

Territory, Politics and Soccer Fandom in Northern Ireland and Sweden

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Abstract

Football fandom and identity politics are widely recognised as being linked. Their relationship, however, is frequently more complex than superficial readings might indicate. This paper attempts to further understanding of the ways in which identity politics are fought out on the terrain of soccer support and in relation to the defence of sporting spaces. Central to the analysis is an examination of fans in two very different societies. In the case of Linfield supporters in Northern Ireland, the use of fandom, as a vehicle for expressing reactive cultural resistance centred around a club and a stadium regarded both as objects of devotion in their own right and also as elements of an imagined community, might come as no surprise, given the deep ethno-sectarian divisions in the wider society. The paper argues, however, that a study of AIK fans in Sweden reveals that any form of social cleavage can turn soccer fandom into a celebration of the Collective Self in defiance of the threat, real or perceived, that is posed by the Other.

Introduction

It is in the realm of culture that communities come to understand themselves and to articulate this understanding to the wider world. There are, of course, numerous cultural forms and arenas within which this process can take place. In the modern world, sport has become one of the most important of these. As Jeremy MacClancy (1996: 2) suggests, sports are 'vehicles of identity, providing people with a sense of difference and a way of classifying themselves and others, whether latitudinally or hierarchically'. This does not mean that the resultant identities are either self-contained or immutable. Indeed, identities are more likely than not to be dual or even multiple (Kellas, 1991). One's identity as a player of a certain sport or a supporter of a particular team may or may not overlap with other aspects of one's identity. Nevertheless, the fact remains that sport plays an important role in the construction and reproduction of part of the identity of most people, and particularly most men, in the modern world.

Much work, however, needs to be done if we are to understand the processes whereby identity is constructed. According to Pnina Werbner (1996: 106), 'the extent to which "fun" and the spaces of fun are constitutive of identity and subjectivity—whether ethnic, gendered or generational—remains to be fully theorized, although discussion of youth subcultures and popular culture have highlighted certain dimensions of this conjuncture'. What is certain is that of all of the world's major games, soccer is one of the most powerful in terms of identity formation and reinforcement.

Writing about ethnicity in Australian sport, Roy Jones and Phillip Moore observe that 'soccer is a public arena in which ethnic identities can be assessed and reinvented in changing circumstances' (Jones & Moore, 1994: 18). Whilst players may be able to detach themselves from the political and social context in the course of a game, for spectators, as Vic Duke and Liz Crolley (1996) remind us, football matches never take place in isolation:

The participants (the fans) do not cut themselves off from external matters. In a sense, football does not cut out external factors but it acts more like a sieve than a solid wall, and the sieve is not only selecting but also modifying what it filters (Duke & Crolley, 1996: 126-7).

In reality, the relationship 'between the game and these so-called external matters may be even closer than Duke and Crolley (1996) suggest. Sport has been widely recognised as contested terrain. As a consequence, attendance at a **soccer** match can become an integral part of a broader social process. According to Richard Giulianotti and Gary Armstrong (1997: 11), 'football centres upon an affirmation of faith, an element of identity, both personal and collective, that is never fully communicable in effectively rational terms'.

In this regard, academic attention has tended to focus on examples of soccer's counter-hegemonic role in the promotion of such things as working-class solidarity (Jones, 1988) or self-styled progressive nationalism (Hargreaves, 1992). Less interest has been shown when the cultural resistance expressed by soccer fans assumes more reactive forms, except insofar as hooliganism has been linked to right-wing extremism (Giulianotti, Bonney & Hepworth, 1994). This paper redresses the balance by revealing the complex nature of identity politics fought out on the abstract terrain of soccer support and in terms of the defence of real sporting spaces.

Politics and Territory

Clearly the socio-economic and cultural history of place is central to any narration or understanding of communal devotion, collective action and socio-cultural modification. Moreover, modes of socio-cultural resistance emanate from ongoing and modified processes of socialisation, which, because they are distinctive to place, give specific meaning to life and living in that place (Thrift & Forbes, 1983). In turn, and in reaction to multi-layered forms of *social* precedent, place and its readings can also engender amongst individuals and communities an identifiable pool of resistance against the real and imagined processes of socio-economic and cultural modification that re-define the nature and composition of places and localities.

Comprehending how space has been either socially or culturally fabricated into a distinctive understanding of place, in relation to the manifestation of support for specific soccer teams, provides crucial insights into the production and reproduction of conflict and reactive resistance. However, a valid interpretation of how place and cultural identity are constituted demands an analysis that stretches beyond the nature and form of built environments (such as stadia), through embracing an analysis that includes the examination of other observable processes of socio-cultural modification and alteration (Beck, Giddens & Lash, 1994). Material, residual and topophilic relationships are saturated with expressive meaning as they are placed in the subjective and at times introspective context of the iconographies and landscapes of past and present occurrences (Roseberry, 1989; Shirlow & McGovern, 1996).

What ultimately emerges is a geography of socio-cultural domination and/or resistance in which power relationships are spatialised and imagined in distinct and observable ways. In particular reactive ideological forms are primarily concerned with the definition and defensive reaction to particular cultural and social forms that are construed as alien, hostile and unacceptable. Undoubtedly, modes of reactive resistance that are played out through the medium of racist and ethno-sectarian discourses are excessively biased and tied to remorselessly negative forms of socio-cultural definition. However, the literature on theories of resistance has tended to ignore the manner, potency and direction of cultural forms of, resistance that are located among communities, self-identified as being influenced by fascist or right-wing philosophies (Pile & Keith, 1997). Obviously, the omission of communities that promote highly reactive forms of resistance impedes a diagnostic interpretation of the multiplicity of power relationships and their varied locations.

In relation to an understanding of the relationship between resistance and reactive modes of resistance this article is taken up with an examination of the extent to which soccer supporting in Northern Ireland interacts with external factors and plays its part in the construction of the political identity of certain working-class Protestant men. Specific attention is paid to supporters of those clubs usually identified as Protestant, particularly Linfield. There is also some discussion of the relationship between support for the latter and for the Northern Ireland national team, both of which play their home games at the same stadium. In assessing the extent to which these phenomena provide examples of cultural resistance, we draw on theoretical perspectives concerning space, place and territory that have only begun to be used in the debate on the relationship between politics and sport in Northern Ireland (Bairner & Shirlow, 1998; Bairner & Shirlow, 1999). It also makes comparisons with a group of Swedish soccer fans whose identity is equally tied up with an affection for a particular stadium and for a wider, albeit arguably mythical, landscape that it is taken to represent. Like Protestant soccer fans in Northern Ireland, members of

the Black Army that follows the Allsvenskan side, Allmänna Idrottsklubben (AIK), have also been involved, even if unconsciously, in the creation of iconographies of an imagined community and expressions of devotion to it.

This article conveys a sense of the localised nature of politics of territorial control and resistance, where the imperatives of communal difference, segregation and exclusion have predominated over the politics of shared interests, integration, assimilation and consensus. Although the central role of 'territory' and 'territorial boundaries' and the nature of coercion, control and resistance are in many ways dissimilar between Northern Ireland and Sweden, the paper charts and explains the relevance of space and topophilia in the reproduction of forms of highly politicised identities, which are linked to notions of cultural 'besiegement' and cultural dissipation.

Soccer Fandom and Cultures of Reactive Opposition

Writing about the fans of Sheffield United, Armstrong (1998: 11) refers to followers of city rivals Sheffield Wednesday as 'the Constant Other'. This is to talk, however, almost solely in terms of football rivalry. In this respect, the Other for Linfield fans would be supporters of Glentoran, themselves ironically also predominantly Protestant. For AIK fans, the Other might be the supporters of Stockholm adversaries, Hammarby or Djurgården, or even those of IFK Göteborg. In both cases, however, the attitudes and behaviour of the fans involved can also signal the presence of an alternative Other; Irish nationalists for Linfield fans and those who are not 'real' Swedes for the Black Army. It is this type of 'Constant Other' that is accorded prominence with reference to the territorial imaginings of the fans we discuss.

In many instances reactive forms of cultural opposition are tied to notions of cultural dissipation, besiegement and disintegration. Clearly, and as noted by James Spradley and David McCurdy (1987), the reality and perception of fear that is tied to the cultural 'Other' means that many individuals:

cling tenaciously to the values they have acquired and feel threatened when confronted with others who live according to different conceptions of what is desirable. Thus culture is like a 'security blanket' which 'has great meaning to its owner' (Spradley & McCurdy, 1987: 5-6).

In particular sectarianism and racist discourses are themselves cultural constructions that are reproduced and reworked through time and space. It is in this sense, too, that the disquisition that constitutes both sectarianism and racism in Northern Ireland and Sweden respectively is reproduced through what are essentially 'lived experiences'. Clearly, the nature and potency of sectarianism in Northern Ireland is more sensitive and acute than racism in Sweden given the

character and extent of socio-political segregation together with nearly thirty years of domestic conflict. Yet, in both arenas the defence of boundaries or the perception that communally defined boundaries are or could be altered by the in-migration of the sectarian or racial 'Other' means that a reactive consciousness is not simply reproduced through consciousness and ideology themselves, but also in physical and spatial terms (Bell, 1990). In both instances religious and racial affiliations are established as primary demarcators of the 'Collective Other', however, religion and race are not recognised as the 'subject' of conflicting interest but as symbols of conflict, representing a method to distinguish, asseverate and 'legitimate' rivalry and dogmatic asperity.

Evidently, defining the 'Other' leads to the imposition of negative and putative characteristics upon a 'Collective Other' whose lifestyle, culture and politics must be both resisted and repelled (Jenkins, 1994). Ultimately, the culturally hostile manner of reactive resistance and the desire to challenge pan-cultural contact leads in turn to what are essentially cultures of besiegement, which, somewhat depressingly, focus upon imaginings that distinguish the 'we' from the 'they'. Such a conception of peoples undoubtedly fortifies group togetherness, on the one hand, and provides a rationale for group action, on the other (Baker, 1990; Graham, 1994).

The biosphere of cultural opposition is firmly established upon the primary binary opposition, of the Collective Self and the Collective Other, and upon the construction of a necessary relationship between the two. The Collective Self, for the Ulster Protestant/Loyalist community, is subjectively defined in terms of 'Devotion' to what is imagined as a distinctly Protestant way of life. The Collective Other is the 'Menace', which can come from a range of social groups or agencies but which is particularly constructed in this instance as the republican-nationalist communities of Ireland. The mediating practice that defines the necessary relationship between the two is the notion of 'Defence'. 'Communal Devotion' in this sense is produced and re-worked through animosity and identifiable defence strategies.

The relationship between the Black Army and those who do not follow AIK is also linked to ideas about the 'Collective Self' and the 'Other'. The latter is partly constituted by fans of other football clubs but, at a deeper and more symbolic level, the Black Army's Other also consists of immigrants, rural Swedes, Swedes from Gothenburg and Malmö and so on. 'Communal Devotion' for both groups within this study is based upon ethno-political identities tied to what are imagined and perceived as either the Ulster Protestant or Swedish way of life and living. The 'Collective Self' is, in other words, built upon the sum of the social relationships experienced by someone growing up within a particular value system. At the same time, through the discourse of 'threat' any challenge to, or change in, the position of the 'Collective Self' is experienced within the context of traditional lines of division and conflict.

More important is the perception that a loss of socio-economic or political status is tied not to the flaws within the character of the 'Collective Self but rather is due to the encroachment of the 'Collective Other'. As a result, the potency of such interpretations means that both communities must defend themselves. 'Defence' and the protection of territory thus emerge as the primary discourse defining the mediating practice between the Self and the Other; the conceptual ordering of inter-communal relations.

It is in this sense that it is necessary to focus upon the relative autonomy of ideology and collective consciousness as a determining factor on social action; the way, in other words, material, political and cultural change is perceived within the context of a pre-existing, if discursive, ideological framework. The role of sectarianism and racism clearly indicates how class relationships in Northern Ireland and Sweden cross-cut politics, economics, ideology and culture. It also illustrates the manner in which class relationships are experienced and perceived as ethno-racial relationships.

Games with Frontiers

Highlighting the importance of sport for the construction and consolidation of national identities, Grant Jarvie (1993:75) observes that 'it is as if the imagined community or nation becomes more real on the terraces or the athletics track'. Most sports fans cast their sporting heroes and favourite clubs in the role of 'proxy warriors', to use John Hoberman's (1986: 6) phrase. In Northern Ireland, this analogy is complicated by the presence of competing national identities and ethno-sectarian attitudes that are intimately involved in a 'real' conflict with real warriors who are also assigned heroic status by certain sections of the population, most notably working-class young men (Bairner, 1997; Bairner, 1999). Lacking intense domestic conflict centred around ethnic division, modern Sweden is, nevertheless, a multicultural society in which competing images of the nation are central to political discourse with sport playing a significant part in this process.

The general relationship between politics and sport in Northern Ireland is already well established (Sugden & Bairner, 1993; Sugden & Harvie, 1995), although there remains considerable scope for more detailed analysis. The broad argument that the organisation of sport in the province not only reflects but can also exacerbate sectarian attitudes and the politics of division cannot be challenged despite the recognition that sport can also be utilised to promote cross-community reconciliation. To support the general thesis, however, it is important to examine particular manifestations of the interplay between sport and politics and to do so from a variety of academic perspectives. One such theme is the relationship between soccer and the construction of collective identities. For example, the importance to unionists (and specifically to unionist men) of the existence of the Northern Ireland national soccer team has been

explored in some detail (Bairner & Sugden 1986; Sugden & Bairner, 1994; Bairner, 1997). It is clear that although Catholics in Northern Ireland are as likely as Protestants to play and watch soccer, a unionist atmosphere surrounds the game at its highest levels, including the administration of senior soccer as well as support for the Northern Ireland team (Bairner, 1999; Bairner & Darby, 1999). However, it is one thing to simply record this fact and to pass some critical comments on it. What is more important is to uncover the reasons why Northern Irish Protestants persist in their attempts to exercise a degree of hegemonic control over soccer.

An obvious nationalist response would be that this phenomenon is simply a continuation of traditional unionist discriminatory practice that has been weakened in other areas, such as the allocation of jobs and houses, since the introduction of direct rule from London, in order to replace the devolved parliament at Stormont (Clayton, 1996). Adopting a rather different perspective towards the same evidence, it has been argued that, with the loss of self-government and given that most sports are organised on an all-Ireland basis, the national soccer team and its administrative body, the Irish Football Association (IFA), are amongst the few visible indicators of the existence of Northern Ireland as a separate place (Sugden & Bairner, 1993). On its own, however, this explanation cannot explain precisely how significant soccer is in the construction and reproduction of a unionist identity, although it points in a direction that, if followed, might lead to greater understanding of this process. The key idea raised is that of Northern Ireland as a place, both real and imagined.

Although Northern Ireland is constitutionally part of the United Kingdom, it is separated from the rest of Britain not only by a stretch of water but also by distinctive cultural patterns. Physically, it is part of the island of Ireland from which it is separated politically by the will of the majority of its citizens as well as by cultural differences. Within the six counties of Northern Ireland there are additional borders, both visible and invisible, most significantly separating Catholics from Protestants, but also dividing the country from the town and the middle classes from the working classes. As a consequence of these various boundaries, the constitutional impasse in the province can be said to be intimately bound up with territorial politics. As James Anderson and Ian Shuttleworth (1998) suggest, the intensifying controversies over Orange marches since 1994 serve to illuminate the importance of the symbolic 'claiming and re-claiming' of territory from which Protestants have retreated, or in which their proportion of the sectarian headcount has diminished. Claiming the right to march through areas against the wishes of a majority of local residents is justified in terms of 'tradition' and basic civil rights. For some, it is a way of demonstrating Protestant and unionist supremacy. Above all, it symbolically asserts that all Northern Ireland is British and that Protestants are the privileged upholders of the Union. It is sport's relationship with the

territorial politics of space and place in Northern Ireland which needs to be recognised if soccer's role in the construction of the Collective Self vis à vis the Other is to be more carefully theorised.

Sporting venues, in Northern Ireland as elsewhere, consistently emerge as sites for the reproduction of a sense of alienation from the Other. The source of the alienation can be social class, with few working-class people feeling comfortable at rugby grounds, for example. Or, it might be gender, since women are no more likely to feel at ease at most sports stadia in the province than in any other society. In terms of the politics of division, however, feeling alienated at sporting venues is intrinsically linked to ethno-sectarian identities. Three major examples illustrate the point.

First, there is the alienation of Protestants from nationalist sporting spaces. It is undeniable that Protestants can be made to feel unwelcome at certain soccer grounds in the province. The best example is that of Derry City's Brandywell, particularly since 1985 when the club began to play in the League of Ireland, having resigned from Northern Ireland's Irish League in 1972. Supported in the past by Protestants in the city, the club's following is now almost exclusively nationalist. The entire west side of the city, where the Brandywell is located, is nowadays regarded as a hostile environment by the overwhelming majority of Derry's Protestant inhabitants and to venture into it for the sake of attending a soccer match is virtually unthinkable. Here is a soccer club that now quite literally plays 'across the border' and which symbolises the estrangement of nationalists from Northern Ireland as a political entity (Duke & Crolley, 1996).

Cliftonville's Solitude ground is also alien territory even when Protestants travel there to support their own team. Established as an amateur club in what was a predominantly middle-class, Protestant area of Belfast, Cliftonville only acquired a nationalist following after population shifts led to a marked decrease in the numbers of Protestants in the area. Into the vacuum stepped Catholics, primarily from the nearby Ardoyne and New Lodge districts, although also from other nationalist parts of the city and beyond. The impression of Solitude as nationalist space was further enhanced by the fact that for almost thirty years, on police advice, Linfield fans were not expected to visit there at all. Instead, their team's 'away' games against Cliftonville were played at Linfield's own Windsor Park. As a result, Solitude was transformed into a place where, for Linfield fans, 'real' Protestants do not go.

Protestant feelings of alienation from sporting venues in Northern Ireland, however, are by no means confined to soccer grounds. Arguably Gaelic sports grounds are even more alien to Protestants than soccer stadia are to either community. The games themselves are not usually part of the experience of growing up Protestant. Venues and clubs are often named after heroes of Republican history. The symbolism is nationalist with the Irish tricolour aloft

and the Gaelic language being used, albeit less extensively than the founders of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) would have wished. Seldom are overtly sectarian comments to be heard but one might argue that this omission owes at least as much to the fact that Gaelic games do not involve competition between the two major communities as to inherent political correctness on the part of the followers of Gaelic games. Certainly when nationalists turn their attention to soccer, as in the case of Cliftonville fans, there is far less hesitancy about sectarian chanting. However, as far as senior soccer is concerned it is Catholics rather than Protestants who are more likely to experience a sense of alienation at most major venues.

Indeed, a second obvious example of alienation experienced at sporting venues concerns the overwhelmingly Protestant or loyalist ambience surrounding most Irish League games. There are a number of related aspects to this situation. First, of the best supported clubs in the Irish League, only Cliftonville has a predominantly Catholic following. Of the other major clubs, Ballymena United, Coleraine, Crusaders, Glenavon, Glentoran and Portadown are all mainly supported by Protestants. In the case of Linfield, moreover, it would be reasonable to suppose that the following is almost exclusively Protestant. There are a number of reasons for this preponderance of Protestant support for Irish League soccer that persists despite the fact that all of the clubs, including Linfield, have Catholic players. Amongst these are the British origins of the game that arrived in Ireland at a time when sportive nationalists were constructing a separate Irish sporting culture as a response to what was regarded as British cultural imperialism (Bairner, 1996; Mandle, 1987). This meant that, in the past, many Catholics viewed soccer with suspicion with the result that they were far less involved than Protestants in the game's early formal development. This is directly linked to a second reason that most senior clubs tend to be supported by Protestants. Although Catholics today follow soccer with as much enthusiasm as Protestants, especially since the GAA has become increasingly less antagonistic towards a sport which is now more appropriately described as universal rather than British (Cronin, 1994, 1996; Holmes, 1994), most senior clubs were established in those areas where Protestants were and, for the most part, continue to be in the majority. In this respect, the example of Cliftonville is instructive. The fact that nationalist soccer fans in Belfast were in search of a team is a reminder of a third reason for the disproportionate numbers of Protestants involved in supporting Irish League teams. Over the years, not only Derry City but before them, in 1949, Belfast Celtic, teams that did possess large numbers of Catholic supporters, were obliged to leave the Irish League. With the departure of these clubs, it has become all the more likely than in the past that Irish League soccer will continue to derive the bulk of its support from the Protestant, unionist community in Northern Ireland. Moreover, being a Catholic soccer fan is by no means an easy option.

For example, during the 1996-7 soccer season successful attempts were made on two occasions to prevent Cliftonville fans from attending soccer games at grounds that are regarded as Protestant territory. In response to efforts by nationalists to have Orange marches re-routed away from their areas, loyalists impeded the progress of Cliftonville supporters as they made their way to games in East Belfast and Portadown on 4 September 1996 and 19 October 1996 respectively. In this way, territorial politics became more closely involved with sport than ever before and soccer grounds became even more alienating.

Catholics have also experienced increasing difficulties in supporting the Northern Ireland national team. Its home fixtures at Windsor Park provide a final example of the alienating capacity of sporting venues in the province. Only those Protestants who are absolutely repelled by vocal expressions of anti-Catholic sentiment would find Windsor Park on the occasion of Northern Ireland games a hostile environment. Catholics respond very differently. They have always represented Northern Ireland at various levels. In addition, it is undeniable that, in the past and even as recently as during the 1982 World Cup Finals in Spain, many of them supported the national team despite the fact that their political outlook would have led them to question the idea of Northern Ireland as a nation or even as a separate place. The fact remained that Catholics as well as Protestants were playing for the team and deserved the support of their co-religionists. This view was taken by large numbers of Catholics although, even at that time, many of the team's Protestant supporters chose to wear the red, white and blue of Linfield or Glasgow Rangers as opposed to the green and white of the national strip and to sing loyalist songs in preference to ones more commonly associated with football supporting. The situation at the end of the 1990s, however, was markedly different.

Very few Catholics attend Northern Ireland games and, indeed, few would even admit to supporting the national team. They argue that the loyalist symbolism associated with the side is the main reason for their antipathy. Cynics would add that it cannot be a coincidence that their abandonment of the national team coincided with an upsurge in the fortunes of the Irish Republic's soccer representatives. For the first time, northern nationalists had a worthwhile alternative to supporting Northern Ireland and, given their own political preference for a united Ireland and the fact that the constitution of the Republic continues to lay claim to the six counties of Northern Ireland, for most of them it was a relatively easy choice to make. However, another reason for their growing sense of alienation from the Northern Ireland team brings us back once more to the question of space and its social meaning.

The national team plays its home games at Windsor Park, which is situated beside the predominantly Protestant Donegall Road and Village areas of Belfast. The ground is also home to Linfield, the senior club with the most vocal loyalist following. Both because of its location and also its association

with a particular club, Windsor Park has always been regarded by nationalists as alien territory. In addition, some fans of Northern Ireland and Linfield have intended it to be so. For many years, the slogan – ‘Taigs Keep Out’ – painted on a wall close to the stadium represented a sinister warning that Catholics were not welcome at Windsor Park unless, ironically, they had arrived to play for Northern Ireland or, as is increasingly likely today, for Linfield. The message is clear. This is a Protestant place for a Protestant people and Catholics require special dispensation to be there. As Armstrong (1998: 8-9) observes, ‘football grounds enjoy the personality of place, and have always been subject to social segregation’. Although all of Windsor Park is suffused with Protestant and Unionist symbolic meaning, this is at its most overt in those parts of the stadium which are occupied on match days by the young men who are most vociferous in their support not only for the team but also for the loyalist cause. Traditionally, most of these fans occupied the Spion Kop terrace at the west end of the ground. During a period of reconstruction, they decamped to Section F of one of the main grandstands. Indeed the most violent elements of the Linfield support assumed the name Section F at this time. With the reconstruction of the stadium now almost complete, however, vocal support from the Kop for both Linfield and Northern Ireland is once again a feature of major games.

The message that Windsor Park is Protestant has arguably been communicated with an even greater sense of urgency as growing numbers of Catholics have moved into nearby residential areas in south Belfast. Windsor Park must remain Protestant despite and in defiance of changes in the surrounding locale. Indeed, for some Linfield supporters the stadium’s symbolic meaning is altered not only by the presence of Catholics but even by the arrival of rural Protestants for international matches. The identification of Protestant Ulster with urban Belfast and its heavy engineering and shipyards appears threatened by the inhabitants of a related but different landscape. The fact that Linfield receives considerable support from outside the city albeit not from towns such as Portadown and Lurgan that have their own Irish League clubs, however, weakens the impact of this sense of a divided Protestant identity and testifies instead to the club’s quasi-national status.

Loyalism and Fandom

These various observations concerning soccer and territory are particularly relevant to the experience of young Protestant males as they seek to come to terms with the diminished status of the Protestant working class. Unemployed, socially marginalised and with deep-seated fears about the future of Northern Ireland as a separate entity, they look for channels through which to express their loyalist identity and, as a result, to restore their self esteem. One such vehicle, as Desmond Bell (1990) observes, are the ‘Kick the Pope’ bands that accompany Orange marches.

The bands and their parades seem to provide for the dispossessed Loyalist youth of Ulster a sectarian habitus within which their generational concerns with communal identity and with winning public space become fused with the focal concerns with territoriality and ethnic solidarity (Bell, 1990: 100).

The political strength of Ulster loyalism historically has been its identification with a state that has been able to impose territorial boundaries, directly or indirectly, while being able to afford a relatively relaxed attitude to boundaries within the British Isles. In the last thirty years this state has been able to enforce a form of effective territorial control in the face of sustained armed resistance. But, Ulster Protestant ideology has an additional myth of siege that implies a contested sense of domicile that cannot be shared with other British citizens, but that also fails to find an exclusive 'homeland' in Northern Ireland.

Supporting a particular 'Protestant' soccer club, such as Linfield or Glentoran, who play at the Oval close to the shipyards of east Belfast, or the Northern Ireland team provides a similar kind of outlet to that offered by membership of a marching band (Bairner, 1997; Bairner, 1999), and soccer stadia offer a context for the celebration of a wider culture. Wearing the colours and singing the songs, young men avail themselves of the opportunity to exhibit their sense of what it means to be Ulster Protestants. Thus, they sing about being up to their knees in Fenian blood or chant the names of loyalist paramilitary organisations in what are amongst the few public spaces where such behaviour is possible (Bairner, 1997). The identity of most of these soccer fans takes the form of a secular, non-Christian Protestantism, described by Norman Gillespie and his fellow researchers as 'a mixture of selective theological dogma, anti-Catholicism and pragmatic loyalism' (Gillespie, Lovett & Garner, 1992: 135). Despite the lack of religiosity, the commitment of these fans to their native Ulster is undeniable. Less certain, however, is their understanding of Ulster as a landscape.

As Brian Graham (1997) has argued, the territorial definition that has traditionally been proposed by unionists has been essentially negative, with the place being understood not for what it is but rather in terms of what unionists do not wish it to be, namely a part of Ireland. For Graham (1997: 40), therefore, 'Unionism occupies not so much "a place apart" as "no place", a failure of legitimation which ensures that it is an ideology which commands little or no external support'. But soccer grounds are real places and, in addition, most of the venues for senior soccer in the province are Protestant places, hence their role in identity formation. The imagined community of Ulster as a Protestant place becomes more real for young loyalists as they express their affiliation at Windsor Park or the Oval and, in so doing, struggle 'to resolve at the level of

the imaginary, the real contradictions confronting the Protestant working-class in contemporary Northern Ireland' (Bell, 1990: 23).

In their own way, by supporting certain soccer teams, these young fans are attempting to defend their home territory and those traditions that make it what it is or what they imagine it to be. This reactive defensiveness is part of a more general 'siege mentality' that afflicts the unionist population and which derives from a sense that everything around them is undergoing fundamental and irrevocable change. Thus, theirs is a form of cultural resistance that remains linked to a parental tradition. The old industries have gone and along with them the sense of community that they helped to create. Political developments are all construed as concessions to the nationalist minority. Through all of this, however, the leading soccer clubs and the Northern Ireland national team have remained constant elements in Protestant working-class culture, although even they are not immune to the forces of change. The presence of Catholic players in the Linfield team, including ones recruited from the Irish Republic, is a relatively novel phenomenon. Combined with the movement of Protestants from inner city Belfast and the growing number of Saturday afternoon distractions that have affected soccer crowds throughout Ireland and beyond, this has clearly had some impact on attendances, similarly, the inclusion of Catholic players in the Northern Ireland team, or ones only tenuously linked to the province, does not meet with the approval of every loyalist. Overall, however, clubs like Linfield and Glentoran as well as the national team continue to provide a necessary focus for Protestant working-class identity. In this respect, they perform a similar function to that played by soccer clubs in other, less overtly divided societies.

The Black Army of Stockholm

Whereas Northern Ireland might seem a fairly obvious society in which to examine the relationship between cultures of reactive opposition and sporting spaces, Scandinavia would at first glance appear like less fertile territory. Even in the world of football, the Nordic region seems relatively peaceful. Thus, as Torbjörn Andersson and Aage Radmann (1998a: 155) note, 'the Scandinavian supporter culture is predominantly positive in its nature'. The emphasis, for the most part, is on carnival and 'tifo' spectacles. For some time, however, there has also been a darker side with the Black Army followers of AIK in particular acquiring a notorious reputation throughout the region. As Andersson and Radmann (1998b:122) explain further, 'in a historical perspective it is one club's support in particular which has experienced a notable transformation, namely that of AIK'. In terms of status, they suggest, AIK's fans have gone from the top to the bottom in Swedish football, from an exclusive, almost aristocratic, following to one that includes large numbers of socially excluded young people.

The Black Army has frequently adopted a reactive and defensive posture not unlike that taken by young Protestant working-class soccer fans in Northern Ireland. It is an independent supporters' organisation that until recently has maintained close informal links with the club's administration. It was founded in 1981 but attracted little interest until the 1990s. It began as a gang of mates and graduated to the status of a club within a club involving thousands of young people from all over Sweden. At its peak, in 1991-2, it had as many as 3,500 members, the overwhelming majority of whom were young men who travelled to away games in large numbers, offered greater vocal support than would be customary for soccer fans in Sweden and acquired the status of 'folk devils' in a country that prides itself on the restrained and law-abiding behaviour of its citizens (Bairner, 1994; Sännås, 1998; Tamas & Blombäck, 1993; Tamas & Blombäck, 1995). According to Andersson and Radmann (1998b:122), 'in many ways the Black Army has been unique in Swedish fan culture'.

AIK play their home games at the Råsunda Stadium. There the Black Army gathers on the North Bank once a standing area of the ground but now all-seated like the rest of the stadium. The initial spatial attachment of Black Army members is to their part of the ground rather than to Råsunda as a whole. This is where the true fans congregate. When the Black Army sings and chants and there is no involvement from other sections of the stadium, Black Army members jeer their own fellow AIK fans. One Black Army song even mourns the demise of 'Norra Stå', the pre-seated terraces of the North Bank (Sännås, 1998: 113). Similar observations can be made of the more vocal elements in the Linfield support. It is they who lead the sectarian chants and singing. By no means everyone in the stadium joins in. On the other hand, by their actions and words, those on the Kop or in Section F establish a form of hegemonic masculinity that is difficult to resist, particularly for young men in the same age group as the hardcore fans (Bairner, 1997, 1999). Tattoos are also a feature of the hegemonic masculinity at both grounds as are expressions of hatred towards Catholics, at Windsor Park, and towards rival fans, particularly those of IFK Göteborg, at Råsunda.

Råsunda resembles Windsor Park in as much as it is home to the national team as well as to a club side. But the similarities do not end there. Råsunda is located in Solna, a municipality situated to the north of Sweden's capital city, Stockholm. The overwhelming majority of AIK fans come from the north of the city, an area which in recent years has also become home to many immigrants. As a result, there is a similar sense as that which affects Linfield fans that the area in which their club's ground is situated has been invaded. Of course, the stadium itself is also 'invaded' from time to time by the supporters of clubs from other parts of the city and from elsewhere in Sweden. For many years, a wall outside the underground station closest to Råsunda was adorned with the words – 'Nu kan ni börja att springa' ('Now you can start to run'). This was a

warning to unwelcome visitors akin to the 'Taigs Keep Out' slogan at Windsor Park in Belfast. Moreover, like it, the message possessed a symbolic importance which went far beyond the confines of soccer rivalries. For example, despite attempts by Black Army officials and others to encourage cross-cultural reconciliation centred around shared support for AIK, many Black Army members have expressed extreme right-wing political views and are particularly hostile towards Sweden's large immigrant population. Immigrants, like Catholics at Windsor Park, are unwelcome, unless they happen to be playing for AIK in which case they are accorded the status of sharing a collective identity. Ironically immigrants can also acquire immunity by joining the Black Army itself. Otherwise, they are being warned that they should be prepared to run.

At times, of course, the 'invasion' is of a relatively benign type in that Swedes from throughout the country come to Råsunda to support the national team. Yet even this can be resented by AIK fans. As one leading member of the Black Army put it, 'I don't want to go to Råsunda for international matches and see our beloved North Bank taken over by farmers'. Again there are echoes of what happens at Windsor Park, although given Linfield's role as a quasi-national side, in terms of a unionist sense of the nation, the Black Army's hostility towards those whom they regard as farmers and peasants almost certainly exceeds any similar disposition on the part of Linfield fans to Northern Ireland supporters from outside Belfast. Even in this case, however, the hostility is somewhat mitigated by the fact that AIK fans, like their Linfield counterparts, have a tendency to see their club as being more truly representative of the nation than national teams that include players of questionable pedigree and can be supported by anyone who is a member of the civic nation. This may help to explain why branches of the Black Army have existed in towns throughout Sweden and not merely in Stockholm alone.

Similar observations have been made about football in Argentina where, according to Eduardo Archetti (1999: 9), the nation and the capital city have been conflated because 'Buenos Aires football was almost by definition national football'. In the past, people from outside Stockholm who had come to live in the capital city retained their provincial football loyalties and went to Råsunda to support AIK's opponents. With the emergence of the Black Army, however, came an entirely different phenomenon. Unlike the fan clubs of the other Stockholm clubs, the Black Army has consistently attracted members from the provinces. According to Andersson and Radmann (1998b: 123), 'the Black Army gives youths who live outside the major cities an opportunity to identify with elements of big city culture which is so appealing to a section of young people belonging to a certain age group'.

There is also one major difference in terms of territorial identification between Linfield fans and the Black Army. AIK is a Stockholm club just as Linfield is a Belfast club. Whilst the latter plays in Belfast, however, the

Råsunda Stadium is situated not in Stockholm itself but in an adjoining municipality. The station that serves Råsunda is part of the Stockholm underground system. But Solna is not Stockholm. Furthermore, whilst many members of the Black Army live in Solna, there is nevertheless widespread resentment of the fact that, in the foreign press in particular, their team is often described as AIK Solna as opposed to AIK Stockholm or better still simply AIK. There is a feeling that Solna itself as a political entity has done little to identify with the football team since it moved there from central Stockholm in 1937 and that it does not deserve to be so clearly associated with it. The territorial attachment of the Black Army to a Stockholm club and a Stockholm stadium, thus, involves an even greater degree of imagination than that which ties Linfield fans to an imagined Ulster. Unlike, Hammarby and Djurgården, AIK is not a Stockholm club in real spatial terms. In the eyes of its fans, however, it is the quintessential Stockholm club with a history that inextricably links it to the Swedish capital. In terms of the imagined community moreover it is also the Swedish club *par excellence*.

There are other clear differences in the way working-class Protestant soccer fans in Northern Ireland and Black Army members articulate their attachment to club, country and place. One would expect this given the very real political and social differences between the two societies involved. For example, there is far less evidence in Stockholm than in Belfast of tightly knit forms of segmental bonding commonly associated with football hooliganism (Bairner, 1999). Rather the Swedish capital is characterised by what Eric Dunning (1999: 151) has called 'the more fluid, open and impersonal forms of bonding which, although these contain highly segmented pockets, predominate in larger cities such as London'. Nevertheless, there are also similarities in that both sets of soccer fans are seeking to defend particular places together with the political meaning attached to them. In Northern Ireland, the fans are protecting Protestant places, Windsor Park, for example, but also the imagined Ulster community. In Sweden, the Black Army have been described as 'the last Swedes' in recognition of their self-appointed role as guardians of the Swedish people in the face of the encroachments of a global culture, immigration and European Union policies (Tamas & Blombäck, 1995). A useful comparison can be made here with those Linfield fans who describe themselves as 'the Billy Boys' or 'the sons of William' in honour of the royal victor, William III, who won the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 that confirmed the establishment of a Protestant monarchy in Britain and Ireland. Linfield fans regard themselves as defenders of that tradition just as the Black Army would claim to remain true to their nation's past. Thus, the North Bank, where they congregate must be defended and then Råsunda as a whole. Ultimately, however, it is also a particular vision of Sweden that is being kept alive.

Within both sets of supporters, it has been possible to identify sub groups, Section F at Linfield for example and Firman ('The Firm'), Rodents Motorcycle Club¹ and Solnas Vita Bröder ('Solna's White Brothers') (Sännås, 1998). The latter, together with Skinheads who have been a feature of support at both Windsor Park and Råsunda, have tended to intensify the extreme right ideological element within the world view of the two sets of fans. At Windsor, their attempts have only been partially successful, having been crowded out of the available ideological space by ideas more closely linked to the parental culture of Ulster loyalism (Bairner, 1997). In the case of the Black Army, extreme right racist attitudes have found more accommodating terrain although, given the presence of immigrants in the team and also in the Black Army itself, an imagined all-white community is invoked as a means of disguising the unpleasant reality of multiculturalism.

Both sets of fans are keen to highlight their historical continuity. They could express their cultural resistance by joining right-wing political organisations and some, of course, do so. Most, however, favour the greater respectability of expressing their opposition to developments in their respective societies by following soccer clubs that are firmly rooted in the history of their imagined communities. Even the motto used by the Black Army – 'Må de hata oss, blott de frukta oss' ('You can hate us but you must also fear us') – was employed in the first instance in the 1920s as a response from perfectly respectable fans to those who disliked AIK's success and capital city status. In the mouths and publications of the Black Army, of course, a phrase originally used more or less in fun assumes a more sinister tone. Nevertheless, history and tradition matter to the Black Army just as much as they do to Linfield fans. For example, regardless of their status as social outcasts, members are eager to point out that the Swedish king is an AIK fan and, by implication, suggest that far from being marginalised, they are proudly linked to national institutions. Even more dramatic evidence of degrees of continuity was provided with recent disclosures that, from 1934 until 1976, the Swedish government authorised widespread sterilisation, at times on clearly racial grounds (Dilke, 1999). Thus, despite attempts by the Swedish media to vilify the Black Army, the racist views of many of its members are less marginal than might commonly be thought. Arguably it is their open expression of racism, rather than the content of what they say, that embarrasses their fellow Sedes. As a senior civil servant observed in a private discussion with one of the authors, 'Scratch the surface of most Stockholmers and you will find views on immigrants which are not so different from those of the Black Army'.

The motives of these separate groups of soccer fans differ in detail but we are writing about comparable people in that they are mainly young working-class men who suffer from or perceive themselves to suffer from relative deprivation. In each case, the blame for their condition has been laid at the feet

of the 'Other', Catholics in Northern Ireland and immigrants in Sweden. In the case of the Black Army, some explanation may be sought in the age-group to which most of these young men and, in some instances young women, belong. Many of the more influential members were born in a Sweden that was about to enter a period of economic and cultural uncertainty after years of complacency founded upon social stability. In a study of Swedish rock group members born in the late 1960s, the authors comment, 'the youths in our bands were born at a turning-point between two main tendencies in late modernity' (Fornäs, Lindberg & Sernhede, 1995: 154). Behind them were the 1950s and 1960s with their comprehensive socialisation process; ahead lay the 1970s and a growth in critical reflection concerning the supposed achievements of civilisation in general and the Swedish model in particular. Out of the resultant cultural maelstrom emerged a new kind of Swedish urban youth – rebellious, anti-social and reactive. In gangs like the Black Army they find new meaning in their lives. 'In school and in their working lives', according to Per-Olof Sännås (1998: 5), 'they have few opportunities to strengthen their self esteem and secure an identity for themselves'. Yet, 'through their actions on the terraces, they acquire social rewards by way of the gang's own ladder of success' (Sännås, 1998: 5).

Supporting particular soccer teams allows these fans to express their opposition to rival identities whilst celebrating their own. The places where they engage in these activities thus become quasi-religious sites, important in their own right but also as metaphors for the political territory which is regarded as being in need of defence (Bale, 1993). These stadia are, therefore, of vital importance in the production of certain identities and in the process of cultural resistance.

It is clear too that as football has been subjected to ever increasing commodification, the type of fans who engage in the forms of reactive cultural resistance discussed in the paper become increasingly embarrassing for the teams involved. As Sännås (1998: 94) comments, 'for AIK the Black Army has always been synonymous with problems'. Indeed, relations between the club and the Black Army have been strained since the outset and reached a new low in 1998-9 with all contact between the two severed. According to Sännås (1998: 5), 'for the boys and girls in the Black Army AIK is everything'. Increasingly, however, an impression grew within the club that, for some of its members at least, the Black Army and its socio-cultural representation had become more important than AIK itself. As a result, the organisational separation that had always seemed likely became a reality.

Whilst Linfield has had fewer problems with its fans than AIK, the IFA certainly has difficulties with those supporters who insist on singing loyalist songs at international matches. Despite repeated warnings, the practice continues creating public relations problems at best and deep hurt and alienation amongst the nationalist community at worst. As fans of this sort are

marginalised, however, the resentments that are already at the root of their behaviour are simply multiplied. If these cannot be expressed freely in those places that they hold dear, they are all the more likely to take their grievances elsewhere arguably with even more damaging consequences.

Conclusion

This article demonstrates the complexity of the relationship between soccer support and identity formation. It does so by emphasising the importance of place to soccer fans. In part, of course, this simply involves an affection for a stadium where their team plays and it should not be forgotten that many of the fans involved would regard their devotion to a particular club as the single most important element of their identity. It has been argued, however, that the love of a real place, the soccer stadium, is also linked to the construction of and loyalty to an imagined place, namely the nation as understood by the fans involved. By revealing this link not only as it operates in the divided society of Northern Ireland but also in the far more consensual environment of Sweden, we also argued generally about the relationship between sport and the formation of reactive, perhaps even reactionary, identities as a feature of cultural resistance. The soccer fans under discussion feel themselves to be threatened by variety of economic and social processes that are beyond their control. In most instances, there is also a sense in which their manliness is subconsciously perceived as being challenged and, as Alan Petersen (1998: 131) suggests, ‘as we enter a new millennium, it is timely to reflect upon the normative ideals of masculine identity that have so strongly shaped twentieth-century culture and to consider what might be done to encourage new ways of being’. Meanwhile, young men like those discussed in this article gather together in those spaces where they still feel safe and believe themselves to be able to exercise a degree of authority in terms of who is allowed to follow the team and what sort of ambience should surround matches. Those spaces, the stadia, in turn become metaphors for the imagined nation which must also be defended against internal subversion and foreign encroachment. In this way, the ‘Collective Self is transformed from a group of soccer fans into ‘the people’ and supporting a team becomes a perceived part of a broader movement of cultural resistance against threats to ‘the people’ and all of its cherished places. The most striking conclusion of this paper is that such transformations are by no means peculiar to deeply divided societies and can occur wherever there are degrees of social dislocation accompanied by crises of identity.

NOTES:

1. Gnaget (or the Rodent) is a nickname and symbol for AK which has been increasingly appropriated by the Black Army.

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