

Oliveira Filho, José Hildo de. 2024. *Sport migrants, precarity and identity: Brazilian footballers in central and Eastern Europe*. Oxon, New York: Routledge. 134 pp. Hb.: £114.75. ISBN: 9781032650357.

Book review by

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"What comes after hope?" This question guides the multi-sited ethnography presented in *Sport Migrants, Precarity and Identity: Brazilian Footballers in Central and Eastern Europe* by José Hildo de Oliveira Filho. The book consists of six chapters, divided into three parts, in which the author explores the different temporalities and ethnographic contexts he has encountered during his academic journey. His research focuses on Brazilian footballers and futsal players in the Czech Republic, Lebanon, Austria, Portugal and Israel. Through the life stories of these interlocutors, the answer to the initial question shifts towards notions of "sacrifice" and "pain" that go beyond the hope of maintaining or starting a successful career abroad.

In contrast to other ethnographies that examine the transnational migration of Brazilian footballers and futsal players, Oliveira Filho innovates by emphasising migration trajectories outside the axes of global football clubs. The focus is on later-stage migration processes involving interlocutors in their thirties and forties. Migration to the above-mentioned countries is often seen as an opportunity for players close to retirement to continue playing abroad. Younger players see competing in European leagues as a way to gain visibility, making appearances in more peripheral countries a potential stepping stone for their careers.

In the *first part*, Oliveira Filho introduces two central concepts related to the migration processes of footballers and futsal players, derived from his fieldwork experiences. The first concerns the convergence of ethnographic studies of football and futsal, which the author calls the "ethnographic continuum". Rather than a racial argument, what is currently recognised as a Brazilian "style of play" should be understood as a continuum

linking futsal and football. This continuum emerges from an examination of the life histories of Brazilian footballers over recent decades, which often reveal a background in futsal prior to their football careers.

According to the author, the racialisation of the Brazilian “way of playing” contributes to the notion of “Brazilianness”. As an analytical category, this concept naturalises certain skills and characteristics that, in migration contexts, can reinforce unequal power dynamics and create racial stereotypes about migrant workers. Thus, the text urges other scholars to remain vigilant against such academic pitfalls and stresses the importance of listening to the narratives of interlocutors.

The *second part* discusses “pain” and “sacrifice” in relation to the social markers of gender and religion. The author seeks to understand the complex relationship between masculinity, religion and agency in the context of sport. Athletes’ careers require high levels of skill, but are relatively shorter than other professions, characterised by short contracts, uncertain renewals and high risks of injury, which can lead to prolonged absence or even early retirement. Clubs and supporters often put pressure on players to return to the field quickly and produce satisfactory results.

The relationship between sporting careers and masculinity (respectable masculinity) is also explored. This concept is linked not only to the athletes’ ability to support their families through sport, but also to their ability to endure the pain of training, matches and injuries. Religion intersects with these aspects of career management, mediating pain—resulting from training, competition or injury—and sacrifice, such as being away from family and pursuing new contracts. It is important to stress that religious expression abroad tends to remain private. This is because, in the contexts studied by the author, the logics governing the institutions related to migrant athletes are aligned with neoliberal perspectives.

Finally, in the last section, entitled *Final Thoughts*, Oliveira Filho summarises the central arguments and highlights the discoveries made during his years of fieldwork. The reflections presented allow for a better understanding of how athletes deal with precarity, pain and hierarchies, while at the same time negotiating practices of care and resisting expectations of sacrifice for sport. The author proposes new directions for the study of sports migration, suggesting a greater dialogue with the humanities. Written in the first person, the text also teaches us that listening carefully and revisiting previous research has the potential to generate new insights and open up new debates.