'And If You Know Your History '. An Examination of the Formation of Football Clubs in Scotland and their Role in the Construction of Social Identity

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They [the players] have to remember that it's more than just a football team they're playing for. They're playing for a cause and a people.

Tommy Burns, ex-Celtic player and manager1

This paper provides an overview of how the processes through which specific football clubs were established in Scotland operated interdependently with the processes of identity construction. It is acknowledged that this paper does not provide any new primary evidence to an already well-researched area. However, rather than offering a new perspective to the debate, the explicit aim of this contribution is to provide a review of recent research into football and sectarianism in Scotland, and to conceptualise the topic within this literature. In this respect, this paper synthesises the material on the development of football clubs in Scotland and places it directly within the context of majority/minority inter-group relations (that is, indigenous Scots and migrant Irish communities) in early twentieth century Scotland. In particular, by examining the establishment of teams based in Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Dundee, all of which housed significant Irish communities, the objective is to examine both how and why particular clubs have developed and become associated with particular social groups and identities, and why these clubs were adopted (consciously or subconsciously) as vehicles for the expression of social identity.

In order to do this it is necessary to account not only for the origins and developments of these clubs, but also for the social relations and power balances between the communities that they have come to represent. Therefore this paper takes the literature regarding the establishment of football clubs in Scotland and places such developments within the wider context of processes of colonialism, Irish migration to Scotland, and ethno-religious prejudice/sectarianism. The focus is predominantly on the two major Glasgow clubs, Celtic and Rangers, and within it a slightly greater

emphasis will be placed on Celtic. This is purely a reflection of the fact that the majority of literature on this topic also concentrates on Celtic. Celtic are perceived as representing a minority group and, as MacDonald identifies, the notion of identity is often studied in relation to such groups.2 However, we must not ignore that majorities have identities too.

'A Grand Old Team To Play For' and 'The Billy Boys': religion, politics, social prejudice and the formation of Celtic and Rangers

Since their respective formations in the latter part of the nineteenth century, Celtic and Rangers have come to represent two distinct, polarised identities within Scotland. As Boyle notes, 'on stating support for either of the two clubs people tend to be identified (accurately or inaccurately) with one particular cultural configuration (e.g. Catholic or Protestant)'.3 Former Rangers player Derek Johnstone offers a more blatant interpretation: 'It's all about bigotry. If you are a Roman Catholic then the only team to follow is Celtic and, of course, if you are a Protestant it is Rangers.'4 Although Glasgow is not geographically divided along religious lines in the manner of Northern Ireland, a strong cultural division is evident.5 As ex-Celtic player Peter Grant remarks, 'there's definitely Celtic areas and there's Rangers areas. There's pubs you'd go into and pubs you wouldn't go into and that's both as supporters and players. There's definitely that divide and there's an acceptance there.'6 Bradley identifies the fact that the situation in Scotland is predominantly seen as sectarian and 'many of the social and political attributes of Catholic and Irish identity in Scotland are judged through a discourse of sectarian concepts and language'.7

It is fundamentally important to conceive of Celtic and Rangers as forming part of the same pattern of social processes, in that their personnel and supporters are bound up in a historically-rooted, interdependent network of relations. Consequently, the actions undertaken by those associated with each club (relating to both their formation and development) have affected not only themselves but also those affiliated to the other club. Therefore the social, political, and religious background of Celtic cannot be understood unless it is placed within the context of that of Rangers and vice versa. It is hoped that by analysing both clubs within the same narrative this will be emphasised. However, before looking at the origins of the two clubs, it is first necessary to examine the pattern of social

relations that has existed in Scotland over the last three centuries.

After the Treaty of Union with England in 1707, substantial agricultural changes in Scotland led to the need for an increased workforce. Combined with massive underemployment in Ireland during the summer season, this meant that in the late eighteenth/early nineteenth centuries a large number of migrants made the short journey from Ireland to Scotland in search of work. Later in the nineteenth century Irish migrants also formed a large percentage of the workforce involved in constructing the technology of the industrial revolution in Scotland, such as roads, canals, and railways.8 This employment tended to be of a seasonal nature, yet more permanent migration occurred after the Great Famine (1845-49) and, according to the 1901 census, there were over 205,000 Irish-born people in Scotland.9 The combination of the lower-class background of the majority of migrants and the presence of considerable discrimination meant that any available employment was accepted. Most migrants settled in the industrial coal-mining areas of west and central Scotland, such as the Clyde Valley.10 However, the development of coal mining was also instrumental in the growth and spread of Orangeism11 in Scotland, and thus during the latter part of the nineteenth century social relations in such areas were often of a sectarian nature.12

Gallagher states that despite centuries of interaction between members of the two nations, for many Irish migrants the process of settling in Scotland was particularly difficult. He suggests that this was due to the fact that

> the ties of faith, language and kinship which had facilitated regular social intercourse were being rent asunder by disruptive historical events which opened up a yawning cultural gulf between Scotland and Ireland.13

In particular, the Reformation of 1560 rid Scotland of its Catholic culture, replacing it with the Calvinism of John Knox. Catholics were forced into the peripheral regions of Scotland, yet despite their decreasing number, remained targets of hatred. For example, in Glasgow in the 1790s, although there were only thirty-nine recorded Catholics, there were forty-three anti-Catholic societies.14 Bradley further states that anti-Catholicism is ‘a key cultural and social feature particularly in central Scotland’ and that its underlying beliefs and orientations developed out of an aversion for

Catholic practices, a rejection of the legacies of Irish Catholicism, and a fear over the perceived objectives of the faith.15 However, as Gallagher notes, anti-Irish hostility can also, to some extent, be attributed to the indigenous Scottish population being unsure of their identity at a time of considerable economic and social upheaval.16

Social relations between Protestants and Catholics in Scotland must be viewed in the context of the balance of power. As Bradley shows, the relationship between the two has always involved the dominance of former over latter, through attempts by Protestants to establish the foundations of their supremacy and impose the universality and legitimacy of their culture on to Catholics.17 In particular, he highlights the importance of locating this within the context of colonialism, arguing that

the inability or desire not to articulate an Irish background is partly the result of Scotland/Britain's relationship with Ireland over a period of hundreds of years, and partly to [*sic*] a constant exposure to a dominating indigenous culture and identity.18

A consequence of this is that many migrants were pressured into underplaying or privatising their Irish-Catholic identity. This meant that, until the formation of Glasgow Celtic, there were few structured means of expressing one's 'Irishness'.19 Finn argues that in contrast to the acceptance of Northern Irish Protestants as Ulster-Scots,

Catholic-Irish Scots were judged to be different in both religion and racialised ethnicity, characteristics which were often (con)fused into one negative attribute: Catholic or Irish became interchangeable terms to describe the supposedly alien quality of the Irish-Scots, who were thus denied any valid status as Scots.20

Glasgow Celtic were formed in 1888 as a charitable organisation by Brother Walfrid, a member of the Catholic Marist Order. Together with other Irish-Catholic migrants, he identified the potential of football in raising money for the poor of Glasgow's East End, with the aim of keeping Catholics within the faith and improving the confidence and morale of the community. As Bradley puts it, 'the club came into existence as the focus for much Catholic and Irish community activity, a setting for that community's broad social and political aspirations'.21 Although Irish

nationalist politics were apparent in Scotland a long time before the establishment of Celtic, Bradley further argues that 'Celtic's formative years paralleled an era when much of the work achieved by Irish nationalists in Ireland and Britain began to bear fruit'.22 Similarly, Campbell and Woods maintain that, for the Irish-Catholic community, support for Celtic compensated for 'the daily troubles in a harsh life amid uncongenial surroundings'.23 Although Celtic were not the only Irish club in Scotland, the club's considerable on-field success during the early 1890s meant that they soon became the main focus for Irish-Catholic identity. According to Bradley, 'the history of Irish-British relations has meant that for the Irish in Scotland, Celtic football club has emerged as a definition of Irishness itself'.24 Finn supports this by arguing that 'sport, relying on open competition, is usually one of the first social arenas in which minority communities can break through to demonstrate their equal competence'.25 However, whilst this enhanced the self-image of the Irish community in the west of Scotland, it also stimulated further intolerance and resentment towards Catholics in Scotland.

Rangers were formed in 1872 as a sporting organisation by a group of young men from the Gareloch in Glasgow. The club soon took on an important role, in that its attempts at halting the early footballing dominance of Celtic were seen by many as integral to the defence of national (Scottish) prestige.26 This aspect appealed to a number of Rangers supporters, and the club soon developed a strong Protestant-Unionist identity.27 However, the commitment of Rangers personnel towards Protestant Unionism should not be interpreted purely as a response to the establishment of Celtic.

A significant figure for Rangers between the 1880s and 1920s was John Ure Primrose, an active Unionist and freemason who not only formed a political alliance with the Orange Order but also often vociferously expressed anti-Irish and anti-Catholic sentiments.28 Primrose was elected patron of Rangers in 1888, and had significant influence on the orientation of club. For example, in 1880 he publicly pledged the support of both himself and his club to freemasonry. Furthermore, in 1887-8, Rangers officials were also active in the formation of Clydebank, a club whose members also expressed Unionist sympathies.29 The attitudes exhibited by Rangers personnel towards Celtic can be seen as a microcosm of those

expressed towards the migrant Catholic population in Scottish society in general. According to Bradley,

Because of the overriding anti or negative element in the club and its support, as a reflection of much of the larger society's attitude towards the Catholic Irish in generalRangers became one of the most overt of anti-Catholic institutions in society.30

Scottish football had thus become not only an environment in which ethno-religious identities were prominent; a sectarian element to these identities also became evident. It has been argued that the beginnings of sectarianism in Scottish football can be traced to the establishment of Belfast's Harland and Wolff Shipbuilding Company on the Clyde at Govan in 1912.31 Due to the geographical location of the club, Rangers had always been associated with Glasgow's shipyards, which had long been a stronghold of Protestantism. For example, in 1886 Rangers' secretary Walter Crichton offered potential players the opportunity of also working for the John Elder Shipbuilding Company. It is argued that the establishment of Harland and Wolff in Glasgow led to a number of Ulster Orangemen lending their support to Rangers, thus adding a sectarian element to Celtic-Rangers relations. Walker argues that this factor may be especially significant if considered in the context of contemporary debates on Irish Home Rule. During this period several Celtic club spokesmen were actively supporting Home Rule politics, and it is suggested that this contributed to a 'firming up' of Rangers' Protestant identity, as many Protestants saw the club as a rallying point for Ulster Unionism.32

Murray, on the other hand, questions the significance of Harland and Wolff in this process, yet bizarrely continues to contradict himself in his explanation of the origins of sectarianism in Scottish football. He argues that 'in fact the real origin of sectarianism in Scottish football lay in the very formation of the Celtic Football Club and their unprecedented success',33 yet later states that 'clearly, then, Celtic and Rangers did not create sectarian division, but were instead among its consequences'.34 However, in essence, the origins of sectarianism in Scottish football should be understood as processes and the consequences of a number inter-related factors.

Finn argues that the formation of Celtic led to the establishment of a dual social identity for Irish-Scots.35 For example, although Celtic were seen as upholding Irish-Catholic culture in Scotland, the club's formation actually increased Catholic integration and participation in mainstream Scottish society. As Wilson shows, this was a conscious aim of the club's founders, for the suffix 'Celtic' was chosen rather than 'Hibernian', 'Harp', or 'Shamrocks' due to the fact that it had both Scottish and Irish connotations.36 Furthermore, at a time when the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) was promoting Irish sports, participation in association football was a symbolic demonstration of a desire to become involved in Scottish life.37 Additional evidence can be drawn from the fact that in 1892, despite a GAA ban regarding the participation of its members in 'foreign sports' such as football, Celtic's first patron, Michael Davitt, laid the first turf at the new Celtic Park. However, Irish-Scots were still mainly perceived simply as Irish, and their associations with their country of origin continued to be a considerable barrier to their assimilation in Scotland.38

However, despite the role of the club in the integration of Irish migrants, Bradley argues that Celtic still assisted in the sustaining of a counter culture, which was Irish nationalist/Catholic and opposed to the perceived dominance of Scottish-British Protestant culture.39 Boyle states that 'to a particular group, Celtic FC are an important badge of identity, a concrete element that helps to sustain and create a sense of difference'.40 The significance of the role that Celtic play, both within Scotland and Ireland, is succinctly illustrated by Bradley:

For the Catholic/Irish community, Celtic are the greatest single ethno-cultural focus because they provide the social setting and process through which the community's sense of its own identity and difference from the indigenous community is sustained, in and through a set of symbolic processes and representations.41

John Hope, 'No Pope' and football in Edinburgh and Dundee

The first Irish Catholic club in Scotland, Edinburgh Hibernians, were formed in 1875 by members of a branch of the Catholic Young Men's Society (CYMS) at St. Patrick's Church in Edinburgh. Although players

had to be practising Catholics, this did not mean, as Murray suggests, that they were 'the first sectarian team in Scotland'.42 The club's Irish roots meant that the Scottish Football Association (SFA) originally refused to grant them membership, whilst in the 1880s there was widespread debate regarding whether the club's Scottish-born players should represent Scotland or Ireland. Even when Hibernian players were permitted to play for Scotland, they were still not 'trusted' to play against Ireland. Hibernian were taken over in 1930s by the freemason Harry Swan, who, despite failing to change the club's name and colours, successfully removed the Harp symbol which dominated the entrance to the ground. However, in contrast to Celtic, Hognestad argues that today Hibernian's Irish connections have decreased in a Protestant-dominated Edinburgh, although fans of both Hibernian and their rivals Hearts still use sectarian songs and symbols in order to construct imagined differences.43

Finn suggests that the failure of Hibernian's early attempts to gain league membership can, to some extent, be attributed to the formation of Edinburgh's first club, the inherently Protestant 3rd Edinburgh Rifle Volunteers (ERV).44 The club was formed in 1874 by John Hope, a purveyor of the temperance cause and, according to Bruce, 'the quiet bureaucrat behind the anti-Popery movements in the Scotland of the last half of the nineteenth century'.45 The 3rd ERV played a key role within the Edinburgh FA, whose members were also supporters of the temperance movement. Hope spoke out against social contact between Protestants and Catholics, and Finn argues that this may have influenced the Edinburgh FA in their opposition to Hibernian's 1875 application for membership.46 Bradley identifies the fact that Irish-Catholics are generally perceived as the perpetrators of sectarianism in Scotland. They are viewed as having contributed to the changing socio-political characteristics of the country, and as lacking affinity with elements of Scottish and British nationhood, whilst their institutions, beliefs, and practices are seen as impediments to the progress of the nation.47 However, as Finn argues, the actions of John Hope reveal that it was not Catholic-Irish clubs that introduced religious or political bigotry into Scottish football.48

The Irish community in Dundee was represented by Dundee Harp, who were formed, also by members of the CYMS, in 1879. However, the club's existence was short, folding in either 1897 or 1906: sources vary on this.49

Harp were followed in 1909 by Dundee Hibernian. Although Hibernian did not employ the same religious selection criteria as their Edinburgh counterparts, the club's new management of the 1920s similarly attempted to remove any Irish connections. The team colours were changed from Irish green to white and black, and the suffix Hibernian was replaced by the name still used today, United.50

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is evident that the origins of a number of Scottish football clubs in the latter part of the nineteenth century are inextricably linked to processes of identity construction. The majority of clubs were founded during a period when Irish migrants were seeking to establish their new dual identities. The development of Catholic clubs enabled the Irish in Scotland to retain their roots in their homeland whilst also demonstrating a willingness to integrate into Scottish society, through their adoption of football at the expense of Gaelic sports. At a time when the Irish community in Scotland were to some extent prevented by the majority hegemonic group from celebrating their identity through political and religious channels, football provided a social arena in which they were able to do so.

It is important, therefore, to locate the establishment of such clubs not only within the development of football as a game, but within the political, religious, social, and economic systems in existence during this period. It is certainly no coincidence that the clubs with the strongest politico-religious affiliations today reside within cities characterised by conflicts of identity over one hundred years ago. When we recognise that the establishment of these clubs needs to be located within a wider socio-historical context, it becomes evident that their respective developments need to be considered not in isolation, but as part of the same pattern of social relations. The actions and beliefs of those associated with particular clubs need to be understood within the context of the identities and social groups to which they are attached, and also as a reaction to those identities expressed by clubs associated with conflicting ideologies.

Whilst there is a plethora of research regarding football and sectarianism in both metropolitan Scotland and Ulster, there is still a complete absence of literature focusing on these issues in English cities. In particular, both

Liverpool and Manchester received a large influx of Irish migrants in the nineteenth century, yet an investigation into the ethno-religious affiliations of the clubs in these cities is yet to be undertaken. This is a key area that needs to be examined, so that a significant comparison can be made regarding football and sectarianism in England and Scotland.

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Notes

1 BBC TV, 1999.

2 MacDonald, 1993, p. 10.

3 Boyle, 1994, p.77.

4 BBC TV, 1999.

5 Boal & Douglas, 1982.

6 BBC TV, 1999.

7 Bradley, 1996, p. 74.

8 Bradley, 1995a, p. 134.

9 Collins, 1991, p. 1.

10 Bradley, 1995a, p. 135.

11 For a detailed explanation of the Orange Order see Edwards, 1999.

12 Walker, 1990, p. 52.

13 Gallagher, 1991, p. 19.

14 Murray, 1984, p. 93.

15 Bradley, 1995a, p. 197.

16 Gallagher, 1991, p. 20.

17 Bradley, 1994, p. 20.

18 Bradley, 1994, p. 15.

19 Bradley, 1994, p. 15.

20 Finn, 1991b, p. 373.

21 Bradley, 1995a, p. 35.

22 Bradley, 1996, p. 65.

23 Cited in Bradley, 1994, p.3.

24 Bradley, 1995b, p. 96.

25 Finn, 1991b, p. 375.

26 Murray, 1984, p. 12-13.

27 Bradley, 1994, p. 3-4.

28 Finn, 1991a, p. 86.

29 Finn, 1991a, p. 87.

30 Bradley, 1994, p. 4.

31 Murray, 1984, p. 84-85.

32 Walker, 1990, p. 140-41.

33 Murray, 1984, p. 87.

34 Murray, 1984, p. 100.

35 Finn, 1991b, p. 370-71.

36 Cited in Bairner, 1994, p. 17.

37 Finn, 1991a, p. 89-90.

38 Finn, 1991a, p. 90.

39 Bradley, 1995b, p. 96.

40 Boyle, 1994, p. 92.

41 Bradley, 1995a, p. 183.

42 Murray, 1984, p. 19.

43 Hognestad, 1997, p. 195.

44 Finn, 1994, p. 91.

45 Cited in Finn, 1994, p. 92.

46 Finn, 1994, p. 97.

47 Bradley, 1996, p. 74.

48 Finn, 1994, p. 109.

49 Finn, 1991b, p. 378.

50 Finn, 1991b, p. 379-81.