

Book Reviews

Sport and Identity

Jeremy MacClancy (ed.), *Sport, Identity and Ethnicity*. Oxford, Berg, 1996. pp. 203. Notes, illustrations, bibliography, index. (paper) £14.99.

John Sugden and Alan Bairner (eds.), *Sport in Divided Societies*. Aachen, Meyer & Meyer Sport, 1999. pp. 234. Notes, bibliography. (paper) £12.95.

Maurice Roche (ed.), *Sport, Popular Culture and Identity*. Aachen, Meyer & Meyer Sport, 1998. pp. 224. Notes, bibliography. (paper) £12.95.

These books explore the broad area of sport and identity formation, although they investigate the phenomenon from different viewpoints and perspectives. *Sport, Identity and Ethnicity* is an anthropology of sport; *Sport in Divided Societies* concentrates on the socio-political aspect of sport in 'divided' societies; *Sport, Popular Culture and Identity* employs a range of approaches (sport studies, media studies, leisure studies) to explain the interconnections between sport, culture and identity. The latter two are part of a series produced by the Chelsea School Research Centre, University of Brighton.

MacClancy believes that by studying their sports, and the meanings attached to them, we can learn much about the production and reproduction of community identities. His collection includes interesting essays on Afghan buzkashi, Pakistani polo, Venetian regattas, cricket among British Pakistanis, Basque football, and African soccer. Although the ethnographic method is a strength of the book, MacClancy's failure to spell out precise objectives, and how each of the contributions fit into broader questions and themes about sport, ethnicity and identity, effectively leaves readers to fend for themselves. In contrast, the two books from the Chelsea School contain more structured introductory chapters. These inform readers about the objectives of the respective books and the contributions of each chapter. Notwithstanding Roche's penchant for jargon, which most undergraduates will find off-putting, *Sport, Popular Culture and Identity* offers the most comprehensive introductory chapter of the three books. Readers of *Sport, Identity and Ethnicity* would also have profited from a chapter analysing the role of the media in identity formation and another discussing gender and identity. The fact that MacClancy explores both these themes at length in his introduction suggests he is well aware of this problem.

The essays in *Sport in Divided Societies* examine a number of politically divided societies and the role of sport therein. Three questions frame the analysis: to what extent does the social organisation of sport reflect political divisions in a given society?, how does sport contribute to political divisions in society?, and can sport play a role in transcending political division? Case studies include Germany and Yemen (as examples of recent political unification), Belgium, Spain, Switzerland and India (as examples of societies

where social divisions are permitted and managed through constitutional arrangements), and Northern Ireland and Quebec (where social and political groups question the legitimacy of current political institutions). Georgia and South Africa are also discussed as examples of societies in the throes of massive political change. Importantly, the authors note that while sport has successfully defused some tensions and brought rival communities together, it has also reinforced and exacerbated divisions. In general, most of the contributors meet the editors' objective of analysing how 'political division manifests itself and becomes implicated in the sports process' (p. 4).

Applying a cultural studies approach to explore sport as a form of popular culture, the essays in Roche's collection focus on the roles of power, politics and policy in the construction of social identities. The book is divided into three parts. Part One analyses sport as a form of media culture and explores the relationship between the media and different football codes at local, national and international levels. Most of the examples come from the United Kingdom and Europe. According to Roche, the precise locations at which sport is played and watched are critical in determining contemporary sport (player and spectator) cultures and in creating local and urban identities. Thus Part Two analyses sporting events and local sport policy as integral aspects of urban political culture. Examples include the politics associated with the promotion of hallmark sports events, such as the Sydney 2000 Olympics, and how these politics and policies combine to shape international images of host cities and local identities. Part Three illustrates how different approaches can be applied to the analysis of the relationships between sport and collective identity. For example, critical sociology offers insights into community identification with soccer in Northern Ireland and South Africa, legal studies illustrates changes in the regulation of British soccer and cricket, and socio-cultural history shows how rugby developed in France.

In conclusion, the essays in MacClancy's readable and interesting collection demonstrate that sport is not only a *reflection of society*, but is also a major mode of expression, thus making it a means of *reflecting on society* (p. 4). MacClancy stresses the importance of power in this context: 'sport and sporting events cannot be comprehended without reference to relations of power' (p. 5). Here MacClancy echoes Sugden and Bairner in noting that sport is an instrument that kindles social conflict as well as nurturing social harmony. The different approaches adopted by these three books make them important contributions to the literature. A thorough reading of all three is recommended for those seeking to fully understand the significance of sport in a wider social context.

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