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Global Game, Local Goals

Football and the Global-Local Nexus

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Abstract

Association football is the most popular sport in the world with massive numbers of players and supporters, both male and female. The global spread of football coupled with its projection through mass media to global audiences suggests an analysis based on the discourse of globalisation. However, 'Global Games, Local Goals' shows that football is also highly-localised, with football clubs and national teams having great significance as centres of community and identity. Thus an anthropological analysis of football necessitates a dialectical approach that addresses the inter-relationship between the global and the local.

'Global Game, Local Goals' also argues that while the 'big picture' of globalisation studies offers relevant macro-analytical possibilities, the particularism of highly-localised ethnographic studies that have been part of the anthropological tradition should not be lost in the rush to larger scale studies of 'globalisation'. Thus the anthropological tradition of particularism is preserved but is also blended with the universalism of globalisation and theorisation.

Preface and Acknowledgements

In New Zealand, association football is not the dominant sporting code that it is in many other countries. Association football here is often referred to as 'soccer' and the dominant football code, rugby union, takes the unmarked word 'football'. However, association football is a global sport and over most of the world the sport it is also known as 'football' or a localised translation of that name, for example in Germany it is '*fussball*', and in Brazil it is '*futebol*'. 'Soccer' comes from a derivation of the word 'association' and is a colloquialism like '*rugger*' for rugby. In this thesis I utilise the term 'football' as it is the international form and my field-study site, Central United refer to themselves as a 'Football Club', not a 'soccer club'.

As a young male growing up in New Zealand in the 1960s and 1970s, I was aware that there was an expectation from some quarters that I should also play the dominant sport of rugby union. However, as a result of being brought up in an immigrant Scots family where association football was seen by my father as the 'manly' game to play, I put up with the taunts from friends, strangers and teachers and played 'soccer' as it is known as here. Growing up in the Hutt Valley near Wellington was fortuitous for a budding footballer as a 'soccer' sub-culture existed, in part due to the presence of large numbers of working-class immigrants from countries such as Britain, Holland and Ireland where association football was the dominant sport.

The perception of football or 'soccer' as being a minor and slightly suspect sport for young New Zealand men to play, necessarily lead to an international outlook for the sport's players such as myself. I and many of my friends looked to Britain, Holland, Brazil and Germany for models of how the game should be played. We also talked of playing overseas and watched televised English football and the FIFA World Cup on television. My ambition was not to play for New Zealand but for Scotland, a 'real' football nation. Unfortunately my senior playing career was cut short by injury, briefly reignited years later in the First Division in Wellington, followed over a decade later by a stint of junior coaching at Central United FC in Auckland in 2004, including gaining a junior coaching qualification.

In between times I have thrilled at the sight of the New Zealand men's team qualifying for the World Cup finals in 1982, with a nail-biting win over China. I also joined in a game with local players in Bali, had a kick-around on the beach with local men in Java and watched international matches in New Zealand, Malaysia and Australia. In 1984 I coached children in England and watched one of my favourite clubs, Tottenham Hotspurs, lose at home to Birmingham. I took great pleasure in seeing 'King Kenny' Dalglish play for Scotland against Iceland, and also attended two matches at Ibrox, the home of Glasgow Rangers Football Club. This included one of the Infamous Rangers-Celtic clashes. In Spain, I overdosed on televised football. Back in New Zealand, I attended the final of the FIFA Under-17 World Cup at North Harbour Stadium and conducted anthropological fieldwork at Central United Football Club in Auckland.

None of the above qualifies me as an expert on football or on the anthropology of the sport. While I do draw on a personal body of knowledge, extensive secondary research provides the global perspective that I seek to convey in this thesis. This is combined with my own ethnographic research on Central United Football Club, one of New

Zealand's premier clubs with an outstanding record of success for its senior men's teams.

Given my enthusiasm for football, my interest in anthropology and the discourse of globalisation it comes as no surprise to me that I now choose to write about how these elements connect. It is the task of this thesis to show these connections both at globalised and localised levels and to show the interconnections of both. At the forefront of this thesis is a desire to show how such an analysis of the world's most popular sport is relevant to the discipline of social anthropology, its methodology of ethnography and its concern for particularism.

A number of people or organisations contributed to this thesis and I would like to acknowledge their contribution:

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Chapter One

The Field of Enquiry

Imagine an activity in which an estimated two hundred and forty million people actively participated in 2000 (Lanfranchi et al., 2004:200). Imagine the huge anthropological interest in this activity which occupies one twenty-fifth of the world's population. Fortunately, anthropologists do not have to imagine such an activity as it already exists. The activity to which I am referring to is association football, the world's most popular sport (Maguire et al., 2002: 120): a sport that can be participated in or viewed in most villages, towns and cities in most countries of the world, at amateur and professional levels.

Football is truly global in its reach, yet is also of immense importance as signifier of local identity and community. It therefore offers anthropologists significant opportunities to research the nexus between the local and the global through the particularism of ethnography and the universalism of theory. Unfortunately anthropologists have only recently started to pay attention to what has grown to become a global cultural phenomenon that encompasses not only a large number of active participants but massive audiences. This thesis is one attempt to build on the relatively small body of work in the anthropology of sport, and especially the anthropology of football.

One of the reasons for the development of a world or global culture of football is its projection through television. Membership of the 'football community' is largely made up of a televisual audience that greatly outnumbers both the audiences that attend football matches and those men, women and children who play football. Indeed 1.7 billion television viewers were estimated to have watched the 2002 World Cup Final from Tokyo (FIFA.com, n.d.). Thus, the global football community also comprises in large part an extensive 'virtual community' of football consumers.

The prime example of football's 'global imagining' is the quadrennial FIFA World Cup, run by football's governing body where men's teams representing their nations of origin compete for the sport's ultimate prize. The World Cup is therefore inter-national and could also be said to be representative of a global or "world culture" (Lechner and Boli, 2005: 86-87) Ironically, many of the participants playing in teams representing their country play their professional club football in yet another country. Football therefore combines both nationalism in the composition of national teams and in their support, and trans-nationalism as players cross borders to play for club teams domiciled in foreign nation-states.

Football is also highly-localised. Football, both amateur and professional is largely played by members of club and school teams, by adults and children of both genders. Football clubs offer a partisan experience for players and their supporters, with most clubs representing a geographical area such as a district, town or city or even a particular ethnicity. With its strong links to geographical place, class, gender and ethnicity, football is highly-significant at the local level in terms of identity and community (MacClancy, 1996:2). Football also encompasses audiences of highly-localised or deterritorialised supporters. This results in a complex interplay between community, and identity while at the same time being

consumers of a commodity that is both local and global. This offers ethnographic and analytical opportunities for anthropologists to further their understanding of the interplay, contests and resolution between the global and the local and between community, identity and commodity.

However football is not just localised in its appeal. It has been professionalised and commodified through the payment of players, the charging of entry fees to grounds, the sponsorship of clubs, the merchandising of club products. The organisation of football into clubs that compete in local, national, regional-international, and world-wide competitions, creates significant opportunities for the global marketing of football clubs and football matches. Due to its extensive reach to audiences of potentially billions, football is also utilised as a marketing tool for commercial products. This has led to the widespread development of sports sponsorship that create a partnership between football clubs and businesses that use football to project their brand to mass audiences as part of their marketing strategy.

If football is 'global' does it provide a model to enhance our understanding of global interconnectivity? As a sport diffused from the 'core' of Great Britain and later Western Europe, these regions remain as economic and cultural centres of the sport. This and the relationship of the rest of the world with these centres of football, apparently reflects Wallerstein's (1974) world system theory. While this model schematically lays out the existence of a 'core', a 'semi-periphery' and a 'periphery', at global levels, it cannot explain the complexities of the global trade in players, or the anomalous positions of Brazil and the USA with respect to top world football ranking and first-ranking economic performance. A football world system is therefore not entirely consistent with that based on an economic perspective. Thus universalising positions may be critiqued by particularisation.

Just as economic globalisation is linked to the spread of capitalism across the world, the growth of football is also linked to that of capitalism (Duncan, 2004; Lanfranchi et al., 2004). Football was codified in the mid-nineteenth century in England and Scotland as capitalism was rising to international dominance as an economic form. The organisation of the sport reflected this in its standardisation as well as in the division of labour between players and club owners. Centralised bureaucratic control of football led to the sport's ability to become internationalised relatively quickly.

Football and commerce both profited from their relationship. Football's world governing body FIFA (*la Federation Internationale de Football Associations*) set out in the 1970s to make football *the* global game (Lanfranchi, 2004: 224; Lever, 1983 [1995]: ix), forming a partnership with sportswear company Adidas, to provide the funding for the expansion of football in new or underdeveloped markets in Africa and Asia and new markets for Adidas. Conceptualising football as both a global social and cultural activity and a global business is necessary in any investigation of this 'global' sport.

Football across the world provides evidence that a culturally and economically 'globalised' activity does not necessarily mean that nationality and parochial identity are no longer important. Indeed football relies on both globality and locality for its continuing significance as the world's dominant sporting code. Articulating the relationship between the two is a necessity.

Is a study of football a relevant vehicle for the analysis of global and local interconnections, often referred to as the 'global-local nexus'? I argue that

it is. Framed within the global-local nexus, 'Global Game, Local Goals' tracks the growth of association football from its beginnings as various forms of football in numerous countries to a codified sport in Britain in the mid-1800s and its subsequent rise to cultural and economic predominance as the world's favourite sport. Although placed within a wider context, this thesis shows how football has been indigenised by its recipients, becoming an important part of a hybridised culture, one that is being re-exported back to the centre of England and Europe in the form of transnational football professionals and their playing, coaching and management styles. This offers a critique of Wallerstein's (1974) world system theory while at the same time demonstrating Appadurai's (1996) thesis on uneven cultural flows.

Limitations

Social anthropology utilises a particularistic approach grounded in ethnography. The highly-localised context of a New Zealand football club, Auckland's Central United FC, is discussed in terms of its global and local connections. Due to a change in personal circumstances I was unable to undertake further fieldwork at the club as intended. Instead I had to rely on a reinterpretation of the research I undertook at that club in 2003 for a research paper (McAdam, 2004).¹ This is contrasted with my experiences of attending matches overseas and the 'consumption' of televised football, drawn from literature and from my own experience.

Given the constraints of time, word limit and the availability of relevant material, I chose not to investigate various issues such as football hooliganism as it has already been well-documented and gender issues are dealt with only briefly. Given my own gender and the overwhelmingly

¹ *Yellow Fever, Stories of Soccer Community* (McAdam, 2004)

phallogocentric nature of relevant research material, I too have taken a phallogocentric approach. However, where possible I explicate the nature of women in the football milieu. Top professional football players are accorded the status of pop-stars. Clubs too provide such a strong focus of emotional outlet and attachment that this becomes quasi-religious in nature. Although I examine how football clubs act as foci for community and identity, I do not discuss football as a form of civil religion as this, I believe, requires a depth of discussion that cannot be fully met within the constraints of this thesis.

The Organisation of this Thesis

This thesis is organised thematically by chapters. Chapter One lays out the key issues for this thesis and signals the scope and the limitations of the research. Chapter Two discusses key concepts and reviews relevant literature and applicable social theory. Chapter Three places football within the context of its history, discussing how it came to global prominence. Chapter Four narrows the field down to a localised context of football in New Zealand arguing that its development has been hindered by a lack of commodification and its subaltern socio-cultural status. Chapter Five reinterprets ethnographic material collected in 2003 (McAdam, 2004). It places one New Zealand club, Central United Football Club, within the context of its history and focuses on the aspects of the club that see it acting as a type of community. The politics of identity are also discussed through the examination of a Rangers-Celtic match in Scotland. Wider connections to the political-economy of world football are made through a discussion of the commodification of football, including the projection of the game to audiences globally through television and the global football labour market. Chapter Six contains a synthesis and analysis of the preceding chapters, providing the basis of the conclusions

in Chapter Seven. In this Chapter I also examine the strengths and weaknesses of this thesis and signal issues that require further investigation.

Theoretical Approach

The complexities of social, cultural and economic implications of football militate against the utilisation of any one single theoretical paradigm. Instead I take a broad approach, one that Gupta and Ferguson (1997: 26) refer to as 'critical anthropology':

...we emphasize that we do not conceive of a critical anthropology as a negative or reactive project. On the contrary, questioning assumptions and deeply ingrained habits of thought is important, for us, not as an end in itself but because doing so enables different kinds of ethnographic work to go forward.

I have also been influenced by Marcus and Fischer's (1986) *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* and their ideas of utilising cross-cultural juxtapositions, interpretation and ethnography to critique one's own society and its cultural practices. In this thesis I utilise both ethnographic and secondary research of football to investigate how football forms a dialectic between the global and the local; and how issues of political economy and society and culture can be explicated through the study of this sport. However in doing so I must ensure that as a football 'insider' my critical faculties are not blunted by this status, and that I practice participant-'critical' observation in my analysis of football, blending both emic and etic perspectives.

Critical anthropology asks anthropologists to engage both the universal and the particular equally. In doing so it provides a framework for the investigation of the concept and phenomena of globalising processes that affect people and events at a localised level. It also seeks to find out how events at local levels are stretched so that they become of global importance. My previous ethnographic project (McAdam, 2004) shows that at a local level football fosters a sense of community and identity. However football is also a global cultural and economic phenomenon. *Global Game, Local Goals* shows that a social and cultural category such as sport is something that can be documented and analysed at various levels from local to global, making significant contributions to the discipline of social anthropology and its concerns for society and culture. It argues that while the 'big picture' of globalisation studies offer relevant macro-analytical possibilities, the particularism of highly localised studies that has been an integral part of the anthropological tradition should not be lost in the rush to conduct larger-scale studies of 'globalisation'.