

## **PART ONE**

# **THE TRANSFORMATION OF A RITUAL**

## CHAPTER 1

### From 1968 to 1999

It was, perhaps, one of the most dramatic moments in the history of European football. Since scoring in the 6<sup>th</sup> minute, it seemed certain that Bayern Munich would win the 1999 European Cup Final. They had dominated most of the game, scoring early and hitting Manchester United's post and crossbar in the second half, while United had made few significant attacks. Half way through the second half, Teddy Sheringham was brought on to replace United's left-winger, Jesper Blomquist, bringing Ryan Giggs back into his favoured position on the left. With Giggs on the left and Beckham out wide on the right, Manchester United looked a more balanced side but the changes appeared to have been made too late. Later in the 80<sup>th</sup> minute Ole Gunnar Solksjaer replaced Andy Cole but, despite Solksjaer's record of late scoring, this substitution also seemed futile. In the 90<sup>th</sup> minute when the game seemed already lost, United won a corner and while David Beckham prepared to launch the team's final effort, Peter Schmeichel, as he had done in other games, left his own net and joined the rest of his team in Bayern's penalty area. As the ball swung over, Schmeichel whose presence had drawn Bayern defenders out of position jumped for the ball. It passed clear over the head of this melee, falling to Dwight Yorke on the far side of the goal. He headed the ball back and it eventually fell to Ryan Giggs who struck the ball weakly towards the Bayern goal. As the ball passed Teddy Sheringham he hooked it into Bayern's net. Three minutes later, now deep into stoppage time, United won another corner. Again Beckham swung the ball in. Sheringham rose and deflected a header down towards the left-hand post where Ole Gunnar Solksjaer threw out his boot, driving the ball high into the net. Now familiar scenes of mayhem followed, while Sammy Kuffour, on all fours, pummelled the ground in despair.

### **1968: an international match**

Thirty-one years earlier, on 29 May 1968, Manchester United had beaten Benfica of Portugal 4-1 in the 13<sup>th</sup> European Cup Final at Wembley Stadium. Although the United players in 1999 lifted the same trophy as their forebears in 1968, any formal similarity between these two events is deceptive. In fact, historical transformations separate these dates decisively from one another though it is often difficult to recognise these wider changes. In the famous opening pages of *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault juxtaposes the brutal execution of the attempted regicide Damiens in 1757 with the penal regimen instituted in the following century in order to highlight the distinctiveness of European society (Foucault 1977). While the pitiful Damiens was ripped limb from limb, his various body parts displayed or burnt in a ferocious act of regal revenge, the criminal of the nineteenth century was subjected to a measured and private regime of mental and physical discipline. For Foucault, the two penal systems reflect the political regimes of the time; Damiens' torture symbolised the personal revenge of the king, whose very self had been insulted by insurrection while the new penal system denoted the imposition of abstract laws on deviant individuals. For Foucault, the peculiar cruelty of the familiar penal system can be recognised fully only when set against a sharply differing system of retribution. As Foucault demonstrated, that juxtaposition allows the familiar to be illuminated in dramatically new ways, providing dulled perceptions with new insights (see Baert 1998). Similarly, in order to recognise the current transformation of football, it is useful to juxtapose contemporary practices against those of the past. To this end, The comparison of 1999 with 1968 serves a useful heuristic purpose of illuminating the direction and extent of present changes, just as the execution of Damiens in 1757 and the prison regulations of 1828 economically highlighted an important historical transformation in the penal system.

A brief examination of the main newspaper coverage in the respective years of Manchester United's European victories is instructive. Throughout the 1968 season, the English newspapers had covered each of United's games with previews and reports and there was an understandable expansion of reports on the final. Not only was this the first final that an English team had ever reached but it was also particularly significant because of the death of the Manchester United team, the so-called 'Busby Babes', in an air crash ten years earlier in Munich.<sup>1</sup> The English newspapers interpreted Manchester United's matches in a historically distinctive fashion; they were international games and the club itself was the unproblematic representative of England and Britain. The line adopted by *The Times*' correspondent, Geoffrey Green, was typical.<sup>2</sup> For instance, after Manchester United had eliminated Real Madrid in the 1968 semi-final, Green commented: 'Manchester United now stand as the heroes of England' (Geoffrey Green 16 May 1968, p.16). He highlighted the qualities which brought these English heroes victory: 'In the end it was English temperament, fibre and morale that won through' (Geoffrey Green 16 May 1968, p.16). Contrasting with the English national character, Green invoked a stereotypical account of Latin temperament of which he saw evidence both in Real Madrid team and the crowd itself. 'This was siesta time for the hot-blooded crowd whose wrath flamed out as Stiles stabbed at fleeting Amancio... All day the sun had beaten down like a hammer and the night, exquisitely still, was humid. It should have favoured the Spaniards...' (Geoffrey Green 16 May 1968, p.16). Contrasting with the phlegmatic English, Green implies that the Spanish players were 'hot-blooded', reflecting the climate in which they lived. This nationalistic paradigm was evident elsewhere in Green's writing. Discussing the prospect of the 1968 final on the day of the game itself, Green similarly drew upon the concept of an English character. 'There will be no question where the hopes of the 100,000 crowd and of the nation as a whole will lie... if there is any valid explanation it probably rests in their

moral fibre, temperament and unquenchable spirit that lifted them off the floor recently' (Geoffrey Green, 29 May 1968, p.15). Once again, Green emphasised the 'English' virtues of Manchester United team.

Although Green assumed that Manchester United represented England, the team, in fact, included players from the other home nations of Britain. Indeed, the team even fielded two Republic of Irish internationals (Tony Dunne and Shay Brennan).<sup>3</sup> For Green, England and Britain were synonymous; Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish and even Republic of Ireland players were viewed by him as English when playing for English clubs. It was significant that during this period the term 'Europe' or 'Europeans' was rarely used in English newspapers. Rather, the preferred term for Europeans in these early years was the 'Continental' (e.g. *The Times* 11 October 1962, p.4; *The Times* 23 May 1963, p.4), emphasising Britain's distinctive maritime isolation. British teams were seen as the embodiment of the common national virtues of manliness, perseverance and strength against the effete (though skilful) showiness of 'Continental' teams. Thus, in describing Tottenham's 4-2 defeat by the Polish team Gornik Zabrze, *The Times* drew on stereotypical accounts of English temperament (which saved Tottenham from an even heavier defeat) but were surprised that the Polish team did not demonstrate these typically 'Continental' characteristics. 'In the end it was fitness, temperament and luck (or ill luck) of that injury to the Polish left-half that saved them from disaster. Most Continental sides in a similar position would have faded like a smoke ring' (*The Times* 14 September 1961, p.4). This reading was repeated when Tottenham played Benfica later in the same season; 'In terms of pure football technique these Portuguese were the greater artists. But technique is not everything at times, and last night they found themselves in a man's game where spirit and fibre and courage and the last drop of breath counted' (*The Times* 6 April 1962, p.4). While the newspapers recognised the skill of the 'Continental', they were invariably portrayed as

temperamentally suspect. After their controversial defeat by Internazionale in 1965,<sup>4</sup> Liverpool ‘walked off the pitch at a hot, hysterical San Siro stadium’ (Horridge, 13 May 1965, p.31) while in 1967, a Naples player, Sivori, ‘showing his quick South American temperament, jabbed his opponent, lashed out at Morgan, then kicked O’Neil’ (Green 9 February 1967, p.5). Similarly, in his description of Manchester United’s game against Sarajevo in 1967, David Meek drew on this same motif which figured heavily in Green’s work of the disciplined English and the hot-blooded foreigner. He noted that the ‘Yugoslavs are a tough, passionate people’ (Meek 16 November 1967, p.30), concluding that the outcome of the game ‘was a matter of temperament’. While Manchester United ‘though often flattened [by fouls] got straight up again to play football’, the Yugoslavs ‘lost their heads’ (Meek 16 November 1967, p.30). This contrast between the English and British and the ‘Continental’ culminated with assertions about the inherent disposition of different races towards certain kinds of behaviour. For instance, Benfica’s defeat by Sunderland in 1963 was explained in significant fashion: ‘Certainly last night was not the sort of weather to excite their Latin and Negroid blood’ (*The Times* 15 November 1963, p. 5).

It followed from his assumption that Manchester United represented England and its national virtues that Green interpreted the final as an international match between two nations. Club and nation were interchangeable for Green: ‘For this is a national occasion make no mistake. It is seen as revenge for Portugal’s World Cup defeat and Benfica’s humiliating 5-1 defeat by Manchester United...two years ago’ (Green 29 May 1968, p. 15). This assumption that clubs represented their nations was long-standing. After Manchester United drubbing of Anderlecht in 1956, *The Times* reported that, ‘They stayed to roar their heads off and to dream dreams of English football showing its true stamp once more’ (*The Times* 27 September 1956, p.3). Similar language was employed to describe Manchester United’s game against Real

Madrid later in that year's competition: 'But now [having gone 2-0 down] United, remembering what they stand for in Britain, seemed suddenly inspired by the danger' (Green 12 April 1957, p.14). This close connection between Manchester United and the nation was emphasised by other journalists. In his coverage of the 1968 Cup Final, David Meek, the *Manchester Evening News* football correspondent, similarly drew a connection between Manchester United and Britain when describing fans gathered in London before the game. 'A group of youngsters in Trafalgar Square decided to back Britain as well as United. Over their sober suits, they had draped large Union Jacks' (Meek 29 May 1968, p.1)

Reflecting this nationalistic interpretation of European competition, club games were often conceived in military terms; an analogy was drawn between the games and war. Thus, the opposition was regularly described as the 'enemy' (*The Times* 15 November 1962) and metaphors of 'arrows' (*The Times* 12 December 1962, p.4; e.g. *The Times* 19 January 1961), 'shafts', 'grape-shot' (*The Times* 23 May 1963, p.4), 'spearheads', 'ripostes' (*The Times* 22 March 1962, p.3) or 'barrages' (Green November 30 1967, p. 13) were often used to describe attacks or shots at goal. Milan made 'a sneak raid' against Ipswich in 1962 (*The Times* 29 November 1962, p.4) while in a game against Internazionale, Everton were criticised for their unsubtle tactics; 'It was physical exertion and the old frontal attack with no ideas of subtle infiltration' (*The Times* 19 September 1963, p. 3). Similarly, to describe defensive play martial metaphors were liberally employed. Thus, while Real Madrid were excellent in attack, 'their shield could be dented' (McGhee 26 April 1957, p.17) and against Ipswich, Milan's sneak raid was mounted from a 'chainmail defence' (29 November 1962, p.29). These military metaphors could reach the lyrical heights as a description of the semi-final between Real Madrid and Manchester United at Old Trafford in 1957 reveals: 'The field had all the appearance of a battlefield. Smoke from the stone-fingers of surrounding chimneys

drifted over the lividly-lit pitch' ( McGhee 26 April 1957, p.17). Similarly, Meek also drew on florid military references to frame his reports: 'Having seen their mountains and watched their football, I can fully understand how the Germans found it impossible to beat Marshal Tito and the partisans into submission' (Meek 16 November 1967, p.30). The most elaborate use of military metaphor was saved for matches against German opposition such as Manchester United's match against Borussia Dortmund in 1956: 'The Borussia forwards in their eagerness fell repeatedly into United's off-side trap, much to the satisfaction of the British Tommies who were present in large numbers... Two superbly judged sorties by Wood held the ravaging Germans at bay... Here was history repeating itself: the Thin Red Line against the German hosts' (*The Guardian* 21 November 1956, cited in Meek 1988, p. 21).<sup>5</sup> In the 1950s, the Second World War was still a vivid memory. Consequently, the military metaphor became apt, denoting the status of European football as an international competition between the representatives of different nations.

The reports of 1968 final itself traversed the same nationalist line which was typical of the era. Thus, *The Times* carried a front-page piece which emphasised the national satisfaction that could be taken from this game: 'how fitting too, that this memorable triumph should go now to a club which has done so much for the game England first gave to the world' (Ecclestone 30 May 1968m, p. 1). On the sports pages, Geoffrey Green continued this theme.

At last Manchester United have climbed their Everest and after 11 years of trial and effort their dreams have come true. So the crown sits on the first English club to enter this competition... They have helped to beat back the Latin domination that for so long had take Continental football by the throat... they [United] fell back on their morale and unconquerable spirit. Again it made giants of men who seemed to have given their last ounce of strength as they searched for the final yard to the summit. (Green 30 May 1968, p. 15)

Significantly, not only were United's virtues of morale and spirit emphasised but the dubious character of foreigners was also highlighted. *The Mirror's* reporter was critical



of the game. ‘It was not a great match. Indeed at times it was an ugly one... In defeat Benfica do not retain the label of sportsmanship that the Portuguese acquired during the World Cup. They showed their true colours last night. It was difficult to admire anything they attempted’ (Jones, 30 May 1968, pp.16-7). In fact, Eusebio was fouled many more times than Best, United were much more petulant than Benfica, and there were a couple of examples of outstanding sportsmanship from Eusebio. Yet, once Benfica had been interpreted as foreigners, unfounded attributions concerning their temperament followed.

The 1968 final was seen as an international match between the representatives of two discrete nations. This interpretation was all but universal in papers such as *The Times*, *The Manchester Evening News* and *The Mirror*. However, although the nationalist paradigm was dominant in this period, it is worth noting that the final could occasionally be interpreted in a different way. In his report on the 1968 Final, Green noted with relish that in the following season both Manchester City, which had just won the league title, and Manchester United would be ‘treading the paths of Europe’. He added: ‘What rivalry that will engender in the years to come’ (Green 30 May 1968, p15). Here Green begins to recognise that European competition could be understood not in nationalistic but in localistic terms. European competition could stimulate local rivalry between the fans of different clubs. However, given the brevity of this comment especially in relation to the volume of Green’s reporting on European football and the positive tone of the sentence, it cannot be invested with too much significance. For Green, European competition was still understood in internationalist terms. On the same theme, the *Manchester Evening News* published a single letter which called for a ‘Truce time’ between United and City fans, noting that ‘there has always been the keenest rivalry between Manchester City and United fans’, but insisting ‘that on this night of nights... a United fan living in London calls for a truce and a linking of Reds and Blues

in the name of Manchester, “home of champions” ’ (Frame 29 May 1968, p.14).

Frame’s letter is interesting calls for unity between the fans on local than national basis. These brief comments by Frame and Green suggest that a localistic interpretation of European football was theoretically possible even in the 1960s. Yet, examples of a localistic interpretation was so rare that they were all but irrelevant in comparison with the hegemonic nationalist account of European football.

The nationalist account of the Final was not a mere construction, any other interpretation of these games providing an equally accurate account of the game. One of the reasons for the dominance of this interpretation is that it did accord broadly with the realities of European football at the time. At this time, national federations were sovereign with the clubs subordinate to them. The federations administered both domestic and European competition with the aid of their international representative, UEFA (The Union of European Football Associations). These federations defended the sovereignty of their leagues carefully. In particular, in the 1960s, and indeed in the 1950s in all countries except Spain and Italy, foreign player restrictions which were enforced. These restrictions ensured that European club teams were drawn from the nation in which the club was situated and were intended to protect the development of native talent for the national team.<sup>6</sup> Thus, Benfica fielded only Portuguese nationals including former colonies so that Eusebio and Coluna, both from Mozambique, were qualified to play. Similarly, in England, although there was no restriction on home nation players from Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and Eire, no foreigners were allowed to play in English club teams. Consequently, the connection between the club and nation which journalists like Green and Meek drew and the metaphor of war which hyperbolically suggested an international struggle were valid accounts of European football at the time. A reading which emphasised the priority of the city or region was not certainly not *a priori* impossible in 1968, but given the structure of European

football, a nationalistic reading reflected contemporary realities most accurately. The final in which Manchester United played some 31 years later was a very different occasion and was interpreted in significantly different ways.

### **1999: a transnational event**

In 1968, the nationalist interpretation of European football was supported by the national composition of the teams. The players were natives of the countries in which the clubs were located and consequently, in European competition, the matches could be straightforwardly interpreted as international games. By the late 1990s, by contrast, the composition of the teams was far more cosmopolitan. For instance, in the 1999 European Cup Final, although both Manchester United and Bayern Munich had unusually few foreign players in comparison with their European peers, their squads were much more diverse. Manchester United's 1999 team included seven foreign players (Blomqvist, Johnsen, Schmeichel, Yorke, Van der Gouw, Solskjaer, Stam) while Bayern's team included two (Kuffour and Salihamidzic). The increasingly transnational composition of the teams in 1999 was reflected in public discussions of the event.

The nationalist interpretation remained very important in 1999. As in 1968, most of the reportage framed the final as a match between England and Germany where Manchester United represented England and Bayern Munich, Germany. A typical example of this nationalistic reading was provided by ex-Liverpool player and European Cup winner, Tommy Smith: 'I wore England's three lions over my heart with pride and I would back any English side in Europe – we all should. It's all about regaining ground in Europe' (Smith, 26 May 1999, p.6). The leader in *The Mirror* affirmed Smith's stance insisting that 'it is the night our football nation sets aside lifelong rivalries and stands United. The red of Old Trafford, Manchester, will be everyone's colour' (*The Mirror*, 26 May 1999, p.7). It was notable that the other major

tabloid, *The Sun*, also adopted an unproblematically nationalist line in its coverage to the point of xenophobia. The paper delighted in the fact that Manchester United had in the course of the season ‘brought the Italians down in Milan and Turin and on Wednesday they put the Germans on their knees’ (Greaves, 29 May 1999, pp.68-9). *The Times* sometimes traversed a similar line. In a humorous article on the day before the game which listed 10 reasons to support United (*The Times*, 25 May 1999, p.2), it was argued that a Manchester United victory would assist English football by providing more places for clubs in European competitions in the next season. In a piece of crude nationalism, the article asked: ‘A football match between an English and a German team? What other reason do you want?’ (*The Times*, 25 May 1999, p.2). Similarly, although *The Manchester Evening News* recognised that many in the city did not support the club (Everett, 27 May 1999, p.9) and appeals to urban pride also featured in their coverage (e.g. Everett, 27 May, p.9; Hince 27 May 1999, pp.8-9), the regional paper generally adopted a simplistic nationalistic line delighting in the defeat of the ‘Germans’: ‘Manchester United made you proud to be English’ (Hince, 27 May 1999, pp.8-9). The same interpretation was demonstrated in the coverage of the game itself on ITV. The commentator Clive Tyldesley persistently drew on common satirical stereotypes of the Germans. Thus, for Tyldesley, United unproblematically represented England and the defeat of Bayern Munich automatically also meant the defeat of Germany by England. He introduced the match by drawing citing the fact that England had not beaten Germany since 1966 in a major tournament. However, Tyldesley noted that while England’s national record against Germany was poor, at club level, English sides had a record of 6 victories and 2 defeats in their last encounters. It should be noted that the idea of the nation mobilised in 1999 was somewhat different from 1968 for while Manchester United sometimes represented England in 1999 (even with its many foreign players), England was no longer conflated the rest of Britain, reflecting what

Nairn has called the incipient 'break-up of Britain' (1981). Consequently, while some commentators appealed to a nationalistic interpretation which seemed to echo Green's own understanding of European football in the 1950s and 1960s, in fact, this nationalist interpretation had undergone significant re-negotiation. Different accounts of the event were given prominent public airings in 1999 which contrasted strongly with 1968.

Thus, directly opposing Tommy Smith's reading, in a piece entitled 'Why I back Bayern' on the same page, Brian Reade proclaimed; 'I will be singing Deutschland, Deutschland Uber Alles' (Reade, 26 May 1999, p.6). Reade's justified his support for Bayern because of Manchester United's domestic dominance and the unjustifiable level of media coverage the club received. Reade concluded the article in significant terms: 'Football will always be first and foremost about tribalism. One-upmanship. Love and jealousy.' (Reade, 26 May 1999, p.6). For him, the urban and regional rivalry between fans at a club level was more important than artificial unification behind putatively national representatives. Interestingly, even in his nationalistic interpretation of the final Tommy Smith emphasised the local rivalry between Manchester United and Liverpool, pointing to Liverpool's greater honours list and the putative superiority of Liverpool's 1977 European Cup-winning team in which he played: 'Players like Beckham are great but we could have whacked them' (Smith, 26 May 1999, p. 6). Smith was not alone in recognising a tension within the nationalist reading of the 1999 Final. Significantly, many of the pieces in *The Times* which drew on this nationalistic interpretation simultaneously recognised its problematic nature.

In practice, it is the Bundes-liga's finest who will have to lie awake and torment themselves with the thoughts of what might have been. English glee must be forgiven. The wait for the role reversal has been a long one and the only trick still beyond Manchester United may be the gift uniting the entire country. Their power and wealth will continue to irk some and cause envy to others, but, at Old Trafford, England's '30 years of hurt has been avenged. (McCarra 27 May 1999, p.31)

Here, the nationalist interpretation of the event which revels in the defeat of a national rival is cross-cut by a recognition of Manchester United's ambiguous relationship to England and its fans. In line with this, *The Times* carried a number of articles which promoted a new interpretation of European football. For instance, the list of 10 reasons for supporting United was matched by 10 others for not supporting them (*The Times*, 25 May 1999, p.3). Typically, Manchester United's domestic domination, its financial power and its pervasive position in the national media were cited. Furthermore, in an article which discussed an opinion poll saying that 86 per cent of people wanted Manchester United to beat Bayern Munich, the author rejected this support for United as false and highlighted the increasing antipathy of many English football fans towards a club.

So what accounts for United's new-found national status? What ever has changed, it is not the hearts of die-hard football fans, many of whom remain enthusiastic supporters of the ABU (Anybody but United) Club. The sad Liverpool fans waving Bayern flags on the Kop were not the only ones to sing 'Stand up if you hate Man U' on the day United won the Premiership this month. The pollsters also found 27 per cent of people insisting that they would never support United 'under any circumstance'. (Hume, 27 May 1999, p.24)

A notable transformation has taken place between 1968 and 1999. Manchester United is no longer necessarily seen as England's representative when playing foreign opposition. European competition is no longer unproblematically viewed as a form of international competition. The major European football clubs are becoming differentiated from the nation and different forms of solidarity are emerging around and against them when they play other European competition. This is a decisive shift in public understandings. This is not to say that some fans in 1968 did not want Manchester United to lose; there is evidence that many Manchester City fans were not pleased by United's European victory. Rather, the two Finals differ because in 1968, the public understanding of the event was nationalistic; the competition was understood in international terms. It may be possible to claim tentatively that, by 1999, a transformation of the once dominant

international interpretation is evident. This nationalistic interpretation has not been effaced but it has undergone significant re-negotiation as allegiances to the local club and city have been prioritised. Just as the international reading corresponded to the political economic organisation of European football at the time, so does this new localistic reading of the competition reflect the current political economic developments. The nationalistic interpretation corresponds to an international regime, the localistic reading to a transnational one.

### **The Ritual of Football**

The two finals of 1968 and 1999 demonstrate that European football is undergoing profound change. Like Foucault's disciplinary examples, these dates stand on opposite sides of a decisive historical transformation. Yet, the significance of these changes is often overlooked because it is difficult to adopt an analytical stance towards the sport. For many, football is entertainment and, therefore, unworthy of serious consideration. Yet, the difficulties of analysis are not automatically obviated for those who are interested in the game. For enthusiasts, football is compelling because the outcome is uncertain. The game thrives upon the random and accidental which inspire ecstasy and despair among players and fans alike. Yet, the very excitement which the game engenders obstructs a proper appreciation of the social significance of the game. Although the exciting contingencies of football are not irrelevant to the analysis of it, contingencies need to be situated within a wider historical context which render them meaningful in a deeper but less emotive sense. In order to comprehend European football and its position in European society, a different relationship to the game must be adopted. It is necessary to become detached from the game and to become de-familiarised with it while at the same time, recognising its profound social importance.

That is not easy but there is a method by which an appropriate analytic position can be attained.

Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* provides a profound sociological account of ritual which, nearly a century after its publication, is still one of the most fruitful resources for comprehending these social events. In that work, Durkheim argued that the ritual constituted a key mechanism by which the social solidarity of aboriginal clans in Australia was sustained. For most of the year, aboriginal clans were engaged in the profane activity of hunting and gathering during which time they would fissure into smaller groups. Periodically, the clan would gather together and engage in ecstatic rituals in which they would worship their totemic god. Durkheim appositely noted that since the totem which the clanspeople worshipped represented their clan, aborigines, in fact, worshipped their own society in their rituals (Durkheim 1954, p.225). The physical sensations which aborigines experienced in the ritual and which they attributed to their god was, in fact, the power of their social group which was amassed ecstatically around them. Indeed, they did more than simply worship this social god. Through their participation in these heightened moments of collective effervescence, the clanspeople recreated this god, their society, for themselves. Only insofar as the clan gathered together periodically, reaffirming its existence which was represented by the totem, did this social group exist at all. Against the interpretations of Victorian anthropology, which dismissed rituals as the product of irrational primitive mentality, Durkheim highlighted the comprehensible and necessary role which ritual played in the social life of aboriginal groups, with the heavy hint that such ritualistic performances are universal. Without these periodic congregations in which group members mutually recognise each other, social groups cannot continue to exist.

A society can neither create itself nor recreate itself without at the same time creating an ideal. This creation is not a sort of work of supererogation for it, by which it would complete itself, being already formed; it is the act by which it is periodically made and remade. (Durkheim 1954, p.422)



For Durkheim, the ritual inculcates a certain idea of society into the minds of its members, which idea is essential to that social group. Group members have to recognise their social relations to each other if the group is to cohere. The group has a reality only if members understand what kinds of social practices their shared idea of society enjoins. However, this ideal does not impose itself upon individuals automatically or inevitably as Durkheim seemed to suggest in much of his early work where society was given autonomous existence. Rather, this ideal has to be recreated by the group, for which re-creation the ritual constitutes a key site. As Durkheim emphasises, this ritualistic recreation is not otiose. It is essential that individuals gather together and celebrate their membership of a unified social group if that group is to exist. The implication is clear. Without periodic ritual interaction, a social group fragments into profane and separate existence. Without ritual, the social group ceases to exist.

It is important to recognise that ritual has no less significance in modern society, although our familiarity with frequently informal and secular modern ritual forms often obscures the continuing centrality of ritual to our lives. Certainly, in modern society, rituals do not always involve the collective effervescence which Durkheim described in relation to aboriginal clans. Yet, even in contemporary European society, if any social grouping is to sustain itself, the members of that group must periodically meet in order to affirm the existence of the group and their commitment to it. These periodic congregations are not supererogatory to a group's existence. Durkheim himself was well aware of the continuing importance of ritual in contemporary life. At the end of *The Elementary Forms*, Durkheim wistfully remarks: 'A day will come when our society will know again those hours of creative effervescence' (Durkheim 1976, pp. 427-8). Durkheim believed that these vital moments of creative effervescence would appear among the professional groups which he promotes as the only possible solution to social anomie. In a secularised, industrial society in which paid employment is a

central experience, Durkheim was correct to argue that the professional group is an important source of social solidarity. Strangely, though, Durkheim completely ignored a key public ritual which could also produce 'hours of creative effervescence': sport. It is possible that he ignored the significance of sport as a modern ritual because of the relative under-urbanisation of France. The mass urban spectator sports such as football developed slowly and weakly in France in comparison with other European countries. Its relative insignificance in France may have led Durkheim to ignore it. Yet, despite Durkheim's failure to recognise sport, some of the most important social groups in Europe are re-constituted through their ecstatic participation in sporting rituals. Consequently, the sporting ritual provides an illuminating focus for sociological research because it is an arena in which social relations and shared understandings are viscerally re-created. These recreations are not supererogatory to the social order which would exist without them. Because social relations have meaningful dimension, they have to be recognised by those who are party to them and the ritual constitutes the critical site at which this communal recognition takes place. Certainly, sport is not the only European ritual but it has been a very important one and is likely to be increasingly significant in the future.

Although Durkheim himself may have failed to acknowledge the importance of sport as a European ritual, it is possible to adopt an appropriate analytical relation to football in the light of his work. Rather than seeing this event as a mundane form of entertainment, football is de-familiarised when it is looked up as a ritual. As a ritual, football is not analysed alongside other equally familiar leisure activities but juxtaposed against the most exotic rituals uncovered by history and anthropology. Viewed as a ritual, football can become as strange and powerful as the spectacles of classical Rome. These spectacles illuminate Roman culture in all its stark brutality. Like the Greek games, the gladiatorial combats of classical Rome originated as an element in a wider

religious rite; they were initially associated with funerals where the combats were intended to honour the deceased. The first recorded gladiatorial combat took place in 264BC in honour of an aristocrat's dead father and involved only three pairs of gladiators (Hopkins 1983: 4). Over the next two centuries, the scale and frequency of gladiatorial shows steadily increased so that in 65 BC Julius Caesar organised a combat of 320 pairs of gladiators in an elaborate funeral rite for his father (Hopkins 1983: 4). Developing from this funerary origin, the spectacles which occurred in the amphitheatres of most towns and cities throughout the empire eventually consisted of three defined events; the execution of criminals often by wild animals, wild animal hunts and, finally, the combats themselves. Gradually, as the spectacles became more elaborate, they became the prerogative of the Emperor himself. For instance, in 80 AD, the emperor Titus organised a spectacle in which between 8 and 9,000 wild and exotic animals were killed in a single day (Hopkins 1983: 9). The monopolisation of the Roman spectacle by the emperor demonstrated the transformation of an oligarchical republic into an absolutist state. Through huge spectacles, emperors demonstrated their absolute authority. At the beginning of the spectacle, criminals were often executed by being thrown to exotic wild animals (Hopkins 1983: 11) which would themselves be killed in subsequent hunting displays within the arena. This process ritualistically equated criminals with the status of mere beasts and was as a powerful statement of social hierarchy. The Roman spectacle was a graphic demonstration of the social abjection of slaves and criminals (Auguet 1994:184; Hopkins 1983:12). Significantly, although the crowd might plead for the life of a gladiator who had fought well, the decision of life and death – as in the rest of Roman life – rested with the emperor alone. Although gratuitous to modern sensibilities, the Roman spectacle was not supererogatory to Roman society. Roman society was re-created periodically in the fervid atmosphere of the arena. The Roman spectacle was a central ritual in later

Roman civilisation whereby the social hierarchy from Emperor, to citizens and down to slaves, criminals and finally animals was re-affirmed in the arena. Although the strangeness of Roman culture often makes the parallel difficult, in the spectacle of European football, social hierarchies are similarly demonstrated through graphic performances on the field of play. These events are bloodless in comparison with the gruesome Roman spectacle but their effervescent power is no weaker. European football illuminates the realities of the New Europe just as the Roman spectacle displayed the brutal power of the *Pax Romana*. The different ritual form reflects the different social orders of which these events are part.

### **The sociology of Europe**

If European club football is analysed as a ritual, it can become as strange and unfamiliar as the Roman spectacle. Then, this apparently mundane social practice can begin to shed as much light on contemporary European society as Foucault cast upon European in the nineteenth century through the contrast of two differing penal systems. Once football is recognised as a social ritual rather than an escape from social reality, important new horizons are opened up. European football provides a prominent arena in which important social relations in European society are periodically remade. The game offers a particularly clear view of the wider society for in it, many of the key values and relations of contemporary society are intensely visible. In these ecstatic moments such as the 1968 and 1999 European Cup Finals, a lucid vision of society comes into view in a way that is rare in any other aspect of social life. In the effervescent moments of this ritual – Best turning away from the goal in 1968 acknowledging victory with a raised arm or Kuffour pummeling the earth in despair – the social relations and social groups which are central to European society emerge with a clarity and force which is often absent elsewhere. In explaining the transformation between the 1968 and 1999 Final it

is essential that the development of this sporting ritual and its changing position in European society at the end of the twentieth century is connected to wider changes across western Europe. It is essential that the significance of the historical transformation of European society from the 1970s onwards is recognised. These European Cup finals are a powerful expression of wider social realities in contemporary Europe and they can only be understood in the light of this wider social context of which they are an inseparable part. In order to achieve this contextualisation, we need to distance ourselves from the aspects of the game with which we are most familiar and to transform that which is most obvious and taken-for-granted into the something which is as strange as the Roman spectacle.

If football can be successfully analysed as a ritual, then the sociology of football may begin to make a serious intellectual contribution by analysing in rich empirical details the actualities of contemporary social transformation. In this way, the analysis of football will begin to transcend its current marginal position to make a serious interjection into current debates about Europe. Theoretical accounts of contemporary social transformation do not provide a better insight into the actualities of current historic changes. On the contrary, those who have ignored the intense reality of this ritual remaining cocooned in their own self-spun worlds should recognise the inadequacies of their idealisations. In his famous work on cricket, C.L.R James' demonstrates the social significance of this sport by altering Kipling's famous comment about England. At the beginning of that work, James demands: 'What do they know of cricket who only of cricket know?' (James 1963). James' challenge can be usefully applied to current concerns to ask: What do they know of Europe, who nothing of football know? Without intimate knowledge of the activities which inspire Europeans today, discussions of the reality of Europe are merely academic. We do not live in theoretical abstractions but in actual social relations. These relations, the passions

which they inspire, must always be the focus of genuine social analysis. This book attempts to make a small contribution to our understanding of Europe today by analysing of one of its most important contemporary rituals.