

WORDS BEYOND THE PANDEMIC: A HUNDRED-SIDED CRISIS

Coord.: José Reis
A collective work by CES

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Centro de Estudos Sociais
Universidade de Coimbra



UNIVERSIDADE DE
COIMBRA



Organização
das Nações Unidas
para a Educação,
a Ciência e a Cultura



Universidade de
Coimbra - Alta e Sã
inscrita na Lista do Património
Mundial em 2013



PROGRAMA OPERACIONAL COMPLEXIDADE E INOVAÇÃO



UNIÃO EUROPEIA

Fundo Europeu
de Desenvolvimento Regional



Fundação
para a Ciência
e a Tecnologia

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Editor

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Publisher

Centre for Social Studies
University of Coimbra

Scientific Review

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December, 2020

This work is funded by ERDF Funds through the Competitiveness Factors Operational Programme - COMPETE and by National Funds through the FCT - Foundation for Science and Technology within the UIDB/50012/2020 project.

The data and opinions included in this publication are the exclusive responsibility of its authors.

ISBN

978-989-8847-28-7

FOOTBALL

Carlos Nolasco

Football is one of the most important expressions of the contemporary world. It is played with such intensity that, in some countries, social and political life have been “footballised”. In essence, football is a recreational game, with its own language, representations and contingencies, repeated in every match – regardless of whether it is played in the street or in the most sophisticated of stadiums. The Fédération Internationale de Football Association – FIFA, the governing body responsible for world football, is a major international organisation, both in terms of the number of its member countries and budget and in terms of the way it has commercialised football and promoted it on a global scale. From a simple match played by two teams and based on the emotion of identity, football has become a complex product due to its multiple, steadily accumulated dimensions. Thus it turned clubs into companies, directors into managers, players into workers/merchandise, and supporters into clients, through a process in which, in addition to sports results, financial gains and political dividends are sought, enhanced by the media and television broadcasts. In contrast to the entrancing, romantic view of the match, the moves and the players, football metamorphosed when it mixed with the economy, was adulterated by politics, and was thwarted by violence, racism, xenophobia and sexism.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, football had to be interrupted, which highlighted the excessive media space occupied by the game and its

by-products. It also made clear that it is possible for society to exist without this dominant kind of football and all that is inherent in it. As a hegemonic product, football – namely top-level football – needs to recreate itself from the remains of an apparently exhausted economic model. A different kind of football is possible, but, for this to happen, sporting ethics – rather than the market – must be given pride of place, doping and violence must be prevented, and fair play must be promoted, along with social ethics aimed at preventing racism, xenophobia, discrimination and corruption, while encouraging integration. Given football’s social relevance, its management by national and international private entities should not be spared the censure of the public authorities, who are supposed to monitor football’s public benefit status and all the institutional practices that go with it – from the management of television rights to supporter behaviour to the commercialisation of international transfers of players. Football allows for a different grammar of human dignity; however, for this to happen, it is important that all football agents, starting with the players, have a social commitment that translates into political and value-based preconditions. A football emancipated from the big stadiums, seeking alternative forms of play, such as street football, popular and amateur football – inclusive, selfless and emancipated ways of playing.