

Creating and Maintaining Collective History in Football Arenas **Miira Kuvaja**

Katarzyna Herd 2018. *'We can make new history here': Rituals of producing history in Swedish football clubs*. Lund Studies in Arts and Cultural Sciences 19. Lund: Lund University. 304 pp. Diss. ISBN 978-91-88899-02-6 ISBN 978-91-88899-03-3 (online) ISSN 2001-7529 (print) ISSN 2001-7510 (online).

In her doctoral thesis, ethnologist Katarzyna Herd analyses the production of history in four Swedish male elite football (soccer) clubs. History plays different roles in male elite football and in this thesis. It is the tool, the process and the end product. According to Herd, supporters or club officials do not shy away from using historical arguments. They are proudly ready to use history as a tool to enhance their club's prestige.

The aim of the dissertation is to describe and analyse how history is produced and performed in clubs, with an emphasis on the process of producing history as well as the implications that this process has for football and the understanding of history. The idea is to present football as a case study in research about similar environments that attract public attention and emotional responses. According to Herd, here the production of history does not focus on a perfectly accurate reconstruction of truth; rather, it is directed towards the future – the next match, next season, next transfer window, next victory or failure that might then become history.

Herd's main research questions are: What is the role of history in football clubs and what historical elements and references appear in contemporary clubs? The third question is: How are different groups of people, officials, supporters and players involved in the production and performance of history? The fourth main question is: What forms do historical narratives take in the football context?

The book has seven chapters. After presenting her research design in the introductory chapter, Herd analyses the importance of history and the ways clubs present official accounts of their past in Chapter Two, 'Historical Recycling'. Chapter Three explores connections to history through individual participants. The material aspects in the narratives about the clubs, here meaning geographical regions, stadiums and grass, are discussed in the fourth chapter, while the fifth concentrates on the connection between history and group

identity. The sixth chapter deals with the role of players in creating history. The main conclusions are presented in the last chapter – ‘The Final Score’.

Herd’s main theoretical concepts include ritual, performance, narrative, collective memory, materiality, magic and myth. These concepts are employed in order to answer the questions concerning the process of producing history, and to identify features in this process that are unique to football. They are used to varying degrees in ethnology, history and sport studies, which constitute her main research fields. Herd’s theoretical framework allows her to deal with many forms and manifestations of narratives anchored in the past. To Herd’s knowledge, no such investigation on football has been done before. These concepts of collective, social, communicative and finally cultural memory are used in the dissertation to trace individual and collective approaches to the past and to analyse creative engagement with the past.

With respect to methods and materials, Herd notes that ‘It is essential to mention that the material gathered was influenced by my own presupposition of what would be found in the field, as well as by the chosen terminology and the perspectives selected before starting the research.’ (p. 36) We have to appreciate her choice of the word presupposition, since the researcher’s preconceptions are not too often spelled out this clearly, even though the problem of preconceptions is a widely discussed theme in ethnology. Her materials include various kinds of interviews with different groups, shadowing, internet ethnography, observation as well as visual material and popular literature.

Herd gives a detailed account of her research process: the abundant material is described clearly with useful comments on ethnographic research – such as reflections on ‘short meetings’ and their usefulness as situational observations. She introduces chats – spontaneous interviews – as a novel type of research material. For her, these chats turned out to be useful in catching small glimpses of people’s relationship to football. They can be described as short, informal, spontaneous interviews. Herd remarks that while one can argue that such short meetings cannot provide much in-depth material, it was the entire arrangement that interested her, and these interviews were also good occasions for situational observation. She did not develop them intentionally in her research design, and hence this provides a good insight into how the research design can be guided by the research process. She also gives an informative description of shadowing, a method that could be used more actively in ethnology. For Herd, the possibility to follow individuals affiliated with clubs was by far the most exciting as well as the most relevant aspect in terms of the material provided. The mix of walking, chatting, observing and following seemed easy and useful to her. The informality of these situations and the routinized activity helped to create an alternative form of sharing stories.

For a closer look, I chose Chapter Five, 'Our History – Our Identity'. In the chapter, Herd discusses the ways in which different clubs and groups construct and maintain history and group identity. She starts the chapter by giving an excellent description about an emotionally invested match between MFF from Malmö and AIK from Stockholm. The clubs have long rivalries, which are displayed at the beginning of the match with flags, songs and flares. The audience participates in the event by mocking the opponent loudly and celebrating the failures of the opponent's players. The first example described in the chapter is AIK, as the club became the focus of many football discussions in her research. The second example is the ultras movement, which represents a type of modern football fandom that, according to Herd, balances on the verge of unlawful behaviour. As groups, ultras construct their image with the help of history. According to Herd, their productions have historical effects and are used as invocations of the past. The chapter ends with a discussion of masculinity, an interesting topic for a female reader, with some valuable remarks, such as Herd's suggestion that football offers women and men possibilities to transgress and challenge a one-sided view of femininity and masculinity: women are allowed to show strength and men are allowed to show feelings. In the conclusion of the chapter, Herd notes, for example, that 'Communicative and cultural memories around football provide a background for creativity and produce the history of those groups and the clubs.' (p. 220) She continues that the examples presented in the chapter use the 'us vs. them' dichotomies to position themselves and to state (and stage) their identities. In history building, the meaning of collective memories is bound together by emotions.

Spectator sports are not widely researched in ethnology. Herd's dissertation corrects this void – after all, sports, in different modes and roles, are a relevant part of modern societies. At the same time, she expands the scope of historical investigation by including individual performers and their engagement through their production of history. Her approach also broadens the field of sports research. The language of the book is very fluent; the text flows from paragraph and chapter to another. As it also offers an excellent description of interviewing and creative use of different research materials – for example, the above-mentioned chats and shadowing – I can recommend this dissertation not only to those interested in football, sports and history, but also to those interested in becoming familiar with the ethnological research process. The reader is left wanting to hear more about the topic – perhaps the next theme might be how the surrounding society perceives the rituals and narratives produced by football supporters.

Because of my background as a football enthusiast, I was quite excited when I found this dissertation. In a way, I was reading a research on myself, as I am

one of the producers and performers of history for my clubs. This was the first time I truly had to reflect and review, not only the book, but also myself as a reviewer. This proved to be a very educational process.

AUTHOR

Miira Kuvaja, MSc and MA, is planning on starting doctoral studies in European Ethnology. Her interests include sports studies, security issues and urban public places.