

## The Culture of Sports

ORLANDO PATTERSON<sup>1</sup> in conversation with  
ALAN TOMLINSON AND CHRISTOPHER YOUNG

**Abstract** In conversation with Orlando Patterson, the editors of this special issue reflected and speculated on the nature of the historical sociologist's task and challenge. We agreed that any historical sociology concentrated upon particular events or single sports, but overlooking comparative cultural and social contexts, was narrow and over-focused. Recalling early contributions, Patterson notes how in cricket in the Caribbean there could be found an "intense distillation of every kind of problem and emotional baggage" carried by a society at a particular socio-historical moment. Patterson advocates the dual focus upon time/place and socio-cultural historical influence that is at the heart of the historical sociologist's enterprise; and that shows how cricket, for instance, is both constituted by the legacies of a specific historical past, and constituting of a potentially different future.

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**Professor Patterson, why should someone who is justly famous for writing on major topics such as slavery and development be interested in the study of sport?**

I should say first that I'm very happy to see sports are taken seriously in the Academy in Europe, because it's certainly not the case in America. It's just quite extraordinary, given sport's cultural and economic significance. In their 2001 review paper, "Sport And Society", Robert Washington and David Karen (*Annual Review of Sociology*, 27: 187–212) refer to the special difficulties of the sociology of sport: it's scorned by sociologists and despised by sports persons! The neglect in America is extremely odd, I might add, because of the striking opportunities sport offers to social scientists and students of cultural studies. In their annual review article a decade earlier, James Frey and D. Stanley Eitzen ("Sport and Society", *Annual Review of Sociology*, 17, 1991: 503–22) correctly pointed out that sport is a highly crystallised form of social structure, not found in other areas of society. It's unique, it's not just a product of social reality. "No other institution", they say, "except perhaps religion, commands the mystique, the nostalgia, the romantic ideational cultural fixation that sports does. No other activity so paradoxically combines the serious with the frivolous, playfulness with intensity, and the ideological with the structural." (p. 504). The more I think about it the more extraordinary it seems that there isn't more study of sports in terms of the enormous intellectual payoff it offers.

**When it comes to considering sport, you have a good pedigree and a source of inspiration in your early mentor C. L. R. James.**

Oh yes, C. L. R. James. He created a tutorial for me and a couple of friends – the economist Norman Girvan and the historian Walter Rodney who was later assassinated in Guyana for his radical politics – thinking these were the three smart colonials coming up. He told us to visit him at his quarters, somewhere in north London, and said he had arranged a seminar for us. But he didn't call it a seminar, he called it a meeting. We had just arrived as graduate students and he didn't wait for us to get contaminated.

**At the LSE?**

Yes. Then in essence what we experienced was an indoctrination session, every Friday evening – instead of going to parties. I guess it's something he must have learned from Trotsky, who was a friend of his. I rebelled after a while. We were literally sitting at the feet of the great man as he told us the correct version of Marxism. We went through *Capital*, *The Communist Manifesto*, and the other classics.

**What about his love of cricket?**

We knew he loved cricket, but all West Indians do whether you are a communist or not, that wasn't a puzzle. He was writing *Beyond A Boundary* then. I had just finished my first novel and he wanted to see it. He wanted to see everything I did, so I gave him the manuscript and didn't hear anything for about three weeks. The next thing, his publisher, Hutchinson, wrote me and said they would like to publish it. I didn't have an agent or anything. And then James wrote a long review of it. I dedicated my first book, *The Sociology of Slavery*, which came out in 1967, to him.

**Was it C. L. R. James who first prompted you to write about sport?**

Well, my very first paper on the subject goes back over four decades (to the 1967–68 test series), and it was prompted by the only riot I've ever found myself in, which was in Sabina Park at the famous cricket match between Britain (England) and the West Indies. The batsman, Basil Butcher – I remember him quite well – was given out just a minute before the end of play in a rather controversial LBW (leg before wicket) decision. It had been a very tense day throughout, as Britain seemed to be on the point of thrashing the Caribbean team, in their own back yard, and I think the audience just couldn't take it anymore. They rioted, and the police were called, and it's the only time I've ever had a sniff of tear gas. Well, I went home and wrote my first paper on cricket. It was called the "Ritual of Cricket" (*Jamaican Journal* III, No. 1, 1969, pp. 23–5; see *New Society*, No.352, June 1969, for a shorter version), and what struck me was the way the whole experience was a microcosm of Caribbean society, an intense distillation of every kind of problem and emotional baggage which that society was carrying at that moment.<sup>1</sup>

**Do you think this sort of distillation is still characteristic of sports, and particularly cricket, in today's societies?**

It certainly is. It's remarkable. The late Samuel Huntington opened his last work, *Who Are We?*, with reference to a soccer match played in Los Angeles, a city which has become a focus for the American right as to what's wrong with America, and what threatens American civilisation and identity. The USA was playing Mexico and the stadium was packed. There was a lot of booing, but they weren't booing the Mexicans, they were booing the US players in their own backyard, since most of the fans were in fact Mexican immigrants! But, what a nerve, Huntington thought. To him this was symptomatic of the threat to what he calls Anglo-protestant civilisation in America.

**Your essay with Jason Kaufman, “Cross-National Cultural Diffusion: The Global Spread of Cricket” in the *American Sociological Review* of 2005, won the prize for best paper on culture from the American Sociological Association. It explored the dynamics of cross-national diffusion through the study of the traditional English sport of cricket, a symbolically powerful cultural practice that spread to most but not all countries with close cultural ties with England. Its absence in the United States and Canada, you argue, provides another key example of American exceptionalism in sport.**

Well, trying to figure all this out posed really intriguing theoretical issues. Beyond Bourdieu’s somewhat problematic work from the 1980s (“Program for a Sociology of Sport”, *Sociology of Sport Journal* 5:2, 1988, pp. 153–61) sport studies are – from a sociological perspective at least – relatively under-theorized. We found the many ways in which one could potentially situate sports theoretically intriguing, but for me diffusion theory was one of the most promising areas in which to offer some deeper theoretical insights. At the same time, the more we explored it, we also found certain basic problems with diffusion theory, even though it’s an area which is very developed in many disciplines, from economics and demography to sociology. So it was a mutually beneficial exercise.

Traditional diffusion theory has a strong rationality emphasis. The basic idea is that practices are adopted to the extent that they are effective, efficient, better than available alternatives, that they are consistent with prior attributes and policies, and that they are simple. And the process is assumed to be rational. But there are many problems with this traditional approach. For instance, there are many cases of rapid diffusion which cannot be explained by the often very sophisticated mathematical models used in the field. The fact that modernity spreads quite rapidly is itself puzzling; for example, the middle classes all over the world now have incredibly similar cultures, and the rapidity with which this spreads is quite striking. It cannot be explained by traditional diffusion theories but rather in terms of cultural categories, with people identifying with particular groups, in this case the middle class.

There’s also another problem which we immediately encounter when we come to look at sport, and that’s a neglect of negative cases, i.e. cases where diffusion doesn’t work. Much of the literature cheats a bit by taking successful cases only, and simple cases at that. The spread of an antibiotic does not present many problems, it’s so obvious because people know if they take the stuff they won’t die of all kinds of diseases. But it’s another matter dealing with more complex issues, and explanations for the rejection of

innovations, it turns out, are almost always absent from the literature. The failure of modern manufacturing techniques to diffuse to third world countries even though they are trying desperately is a case in point, or then there's the spectacular failure of democracy after independence. There are many cases of failure which are not yet explored, and that is precisely what we were looking at with cricket. Our basic problem was to explain why cricket failed to take hold in Canada and the U.S. after initial adoption, two countries that are close to Britain culturally and historically, while succeeding in such un-English places as Pakistan and India (where, admittedly, ruling elites were not slow to adopt the values and cultural practices of the colonizers).

The egalitarian and historical cultural dynamics of adoption which are often neglected in these models are important. So is the understanding of the internal structure, transmitted meanings, and symbolic associations of the diffused objects, and the status, power and intentions of the transmitters. Traditional diffusion theory notoriously neglects class and power, the sociological complexities of the recipient context, the resources, intentions and status of the recipients, the inevitable modes of contestation and negotiation, especially where inter-class competition is engaged, and not least the other historical contingencies that inevitably accompany the adoption process.

**There's a lot in that last statement on the "sociological complexities". What do you feel is the most important aspect?**

Class and power. I wouldn't be a sociologist if I didn't end up with class as the critical factor. In some interesting way, in fact, class and class differences are often seen as obstacles to diffusion, but, paradoxically, class differences can sometimes be facilitators of diffusion and cultural adoption, a critical point neglected in cultural capital theory. Cricket, viewed comparatively, illustrates both processes, which is why we found the game so profitable sociologically.

**How does this work exactly?**

What we found in our cricket study has to do with the role of elites in sports diffusion and the nature of the class system, but in a very counter-intuitive way. It was in part the egalitarian nature of North American societies and their greater mobility which presented the elite with a challenge. They weren't very secure in their status, and this combination of class mobility and a not too secure elite led to a situation where elites insisted on finding boundary markers of their status. The markers can be anything, such as going to opera, the ballet, or art galleries. It was unfortunate for cricket that it was

the marker the North American elite chose. They basically lifted it out of the public arena. But it's important to note that North American cricket was not a case of a failed adoption. It was played in Canada and the United States on a regular basis and ran parallel with baseball in popularity for a significant period of time. So what you have here is a case of dis-adoption, which is also not very much explored in diffusion theory.

### **How did this work elsewhere?**

The situation was rather different, of course, in the rest of the empire, where you had just the opposite: rigid class structures, racial and ethnic divisions, which actually helped in the promotion of the game. The British elite felt they had a mission to civilise the masses and didn't feel insecure about promoting their culture not least due to inclusive segregation where different classes were encouraged to play against each other without any insecurity on the part of the British elite of losing face or class honour.

### **Does class explain everything?**

Well, we emphasise several other factors as well. Educational systems turned out to be vital in the diffusion of sports, both secondary level in the case of the colonies, and colleges in the case of North America. Sport entrepreneurship and network building are other critical factors and what we call indexical nationalism, the frame of reference in which citizens measure their own national accomplishments. Finally, one other thing which is neglected in diffusion literature is the nature of the diffusing object. Cricket has characteristics that make it highly diffusible and in this respect it's different from other sports. Most importantly it doesn't involve body contact, which is great for an elite that wants to civilise the masses but doesn't want their smelly bodies close to them. In the past the game was notoriously characterized by stacking, sometimes called oppositional segregation, in which certain positions such as batting and captaincy, went to elites while other positions, such as bowling, went to the working class. This pattern developed in England from the eighteenth century and was a built-in feature of the game that facilitated its use as an instrument of cultural hegemony in the colonies. The game is also played fully clothed.

### **Can we link your biography and your theory? How did all of this translate to your own experience of sport when you were growing up?**

I remember playing cricket in cream flannels in the Caribbean in temperatures of over 95 degrees. I was always struck by the fact that it was a very orderly game. I mean, as a child in the Tropics,

how wild we were on all other occasions. When we played soccer we screamed, kicked, yelled over whether there's a goal or not, or whether you're offside – we got in fights and so on. The West Indies is a very physical place, and Jamaica in particular is prone to this. But here's the strange thing: when you went on the cricket field, it was like the culture of imperial England was distilled in the game, in its rules and so on. It's the only occasion in which you clapped when someone did something special. You changed your language, you didn't scream like crazy when someone did something spectacular, instead you said "good shot", "splendid shot" – it was the only time we switched from speaking Creole to speaking the King's English when playing. In formal matches, we sometimes had tea in ninety degrees temperature, but most important of all was the discipline. The first thing you learned about cricket was: the umpire's decision is final, and you never argued. The important point is that it seems you can persuade people about anything. I can't think of a game more incongruent with the Caribbean way of being. But it took hold, and we enjoyed it.

**Could we ask specifically about the methodology you used in your article on cricket and globalisation? Reading it with the eyes of historians, it struck us that you had a lot less of what we would call evidence than an historian looking at the same problem might perhaps have had. Yet on the other hand, your argument was beautifully clear, in a way that an historical argument might not be. How does a sociologist deal with historical evidence?**

In historical sociology we deal a lot with the problem of evidence and method. When something doesn't happen when you would expect it to, it's always a very challenging, interesting situation. At the AHRC network conference on Sport in Modern Europe in Cambridge 2009, Sébastien Darbon raised the question why there was no strong rugby tradition on the Spanish side of the Basque divide.<sup>2</sup> Here we're dealing with a group which is intensely ethnic and has a strong defensive solidarity, but on one side they're playing rugby and on the other they're not. It's a puzzle to solve, and going back through history is usually the only way of understanding it. The answer, I would suggest, lies maybe in the fact that you have a group that has come across a border. When this happens, some aspects of the culture are going to reflect the nation in which you are located: the French Basque is going to have a French aspect, the Spanish Basque a Spanish aspect. But if you're identifying with your *Basqueness*, then you're inclined to downplay precisely those features of your group which are characteristic of the wider society to which you belong, especially if

it's one that's shared with the other side. You could say we're going to make rugby a Basque thing, but it's too late to do that since the French have already claimed it, so you drop it in order to assert your national identity.

### **How would you go about proving this?**

You prove it by looking at other cases, you test it by seeing if you can find other similar cases or challenging counter-cases. That's what we did when we looked at the absence of cricket in Canada. We started with Canada as it's the odd unexpected case – it's British, has the British queen etc. and should have had cricket as a major sport –, and then we looked at America, which also has a British background and still proclaims a “special relationship” with Britain. When we looked at comparative cases, we found more challenges. The presence of cricket in the West Indies, India and Pakistan was as odd as its absence in Canada and the U.S. Our hypothesis was that class was important. We kept looking for counter-cases, and the big challenge was Australia: Australia was very like America in being more egalitarian and the question was why the elite was not doing the same there. As we discovered, there are several reasons. For instance, Australia is peculiar in that it's population emerged in part from ex-convicts, and they were desperate to assert their Britishness. Since the British were highlighting cricket as a mark of civilization, the elite found it a very useful way of promoting Australianness, both in mastering the game and eventually beating the British at their own game.

**So you had your counter example. But let us throw a problem at this in relation to rugby and the Basques. Having identified your problem and formulated a hypothesis, you would look at other examples. But aren't there potentially two complicating factors? One would be contingency: what about the individual – sports history is full of accounts of individual influence that go beyond the merely hagiographic – how does that factor into the argument? The other would be what you do when you find out that rugby isn't played in other places in Europe, for all sorts of different reasons?**

That doesn't matter. The ideal comparison would be not so much rugby, but any other situation you can find where you have an ethnic group, in which one half of the group plays a game and the other half doesn't. It doesn't have to be rugby, it could be cricket, or soccer or baseball. The hypothesis here is that if you're asserting the identity of the group then you're less likely to use as a marker of the group identity a game which is already identified with



another group. The counterpart examples wouldn't have to include rugby. My emphasis on boundary marking and identity formation, by the way, was derived from Fredrik Barth's seminal edited book (*Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*) first published in 1969 and which introduced all the important concepts in the theory of boundaries now attributed to other people, especially by those working in the sociology of sport who seem to be utterly ignorant of the true origin of these ideas.

**But what if you want to look at a particular sport across several countries? For instance, in Germany rugby was supported by the National Socialists, because it was quite a robust sport, a manly sport, and one thesis might be that it didn't flourish later precisely because it didn't have deep roots in the sporting culture and was associated with the National Socialist regime.**

Those could be the kind of contingencies we should look at. There's not much in the game itself. With one exception, we quite explicitly excluded arguments such as cricket not being manly, and so on. Those arguments don't really hold tight. What does hold though, are a few basic features which we think are important: whether there is body contact or not, for instance. That is a hypothesis which would be worth checking out for rugby. Rugby can't get more intimate – it seems the game was invented as a way of promoting male bonding. You can't imagine white and black Africans in a scrum or whatever, at least not in the past. Contact sports are not going to work where you have groups that are very sharply divided in terms of status. Now to disprove the hypothesis is very simple. You find a couple of examples – white Americans playing with their slaves, or their ex-slaves, elite and working class doing Greco-Roman wrestling – that will disprove it.

**To come back to your cricket interests, have you any idea why there is no major bat and ball game in mainland Europe?**

No. I've never thought about that. That blows me away, actually and is just the kind of puzzle that ignites my imagination as a historical sociologist. There could be a primarily historical explanation. There are certain things that only contingencies will explain. It seems so natural: you throw a ball and someone else hits it with a bat. Or maybe it's not so natural if it's not done in continental Europe. Do we conclude that this remarkable absence denaturalizes what we have taken for granted, or do we conclude that continental Europe is just plain odd and is in need of explanation? Either way, I think this deserves a whole paper, perhaps even a book-length treatise.

**It's odd, not least because in Spalding, who toured large parts of the world, baseball had an entrepreneur, par excellence.**

Spalding was certainly a genius, he made himself a millionaire doing it. But education is really important too. He not only invented the baseball uniform, rationalized the sport, and attracted an audience to the games, at the expense of cricket which he mocked as a game for effete Englishmen, but also promoted the game in schools and as a national pastime.

**Exactly. Japan is passionate about baseball, but it really took off there when it got into the universities.**

Yes. And in relation to Europe, remember that during the period up to the late nineteenth, early twentieth century, the flow of education and innovation was coming the other way. Germany in particular was the model for America's expansion of its educational system, and maybe the Germans didn't want to adopt an American game. Maybe they felt that the same way the Americans were adopting their scientific procedures and so on, they ought perhaps to take over gymnastics. This was a great period of growth of German nationalism too, so they would hardly want to select the American game, especially since they were beginning to see themselves in competition with America in ways explicit and implicit. Again, my part of the Caribbean is interesting. One of the main excuses the Americans repeatedly gave for invading Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Haiti, which they occupied for over eighteen years, was their fear that the Germans would move in because these countries had borrowed money from Germany which they couldn't pay back, and the Germans were threatening to take over the ports and seize the excise. So there was some sense of national competition with Germany, which may have been a factor in sporting choices. During these occupations they successfully diffused their national game of baseball to Cuba and the Dominican Republic, the latter now an important source of major league baseball stars in the U.S. but the game was not diffused to Haiti, in spite of the fact that they occupied that country for a far longer period than Cuba or the Dominican Republic. Why was that? Another plot for the comparative historian and sociologist of sport to solve.

**You're not the first, of course, to treat the absence of a particular sport in a national setting. In their book, *Offside: Soccer and American Exceptionalism*, Andrei Markovits and Steven S. Hellerman discuss the relative unimportance of soccer in the United States compared with the big three and a half: American football, baseball, basketball, and ice hockey.**

**They have two key concepts, which overlap in their argument: hegemonic sports culture and sports space.**

On hegemonic sports cultures, it's important to note that Markovits and Hellerman are not saying there are no other sports; as a matter of fact they point out that there are about nineteen million pool tables in the United States and that more people play pool than basketball or any other sport. And there's a lot of pool on television. So the notion of a hegemonic sports complex relates to the sports that dominate the emotional psyche, the national psyche. The best indication of this is when you pick up the newspaper in the morning: you don't read about who won the billiard tournament or whatever; instead you're always reading about baseball, football, basketball, and sometimes hockey. There are many other sports of course: track is common, gymnastics is done in America, volleyball and so on, particularly in Olympic times. The question is not whether the sport is there but whether it's part of the hegemonic sports culture. The concept is useful, it certainly makes sense to explore it critically for a history of sport in Europe, say. All sports are played in all countries now – certainly America plays all of them as indicated by its Olympic performance – but the important point is to determine which make up the hegemonic culture of different countries and regions. You should look at whether there is such a thing in Europe.

**Since we're talking about absences, does it hold that each country has to have a hegemonic sports culture?**

Well, as Sébastien Darbon also noted at the Cambridge conference in 2009, France basically does not have a hegemonic sports culture, or rather it does not have the same passion for sports as, say, England or Italy. This is very intriguing. Darbon claims that people like tennis and so on and will go to matches but that the kind of passionate engagement in sports which you get in Boston, Manchester, or Milan doesn't exist. Another great puzzle waiting.

**France attracts the lowest crowds in elite European football, and when they won the World Cup in 1998 it took a long time for the passion to ignite with a lot of the people. If you open the daily sports paper *L'Equipe*, which has been one of the surviving sports monopolies, it is full of many different sports. We don't have an equivalent in Britain, and the national broadsheet, or quality, press is dominated by three sports: football, cricket, rugby. There's definitely a hegemonic base in people's everyday thoughts about sport.**

It's very interesting in terms of what is called primary emotional attachment. Typically in the United States, the working class man

leaves work and what he spends most of his time doing is watching sports or going to sports. That's emotional attachment, and on weekends he's either playing it or he's watching it. But there's another complication in the U.S. that I am now beginning to work on. It's the fact that black Americans are prominent in these hegemonic sports and, in the case of basketball, dominant. At the same time, while lauding these black athletic heroes white Americans still shun blacks in their neighborhoods, the country being as segregated now as it was before the civil rights movement. How does one explain this amazing juxtaposition of complete acceptance, even veneration in the public sphere, with continued exclusion in the private sphere?

**Yes, playing and/or watching and the interrelated aspects of the two have been fundamental to the historical development of sports. Thinking historically, we have to consider how the twentieth century opened up the difference between participation and spectatorship.**

Absolutely. Important changes took place in the critical period between the 1890s and 1930: from participation to spectatorship, from amateur to professional, from the heroic to the athlete as player to the athlete as displayer. Advertising becomes important, the corporate sector takes over, more and more sports influence and indeed come to imitate the corporate system, and are seen as part of the corporate structure of the country. One way in which a sport is sustained is by having lots of people playing it. The reason why I'm crazy about cricket is no doubt because I grew up playing it; the reason I can never get involved with baseball is that I didn't grow up with it.

**You've now explained the second element of Markovits and Hellerman's argument: sports space. They argue that there is a critical period in the whole history of sport, which is more important than what went before and what went after, and that was the period between 1890 and 1930. And they propose that it's during this time that social space or sports space is taken up.**

Yes. Essentially, Markovits and Hellerman argue that sports space got swallowed up during that period, by certain sports in different countries. In the United States, for instance, sports that made it during this decisive transitional period were baseball, football, and basketball. Soccer came a little on the scene, and by the time it fully emerged there was no space for it. They used a path dependence model, i.e. the thing becomes reinforced, once established, by externalities such as those emphasized by economists. You've invested a

lot of sunk cost into establishing new sports, you build stadiums, and you know if you've built a cricket or baseball stadium you can't use it for soccer and so on. It's certainly an interesting argument, but I think there are problems with it. For instance, after this sort of sport space was taken up during the critical period, other sports did move in. They mention one themselves: figure skating, which grew tremendously in the United States. Also, basketball is spreading like wildfire in Europe, with American stars, either in their waning years or on their rise, now coming over if they are not picked up at home. It's blowing away everything else in China, where the game is enormously popular. The Beijing Olympics were very intriguing because the Chinese team was headed by a great star in China who plays in American basketball, and the man was obviously treated like a god; but when the Americans, Kobe Bryant and his Olympic team came on, the spectators went wild. This raises some questions about the argument that sports space gets swallowed or taken up. Under what conditions do hegemonic sports get challenged or fall from grace? This part of the theory needs more work.

**But it seems that for all the reasons outlined, the period 1890–1930 is certainly foundational. We should hold on to that as an historical fact. So how would you refine their argument?**

It seems to me that a country has a capacity for more than a limited number of sports. Looking to the future and picking up on the notion of emotional commitment again, it will be worth pondering the extent to which the shift towards spectatorship creates interesting situations. With regard to the concept of sports space, we might want to think not just about competition from other sports, but also in terms of seeing sports within the broader context of leisure. As people spend more and more of their leisure time preoccupied with the internet, they might well have less time to engage with the emotional intensity that a hegemonic sports complex requires. We need to think more about that.

**Why do people play sport and why do they watch it? Could it simply be because they enjoy it? As Gavin Kitching noted at our network meeting in Cambridge 2009: "Enjoyment is an enormously complex concept. It can have physical dimensions, aesthetic dimensions, social status dimensions, ethnic status dimensions, gender status dimensions – and many of these dimensions are expressed in inter-relationship between fans, spectators and the players. But the point is that nobody can be got to play a sport because it has a particular political**

**function. Nobody can be got to play a sport because it's an elite marker, or a mass marker, or a class marker. They play it because they enjoy it, and it is in unpacking the concept of enjoyment that all these other things have worked. It's not that those other things are not important, but just the banality hides the multi-dimensionality and the complexity of the experience." Maybe we should start with the activity, looking away in the first instance from the activity's undoubted many meanings?**

I would challenge that straight away. Why do I eat and why do I like and enjoy the strange Jamaican national food called ackee? Ackee is a potentially poisonous fruit which comes from West Africa and only Jamaicans eat it. Why do Americans eat and love hot dog? One could say Americans eat hot dog and I and other Jamaicans eat ackee because we like them. But I want to suggest that the causal direction runs the other way. I enjoy ackees and Americans enjoy hot dog because we eat these things. In other words, we come to like the things we do. To get back to sports, I can sufficiently put myself out of my upbringing to objectively say that had I not grown up with cricket I would have hated it. It has to do with what's available. I came to love cricket because it's what was available and what I did with other kids and saw my grown-up role models and heroes doing. You first do things due to circumstances and upbringing and you learn to like them. You do, therefore you enjoy. But then, you turn around and say that you enjoy therefore you do. It's the narcissism of agency.

**As historians, we could ask at what point in time certain pleasures are historically created. And then the issue becomes difficult and more complex, as we would be trying to learn more about differences between different cultures across time.**

Absolutely. But I would not want to lose sight of how diffusion theory provides a nice way of theorising sports. It emphasises the fact that class, power and culture are central. It also questions the traditional view of the role of class: elites are critical. Not only in excluding but in including, not only in preserving their cultural capital but in extending it to other groups as part of the effort to rule. Sports as cultural resource can be an agent of hegemony; but sports, often the very same sport, can be counter-hegemonic. That was the central thesis of C.L.R. James's great classic. The nature of the sport itself is also very important, as is the role of entrepreneurs and nationalism. The timing of the introduction of sports plays a part, and not just the degree to which there is sports space or social space available, but the cultural struggle between classes in which, contra Bourdieu, the subaltern often more than hold their own,

even if they sometimes partly lost by partly winning. Cricket could only have taken hold in the Caribbean when they were colonies. An awful lot was invested socially and emotionally in the institutionalization of the game, not only by the colonizers, but by the colonized, especially in the latter's effort to emulate and beat the colonizers at their own game. The British colonizers, with imperial cunning, may well have known this all along and used it to their advantage because what they were prepared to lose – being beaten at their own game – was of less import to them than it was to the colonized, and was outweighed by what the colonizers gained in extending their hegemonic control. In the West Indies we still have a soft spot for the British, three centuries of the most brutal slavery and colonialism notwithstanding. Ethnicity and ethno-racial factors are also very important. These are all factors we can play with, and which are critical for understanding sport, especially in comparative and historical terms. Sport may be the most complex of cultural processes, second only to religion, and only the nerdy, intellectual snobbery of academics can explain why it is not of far greater importance in the academy.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> This paper, exploring the relation between class, culture and power, appeared nearly a decade before Bourdieu's first paper on similar themes, his "Sport and Social Class", in *Social Science Information*, 17/6 (1978), pp. 819-40.

<sup>2</sup> Gernika Rugby club, though, of the Bizkaia (Biscay) Premier League, was founded in 1973, a pioneer of the sport in that Basque region beyond the metropolitan centre of Bilbao. The Estadio Anoeta in Donastio-San Sebastián, opened in 1993 at a sport complex previously concentrating on athletics, has staged Heineken Cup fixtures, including French Basque club Bayonne against Stade Français. Toulouse has also faced French (Northern) Basque opposition there, and Bayonne and French Basque neighbours Biarritz Olympique have played their Basque derby at the stadium.