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EDITORIAL

Exploring Issues in Transnational Sport History

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Increasingly, sport has become an important lens through which to examine the historical influences of, and issues related to, transnational interactions and exchanges, yet the term "transnational" remains beset with disagreement regarding its precise meaning and definition. Commonly, transnational approaches to the historical study of sport provide opportunities to reach beyond "the nation," whereby the nation–state is not positioned, necessarily, as the central category of analysis in discussions of cultural exchange between or across nations and borders. In such analyses, nonstate actors—essentially, those working outside of government influence—can move from the periphery to the center of focus. Challenging the dominant narrative of much historical research into globalization in sport that has tended to dwell on the negative, transnational approaches, as evidenced in this collection, offer new opportunities to consider positive, progressive, and co-operative aspects inherent to the connections and exchanges examined.

Keywords: globalization, internationalism, leisure, recreation

Scholars in the social sciences have over time come to develop a more nuanced and enlightened view of what a nation is—that is, beyond merely political defined borders—and how national identity is understood and transmitted through cultural messages and representations. Sport has emerged as a key focus point for analysis, as historians continue to grapple with critical issues related to "the nation," e.g., the globalization of culture, media, and business in the light of new technologies; colonization, neo-colonization, and post-colonial politics; international politics; and nationalism, jingoism, and xenophobia. Sport, defined broadly to incorporate the myriad of leisure and recreation activities, is now understood to be an important platform from which to understand, and an important vehicle for the transmission of messages about, nations and their people in a collective sense. This is seen in how representatives of nations view and understand themselves and those of other nations and how nations, broadly speaking, relate to one another through sport as a vehicle to transmit certain cultural, social, and political ideologies.[1] Indeed, as Matt

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Taylor argues, "examining sport might help to deepen our understandings of globalizing processes and transnational linkages over time."[2] Particularly through elite-level competitions, which are showcased within events open to sportsmen/women from all nations like the Olympic Games and Soccer World Cup, televised to a global audience, made attractive to corporate sponsorship from multinational companies, and supported if not partially funded by nations' governments, sport has shown itself to be a powerful tool to further the economic, political, and cultural projects of nation building. However, the extent that these projects have been undertaken explicitly is always open to debate, interpretation, and empirical analyses.

Academic scholarship around the terms "global," "international," and "transnational" is also lacking agreement on what differentiates them, as each has progressed through various historical trends that have seen meanings shift significantly. Nevertheless, they began as and remain significantly overlapping terms. Adding the suffix "ization" to "global" should merely represent a processual shift, denoting the process of some entity becoming "globalized," yet the term has become heavily value laden. "Globalization" emerged as a popular term in the 1980s, used, quite benignly at the time, to describe economic processes, but its meaning has since evolved into something arguably more negative, used to describe international developments that have sharpened social inequalities between the rich and poor, extended the disparities in political power both within and between nations, and promoted and served the sociopolitical and economic interests of the most powerful nations, like the United States, to the disadvantage and ultimate exploitation of other, less powerful nations.[3] This shifted meaning is now implied in its synonymous use, at least for some scholars, with the terms "Americanization" and "McDonaldization," which imply the homogenization of culture, and therefore the loss of distinct or local cultural identities.

Similarly, "internationalism" as a concept has not remained static in its approved meanings. In 1963, H.L.S. Lyons, in his groundbreaking work on internationalism in Europe in the hundred years before the First World War, used the term to consider mainly international organizations and conferences. However, more recently, according to Akira Iriye, the term has come to attract certain ideological meanings.[4] He defined the term, in his 1997 text, as "an idea, a movement, or an institution that seeks to reformulate the nature of relations among nations through cross-national cooperation and interchange."[5] This definition follows logically, given that the prefix in the term *inter*national or *inter*nationalism means "between"—that is, between nations. Thus, the nation remains the central category of analysis in research identified within this theme.

The newest of the three, "transnational," emerged as, and has developed into, a more ambiguous term, whereby the place of "the nation" is complicated if not somewhat circumvented in historical research.[6] Definitions of transnational history vary widely, and its exact meaning remains "controversial," according to Kiran Patel.[7] For Iriye and Saunier, in their vast edited collection entitled the *Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History*, transnational history is understood broadly, if not vaguely, as dealing with entanglements, interactions, and encounters—the "links and flows"—between and among the "people, ideas, products, processes and patterns that operate over, across, through, beyond, above, under or in-between polities and societies."[8] Conversely, a symposium organized by the *American*

Historical Review in 2006 stressed a definition that focused, more narrowly, on the interpenetration of various parties across or beyond nations engaged in or undergoing mutual change, for example, in areas like anti-Colonialism, antiracism, feminism, LGBTQ movements, human rights, migration, and environmental change. Methodological approaches within the transnational historical framework were also contested, and Bayly et al.[9] notes: "Dialogues between activists and scholars have produced transnational historical analyses that explore social inequalities that structure the 'movements, flows, and circulations' that ... are defining characteristics of transnationalism."

This historiographical development, as Patel acknowledges, has oftentimes invited "positive connotations,"[10] given that the bulk of historical research within a transnational framework has tended to "present transnationalist encounters as consistently progressive and co-operative in character."[11] However, transnational history should be just as interested in "the suppression and subsiding, the diversion and destruction, the forgetting and fading of transnational relations."[12] With that said, especially in relation to sport, transnationalism typically carries the promise—though perhaps, not necessarily the reality—of open cultural exchange between and across nations, where borders and barriers break down and where the benefits of this exchange are shared mutually among all involved parties. The lack of agreement aside, "transnational" might now be considered a term most appropriate for understanding the process of cultural exchange between or across nations/borders, where the primary and explicit aim is one of equitable, open, and free exchange. Of course, this does not mean that explicit economic or political outcomes cannot be obtained through these endeavors, but rather that they do not, at least at the time of conception, represent the key focus or objective, or an explicit goal.

Among these divergent perspectives around transnationalism, there are several key foci. First, since the emergence of transnationalism as a term of relevance in the social sciences, there has developed a general awareness that "there are many forces and developments in the world that cannot be understood merely in a national framework."[13] Thus, in defying and circumventing the historiographical dominance of "the nation" and breaking away from the nation state as the central category of analysis, transnational history directly connects the local to the supranational or transcontinental.[14] However, as Iriye pertinently proffers, "the transnational approach of the study of history ... does not deny the existence of nations and the role they play in contributing to defining the world in a given moment in time."[15] Second, a key focus of agreement is on the primacy of what might be termed "nonstate actors," that is, individuals and groups (e.g., communities, associations, institutions, and organizations) not connected to or explicitly representative of governments.[16] The focus on the individual is key, according to Patricia Clavin, given that, in her estimation, transnationalism is "first and foremost about people: the social place that they inhabit, the networks they form and the ideas they exchange."[17] It is understood that, within a transnational lens, these individuals operate outside of governmental institutions and processes. To give examples of this distinction within the Cold War sporting context, one might label the US State Department's world tours involving Black athletes in the 1950s and 1960s as *less* an example of transnational exchange, as it carried with it the explicit political goal, supported by the US government, to further American political

interests internationally.[18] This might be categorized more accurately within the framework of globalization or Americanization. Conversely, the 1972 Hockey Summit Series between Canada and the Soviet Union might be more closely aligned with the philosophy of "transnational," as the primary aim of the players, coaching staff, administrators, and officials, was, at least as far as we are aware, to play hockey. Any international benefits—politically, economically, or culturally—that were accrued from the contest were, at least at the outset, of secondary importance to those involved. Though certainly involved, the Canadian and Soviet governments and their agents and agencies were not the *primary* drivers of this contact or exchange.[19]

Transnational exchanges are abundant and can take many forms in sport, from formal or informal sport tours or international-oriented competitions and events, to the creation of international federations and collective associations/clubs of sportspeople that cross national borders. These transnational exchanges, far from being innocuous or "just about sport," can contain numerous features that, upon critical analysis, reveal compelling aspects of national culture or politics where debates, challenges, or disagreements manifest themselves.[20] For example, historical research—supported by a swathe of anecdotal evidence—has uncovered detailed descriptions of "national playing styles" in sports like soccer and hockey, where aspects of a broader national culture or what might be termed, somewhat crudely, as a "collective personality," were revealed.[21] Similar distinctions have been assessed within Canada between (Francophone) Quebec and (Anglophone) Ontario,[22] where the exploits of Maurice Richard during Quebec's "quiet revolution" in the 1950s were given much importance.[23] Aspects within the "performativity" of sport therefore become markers of culture, society, and politics, reflecting aspects of the nation in potent ways, and this has been investigated across broader transnational contexts in several different sports.[24]

In addition, coaching styles and attitudes toward talent development and performance have been focal points for transnational disputes throughout history, especially when rooted in divergent philosophies of how sport *should* be played, organized, approached, or understood, for example, in accordance with amateur or professional ideals and values. British and American athletes, coaches, and administrators, for example, were argued to have approached the pursuit of sporting excellence in markedly different ways coming into the 1908 Olympics, and their respective differences that famously came to a head were said to reflect deepening distinctions in cultural norms and values amid the decline of the British Empire and the rise of the United States as a global superpower.[25] Research involving media analyses has brought to light interesting manifestations of Anglo-American relations during this same period prior to the First World War, in competitive sports including athletics, tennis, and horseracing, which revealed similar distinctions in how both nations—Great Britain and the United States—understood the other, and highlighted the widespread use of cultural stereotypes in the dominant narratives of sporting performances in this rapidly changing transatlantic context.[26] Research into football (soccer), cricket, and rugby has highlighted the seemingly ubiquitous and inveterate cultural politics of national identity across continents and between hemispheres,[27] and as North American team sports like baseball, basketball, and (American) football have spread internationally, they have served as relevant platforms from which individuals representing nations

have reproduced and challenged dominant ideologies.[28] Played out in broader political, economic, social, or cultural contexts, these cultural exchanges etched into the fabric of sporting performance may manifest in increased global power struggles between nations.

Sport has been the subject of previous journal special issues focused on matters pertaining to globalization and transnationalism, which provides something akin to proof of concept for scholarship in this burgeoning field. In 2007, *Global Networks* ran a special issue entitled "Sport and Globalization: Transnational Perspectives," guest edited by Richard Giulianotti and Roland Robertson.[29] Six years later, the *Journal of Global History* ran a special issue entitled "Sport, Transnationalism and Global History," guest edited by Matt Taylor.[30] Both were well received and contained excellent articles from renowned scholars. Yet, with only a few exceptions, the papers in both collections were overwhelmingly about globalization, rather than transnationalism. Such broad, rather than narrowly focused, coverage of topic matter in these special issues was indicative of where the debate on defining transnationalism was at the time. More recently, the chapters on sport within the *Yearbook of Transnational History*, which commenced its first volume in 2018, and perhaps most pertinently Souvik Naha's published edited collection, *Global and Transnational Sport: Ambiguous Borders, Connect Domains*, accords respect to the role of sport as a platform to understand and analyze issues in transnational history.[31]

Contributions to this Collection

While disagreement on how to define transnationalism continues to persist into the 2020s, nevertheless, a concerted effort was made in this present collection to invite scholarship on issues specific to the various ways we can understand the term "transnationalism" or "transnational sport history." The essays assembled within this edited collection represent the most up-to-date research in this field, approached from a multidisciplinary perspective, and underscore the important role of research into transnational connections in sporting contexts, be they described alternatively as exchanges, contacts, entanglements, interactions, encounters, links, flows, or another relevant term. This collection blends historical analyses with sociology, political studies, communications, and media studies to develop a body of knowledge on the role of sport in fostering and augmenting transnational relations and exchanges on a broad sociocultural and sociopolitical basis. It incorporates, at its core, analyses of race, ethnicity, gender, and class relations over time, and highlights the growing importance—and increasing appreciation for the growing importance—of sport in the making of identity politics throughout history.

Collectively, this collection covers issues in transnational sport history spread across the geographical regions of North America, Africa, Asia, and Europe, and includes original research on sports as wide ranging as wrestling, rugby, ice hockey, figure skating, bodybuilding, American football, golf, and yachting. As a testament to and an example of the growth and breadth of new research into issues in transnational sport history, this collection of essays offers a renewed focus on the key distinguishing aspects of this tradition, as discussed above.

Beyond the Nation

First, while the nation is framed as an important component in the stories of sport here, the key focus lies beyond the nation.

The role of wrestling in the historical construction of Spanish national identity was considered by Carlos Garcia and Raul Sànchez-Garcia. They posit that specific aspects of how the Spanish understood themselves in relation to racial, gender, and class stereotypes in the first two decades of the twentieth century were influenced by traditions in and cultural representations of wrestling. Tournaments, exhibitions, and circuits were not only sites for the contestation of different—and dominant—wrestling techniques, but also for providing opportunities for the Spanish public to reassess their own national identities, particularly in terms of race. Therefore, the outside influences that wrestling—and, to a lesser extent, jujutsu—invited expanded representations of what it meant to be "Spanish" beyond the nation.

Michelle Sikes's article on the controversial 1974 British Lions tour to South Africa added to the growing body of research on the ways in which sporting tours impacted, either positively or negatively, anti-Apartheid political movements in the 1970s, on a pan-African scale. The collective movement of nations, focusing specifically on those within the African continent, truly represented a transnational endeavor. However, Sikes sheds light on the internal dynamics of this, supposedly, pan-African united front to provide a more complex and nuanced view.

In our only French-language article in this collection, Denis Jallat critiques the notion of a unified Canadian identity in his analysis of the historical development of yachting among both Anglophone and Francophone groups in Canada. Interesting distinctions were made apparent in their approaches to the sport, particularly the enforcement of racing rules and in the design and construction of the boats themselves. The historical influences of both the British and Americans on yachting culture in Canada helped to add further complexity to the story.

The Primacy of Nonstate Actors

Second, within these stories, the significance, if not the primacy, of nonstate actors is evident—the individuals, communities, groups, associations, institutions, and organizations that exist outside of, or autonomous from, government control, or influence.

Offering an excellent example of this is Hendrik Snyders' article, which focuses on the clandestine tours for amateur wrestling that allowed South African teams during the Apartheid regime to continue competing for almost two decades despite an international ban on sporting contacts with the beleaguered nation. One particular exchange with a group based in Oregon, United States, was featured as the main case study examined by Snyders. It offers an interesting example of how contests for power were manifested—and ultimately, played out—between state and nonstate actors in the determination of politically embroiled sporting relations.

Golf course design is the subject matter examined by Jordan Goldstein and Graeme Thompson, who offer a compelling opportunity to understand transnational exchange less through playing sport, but instead, through the interchange of ideas in relation to the physical geography of sport settings. Indeed, the notion of

"national styles" in sport is not new, but rarely has this been attributed to, or discussed in relation to, how this manifests itself in the construction of the surfaces, courts, arenas, and in this case "courses" where play takes place. In the case of golf, and specifically among those who exported Scottish identity to England, the United States, and the British dominions, little of this was undertaken by those representing government agencies or for any explicitly political reasons. Instead, it was enthusiastic afficionados who were led by an often unspoken understanding of how golf should be played, in accordance with a specific Scottish brand of course design itself.

Chris Bolsmann returns to the topic of anti-Apartheid in South Africa, examining Irish efforts, specifically, both for and against this movement. Bolsmann suggests that the overall outcomes of the Irish anti-Apartheid Movement were "uneven, contested and contradictory," garnering support from religious organizations, trade unions, and a swathe of civil society. Yet it found resistance from the Irish Rugby Football Union, which continued to maintain sporting relations with the Springbok rugby team throughout the 20-plus-year conflict, thereby circumventing the rules and prohibitions set out by government actors.

Privileging the Positive

Third, if there has been a tradition in transnational historical research to privilege, perhaps inadvertently, the positive, progressive, and cooperative aspects inherent to the connections and exchanges, then this collection offers added breadth.

K.V. Iyer is the interesting case study examined by authors Aishwarya Ramachandran and Conor Heffernan. Iyer was a man broadly responsible for fostering the exchange between Indian and American bodybuilding cultures and communities in the first half of the twentieth century, and is probably the highest profile and influential advocate of Indian physical culture during this period. His writings were infused with political rhetoric, which made his correspondences with audiences in the United States—especially his views of an "ideal citizen" that blended ideas of "modernity, industrialization and self-discipline"—of significant importance.

Mathieu Boivin-Chouinard's essay examines ice hockey, specifically, the sport's role during the Cold War in constructing a distinctly positive and empowering Soviet national identity. The perceptively Canadian sport of ice hockey was transformed for Soviet public consumption and translated into Soviet nationalistic cultural representations during the period of massification of sport in the USSR (broadly 1940s–1960s). Thus, ice hockey was in a sense "Sovietized" during a period of marked sociocultural and political change in the USSR, and this also contributed to the ways in which ice hockey culture globally developed in time.

Adam Burns focuses on the incipient growth of rugby football in the United States as an avenue to critique the widely held myth about the origins of American football. Extending the work of other authors in this debate, Burns focused specifically on the significance of two international fixtures in 1873 (Eton College, England vs. Yale University, United States) and 1874 (McGill University, Canada vs. Harvard University, United States), which impacted the development of football in the United States. The soccer-style games that had been played previously were replaced in these matches with a version of football more akin

to rugby; thus, it is argued that it was this version—broadly described as "American rugby"—that can be attributed as the true ancestor of American football.

In the final article, Bev Thurber contrasted the two forms of figure skating that predominated during the second half of the nineteenth century: an international style that featured brisk limb movements, jumps, and spins and a British style that emphasized long, flowing glides of "figures" done with an upright posture. Considered effeminate, the former style was essentially snubbed by the British, but its dominance within international competitions—a process precipitated in part by the creation of the International Skating Union in 1892—forced the British to adapt to this style, as its own became nearly obsolete.

In this collection, the authors highlight the significant social, cultural, and political role of sporting practices examined through a transnational lens. This is evident through various guises: in the construction of identity; in mobilizing social movements; in contesting regional, national, or international relations; in the facilitation of social exchanges; and in the creation of forms and representations unique to, and reflective of, particular cultures. Oftentimes, outcomes extended beyond the national context, involved nonstate actors who worked outside of government intervention and without explicit political motives, and resulted in—at least from the perspective of the dominant narrative—invariably positive and progressive results. In clear ways, these articles about sport reflect a broad definition of "transnational" in the sense that they involve entanglements, interactions, and encounters between "people, ideas, products, processes and patterns that operate over, across, through, beyond, above, under or in-between polities and societies," as Iriye and Saunier conceptualized the term.[32] In addition, some of the articles also align with the narrower definition of "transnational" in that social inequalities were explored via the interpenetration of groups across or beyond nations. Collectively, these authors demonstrate the value of exploring sporting relations through a transnational lens, as well as the potential of transnational historical analyses as a vehicle to explore sporting practices.

Notes

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