

Nationhood is an
important part of
culture history essay



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To define a nation and state is complex, but essentially a nation is a group of people who are bound together by a “ particular kind of enduring identity which encompasses common myths of origin, historical memories, a common culture, conceptions of common rights, duties and economic opportunities and, above all, attachment to a given territory.” (Hargreaves, 2000: 5). Edensor (2002) adds it is a social and cultural construct which enables the inhabitants to define ‘ them’ and ‘ us’ at both a collective and individual level. Brubaker (1996, cited in Hargreaves, 2000) argues that because a nation is by no means a static, fixed entity, this topic should be spoken of in terms of ‘ nationhood’ or nationness’. Anderson (1991) describes the nation as an ‘ imagined community’ in the sense that the members of such nation could never possibly meet all of their compatriots, but they are aware of them. The state is similar in the sense that it is complex, but it can be defined a legal and political structure of public institutions which hold claim over legitimate use of force within the given territory (Weber, 1948, cited in Hargreaves, 2000; Jarvie and Reid, 2000). Finally, nations and states can be similar, but in some cases there are nations within states, the United Kingdom of Great Britain for example, which consists of Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland, which Kellas (1998) explains should be referred to as ‘ multinational states’, as they contain more than one nation.

Sport is an area around which nationalism ‘ so often coheres’, yet it is often overlooked as a vehicle of nationhood (Hargreaves, 2000: 3). Duke and Crolley (1996) identify that the two major outcomes of this combination is a representation of nations and identities within states, and that of the state

itself. As a universal event, sport can transcend the divisions across communities, and bring people together. MacClancy (1996: 7) argues that sport has a 'plethora of functions', in that it redefines established boundaries of the nation, provides people with a way of classifying themselves and creating a new social identity, and then providing a most important platform for the expression of that identity. Sport creates 'sameness' within specific communities by playing on the common ancestry and myths that they share to create a nation as one. In Scotland, sport is an important symbol of social structure, with a heightened level of significance given the nature of the nation (Jarvie and Walker, 1994). The support for the national team in sports such as football and rugby is often vast and intense; however it is possible that the displays of nationalism we see are particularly unique to sport. On a game day it is common in Scotland to see the 'Tartan Army', the legion of supporters dressed up in kilts, flags and other national symbols, singing songs of the history of the nation, for sport creates an environment in which people are free to revel in their own national identity. Scotland and England maintain a sporting rivalry, one which Sugden and Bairner (1993: 129) believe to be 'strange' considering they have shared a political structure for almost 300 years, and yet the Scottish have campaigned throughout for autonomy, with a large part of Scottish national identity stemming from sense of perceived oppression from the English (Smith and Porter, 2004: 6). Bairner (2001: xiv) sums up the Scots sentiment, characterising the Scottish as the "underdogs... plucky fighters" while the English are "arrogant... more powerful... deserved to be taken down a peg or two". The rituals which the Scots partake in make no mistake of their antipathy towards their neighbours; the national anthem for <https://assignbuster.com/nationhood-is-an-important-part-of-culture-history-essay/>

instance ' Flower of Scotland' tells of the fighting of the ' Auld Enemy', and therefore the sport is the battleground, the arena of cultural resistance, and possibly extreme anti-English nationalism (Boyle and Haynes, 2000: 145; Kowalski, 2004: 83).

In 1992, Jim Sillars MP accused the Scots of being '90 minute patriots' in regard to the loss of his SNP seat in Parliament; saying nationalism was only expressed through sport. In this regard however, it could be argued that the national sentiment evident at Hampden and Murrayfield in the build up to the election was reflected, as the SNP saw a 7. 5% rise in their share of the Scottish vote from the previous election (Jarvie and Walker, 1994: 5; www.parliament.uk). The fans who attend are seen as a " manifestation of the national character" (Edensor, 2002: 81) in that they reflect the social, political, and cultural circumstances of that nation, whilst remembering their traditions. In the same way that the Scottish fans go to great lengths to avoid association with the English, and take a sense of belonging with their common ancestry, so to do other similar cultures around the world.

Spain is comprised of 17 autonomous communities, however the historic ' nations' as they identify themselves, tend to hold the most internal power. These historic regions are Catalonia, the Basque Country, Andalucía and Galicia. Dating back to the early 20th Century, these regions have been part of a struggle against the centralisation of the Spanish nation state and the oppression at the hands of dictatorships. The Rivera and Franco dictatorships of 1923-30 and 1939-73 respectively repressed regionalist sentiment the non-Castilian parts of the country. Duke and Crolley (1996) suggest that football was the only resource for groups such as the Catalans to release <https://assignbuster.com/nationhood-is-an-important-part-of-culture-history-essay/>

their 'pent-up nationalism', resulting in a large increase in 'socios' (members) attending FC Barcelona matches. Football at this period of time provided the setting for opposition to Fascism, and allowing the Catalan people to freely express their heritage, Catalan language as opposed to the Spanish Castilian and rituals such as the Sardana dance, all of which were repressed by the Fascist dictatorship in government. Bairner (1994) describes football at this time as a metaphor for Catalan tradition, as the Camp de les Corts and later the Camp Nou, became a symbol of Catalan nationalism. In Basque Country, clubs performed a similar function for the Basque community by giving them a vehicle to express their regional nationalist in a metaphorical way. Athletic Club and Real Sociedad altered their team colours to the red, green and white of the ikurriña, the Basque flag, and signed up only pure Basque residents, mostly from the province of Vizcaya (Duke and Crolley, 1996: 26). Football in Spain was also used as a force of centralist nationalism during the fascist regimes. If FC Barcelona represented the historic nation of Catalonia, and Athletic Club that of the Basques - both anti-centralist and in a sense almost anti-Spanish, then locally RCD Espanyol of Barcelona, and more symbolically Real Madrid were seen as the persecutors and the essence of Spanishness, with the latter adopted by Franco as the Spanish national team (Duke and Crolley, 1996: 35), and named 'el equipo del régimen', the team of the regime. This nationalistic rivalry found its expression through football. Athletic Club as with FC Barcelona, undeniably disengaged themselves from Spanish nationalism, but at the same time established and reinforced a sense of identity and community by cutting through the conventional barriers of class and society to unite the region as a group, with their own nationalism, and <https://assignbuster.com/nationhood-is-an-important-part-of-culture-history-essay/>

give them the platform to voice said nationhood. At present there is no longer such a manifest oppression of the Basque and Catalan cultures throughout Spain, however these nations still feel a great deal of patriotism, and remember their history in visible ways as FC Barcelona pride themselves on the motto ' Mes qué un club' (More than a club) and participate in the ' El Clásico' derby between and Real Madrid, while Athletic maintain their policy of signing only Basques. It could be argued that without sport, there would not be such a way in which these communities could come together to unite with one another and establish boundaries and differentiation which create their national identity.

The West Indies is not a nation state as we speak of it. It is a large collection of Caribbean island nation states such as Barbados, Grenada, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. Sport, more specifically cricket, became a social and cultural vehicle for anti-colonial nationhood and national identity in the British West Indies of the 19th and 20th Centuries. The British Empire was a huge world structure, built upon an ideology of white-British supremacy, and the indigenous population were introduced to cricket by the British colonisers at this time, and it was used as a tool to teach Englishness. The West Indians saw cricket as a route of social ascension and cultural distinction, and so sought out to play the game as a political form of resistance. Searle (1990) argues that cricket served as a means of struggle which resulted in the progress and achievement of Caribbean nationhood. Cricket mirrored the structure of society at the time of white elitism, and so the West Indians utilised it in a civil rights war to seek both the democratisation of cricket itself and to seize internal autonomy from the British. Cricket became

synchronised with the demand for political franchise and social reform in 1938 in the first wave of Black Nationalism (Beckles, 1995: 42, 151). One of the most poignant examples of “ the black man being kept in his place” in cricket (Constantine, 1947, cited in Searle, 1990) was the reluctance of the white run WICBC to allow a black man to captain the West Indies national team. In 1960 after a campaign by C. L. R. James in his Nation newspaper, Frank Worrell became the first black captain, symbolising the transfer of cricket into the ‘ hands of the masses’ (Beckles, 1998: 76-77). Since this point cricket prospered and created an overwhelming sense of national pride, and has brought together the Anglophone Caribbean, ‘ a multi-ethnic synthesis’ in unity like “ no other activity” (Sandiford, 2004: 135, 128) has done before or since. Beckles (1998: xvii) concludes by stating cricket acted as,” an agency of colonial oppression and at the same time provided an area in which the socially oppressed majority ventilated endemic, antisystemic attitudes and ideals.”

Sport in Ireland has been an aspect of nationalism and nationhood even before colonisation by the British in the 17th Century, but perhaps more so since then. The traditional GAA sports such as hurling, camogie and Gaelic Football are referred to as Irish and Catholic activities, whilst Rugby Union and cricket are thought of as Protestant and British sports; soccer football, despite being an import of British colonial soldiers is played across the field by all, but considered representative of the working classes (Holmes and Storey, 2004: 89-93). Cricket is played despite its undoubted Englishness, but is not much of a success in popularity. Boyle and Haynes (2000) conclude that the successful exploits of the Irish national football team

through the 1980's was represented through the media, and put Ireland on the sporting map. Rugby in Ireland was unusual in the fact that it combined players from the nation state of Ireland, and Northern Ireland, nation within the state of Great Britain, under the Irish national anthem ' Soldier's Song'. Two nations which had been very much divided by religious and cultural tension were assembled into a squad which according to John Beattie, former Scottish international and British Lion, felt was " proof that sport can rise above religion and politics and assist in breaking down the barriers peacefully. (Scotland on Sunday, 1990, cited in Sugden and Bairner, 1993: 53). On the face of it, this formation was an ideal vehicle for celebration of true Irish nationhood, giving the fans an opportunity to wear the green of their nations together in unity. Sugden and Bairner (1993: 63) argue that the coalition between the two nations provided only a thin veil to cover the divisions within the team and by the same rights the nations, as they claim the players from the North wanted to win, but through success of their own efforts and not necessarily from the success of their Southern teammates. Football and Irish identity during this period was however more complicated, as the manager Jack Charlton, an Englishman, took advantage of the ' granny rule', eligibility through Irish blood in grandparents, and recruited ' anglos' from all over the Britain for his Irish national side, which fans felt diluted the Irishness of their team. Polley (2004: 26) identifies this as a ' flag of convenience' culture which has developed in predominantly European but also British sport. It relates to athletes who choose to play for a national team, or on behalf of a nation, in which they were born, not because they feel a strong identity or affiliation, but because they might have more chance of ' getting a game'. In Ireland, football integrated the Catholics and

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Protestants of all communities, which created not a vehicle for nationhood, but a vehicle for radical sectarianism, which often elevated into trouble. In 1985, Derry City FC, seen as sympathetic to the Catholic and nationalist cause, moved from the Irish League (I. F. A.) into the League of Ireland (F. A. I.) due to sectarian treatment from opposition fans, particularly Linfield and the league itself (Sugden and Bairner, 1993: 85-6). In terms of nationalism, football in Ireland remains very much divided, but to the means that it allows perhaps too much of a platform for radical nationalism.

“ Celtic, like Barcelona, are more than a football club. Our clubs are a symbol of a culture and community that has not always been made welcome in their respective countries.”

Xavi Hernández (Barcelona midfielder)

In Scotland, despite the aforementioned unity as a nation, there is a huge divide which is easily identified as the ‘ Old Firm’, Celtic FC and Rangers FC. A prime example of how sport can “ divide as much as unite (MacClancy, 1996,: 11), the rivalry between these two teams is deeply rooted in religious history and differentiation. Bairner (2001) recalls the mythical acceptance that Celtic is representative of the Irish Catholic community within Scotland, whilst Rangers are likewise of the Protestant community; however it is true that Celtic FC was founded as a charity for the impoverished Irish immigrants in Scotland. In this sense Celtic and Rangers, share many characteristics of the relationship between FC Barcelona and Real Madrid, as Walker (1990, cited in Bairner, 2001) believes Rangers to be a ‘ celebration of Scottishness’, although Bairner (2001: 56) feels this extends to a display of

Britishness due to their displays of the Union flag, and singing ‘ God Save the Queen’ and ‘ Rule Britannia’. Because of the deep sectarian tensions in this society, much of which is an extenuation of the circumstances in Northern and Southern Ireland, the capacity for Scottish sport to “ forge a unified national consciousness” is undermined, and so highly unlikely (Bairner, 1994: 17)

South Africa, a country proclaimed as the ‘ rainbow nation’, is one of the most complex nations in the world, with 11 recognised languages (Keech, 2004: 107). The Afrikaner community reinforced a myth of white racial supremacy through the Springboks rugby team, while the majority non-white communities preferred soccer. Sporting people and organisations, as well as political figures saw sport as “ key to empowering disenfranchised Black communities”, through the formation of National Sports Congress in 1988, and the African National Congress party, who tried to Africanise sport during the demise of Apartheid. It seems sport evolved as Apartheid was abolished, however it proved to be a huge symbol of society before and after, more so for the white Afrikaners who saw sport as ‘ theirs’ and expressed their nationality through it. Keech (2004: 121) maintains that the rainbow nation ideology is merely a myth, and South African sport is still scarred by Apartheid.

In conclusion, sport is undoubtedly a huge part of society all over the world, and it gives many different communities the chance to express their nationalist feelings in a safe controlled environment, and become the ‘ glue’ which binds people of all walks of life together (Jarvie and Reid, 2000: 88). It should be said however that different nations express nationalisms
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differently, and different sports have differing resonances within society.

Sport is a more than able vehicle for national expression, but the level and type of expression depends greatly on the environment in which the sport is partaken.