

## **Making the Mainstream: The Domestication of American Soccer**

In a very real sense, soccer is at one and the same time a distinctly un-American and explicitly American cultural practice. The game has long been associated with the waves of immigrants – initially drawn in greatest numbers from Europe and latterly central and south America – who came to America over the last 120 years ... In recent decades, soccer's culturally differentiating un-American identity has comfortably coexisted with the game's emergence as perhaps the sporting practice and symbol of fin-de-millennium suburban America. (Andrews et al. 1997:262)

Soccer in the United States occupies a paradoxical position. Despite coming to be firmly planted in the American mainstream in the second half of the twentieth century, it has yet to fully shake the perception that it is a “foreign” sport. How is it that soccer can be both mainstream and foreign? While Andrews and colleagues suggest that these two versions of the game comfortably coexist, others have argued that the relationship between them is much more acrimonious (Markovits and Hellerman 2001; Markovits and Rensmann 2010; Wangerin 2006). Explaining soccer's place today is best done through a thorough examination of the sport's history and the ongoing process by which soccer has been domesticated – or “made American” – in the United States beginning in the 1960s. Looking at this history as well as the present, I ask at what times, in what places, and under what conditions soccer has indexed the American mainstream and in what contexts it has indexed the foreign<sup>1</sup>.

The history of soccer in the United States goes a long way to explaining the paradoxical place the sport occupies today. Brought from England in the second half of the nineteenth century, soccer was originally played in elite American universities. At the time, the sport of soccer had only recently been codified, and its rules were still in a state of flux. The 1869 matchup between Rutgers

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<sup>1</sup> The meaning of the index, a term I explain more fully below, is close to the more common term symbolize.

and Princeton, interestingly, is commonly recognized as both the first soccer game played in the United States as well as the first ever American football contest (Wangerin 2006:20). Shortly after, there was a break between schools playing the kicking version of the game which became soccer and those who espoused a handling version that led to the development of American football as a unique sport. Football quickly rose to prominence in the United States, in no small part out of a desire to create uniquely “American” games that would fit with “nineteenth century American nativism [that] was a powerful for shaping America’s social and political agenda” (Sugden 1994:235). Most universities chose football as their preferred sport, leaving soccer to retreat into the immigrant communities where it would remain for roughly the next century (for exceptions to this pattern, see Wangerin 2006, 2011).

During this time, various waves of newcomers to the United States have ensured that soccer remains popular in immigrant communities. Many major cities have long had strong amateur leagues with teams based on ethnic background. Chicago’s National Soccer League (NSL) for instance, was founded in 1919 and has long drawn teams from the Polish, Albanian, Croatian, Serbian, Romanian, Greek and Mexican immigrant communities that have made up the city’s population over the years (Trouille 2009). But until the 1960s, soccer was little played outside of immigrant communities, and as a result received little attention outside of these circles.

The 1960s was a transformative decade for soccer in the United States, as groups like the American Youth Soccer Association (AYSO) began to promote the game for suburban children. From the beginning, AYSO had a philosophy of “balanced teams” and “everyone plays,” two elements which defined his version of youth soccer in opposition to the highly competitive nature of soccer that existed in immigrant communities in the Los Angeles area at the time. In the process, founder Hans Stierle and others at AYSO promoted soccer “more as a highly participative, fun activity than a competitive sport” (Wangerin 2006:149). This version of soccer appealed to many

parents, especially in the rapidly developing suburbs, who rushed to sign their kids up for the sport. Soccer quickly grew to become *the* sport of a newly developing demographic, the “culturally domineering, economically empowering, and racially differentiating, middle American suburban agglomeration” (Andrews et al. 1997:262) of the post-World War II United States. Along the way, soccer has both fit within existing discourses of suburbanization and also helped to shape the nature of these discourses.

David Andrews calls the post-World War II rise of soccer “America’s silent sporting revolution” (1999:37). From a small group of mostly immigrant fans and players before the 1960s, soccer has risen to prominence as “a defining practice at the core of American life” (1999:31). A 2010 report on sports participation in the United States, put out by Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association, showed 13.8 million soccer players nationwide, a number second only to basketball and above that of the “American pastime,” baseball (SGMA 2010).

Yet despite the numbers of players today, as soccer has moved into the American mainstream, backlash against it has grown concurrently, and the sport has never been able to fully shake the perception of being a “foreign” game. Political and cultural conservatives bash it repeatedly – Glenn Beck, speaking of Americans, said recently “we don't like soccer, we want nothing to do with it” (Zirin 2010) – leading Franklin Foer (2005) to suggest that soccer has become caught up in the “culture wars.” Antipathy towards soccer also surfaces in interactions between immigrants and non-immigrants, as seen in Mark Grey’s study of student relations at a Kansas high school. In the 1990s, Garden City was in the midst of an immigrant boom, with many newcomers from Latin America finding work at the local meatpacking plant and settling in the town of 25,000. When the children of these immigrants entered the local high school, they were told, in subtle and not-so-subtle terms, that they should give up soccer and focus on “American” sports like football. As Grey wrote of the situation at the time:

The process of isolating and marginalizing immigrant and minority students is exacerbated by an emphasis upon established forms of American athletics and their related rituals ... The terms under which immigrant and other minority students in the school and community can escape from an isolated and marginal status are narrowly defined and directly related to participation in established athletics ... The status of immigrant minorities in the school is complicated further by the use of American sports as a standard by which to judge these students' willingness to assimilate into mainstream American life. (Grey 1992:268)

One of the reasons that soccer, in contexts such as the one Grey describes, continues to be perceived as a foreign game and disliked as such is American exceptionalism. Andrei Markovits and Steven Hellerman argue that "America's sports exceptionalism is deeply rooted in other exceptionalisms that constitute essential features of modern American life" (Markovits and Hellerman 2001:9; see also Sugden and Tomlinson 1994). They claim that sports that became hegemonic during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have become difficult to displace in national sporting landscapes. In the case of the United States, this means that baseball, football, and basketball have proven difficult to displace as symbols of truly "American" sports, especially by soccer, so long associated with foreigners and immigrants.

Markovits and Hellerman, and indeed many others (Dunning 1999; Wangerin 2006, 2011; Allaway 2005), focus on professional soccer and draw inferences from that to make claims about soccer in the United States more broadly. But, as the numbers suggest, soccer *is* in fact quite popular in the United States among youth. Among this group, soccer has achieved broad appeal in both immigrant and non-immigrant communities. Instead of painting with the broad brush that Markovits and Hellerman use to argue that soccer has not been able to achieve hegemony on the American sports scene, I seek to show a more nuanced picture of soccer's place in the United States. It is not enough to say that soccer has not "made it" because it is foreign. Instead, focusing on soccer at the youth level, I reframe the question to ask how it is that soccer in some contexts indexes the foreign while in other contexts it indexes the American mainstream.

Where I agree with Markovits and Hellerman is on the idea that the relationship between the United States and the rest of the world is fundamental in shaping the place of soccer in this country. While they largely focus on foreigners in foreign lands, I focus on the role of foreigners in the United States – immigrants – in shaping the place of soccer today. Soccer-playing immigrants have been an important part of the background against which suburban American soccer has been domesticated. Because of the power of American exceptionalism as a discourse, claims about what is mainstream (and what is not) are often couched in national terms. Thus, detractors often describe soccer as “un-American.” But I believe that it is possible to go further and ask what specifically about soccer some people perceive as un-American. For underneath the initial boundary that people draw on national lines lie other boundaries: race and class (“soccer is for rich white suburban kids”) or gender (“soccer is a sport for girls”) to name a few. Although people may couch their discussions of soccer in terms of national boundaries, the underlying sentiment, which I plan to explore, may yield elements of other boundaries.

Two main developments in the post-World War II United States have been essential in shaping the domestication of American soccer: 1) the rise of the suburbs (Baldassare 1992; Jackson 1987) and 2) the rise in immigration, especially from Asia and Latin America (Massey 2008). These two developments combined have led the domesticated version of soccer played in the suburbs to take on a very different character from the version of the game played in immigrant communities (Wallace 2009). If the suburbs have provided the context in which this domesticated version of the game could develop, soccer played by immigrants has provided an alternative to which suburban soccer has sought to contrast itself.

Four main questions guide my research: 1) How has soccer been domesticated in the post-World War II period?; 2) In what contexts does soccer today index the foreign and in what contexts does it index the American mainstream?; 3) What interactions occur between suburban soccer and

soccer in immigrant communities, and how do these interactions shape how soccer is perceived in both communities?; and, 4) Mostly broadly, how does the mainstream change as it adopts foreign practices? In order to answer these questions, I propose to study both the past and present of soccer in the post-World War II period through ethnographic and archival research. My research will be focused in Southern California because it is one of the main areas where soccer initially became domesticated. Studying soccer as a cultural practice that has been domesticated allows me to explain the paradox of the sport indexing both the foreign and the mainstream. From a focus in this one place, I hope to explain the development of soccer throughout the United States and, most broadly, comment on the relationship between the foreign and the mainstream.

### **Theoretical framework**

The theoretical framework on which I rely has three main parts. I combine work on assimilation, especially the so-called two-way assimilation proposed by Richard Alba and Victor Nee (2005), with research on social boundaries, especially that of Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 1978, 1988) on consumption and status. Throughout, I use a semiotic perspective, especially that proposed by Charles Sanders Peirce (1958), which argues for seeing reality as mediated through a system of signs, which differs based on the context and people observing it.

#### ***Two-way assimilation***

While classic studies of assimilation (Park 1930; Park and Burgess 1921; Warner and Srole 1945; Gordon 1964) have largely focused on immigrants' adaptations to the host society, recent work (Alba and Nee 2005) has emphasized the fact that the "mainstream" also changes with the arrival of immigrants. In focusing on the domestication of soccer, I am providing a specific example of a cultural form that came from the outside before becoming part of the mainstream. I hope to

show that in this process, soccer has not simply moved into the mainstream but has also shaped the boundaries of the mainstream.

The overwhelming majority of scholarship on assimilation has treated the process as one of outsiders adapting to fit into an already existing mainstream. Thus, classic studies of European immigrants in the United States have focused on ways in which they have lost their “foreign-ness” and become “American” (Gordon 1964). In recent years, immigration scholars have picked up on this idea and argued for a more complete analysis of what they call two-way assimilation. In doing so, they are fulfilling the vision of one of the earliest proponents of assimilation research, Park and Burgess, who wrote nearly a century ago that “assimilation is a process of interpretation and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons or groups, and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life” (1921:735).

While this idea of assimilation as a fusion was, for decades, largely ignored in favor of a focus on immigrants’ adaptation to life in the United States (Gans 1962; Gordon 1964; Thomas and Znanicki 1918; Warner and Srole 1945; Wirth 1938), Richard Alba and Victor Nee have sought to restart a research framework for two-way assimilation. Alba and Nee’s vision of “two-way” assimilation is one in which “mainstream culture ... changes as elements of the cultures of the newer groups are incorporated into it” (2005:13). They define assimilation as “the decline of ethnic distinction and its corollary cultural and social differences” (2005:11), and suggest that this process underlies traditional measures of assimilation such as socioeconomic status, residential segregation, language use, and intermarriage (Waters and Jiménez 2005). Seeing other theories (in particular segmented assimilation; see Portes and Zhou 1993; Portes and Rumbaut 2006) as overly deterministic and pessimistic about assimilation today, Alba and Nee argue that the blurring of boundaries will lead to assimilation of today’s immigrants and their children that mirrors that of past

generations. As racial and ethnic difference that today shapes social boundaries may lose its power to do so in the future: “Assimilation will alter the racial/ethnic contours of American society, we predict, at a minimum augmenting the majority group by boundary crossing and expanding the mainstream by blurring the boundaries between the majority and the groups being fed by contemporary immigration” (2005:288). In this way, Alba and Nee suggest, the mainstream will be remade. For Alba and Nee, underlying assimilation is the question of boundaries, what is “mainstream” and what is not.

However, this book falls short in two ways: 1) failing to define “mainstream culture,” thus making the term “so broad as to practically deprive it of any meaning” (Portes 2005:4), and 2) lacking the theoretical tools to adequately discuss shifting social boundaries on which their theory relies. Alba and Nee present an antiquated view of culture, seeing cultures as entirely separate, internally homogenous, and only changing when they come into contact with other cultures. This view, which reads like a half-century old anthropological text, does not provide them the necessary tools to examine shifting boundaries. Seeing cultures as entirely separate ignores how connected people are, especially in an era of rapid and easy communication, even before they come into physical contact with each other. Contact in this way may inspire change, but it is far from the only way. And even without contact, Alba and Nee view “culture” as much less internally homogenous than recent thinkers (Ortner 2006; Ortner, Dirks, and Eley 1994; Roseberry 1996; Sewell 2005; Trouillot 2003; J. Comaroff and J. L. Comaroff 1991) have argued it is. A heterogeneity of power in particular causes change as people with different degrees of power struggle to define cultural norms (Hall 1994; Giddens 1983). Overall, Alba and Nee’s perspective needs a much more dynamic view of culture in order to achieve its goal of examining shifting social boundaries.

*Social boundaries*

Because shifting social boundaries are so central to Alba and Nee's two-way assimilation theory, a sophisticated theory of social boundaries must be a part of any work that employs this perspective. I seek to move past the antiquated view of culture that Alba and Nee rely on and instead suggest a view of social boundaries that provides space for the cultural dynamism that they view as central to assimilation and particularly the remaking of the mainstream. Relying especially on Bourdieu's work on consumption and social status, I propose to see social boundaries as: 1) a constantly shifting process of classification, 2) made through performance, and 3) part of larger struggles for power, prestige, and privilege.

Much of Bourdieu's work, particularly his book *Distinction* (1984), is an attempt to demonstrate that consumption is part of a larger process of status differentiation. Instead of consumption simply following class, consumption is actually part of creating class distinctions and "legitimizing social differences" (Bourdieu 1984:7). But in order to serve as tools of distinction, the things or practices being consumed must have meaning and be understood to represent something larger. This is why

individuals and groups invest in the particular meaning they give to common classificatory systems by the use they make of them ... their whole social being, everything which defines their own idea of themselves, the primordial, tacit contract whereby they define "us" as opposed to "them", "other people", and which is the basis of exclusions ("not for the likes of us") and inclusions they perform among the characteristics produced by the common classificatory systems (Bourdieu 1984:478).

How is classification made real, or put into practice? Through performance. Seeing consumption as a performance, it is possible to see how everyday actions shape classificatory systems that underlie social boundaries. As people consume, they give meaning to the social practices in which they participate. And it follows that meanings given to these social practices change through performance. The meaning of soccer in the United States, as I will show, has

changed as it has been performed by suburban children in addition to the immigrants who have long played the sport.

Finally, Bourdieu argues that the consumption of things and practices is part of larger struggles over power, prestige, and privilege. As people consume and classify things, they also seek to classify themselves.

The classifying subjects, who classify the properties and practices of others, or their own, are also classifiable objects which classify themselves (in the eyes of others) by appropriating practices and properties that are already classified (as vulgar or distinguished, high or low, heavy or light etc. -- in other words, in the last analysis, as popular or bourgeois) according to their probable distribution between groups that are themselves classified. (Bourdieu 1984:482)

Thus, the choice of, for example, what sport to play is not only about personal preference. It is also about status differentiation, saying something about oneself through practices of consumption. Soccer has both been shaped by and played a part in reshaping social boundaries. Suburban parents in the post-World War II period have chosen to sign their children up for soccer in large numbers, in part, because the sport has served as a tool of distinction. But soccer can mean different things in different contexts. As such, it is important to have a theoretical tool that accounts for the dynamic and shifting meanings of soccer in the United States.

### *Semiotics*

The third theoretical tool I propose to use in my study of soccer in the United States is a semiotic approach. I draw particularly from the work of Charles Sanders Peirce, who proposes to understand reality as a system of signs. Peirce proposes that reality be understood as a series of interlocking relationships between an object, a sign, and an interpretant. He defines the sign as that which signifies something, the object as that which is being signified, and the interpretant as the person who makes sense of the sign-object relationship. Using my topic, soccer is a sign and the

foreign-ness or mainstream-ness the object depending on many factors, including who is perceiving the sport, the interpretant. The point I draw from Peirce's work is that soccer can "stand for, that is to be in such a relation to another that for certain purposes it is treated by some mind as if it were that other" (1958:155). In this view, reality is not an objective thing, but instead is different for different people, as their perceptions of reality are always mediated through this sign system. Using Peirce's terminology, soccer can "index," by which he means "stand for ... or be treated as if it were that other," many meanings.

If soccer does index larger meanings, it is important to recognize how these meanings can change depending on the context. Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs' (1990) discussion of contextualization provides one tool to do just this. They argue that the production (what they call entextualization), circulation, and interpretation (decontextualization) of a text (or, in my case, the practice of soccer) fundamentally shapes interpretations of it. They describe contextualization as a

process of rendering discourse extractable, of making a stretch of linguistic production into a unit – a text – that can be lifted out of its institutional setting. A text, then, from this vantage point, is discourse rendered decontextualizable. Entextualization may well incorporate aspects of context, such that the resultant text carries elements of its history of use within it. (Bauman and Briggs 1990:75)

The meanings of texts, Baumann and Briggs make clear, are not pre-determined prior to their production, circulation, and interpretation. Instead, the processes of entextualization and decontextualization fundamentally shape these meanings. Baumann and Briggs also argue that an important element of the process by which texts are made meaningful is framing. "The metacommunicative management of the recontextualized text" (1990:75), framing involves ways in which actors recognize and seek to alter the frames in which texts are being interpreted to highlight certain interpretations.

Social practices undergo a similar process of transformations when circulated. This is precisely what Raymond Williams (1977) argues in putting forth his notion of emergent, dominant,

and residual forms. For Williams, within dominant practices, there are always residual elements of prior practices. He writes that “the residual has been effectively formed in the past, but is still active in the cultural process as an effective element of the present” (1977:122). Just as contexts shapes, even changes, meaning in the view of Baumann and Briggs, for Williams as social practices move from emergent to dominant, they often retain residual elements of their past.

The circulation of texts or social practices is not simply shaped by the contexts in which they move. As Susan Gal argues, the circulation of texts does not simply involve them finding a context into which to fit; instead, they shape the context by their circulation. Or, as Gal puts it, “when texts move, both text and context are transformed” (2003:94). And just as context is shaped by the movement of texts, so too are the people involved in these processes of circulation transformed by their involvement. Those who play a role in circulating texts and practices, in doing so, also simultaneously comment on their relations with other people as well as the type of people they imagine themselves to be. As David Graeber puts it, “in working towards obvious goals, people also set up relations with other people and shape themselves” (Graeber 2001:64). Similarly, Nancy Munn writes: “agents not only engage in action but are also ‘acted upon’ by the action” (Munn 1992:14).

The semiotic perspective allows space to view soccer not as a unitary thing, but instead, an object whose meanings changes at different times, in different places, and with different people. As soccer has transformed from an emergent to a dominant practice, the circulation the circulation (or, in my words, the domestication) of the sport and the people involved in it have been fundamentally shaped in the process. The question ultimately becomes: in what places, at what times, and under what conditions do which type of people perceive soccer as a foreign game? Conversely, in what places, at what times, and under what conditions do which type of people interpret soccer as a mainstream game? And how has the domestication of soccer over the years both shaped and been

shaped by the context in which it has taken place? A semiotic approach can provide the tools to answer these questions.

My theoretical perspective has three main parts: 1) a view of assimilation as a two-way process by which immigration remakes the mainstream; 2) a view of social boundaries as a constantly shifting process of classification, made through performance, and part of larger struggles for power, prestige, and privilege; and, 3) a semiotic perspective that trains the eye to see the importance of the context in which a thing exists in shaping the varying meanings it can have. Studying the domestication of American soccer using this theoretical framework, it is possible to examine how the sport has been part of the remaking of the mainstream, a process shaped by shifting social boundaries in which soccer, an object whose meanings has changed over time and continues to shift today, has played an important role.

### **The domestication of American soccer**

As soccer has moved out of immigrant communities and into the suburbs, it has undergone what I call a “triple domestication.” By this, I mean that the sport has been made “American” (domestication number one) by presenting it as a “safe” sport (domestication number two) and moving it into the domestic sphere (domestication number three). Soccer has long been an object of distinction in the United States. But for decades it only indexed foreign-ness. As it has become domesticated, the sport has also come to index something else: the American mainstream.

One of the major questions that those who study soccer raise in the United States is that of what I call “residual ethnicity.” How much does soccer today continue to be “associated with ethnic Otherness” (Andrews et al. 1997:35)? While some see residual ethnicity as central to explaining why soccer, especially at the professional level, has never quite “made it” in the United States (Markovits

and Hellerman 2001), others, especially those who study suburban youth soccer, suggest that the sport has moved beyond such associations (Foer 2005; Andrews et al. 1997).

The domestication of American soccer has been, in large part, a process of stripping the residual ethnicity from soccer. By transforming the game into something largely unrecognizable compared to instantiations of the game in other countries as well as that played by immigrants in the United States, suburban soccer has been able to strip much, though not all, of the residual ethnicity from the game. To the degree that the residual ethnicity has been stripped from soccer, it is because the sport has not only moved into the American mainstream, but has also reshaped the boundaries of the American mainstream in the post-World War II period. Soccer has shed itself of much residual ethnicity – it has been, to use my term, been domesticated – by being made a “safe” sport and moved into the realm of the family, domestications numbers two and three.

Michael Messner writes that “youth sports are, among other things, an organized response to a culture of fear for our children's safety” (2009:194). One way that suburban soccer has been made safe is by limiting it to those in the suburbs – a largely racially and economically homogeneous group, especially in early suburban developments (Baldassare 1992; Massey and Denton 1993; Jackson 1987:241; for work on increasing diversity in the suburbs in recent years, see Singer, Hardwick, and Brettell 2008). Among the largely affluent white suburban children who have taken up soccer, a notable difference has emerged from soccer played in other contexts: the presence of both male and female players, sometimes playing on the same field (Wangerin 2006). The first girls program within AYSO was started in 1971, only a few years after its first boys program. Markovits and Rensmann note that parents who disliked the hyper-masculinity and marginalization of girls within other sports, especially football, gravitated towards soccer. This is also a contrast to soccer in immigrant communities, where the sport remains largely the purview of men. The feminization of soccer has led many to see it as a safe sport.

In addition to who plays soccer – the racial and economic homogenization as well as the increased involvement of females being the most notable elements – how the game is played has also had a strong impact on its being perceived as a safe game. Soccer is seen as less dangerous than other sports – especially football (Andrews et al. 1997). And many have noted that soccer in the suburbs has often been less focused on winning than on developing character. Markovits and Hellerman, Foer, and Wangerin all suggest that the perceived lack of competition in youth soccer has been part of its appeal. In addition to being seen as less physically dangerous and more of a tool for teaching character, soccer has also come to be seen as relying less on physical strength and more on intelligence (Andrews et al. 1997:276).

A final way in which soccer has been made safe is by to associating it with the domestic realm of the family. Among the most notable features of youth soccer has been the involvement of adults in it. Andrews and colleagues go so far as to describe suburban youth soccer as a “wholly-owned subsidiary of competitive adults” (1997:48). That youth soccer has become a sport so closely controlled by families is perhaps not a surprise given what Kenneth Jackson calls the “privatization of social life” (1987:272). Jackson argues that the rise of the suburbs saw the break-down of social life, which was once focused on neighborhoods but would later come to be centered largely around the nuclear family. As people moved to the suburbs, without an existing structure in these new neighborhoods (or, indeed, many other types of social organizations), parents stepped into the void, playing a large role in shaping the activities that their children would take up. The “soccer mom” would become the most well known example of the sport’s move into the domestic realm.

The second and third domestications – making soccer safe and part of the domestic sphere – form what I call hegemonic patterns of domesticity. Soccer has both fit into these developing patterns of domesticity as well as played a role in shaping them. And these patterns of domesticity are, I suggest, intimately tied to the process of making soccer domestic, or part of the American

mainstream. Lauren Berlant has argued that a discourse has developed in recent years by which the boundaries of the United States as a nation are shaped in the domestic realm. Her term “public intimacy” describes “the dominant idea marketed by patriotic traditionalists ... of a core nation whose survival depends on personal acts and identities performed in the intimate domains of the quotidian” (1997:9). While Berlant locates this idea within conservative politics, I argue that it exists more broadly. Statements such as “soccer is a ‘foreign’ game” can be unpacked further. Within these statements lie implicit discussions of the boundaries of the nation and the mainstream.

Soccer played by racially and economically homogeneous suburban children of both genders is one such pattern of domesticity that would become hegemonic. So, too, would the idea of soccer as a safe game, both by having girls play along with boys, and by playing the sport in a way that encouraged character development over winning as well as the development brains over brawn. These hegemonic patterns of domesticity all took place under the watchful eye of parents. With dads as coaches and moms as organizers extraordinaire, suburban soccer was, from the beginning, fully part of the domestic sphere. All of these patterns of domesticity came to index a larger domestic sphere: that of the American mainstream.

Here I have presented three places to begin to examine what I call hegemonic patterns of domesticity. I have suggested that the domestication of soccer in the United States has taken place as the sport has come to be associated with – and helped to create – patterns of domesticity that have become hegemonic in post-World War II suburbs. Soccer that is safe and part of the domestic sphere is more likely to index the mainstream. Soccer that does not fit within these hegemonic patterns of domesticity is more likely to index the foreign. It is essential to recognize that these hegemonic patterns of domesticity have been created through soccer at the same time that soccer has been domesticated by fitting with them. The creation and maintenance of the mainstream is an inherently dialectical process.

But it is never so simple as to say that, for example, suburban soccer fits completely within these hegemonic patterns of domesticity while soccer in immigrant communities does not. More accurately, each pattern I have identified is a continuum, and soccer in different contexts may fit more or less closely with it. Using a semiotic approach to study the position that one particular practice – soccer – has come to occupy allows me to discuss how people who come to the United States – immigrants – can be both incorporated into while at the same time remaining outside of the American mainstream. The mainstream, as Alba and Nee tell us, is a moving target, and my study is an attempt to discuss how its boundaries change over time. Ultimately, I argue, using this approach to examine the domestication of soccer – asking how it has become American – has much to teach us about the remaking of the mainstream, a process that will shape the assimilation of immigrants coming to the United States.

### **Belonging to the nation and shaping its boundaries**

The boundaries of the mainstream can be expressed using many idioms. In the United States, because of the long history of American exceptionalism (Markovits and Hellerman 2001), the boundaries of the mainstream are often expressed using the idiom of the nation. Interpretations of soccer which highlight its foreign-ness place it outside of the boundaries of the nation while interpretations of the sport as mainstream include it within those national boundaries. Which practices are mainstream can shape who is considered within the boundaries of the nation and who is outside of them.

No work is more influential in seeking to define the nation than that of Benedict Anderson (1991). Describing it as an “imagined community,” Anderson writes that the “nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (1991:7). He claims that the print media is hugely important in establishing imagined communities, both by writing in secular languages that come to

be associated with particular nations and by establishing a common “story,” the reading of which leads disparate people to imagine themselves as being part of the same nation. In Anderson’s telling, the nation is not “real” so much as it is constructed in the minds of citizens through their everyday practices. But one major problem remains: what *is* “the nation?” To continue with Anderson’s focus on the print media, the newspaper is a sign of the nation. For him, it is enough to say that people all read it and imagine themselves as part of a community. But what type of community do they imagine? It is not only a question of whether or not people are reading the same newspaper, but also a question of what they are reading on the newspaper’s pages. Anderson sketches out the process for how an imagined community comes about, but leaves open the question of the specific boundaries of this community.

John Kelly and Martha Kaplan (2001) critique Anderson for overemphasizing the imaginary nature of communities and ignoring specific ways in which national communities are represented. They write that “the shift from focus on diffusely totalized imaginaries to a dialogical semiotic terrain is itself important, enabling clearer recognition of representations by others as well as by selves in the construction of possible and impossible nations” (Kelly and Kaplan 2001:22). Others critique Anderson for not examining how the boundaries of the nation come to be inculcated within people’s everyday practices. As Katherine Verdery puts it, the nation is “an aspect of the political and symbolic/ideological order and also of the world of social interaction and feeling” (Verdery 1993:37). Ana Maria Alonso writes that Anderson “does not go far enough in identifying the strategies through which ‘the imagined’ becomes ‘second nature,’ a ‘structure of feeling’ embodied in material practice and lived experience” (Alonso 1994:382).

If the boundaries of the nation exist within people, how, then, is their shaping to be observed? I would suggest that it takes place through performance of everyday practices. Performances of such practices, including sports, can shape national boundaries by providing an

arena for them to be “played out.” If the nation does indeed become part of people’s material practice and lived experience, then it is possible to see the maintenance of the nation as a salient boundary through its performance. Among the most articulate proponents of this perspective are Jon Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss. They write that “nations are not just the product of structural forces; they are simultaneously the practical accomplishment of ordinary people engaging in mundane activities in their everyday lives” (2008:554). Andrew Thompson echoes this view, writing that “nations do not just exist, they are made real to the individual by the individual in the course of her/his deliberations and interactions” (Thompson 2001:24).

Nations may indeed be imagined, but the specific boundaries that make them up are shaped through performance. Therefore, it is important to find performances through which the boundaries of the nation are made real. And I would argue that in the United States, sports, and particularly soccer, are the perfect place to see the shaping of the boundaries of the nation.

### **Why sports? Why soccer?**

During the 2010 World Cup, I watched Mexico take on Argentina with a Mexican friend. As the match progressed, it became clear that Mexico would lose. My friend confidently predicted that the Mexican team would start to lose their heads, foul their opponents, and, in his view, embarrass themselves and their nation. He told me that he liked the American team because they, unlike the Mexicans, knew how to lose with dignity. My friend was talking not only about soccer, but also about what he saw as the traits that define the two nations and their people. He might never have shared these views with me but for the fact that soccer provided the subject matter to prompt him to share them. Through the performance of the game, the boundaries became real in the mind of my friend.

Studying sport to examine the boundaries of the nation may not be an obvious choice. But it is useful precisely because the two are not directly connected. Concepts such as “the nation” are abstract and disconnected from people’s everyday experiences, but come about in the interactions of everyday life. While people are unlikely to discuss what they believe the nation to stand for without prompting (and perhaps unlikely even with prompting), they do discuss this question, albeit obliquely, in their discussions of sports. These discussions become, in Volosinov’s (1986) terms, utterances that mediate between the imagined boundaries of the nation within people’s minds and that at the societal level. Through everyday interactions among ordinary people, discussions of the nation’s boundaries become societal norms and vice versa.

Anthony King makes the case for using sports to study the nation, arguing that they form “charged interaction ritual[s] out of which imagined communities emerge” (2006:251). He continues:

The transformation of the nation-state and nationalism can be traced through almost any social activity. Not unreasonably, it has been traditional to trace these changes through formal political activities and institutions. Yet, the transformation of the nation today can be equally well identified through informal social activities and above all through an activity like sport, even though sport appears otiose to the grand sweep of human history. Yet, in the ritual of sport, humans create and sustain the social groups of which they are part and consequently in this ritual the contours of national communities are thrown into relief. (2006:258)

King’s approach is to focus on the practices of sport most obviously connected to the nation-state: those of national teams playing each other. But his approach does not require that one focus on sport at this level. He writes also that “apparently trivial everyday, face-to-face encounters are critical to the creation and maintenance of national communities.” (2006:251). It is this type of approach that I plan to take in my research. Instead of focusing on soccer at the professional and international level, I plan to look at the game among youth. This follows the work of Bourdieu (1984), whose work shows that ordinary French people’s choice of sport indexes both social class as well as values associated with class. Bourdieu emphasizes that

*the social definition of sport* is an object of struggles, that the field of sporting practices is the site of struggles in which what is at stake, *inter alia*, is the monopolistic capacity to impose the legitimate definition of sporting practice and of the legitimate function of sporting activity (Bourdieu 1978:826; italics in original)

Bourdieu's work seeks to connect the legitimate definition and functions of sports to class struggles. Most important here is that he shows that the meanings associated with sports played by ordinary people are not isolated to the sporting realm. Instead, they index social class, and struggles over the legitimate definition and function of sports index larger class struggles. My project will allow me to look at the social definition of soccer in the United States, and how struggles to define it are connected to larger discussions about the boundaries of the mainstream, and of the nation.

Soccer is, in my view, the ideal sport to examine the boundaries of the nation in the United States. The anxieties of the changing boundaries of the nation brought by immigration (Chavez 2008) can be examined through the study of a practice that has also come from the outside and become, at least in some contexts, mainstream. Examining this process has the power to illuminate the flip-side of the assimilation process – how the mainstream changes as it incorporates foreign practices.

## **Methodology**

Four main questions guide my research: 1) How has soccer been domesticated?; 2) In what contexts does soccer today index the foreign and in what contexts does it symbolize the American mainstream?; 3) What interactions occur between those who play soccer in suburban communities and those who play soccer in immigrant communities?; and, 4) How does the mainstream change as it adopts foreign practices? In order to address these questions, I am proposing to carry out a combination of ethnographic and archival research.

For two main reasons, I have chosen to limit my research focus to youth soccer. First, most research on soccer, including that done in the United States, focuses on the professional game. As I have shown, the soccer landscape in the United States is hugely varied, and a large part of it is the youth game. Pronouncements about whether the sport has “made it” in the United States that ignore youth soccer are simply incomplete. My study will fill this gap. On more theoretical grounds, working with youth soccer is valuable because it provides an arena to examine the types of messages that parents, coaches, and team officials seek to convey to their players through soccer. Discussions of boundaries will likely be apparent in youth soccer (e.g. a coach telling a player, “we don’t play that way”) in ways that they would not be in other places where soccer is played.

I plan to carry out ethnographic research by working as a coach and volunteer for two clubs in San Diego. I have selected the clubs, both of which play in the Presidio League, carefully to allow me to see soccer in the two contexts I have identified. The first, the San Diego Crusaders, based in La Mesa, is typical of suburban clubs. In existence for 40 years, the club is one of the older youth clubs in San Diego, and this will allow me to see how the club has changed over time. The second club I have identified, the San Diego Aztecs, is based in Chula Vista, and has almost exclusively Mexican and Mexican-American players. As a coach and volunteer for both clubs, I plan to observe the way that soccer is played and discussed, among players, parents, and coaches. In addition to coaching, I plan to take part in the various activities involved in running the clubs: attending meetings, assisting with paperwork, doing publicity, etc. All of these activities will enable me to see the inner workings of the clubs and allow me to make contacts with people with whom I can conduct formal interviews. In addition to my participant observation and interviews with the two clubs, I plan to conduct interviews with parents, coaches, and team officials of many teams throughout the Presidio League and San Diego in general. I will ask questions about soccer today as well as how it has changed over the years.

In order to examine the domestication of American soccer over time, I intend to carry out interviews with people who have been involved in this process. These interviews will take place mostly in Southern California, though I also plan trips to the San Francisco Bay Area, Chicago, and Seattle to conduct interviews with various people (the chart below lays out a projected timeline). In addition, I will carry out archival work in two archives as well as using online databases to examine media coverage of soccer over time. The archives I will use are the LA84 Library in Los Angeles and the National Soccer Hall of Fame archives, housed in Hillsborough, North Carolina. I plan to use online databases to examine coverage in the *Los Angeles Times* and the *San Diego Union-Tribune* (and the newspapers that combined to create the current newspaper) over time. I also plan to look at coverage of soccer in the sports media by examining the coverage in *Sports Illustrated* over time. Finally, I plan to examine how soccer has been presented in soccer-specific publications by analyzing coverage in *Soccer America* as well as books that have been published about youth soccer since the 1960s. In all of my archival work, I intend to focus on how soccer has been presented as it has become domesticated. What types of presentations of the sport have led consumers of these media to perceive the sport as mainstream and what types of presentations have led them to see it as a foreign sport?

**Projected Timeline**

<b>September – December</b>	<b>January – March</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participant observation with Crusaders and Aztecs clubs</li> <li>• Interview people knowledgeable about San Diego soccer history</li> <li>• Begin archival research on media coverage of soccer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participant observation with Crusaders and Aztecs clubs</li> <li>• Begin formal interviews with parents and coaches in Crusaders and Aztecs clubs</li> <li>• Do archival work in LA84 library (Los Angeles)</li> <li>• Do interviews with people at AYSO headquarters (Los Angeles)</li> <li>• Do interview with Hans Stierle, founder of AYSO (Seattle)</li> <li>• Do interviews and archival work at <i>Soccer America</i> (San Francisco Bay Area)</li> <li>• Continue archival research on media coverage of soccer</li> </ul>
<b>April – June</b>	<b>July – September</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participant observation with Crusaders and Aztecs clubs</li> <li>• Continue formal interviews with parents and coaches in Crusaders and Aztecs clubs</li> <li>• Begin formal interviews with parents and officials of teams involved in Presidio Soccer League, San Diego</li> <li>• Do archival work at National Soccer Hall of Fame archives (Hillsborough, North Carolina)</li> <li>• Do interviews with staff members at United States Soccer Federation (Chicago)</li> <li>• Continue archival research on media coverage of soccer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participant observation with Crusaders and Aztecs clubs</li> <li>• Continue formal interviews with parents and coaches in Crusaders and Aztecs clubs</li> <li>• Continue formal interviews with parents and officials of teams involved in Presidio Soccer League, San Diego</li> <li>• Complete remaining out-of-town trips for interviews developed in the course of research</li> </ul>
<b>September – as necessary</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participant observation with Crusaders and Aztecs clubs</li> <li>• Continue formal interviews with parents and coaches in Crusaders and Aztecs clubs</li> <li>• Continue formal interviews with parents and officials of teams involved in Presidio Soccer League, San Diego</li> </ul>	

## **Conclusion**

The rise of soccer has been one of the major sporting developments in the United States in the post-World War II period. Yet despite the growth of the game, little research has given in-depth attention to American soccer. Among those researchers who have focused on the sport, most identify the game's association with foreign-ness as central to explaining the place of soccer in the United States. My study is intended as an in-depth examination of the domestication of American soccer, how the sport has been "made American" by stripping the residual ethnicity from it.

Using a theoretical toolbox that includes work on assimilation, social boundaries, and semiotics, I intend to investigate how soccer has been made mainstream by also shaping the boundaries of the mainstream. Drawing inspiration from the work of Richard Alba and Victor Nee on two-way assimilation, I intend to use the post-World War II development of soccer in the United States, a sport taken from immigrant communities and popularized in the rapidly developing suburbs, as an example of how the mainstream changes with the arrival of immigrants. Because of the power of American exceptionalism, I have argued that discussions of the mainstream are often couched in terms of national boundaries (i.e. American vs. foreign), but underneath these statements are often other boundaries, including race/ethnicity, gender, and class. The triple domestication that I have proposed to explain the development of American soccer in the past half century suggests that the reshaping of a boundary on national lines (i.e. making soccer American) has taken place by reshaping other boundaries (e.g. race/ethnicity, class, and gender) in the process of making soccer safe and moving it within the domestic sphere. One of my major tasks will be to examine which boundaries have been reshaped at which points in the domestication of soccer. Throughout my work, I will use a semiotic perspective in order to discuss how soccer can index different meanings in different contexts. Another main task will be to determine in what contexts soccer indexes the mainstream and in what contexts it indexes the foreign.

Overall, I hope to make an argument about the nature of the mainstream. Far from being simply a question of the popularity of a practice, I propose a view of the mainstream as a constantly shifting entity, shaped by social boundaries. My argument that soccer has become mainstream insofar as the residual ethnicity has been stripped from it, a process done by making the game safe and part of the domestic sphere, demonstrates the importance of social boundaries in shaping which practices are mainstream and which are not. Soccer in the United States has been shaped by and played a role in shaping the boundaries of the mainstream.

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