

Football.

Identity, culture and power

Summary

The aim of this book is to present the variety of social and cultural contexts of football in contemporary world. It is because this sport serves as a perfect example of problems related to globalisation and glocalisation, or in other words, the local cultural re-adaptation of global practices. This book contains references to Brazil, Argentina, the United States of America and Japan. For the sake of comparison I also devote space to two European countries, i.e. Germany and Holland. A separate chapter deals with women's football. Although one should be there, there is no chapter in this book devoted to English (or rather British) football, which is frequently referred to as the 'cradle' of this sport. This is because, to my mind, there is only one way of covering British football and that is through writing a whole separate book about it. At various points in this publication British football serves only as a reference point in the discussion devoted to other countries.

This book is the result of my personal fascination with football and the conviction that it is both a remarkably appealing cultural practice and a common ground for identification, as well as being the object of my research interest. This does not mean that I am not aware of the criticism levelled at football. Nevertheless, when evaluating this sport, it has to be remembered that due to its global appeal, football provides insight into the way particular nations perceive the global world, as well as the way this global world perceives those nations. Victories and losses become the source of generalisations about the place particular nations hold in the global society, as well as about the features these particular nations exhibit as they become apparent on the football pitch (determining the success or failure). Sometimes it can even create an impression that football is one of the most integral components of the global cultural capital of a particular nation.

I attempt to provide evidence for the above assumption in the following chapters of this book, which are devoted to particular countries, the choice of which, as will become clear, was not done at random. The second part of the title of this book is composed of three notions: identity, culture and power. The first notion refers to the role of football in creating national, global and also personal identity (of particular footballers and fans). The second notion refers to the cultural processes of re-adapting football by particular societies which differ in terms of their traditions,

circumstances and geopolitical status in the world. In turn, the category of power refers to the first context of the relationship between the focal point of football, i.e. Europe, and other continents. The second context comprises the power that football has (as well as particular footballers) in the processes of creating identification systems (on the local, regional and national level). Finally, the third context, although very trivial but equally important, refers to particular footballers and their ball control skills, the essence of the game.

I would like to add that in recent decades football has acquired the status of a “classless” sport due to its appeal and function as a source of identification. The supporters of the national teams and renowned football clubs with a long tradition come from all social classes. Lawyers, scholars, doctors and businessmen cheer their teams on alongside manual workers, all sharing a mutual identification with the club colours. What is also interesting to note is the fact that unlike other cultural practices operating on the global level, such as music, fashion or popular films and magazines, which seem to become increasingly dispersed into thousands of incoherent copies, football retains its integrity, in what is its classic variant. It is consolidated around its rules and tournaments as well as personal, family and collective identifications passed on from generation to generation. It is this that lies at the root of football’s power in our contemporary global world.

Translated by Aleksandra Oszmiańska-Pagett