

Friendly Competition:
A Case Study of the Supporter Groups of the Colorado Rapids and Glocalization

A thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the
Department of Sociology
The Colorado College
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Arts

Samuel Franklin
Spring 2012

On my honor
I have neither given nor received
unauthorized aid on this thesis.

Samuel Franklin
Spring 2012

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank everyone who made this project possible. I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Jeff Livesay, for his support and guidance throughout this journey. I would also like to thank Wayne Brant whose blessing made this project feasible. In addition, I would like to thank the Colorado Rapids organization and their supporters whose enthusiasm and contributions to this project were invaluable. Finally, I would like to thank my mom, my dad, my brother, and Lauren for their boundless encouragement.

ABSTRACT

The increasing presence of supporter groups, or organized fan groups driven by diverse cultural practices, of the Colorado Rapids has resulted in a non-traditional American spectator experience for some fans at games and is an area suitable for sociological study due to gaps in the body of literature. Using Giulianotti and Robertson's (2007) theory of glocalization as a lens, this thesis examines the forces that are influencing the supporter groups. This study investigates the effect of the forces of globalization on the supporter groups of the Colorado Rapids. Qualitative methods and in-depth interviews were used to obtain information about these processes. This study found three forces simultaneously competing with one another in an effort to become the cultural norm for spectators at Colorado Rapids games.

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INTRODUCTION

The rise of supporter groups or organized fan groups in the United States is a phenomenon that has influenced American soccer culture. Supporter groups have risen to prominence over the last few years as the increased acceptance of soccer has galvanized the supporters' movement. As the enthusiasm for soccer has spread from the rest of the world to the United States, the interpretation of the behavior of the most passionate soccer fans is a compelling topic for study.

The visual, vocal, and organized style of support is not a traditional American form of spectator culture, but it has become crucial to the framework of soccer spectator culture in the United States. In the process of growth among supporter groups in the United States, they have undergone a wealth of global influence. Supporter groups are exposed to local supporter cultures around the world and see the differences between them. These global forces have had a profound effect on the supporters of the Colorado Rapids, the local Major League Soccer (MLS) club in Denver, Colorado, as they mimic learned styles of support from around the world in an effort to bring into being their own unique variety of support for the Rapids.

The core MLS fan in America is undergoing a change from a passive spectator to an active "soccer supporter" who takes elements from global soccer cultures and adapts these newfound rituals to support their club. In the case of the Colorado Rapids, a club that has been in existence since the inception of MLS in 1996, the effect of global soccer fan culture on the clubs' supporter groups remains unclear. Using Giulianotti and Robertson's (2007) theory of glocalization as a lens, what is the nature of this influence? Furthermore, how do the supporters and the front office react to the global influence?

To understand how supporter groups in the United States arrived in the state they are in today, it is crucial to become familiar with not only the history of soccer support locally in Denver since the inception of the Colorado Rapids in 1996, but also the historical marginalization of soccer in the United States. Drawing on interviews using Giulianotti and Robertson's (2007) theoretical lens, I assess the how the ongoing process of glocalization effects the supporter groups of the Colorado Rapids.

HISTORY

Missed Opportunities (1869 – 1929)

An examination of the historical position of soccer in the United States illuminates the cultural hesitation to embrace a globally normative phenomenon. The resistance to the adoption of soccer in the United States or the cultivation and development of a unique American soccer culture functioned to allow the sporting field of the United States, for example football and baseball, to take its own path relative to cultural trends in the rest of the world. The hostility fixed on soccer from influential establishments, most notably the media and colleges, suppressed any potential nationalist sentiments that could be encouraged by international competition. A distinct soccer culture did not develop, and instead neglectful indifference resulted in the suppression of soccer until the modern era (Markovits & Hellerman 2001; Giulianotti & Robertson 2004).

The formative years of soccer in the United States were characterized by the development of local sporting systems, hegemonic institutionalization, and hostility to the importation of European games. During the time from 1869 to 1930, the United States was content with its place as a provincial nation, isolated from world affairs. This

sentiment was reflected in the American sporting landscape. The collegiate arena was the first locality where the English form of soccer was imported and introduced to the community. What is conventionally called the first football game in history between Princeton and Rutgers on November 6, 1869, was a soccer-style match. The rules stipulated that the ball could be moved with the feet or the head, but caught with the hands. The winner was the first team to earn six points by moving the ball through posts twenty-five feet wide. Two divergent paths emerged from this game – one towards soccer and the other towards football. Most of the Ivy League schools were happy with the soccer-style game, except for Harvard, which preferred the football-style game. Due to Harvard's esteem, other schools followed suit. The initial rejection of soccer by Harvard allowed soccer to lose its potential to assimilate immigrant communities. Harvard's influential decision gave football its transformative power as a cultural institution. The rejection of soccer in the collegiate community left soccer as a marginalized relic of the old world (Markovits & Hellerman 2001; Wangerin 2006).

The limited standing of soccer in mainstream American society did not prevent local immigrant communities of European origin from attempting to establish soccer in the United States. In the early twentieth century, immigrants established soccer's organizational infrastructure and concurrently conformed to international standards. The United States Soccer Football Association (USSFA) was established in 1913 and recognized by Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) in 1914 (Wangerin 2006). The adherence to the rules and oversight of an external administrative body was unique to American sports, because soccer was not governed by Americans and unique American rules as opposed to football and baseball whose management resided in

the United States. The foreign nature of soccer was a contributing factor to soccer's precarious position in the United States. Consequently, soccer had a difficult time unseating the hegemonic sporting cultures of baseball and football (Giulianotti & Robertson 1999). There were distinct un-American cultural undertones to soccer and its organizers because they were recent immigrants who spoke with an accent. In the face of these challenges, the administrators sought to promote the game. One of the first acts of the USSFA was to establish what is now called the U.S. Open Cup in 1914. This competition complemented regular season play and served as a national elimination tournament based on the English FA Cup¹. The tournament was attractive to immigrant communities but still failed to reach the mainstream (Markovits & Hellerman 2001). The influence of the international community was prominent in the early formation of the American soccer community, but soccer was still met with suspicion by the general public (Markovits & Hellerman 2001; Giulianotti & Robertson 2009).

Over the next several decades following the first soccer-style game in the United States, many local amateur and semi-pro clubs tied to industrial centers and populated largely by immigrant talent began to form their own regional leagues. After an unsuccessful attempt by Major League Baseball owners to create a professional soccer league that lasted seventeen days in 1894, the first legitimate professional soccer league in the United States formed under the auspices of American Soccer League (ASL) in 1921. The ASL consolidated the regional leagues into a sanctioned professional association. As the name indicates, this league was a cultural hybrid whose organizers were in touch with public sentiment. The ASL was an attempt to normalize an American

¹ A knockout competition contested in England for English soccer clubs. It is the oldest running soccer competition in the world, first played during the 1871-1872 season.

appreciation of the international game (Wangerin 2006). However, domestication processes never gained traction because players were imported from the United Kingdom despite a few notable exceptions. In other words, a creolization of American soccer culture never reached second and third-generation Americans, and soccer failed to transcend its immigrant background. The league did have several teams that drew very well and played the game at a high level, but soccer never outgrew its niche sport status (Giulianotti & Robertson 2009). Indigenization did not materialize because the ASL never outgrew its ethnic roots to develop its own American culture of soccer fandom and style of play (Giulianotti & Robertson 2004). The ASL was a regional league, and clubs sought to create geographic association with their fans rather than ethnic, political, or religious ties, as many other soccer clubs did outside of the United States. The ownership model in the United States may have weakened community-club bonds. As stated by Giulianotti & Robertson (2009: 21), “Supporter identities varied markedly between nations due to divergent club constitutions. In Iberia and Latin America, most clubs were private associations that allowed *socios* (members) to elect presidents and to use the club’s sporting facilities. In the United Kingdom and Italy, private ownership prevailed, producing weaker owner-supporter bonds.” After clubs and the USSFA squabbled over a scheduling conflict, irreparable damage had been done, and the league collapsed with a whimper in 1929 (Wangerin 2006).

At the same time the ASL was at its peak, international teams toured the country to much fanfare – but soccer never reached the mainstream. The tours revealed the simultaneous potential and limiting components of a nation without a hegemonic soccer community. An example of this was when Hakoah Vienna visited the Polo Grounds in

1929 to a crowd of 46,000 (Wangerin 2006). The dual nature of the ethnic glocal communities (in this case the Jewish community), which would succumb to the homogenizing forces of society on any other day, showed up in force and supported their ethnicity, not necessarily the game of soccer. Local ethnic communities situated in the United States sought to assimilate, not differentiate themselves from the general population. They embraced Hakoah instead of supporting the local soccer clubs, community, and culture (Giulianotti & Robertson 2009). As stated by Giulianotti & Robertson (2009: 19), relativization was a process where "...national societies came into increasing contact with each other, so they were inspired to differentiate themselves, to sharpen their identity-markers in relation to others." The tours were popular with their respective ethnic communities that wanted to be Americanized but had no interest in soccer past its connection to their country of origin. The American soccer culture was influenced by Scots, English, and Irish, but an American soccer culture did not develop. American club teams were immigrants too, so there was not a domain where American soccer clubs could compare themselves to European clubs (Markovits & Hellerman 2001).

The USSFA did not attempt to develop high school soccer and did not implement any grass roots programs that could inculcate soccer into non-immigrant communities. The hegemony of educational institutions in sport highlighted this oversight. The media and fans did not establish an American soccer culture because there was not enough focus on youth development and American players. One of the major shortcomings of the ASL was that American players were not developed and embraced, so American soccer players were met with indifference. As stated by Giulianotti and Robertson (2009: 33),

“Football’s initial diffusion and subsequent popularization depended upon the positive reception by young males in diverse contexts.” Importantly, it was one’s ethos not one’s ethnicity that made one an American, so soccer could not attract young males to play it as their callisthenic outlet. The international cultural flows were blocked by hegemonic sports that had saturated the American sporting space and were satisfied with domestic competition, titles, and the American way. Soccer had been crowded out by football and basketball which became the mainstream sports of choice while soccer remained in the domain of “the other” and immigrant players who were largely foreign born (Markovits & Hellerman (2001).

The Dormant Years (1930 – 1967)

Following the demise of the ASL in 1929, soccer during the dormant years from 1930 to 1967 remained marginalized and obscure. Without a top-flight professional league, cultural flows stopped in ethnic communities because America was in many ways a xenophobic country keen on the normalization of its citizens. America’s foreign affairs in World War II and the Cold War did not help to assuage these sentiments. Soccer remained a foreign entity, and despite appearances of American teams in the 1930, 1934, and 1950 World Cups, soccer received little to no coverage. Soccer survived in the form of amateur or semi-pro leagues that were based in ethnic enclaves (Markovits & Hellerman 2001; Wangerin 2006). These glocal communities had multinational elements, and they differentiated themselves from other Americans, but soccer was never able to transcend these communities to obtain transformative power (Giulianotti & Robertson 2007). Consequently, American ethnic soccer systems never left their respective communities, and soccer still had not been able to reach second and third-generation

Americans. Due to the newfound momentum of the National Basketball Association and the National Football League, the challenge to unseat hegemonic norms became an ever more daunting task. The sporting space became ever more crowded and satisfied the American sports fan. Soccer was still marginalized in the education system, but it slowly became the sport of choice for those who were not good enough at football. College soccer became more prominent and was “Americanized”. It had different rules than FIFA guidelines and was an unsanctioned league that was a form of the development of a distinct, albeit unconventional, soccer culture. The unique rules of NCAA soccer and scant attention rendered college soccer a small part of American culture (Markovits & Hellerman 2001; Wangerin 2006; Giulianotti & Robertson 2009).

The Early Modern Era (1968 – 1987)

During the early modern era from 1968 to 1987, American society became increasingly modern, suburban, and interconnected. At the same time, entrepreneurs saw potential in soccer as baby boomers matured and were open to other non-traditional forms of entertainment. High ratings for the 1966 World Cup Final sparked interest in the potential of soccer, and a league was formed in 1968. The North American Soccer League (NASL) kicked off in 1968 and struggled until Pelé’s² arrival in 1975. While Pelé was in America, he elevated the status of the New York Cosmos to the point where the team garnered significant media attention. The Cosmos toured the world and became the first global club, even before European giants became world-renowned (Markovits & Hellerman 2001; Wangerin 2006). The Cosmos were the first club to transcend its local

² Pelé was one of the best soccer players of all time.

community and draw fans all over the world and subsequently gain a worldwide reputation (Giulianotti & Robertson 2009).

Over the duration of the NASL's existence, attendance was phenomenal for some clubs and tepid for others, but importantly it allowed cities to compare themselves to other American cities and cities all over the world. The legacy of the NASL's fans' construction of a local soccer identity is evident to this day in San Jose, Portland, Seattle, Vancouver, and Minneapolis where intense rivalries and regional cultures took hold. The popularity took off in some cities, and Portland subsequently gave itself the nickname "Soccer City USA" and wholeheartedly embraced the local club. Many teams used clever marketing tactics to lure fans to the games, but nonetheless NASL clubs managed to expose many Americans to the game (Markovits & Hellerman 2001; Wangerin 2006; Giulianotti & Robertson 2007). A hybrid soccer fan culture emerged around the league where American fans were showing up in numbers and learning the game (Giulianotti & Robertson 2007). The league was "Americanized" and did not conform to FIFA standards. The clock counted down to zero; there was a 35-yard line to demarcate offside; and a shootout decided the winner so that a game could not end in a draw. The NASL managed to draw crowds, but the stability of the league was erratic. The number and location of teams in the league fluctuated each year, and it became apparent that this pattern was unsustainable (Markovits & Hellerman 2001; Wangerin 2006).

The clubs in the NASL were populated almost entirely by aging foreign stars who were still good enough to keep most Americans on the bench. The college game was the pinnacle of soccer for most Americans, and it remained that way for the most part during the NASL years. However, league administrators recognized that the NASL needed some

American players. So the administrators instituted a college draft that produced a few great talents but was largely inefficient. It was evident that there was not enough of an effort to develop young American talent that would have given the league more of a sense of permanence, indigenization, and stability. As a result, during the period from 1968 to 1984 the United States Men's National Team (USMNT) did not qualify for the World Cup, and American players were underdeveloped (Markovits & Hellerman 2001; Wangerin 2006).

The instability of the league divided owners and led to the downfall of the NASL. The owners were always going to have a hard time unseating the hegemony without mobilizing a united front with a comprehensive plan to develop American players, fans, and a sustainable wage structure. The NASL folded in 1984 under the heavy weight of the Cosmos legacy because there were not enough cost controls and teams went bankrupt as they tried to outspend each other to compete with the Cosmos. This was the last time that a capitalistic consortium of teams tried to create a topflight outdoor soccer league. However, the NASL's legacy laid the groundwork for soccer's reemergence in the 1990s. Soccer became immensely popular with suburban middle class families who saw it as an attractive alternative to football. Furthermore, Pelé was a transcendent figure who temporarily launched soccer into the limelight (Markovits & Hellerman 2001; Wangerin 2006).

Professional soccer migrated inside for much of the 1980s, and there was no topflight outdoor professional league. The Major Indoor Soccer League (MISL) was the ultimate Americanized version of soccer. It was soccer morphed with hockey. Plexiglass wrapped around the boundaries of an artificial playing surface; the goals were eight feet

tall; and there were infinite substitutions, among other unusual rules. This created a high-scoring game that had a considerable following in some cities. Similar to the NASL, the MISL could not escape institutional instability with clubs moving and folding every year. The MISL ceased operations in 1992 unable to sustain financial losses (Wangerin 2008).

The Modern Era (1988 – Present)

The modern era began on July 4, 1988 when FIFA announced that the 1994 World Cup was to be staged in the United States. The beginning of the modern era of soccer from 1988 to the present was characterized by indifference to soccer, and it showed. America barely acknowledged the announcement of hosting the World Cup. Soccer faced an uphill battle because sporting cultures are “sticky” and difficult to change once societal preferences have been established. The World Cup announcement was an explicit attempt to establish soccer in America (Markovits & Hellerman 2001; Wangerin 2006).

During the early stages of this era, American fans were still learning how to watch the game, and in the run up to the 1994 World Cup fans showed up in large numbers but were impartial spectators rather than passionate fans of the USMNT. As Bora Multinovic, the manager of the USMNT, complained after a loss to Brazil, “There is no advantage playing at home.” The fans were too polite, applauded Brazilian plays, and did not understand that they could play a role in determining the outcome of the match (Hopkins 2010: 53).

As an isolated sporting event, the World Cup in 1994 was an overwhelming success with full stadiums, the absence of hooliganism³, and a successful run by the

³ Hooliganism refers to violent behavior by soccer supporters.

USMNT. The World Cup received great ratings, and the post-colonial cultural invasion of the World Cup was an indicator of soccer encroaching upon “the last frontier”. In other words, the United States was one of the last remaining countries with massive commercial and player development potential that had not embraced soccer. The media begrudgingly covered the event, and there were even American journalists who liked soccer and finally had an outlet to write about it. More Americans than ever before had been exposed to soccer at the highest level and the most popular event on the planet. Furthermore, the USMNT had a successful tournament, and Americans identified with their national team. In these circumstances, soccer had a chance to gain a sense of permanence (Markovits & Hellerman 2001; Wangerin 2006; Giulianotti & Robertson 2009).

Major League Soccer (MLS) was established to build on the success of the World Cup and began play in 1996. The league was organized in a single-entity structure, where every club is owned by the league but operated by an investor who bought a stake in MLS. This organizational structure united owners into a cohesive unit in the face of a hegemonic sporting landscape. In the years after the launch of MLS, the league struggled to create an “authentic” product on the field. MLS attempted to “Americanize” soccer and chose not to align with standard international rules. The clock counted down rather than up; a shootout was imposed so that games could not end in a draw; fields were not the correct dimensions; and there was no trophy for the regular season champions (Markovits & Hellerman 2001; Wangerin 2006). The Americanization of soccer had a negative effect this time, unlike during the NASL years. This was due to the proliferation of the Internet, which allowed passionate supporters to connect with other fans of MLS in

the United States and supporters around the world. The Internet was an important tool for fans to use to converse about MLS and connect with European leagues. Many fans were turned off by the gimmicky “Americanized” rule changes. MLS had a successful first year in 1996 but then struggled mightily on all fronts in the later 1990s and early 2000s. MLS survived these tumultuous years and emerged with a new mandate. MLS enacted a game-first initiative that eliminated the “Americanized” rules. MLS teams up to the mid-2000s played in massive NFL stadiums and were secondary tenants. Fans at the games struggled to make a lot of noise in the oversized stadiums that made great attendance look feeble. In the mid-2000s MLS clubs began building their own soccer-specific stadiums (SSS), which were a huge psychological and economic boost for MLS clubs (Markovits & Hellerman 2001; Wangerin 2006; Giulianotti & Robertson 2007).

The most recent part of the modern era began with the 2006 World Cup where American fans attended games in large numbers and showed that they had learned how to become soccer fans. The American fans were singing, wearing scarves, face paint, and costumes. This moment signaled that American fans had established an identity. At the 2006 World Cup American supporters joined the global community, as Giulianotti & Robertson (2009: 32) stated, “...growing public and media interest in different football cultures has mushroomed, and has been reflected further in the transnational hybridization of young supporter fashions.” American soccer spectators transformed from passive and nonchalant soccer fans into active and emotional soccer supporters.

The introduction of Toronto FC in 2007 launched the most recent paradigm shift in domestic soccer circles. Toronto FC showed that an MLS club could attract a young urban fan base that could generate a stadium atmosphere unparalleled and unprecedented

in MLS. After the launch of Toronto FC, fans started travelling more frequently, the league was expanding every year, and supporter groups became a priority for future growth. Expansion teams in new MLS cities such as Seattle and Philadelphia became increasingly relevant (Hopkins 2010).

When the Los Angeles Galaxy signed David Beckham in 2007, the big name potential of MLS was realized. Beckham helped the Galaxy become the second deterritorialized, global American club. The ability of MLS to sign skilled and aging European stars has brought more awareness to the league and has helped raise the quality of play. Since 2006 MLS has made a concerted effort to make it more attractive for MLS clubs to develop and sign young American players. The league-wide homegrown player initiative incentivizes clubs to develop their own, mostly American talent. This development helps build a local culture at each club. At the same time, the quality of the average American soccer player has improved since the early years of MLS. College soccer remains a means of player development, but due to the homegrown player initiative its days as a feeder to MLS remain numbered (Giulianotti 2009; Hopkins 2010).

Off the field, MLS fans have matured and become increasingly sophisticated and organized. During the early years of MLS, with the notable exception of DC United, clubs sought to market themselves primarily to families, and both clubs and institutional forces, such as NFL stadium security, suppressed supporter groups. During the recent expansion of MLS, league executives took notice of the supporter groups in Toronto (2007), Seattle (2009), Philadelphia (2010), Portland (2011), and Vancouver (2011). Simultaneously, the majority of MLS clubs were playing or moving into their own SSS, where the clubs could make supporters a priority. SSS stadiums were incredibly

important for supporter groups because they could sing, chant, and generate atmosphere in a 20,000 seat stadium much more effectively than in an 80,000 seat stadium. Since their diffusion started in 2007, the American supporter groups have shown distinct adaptive hybridization processes. Due to improved means of communication in the form of the Internet and premium TV stations, exposure to both European and South American soccer has increased and made the world of soccer accessible to American soccer fans in ways unimaginable ten years ago. At the same time that the supporter groups rose to prominence, they have had increased access to foreign fan cultures and subsequently mimicked many elements of supporters in other countries. Importantly, American soccer supporters have ignored the tradition of fan violence that is problematic in many countries. Currently, many supporter groups struggle with their identities and style of support as they attempt to emulate other cultures but concurrently create an American soccer supporter culture. The creolization of fan cultures has been successful in some cities where there has been a noticeable differentiation, as evidenced by distinct supporter cultures in Houston, Portland, and Chicago. American soccer supporters are attempting to differentiate themselves and create their own unique fan culture that draws elements from global fans and incubates a distinctly American soccer atmosphere at local club games.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In reviewing the literature it was soon evident that American soccer supporters have not been a focal point of sociological study. Though there have been studies on soccer spectator culture, it is not a comprehensive or cohesive body of work. With that in mind, this thesis evaluates soccer spectator culture with an eye towards utilizing Giulianotti and Robertson's (2007) theory of glocalization as a lens to investigate soccer

spectator culture in America, in the specific case of the Colorado Rapids supporter groups.

Soccer Fan Cultures

Giulianotti (1999) described the origins of the global academic interest in soccer fan cultures. It began with the examination of the violence and cultural practices of English hooligans in the 1970s. After the English government addressed this issue in the 1980s, the study of fans became broader in scope. There was a deeper inspection into two of the most influential styles of support: Italian *ultras* and Argentine *barra bravas*. Both groups had a penchant for violence, but they emerged out of different circumstances. Italian *ultras* appeared in the 1950s as a reaction to the commodification (the increased prominence of money) in soccer and engaged in a distinct style of support with flags, banners, *tifo*, and pyrotechnics. In some cases these supporter groups had political agendas which lead to militant and violent behavior. Duke and Crolley (1996) noted that *barra bravas* were supporter groups in Argentina often times aligned with politicians. Politics were intertwined with soccer because the soccer clubs and supporter groups preceded the existence of electoral democracy in Argentina. *Barra bravas* were highly visual supporters who often acted violently in the interest of their affiliated political party.

These three types of fandom, hooligan, *ultra*, and *barra brava*, influenced supporter groups around the world. An example of this was Spain, where Spaaij and Viñas (2005) observed that supporter culture began to emulate Italian *ultras* in the 1980s. In Spain, support was traditionally passive, but it became more visual, vocal, and political after Spanish supporters were exposed to different cultures during the 1982 World Cup

held in Spain. However, the diffusion of Italian supporter culture was not wholeheartedly adopted in Spain. Supporter culture took on its own character and was hybridized. Clubs supported the more aggressive and active fandom, but supporters were not regulated and this led to increased violence at matches. As evidenced by evolving supporter culture, there can be a spectrum of fandom as noted by Giulianotti (2002). He formulated a classification model of ideal types, which were supporters, followers, fans, and flaneurs. The classification model was a gradation of loyalty that Giulianotti used to link a style of support for each particular category of fan to the club. The typology of fans created a lens through which to examine soccer spectators. Giulianotti took a more theoretical approach to fandom and attempted to contextualize each type of fan in the modern globalized soccer environment.

The spread of fandom can manifest itself in different ways than just mimicry. An example of this was an exploration into Norwegian fans of English Premier League (EPL) soccer (Hognestad 2006). The long-distance fans of Norway were cultural hybrids who embodied styles of transnational support, which is increasingly prominent in sporting cultures today. The Norwegian fans were influenced by the increased presence of EPL soccer on TV, and the construction of fan identities was contingent on live games and exposure to their favorite English club.

Fandom at the international level can encapsulate socio-cultural and political tensions between two countries. This occurred in Scotland where fans of the Scottish National Team (also known as The Tartan Army) attempted to disassociate themselves from the behavior of English hooligans. These fans were polite and friendly to other fan groups. The Scottish fans have been extremely influential. Due in part to their efforts,

World Cups are now more akin to parties because the carnival atmosphere has become increasingly prominent. The friendly-fan movement is on the opposite end of the spectrum from hooligans (Giulianotti 1999). On the other end of the spectrum from the Tartan Army are matches that are politically charged. Matches between France and Algeria can be very tense and can be violent because of the historical link between colonizer and colonized (Dine 2002). Supporters of countries with complex relationships are vulnerable to violent outbursts. These games are often more meaningful to the country which has been dominated historically.

The Dissemination of Sport as a Reflection of Cultural Trends

In an increasingly interconnected world, soccer serves as a useful tool to illustrate the consequences of globalizing forces and trends. The formation of transnational modern communication systems that facilitate the diffusion of culture and sport are ever more relevant in contemporary society. The diffusion of culture is implicit in a global civil society where culture is malleable, open, and reflexive (Miller, Lawrence, McKay, Rowe 1999). This phenomenon can be observed in sport and in the development of contemporary global cities (Brenner 1998). The link between sport and global civil society is typified in soccer not only by its governance by a global body but also the spread of soccer and its subsequent hybridization (Giulianotti and Robertson 2009).

Giulianotti and Robertson (2009) described the globalizing elements of soccer which began in industrialized Britain. The subsequent establishment, diffusion, and domination of soccer as the predominant sport of the world allowed for soccer to simultaneously develop local and global cultures. These transnational elements of soccer reinforce the development of global soccer cultures. Inquiry into the conceptual

development of contemporary cultural phenomena provides the framework for the examination of local soccer cultures.

The global dimensions of sport are not limited to soccer. The establishment of baseball in the United States as a primary sport and the crowding out and marginalization of soccer allowed for the expansion of baseball in the nineteenth and early twentieth century (Markovits and Hellerman 2001). The ensuing proliferation and creolization of baseball in places like Cuba and Japan followed similar patterns to the spread of soccer around the world (Kelley 2007).

According to Giulianotti (2005), the reaction of supporters to the commodification of modern soccer has become increasingly important. Supporters acknowledge that the club will fall behind its big-spending rivals if its fans do not embrace commodification and spend more money on tickets, jerseys, and scarves. Therefore, supporters simultaneously resist and accommodate the business aspects of modern soccer.

Transplanted Soccer Spectator Culture in Relation to American Soccer Spectator Culture

In “Forms of Glocalization” Giulianotti and Robertson formulate a four-category typology of adaptive processes of glocalization that are employed by supporters of Scottish clubs living in North America. According to Giulianotti and Robertson, (2004: 548) glocalization is the process, “whereby local cultures adapt and redefine any global cultural product to suit their particular needs, beliefs, and customs.” Glocalization is an ongoing process that shapes how supporters interact with their environment. According to their interpretation, globalization does not threaten the local culture. Rather, it reinforces

the local culture because the local filters what elements are incorporated from other cultures while resisting elements that are unwanted.

Using this lens, Giulianotti and Robertson studied Scottish immigrants in North America in relation to their favorite Old Firm⁴ club in Scotland. Here, different mechanisms that supporters use to stay in touch with their club were evaluated (Giulianotti and Robertson 2009). The different cultural practices in North America articulated the concepts of universalization of particularism, particularization of universalism, hybridization, relativization, accommodation, and transformation to illuminate how fans of the Old Firm follow their favorite club in Scotland. These processes were interdependent and showed how Old Firm fans mimicked their counterparts in Scotland (Giulianotti and Robertson 2007).

In this study their analytic framework formed a typology with four parts. Relativization for Giulianotti and Robertson (2007: 137) occurs when, “social actors seek to preserve their prior cultural institutions, practices, and meanings within a new environment, thereby reflecting a commitment to differentiation from the host culture.” In other words, relativization is preserving their identity as soccer supporters and resisting American sports. Another process called accommodation occurs when, “social actors absorb pragmatically the practices, institutions and meanings associated with other societies, in order to maintain key elements of the prior culture” (Giulianotti and Robertson 2007: 139). An example of this was the match-day routine. As a result of the time difference between Scotland and North America, games were watched during the

⁴ The Old Firm refers to two of the most storied clubs in Scotland, Rangers FC and Celtic FC, located in Glasgow, Scotland.

morning in North America. Accordingly, supporters changed their habits and drank coffee and ate breakfast during the game instead of drinking beer.

Hybridization occurs when, “social actors synthesize local and other cultural phenomena to produce distinctive, hybrid cultural practices, institutions, and meanings (Giulianotti and Robertson 2007: 142).” For example, supporters of the Old Firm were able to watch games together, and they toned down the sectarian hostilities in their new environment in North America. The cordial relationship adapted to their new location where traditional religious meanings in Scotland were not applicable to the supporters situation in the United States.

Transformation occurs when, “social actors come to favor the practices, institutions or meanings associated with other cultures. Transformation may procure fresh cultural forms or, more extremely, the abandonment of the local culture in favor of alternative and/or hegemonic cultural forms (Giulianotti and Robertson 2007: 145).” In other words, transformation takes place when supporters open up to cultures other than their own. This occurs when supporters are situating their club’s status in the world as opposed to just Scotland. In some cases they embrace the new societies’ customs and culture. Some of the supporters expressed how religion is not as significant in North America, and this effected supporters of the Old Firm. Once supporters had been here for a while, they had a more relaxed approach to supporting their club.

To Giulianotti and Robertson, the universalization of particularism is the belief that all local communities have unique cultural forms. The unique cultural forms manifest themselves in local soccer culture by developing symbols and customs that represent that community. The particularization of universalism means that all local communities are

simultaneously differentiating themselves and are influenced by the global domain. This is because professional soccer is organized under the auspices of an external domain (FIFA) that unifies and runs soccer. There is constant dialogue between the local and the global on the local level, and because of this local soccer cultures continue to evolve (Robertson and Giulianotti: 2004)

New, locally meaningful forms of support have sprung up in new soccer territories such as Japan, Australia, and the United States. This support both mimics fan behavior in early iterations of support around the world and develops its own local flavor and attributes. Studies of soccer fandom up to this point were independent historical analyses, and the body of literature is highly fragmented and moving in autonomous directions. The body of research examined soccer fan cultures, the dissemination of sport as a reflection of cultural trends, and transplanted soccer culture in relation to American soccer spectator culture.

Though soccer fans have been a topic of examination for sociologists worldwide, American soccer fans have not been thoroughly investigated. In particular, MLS supporter groups have not been a focal point of these studies. Nevertheless, some aspects of American soccer spectator culture have been studied. Namely, the duality of soccer cultures in the US between immigrant communities and middle class suburbanites (Danforth 2001), the need for MLS to connect with the Hispanic community (Jensen and Sosa 2008), the use of the Internet to connect soccer fans when traditional media ignores them (Wilson 2007), and the effect of the greater interest in European clubs on MLS clubs (Brown 2007) have all been studied. These studies examine the cultural hybridity of soccer in ethnic enclaves in the United States, a phenomenon that also occurs in

Australia, a new soccer territory as well. A study that explains why soccer in America remained in ethnic enclaves was one of the most comprehensive assessments of American soccer culture. Markovits and Hellerman's (2001) historically examined the crowding out of soccer in the American sporting space.

Research into supporter groups as a whole is uneven with many gaps and unexplored areas. Studying supporter groups is a novelty, and there is not yet a cohesive tradition of examining supporter groups. There are a number of gaps to fill in research of supporter groups in the United States since supporters in the United States have not undergone academic focus or social science research due to their recent rise to prominence. My thesis breaks new ground and uncovers previously unexposed features of soccer fans in the United States. I conducted a case study of the Colorado Rapids supporter groups and used an extension of Giulianotti and Robertson's (2009) work to articulate the Rapids' supporter groups' attempts to adapt international phenomena to local settings, also known as glocalization.

METHODS

To investigate the dynamics of glocalization, I used qualitative methods to conduct in-depth interviews. I attempted to obtain the perspective of the front office of the Colorado Rapids, members of the Rapids' three supporter groups and casual fans. To do this, I divided the population into three categories (front office, supporter group members, casual fans), with six subjects in each category, for a total of eighteen interview subjects. The original intention to interview casual fans was more difficult than anticipated. It was difficult to label and identify casual fans who would be willing to participate in a study involving a brief interview. The casual fans were typically with

their friends and family, and the appropriate opportunity to interact with this group did not unfold. After two attempts to find suitable circumstances to talk to this category, efforts to interact with this sample group were abandoned.

The sample of this study was thirteen individuals in two categories. I interviewed six members of the front office and seven members of supporter groups. I interviewed members of the front office during August 2011 and supporters in August and October of 2011 because I was recovering from post-concussion syndrome during the month of September. I interviewed one more supporter than I anticipated because a greater than expected number of supporters agreed to be interviewed. Since interviewing one more supporter was only helpful for research purposes, I asked all seven to participate, and they agreed.

I was able to gain access to both of these groups because I had an internship with the Colorado Rapids during the summer of 2011. As I felt more comfortable over the course of the summer, I mentioned my project to my boss, and he liked it. I asked him for permission to conduct interviews with members of the front office and supporter groups. He agreed, and I was put in touch with both members of the front office and supporters by means of email. After acquiring the contact information of the supporters, I sent out an email informing them of my study and asking if they were willing to participate. I interviewed six members of the front office during my last week on the job and one supporter group member the following week in August.

I used non-random, purposive, and snowball sampling. Members of the front office were all college-educated and between the ages of twenty-eight and forty-five. Members of supporter groups were all college-educated and between the ages of twenty-

six and thirty-eight. Twelve interviews were conducted at the Rapids' offices at their stadium, Dick's Sporting Goods Park. One interview was conducted on the Colorado College campus. All subjects signed a consent form to agree to participate in the study, and I protect their identity in this thesis by using an alias for each subject.

I formulated a loosely structured interview schedule for the different sample groups: the front office, supporters, and potential supporters. However, the potential supporter interview schedules were not used. For both supporters and the front office, sampling was purposive and non-random because I was looking for individuals in a certain occupation or individuals who were members of a particular group. For both the front office and supporters, interviews ranged from approximately forty-five minutes to an hour-and-a-half-long. All seven members of supporter groups interviewed were white and male. All six members of the front office interviewed were male, while five were white and one was Latino. All thirteen subjects reside in the greater Denver-Colorado Springs area. The interviews were conducted in person, recorded, and transcribed.

There were limitations to the study. Time limited how many supporters and members of the front office I could interview, and my snowball and purposive sampling was limited to those who were available and did not have obligations that prevented them from participating in my study. I did not interview casual fans or families or potential supporters to understand these segments' understandings of soccer fandom. Accordingly, my findings are narrow because the perspectives of casual fans have not incorporated. Given more time I would have interviewed more subjects and acquired more valid results. Potential biases in the study are my pre-conceived notions of American fan culture and supporter culture. I am in danger of romanticizing supporters or taking sides

on certain issues because I am a soccer fan who wants to see supporter groups grow. This is not helped by my status as a member of the Rapids front office for the summer of 2011. I was an intern over the summer of 2011 and sat in on meetings with different personnel from the Rapids front office and learned their perspective on issues that affect supporters.

Questions were asked about American spectator culture, digital media, the history of standing support of the Rapids, and authenticity. One interview schedule was used for both groups, but the ability to answer all questions was not consistent as some subjects had only been around for a year and others had been involved with the Rapids since 1996. The questions were open-ended (see Appendix for full interview schedule). The interviews were transcribed, and themes were linked and organized into the results section.

RESULTS

The formative years of MLS in the 1990s through the mid-2000s had far reaching effects on the health and longevity of the Colorado Rapids' supporter groups. In the early years of MLS, clubs attempted to fill the massive NFL stadiums that they were playing in with fans. In order to do this, the league sought to attract young families with children who played youth soccer. At the same time, in an effort to repudiate the image that soccer was slow, low-scoring, and boring, MLS "Americanized" the rules of soccer to make it more exciting and accessible for families who were unfamiliar with the international standards of soccer. Consequently, MLS implemented a number of rule changes that upset core soccer fans. These rule changes included an overtime period, a shootout to eliminate draws, and the clock counting down.

It was a commonly held belief of the supporters I interviewed that these rule changes adversely affected soccer fans and supporter groups. One supporter, Neil, remarked:

I know people here who protested the shootout from the get go. It was really built more on let's get the little kids, let's get the families, in the stadium. That is how we can grow the league. Of all the groups DC United⁵ was one of the few that had a really powerful fan base despite all those obstacles that MLS was putting in place.

The Rapids and the entire league, with the notable exception of DC United, alienated the small but loyal base of soccer fans. For the Rapids' supporter groups, the league's focus on families led to a culture clash at games. These families had scant exposure to professional soccer, let alone soccer supporters, and no one really knew what to think of supporter groups. The first supporter group of the Colorado Rapids as described by a supporter named Cody was the Jolly Green Men, a group who, "...supported a guy who went to some high school around here and they were his friends." They attended games for several years and made a decent amount of noise, but they clashed with security and soon stopped attending games when they graduated and went to college.

The first major supporter group was the River Ratz who formed in the latter half of the inaugural season in 1996. The River Ratz drew respectable numbers, but it was difficult for the group to grow and have an impact on the game. The River Ratz struggled to create a significant visual appearance and atmosphere because the cavernous Mile High Stadium dwarfed the group. Furthermore, stadium security – a group that was not accustomed to soccer supporters – did not want to allow flags, banners, and standing at

⁵ DC United is one of the ten original MLS clubs that began play in 1996.

games. Inevitably, The River Ratz and security were constantly at odds with each other. Eventually, the lack of support from the front office and diminishing interest of the leadership of the River Ratz resulted in the slow death of the group. The River Ratz died with a whimper by 2002.

Of note, in the early years there was also a group started by Guatemalans and Salvadorans called Ultras Azul, which ran into the same problems as the Jolly Green Men and the River Ratz. They clashed with stadium security, were not supported by the front office, and eventually dissolved. All of the groups at one time or another had decent numbers, most notably the River Ratz. However, all of the groups eventually fizzled out by 2002, and there was no standing support for the Rapids. Longtime supporter Max described the downfall:

It is a combination of things: leadership lost interest, issues with stadium security, and the front office was not supportive. In those days, it wasn't until mid-way through the last decade that the league as a whole and front office support got on board with that. Those two groups (Jolly Green Men and River Ratz) faded out, and we didn't have any organized support. Like no formally recognized support when I started coming to games on a regular basis, which was around 2002, 2003.

There was cultural incompatibility between families and supporters. The families were deemed a more promising demographic by the front office because they were less trouble, paid more money, and were easier to please. Cody described the conflict:

It stems from the way they launched from the beginning in '96. MLS was kicked off to be a family entertainment sport. The only team that didn't do that was DC United, and their culture was built on that from the very beginning. All of the existing teams have a fan base (families) that if they make the sudden change, they are afraid that they are going to alienate the largest group of fans.

Unfortunately for MLS, most of the families that attended games were there because it was a cheap family activity, not because they were soccer fans. Additionally, Cody explained that "Denver is a unique town. You have got to win or people walk."

They were not loyal fans or potential season ticket holders, and by no means were they passionate about the club. The appearance that MLS projected to core soccer supporters validated the suspicion that the league was a watered-down version of European soccer with gimmicks to attract families. A member of the front office, Curtis, elaborated:

So with all of these kids being around here, the main focus a lot of the time was just families. So in that aspect, the Rapids in general actually alienated all of those supporters in that eighteen to thirty-four age bracket. Because it was mascots and the cheerleaders and it created more of a family atmosphere as opposed to the authentic soccer experience.

From the late 1990s through to the mid-2000s, the Rapids were not connecting with fans off the field, and the results were poor on the field. Attendance was declining (despite a few games a year that inflated the overall numbers); the Rapids were dying (they were on the shortlist of clubs that were eligible to fold in 2002); and the league was on life support. The kids who had been targeted so aggressively by MLS preferred soccer as a callisthenic activity rather than as a spectator sport. Many of the fans who did come to games were uneducated about soccer and were not engaged with the Rapids. A member of the front office, Lonnie, who was around during these days remarked:

I remember days when someone would punt a ball way up and you'd hear "oooh." Really? Like that's exciting? That someone kicked a ball that high on a punt? Nobody even reacts to that (anymore). They used to play music and make announcements during the game, like go buy yourself this and that. And they cut it saying you can't do this and that.

To the soccer supporter who cared about the game the match-day experience was inauthentic and frustrating. However, the ranks of educated fans began to swell in the mid-2000s. During the 1990s, the average soccer fan was not exposed to soccer on a regular basis on television and the Internet. At the time, the world was less connected. Consequently, supporter groups in many cases failed to gain traction since people did not

understand the concept of a supporter group because they were not able to watch international soccer on television. A member of the front office, Jesse, echoed this sentiment:

Well, I think it's easy... Yes, that's true, but I would challenge anyone to say that fifteen years ago that they knew men twenty-one to thirty-four years old was going to be the right demographic. In fact, back then, it would not have been true. That is a pre-social media world. A world before Fox Soccer Channel, Setanta, Gol TV.

During the mid-2000s premium television soccer channels, soccer forums and blogs on the Internet, and the increasing prominence of YouTube were signs of the rising significance of the Internet as an avenue for soccer fans to communicate, share pictures, stories, and videos and to learn what it means to be a supporter in different locales around the world. Digital media allowed soccer fans to consume information that traditional media such as newspapers and radio had ignored. Around this time MLS aligned with international soccer standards and abandoned efforts to incorporate more domestic elements of spectator sports. In order to do this, MLS removed the shoot out, the clock counted up, and the referee kept time on the field. These game-first initiatives gained back some of the credibility that MLS had lost. Additionally, coverage and the shocking success of the United States Men's National Team (USMNT) in the 2002 World Cup helped MLS financially and also generated some excitement about soccer in the United States.

Despite the progress of the USMNT, the Rapids continued to struggle, but the supporters movement was bubbling back to life in Denver. Class VI was founded in 2005 in an effort to unite like-minded, passionate, and engaged Rapids fans. Class VI is not a traditional (by international standards) supporter group where fans stand and sing the

whole game. It is a seating club, and the group does cheer and sing often, but not constantly, and group members are not excessively rowdy. The group typically attracts an older crowd than traditional supporter groups, but they are by no means less passionate or invested in the team.

Class VI was the first supporter group of its kind in MLS and is the oldest running supporter group of the Colorado Rapids. Around the same time in 2005, the Centennial Firm (C-Firm) was formed as a traditional standing supporter group to fill the void that had been left since the disbandment of the River Ratz. C-Firm was aligned with rowdy, standing, and singing supporter groups. However, because the team was playing at Invesco Field they ran into the same issues as previous groups. They were boisterous and fanatical but struggled to attract new members and constantly clashed with security and the front office. C-Firm struggled to grow but believed change would come when the new stadium opened in 2007.

When the Rapids moved into their new soccer-specific stadium, Dick's Sporting Goods Park (DSG) in 2007, – C-Firm and Class VI anticipated a new day with trained security, promotion from the club, and improved communication. Not much thought was given to supporters when designing the new stadium, and consequently the front office could not find a satisfactory location in the stadium for C-Firm. The front office did reach out and warmed to the idea of supporter groups but eventually became increasingly frustrated, as their efforts did not help the supporters grow. A member of the front office, Darren, remembered:

We tried to do everything in our minds that we thought we could to try to grow the group, and make it more exciting and make people want to join. But, we weren't having any success. I was almost to the point of get rid of supporter groups. Sell the tickets to someone else, we don't need supporters groups.

C-Firm was moved to several locations around the stadium that did not work because families complained. Despite their best efforts, the supporters could not secure what they had coveted since the new stadium opened – the north end. It was close to the players, an isolated area of the stadium, and the traditional location of supporter groups worldwide. Class VI did not have the same issues as C-Firm because they were not as boisterous so families and casual fans tolerated them. Families complained consistently about the supporters, and the relationship between the front office and C-Firm deteriorated, due to a lack of mutual trust.

However, the same season that DSG opened, Toronto FC sent shockwaves throughout MLS circles during their first year in the league. Toronto FC had managed to attract a core fan base of young males with disposable income and had one of the most vibrant, vocal, and visible fan bases that the league had ever seen. Fans and supporter groups alike donned scarves, sang songs for ninety minutes, and were knowledgeable about soccer and their team. Also, the trend of foreign clubs touring North America and flexing their marketing muscle began to pick up steam. As a result, more casual fans were exposed to soccer at the highest level by glamorous European clubs. Curtis described the ascent of soccer on television:

With emergence of ESPN and putting the Premier League⁶ on TV and getting the World Cup on TV and the Euros⁷ all that stuff, now you are starting to see more of those supporter groups on TV and Champions League⁸ on TV and really seeing that it is awesome. And more people are travelling to those games and get that

⁶ The Premier League refers to the first division in England known as the English Premier League (EPL).

⁷ The Euros refers to the UEFA European Football Championship which is a Pan-European tournament.

⁸ The Champions League refers to the top continental competition in Europe known as the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) Champions League.

experience and now they want to bring them back over here.

Premium television channels such as ESPN, Fox Soccer, Setanta, and Gol TV, gained prominence and broadcast an ever-increasing number of matches from Europe and South America building on the rising tide of soccer coverage that continued with the 2006 World Cup. Cody mentioned the importance of new forms of social media to supporter groups. “So we recruit one person at a time. Social media has helped a lot. That has been a big thing because Big Soccer died.” Meanwhile, social media became increasingly prevalent as Facebook, Twitter, and blogs replaced message boards, to create new avenues for American fans to consume soccer – as traditional media continued to shun coverage of the sport.

Meanwhile, all was not well in Colorado. Despite their best efforts, C-Firm and Class VI did not get along or work well together due to disagreements among their leadership. On top of the contention between Class VI and C-Firm there was also internal discord regarding how to maintain the groups’ relationships with the front office. So a splinter group called the North Corner Council (NCC) was formed. Longtime supporter Cody described the sequence of events:

So the tensions between the front office and the standing groups just grew more and more. And they (this was C-Firm) got moved to the corner, and then she (the leader of C-Firm) is a very nice person, and she was trying to do what the people wanted, but at the same time she was a fan and her first priority was being a fan of the game. When you are leading a supporter group, you sacrifice everything for the group. So people were getting a little upset with her and they split. A guy named Clinton split. Clinton came along and he and his friends took it to the next level, and they were lighting smoke bombs, and the front office was going bat shit about that.

Cody went on to describe the eventual downfall of both groups:

He (Clinton) broke off... they split apart and it was the NCC who wanted the smoke bombs. So they were already deteriorating because people didn’t want to

be there. So the front office was just trying to bury them. And people were getting fed up with it and they split into the two groups, and then a year later 2010 there was no group. NCC pretty much fizzled out because I had to tell Clinton that they were this close to being banned for life, because they were so sick of him. When I told him that, he just kind of stopped. The other group was lead by Tyrone, but he had an internship in Florida so he wasn't around.

The NCC was focused on the more hardcore elements of soccer support that are found in European *ultras* and South American *barra bravas*, and they split in part because they did not want to compromise their style of support with the front office. Eventually tensions between the groups and the front office escalated to such an extent that the front office did not see a need to allow the groups to upset families. A member of the front office, Jessie, described the chaotic situation:

They would say chants like “fuck families”, and it didn't go over well with our fan base. So I had to kill sections on either side of them, and we wouldn't sell the next section or two over so that I wouldn't have more complaints, and lose more people on a game-by- game basis than I am selling to these groups. They had the NCC and they were just people who aren't supporters. They are quite the opposite actually. Everything you do is in an effort to... it harms the club. Maybe it is funny for you, and maybe you enjoy it, but if you are enjoying it and costing me money and influencing it in a negative way. They started in the Southeast corner. And they didn't like it, but it was also not good business for me because it was killing seats.

The front office did not think that the supporter groups added atmosphere or were genuine “supporters” and instead preferred a family-friendly environment at games. Also, the Rapids were still mediocre on the field and struggled to attract fans. It is interesting to note that during this period another short-lived Latino-oriented supporter group called Legion 5280 sprang up. However, interest in the group waned, and its existence was short-lived.

This increased exposure to soccer on the Internet and TV allowed like-minded people to communicate and spread the word to soccer fans who may be interested in

supporting clubs in the “traditional” European and South American style. As these forces gained momentum, Seattle took MLS by storm when they were added to the league in 2009. Toronto showed the potential benefits of a relatively young and vocal fan base. Seattle proved that soccer could be a major sport in American cities with thousands of vocal fans wearing scarves and singing. The increased acceptance of soccer culture and the surge in exposure to supporters groups led to new measures from the league to promote the growth of these groups.

Concurrently the NCC, C-Firm and Class VI loathed each other, and the front office had grown weary of clashing with the NCC and C-Firm. Despite the acrid relationship between supporters and the management, the front office could not ignore what had happened in other cities and the new directives and mandates coming from league officials. Something had to be done with the supporters. Darren, a member of the front office, recounted the sequence of events:

Yeah, Toronto and then Seattle when they shook MLS up with their fans and finally figured out that we have to do something because this is not working. We have to completely start over. It was almost like we intentionally want to do this but we almost forced out the old remnants of the supporters groups.

The supporters had always coveted the north end of the stadium but could not secure it when DSG opened since the front office did not trust them. Over time, the front office became more familiar with soccer culture. During the winter of 2009-10 the front office pitched the idea of a terrace in the north end to the remaining supporters. Cody was at that meeting:

They had bleachers there at the moment, and we wanted to move to the bleachers. Really, Jeff Plush is the one who made the jump to terraces, and I think by making that leap of faith, that is when it became real and it happened. Before that it was never gonna happen. And so supporters can fight and fight and fight all they want, but in the end it is what kind of support you are going to get from the

front office.

The terrace would be located at the north end of the stadium that the supporters had wanted so badly, and it would be akin to European or South American *ultras'* standards. This was unique in MLS as no other team had a terrace for their supporters. The supporters embraced the idea and sought to mark this new era of support in Colorado by putting egos aside and reorganizing and renaming themselves. Neil was one of the leaders of the reorganization:

When I first started, the NCC, C-Firm, Class VI, they all hated each other. So we just said, this is dumb. We got involved, Hector and I, when the terraces started. We were like, this has to stop, we are not big enough to have this many groups. We got all the leaders to get along, so C-Firm and NCC merged and became Pid Army, and we have a really good relationship with Class VI.

The NCC and C-Firm dissolved in part due to the poor reputation the groups had earned with fans and the front office alike. The remnants of these groups formed the newly christened Pid Army (PA) with new leaders. The relationship between the front office and PA improved, and they patched their relationship with Class VI. During the same offseason a new group emerged to occupy the other half of the terrace – the Bulldog Supporters Group (BSG). Pid Army was quickly frustrated by the BSG because the BSG did not want to work with PA. There was a pervasive perception among members of PA that the BSG was taking advantage of all of the hard work that members of PA and Class VI had done to gain access to the north end and create the terrace. As the season began new tensions arose between the groups.

Since the terrace was created for the 2010 season, Pid Army and Class VI have had a great relationship, but both groups do not see eye-to-eye with the BSG because of the divergent philosophies regarding how to run a supporter group. Furthermore members

of Pid Army and Class VI voiced their concern that the BSG has conflicting interests due to the organizational structure of the group. Longtime supporter Cody elaborated on how the groups are organized:

The philosophy of how we do things in Class VI and the Pid Army is one hundred percent voluntary. People give what they want to give. You come to the tailgate, you don't have to pay, or you could pay a lot. Some people believe in it, and they kick a lot of money in. Some people once in a while kick money in because they don't have money or whatever. We don't require anybody to pay and they do.

The difference Cody went on to explain is that:

They (the BSG) require when you get on the bus you have to pay for the tailgate. So that was really what it came down to in the end. Now there are two true soccer bars in town, and we had always supported the Bulldog in the past, against the Rapids' interests. They always wanted us to do their viewing parties, but we always supported Fernando who was running the Bulldog. When Toby announced that the Bulldog was that groups' bar, that set off a lot of people. That is going to be hard to bridge. If they were able to make it not be the Bulldog bar that would be huge. The other thing is that the owner of Three Lions (Bar) is Toby. So, I mean there is no doubt that there are people in our group who do things to make the group better. Nobody has self-interest in it. They just give all their time for free. They put money into it to make it happen. So, on the other end of that is Toby who owns Three Lions, and it is always going to be this feeling of conflict of interest in his decision-making. Is he really trying to elevate the supporters groups and supporters culture? Or if there is decisions being made in the interest of his bar. It is a tough one to overcome.

Members of PA and Class VI were upset when the BSG claimed the Bulldog as the home bar of the BSG, which was frequented by members of other PA and Class VI in the past. The members of PA and Class VI also think that there is a conflict of interest because the founder of the BSG also owns the bar. So when the BSG run events out of the bar, members of PA and Class VI are unsure if the events are for the good of the supporter group or to make money for the bar.

Furthermore the style of support of the BSG is a bit different than PA. The BSG is more English and responds to the plays being made on the field more than PA who align

their style of support with European *ultras* and South American *barra bravas* who sing and chant through the entire game. Despite these challenges, both groups have managed to grow since the inception of the supporters' terrace in 2010. The terrace successfully segregated supporters from families and allowed them to be rowdy, have flags, banners, and room to grow along with the cheapest ticket in the stadium.

The Rapids' supporter groups seek to emulate "authentic" soccer support, but it remains undetermined what exactly composes authentic American soccer support. The supporters mimic what they have experienced, seen, or read overseas about *ultras* and *barra bravas* in Europe and South America. Both the front office and supporters agreed that authentic soccer support originates from the fans. A member of the front office, Winston, expressed his perspective:

I think "authentic" means that it is not the club telling their fans how to support us. It is not the club telling people how they should support us and putting them in certain places. It is them wanting to be a part of the sport and them almost coming here and helping us raising the level of relevancy and interest in the club. When it is authentic to somebody, I don't have to convince them why they should do it or how they should do it.

That being said, a multitude of factors have blurred the conception of what fans want. Most subjects compared MLS to the English Premier League (EPL). England has taken on the role of the measuring stick for not only skill level but style of fan support in the United States. This is due to the prevalence of the EPL on American television, language compatibility when reading about English soccer online, and the EPL's stature as arguably the strongest league in the world. There is a superiority complex that transcends the play on the field. However, because the EPL is the standard regarding the quality of play on the field, many view England as the most "authentic" soccer locale in the world.

The BSG seeks to recreate the match-day experience in England where supporters assemble in a pub, mingle in the streets, attend the match, and then reconvene in the pub afterwards and talk about the game. The American adaptation begins at the bar downtown (The British Bulldog) where attendees pay for the bus, tailgate, and a ticket (after meeting at the bar and having attendees take a chartered bus to the stadium nine miles east of downtown.). Once at the stadium the BSG has catered tailgate, attends the match, and takes the bus back to the bar.

The match-day experience of all three groups is an American adaptation of the European model, but PA and Class VI eliminate the bar component. DSG is surrounded by undeveloped vacant lots and youth fields, and one of the few advantages of the stadium location is that it allows for free parking and easy tailgating. The stadium location is derided by most subjects as a disadvantage because it does not allow the team to be as visible as it would like to be. Jessie articulated the disadvantage of the stadium location:

If we were a downtown stadium, I would think we could get much more aggressive in targeting men twenty-one to thirty-four and that would be our bread and butter. But the reality of where we are located, with the fields complex and the youth tournaments and all of those things, I think the youth and family piece will always be a part of our demographics.

Inside the stadium, since the opening of the terrace, the Rapids have struggled to create soccer-centric traditions because the parent company of the Rapids, Kroenke Sports & Entertainment (KSE) is a family and scoreboard-oriented company that is interested in promoting a family-friendly experience. This can be seen during several match-day events where there is cultural incongruity. One example of the cultural conflict is when the supporters commence their small march of fifty to a hundred people

from the parking lot to the terrace, music is playing over the loudspeakers. Also, during the game there are facts on the jumbo tron, and these seem to be a subtle effort to inject American arena sports into soccer. Lonnie described his take on the situation:

There is this mentality that I feel like the Rapids have that because of the Pepsi Center⁹ and there you have this scoreboard in the center of your arena that your eyes are focused to a lot and it gets your attention away when the action is not happening I think that the Rapids have continued to do that and I don't know if that is right. I have argued in here that we don't need to have some of the stuff that they do in other things. The action is going on here and you are telling people at this point look over there and let's show you what our creative department can do. Well, what is the point of that?

Recently, the Rapids' achievement on the field has improved considerably. The Rapids won the MLS Cup in 2010, and for the first time Colorado is not the laughingstock of MLS. Furthermore, the recent emergence of the Rapids' rival, Real Salt Lake (RSL) has led to a natural rivalry that has been a helpful tool to galvanize the fan base. Fans of the Rapids and RSL established the Rocky Mountain Cup (RMC) in a mutual effort to help grow the rivalry. Both teams are competitive, and the RMC rivalry has become one of the best rivalries, if not the best, in the league in terms of quality and fan support.

DISCUSSION

The successes and tensions related to glocalizing processes have had a far-reaching effect on the supporter groups of the Colorado Rapids who are attempting to create a unique local culture while simultaneously engaging with the greater national and global sporting community. The ongoing tension between families and supporters is an

⁹ The Pepsi Center is a sports arena in downtown Denver that is the Home of the NBA's Denver Nuggets, the NHL's Colorado Avalanche, and the NLL's (National Lacrosse League) Colorado Mammoth. The Rapids combine resources with the management of the other three teams because they are all owned by the same parent company, KSE.

example of the tangible influence of glocalizing forces on local communities that attempt to balance the American sporting culture and global soccer culture. The efforts by the front office to adapt local traditions and practices to the global sport provides an insightful narrative of the manifestation of glocalization in the local soccer cultural discourse.

Building off Giulianotti and Robertson's analysis of Scottish fans of the Old Firm in North America, the theoretical lens applied to this study is a mirror image of their work. Since the processes of glocalization they studied describe Old Firm supporters in North America and this study examines Rapids' supporters mimicking foreign cultures, the processes are reversed, while the terminology remains the same. For example, relativization means the preservation of American spectator culture in reaction to the rise of supporter group culture. On the other side of the spectrum transformation means the abandonment of traditional forms of spectator culture and the adoption of non-native forms of support. Hybridity represents a middle ground between the two. It is not a complete adoption of foreign cultures or a complete abandonment of American spectator tradition. In my analyses of the recent history of the Rapids, the concept of accommodation proved to not be relevant because it overlapped with hybridization. The exception to this reversal is the processes of glocalization known as the "particularization of universalism" and the "universalization of particularism".

The Particularization of Universalism and The Universalization of Particularism

Glocalization articulates the fusion of the local and the global and how these forces establish themselves in the local cultural circumstances. This is also known as the "universalization of particularism," where local communities have unique characteristics

despite the deluge of external cultural flows. This phenomenon is why soccer could be called the “glocal game” where the local traditions are revered worldwide. The particularistic collective identity of the local supporters is evident in their match-day habitus. The unique identity and rituals of the Rapids’ supporter groups are the amalgamation of both American sporting traditions and nonnative customs.

The opposite process, the “particularization of universalism” means aligning with the global rules and customs of the sport. As MLS and the Rapids discovered, there are inherent dangers in not embracing the “particularization of universalism” of soccer in the United States. An example of this was in the early years of the league, when MLS failed to align with international standards regarding the laws of the game. When MLS created their own rules, they failed to acknowledge the importance of the “particularization of universalism,” as no other sport in America must answer to a higher power off its shores. The attempt to subvert the global influence of soccer and the effort to “Americanize” soccer were met with considerable backlash and consternation by fans and supporter groups. The Rapids are constantly negotiating a tightrope between the burgeoning American soccer supporter culture and the influence of the rest of the world.

Relativization

The inundation of global cultural norms can have different implications for the local community. Historically, soccer in the United States has been a callisthenic activity for children and immigrants and a family-friendly spectator experience at professional games. Recently, this has undergone an alteration due to the increasing prominence of supporter groups. This has culminated in a culture clash at games due to different cultural expectations. The front office of the Rapids recognized the change and segregated

supporters in an effort to validate and isolate their distinct style of support. The segregation relativizes American spectator culture. In other words, it sustains and differentiates traditional American spectator culture by segregating families from supporters. It is a form of resistance against supporter culture because it makes supporters “the other” and isolates them at the north end of the stadium. The overt attempt to separate families from supporters articulates the conflicting cultural expectations at a game between the two groups. The physical separation shows that the conflict between the two styles of observing a match is significant and the Rapids are placing a great deal of importance on the families and accommodating them to keep them happy. The effort to make the spectator experience comfortable for families is explicit relativization because the Rapids seek to preserve the American cultural experience in the face of an encroaching non-native style of fandom.

The implementation of the supporters terrace was an act of relativization on the part of the front office. The reterritorialization of the stadium was a measure to make the area more habitable and supporter-friendly in an effort to reclaim that section of the stadium for supporters. It has become their sacred space as supporters have watched many important games and shared collective memories with their fellow supporters on the terrace. However, the front office stopped short of making supporter culture the new normal throughout the entire stadium. Consequently the remainder of the stadium was relativized because it was oriented towards traditional American spectators. Traditional American spectators are accustomed to observing the game in a sanitized and subdued family-friendly environment and typically are not compatible with supporter culture.

Hybridization

Hybridization or the combining of cultural practices into unique forms is another ongoing process of glocalization that influences Rapids supporters. An example of this process is Class VI. They manage to incorporate some of the more exuberant elements of soccer support while not making families uncomfortable or upset. Class VI does this by abstaining from behavior foreign to American families like standing for ninety minutes and waving flags. However, they do import some of the more admissible elements of soccer support such as singing and holding up scarves.

The contained passion of hybridized supporter groups is further evidence of this trend. Worldwide, violence, racism, and uncontrollable fans are an issue that many countries are struggling to control. However, all three of the Rapids' supporter groups emulate worldwide styles of support, but stop short of being violent, politicized, and racist. However the passion of supporters still manifests itself in a different way for soccer supporters than for fans of American sports. As a result of the community that has formed, supporter group members have an unorthodox (by American standards) approach to supporting the Rapids. They create their own symbols that simultaneously support their particular group and the Rapids. For example, all three groups have their own logos and merchandise in Rapids colors but with their own designs that differentiate the groups and indicate their membership in a particular community.

Another way that hybridization is implicit in glocalization can be seen is in scarves and supporter culture. A few years ago, scarves were not widespread at Rapids games. At first, scarves became more popular among supporter groups. More recently scarves have become even more popular, and they are now a symbol that is worn by

supporters, families, and season-ticket holders. This symbol has transcended its foreign origin to become a distinct, hybridized, and authentic aspect of Colorado Rapids culture.

The uncommon relationship that the supporter groups have with players and the front office is part of a hybridized supporter culture. Leaders of the supporter groups regularly engage with the front office and players in face-to-face meetings and increasingly by means of social media. Prominent members of the supporter groups have constant dialogue with the front office and know the president, players, and coaches by name. This is unheard of in topflight American sports leagues. There are not yet excessive salaries so players and fans can relate to one another. For the time being, this can be maintained as a core part of the unique soccer culture in America, whereas in other countries salaries for soccer players are exorbitant and the players are inaccessible. The closeness of the supporters to the club is an import that has taken its own form due to miniscule (relative to top flight European leagues) salaries of many players.

Hybridity occurs when the simultaneous accommodation of American and international practices is evident on match day when the BSG mimic the English convention of patronizing a bar, and all three groups partake in the American convention of a tailgate, and then two groups participate in the global tradition of standing support. In the stadium, the supporter groups integrate flags, *tifo*, and song of multinational origin. The PA and BSG are a subversive and sometimes discordant faction of American soccer fan culture because they employ an imported style of support.

Many supporters of the Rapids are fans of clubs overseas in large part because that is where they were exposed to soccer and the quality of play is higher. These supporters seek to accommodate and mimic what they saw overseas in the United States

with increased passion, visibility, and volume relative to typical North American fans. They want the Rapids supporter culture to be as passionate as the rest of the world, while maintaining their unique identity as Colorado Rapids supporters.

Supporters aim to do this by retaining “cultural congruity” from the places that they learned about soccer by recreating and accommodating the match-day routines they learned in these locales. As a result, supporters have developed a collective habitus for both away and home games akin to global standards. For home games there is a routine that focuses on the stadium, and for away games, there is a routine that focuses on viewing parties at bars and homes. These places become institutions with deeper meaning for supporters because they provide a space for the Rapids supporters to congregate in large numbers.

Transformation

The supporters are not receptive to the tradition of quiet and passive American crowds. Part of the mantra of the supporters is to enhance the atmosphere during games at DSG and to transform the atmosphere into a more tangible soccer-specific environment. The supporters seek to undergo transformation or the complete adoption of normatively foreign customs.

The supporters want to differentiate themselves from other sports fans and align themselves with globally normative cultural standards. This is the influence of the particularization of universalism, or aligning with the world’s standards to influence the local community. Globally, soccer fans display their passion in a much more visible manner than American standards. The supporter groups of the Rapids are led by Americans and internationals who have experienced the game abroad and learned to

embrace soccer because of the passion surrounding it. Soccer has this capacity because it is played under the same rules and fans are passionate everywhere.

Supporter groups seek to undergo a transformative process relative to normal American spectator culture. Due to the cosmopolitan nature of supporters and their familiarity with other soccer cultures, the local customs, symbols, dress, flags, and songs of the Rapids' supporters is an amalgamation of the different experiences and knowledge of group members that the supporter groups attempt to mimic. The supporters differentiate themselves from other sports fans by not fully assimilating into American sports culture where crowds are subdued.

There are three ongoing and interdependent processes vying for dominance over each other. They are not mutually exclusive and are part of a continuum where the categories overlap. Of note is that the "particularization of universalism" and the "universalization of particularism" did not prove to be relevant terms to analyze the status of the supporter groups because of the amount of overlap with the other terms. The forces are part of the evolutionary process of soccer spectator culture of the Colorado Rapids. American spectator culture is relativized to imported cultural elements as evidenced by the segregation of supporters. Transformation occurs when the complete adoption of normatively foreign customs by local supporters to becomes the new normal. When these two processes combine, it results in hybridization as seen among Class VI supporters, who are passionate about integrating American customs of civility and respectability with songs that are limited to the non-offensive, and peacefully coexisting with those accustomed to the American spectator experience. Complete transformation was the aspiration of every supporter and member of the front office I interviewed. They all

expressed their desire to be more like Portland and Seattle who have vibrant supporter cultures.

These competing forces concurrently attempt to minimize and maximize American spectator culture at soccer games. No one can be certain that supporters of the Colorado Rapids will ever reach where Seattle, Portland, or Philadelphia are now. Class VI offers an alternative path for supporter culture in Colorado that could become the cultural norm for the Rapids. The future remains uncertain, but these are three different forces vying for realization in Colorado. This is a snapshot at a moment in a longer process that will continue to play out and develop over time as soccer spectator culture has proven to be malleable, open, and reflexive.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study communicated the effect of processes of glocalization processes on the supporter groups of the Colorado Rapids. Though the scope of research was limited by time, the study illuminated how supporters of the Colorado Rapids are grappling with their position as non-traditional fans of an increasingly indigenous sport. They are the product of an ongoing glocalization process that will only continue to reinforce their unique position in the American sporting cultural landscape. In this thesis I have drawn on the concepts of Giulianotti and Robertson to investigate the competing alternative forms of glocalization in the recent history of the Rapids. The three alternatives, relativization, transformation, and hybridization, contend with each other continuously in an effort to become the dominant type of spectator culture of the Colorado Rapids. The “friendly competition” between glocalizing forces will continue to play out over the next few years as supporters attempt to achieve complete transformation

in the face of relativization, which serves as a barrier to the growth of supporter culture. Hybridization will continue to be a middle ground between transformation and relativization.

Since this is a largely unexplored area of sociological study, there are many opportunities for further research. Future studies can examine the reaction of casual fans to the rise of supporter groups, the effect of the demographics of cities on their receptivity to supporter groups, and case studies of other supporter groups. Future studies can also examine the relationship between supporters and their stadium, the effects of exposure to international soccer on supporter groups, and the legacy of the NASL on supporter groups. Further study can also study authenticity and how the Rapids attempt to situate themselves in the global community, the effect of the changing demographics of the United States on MLS supporter groups, the effect of digital media on supporter groups, and gender and supporter groups.

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Appendix. Interview Schedule

How do soccer fans differ from other sports fans?

- Passive vs Active (Standing & Singing)
- Organized Groups (Membership, Representative with club)
- Visual Support (Scarves, Banners, Flags, Tifo)
- Defiance and Controlled Enthusiasm (Lack of Violence)
- Loyalty (Travel to Away Matches and Attend All Home Matches)
- Multinational (Elements From Many Different Countries)

How would you describe the typical Rapids fan? Is there just one type or a range?

- Composition of Fan Base
- Trying to Please Everyone
- Lack of Latino Presence
- Supporter Groups
- Families
- Young Males

How do the Rapids appeal to both the core fan and the casual sports fan?

- Glocalization (Adapt Global Phenomena to Local Fan)
 - Media Savvy Fan Who Has Access to Many Cultures
 - Global (Scarves and Supporter Culture) and Local Elements (Families)
 - Hybridization (Implicit in Glocalization) (When one Culture Adapts an Element From Another it is Bound to Represent Glocalization)
- Authentic (Elements of Game, Halftime, to Whom?)
 - Perquisite Intergenerational... How Do You Manufacture it?
- Americanization (What is American Soccer Culture?)
- Indigenous Sport (Playing as a Kid and Becoming an Adult Fan)
- Continuum of Fans (Appeal to Eurosnoob, MLS fan, and Casual fan)
- Fan Expectations
 - Cultural Preferences Differ (Families & Supporters & Ethnicity)
- What Do you Think Those Fans Want?

I get the impression that Rapids management is not satisfied with the size of the Rapids vocal support. Can you walk me through how the Rapids supporters terrace arrived at the state it is in today?

- History
- Rule Changes
 - Not Game First
- Alienation of Core Fans
 - Americanization (too much)
- Implementation of Supporters Terrace
 - Who are You Catering To?
- Results/Expectations

What efforts are being made to expand the fan base and replicate models that work?
(Seattle, Philly, etc)

- New Media
- Hybridization and/or Transformation of “Unique Fan Experience”
- Educating Fans
- Emphasizing Local Club in Global Marketplace
- Connecting with the Community
- Development Academy

What are your goals for the Rapids supporter groups and fans over the next five years?

- Plans
- Initiatives
- Stadium Atmosphere
- Rapids Culture
- Game Day Traditions
- What Culture are the Rapids Attempting to Emulate?

What are some of the current challenges that the Rapids face when trying to build supporter groups and loyal passionate fans?

- Current Challenges (Operationally, Budget, Demographics, Time, Staff)
- Cultural Contradiction (Ops vs Mark)
- Structural (Can’t Rebuild Parts of Stadium to Cater to Supporters)
- Crowded Sporting Space
- Resources
- Suburban Stadium
- Past Mistakes