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John Marks

Public Discourse and Football in France after 1998

Over the course of four World Cup campaigns (1998, 2002, 2006, 2010) and four European Championships (2000, 2004, 2008, 2012), the French national football team has undoubtedly experienced the most eventful and dramatic period in its history, surpassing the *football champagne* era of the 1980s in terms of both success and controversy. As far as playing performance is concerned, there have been notable successes in three tournaments (1998, 2000, 2006) and relatively ignominious exits in the group stages of others (2002, 2008, 2010), whilst in the 2012 European Championships the team lost tamely to Spain at the quarter final stage. However, the significance of the team's exploits for the French nation has frequently gone far beyond straightforward joy or disappointment as a reaction to results on the pitch. In short, a turbulent, intense and complex relationship has developed between *les Bleus* and the French nation.

France's World Cup victory as host nation in 1998 gave football a new profile and significance in French public life. The extraordinary outpouring of popular feeling and attendant mediatisation of this "liesse populaire" following France's World Cup victory in 1998 in retrospect constituted a major turning point with regard to France's relationship with football. As well as gaining a new popularity with the French public in general, a number of French intellectuals – a group which had previously tended to be rather dismissive of football – found themselves converted by the wave of national celebration: "L'intelligentsia « anti-foot », encore prépondérante avant le mondial, se délite devant l'unanimité nationale et l'admiration internationale" (Abdallah 2000: 6). At the same time, the diffuse nature of this moment of collective euphoria meant that it was unlikely to have lasting political and social

effects. This distinctive dynamic – a widespread and positive assertion of national identity followed by disappointment and dilution – has set the tone for much of the subsequent discourse around football.

As well as generating a positive sense – however short-lived – of national identity the 1998 tournament also gave French football a new prominence in terms not only of the success of the national team, but also the capacity to produce good players and to organise a well received major tournament. France was left, as Patrick Mignon points out, with “un héritage à gérer” (Mignon 2010: 10). This legacy has not, however, always been easy to manage. Although France has in many ways established itself as an important and influential football nation, French club football still lags behind Spain, England, Italy and Germany, and players in the national team have tended increasingly to pursue their club careers outside of France.¹ Also, the steady decline of the national team has raised questions about national structures that were initially seen as a model for others to follow. Crucially, many in France in recent times have expressed disaffection and disappointment with the national team.

As far as what one might call public discourse is concerned, this period, which is bookended by the neo-republican “multicultural” enthusiasm that followed the 1998 World Cup victory in France and the implosion of the team in South Africa in 2010 (followed by a scandal relating to proposed ethnic quotas, which broke in May 2011²) has been marked in the French imaginary by a cast of heroes (Zidane, Jacquet) and villains (Domenech, Anelka). It has also been punctuated by iconic and much-discussed moments, including Zidane’s head butt in the World Cup Final 2006 (celebrated in a five-metre high bronze statue on display outside the Centre Pompidou from September 2012 to January 2013), Thierry Henry’s handball in a 2009 World Cup qualifying playoff against the Republic of Ireland in 2009, and the unusual spectacle of the then team manager Raymond Domenech reading out the team’s statement outlining their reasons for refusing to train as a gesture of support for Nicolas

Anelka in South Africa 2010.³ Whereas *Les Bleus* were initially seen in France – and elsewhere – as representing renewed hope in the nation’s capacity to embody a positive model of integration in the context of a diverse population, the team has more recently been seen by many in France as being symptomatic of a divided, even ghettoised society. Many in France saw the events in South Africa as the actions of a mercenary, socially isolated sporting elite, as the headline in *Libération* on 19th June indicates: “Ras les Bleus. Plus que la défaite, c’est l’arrogance et l’individualisme des joueurs de Domenech que les Français brocardent.” Some (notably and notoriously Alain Finkielkraut) went further, focusing on what they saw as the unbalanced and fragmented “ethnic” composition of the team, which was in turn seen as a reflection of a fragmented nation.

In short, it seems that France now, to a previously unprecedented extent, *talks football*. As Yvan Gastaut says of the post-1998 period: “la société française se « footballise », dans la mesure où ce sport est utilisé comme une référence de plus en plus essentielle dans la vie publique” (Gastaut 2008 : 124). Every event and character that have gone to make up this unfolding narrative have been commented on and debated in exhaustive detail: in the media; in the sort of book-length journalistic “investigations” previously limited to the obsession with the Tour de France; in academic books and articles; and even in film and literature. Public discourse of various kinds has been inflected with what Christian Le Bart and Jean-François Polo call “l’infinie discutabilité du football” (Bart & Polo 2010: 26). What is more, France now not only talks football, but has also integrated football into public life to an extraordinary and unprecedented extent. The conviction that football can in some sense convey real social meaning has been intensified to a level such that it is justified to speak, as Patrick Mignon has done, of the phenomenon of football talk as a form of national *psychodrama*, or *sociodrama* (Mignon 2010). The feeling that “une mésaventure sportive” somehow conveys and encapsulates a much wider set of social meanings clearly came to the

fore in the wake of Henry's handball alluded to above. Following a disappointing qualifying campaign for the 2010 World Cup, France played a two-match playoff against The Republic of Ireland in November 2009: the winners over the two ties would qualify for the finals. After a narrow 1-0 win in Dublin the return leg in Paris was equally tense, with Ireland taking a first-half lead and controlling much of the game. With the aggregate scores level after ninety minutes, the match went into extra time and Henry assisted in France's winning goal with what television replays revealed to be a clear handball (Henry subsequently admitted to the misdemeanour). The incident provoked a general outpouring of disappointment and widely expressed feelings of national shame. Sports minister Roselyne Bachelot, for example, felt compelled to address herself publicly to Raymond Domenech:

Raymond Domenech ne peut pas se dire qu'à partir de là, il est sur le chemin des roses. J'ai envie de lui dire: Raymond, il faut vraiment que tu te mobilises, et que tes gars se mobilisent parce que, nous, les Français, on est quand même inquiets et déçus. (Quoted in Grynbaum & Schneider 2010: 45)

Even more spectacularly, the drama of South Africa 2010 unfolded not only as a highly mediatised episode of national embarrassment and shame, but also as an affair of state, culminating in a meeting between Thierry Henry and President Nicolas Sarkozy following France's exit (Grynbaum & Schneider 2010: 27-30). It is not surprising that some commentators have suggested that football has been invested with rather too much social and political significance. Antoine Grynbaum and Romain Schneider for example come to the following succinct conclusion: "Décidément, on demande beaucoup au football..." (Grynbaum & Schneider 2010: 310).

Modernity and postmodernity

The argument here is that the integration of football into public life and discourse is symptomatic of a wider conceptual transition from *modernity* to *postmodernity* that has played itself out in French society in recent times. Writing in 1999, Max Silverman highlights the ways in which France found itself “facing postmodernity” at the end of the twentieth century. It had to come to terms with a general a move away from grand narratives, ideologies and collective projects to more individualised, affective and mediatised modes of social interaction. The articulation of the transition – however provisional – from modernity to postmodernity has particular significance in France, given its widely acknowledged status as “the quintessential modern nation-state” (Silverman 1999: 1) Given this status and self-perception, it is not surprising that the era of postmodernity has been experienced ambivalently, promoting both a sense of liberation from the strictures and articles of faith of modernity, but also provoking uncertainty, anxiety and a sense that social and political meaning is collapsing into an undifferentiated continuum of populism, platitudes and free-floating cultural signs. For those who are predominantly critical of postmodernity, the republican citizen has been reduced to nothing more than an individualistic consumer, and the properly political functions of the public sphere have been replaced by a pervasive culture of spectacle, focusing on the experiential and the purely performative. Other commentators have adopted a more neutral stance, and have attempted to identify the key features of a distinctively new mode of social organisation. Alain Ehrenberg and Gilles Lipovetsky, for example, have tended to see the growing focus on the individual in French society from the 1970s onwards as a new, “personalised” framing of social relations rather than as a generalised withdrawal of individuals into the private sphere. Both writers explore in various ways the idea that a sense of community and collectivity has not entirely disappeared, but that

this is now mediated through the dimension of the personal (Lipovetsky 1983; Ehrenberg 1991).

It is also important to recognise – as the suffix “post-” implies – there is no definitive shift from modernity to postmodernity. In fact, a good deal of the ambivalence around postmodernity stems from the persistence and reassertion of, as well as nostalgia for, distinctively *modern* phenomena such as nationhood, class and various forms of group identity. Modernity is not swept away entirely, but is recycled and sometimes revived wholesale. Ideas and representations of the national are even in some ways reinforced, and national football teams have been significant vehicles for such identifications in recent times. Consequently, it is sometimes the case that the newness of the postmodern is couched in terms that are closer to the modern than might initially be expected. This, as will be discussed later, is particularly striking in the case of apparently new forms of national identity that are celebrated in 1998 in France.

It is important to recognise that the era of postmodernity has also coincided with the process of globalisation, and it can be seen that the World Cup victory of 1998 occurred at a significant transitional point, when economic and cultural globalisation were accelerating and the idea of the nation was under threat as a stable reference point. Zaki Laïdi’s assessment of the “imaginary” of globalisation – coincidentally published in 1998 – is useful in this respect (Laïdi 1998). Laïdi highlights five components of this imaginary: the homogenisation and uniformisation of everyday culture (urban architecture, clothes, food, etc.); the advent of a globalised culture of “happenings” (accidents, disasters, royal weddings, sports events, etc.); the globalisation of affective responses to these mediatised events; the globalisation of markets and marketisation; and the valorisation of global political agendas, legitimised by organisations such as the UN. Whereas the tone of much of the media and public discourse in France actually celebrated 1998 in the context of what was perceived as a renewed and

progressive sense of nationhood, the tournament in many ways marked a successful adaptation to globalisation that corresponded closely to the first four of Laïdi's categories. The success of 1998 cemented football's position as a truly global cultural commodity; the euphoria that surrounded France's victory was a global "happening" that gave rise to affective responses; French football – and in particular French footballers – took on a new role in the global economy; and the emerging global economy of football was rapidly liberalising.

However, features of this successful adaptation in 1998 have arguably also been key factors in the progressive disenchantment of the French with the national team, along with ongoing, broadly modernist, anxieties about social fragmentation and the dilution of national identity. The French national team is now a *product*, a commodity, which provides the Fédération française de football with 40% of its income from television and sponsorship. Also, one consequence of the liberalisation and globalisation of football economics in recent years – enshrined in a legislative sense in the Bosman ruling – has been the emergence of top professional footballers as powerful economic agents. For promising young French players this frequently means an early move away from French club football to one of Europe's more economically powerful leagues, and this fuels the notion that the post-1998 generation of players is somehow more "mercenary" and are less loyal to the collective cause of French football. The suspicion is that the national team is somehow less "French" and is now simply a collection of self-interested individuals.

Modern and postmodern conceptions of football

It can already be seen from the discussion so far that public discourse around football moves – often somewhat uneasily – between postmodern and modern registers. As far as the postmodern mode is concerned, football is seen as a legitimate focus for a new sense

collectivity and a means of expressing diversity in a globalising, market-orientated, post-ideological era. The modern mode is, in turn, characterised by two rather different reactions. On the one hand, there is the conviction that football cannot sustain these postmodern promises, and that in fact it might actually be a symptom of the highly commodified, individualising and emotionally effusive – but ultimately cynical – landscape of postmodernity. On the other hand, the modern mode sees football as a legitimate and meaningful expression for more conventional ideas of collectivity, acting as a focus for a republican sense of national identity, teamwork, and civic duty. The articulation between modern and postmodern registers is, in turn, further complicated by the context of globalisation.

It is notable that this distinction between the modern and the postmodern was already a subject for discussion within the field of writing on football (and sport in general) prior to 1998, and it is worth revisiting these debates in order to shed further light on the 1998-2010 period. Pascal Balmand, writing in 1990, proposes precisely such a distinction in a wide range of writing in French on football, encompassing literature, sociology and cultural theory (Balmand 1990: 111-126). The modern mode associates football with distinctive social values such as physical training, moral development and social solidarity, whereas postmodern writing focuses on the broadly ludic, celebratory and spectacular aspects of football. The modern tendency is particularly marked in the inter-war period but, as Balmand emphasises, continues into the present. This modern conception of sport and associated values is not only limited to a positive focus on capacity of sport to foster and transmit these values: it also encompasses, for example, the critical, Marxist-inspired critique of football as a form of false consciousness associated with the journal *Quel corps?* The postmodern focus on football as a form of secular ritual establishes itself as dominant in the 1970s and 1980s and is associated with the wider postmodern shift away from the grand narratives of progress

and emancipation towards more eclectic and often playful engagement with social phenomena. As the previously dominant fields of structuralism, Marxism and psychoanalysis began to lose currency a number of intellectuals sought to engage in a new, broadly centre left forms of analysis, and one manifestation of this was the attempt to understand formerly neglected areas such as sport, leisure and fashion by taking seriously new social trends such as democratic individualism.

As Balmand characterises the distinction, football modernists tend to be intellectuals who seek either to legitimate or criticise football in terms of its moral, social or political significance. The postmodernists, in contrast, tend to be from the fields of social science or literature, and football for them is a legitimate object of study in its own right. It may convey, and act as a focus for, social meaning, but this is more often affective and symbolic rather than straightforwardly moral or political. Elements of these two strands can be identified quite clearly in writing and more general public discourse in the 1990s and 2000s. As suggested already, it can be seen that much of the reaction to 1998 was marked by an uneasy juxtaposition of modern and postmodern registers: the “modern” virtues of republican integration and a more diffuse “postmodern” sense of national celebration were often presented as mutually supporting phenomena, glossing over the real tensions between the two sets of meaning. Before looking further at the public discourse around football that emerges in France after 1998 it is worth looking at two distinctive analyses of football that encompass key elements of these modern and postmodern approaches and shed light on the emergence of a public discourse around football.

Modern: Brohm and Perelman and *l’opium du peuple*

Jean-Marie Brohm and Marc Perelman’s *Le football, une peste émotionnelle* (2006) can be situated squarely in the modernist camp, arguing that football is a “social drug”, a

proverbial “opium” of the people. Their critique is motivated in a general sense by a suspicion of the irrational, infantilising, and fetishising – both in an anthropological and economic sense – dimensions of football spectatorship. As far as football as a sphere of economic activity is concerned, they emphasise what they see as the unedifying contemporary reality of capitalist “wheeler dealing” (“l’affaireisme capitaliste”). In response to this, they propose a radical critical theory – drawing on the thought of Marx, Wilhelm Reich, Erich Fromm and Adorno – in order to analyse the deleterious effects of the growing presence and impact of football in French public life. Taking inspiration from the dialectical theory of the Frankfurt School, they argue that the only way to properly understand football is to analyse it as a “concrete totality” and reveal its hidden face (16). The economic processes that have transformed football into a valuable global commodity and have opened it to the increasing mobility and uncertainty of global capital should not be seen as external forces that have distorted the purity and universal appeal of the sport. There is no Platonic ideal of pure football, uncorrupted by capitalism or hijacked by bourgeois values: instead, football as a concrete social reality has a decidedly dark heart, marked as it is by violence, corruption, scandals, cheating, doping, racism and xenophobia. What is more, these tendencies are not unfortunate distortions or deviations, but rather they are intrinsic to the sport as a social phenomenon. Football is, in and of itself, an instrument of domination and regression; a limiting and stultifying mass cultural phenomenon (216). Rather than expressing spontaneous social solidarity and joy, football supporting is a form of social diversion, a safety valve that absorbs individuals into an anonymous mass. Football encourages an unthinking, passive and infantile collective experience, and the widespread passion for football evinces a form of false consciousness, a wilful blindness to corruption, exploitation, commercialism and xenophobia.

Brohm and Perlman are scathingly critical of what they see as a “postmodern consensus” about football running across the conventional political spectrum and the media (16-17). On that score, they lament the fact that even *Le Monde*, France’s “journal de référence”, has succumbed to “la tendance *people*” in incorporating ever more sports coverage (20). Particular scorn is reserved for those, particularly on the left who, in the wake of France’s 1998 World Cup victory, hailed football as an instrument of integration:

Beaucoup [...] furent attendris, puis rapidement fascinés, chauds supporters quasi hystériques, par l’équipe nationale composée, nous a-t-on répété à l’envi, de toutes les couleurs (à l’instar de l’équipe plurielle au gouvernement). Tous sportifs ! Tous foot ! Tous blacks-blancs-beurs ! Tous ensemble ! Tous ensemble ! Tous sous le même maillot, jusqu’au président ! Un maillot pour tous et tous sous le même maillot...une camisole. (205)

Writing in 2006, Camille Dal and Ronan David echo Brohm and Pereleman’s critical theoretical, broadly Marxist approach. They argue that a genuinely sociological understanding of football reveals nothing less than a collective pathology of multiple forms of hatred: violence and aggression directed at adversaries on and off the field; self-loathing focused on the body; hatred of women; and, significantly, a hatred of *thought*. This pervasive culture of negativity is fostered in turn by the ideological violence of the mass culture industry. Dal and David take a particularly dim view of intellectuals who have given up on any kind of critical position in favour of a celebration of a football as a positive force for multiculturalism, education and democracy (Dal & David 2006: 14-15). More than simply being a reflection of a violent and unjust society, football is intrinsically suited to act as a vehicle for the alienating and destructive force of advanced capitalism (15). Writing in the same collection of essays, Marianne Nizet dismisses “le slogan mensonger *black-blanc-beur*”

as nothing but a distraction from the real problems of racism in French society, pointing to the success enjoyed by Jean-Marie Le Pen in the first round of the 2002 presidential elections:

Les résultats du premier tour des élections présidentielles de 2002 furent d'ailleurs une bonne illustration de ce qu'une partie des Français entendirent par le *black-blanc-beur*: brutalité et force, affrontements perpétuels dans lesquels aucune compréhension de l'altérité n'est possible, aucune communication autre que celle médiée par la violence des institutions pré-établies, intégration *quasi* carcérale dans des banlieues poubelles, accueil et partage passant par une suspicion et une discrimination omniprésentes, bref, l'idéologie du dominant se rejouait, non plus au sein du stade, mais à l'échelle nationale. (Nizet 2006: 83-84).

Postmodern: Ehrenberg and the football imaginary

Alain Ehrenberg, writing in 1984, adopts a broadly sociological and anthropological, view in order to consider football as a complex repository of social, political and mythical meanings. Ehrenberg does not define his approach as postmodern – although Brohm and Perelman identify him as a proponent of the postmodern consensus around football– and in fact he identifies the social role of sport with what he sees as the essentially egalitarian character of modern culture. However, the fact that he analyses of football as an “imaginary universe” onto which French society projects meanings that are worthy of study and clearly signals a rejection of the “modern” critical theoretical approach favoured by Perelman and Brohm. Ehrenberg rejects in particular the notion that sport is an “opium of the masses”, diverting the working class from its real class interests (Ehrenberg 1984: 855). He suggests that that is overly simplistic and posits the working class as a passive instrument of the ruling classes. It also presupposes that football is essentially a working-class pursuit, and here he

points to the growing importance – in the 1980s – of television in exposing football to a much more diverse public. He suggests that sport, and football in particular, is not, in any straightforward way, a means of social control. There are undeniably close links between sport and politics, but the relationship is always complex and frequently ambiguous and contradictory. He prefers to define the football imaginary in anthropological and cultural terms as a vital and multi-faceted form of genuinely *popular* engagement and expression. It offers a focus for community and what he calls the “passion for equality”, particularly in milieu where the opportunities for social advancement are limited. So, a football star such as Pele embodies the potential for spectacular social ascension and acts as “sociological mediator” between social classes (871). Significantly, Ehrenberg points to an implicit contract between the football star and the appreciative football public: in order to cement his legendary status, the star player is obliged to display an ongoing connection with his humble origins and emphasis on hard work and patient accumulation is favoured over extravagant displays of wealth (872).

Ehrenberg situates the development of football as a genuinely popular sphere of activity in the general move in France away from sport as an elite pursuit. From the 1930s onwards football establishes itself as a professional sport within which players have market value. The fact that successful professional players could subsequently establish themselves as “patrons de bistrot, petits commerçants, etc.” meant that – as opposed to rugby, athletics or tennis – football could act as a vehicle for, and an expression of, working class values and aspirations. The mind-set of the modern professional footballer is depicted by Ehrenberg as an expression of a wider set of social meanings: “Son organisation, son *ethos*, contrairement à l’idéal amateur, n’était pas extérieur son mode de vie. Il l’exprimait” (854). He emphasises the role of the “street” and the development of “collective consciousness” (859). Football, he suggests, can be vehicle for a sense of solidarity, pride and dignity (862). As far as players

are concerned, the trajectory of the star player was generally as follows: working class origins and a generally tough upbringing with limited educational possibilities. The star found his way out of this relatively restricted environment by dint of football talent, hard work, and a hunger to succeed (865).

Although Ehrenberg is clearly at odds with Brohm and Perelman's critical theory approach, it remains the case that this analysis of football is distinctly modernist in terms of the values of working-class community and solidarity that are seen as conveying social meaning. However, Ehrenberg's approach takes a distinctively *postmodern* turn when he argues that football fulfils a quasi-mythical function in the sense that it provides the socially performed "realist illusion" of temporarily resolving the contradictions that lie at the heart of modern democracy and capitalism. According to this analysis, which he revisits in *Le culte de la performance* (1991), a sport such as football provides a symbolic resolution of the tension between the ideal of self-realisation through competition and the inbuilt inequalities of liberal capitalism. In this sense sport is an important component of the growth of individualism. What is more, football as a sporting spectacle has the capacity, paradoxically, to articulate this realist illusion in the context of the collective identifications of the "crowd". Drawing directly on Durkheim's work on religion and society, Ehrenberg points to the capacity of sport to provide a focus for collective effervescence: "Collectivité somptuaire qui ne dure que le temps d'un match et atteint pour cette raison la démesure de l'instant" (882).

1998 and its aftermath: *la liesse populaire*

The World Cup victory of the French team in 1998 came, as Patrick Mignon emphasises, as "une divine surprise", both for those who were already interested in football, and also those who felt a new connection to the French team in the course of the tournament (Mignon 2010, 9). From a purely footballing point of view, the form of the team had been

relatively unconvincing before the tournament. What is more, France's first World Cup victory retrospectively validated the French coaching system, with particular focus being placed on the Institut national du football at Clairefontaine. In a broader sense, the victory provided a temporary resolution to a series of contradictions and tensions in French political and social life. Most obviously, this was a chance to celebrate, at a time of generally perceived national decline, "la France qui gagne": a new, self-confident, multicultural France symbolised by Zinedine Zidane. Didier Braun, for example, was convinced that – even though the euphoria around 1998 inevitably dissipated – the national team nonetheless constituted a sort of multicultural vanguard:

En revanche, il est évident que celui-ci [le multiculturalisme] existe dans le football, et que le football de ce pays y puisera encore longtemps sa richesse. Au Centre technique de Clairefontaine, où passent chaque année les meilleurs jeunes de 13-15 ans, ce football « multiculturel » et de qualité remarquable ne cesse de s'amplifier. La génération Anelka entre à peine dans la carrière. (Braun 2000 : 56)

At the same time, the team manager Aimé Jacquet was celebrated as "un hussard de la république". Jacquet, who had been sometimes ridiculed for his regional accent and rather staid demeanour, was hailed, somewhat guiltily, as a representative of the frequently overlooked army of educators that animate the nation:

Aimé, c'est ça, un homme brut, sans secrets ni coups bas. Un homme de l'école de papa, du tableau noir et de la blouse grise, du devoir respecté et accompli. Des allures de prof de gym de notre enfance, chronomètre au cou, lunettes sur le nez, debout au bord de la piste en terre battue d'un collège de province du côté du Forez. (Perrot 1998: 17)

The French political class seized upon the overwhelming positive reaction, endorsing not only the idea of “une France *black-blanc-beur*”, but also the capacity of sport to stimulate economic dynamism and confidence in a nation widely perceiving itself to be “en déclin”. As Mignon suggests, the 1998 World Cup fulfilled a powerful symbolic function in forging links between French educational and coaching ideals (“la formation à la française”), sporting meritocracy, and the capacity of France as an advanced economy to organise an efficient and enjoyable tournament. However, the fleeting sense of national economic and sporting rejuvenation turned out to be a moment of lost innocence: football would henceforth be freighted with a new series of inflated expectations. From a social perspective, it would be expected to act as a vector for the promotion of social integration, of sports coaching as a positive educational force, and of football supporting at both club and national level as a contemporary mode of sociability. Football was also now faced with the task of managing the encroachment of politics and politicians, as well as the new economic reality of football as a truly globalised and mediatised commodity (Mignon 2010: 10) In addition to this, the reaction to France’s victory and the subsequent intense media focus constituted a globalised “happening” along the lines suggested by Laïdi. As Yvan Gastaut indicates, the euphoria of 1998 displayed structural similarities with the mediatisation of the death of Diana Spencer in 1997 (Gastaut 2008: 55) Gastaut suggests that the reaction encapsulated a widespread drive for collective expression and catharsis in the absence of wider political, ideological and perhaps religious narratives.

In this way then, the 1998 World Cup gave rise to both *postmodern* and *modern* modes of analysis and mediation, as well as expressing the complex and sometimes confusing articulation of the two registers. In one sense 1998 marked the point of entry into an era of postmodernity, as football was drawn into the intense media discourse that began to link politics, celebrity and sport in new ways. As Silverman notes, drawing on the British

political and social commentator Martin Jacques, one marked tendency in the postmodern public sphere is the emergence of a “continuum between star and punter” (quoted in Silverman 1999: 110). Certain “celebrities”, including sports stars, have become the focus of a form of attention that is simultaneously adulatory but also articulated as democratic and enfranchising: they are “just like us” but also not like us. These new chains of social signification and collective identification have shown themselves to be inherently unstable and unpredictable, and consequently this “post-ideological” scenario has enabled the media to facilitate and fuel punctual but ultimately short-lived and conspicuously depoliticised outpourings of collective euphoria, grief, anger, fear, etc.

On the other hand, a more distinctively modern register clearly persists at the same time. For example, a key legacy of 1998 has been the expectation that the French national team should in some way represent, and to a certain extent enact, recognisably “French”, sometimes explicitly republican, values. Along these lines, following the events in Knysna in 2010 the players were variously accused of “high treason”, of “dishonouring the nation” and of “besmirching the shirt”: they were identified as a sort of “anti-France”. For some commentators, the links between the social – and by extension and implication perhaps, ethnic – composition of the team and its perceived coherence and sporting integrity have been subject to scrutiny and investment. Alain Finkelkraut’s comments on France Inter and Europe 1 on June 20 2010 are particularly significant in this respect. They constitute, unsurprisingly, a textbook example of republican outrage. This was not, Finkelkraut claims, a “team”, but rather “une bande de voyous qui ne connaît qu’une seule morale, celle de la mafia”. It is particularly significant that his comments on Domenech draw on the metaphor of school and education, the paradigmatic institution of the modern French Republic. Domenech is characterised as a weak teacher, lacking in authority, defended by a school “administration” that refuses to acknowledge that anything is wrong.

Football: politics by other means

As Gastaut observes, France's political elites were swift to see the opportunities offered by an identification with the winning team of 1998: "Ignorant toute approche critique, l'ensemble de la classe politique, dans un unanimité de rigueur, s'est identifié à l'équipe de France" (Gastaut 2008: 88). Further to this, several commentators have noted a tendency towards a general "footballisation" of politics in France. Denis Barbet, for example, in "La politique est-elle foutue?", looks at the importation of football metaphors into French political discourse. He points to Ehrenberg's assertion, alluded to above, in *Le culte de la performance* (1991) that sport, economy and business have become the dominant paradigms of public life in contemporary France. This footballisation of politics has also found expression in the increased willingness of French politicians to intervene in, and comment on, issues related to football. Also, these political interventions have taken place in the context of a much more fraught relationship between the French nation and *les Bleus*, allowing politicians to gain political capital by highlighting the perceived gap between the ideals represented by 1998 and the egotistical, "bunkerised" generation that has emerged in more recent times.

In recent times, politicians have attempted to capitalise on this growing perception that the French team are disconnected from the nation. Shortly before the start of the 2010 World Cup the Secretary of State for Sports, Rama Yade, criticised the choice of a five-star hotel for the French team (Grynbaum & Schneider 2010: 36-38). Most notably, the so-called "grève de Knysna" was swiftly elevated, as indicated already, to the level of an affair of state. Marine Le Pen reacted immediately on the day that the strike was announced by demanding the resignation of the Sports Minister and the socialist deputy Jérôme Cahuzac set the tone for much of the public debate, claiming that Anelka's behaviour reflected the individualism

and egotism, “le chacun pour soi” of Sarkozy’s France (Grynbaum & Schneider 2010: 19). Apparently on the orders of President Sarkozy the Sports minister Roselyne Bachelot stayed in South Africa until the French team’s exit from the competition and spoke to the players at length about the “moral disaster” that French football was now facing. This was widely perceived as a clear intervention on the part of the French state in the affairs of the national team, a form of external interference that is explicitly outlawed under FIFA regulations.

In discursive terms, as Barbet emphasises: “Le passage du football à la politique est d’abord assuré par la métaphore ludique” (Barbet 2007: 13). Footballing and other sporting metaphors reinforce the broadly postmodern construction of politics as an interpersonal game, thus downplaying the ideological aspects of politics. Barbet suggests that the mutual linguistic exchange between the worlds of football and politics only serves to impoverish the significance and complex reality of both fields:

C’est en définitive une vision restrictive de la politique et du sport qui transparait à travers ces croisements politico-footballistiques: une politique limitée le plus souvent à sa dimension électorale, réduite à une compétition de personnes, confinant les citoyens et le peuple dans le rôle passif de spectateurs ou de récepteurs. Une politique peu idéologisée, sans programme ni décision, où les camps sont figés plutôt qu’en construction. Mais plus intéressante encore est la sélection opérée par ces métaphores qui, fonctionnant dans les deux sens, avec un flux dominant, ne captent qu’une facette des domaines reliés : la mise en spectacle de la conflictualité. Si la métaphore a d’ordinaire pour but d’enrichir le discours, elle tend ici curieusement à appauvrir à la fois les réalités politiques et les réalités sportives. (Barbet 2007: 20)

In alluding to the way in which this process of footballisation empties politics of ideological content, Barbet touches upon one of the main tensions that football talk gives rise to in

France and at the same time expresses a common anxiety relating to postmodernity. As the familiar signposts of the French post-war project fade from view – one of which was a post-ideological public construction of politics – it is not yet clear what new social significations and practices will replace them. In summary, football, particularly in the immediate period after 1998, appeared to offer a new set of social meanings, but these have proven to be very fragile.

National identity

The modern and the postmodern conceptions of football also help to make sense of the strongly contrasting senses of nationhood and identity that have been associated with the team in the 1998-2010 period. As indicated already, as far as 1998 is concerned, the postmodern focus on social potency of symbolic identification helps to explain the euphoria of 1998 and the footballisation of much public discourse in France. At the same time, this postmodern celebration of a “new” France was actually overlaid by a much more complex and problematic association of footballing success with a distinctively modern French republican social model of collectivity, co-operation, education and integration. In this way, much that was claimed to be new about this model in fact drew on themes that relate to France’s past as a quintessentially modern nation-state. This republican vision of the side has been very powerful and surprisingly persistent through time. It is striking, for example, to note the way in which Paul Yonnet – writing prior to South Africa 2010 – counters the “racist” focus on the visible “blackness” of the current French team in conventional French Republican terms. Any call for quotas or for a balanced representation of different “communities” in the French side undermines a sense of French identity:

Ce que le public comprend actuellement, ce n’est pas qu’il y aurait une communautarisation, un accaparement de l’équipe de France par « les Noirs », donc

une perte d'identité, un rétrécissement des facultés représentatives de l'équipe ainsi constituée, mais *très exactement l'inverse* : à savoir que les joueurs noirs, en mettant leur talent au service de l'identité française, alors que certains auraient pu choisir de représenter un autre pays, augmentent ce que celle-ci embrasse, témoignent à travers ce moyen de ce qu'ils peuvent lui apporter, et la fortifient en la gratifiant. (Yonnet 2010 : 154-5)

As for the twelve years or so after 1998, the modern, critical theory approach serves a useful explanatory role (and also maintains a distinctive presence in public discourse). Many commentators and followers of football would no doubt find Brohm and Pereleman's analysis both too radical and somewhat one-dimensional, but the central insight that the football economy is driven by the logic of advanced globalised capitalism explains at least some of the disenchantment with *les Bleus* and the resistance to footballisation of public discourse that has characterised this period. This approach also serves as a useful corrective to any uncritical acceptance of postmodern affective identification. It would seem that, however intense the fervour generated by a sporting event may be, these identifications ultimately prove to be fragile, transient and volatile. So, the euphoria of 1998 stands in direct contrast to the widely shared, and strongly felt feeling that the 2010 team had brought shame on the French nation by refusing to train in South Africa 2010 (l'affaire Knysna).

As far as postmodernity and globalisation is concerned, as Stéphane Beaud and Albrecht Sonntag suggest, football throws into relief anxieties and tensions created by these new global dynamics. Sonntag, for example, defines globalisation in terms of the interdependence of economy and culture, as well as the growth in power of transnational actors at the expense of the power of the nation-state. In this context, football is a paradigmatic globalised commodity, but it also offers the potential for the assertion of local allegiances in the face of a fluid, uncertain world. Along these lines, Sonntag points to a

polarisation in modes of viewing and engaging with football. It is possible to switch between being the “consommateur averti et individualiste” who typically watches Champions League matches in order to enjoy a high technical level of football and losing oneself in the “chaleur fusionnelle” of the “foules sentimentales” that emerge in the wake of events like 1998. This postmodern engagement with football, although commercially successful and punctually exhilarating, leaves some supporters feeling disorientated. Once again, as Beaud points out, the key reference point is the Bosman ruling of 1995, which constitutes a turning point in the European (and also global) football economy. The increased mobility of players has led to an internationalisation of the various European Championships and, in general terms, the creation of a fairly narrow European footballing elite (primarily composed of Spanish, German, English and perhaps Italian clubs). The norm for French players of the 2010 generation in this context is summarised as “carrières plus précoces et attrait de l'étranger” (Beaud 2011: 194-5). The sense that players are increasingly mercenary and entrepreneurial in maximising earning potential through mobility has been reinforced by FIFA rulings that have permitted players of immigrant origin to choose to play for their parents' national team. Paul Yonnet expresses most clearly the anxiety that an increasingly globalised and commodified football economy will undermine any notion of national football ecosystems:

Les joueurs sont devenus des mercenaires de l'identité [...] Les clubs sont devenus des entreprises financières [...]. Si rien n'est fait pour préserver les filières de formation autochtones en imposant des quotas de joueurs nationaux dans les clubs, les observateurs prévoient que dans quelques dizaines d'années le football de haut niveau n'opposera plus, majoritairement, que des Brésiliens et des Africains subsahariens, répartis dans les meilleures équipes. (Yonnet 2010: 141-2)

Les Bleus et la fin de la France des Trente glorieuses

Returning to a more conventional historical framework of modernity and postmodernity, it seems that tensions and uncertainties relating to national identity caused by globalisation can also be framed in the somewhat more focused context of the legacy of France's post-war modernisation. Viewed from this perspective, as Stéphane Beaud has convincingly argued, the popularity of the 1998 generation reflects in many ways a nostalgic attachment to the France of the *Trente glorieuses* as much as it does a widespread appreciation of a new, putatively multicultural France. In his analysis of the imaginary of globalisation mentioned above, Zaki Laïdi highlights the way in which the neoliberal right disturbs any consistent and generally identifiable notion of the left as a force for movement opposed to the right's defence of order, stability and continuity. The "revolutionary" project of neoliberalism is not, as Laïdi astutely emphasises, to destroy state socialism (which collapsed internally), but rather to dismantle the Keynesian framework of the post-war era, and in the process to sweep away cultural and social symbols of this phase of capitalism: nations, classes and traditions (Laïdi 1998: 95). It is in this context that the players who made up the 1998 squad have been associated for many in France – perhaps even unconsciously – with the relative national stability and Keynesian consensus of post-war modernisation.

Beaud argues that the shifts in the social makeup of the French national team in the 1998-2012 period must be seen in the context of a series of social and economic changes, both in football and wider society. He points to the fact that until recently French clubs recruited players from a mix of social backgrounds, encompassing the middle classes, "des classes rurales populaires" and also working-class communities in traditional footballing territories (129) Exemplary in this respect was Aimé Jacquet, who was brought up near Saint-Étienne, "dans cette France rurale et paysanne de l'après-guerre" (131). Jacquet combined his early footballing career with factory work, only signing professional at the relatively

advanced age of twenty-four in 1964. Jacquet's move from a rural environment to a more recognisably urban working-class milieu demonstrates classic traits of this typical post-war social trajectory. In the course of this upbringing Jacquet absorbed – as he emphasises in his autobiography – a set of values that were common to both the football and social milieus he inhabited: hard work, respect, humility, self-improvement. Beaud goes further to suggest that Jacquet's upbringing was not entirely different from that of a significant number of the players in the 1998 team: they were in many ways as much a product “le monde ouvrier de la France des Trente Glorieuses” as they were successful examples of republican integration (143). Only three of the 23-man squad were the sons of immigrants (Zidane, Pires, Vieira) – most of the other non-white players came from DOM-TOM (Desailly was born in Ghana but raised in France by adoptive parents). The majority of the side could be identified as “issus des classes populaires traditionnelles”, and were also identified with “[des] familles souvent ancrées dans des territoires géographiques” (144). The shared values of the 1998 team expressed a sense of post-war solidarity and patriotism, fostered in the France of the 1960s and 1970s in which the working class retained a strong sense of political identity:

À travers l'équipe des Bleus en 1998, c'est en quelque sorte la France ouvrière et rurale des Trente Glorieuses qui vit ses derniers feux en donnant à l'équipe nationale ses plus beaux produits. Plus fondamentalement, à travers cette filiation, c'est tout un *ethos* sportif et social qui est transmis: le sens du collectif, une certaine forme d'humilité, le respect des anciens, l'amour du maillot bleu et de la patrie (quand bien même *La Marseillaise* n'est pas chantée). (144)

The social origins and professional formation the subsequent generation of players in the national team has been different in a number of ways. In general terms, the 2010 team were frequently associated in the media with “la banlieue”, and it has certainly been the case

that a growing number of French international players after 1998 have come from some of France's more deprived estates. Anecdotally, it is now claimed that 60% of all new professionals in any given year come from the Parisian region (Beaud 2011: 161). However, this was not the only shift in the social makeup of the side. For one thing, there was the new phenomenon of relatively large number of players born to African immigrants (Cissé, Diaby, Diarra, Évra, Govou, Mandanda, Sagna). Also, Beaud points to a significant internal class divisions in the squad. Lloris, Gourcuff, Planus and Carrasso all have solidly middle or even upper-middle class backgrounds and Anelka, Govou, Malouda and Toulalan come from lower-middle class families. As far as professional experience is concerned, more of these players were playing for clubs outside of France than did the 1998 side: Barcelona (Abidal, Henry); Arsenal (Sagna, Galls, Diaby, Clichy); Chelsea (Anelka, Malouda). Also there has been a general lowering of the age at which players are recruited into "centres de formation".

Conclusion

The categories of the modern and the postmodern provide a useful framework within which to assess the intense reaction to France World Cup victory of 1998 and the subsequent "footballisation" of French public life. In one sense, the euphoria of 1998 now seems much more "modern" than it might have first appeared. In many ways, France was celebrating an era of social mobility, working-class progress, and national economic success that was already past. What is more, the "postmodern" emphasis on sport as a cohesive social ritual that transcends ideological and class divisions has been seriously undermined by the economic, social and cultural upheavals resulting from France's adaptation to globalisation. As John Gray argues, the underlying dynamic of globalisation is "delocalisation": "It means the displacement of activities that until recently were local into networks of relationships whose reach is distant and worldwide" (Gray 1999: 57) It is perhaps for these reasons that,

for those who celebrated the euphoric sense of identity generated by the unexpected success of the French team at the turn of the century, the perception that a new generation of players have a diminished sense of loyalty to *les Bleus* has been hard to bear. The delocalisation of the social significations associated with football means that they are now that much harder to conceptualise within a national context.

The capacity of football to act as a vehicle for positive and progressive expressions of identity and collectivity has also been undermined by the fact the French team has become a form of ongoing “télé-réalité”: the proliferation and intensification of media scrutiny of the French side have created a “bunker” mentality on the part of the players and management. The changing relationship between players and journalists in the new ultramediatised world of football leads to what Stéphane Beaud terms a “dilemme de statut” on the part of the players. That is to say, they are required to play the role of “vedettes médiatiques” (to display appropriate star-like charisma but also reflect in abstract terms on the game) in a way that they have not been prepared to do by their education. As Patrick Mignon says:

Cette hypermédiatisation a pour effet de donner le sentiment qu’à travers une mésaventure sportive, c’est l’ensemble du corps social qui est représenté, appelant des réactions immédiates, interprétations et accusations, censées répondre aux interrogations et aux émotions des spectateurs et surtout des téléspectateurs. (Mignon 2007: 7)

In a general sense, it is striking to note the way in which the popular disaffection with the French national team that has grown in intensity in recent times echoes the analysis of American sports as a social phenomenon that Christopher Lasch outlines in *The Culture of Narcissism*, originally published in 1979. Here, Lasch argues essentially that professional sport in the United States has been robbed of any sense of enchantment. The mediatisation of

sports such as American football and baseball has “reduced” these sports to being branches of the entertainment industry and professional sportsmen now have a “thoroughly businesslike approach to their craft” (118). Sport should be protected, Lasch suggests, from the more prosaic and brutal realities of business, entertainment, politics, work, and even “gossip”. There is undoubtedly a yearning for a “purer” vision of sport along these lines in France, and this vision of sport is frequently associated with idealised versions of national identity. Furthermore, in recent times it has often been the case that attempts to gain credibility and political advantage by evoking purer versions of French football have only served to draw football further into fulfilling a carrying out symbolic role that it cannot possibly fulfil. In one sense we should not take sports talk too seriously. We cannot, as Grynbaum and Schneider suggest, expect too much of football. But, in another sense, sports talk is a symptom of the instability of social and political meaning in an uncertain, postmodern world.

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¹ This situation change as the big-spending clubs of Paris Saint-Germain and, more recently, AS Monaco grow increasingly ambitious.

² (Allegations of racism that were levelled at Laurent Blanc in late 2010 when he was revealed to have agreed with the idea of quotas for players of foreign or dual-national background (usually black players) in France’s Youth Academy football system: ‘Qu’est-ce qu’il y a actuellement comme grands, costauds, puissants ? Les blacks (...) Je crois qu’il faut recentrer, surtout pour des garçons de 13-14 ans, 12-13 ans, avoir d’autres critères, modifiés avec notre propre culture (...) Les Espagnols, ils m’ont dit: “Nous, on n’a pas de problème. Nous, des blacks, on n’en a pas” (...)’

³ The FFF sent Nicolas Anelka home from the 2010 World Cup in South Africa when he refused to apologise after verbally abusing the team manager Raymond Domenech in the dressing room at half-time during the group stage match against Mexico. Anelka’s expulsion heightened existing tensions between the team, Domenech and the FFF, and matters came to a head at the team’s open training session at Knysna shortly before the next match. The team captain Patrice Evra argued on the training pitch with fitness coach Robert Duverne, and the French players reacted by withdrawing to the team bus and pulling down the curtains. Somewhat unexpectedly, it was Domenech who subsequently read out a statement from the players explaining their reasons for refusing to train.