

Common Ground? Links Between Sports History, Sports Geography and the Sociology of Sport¹

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Writing in 1977, Johan Goudsblom, the Dutch sociologist observed that 'the divorce of history and sociology is detrimental to both: it makes historians needlessly allergic to the very idea of structures, and sociologists afraid of dealing with single events'.² This observation, and several others that process oriented sociologists have made regarding historical sociology, informs the analysis contained in this article. My task is to explore the potential or actual common ground that exists between sports history and the sociology of sport. Rather than arguing for a 'dialogue' between these two disciplines, a more radical approach will be suggested—one which is perhaps too much for some established groups—that of reconceptualising these sub-disciplines and arguing for, at the very least, the co-ordination of their efforts and possibly their fusion. I would go further and include the geography of sport in this conceptual realignment. The study of sports labour migration that John Bale and I conducted is illustrative of what can be achieved.³ Throughout this article terms will be used such as historical sociology, process sociology, developmental history, time geography or geographical history to denote the kind of synthesis which is proposed.

I am aware that such a fusion, however conceived and implemented, is no easy matter. The problems loom large in my own work when I try to understand sportisation processes as part of globalisation.⁴ In looking again at the current perception that exponents of these disciplines have of their own and others' crafts, missions and directions a somewhat mixed picture emerged. The process of fusion may well itself be part of a long term process, which is only at a very early stage of consideration. Though the project sketched in this article is ambitious, the chances of it being implemented in the near future are relatively slight. Making the case is still worthwhile.

In the sociology of sport—and especially in its so-called 'critical tradition—the deployment of an historical perspective is nowadays an

almost 'taken-for-granted' assumption. Scholars of various shades genuflect at the altar of C Wright Mills. Now this is all well and good. As some historians have acidly pointed out, however, not all sociologists do even this. Of those who do proclaim the virtues of a time perspective, some conduct their enquiries through secondary sources and rely upon the output and beaver-like qualities of antiquarians and sports historians. Little wonder, then, that sports historians view such efforts with disdain and as carrying little prestige in the academy. Nor does this output threaten or usurp the role of historians. One should point out, however, that sociologists who pursue this strategy would also have incurred the wrath of C Wright Mills.⁵ For while Mills suggested that every social study required an historical scope of conception and a full use of historical materials, his approach was sceptical of both grand theory and abstract empiricism. Just as history has no privileged access to empirical evidence, sociology has no privileged access to theory. Both theory and evidence are ongoing interdependent features of historical sociology.

While there is some force of dovetailing theory with evidence accumulation, it is also necessary to suggest that some good synthesising work can and has been produced by such a strategy. There are different forms of enquiry and various forms of knowledge that have contributed to the development of more adequate understanding of the growth of global sport. Yet, looking again at how the sociological and historical combatants view each other it appears that some historians are fairly dismissive. When will these sociologists of sport get their hands dirty in the dust of primary data?

Not surprisingly, if mainstream sociology is considered, similar trends are evident. Giddens, Wallerstein and Elias have, in their own ways, called for a realignment of the subject matter of sociology. Wallerstein, current President of the International Sociology Association, has recently called for the next World Congress of Sociology to focus on 'the relations of sociology and history, both as heritage and as prospect'. Again, such thinking has gained more favour during the 1980s and 1990s. Writers such as Philip Abrams, Christopher Lloyd and Theda Skocpol have been powerful advocates of what has been termed 'historical sociology'.⁶ Abrams, for example has cogently expressed what is at stake when he observed:

In my understanding of history and sociology, there can be no relationship between them because in terms of their

fundamental pre-occupations, history and sociology are and always have been the same thing. Both seek to understand the puzzle of human agency and both seek to do so in terms of the process of social structuring.⁷

This type of thinking is also central to research being carried out by Eric Dunning and his colleagues within the Centre for Research into Sport and Society at the University of Leicester, England. In the early 1990s, Dennis Smith among others, has provided a long overdue synthesis of material and vindication of historical sociology.⁸ 'Grand historical sociology' of this kind returns to some of the pre-occupations of Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Spencer and Simmel. Yet, with the now more fashionable recourse to post-modern thinking, such 'grand narrative' is seen as belonging to the false promise of the age of the Enlightenment. In return we are offered a Pol Pot type ground zero view of social development, where the past does not matter and where the future lies in cyberspace and hyperreality.

Ironically, one of the more recent critiques of attempts to develop common ground between history and sociology has come not from a post-modernist informed by some impenetrable European theoretical jargon, but by a sociologist, originally trained as a historian but reared in the 'empirical' tradition in British social science. Challenging what he perceives as the current orthodoxy, John Goldthorpe, in a 'blast from the past', waylaid advocates of historical sociology. Writing in the *British Journal of Sociology* in a language and with a type of logic that would no doubt raise the hackles of some historians, Goldthorpe dismissed the knowledge claims of historical research. Historians, he argued, have to 'rely on the relics of the past'. Sociologists have a distinct advantage in that 'they have the considerable privilege of being able to generate evidence in the present'.⁹ The issue of the knowledge claims of these disciplines will be discussed in more detail at a later point.

The somewhat dismissive attitude exhibited by Goldthorpe is not confined to empiricist sociologists. Yet, as several sports historians have observed, their discipline has itself become more social, if not sociologically inclined.¹⁰ Marxist and feminist historians have advocated various forms of social history. Notwithstanding Thompson's strictures about the poverty of theory, he, along with Williams and Hobsbawm, have been a source of inspiration to social and sports historians alike. Examine the work of Bailey and Storch in the leisure area, and Hardy

and Holt in historical studies of sport, and this influence is evident. In the latter case, Richard Holt has called for 'dialogue and greater interplay' between sports historians and sociologists of sport.¹¹ Laudable though such comments are, sociologists cannot help observing that his theoretical discussion was itself tucked away in an appendix to his otherwise splendid *Sport and the British*.¹² This call for dialogue is itself nothing new. Peter McIntosh made a similar if somewhat narrower observation when he argued that 'the understanding of human behaviour may be illuminated if, [from] time to time, the historian makes use of sociological concepts and the sociologist tests his (*sic*) theories and hypotheses against historical data'.¹³ Given that his discussion of sociological concepts focused exclusively on functionalist ones, perhaps it is less surprising that McIntosh could not see that something more radical was possible.

Yet, just as there are some who reject such overtures in sociology, so too can their counterparts be found in sports history circles. Some historians wish to place a great deal of distance between the two academic areas. Such thinking, however, overlooks the contribution that mainstream historians have made to this debate. William H McNeill, the eminent American historian, has made several calls for a type of process thinking to inform historical research. In the mid 1980s McNeill remarked, 'only by accepting and then acting on a theory of social process can historians expect to have a criterion of relevance to guide them amidst the confusing plethora of data potentially available to their researches'.¹⁴ In addition, the distinguished French historian Roger Chartier has recently made an imaginative appeal for what he terms 'cultural history'. Drawing extensively on the work of sociologists such as Elias, Chartier also notes that the rift between history and sociology while 'formulated in terms of conceptual and methodological differences', are also 'embodied in struggles for predominance, both between and inside the disciplines and in the intellectual sphere in general'.¹⁵ As Giddens observed in his work, *Central Problems in Social Theory*, 'there simply are no logical or even methodological distinctions between the social sciences and history—appropriately conceived'.¹⁶

Clearly then, this relationship and potential common ground between both history and sociology, and their sub-disciplines, can be either a source of constructive dialogue or of disdain and denigration. In probing the potential common ground several methodological and conceptual issues require consideration. In the final section the argument

for synthesis will be made more fully in a case study where the common ground will be highlighted.

Forms of Historical—Process Sociology

It is useful initially to draw a distinction between two basic types of historical sociology. Although the distinction is not totally fixed, it is possible to identify a type of historical sociological tradition that involves a sociology of the past and another type that seeks to discern and explain longer-term structured processes of development.¹⁷ A sociology of the past employs sociological concepts to investigate groups of people living in some specific culture at a period in the past. It can be conducted by what is known currently as historians or by sociologists. It is not simply that sociological concepts are used to make better sense of the past. Empirically based studies of the present can also aid a more adequate grasp of specific processes at an earlier point in time. Here, as Stephen Mennell has pointed out, we might use Cohen's study of *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*¹⁸ to help make sense of witch crazes in the seventeenth century.¹⁹ This type of historical sociology can take various forms, the Annales school can be considered representative of this. The work of Braudel, in examining the unfolding development of the societies and cultures of the Mediterranean, exemplifies some of these qualities providing a history of the present and a sociology of the past. They are two sides of the same coin. What these types of historical sociology have in common is that both involve the generation of knowledge about specific types of recurring phenomena—irrespective of the time frames involved.

The other type of historical sociology, which can be referred to as developmental history or process sociology, is more interested in the analysis of long-term, sometimes very long-term, structured processes. From this perspective, in order to understand present social structures and patterns of action, an understanding of the past is not only desirable, it is a necessity. Such an approach would facilitate an analysis of how the present is connected to the past and how exponents of these disciplines need to examine the structured processes within which sport development has occurred. One of the hallmarks of research informed by such a developmental perspective therefore is the extent to which the researcher stresses the ways, and the extent, in which the relation of action and structure is to be understood as a matter of process in time and space. By

seizing on this idea 'geography, 'history and 'sociology' merge and the researcher becomes more capable of answering questions about why the world has become what it is.

Academic rivalries both within and between these disciplines have seen to it that the adoption of process thinking has been slower than is desirable. In addition, our conceptual apparatus is attuned to permanence not structured change. Much sociological thinking is informed by a deeply rooted tendency towards today-centred thinking. For its part historical thinking is permeated by an aversion to structures and theoretical thinking. Until relatively recently, a similar position held sway in the geography of sport.²⁰ One consequence which follows from this situation has been the retreat of sociologists to the present and the abandonment of a long-term perspective. Another consequence is that many historians stress the uniqueness and individuality of historical events. Equally geographers of sport have been, until recently, more concerned with tracing here-and-now patterns and indulging in cartographic fetishism. They have overlooked the study of structured processes and have avoided probing how people have interpreted the enabling and constraining dimensions of the places and spaces in which they live out their lives.²¹

Even in small scale, short-term social situations involving the teasing out of developmental and comparative processes is arguably a more adequate way of discovering the relationship between structure and action. The study of the sports stadium can be understood in such terms.²² When small-scale situations are treated in this way we simply see a 'history' in which ordinary individuals loom larger than usual and in which the detailed interdependence of the personal and the social is accordingly that much more easily seen. In this connection C Wright Mills rightly observed that 'social science deals with problems of biography, of history, and of their intersections within social structures'.²³ More recently Abrams observed in similar vein:

If anything the study of small scale interaction makes the necessarily historical nature of good sociology more rather than less apparent. What B does now can only be explained in terms of its relationship to what A did before in such settings; we have to see it as a moment in a sequence ... Doing justice to the reality of history is not a matter of noting the way in which the past provides a background to the

present; it is a matter of treating what people do in the present as a struggle to create a future out of the past, of seeing that the past is not just the womb of the present but the only raw material out of which the present can be constructed.²⁴

The task that a developmental and comparative perspective sets itself is therefore to discern the specifically historical structuring of action without falling into the trap of separating structure from action or of postulating a theory of history in which the theory is imposed from above. No idea of historical necessity is being advocated here. Simply put, in order for D to occur, C, B and A had to have occurred. This does not mean that D was inevitable.

Studies that are characterised by this type of thinking have several distinguishing hallmarks. A constant interplay between theory and evidence and narrative and analysis is seen as crucial.²⁵ Such research asks questions about structured processes understood to be concretely situated in time and space. In addition, structured processes are examined over time and the tracing of temporal and spatial sequencing is seen as crucial. Furthermore, to make sense of the unfolding of unintended as well as intended outcomes in individual lives and social transformations attention is given to the interplay of meaningful actions and structural contexts. In the development of human societies, yesterday's unintended social consequences of intentional actions are today's unintended social conditions for further intentional actions. Moreover, as Skocpol notes, research, informed by what she terms a historical sociology, is concerned with highlighting the particular and varying features of specific kinds of social structures and patterns of structured change.²⁶ The adoption of a developmental and comparative perspective therefore requires the researcher not only to be able to observe, describe, reconstitute and resurrect but also to be able to judge, interpret, explain and make sense of the sports process. In doing so, the researcher becomes what Elias termed a *Mythenjager*, a hunter and destroyer of myths.

Despite this position, attempts to construct historical sociological models of sport development have taken several different forms. In many cases there is no one specific model or theory that can be attributed to any one author. Several composite ideas stemming from many sources have been expressed in quite different and often contradictory ways by various social theorists and historians who have commented upon the

development of sport. However, implicit within various models of historical sociology are several common concepts and classical questions. How has sport been affected by the historical period in which it is played, watched and organised? What is the relationship between sport, culture and the prevailing social structure? To what extent has sport been shaped by the balance between enabling and constraining structures? To what extent are people free to determine their own sporting experiences? What are the intended and unintended elements in various social transformations and how have these changes affected sporting choices? What parts do processes of resistance, contestation and simple voluntary adaptation play in the adoption of modern sporting forms and their diffusion on a global scale? These and many other questions indicate the potential richness and common ground that may be found in any historical sociological study which takes as its main focus the structured development of sport in society. Several key issues and questions have to be addressed by would-be advocates of it in sports history, geography and sociology.

Doing Historical Sociology: Issues, Questions and Problems

If the fundamental preoccupations of these academic specialisms are the same, it follows that these subjects need to be conceived of as one and the same thing. 'Historians' have no privileged access to empirical evidence about the past and 'geographers' have no unique claim on place-space dimensions relevant to the common explanatory project. Equally, 'sociologists' have no privileged access to theory or the contemporary world in order to apprehend evidence regarding how the present has unfolded from the past. 'Sociology must be concerned with eventuation because that is how structuring happens. 'History' must be theoretical because that is how structuring is apprehended. 'Geography' must be conceptually and temporally oriented because that is how movement in space occurs and can be understood. Ogborn, in a set of papers dedicated to *Reconceptualising Social and Cultural Geography*, turned to the work of Elias to promote this type of thinking.²⁷ The adoption of this kind of developmental and comparative perspective signifies the attempt to understand the relationship of personal action and experience on the one hand and social organisation on the other as something that is continuously constructed in time and space. This perspective makes the continuous process of construction the focal concern of social analysis. Goudsblom expresses this differently but the message remains the same:

What happens in the present can only be understood in the context of what has happened in the past. What is happening here can only be understood in the context of the interdependencies with human beings elsewhere.²⁸

Such an observation, however, is itself theoretically laden. How therefore are we to make sense of the interplay between these elements of enquiry?

Theories, Observation and Evidence Accumulation

Both in the formulation and the execution of the research task, the researcher is confronted with the relationship between theory and evidence.²⁹ Simply put, this involves a rejection of both the imposition of ‘grand theory’ onto evidence and ‘abstracted empiricism’ uninformed by theoretical insight.³⁰ Rather, the processes of theory formation and empirical enquiry are seen as interwoven and indivisible. A constant interplay between mental operations directed at theoretical synthesis and at empirical particulars is advocated. This is seen as recognition of the mutual contamination of theory and evidence. As E H Carr noted ‘the historian is engaged in a continuous process of moulding his (*sic*) facts to his interpretation and his interpretation to his facts. It is impossible to assign primacy to one over the other.’³¹ Given this, researchers are committed to a rather agile intellectual life in which they must work on the empirical without dominating it with theory and, at the same time, develop theoretical insights firmly informed by evidence.³² An uninterrupted two-way traffic takes place.³³ In seeking to understand the global sports process what is required is both an intellectual detachment from it as well as intimate contact with it. What is required is analytical distance as well as ‘empirical’ access. There is a need to avoid what Thompson has called the ‘poverty of theory’ but also what Elias sees as ‘empty empiricism’.

There are some in the sports history community, however, who maintain an aversion to theory, believing that their plundering of archives is untainted by a priori assumptions. Their task, or so it is maintained, is to determine the veracity of the sources not of their own interpretation. Not for them the theoretical jargon of sociologists. Yet, as Abrams remarked in *Past and Present*, ‘narrative has lost its old innocence. It is less and less likely to be offered as merely the record of what happened.’³⁴ In one sense this should not surprise historians. One cannot have been listening to feminist scholars in the humanities and social sciences over

the past decade if one still clings to the belief of empirical absolutism. This argument is in fact nothing new.

E H Carr argued against such a position when he contended that 'it used to be said that facts speak for themselves. This is, of course, untrue. The facts speak only when the historian calls on them.'³⁵ Carr was arguing that history means interpretation and interpretation relies on assumptions, implicitly held or explicitly stated. The gathering of data then depends on the social location of the 'historian' and the conceptual and methodological tools used. Eric Dunning has observed that 'historians cannot escape the language and concerns of the age in which they live'.³⁶ But developmental history or process sociology is not seeking to go down the false trail of relativism. Formulating the problem as an either/or between historical absolutism and historical relativism is not the answer. Neither will the sterile debate between objectivity and subjectivity help much either. Here discussion of the interweaving of involvement and detachment on the part of geographers, historians and sociologists is required.

Involvement and Detachment

In conducting an enquiry in which the theoretical and empirical modes are indivisible it is essential to come to terms with the fact that the research act is also dependent upon the qualities of 'involvement' and 'detachment'.³⁷ These concepts are 'complementary indicators of the direction of knowledge processes'.³⁸ Involvement and detachment, which are central to the account of the development of knowledge, highlight differences in the relationship and development of magico-mythical and reality-congruent knowledge and the ways in which human beings regulate themselves. What does this entail? The hallmark of scientific enquiry is arguably an attitude of detachment. In the study of physical and biological phenomena, communities of natural scientists have, over time, developed methods of professional and personal restraint that hold their fantasies, wishes and feelings in check. In the context of continuing struggle, some natural scientists have been, relatively speaking, able to consider problems relevant to all human beings and human groups and not simply to satisfy the whims of particular interest groups.³⁹ This quality of detachment from the routine of everyday occurrences is also required of socio-historical geographers in order for them to become aware of how long-term developments affect daily

occurrences.⁴⁰ The difficulties that researchers face in this attempt, however, centre on the relative lack of emancipation from interest groups and that, unlike natural scientists, they are much more closely involved in—even being part of—what they study. This requires a brief elaboration.

The task that this approach sets itself is to explore and to make understandable the patterns they form together and the nature of the relations that bind them to each other. The investigator is, of course, part of these patterns. As such it is more difficult for a researcher to perform the mental operation of detaching himself or herself from the role of immediate participant and from the limited vista that it offers. It is not a question of discarding an involved position for a completely detached role. As social actors, researchers cannot cease to take part. In fact, their very participation and involvement is itself one of the conditions for comprehending the problem they try to solve as scientists. Unlike the natural scientist who, in studying the behaviour of enzymes or galaxies, does not have to know what it feels like to be one of its constituent parts, developmental historians must, if they are to understand the interdependencies that bind people together, probe from the inside how human beings experience such an existence.⁴¹ They must, therefore, be both relatively involved and detached to grasp the basic experience of social life. It is a question of balance. The process sociologist as participant must be able to stand back and become the developmental historian as observer and interpreter. What guidelines can be offered in this regard?

Adoption of a long-term, developmental perspective has already been mentioned. More highly involved approaches tend to have a short-term time frame. More detached thinking demands a greater capacity for distancing oneself for a while from the situation of the moment.⁴² This ability to adopt a long-term perspective in sociology has declined not increased. For Elias, the twentieth century has witnessed the narrowing of the focus of interest among sociologists. The involvement-detachment balance has shifted in favour of both the fears and imaginings of one's own involvement and the tendency towards short-term 'today-centred' thinking. Relevancy to the short-term concerns of policy makers has its place but so too does the scope of the enquiry. Better to emphasise the image of the researcher as *Mythenjager*.

Avoiding seeing today's world as timeless and immutable also relates to the need to think about and express one's research findings

processually.⁴³ Use of static, non-relational concepts and words betrays a lack of emancipation on the part of the geographer, historian or sociologist. Avoid then *Zustandsreduction* or process reduction, that is, reducing processes to states. The use of personal pronouns assists in this regard and can be employed to better represent the elementary set of coordinates with which human groupings or societies can be plotted out.⁴⁴ In addition, the time-space researcher must place him or herself in the position of what Elias terms 'not knowing'.⁴⁵ The emergence of this ability in the development of the natural sciences was a manifestation of a complementary change in the personality structure of people. To make this effort of detachment also implied an increase in the human capacity for observing nature, for exploring its structured processes for their own sake. No less a capacity is required in the study of human interdependence. This process of self-distancing arguably also entails the use of particular types of questions and the adoption of particular styles of writing.

Reality Congruence and the Adequacy of Evidence

Reality congruence and adequate evidence accumulation are elusive quarries. Peter Burke, in his study of popular culture in early modern Europe, made exactly this point. Commentating on the difficulties involved he observed:

We want to know about performances, but what have survived are texts; we want to see these performances through the eyes of the craftsmen and peasants themselves, but we are forced to see them through the eyes of literate outsiders. It is hardly surprising that historians think it impossible to discover what popular culture was like in this period.⁴⁶

Weaknesses in existing research may stem therefore not only from a distorted conception of the making of social, geographical and historical processes, but may also be a function of the source material used or of the interpretation adopted. Knowledge can be gained by a variety of methods but this process is guided by the interwoven issues of observation and theory formation and involvement and detachment already discussed. With documentary evidence there is a need to question its status and the ability of researchers to establish 'how it really was'.⁴⁷ In attempting to trace how, for example, later social formations arose out of earlier ones the researcher is confronted with a number of problems.

Archival silence, by which a direct record of the activities and perceptions of specific individuals or groups is absent, should not be taken as indicating that a particular group did not have its part to play in the unfolding process under examination. Equally, neither is there such a thing as an innocent text. Nor do the facts simply speak for themselves. Whereas, perforce, analyses have to view the past through the 'narrow' and 'misty lens' of what particular writers thought and felt, the researcher is still able to assess how blurred the image actually is. In some respects, the task is to subvert or escape from the ways of thinking and feeling in which the documents were conceived and the aim is to provide an account that is more adequate and more consistent, both internally and in relation to other areas of knowledge, compared to previous accounts.⁴⁸

This task of uncovering the past and how it connects to the present may be beyond the scope of an individual working in heroic isolation. Perhaps the image of the medieval scholar needs to be dropped. Braudel, of all historians, was forced to acknowledge the scale of the problems involved. Writing in *The Mediterranean*, he observed:

Perhaps the day will come when we shall no longer be working on the great sites of history with the methods of small craftsmen. Perhaps on that day it will be possible to write general history from original documents and not from more or less secondary works. Need I confess that I have not been able to examine all of the documents available to me in the archives, no matter how hard I tried. This book is the result of a necessarily incomplete study.⁴⁹

Given these problems, perhaps the common ground advocated here will also involve working together in a common endeavour as groups of researchers? Which ever way the endeavour is conducted, an assessment of the relative adequacy of evidence is required. This is, in part, dependent on establishing the precise pattern of interdependency between established and outsider groups. Central in this regard is the balance of power between them. Hence the analysis should focus on the level of participation by the observers of the events in question, and on the pattern of tension and conflict evident in the relationship between observers and observed. The forms of distortion that permeate evidence are dependent on particular circumstances. The 'insider's' account will give you, sometimes inadvertently, the minutiae and emotional resonance of what you seek to examine: the 'outsider's' account is likely to give

you a more detached view but may be distorted as a result of, for example, class or gender bias or lack of detailed knowledge. An analysis, therefore, ideally needs both but when one cannot get them, *verstehen* analysis based on the relative positions of groups and a more detached knowledge of the balance of power and of tensions within a particular interdependency chain can be used to work out an hypothesis. This applies with respect to both short-term, small scale interaction and more long-term, large scale developments.⁵⁰

Even in these short-term, small-scale social settings the teasing out of the dynamic involved is the best way of discovering the detailed interdependence of the personal and the social. Access to the study of these structured processes can again be attempted by documentary material but can also be combined with a form of participant observation. In studying social life it is necessary to try to place oneself within the world of experience of the various groups of people who make up the interdependency chains in which one is interested. In doing so it is also necessary to adhere to the principles that underpin a comparative and developmental approach. The issues of observation and theory formation and involvement and detachment need to be kept uppermost in the researcher's mind.

Identification with the 'we' perspective of different groups is necessary so the researcher can understand something of the sense in which certain actions are 'meaningful'. At the same time it is necessary to grasp that no matter how sincere, these interpretations can be misleading. Comparison of different 'we' perspectives will help, but the employment of 'they' perspectives which show the interrelationships from a greater distance offers a more adequate view of how the intentions and actions of the various groups are interlocked.⁵¹ The method of combining participant observation with detailed documentary enquiry can be most rewarding as it can yield immediate knowledge of the local scene as well as insight into how the here and now fits into the more encompassing spatial and long-term developments. Such an approach avoids the withdrawal to the present inherent in some participant observation. All that is required is to see small scale interaction not in isolation, but in the larger context of a network of interdependencies that stretch across time and space.

Historical Sociology: a Problem of Method

The task of historical sociology is not only to generate ‘facts’ by means of substantive research but also to explain the status, selection and interpretation of such ‘facts’ as part of a more general endeavour of enlarging our understanding of the various ways in which individual people are interconnected. This strategy reflects both the issues already identified but also involves the ‘interpretative arranging of the facts’.⁵² To argue this is not to impose some over-arching theory onto the evidence but rather involves researchers attempting to come to terms with the mutual contamination of theory and evidence and to continually probe the adequacy of their findings. In ‘going public’ with their findings, researchers must conduct a dialogue between what Abrams terms the interwoven styles of narrative and theoretical writing.⁵³ The power of research springs from the synthesis achieved in these types of explanations. The actual method employed to make evidence public is dependent on the manner in which the research has been conducted. In attempting to explore structured processes it is necessary to employ different sets of questions. ‘How it happened’ and ‘how it was’ questions enable the probing of the manifold, sequential and cumulative nature of structuring and the capturing of how ‘it really was’. But on their own they are not enough. Questions are needed which enable one to assess the significance of events and to consider their relation to a course or chain of other events.⁵⁴ The emphasis is on the ability of the researcher to judge, interpret, explain and make sense of his or her research matter in a detailed substantive manner.

In this way, the view of social processes in terms *either* of the ‘individual’ *or* of ‘social systems’ is avoided. The use of questions that reflect the interweaving of theory and evidence enables the researcher to consider the structured processes that gave or denied people their opportunity for achievement and fulfilment. For example, as Elias observes,⁵⁵ neither the development of Louis XIV as an individual nor his actions as King can be adequately understood without reference to a sociological model of court society and without knowledge of the development of his social position within its spatial and social structure.⁵⁶ To achieve this, a constant, yet ever-changing, interplay occurs at all levels of the analysis between theoretical insight and empirical particulars. It is not, as noted, a question simply of gathering facts. The task is to trace and analyse the significance which specific events have in time and

their conjunction with other events. In doing so, the research must come to terms with both the particular events that he or she documents and interpret the place which such events have in the phenomena under investigation.

Explaining how the event happened is not sufficient. It is necessary to make clear what sort of event it was at that moment in the network in question. In order to do this, the analysis must deal with the phenomena at three levels. At each of these levels, the prevailing balance of power between and within groups and the pressures and constraints felt by and exercised on these groups must be probed. But these levels, the short-term day-to-day phenomena, that is, 'events', the patterning of action within the flow of such events and the points at which such patterning reinforce and reflect the ongoing structural features of the historical process, must be viewed as interwoven. Explanation turns in equal measure on identifying and describing the actions of and relationships between participants and providing a coherent theorising of the structured processes at work. Adoption of an historical sociology perspective thus denotes a change in the persons' experience of the world in which they live and their own position within it. The call for fusion which has been abstract up to now will be supported with specific examples of good practice.

Case Studies in Historical Sociology: Exploring Football Hooliganism

This particular case study deals with the long term process of football hooliganism in British society. The example proves that Elias was right when he argued that 'like Brisaeus in relation to earth, theoretical thinking retains its force as part of sociological enquiry only as long as it does not lose touch with the terra firma of empirical facts'.⁵⁷ Those fashionable academic voices who believe football hooliganism has gone away should forget style and concentrate on substance.

As part of the research team at Leicester University I began the task of investigating football hooliganism mindful of the dominant ideology surrounding the phenomenon. Simply put this emphasises that football hooliganism is of recent origin, that it is getting worse, that it can be understood by reference solely to changes that have taken place in British society since the early 1960s and that the foundation of the game in the late Victorian period was a 'golden age' untroubled by such

disorder. Those of us involved directly in the historical or developmental part of the hooliganism research, Eric Dunning, Pat Murphy and myself, also knew that there had been preliminary work conducted by historians that demonstrated that disorder had in fact occurred at soccer matches during the 1880s and the 1890s.⁵⁸ The research group was also building on the work of Elias, Brookes, Dunning and Sheard who had conducted various studies of the emergence and diffusion of sport more broadly.

As a group of sociologists concerned with how the present is connected to the past we were concerned to trace the nature and extent of disorder, establish its status as a social problem and note issues of continuity and change over time and, where possible across societies.⁵⁹ Historians such as Wray Vamplew and John Hutchinson had concluded that spectator misconduct was a 'fairly widespread and not infrequent occurrence at matches', while Tony Mason tended to downplay it.⁶⁰ While such work was of undoubted value, this work was found to be deficient in certain respects and we began to formulate a strategy and conduct further research because 'historians' have no privileged access to empirical evidence.

It was discovered that these historians had relied on a specific source (the FA Minutes) to establish the nature and extent of football hooliganism, and had then gone to national newspapers to flesh out these reports. This led to a number of problems: an under-reporting of the extent of the disorder; a portrayal of the range and forms of disorder that reflected the concerns of the FA and not 'how it really was'; and an inability to establish the status of such disorder as a social problem. Using a greater range of source material drawn from a variety of sources, it was established that there were cases of misconduct cited in the FA Minutes that were not cited in the press and vice-versa. In addition, the same held true with regard to local and national press and club records so that a degree of under-reporting was evident in the sources consulted. Further, the FA Minutes were based on reports compiled by referees whose instructions involved reporting incidents that were deemed to have interfered with play. Incidents which did not interfere with play but which were nevertheless reported by the press do not appear in the FA Minutes. These incidents included fights between rival groups of supporters and disorder away from grounds. Further, these historians failed to question the nature of press reporting *per se* in this period. Certainly, use of this source on spectator misconduct demands

of the researcher that they 'make sense' of this dimension. Sociologists would do so with contemporary reporting, we attempted to do so for reporting across time. This is especially true in that we were dealing here with reported disorder not the actual rate.

What of the status of football hooliganism as a social problem: how could this be gauged? Issues of the content, context and tone of reporting needed consideration. This issue was subject to intense debate within sections of the Leicester group. The debate revolved around the extent to which due attention should be given to the social roots and perceptions of spectator misconduct. In this debate it was never seen as an either/or situation, but rather a question of balance and blend between the socio-generating conditions and subjective definitions. An intention here is not to summarise the debate but rather to indicate some aspects of how the status of the phenomenon as a social problem was tackled.

There was clearly a need to establish what kind of events particular reports were referring to. In some instances a report described a specific incident. Useful in itself, such reports added insights into the extent and form of disorder but not its status as a social problem. Other reports cited a specific incident and the writer offered a generalisation on the basis of this. These generalisations provided one of the sources on which the analysis of the status of spectator misconduct could be further refined. Finally, there were also reports which cited a specific case of misconduct, offered a generalisation about spectator misconduct and linked this phenomenon with other social issues of the day.

Crucially press accounts of such disorders came from six main sources. Firstly, they were the result of observations by match reporters or journalists who penned a general column devoted to the 'football scene'. Secondly, stories were relayed to the local press from other local or national contacts in other newspapers. Thirdly, they emerged out of reports on the proceedings of the Football Association's disciplinary committees. Fourthly, they took the form of court proceedings. Fifthly, they came in the form of letters to the editor by citizens who were 'concerned'. Finally, they were located in the editorial columns of the newspaper. In order to 'make sense' of such reports there was a need to employ both existing substantive knowledge and theories about crime, deviance, leisure and working class youth in the period in question. In the same way that Elias had deployed models of court society to make sense of the power of Louis XIV, so, too, there was a need to deploy

models in relation to the issues referred to. Again, the conclusion reached was a product of a dialogue with substantive detail and theory formation. In our judgement spectator misconduct in the late Victorian period was not simply a problem confined to the football authorities, but was linked in the minds of increasingly anxious middle class commentators with what was termed 'the great social problem of the age', the perceived need to control working class leisure. This is not to suggest that the status of spectator misconduct as a social problem was equivalent to the present day phenomenon. The nature and form of press reporting and the stage that the state apparatus had then reached ensured that this was not the case.⁶¹

Other issues included variations in local and national reporting about techniques, styles and insider knowledge. Another problem was that in the period in question we came across no testimony from the accused, though occasionally testimonies from policemen, club officials and players provided insights. No direct testimonies from those involved in spectator misconduct have been uncovered. In the study of popular culture adoption of what Burke has termed an 'oblique approach' is therefore sometimes necessary. The task is to gain insights into the social scene offered inadvertently by 'obvious' and sometimes less obvious sources'. A comment in an unusual source, the *Liverpool Diocesan Review*, a religious magazine published in 1939, demonstrates the potential of this approach. The Bishop of Liverpool offered his own observations on spectator misconduct arguing that the 'limits of decent partisanship' were being over-stepped. The Bishop's phrase highlights several dimensions in assessing the status of the phenomenon as a social problem. Such evidence raises questions as to who decides and by what criteria whether specific forms of behaviour by particular groups in society and across societies and over time are more or less problematic. Answers to such questions arguably require the adoption of the kind of comparative and developmental or historical-sociological perspective outlined in this article.

This case study has attempted to show not only the advantages to be gained by co-ordinating efforts across disciplines but also the common ground that exists between geography, history and sociology, appropriately conceived. To this end, colleagues in the United Kingdom and across Europe have been combining to study the European football championships to be held in England in 1996.

Conclusions

If the approach advocated here became the central concern of the geography, history and sociology of sport, then certain consequences would flow from this decision. Clearly co-ordination and a long term reorientation of the practice of researchers would be required. This may not necessarily mean an end to some forms of specialisation. In addition, some existing areas of research would receive less priority. Other research areas currently considered crucial would be refocussed. Further, research areas that are, at present, neglected by geographers, historians and sociologists would receive greater prominence. My objective has not been an attempt simply to extend the contemporary dialogue between these disciplines, but rather to consider the potential common ground between them. In the long run, however, I would be happy for the speciality of historical sociology to dissolve and allow the premises upon which it rests to permeate all sociological, geographical and historical research on sport. Such hallmarks include the necessity to ask questions about structured processes understood as being concretely situated in time and space; an attempt to make sense of the unintended as well as the intended outcomes of various social transformations; an attention to the meaningful interplay between individuals' lives and structural contexts and the development of a more reality-congruent body of knowledge. In responding to Goldthorpe's critique Joseph Bryant made a similar observation:

Historical social science is a 'grounded' science, in that it proceeds by comprehending the distinctive and essential properties of its object: human agency as mediated by the constitutive contextual frames of historical time and cultural milieu. All methodological considerations should be similarly grounded.⁶²

Developmentally grounded theoretical questions must, then, be the compelling driving force and not an optional extra within the geography, the history or the sociology of sport. The result would be a historically and comparatively grounded subdiscipline of far greater intellectual and practical power than its current incarnation. The pursuit of this goal should not lead one to overlook that paradigmatic rivalries and abstract generalities have tended to obscure the common ground which already exists between many of the so-called competing intellectual traditions of thought on sport. In reviewing research conducted within various

traditions in the historical sociology of sport Jarvie and I observed that more common ground existed than some would have us believe.⁶³ For example, much common ground exists between the figurational and cultural studies research on sport and leisure. Both traditions have a common respect for history, an analysis of power relations at the core of their general frameworks, and a common emphasis on the cultural diversity and richness of social reality. In the same way, a great deal of common ground also exists between various traditions of feminism and Marxism. Furthermore, as the social meanings attached to bodies of work change over time, new forms of reconciliations between bodies of knowledge might be possible. While differences continue to exist, and different scholars compete for scarce resources, exponents of various traditions need no longer view each other as anathema. Neither should geographers, historians or sociologists. Perhaps we should heed the words of a less fashionable sociologist, Emile Durkheim when he observed in 1896:

Developing historians who know to look at historical data as sociologists, or what amounts to the same thing, developing sociologists who possess all the techniques of the historians, is the objective we must pursue on both sides.⁶⁴

Given that structured processes occur across time and space, it would be useful for geographers to be involved in this common pursuit. In this way, we may in the next millennium be able to build on our common heritage but also stake out a common future.

Notes

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