

Reading football in Brazil through a boy's own story

Abstract

This essay is a contribution to debates about football in Brazil. It is also an attempt to engage in discussions about how we come to know and talk about the social world around us. The central element of the essay is the story of one young man's interaction with a particular sporting space and the emotions and insights that are triggered by memories of that place, situated as it is in a rapidly developing country but retaining many of the problems associated with under development. Absolved from any responsibility to adhere to a dominant value system or to feel constrained by research ethics, the storyteller is free to offer honest, if conflicted, personal reflections on a range of issues, including poverty, 'race', and sporting values. The result is a story which does not negate the necessity of more orthodox research on sport in Brazil, particularly related to the hosting of sport mega-events but which reminds us of the importance of understanding the world through everyday personal experience.

Introduction

In 2014, the FIFA World Cup will be held in Brazil, arguably the country most closely associated with the tournament's history. Since its arrival in Brazil in 1894, football, according to Alex Bellos (2002: 1), has become 'the strongest symbol of Brazilian identity'. According to Gordon and Helal (2001: 147), 'the transformation of football into the "national sport" was the product of a historical process carried out by agents of the cultural, political and sporting world which had had at its base the powerful presence of the state and of nationalism'. In fact, the country is famous for much else besides – carnival, samba, beaches, caipirinha, the Amazon and its rain forest, capoeira and, of course, coffee. It has also hit the

headlines in recent times for street protests, many of them directed at the cost of bringing not only the World Cup but also the 2016 Olympics Games to a country in which alongside much wealth exists desperate poverty. For the duration of the World Cup, however, it will almost certainly be football that will take centre stage.

This essay is a contribution to **knowledge about** football in Brazil. **However**, it is also an attempt to engage in discussions about how we come to know **and, in particular, represent** the social world around us. Constrained by the requirements of ethical clearance and by the dominant discourses of their subject areas, researchers are in many respects able to know (and tell) only what they are permitted to know (and tell). It is for this reason that we should also consider the insights of people who have found themselves in interesting situations and feel free to talk about their experiences and emotions simply as storytellers.

A vast amount will be written by sport scholars about Brazil in the months before and immediately after the two mega events. It is doubtful, however, if much of this academic output will draw upon first-hand experience of playing sport in the country and of the places where people play sport. As Bale and Vertinsky (2004: 1) observe, ‘the significance of space and place as central dimensions of sport is well recognized by scholars who have addressed questions of sport from philosophical, sociological, geographical and historical perspectives’. More specifically, sports grounds are always emotive places. This is often because of the ebb and flow of the sporting event itself. However, there may also be evidence of emotional responses to particular landscapes (Bale, 2003, Bairner, 2009) which are arguably best captured in the stories that people tell to one another.

On methodology

During the past thirty years, ‘mourning the devaluation of narratives as sources of knowledge, and emphasizing the moral force, healing power, and emancipatory thrust of stories, scholars

across the disciplines have (re) discovered the narrative nature of human beings' (Sandelowski, 1991: 161). Narrative qualitative research involves a focus on stories (Smith and Caddick, 2012). The researcher is interested in a variety of narrative resources selected from the cultural menu of storytelling. Berger and Quinney (2005: 5) note that 'narrative scholars of various stripes seem to concur with the proposition that lived experience can be understood through the stories people tell about it'. Furthermore, for some narrative researchers, the personal sense of self and of emotion can be constituted through auto-ethnographic stories.

In 2000, Jim Denison and Robert Rinehart (2000: 2) underlined their commitment 'to making fictional and other types of storied representations an accepted form of scholarship' (Denison and Rinehart, 2000: 2). In so doing, they recognised that 'the shift into personal experience narratives, storied accounts, or ethnographic fiction requires a highly complex and complicated conceptual shift in the way one approaches subjects and topics' (p. 3).

Another consideration is the extent to which these personal stories need to be true in some positivistic sense (Bairner, 2012). Whilst most academic researchers may be cautious about the excessive use of invention even in personal narratives, other writers are less circumspect. According to Jean-Claude Izzo (2013: 38), the chronicler of Marseilles' criminal underbelly, 'imagination is a reality, sometimes more real than reality itself'. In similar vein, Joe Queenan (2010: 151) writes, 'Just because something isn't true doesn't mean you shouldn't believe in it'. Indeed the former Bishop of Edinburgh Richard Holloway (2012) argues that great fiction explores the truth better than anything. But this requires some qualification. We are not talking here about the difference between truth and lies but about 'different sorts of truth' (Maitland, 2012: 14) or of verisimilitude as a way of presenting truth(s). In storytelling sociology, 'the measure of the truth is judged not by conventional scientific standards of validity and reliability but by the power of stories to evoke the vividness of lived experience'

(Berger and Quinney, 2005: 9). To this extent, storytelling is undeniably research (Koch, 1998). But it is less constrained by research ethics and dominant discourses within specific disciplinary fields. For example, the storyteller may be reflecting on experiences that most, if not all, research ethics committees would have prevented. In addition, s/he can express discordant views more freely than if these were to be appraised by academic reviewers.

Most autobiographies of footballers (many of them ghost-written), like celebrity autobiographies more generally, have a poor reputation. Widely regarded as badly written, they are also dismissed for the vacuous quality of their contents. Many such works consist either of boring accounts of goals scored and saves made or of a racy celebration of various extra-curricular activities. In large part, what is involved is the presentation of the self (Goffman, 1959) with the 'author' presenting himself 'in accordance with his audience's presumed expectations' (Amossy, 1986: 675) This explains the emphases on on-field achievements and off-field indiscretions. On the other hand, 'the author' 'must also cope with the audience's growing demands for authenticity; he is summoned to display his intimate self. In other words, he is asked to remove the masks of social roles and show the flesh and blood character under the ... stereotyped parts' (Amossy, 1986: 675). Often, however, it is in those passages of an autobiography that neither the author nor the audience might consider important that the researcher finds the most useful data – asides that keep the narrative moving along but which offer, almost certainly unintended, insights (Bairner, 2010).

What follows is a sort of truth about one of the author's interaction with a particular sporting space and the emotions and insights that are triggered by memories of that place, situated as it is in a rapidly developing country which still retains many of the problems associated with under development. This does not involve what might be described as collective sporting memories (of results, goals scored, players ordered from the field of play) which can of

course be faulty but which can also to a certain extent be verifiable. Nor is this a story constructed around fandom, a far more common genre which has been used already to offer personal insights into Brazilian football (Cavallini, 2011). Instead, the story that follows is an attempt to demonstrate of how far, and in what ways, place, memory and **personal reflections** come together. The memory can of course be an unreliable tool. However, as Kensinger and Schacter (2008: 603) note, ‘emotion can affect not only the likelihood of remembering an event, but also the subjective vividness with which it is remembered’. The thing to stress, however, is the importance of ‘being willing to tell as a researcher as well as listen’ (Cross, 2009: 102).

Some ethnographic storytellers have prioritised the senses – soundscapes, smellscapes – and also, in relation to sport, active participation (Sparkes, 2009). The story that follows focuses on the emotions of a player. The venues and occasions described have been selected precisely because they contain personal emotional resonance. But they also offer insights into the interplay between sport and its socio-spatial context although this was never the storyteller’s initial intention. Bellos (2002: 4) notes that ‘Brazil has many truths’ but proceeds to identify his own search as being for the ‘*true* truth’ of Brazilian football. Yet Brazilian football itself has many truths. **The following story is a reflective essay on one of them.**

The story

The city of Sorriso did not exist until 1985. Built in an area of cleared rainforest in the Brazilian heartland of Mato Grosso, it soon attracted thousands of settlers due to its cheap,

flat land. Nowadays Sorriso is known as the national capital of agribusiness, and the fertility of its land has enabled it to become the greatest global producer of soybean. As in all Brazilian cities, football is held in high regard. Sorriso Esporte Clube (SEC) was established at the time of the foundation of the new city and has achieved relative success, winning the Campeonato Matogrossense in 1992 and 1993. The man who led them to these titles has now been immortalised in the name of Sorriso's stadium, Estadio Egidio Jose Preima.

The stadium itself provides a reminder of how the city made its fame. The pitch is built into a hillside on the edge of the city. There is one large stand, running the length of the touchline, which can hold up to 5,000 people. From this vantage point, obstructed only slightly by the two dugouts, the spectators are treated to views of the rolling Brazilian countryside, with its numerous soybean fields, the source of Sorriso's wealth.

The pitch is surrounded by a running track, which is often used by the local athletic club and schools. When the first team is not playing, the stadium is left unlocked so that anybody can use the facilities. Children are often seen running around the pitch, dribbling balls through the bare patches of turf and pretending to be their favourite SEC players. The stadium is seen as a resource, thereby consolidating Sorriso Esporte Clube's association with its local community. The respect that the club has for its supporters is also evident. The words 'Obrigado por prestigiar o esporte' – 'Thank you for honouring the sport' – adorn the commentary box in large, bright red letters. The respect is mutual, and turns to adoration on match days. Due to the large distances involved in Brazilian professional football, there are rarely any away fans, and the home supporters do their best to intimidate the opposing team, covering the stands in flags and banners and wearing the green and white of SEC. When a

player scores, he runs to the wired fence separating the supporters from the pitch and jumps onto it, sharing his jubilation with the fervent supporters.

Football is synonymous with Brazil – when people think of football they think of Brazil, and when people think of Brazil they think of football. The country eats, sleeps and drinks football. Such is the popularity of the sport that even local amateur teams regularly attract crowds of over one thousand. This popularity, verging on an obsession, was one of the first things that I noticed when arriving in Brazil. I had initially been to Brazil on an end-of-season tour with my local English semi-professional club. Such was the shock of an English team coming to Brazil to play football that we were mobbed by the media and other intrigued spectators upon our arrival in the country. I did quite well on this tour, and my skills impressed one particular manager enough for him to invite me to play for his youth side in the upcoming Copa Sao Paulo – an invitation which I gleefully accepted.

It took me 38 hours to get to Sorriso. I arrived to find that I was to live with all of my team mates in a bungalow located on the edge of a favela. I was the only non-Brazilian and the only English speaker. There were four bedrooms – I had to share a small room with five others. I soon learned that, because of my nationality, I was given priority and put in the most spacious room with the best players. The only slightly bigger room next to mine was home to eight of my team mates. The room opposite housed fourteen Brazilians. Next to their room was the communal bathroom which contained six open showers, a urinal, three doorless toilets and a washing line. It was filthy. The final room, the same size as mine, was reserved for the kit man and the goalkeeping coach who had the task of ensuring the players were well behaved and obeyed their curfew. I soon learned that this curfew, although quite strictly enforced, was rarely obeyed. Each room had windows covered by bars, but in our room there

one bar was missing. This meant that it was just possible to sneak out of the house through the window. Sometimes players would return, usually smelling of alcohol, only a couple of hours before our morning training session,

Training was exhausting. We would wake up at 7.30 to collect our kit and have a breakfast of bread and milk. Training would be from 8.30 to 11.00 and we would then shower and have a lunch of rice and beans before going to sleep for the siesta. At 15.00 we would wake again for bread and milk before an afternoon training session from 16.00 to 18.30. This would once again be followed by a shower and a dinner of rice and beans. Sometimes we would get either the morning or afternoon off, but usually we would be doing double training sessions every day. In training everything would be with the ball. We would have five or six training matches amongst ourselves a week, with the other sessions being technical or physical – the worst of them being done in the sandbox in the city centre.

The Brazilians were all so comfortable with the ball, and quite obviously loved having a ball at their feet. This was to be expected; we were training for 28 hours a week, and it was obvious that the majority of them were used to such a gruelling schedule. Many of them had sacrificed their lives for football. Daniel was 13 and no longer went to school. He had given it all up so that he could train to be a footballer. When the Copa Sao Paulo finished he would go to night school for a few months, but for now his entire focus was on football.

As with the majority of Brazil, Sorriso suffered from a great deal of economic inequality. It was not uncommon to see a gated house with a swimming pool just a hundred yards from a hastily assembled corrugated iron shed on the edge of a favela. There were similar differences in wealth within the team. Yago lived in a gated house, attended private school and was planning to attend university in the USA. Fernando came from the poorest of the

favelas in Rio de Janeiro. For a four month stay in Sorriso, he brought his entire luggage in a backpack – a toothbrush, a pair of football boots, one vest and one pair of shorts. At the end of each month when we collected our wages, Fernando would take 20 Reais – about £7 – for himself, and send the rest back to his family in Rio. He was the happiest person I had ever met. For him, football offered an escape from desperate poverty. He told me of his pride in providing for his family, of how he was unable to leave his house in Rio at night because rival drug gangs occupied the streets around his house, and of his fear during the regular police raids during which they randomly opened fire – when this happened he had to lie down flat and just hope not to be hit.

Fernando made me realise how blessed I truly am. The reception that I received in Brazil only underlined this. The media interest in my signing for a small professional team in Mato Grosso was incredible, and I even had to contend with camera crews coming to my room to film me sleeping. Because of this I was given an enormous ovation when I was given my first taste of competitive football in Brazil. I started the game on the substitutes' bench and had a camera trained on me throughout my entire warm-up. When the manager called for me to be brought on, there was a huge cheer. I will never forget that moment. The smiling, waving, cheering Estadio Egidio Jose Preima is ingrained in my memory. The fact that the pitch was far from perfect only makes the power of my memory stronger. There was either no grass on the pitch or grass that came up to one's ankles, making dribbling particularly tough. It was rugged, yet authentic. The cheers that I first received soon turned into banter, and there was a section of 100 or so in the crowd who were particularly passionate, crying 'Inglese boiola' or 'your sister beautiful' each time I touched the ball.

Despite the media hype surrounding me, the manager of the team did not play me in any of our games in the Copa Sao Paulo. The chairman of the club was furious. Two of our games

had been scheduled to be broadcast live on ESPN, and he wanted to increase Sorriso's fame with the addition of 'their Englishman'. The chairman was not a man one would want to cross – he had already fired more bus drivers than I could count on my fingers – and our manager was no exception. He was promptly fired as a direct consequence of refusing to play me in the Copa Sao Paulo, and the chairman compensated me by offering me a professional contract.

My living conditions with the senior side improved slightly. We were moved out of our filthy bungalow into a hotel. I was ordered to share a two-person room with the five other players from the youth team who had been awarded contracts. One of these was the third-choice goalkeeper, Felipe. He was an orphan and had no home. He had travelled around Brazil with various football clubs who all took him in and looked after him. Sorriso was no exception and, despite his average ability, he was well looked after by the club.

I was introduced to a variety of team mates divided almost as much by wealth as they had been in the youth team. Leandro and Dino were both from the favelas. Capone, a former European Super Cup winner with Galatasaray, lived in a mansion. Adilson had been in prison for the previous five years. I asked him why. 'Shoot two men. Bang bang. Football argument.' I wasn't sure if something had been lost in translation. One of my closest friends was Aroldo, a black man who insisted that I call him 'negão'. I was rather taken aback by this, and told him that I refused. He was shocked that this would be deemed as serious racial abuse in England, claiming that the word was used as a term of endearment in Brazil. His friends used it, his family used it, and his colleagues should also use it. He called other black men 'negão', so why shouldn't people refer to him by that name too? Brazil had seemed so well racially integrated to me until that moment. I had certainly been accepted by everyone I

had met, but I was white. I cast my mind back to my experiences in the youth team, where the coaches had referred to many of our players as 'negão', where Leandro had laughingly insisted that he was 'negão' despite his olive complexion, where 'ei negão' was a commonly heard welcoming phrase. Everywhere you looked there were people of all creeds, colours and races talking, dancing and laughing together. There seemed to be no prejudice. Brazil was built on foreigners and they play an integral part within the society. Was 'negão' racist then or was it truly a term of endearment?

Like the youth team, the senior squad players originated from all over Brazil. The youth team squad contained only five members from Sorriso; the senior squad had just one. Two players had played for Sorriso the previous year. The senior squad, ranked 322nd out of the 800 or so professional teams in Brazil, competed in the Campeonato Matogrossense which ran from January to April. Each January there would be an almost entirely new squad with a new manager and backroom staff. On the very rare occasions that a manager would stay for a second year with the same club, few of his players would also stay. This is the way of small Brazilian professional clubs.

Many of my new teammates had given up other lives to come to Sorriso. The majority had wives, girlfriends and children whom they had left at home. Only Capone brought his family with him (including his brother and two sons who also played for the team). The commitment to football shown by the Brazilians was incredible, and this commitment was especially needed within the senior team. In the four weeks prior to the start of the season, we were only given Sunday afternoons off, when we would have a team barbeque at the hotel swimming pool. The rest of the week we were training – a session each morning and each afternoon. The morning session, always a physical one, began with a 40 minute run.

The new schedule was truly gruelling, but it was improving my game. I was given my professional debut in a cup game, playing the last ten minutes and getting an assist in a 5-0 victory. Little was I to know that this would be my one and only appearance for the senior side. Despite assuring me that I had a one-year contract – a contract that I had even signed myself – the chairman revealed that he had been unable to do the necessary paperwork and that, actually, I had overstayed my visa and was now an illegal immigrant. He suggested I fly to Paraguay and back again to get a new visa. The goalkeeping coach was especially keen for me to do this, as he had got a laptop through the black market in Paraguay and wanted a new battery for it. The chairman had lost my trust, however, and as there were only a few games left anyway, I decided to return home.

I learned so much in Brazil, and not just about how to play better football. The commitment exhibited by the Brazilians was exemplary, and it is little wonder that they are famed for their flowing football. The welcome and subsequent acceptance I received from all the Brazilians I met was heart-warming, and their love of everything English was surprising. My most important lesson came from Fernando. He taught me that you can be happy whatever your situation and that you should be grateful for whatever you have. There were also the negatives: the chairman's lies regarding my contract and inability to do the necessary paperwork taught me a lot about trust. Then there were the ambiguous things: I wasn't sure if the 'negão' incident was a negative or a positive. But what I did know for certain is that Brazil is an open, welcoming, multicultural country with an incredible passion for football running through every single person in the nation. Brazil is football. Football is Brazil.

Conclusion

According to Caudwell (2011: 127), ‘stories related to sport (including the formal story, her-story, and my story) are invaluable because they provide detailed explanations of the social, cultural and political dimensions of sporting practice’. In this particular instance, the storyteller comments on his own immediate circumstances and links these to wider issues relating to sport. As a young footballer, it is almost inevitable that he accepts the widely held perception that ‘Brazil is football. Football is Brazil’. We see places through lenses constructed around our own interests and experiences. Whereas the devotee of crime fiction may well view the United States as a place of murder and mayhem, the practising Christian might be more inclined to see it as a site of widespread religiosity and omnipresent churches. That said, the young footballer is also well-positioned to challenge certain myths about football in Brazil.

Thus, he describes the arduous training schedule (morning sessions, for example, that ‘began with a 40 minute run’) and recognises, implicitly at least, that the reason why ‘the Brazilians were all so comfortable with the ball’ was no simple gift of nature but a talent that had been nurtured through hours of intense practice, far removed from romantic images of samba-style football **as depicted in the popular media in the UK and elsewhere**. He notes the commitment of his team mates, many of whom ‘had wives, girlfriends and children whom they had left at home’. Conversely, with a nod in the direction of more conventional footballers’ autobiographies, the storyteller also refers to the post-curfew activities of some of the players in the course of describing more generally his living conditions in Sorriso. Here he reveals his emerging awareness of poverty in Brazil and the massive disparity between rich and poor. He writes about Yugo who ‘lived in a gated house, attended private school and was planning to

attend university in the USA' and Capone who 'lived in a mansion'. On the other hand, Daniel had given up education at the age of thirteen to pursue his ambition to play professional football and Leandro and Dino had grown up in the *favelas*. Adilson appeared to have been in prison for five years, sentenced for shooting two men in a 'football argument'.

In addition, the chairman of the football club's 'lies' were also indicative of the harsh reality that idealistic thoughts about the beautiful game always need to be tempered to some extent even in Brazil. Although initially the chairman is presented in the story as passionate man with the best interests of the club at heart, he emerges later as incompetent at best, malevolent at worse. The corruption of others, whilst real enough, is treated more light heartedly. Hence the memory of the goalkeeping coach who wanted the storyteller to go to Paraguay to apply for a new visa so that he could get a battery for his black-market laptop. One is reminded here of Eva Menasse's (2006) novel, *Vienna*, in which the father, an ex-footballer 'uses his sporting contacts to help build a business importing and exporting goods (or to be more accurate, smuggling), making use of Austrian footballers travelling abroad and visiting east European athletes in Vienna' (Bairner, 2011: 40).

The storyteller is also acutely aware of the relationship between the sporting space in which he found himself and its location. Thus, he can link Sorriso's economic development, particularly the importance of agriculture, to the scenes that he could see from the football ground. He is also conscious of the extent to which that ground is a community resource which helps to create a special bond between the city, its people, and the football club. These particular discoveries, even the reflections on the relationship between training and ability, would almost certainly have featured in a well thought out qualitative research project on

football in Brazil albeit lacking the same type of involvement as the storyteller is able to bring to the subject matter.

Less reflexive, perhaps, is the storyteller's unquestioning acceptance that the Brazilians he met expressed 'their love for everything English'. It should be noted that autobiography has regularly been seen as a medium for those who from a postcolonial standpoint - individuals and groups, that is, whose perspectives and experiences might otherwise remain hidden - hence, its importance in relation to postcolonial and post-imperial contexts (Horning and Ruhe, 1994; Hearn, 2005; Huddart, 2008)). But this relationship between the post-imperial and the post-colonial can work in different ways - for example, when the storyteller's background is in a former imperial power. In this instance, the storyteller's sense of the relationship between the Brazilians and English may imply some awareness, whether conscious or not, of what might be described as the post-imperial cringe. After all, although it was the Portuguese rather than the British who colonised Brazil, an Englishman of Scottish heritage, Charles William Miller, is usually credited with introducing football to the country (Bellos, 2002). On the other hand, his story may simply reflect a youthful inclination to put everything that he sees and hears in a positive light. It is difficult to accept, for example, that references to the storyteller's 'beautiful sister' can be construed as evidence of a liking for all things English rather than of casual sexism. This is not the only example of the ways in which some of the insights provided in the story appear at odds with the type of findings one might expect to see in more formulaic research studies.

Sandelowski (1996: 165) notes that 'what preoccupies the storyteller and audience...is not how to know a truth, but rather how experience is endowed with meaning'. It matters little whether or not 'Brazil is an open, welcoming, multicultural country'. What is important is

that the storyteller experienced it as such and yet still felt uncomfortable about the use of the word '*negão*'. Is this simply a contradiction in terms or, to use Judith Butler's (2005: 71) term, an 'enigmatic articulation'?

As McLeod (2006: 207) argues, 'the concept of narrative provides a bridge between the stories told by specific persons, and the dominant discourses and narratives within which we all collectively live our lives'. The professional sociologist of sport, paralysed by the dominant discourses of the field, might feel obliged to condemn the use of '*negão*' without further discussion and, on that basis, dismiss any suggestion that Brazil is 'open, welcoming, multicultural'. But the storyteller is arguably reflecting a complex set of circumstances which demand, and increasingly receive, more nuanced analysis.

It is widely acknowledged that 'race and national ideologies in the Americas are inextricable' (Golash-Boza and Bonilla-Silva, 2013: 1485). In the case of Brazil, however, there is considerable debate as to how ideas about 'race' have been played out. Colonial attitudes were closely linked to the idea of racial inferiority (Golash-Boza and Bonilla-Silva, 2013). The consequences of this have included the construction and reproduction of racial hierarchies and the naturalization of black inferiority (Hordge-Freeman, 2013). Nevertheless, Brazil has frequently been discussed in terms of 'racial democracy' (Joseph, 2013: 1524). The concept itself has, however, been interpreted in three different ways to describe Brazilian race relations – 'the racial utopia', 'racial democracy as a myth', and 'the aspirational view of racial democracy' (Joseph, 2013: 1525). What is certain is that attitudes in Brazil towards 'race' are complex. Whilst 'whitening' has in the past been an aspect of individual aspiration, especially in black-white interracial marriages, in an era of black consciousness (Hordge-Freeman, 2013) 'changes in Brazilian society over the last fifteen years have ushered in an

overall appreciation for blackness that is incompatible with whitening ideology’ (Osuji, 2013: 1503). It is a moot, but not an implausible, point that football has played its part in these developments.

Absolved from any responsibility to adhere to a dominant value system, the storyteller is free to offer honest, if conflicted, personal reflections on this vexed issue. In this regard, it is worth noting the claim made by Leite Lopes (1997: 75) that, following the national team’s triumph in the 1958 World Cup, ‘as part of the national sentiment and identity associated with football, the incorporated “black” style inverts social and “racial” stigmatization’. Indeed, he continues, ‘perhaps the reasons for the power and frequent re-creation of the “Brazilian style” rest in the successful reversal of social prejudices which still remain in society as a whole’. Football became an integrative force in Brazilian society (Gordon and Helal, 2001). However, as in other societies, the valorisation of one group’s sporting prowess need not signal inclusion on a wider scale (Hoberman, 1997: Yu and Bairner, 2012). In certain discourses about football and ‘race’ in Brazil, according to Maranhão (2007: 519), ‘the blacks do not speak, they are spoken of’. Arguably this goes some way towards explaining the importance of understanding language relative to context and the reasons why a young English footballer would be confused by what he had heard.

Finally, there is the example set for the storyteller by Fernando who taught him ‘that you can be happy whatever your situation and that you should be grateful for whatever you have’. The extent to which there is any truth in this is debatable. It is difficult, if not impossible, to be grateful for what one has, if one has almost nothing. At least this would almost certainly be an appropriate response from a socially aware professional researcher. But the storyteller is a

young man living in an alien environment and no doubt looking for sources of comfort. Why not focus on the indomitability of the human sport?

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, many sociologists of sport will be researching and writing about Brazil in anticipation of the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympic Games. Their research will be governed to a large extent by the interests of funders, the concerns of ethical approval committees/research ethics boards (REB), and the dominant discourses of their disciplines. Risk assessment is an increasingly significant consideration when approval to do certain types of research is being sought. However, as Atkinson (2013: 87) suggests, 'a progressive turn in REB mantra and practice might commence from the basic appreciation of agents' abilities to know more about what constitutes "minimal harm" than researchers'. In the unlikely event of this happening, for the time being it is important to make use of other sources of data, not least the stories of those who have engaged with people who might otherwise be described as agents but as one of them rather than as involved and/or detached observers.

It is also worth noting that the overwhelming majority of research on sport in Brazil over the next three years will focus their attention on big themes, most notably the role of mega events as agents for or against urban renewal and civic and national pride. But what about the less grandiose topics, amongst them being the ways in which sport is experienced by most Brazilians? The English novelist Jon McGregor has written the following:

If you listen, you can hear it. The city, it sings if you stand quietly, at the middle of a street, on the roof of a house. It's clearest at night, when the sound cuts more sharply across the surface of things, when the song reaches out to a place inside you. It's wordless song, for the most, but it's a song all the same, and nobody hearing it could

doubt what it sings. And the song sings the loudest when you pick out each note

(McGregor, 2002: 1).

The boy's own story that forms the central pillar of this paper represents a single note of one such song.

References

Amossy, R. 1986. Autobiographies of movie stars: Presentation of self and its strategies.

Poetics today, 7, 673-703.

Atkinson, M. 2013. Mischief managed: Ticket scalping, research ethics and involved detachment. In: A. Smith and I. Waddington, eds. *Doing real world research in sports studies*.

London: Routledge, 74-87.

Bale, J., 2003. *Sports geography*. Second Edition. London: Routledge.

Bale, J. and Vertinsky, P., 2004. Introduction. In: P. Vertinsky and J. Bale, eds. *Sites of sport*.

Space, place, experience. London: Routledge, 1-7.

Bairner, A., 2009. National sports and national landscapes: in defence of primordialism",

National identities, 11 (3), 223-39.

Bairner, A. 2010. Representing the north: reflections on the life stories of Northern Ireland's catholic footballers. In: P. Dine and S. Crosson, eds. *Sport, representation and evolving identities in Europe*.

Oxford: Peter Lang, 217-238.

Bairner, A. 2011. Soccer and society in Eva Menasse's *Vienna*. *Sport in history*, 31(1): 32-48.

Bairner, A. 2012. Between flânerie and fiction: ways of seeing exclusion and inclusion in the contemporary city, *Leisure studies*, 31 (1), 3-19.

- Bellos, A., 2002. *Futebol. The Brazilian way of life*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Berger, R. J. and Quinney, R. 2005. The narrative turn in social inquiry. In: R. J. Berger, and R. Quinney, eds. *Storytelling sociology. Narrative as social inquiry*. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Butler, J., 2005. *Giving an account of oneself*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Caudwell, J., 2011. 'Easy, Oar!': rowing reflections. *Qualitative research in sport, exercise and health*, 3 (2), 117-129.
- Cavallini, R. 2011. *Oi gringo!: Football, Brazil and an Englishman abroad*. York: SportsBooks.
- Cross, B., 2009. Feeling my way into story space: Lessons for research. *Emotion, space and society*, 2 (2), 98-103.
- Denison, J. and Rinehart, R., 2000. Introduction: Imagining sociological narratives. *Sociology of sport journal*, 17 (1), 1-4.
- Goffman, E., 1959. *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York: Harper.
- Golash-Boza, T. and Bonilla-Silva, E. 2013. Rethinking race, racism, identity and ideology in Latin America. *Ethnic and racial studies*, 36 (10), 1485-1489.
- Gordon, C. and Helal, R. 2001. The crisis of Brazilian football: perspectives for the twenty-first century. *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 18 (3): 139-158.
- Hearn, J. 2005. Autobiography, nation, postcolonialism and gender: reflections on men in England, Finland and Ireland. *Irish journal of sociology*, 14 (2), 66-93.
- Hoberman, J. 1997. *Darwin's athletes. How sport has damaged black America and preserved the myth of race*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Holloway, Richard 2012. *Leaving Alexandria. A memoir of faith and doubt*. Edinburgh: Canongate Books.

Hordge-Freeman, E. 2013. What's love got to do with it?: racial features, stigma and socialization in Afro-Brazilian families. *Ethnic and racial studies*, 36 (10), 1507-1523.

Hornung, A. and Ruhe E. 1994. *Postcolonialism and autobiography*. Amsterdam: Rodopi BV.

Huddart, D. 2008. *Postcolonial theory and autobiography*. London: Routledge.

Izzo, Jean-Claude 2013. Garlic, mint, and sweet basil. Essays on Marseilles, Mediterranean cuisine, and noir fiction. New York: Europa Editions.

Joseph, T. D. 2013. How does racial democracy exist in Brazil? Perceptions from Brazilians in Governador Valadares, Minas Gerais. *Ethnic and racial studies*, 36 (10), 1524-1543.

Kensinger, E. A. and Schacter, D. L. 2008. Memory and emotion. *In*: M. Lewis, J. M.

Haviland-Jones, and L. F. Barrett, eds. *Handbook of emotions*. Third edition. New York: The Guildford Press, 601-617.

Koch, T. 1998. Story telling; is it really research? *Methodological issues in nursing research*, 28 (6): 1182-1190.

Leite Lopes, J. S., 1997. Successes and contradictions in 'multiracial' Brazilian football. *In*: G. Armstrong and R. Giulianotti, eds. *Entering the field. New perspectives on world football*. Oxford: Berg, 53-86.

Maitland, S., 2012. The greatest pleasure I know. *Saturday Guardian Review*, 22 September: 14-15.

Maranhão, T. 2007. Apollonians and Dionysians: the role of football in Gilberto Freyre's vision of Brazilian people. *Soccer and society*, 8 (4): 51-523.

- McLeod, J., 2006. Narrative thinking and the emergence of postpsychological therapies. *Narrative inquiry*, 16 (1), 201-210.
- McGregor, J. 2002. *If nobody speaks of remarkable things*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Menasse, E. 2006. *Vienna*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- Osuji, C. 2013. Confronting whitening in an era of black consciousness: racial ideology and black-white interracial marriages in Rio de Janeiro. *Ethnic and racial studies*, 36 (10), 1490-1506.
- Queenan, J., 2010. *Closing time. A memoir*. London: Picador.
- Sandelowski, M., 1991. Telling stories: narrative approaches in qualitative research. *IMAGE: Journal of nursing scholarship*, 23 (3), 161-166.
- Smith, B. and Caddick, N. 2012. Qualitative methods in sport: a concise overview for guiding social scientific sport research. *Asia Pacific journal of sport and social science*, 1 (1), 60-73.
- Sparkes, A. C. 2009. Ethnography and the senses; challenges and possibilities. *Qualitative research in sport and exercise*, 1 (1), 21-35.
- Yu, J. W and Bairner. A. 2012. Confucianism, baseball and ethnic stereotyping in Taiwan. *International review for the sociology of sport*, 47 (6), 690-704.