A Reflection on Tradition and Globalisation

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It was a Saturday, and ten year old David puts on his lucky socks. He does this every Saturday and it has become somewhat of a ritual for him. David supports Manchester City, his beloved football team, but today he is apprehensive. Last week his lucky socks did not work and his team was battered 3-0 away to Cardiff. But today was different, City were playing at home against their bitter rivals Manchester United who were making the short trip across Manchester to Maine Road. David only lived a 3 minute walk away, in the thick of the terraced houses of Moss Side. His Dad was late as usual and David stood by the door waiting eagerly; he could hear the fans from his house singing loudly and the atmosphere was intense - Maine Road was filling up fast. The fans all chanted for the same cause, they loved and backed their team and David was no exception.

It is the 21st of September 2014 and David is now 70 years old and still lives in Moss Side. Today David does not wear his lucky socks, and he does not hear the echoes of the crowd through the streets because his beloved Maine Road - his ‘church’ - was knocked down in 2003. Manchester City now reside at the Etihad Stadium, named Etihad for sponsorship reasons. David didn’t watch the game today because he doesn’t have a Sky Sports package for his television; he rarely catches the game and no longer feels the same connection with the players. Modern Football is beyond David, for him the passion has disappeared.

Football in the UK is huge, as an institution and as a tradition especially among the working masses of Britain. It clings to tradition by a thread however: the rivalries, the Saturday and boxing day fixtures, but it has followed suit with the rapid changes of modernity. It is possible to view Football as a microcosm of society as it shares the same hierarchical system and has changed through the effects of globalisation. “Globalization is a process fuelled by, and resulting in, increasing cross-border
flows of goods, services, money, people, information and culture” (Held et al., 1999: 16).

David’s City team beat Manchester United 3-2 at home that Saturday back in 1954, with United fielding a full British starting 11, which is today extremely rare in English football and in the English Premier League. The City first team now consists of players from 10 different nationalities, and the United team 11. What is especially interesting in terms of a huge UK institution is the ownership of the football clubs themselves. Not only is there a huge diversity in the players (people) and their talents (services) but in the owners of the football clubs. Giddens (1990:63-64) argues that ‘Modernity is inherently Globalizing’ and Globalisation is the ‘sharing’ of modernity across the world.

For David the change is beyond him: he doesn’t trust the businessmen of football who don’t know about his City or his club.

In terms of an explanation for this we can look to Castells’ ‘Informational Capitalism’ (Castells, 2000). This defines global capitalism by the way the spread of ‘information’ on a global scale has formed new relations but to show that “familiar forms of economic relationships (profit-seeking and ownership) eventually prevail” (Castells, 1996: 21). Although David may be cynical, away from the ‘romanticisation’ of football it is still a business like any other.

Football has a reflexive relationship with capitalism; in one sense football helped further spread capitalism through business and on the other hand capitalism helped spread football worldwide through technology. Castells explains informational capitalism as an “unforgiving, even rapacious form of capitalism because it combines enormous flexibility with global reach” (Castells 1998: 338).

The World cup of 1966 was arguably the biggest factor for globalising football, through technological advances such as the television. Castells traces the roots of the ‘information age’ back to roughly the same time, the 1970's. The period after the war required the ‘restructuring of capitalist enterprise’ due to the search for profit after rising living standards and full employment. The main factor for the capitalist system was that ICT’s such as television, phones and especially the internet created a ‘distanciation’ between space and time (Giddens, 1990: 64). This gave rise to a network society - and moreover a global network society. Again football mirrored the trend: in order to compete, the large Premier League clubs used networks from other countries to introduce better players to the league. This explains the large amount of nationalities in the Premier League but also shows how network society has broken down “the frontiers of the nation-state” (Castells, 1983: 310) and replaced them with “electronic flows of marketing and production” (Castells, 2000: 22).

However David’s cynical view of ‘foreign’ owners may be justified seen as David does not share their business mind set towards football. It is the uncertainty that takes prevalence for David. For David, this football club was a huge part of his life, his and his friend’s culture. His
insecurity comes from his inability to identify who or what to trust, a result of Globalisation and Network Society that has broken down the barriers of The Nation state. This can be the effects of a ‘Risk Society’ (Beck, 1992), a reflexive society based on the day to day management of risks, created by contemporary society. David no longer has access to expert knowledge from a higher-power like the nation state and tradition of old has been fragmented and made almost meaningless. It is possible that Global networks and Modernization introduced ‘hazards and insecurities’ (Beck 1992: 21).

However not all countries in the world have the same transport, technology and infrastructure to be involved in this global ‘Network Society’ so does the whole world experience this?

In terms of globalisation many assume that the world is becoming inter-related and global which football again mirrors. The Premier League in England has become increasingly diverse, in both nationalities and styles of play and due to its popularity it is taken as the status quo that football in general has become an inter-related world sport. This however is not the case: “the global economy is not meant to encompass the entire earth, rather it comprises only segments of activity in both developed and developing countries” (Castells 1996: 102). The grasp of globalisation seems to have avoided lower less developed leagues of football, displayed by lack of investment and lack of diversity. One could compare a large Premier League club such as Chelsea or Manchester City to a core country, and teams in lesser leagues such as Shrewsbury or Accrington Stanley to peripheral countries. “International trade was not a trade between equals. Some countries were stronger than others (the core) and therefore able to trade on terms that allowed surplus-value to flow from the weaker countries (the periphery) to the core” (Wallerstein, 2004: 12). For example, Manchester City bought Joe Hart, arguably one of the Premier Leagues best goalkeepers, for just £100,000 pounds, Hart himself now makes roughly that sum per week. This displays the somewhat ‘monolithic’ concept that globalisation is; it assumes a global network of relations but ignores the inequalities or lack of networks in particular parts of the world. However this is not to refute globalisation, which has clearly happened and is still happening, but displays its somewhat feeble assumption.

For David football is no longer a battle between two teams for deserved superiority. It is a predictable sport where the best teams dominate (the core) and peripheral teams rarely are given the opportunity (the periphery). His team means little to him because the players no longer play for the shirt, instead playing for huge pay cheques. The businessmen at the head of his team know little of football and what it is to David. To him, the owners speak the language of profit, and have little value for tradition. Some would say football players are more accessible than ever via social media, however
this is far from the truth and displays the paradox of modernity - the closeness doesn’t feel real. “To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world- and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are” (Berman 1982: 15).

Bibliography


Images

