Exploraciones/Explorations

The Meaning of Sport in Anthropology:
A View from Latin America

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In explaining social and cultural processes, the position of critical intellectuals, professional historians and social scientists, with some exceptions, has been a difficult one in relation to the role of sports (see Arben 1988 and Mason 1995). Anthropology, my discipline, is no exception. Theory production in anthropology has been characterized by the absence of sport as a field of analysis for understanding rituals, complex processes of identity construction, rites de passage, and bodily performances. For instance, Mauss' (1935) exemplary piece on body techniques does not mention sports arenas and performances as privileged loci for the development of an anthropology of the body. Several reasons can be advanced as an explanation for the inattention to sport as an important anthropological endeavour. In my opinion, the main explanation lies in the accepted idea that sports and games, because they produce an asymmetry of winners and losers, are only expected to flourish in and be a characteristic of highly competitive industrial societies. The reverse should be true in non-modern societies where rituals dominate. In rituals, asymmetry is postulated in advance – initiated and uninitiated or profane and sacred – ‘and the “game” consists in making all the participants pass to the winning side’ by means of ritual participation (Lévi-Strauss 1966:32). Therefore, almost by definition, anthropology, as the science of the non-modern and ‘primitive’, has in the past excluded the study of sports and competitive games because they were correctly perceived as central features of modernity.

General Trends

The revaluation of the importance of sport in social theory is related to the influence of the late Norbert Elias and the research efforts of Dunning, his devoted collaborator. In the historical macro-sociological approach of Elias, sport was defined as a key area and late period of activity in the development of the civilizing process of European societies which started in the seventeenth century. The civilizing process was characterized by continuous state control of the legitimate use of force, the development of social organizations to reduce open conflict among social groups, and the elaboration of codes for social behaviour oriented towards the exercise of individual self-control (Dunning 1986: 13-4).
Sport became a typical activity of leisure that, historically, fulfilled some of the required functions for the consolidation of the civilizing process. It is evident that the exercise of individual self-control is central to sport. For Elias, one of the essential problems of many sports is how to reconcile two contradictory functions: 'the pleasurable de-controlling of human feelings and the full evocation of enjoyable excitement on the one hand, and on the other the maintenance of a set of checks to keep the pleasantly de-controlled emotions under control' (1986:49). Modern sport is regulated by clear rules that assure equality among the contenders, make possible the maximization of inner pleasures and the relaxation of individual tensions, and contain the exercise of physical violence.

Through Elias, the minor theme of sport is transformed into a major theme and becomes a privileged field for the analysis of individual and social tensions in modern societies. According to him, a civilizing process may be followed or even accompanied by a retreat in the opposite direction, by a de-civilizing process. Elias's followers, convinced of the importance of the dialectics of civilizing and de-civilizing processes in modern societies, devoted much of their research efforts to an understanding of British hooliganism (Dunning, Murphy & Williams 1988).1

In many contemporary European sociological and anthropological traditions, the practice of sports has been seen as an efficient state, and bourgeois, mechanism to indoctrinate youth in the values of sexism, nationalism, fanaticism, irrational violence, the cult of performance and competition, the cult of idols, and the uncritical acceptance of the central values of capitalism. The perspectives of Vinnai (1970), Brohm (1976), Bourdieu (1984) and Hargreaves (1986) are clear illustrations of the radical critique of the negative 'functions' of sport. Bourdieu maintains that one of the main, perverse effects of sport is to transform the spectators – the consumers of the performances of the athletes – into a caricature of militancy. This is because their participation is imaginary, and their knowledge has been appropriated by the sports coaches, journalists and bureaucrats (1984:185). This hypothesis was, of course, advanced before football* hooliganism became, or was defined as, an acute social problem in England and other European countries. The fact that resistance to cultural or political hegemony in the field of sports is not considered as possible limits the validity of this critical approach.

It is clear that the anthropological perspective of Lévi-Strauss in the critical tradition of social theory and the historical sociology of Elias have something in common: sport is perceived as an important field of analysis for achieving a better understanding of the appropriate or contradictory functioning of modern societies. In the arena of sport, individual self-fulfilment is related to games producing winners and losers, to exalted nationalism in an age of international competition, passivity and ideological domination, and, in some cases, to an abnormal quest for excitement and violence. No one will deny that sport is associated with these practices and values, but it is so much more. Let me briefly introduce some of the theoretical assumptions which have guided this new type of research.

* The word football is synonymous with soccer.
The key, and common, assumption is that sport is a ritual and a game at the same time, and is, as such, a cultural construction that makes symbolic communication among its participants possible. The content of the communication may vary according to the degree of formality, rigidity, concentration of meaning and redundancy. But the ritual is also a performance in the sense that saying something is also doing something; hence, the ritual action makes possible a connection between the meanings and values mobilized by the participants. In every ritual, various types of participants can be distinguished: the experts in knowledge, the central participants or players and the peripheral participants or audience. This approximation will permit the consideration of a range of discourse and identities produced by the various kinds of participants. In this sense, journalists can produce a written or, in the case of radio and television, a verbal ‘ideology and morality’, and sports fans can verbalize their ‘obsessions’ and their ‘sentimental concerns’ in the stadiums. A historical analysis of the impact of sports situates these narratives within specific periods of time and place, and, consequently, enables us to follow their transformation.

Many anthropologists have commented on the importance of specific rituals in the creation of a certain licence to distance one’s self from particular dominant values in society. Carnival in its many variants is said to be a type of ritual in which it is possible to suspend particular hierarchies and consequently to ‘question some of the dominant values’. This approach indicates the importance of considering the types of ‘transgressions’ that arise in the ritual being analyzed. The ritualization of sport allows for the convergence of tragic and comic elements combined in various ways. Such a perspective transforms violence into a dramatic form, latent in rituals, in which dominant values can be suspended. Thus, violence – symbolic or real – and the lack of violence are not deviations from a civilizing process but are instead the central features in the development of the ritual.

Sport can also be viewed as a parallel ritual process marked by leisure time and freedom. Seen in this way, the clear connection between sport and dance in Latin America is another important dimension that needs further exploration. Bodily-exporting performances in sport and dancing by countries such as Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Brazil and Argentina are of great historical importance in the construction of identities in the global cultural landscape. These countries have exported to the world the danzón, merengue, samba and tango, as well as exemplary baseball and football players.

Generally, the symbolic effect of a ritual is charged not only with the presence of tragic and comic aspects but with the content of the ritual itself. This dimension, which we may – perhaps pretentiously – call ‘cosmological’, alludes to the various ways of classifying social relationships among men, and between men and women, and allows for a reflection on the ‘national’ that sport has produced in the international global landscape of this century. Some sports, particularly ‘national sports’ like baseball in Cuba, cricket in the West Indies and football in the majority of the Latin American countries, express activities and passions that cut across class lines, ethnic status or regional origins. Thus, sport is a powerful masculine expression of national capabilities and potentialities. Sport constitutes a symbolic and practical male arena for national pride and shame, joy and sorrow. The nationalist discourses on sport, in addition to
reflections on ‘a national style of play’, can then be seen as an influential mechanism through which male cultural power is established.

The complex intermingling of individuality, gender (masculinity) and nationhood is an integral part of the historical construction of sport. The role of sports heroes in this respect is of crucial importance. A sports hero is an idol and icon who exists within a separate dimension of time, the time of heroes. The time of heroes as opposed to the time which encapsulates daily routines or scheduled rituals represents a glorious, dream-like time in the minds of the adoring public during which the mediocrity of daily life is suddenly transcended. Sport enables us to ponder the dynamics of culture in a way that rituals do not.

**Thinking and Practising the National in Latin America: Sport and Dance**

It has been argued consistently that a nation is an ‘imagined political community’ in the sense that its members share a sovereign boundary and have a strong feeling of communion. Hence, the ideology of nationalism should be integrated in social practices that can, over time, create an image of ‘the people’ having ‘something’ in common. For that purpose, it is crucial to identify social practices which appear to reflect ideas of nationalism and investigate the ‘content’ of these practices with respect to the actors involved and the meaning of the values conveyed. Presenting cases from Brazil, Cuba and Argentina will permit us to examine how certain bodily practices are involved in the formation of national imageries.

A book on football in Brazil with the programmatic introduction written by DaMatta (1982), a prestigious Brazilian anthropologist trained in the study of ‘primitive’ Amazonian people, has opened the door to the study of sport and its relation to the ‘national’. Inspired by structuralism as the search for decisive cognitive maps, and by ritual theory as the importance of public dramatic performances in complex societies, DaMatta in an earlier book (1978) problematized the ‘national’ through the analysis of carnival, a central ritual in Brazilian society, and the construction of popular heroes versus the villains. This paved the way to an examination of football.

It was clear from the beginning that putting an emphasis on football implied adopting a ‘positive’ perspective toward society and history. Since the 1930s Brazilians of all races and mixtures – whites, blacks and mulattos – have achieved great success and world-wide recognition of their excellence in this sport. Brazil, according to DaMatta, is a society articulated by the sharp division between the ‘home’ and the ‘street’, and between the family – a system of hierarchical social relations and persons – and the market and free individuals. For DaMatta these divisions are less geographical or physical places than symbols of moral and ideological universes. The role of football is privileged because the personalized social world of the home and the impersonal universe of the street are combined in a public ritual (1982:17). Impersonal rules regulating the game make possible the expression of individual qualities: ‘football, in the Brazilian society, is a source of individualization...much more than an instrument of collectivization at the personal level’ (1982:27). The players es-
cape from fate – the fate of class or race – and construct their own successful biographies in an open arena. Football makes it possible to experience equality and freedom of creativity in hierarchical contexts. In order to triumph, a football player (like a samba dancer) must have *jogo de cintura*, the capacity to use the body to provoke confusion and fascination in the public and in their adversaries (1982:28). A disciplined, athletic but boring player has no place in Brazilian football (1982:39).

This vision, however, is historically much more complex (see Rodrigues Filho 1964, Vogel 1982, Caldas 1989, Rosenfeld 1993 and Leite Lopes 1997). Leite Lopes has shown that while white Brazilian players were exported to Europe in the 1930s, especially to Italy, black players became virtually non-exportable. ‘Blacks appeared to be “condemned” to “local” success, to be great local players, to be Brazil’s greatest players’. If Vasco de Gama was the first Brazilian club to recruit working-class players in 1923, then Flamengo, the popular Rio de Janeiro club, in 1935 became ‘the example of a universally “mixed-race” Brazilian club’ (Leite Lopes 1997:69).

In spite of racial democratization in football, stereotypes and prejudices were still prevalent in sports. The Brazilian defeat by Uruguay in the final game of the 1950 World Cup, held in Brazil, focused on the colour of several black defenders who were accused of lacking courage and stamina. They were targeted as the scapegoats for the nation’s tragedy because, as Vogel (1982: 95-100) and Leite Lopes (1997:70-5) argue, the Brazilian sense of inferiority was related to racial stereotypes. The victory in the 1958 World Cup, later consolidated in 1962 and 1970, with a ‘multi-racial’ team, confirmed the excellence of the Brazilian style. Leite Lopes maintains that the Brazilian style of football resembles physical activities which have ethnic Afro-Brazilian origins, like *samba* or *capoeira* (a martial sport of African origin) (see also Roberts 1972:26-9). The European identification of a Brazilian style of playing relating football and *samba*, manifested in the expression ‘samba-football’, is therefore not an arbitrary creation; it is rooted in Brazilian self-imagery and identity. This identification establishes important cultural differences, because the existence and development of European styles of playing football are not linked to music and dance.

The first baseball match in Cuba was played in Matanzas in 1874, and four years later the first *danzón*, the seed of the *salsa*, was composed. González Echeverría (1994) maintains that music and baseball – together with literature – are the Cuban cultural products of greatest prestige and international recognition, and therefore essential as the founding myths of the ‘national’ in Cuba. Baseball, a North American creation imported to Cuba by the sons of the sugar plantation aristocracy, was rapidly seen as a weapon of ‘resistance’ against colonialism and primitive Spanish games such as bullfighting. González Echeverría writes that ‘baseball was an integral part of the patriotic and anti-Spanish ideology which led towards independence’ (1994:73). By 1890 baseball had been accepted by the Hispanic and Black working-class population, becoming a very popular bodily activity.

From the beginning the ritual of playing baseball has been associated with dancing: ‘each baseball match culminated in a magnificent dinner and dancing, for which orchestras were hired for playing danzones’ (1994:74). As in the case of football, baseball was perceived as a democratic and modern game that
made it possible for young players of modest origins to experience social mobility.

It is quite interesting that both baseball and football, two sports which originated outside the Latin American countries, were integrated into the construction of the ‘national’. ‘Thinking the national’ was, thus, a typically modernist project because it was fabricated by the introduction of foreign cultural practices and not by the revival or invention of traditions. The Cuban national sport is still baseball, and outstanding players are still produced by the hundreds in the island. Baseball in Cuba, like football in Brazil, is not related to the tradition of national romanticism that was dominant in other countries of the region.

The case in Argentina confirms in the same way this historical and sociological trend (see Archetti 1994a, 1994b, 1995a and 1996). In the nineteenth century, British immigrants not only brought to the new country industrial capital, new technology in agriculture and livestock and financial institutions, but their modern sports. The first football match was played in 1867, only four years after the creation of the Football Association of London. The first league and, until 1911, the dominating clubs sprang from British schools. Not only was the game a British export but so too were the standards and the quality of the play. Argentinian football grew under the influence of the excellent professional teams that came to play in Buenos Aires. Buenos Aires has been the city of football – and the tango – since the 1880s.

The arrival of millions of European immigrants to Buenos Aires and its hinterlands made possible the rapid expansion of football and tango. Leisure was transformed; the practice of different sports was accompanied by the crystallization of the choreography of the tango and the formation of new orchestras. Tango was first exported to Europe in the 1910s, then to the rest of Latin America and North America, becoming a ‘universal’ dance to express eroticism and modernity. Argentinian football players were exported to Europe as early as in the 1920s. Argentinian performing bodies – dancers and musicians and football players – became highly visible in the world arena of leisure.

The majority of the new sports clubs rapidly incorporated non-British European immigrants and their sons or were directly founded by them (see Frydenberg 1997). The intense competition in football between British teams and the new ‘mixed’ clubs was a place of growth for imaginative creolization, the creation of the Argentinian style of playing football.

The British were the founders of football; they codified the rules; they developed a morality based on fair play; they constructed a style of playing and exported it all over the world. The origins of football in Brazil, Uruguay and Peru are the same (see Deusta Carvallo, Stein and Stokes 1984 and Caldas 1989). Argentinians and immigrants accepted and incorporated football as an important bodily practice in their leisure time and as a ritual context for competition and emotional display of loyalty and engagement. The social and cultural complexity of Buenos Aires at the beginning of the century – a city with 1.8 million inhabitants in 1914 – created a setting conducive to creativity and to identifying the ‘national’ with the new practices of sports and tango. Through them, immigrants and Argentinians created new ways of expression in a modernist context free from tradition. They weren’t riding horses on the pampas, they were urban and lived in Buenos Aires.
In the rapidly modernizing pampas however, the gauchos existed as premodern and romantic figures, reminding urban Argentinians and immigrants of the existence of a traditional past. By the beginning of WWI under the pressure of mass immigration, the nationalists had enlisted the gaucho as a symbol of the nation's cultural heritage. Before the modernization of the pampas, the gauchos had had a number of rugged and violent games, contests and plays which required great strength and courage in both man and horse as well as breakneck speed (Slatta 1986). Accidents and violence were common.

The development of the British-organized equestrian sport was seen as a sign of modern times. They brought polo to Argentina and developed it on their own estancias. By the 1920s polo had been adopted by the Argentinian landed aristocracy as an expression of a refined civilizing process. The British players discovered that the gaucho riding style was perfectly suited to the practice of polo (see Archetti 1995b and 1997b). The Argentinian national team won the Olympic Games in Paris in 1924 and in Berlin in 1936, and by the end of the decade they were defined as the masters of the game (see Watson 1986:118-20). With polo, a gaucho tradition was reconstituted in a context of modern competition.

In thinking and practising the national, Argentinians combined the urbanfootball and tango with the ruralpolo. Modernism embraced romanticism. This imagery reflected the fragmented, dislocated and mismatched identities, the changing character of the social classes, and gender relations where, in the tango, men and women were at the centre.

To the cases of Brazil, Cuba and Argentina we could add Uruguay, the Dominican Republic, Colombia, West Indies and Peru where sport and dance, as important cultural and social arenas for creativity and performance, show that 'high' and 'low', 'elite' and 'popular', 'global' and 'local' were at work in the process of creating national imageries. Identity is thus highly dependent upon multiplicity. Over time, sport and dance have created blocks of identity that are undeniable, a kind of 'national and international space' in which different social classes, races and nationalities enter into a dialogue because the social and cultural interconnections are so very strong.

Adoring the Heroes

A nation needs heroes even in times of peace, and sports provides them. The cult of sports heroes unites the admiration for their performances with the moral and social impact of their lives on followers. The history of real individuals provides a social model to perceive paradoxes and dramas in society, and to recognize and question key values. The meaning that the lives of two outstanding football players can have for millions of people will elucidate some of these postulates.

Manuel Francisco dos Santos (1934-1983), better know as Garrincha, the extraordinary right wing of the successful Brazilian team which won the World Cup of 1958 and 1962, died alcoholic and in extreme poverty in 1983. The nation was shocked. In life he had been called 'the joy of the people' and his death produced profound sorrow. His body was displayed at the mythic Maracaná stadium in Rio de Janeiro, and thousands upon thousands of Brazilian
football lovers paid him a last tribute. His casket was followed by the multitudes, and his funeral became a part of national history.

Leite Lopes and Maresca have tried to interpret the meaning of this dramatic event for Brazilian society (1989 and 1992). As a player, Garrincha represented perhaps even better than Pelé, his contemporary, the quality and essence of the Brazilian style of playing football: a disconcerting dribbling based on improvisation and intuition. He transformed the way wingers played; before him, the technique had been primarily based on speed. His slow dribbling style and maniacal possession of the ball was seen as a product of the peladas – the kind of football played in the streets. Before he joined Botafogo, a great club in Rio de Janeiro, he played in the Sport Club Pau Grande. It had been established in 1919 by the textile factory where Garrincha was working (see Castro 1995).

Leite Lopes and Maresca maintain that in Brazil the introduction and practice of football among industrial workers was an important civilizing and disciplinary bodily mechanism. Garrincha represented the final, paramount product of this tradition, because from the 1930s it became possible for talented young players to be directly recruited by professional clubs. Garrincha remained, in many ways, an ‘amateur’ in a highly competitive and cynical world of professionalism. His life can be seen as antipodal to the life of Pelé, the other great Brazilian hero. Garrincha never abandoned his working-class roots nor adapted to the requirements of a successful public social life outside the football field. He did not learn business management or master public relations, and he continued to play even when his body was exhausted and deformed by alcoholism and injuries. He was not sufficiently educated to become a coach. In 1963 at the top of his career he, and he ‘alone’ as the myth tells it, won the World Cup in Chile. In contrast, his professional and private life was marked by constant failures and scandals.

According to Leite Lopes and Maresca (1989 and 1992), the crowds following his casket in silence in the streets of Rio de Janeiro were participants in a social drama, showing the most profound respect to a son of the working-class who had suffered from injustice, maladjustment, and prejudice. The nation wondered how it had been possible for them to abandon so heartlessly the player defined as ‘the joy of the people’. His death was interpreted to mark the end of the romantic epoch in football now being transformed by business, capitalism, and a growing international market of players. Garrincha was seen as the last great ‘amateur’, a product of the street and factory. Today, Garrincha remains a powerful symbol of the consolidation of the Brazilian style of playing.

Diego Armando Maradona is the modern answer in Argentina to Garrincha, and like Garrincha, the myth relates – and reality confirms – that he ‘alone’ won the World Cup of 1986 in Mexico for his country. He too was born into a working-class family, and his childhood in the slums of Villa Fiorito in Buenos Aires, was marked by poverty and football. Born in 1960, he was discovered by a professional club as a genius of football when he was only eleven years old, and after that his life was devoted to football. He is called el pibe de oro (the golden youth), and is, indisputably, the historical synthesis of the Argentinian construction of a national style based on the playing qualities of the ‘pibes’
(Archetti 1995a, 1996 and 1997a). Maradona belongs to the special world of pibes-players which adult players can not enter.

The ideological emphasis is on the border between childhood and adulthood, not on the transition from one condition to the other. In the ideal construction of an Argentinian football style, a harmonic universe is created by pibes in which freedom of creativity and irresponsibility in inventing the unexpected dominate. Maradona, like Garrincha in street football, learned football playing in the potreros – open fields, and nobody taught him the art of dribbling. In this social and moral context, Maradona is thought of as the most archetypical pibe player. His private and professional life has been chaotic, and, from 1991 until his retirement in October 1997, his career was identified with failures and scandals. His condition of being a pibe partly explains this. Disorder is expected from a pibe, and chaotic behaviour can be the norm. A pibe is creative, guilt-free, self-destructive and, ultimately, a poor moral example to other players. However, in the global moral evaluation of these kind of players, the ultimate criterion is the creative use of their bodies. Explicitly, the great joy given by the pibes is more important than any consistent moral evaluation (Archetti 1997a:36-39). Adoring spectators have a kind of emotional contract of joy with their heroes that transcends bourgeois morality and the logic of order of nation states. Football can, therefore, produce transgression and rebellion when freedom of creativity is valued the most.

Engaged Supporters and Audiences

Sport, as enacting modernity, is imagined as an active practice producing healthy bodies, and as a democratic activity open and recommended to women and men of all ages. Professionalism in sport has also produced marginal participants or, in Geertzian terminology, 'shallow players'; they are the supporters following athletes and sports events as spectators, the passive television viewers and listeners to radio.2 The successful narratives of sport have historically been produced by journalists, and have centred on the history of playing styles, clubs, national teams, and players (see Leite Lopes and Faguer 1994, and Archetti 1995a and 1996). In the last two decades, coaches have joined journalists in the ideological construction and interpretation of the meanings of sport. Coaches now write books and actively participate in television programmes as experts, interpreting the development of the game. In this process the voices of the audiences and supporters have been silenced; as Bourdieu pointed out many years ago, they are the passive consumers of sports events.

Neves Flores (1982) has demonstrated that in the arena of football the supporters 'narrate' social stories and even produce what he calls 'ideologies of transformation'. The popular clubs, like Flamengo in Rio de Janeiro and Corinthias in São Paulo, are seen as courageous, with lots of stamina and a will to win. The 'elite' clubs, like Fluminense in Rio de Janeiro, are machista and show discipline and fair play. The clubs where sons of immigrants are most represented because their origins are 'ethnic', as with the Portuguese in Vasco de Gama or the Italians in Palmeiras, are usually perceived as less national than the others. In addition to the clubs that are 'national', minor clubs always represent moral and social qualities of a given neighbourhood and, in this sense,
are very local in the manifestation of their identities (see also Lover 1983). He shows how the symbols of identification that the supporters create reproduce many of these ideological representations. Neves Flores argues that the organized activity of the supporters displays the class and ethnic divisions in society, stresses masculinity, and, finally, exhibits violence. In this view, the supporters in the football arena act against the dominant values in Brazilian society of national equality, populist integration, and political paternalism (1982:57).

Klein (1988 and 1991) has argued that baseball, an American sport that became the national sport in the Dominican Republic, is a privileged field for the analysis of cultural hegemony and resistance. 'The Dominican Republic has produced more professional and major league baseball players than any country including the United States' (Klein 1991:2). Dominicans use the very form and symbol of American domination – baseball – to promote resistance. The reason is clear, for the field of baseball is the only area in which the Dominicans can measure themselves against the Americans and demonstrate superiority (see also LaFrance 1985). Adopting the sport of baseball has also influenced cultural movements. ‘Dominicans infused the game with their own raucous, melodramatic style, marked by a highly individualistic way of playing, and easy-going attitude toward the game both on the field and on the stands, music and dancing, and crowds by turns temperamental and tranquil,’ (Klein 1991:152). Klein reports that working-class supporters of baseball in the Dominican Republic prefer wearing the shirts of national clubs rather than American ones.

In Argentina, the chants of football supporters reflect the importance of sexuality and masculinity – real against dubious men – in defending their teams and attacking the opponents, and in this they are no exception (Archetti 1992). However, alongside the dramatization of sexuality there is a set of chants that refer to the elusiveness of the ‘world’, to a sort of disenchantment and loss of hope. Professionalism and football as a spectacle have brought a set of new problems of which two are apparently central: the overweening ambition of the managers and the disloyalty of the players. The spectators chant that loyalty and continuity cannot be guaranteed by the players or by the managers of the clubs. The themes of disillusionment and loneliness implicit in loyalty to a club appear in many classic chants. They often stress the pain that the fan of a great club must endure when its managers and players perform badly. What remains as something ‘pure’ in this complex world is a love of the club’s colours, passion for the club’s jersey shirt, nostalgia for the glorious past and pride in what was and is to come (Archetti 1992: 230-2).

One might conclude by saying that at the risk of losing their illusions, the fans reaffirm the importance of continuity derived from positive self-identification with their club. Enduring this ‘risk’ implies a certain resistance to pain and disappointment, a resistance that does not lead to open rebellion but to a set of possible transgressions in which the use of violence and drugs are accepted. Football permits a certain distance and licence vis-à-vis the everyday routine, whether morally or in terms of one’s job. Football is neither a ritual of open rebellion nor the much-mentioned opium of the masses in Argentina (see Sebreli 1981).
Perspectives for Comparative Research

The field of sports is rich and complex, an open scenario that should be taken seriously by anthropologists. The development of a comparative perspective, both intra- and cross-culturally, could be an important and fruitful research strategy that should be explored further. Sport appears historically as a key arena for the analysis of the way individuals 'play' with modernity and the complexity of self-awareness, cultural creativity in general, the importance of individual and social memory, bodily practices, dramatic rituals, moral dilemmas, collective identities, gender, and local political processes transformed into national events.3

Why do athletes from certain Latin American countries excel on a world level in specific sports? Kotakk (1996) argues that it is not simply a matter of being rich or poor, developed or undeveloped: 'cultural values and social conditions also play a role in international success' (1996:49). He observed striking contrasts between Brazilian and American swimming styles which, according to him, are related to different cultural attitudes towards time. In the United States, for example, time is valued more highly and calculated more carefully than in Brazil where there is less emphasis on time, measurement, comparison, and individual achievement (1996:57). More research on this topic is needed, including a more systematic historical and sociological comparison between individual and collective sports.

The practice of sports is 'gendered' and should be understood as expressing and articulating gender differences. For example, Sánchez León, a Peruvian sociologist, has analyzed the gendered meaning of the two most popular sports in his country (1993:138-44). Football, a male practice, is related to freedom and improvisation, whereas volleyball, a female practice, is seen to demonstrate the sense of responsibility and discipline of Peruvian women. How masculinity and femininity are related to certain sports in Latin America calls for more investigation, because the results of research presented so far are, without exception, male-biased. The sport practised and the research accomplished has been dominated by men.

'Thinking and imagining' the national is most likely related to collective and masculine sports, but this assumption needs further exploration. After all, as I have demonstrated in an analysis of the symbolic value of Garrincha and Maradona, individual heroes are typically produced in team sports like football. The conflation of individual and collective values opens the way for a careful examination of the meaning of 'heroes' in areas usually connected to such elite practices as automobile racing or tennis. The cult of Ayrton Senna, a Formula One driver from Brazil, or Manuel Rios, a tennis player from Chile, invites more comparative research.

Notes

1. Many of the hypotheses and empirical findings of Dunning and associates have been questioned. Recent anthropological analysis of violence and hooliganism demonstrates that the phenomenon of violence is complex, requiring a more sophisticated analysis (see Armstrong and Harris 1991, Giulianotti, Bonney & Hepworth 1994 and Giulianotti 1995). Armstrong's ethnography (1998) of the 'Blades', a group of football fans supporting Sheffield United who
are notorious for their hooliganism, definitively challenges many traditional views (see also Hughson 1998). This kind of analysis needs to be done in Latin America as well, especially in Argentina where violence in the stadiums is a social and political problem (see Archetti & Romero 1994).

2. The ethnographic comparative results of Bromberger and associates (1995) on the study of the meaning of football in three European cities – Turin, Naples and Marseille – shows the complexity of the process of constructing local identities. More ethnographic work on the social organization and cultural meaning of sports is urgently needed in anthropology. A more refined analysis of the interplay between modernity and the global and the local is also needed.

3. The articles in the book edited by Armstrong and Giulianotti (1997), in spite of being entirely devoted to world football, can be seen as a manifestation of the empirical richness of the field of sport.

References


