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Global Games (review)

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Journal of Social History, Volume 39, Number 1, Fall 2005, pp. 294-296
(Review)

Published by Oxford University Press
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jsh.2005.0119>



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Global Games. By Martin Van Bottenburg, translated from the Dutch by Beverley Jackson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001. viii, 282 pp.).

Historicising sports that are played at an international level requires layer upon layer of contextualisation in order to make sense of the local, national and global meanings embedded and embodied in the participation and consumption of sport. Martin Van Bottenburg provides these contextual layers in an accessible, panoramic analysis of both the differential popularity of sports around the world and the moves towards international standardization in the institutions and practices of sport.

Global Games follows in the figurational sociology tradition by focusing on the social and cultural meanings attributed to sport and situating these meanings within a conceptual framework that emphasises longitudinal change and the interdependency of social groups. This macro-sociological approach has been influential in the development of the sociology of sport; for example in the work of Allen Guttman and Joseph Maguire.¹ Martin Van Bottenburg furthers the field, however, by also incorporating insights from the interpretive sociologist Pierre Bourdieu into his analysis. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of distinction, this study links the individual, class-based preferences for sport to wider social and economic structures, groupings and interdependencies, in local, national and international contexts.²

Martin Van Bottenburg begins his study by posing the question of why different countries have different national sports at a time when the dissemination of standardized sport has reached global status. He seeks to understand this "differential diffusion and popularization" by analysing the social construction and meanings of sport in four countries—Britain, Germany, the United States and Japan—from which, it is argued, the sports with the largest number, and widest spread, of participants internationally originated.³ There are three stages to this analysis: a discussion of the social background of the people who practice sports in these countries and how these groups relate to other social groups; an understanding of the relationships between these countries and other countries where the sports are introduced; some reflections on the social groups that take up the sports in the "adopting countries" and how they relate to other social groups.

The specialist terminology that Martin Van Bottenburg uses in this book to describe these three stages not only links him to a particular strand of the sociology of sport as mentioned above but, moreover, has the potential to depoliticise the phenomena he is describing. Britain, Germany, the United States and Japan are referred to as "centers of diffusion". The dissemination of codified sports to colonised nations and peoples, or "adopting" countries, is therefore presented in relatively benign terms.⁴ The hierarchical structure of nations and social groups is implied in the analysis, but these labels could be seen as belying or eliding the hegemonic struggles between dominant and subordinate groups. From the rational recreation movement in nineteenth-century England to West Indian cricket, sport has played a crucial role in establishing, maintaining and disrupting power relations within and between nations. The "centers of diffusion" are nations that have been economically, politically and culturally dominant, subjugating other nations that have used sport as a means of resistance to these

forms of colonisation and imperialism. These power struggles, which are on-going, need to be made explicit, and not erased, through the language we use to make sense of complex social relations.

Given the scope of *Global Games*, it is inevitable that the author had to make some selection criteria for both the data collected and the theories applied. Martin Van Bottenburg is explicit about these choices; however, there are two under-represented areas that are particularly significant for a volume on the dissemination of standardized sport at national and international levels. At the end of chapter four, entitled 'Sports in Europe: The Slow Erosion of European Dominance', the author highlights the popularization of tennis as an example of "a hybrid of elitist and popular characteristics" in sport.⁵ This would seem to illustrate post-modern tendencies in sport. Perspectives on post-modernism, such as David Harvey's concept of time-space compression to understand the consumption of the FIFA 2002 World Cup hosted by Japan and Korea or Jean Baudrillard's work on sign value to make sense of the multiple and complex meanings of rugby around the world, are not used in this study.⁶

This leads on to the second area, which is the underplaying of spectatorship in favour of participation rates in sport. The market for watching sport at stadia; on television; in pubs and at home; and the consumption of sport products from trainers to replica football or baseball shirts, from fanzines to sport celebrity-endorsed commodities is a central feature of the hegemonic incorporation of the local into the global. *Global Games* would have benefited from a greater engagement with post-modern theories and consumption practices to illuminate further the global contexts and experiences of sport.

Unravelling the context of global forms of cultural production, such as sport, is a huge undertaking. There is a global and historical breadth of analysis in this study, but Martin Van Bottenburg avoids banal generalisations by focusing on the specificity of particular sports in particular settings and by linking the social status of individuals to macro-level social change. *Global Games*, therefore, is a useful contribution to the field and highlights the importance of case-study research in analysing the interplay between the local and the global in our everyday lives.

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ENDNOTES

1. Allen Guttman, *Games and Empires: Modern Sports and Cultural Imperialism* (New York, 1994) and Joseph Maguire, *Global Sport: Identities, Societies, Civilizations* (Cambridge, 1999).
2. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London, 1984).
3. Martin Van Bottenburg, translated from the Dutch by Beverley Jackson, *Global Games* (Urbana, 2001), 43 & 45.
4. Van Bottenburg, 43.

5. Van Bottenburg, 164.
6. David Harvey, *The condition of postmodernity: an enquiry into the origins of cultural change* (Oxford, 1989) and Jean Baudrillard, "For a critique of the political economy of the sign," in Mark Poster, ed., *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings* (Cambridge, 1988).