Sojourner perceptions of the St George Cross flag during the FIFA 2010 World Cup: A symbol of carnival or menace?

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Abstract

Researchers have observed that during a major sporting event, participating nations are transformed into sites of carnival and patriotic celebration. National flags are important symbols, increasingly used to denote support for the national team and to express group identity. Using findings from a qualitative study of sojourner perceptions of a transformed England during the FIFA World Cup 2010, this paper explores how the display of the England national flag (St George Cross) is decoded by national outsiders to the culture. Two conflicting themes emerged from an inductive thematic analysis of data. The England flag is perceived as both a positive symbol of national pride and a signifier of potential violence.

Introduction

Hosting mega sporting events carries positive impacts for the host destination in terms of job creation, improved destination image, tourist arrivals, repeat visitation and destination marketing, hence the effort put into bidding for the opportunity to host events (Bowdin

et al., 2006). Crucial to a successful bid to host mega events is the host destination's stated capacity and willingness to receive and welcome sport tourists from around the world (Bowdin et al., 2006). The experiences of such tourists have received little research attention, however (Gibson, 2005). By focusing on the perceptions of international students in an England gripped by World Cup fever, it is hoped that this paper will help to start a dialogue about the sojourner experience of the host destination. Whilst the focus in this paper is not on the host destination, but on a country transformed temporarily by the tournament, it is anticipated that the international student perspective will help us to understand what it might be like for cultural outsiders to live through a major tournament in a foreign country. The findings may also carry implications for the reception offered to sport tourists by the host community (England) during a time of celebratory patriotism (Kersting, 2007). The cultural outsiders in the case of this paper are international students whose motivations for being in the country are different from those of sport tourists, and who have different experiences and expectations of the sojourn in a new culture. Nevertheless, their perceptions of a country transformed by a major sporting tournament may be pertinent to the sport tourist experience.

In particular, at the heart of this paper are sojourner perceptions of the display of the English St George Cross flag during the World Cup. The paper reveals a dichotomy, as it centres on its use in creating a carnival atmosphere as well as signifying a potential threat. Brass (1999) states that the meaning of a sign, such as a flag flown during a public event, depends on the individuals who encode and decode it. This paper focuses on how the significance of the flag is decoded by national outsiders to the dominant cultural group.

Handelman (1990) states that a flag is a symbol that carries different meanings, as by definition a symbol is something that stands for, stands in place of, or points to something else beyond its presence. Reichl (2004) uses semiotics to explain how the national flag is a polysemic symbol to which different meanings can be attached. Reichl argues that it is necessary to understand not only the intentions of someone wearing or flying a flag, but also the viewer's decoding of the image and the context in which it is seen. This paper elaborates on this tension in meanings.

A sign of carnival and a symbol of belonging

An integral apparatus of heraldry and pageantry in the past, flags have retained their significant emotive power in the modern world (Mirzoeff, 2005). Indeed, contradicting the notion that flags have lost their symbolic power (Psner, 1998), there has been a proliferation in the purchase and display of national flags, particularly during major international sporting tournaments (Hayward, 2010). In England, the context of this study, there has been a rise in the use of symbols of national identity (Hunter, 2003). As Conn (2006) notes, during the FIFA World Cup in June 2006 (hosted in Germany), more 10 million St George Cross flags were bought by in total 27% of English adults. Furthermore, commentators have pointed to competitiveness over the degree of patriotic support shown during the FIFA World Cup 2010 (BBC, 2010a). One might speculate with regard to a likely increase in patriotic displays were the tournament to be held on national soil.

There are two main explanatory factors for this phenomenon. Firstly, the display of national flags and other symbols of identity helps to foster an air of excitement and carnival that maximises both the levels of interest in sport and the support offered to the national team (Chalip, 1992). Members of the public who are not ordinarily followers of the sport are galvanised into supporting the national team, often by the furore and excitement generated by intensive media coverage (Crawford, 2003; Frew and McGillivray, 2008). Such supporters are classed by sport sociologists as temporary fans (Hunt et al., 1999), whose interest is time-constrained, for example, by the period of a sporting event.

Secondly, spectators are recruited into supporting their national team through the gratifying sense of community offered by the tournament, symbolised in the display of the flag (Chalip, 1992). The flying of flags during major tournaments is a symbol of a collective experience, of group identity. As Kersting (2007) notes, during the World Cup held in Germany in 2006, a survey showed that 61% of the country's population appreciated the sense of belonging and celebration permitted by the adornment of houses and cars with the German flag.

To the wearer, the display of the flag is an acknowledgement of belonging to a wider community (Boutle, 2006; Hunter, 2003). This group is not in itself visible and needs some form of expression, which the flag fulfils (Reichl, 2004). As Armstrong and Young (1999) observe, group affiliation is an important element of the enjoyment of being a sports fan, as supporters receive personal validation of their support for a team from being surrounded by a group of fans who also support the same team.

Barrer's (2007) study highlights that international spectator sports are of central importance to contemporary constructions of national identity, allowing fans to bond with each other and to demonstrate a symbolisation of their nation. As globalisation intensifies, sport is increasingly used as a vehicle for the reaffirmation of national identities (Mariovet, 2006). In the face of an allegedly homogenised global culture, people are increasingly searching for new experiences that allow them to differentiate and identify themselves with individual nations (Shipway and Kirkup, 2011). Interestingly, however, it has been observed that the national flag may have become a symbol of inclusive patriotism (Garland, 2004; Kersting, 2007), being adopted by fans from different cultures and ethnic minority backgrounds. According to Mirzoeff (2005: 263), the national flag can become "an emblem of multicultural inclusiveness".

A marginalising symbol

Brass (1999) and Reichl (2004) stress however that whilst an ethnic group's use of the flag as a cultural symbol serves to establish inclusion criteria for the in-group, it can also signify exclusion of the out-group. Indeed, there is some debate regarding the intentions of the user of the flag, which revolves around terms such as nationalism, national pride and patriotism, often used synonymously to refer to national identity (Hunter, 2003; Kersting, 2007). It might be useful to consider the distinction made in Orwell's essay on the matter, where patriotism is taken to mean "devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life, which one believes to be the best in the world but has no wish to force on other people", whereas nationalism is "inseparable from the desire for power" (1945:

361). As noted by Kersting (2007), nationalism places one's nation above all others and can lead to chauvinism and out-group hostility.

There are negative associations between national flag-waving and hooliganism. The history of hooliganism linked with English football dates back to the 1960s and 1970s (Abell et al., 2007; Frosdick and Marsh, 2005), since which time the 'hooligan' stereotype has become firmly established (Abell et al., 2007). Frosdick and Marsh (2005) observe that rivalries between England and other nations such as Germany and the Netherlands have led to violence. In such episodes, the St George Cross flag has become a symbol of nationalism and is associated in people's minds with violence (Reichl, 2004). Though a broadening of the fan base has done much to diminish the link between football and violence domestically (Abell et al., 2007; Garland, 2004), the England flag was once again associated with hooliganism and nationalism during the FIFA European Championship in 2000 in Belgium and Holland, when there was extensive coverage of fans rioting (Mirzoeff, 2005).

Hooliganism often takes the form of racist behaviour. As Penny (2010) notes, the England flag is used by and has become associated with far-right groups, such as the English Defence League (founded in 2009). This is discomfiting for those members of ethnic minorities in England desiring to support the national team, as Younge (2010) points out: "[Y]ou are keenly aware of the possibility that others might be revelling in something you truly detest". Racist violence is a problem at international matches both at home and away (Frosdick and Marsh, 2005), and international matches on foreign soil can be a catalyst for violence at home (King, 2002). During the FIFA World Cup 2002, there was little violence in Japan and South Korea, but there was race violence in England (in Burnley, Oldham and Hull) (King, 2002). Football-related violence is on the increase, but patterns have changed; almost all assaults now take place away from football grounds, where drunken, aggressive and violent behaviour nevertheless still persists (Home Affairs, 2002; Institute of Alcohol Studies, 2010).

International students' contact with the host society

International education is a major export industry, with fierce competition among the key markets of the UK, Canada, New Zealand and Australia. In the UK alone, international students make up around 15% of the higher education student population (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2011) and make a significant contribution to the local and higher education economy. In a bid to understand and improve the international student experience, and thereby to enhance recruitment, there has been a steady increase in research into international student adjustment. Social interaction has received much research attention, being highlighted in both the theoretical and the empirical literature as central to sojourners undergoing the process of transition, when they commonly experience homesickness and loneliness (Ward et al., 2001). Interaction has been linked with sociocultural and psychological adjustment; the strategy adopted by or forced on the sojourner has implications for their well-being and acceptance into the new culture (Berry, 1994; Kim, 2001).

In their typology of friendship, which is still cited today, Bochner et al. (1977) found three categories of friend: the host national friend, who acts as a cultural informant and

is an important source of host culture and language learning for the cultural outsider; the co-national, who acts as a comforting reference of values from the home culture and simultaneously inhibits the acquisition of communicative competence; and other-nationality friends, who act as a general social network.

In spite of the importance attached to contact with members of the host community due to the chances it offers to improve linguistic and cultural knowledge (Hofstede, 2001; Toyokawa and Toyokawa, 2002), successive studies conducted in the top destination countries for international students have documented a difficulty in achieving host contact among international students (Brown, 2009). This has been attributed to language difficulties and indifference on the part of the host community (Brown, 2009; Sovic, 2008). In some studies, racism has been cited (Brown and Jones, 2012). At the same time, a pattern of ghettoisation has long been observed in the international student body, whereby students mix largely with compatriots (Brown, 2009; Gu et al., 2008; Sovic, 2008). This mononational bond offers emotional sustenance but is credited with decreased intercultural interaction and diminished language progress (Bradley, 2000; Kim, 2001). Noted by Bochner et al. (1977) as the least important friendship network, a multicultural friendship group is also commonly established: this sub-culture of the heterogeneous university population is formed of contacts between students of different nationalities (Brown, 2009). Deprived of the chance to learn about the host culture, international students turn to each other to improve their cultural learning (Brown, 2009). This multicultural approach to interaction has been credited with transformative potential, as sojourners can acquire intercultural skills that will aid global understanding and increase their employability (Cushner and Mahon, 2002).

Aware that host contact promises the route to culture learning, adjustment and acceptance, international students are often reported to be disenchanted by the reception they face in the new culture and disappointed to remain cultural outsiders – to find that the route to improving their language skills and knowledge of cultures other than their own is through mixing with other international students (Brown, 2008). Ingroup–outgroup theory can be used to explain the high incidence of monocultural bonds. Ghettoisation can be influenced by the urge to gravitate to the comfort of sameness in a diverse and unfamiliar setting (Ward, 2001), which the ingroup provides (Kim, 2001). It can also be viewed as a response to threat from the outgroup. In Brown's (2009) study of international student interaction, it was found that racism against non-white students led to fear and suspicion, and to self-segregation into mononational groups. Theoretical models developed by Crocker and Luhtanen (1990), Stephan and Stephan (2001) and Branscombe and Wann (1994) show that withdrawal into self-designated ethnic groups is a predictable response to a threatened collective self-esteem, to a fear of discrimination. As Pettigrew (2008) notes, real or perceived threats to the minority group represent an important mediator in cross-cultural interaction.

Pettigrew et al. (2007) emphasise the positive influence of ingroup friends who have an outgroup friend: such indirect contact is said to be as influential as direct contact in reducing intergroup prejudice. However, few international students manage to make friendships with the host. Thus ethnocentric attitudes develop, consisting of intentional separation and a dualistic 'we–they' thought pattern that leads to negative stereotyping of difference (Paige et al., 2003). It is often claimed that the international

campus provides opportunities for students of different cultures to interact, to exchange knowledge and to improve their cultural learning, but Ward (2001) argues that the benefits of the international campus are hypothesised. As De Vita (2005: 75) states, "the ideal of transforming a culturally diverse student population into a valued resource for activating processes of international connectivity, social cohesion and intercultural learning is still very much that, an ideal". Higher education practitioners continue to develop strategies to improve integration between domestic and international students, but there is little evidence yet of their success. Indeed, there is a weight of evidence of polarisation between cultures.

Methodology

The aim of this study was to explore sojourner perceptions of England during a time of patriotic fervour elicited by a major sporting event. A qualitative approach was adopted as it offers the means through which to uncover the views, experiences and meanings held by participants (Daymon and Holloway, 2010), an approach that could help us to understand how the sojourner experiences the World Cup outside their own country and how they perceive the new culture during a time of heightened patriotism. In a situation where little is known about the sojourner experience of a major sporting event, only the qualitative approach with its emphasis on exploration, and in some cases the generation of theory (Jones et al., 2012), could fulfil the goal of understanding the international student experience of following the World Cup away from home.

A semi-structured interview was used, as there were a number of issues that we wished to cover. Thus a flexible interview guide was prepared, covering the following topics: participants' allegiance to football, the impact of the World Cup on their day-to-day life in England and their impressions of England during June and July 2010. As Mason (2002) suggests, the semi-structured interviewer has a topic and an agenda, but is open to new avenues of research and is flexible and spontaneous in terms of the lines of enquiry pursued. Interviews therefore differed among the participants in response to the issues of concern raised by them. Recurrent themes were identified during the analysis process, though there was, predictably, divergence in the emphasis placed by students on the relative importance of each theme.

Purposive sampling was used: the setting for this research was a graduate school which recruits a high number of international students to its postgraduate programmes. Access to students was granted through the gatekeeper and the lead researcher, who has a teaching relationship with the students. Inclusion criteria for the sample were that participants should be a) international students who were b) intending to follow the World Cup tournament in June/July 2010. It was decided to interview international students as they represent one of the categories of sojourner identified in Ward et al. (2001) sojourner typology, whose experiences could help to shed light on how the cultural outsider experiences a major sporting event away from home. A total of 15 students from a range of countries volunteered to be interviewed, thus some variation in the sample was achieved and a diversity of experience was captured. A sample size of 15 is considered sufficient for an exploratory study (Jones et al., 2012). Besides, data saturation was reached, as similar findings were echoed across the interviews.

Ethical approval to undertake this study came from the university's Research Ethics Committee. In addition, participants were informed of the research aim when consent was sought, and were assured of anonymity and confidentiality and of their right to withdraw from the project when volunteers were sought and at the start of the interview. The profile below includes nationality, age, gender, level of fandom and the team that participants supported during the tournament. This information will help to contextualise the data.

French, 23, female, France, temporary fan
German, 22, female, Germany, temporary fan
German, 24, female, Germany, temporary fan
Greek, 44, male, Greece, permanent fan
Greek, 27, male, Greece, permanent fan
Cypriot, 26, male, Greece, permanent fan
Ghanaian, 31, male, Ghana, permanent fan
Nigerian, 28, male, Nigeria, permanent fan
Nigerian, 42, female, Nigeria, temporary fan
Tibetan, 25, male, England, temporary fan
Russian, 23, female, England, permanent fan
Indian, 24, male, England, temporary fan
Indian, 31, male, England, temporary fan
Algerian, 35, male, Algeria then England, permanent fan
Chinese, 26, male, England, temporary fan

Interviews were conducted by the first author, who had already achieved rapport with the student body in her capacity as study support tutor. As Spradley (1979) notes, trust and rapport are important in putting a participant at ease and in encouraging disclosure. Thus it was preferable that the first author conduct all of the interviews. Furthermore, the interviewer, by virtue of her relationship with the participants, was able to return to interviewees for clarification when necessary, subsequent to the interview. Such was students' stated interest in and enthusiasm for the topic that many contacted the researcher following the interviews to discuss issues related to the World Cup, such as the sacking of Nigeria's manager and Ghana being knocked out of the tournament. Given that the researcher is a football fan herself, and was following all of the tournament matches, this was not a burden. Exit strategy did not therefore have to be considered, as recommended by Mason (2002), because the topic of the research was mutually enlivening, and discussion continued beyond the tournament at times. It must be acknowledged, however, that the specific role and characteristics of the interviewer might have influenced the data collected. The interviewer is a white English woman, older than the participants and in a position of power as a tutor: this could lead participants to withhold feelings and opinions that they may deem unacceptable for the interviewer to hear, especially concerning attitudes towards England and English values and behaviour.

Interviews took place between June and July 2010, during the tournament itself, when thoughts and feelings were fresh. Interviews were conducted in the interviewer's office and were recorded by digital recorder, subject to participants' agreement. As advised by Mason (2002), interviewees' physical comfort was attended to: lighting was not too bright, seating was comfortable, a hot or cold drink was supplied, the phone was taken off the hook, and a 'do not disturb' sign was put on the door.

The demeanour of the researcher has an impact on the quality of the data generated as well as on the emotional comfort of the interviewee (O'Reilly, 2005); thus, the first author made sure that she was friendly and attentive, and that eye contact was maintained. O'Reilly (2005) advises that the interview *should* feel like a conversation with a friend, but as Mason (2002) mentions, the effort needed to sustain conversation in an interview can be tiring; this was particularly pertinent in this study, as all interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. That participants felt comfortable and engaged is reflected in the fact that many commented on the enjoyable experience they had had and continued contact by email after the interview for the duration of the tournament.

Thematic analysis was used to treat the raw data, consisting of three steps (Jones et al., 2012). Firstly interviews were transcribed in full. Secondly, a process of familiarisation took place whereby transcripts were read repeatedly so that a holistic impression of the data could be gained, permitting initial analysis to take place before data were broken up through the process of coding. Thirdly, data reduction took place, whereby the data were coded and similar codes were grouped together, leading to the emergence of a category. Analysis showed that the England flag occupied an important role in students' perceptions of England during the World Cup 2010. Two distinct associations were formed, as reflected in the two research categories that make up the results section: the flag signified both celebration and threat. As is the norm in qualitative research, the literature review was processual (Mason, 2002), conducted at the start of the research and throughout in response to emergent themes.

With regard to the generalisability of findings, like most qualitative researchers, we acknowledge that a small sample and the selection of one case makes it difficult to move to general classifications (Mason, 2002). Nevertheless, as Jones et al. (2012) claim, similar settings should produce similar data, such that theory-based generalisation, involving the transfer of theoretical concepts found in one situation to other settings and conditions, is possible. We would suggest that the context and setting for this research permit the transfer of the findings to similar settings: namely, higher education institutions with a high number of international students and communities with a diverse ethnic mix. The findings might also be transferable to other categories of sojourner visiting England during a time of heightened patriotism, including tourists, migrants and business people.

Results

Carnival and revelry

One of the attractive features of a major sporting tournament is the atmosphere of carnival and celebration created by supporters and the media (Shipway and Jones, 2008). Barrer (2007) notes that sports stadia are transformed into festive places during major

events such as the Olympic and Paralympic Games and the FIFA World Cup. This study notes a similar transformation in England even though it was not the host destination, as St George Cross flags were observed to be flying in streets, on cars and in shop windows and sported on tee shirts, hats and face paints. Reflecting an increase in the sale of flags during the World Cup (Conn, 2006), this show of patriotism by England fans during the world cup was striking to participants:

I've never seen such things. I have heard from my father that these people are crazy about the football here. I saw so many houses and on the window was the flag. It was amazing surprise. Indian student (aged 31)

I was wondering why there were flags everywhere because I don't have TV so I went into one of my flatmates and I said 'what is happening?' My flatmate said 'it's probably just the youths having a party.' I said 'no its more than parties I can see it when people pass in cars, England, England, England, what is happening?' but later on I learnt it was going to be football. If not for the flags probably I wouldn't know but the flags really alerted me. Nigerian student (female)

Everybody in the street were wearing the England flag and many cars put the England flag and many people in their living room have the England flag on the windows. I never saw this in my life. Chinese student

As the above comments show, the display of flags was surprising, and contrasted with the England participants had become used to. For the Nigerian student, who was not a permanent football fan, the revelry alerted her to the imminent tournament, whilst the Indian students compared the festivities they observed with the way in which support for the national cricket team is shown at home.

The reaction to this display of patriotism was universally positive; participants were cheered to witness the passion provoked by football:

It's good, you see everybody putting flags on their cars everywhere, it shows passion. They have passion for football which I like so much, they have passion for their country and support which is nice. Nigerian student (male)

The English are very passionate, they love football; a lot of people buy flags, even people use them to dress in, you see them all around town. It's great! Ghanaian student

It's a really good thing because supporting your players and become a fan about the sports is showing how strong the country is supporting. I saw when England lost, the crowd was crying. It's like something they lost; it's like a family, like if something goes wrong with your family. I feel really these people are very influenced by the football and it's really good. Indian student (aged 31)

Allegiance to the national team was endearing, and participants were unanimous in their gratification at being immersed in what seemed like an atmosphere of festivity. Participants were moved by the passion shown by England fans; this was seen as a positive attribute, to be celebrated. It was also compared with the support shown for the national football teams in Ghana, Nigeria, Greece and Germany, which was deemed also to be an acceptable display of pride. As Garland (2004) points out, within the context of

sport, flag-waving is a statement of support and a reinforcer of group identity. The celebration and performance of national identity uniquely allowed by sport (Ben-Porat, 2006; Lee, 2009) were viewed with respect by participants. They did not feel alienated or excluded by the display of patriotism, as suggested by Reichl (2004).

As Trail and James (2001) note, escapism and a break from routine are important motivators for sport consumption, and the fervour generated by the World Cup allowed participants a temporary reprieve from their mundane world, as noted in the repetition below of the word 'different'.

I think for me it's good to see all the flags and everything around, it looks like a piece of decoration. I like seeing something different, something festive. Cypriot student

People are cheering, and at the pub horns were blowing. I realised that the World Cup has started and the environment is different, it's like a festival. From the environment we can say that a good thing is going on. It feels like a celebration. Indian student (aged 24)

For participants, the physical landscape was altered and the atmosphere was charged with excitement. As Shipway and Jones (2008) point out, both watching and taking part in sport allows for an escape from the norm. It holds what Jones (2000) describes as a de-routinising function. Elias and Dunning (1986) argue that leisure is important in that it offers emotional arousal and excitement that are usually missing from everyday life. For students at the dissertation stage of their course, the World Cup permitted reprieve from the burden of academic work for a short period. This will explain why students who were not permanent football fans, and whose national team had not qualified for the tournament, decided for a short while to offer their allegiance to the England team. Perhaps this offered an opportunity to bond with the host community, offering a desired contact that is often elusive.

The vocabulary participants used (*celebration, cheering, festive, decoration*) highlighted the revelry evoked by the display of flags. Indeed, some participants compared the scenes to the way the landscape is transformed in England during the build-up to the Christmas holidays. Shipway and Kirkup (2011) note that a mega sporting event allows spectators to revel in a uniquely carnivalesque party atmosphere but, as this study notes, this atmosphere is also created and enjoyed outside of the host destination.

Furthermore, participants were adamant that flying the flag was not to be frowned upon or associated with racism or nationalism. Given the often negative associations with flag-waving (Reichl, 2004; Penny, 2010), this was a surprising and revealing finding for the researchers:

It is not harmful, not harmful at all. I don't think anyone would stop me from holding my green and white (Nigerian colours) *while I watch. If you look at the whole team in the stadium you can see a lot of flags depending to where you belong, everyone does it, it's fine.* Nigerian student (female)

It was really good to see it. There's nothing wrong in showing your patriotism. In India if there's a cricket match we will have our Indian flag. It's not racist. I feel you are showing your flag, you're being supportive and patriotic and that's what you want from a citizen of the country. Indian student (aged 24)

Sports is part of culture, it's part of a country's identity and it's sometimes a way to express your feelings and to express your cultural identity. It's fine. Greek student

I saw the news that this pub had a big England flag and I heard that the government are banning the England flag and I thought, 'why are they talking like that, why, this is your country, you can show your flag!' Tibetan student

As the above comments indicate, there was a clear rejection of the notion that national flag-waving is a chauvinist act; patriotic display was not only acceptable but to be encouraged. Participants understood that flag-waving was a mechanism of showing support and celebrating and reinforcing group identity (Boutle, 2006; Hunter, 2003). At the same time, this was not received as excluding or nationalist behaviour. As outsiders to the culture, participants did not feel the guilt and trepidation that are so often associated with flag-waving in England (Abell et al., 2007, Condor, 1996). Participants viewed patriotism as an acceptable feeling of pride, distinct from the more racist connotations of nationalism (Kersting, 2007).

This finding mirrors a growing movement in England seeking to reclaim the use of the flag and reappropriate it from the far right (Abell et al., 2007). Indeed, it is claimed that football is one of the few remaining spheres in which it is acceptable to openly display patriotic sentiment in England (Boutle, 2006; Garland, 2004). Supporters feel comfortable about displaying immense emotional involvement in the fate of the England football team, for example, without expressing nationalistic sentiment (Abell et al., 2007).

This is not to say, however, that participants did not understand the symbolic associations with the flag. For the Tibetan student, the flag is associated with independence and freedom:

It's really good to have your country's flag because in Tibet people can't carry their own flag. Here you can. I got three in my house. Having it makes you feel very proud and I want to show it to people (shows the flag to the researcher). Everybody has a right to have their flag.

According to Roy (2006), the national flag is a symbol of freedom, of national independence. This is clearly the meaning attributed by the Tibetan student to the flag and to the prohibition of its use. The student, understanding the important link between sport and national belonging, had decided to bring his national flag with him, and was clearly moved when he showed it to the researcher. For him, the flag was a symbol of his country's right to exist, and to national independence. Though he supported England during the tournament, like other participants who offered temporary allegiance to England because their country had not qualified, he confessed that his emotional attachment would be far greater if his own country had been in the competition. Indeed, such is the succour obtained from affiliation to the national side that migrants in Australia have been shown to follow a football team just because members of their own ethnic group play for the club (McDonald et al., 2010).

In the Greek student's case, the flag was negatively associated with intimidation and outsider status in a Turkish context:

I have been to Constantinople, Istanbul and it was full of flags. They really love their country. Red everywhere and I say to myself, 'this is too much, it makes me nervous.'

Given the history of conflict between Turkey and Greece, it is little surprise that confrontation with a proliferation of Turkish flags would be felt as both a reinforcement of cultural identity and a threat (Özkirimli and Spyros, 2008). As with the Tibetan student, mention of the national flag and its symbolic properties led to a discussion of history and politics. This was a feature of the interviews with most of the participants, underlining the commonly held view that football is 'more than a game'.

Meanwhile, the Cypriot student acknowledged that outside a sport event, the display of the flag can carry racist connotations:

Ok, if they had the English flag there when it's not the world cup then it may be racist. If it's just there for no reason except for being English and they wanna say that, well that would be different.

This student was mindful of the use of the England flag by far-right organisations and the lingering associations therefore carried by the St George Cross symbol (Penny, 2010). As Garland (2004) notes, context is important; the general moral opprobrium against overt displays of national identity and national pride in England may be suspended during a sporting event (Condor, 1996).

As the above excerpts show, enjoyment of a carnival atmosphere and of the escape it provided does not imply ignorance of the broader symbolic connotations of national flags. The acceptance and embrace of the England flag by many fans was time- and context-bound. Within the context of a major sporting event, patriotism was an acceptable reflection of allegiance to the national team, and it was therefore condoned. Negative connotations with chauvinism were denied, paralleling the reclamation of the England flag by a growing proportion of the home population. It appears that shame-inducing associations with the flag are diminishing, and outsider approval can be seen to offer vindication for a growing trend towards patriotic display.

A sign of menace

At the same time as helping to create a positive ambiance of celebration, the England flag *was* however also a source of menace when associated with crowds of drunken white men. Context was again deemed to be important. The display of flags away from the pub environment was viewed positively, as a signal of celebration and a symbol of national pride. Such pride, however, when teamed with alcohol and crowds of men, was found to be menacing. A pub adorned with England flags and full of loud drunk men was fear-inducing because it recalled incidents of hooliganism that had been widely reported in the media. This negative association between the England flag and hooliganism is echoed in the literature. The intentions of the crowd were viewed with apprehension, as the combination of alcohol and fandom inspired a fear of violence. The reputation for hooliganism perpetuated through the media and word of mouth was enduring:

English fans have a reputation in the world because they're quite violent. If they lose it's really bad. I heard and read a lot about it. Russian student

Before I came to England and before the World Cup started I was thinking it might be dangerous. Tibetan student

What you hear in Germany about English people is hooliganism so I'm a bit scared. German student

All participants, regardless of nationality, had heard stories of England fans' hooligan behaviour. Considering the relatively young age of the study sample, the findings suggest that this negative reputation is taking time to die out, despite a reported decrease in incidents of violence at international matches – most notably during the World Cup tournaments in Japan and South Korea, Germany and South Africa (BBC, 2010b; Conn, 2006; King, 2002). Apprehension over watching World Cup matches in the group setting of a pub was high before the tournament. Student comments indicate preconceptions about England football fans and anticipation of violence; this paper will reveal whether their fears were well founded.

Vindication of participants' fears was offered by their observation of increased security, in the form of police in the community and private security personnel in bars and pubs that were showing the football. This reflects both the public acknowledgement that violence is on the increase away from football stadia (Football Association, 2011) and the equation by the police of flag-flying with football-related violence (BBC, 2006). Increased security was simultaneously reassuring and disquieting, acting as a reminder of the potential for violence:

The pub we went was highly guarded, well policed so I was not scared. Men were in position watching to see if there is anybody who is going to make any problems, to take them out. Nigerian student (female)

There were police everywhere so that just reminds you that something could happen. You begin to believe that something may happen and you're not really safe when you have the police. In Nigeria we don't have such so it begins to suggest that you must be careful. Nigerian student (male)

During the English matches I saw a lot of police officers around. My managers were telling me that they deploy additional police personnel during each match. It's a bit worrying. Ghanaian student

It is important to note a difference in the vocabulary now used by participants to refer to the fandom they observed; an atmosphere of tension, in contrast with the carnival and revelry earlier observed. Where flags previously could convey festivity and joyfulness, now, in the context of a pub full of drunk men, they could point to danger. Participants associated hooliganism with drunkenness, thus they were nervous of the increased drinking that they witnessed on the part of local people, men in particular. This anxiety is justified according to the Institute for Alcohol Studies (2010), which links violent behaviour

with increased alcohol consumption. Furthermore, the finding that alcohol consumption increases during the FIFA World Cup tournament (Conn, 2006) helps to support a link between England fans, drinking and violence.

Being watchful was important if danger was to be avoided:

I don't go where there are a lot of drunk people. When people drink I know to some extent where the bad behaviour is so I will just go to where the few people are. Ghanaian student

I was concerned about my security. The crowd was very threatening. They sing, they shout. You could just easily see that if there was any mistake then it could just lead to violence. I'm very careful. Nigerian student

These men were really screaming and shouting. There were so many drunk people! I felt sometimes so unsafe, so I often left the pub before the match ended. Indian student (aged 31)

Avoidance strategies were necessary, underlining the contrast between the carnival and the aggressive, between the exciting and the menacing. Such avoidance is noted in previous studies of international student safety, where reactions to abuse from drunken men have included withdrawal from society at night in a bid to avoid danger (Brown, 2009; Brown and Jones, 2012). In this context, the expression of fandom was felt to be excluding, as not belonging to the dominant cultural group – in this case, the English – could provoke aggression. Though skin colour was not mentioned by participants, it could be significant that most of the sample were non-white and easily identifiable. As Brown (2003) notes in her study of migrants in the UK, whiteness can be protective.

The participants who were most nervous of aggression were the two German students, who had faced anti-German sentiment before the tournament and were sure that this would be aggravated during the England–Germany match:

I did show my national flag during that day but it was the colours rather than the flag. People looked at me when I had the German flag. I was scared to cheer for Germany and be happy for them when they played England. On the day that England played Germany they were singing Nazi songs and Second World War songs again. After Germany beat England we walked back home and there was a crowd of 20-year-old boys who were running around with English flags obviously still trying to show their national pride. I was very frightened. German student

Despite previous experience of verbal abuse, this student was determined to show her support for her country through sporting the colours of the German flag, all the time aware that it made her vulnerable to attack. As both German students were temporary football fans, following the game only for the duration of the tournament, it can be surmised that attachment to the German flag was less about sport and more about asserting cultural identity. The display of the England flag was felt to be highly threatening, in that it was being flown by a group of young men only a short time after England's defeat by Germany. So strong was the hostility generated by the tournament that one of the German participants found herself sometimes hiding her national identity in a bid to ward off possible threat.

The portrait offered by the above participants echoes that provided by Weed (2008), whose ethnographic study paints a picture of pubs and bars in England, during the FIFA 2006 World Cup in Germany, as meeting-grounds for England fans to engage in alcohol-fuelled xenophobic and racist singing and chanting. Furthermore, official statistics vindicate participants' fears, as there has been an increase not only in football-related violence in communities away from football stadia (Football Association, 2011), but also in racist abuse in the UK as a whole (Crown Prosecution Service, 2010; European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, 2010).

To their own surprise, participants reported that their fears had been groundless in that they were not subject to physical or verbal abuse, and this was felt as a relief:

People are not like I thought, crazy or something. Almost all the football fans are good. Chinese student

I haven't noticed anything bad, I haven't had any problems and generally when England play even if they don't do well it's still a good atmosphere. Cypriot student

Humour was provided by the Greek student, who lamented: 'I didn't see any hooligans, I want to meet one!' Such was the prevalence and entrenchment of the stereotype of the England hooligan fan that participants anticipated violence and were relieved that they had escaped the tournament unscathed. Perhaps their own caution protected them from danger, as did the increased security around the venues they frequented or walked by. In their research conducted around the FIFA European Championship 2000 and the 2002 World Cup, Abell et al. (2007) found that although such events 'granted licence for open expression' (p.114) of repressed nationalist sentiment, it was seldom accompanied by violence except among a small minority of fans. This is supported by statistical evidence of police arrests (BBC, 2010b; Conn, 2006; King, 2002). As Skita (2006) argues, flag display behaviour constitutes an expression of patriotism that *can* exist without violent nationalism.

Conclusion

This paper points to the conflicting messages received by international students in response to the display of the England flag during a major sporting tournament. On the one hand, international students were cheered and enthused by the atmosphere of carnival that the FIFA World Cup tournament triggered. The display of the St George Cross flag was viewed as a positive phenomenon, a sign of joyful patriotism. There were no negative associations between the flag and the far right. From this, might one conclude that the commercialisation of the flag has rendered it redundant as an identifying symbol of the far right? Do cultural outsiders help to restore patriotism as an acceptable value, or are they unaware of the underlying tensions in the host society and thus insensitive to the negative symbolism of the England flag?

Conversely, however, the England flag was held as an object of apprehension when placed in the context of a noisy crowd of drunken white men. This was attributed to enduring collective memories of football- and alcohol-driven hooliganism. By adorning

a pub with the England flag, the pub advertises its allegiance and attracts supporters to gather in numbers; the flag is a galvanising force. Fears of violence are not unfounded, as a rise in both football-related violence and racism has been observed in the UK. This paper thus highlights a tension engendered by drunken flag-waving during a major sporting event. The flag is at once a symbol of and catalyst for celebration and national pride, and a warning sign of possible violence.

This study uses data from a sample of 15 international students following the World Cup tournament away from home, who frequented local bars that were broadcasting the matches. The findings have some implications for England as a future host destination. Though international students are a distinctly different population from sport tourists in terms of length of stay, purpose of visit and motivation to adapt (Jandt, 2001), their perceptions of a transformed England during the tournament may nonetheless be shared by other categories of sojourner. It is plausible that the tension reported in this study would be similarly found in a study of sport tourist experiences in host destinations, that similar contradictory emotions might be triggered by displays of patriotism.

Though visitor parks create a safe haven for tourists to watch live televised matches, many games are viewed in venues away from stadia and sheltered parks. It is in such spaces where violence has increased in recent decades, and it is here where security must be ensured. It is important that sport tourists are made to feel secure during their visit to the host destination and that the tourist experience is managed, not least because of the consequences of negative experiences for word of mouth and intention to return.

Nevertheless, it is recommended that future researchers could target a different category of sojourner, such as sport, leisure or business tourists or migrant workers, to see if different findings are produced. It might also be useful to use an interviewer whose nationality differs from that of the nation under investigation in order to remove bias. Finally, a study conducted in the host destination would be useful in understanding the sport tourist experience and gauging the welcome they receive.

Funding

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