

## Football cultures

*Entering the field. New perspectives on world football.*

Edited by Gary Armstrong and Richard Giulianotti. Oxford: Berg. 1997. 319 pp. Hb.: £14.95. ISBN 1 85973 198 8.

Until a few years ago, dedicating an academic volume to the anthropology of football would have seemed a mere diversion, little more than an intellectual whim. In spite of their important social repercussions, sports in general and football in particular were considered minor, even irrelevant, objects of study. Condemned by the majority of intellectuals as an 'opium of the people' at the service of the authoritarian or democratic powers that be, academics ceded the sporting terrain to other more or less organic intellectuals, such as sports journalists and a few assorted essayists and writers (such as Eduardo Galeano [1995] and Manuel Vazquez Montalban [1995], who have published poetic accounts of football and its metaphors). Until recently, only one of the many aspects of the football scene, not surprisingly its most problematic and morbid, had captured the attention of social researchers: stadium violence associated with hooliganism. One might ask, then, echoing Marc Augé (1982: 59), if 'the timidity of the human sciences with regard to important modern day rituals is not due to the fact that those who would observe and analyse such rituals are too close to them?' However, as Fabio Dei (1992: 7) has pointed out, 'the anthropological relevance of football is related to its strong affinity with a series of classic themes in the discipline: ritual, sacrifice, violence, symbolic communication, etc'. Why have anthropologists, specialists in distant peoples and exotic rituals, taken so long to visit tribes much closer to home, yet perhaps no less exotic? By considering the football tribes of Manchester United, Flamengo or Football Club Barcelona, anthropologists can observe modern forms of totemism and segmentarity.

It is not surprising that the editors of this collection have decided to employ a football metaphor as the title of their work. *Entering the field* refers both to the act of stepping onto the 'pitch' as well as the emergence of a new terrain for anthropological investigation. However, the study of football is not entirely new to the field of social anthropology (beyond the parallels drawn by the editors between the history of football and the history of British anthropology, from its origins in the nineteenth century). In recent decades, several anthropologists have demonstrated an interest in carrying out a study of modern football, though very few have actually done so. Two seminal texts in this regard were published in 1982: Marc Augé proposed to move 'from social history to religious anthropology' in the study of football; and Roberto Da Mata invited us to see Brazilian football as a 'social drama' in which Carioca society represented itself to itself. More recently, monographic accounts in the Italian anthropology journal *Ossimori* (1992) and in the French journal *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales* (1994), directed by Pierre Bourdieu, have focused on football. In addition, a comprehensive ethnography about football passion in Marseille, Turin and Naples (Bromberger 1995) and other less global, but no less interesting works (MacClancy 1994; Signorelli 1996) have recently been published.

*Entering the field* is not, then, the first anthropological work dedicated to football. It can be considered, however, the first serious attempt to treat the phenomenon of football in an intercultural and comparative context on a universal scale. The volume is a collection of twelve case studies that cover five continents: three are dedicated to the 'Latin' and Latin American sphere (Argentina, Brazil, Italy); four to 'emerging nations' of the Middle East (Palestine) and Africa (Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Tanzania); and five to the Anglo-Saxon world (United

Kingdom, Scotland, United States, Australia). Although this Anglo-Saxon predominance results in significant biases and gaps, the collection provides a relatively broad and diverse sample, offers abundant contrastive data and includes a notable variety of methodological approaches (from participant observation to social history, from archival surveys to detailed qualitative interviews, from the analysis of the press to the study of 'fanzines'). In a dense introduction, the editors outline the panorama of theoretical reflections and anthropological contributions to the study of football cultures to date. This term – *football cultures* – serves as a kind of *leitmotif* characterising the authors' approach. Football can be seen as culture in the sense of a multi-fractal mirror reflecting the various cultural identities present in a given society at a particular historical moment, and in the sense of an arena for (and powerful catalyst to) the creation of new identities and the reproduction and transformation of existing ones. Novel identities can give rise to authentic micro-societies characterised by a set of distinctive discourses and social practices. Despite their local roots, such micro-societies are embedded in transnational social networks that span the entire planet. The authors' definition of football as 'global play' is extremely fitting indeed! The notion of football cultures is complemented by other anthropological metaphors suggested throughout the book (although not always employed in the analysis), such as 'deep play' (Geertz), 'social drama' (Turner), 'lay religion' (Hobsbawm), 'carnivalisation' (Bakhtin) and 'total social fact' (Mauss).

This last concept, used by Marcel Mauss (1973) to analyse the gift and ritual exchange in primitive society, would seem to be the most fruitful for the case at hand (cf. Padiglione 1988). A 'total social phenomenon' is one which 'puts into movement the totality of a society's institutions', giving form to, and functioning as, a 'complete social system'. Conceiving football as a 'total social fact', we will explore the chapters in this volume from the double perspective outlined above: football as 'reflection' and as a strategic site where cultural identities are created and transformed. To the extent that it reflects cultural identities, football is an excellent terrain to investigate ethnic, class, gender, generational, territorial, political and religious frontiers emerging in a particular society. Football's relation to the construction of ethnic and national identities is a theme running through a majority of the volume's essays. From its British origins, football's colonial expansion has given rise to its differential appropriation in each new territory where it was introduced. This has led to the emergence of various discourses surrounding 'national styles of play' (a metaphor for national cultures). By examining the popular rhetoric involving the figure of Maradona, Archetti illustrates the role played by the so called '*Criollo* style of play' in the construction of an Argentine national identity. Leite Lopes analyses the invention of the famous '*Carioca* style of play' – essentially multiracial – through a process of symbolic appropriation by blacks and mulattos of a sport that was initially associated with white Europeans. De Biasi and Lanfranchi demonstrate how the reinvention of the medieval *calcio* to denominate a modern sport would be used in Fascist Italy as the imitation of a style of play opposed to the English style. Football's centripetal force exists alongside an opposing centrifugal tendency: it often amplifies ethnic conflicts in multicultural states. Several chapters examine the efforts of political and sports authorities to prevent football cultures from being constructed according to ethnic criteria (as explained by Nkwi and Vidacs for the case of Cameroon) or so that football be seen as an 'immigrant sport' (as explained by Hughson for the case of Australia and Andrews *et al.* for the case of the United States). Such efforts and prohibitions encounter resistance on the part of fans who refuse to spur their 'diasporic memories'. In other contexts, this identity dynamic may even anticipate the creation of new nation-states. As Tuastad shows for Palestinian refugees in Jordan, football has provided a setting in which refugees have been able to express a resistant national consciousness in the absence of more institutional arenas.

The polysemic relationship between football and social class derives from its complex historical development (Elias and Dunning 1992). While in Great Britain football was originally a popular sport identified with the working classes, its later use as an educational technique in bourgeois academies and its colonial diffusion throughout the world imbued it with an air of elitism. Leite Lopes points out that in Brazil football was originally an aristocratic sport; it was imported by the British and practised by middle-class youth in high-society clubs (such as Fluminense). It was not until several industrial enterprises promoted

football among their employees as a form of social integration that members of the working classes began to play the game. Over time, the big clubs would go through a process of democratisation as they began to recruit white, mulatto and black players from working-class suburbs. However, the sport's social ambivalence never disappeared, as expressed in the physical spaces where football is learned (sandlot versus court games) and the varied lifestyles led by football players (hedonism versus asceticism).

While football in Brazil was transformed from an urban middle-class game to a symbol of inter-class and inter-ethnic relations, the contrary appears to have been the case in the United States. Andrews *et al.* suggest on the basis of a case study (though not a particularly profound nor comprehensive one) carried out in Memphis, Tennessee that football (*soccer* in American parlance) is no longer exclusively identified with immigrant minorities from Europe and Latin America. Tied to the process of 'suburbanisation' in the United States, soccer has increasingly come to be a preferred sport among suburban middle-class youth: 'soccer in the US is essentially a white, middle-class, suburban sport, just the opposite of the game's demographics in most of the world' (Hersh, p. 263). Without dismissing these important insights, however, it should be pointed out that the present reality of the game in the US is a great deal more complex than these authors would have it. Soccer often provides one of the few arenas in which kids from different racial, class, ethnic and even national backgrounds have the chance to meet and interact with one another. Although the game is certainly linked to complex processes of distinction and domination, in many instances the sport has and continues to provide a privileged space for the fostering of openness, tolerance and multi-cultural awareness. Indeed, the polysemic nature of modern football is also manifest within national boundaries and its significance in any context is subject to the continuing push and pull of history.

Although the topic of gender is never explicitly broached in the collection, the 'privileged male participation' in football cultures (a theme developed by Archetti 1992) is present in every chapter. Armstrong and Young apply Victor Turner's categories to the analysis of the hooligan phenomenon in the United Kingdom, showing how the many actors in this 'social drama' share a common system of practices and discourses: 'All of the mostly masculine parties to the event – the players, the alleged hooligans, the police, the sports journalists, the officials and stewards, the politicians – can denigrate and attach "shame" and degradation to a set of binary others' (p. 180). There is one exception to this masculine hegemony. Andrews *et al.* document the process of feminisation of soccer in North America: in contrast to American football, seen as a reserve of masculine attributes and values, soccer is perceived as a sport which establishes few barriers to feminine participation. Females comprise more than 40 per cent of the soccer-playing population (it would seem that a similar phenomenon occurs in some Asian countries as well). Several parents in Memphis explain why their daughters like soccer with the following kinds of arguments: 'it's a sport that is not unfeminine'; 'it's not a contact sport'; 'it's not violent', etc. No European or Latin American football fan would ever think they were talking about the same game, which demonstrates once again the enormous plasticity of football cultures.

The generational dimension to football cultures is expressed in the differing rates and styles of participation on the part of various age groups, young people in particular. Despite its profound historical roots (Elias and Dunning 1992), stadium violence has become increasingly related to the fracturing of intergenerational cohesion among fans. In reality, however, stadiums are nearly the only spaces at present where different generations share a common interest. The chapters by Hognestad and Giulianotti on the Scottish case indicate that generational identification rather than violence is what motivates young people to become followers of a particular team. As affirmed in a 'fanzine': 'you may hate your father's taste in music, clothes, politics, but you share something important in your heart' (p. 200). Hughson's stimulating text explores how second generation Croatian immigrant youths in Sydney attempt to 'magically recover', through their identification with a football team, the 'lost (or imagined lost) community' of their parents, with whom they share nonetheless the same symbolic universe. From Hughson's somewhat romantic perspective, their nazi symbols and aggressive attitudes should not be interpreted as conforming to a political or violent posture,

but rather should be seen as a form of 'ritual resistance'. It should be emphasised, however, that the fact that violent behaviour and politically nefarious discourses can be seen as part of a culture of resistance does not mean they are justifiable. In his essay about Serra Leone, Richards goes even further in challenging the popular tendency to link soccer with violence. Rather than generating violence, football can be used as an antidote to it. At least so much is suggested by the experience of young ex-guerrilla fighters who encounter in football an effective means of resocialisation: 'Soccer is sufficiently free of cultural content to be an effective medium for the forging of co-operative skills from scratch' (p. 155).

Regarding territory, football can be seen as a modern demonstration of Evans-Pritchard's classic theory of 'segmentary opposition' as a central organising principle in tribal society. Territorial identities (neighbourhood, local, regional, national) are successively and alternatively affirmed in opposition to various 'others'. However, although local and regional rivalries are often put aside while supporting the national team, other kinds of cross-cutting alliances are largely absent from the football world: in no way can football cultures be associated with systems in a state of structural-functional equilibrium. De Biasi and Lanfranchi show how football in Italy is channelled into local rather than national rivalries. The 'importance of difference' that derives from the medieval *calcio* is expressed in local patriotism – *campanilismo*. 'In Italy, nationalism, at least among football fans, became *ultra* in a municipal culture manifested in opposition to the national side' (p. 101). This explains why there are no *ultras* (radical youth fan-groups) that travel with the national team and why the fans of Inter, Milan or Napoli, rather than identifying with their own *squadra azzurra*, prefer to identify with the national squads for whom the stars of their respective teams play (Germany, Holland, Argentina). On another level, the nature of the spaces where the game is learned (the Argentine *potrero*, the Brazilian *pelada*, the North American suburban field) underlines the mutual interconnections between football and urban space, while the location of today's massive stadiums – 'cathedrals of concrete' – indicate the symbolic topographies of the twentieth century.

Political and religious identities are also reflected in the world of football, above all when there exist no other channels to facilitate their expression. In Italy the 'politicisation of football' (judged by the radicalism of its left-wing and right-wing *ultras*) may have given way to a 'footballisation of politics' (judged by the use of football-related strategies and slogans since the political emergence of Berlusconi). Nchoji Nkuwi and Vidacs document how the manner in which the Paul Biya regimen in Cameroon appropriated the success of the 'Indomitable Lions' in Italy '90 for its own political purposes backfired after their failure in the World Cup in 1994. The team's failure provoked popular indignation, which was voiced in a radio call-in programme during the competition – the listeners referred to the president as the lion man ('*l'homme lion*'). With respect to religion, football, originally rooted in British puritan ideology, is still associated with sectarian tendencies – at least in the imagination, as exemplified by the Scottish clubs studied by Hognestad and Giulianotti. The rivalries between fans of Rangers (Protestant–Unionist) and Celtic (Irish–Catholic) as well as between the two Edinburgh fan groups Hearts and Hibs are still symbolic frontiers dividing Scottish football. Although several chapters treat football as secular religion, none of them satisfactorily elaborate upon the theme as well as does Bromberger (1995) in his stimulating and comprehensive study of French and Italian football clubs. The analysis of sports in terms of magic and ritual is only fully developed by Leseth, who illustrates how Tanzanian football is fertile ground for witchcraft. But *juju* is not exclusively African: 'the practice of witchcraft rationalises the element of unpredictability in football which is not only related to the Tanzanian or African experience, but is a common experience within the world of football' (p. 163).

As well as reflecting already existing cultural identities (real or perceived), football is also an important site at which new cultural identities are created, and existing ones are reproduced and potentially transformed. The production and transformation of such identities is a process endowed with a specific logic that can be expressed at the individual, interpersonal, institutional and/or transnational levels. At the individual level, the identification with a club or with a football player, is one of the modern ways meaning is constructed. In a chapter

entitled 'And give joy to my heart', Arquetti reconstructs the 'Argentine cult' surrounding the figure of Maradona. He examines the impassioned creation of a popular myth involving Maradona's style of life and play. The informants interviewed by the author project into the biography of *el Pibe* the diverse values associated with Argentine masculine culture (hedonism, spontaneity, irresponsibility, exaggeration, etc.): 'football is transformed into reality when supporters transform this fiction into a weekly profound emotional experience' (p. 46). At the interpersonal level, fans organise in a multiplicity of groups and associations with varying reputations (from 'respectable' to 'criminal') in which they channel their support for a team. Hognestad, in his study of Hearts fans in Edinburgh, argues that 'football as a public phenomenon stands out as one of the few remaining generators of huge collective rituals', transforming the stadium into a kind of 'second home' for fans (p. 194). At the institutional level, the collective entities historically created to channel passion for football (clubs) become authentic micro-societies, with specific economies, political structures, social systems, languages and symbols. Through a study of 'fanzines' produced by followers of Aberdeen FC, Giulianotti shows how local football identities are not only constructed from above, but also from below through the diffusion of local informational alternatives, which, like rumours, nourish the collective imagination. Finally, at the transnational level, new information technologies are profoundly transforming the local base of football identities, creating networks of meaning that span the globe. The same chapter by Giulianotti suggests that 'the creative politics of football fanzines have been in the informational vanguard of a "new social movement" within football, which includes a new oeuvre of satirical plays, books, and television shows, broadcasting phone-ins ... and fan communication links via internet web-pages' (p. 215). The appropriation of this 'global game' by a 'transnational post-industrial culture' might lead to the kind of 'hyperreal football' anticipated by Berlusconi. Perhaps more importantly, it has the potential to foster the fluid and hybrid social networks capable of generating new cultural identities in post-modern society.

Overall, *Entering the field* encompasses a rich panorama of the 'state of the art' and prefigures the future research locations of a genuine anthropology of football. The collection does have some serious limitations, though, even if it does not merit all of the excessively harsh criticisms it has provoked in the world of football journalism (cf. Gardner 1997). We have already alluded to the volume's Anglo-Saxon bias (which in addition to a debatable grouping of articles, leads to the omission of some basic texts, such as much of those cited before). A comparative study of world football ought to dedicate more space to France and Spain, two additional 'Latin' cases with a strong football tradition; to northern European soccer powers such as Holland and Germany; to Central and Eastern European nations, particularly those from the former Yugoslavia; and to emerging powers in the Far East, such as Korea and Japan, which will co-host the World Cup in 2002. The contrast between chapters dedicated to 'western' nations (which treat football as the principle object of study) and those dedicated to 'ex-colonial' nations (in which football is merely a pretext to reflect on more traditional anthropological themes, such as magic, politics, tribalism and violence) can also be criticised. Moreover, we should point out the decidedly uneven quality of the ethnography and the failure on the part of some authors sufficiently to elaborate on certain theoretical concepts and adequately to integrate theory and description. Finally, it is unfortunate that we only rarely hear the voices of actual football players; the analysis of any ritual is somewhat incomplete without the protagonist's perspective.

As researchers interested in football cultures in Catalonia, we appreciate the references made throughout the volume to Football Club Barcelona, which underscore the paradoxical lack of dependable academic studies of one of the most important football clubs in the world. But 'Barça's' uniqueness is not due to the fact that it is a powerful marker of identity among 'indigenous Catalans' (p. 16) – in reality, it is the most powerful mechanism of cultural integration for all the ethnic minorities present in Catalonia, from Andalusians to the recent African immigrants – nor that there is a chapel annexed to its locker rooms (p. 93) where each Sunday its president and some of its players pray before the Virgin of Montserrat, whose mountain sanctuary becomes a centre of pilgrimage for the team after winning a major title (Feixa 1992). Rather, its singularity derives from its status as a club representing a nation

without a state, founded by a Swiss, with fan clubs in the five continents, whose stars have always been foreigners, whose team is currently comprised of players from eight different countries, which is the subject of multiple web pages and which is developing its own channel on digital television (RCD Espanyol, FC Barcelona's cross-town rival, provides an interesting comparative case, given the recent campaign to 'catalanize' a club that was founded as Barcelona's local (i.e. Spanish as opposed to international) football contingent. 'Barça' truly is a magnificent metaphor for the 'global game' that increasingly characterises modern football!

Archetti's essay about a star who began his international career in Barcelona is without doubt one of the more suggestive chapters in the volume. The 'Argentine cult' of Maradona reminds us of the blurb attached to a publicity photo of 'el Pelusa' during his playing days with 'Barça', ecstatically praying on the soccer field: 'the shadow of God'. We were reminded of that image recently while reading about Maradona's latest death throes in the press. Alongside a story about his latest (and seemingly definitive) doping incident was a photograph showing the star with an image of Che Guevara tattooed on his arm. Che is dead, long live 'el Pelusa'! 'El Pelusa' is gone, long live Rivaldo!

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