

# The European Ritual

*Football in the New Europe*

ANTHONY KING

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ASHGATE

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# Preface

What is Europe? Since the early 1990s, this question has become an increasingly central concern for the social sciences as sociologists, political scientists, economists and historians attempt to comprehend the nature of European integration. This question is difficult because it is becoming clear that the European Union is a reality without obvious historical precedents although various commentators have used historical examples to predict the future form of the European Union. Larry Siedentop (2000) has recently tried to draw parallels between Europe in the 1990s and the creation of the United States. Siedentop looks to the Federalists and to De Tocqueville to provide a framework for understanding the European Union. Indeed, he believes that the formation of the United States in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries can usefully suggest an appropriate political structure for Europe today; the principles of political organisation on which that Union was founded may be applicable to the European Union in the twenty-first century. Yet, although Siedentop is correct when he claims that De Tocqueville illuminates the historical reality of the time in which he wrote, we should be careful about applying the political principles which De Tocqueville identified to an era entirely different to that which he examined. The best use we can make of De Tocqueville is to imitate his close attention to the details of everyday existence in America in the early nineteenth century. His works endure as they do precisely because of their compelling empirical orientation. The best lesson which De Tocqueville teaches is that we should focus on the reality which actually confronts us rather than speculating what that reality should be. Following De Tocqueville, we should recognise that Europe cannot be understood by applying the principles of the past to the present but by confronting the present in all its confusing reality. We cannot answer the question 'What is Europe?' except by focusing directly on the reality of Europe as it is currently lived by millions of individuals in differing circumstances across this north-western peninsula of the Eurasian continent.

This book employs the example of European football to provide one possible answer to this question. By engaging closely with one form of social practice in Europe today, it is hoped that a more sustainable account of contemporary reality is proffered than by Siedentop and others like him who are disappointed by the nature of the European Union because it does not match their idealisations of what it should be. In order to come to terms with the reality of the European Union, it is necessary not to abstract from everyday

life but to become immersed fully in it. Yet, this immersion brings with it certain problems which have to be recognised. Avoiding unrealistic idealisation risks the danger of falling into an empirical provincialism which, while rich in detail, throws no light on general processes. This is the unavoidable dilemma of every researcher. In the belief that the interest lies in the detail, this book takes the empirical and ethnographic route. It tries to illuminate the reality of Europe by analysing the process in one specific form of life. It is hoped that focusing on the specific will illuminate the general and that this study will outline the broader architecture of Europe today. I accept the risks entailed by that decision.

While empirical research faces certain limitations, theoretical work confronts some equally serious difficulties. Although theories of European integration try to illuminate general processes, it is misleading to claim that there is an overarching 'European' position from which abstract theorising speaks. Abstract theorising does not enjoy a panoramic view denied to empirical research. The view from nowhere does not exist; there are only views of Europe from Germany, Spain, Italy or France, from Scotland, Catalonia, Lombardy or from Marseilles, Milan or Amsterdam. Most often abstract theorising, in fact, adopts a particularistic perspective which it disguises rhetorically. To understand the complete reality of Europe, it would be necessary to immerse oneself ethnographically in all these diverse and countervailing positions. Only the synthesis of all these particular positions could produce a genuinely general theory of European integration. A total synthesis of this sort is impossible. However, if the analysis at one point is compelling enough it may be able to shed light on similar, though differentiated processes occurring elsewhere. It is hoped that in some small way the analysis proffered here might contribute in this way to a more general understanding of Europe. It is hoped that other social scientists find that there are parallels between the processes described here and their own areas of study. Whether this book is able to perform that function is uncertain. However, whatever the merits or demerits of this book, it is hoped that it will convince on one point: football is a central social practice in Europe today and its analysis can illuminate the contemporary reality with unusual lucidity. If anything can help us to answer the critical question of 'What is Europe?', it is this extraordinary public ritual which dominates the lives of so many Europeans.

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PART I  
THE TRANSFORMATION  
OF A RITUAL





# Chapter 1

## From 1968 to 1999

It was, perhaps, one of the most dramatic moments in the history of European football. Since scoring in the sixth minute, it seemed certain that Bayern Munich would win the 1999 European Cup Final. They had dominated most of the game, scoring early and hitting Manchester United's post and crossbar in the second half, while United had made few significant attacks. Halfway through the second half, Teddy Sheringham was brought on to replace United's left-winger, Jesper Blomquist, bringing Ryan Giggs back into his favoured position on the left. With Giggs on the left and Beckham out wide on the right, Manchester United looked a more balanced side but the changes appeared to have been made too late. Later, in the eightieth minute, Ole Gunnar Solskjaer replaced Andy Cole but, despite Solskjaer's record of late scoring, this substitution also seemed futile. In the ninetieth minute when the game seemed already lost, United won a corner and while David Beckham prepared to launch the team's final effort, Peter Schmeichel, as he had done in other games, left his own net and joined the rest of his team in Bayern's penalty area. As the ball swung over, Schmeichel, whose presence had drawn Bayern defenders out of position, jumped for the ball. It passed clear over the head of this mêlée, falling to Dwight Yorke on the far side of the goal. He headed the ball back and it eventually fell to Ryan Giggs who struck the ball weakly towards the Bayern goal. As the ball passed Teddy Sheringham he hooked it into Bayern's net. Three minutes later, now deep into stoppage time, United won another corner. Again Beckham swung the ball in. Sheringham rose and deflected a header down towards the left-hand post where Ole Gunnar Solskjaer threw out his boot, driving the ball high into the net. Now familiar scenes of mayhem followed, while Sammy Kuffour, on all fours, pummelled the ground in despair.

### **1968: An International Match**

Thirty-one years earlier, on 29 May 1968, Manchester United had beaten Benfica of Portugal 4–1 in the 13th European Cup Final at Wembley Stadium. Although the United players in 1999 lifted the same trophy as their forebears in 1968, any formal similarity between these two events is deceptive. In fact, historical transformations separate these dates decisively from one another though it is often difficult to recognise these wider changes. In the famous

opening pages of *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault juxtaposes the brutal execution of the attempted regicide Damiens in 1757 with the penal regimen instituted in the following century in order to highlight the distinctiveness of European society (Foucault 1977). While the pitiful Damiens was ripped limb from limb, his various body parts displayed or burnt in a ferocious act of regal revenge, the criminal of the nineteenth century was subjected to a measured and private regime of mental and physical discipline. For Foucault, the two penal systems reflect the political regimes of the time; Damiens' torture symbolised the personal revenge of the king, whose very self had been insulted by insurrection, while the new penal system denoted the imposition of abstract laws on deviant individuals. For Foucault, the peculiar cruelty of the familiar penal system can be recognised fully only when set against a sharply differing system of retribution. As Foucault demonstrated, that juxtaposition allows the familiar to be illuminated in dramatically new ways, providing dulled perceptions with new insights (see Baert 1998). Similarly, in order to recognise the current transformation of football, it is useful to juxtapose contemporary practices against those of the past. To this end, the comparison of 1999 with 1968 serves a useful heuristic purpose of illuminating the direction and extent of present changes, just as the execution of Damiens in 1757 and the prison regulations of 1828 economically highlight an important historical transformation in the penal system.

A brief examination of the main newspaper coverage in the respective years of Manchester United's European victories is instructive. Throughout the 1968 season, the English newspapers had covered each of United's games with previews and reports and there was an understandable expansion of reports for the final. Not only was this the first final that an English team had ever reached but it was also particularly significant because of the death of the Manchester United team, the so-called 'Busby Babes', in an air crash ten years earlier in Munich.<sup>1</sup> The English newspapers interpreted Manchester United's matches in a historically distinctive fashion; they were international games and the club itself was the unproblematic representative of England and Britain. The line adopted by *The Times*' correspondent, Geoffrey Green, was typical.<sup>2</sup> For instance, after Manchester United had eliminated Real Madrid in the 1968 semi-final, Green commented: 'Manchester United now stand as the heroes of England' (Geoffrey Green 1968a: 16). He highlighted the qualities which brought these English heroes victory: 'In the end it was English temperament, fibre and morale that won through' (ibid.). Contrasting with the English national character, Green invoked a stereotypical account of Latin temperament of which he saw evidence both in the Real Madrid team and the crowd itself. 'This was siesta time for the hot-blooded crowd whose wrath flamed out as Stiles stabbed at fleeting Amancio ... All day the sun had beaten down like a hammer and the night, exquisitely still, was humid. It should have favoured the Spaniards ...' (ibid.). Contrasting with the phlegmatic English, Green

implies that the Spanish players were 'hot-blooded', reflecting the climate in which they lived. This nationalistic paradigm was evident elsewhere in Green's writing. Discussing the prospect of the 1968 final on the day of the game itself, Green similarly drew upon the concept of an English character. 'There will be no question where the hopes of the 100,000 crowd and of the nation as a whole will lie ... if there is any valid explanation it probably rests in their moral fibre, temperament and unquenchable spirit that lifted them off the floor recently' (Geoffrey Green 1968b). Once again, Green emphasised the 'English' virtues of the Manchester United team.

Although Green assumed that Manchester United represented England, the team, in fact, included players from the other home nations of Britain. Indeed, the team even fielded two Republic of Irish internationals (Tony Dunne and Shay Brennan).<sup>3</sup> For Green, England and Britain were synonymous; Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish and even Republic of Ireland players were viewed by him as English when playing for English clubs. It was significant that during this period the term 'Europe' or 'Europeans' was rarely used in English newspapers. Rather, the preferred term for Europeans in these early years was 'Continental' or the 'Continental' (for example, *The Times* 1962a; *The Times* 1963b), emphasising Britain's distinctive maritime isolation. British teams were seen as the embodiment of the common national virtues of manliness, perseverance and strength against the effete (though skilful) showiness of 'Continental' teams. Thus, in describing Tottenham's 4-2 defeat by the Polish team Gornik Zabrze, *The Times* drew on stereotypical accounts of English temperament (which saved Tottenham from an even heavier defeat) but were surprised that the Polish team did not demonstrate these typically 'Continental' characteristics: 'In the end it was fitness, temperament and luck (or ill luck) of that injury to the Polish left-half that saved them from disaster. Most Continental sides in a similar position would have faded like a smoke ring' (*The Times* 1961b). This reading was repeated when Tottenham played Benfica later in the same season; 'In terms of pure football technique these Portuguese were the greater artists. But technique is not everything at times, and last night they found themselves in a man's game where spirit and fibre and courage and the last drop of breath counted' (*The Times* 1962e). While the newspapers recognised the skill of the 'Continental', they were invariably portrayed as temperamentally suspect. After their controversial defeat by Internazionale in 1965,<sup>4</sup> Liverpool 'walked off the pitch at a hot, hysterical San Siro stadium' (Horridge 1965) while in 1967, a Naples player, Sivori, 'showing his quick South American temperament, jabbed his opponent, lashed out at Morgan, then kicked O'Neil' (Green 1967b). Similarly, in his description of Manchester United's game against Sarajevo in 1967, David Meek drew on this same motif which figured heavily in Green's work of the disciplined English and the hot-blooded foreigner. He noted that the 'Yugoslavs are a tough, passionate people' (Meek 1967), concluding that the outcome of the game 'was a matter of

temperament'. While Manchester United 'though often flattened [by fouls] got straight up again to play football', the Yugoslavs 'lost their heads' (ibid.). This contrast between the English and British and the 'Continental' culminated with assertions about the inherent disposition of different races towards certain kinds of behaviour. For instance, Benfica's defeat by Sunderland in 1963 was explained in significant fashion: 'Certainly last night was not the sort of weather to excite their Latin and Negroid blood' (*The Times* 1963a).

It followed from his assumption that Manchester United represented England and its national virtues that Green interpreted the final as an international match between two nations. Club and nation were interchangeable for Green: 'For this is a national occasion make no mistake. It is seen as revenge for Portugal's World Cup defeat and Benfica's humiliating 5-1 defeat by Manchester United ... two years ago' (Green 1968b). This assumption that clubs represented their nations was long-standing. After Manchester United's drubbing of Anderlecht in 1956, *The Times* reported that, 'They stayed to roar their heads off and to dream dreams of English football showing its true stamp once more' (*The Times* 1956). Similar language was employed to describe Manchester United's game against Real Madrid later in that year's competition: 'But now [having gone 2-0 down] United, remembering what they stand for in Britain, seemed suddenly inspired by the danger' (Green 1957). This close connection between Manchester United and the nation was emphasised by other journalists. In his coverage of the 1968 Cup Final, David Meek, the *Manchester Evening News* football correspondent, similarly drew a connection between Manchester United and Britain when describing fans gathered in London before the game. 'A group of youngsters in Trafalgar Square decided to back Britain as well as United. Over their sober suits, they had draped large Union Jacks' (Meek 1968b).

Reflecting this nationalistic interpretation of European competition, club games were often conceived of in military terms; an analogy was drawn between the games and war. Thus, the opposition was regularly described as the 'enemy' (*The Times* 1962b) and metaphors of 'arrows' (*The Times* 1962d; *The Times* 1961a), 'shafts', 'grape-shot' (*The Times* 1963b), 'spearheads', 'ripostes' (*The Times* 1962f) or 'barrages' (Green 1967a) were often used to describe attacks or shots at goal. Milan made 'a sneak raid' against Ipswich in 1962 (*The Times* 1962c) while in a game against Internazionale, Everton were criticised for their unsubtle tactics; 'It was physical exertion and the old frontal attack with no ideas of subtle infiltration' (*The Times* 1963c). Similarly, to describe defensive play, martial metaphors were liberally employed. Thus, while Real Madrid were excellent in attack, 'their shield could be dented' (McGhee 1957) and against Ipswich, Milan's sneak raid was mounted from a 'chainmail defence' (*The Times* 1962c). These military metaphors could reach the lyrical heights as a description of the semi-final between Real Madrid and Manchester United at Old Trafford in 1957 reveals: 'The field had all the

appearance of a battlefield. Smoke from the stone-fingers of surrounding chimneys drifted over the vividly-lit pitch' (McGhee 1957). Similarly, Meek also drew on florid military references to frame his reports: 'Having seen their mountains and watched their football, I can fully understand how the Germans found it impossible to beat Marshal Tito and the partisans into submission' (Meek 1967). The most elaborate use of military metaphor was saved for matches against German opposition such as Manchester United's match against Borussia Dortmund in 1956:

The Borussia forwards in their eagerness fell repeatedly into United's off-side trap, much to the satisfaction of the British Tommies who were present in large numbers ... Two superbly judged sorties by Wood held the ravening Germans at bay ... Here was history repeating itself: the Thin Red Line against the German hosts. [*The Guardian* 21 November 1956, cited in Meek 1988, p. 21]<sup>5</sup>

In the 1950s, the Second World War was still a vivid memory. Consequently, the military metaphor was apt, denoting the status of European football as an international competition between the representatives of different nations.

The reports of the 1968 Final itself traversed the same nationalist line which was typical of the era. Thus, *The Times* carried a front-page piece which emphasised the national satisfaction that could be taken from this game: 'How fitting too, that this memorable triumph should go now to a club which has done so much for the game England first gave to the world' (Ecclestone 1968). On the sports pages, Geoffrey Green continued this theme.

At last Manchester United have climbed their Everest and after 11 years of trial and effort their dreams have come true. So the crown sits on the first English club to enter this competition ... They have helped to beat back the Latin domination that for so long had taken Continental football by the throat ... they [United] fell back on their morale and unconquerable spirit. Again it made giants of men who seemed to have given their last ounce of strength as they searched for the final yard to the summit. [Green 1968c]

Significantly, not only were United's virtues of morale and spirit emphasised but the dubious character of foreigners was also highlighted. *The Mirror's* reporter was critical of the game: 'It was not a great match. Indeed at times it was an ugly one ... In defeat Benfica do not retain the label of sportmanship that the Portuguese acquired during the World Cup. They showed their true colours last night. It was difficult to admire anything they attempted' (Jones 1968). In fact, Eusebio was fouled many more times than Best. United were much more petulant than Benfica, and there were a couple of examples of outstanding sportsmanship from Eusebio. Yet, once Benfica had been interpreted as foreigners, unfounded attributions concerning their temperament followed.

The 1968 Final was seen as an international match between the representatives of two discrete nations. This interpretation was all but universal in papers such as *The Times*, *The Manchester Evening News* and *The Mirror*. However, although the nationalist paradigm was dominant in this period, it is worth noting that the final could occasionally be interpreted in a different way. In his report on the 1968 Final, Green noted with relish that in the following season both Manchester City, which had just won the league title, and Manchester United would be 'treading the paths of Europe'. He added: 'What rivalry that will engender in the years to come' (Green 1968c). Here Green begins to recognise that European competition could be understood not in nationalistic but in localistic terms. European competition could stimulate local rivalry between the fans of different clubs. However, given the brevity of this comment especially in relation to the volume of Green's reporting on European football and the positive tone of the sentence, it cannot be invested with too much significance. For Green, European competition was still understood in internationalist terms. On the same theme, the *Manchester Evening News* published a single letter which called for a 'Truce time' between United and City fans, noting that 'there has always been the keenest rivalry between Manchester City and United fans', but insisting 'that on this night of nights ... a United fan living in London calls for a truce and a linking of Reds and Blues in the name of Manchester, "home of champions"' (Frame 1968). Frame's letter is interesting in that it calls for unity between the fans on a local rather than a national basis. These brief comments by Frame and Green suggest that a localistic interpretation of European football was theoretically possible even in the 1960s. Yet, examples of a localistic interpretation were so rare that they were all but irrelevant in comparison with the hegemonic nationalist account of European football.

The nationalist account of the Final was not a mere construction, any other interpretation of these games providing an equally accurate account of the game. One of the reasons for the dominance of this interpretation is that it did accord broadly with the realities of European football at the time. At this time, national federations were sovereign, with the clubs subordinate to them. The federations administered both domestic and European competition with the aid of their international representative, UEFA (The Union of European Football Associations). These federations defended the sovereignty of their leagues carefully. In particular, in the 1960s, and indeed in the 1950s in all countries except Spain and Italy, foreign player restrictions were enforced. These restrictions ensured that European club teams were drawn from the nation in which the club was situated and were intended to protect the development of native talent for the national team.<sup>6</sup> Thus, Benfica fielded only Portuguese nationals including former colonies so that Eusebio and Coluna, both from Mozambique, were qualified to play. Similarly, in England, although there was no restriction on home nation players from Scotland,

Wales, Northern Ireland and Eire, no foreigners were allowed to play in English club teams. Consequently, the connection between the club and nation which journalists like Green and Meek drew, and the metaphor of war which hyperbolically suggested an international struggle, were valid accounts of European football at the time. A reading which emphasised the priority of the city or region was certainly not *a priori* impossible in 1968, but given the structure of European football, a nationalistic reading reflected contemporary realities most accurately. The Final in which Manchester United played some 31 years later was a very different occasion and was interpreted in significantly different ways.

### 1999: A Transnational Event

In 1968, the nationalist interpretation of European football was supported by the national composition of the teams. The players were natives of the countries in which the clubs were located and consequently, in European competition, the matches could be straightforwardly interpreted as international games. By the late 1990s, by contrast, the composition of the teams was far more cosmopolitan. For instance, in the 1999 European Cup Final, although both Manchester United and Bayern Munich had unusually few foreign players in comparison with their European peers, their squads were much more diverse. Manchester United's 1999 team included seven foreign players (Blomqvist, Johnsen, Schmeichel, Yorke, Van der Gouw, Solskjaer, Stam) while Bayern's team included two (Kuffour and Salihamidzic). The increasingly transnational composition of the teams in 1999 was reflected in public discussions of the event.

The nationalist interpretation remained very important in 1999. As in 1968, most of the reportage framed the Final as a match between England and Germany where Manchester United represented England and Bayern Munich, Germany. A typical example of this nationalistic reading was provided by ex-Liverpool player and European Cup winner, Tommy Smith: 'I wore England's three lions over my heart with pride and I would back any English side in Europe – we all should. It's all about regaining ground in Europe' (Smith 1999). The leader in *The Mirror* affirmed Smith's stance insisting that 'it is the night our football nation sets aside lifelong rivalries and stands United. The red of Old Trafford, Manchester, will be everyone's colour' (*The Mirror* 1999). It was notable that the other major tabloid, *The Sun*, also adopted an unproblematically nationalist line in its coverage to the point of xenophobia. The paper delighted in the fact that Manchester United had in the course of the season 'brought the Italians down in Milan and Turin and on Wednesday they put the Germans on their knees' (Greaves 1999). *The Times* sometimes traversed a similar line. On the day before the game, in a humorous article



which listed ten reasons to support United (*The Times* 1999b), it was argued that a Manchester United victory would assist English football by providing more places for clubs in European competitions in the next season. In a piece of crude nationalism, the article asked: 'A football match between an English and a German team? What other reason do you want?' (ibid.). Similarly, although *The Manchester Evening News* recognised that many in the city did not support United (Everett 1999) and appeals to urban pride also featured in their coverage (for example, Everett 1999; Hince 1999), the regional paper generally adopted a simplistic nationalistic line delighting in the defeat of the 'Germans': 'Manchester United made you proud to be English' (Hince 1999). The same interpretation was demonstrated in the coverage of the game itself on ITV. The commentator Clive Tyldesley persistently drew on common satirical stereotypes of the Germans. Thus, for Tyldesley, United unproblematically represented England and the defeat of Bayern Munich automatically also meant the defeat of Germany by England. He introduced the match by citing the fact that England had not beaten Germany since 1966 in a major tournament. However, Tyldesley noted that while England's national record against Germany was poor, at club level, English sides had a record of six victories and two defeats in their last encounters. It should be noted that the idea of the nation mobilised in 1999 was somewhat different from 1968: while Manchester United sometimes represented England in 1999 (even with its many foreign players), England was no longer conflated with the rest of Britain, reflecting what Nairn has called the incipient 'break-up of Britain' (1981). Consequently, while some commentators appealed to a nationalistic interpretation which seemed to echo Green's own understanding of European football in the 1950s and 1960s, in fact, this nationalist interpretation had undergone significant renegotiation. In addition different accounts of the event were given prominent public airings in 1999 which contrasted strongly with 1968.

Thus, directly opposing Tommy Smith's reading, in a piece entitled 'Why I back Bayern' on the same page, Brian Reade proclaimed; 'I will be singing Deutschland, Deutschland Uber Alles' (Reade 1999). Reade justified his support for Bayern because of Manchester United's domestic dominance and the unjustifiable level of media coverage the club received. Reade concluded the article in significant terms: 'Football will always be first and foremost about tribalism. One-upmanship. Love and jealousy' (ibid.). For him, the urban and regional rivalry between fans at a club level was more important than artificial unification behind putatively national representatives. Interestingly, even in his nationalistic interpretation of the Final, Tommy Smith emphasised the local rivalry between Manchester United and Liverpool, pointing to Liverpool's greater honours list and the putative superiority of Liverpool's 1977 European Cup-winning team in which he played: 'Players like Beckham are great but we could have whacked them' (Smith 1999). Smith was not alone in recognising a tension within the nationalist reading of the 1999 Final. Significantly, many of