

Book Review

- *Fútbol y Sociedad en América Latina – Futebol e sociedade na América Latina*, edited by Thomas Fischer, Romy Köhler & Stefan Reith. Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2021

Fútbol y sociedad en América Latina is a book that addresses many of the complexities of these phenomena in an interdisciplinary way. It compiles a series of articles by members of the German Association for Research on Latin America (ADLAF) presented at the *Fútbol y sociedad en América Latina* congress at the Academy of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in Berlin in June 2018, which is one of the most important scientific congresses that has been held on Latin American football and the largest on the European continent. Through different thematic fields, the volume explores the complexities of this sport in Latin America, both in the community and in the institutional, national and overall setting, over time. Furthermore, through 30 studies in English, Spanish, and Portuguese, the book supports a large readership and a more global understanding of Football and Latin America.

The book is organised around seven themes with different authors and works per theme. It begins with an introduction by Thomas Fischer, Romy Köhler and Stefan Reith. The first theme concerns football, history and society, noting, among other things, the work of the chroniclers and the achievements of anthropology and historical sociology in the social and cultural history of football in Latin America. The second theme deals with identities and styles concerning Latin American football. Aspects such as collective, national and migratory identities are discussed in depth. It continues with football players and fans; elements such as citizenship, territory, use of space, and forms of associativity are analysed and exemplified. The third theme deals with the relations between political power and football, pointing out historical aspects, ideas of nationalism, and the influence of drug cartels. The fourth theme deals with gender issues, emphasising how women are increasingly involved in Latin American football. What I found interesting here is that, as Carmen Rial explains, football practised by women was ignored for a long time, even by feminist movements. Yet, now it has been taking on growing importance and visibility. The fifth theme deals with aspects of cultural heritage, indigenisation and its links with history. The

media is problematised by addressing literature, the press and their relationship with football in the sixth theme. The seventh theme analyses representations in literature and cinema, discussing topics such as the instrumentalisation of soccer, its importance in popular culture, and specific cases of how cinema and literature have developed in some Latin American countries. In addition to these thematic sections, relevant information about the authors and the editors at the end of the book is presented.

The plurality of visions that these themes show is a relevant strength of the book. *Fútbol y sociedad en América Latina* brings together a series of studies from historiography, essays and academic papers that, with different methodologies and approaches, exalt football as a growing field of study and research in Latin America. One of the merits of this compilation is that it sheds light on both micro and macro cultural aspects of the relationship between Latin American society and football. Football is the most popular sport globally, and in places like Latin America, as Thomas Fischer explains, football is the king sport. It is a phenomenon that exceeds the barriers of sport to become a language, a passion, a symbol, a struggle, an identity and a political field. In Latin America, football is a cultural movement involving and affecting large portions of society. Besides, it has been present in periods of dictatorships, populisms, ultra-nationalism and democracies. Undoubtedly, football and its fans have a fundamental role in daily life throughout the Latin American continent, and in *Fútbol y sociedad en América Latina* this is illustrated and explained with different case studies and historical periods.

As Pablo Alabarces has defended and as some of the *Fútbol y sociedad en América Latina's* articles demonstrate, in Latin America, football revolves around and affects five critical elements: ethnicity, race, class, territory and the nation. Even though there is no such thing that can be described as Latin American football, there is no single or homogeneous development of it. There is no collective way to play it, watch it or a common destiny. Nevertheless, these five axes, ethnicity, race, class, territory and the nation, trace the narratives of Latin American football. Some articles in the book explain how football has appropriated the public and private space of the Latin American continent, creating their own disputed places, borders and territories. Other studies show how the phenomenon of migration brings football with it and adapts it, mixing it with new regions, cultures and people. Other authors discuss how for many people, football represents a lifestyle that mobilises collective identities, associations, championships, symbols, meanings, images, rituals, languages, businesses, mass media, legends, myths, speeches, narratives, shows, mega-events, among other phenomena. Football as a phenomenon has expanded into endless macro and micro social complexities, and given the diversity of the 30 articles that *Fútbol y sociedad en América Latina* compiles, the book shows and emphasises the importance and need for its study and understanding from the social sciences and humanities.

Fútbol y sociedad en América Latina on the one hand is an entertaining and educative book on what many call the king sport. It contributes substantially to the academic understanding of a dense phenomenon. The book not only deals with the joy and positive aspects of football, but also addresses complexities such as violence, its excessive commodification, its corruption and its hostility to the female gender. On the other hand, one of its weaknesses is that it does not present general conclusions or a section that somehow reconciles and unifies all the articles/essays presented, leaving the book not as a unit but more as a set of exciting but different articles. *Fútbol y sociedad en América Latina* is full of nuances, history and stories, reflections and illustrations that makes a multidisciplinary step forward to understand football and the complexities and peculiarities of the Latin American continent.

Alexis Sossa Rojas, CEDLA/University of Amsterdam
Alexis.sossa@gmail.com