

Postmaterial Britishness: Playing Football Like a Gentleman

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Introduction

In the following, I will analyse the relation between football and nationality. Many other important aspects of football – class, gender, imperialism, economics, mass media etc. – will only be treated peripherally, and in regard to this central question. To my mind, recent developments on the level of club football have caused a dramatic change in the relation between national identity and football, pushing football into a globalised, transcultural era (cf. Schulze-Engler 2006: 129–130). Football will be analysed as part of popular culture, constantly debated in various spheres of society. Following this, I will give an overview of the traditional relationship between modern football and national identity. Then, I will come to the central topic of this text: Arsenal FC's completely non-English 'English' football team and its echo in the media and among fans. This is followed by an attempt to reveal a new notion of the relation between individuals and national identity as it may be seen to emerge in the discussions surrounding the case of Arsenal. Finally, this development is, very briefly, embedded into a wider account of societal development.

1. Football as Popular Culture

Popular culture has two important qualities to offer when it comes to dealing with urgent questions in society: on the one hand, popular culture presents topics that matter a great deal to those who participate in it, it affects people, provides pleasure, touches them emotionally; on the other hand, popular culture has a lightness to it, a transitoriness and ephemerality, which provides a freedom to experiment, to try out different solutions, to act like some kind of cultural laboratory, hidden away from the eyes and ears of the 'official' culture. Paradoxically, then, popular culture seems to be both light and heavy at the same

time, comprising the light entertainment of TV-football as well as the heavy boots of hooligans.

The first point has been stressed by Lawrence Grossberg. For him, popular culture lays out what he calls 'mattering maps' (cf. 1992). Football matters a lot to many of those who consume it on a regular basis – they travel hundreds of miles to flock into stadiums, they watch it on TV, they read about in the papers, they discuss it at work and in pubs, on the radio and the internet. Football is part of many people's life, a part of their lives that is emotionally charged and one they find difficult to abandon – however much it might annoy them. Consequently, they *have* to deal with whatever comes their way within the world of football. While, for example, people might be able to ignore the question of multiculturalism in other parts of their daily life, they *have* to form a stance towards it when it comes to football.

The 'virtuality' of popular culture, on the other hand, has been emphasized, among others, by Carsten Zorn (cf. 2007). Zorn likens high or official culture to the long-term memory of society, and popular culture to its short-term memory. Culture provides society with a set of accepted rules of conduct; they may be arbitrary on closer look, but they are justified by habitus, gravitas and tradition. Culture, therefore, is adapted to the structural organisation of society. But how can such culture adjust, if the structural organisation of society changes? Zorn suggests that popular culture is quick to react to any changes, or even signs of change in society, to any anxieties a society might harbour. In popular films, books, songs etc., these anxieties can be expressed and amplified, and sometimes even resolved, albeit in a simplified manner. A more obligatory official culture might adapt the ideas developed in the popular realm, or repudiate them.

The topic of football, then, provides a playing field where wider changes in society – caused by globalisation, for example – come to affect people's everyday life and where people have to find ways of coping with these changes. Richard Holt, Britain's most eminent historian of sport, emphasizes the representational role of sport in society: "As the anthropologist Clifford Geertz remarked, sports are a kind of 'deep play' in which the innermost values of a culture may be expressed [...]; they are, in a sense, 'a story we tell ourselves

about ourselves” (Holt 1989: 3). It should be added that such ‘deep play’ is by no means a ‘free play’, but governed by the structural powers within society (cf. Hargreaves 1986). However, sport, and the popular discussions about sport, is not only a (hegemonically transformed) representation of the ‘popular mind’, it can also highlight or even foreshadow new developments. The international make-up of contemporary club teams is certainly not representative of the make-up of British society as a whole; but in the confrontation with such a phenomenon, a pre-adaptive stance is developed, that might or might not be adopted by society at large. Popular culture, then, is more than a representation of an already formed ‘popular mind’; instead, it performatively helps to form attitudes and values.

2. Football and National Identity

Sport, and especially football, has been identified as an important catalyst in the forming, or at least the (performative) expression of national (and regional) identities, in Europe, but also in South America, Africa and Asia: “Football is one of the great cultural institutions [...], which shapes and cements national identities throughout the world.” (Giulianotti 1999: 23; cf. Porter & Smith 2004b; Crolley & Hand 2006; Jarvie 2006: 109–129; Giulianotti & Williams 1994) In the twentieth century, and especially after World War II, international events, transferring the inherent rivalry of football to an inter-national level (cf. Giulianotti 1999: 10–14), have taken on a central role of expressing national feelings (cf. Holt & Mason 2000: 128–133). Crolley and Hand delineate the neat differentiation and compartmentalisation of national identities, especially when it comes to national teams, which is affirmed and created by the media (cf. Crolley, Hand & Jeutter 2000):

There is a long-standing tendency to read football as the expression of the societies in which it operates and this is particularly true of national teams which are frequently seen as representing facets of national identity in their reputed style of play. The styles often become sources of national pride and function in opposition to other national styles. The identification with the style practiced by a particular team is, therefore, also an affirmation of a specific, collective national identity. The universal practice of football is ‘indigenised’, with the effect that certain playing styles are seen as unique and essential to the nation concerned, as well as

representing values that are deemed important in that nation. Notions are widespread, then, of English fighting spirit and virility, French flair and style, and German mental strength and efficiency. (Crolley & Hand 2002: 9)

That these are 'imagined identities', informing the discourse on the game rather than the playing itself, has often been noticed: "national styles do not always correspond to the reality of the game as practiced by players, far from it, but rather to the stereotypical images, embedded in time, that a nation attributes to itself and that it wishes others to see" (Christian Bromberger quoted after Crolley & Hand 2002: 9). Players, nonetheless, might adopt the style suggested to them by the media, their managers and the fans – all of them censoring apparently 'non-national' behaviour. Essentialised notions, then, can be analysed as an effect, rather than the foundation of comparative international meetings.

However, even though the constructed nature of identity might be revealed by cultural critics, many supporters have a different view. Rather, 'national styles' are thought to be determined by certain environmental, historical or even racial features, "thereby preserving European myths of essentialist national identity" (Crolley & Hand 2002: 158). That such essentialist notions of England and other footballing countries are still widespread and are constantly perpetuated by pundits on TV and radio as well as journalists in tabloids, fanzines and broadsheets alike has been widely documented (cf. Blain, Boyle & O'Donnell 1993).

Unfortunately, the flipside of such international presentation is that national communities have a well-recognized tendency towards internal purification (cf. Nancy 1991). Generally, such communities are imagined as uniform and homogenous. As a consequence, the presence of other aspects of the national make-up is repudiated; racism, misogyny and homophobia, amongst other forms of discrimination, are all too present on football terraces (cf. Carrington 1998).

However, instead of analysing in how far, and if at all, a multi-cultural Britain could be represented adequately on and off the pitch (cf. Conn 2006), I want to look at a new development in the debates over football and nationality. Whereas football clubs like Manchester United, Liverpool or Arsenal used to be representatives of the national sport, or harbourers of more regional adaptations

of national identity, this status has increasingly come under debate. Today, football clubs are owned by foreigners and trained by foreigners, they field foreigners and are sponsored by foreigners – in stark contrast to the national team. The question I want to tackle here is whether such 21st-century football clubs can still say something about the national self-image.

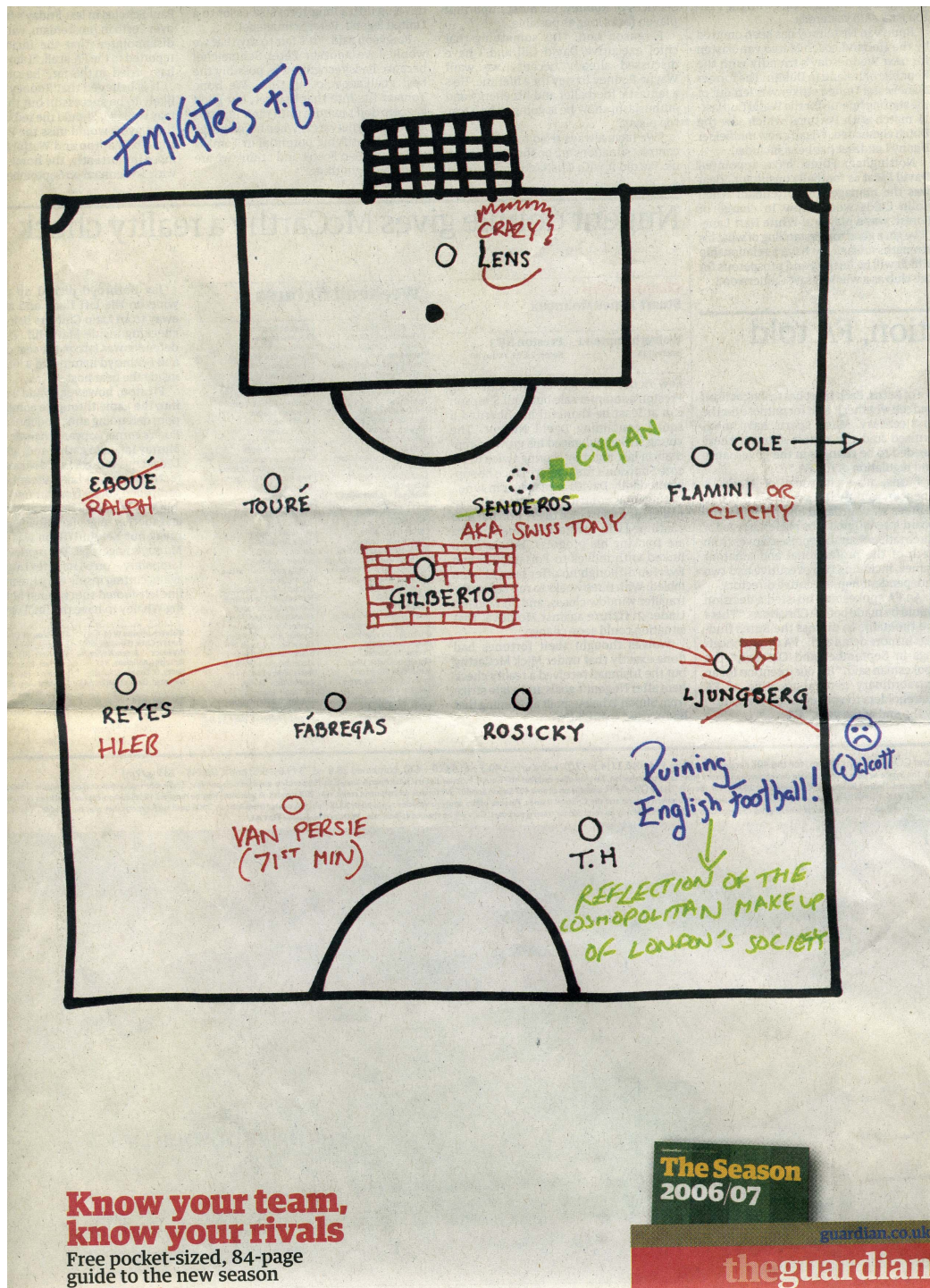


Image 1: *The Guardian*, 7 August 2006, 12.

3. The Case of Arsenal F. C.

In the following, I want to concentrate on one particular case that worked as a magnifying glass to highlight the anxieties surrounding English football, and, as I want to suggest, English society in general. In December 1999, Chelsea fielded a team made up of eleven foreign players for the first time in the history of English football. But while Chelsea still had four English players on the bench, Arsenal's entire squad consisted of non-English players when they beat Crystal Palace 5–1 in February 2005. The whole issue seemed to boil over in March 2006. After the first knockout stage of the UEFA-Champions League, the most prestigious and financially rewarding club competition in the world, Arsenal were the last English team standing. Chelsea and Liverpool had lost their respective encounters and Manchester United did not even make it through the group stage. However, the eleven men representing the last English team, again, all carried foreign passports.

The multi-national make-up of Arsenal is now legendary, and the *Guardian* took up the central question resulting from this in their ads for a new season guide: "Ruining English Football!" or "Reflection of the Cosmopolitan Make Up of London's Society"?

Alan Pardew, manager of West Ham United, questioned Arsenal's right to represent Britain: "I saw a headline saying Arsenal are flying the flag for Britain. I kind of wondered where that British involvement actually was when I looked at their team. It's important that top clubs don't lose sight of the fact that it's the English Premier League and English players should be involved. Foreign players have been fantastic. We have learned from them and from foreign coaches. But, to some extent, we could lose the soul of British football."¹ (quoted after "Dein Backs Wenger Foreign Policy" 2006) Gordon Taylor, the chairman of the Professional Footballers' Association, backed Pardew: "It's an English club but not an English success. It's probably a greater reflection of youngsters from France and elsewhere in Europe. [...] It's hard to say that it speaks volumes for English football when none of the players is homegrown." (quoted after Morris

¹ Like Pardew, I will not differentiate between British and English as these terms are used interchangeably in the English (!) media – as long as the English do not play another 'home nation'.

2006) The outspoken Wigan chairman Dave Whelan also felt the urge to contribute to the discussion: “But you need four or five British players to give your squad heart and depth. They give you leadership and they will fight to the death.” (quoted after Wyett 2006: 70) Arsene Wenger, the French manager of Arsenal, stroke back quite fiercely at such accusations: “The criticism was disappointing. I thought we had kicked racism out of football – but racism starts here. That is a regressive way of thinking.” (quoted after Banks 2006)

4. Reactions in the Press



Image 2: *The Sun*, March 10, 2006



Image 3: *Daily Express*, March 11, 2006

One would expect the tabloids to make a meal of this – and in the beginning they did. *The Sun* echoed Pardew’s complaint: “You’re a Brit out of Order!”, and the *Daily Express* designated the back page to Wenger’s counter-accusation of “Racism”. *The Sun*’s chief sports writer Steven Howard took a more sober look:

Arsenal’s position as the last Premiership team left in the Champions League is a boost for Arsene Wenger’s football philosophy. While Chelsea and Liverpool have seen their traditional English power game exposed at the highest level, Wenger has been rewarded for sticking to his guns and persevering with style, sophistication and individual flair. In fact, their success in Europe this season is down to the total UNEnglishness of their play. (2006)

Interestingly, Howard thinks that 'style, sophistication and individual flair' are totally un-English; and even if he does not explicitly say so, he seems to reserve these attributes for the French, echoing, once again, long held national stereotypes. Even the *News of the World* got behind Wenger; Martin Samuel, apparently 'Britain's No. 1 columnist and Sports Writer of the Year', reasons: "Alan Pardew is not a racist. But he is wrong about Arsenal." He goes on to list the failures of English players who played for Arsenal, and concludes: "It is no coincidence that the manager aspiring to play the best football finds less and less room for English footballers. That is our problem, not his." (2006) Both the *Sun* and the *NOTW* seem to be careful to differentiate between an admiration for Arsenal, the club, and commiserations for the problems this creates for the national team. However, come next week, the whole mess seems to be forgotten already – in fact, there is hardly any mention of it in neither the tabloids nor the broadsheets.

When it came to the semi-finals of the Champions League, where Arsenal was playing the Spanish side Villarreal, the press seemed unanimously behind Arsenal. David Mellor (2006a) from the *Evening Standard* concluded: "English football, I hear you scoff. What's English about Arsenal? [...] as far as I am concerned, Arsenal are English and good luck to them against a Villarreal side who badly let themselves down on Wednesday with so much diving that ultimately it became self-defeating." The problem moves away from being a question of passports to one of behaviour: *diving*. I will return to this transformation from an essentialist notion of nationality to one of performance later.

5. Reactions of the Fans

Football fans seemed to be less sure whether they should still support Arsenal in Europe. Asked "Was Pardew right to criticise Arsene Wenger's non-English selection policy?" the readers of the *News of the World* answered: "Pards was spot-on in having a go. How can you support a team of plastic foreigners." (Aaron Painter, Barking); "I'm fully behind the boss on this one. English football will go down the pan if no English players get to play." (Greg Parker, Birmingham); "Arsenal fans are fake if they really support a bunch of foreigners." (Keith

Granger, Canning Town) etc. In a traditional vein, artificiality ('plastic', 'fake') is contrasted with a more organic, given nationality.

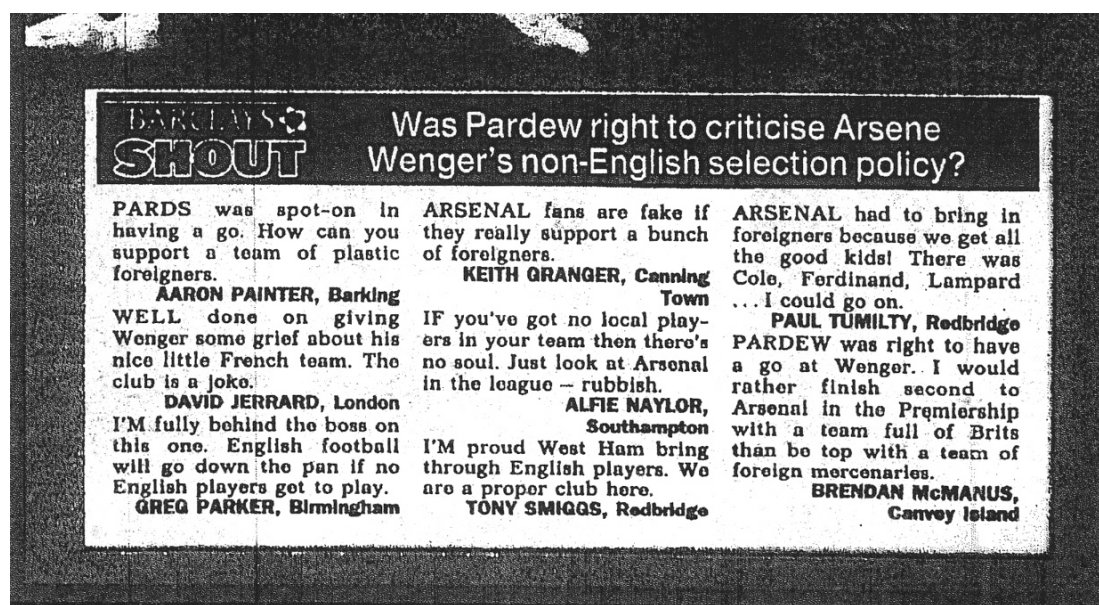


Image 4: *News of the World*, 12 March, *Score*, 10 (excerpt).

Others, however, begged to differ: "I couldn't give 2 sh!ts where our players come from if they have the talent", said one poster on the Vitalfootball forum,² echoing Arsenal's most famous fan's earlier sentiment – Nick Hornby declared in an interview: "Why should it make any difference to me whether a player comes from Scotland or Ireland or France?" (2000/2001: 23). Another poster on the Vitalfootball forum added: "Whatever, if they're English great, if they're not, great." Commenting on the *Daily Mail*-homepage, Aly from Petersfield has this to say: "I cannot understand why the media cannot shake off this Islander mentality and accept that we live in a global community now." Starkie from Cambridge adds: "The club is bigger than the players themselves and it is the English club Arsenal FC that is now in the final. I hardly think Ferrari fans were bemoaning their German champion during the Schumacher reign!" Finally, another poster on the Vitalfootball forum summed up the pervasive attitude: "again i say bring

² As many of the postings are taken from forums and message boards, which might require registration, and as many others have disappeared soon after their first appearance, these quotations are a) anonymised, b) uncorrected and c) not referenced in the bibliography. However, the author of this text guarantees the unaltered representation of postings.

on the talented dark skinned eskimo midgets with amazonian warriors for mothers and swahili speaking fathers and if they are good enough we'll buy them." The makeup of a team is no longer determined by the origin of the players, but by the voluntary composition of a team by the managerial board, acquiring players from all over the world at will (if they have the financial means): performance counts, not origins.

A few months later (31 October 2006), a poster on the BBC 606 forum repeated the general view of Arsenal fans:

Let me spell it out for those of you still confused. ARSENAL PLAY IN THE PREMIERSHIP. We were formed in England, we play in England, We are an English club. Now, some of the more witty posters out there might think it's desperately droll to spend their precious time typing out ill informed, ignorant dross that has been charted out a billion times before, but seriously, it isn't. You're just making yourselves look very stupid, and unable to come up with original material. [...] It comes down to this, if you want to be entertained by some of the best players in the world, watch the Premiership. If you want to maintain your National Front principles and only watch English players, watch England play! Not rocket science is it?

In the entertainment world of modern club football, national origin is of minor concern; instead, an insistence on questions of nationality is deemed as anachronistic and regressive as the largely unsuccessful English national team. In the end, there are just too many postings on this topic to provide a fully representative picture of where the pendulum finally swings, especially as the debate is still going on. But three points can be deducted: a) the topic is hotly debated on reader's pages, internet forums and in radio phone-in shows – the question obviously matters to people; b) as long as Arsenal is winning, the nationality of the players seems neglectful to Arsenal supporters; c) positions seem neatly divided between Arsenal supporters and supporters of rival teams. A recent poll among 2500 supporters of football-teams based in London revealed that while 61% of *all* football fans thought there were too many foreign players in English football, 68% of Arsenal fans and 60% of Chelsea fans were in favour of the present number of foreigners (cf. Simons 2006).

6. Facts

Before I come back to Alan Pardew's notion of the 'soul of English football', let me just quickly present some facts about the nature of the highest English football league during the 2005/2006 season. The Barclays Premiership – sponsored by the multinational banking consortium – hosts fifty different nationalities among its players: 95 players from England, five from Scotland, four from Wales and two from Northern Ireland. 114 players come from non-British countries: nine Irish players, eight French, seven Dutch, six USA born players, five each from Spain, Australia and the Ivory Coast, four each from Denmark, Germany, Portugal, Finland, Wales and Senegal, three Swedes and one or two players from 32 other European and non-European countries (cf. "Premiership Melting Pot" 2006). But not only the players are foreign. The top five teams of the 2005/2006 season had a Portuguese, a Scottish, a Spanish, a French and a Dutch manager respectively. Increasingly, also, the owners are non-English: Manchester United, Liverpool and Aston Villa are owned by US-Americans, Chelsea by a Russian, West Ham United by an Icelander, Manchester City by the former Thai prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra – and Portsmouth's former Serbian owner Milan Mandaric recently sold the club to Alexandre Gaydamak who holds an Israeli as well as a French passport and is of Russian origin (cf. Jackson 2006; "The Big Sell Out" 2007). The team sponsors, finally, are mainly internationally acting transnational companies: Chelsea has Samsung on its shirt, Manchester United AIG, and Arsenal play in their new Emirates stadium. The material make-up of English club football, this should prove, could hardly be more international. So what is English about English Football, if the 'material' is foreign in majority? Can the traditional, essentialist notion of English football still be applied?

7. The Soul of English Football

What these facts show, then, is that the *soul* of English football can no longer be thought to rest on an English *body*. Every attempt to define the Englishness of English club football by reference to an Anglo-Saxon bloodline is bound to fail. However, this does not mean that the different footballing nations are perceived as being indistinguishable in a homogenous globalised world – but that this

difference must now be constructed differently. Most people accept that players who play all over the world with other international players become more similar in their abilities: most of today's players could run like the Germans, have the technique of the South-Americans, and the tactical awareness of the Italian – to employ the much used stereotypes once more. Also, the belief that foreign players might 'go missing' when the game gets more physical becomes more and more doubtful. But this does not necessarily lead to sameness. Instead, playing football the English way is being disconnected from passports and bloodlines, as Michael Henderson's recent article "Arsenal's *rosbif* cooks up a rare taste of old England" declares. Englishness becomes a form of cultural performance:

What a marvellous goal it was; what a marvellous English goal. Cesc Fábregas played the ball towards the right wing where Emmanuel Eboué gave a pass to Thomas Rosicky, received an immediate return, and provided the kind of cross that Stanley Matthews used to supply for Stan Mortensen. Presented with this glorious invitation to score, Thierry Henry headed unanswerably into the Manchester United goal, and Arsenal had, in the third minute of injury time, achieved a notable victory. Manchester United were a bit unlucky but there is no disgrace in losing to a goal as English as roast beef – fashioned by three foreigners, and scored by a fourth, even if the magnificent Henry has become more English than the English. (2007)

The way people play football is transformed from being an essentialist necessity of race or environment to the adoption of a certain 'style' (cf. Critcher 1991) – with all the problems this involves: can everyone adopt such a style? Does everyone *have* to adopt such a style? What happens to those who don't?

In the end, such a notion of 'style' is still rather similar to the old essentialist notions: the same qualities are now attributed to some vague idea of tradition and culture. Lately, however, something equally 'British' but even less essentialist is increasingly considered to represent the English game. To define the central feature apparently distinguishing English football from the rest of the world, let me hark back half a century. In 1953, at the English Football Association's 90th anniversary, FIFA's then secretary Kurt Gassmann composed the following tribute:

It is with deep gratitude and admiration that we all look to this great sporting nation – the English – as after all they gave us the glorious game of football, which in the course of recent decades has proved to be the most popular game in the world. If it appears today that some of their ‘pupils’ of the olden days have now reached their standard of play, it shows in a very clear way that they were good pupils and that the English were even better teachers ... They not only taught us their methods of play but they made known to us these true English traditions, the famous English sporting attitude, sportsmanship and fair play as well. (quoted after Beck 1999: 283)

Fifty years on, these ‘true English traditions’ are referred to, once again, as a distinctive feature.

8. The Litmus Test of Englishness: To Dive or Not to Dive?

If you type “football diving foreign players” into Google, you get nearly a million hits. And the verdict is quite unanimous. Out of the thousands who post their opinion on message boards all over the internet, most express a similar view to this poster on a Yahoo!Sport message board: “I love my football and lately ive been getting so annoyed at the diving especially Spanish&Italian football and i believe its the foriegn footballers thats bringing this problem to our country it is a shame as they also bring excitement to our game but yessomething hasgot to be donr soon.” Another poster on Sky.com, home of Premiership action on English TV, echoes this sentiment: “It may be something that is shown a blind eye in the rest of Europe but, along with all the many positive things that the ‘foreign players’ have brought to the Premiership, managers, referees and the football authorities must be firm in their convictions – diving is not a welcome feature of our national game.”

The incident that incited a long simmering discussion happened only a fortnight after the Pardew-Wenger exchange about foreign players analysed above. As it seems, the two questions bear a close connection. After Chelsea beat Manchester City on March 25 due to an unnoticed handball, Chelsea’s striker from the Ivory Coast, Didier Drogba, stood in front of the cameras and said: “Yes, it was handball, but that’s part of the game. [...] Sometimes I dive, sometimes I stand” (quoted after “Drogba Backtracks on Diving Claim” 2006) And even though Drogba backtracked shortly afterwards, the debate about foreign players

took a different turn. The question was no longer generally whether teams made up of foreign players could still represent English football, but whether their behaviour brought the English game into disrepute.

The incident was experienced as a decisive moment, as David Mellor from the *Evening Standard* reports: “THE Chelsea-Manchester City match was pretty lousy, but after Didier Drogba’s antics it may go down in history as the moment when football decided to stand up to divers.” (2006b) *English* football, that is. James Lawton from the *Independent* sensed an existential crisis: “The result is becoming more scandalous by the week. What can be done? Nothing short of a wholesale realisation that cheating [...] is bringing about the game’s biggest crisis. It is a crisis of affection, of enjoyment, of truth.” (2006) ‘Affection, enjoyment’ – more than anything, diving is feared to effect the popularity of football. Frank Lampard, England international and Chelsea star shows a somewhat ambivalent position concerning the connection between diving and foreign players, but sees a strong connection between fair-play and Englishness: “Outright cheating is something that shouldn’t be in the game. It’s wrong to say foreigners brought this with them. It’s true to an extent that this happens more on the Continent but us as a public, and us as players, have to address it and keep that little bit of honesty in our game. It’s one of our traits that people across the world probably look up to.” (quoted after Cable 2006)



Image 5: www.timesonline.co.uk/nodiving (30.09.2006)

After the 'London Football Report 2006' marked out 'cheating' as the central problem concerning present-day football (cf. Simons 2006), it was *The Times* who took it upon them to save the English game, kick-starting a campaign

against diving. On a specially designed webpage they urged their readers:

We call upon you, *Times* readers, to rise up against those who fall down. [...] If you think some players' skills are more suited to a 10 metre platform than a 20-yard free kick. If you think simulation is something that should be performed on computers not pitches. And if your role model is a little too keen on forward rolls, then join our campaign. For too long the authorities have talked hot air while players continue to collide with thin air. It's time to make your opinion count. It's about integrity, respect and preventing gamesmanship from destroying the beautiful game.

Although there is no mention of foreign players in this tongue-in-cheek appeal, the picture gallery under the link "The Great Pretenders" reveals a darker side, namely that foreign footballers are seen to be the reason for the rise in falling: all six pictures show foreign players. Similarly, a recent humorous take, entitled "Legends of the Fall", features 80% foreign players (cf. Pearson 2006). Needless to say that there is no statistical evidence to back such claims – it is nonetheless a truly popular conception.

'Simulation' is set against 'integrity', and 'gamesmanship' is cast as the opposite of sportsmanship. What appears as a return to the ideals of a Victorian gentleman sport (cf. Eisenberg 1999: 36–77; Holt 1989: 98–117), can be interpreted in two ways, at least. On the one hand, it could be seen as a (slightly cynical) reaction against the over-commercialisation of modern football, where the money at stake finally threatens to overrule the last remaining bits of integrity in the game; this, then, would also be a sign of the ongoing re-gentrification of the 'post-fan' of toplevel sports (Giulianotti 1999: 146) and the middle-classes' urge to downplay its own commercialism. On the other hand, this summoning of gentlemanly behaviour also reveals the loss of any *essential* trait of English football and the urge to compensate this loss with an *affiliatory* identity. I will return to this second option in my conclusion.

Conclusions

The question whether a multi-national football team is embraced or condemned within popular culture has no straightforward answer. There are multiple motives for speaking out for or against an Arsenal team made up completely of foreigners; these motives might be personal, collective, or determined by

economic demands. Xenophobe or xenophile opinions do not stand alone, but are part of a network of opinions, which might even be contradictory but are nonetheless held simultaneously and influence each other; 'mattering maps' are superimposing and interfering. Alan Pardew, for example, the West Ham manager attacking Arsene Wenger, was auditioning for the job of England manager at the time. As such, obviously, he would rely on players with an English passport playing for high-calibre teams. Most fans attacking the Arsenal make-up on the letters pages of the tabloids and on the internet are fans of rival teams who are glad to grasp any opportunity to criticise and belittle Arsenal. The majority of Arsenal fans themselves seem not to mind the lack of England-born players – at least they say so when answering to criticism by other fans. Some even use it to distinguish themselves socially, as one poster on digitalspy.co.uk answers the accusations of fielding too many non-English players by distancing himself from the lower sections of the mass media: "Maybe that's because we're trying to win things rather than appease the Daily Mail and Talk Sport." Furthermore, alliance at club level seems to be even more important than, or at least clearly distinguished from, loyalty to the national side – the more global the world becomes, the more local the alliance (cf. King 2003: 12). And this alliance to a club seems to be unimpressed by everything that is going on in and around it (cf. King 2002: 166–170).

The various commercial media, on the other hand, cannot afford to offend an integral part of their readership: if they should criticise Arsenal too strongly, they risk losing the loyal Arsenal supporters. It is not that the *Sun* would shy away from being outright xenophobic, but they themselves rely too heavily on reporting about Arsenal's glamorous stars and scintillating, spectacular football to write against them for a prolonged time. The foreigner, though maybe not particularly liked, is an exotic – and often erotic – spectacle to look at. An analysis of the discourses surrounding events like Arsenal's non-English English team and Drogba's admission of diving can never reveal more than the diverse strategies of coping with such an event.

Concentrating on the commercial interests involved, one might lament that "the emergence of a powerful corporate multinationalism, along with the increasing tendency for media output to transcend territorial boundaries,

threatens to submerge individual awareness of national identity in an ocean of globalised consumerism.” (Smith & Porter 2004a: 1; cf. Linder & Breuer 1978: 84–94) However, by cutting apparently ‘indigenous’ ties, the commercial mass media also open up new possibilities from which the individual football fan might choose – whether these choices are better or worse than an ‘awareness of national identity’ remains to be seen.

Finally, it can be argued that football is beginning to enter a post-national, or trans-national, rather than inter-national era: the players, the managers, the owners, the sponsors, and even the fans are recruited globally – players no longer play against each other but side-by-side in the same team. But, as I tried to argue, the less ‘material’ Englishness there is, the more important it seems to become to identify a British/English style of football, a style that is open to voluntary adoption. The one trait that goes beyond racial qualities of strength and fervour is fair play, a moral rather than a material quality. It is a quality that everyone can adopt, but one that is more than often perceived as missing in teams from other nations. Fair play is marking a selected affiliation rather than a given belonging. Britishness becomes a matter of choice rather than of determination, identity is what you choose to do, not what you are born into. (Of course, the freedom to choose can not be chosen; large parts of society have to come to terms with identities forced upon them.)

This development seems to be part of a larger framework. To conclude, I will move to a more abstract level. Let me look back a couple of centuries to the developments concerning the ‘gentlemen’ – the spectre summoned up to today to define the Englishness of English sport. Up until the seventeenth century, the status of an individual was assumed to be naturally given. In stratificatory societies, status positions are ascribed and cannot generally be changed through achievements (cf. Luhmann 1997: 636). However, as numerous studies have shown, individual status and identity became increasingly ‘de-substantialised’ and unstable in the modern period; gentlemanliness, for example, became something that had to be acquired, learned and performed; it became a matter of education and socialisation, not of blood (cf. amongst many Luhmann 1997: 733; Heyl 2004: 43–44, 91–92).

Nationalism can be considered, amongst other things, as a way of

countering the contingency that came to be felt on an individual level, compensating for the loss of a given place in a stratificatory society. By emphasizing “the ‘one, yet many’ of national life” (Brennan 1990: 49) in popular publications like newspapers and novels, the newly found freedom of the individual could be integrated within a new, larger framework. Against all obvious evidence of difference, an underlying sameness and communal coherence could be proclaimed (cf. Luhmann 1997: 1051–1055). National football appeared as a late and spectacular continuation of the work started by print media, using the power of the ‘mob’ as well as the power of TV to integrate formerly unattainable sections of society. Today, the merging of the idea of the gentleman with that of national identity appears as a last effort to saviour the notion of national identity. However, it seems as if the notion of the nation, once the basis for a burgeoning capitalistic economy, has lost its appeal in exactly those societies that have pushed capitalism to its furthest limit. (For those still trying to enter the capitalistic stage, the coat of the nation is of course still relevant.) How can national identity provide any more stability, if its own contingency, its own selectiveness is becoming more and more obvious? As it seems, even the ersatz has run its course; capitalism has devoured its favourite child.

But while the notion of the nation has been increasingly de-materialised, the individual human body, formerly the sight of inscription for a stratificatory and then a national identity, can be observed to become more and more ‘materialised’. On the underside of increasingly contingent constructions of community, the particular, ‘indisposable’ body is constructed as a last anchor of stability.

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