickets and the strong commercialization of football was contested by them, but a more important problem was highlighted, the growing distance between the club and the ultra groups. This made it possible for different groups to be unified around a common interest, the protection of their terraces and the rejection of the modern football. I find this aspect truly crucial, because, looking just at the level of the civil society, the unification of several classes around one common interest seems easier than in this case. As I mentioned earlier, the rivalry between ultras is a important factor in the reproduction of their identity, so that the alliances formed around the AMF seemed at first more difficult, but it happened, even in Italy where rivalries are long-lasting and have a violent past. The war of positions here is conducted in several areas, online through the websites used by ultras all around Europe, locally and nationally during the games and during the protests inside and outside the stadiums. As the manifesto says, as managers and directors come and go, the supporters are staying and they have to endure the changes that happen. Thus, it is not enough to reduce the ticket prices, but fans have to become part of the club, the decision-making has to become democratized. In addition, the import of foreign players has to be replaced by the production of youth players. (“Time for a Manifesto for Football” 2013) It is important to note here that during the period of contestation of the modern way of football, a manifesto appeared which highlights the idea of “supporters before money” and which could be seen as an alternative plan for the future. Also, very important here is the international character of the movement. As mentioned above, a counter-hegemonic movement has to start at local level and become international. AMF managed to reach terraces all over Europe: Germany, England, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Romania, Croatia, etc.

Conclusion

There is one important aspect that I would like to discuss here, the role of the stadium for the ultras. As Testa argues, the stadium can be seen as a public space where ideas are born, problems are dealt with and I will add now, hegemonies can be contested. “The Italian football stadium is one of the few remaining Italian modern social Agorá. It is a site where not only football, but also ideological opinions – often the antithesis of notions of political correctness – and direct actions are freely expressed in the pursuit of a wider consensus and resistance.” (Testa 2009, 61) This is why I find it important to analyze the counter-hegemonic movement in football, because the stadium could be a place where the process of catharsis starts, even without an organic intellectual, as it started in the case of ultras, and though a group-consciousness emerged.

If we perceive football as a form of cultural manifestation, the contestation of hegemony in the terraces has to be seen as an important factor in the context of the appearance of a war of positions within the civil society. What I am trying to argue here is that, the AMF is not a counter-hegemonic movement per se, it is a counter-hegemonic movement at a micro-level and thus it does not include several classes. However, it is important if we think of it as a war of positions at a cultural or sub-cultural level, thus, ultras are mainly perceived as a sub-culture, but football is part of the cultural level. In this sense, the terraces could be part of a broad counter-hegemonic project in the future.

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