



Globalization and Sport: Beyond the Boundaries?

Sociology
45(5) 923–929
© The Author(s) 2011
Reprints and permission: sagepub.
co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/0038038511413432
soc.sagepub.com


Joseph Maguire

Loughborough University, UK

Chris Rumford and Stephen Wagg (eds)

Cricket and Globalization

Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010,

£38 hbk (ISBN: 9781443823708), 295 pp.

John Harris

Rugby Union and Globalization: An Odd-shaped World

London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, £49.93 hbk (ISBN: 9780230289710), 184 pp.

Richard Giulianotti and Roland Robertson

Globalization and Football

London: Sage, 2009, £70 hbk (ISBN: 9781412921275), 216 pp.

For Georg Simmel, in the seemingly mundane lies something significant. For some sociologists, perhaps most, sport remains among the mundane to which Simmel refers. And yet, some sociologists, perhaps most, fail to grasp the significance lying therein, due perhaps to a value system that takes for granted what constitutes the ‘serious’ side of social life. Not so, for Simmel. In his ‘Alpine journey’, (1991[1895]), the interconnect-edness of culture, the metropolis, wilderness and leisure forms were the foci of attention. In the three books under review, the various authors similarly probe the interdependen-cies that embed sport in global processes, and capture, to varying degrees of success, why the study of sport reveals patterns of significance for those seeking to understand globalization.

Here, my intent is three-fold: first, to indicate what we already know about the con-nections between sport and global processes and what significance these findings have; second, to outline what new knowledge is provided by recent examinations of cricket,

Corresponding author:

Joseph Maguire, School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences, Loughborough University,
Loughborough, LE11 3TU, UK.

Email: j.a.maguire@lboro.ac.uk

football and rugby union; and, third, to outline a research agenda that indicates aspects of globalization and sport that remain relatively unexplored or which lie beyond the boundaries of existing studies.

The Global State of Play

The diffusion of modern sport out of its European heartland was connected to the formal and informal spheres of influence of the British Empire and to an intensified global spurt that occurred in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Its standardization, organizational development, and global diffusion reflected and reinforced the global processes that were being powered by the West in both the public and private sectors. On the one hand, and reinforcing the views of the sports-industrial complex (SIC), this process has been viewed as a progressive and liberating phenomenon that opened up the potential for greater human dialogue and friendship. Such sentiments find expression in current International Olympic Committee (IOC) discourse, and United Nations (UN) initiatives that seek to employ sport in addressing a range of Millennium Goals.

On the other hand, the structure of global sport can also be seen as symptomatic of a new, consumer-dominated phase of western capitalism. The spread of western civilization – of which the diffusion of modern sport was a part – led not only to the destruction of habitats but also to ludic diversity. Global consumer sport therefore continues a process that leads to the spread of western culture to communities across the globe. Yet, in the establishing of western zones of prestige, there has been evidence for both emulation of and resistance to sport. In addition, new varieties of body culture have emerged and aspects of ludic diversity (along with dance and musical forms) have survived and also, to a degree, globalized. Despite this, one consequence of the process has been the reduction in cultural differences: the West dominates the economic, technological, political and knowledge resources and controls the levers of power of global sport. The global SIC is thus tied to the opening up of new markets and the commodification of cultures.

These views of global sport raise several questions regarding the origins, dynamics and characteristics of globalization and are not as contradictory as they seem. The tendencies they describe may well be part of the same overall process. Cultural globalization, of which global sport is a part, can thus be viewed as unifying, universalizing, progressive and liberating, or as divisive, fragmenting, constraining and destructive of local cultures. There appears to be evidence for both. In the 'Alpine journey', Simmel wanted to understand the meaning of such journeys for individuals and the societies they form – a similar intent lies behind the study of global sport. To what degree, then, is the picture outlined here confirmed by the recent case studies of cricket, football and rugby union?

Globalization, Cricket, Football and Rugby Union: Similarities and Differences

Cricket, often associated with qualities that are quintessentially English, and sometimes portrayed as the 'imperial game', is the subject of a collection of readings, *Cricket and*

Globalization, edited by Chris Rumford and Stephen Wagg. While some of the readings reflect on and provide case studies that illustrate this legacy of Victorian England and the British Empire, equally, as the editors make clear, the changing structure and organization of the game reflects shifts in broader global processes. By focusing on cricket, wider consideration of the changing dynamics of globalization can also be considered. In particular, papers by Robert Holton, Amit Gupta and Stephen Wagg demonstrate that the game of cricket is 'globalizing' beyond its traditional boundaries. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, the epicentre of the sport is shifting to India. Cricket, as Rumford and Wagg claim, tells us something new and interesting about globalization – they are right.

At one level, as the collection makes clear, the participation in, spectating at and consumption of cricket appear to be in flux. The consumption dimension is driven, in part, by the development of the 20/20 version of the game and the franchise model adopted by the Indian Premier League (IPL), but also by the concurrent 'telemediatization' of cricket to which Barrie Axford and Richard Huggins draw attention. These dynamics are captured in various ways, and with differing degrees of success, in the chapters of Gupta, Holton and Rob Steen. Significantly, this consumption may not only be changing the format of the game, and where the game is played, but also its political economy. The transfer of the International Cricket Council (ICC) to Dubai and the establishment of the IPL represent a challenge to the old white commonwealth control of the game, and, as such, *may* also be an early sign of the challenge to western hegemony in the structure and governance of global sport. Yet, it would be unwise to overstate this case – the IPL, its franchise model and the political economy of the game remain locked into the broader SIC. In addition, the recent ICC decision to limit the 2015 World Cup to 'full-member' nations only, excluding, for example, Ireland, indicates that the established remain in control.

Nevertheless, that change is occurring in the game of cricket is adroitly documented within this collection, nowhere more so than in the work of Hilary Beckles examining Caribbean cricket. Here, both with the impact of Americanization and the changing structure of global cricket, the fortunes of West Indian (WI) cricket have suffered. Changes in the global balance of power can lead to unexpected outcomes. Beckles concludes that the new features of WI cricket have to be located in the context of the re-colonization of the island economies by foreign multinationals, the loss of economic sovereignty in the age of globalization and the end of the nationalist project. In lamenting the loss of the past, Beckles captures the costs associated with the shifting balance of power in the global game.

Inevitably, in collections of this nature some papers are more in tune than others with the overall thrust of the book. Likewise, in any edited collection, there are gaps and absences. There is a relative lack of a historical account of the game – its globalization per se is not something new. Furthermore, greater sensitivity to the indigenization processes that marked the diffusion of cricket, notably dealt with by Arjun Appadurai (1995), would also suggest that the imperial game had globalized earlier than suggested. In addition, attention to issues of migration – both of elite players and of people generally around the boundaries of the old empire – would have provided additional insights from cricket about globalization processes. For example, Canada's representation in the 2011

men's World Cup composed largely of migrants from the Indian sub-continent illustrates the complexity of global identity politics.

If cricket is seen as the imperial game then association football is claimed to be the 'people's game'. That is, football, from its early folk game tradition in Europe, developed into the modern game of football in the 19th century and diffused via the British Empire during the latter part of that century and the early 20th century. There were several phases to the emergence and diffusion of football (Elias and Dunning, 1986) which was part of the more general globalization of sport that has been documented over the past two decades. *Globalization and Football*, written by Richard Giulianotti and Roland Robertson, reinforces this existing knowledge with reference to a consideration of one sport, football. To the authors' credit several useful insights are provided regarding the interconnected economic, political and socio-cultural aspects of football as emblematic of globalization processes. As important is their recognition that, as noted in this discussion of globalization and sport, football provides a powerful lens through which to view broader glocal processes. Within the sociology of sport it is recognized that studies of football must also be studies of the societies in which the sport is located if they are not to be studies out of context. There is a danger, however, in overstating the case. While correctly pointing to the insights to be gained from the study of football as a glocal phenomenon, Giulianotti and Robertson make the case for the:

... central transnational and sociological status of football itself. If our fellow social scientists are serious about understanding globalization in the twenty-first century, then all of us need to look far more closely at *the* global cultural form that transfixes and fascinates so many diverse societies and so many millions of the world's citizens. (p. 172, italics in original)

A slightly more circumspect claim should be made. Privileging one cultural form as *the* global cultural form captures neither the diversity of body culture (including sport but also music and dance) across the globe, nor the highly stratified taste for football itself. Football may be perceived to be the people's game, but it is not all of the people's game. Despite this caveat, several elements of this case study add to our knowledge of football and globalization. And, unlike edited collections, this book has the advantage of a narrative advanced by two authors which is woven around a framework drawn from Robertson's wider work on globalization. Robertson's framework focuses on dimensions that have been fruitfully applied to football.

The strengths of the text thus lie in its advocacy of a long-term perspective, the use of the concept of globalization, the possibilities of transnational convergence, divergence and interrelations among social groups and societies, and the 'making and remaking of the local, regional, national, international and transnational realms' (p. 172). The authors' adherence to this theoretical scaffolding is evident in the structure of the book – with its focus on history, its cultural aspects, its economic concerns, political contours and social expression. In these areas an effective synthesis of some, though not all, existing literature is provided and new insights generated. Oddly, however, what is not evident is a rich, 'thick description' of a *specific* glocality to illustrate football and globalization. In addition, the authors distance their approach from that of George Ritzer, observing that globalization involves 'the possibility of both homogeneity and heterogeneity' (p. 45).

Or, expressed another way, there is evidence for the co-presence of 'diminishing contrasts and increasing varieties' (Elias, 1994[1939]).

Notwithstanding whether the authors overstate the status of football as being 'the global cultural form' they rightly point to the fact that the sport does transfix and fascinate millions of people across so many diverse societies. To substantiate that claim, and, at the same time, contribute to our knowledge of globalization and sport as part of wider intercultural communication more generally, reference to Robertson's earlier work with Victor Roudometof (1995) examining global civilizing processes could have proved useful. Certainly, that is a line of enquiry that others have pursued in studying international relations and intercultural communication (see Linklater, 2004).

In his work *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (2003) Niall Ferguson observes: 'I grew up ... relishing all the quintessentially imperial sporting clashes – best of all the rugby tours by the "British Lions" to Australia, New Zealand and (until they were regrettably interrupted) South Africa' (2003: xvi). While not quite the imperial game to which Ferguson refers, rugby union was, and to a large degree remains, the game of the old white commonwealth. In several respects Ferguson's reminiscences illustrate points made by John Harris in his book *Rugby Union and Globalization* (2010). Despite the claims from within the sport about rugby's global appeal and the media representation of its men's World Cup as a 'world in union', Harris reminds us that the sport remains 'dominated by a very select group of nations and a small cohort of men' (p. xvi). That is, the game of rugby union remains not only a male preserve (Dunning and Sheard, 1979) but its governance and control remains dominated by the 'home nations': England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, plus Australia, France, New Zealand and South Africa. There is little evidence of a shift in the epicentre of the game, as opposed to the example of cricket.

Despite this, in the particular the more general can still be seen. Glocalization is at work even within the more narrow boundaries of this remnant of the old white commonwealth. In combining the qualities of an enthusiastic 'insider' with the perspective of an 'outsider', Harris captures some, but not all, of the dynamics of globalization at work in this sport. How so? The book's sub-title suggests that the game represents an 'odd-shaped world': despite a degree of global spread the game remains, by and large, locked into colonial roots and has, as Harris argues, limited global audience appeal. For this reason, he cautions against making categorical statements about global sport – reading the text one gets the message that we should be more circumspect in the claims we make. Implicitly following the lead of Appadurai, Harris traces the 'global flows' that contour and shape the game. Issues of political economy, the media, migration and identity are examined and Harris captures both specific features of these flows and the more general patterns they weave.

That said, the work is more focused on issues of migration than other flows, and this brings with it advantages, notably with its focus on coaches. The case study is strong on description and specific examples and also insightfully makes connections between celebrity, place and migration. Yet the book would have been enhanced by a more overarching theoretical framework. While several theories are mentioned, no one approach or synthesis of approaches is explicitly provided that would tie together the links described.

Future Directions in the Study of Globalization and Sport

What areas of research do we need to know more about and what have we so far failed to grasp as possible lines of investigation? Here, but a brief outline can be provided. First, if, as argued, there is a SIC, then investigation of the continuities and changes involved in the make-up of this global sport power elite is required. Is there evidence for a move away from domination by elite male, able-bodied westerners, and, if change has occurred, is there continuity in terms of the influence of alliances (albeit reconfigured) between states and between state representatives and the executives of transnational corporations? Second, if sport acts as a 'global idiom', how does this process occur and how it is understood in different cultures and civilizations? Whose tastes shape the global idiom? Clearly, westerners have tended to be the global winners at their own games both on and off the field. The male members of western societies acted as an established group on a world level; their tastes and conduct, including their sports, became sanctified as elite cultural activities that acted and act as signs of distinction, prestige and power, for men and by men. How this process was played out in different societies, along class, gender and ethnic lines, is yet to be fully understood. Third, the rise of the West was contested and its 'triumph' was not inevitable; western culture had long been permeated by non-western cultural forms, people, technologies and knowledge. In sum, these cultural interchanges stretch back to long before the West achieved relative dominance in global cultural interchange. Yet we know relatively little about these processes from a non-western perspective.

Fourth, by focusing on globalization and sport we may overlook issues of anti-globalization, of resistance to western influence, culture and sport, and identity politics and nationalism more generally. Issues concerning the impact of sport and development, the impact of sport on development, the role and impact of mega-events and the exploitative practices of the SIC require far greater attention from those both within the 'established' groups of nations and those who are viewed as 'outsiders'. Fifth, the study of globalization and sport needs to include body culture more generally. Linking questions of body culture to environmentalism could help in examining the wider issues of globalization, indigenization and disappearing worlds. That is, research could probe the depletion of habitat and also of habitus – of place, space and ludic diversity. Considered in this way the interconnections between globalization and body culture could begin to be better understood and this seemingly mundane, everyday, yet excitingly significant aspect of social life might then be better appreciated.

References

- Appadurai A (1995) Playing with modernity: The decolonization of Indian cricket. In: Breckenridge CA (ed.) *Consuming Modernity*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 23–48.
- Dunning E and Sheard K (1979) *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players: A Sociological Study of the Development of Rugby Football*. Oxford: Martin Robertson.
- Elias N (1994[1939]) *The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners and State Formation and Civilization*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Elias N and Dunning E (1986) *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Ferguson N (2004) *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World*. London: Penguin.

- Linklater A (2004) Norbert Elias, the 'civilising process' and the sociology of international relations. *International Politics* 41: 3–35.
- Robertson R and Roudometof V (1995) Globalization, world-system theory, and the comparative study of civilizations. In: Sanderson SK (ed.) *Civilizations and World-Systems*. Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 273–300.
- Simmel G (1991[1895]) The Alpine journey. *Theory, Culture & Society* 8: 95–8.

Joseph Maguire did his PhD in Sociology at the University of Leicester and is currently Professor of Sociology of Sport at the School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences, Loughborough University and Visiting Professor at the University of Copenhagen. He is Past-President of the International Sociology of Sport Association and Past-President of the International Sociological Association Research Committee 27 (Sociology of Sport). He recently received the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport 'Distinguished Service Award' and the International Sociology of Sport Association's 'Honorary Member's Award'. He has published extensively in the area of sport, culture and society and has authored, co-authored or edited 12 books and has published in a wide range of international journals. His recent work includes *Sport and Migration* (Routledge, 2010, edited with Mark Falcous) and *Reflections on Process Sociology and Sport: 'Walking the Line'* (Routledge, in press).